

RNA News

The Official Journal of the Rochester Numismatic Association

September-October 2025



Hasmonean Lepton



Photos by Dennis DeYoung



Prutah of Pontius Pilate



1 and 2 Daler Plate money— Photo by John Zabel



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The John Jay Pittman Memorial Library is available at every regular meeting.
Members can select from 600 titles with new ones added regularly.
See the RNA Librarian to sign for and borrow material.
A complete, searchable library inventory is available on the RNA website.



RNA

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

Meetings

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.
Above are the current active committees:

Membership

Jason Childers
Dennis DeYoung
Scott Annechino
Darlene Corio

Endowment

Jason Childers [2023-2025]
Steve Eisinger [2023-2025]
Dennis DeYoung Treasurer [Ex-Officio]
John Zabel, Chair [RNA Curator]

Auditing

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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.**

From Our President

RNA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE –

Welcome faithful RNA members to our 114th year - 2025/2026! 114 years spans an incredible amount of history and change here in Rochester, but the RNA has been an enduring organization.

I think it's accurate to say that coin collectors- as well as history buffs - like dates. I think of the historical significance of January, 1912. The world had not yet experienced a "world war." the Titanic was about to set sail. As for some personal history, my four grandparents were courting in 1912 !

It's so interesting to think about what the city of Rochester was like in the teens, 20s, 30s, 40s,, 50s and then relate that to the corresponding history of the RNA. Fast forward to 1962; the RNA celebrates its 50th anniversary, Midtown Plaza opens downtown, I start kindergarten. What will the next 50 years bring, starting in 1962 and culminating in 2012? We know because we've experienced it! Bustling, vibrant, midtown plaza, sadly has completely come and gone by 2012, having been demolished in 2010. Eastman Kodak, growing and so profitable in the 60s 70s and 80s, but in 2012 it's a different story. Who would have thought it? RNA? – Prospering in 2012!

Looking forward, changes will happen as quickly and dramatically as ever, but the human nature of collecting – particularly for coin and currency collectors – seems permanently entrenched, and therefore should propel RNA and its mission for years to come. Just as important, RNA has enjoyed a succession and overlap of good and talented people.

When I come across something old and venerable, say a building, a tree, or a person, I feel moved to honor it/them and want to preserve it. Well, that's the way I feel about the RNA in Its 114th year. Therefore, in the coming year, I will work hard as president to help it Prosper !

Cary

Divine Currency: The Numismatic Odds of a Coin Touched by Jesus – Part 2

by Dennis DeYoung

In our previous issue, we explored how the Attic drachma of the **Lost Coin**, the Tiberius denarius **Tribute Penny**, and the Tyrian shekel of the **Temple Tax** each illuminate Jesus's world through numismatic evidence. Now we turn to the **Widow's Mite**, a story centered on two tiny bronzes – a Hasmonean lepton and a prutah minted under Pontius Pilate – that have quietly circulated through centuries of Jewish life. By comparing their mintages and archaeological footprints, can we challenge the default assumption in favor of the lepton and ask whether the Pilate prutah actually offers a far higher probability of having passed through Jesus's own hands?

The Widow's Mite: In Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4, Jesus observes a poor widow giving two small copper coins (assumed to be lepta) to the temple treasury and commends her for giving all she had.

- It is commonly thought that each of these coins was likely a **lepton** (Greek for “small” or “thin”), the least valuable coin commonly circulating in Judea at the time.
- A lepton was a tiny bronze coin worth roughly six minutes of an average day's wage. Because they were struck crudely and inconsistently – varying in size, weight, and often off-flan – lepta were typically traded by weight rather than one by one. In practice, a properly measured handful of these small bronzes might buy you a chicken at market.
- Two lepta together made up a **quadrans**, which was one of the smallest of the coins minted in Rome, bronze also, and worth a quarter of a standard **as** (plural - asses) or 1/64 of a denarius. (Remember this for later.) Double sized versions of these lepta were also made – they were called prutot (plural for prutah) and would have been mixed into the handful you purchased the chicken with.
- The most common lepton in first-century Judea was the **Hasmonean Lepton**. These coins were minted during the reign of the Hasmonean dynasty, particularly under King Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.). The Hasmonean Lepton featured simple designs, such as an anchor and an eight-pointed star, reflecting the era's reliance on maritime trade and cultural symbols.



Hasmonean Lepton, image from the author's collection

RNA Online Resources



www.rochesternumismaticassociation.org
[@RocCoinClub](https://www.facebook.com/groups/21533643632)
Social Media Chair: David Gottfried
Webmaster: John Zabel

Although these lepta were minted nearly a century before Jesus' time and continued to circulate widely – even into the 4th century A.D. – their estimated mintage of up to 150,000, combined with their broad geographical distribution, suggests that the likelihood of any particular coin still being in active use in Judea during Jesus' time is relatively low.

While the traditional interpretation holds that the coins in the Widow's Mite story were lepta, an alternative possibility merits consideration – the **Prutah**.

