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• THE ROYAL COIN COLLECTION • MOZART'S THREE COIN ACT – AND MORE • THE TRIBUTE PENNY – THE DENARIUS DEBATE CONTINUES • FADEOUT \$2 NOTES • OBOLS OF LARISSA • THAT PENNY BROCKAGE • MASTERSTROKES (RAM) • A SOMEWHAT BITTER BLUEBERRY • MINT CONDITION (PERTH) • NEW NOTE ISSUES • AUCTION NEWS ... AND MUCH MORE

THE AUSTRALASIAN Coin & Banknote MAGAZINE

Volume 18 • Number 9 • OCTOBER 2015

FEATURE ARTICLES

New Zealand Launches

New Brighter \$5 & \$10 Notes

CAB Editorial Staff6

Noteworthy Banknote Variations

Mick Vort-Ronald10

Book Review:

McDonald's Pocket Guide 22nd Edition

Dr K.A. Rodgers14

Boulton's Halfpenny Bonanza

Part I King George V

Ian McConnelly16

Mozart's Three Coin Act – And More

Dr K.A. Rodgers20

That Penny Brockage (CAB June 2015)

Fred Lever28

Obols of Larissa

Dr Peter E. Lewis34

Europe's Gold Pistole

Dr K.A. Rodgers39

Coins and Medals Chart Serbia's WWI Rape

Dr K.A. Rodgers46

The Royal Coin Collection

John Andrew50

Fadeout \$2 Notes

Mick Vort-Ronald58

The Tribute Penny

– The Denarius Debate Continues

Walter C. Holt MA and

Rev. Peter R. Dunstan BSc BD62

A Somewhat Bitter Blueberry

Tony James68

REGULAR FEATURES

CAB Magazine Subscription Form77

Calendar of Events74

Club Meetings76

Index of Advertisers73

Letters to the Editor72

Masterstrokes44

Mint Condition12

New Note Issues (Trevor Wilkin)78

Noteworld (Tony James)60

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I had numerous reports of late delivery of last month's (September) issue of CAB to Victorian subscribers. The best that can be said for Australia Post Victoria is that they appear to be consistent. Reports of late delivery ranged from Melbourne metropolitan addresses to Mildura in the far north-western corner of the State. CAB is mailed usually in the second-last week of the month prior to cover date but

even this doesn't seem to be good enough. When one makes a huge effort to deliver early it's depressing to be asked, time after time, "is the magazine running late?"

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has now attained the longest reign of any monarch in any kingdom of the British Isles. It is appropriate then that this October issue contains John Andrew's report on the Royal Collection. Access to the Collection was granted and the story is presented with approval from Buckingham Palace.

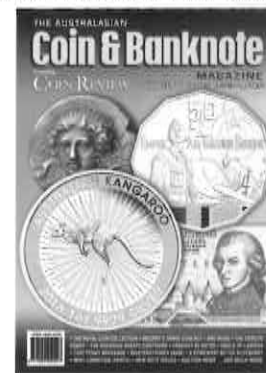
It's time again for the ANDA/APTA Sydney Coin, Banknote and Stamp Show. Again, the venue is Lower Town Hall, Drutt Street, Sydney. Dates are Friday 9th October (12 noon to 7p.m. and Saturday 10th October (10a.m. to 5p.m.).

CAB will be represented at the Sydney Show and I look forward to catching up with readers there. Unfortunately ill health prevents Ian McConnelly from attending. I know many of his Sydney friends and readers will be disappointed.

I wish you happy reading.

EDITOR'S NOTE

John



A tetradrachm of Syracuse from 405-400 BC appears at top left of our October cover. The image on the coin is that of the nymph, Arethusa. The coin features in Dr Peter Lewis's story, "Obols of Larissa" beginning on page 34 (image © Numismatica Ars Classica). The 50c coin at top right is part of the Royal Australian Mint's "Australia at War" series. This coin commemorates the very important contribution made by Australia to the Empire Air Training Scheme during World War II (image courtesy of and © Royal Australian Mint). At bottom left is the Perth Mint's new 40.60 mm silver bullion coin featuring Dr Stuart Devlin's classic Red Kangaroo design. Previously the design has been restricted to Perth's gold bullion issues (image courtesy of and © the Perth Mint). The highly recognisable image of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart appears on the face of the partial banknote at bottom right. The note is Austria's 5000 Schilling issue of 1989. Oddly, to date it is the only Austrian banknote commemorating the legendary composer (image courtesy www.ha.com).

The Tribute Penny

- THE 'DENARIUS' DEBATE CONTINUES

by Walter C. Holt, MA. (Anc. Hist.) and Rev. Peter R. Dunstan, BSc.BD.

