

THE TWENTY-SECOND YEAR OF TIBERIUS AND THE DEATH OF HEROD THE GREAT: A REPLY TO RAYMOND J. JACHOWSKI

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In 2015, Raymond Jachowski published an article that proposed dating Herod the Great's death to 3 BC.¹ His claim was backed by a conjecture of how Josephus's mention of Herod's son Philip dying in Tiberius's twentieth year was changed to 'twenty-second year' in some Latin manuscripts.² Jachowski's motive was to disprove the contention of some that, using the twenty-second year figure, Philip antedated his reign to a time before Herod's death.³ There are multiple difficulties with Jachowski's analysis, some of which are obvious in studies published since 2015. In this paper, I would like to explore issues both from Josephus and from numismatics that I believe invalidate Jachowski's thesis that Herod died in 3 BC.

1. Raymond J. Jachowski, 'The Death of Herod the Great and the Latin Josephus: Re-Examining the Twenty-Second Year of Tiberius', *JGRChJ* 11 (2015), pp. 9-18.

2. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.106.

3. W.E. Filmer, 'The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great', *JTS* 17 (1966), pp. 283-98 (298); David W. Beyer, 'Josephus Reexamined: Unravelling the Twenty-Second Year of Tiberius', in Jerry Vardaman (ed.), *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II: Chronological, Nativity, and Religious Studies in Memory of Ray Summers* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp. 85-96 (86-87). Jachowski mistakenly believes that A.E. Steinmann, 'When Did Herod the Great Reign?' *NovT* 51 (2009), pp. 1-29 (14) argued that the correct figure was twenty-second year. This is false. The conclusion of the discussion states, 'Thus, we can agree with Schürer against Filmer: Philip died in the twentieth year of Tiberius (33/34CE) after a reign of thirty-seven years' (p. 24).

Preliminary Considerations

Before delving into the evidence concerning Herod's reign and the reign of Philip, two items need to be discussed to bring clarity to any analysis of the data. These are the ways that calendar years were viewed in antiquity and the way that reigns of rulers were reckoned.

The Way Calendar Years Were Viewed

While Julian years—Roman civil years—began on January 1 like our Gregorian years, other reckonings of years started at different points in the calendar. For instance, Olympic years began in summer and were commonly dated from 1 July. Jewish sacred years began with the first month of spring, the month of Nisan (Exod. 12.2; *Ant.* 1.81; 3.248). The Babylonian method of reckoning years of the Seleucid era also began in Nisan, with year one of the era beginning on 1 Nisan 311 BC. Another method began the year in the fall with the month of Tishri. The Macedonian reckoning of the Seleucid era began in Tishri, with year one of the era beginning on 1 Tishri 312 BC, six months earlier than the Nisan reckoning. Josephus noted that his people reckoned matters of 'governmental administration' (διοικήσεις) from Tishri (*Ant.* 1.80-81).⁴ In fact, Josephus uses the verb from the same root (διοικέω) to write about the Hasmonean ruler Hyrcanus I administering the government.⁵ Therefore, Josephus suggests that we should normally understand the official years of Herod and his sons as beginning in the fall month of Tishri.

To provide a more accurate notation concerning year dates, I will use the following: A year beginning in Nisan will employ the Julian year number followed by 'n'. Thus, 42n BC would denote the year that began on 1 Nisan 42 BC and ended on the last day of Adar 41 BC. Such a year would cover the last three quarters of 42 BC and the first quarter of 41 BC. A year beginning in Tishri will employ the Julian year number followed by 't'. Thus, 42t BC would denote the year that began on 1 Tishri 42 BC and ended on the last day of Elul 41 BC. Such a year would cover the last quarter of 42 BC and the first three quarters of 41 BC.

4. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.299; *War* 1.68. The English word 'diocese', a church administrative district, is derived from the Greek word.

