

HISTORICAL GREEK COINS

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Historical Greek Coins by G. F. Hill

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DESCRIBED BY

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(OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM)

WITH THIRTEEN PLATES

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PREFACE

THE title adopted for this volume is meant to indicate that the idea of such a compilation was inspired by the work of Canon E. L. Hicks, dealing with Greek inscriptions. It was while I was engaged with Dr. Hicks in preparing the second edition of his book that the thought of making a selection of coins on the same principle first suggested itself. It is seldom, indeed, that a single coin can be regarded as possessing equal value, from a historical point of view, with an inscription recording a public decree or treaty, or the erection of a monument to some great man of antiquity. Yet, in a more modest sense, of all fields of archaeological study, that of numismatics is the one of which we can most truly say: *quacunque ingredimur, in aliquam historiam vestigium ponimus*. Every coin that has been issued under public authority since the invention of coinage is a historical document. Apart from monumental sculpture, inscriptions, and coins, the remains of antiquity are chiefly of interest as bearing on domestic life, on trade, on art, and religion; it is only exceptionally that they take rank (no matter

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whether we call it higher or lower rank) as state documents. Fortunately for the student of Greek art, in Greece the fact that a work was produced under the auspices of the state does not imply that it was, as a rule, below the average level of achievement of the time. [The Greek coin, then, enjoys the advantage of being at once the best thing of the kind that Greek art could make, and an official document withal. What is more, the Greek die-engraver was at many mints allowed to give free play to his fancy; so that these official documents throw many an instructive sidelight on the life of their time.]

The principles according to which the pieces discussed in this volume have been selected as 'historical' will, I hope, be fairly clear. Above all, they are pieces which, either by the mere fact that they were issued, or else by information conveyed through their fabric, types, inscriptions or standard, actually add their quantum to our knowledge of the period to which they belong. Sometimes, as in the case of the coins struck after the battle of Cnidus, the amount added is considerable. Sometimes, however, as with the early didrachm of the Achaean League, the coins cannot be said to do more than throw a pleasantly illustrative light on the period. Yet even such illustration should make our ideas of antiquity more vivid. The monetary series, which in this subsidiary manner

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mark the course of the rise and decay of states, are so numerous, so complete, that an acquaintance with them becomes almost as essential to the historical student as is the use of a geographical atlas. But the difficulties in the way of acquiring such an acquaintance are manifold—we cannot, perhaps fortunately, all be specialists. Nevertheless, by the exhibition of a few instances of the commentary which numismatics can furnish to literary history, it is possible to show that there is a whole mine of information lying ready to be worked, and that no historical problem should be attacked without asking: ‘How will the coins help us?’

The selection here employed for this purpose doubtless differs considerably from that which would be made by another writer if the task were set him, or even by myself, if I began my task again. Athens, for instance, is poorly represented; but, as is stated in the text, we have singularly little certain knowledge of the historical relations of its coinage. The coins of Corinth, again, hardly lend themselves to treatment in connexion with history, in spite of the fact that they formed one of the most important currencies in the ancient world. Even merely with a view to illustrating the economic phenomenon of the money of a single state obtaining an international character, other states provide

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better material than does Corinth. There are many other mints which might have been and are not represented here; but it is hardly necessary to insist that one cannot find room for everything.

Towards the end of the period under review, the centre of interest gradually shifts to Rome. The history illustrated by the Greek coins from the beginning of the first century B.C. becomes increasingly provincial and petty. The true continuation of the historical line in numismatics is to be found in the Roman coinage. If the present volume meets with sufficient encouragement, it may be followed by a companion dealing with Historical Roman Coins.

It is often said that controversy should be eliminated from a work which is not meant for advanced students. This book, however, is not intended for readers altogether untrained in the study of history, so that it has not seemed necessary entirely to exclude the discussion of certain doubtful points. No little harm is done by giving the impression that the course of study runs smooth, whereas it is beset by obstacles throughout. It is better that the beginner should realise the uncertainties of his path, provided these are not allowed to obscure its general direction.

The descriptions have been made as simple as possible. A few unavoidable technical terms are

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very summarily explained in the Glossary. The bibliographical references have been purposely restricted. Some books, such as Mr. Head's *Historia Numorum* and Professor Gardner's *Types of Greek Coins*, ought to have been cited in nearly every section. To save space I would make a general acknowledgment to them here. I much regret that it has not been possible to postpone publication until the second edition of Mr. Head's manual is available. Mr. George Macdonald's work on *Coin Types* would have been more frequently quoted had its publication been less recent. This volume was complete in manuscript before I had the privilege of seeing his proofs, so that it has only been possible to make occasional modifications in accordance with the new light which he has thrown on the subject. To his kindness and care in reading my own proofs are due improvements great and small on nearly every page.

It remains for me to express my thanks to the authorities of the coin cabinets at Berlin and Paris for their kindness in answering my inquiries and in providing casts of coins which were necessary in the preparation of the book.

G. F. HILL.

March, 1906.