The original version of this article was written several years ago, first appearing in *The Celator*, *Journal of Ancient and Medieval Coinage* (U.S.A.), 20.10 (October 2006), pp.22-28. (www.celator.com)

It is reproduced here, with some minor editing and updating, both in response to Steele Waterman's comments in the letters section of this magazine (CAB 17.4, May, 2014, p.62), and to address matters raised in a recently published book and a subsequent review of same (CAB 17.2, March 2014, p.53).

With thanks to Messrs. Kerry Wetterstrom and Wayne Sayles from *The Celator* for their very kind permission to reproduce this article as it appears here.



IN recent decades there has been considerable debate over the identity of the coin that has come to be known as the Tribute Penny.¹ This was the coin which, according to the Gospels in the names of Matthew, Mark and Luke, was brought to the character of Jesus of Nazareth at his request when he had been asked for his opinion on the issue of paying taxes to Caesar.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on both the available numismatic and documentary (ie: *Biblical*) evidence and so attempt to develop a more certain identification of the coin in question.



Tiberius Silver Denarius (RIC Lugdunum 30)
Image courtesy of CNG, ex R. Hansen collection.

The Tribute Penny has, most commonly, been identified as a silver denarius of Tiberius (14-37 CE), the Roman Emperor who reigned at the time of the gospel story. This proposed identification of the coin goes back to at least 1599.²

Other suggestions include, in a proposed order of likelihood, one of the most common silver denarii of Augustus, who reigned from 27 BCE-14 CE (that with the grandsons of Augustus, the young Caesars Caius and Lucius on the reverse), or possibly even one of the contemporary silver provincial coins issued in the region local to the stated events, particularly those struck at the nearby mint of Antioch.³

The biblical texts concerning the identity of the Tribute Penny are located in three separate, but related passages within the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. These are summarised and reproduced here:⁴

Show me the money for the tax (literally: "coin of the Census"), and they brought him a denarius. ("ἐπὶ δεῖξατε μοι τὸ νομισμα τοῦ κηνσοῦ. οἱ δὲ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δηνάριον"). And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:19-21).

Bring me a denarius, and let me look at it. And they brought one ("φερετε μοι δηνάριον ἵνα ἰδῶ οἱ δὲ ἤνεγκαν"). And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:15-17).

Show me a denarius ("δείξατε μοι δηνάριον"). "Whose likeness and inscription has it?" They said 'Caesar's.' He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:24-25).

As may be seen in the above texts, each of the three gospels explicitly states that the particular coin brought to, or shown to

Jesus that day in Jerusalem was a *denarius*, with each text unambiguously using the Greek form of the coin's Latin name (denarius = δηνάριον). Matthew gives the added information that Jesus, when initially asked about paying taxes, asks for "τὸ νομισμα τοῦ κηνσοῦ" (*the coin of the Census*). Crucially, however, Matthew then clearly records that what was brought to Jesus was not just any coin, but a Roman denarius (δηνάριον). It is the use of this exact term, δηνάριον, in all three texts that is perhaps most significant.

The later Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, although considered apocryphal and probably produced in the late 2nd century CE, also records this story but with the noteworthy, although quite unlikely variation that the coin brought to Jesus was made of gold:

They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, "The Roman emperor's people demand taxes from us." He said to them, "Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor; give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine." (Logion 100).⁵

This translation may be a little misleading as it translates the Coptic word *ΔΥΝΟΥΒ* as "a gold coin" (other translations read "a gold piece"). Reference to W.E. Crom's "A Coptic Dictionary" (Oxford 1939) reveals that the root word *ΝΟΥΒ* is in fact the word for "gold", but also notes that the word can instead mean "money" or simply "a coin".

As gold coinage was used primarily for larger transactions, and not for general market place purchases, we really should not conflate these two possible meanings. There is very little chance, if any at all, that it could have been a "gold" coin as indicated. In this case we should accept that the intended meaning was more in line with the earlier writings, which this text apparently used as its source material (*predominantly Luke and Matthew*).

Consequently, a more feasible translation of Thomas may instead be read to begin: "They showed Jesus a coin ...".

Modern scholarship has established the Gospel of Thomas as a significantly later retelling of this story, written some 150 or more years after the stated events. With its obvious reliance upon, and additions to, the earlier versions, along with its lack of clarity regarding the identity of the actual coin it is therefore a text that can, realistically, have little additional bearing on the question of the identity of the precise coin Jesus held.