5. Josephus also employs this verb to speak of Claudius's administration of the empire (*War* 2.248).

The Reckoning of Reigns in Antiquity

Several ways of reckoning lengths of reigns are known to have been practiced in antiquity. The factual method counted from the start date to the end date, tallying years, months and days. Josephus employs this method for the reigns of Roman emperors.⁶ At times this might be approximated by simply giving the tally in years and months. Other methods simply counted whole years. The non-inclusive or accession-year method began counting on the first day of the new year following the ruler's accession to the throne. Any partial year from accession to the end of the year of accession was not counted. However, the final year was counted, even if it was partial. The inclusive or non-accession-year method counted the partial year between a ruler's accession and the new year as an entire year of reign. Thus, the inclusive method was always one year greater than the non-inclusive method. However, there is little or no evidence that Josephus employed the inclusive method for reigns during the late Hellenistic or Roman eras.⁷

For the Hasmonean rulers and for Herod and his sons, Josephus gives only whole number of years except for Aristobulus II and Antigonus for whom he lists years and months. Since these are Judean rulers or at least rulers who were nominally Jewish (e.g. Herod's sons Philip and Antipas), each official regnal year began in the fall with the first day of Tishri in keeping with Josephus's statement about the regnal years relating to 'governmental administration'.

Jachowski's Date of 3 BC for Herod's Death

Jachowski is aware that Josephus's narrative of Herod's last days places it between a lunar eclipse and Passover.⁸ He seeks to eliminate the impact of this by two arguments. The first is his contention,

6. Augustus (*Ant.* 18.32; *War* 2.168), Tiberius (*Ant.* 18.224; *War* 2.180), Gaius (*War* 19.201), Claudius (*Ant.* 20.148; *War* 2.248), Nero (*War* 4.491), Galba (*War* 4.499), Otho (*War* 4.548) and Vitellius (*War* 4.652).

7. Filmer, 'Chronology', pp. 291-94; Ormond Edwards, 'Herodian Chronology', *PEQ* 114 (1982), pp. 29-42 (35); A.E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2nd edn, 2011), p. 188.

8. Jachowski, 'Death of Herod', p. 14. The eclipse is mentioned at *Ant.* 17.167 and the Passover at *Ant.* 17.213; *War* 2.10.

In his earlier *The Jewish War*, Josephus dates Herod's death ... by counting the years of Herod's reign 'non-inclusively' or by an accession system ... When Josephus wrote his later *Antiquities* of the Jews, he mentions that Herod died shortly after a lunar eclipse. However, he corrects this error and dates Herod's and his successors' reigns inclusively.

This cannot be correct. In both works, Josephus lists the length of Herod's reign as thirty-seven years from the time of his appointment as king by the Romans but thirty-four years from having Antigonus slain shortly after conquering Jerusalem.⁹ If Josephus switched to inclusive reckoning in *Antiquities*, then the figures would have been thirty-eight and thirty-five years, since inclusive reckoning is always one year greater than non-inclusive reckoning.

Moreover, while Jachowski alleges that Josephus's notice of the lunar eclipse was an error that he corrected by switching to inclusive reckoning, he offers no demonstration or arguments for this. He simply states this as if it is evident, when, at least to my reading of his text, it is not. Jachowski's motive for eliminating the lunar eclipse as a chronological marker is clear: there was no visible lunar eclipse in Palestine in 3 BC. However, Josephus is clear both in *War* and in *Antiquities* that Herod died shortly after a lunar eclipse but before Passover. Despite Jachowski's claim, most other studies of Herod's reign of which I am aware find little reason to doubt Josephus's assertion about the eclipse. A partial lunar eclipse occurred on 13 March 4 BC, twenty-nine days before Passover.¹⁰ A full lunar eclipse was visible in Judea on 10 January 1 BC, eighty-nine days before Passover that year.¹¹

9. *Ant.* 17.191; *War* 1.165.

10. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, pp. 196-97; J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, rev. edn, 2015), p. 295 (Table 142). A good argument against this eclipse as being the one referenced by Josephus is found in P.L. Maier, 'The Date of the Nativity and the Chronology of Jesus' Life', in J. Vardaman and E.M. Yamauchi (eds.), *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), pp. 113-30 (117-18).

11. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, pp. 196-97; Finegan, *Handbook*, p. 295 (Table 142).

