

**ANCIENT GREEK
COINS. VOLUME I**

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Ancient Greek Coins. Volume I by Frank Sherman Benson

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FRANK SHERMAN BENSON

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ANCIENT GREEK COINS

VOLUME I

PART I. INTRODUCTION
PARTS II-IV. MAGNA GRAECIA

BY

FRANK SHERMAN BENSON



PRIVATELY PRINTED
1900-1

Fogg Art Museum
Harvard University

Gift. Haffin Request
1- July '30
5569
B47
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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ANCIENT GREEK COINS.

III. MAGNA GRAECIA.

IN 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