- The prutah was a small bronze coin that circulated widely in Judea during the Roman period. Governors of Judea were striking these coins as needed because the equivalent Roman quadrans were not readily available this far from Rome, and sufficient small change was required for daily wages and commerce.
- A prutah is slightly larger than a lepton but their value was also very low, being worth at most two lepta or 1/32 of a denarius or 1/256 of a shekel.
- Prutot often exhibited regional designs and iconography that reflected local culture and administrative practices, distinguishing them from the uniform Roman quadrans.
- The most interesting variety of prutah to this examination would be the **Roman imperial coin of Pontius Pilate**. Pilate, a prefect of Judea – a culturally diverse and often rebellious province on the Roman frontier – became a historically significant figure largely due to his infamous order leading to Jesus' death (likely in either 30 or 33 A.D.)
- The obverse of these coins typically features symbols such as a simpulum (ladle) or lituus (ritual staff), while the reverse often depicts a wreath and the date of issue in the local calendar.
- These bronze coins were minted in Jerusalem (an example was recently found there in an incomplete state of manufacture) in the years 29, 30, and 31 A.D. during Pilate's tenure as the Roman Procurator of Judea. The total mintage, estimated at 100,000 - 500,000, would have circulated primarily in Judea during the time of Jesus.



Prutah of Pontius Pilate, image from the author's collection

Fun Fact: Recent imaging of the Shroud of Turin indicates coins were placed on the eye sockets under the cloth (a not uncommon practice at the time), and one of the two was identified as likely being a prutah of Pontius Pilate!

Due to the fog of time, it's possible that the distinction between a lepton and a prutah may have been lost, meaning that the Widow's Mite may have actually been a prutah. It is hard to differentiate a less worn lepta from a badly worn prutah by size. And to demonstrate how interchangeable the terminology was for these small coins, note that a prutah was sometimes referred to as an **Assarion** (ἄσσάριον), Greek for "small copper coin," despite the prutah being made of bronze. At the same time, a lepton could be referred to as a "half-prutah". Even today,

NGC will almost always slab lepta with “AE Prutah” on the label!

Looking closer at whether the Widow's Mite should be interpreted as a lepton or a prutah, the translation and interpretation of ancient texts might give pause. The original Greek word used in the New Testament for the small coins is "**leptón**" (λεπτόν), meaning "small" or "minute". Early English translations, such as the King James Version, used the term "mite" – a small coin familiar in 16th-century England – which was likely applied to either a lepton, a prutah, or both.

We are talking really small change here, the distinction between which would not have been important to historians who are non-numismatists. Recall that in the Roman coin hierarchy around 33 A.D., the prutah was worth 1/256 of a shekel, while the lepton – being two to a quadrans, with four quadrantes to an as, 16 asses to a denarius, and four denarii to a shekel – comes out to be worth about 1/512 of a shekel. Imagine dropping a fraction of either a penny or half-penny today – chances are, if you aren't a coin collector, you wouldn't bother picking it up!

Pilate's coins are Roman but the words on them are Greek. This obviously contributes to the fact that the terms lepton and prutah are often used interchangeably in historical and biblical contexts due to their similar values and widespread use. In summary, the Widow's Mite could well be either a lepton or a prutah, as both types fit the description of the small bronze coins given by the widow in the biblical story!

Early in His life as a tradesman, in addition to his well-documented ministry, Jesus may have handled roughly 1,000 distinct coins – assuming a mintage of 300,000 Pilate prutot. If each coin had an equal chance, a rough calculation suggests odds of about 1 in 300, or roughly 0.3%, though such a simplistic ratio fails to capture the full complexity of ancient coin circulation. Coins were recycled continuously, and the chance that any one coin ended up in Jesus' hand depends on many factors – the inherent randomness of exchange; the uncertainty regarding the exact number of coins He personally used; and the fact that coins passed through countless hands in a short period. In reality, the actual probability is likely somewhat lower than our rough estimate. In any case, these humble prutot were minted on the orders of an individual whose decisions continue to resonate in our society 2,000 years later – after all nobody prays to Jupiter anymore!

RNA Annual Coin Show

The Annual Rochester Numismatic Association Coin Show will be held at the Eisenhart Auditorium at the Rochester Museum and Science Center on Saturday and Sunday November 1 and 2. The hours are: Saturday—10 to 5 and Sunday— 10 to 4. If you wish to enter a coin exhibit, contact John Zabel to let him know you will need cases. Exhibits can be set up starting at 8:30 and should be in place by opening at 10. Exhibits will be judged and a Best-In-Show award will be determined.

Help will be needed by dealers in unloading on Saturday and loading on Sunday.

Swedish Plate Money

Among the largest pieces of currency issued and circulated are this plate money piece of Sweden. In the 17th and 18th centuries Sweden was the major source of copper in Europe. Sweden had little silver and gold.

Sweden first issued plate coin following an act of 1649. The issue is pure copper and had the same intrinsic value as silver coins of the day at the ratio, by weight, of 2.5:1 copper to silver. This made the pieces large and heavy. The denominations minted were ½ Daler, 1 Daler, 2 Dalers, 4 Dalers, 8 Dalers and 12 Dalers. The pieces range from 400 grams to 6,000 grams of copper, or 0.9 pounds to 13.5 pounds. Plate money was never considered “pocket change.” The mintage ended in 1760.

The piece shown was struck during the rein of King Frederick I at the Avesta mint near the copper mines. They were actually used in commerce., by being carried in wagons to market.

These pieces are difficult to obtain with the 8 and 12 Daler pieces being extremely rare.



4 Daler Plate Money from the Club collection

Photos by John Zabel





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For the LOVE of Coins



RNA Events

RNA Meeting -What I did over the summer	September 10
RNA Meeting	September 24
RNA Meeting	October 8
RNA Meeting	October 22
RNA Coin Show.....	November 1-2

Members are welcome to attend RNA Board meetings.

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

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