Most proposals for the date of Herod's death, therefore, argue either for early 4 BC or for early 1 BC as the date for Herod's demise.¹²

The Length of Philip's Reign in Tiberius's Twentieth Year

Jachowski goes to great lengths to argue for an explanation of how Josephus's text concerning Philip's reign was changed from Philip being deposed in Tiberius's twentieth year as found in Greek manuscripts to Tiberius's twenty-second year as found in some Latin manuscripts.¹³ However, the upshot of his discussion is that he believes that Josephus's text originally stated that Philip died in Tiberius's twentieth year, not in the twenty-second year as in some Latin manuscripts. He then calculates that this also places Herod's death in 3 BC. However, Jachowski's calculation cannot be correct. Tiberius began to reign in AD 14 after the death of Augustus in August of that year. He was recognized as emperor by the Roman Senate in September. That makes Tiberius's first year August or September AD 14 to July or August AD 15. His twentieth year would have

12. The classic argument followed by many for a 4 BC death is Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (5 vols.; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1891), I, p. 281 n. 3; I, p. 284 n. 11; I, p. 327 n. 1. Arguments for a 1 BC death include W.E. Filmer, 'Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great', *JTS* 17 (1966), pp. 283-98; Edwards, 'Herodian Chronology'; Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians: From Herod the Great to About 200 A.D.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 1-43; Ernest L. Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated* (Pasadena, CA: Foundation for Biblical Research, 2nd edn, 1980); Ernest L. Martin, 'The Nativity and Herod's Death', in J. Vardaman and E.M. Yamauchi (eds.), *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), pp. 85-92; Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, pp. 192-94; Steinmann, 'When Did Herod the Great Reign?'; Rodger C. Young and Andrew E. Steinmann, 'Caligula's Statue for the Jerusalem Temple and Its Relation to the Chronology of Herod the Great', *JETS* 62 (2019), pp. 759-73; Andrew E. Steinmann and Rodger C. Young, 'Elapsed Times for Herod the Great in Josephus', *BSac* 177 (2020), pp. 308-28; Andrew E. Steinmann and Rodger C. Young, 'Consular and Sabbatical Years in Herod's Life', *BS* 177 (2020), pp. 442-61; Andrew E. Steinmann and Rodger C. Young, 'Dating the Death of Herod and the Reigns of his Sons', *BSac* 178 (2021), pp. 436-54.

13. Jachowski, 'Death of Herod', pp. 12-14.

run from August or September AD 33 to July or August AD 34. Since Philip reigned thirty-seven years and since Jachowski holds that Philip's reign could only have been reckoned after Herod's death, we can calculate the date of Herod's death as AD 33/34 – 37 – 1 (no zero year) = 5/4 BC. If Jachowski's contention were correct, Herod died no earlier than August 5 BC and no later than August 4 BC. Since Herod died before Passover, the only viable date for his death by this calculation is no earlier than August 5 BC and no later than the first quarter of 4 BC.

However, the question of whether Philip antedated his reign to a time before Herod's death can be answered by numismatics. A study of the coins issued by Philip and his brother Antipas and a careful examination of Josephus's statements about the length of the reign of Archelaus demonstrate Jachowski's contention is false: Philip antedated his reign to a time before his father's death.¹⁴

The Coins of Philip

Philip issued coins in eight series, dated years 5, 12, 16, 19, 30, 34 and 37. The first issue that Philip's coins settle is the length of his reign. His last series of coins was issued in four denominations, each inscribed on the reverse with LAZ ('year 37' [with the symbol L denoting 'year']).¹⁵ They confirm the texts of Josephus that give thirty-seven years for the length of Philip's reign.

In year 19 of his reign, Philip issued a coin inscribed on the obverse (in the Greek dative case) ΤΙΒ ΚΑΙCΑΡΙ ΣΕΒΑΣ ('for Tib[erius] Caesar Augustus').¹⁶ The reverse has the inscription ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ ΤΕΤΡΑΧΟΥ ('of Philip the Tetrarch') and the symbol L followed by ΙΘ, denoting year 19. It

14. Steinmann and Young, 'Dating the Death of Herod', pp. 446-52. Coins issued by the Herodians can be found in several catalogues, including David Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins* (New York: Amphora, 5th edn, 2010); Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins from the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (Nyack, NY: Amphora, 2001) and the series *Roman Provincial Coinage Online* which is available in an online database with photos (<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk>). This database is searchable and maintained by Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum. For the coins discussed below, the catalogue number in *Roman Provincial Coins Online* will be referenced with volume number.

