

# ANCIENT GREEK COINS

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## VOLUME I

PART I. INTRODUCTION  
PARTS II-IV. MAGNA GRAECIA

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BY

FRANK SHERMAN BENSON



PRIVATELY PRINTED

1900-1

Fogg Art Museum  
Harvard University

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Vol. 1.

OUT of these cabinets there smiles  
upon us an eternal spring of the  
blossoms and flowers of art.

— *Goethe's Italian Journey.*

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I

## INTRODUCTION

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REPRINTED FROM  
"THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NUMISMATICS."



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## III. MAGNA GRAECIA.



**I**N our introductory remarks a brief description was given of the primitive process employed by the Greeks in striking their coins ; an interesting subject, the details of which may with advantage be again considered, in connection with the somewhat uncertain question of die-cutting. We saw that the obverse die was sunk into the face of an anvil, and the corresponding reverse die attached to the lower end of a bar of iron. Between these two dies a prepared piece of metal, or "blank," heated to redness, was placed ; and repeated blows of a heavy hammer upon the upper end of the bar produced the finished coin. That this was their simple and uncertain method, modified by slight improvements in the course of centuries, seems clear.

But as to the tools and materials used in the production of these dies there still remains a certain amount of doubt, in spite of persevering research and clever conjecture.

Since the practice of gem engraving antedated by many centuries the invention of the cognate glyptic art of die-cutting, it is probable that the improvements gradually evolved in implements and technique of the former, were speedily appropriated by workers in the sister branch. But in contrast to the hard, brittle stone which had to be laboriously engraved by the gem-expert, the material upon which the coin-artist exercised his skill was some soft, malleable metal, probably bronze. Its softness is shown by the facility with which dies seem to have been cut, and by the equal facility, unfortunately, with which they were injuriously affected by rough usage or action of the elements. There are many evidences of this peculiar liability to injury; such as, that no example of an ancient Greek coin-die has come down to us; that, in some otherwise well-preserved coins, there is a want of sharpness which can be only the result of a rapid wear of the die; that we also frequently find in coins defects due to corrosion or fracture of their dies; and that two coins from the same die so rarely appear that the few instances of such occurrence are always deemed worthy of note. Again, the many varieties of a single type from the hand of one artist, as well as certain issues of emergency show that ancient dies must have been produced with an ease and rapidity incomprehensible in our day, when the cutting of one die in the hardened steel may consume months. These old coin-engravers, however, from constant practice in this rapid production of dies doubtless acquired a wonderful facility; degenerating in some cases, it must be confessed, into carelessness and indifference.

If an Egyptian wall-painting be rightly interpreted, it seems certain that at an early date, centuries in fact before the appearance of coinage, the graver's wheel was in use among workers in gold, and inferentially among gem-engravers. This tool appears to have been, in principle, the same as at the present day. On a spindle there was mounted a minute copper disk, which moistened in a mixture of oil and diamond dust would when whirled with rapidity, speedily cut into gems, gold, or — after its adaptation (probably immediate) to the invention of coinage — with even greater ease into the soft metal used for dies. It is conjectured that with this wheel the design

was roughly cut out, and that for the more minute and delicate work the jeweller's fixed point was used; in finishing with which the engraver removed all trace of the bosses produced by the coarser implement. Not always, however; for we have seen that on early coins hair is represented, after the archaic model of statuary, by clearly defined dots; while at a later period these bosses seem purposely left on the lettering of inscriptions.

A charming feature, which adds greatly to the interest of the coinages of Magna Graecia and Sicily — found moreover with one or two exceptions nowhere else in the Greek world — appears in the signatures which certain coin-engravers of the fine-art periods affixed to their compositions. This practice shows that in these western regions the artistic value and the importance of coins were fully appreciated; and that the State strove to encourage artists of the highest ability and of established reputation to employ their talent in the production of a dignified and artistic coinage.

