HEROD ANTIPAS is an important character in the story of Jesus Christ as told in the Gospels. Saint Luke in his Gospel fixes the time when Jesus began his ministry and John the Baptist began preaching, by referring to Herod Antipas: In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis . . . (Luke 3:1)

We know that Tiberius became emperor in 14 AD, and therefore his fifteenth year was 28 AD, counting inclusively. Herod Antipas had been tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea (Figure 2 - map) since the death of his father, Herod the Great, in 4 BC. The word, ‘tetrarch’, means the ruler of a quarter, and Herod’s territory of Galilee and Peraea equaled about a quarter of his father’s kingdom. Herod Archelaeus, another brother of Herod Antipas, had ruled Judaea, which equaled about half of his father’s kingdom, until he was deposed by the Romans in 6 AD, and thereafter Judaea was ruled by Roman governors. From 26 to 36 AD the governor of Judaea was Pontius Pilate, and the crucifixion of Jesus probably occurred in 30 AD.

When Herod Antipas became tetrarch he made Sepphoris his capital. In Hebrew its name is Zippori. The city stood on a
hill overlooking the fertile region of Galilee. People have lived in the area since prehistoric times, and the hill itself has been occupied continually from about 600 BC to 1948 when the modern state of Israel came into being and the Arab village on the site came to an end. Today on the top of the hill there is a square stone building known as the citadel. It was erected in the Byzantine period, used as a watchtower by the Crusaders and reconstructed in the 19th century as a schoolhouse for the Arab children in the village.

When Herod the Great died in 4 BC a rebellion broke out in Sepphoris, but the Roman governor of Syria captured the city and burnt it to the ground. Herod Antipas had to rebuild it. He called it Autocratis (‘Emperor’ in English) in honour of the Roman emperor. The village of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, is only four miles to the south-east (Figure 3) and scholars have wondered what influence it had on him, especially as he was a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and there is a tradition that Mary’s parents lived in Sepphoris.

Up to the present century it was assumed that Antipas issued no coins from Sepphoris and the only coins that circulated in Galilee when Sepphoris was the capital were bronze coins minted at Jerusalem and silver coins minted at Tyre. These silver coins were needed by the Jews to pay their taxes. David Hendin, a Jewish numismatist who works with the archaeologists at Sepphoris, discovered a bronze coin that was almost certainly minted at Sepphoris by Herod Antipas (Figure 4). He reported it in the *Israel Numismatic Journal* (‘A New Coin Type of Herod Antipas’, INJ 15: 56-61, 2003 – 2006).

The coin is only 14 mms in diameter. On the obverse there is a grain of wheat...
or barley with the surrounding Greek inscription: TETPA[PX]HCA. This translates as ‘Tetrarch 4’ (i.e. tetrarch for year 4, which is 1 BC). On the reverse there is a palm tree with seven branches, and the Greek inscription HPW (HRO, i.e. Herod). The date palm was a symbol of the land of the Jews and its seven branches referred to the Menorah, the great seven-branched candelabrum that stood in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is the first time that a palm tree appears on a Jewish coin, but the Greek letters on this coin are particularly noteworthy because if Sepphoris was a thoroughly Jewish city one would have expected Hebrew or Aramaic. The use of Greek suggests that a sizable proportion of the population could read it and that Hellenistic influences were present in the city.

It is quite possible that Jesus held one of these small ‘grain coins’ in his hand at some time. Thinking about this, Christians would immediately recall the times when Jesus mentioned wheat, especially when he said, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24) He was referring to his death and resurrection.

In about 18 AD Antipas moved his capital to Tiberias on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Figure 5). Although Sepphoris is not mentioned in the Bible, Tiberias is: Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. (John 6:23) Antipas named the city in honour of the Roman emperor, Tiberius, and when he issued coins in 20/21 AD he put on the obverse the name TIBEPIAC (Greek for Tiberias) in a wreath. On the reverse there was a reed with the surrounding Greek inscription HPWΑΟΥ TETPΑΧΟΥ (of Herod Tetrarch) and the date LΚΑ, i.e. year 24 (Figure 6). There were four denominations: full, half, quarter and eighth. Reeds grew on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Figure 7) and the reed on these coins was probably intended to refer to its location. Antipas might have chosen the site because there were hot springs there, but a cemetery was nearby and strict Jews would have considered the area unclean. Because the reed could symbolize growth and fertility (and hence prosperity and wealth) it has

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been suggested that Antipas put it on his coins to encourage Jews to come to his new city. In other words these coins were a kind of an advertisement. There is no record of Jesus having gone there, but when he asked a crowd of people, “What did you go into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?” (Luke 7:24) he might have been referring to Antipas and his wavering character.

In any case, when Antipas issued new coins in 29/30 AD the reed had been replaced by a palm branch (Figure 8). Apart from the dates there was no other change in the coins issued in 30/31 and 33/34 AD. When Tiberius died in 36 AD Antipas flattered the new emperor Caligula by putting his name, Gaius Caesar Germanicus, in a wreath on the obverse of the coins that he issued in 39/40 AD. On the reverse of the largest denomination he put a palm tree, again with seven branches (Figure 9). On the half denomination he put a palm branch (Figure 10) and on the quarter, a bunch of dates (Figure 11). The eighth denomination was similar to the half, but with abbreviated inscriptions.

Unfortunately the flattery of Caligula did not help Antipas in his subsequent career. Antipas was jealous of his nephew, Agrippa I, who had been given Philip’s territory with the title of king, while he remained only a tetrarch. With his wife, Herodias, he sailed to Rome to argue his case; but Agrippa was a personal friend of the emperor and when he accused Antipas of being an ally of the Parthians, who were the enemies of Rome, Antipas and Herodias were banished to Lugdunum in Gaul.

We do not know what Antipas looked like because in accordance with Jewish law he did not put his image on coins, but some of his relatives did. Philip the tetrarch ruled an area with a large non-Jewish population and his portrait appears on his coins (Figure 12). Also the portrait of Agrippa I appears on his coins minted at Caesarea Maritima, which was a cosmopolitan city (Figure 13). These coins give us some idea what Antipas might have looked like. It is unlikely that he had a beard, and his image in the painting by Duccio di Buoninsegna (Figure 1) is probably wrong. The rest of the painting, however, is as described in the Gospels: Jesus stands before Antipas and ‘the chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him.’ (Luke 23:10,11) It is interesting to speculate how the course of history would have changed if Antipas had said, “He is an innocent man. Free him.”

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The Perth Stamp & Coin Show 2013 will be held on Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th August. Venue is the University of WA Guild Centre, Hackett Drive, Crawley, Perth. Show hours are 10am to 4pm on the Saturday and 10am to 3pm on the Sunday. Here’s an opportunity to inspect the wares of 22 local and interstate dealers.

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