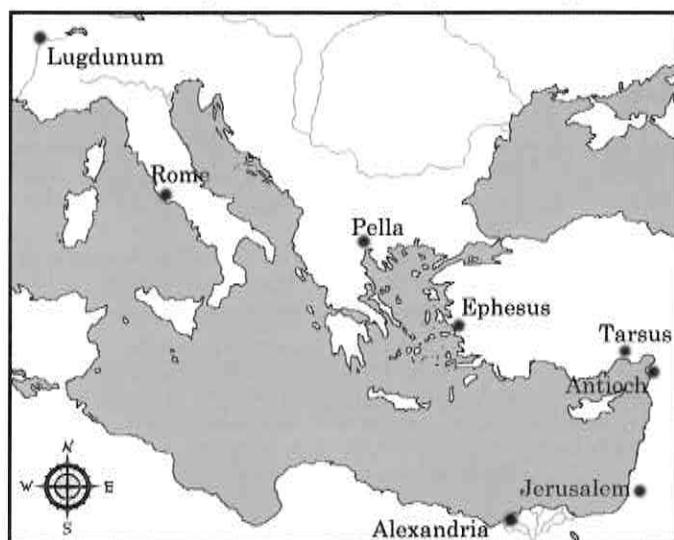
Little, except that if the original meaning was that the coin was made of gold, then it only serves to enhance the argument that it must have been a Roman coin as there are no gold coins from this period which have *both* the portrait and name of an emperor, or "Caesar", that are not Roman.⁶

The alternative translation of simply "a coin" seems most appropriate and is preferred here, and the possibility of that coin being gold should be firmly rejected. As a result of this, Thomas, as an additional source for this matter, adds little or nothing to the veracity of the original stories, and although worthy of consideration it can therefore be safely disregarded as a supporting reference.

Most current theological studies have accepted that Mark's gospel was the first to be written.⁷ Whether the writers of Matthew and Luke had Mark's gospel before them when they wrote their own versions, and if so, to what extent they may

have been influenced by it, continues to be the subject of considerable debate. Similarly with the influence of the so-called "Q document".

Mark's Gospel cannot be any earlier than the period between about 67 and 70 CE, around the time of the "First Jewish Revolt" and the Siege of Jerusalem, as it makes several indirect references to some of those events. That does not rule out the possibility that it could have been written some significant time later. Matthew is believed to have been written around ten or more years after Mark, and well after the fall of Jerusalem, a date around 80-90 CE gains modern acceptance. The Gospel of Luke perhaps a further ten or twenty years after that, with a date prior to about 100 CE considered to be generally suitable (though dates as late as 120 CE have also been proffered with varying levels of support).



Whatever the actual dates of composition, ancient church tradition claims that Mark's primary source was the apostle Peter. Mark, it is thought, was written for a predominantly Roman audience. Luke, as a colleague of Paul, was believed to have been written for a primarily Greek audience, whereas ancient tradition asserts that the gospel of Matthew at least owes its origins to the tax-collector come apostle Matthew, whose core audience was believed to have been Jewish.

There is also the suggestion that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic, however, no earlier Aramaic copy of Matthew's gospel has yet been discovered, if such a tome exists (*or ever existed*).¹⁸ This is worth bearing in mind, as knowing the intended audience for such writings is often as important as knowing the writer.

"... they each knew their denarii from their drachmae."

It is apparent that the writers of all three Gospels understood that their readers, whether Roman, Greek or Jewish, were all familiar with the term "δενάριον" as well as the concept of what a denarius was.

Importantly, they each used that specific word above all others. It was a term used not merely because it was a word that was familiar to each of their intended audiences, just as the word 'penny' was used in the KJV, but because the particular coin brought to, shown to and held by Jesus in the texts was in fact a Roman denarius.

There is also an etymological connection, as the Latin word *denarius* later became the Medieval *denier* and *dinar*, which became the English 'penny'. So even this use of the term "penny" is effectively confirming the earlier word "denarius".

Rome's influence by this time was undeniably widespread, from Spain in the west, toward India in the east. This coin's denomination, name and identity was known across the empire and was so well known as to become incorporated into the *lingua franca* of the region (i.e. Greek).

To support this notion further, elsewhere in the Gospels of Matthew and of Luke there are explicit and specific references to other Greek coin denominations, including: λεπτα(*lepta*),

διδραχμα (*didrachma*), δραχμα(*drachma*), στατηρα(*stater*), and ταλεντων(*talent*).¹⁹

Since Luke refers to both δραχμα(*15:8* and *15:9*) and δηνάριον (*10:35* and *20:24*) it simply must be the case that the writer was acutely aware of the differences. Luke also refers to the Roman denomination ασσαριων(*assarion*; *12:6*) as does Matthew (*10:29*). Matthew likewise refers to both διδραχμα(*17:24*) and δηνάριον (*18:28*, *20:2*, *20:9-10*, *20:13*, and *22:19*) and clearly identified them as different coins and denominations. They both also refer to the Roman quadrans (κοδραντης; (*Luke 12:42* and *Matthew 5:26*).

