

# RNA News

The Official Journal of the Rochester Numismatic Association

Summer 2025



Summer Picnic Location—rear view



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Members can select from 600 titles with new ones added regularly.  
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One of America's Oldest Local  
Coin Clubs  
Established January 1912

### **Memberships**

American Numismatic Association  
Branch #2, Life Club #8  
American Numismatic Society  
Royal Canadian Numismatic Association  
Token and Medal Society

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Rochester Museum & Science  
Center  
- Eisenhart Auditorium -

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### **RNA Committees**

RNA Bylaws designate several committees appointed by the President and Board of Directors.  
Below are the current active committees:

#### ***Membership***

Jason Childers  
Dennis DeYoung  
Scott Annechino  
Darlene Corio

#### ***Endowment***

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John Zabel, Chair [RNA Curator]

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Regular **RNA** meetings are held from September to June at 7:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month (see Calendar for possible schedule exceptions at Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays) at **Eisenhart Auditorium** of the **Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607**. The auditorium is the glass front building behind the Museum. **Enter and exit through the main entrance, and turn left to go up the ramp to the ballroom. We will continue to have these meetings on Zoom for members who cannot attend in person.**

# Summer Picnic

## August 17, 2025

### Whitebrook Park in Perinton

The Summer picnic will be at Whitebrook Park on Aldrich Rd off Route 31 in Perinton. The start time is noonish. The cost is \$15 per person, children under 12 are free. The price increase helps pay for cost increase. Bring a white elephant and a dish to pass if you wish. Your own eating wear will help.

There will be a hike after the meal and auction. Location and length will be announced at the picnic. This will be lead by Steve Eisenger as usual. Come prepared to walk.

#### Divine Currency: The Numismatic Odds of a Coin Touched by Jesus by Dennis DeYoung (July 2025)

Much like the myriad of currencies circulating in the American Colonies before and after the Revolutionary War, Judea during the New Testament era was a melting pot of various coinages. The Bible records several stories involving coins, though not all provide the detail necessary for a numismatic analysis. References include Greek coins (such as the drachma), Roman coins (such as the denarius), and Jewish coins (such as the shekel). In my quest to assess the likelihood that Jesus might have touched any of the coins within my collection, I first needed to understand the various types of coinage featured in the biblical narratives.

Several episodes in the Gospels involve Jesus handling coins, often as part of teaching important lessons. In **The Parable of the Lost Coin**, for example, Greek drachmas take center stage. In **The Tribute Penny**, a Roman denarius is used by Jesus, while **The Temple Tax** narrative highlights a Jewish shekel retrieved from the mouth of the fish.

- **The Parable of the Lost Coin:** In Luke 15:8-10, Jesus tells a parable about a woman who loses one of her ten silver coins (usually assumed to be drachmas) and rejoices when she finds it, illustrating God's joy over a repentant sinner.
- The **drachma** is a silver Greek coin used broadly for centuries prior to the Roman Empire.
- Also circulating was the **tetradrachm**, meaning “four drachmas”, which would be about the same as a shekel.
- While we describe its weight in modern grams (typically around 4.3g of highly pure silver), contemporaries used units such as the 'shekel' – an overloaded term that both denoted a unit of measure (~8.4g) and a similar coin type (weighing about 14g).
- The drachma's value varied depending on the city-state that issued it, but it was

generally worth about 6 **obols** (another Greek bronze coin), between one-half to a full day's wage.

- Greek drachmas typically depicted gods, heroes, or mythological scenes.
- The drachma likely referred to in this story would have been the **Attic Drachma**. This was a widely used silver coin in Greek-speaking regions and trade networks, especially during the Hellenistic period and into the early Roman era. Minted in Athens from silver out of the nearby mines of Laurium, the Attic Drachma was known for its consistent weight and silver content, making it a reliable and valuable currency at the time.

Having been minted since the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Attic Drachma would have been in wide circulation across the Eastern Mediterranean, including Levant, Asia Minor, Egypt, as well as much of the area under Roman control. Estimating the mintage is difficult due to the lack of precise historical records, but an educated guess, based on the scale of the Athenian silver production at Laurium and the widespread use of the Attic standard, suggests that tens of millions were produced. Furthermore, local currencies (noted below) were more commonly used in the vicinity of Judea for official and everyday transactions during Pontius Pilate's governorship (A.D. 26-36). With tens of millions minted and such coins circulating far and wide, the odds that any particular drachma in our possession today was part of the coinage in Judea during the time of Pontius Pilate are staggeringly slim.