In the period of finest art these signatures were as a rule very minute and inconspicuous, being engraved, as we shall see, on the front of an amphyx, beneath a neck, on a dolphin's back, or on a tablet borne by a flying Nike. There was also a great diversity in the manner of writing the names. Sometimes one would appear in full, and again in abbreviated form; ΦΙΛΙΞΤΙΩΝ, ΦΙΛΙΞΤΙ and ΦΙ; ΕΥΜΗΝΟΥ and ΕΥ; ΕΥΑΙΝΕΤΟ and ΕΥΑΙΝ; sometimes a signature was written always at length, ΜΟΛΟΞΞΟΞ; or it was represented by the initial alone, as Φ, Π and Δ.

At a later period in Magna Graecia the artists seem to have increased the size of their signatures, now always abbreviated, and to have placed them in more prominent positions. This departure from accepted custom caused until within a short time a grave error in their interpretation. Throughout the Greek world in early days it was the usage for the civic magistrate ruling at the time of a fresh coinage to place thereon a personal symbol as his official signet. Later, by the fourth century, this was supplemented or replaced by the magistrate's name or initials; always in large letters and occupying a prominent position in the field. So that the entire class represented by ΦΙ



and ΔΑΙ—referred to under Taras (No. 12) and Elea (No. 17)—was naturally supposed to consist of these magistrates' signatures. This was the accepted explanation until the appearance, in 1889, of the *Horsemen of Tarentum*, in which Mr. Evans demonstrated by an analysis of the similar styles prevailing on coins having the same signature, that these Magna Graecian initials must be those of die-sinkers. This strange innovation is explained by the theory that these die-sinkers were also private moneyers, and that they thus boldly placed on record their full responsibility for the fineness and accurate weight of the coin.

Admitting only the signatures which are indisputably those of engravers, we find less than fifty in all. The minuteness and delicacy of many of these names during the best art-periods show that the workmen must have been gifted with keen, trained vision, and accustomed probably from youth to working in the restricted and difficult field afforded by a coin-die or a gem. For, as has been pointed out, die-sinkers were often also gem-engravers; and we may consider the rarity (actual and comparative) of an artist's signature on a gem as additional evidence that the position of die-engraver was recognized by the State as a branch of its official life.

While certain of these artists confined their work to a single city, as ΕΥΚΛΕΙΔΑΣ at Syracuse, occasionally an enterprising engraver of wide repute would extend the field of his activity; as for instance Φ, whose charming and characteristic compositions appear at Thourioi, Terina, Elea and adjacent towns.

Unfortunately no mention of a die-engraver is made by any writer of antiquity, so that the details usually afforded by history regarding an artist, such as the date, place, and duration of his artistic career, must all be supplied from a comparative analysis of such examples of his work as have survived. It will be interesting however to examine the various signatures as they appear, with their aid to group the artists into schools of similar or widely divergent styles, and to consider such general information regarding them as it has been possible to collect, or to infer.

The coins shown on Plate III illustrate the four art-periods which succeeded the archaic ; and exemplify the rise, the glory, and the decline of the art.

## KROTON (BRUTII).

24. Stater, wt. 123 grs. B. C. 480-420. (Pl. III : 1.) Obv. Eagle, standing to right, and flapping his wings. Rev.  $\varphi$ PO Tripod ; on left, laurel-leaf.

(From the Bunbury sale.)

Again we have, as in our incuse Krotoniate example (Pl. I : 4), the bird of Zeus, the familiar of Pythagoras ; but now presented in a charming attitude of easy activity which marks a wonderful advance in technical skill. The spirited nature of this type, as well as the strong, simple, dignified treatment of the tripod, show that our example must be a product of the closing years of the transitional period ; shortly before the substitution, in inscriptions, of  $\kappa$  for the archaic  $\varphi$ ,—a change which at Kroton took place toward the end of the fifth century. The laurel-leaf supplements the tripod in its constant symbolism of the protecting Apollo.

