

# Catalogue of the Classical Collection. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design : Ancient Greek Coins [R. Ross Holloway]

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R. Ross Holloway

*Catalogue of the Classical Collection. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. Ancient Greek Coins.*

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In 1940 the Art Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design (hereafter, RISD) purchased a collection of over 340 Greek coins from Henry Augustus Greene, a Providence collector who, on what was apparently a rather small budget, had selected them to illustrate the development of Greek art. The Museum previously owned only a very small number of coins: most were rather unimportant but in 1913 E.P. Warren donated two superb pieces from Tarentum and Athens (coins 11 and 236), a Mende tetradrachm was bought in 1925 (126), and in 1926 Mrs. G. Radeke donated a rare and important Pheneus stater (356). The total number of Greek coins in the Museum's collection now numbers 469 (including a gift of some particularly important pieces from Drs. A.-P. and Y.S. Weiss). All of them are published in this slim, very badly illustrated, and ridiculously expensive card covered volume.

The book begins with a foreword by the Museum's Director, D. Bolger, and the Curator of Ancient Art, F.D. Friedman, in which these coins are, with more than just a trace of hyperbole, termed «...one of America's outstanding collections.» This is followed by a preface by Professor R. Ross Holloway (RRH) in which he acknowledges the people who helped with this project, and explains that he wishes to use the publication of this collection as a vehicle to show something of the history of Greek numismatic art. Illustrated by enlarged photographs of 28 coins, this theme is expanded in a 25 page introduction, into which RRH has packed a large amount of extremely interesting, informative and, in some cases, controversial information. I was intrigued by his comments on the coinage of Aegina: he tells us that lumps of silver used on Aegina before the invention of coinage were nicknamed *turtles*, thus providing the reason for the choice of the turtle as a coin type. His discussion of the meaning of the signatures on the dies of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century coinage of Syracuse is particularly provocative: he contends that some are the names of die cutters while others are those of the owners of the workshops in which the coins were struck. The description on, p. 14, of a 12 litra piece of the Last Democracy at Syracuse, as being «...one of the rarest coins in the Greene Collection... » will seem inexplicable, given how many of them now exist. Rather unfortunately, the coin used to illustrate RRH's short discussion of the coinage of Mithradates VI on p. 25 is, as noted below, a modern forgery made in the 1820s! RRH's reconstruction of the early coinage of Athens is extremely controversial, to say the least! Not only does he suggest that the Wappenmünzen were *not* minted in Athens, but he also dates the introduction of the owl coinage to 560! Both of these claims are more than highly unlikely, especi-

ally given what hoard and excavation evidence we now have, and it seems rather unfair to put them, without a shred of supporting evidence, into an introduction designed for non-specialists (even more so since while RRH will present his arguments in favor of these theories in an article forthcoming in RBN 155, 1999, this is a publication to which most non-specialists will not have access).

The real problem with RRH's introduction is not his stimulating commentary but his illustrations. Any discussion of art in coinage needs to be accompanied by clear and, ideally, attractive coin photographs. Unfortunately, the *only* really good photograph in this *entire* volume is the coin illustrated on the cover, the Metapontum didrachm, 27. Nearly all the other photographs of the silver and gold coins in this catalogue are unacceptably over-lit, with distracting glare on the high points and deep shadows covering everything else. Badly made photographs combined with coins which are themselves of rather poor quality results in illustrations that tell the uninformed viewer almost nothing. For example, an archaic stater from Corinth on p. 3 (287) is so misstruck as to be virtually illegible, and the Syracusan tetradrachm on p. 10 (98), signed by *Euth...* and *Phrygillos*, is so worn, corroded and badly cleaned that its value as a work of art is severely compromised. Better photographs could have alleviated this problem, as can be proven by a glance at RRH's previous book, *Art and Coinage in Magna Graecia* (Bellinzona, 1978), which contains numerous splendid photographs of less than perfect coins, thus allowing their underlying artistic quality to shine through. Almost certainly, drastic overcleaning has played a part in making these coins look as bad as they do. The proper object of cleaning is to take away unsightly dirt or corrosion to enhance a coin's legibility, rather than to give it a mirrored surface like a modern proof! Almost all the silver coins in the RISD, save for the most recent donations, are now so bright and shiny (as the Boeotian issues 212-214 and 216-220, the important Pheneus stater 356, etc.) that they look *polished*. Adding insult to injury, a considerable number of the photographs are clearly *not to scale*, some being smaller and others larger than natural size: an extraordinary mistake in a book by a numismatist of Holloway's stature (for example, the Delphi trihemiochms 210-211 seem to be the same size as the Boeotian staters 212 and 215, and 106, a small gold piece struck under Timoleon at Syracuse, is at least twice natural size!). Quite frankly, the publication of photographs like these is simply inexcusable for an institution with a reputation as high as that of the Art Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design.

