

TWO DOZEN GREEK COINS.

BY EDWARD L. CUTTS.

SILVER was the principal circulating medium of ancient commerce. It was probably at first divided for convenience into bars and lumps, which were roughly parts and multiples of a given standard weight. The seller had the price of his goods weighed out to him, and judged of the purity of the metal by eye.

The Lydians of Asia Minor have the credit of having (about 700 B.C.) facilitated the operations of trade by stamping the silver pieces with a die, as a guarantee of their weight and purity. This guarantee was of a religious character. The treasuries of the ancient cities were within the temples, under the protection of their deities; there is reason to believe that the earliest mints were also placed within the temple precincts; the types of the dies were symbols of the deity. For the State to issue coin of false weight or purity would be a sacrilege, and for anyone to mutilate the current coin would be an offence against the deity under whose protection it was placed. Other States followed the example set by the Lydians, until nearly every commercial State had a coinage of its own.

The Greek genius soon recognised the State coinage as a fit motive and material for art. It transformed the ovoid lump of metal with its rude assay-work into a medallion ornamented—at first on one side only, but soon on both sides—with designs in relief. The method of producing the designs was by striking the silver disc with dies of hardened metal; a method which is still retained, because it is found to produce a sharper and more finished result than casting the metal in a mould.

The subjects of the designs upon the earlier coinage down to the time of Alexander the Great are always sacred subjects; very generally a head of the tutelary deity of the city which issued the coins on the obverse, and on the reverse some object sacred to the deity: thus, the coins of Athens have on the obverse a head of Pallas, and on the reverse an owl. It is probable that in many cases the artist

at work upon the die, in the precinct of the temple, actually copied the statue of the deity in the neighbouring Naos. The spirit of patriotism led the rulers of the State to employ the best contemporary art upon the coinage which represented the city's wealth and greatness.

As works of art, the Greek coins form an unbroken series of illustrations of the rise, culmination, and decay of Greek plastic art. If they were not so small, they would form the finest series of art-studies in the world. As it is, the art-student may take a selection from them which will make him the owner of a complete gallery of authentic, uninjured examples of Greek sculpture of the best age; the historical student may form a gallery of contemporary portraits of the principal personages of history, from the time of Alexander downwards, done by artists who knew how to present not merely the features, but the very character of the man. Originals, indeed, are costly, and rarely to be had at any cost; but electrotype facsimiles may be had at the British Museum at so small a price that the student can supply himself with dozens of the finest coins in the world at a very modest outlay.

We have selected a few examples from the Coin Room of the British Museum, and reproduce them here by photography. Many of them are of the fourth century B.C., when the art was at its highest point of excellency. Others are chosen for their lifelike characterisation of different types of feature. An essay might be written on every one of them; there is only room here for a brief note upon each.

No. 1 is a specimen of the earliest form of coin, in which the ovoid lump of metal



No. 1.

is stamped with the Æginetan assay-mark of the turtle, the symbol of Astarte. On the obverse is the impression of the tool which was used to stamp the coin into its die.

No. 2 is a tetradrachm of Athens, with

a head of Pallas on the obverse, and on the reverse an owl and olive-branch on the incuse square. An early example of the improved method of charging the stamp



No. 2.

with a device which was speedily developed into the use of a double die, with the result of making the coin a double medal. It is a fine example of the archaic art of Greece, probably not much later than the time of Solon—*i.e.*, about the middle of the sixth century B.C. The head is probably copied from the statue of Pallas in the temple on the Acropolis—not the temple whose ruins still exist, and the famous chryselephantine statue of Phidias—but the temple and the statue which preceded them. The archaic type was retained on the coins of Athens to a late date.

No. 3. A coin of Thebes; represents Heracles stringing his bow. It is a fine example of art immediately before the time of Phidias, *i.e.*, before 430 B.C. On the reverse is the name of the city; with Harmonia seated, holding a helmet.



No. 3.

No. 4. A coin of Thurium, one of the Greek cities of Southern Italy; represents Pallas, her helmet bound with an olive



No. 4.

wreath. It is of the fourth century B.C. Reverse: the name of the city, and a bull.

No. 5. A coin of Cræsus, 568-554 B.C. "Rich as Cræsus" was a proverb 2500 years ago, and has not yet altogether died out of the speech of men. It brings ancient history home to us when we handle a specimen of the gold and silver coins which filled the treasury of Sardis. The design is a half lion and a half bull, face to face.



No. 5.

lion's scalp. On the reverse is Pallas in a quadriga, Nike above crowning her.



No. 6.

No. 7. A coin of Agrigentum in Sicily; represents with great truth and spirit two



No. 7.

eagles standing on a captured hare; one is about to tear the prey, the other raises its head with a scream of triumph. The eagle is one of the commonest types of the coinage of this city; it probably alludes to the local worship of Zeus. Reverse: the name of the city; Nikediving a quadriga.

No. 8. A specimen of the fine series of the coins of Elis; it represents Hera, crowned. Reverse: contracted name of the city; a thunderbolt in a wreath.



No. 8.

No. 9. A coin of Clazomenæ. A full-face head of Apollo. Full-face heads are characteristic of the coinage of the fourth century B.C. This is selected as a good example of them. Reverse: the name



No. 9.

of the city; a swan, one of the symbols of Apollo, to whom there was a temple in the city. The neighbourhood abounds in wild swans, and it is said that the name of the city was taken from their shrill cries.

