



Prutah of Antonius Felix depicting two shields and javelins and a palm tree (54-60 CE)

Prutah of Antonius Felix depicting two shields and javelins and a palm tree (54-60 CE) - Obverse



[1]

[Prutah of Antonius Felix depicting two shields and javelins and a palm tree \(54-60 CE\) - Reverse](#) [2]



[3]

Denomination:

Prutah

Date: 54 CE

Material:

Bronze

Mint: Caesarea Maritima

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien/Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Name of Ruler:

Claudius (procurator Antonius Felix)

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Two shields and javelins

Inscription: NEPW K??Y KAICAP

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Palm tree

Inscription: BPIT L I? KAI



Diameter (mm): 17.00mm

Weight (g): 2.61g

Commentary:

(See Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins*, pl. 75, no. 340)

This prutah, minted at Caesarea Maritima by Antonius Felix, procurator of Judea, in 54 CE, depicts on the obverse two shields and javelins, and on the reverse a palm tree. The prutah (in Hebrew ?????) was a Jewish bronze coin of low value minted both by the prefects of the Roman province of Judea, and also by the Jews during the First Revolt. They are sometimes also referred to as “Masada coins.” The inscription is in Greek, and spans from the obverse to the reverse, refers to Nero Claudius Caesar (Nero came to the throne in 54 CE after the death of his uncle and adopted father Claudius) and Britannicus, Claudius’s son by birth. The inscription also records the year in which the coin was minted, “L I? KAI”: the fourteenth year of the reign of the emperor (KAI being an abbreviation of ?????, *kaisar*). We can therefore date the coin to 54 CE (Claudius came to power in 41 CE), which is also the year he died.

In the wake of the death of Herod Agrippa I (44 CE), Claudius appointed Cuspius Fadus as governor of Judea (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XIX.9.2; *Jewish War* II.11.6). Contrary to the previous governors of Judaea, who held the title of prefect, from Claudius onwards until the First Jewish Revolt (66-77 CE) the governors of Judea were given the title of procurator. Although still of equestrian rank, they enjoyed a major degree of independence from the senatorial governors of Syria. After the procurator Cumanus was deposed in 52 CE he was succeeded by Antonius Felix, who was the brother of Claudius’s secretary Pallas, an imperial freedman of either Antonia Minor or Claudius. Felix had by this point married Drusilla of Judea, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and Cyprus, and sister of the young Agrippa II (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XX.137-140). In fact Felix is also the Roman procurator in front of whom Paul the Apostle stands trial after being arrested in Jerusalem, and the Lukan author tells of how Paul speaks to Felix and Drusilla about his beliefs (see the commentary on [Acts 24:10-26](#) [4]).

This coin bears contrasting messages. On the one hand, the two crossed shields and javelins depicted on the obverse served to emphasize the power of the Roman hegemonic authority, by emphasising its military strength. It is possible that Felix wished to celebrate Claudius’s conquest of Britannia (which began in 43 CE), as the two crossed shields are Celtic in design. The motif was also probably inspired by a similar type minted by Claudius between 41 and 45 CE (see RIC I², Claudius, no. 74), which depicts on the reverse a battle standard with two crossed shields and javelins in addition to trumpets, very similar to the imagery on the present prutah, and bearing the inscription “DE GERMANIS” (the coin celebrates the German conquests of Claudius’s father, Drusus, in 12-9 BCE). The purpose of the very similar image of weaponry on this prutah, then, may well be a way of warning “would be” Jewish rebels that an attempt to rise against Rome would lead to their defeat. The connection to Judaism is made evident by the fact that the reverse of the prutah depicts a palm tree, which was perceived as a Jewish symbol due to it being native to Judea (see Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, Volume 2, p. 182-183). The palm tree already appears on coins minted by Coponius, the first prefect of Judea, and was one of the Seven Species which characterized the Land of Israel (see Deuteronomy 8:8; the other six species are wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, and olive oil). In the Bible the English word “honey” indicates the product made from the palm trees dates. Thus, the palm with seven branches, shaped like the menorah, another very important Jewish symbol, came to symbolize the province of Judea. Moreover, the palm tree also stood for righteousness in Jewish tradition (Psalm 92:12) (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, Volume 2, p. 120-121). Felix minted these coins in enormous quantities, and fulfilled the needs of the local market until 58 CE (Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, Volume 2, p. 183). Essentially, this coin made clear that while Rome was aware of Jewish cultural symbols and made a nominal attempt to appease the Jewish people by avoiding anthropomorphic representations and continuing to include Jewish symbols on their coinage, ultimately the Roman power, with its powerful army, had dominion (for a similar blend of messages, see also [Prutah of Valerius Gratus depicting three lilies \(16 CE\)](#) [5]).

Keywords in the original language:

- [??????](#) [6]

Thematic keywords:



- [Jewish symbols](#) [7]
- [Judea](#) [8]
- [Roman hegemony](#) [9]
- [procurator](#) [10]
- [Claudius](#) [11]
- [Britannia](#) [12]
- [province](#) [13]
- [war](#) [14]
- [triumph](#) [15]
- [palm tree](#) [16]
- [Jews](#) [17]
- [Jerusalem Temple](#) [18]
- [Seven Species](#) [19]

Bibliographical references:

[Ancient Jewish Coinage 2: Herod the Great through Bar Cochba](#) [20]

Meshorer, Ya'akovbook*Ancient Jewish Coinage 2: Herod the Great through Bar Cochba*Dix Hills, N.Y.Amphora Books 1982

[A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba](#) [21]

Meshorer, Ya'akovbook*A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba*JerusalemYad Ben-Zvi Press2001

Other sources connected with this document: Numismatic item

[Prutah of Valerius Gratus depicting three lilies \(16 CE\)](#) [22]

- [Read more about Prutah of Valerius Gratus depicting three lilies \(16 CE\)](#) [22]

Text

[Acts 24:10-26](#) [23]

Paul's defence before Felix the procurator

- [Read more about Acts 24:10-26](#) [23]

Realized by:

[Samuele Rocca](#) [24]





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Links

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- [2] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/prutah-antonius-felix-depicting-two-shields-and-javelins-and-palm-tree-54-60-ce-reverse>
- [3] https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/09_08b_2.jpg?itok=38Vh1usp
- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/acts-2410-26>
- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/perutah-valerius-gratus-depicting-three-lilies-16-ce>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/%CE%BA%CE%B1%E1%BF%96%CF%83%CE%B1%CF%81>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/jewish-symbols>
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- [19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/seven-species>
- [20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/ancient-jewish-coinage-2-herod-great-through-bar-cochba>
- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/treasury-jewish-coins-persian-period-bar-kokhba>
- [22] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/prutah-valerius-gratus-depicting-three-lilies-16-ce>
- [23] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/acts-2410-26>
- [24] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/samuele-rocca>