The catalogue itself is a straight forward listing of Greek coins ranging from Massalia to Cyrene. It is, however, somewhat unevenly done. Some coins are referred to standard works which contain studies about them, but others are not even if such studies exist. The same situation applies to provenances: some coins have them, while, again, some do not, even if the information exists. (In mitigation, while H.A. Greene had an extensive inventory of his coins, giving full provenances for each of them, I understand that the Museum somehow managed to lose or misplace most or all of it!). For example, there are two silver coins of the Euboean League (227-228) in the RISD, but neither is given a reference to W.P. Wallace's *The Euboean League and Its Coinage*, ANSNM 134 (New York, 1956). In fact, both coins are published there as being in the RISD: 227 is Wallace 17 (ex Hess Lucerne, 15 February 1934, lot 321) and 228 is Wallace 55! All three RISD coins from the Chal-

cidian League (130-132) are correctly cited as having been published by Robinson and Clement in *Olynthus IX*, but the catalogue leaves out the fact that 130 and 132 were purchased in Athens in 1910, and that 131 was not only also purchased in 1910, in London from Spink's, but came from the collections of Sir Lucas White-King (Sotheby's 1909) and E.P. Warren (published by Regling and in the anonymous Sotheby sale of 1905). The attractive early Syracusan tetradrachm, 88, is not merely the same dies as Boehringer 65, it is almost certainly specimen 65.9 (ex O'Hagan and Bunbury). A gold drachm of Hicetas (113) lacks a reference to Buttrey's corpus in NC 1973 (die pair 3-F: it might even be coin *p*, from J. Hirsch VIII in 1903, but the RISD's photograph is too poor to allow us to tell).

A small hemidrachm with a reverse of a truly beautiful facing head of a goddess (69) is ascribed to Locri Epizephyrii, presumably based on Cavedoni (but there's no reference), but is actually from *Leucas* (as *BMC* 115 and *Traité* IV 157 = Pl. 276, figs. 15-16). Also from *Leucas* is 315, a Corinthian-style stater which RRH ascribes to an uncertain mint: the symbol on the coin is not the *long torch* given in the catalogue, but a fish hook; other examples can be found as Calciati 101 (R. Calciati, *Pegasi*. Mortara 1990). The photograph of the obverse of the rare didrachm of Eretria (225, once in the Wertheim collection in Berlin) is not only illegible, it's also upside-down. The Wappenmünzen wheel series drachm (231, *pace* RRH, it is Athenian) is from the collection of Winifred Lamb (AC XVI, 3 July 1933, lot 1187). RRH continues to use Thompson's high chronology to date Athenian New Style silver (268-270), commenting only that «...lower dates have been suggested.» Can he possibly wish to maintain that the otherwise universally accepted low chronology is still up for discussion? While the Sullan tetradrachm (271) bears Athenian types, it was surely not minted in Athens. Coin 300 is a rare, early Corinthian *trihemidrachm*, not a didrachm, Warren I.1 (J. Warren, *The Trihemidrachms of Corinth*, in *Essays Robinson*, Oxford 1968). The Elis stater 331 does not merely share the reverse with Seltman 127, it is Seltman 127*a* and is there so cited (and it also comes from Rhosopoulos). 132 is also not merely the same dies as Seltman 138 but is 138*d*, the Weber coin (as is noted in Weber, the coin was originally purchased from Paul Lambros in 1889, and Seltman got the weight wrong). The Hermione hemidrachm (351), instead of having a reference to C. Grandjean's corpus, *Le monnayage d'argent et de bronze d'Hermioné, Argolide*, RN 1990 (struck by dies D 1/R 4) has a misplaced reference to P. Requier's article in SNR 72: that reference, pointing out that the coin in question is *dubious*, actually belongs with 350 (*a false Epidaurus hemidrachm*). An attractive and extremely rare coin from Tegea (358) lacks both its date (mid 4<sup>th</sup> century) and its denomination (a hemidrachm). Another coin lacking its denomination is 70, a very rare and attractive Pentonkion from Rhegion, carefully marked with a large Π on its reverse.