## KROTON (BRUTII).

25. Stater, wt. 102 grs. B. C. 420-390. (Pl. III : 2.) Obv. Eagle with head turned back, standing to right on thunderbolt ; on right, terminal figure of Hermes ; magistrate's initials  $\Phi$ 1. Rev.  $\kappa$ PO Tripod, crowned by flying Nike on left.

(From the Evans sale.)

In the small accessory type of this obverse we first meet with an example of the well-known Hermai. These were representations of the god Hermes, who was portrayed in early times simply by a rough, square block or column of stone, surmounted by a head. Such rude shapes, later, under the influence of a universal art-progression, imitated, first vaguely then with greater likeness, the human form ; until finally they became as in the present instance draped but complete statues of the god ; always preserving however a marked degree of archaistic stiffness reminiscent of their primitive origin. Our coin shows Hermes bearing in one hand his heraldic staff, and in the other a patera of sacrifice.

The deeply religious nature of the Greek was displayed in every act, public and private; so that we need feel no surprise at learning that these symbolic statues of Hermes were familiar features, whether of the cities, where they stood at the doors of temples, tombs, and houses; or of the country, where they defined the boundaries of States and private properties, marked the position of cross roads, and at times formed whole avenues. "The religious feeling of the Greeks considered the god to be planted or domiciliated where his statue stood, so that the companionship, sympathy and guardianship of Hermes" were ever-present, beneficent influences.

The strength of this feeling of religious veneration finds its clearest expression in the unexampled horror and dismay spread throughout Athens by the wholesale and mysterious mutilation of the city's Hermai, on the eve of her first expedition against Syracuse. The disasters and humiliations arising from that war seemed to the conscience-stricken Athenians a cruel but just Nemesis, inspired by this deity, outraged, indignant, and at last hopelessly implacable, as it became apparent how futile were to be all their strenuous and long-continued efforts to discover and punish the perpetrators of the sacrilege.

M. Sambon sees in each detail of this coin,—the war-like eagle standing in menacing attitude on the devastating thunderbolt of Zeus, the Hermes pouring forth a propitiatory libation, and the floating Nike, who crowns, through his tripod-symbol, the sun-god Apollo victorious over the serpent Python—a foreshadowing of the fierce struggle for independence which, as our next coin will show us, was to come to the Krotoniates, so soon, and with so disastrous a termination.

#### KROTON (BRUTTI).

26. Stater, wt. 120 grs. B. C. 390. (Pl. III: 3.) Obv. ΚΡΟΤΩΝΙΑΤΑΞ Head of Apollo to right, laureate, hair long and flowing. Rev. Infant Herakles, naked, seated on rock, facing, and strangling two serpents.

The reverse group, originating at Thebes about fifty years before this date, probably in its inception depicted simply another action in the life of

the great Theban hero, who furnished so many grand types for the coinage of his reputed birthplace. When, however, about 395 B. C. two great Hellenic alliances were concluded,—both directed against the unbearable oppression of Spartan rule,—one in Greece, between Thebes, Athens, Corinth, and Argos, the other in Asia between certain Greek cities of the mainland and islands; each adopted this coin-type, seemingly so appropriate in its symbolism “of the victory of light over darkness, of good over evil, and of free and united Hellas over barbarism and tyranny.”

Thus, when a few years later Kroton headed a confederation of Italian cities seeking mutual protection against the threatened encroachments of Syracusan Dionysios on the one hand and the Lucanians on the other, it must have seemed of good omen that the coins issued by the leading city should bear a type which recalled such marked triumphs of right over might, of freedom over despotism. Such high hopes were, unfortunately, not destined for fulfillment, and the crushing defeat of the allied forces in 388 B. C. by Dionysios, placed at the tyrant's mercy Kroton as well as most of the Greek cities of Bruttii.

The head of Apollo now makes its first appearance on the Krotoniate coinage, either in place of or in conjunction with his symbol the tripod. Our obverse gives a noble example of the almost effeminate type with flowing hair.