15. *RPC Online* 1.4952-4953.

16. *RPC Online* 1.4943.

likely commemorates Tiberius's ascension to the imperial throne by declaration of the Senate on September 18 AD 14. This followed the death of Augustus on August 19 AD 14. The coin was probably issued not long after news of Tiberius's accession reached Judea. Upon hearing of Tiberius's accession sometime in October or November of AD 14, it is likely that Philip issued this coin late in that year or early in AD 15. This would make AD 14t Philip's year 19.

The coin of year 19 settles this issue that Jachowski was grappling with when producing his conjecture. Since Philip's year 19 was AD 14t, his thirty-seventh and final year, eighteen years later, was AD 32t. This rules out Philip's dying in the twenty-second year of Tiberius, as given in some manuscripts of Josephus. It is compatible with Tiberius's twentieth year if Josephus reckoned Tiberius's reign in a factual manner, that is, reckoning Tiberius's first year as starting with his declaration as emperor by the Senate on 18 September AD 14, so that his twentieth year by this reckoning began on 18 September AD 33. This overlaps Philip's thirty-seventh year by Judean reckoning in the period 18 September to 14 October (last day of Elul), indicating that Philip died during those four weeks. The calculation depends on Josephus reckoning Tiberius's twentieth year in a factual sense rather than starting on 1 January.¹⁷ That Josephus used this method for Roman emperors is suggested by his giving their reign lengths in the exact terms of years, months and days rather than just years as he does for Judean rulers. Therefore, upon hearing of Tiberius's accession sometime in October or November of AD 14, it is likely that Philip issued this coin late in that year or early in AD 15.

Another question this coin answers is from what date Philip reckoned the beginning of his reign. Since the coin was issued in Judean year AD 14t,

17. *Ant.* 18.224 (twenty-two years five months and three days); *War* 2.180 (twenty-two years, six months and three days). The difference may be explained that, in *War*, Josephus was attempting to calculate Tiberius's reign from the death of Augustus (AD Aug 19, 14), while in *Antiquities* he was attempting to calculate Tiberius's reign from his declaration as emperor by the Senate (AD Sep 18, 14). In both cases Josephus appears to have miscalculated. Tiberius reigned twenty-two years, five months, and twenty-seven days from his investiture by the Senate until his death (Julian calendar, beginning on Sep 17 AD 14 and ending on Marc 16 AD 37). If one reckons his reign from the day after Augustus's death on Aug 19 AD 14, he reigned twenty-two years, six months and twenty-five days.

Philip's first year was 6t BC, and his official regnal years spanned 5t BC to AD 32t.¹⁸ This indicates that Philip was antedating his reign to a time before the death of Herod. Therefore, his death in Tiberius's twentieth year cannot be used to date Herod's death.

Another of Philip's coins confirms this. In his year 34, Philip issued a coin inscribed on its obverse ΤΙΒΕΡΙΟΥΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣΚΑΙΣΑΡ ('of Tiberius Augustus Caesar').¹⁹ On its reverse is the inscription ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΣΤΕΤΡΑΡΧΟΥΚΤΙΣ ('of Philip the Tetrarch, founder') as well as ΛΛΔ ('year 34'). This coin commemorates Philip's re-founding of Bethsaida by renaming it Livias in honor of Livia Drusilla, the wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius.²⁰ Livia died on 28 September AD 29, and this coin commemorates Philip's dedication of Bethsaida to her in the following year, AD 29t by Judean reckoning. Once again, this implies that Philip reckoned his accession year as 6t BC.²¹

The Coins of Antipas

The last of Antipas's coins were dated to year 43.²² They contain the inscription ΓΑΙΩ ΚΑΙCΑΡΙ ΓΕΡΜΑΝΙΚΩ ('in honor of Gaius Caesar Germanicus'). Antipas was deposed by Gaius in Rome before the fall of AD 39, since Caligula (i.e. Gaius) left for Gaul in the fall of that year and did not return until 31 August AD 40.²³ The encounter between Caligula and Antipas in Rome could not have occurred after Caligula's return from Gaul (i.e. after August AD 40), because Antipas was not involved in the trouble over Caligula's statue for the Jerusalem temple that is related by Josephus and Philo (*Legatio ad Galium*) after his account of the deposition of Antipas. Therefore, year 43 was Antipas's last year, and it dates to AD 38t in the Judean system. This coin, therefore, shows that Antipas also reckoned

18. AD 14t – 19 – 1 (no year zero) = 6t BC.

19. *RPC Online* 1.4948.