With this in mind it becomes obvious that there was a clear distinction in the individual writer's minds between a denarius, that very Roman coin, and a drachma or any other denomination of Greek coin.

The writers were not merely offering a familiar and simple term for a coin, as was the case with the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible (c.1611 CE) which translated the Greek 'δενάριον' into the equivalent English coin of that time (the silver "penny"). All three of them were writing for an audience that knew which coin was which. It is abundantly apparent that they each knew their denarii from their drachmae.

Schurer²⁰ records that Roman Taxation, and especially the poll tax, had to be paid with coins bearing Caesar's portrait, while the temple tax had to be paid in the coinage of Tyre (Phoenicia), hence the presence of money changers in the outer court of the Jerusalem Temple. What were the money changers doing if not changing Roman denarii for Tyrian shekels?



Phoenician Shekel of Tyre (Yr 126=1 BCE/1 CE)
Image courtesy of CNG, Auction 96 lot 557 (RPC 4650).

Of course there must have been other coins that were being exchanged there as well, but with Jerusalem you have a place which has a large number of visiting travelers and particularly religious pilgrims. This gathering of people from across the empire together with a requirement for a tax in one currency and a requirement for offerings to be paid in another would indicate that the money changers would be changing all sorts of currency just as is done in many airports, banks and other international market places today.

The presence of pilgrims in Jerusalem, at Passover especially, seems to have been to some extent overlooked in the debate over the identity of the Tribute Penny. Until its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE the Jerusalem Temple, and thus Jerusalem, was a place of annual pilgrimage (much like Rome and the Vatican is for Catholics, Mecca is for Muslims, the Ganges for Hindus, etc.), and still today it remains so for many faiths.

Under the Old Testament and Levitical Laws, observant Jews were obligated to make an annual pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple for Passover (as well as for *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*) and as Acts 2:8-11 records, Jews travelled from Rome and all over the known world to Jerusalem at Passover. There had been a significant Jewish population in Rome from at least the time of Pompey's triumph in 62 BCE. Pompey had released his Jewish captives after his triumph and they and their families had settled and remained in Rome until the decree of Claudius (41-54 CE) forced their departure.

There were other large Jewish populations throughout the empire. The diaspora stretched as far west as Gaul and Spain, and to many of the major metropolises including Ephesus, Athens, Aphrodisias, and Alexandria, to name but a few. Conceivably, they all could have used Roman currency (ie: denarii, etc.) in their everyday lives in and around these cities, and also to fund their travel to, and lodgings in, Jerusalem.



Phoenician Half-shekel of Tyre (Yr 159=33/4CE)
Image courtesy of CNG, MBS 96 lot 558 (RPC 4693).

Pilgrims, upon venturing to the Temple at Passover, would pay their annual temple tax of a half-shekel each. They would have changed their Roman coins into the currency acceptable to the temple treasury at one of the many money changers that had, on at least one occasion, so offended Jesus (John 2:12-16).

These were the men who would gladly change a pilgrim's less-than-acceptable, non-Tyrian coinage (including Roman denarii) into the acceptable Temple coinage for a set or negotiated fee.

Consequently, and quite apart from common trade, the markets of Jerusalem had a readily available and independent source of foreign currency, namely the coinage brought in by Jewish pilgrims, from Rome and elsewhere. Those same places where Roman denarii, including those issued by Tiberius, were undoubtedly common and in daily use.

The Gospel accounts indicate that when Jesus asked the question "whose likeness and whose inscription is this" (apparently with the coin in hand), the answer given is "Caesar's". Clearly the coin in his hand was one which had a likeness (ie: portrait) and inscription that was recognisable and known to both the speaker and audience, to be that of a "Caesar".

It is in this reference to Caesar that there lies some ambiguity. It is more than likely to be a reference to the current ruling emperor, Tiberius, than either his predecessor, Augustus, or the deified dictator Julius Caesar, each of whom could properly be referred to as "Caesar", though for different reasons.

The recorded text excludes any possibility that the coin was either of the Tyrian denominations used for the temple tax (shekel or half shekel = *tetradrachm* or *didrachm*) as neither of these had a Caesar's portrait or inscription. Nor, for that matter, did any of the earlier Roman Republican denarii, should any of those issues happen to be suggested, all of which demonstrably lack both an appropriate portrait and suitable inscription.

Some of the silver Roman Provincial issues, including those of nearby Antioch in Syria, did have the portrait of Augustus and/or Tiberius, but these were not denarii but the much larger and more intrinsically valuable tetradrachms.

The writer of Matthew claims to have been at the Temple with Jesus during the events in question, and also to have visited Antioch and was therefore well aware of what an Antiochene tetradrachm was. The writer of Mark records Peter, who had also claimed to have been present, and Luke claims to record eyewitness testimony of others who had also claimed to have been there.