#### KROTON (BRUTTII).

27. Stater, wt. 107 grs. B. C. 370–330. (Pl. III: 4.) Obv. Head of Apollo to right, laureate; hair long and flowing. Rev. KPO Tripod ornamented; on left, branch of laurel, filleted.

For twelve years after this capture Kroton is said to have been kept in subjection by a garrison of Dionysios, under whose despotic rule the city struck no coins. When at his death, a restored independence enabled it to enjoy again the right of coinage, the old types were revived; but now showing a soft delicacy and a complex ornateness, which clearly prefigure the weakness of decline.

## THOURIOI (LUCANIA).

28. Stater, wt. 122 grs. B. C. 420-390. (Pl. III : 5.) Obv. Head of Pallas to right, wearing crested Athenian helmet, ornamented with olive-wreath ; artist's signature  $\Phi$ . Rev.  $\Theta\text{OYPI}\Omega\text{N}$  Bull walking to left, with head lowered ; beneath, bird standing to left with spread wings ; in exergue, tunny-fish to left.

The coinage of Thourioi while not historically interesting is of the highest value when considered from an artistic standpoint. The mother-city, Athens, for reasons of commercial expediency, as will appear in a future paper, issued,—down to 322 B. C., the end of the civic coinage of “the old style”—series after series of coins totally deficient in artistic merit ; and preserving, in their reproduction of the primitive types (obverse, head of Pallas Athene) the stiff, rude, harsh, although later somewhat conventionalized, characteristics of the archaic period.

Among the Athenian colonists of Thourioi, there were doubtless many gem and coin-engravers, whose first task would be the production of a suitable coinage for the new foundation ; and who, hampered by no such restraints as at Athens, could here give free rein to their artistic instincts and sensibilities, trained and stimulated by long dwelling in the shadow of the transcendent art-products of “the ornament and the eye of Hellas.” Nor can these coin-artists be said to have proved unworthy of even such lofty influences and inspirations. The prototypal head of Pallas on the Athenian coin, with staring eye, rope-like locks, and antiquated features ; with in fact all the failings of a pronounced and intentional archaism, becomes transformed into a strong, pure, clear-featured divine likeness of Pallas Athene the virgin goddess, most suitably protected by the graceful, well-proportioned helmet of her peculiar city.

The reverse type is one of those examples of the fitness with which the details of an entire design were made to harmonize. The name Thourioi was derived from some copious springs which gushed forth on the city's site ; and the butting bull,  $\beta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \theta\omicron\upsilon\acute{\rho}\iota\omicron\varsigma$ , was, in Magna Graecia and Sicily, a recognized symbol of rushing waters ; which idea is still further conveyed by a fish

swimming beneath, so charmingly adapted to the exergue by its upward curving shape.

The artist who signs himself  $\phi$  is one of the most familiar and charming of all the Italiot die-engravers, as well as one of the most prolific; specimens of his delicate, yet strong work appearing as has been already mentioned, at Terina, Herakleia and Elea, as well as at Thourioi.

THOURIOI (LUCANIA).

29. Distater, wt. 242 grs. B. C. 390-350. (Pl. III: 6.) Obv. Head of Pallas to right, wearing crested Athenian helmet, ornamented with Skylla; artist's signature  $\Delta I$ .  
(From the Hobart Smith sale.)

30. Stater, wt. 121 grs. B. C. 420-390. (Pl. III: 7.) Rev.  $\Theta O Y P I \Omega N$  Bull butting to right; in exergue, tunny-fish to right; artist's signature  $\Phi P Y$ .  
(From the Bunbury sale.)

31. Stater, wt. 119 grs. B. C. 390-350. (Pl. III: 8.) Obv. Similar to No. 29; but artist's signature E.  
(From the Montagu sale.)