No. 10. A coin of Colophon, one of the Greek cities of Asia Minor under the sovereignty of the King of Persia. The head is a very striking portrait of a Persian satrap; perhaps of Pharnabazus or Tissaphernes; and carries us back to the time

of the great strife between the Greeks and Persians, and to "the Retreat of the Ten Thousand."



No. 10.

No. 11. A coin of Philip the Great, King of Macedon. The design is a head of Zeus, a very fine work of art, probably copied from the famous statue of the Olympian Zeus by Phidias,



No. 11.

which was reckoned the masterpiece of Greek sculpture. Reverse: the name of the king; a boy on horseback.

No. 12. A gold coin of Tarentum; one of the earliest specimens of the beautiful gold coinage of this city, about the middle of the fourth century B.C. The head is that of Demeter wearing a crown and veil. Reverse: contracted name of the city; a youth on horseback, crowning his horse.



No. 12.

No. 13. Another gold coin of Tarentum, representing an armed horseman, who may be compared with those of the Elgin Marbles. Reverse: the name of the city; Tarason a dolphin.



No. 13.

No. 14. A coin of Thurium; the very fine and striking design represents Pallas wearing an Athenian helmet highly ornamented in



No. 14.

front with Scylla—the dogs' heads about her waist, a griffin on the neck-piece. Reverse: the name of the city; a bull.



No. 15.

No. 15. The coins of the powerful city of Syracuse are very numerous and of great diversity of types, and form a series of masterpieces of the engraver's art. This example is by the engraver Evænetus. It represents the head of Persephone crowned with corn-leaves and surrounded by symbolic dolphins. It is one of the finest of ancient coins. Reverse: a victorious quadriga, armour, and the word *Athla*—prizes.

No. 16. Another of the Syracusan coins, by the engraver Cimon, which rivals the



No. 16.

preceding in merit. Reverse: the name of the city; a victorious quadriga, Nike crowning the victor.

No. 17. Alexander the Great was the first man who placed his own likeness upon his coins, but in the character of a deity. In this coin, probably struck in his own lifetime, the face is that of Alexander, but in the character of Heracles,



No. 17.

as indicated by the lion's skin. Reverse: the name of the king; a head of Perseus.

The head of Alexander was adopted as the type of the obverse of their coins by many of the successors to his conquests, and even by some of the free cities. The heads are of very fine execution; they all have a strong likeness to each other, and

may very possibly have been copied from the famous statue executed by Lysiphus, or the equally famous gem portrait of



No. 18.

Pyrgoteles. Here is one of them, No. 18, struck by Lysimachus; the horn shows that Alexander is to be accepted as (what he claimed to be) the son of Zeus Ammon. But, emboldened by the innovation of Alexander, kings began to put their own heads upon their coinage; and their "image and superscription" upon the coinage of the country became one of



No. 19.

the signs of sovereignty. The result is that, as in the earlier part of the series we get copies of the finest conceptions by the great sculptors of the deities and heroes of classical mythology and fable, so in the latter part of the series we get authentic



No. 20.

portraits of the kings of Greek and Roman history by the best contemporary artists. From the vast gallery of portraits we select a series of several of the Seleucid kings of Syria as examples of fine and characteristic portraiture.

No. 19 is Seleucus I., the general who succeeded to the Asian conquests of Alexander. The helmet is adorned with the horn and ear of the bull, a symbol of



No. 21.

strength, and round the neck a lion's skin. Reverse: the name of the king; Nike crowning a trophy.

No. 20. Antiochus I. (280-261 B.C.), the eldest son and successor of the preceding. Reverse: Apollo.

No. 21. Antiochus II. (261-246 B.C.), son and successor of the preceding. He waged war with Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, and so weakened his own power



No. 22.

that Parthia and Bactria made themselves independent. Reverse: Heracles, seated.

No. 22. Seleucus II., called Callinicus, 246-226 B.C. Son of the preceding. Ptolemy Euergetes drove him from his throne. Reverse: Apollo, standing.

No. 23. Antiochus Hierax, before 227 B.C., brother of the preceding, was independent King of Asia Minor. The coin



No. 23.

is given for the sake of the striking portraiture.

No. 24. Seleucus III., called Ceraunus, a feeble prince, who succeeded Seleucus II. at the age of seventeen, and was assassinated after a three-years' reign.

And so the series of the Seleucids continues down to the thirteenth Antiochus,



No. 24.

who was dethroned by Pompey in 65 B.C., and Syria became a Roman province.

We conclude with two other fine examples of the Syracusan mint.

No. 25 is Hiero II., about 270 B.C.; not Hiero the Tyrant, but the popular and magnificent ruler celebrated by Theocritus,

a quadriga. It is one of the finest coins of the third century B.C.

No. 26 is a coin of the same king, representing, as the inscription says,



No. 25.



No. 26.

the relative and friend of Archimedes, the faithful ally of Rome in the Punic Wars. Reverse: the name of the king; Nike in

Philistis, who is only known by her beautiful coins and by an inscription in the theatre at Syracuse, but is supposed to have been the wife of Hiero.