It therefore has to be explained why any of them would record this coin as specifically being a denarius if that were not the case. Especially as both Matthew and Luke elsewhere refer several times to other Greek coins by their individual denominations in their accounts of other events.



Images courtesy of the Royal Australian Mint (RAM).

To put this into a context relevant to readers of this magazine, it is like confusing a coin about the size of an Australian 5c piece with a 20c piece. It is at best highly implausible.



Tetradrachm of Tiberius & Augustus (RPC 4161)
Image courtesy of NAC, Auction 72, lot 1445.

A recently submitted candidate for the Tribute Penny is the tetradrachm of Antioch that has the laureate portrait of Tiberius on the obverse and the radiate portrait of the deified Augustus on the reverse (RPC 4161).^{xii}

Had this been the coin referred to in the texts, as exhorted by Lewis, and more circumspectly by Abdy and Dowler, then a) the question asked by Jesus would presumably have been in the plural, "whose portraits", and b) the specific word "τετραδραχμία" would have been stated somewhere in reference to this much larger coin, exactly as had been done elsewhere within these writings.

These tetradrachms of Tiberius and the deified Augustus are now believed by several prominent numismatists to have been struck not at Antioch, but instead at the more distant mint of Tarsus.^{xiii}

Even if one does not choose to accept this most recent and up-to-date research, then it has to be pointed out that not only was this not the only type of silver coin struck at Antioch, it was not the only large silver coin struck in the adjacent area. There were several others (on both counts).

Those other eastern silver tetradrachms may be summarised here (abbreviated): Syria, **Antioch**: RPC 4108 Augustus/Zeus; RPC 4109-10 Tiberius/Zeus; RPC 4150 Augustus/Zeus; RPC 4151-60 Augustus/Tyche seated; Syria, **Seleukeia**: RPC 4328-9 Augustus/Fulmen; Syria, **Laodikea**: RPC 4381(-2) Augustus/Bust of Tyche. Why not any of these others, each of which concurs with most or all of Lewis' apparent criteria?

[NB: two other coins (Syria, **Tarsus**: RPC 4005 Tiberius/Livia as Hera seated; and Syria, **Antioch**: RPC 4162 Tiberius/Tyche seated) have been dated to shortly after the commonly accepted dates of the events in question, and both can be immediately excluded on those grounds alone].

If not any of these, then why not? They appear to equally fit the criteria put forward by Lewis, and those few others who for various reasons have aligned themselves with a similar view.

This raises some important questions as to why these authors have singled out one particular issue (ie: RPC 4161), above all of those others, for this unique distinction.



Tiberius Tetradrachm of Antioch (?) (RPC 4109)
Image courtesy of H.D.Rauch, Summer 2013, lot 501.

This is another issue presently attributed to the mint of Antioch (RPC 4109), but apparently overlooked by opponents of the proposition that the coin should be a denarius (although it was used to illustrate the book by Abdy and Dowler). Butcher now associates this 'Zeus' group with the above RPC 4161.^{xiv} McAlee follows Seyrig in suggesting that both groups were instead struck at Tarsus.^{xv}



Augustus Tetradrachm of Laodikeia. (RPC 4381)
Image courtesy of NAC, Auction 64, lot 1051.



Augustus Tetradrachm of Seleukeia (Yr 115=6/7CE)
Image courtesy of Gemini IX (2012), lot 256.

If the word 'δενάριον' is going to be disregarded and consideration instead directed toward one of the unstated 'τετραδράχμια' for this piece, then an explanation has to be put forward as to why, for example, these alternative coin issues have been summarily rejected.



Tiberius Silver Drachm of Cappadocia (RPC 3620)
Image courtesy of Künker 216 (2012) lot 783.

The mint of Caesarea in Cappadocia, some 800 km to the north, also produced drachmae with the requisite portrait of Tiberius. Whilst it was "the equivalent of the Latin denarius" in the East no one has yet proposed that this may be the coin in question.

Matters nevertheless fall to the terms *δενάριον* vs *δραχμα*. This mint was the only one to strike drachma for Tiberius, and as for any earlier pieces struck under Augustus, they are few in number and struck at mints much farther to the West (in Thrace, and in south-western Asia Minor).



Augustus Tetradrachm of Antioch (RPC 4156, 2/1 BCE)
Image courtesy of CNG, MBS 60 lot 1293.