These heads exemplify the increasing ornateness characteristic of the fine-art periods, while the figure of Skylla seems peculiarly appropriate for the helmet decoration; both as illustrating an Italian myth, localized on the shore of the near-by Sicilian Strait, and as filling most pleasingly by its irregular shape the plain, rounded side of the helmet.

But even in this composition the intense love of beauty innate in the Greek shows itself. Homer's vivid and terrifying description of the loathsome monster who seized the unhappy companions of Odysseus, would have touched a sympathetic chord in the imagination of a Mediaeval or Renaissance artist, and have inspired a creation of horror and repugnance, while one can easily imagine the conscientious pains which would be devoted to the congenial task—if such were by chance suggested to him—by a designer of the far East, of China or Japan, whose traditional ideal seems the most startling and awe-inspiring grotesque. How different the Greek! In his

distaste for ugliness our die-engraver has subdued the horrible features, softened the repellent details, and emphasizing only the beauteous head and shape which had unfortunately aroused Kirke's jealous rage, has completed the subject with a figure of winding, dentate-edged curves, designed apparently only with the object of substituting a more ornate decoration for the simple olive-wreath of a severer art-period.

The bull on this reverse is distinctly later than the preceding one, displaying greater elaboration in treatment, and far more action. The signature  $\Phi\PY$ , it is conjectured by Mr. R. S. Poole, is thus written to distinguish this artist from his contemporary who signs  $\Phi$ . Nor can  $\Phi\PY$  be identified with  $\Phi\PY\Gamma\text{I}\text{A}\text{A}\text{O}\text{Z}$  of Syracuse, who is somewhat later, and whose style it will be seen shows far more simple severity.

#### HERAKLEIA (LUCANIA).

32. Stater, wt. 117 grs. B. C. 380-300. (Pl. III: 9) Obv. Head of Pallas to right, wearing crested Athenian helmet ornamented with Skylla. Rev.  $\text{H}\text{P}\text{A}\text{K}\text{A}\text{H}$  Herakles naked, standing to right, strangling lion; behind, club; between legs of Herakles, owl facing; artist's signature  $\text{K}\text{A}\text{A}$ .

(From the Montagu sale.)

33. Stater, wt. 122 grs. B. C. 380-300. (Pl. III: 10.) Rev.  $\text{H}\text{P}\text{A}\text{K}\text{A}\text{H}\text{I}\text{O}\text{N}$  Herakles naked, standing facing, holding club, strung bow, arrow, and lion's skin; on left, one-handled vase, and artist's signature  $\text{A}\text{O}\text{A}$ .

This city, a joint colony, as has been shown, of Thourioi and Taras in 432 B. C., rapidly assumed great importance owing to the influential position it occupied for nearly a century, as the seat of the general assembly of the Greek States of Italy. A natural choice for the obverse type of its artistic and copious coinage was the head of the Athenian Pallas, as adopted and transfigured by the mother-city Thourioi, with whose charming coins we are now familiar. Equally spontaneous is the presence, on the reverse, of the eponymous hero Herakles, either engaged in one of his most arduous labors, the strangling of the Nemean lion; or bearing the skin of this defeated antagonist, together with his own peculiar symbols. The agonistic group is a

superb composition, and must have been the work of a skillful gem-engraver, as evidenced not only by the power and symmetry of the design, but also by the minute and careful treatment of the muscles and general details. Special attention should also be paid to the gem-like sharpness and wonderful preservation of the pendent lion's skin on the second reverse; each individual claw being clearly distinguishable, as well as the difference between the fore and hind paws.

## NEAPOLIS (CAMPANIA).

34. Didrachm, wt. 115 grs. B. C. 340-268. (Pl. III: 11.) Obv. Head of nymph to right, diademed, wearing earring and necklace; around, four dolphins. Rev. (NEO)ΠΟΛΙΤΩΝ Man-headed bull to right, crowned by winged Nike.

(From the Bunbury sale.)

