

Mildenberg's Dream Collection

Leo Mildeberg, "From my Dream Collection of Early Greek coins"

Some excerpts from a presentation by Leo Mildenberg, Zurich

The material stems from auction catalogues and public and private collections.

Leo Mildenberg in his office, May 1999



Dream collection: The collection that I dreamed about is the one I would put together if I were a collector and the prices not so exorbitant. Nevertheless, I can enjoy their beauty by looking at their pictures, be they in black and white or in color."

Sicily, Syracuse, Tetradrachm, c. 410 BC, Arethusa



First, a black and white shot by Max Hirmer, Munich. It is an image of Arethusa the Fountain nymph of the city of Syracuse. The die was engraved by Kimon of Syracuse, whose signature is on the hair band on the forehead. Dolphins circle around the head of Arethusa. It is the first great work of art with a facing head, "en face." At the height of Sicilian art between 415 and 400 BC there were only a few artists who could successfully undertake such a challenging task. The coin you see here was made between 406-405 in Syracuse in Sicily under the rule of its powerful King Dionysius I.

Sicily, Syracuse, Tetradrachm, Arethusa



The second slide shows the same coin in color, and I like it more, though it is actually a black and white picture that has been colored by hand. Max Hirmer made the photograph during the Second World War for his little book: "Die schönsten Griechenmünzen Siziliens" (The Prettiest Greek Coins of Sicily), which he also wrote. I prefer this enlargement for its representation of feminine beauty and I believe this photograph is a lasting masterpiece.

Sicily, Katane, two Tetradrachms, c. 455 BC



I used to ask students which one of the two coins they liked better. Both coins are from Catane, on the east coast of Sicily, and were minted around 450 BC: Both show a laureate head of Apollo and the inscription Katanaion. On the right side you see a perfectly centered and well-struck coin, in mint condition. The image of the coin on the left is not centered, not well preserved. Only two letters of the inscription are visible. But in my opinion the coin on the left is a more impressive work of art. I adore this coin, the other coin I only admire.

Southern Italy, Lucania, Poseidonia, Stater, c. 520 BC



This coin comes from Poseidonia (Paestum), the city with the beautiful Doric temples in south Italy. We see Poseidon striding to the right, his trident poised behind his head. The inscription POS standing for Poseidonia, is well struck, and beautifully positioned on the left. The well-formed abdominal muscles and the bone structure of the upper body are remarkable. The deity is monumental and is, for me, one of the most beautiful and best-preserved coins of archaic art.

Southern Italy, Lucania, Metapontum, Stater, c. 530-510 BC

Two common coins showing an ear of barley. They are always available at an affordable price, their average value being around 1500 Swiss francs. Their place of origin is southern Italy, in Metapontum, 520-515 BC. The single grains of the ear of barley are so perfectly formed. These coins were struck in a technique similar to that of Medieval bracteates. The obverse is convex, the reverse concave. The coin image is struck on both sides, which only occurred in this region in south Italy in the period around 500 BC.

Sicily, Naxos, Drachm



Naxos on Sicily, a city lying between Catania and Acireale on the present day isthmus of Sciso. This is the earliest coin of the series, about 525 BC, with a double image, e.g. a convex image on the obverse and the reverse. On the obverse, the head of the bearded Dionysus with a wreath of vine-leaves; on the reverse you see a vine-tendril with a cluster of grapes, two leaves and the inscription NAXION.

Sicily, Naxos, Drachm, c. 535-510 BC



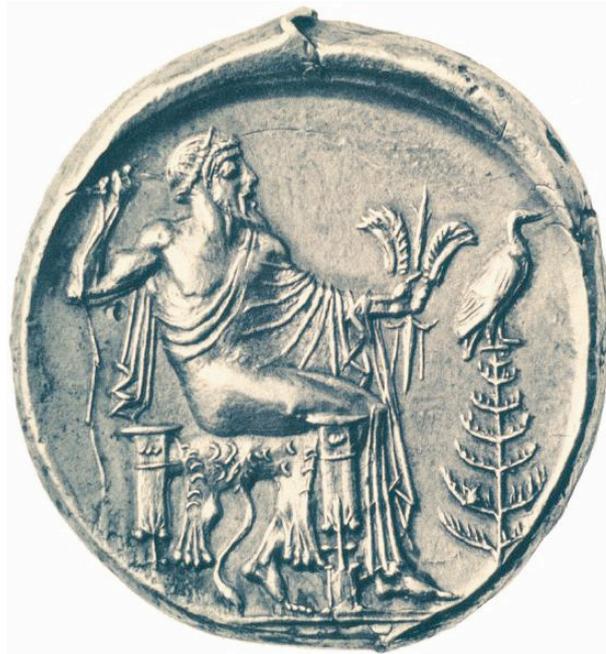
This coin here is smaller, finer, with the same face as on the previous coin, but with a wonderful eye and an expressive mouth. The forms of the sharply struck, pointed beard and each of the grapes makes this early drachm a more significant coin for me than the one previously displayed. Dated at approximately 515 BC.