The large silver tetradrachms (equivalent to 3 denarii) of Augustus from Antioch are generally uncommon at best (most are known by only a few examples for each individual date of this emission, but a couple of issues are known by up to about thirty examples, RPC 4150 and 4151-4160). The issues of Tiberius are especially rare with only three examples recorded of each of the two known variants.^{xvi}

That first Tiberian issue, RPC 4161, is not dated (although

RPC assigned it to "probably near the beginning of the reign"^{xvii}) and the second issue, which has Tiberius on the obverse and the Tyche of Antioch with the river-god Orontes on the reverse (RPC 4162), has been dated to 35/6 CE, which is after the crucifixion of Jesus and simply cannot be the coin referred to. Neither of these coins has been recorded as ever being found in Jerusalem, or Israel for that matter, and today both are considered to be extremely rare.

Lewis, in arguing against the Tiberius denarius, states: "it is very unlikely that Jesus would have called for an object bearing an image of the emperor, especially in the precincts of the temple, because such images were forbidden in Jewish law". However, the same writer instead proposes the dual-portrait Tiberius/Augustus tetradrachm (RPC 4161). In doing so he is extraordinarily and paradoxically suggesting a coin that has not one, but *two* of these supposedly 'forbidden' graven images.^{xviii} In the same article that writer fully acknowledges that the temple tax was to be paid in coin with unambiguously graven imagery (ie: Melqart/Eagle), the Tyrian shekels.

For centuries the conventional identity of the Tribute Penny has been a silver denarius of the Emperor Tiberius (14-37 CE). It was struck at the Lugdunum (Lyons) mint, and shows the portrait of Tiberius and "his inscription" on the obverse "TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS". The reverse bears a figure of Livia seated and the inscription "PONTIF MAXIM" (no less than three variants have been recorded, perhaps as many as five: RIC 26, 28 and 30).^{xix} This was the one type of denarius that was issued in great numbers continuously throughout the twenty-three years of his reign. His other type of denarius (Rev: Triumphal quadriga, RIC 4) was only struck briefly at the beginning of his reign and remains quite rare.

The primary objection to this identification is the claim that no Imperial denarii have been found in any recorded coin hoard discovered in or near Israel/Palestine that can be dated to a time prior to the Jewish War of 66-70 CE. Note that there are three qualifiers: 1) that the coin has to have been found in a hoard

context; 2) that the hoard has to have been found in this particular area; and 3) that the hoard must also date to a time prior to c.66-70 CE.

The consequent argument is that Tiberian denarii had therefore not found their way into the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire in time for Jesus to have been given one at the Jerusalem Temple some time between 27 CE and 33 CE.

There have been some 152 coin hoards found in or near Palestine of which only 15 contain coins minted before 60 CE and only 8 of these contained silver coinage.^{xx} None of these hoards contained a Tiberius denarius.

It is noteworthy that one of the Qumran hoards (buried about 9 BCE and discovered in 1955) included 6 mid-1st century BCE Republican denarii amongst a total of 561 silver coins (the remainder being Seleucid tetradrachms and Tyrian shekels).^{xxi}



Augustus Silver Denarius (RIC Lugdunum 207)
Image courtesy of CNG, ex R. Hansen collection.

Another significant hoard of about 4500 silver coins (buried about 67 CE and found at Mt. Carmel in 1960) comprised predominantly of Shekels of Tyre mainly dating from 40 BCE to 53 CE (most 20-53 CE). Importantly, however, it also included some 160 Roman denarii of Augustus, all of which were the common issue depicting Augustus on the obverse, and Caius and Lucius Caesars on the reverse (RIC 207ff.).

Leo Kadman^{xxii} suggested that this hoard was a shipment of temple tax money from northern Palestine or beyond, the hoard being buried when it was found that entry to Jerusalem and the Temple was blocked by the besieging Roman Army. What then are the implications of these Roman coins in a purported temple tax hoard?

Whilst there is no hoard evidence supporting the existence of denarii of Tiberius in Palestine, Roman denarii of both Augustus (primarily the Caius & Lucius reverse coin) and particularly of Tiberius have been discovered large numbers in hoards buried far to the east of Israel/Palestine during the 1st century CE, namely in India.^{xxiii}

This evidence, together with the discovery of the Republican Denarii at Qumran mentioned above and the presence of the Caius/Lucius Augustan denarii at Mt. Carmel, makes it difficult to sustain the claim that Roman denarii were absolutely not to be found in Jerusalem at the time required for the Tribute Penny to be a Roman Denarius. The discovery, again in India, of a Gold Aureus of Tiberius in a burial site dated to the 1st century CE^{xxiv} is further evidence of the free and relatively rapid easterly movement of Roman silver and gold coinage.



"Tiberius" Silver Denarius; Contemporary Indian Copy
(types as RIC 30) Image courtesy of CNG, E-318 lot 339.

Not only did these Roman coins circulate in places as far afield as India, but they were also copied for use locally in trade. The above example is based on a coin of Tiberius, but several others with earlier prototypes are known, including those emulating coins of Augustus (mostly with Caius & Lucius Caesars), and even some which imitate late Republican examples.