This flourishing and prosperous city in spite of its comparatively early absorption by the Romans, remained distinctively Greek, and seems to have been characterized by the same noisy, active, turbulent life, and to have displayed the same sharp contrasts of luxury and squalor, of wealth and poverty, as distinguish its descendant, the modern Naples. The Neapolitan coinage was copious; its obverse type being doubtfully interpreted, either as the head of the Siren Parthenope, the local goddess; or as that of Dia-Hebe, bride of the Dionysos Hebon whose embodiment as a man-headed bull forms the reverse type; and whose worship in this guise throughout South Italy has been alluded to already under the coin of Laos (Pl. I: 8). The constant presence of this peculiarly Campanian deity on the coinage of the greatest Campanian city was most appropriate; while his crowning by Nike probably symbolized the power and prosperity of Neapolis under the divine guidance.

This obverse is also of interest in one unusual particular, being an evident reproduction, slightly modified to accord with its fresh character, of the celebrated Syracusan Persephone-head by Euainetos; the influence of that admitted master-piece of the art of die-engraving,—as we shall see when delighting in the numismatic splendors of Dionysios' reign,—extended far and wide, not only into Italy, but also into many parts of old Greece. The



four dolphins, emblematic, on the prototype, of the sea-encircled island of Ortygia, the early foundation of Syracuse, have less fitness on a Neapolitan coin, and must here be considered simply as symbolic of a maritime situation.

A close examination of this coin will show two projections on opposite sides of the edge. These are valuable indications of the methods of producing blanks or *flans* for impression by the dies. The molten metal was poured into a series of moulds connected by narrow channels, in arrangement probably similar to our old fashioned bullet-moulds; and the chain of blanks when cool was simply broken up without any attempt being made to remove the channel marks. Such indications of casting are even more frequent on Sicilian coins than on those of Magna Graecia.

ARPI (APULIA).

35. Didrachm, wt. 109 grs. B. C. 217-213. (Pl. III: 12.) Obv. ΑΡΠΑΝΩΝ Head of Persephone to left, wearing wreath of barley, earring and necklace; behind, ear of barley. Rev. Free horse prancing to left; above, star; magistrate's name ΔΑΞΟΥ.

(From the Montagu sale.)

Livy, in the twenty-fourth book of his history, gives us a graphic story of the adventures of one Altinius Daxus, chief magistrate of Arpi during the Second Punic War, when this city was near the centre of military operations in Lower Italy. After the overwhelming defeat of the Romans at the battle of Cannae, Daxus, who is of course the magistrate of our coin, betrayed his city to Hannibal; of which act he seems to have repented, when a year or so later (B. C. 214) the success of the Roman cause appeared assured.

"To this (the Roman) camp came Altinius Daxus of Arpi privately and by night—with a promise that if he should receive a reward for it he would engage to betray Arpi to them." In spite of the natural distrust inspired by such two-fold treason, his offer was accepted. Arpi was captured, partly by this treachery, partly by storm; the family of Altinius were by Hannibal in revenge burned alive; and the wretched traitor himself was kept in captivity by the Romans.

This obverse shows us another imitation of the Euainetos head, but now degraded into a weak and slavish copy of the great original.

The bridleless horse always symbolized freedom; perhaps in this case the removal of the Roman yoke, which was to be brought about by the alliance with Hannibal.

TEANUM SIDICINUM (CAMPANIA).