Sicily, Aitna (City on the Southern Slope of Aetna), Tetradrachm, c.
470-465 BC



The first coin from a museum. It comes from the Cabinet des Médailles in the Royal Library in Brussels, a coin that has remained unique till today. The picture is clearly too red but I could not get a better one. The significance of this coin lies in the drunken expression on the Silenus' face; but also in the detail under the neck: the small scarab seen from above.

Sicily, Aitna, Tetradrachm, c. 470-465 BC



Even more important in my opinion is the reverse of this coin. I don't know whether it was made by from the same die-cutter. I do know, however, that this is a masterpiece of Greek engraving. The knotted stick as a scepter, the pine tree and eagle (an attribute of Zeus), the ornamental thunder bolt in his left hand, the opaque garment exposing one shoulder and the beautifully executed upper body make it a masterpiece. But, in my opinion, particular relevance lies in the facial expression. The artist succeeded in depicting not only a realistic image of a bearded man but truly the god of all gods: Zeus. His expression is as if he were deep in thought. His lips, the slightly raised chin, the almost closed lids of his eyes, the calm expression. There is hardly another piece of art that has reached this depiction of the senses, especially in this quality. Perhaps the coin from Cos comes close. A little later we shall see the coin from Cos, which, perhaps, comes close.

Sicily, Aitna, Litra, c. 460 BC



A small silver coin, 0.8 cm in diameter and with a weight of 0.6 grams, belonging to the American Numismatic Society in New York. It is a crustacean shrimp, wonderfully positioned in the circularity of the coin, around a central dot. On the reverse is a simple wheel and the first letters of the city name Aitna. Date: same as the preceding coin, approximately 460 BC.

Sicily, Syracuse, Decadrachm (Demareteion), c.480-479 BC



The so-called Demareteion comes from the same time period as the previous piece, approximately 460 BC. A heavy silver coin of some 43 grams, minted by the tyrant of Syracuse, Gelon. Apparently a portrait of a woman named Demarete, hence the name Demareteion.

Syracuse defeated the Carthaginians around 470 BC, the Carthaginians had to pay heavy reparations for the war. With the metal of the reparation payments these coins were minted. Historical sources mention gold for this coinage, but our piece is made of silver.

Why did I select this coin? Because it is well struck: the nose, eye, and profile on the other 14 known pieces do not match this quality. The precise stroke of the hammer was effective on the profile, the eye of the upper dolphin and the sigma of the inscription in front of the lips of Demarete.

In all it is an example of a significant masterpiece in the ancient art of coin making. The best pieces are in Berlin, Boston and in the British Museum. This one from Berlin is the best struck, the photograph is the best I could find.

Sicily, Naxos, Tetradrachm, a Masterpiece of Art from Approximately 460 BC



A late archaic coin of the city of Naxos, also with a representation of Dionysus with an ivy wreath, but here the beard pokes through the pearl border.

The reverse is a magnificent work of art. A unique representation of the difficult foreshortened front view, showing a sitting, drunken Silenus, holding a cantharus (drinking vessel) in his right hand with muscular thorax, legs in an upright position, genitals, his feet crossed. A masterpiece of equal artistic quality on obverse and reverse.

It is not a rare coin. Herbert Cahn identified 56 examples in his book written during World War II. Today, at least 100 pieces are known.

The die of the obverse suffered from the strong impact by the hammer blow and was damaged. All later coins show on their obverse under the nose and in front of the mouth an irregularity looking like a drop, disfiguring the piece, but proving that this damaged die was used until it broke.

Sicily, Syracuse, Tetradrachm, c. 450 BC



This is one of my personal favorites: a young woman from Syracuse around 450 BC. The only coin that the famous coin dealer Jakob Hirsch from Munich, later Paris and Geneva, and finally New York, used to carry with him and the only coin he never sold. A remarkable fact since it was his profession to sell art. Except for this very coin he kept nothing for himself. This piece was found after his death on a hot summer day in July 1955 in Paris, in the right pocket of his jacket.

Sicily, South West Coast, Gela, Tetradrachm, c. 425 BC



This representation of the young river god of Gela is of finest craftsmanship. In the short cropped hair and a diadem with a small horn clearly visible above the forehead. It is the profile of a young aristocrat of Gela in southern Sicily. It was only when I saw this coin on a large screen that I became aware that the fish on the upper left is swimming on his back with open, breathing gills. A master work in this detail from 425 BC.

Sicily, Messana (Messina), Two Tetradrachms



Two tetradrachms from Messana, Sicily, today's Messina. On the left a coin from an auction in Paris, on the right one from an American auction. Both photographs were taken in 1998. The inscription on the right piece is not sharp, causing me to doubt about the coin's authenticity. If you compare the legend on the two coins you can see exactly what I mean. But I inspected this coin on the right carefully, and saw that it is genuine. The explanation is simple: The die for the hare was cut by a master, the legend by an inexperienced man. One would have to call him a blunderer!

