The Coins of the Tetrarch Philip and Bethsaida

The Tetrarch Philip (4 BCE–34 CE), the son of Herod the Great, who ruled the territories in the north of the country, including Trachonitis, Auranitis, Batanaea, and Gaulanitis, issued a rather long series of coins, most of them semis of one particular design. On their obverses usually appears the portrait of the emperor (Augustus or Tiberius); on their reverses usually appears a depiction of the temple of Augustus which Philip’s father Herod had erected in Pania before Philip made that city his capital. During the first years of his rule, Philip even issued a limited number of coins which bear his own portrait.

However, in the thirty-fourth year of his reign (30/31 CE), for the first time he issued a series of three coins, a series that differs from his former issues by two of its types and denominations: semis, quadrans, and half-quadrans. Here follows their descriptions.

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1. AE.
Denomination: *semis*
Weight: 5.16–5.51 gr
Size: 17–20 mm
Obverse: Portrait of Tiberius to right
Olive spray in front to head
Dotted border
Legend (around from left below): ΤΙΒΕΡΙΟΥ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΥ ΚΑΙΚΑΠΟΥ
Reverse: Tetra style temple with triangle-shaped pediment, within which is a dot
At base of the temple, three lines (stairs?)
Dotted border
Legend (around from left below, reading outwardly to the right): ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ ΤΕΤΡΑΡΧΟΥ ΚΤΙΣΜ (ττζ) (= by Philip the tetrarch, the founder)
Between the columns of the temple, the date of issue: ΛΔΑ = year of Philip 34 (30/31 CE)³

The olive spray on the front of the emperor’s portrait expresses an act of celebration. The legend on the obverse ends with the word ΚΤΙΣΜ (ττζ), “founder.” To date, scholars have not offered any sound explanation for the appearance of this word on this coin.

2. AE.
Denomination: *quadrans*
Weight: 3.00 gr
Size: 15.4 mm
Obverse: Portrait of Livia to right, draped
Dotted border
Legend (around from left below): IΟΤΑΙΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΘΗ
Reverse: A hand to the left, holding three ears of barley
Dotted border
Legend (in semicircle from left to right, reading outwardly): ΚΑΡΠΟ – ΦΟΡΟΣ
In field above, the date of issue: ΛΔΑ = year 34 (30/31 CE)³

This type has recently been connected to Philip.⁴ As a matter of fact, the legend of this coin does not directly refer to Philip or to the city of Panias. It was, however, related to Philip because of the date of issue (year 34), and to the city of Panias because of the Karpophoros type, represented by the hand holding the ears of barley. This type reappears twice: (a) on a coin struck for Kypros, the wife of Agrippa I⁵ and (b) on the coins of Agrippa II struck in his eleventh year of reign,⁶ a year in which Panias was doubtless Agrippa’s capital. Another indication that this coin belongs to the series of coins of Philip is, besides the date of issue, the fact that the legend reads outwardly, a modus common on the coins of Philip. It is likely that the Karpophoros is meant to express the abundance of grain in the territories ruled by Philip.

3. AE.
Denomination: *half-quadrans*
Weight: 1.46–1.75 gr
Size: 10–12 mm
Obverse: Portrait of Philip to right, draped, bareheaded
Dotted border
Legend (around from left below): ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ
Reverse: Wreath, tied at bottom
Legend (within the wreath in one line is the date of issue): ΛΔΑ = year 34 (30/31 CE)⁷

A similar series was issued by Philip a second time in the thirty-seventh and last year of his reign, 33/34 CE. However, only in the thirty-fourth year of his rule does the title ΚΤΙΣΜ (ττζ), “founder,” appear. This fact doubtless hints at an extraordinary event which occurred in that year (30/31 CE), in the tetarchy of Philip. This event seems to have provided an impetus for him to leave his numismatic routine and issue a more complicated series, different from the monotonous series of coins he had issued during most of the other years of his reign.

In view of the indirect numismatic evidence provided by the three aforementioned coin types it is well to review the relevant evidence found in Josephus’s *Antiquities,*⁸ according to which the village called Bethsaida was renamed Julias by Philip in honor of Julia, the daughter of Augustus. Almost by necessity, the renaming of Bethsaida would have had to occur before 2 BCE, for in that year Julia was exiled by her father to the island of Pandateria. Josephus does not give this information in chronological order. He reports first the liquidation of Archelaus’s properties by Quirinius, the governor of Syria, during the thirty-seventh year of reign of Augustus (6 CE). Then he goes back ten years, to report that the two other sons of Herod, Antipas and Philip:
were given their tetrarchies; Antipas named Betharamphtha Julia
after Livia, Augustus's wife; Philip named Bethsaida Julia after Julia,
Augustus's daughter. The mention of the renaming of both these cities
in one sentence is curious. The daughter of Augustus was, as men-
tioned above, banned in 2 BCE, while Livia, his wife, was given the
name Julia only some sixteen years later, according to the will of
Augustus. Josephus discusses the same matter in a different way in his
Bellum Judaicum, and it seems that in this case he was more careful
about chronology:

On the death of Augustus ... the empire of the Romans passed
to Tiberius, the son of Julia. On his accession, Herod (Antipas)
and Philip continued to hold their tetrarchies and respectively
founded cities: Philip built Caesarea near the sources of the
Jordan, in the district of Panias, and Julias in Lower Gaulanitis;
Herod built Tiberias in Galilee and a city which also took the
name of Julias, in Perea.9

The era of the coins of the city of Panias starts in 3 BCE, namely
one year after Philip received his tetrarchy. It is unlikely that the foun-
dation of Panias (which was also called Caesarea Philippi) should be
mentioned on Philip's coins, arbitrarily, some thirty years later. Based
on coin no. 2 on which Livia/Julia is depicted, I would suggest that the
event of foundation mentioned on coin no. 1 refers to the foundation
of Bethsaida as Julias. Livia, Augustus's wife, was adopted into the
Julian gens, according to Augustus's will, in 14 CE and died in the year
29. Since these coins were issued in 30/31, it is appropriate that the
two cities (Bethsaida and Betharamphtha) should be renamed in
honor of the mother of Tiberius,10 rather than in honor of Augustus's
daughter.

If this suggestion is accepted, it follows that Bethsaida was
founded anew in the year 34 of Philip's rule, namely in 30/31 CE.
Whether the Julias of Philip was renamed before Antipas gave the
same name to Betharamphtha remains, for the time being, an open
question. If, however, one can compare the relationship between the
renaming of the two cities and the behavior of Antipas towards King
Agrippa I (a behavior guided by the jealousy of his wife, Herodias), one
may imagine that it was Antipas who followed after Philip, to please
Emperor Tiberius. Thus it is likely that Betharamphtha was renamed
Julias after 30/31 CE.

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pl. 8, no. 11. This coin type was also issued in the year 37 of Philip's rule, using the
same portrait of Tiberius as depicted on the issue of year 34; cf. Meshorer (1982) pl.
8, no. 14.
12.
9. Tacitus, Annals 1.8: "On the first day of the Senate he (Tiberius) allowed nothing to
be discussed but the funeral of Augustus, whose will was brought by the Vestal Vir-
gins. He named as his heirs Tiberius and Livia. The latter was admitted into the
Julian gens with the name of Augusta."
10. And this in spite of the fact that Tiberius hesitated to perpetuate her memory; cf.
Tacitus, Annales, 5.2.

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