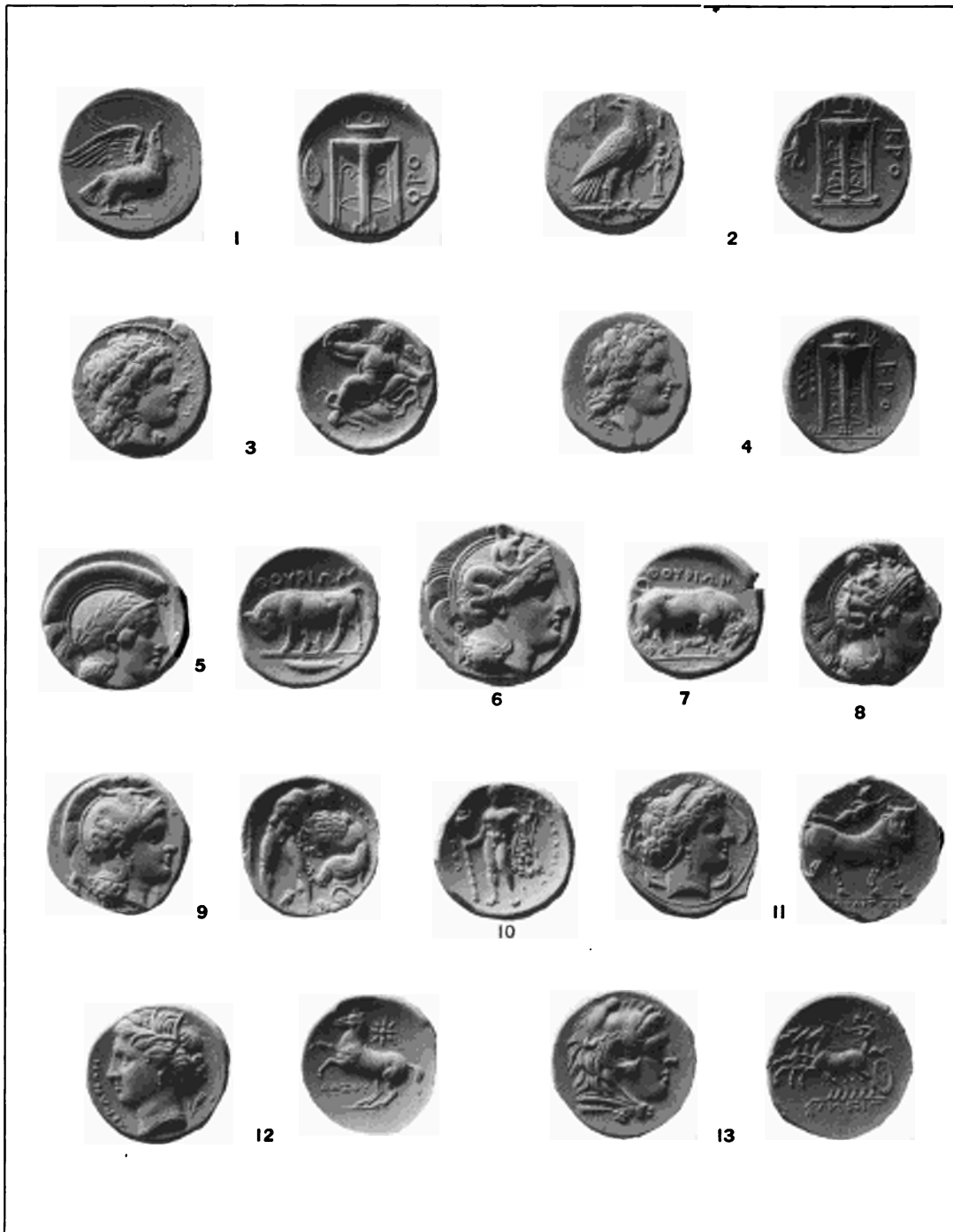
36. Didrachm, wt. 111 grs. B. C. 280-268. (Pl. III: 13.) Obv. Head of young Herakles to right, wearing lion's skin; beneath, club. Rev. DUNAIT (in Oscan); Triga to left, driven by winged Nike; horses galloping.

(From the Bunbury sale.)

This city probably issued no coins until after its alliance with Rome; the influence of which, so pernicious from an artistic standpoint, appears in the treatment of the reverse type.

The representation of a three-horse chariot is very rare. The third horse was fastened to the car by traces—the two yoke-horses being attached to the pole—and was intended to take the place of either of these latter which might be disabled in battle or by accident.





ANCIENT GREEK SILVER COINS FROM THE BENSON COLLECTION.