"No one states incontrovertibly that they did not circulate at all."

Whilst the recorded hoard evidence does not tend to indicate that Roman silver denarii of Augustus and Tiberius circulated in this area, it is nevertheless highly probable that they were, in fact, to be found in Israel/Palestine in the early to mid c.1st century CE.

This assessment is supported by significant anecdotal evidence of otherwise unrecorded surface finds of Roman denarii over the past decades, including this type of denarius of Tiberius.^{xxv} None of this takes anything away from the conclusions of Brooks Levy and others, that these denarii "did not circulate much in the Near East".^{xxvi} No one states incontrovertibly that they did not circulate at all.

Why is it then that there are so few Tiberian and Augustan denarii in the region of Judaea datable to an early first century CE context? Perhaps they were not hoarded (they did bear graven images after all). Perhaps they were traded out of the region soon after their use or exchange, straight back to Rome for instance, or used to buy items in trade from passing merchants. Perhaps they were used to buy items from places where the local Judaeans coins were unacceptable for such foreign transactions. Could this silver have been remelted as part of the bullion used to strike the Judaeans 'first revolt' coinage of 66-70 CE?

Perhaps there is a more contemporary reason: upon being found by modern residents and farmers, and being unaware of their numismatic, archaeological or historical value, they were melted down for their bullion before getting to market or being recorded and studied. Or more probably they have simply not been specifically recorded when found locally (innocently or otherwise) and have ended up on the market without any additional provenance.

At least one Tiberian denarius has in fact been found in an archaeological context, in Jerusalem. It was discovered in the excavations carried out at the Southern Wall, in the late 1960's.^{xxvii} There was also an Augustan denarius found in the same general area, and an Aureus of Tiberius as well.

It seems unreasonable to accept that these coins are to be found much farther east, in fact throughout many of the surrounding parts of the empire, and not, as is often claimed, in the area of Judaea. The above excavation finds give clear indication that they were to be found. Too many well respected numismatists and academics have indicated that other local surface/site finds of these coins are also known to exist (even though each also generally concedes that none are necessarily from a hoard related context).

In summing up: Firstly, one must be willing to accept each of these Gospel stories as true, individually and collectively. Secondly, if one accepts their veracity, consideration must be directed to the uses within those texts of specific Greek and Roman coin denominations. Thirdly, consider the specific terms used and their use within their respective contexts. Fourthly, having accepted the first point, is there reason for any, or additional re-interpretation? If so, then detailed explanation must be given as to why that should be, instead of accepting the texts as they are presented. Lastly, with all of this in mind, what are the most likely candidates for the coin in question?

Conclusion:

Based on the textual and numismatic evidence available, it seems reasonable to conclude that the well known Tribute Penny of the gospels was in fact a Roman Denarius and not any other Greek, Greek Imperial or Roman Provincial issue. Each of the writers in question specifically uses the word "δραχμῶν" in this context, and each also uses words that are other Greek denominations in those contexts. They are consistent, and do not offer any appearance of confusion with any of their respective uses of the precise word "δραχμῶν".

As to exactly which Roman denarius was the one held by the figure of Jesus in the biblical story, the situation will continue to be less than definite unless more evidence comes to light or further hoards or finds allow added clarification.

The choice would seem to be limited primarily to two coins, a Roman denarius of Tiberius, who was the reigning emperor at this time, with the figure of Livia on the reverse; or one of the many denarii of Augustus, of which the most likely contender among these would be the common Caius & Lucius Caesar reverse denarius, as was found in significant numbers in the 1960 Mt. Carmel hoard. Both of these coin types have also been found in excavations at the Southern Wall.

If we date the story to some time in the years 28-30 CE, as is generally accepted, then Tiberius had been reigning for about 15 years, a period which would have allowed more than enough time for the issue proposed above to have made its way to Jerusalem, in small numbers at the very least, whether through trade or perhaps equally likely as a result of travellers and the annual Passover pilgrimage.

Ultimately, for the coin in question to have been a Tiberius denarius, there only needed to have been one single coin of this type available on that particular day at the Temple in Jerusalem (perhaps even 'borrowed' from one of the many moneychangers).

"Ultimately, ... there only needed to have been one single coin of this type available on that particular day ..."

Consequently, if you want to be sure that you have a coin that is of the type of an actual Tribute Penny then collect both a Tiberius Denarius with the Livia reverse and an Augustus denarius with the Caius and Lucius Caesars reverse. You will then almost certainly possess the coin that was the subject of these Biblical stories, a denarius roughly identical to the one Jesus was shown and held and used to defeat the potentially lethal question of his antagonists – and, although extremely unlikely, nevertheless hypothetically possible, the actual coin.