20. As stipulated in Augustus's will, Livia had been adopted into the Julian family and given the title 'Augusta'. She then became known as Julia Augusta. While the city was generally known as 'Livias', Josephus always calls this city 'Julias' since he calls Augustus's wife 'Julia', never 'Livia' (*Ant.* 18.27-28, 108; 20.159; *Life* 1.398-399; *War* 2.168, 252; 3.57, 515; 4.438, 454).

21. AD 29t – 34 – 1 (no year zero) = 6t BC.

22. *RPC Online* 1.4934-4937.

23. Suetonius, *Calig.* 8, 49.

his accession as beginning in 6 BC.²⁴ The official regnal years for Antipas spanned 5t BC to AD 38t.

The Reign of Archelaus

Numismatics is of no value in dating the reign of Herod's son Archelaus, since the coins he issued bear no dates. The last year of Archelaus's reign is given in Cassius Dio as the consular year corresponding to AD 6, when Archelaus was banished by Augustus to 'beyond the Alps'.²⁵ Josephus relates that it was in the tenth year of his reign that Archelaus was banished to Vienna in Gaul.²⁶ The narration of events in *Antiquities* and *War* suggests that Archelaus's banishment came before the fall season of AD 6 so that his last year by Judean reckoning would be AD 5t. Once again, it appears that Archelaus, like his brothers, reckoned his reign from 6t BC.²⁷

To What Event Did Herod's Sons Antedate their Reigns?

Since all three of Herod's sons antedated their reigns to 6t BC, that date must have been significant. Josephus relates that some years before his death Herod declared his son Antipater to be his heir. Subsequently, Herod had Antipater executed when he discovered that his son and heir had been behind a plot to assassinate Herod's brother Pheroras. However, in connection with declaring Antipater his heir Herod assigned royal status to his sons. This is indicated by a passage in *War* where, according to Josephus, Herod declared, 'I am not giving my kingdom to my sons, but only giving them royal titles by which they may enjoy the easy side of government as princes, while the burden of decision rests upon me whether or not I want it.'²⁸ Numismatics suggest that this took place in 6t BC.²⁹

24. AD 38t – 43 – 1 (no year zero) = 6t BC.

25. Cassius Dio, *Hist. rom.* 55.27.

26. *Ant.* 17.342. Earlier in *War*, Josephus credited Archelaus with nine years (*War* 2.111). He appears to have corrected this to ten years when he wrote *Antiquities*.

27. AD 5t – 10 – 1 (no year zero) = 6t BC.

28. *War* 1.461.

29. This date is more amenable to a 1 BC death of Herod than to a 4 BC death. The one-and-a-half years between Tishri 6 BC and Nisan 4 BC do not allow for: (1) Antipater to be declared Herod's heir in his will; (2) Antipater's plot to assassinate Pheroras to be implemented and then discovered; (3) Antipater's trial in Rome and

Concluding Thoughts

Jachowski attempted to date Herod's death to 3 BC, but his arguments do not align with the evidence. Yet he is correct in maintaining that the text of Josephus originally placed Philip's death in Tiberius's twentieth year. His conjecture concerning how this was changed to Tiberius's twenty-second year in some Latin manuscripts is interesting and could possibly be correct. However, his use of this to argue that Herod died in 3 BC does not align with the date of Philip's death in Tiberius's twentieth year nor any of the other evidence he cites. Moreover, the numismatic artifacts indicate that Herod's sons Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip all antedated their accessions to 6t BC, with their first official years as 5t BC. This is before the death of Herod, whether one accepts his death as occurring in 4 BC or 1 BC.

subsequent execution, which required both Antipater and Herod to travel to Rome;
(4) Herod's return to Palestine; (5) Herod's final actions, illness and death.