*Attic Drachma, image by Classical Numismatic Group, LLC*

**The Tribute Penny:** In Matthew 22:15-22, the Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus asks for a coin (usually assumed to be a denarius) and responds, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The term 'penny' is from the 1611 King James translation of the Bible, and was adopted since the penny was the standard denomination of the time.

- The **denarius** was a Roman silver coin introduced around 211 B.C. and widely used throughout the Roman Empire for trade and military payments.
- For completeness, the typical gold coin in use was the **Aureus**, worth 25 silver denarii, whereas the **as** (yes, that is how it is spelled) was a standard bronze coin

#### RNA Online Resources



[www.rochesternumismaticassociation.org](http://www.rochesternumismaticassociation.org)  
[www.facebook.com/groups/21533643632](https://www.facebook.com/groups/21533643632)  
[@RocCoinClub](https://twitter.com/RocCoinClub)

Social Media Chair: David Gottfried



valued at 1/10 of a denarius.

- The denarius was made of around 4.5 grams of exceptionally pure (~98%) silver.
- Denarii often featured the emperor's portrait on the obverse and various deities or symbols on the reverse.
- The coin Jesus likely handled would have been the **Tiberius Denarius**. The specific denarius presented by the Pharisees featured Tiberius' image and the inscription "Caesar", which is why Jesus used it to illustrate His point. Although two other reverse types existed during Tiberius' early reign, the version with Livia as Pax was employed throughout the remainder of his tenure, making it the more probable coin referenced. This coin was primarily minted at the Lugdunum mint near modern-day Lyon, France, during Emperor Tiberius' reign (A.D. 14-37).

The Tiberius Denarius not only supported the military but also drove trade and commerce across the Roman Empire. As the most common imperial-issue coin circulating at the time, they would have been quite easy to find in Italy, Gaul, Hispania, Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Judea, and North Africa.

The exact number minted is unknown, estimates suggest it could be in the hundreds of millions – some sources even speculate that Tiberius may have amassed a hoard of around 675 million denarii during his reign (a figure that includes coins from earlier periods). Saying it would be highly unlikely that any one example possessed today would have been in the region during the time of Jesus would be a gross understatement!



Tiberius Denarius, image by *Classical Numismatic Group, LLC*

**The Temple Tax:** In Matthew 17:24-27, Jesus instructs Peter to catch a fish, which will have a coin (usually assumed to be a stater) in its mouth to pay the temple tax for both of them because at the time there was a requirement that every Jewish male over the age of 20 must pay a half-shekel annually.

- The **stater** coin mentioned could have been the four-drachma coin, the **tetradrachm**, or a Jewish **shekel**. The two coins are essentially the same and would have been spoken about interchangeably at the time, or simply just called staters.
- These coins would contain about 14 to 17 grams of silver.
- A stater might have been equivalent to two days' wages for a laborer at the time.
- The coin in this story was likely the **Tyrian Shekel** (or Tyrian Tetradrachm). This coin typically featured the image of Melqart (the Phoenician equivalent of Hercules) on one side and an eagle perched on a ship's prow on the reverse. Minted in the ancient city of Tyre (modern-day Lebanon) beginning around 125 B.C., these coins gained renown for their purity (similar to the drachma at 94% to 97%)

which made them particularly suitable for the temple tax and highly valued throughout the region.

- Fun Fact: Judas Iscariot was likely paid in Tyrian shekels when he received thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus to the chief priests in Matthew 26:15.

Tyre was a major Phoenician port city, renowned for its wealth and trade networks, and the minting of these high-purity silver coins reflected its economic and cultural significance. Interestingly, after 19 B.C., the minting of Tyrian Shekels shifted to Jerusalem under Roman oversight – likely near the Praetorium at the Antonia Fortress, conveniently close to the Temple Mount where the trial of Jesus took place. Despite the change in location, the coins retained their original designs and inscriptions to remain acceptable for religious usage. They were continuously minted until A.D. 69 or 70.

With such high demand from the temple tax requirement and considering the population of Judea, hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of shekels would have been produced annually. Between 19 B.C. and the time of Jesus' death, tens of millions of these coins could have been struck, making it exceedingly unlikely that any single coin in our possession today was among those that circulated locally during that era.