Tiberius Tetradrachm of Tarsus (dated to c.35/36CE)
Image courtesy of CNG, Triton XV (2012), lot 1418.

* All images have been slightly enlarged.

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ The Tribute Penny is so named because of the reference to it as a "penny" in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. The word "denarius" or "denarius", the standard Roman coin of those times, was translated from the Greek and Latin to the word for a standard silver coin that was regarded as the closest equivalent in the English language of the time (c.1611CE).
ⁱⁱ Johann Christoph Rasche, *Lexicon universae rei numariae veterum et praecipue Graecorum ac Romanorum cum observationibus antiquariis geographicis chronologicis historicis critica et passim cum explicatione monogrammatum editio Io. Christophorus Rasche* (Volume 2, pt. II) (c.1785); entry "Census", which therein lists the following earlier works: a) Johan Hermansson and Ericus Christiernsson *Christiernin, Specimen Academicum, De Denario Census* (Upsalia, 1732); b) Johann Lorenz von Mosheim and Johann August Steding, *In Historiam De Numo Census Matth. XXII. Observationes* (Helmstadt, 1725); c) Johann Nicolaus Schüller and Johann Weidmann, *De Numismate Census, ad Matth. cap. XXII. vers. 19* (Wittenberg, 1685); and d) Marquardus Freherus, *de Numismate census, a Pharisaeis in quaestione vocato* (Heidelberg, 1599).
ⁱⁱⁱ P. Lewis and R. Bolden, *The Pocket Guide to St. Paul* (Kent Town [Australia], 2002) pp.9-24.
^{iv} Kurt Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, Greek English Edition of the Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum, 6th Edition (Stuttgart, 1983), p.246; The wording of these texts is taken from their Greek originals and is confirmed in a number of early manuscripts including Codex Alexandrinus (c.4th century CE) and a number of papyri, some dating from the 2nd century CE (eg: Papyri 45 for Mark chapter 14).
^v "βέβηρος": translates to "census, an assessment; tribute" (Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Abridged Edition, (Oxford, 1997)).
^{vi} R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (Mowbray 1960) p.59; Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer, "The 'Scholar's Translation' of the Gospel of Thomas", *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Sonoma, 1994). <http://www.misericordia.edu/users/davies/thomas/Trans.htm> (February 2006).
^{vii} The only other gold coins with the portrait of a Roman ruler to circulate at this time were struck by the Bosporan kingdom. They were only struck in the names of the kings Asander and Aspurgus, and in each case did not have the name of the Roman ruler. As such they can safely be excluded from consideration.
^{viii} R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Greek Text Commentary (Grand Rapids, 2002) p.41-45.
^{ix} Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leicester, 1992) p.1-17.
^x Aland, op.cit. *οὐρα* Mark 12:42; Luke 12:59 and 21:2), *μαρμαρα* (Matthew 17:24), *μαρμαρα* (Luke 15:8-9), *απακριμα* (Matthew 17:27), and *πολις* (Matthew 18:24).
^{xi} Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: Clark 1986/87) Vol. II, p.274; p.603.
^{xii} Richard Abdy and Amelia Dowler, *Coins and the Bible* (London, 2013), p.50 (illustrating RPC 4109); and Peter Lewis, *The Denarius in Mark 12:15* (2012) <http://the-ans.com/library/2012PeterLewis.html> (referring to RPC 4161, and rehashing a similar notion proposed in two of his previous articles).
^{xiii} R. McAlee, *The Coins of Roman Antioch* (Lancaster, PA [U.S.A.], 2007), p.122; agreeing with H. Seyrig, "A propos du culte de Zeus à Séucie" in *Syria* 20 (1939).
^{xiv} K. Butcher, *Coinage in Roman Syria: Northern Syria 64 BC – AD 253*, RNS Special Publication No.34 (London, 2004).
^{xv} See above, note 13.
^{xvi} Abdy and Dowler, op.cit., p.50.
^{xvii} It appears that perhaps two or three more examples of RPC 4161 have come to light since the publications of RPC in 1999.
^{xviii} RPC, p.607.
^{xix} Lewis, op.cit., p.50.
^{xx} C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume I, Revised Edition, From 31 BC to AD 69* (London, 1984) [RIC]
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^{xxii} *Dead Sea Scrolls: Coins*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea/scrolls.exhibit/Community/coins.html>, (February, 2006).
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^{xxv} Peter K. Tompa, "Guest Editorial: Afghan Treasures Lost and Found", *The Celator*, Vol.19 No.4, April 2005, (Lancaster, 2005) p.2.
^{xxvi} Personal communication with David Hendin of Amphora Coins (New York, 2004).
^{xxvii} B. Levy, "Tyrian Shekels: the Myth of the Jerusalem Mint", *JSAJ*, Vol. XIX/2, 1995, p.33ff.
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