The Lampsacus electrum stater (366) is not just Baldwin Period II, 1, but specimen *u*, and comes from the Consul Weber sale of 1908. The rare tetradrachm of Philetaerus of Pergamon bearing the fine portrait of Seleucus I (367) is missing the expected reference to E.T. Newell's *The Pergamene Mint under Philetaerus*, ANSNM 76 (New York 1936), where this piece was published as 14 XVb/33 *a* (there cited as being in the Greene collection, purchased at the Egger sale of the collection of Prince Chatkowski in 1908). The lack of a reference for the archaic

tetradrachm from Cycladic Naxos (359) is particularly bizarre, since it was published by RRH *himself* back in 1962 (*The Crown of Naxos*, ANSMN 10, 1962: p. 7, obverse die 15, *this coin*, cited from its appearances in four major auctions, J. Hirsch XXI and XXXIV and Naville IV and X, from 1908 through 1925). The lovely gold octodrachm of Arsinoe (450) comes from the famous Pozzi sale of 1921 (lot 3221: it should be noted that the illustration in Pozzi was made from a defective cast). The equally splendid Arsinoe decadrachm (451) comes from the celebrated Bement collection (Naville VII, 23 June 1924, lot 1842). The Cyrene tetradrachm, 466, might be from Naville V, 2941 = Naville X, 1634: the shape is the same but the RISD photograph is not good enough for us to be able to tell for sure and the weight differs (could the coin be over-cleaned or tooled?). 467, a gold stater from Cyrene, is more specifically Naville 87 *q*, the fine example from the Stamford sale of 1907. The superb and well-preserved gold obol from Cyrene, 469, lacks its inscriptions and is more correctly Naville 122. One of the rarest of all the coins in the RISD is 396, the discobolos tetradrachm from Cos: it is an unfortunate, and all too typical, commentary on the quality of the photographs in the RISD catalogue that the earlier published illustrations of this coin, in the catalogues for the Rhusopoulos sale of 1905 and for the Prowe sale of 1914, are not only clearer and more legible than the one here, but infinitely better.

Old collections always contain at least a few fakes. In addition to the false Epidaurus mentioned in the catalogue, RRH seems to have missed *three other modern forgeries*. Two, from the Greene collection, were made in Smyrna in the early 1820s by a forger named Caprara (P. Kinns, *The Caprara Forgeries*. London/Basle 1984): 362 (Kinns 45), a tetradrachm of Mithradates VI of Pontus (also illustrated in an enlargement on p. 25), and 370 (Kinns 51), a tetradrachm of Attalos I of Pergamon. The third is the stater of King Zotimos of Amathus in Cyprus (438), the most important coin from an otherwise extremely undistinguished group donated by Mrs. C. R. Stillwell in 1986: it was made by the famous Greek forger Christodoulos (J.N. Svoronos, *Synopsis de mille coins faux du faussaire C. Christodoulos*. Athens 1922, 498).

Frankly, while it is important to publish little known collections, publishing them in such an offhand, uncaring way does no one any favors. Many of the photographs are not only too poor to be used in research, they are also not even clear enough to enable the coins to be identified should they be lost or stolen. RRH and the RISD had a wonderful opportunity to publish a virtually unknown collection of Greek coins in a catalogue which could have been attractive, inexpensive and useful: it is a pity that what they produced has none of those qualities.

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