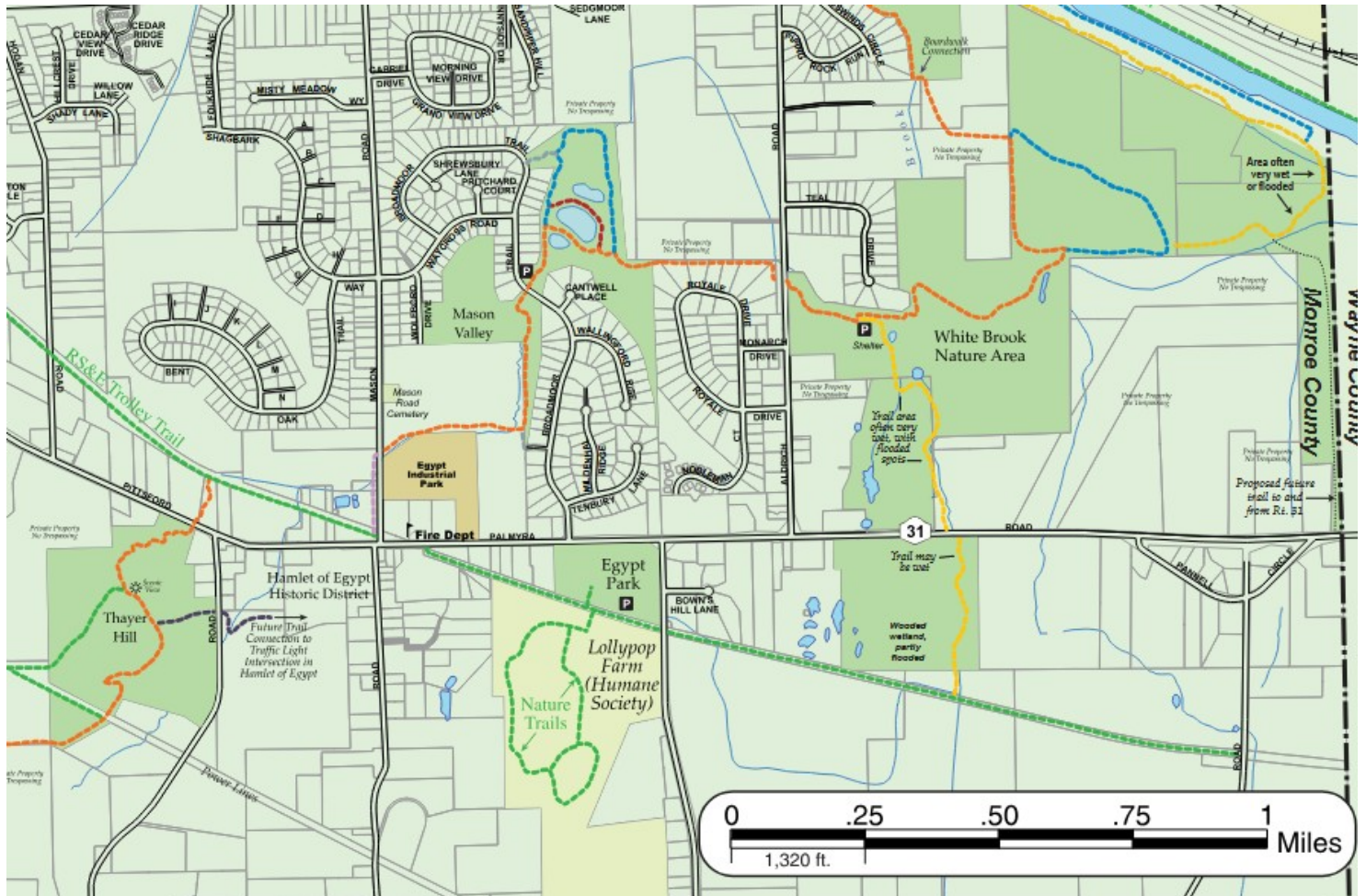


*Tyrian Shekel, image from [CoinArchives, LLC](#)*

These three stories provide rich insights into Jesus' teachings and the numismatic and socio-economic contexts of the time. But there is another story that calls for in-depth analysis, that of **The Widow's Mite**. Often romanticized yet rarely scrutinized in numismatic detail, it invites a closer look at two humble coins whose historical trails span the Hasmonean dynasty and the governorship of Pontius Pilate. In the next issue of the RNA News, we'll examine whether challenging the common assumption about these tiny bonzes – that the Mite was a Hasmonean Lepton – might instead point to a Prutah minted under Pilate, significantly increasing the statistical likelihood that a surviving specimen once passed through the hands of Jesus Himself!

# Portion of the trail map of trails in the town of Perinton.

## Picnic in the Whitebrook Nature Area



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## RNA Events

First Fall Meeting .....September 10  
Second Fall Meeting .....September 24

Members are welcome to attend RNA Board meetings.

☛ ☛ ☛ *See the RNA Website for Additional Event Details* ☛ ☛ ☛

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