Southern Italy, Terina, Stater, c. 425 BC



Another coin of the late classical period, about 425 BC, from Terina, in southern Italy. The Greek letter Phi behind the neck of the beautiful head of the nymph Terina stands for Phrygillos, a Sicilian artist. The coin die was certainly made by him since he signed dies of other cities in Sicily and South Italy with Phi. This on coins from Sinope and other cities must be attributed to other master die cutters, most certainly not to Phrygillos; he never traveled to the Black Sea region or elsewhere, as Charles Seltman once thought.

Sicily, Syracuse, Decadrachm by Euainetos, c. 410 BC



The most famous coin of the Ancient world, the decadrachm of Syracuse, struck between 400 and 395 BC. The die is signed EUAINE under the lower dolphin by the master Euainetos who lived at the court of Dionysius I. The left profile of the Kore Persephone wearing a wreath of wheat leaves is a piece of art that had a broad effect in the Western and Eastern world of the time. It influenced the Carthaginians as well as the Greeks.

Southern Italy, Terracotta plate



This is a terracotta plate from south Italy with an impression of the previous coin. A layer of clay was pressed onto the coin, afterwards integrated into the dish and then fired. This was a plate for everyday use. So popular, so beloved was the decadrachm of Euainetos.

Sicily, Katane, Drachm, c. 410 BC



Once again by the famous master Euainetos, here working for Katane, approximately 410 BC. Once again signed below the neck. For me this wonderful head of a young man with the small horn is his masterpiece, and not the signed decrachms or tetradrachms of Syracuse.

Sicily, Akragas, Tetradrachm, c. 420-415 BC



Two eagles, perched on an dead hare. One tears at the prey with his beak, the other gives a cry of triumph. The preservation of this coin is remarkable. First, it is perfectly centered, with a clear border; second it is sharply struck; third it is uncleaned, with the residues of oxide clearly visible at the bottom, and fourth, the coin has hardly been in circulation. It is also perfectly preserved and has a beautiful color. Nevertheless, lets have a look at the next coin...

Sicily, Akragas, Tetradrachm, 413-406 BC, Die Cutter Polyai ...



... this is for me a true masterpiece. You see an excellent color photograph. The two eagles are much more dynamic. The head of the bird in front is pulled back at a right angle. The details are even bolder, and more perfectly struck. Another important aspect is the inscription. On the lower right it is signed by a master die cutter between the two lower feathers of the tail.

There is another specimen in the British Museum on which the die is not so well centered. Only the letters POLY could be deciphered, and one speculated that the coin was made by a master who was called Polykletes II. The coin shown here is signed clearly: POLYAI.

Sicily, Kamarina, Tetradrachm, c. 430 BC



The next coin is a tetradrachm from Kamarina around 430 BC with the two diagonally set protuberances on the rim. This reminds us how, only in Greek Sicily, the flan, or planchet, was prepared for minting. The molten metal was poured into a multiple mould that had a groove leading the metal from mould to mould. The resulting coins were cut apart. The sprues are the result of this technical procedure and are a clear proof of authenticity.

On the coin you see the head of Herakles wearing the scalp of the Nemean Lion. It is powerfully struck, even the lions eyelashes are clearly visible. Alexander, the conqueror, adopted this subject for his imperial coinage in 335 BC. His coins have been imitated again and again in later years. On the left we see that the die was damaged, but this does not effect the coin.

Sicily, Kamarina, Litra, c. 415-405 BC



Also from Kamarina, probably five to seven years later, a so-called litra. In Sicily the small coins were called litrae. Their weight is approximately 0.1 gram more than that of the obols of Greece on the East.

On this coin a swan is swimming to the left on the lake of Kamarina. The stylized waves move to the left as does the fish. The swan's wings are widely spread and so wonderfully placed on the coin. The picture radiates so much harmony that for me no small coin is equal to this. Even if this 0.9 cm miniature coin is enlarged and displayed on a ten-meter screen there is no loss in quality. This is the ultimate proof of a true masterpiece.

It is hard to fathom for us how a die of this small size could be engraved without a magnifying glass. Magnifying glasses and spectacles were only invented at the beginning of the European Renaissance.

Sicily, Katane, Tetradrachm, around 410 BC



The head of Apollo "en face" by the master Herakleidas, signed on the right side of the flan. Sotheby's in London once put this picture on the cover of a catalogue. Unfortunately, not the whole coin is visible. Still it is the best picture of this coin I could find, so I decided to show it here.

Sicily, Syracuse, Tetradrachm, 412-400 BC, Arethusa



One more time the head of the nymph Arethusa of Syracuse signed by the master-engraver Kimon. It is the best coin in the Pennisi collection from Acireale on the east coast of Sicily. The reason why I have chosen to display this coin a second time is the fact that obverse and reverse are signed by Kimon. Furthermore, the obverse shows one of the best representations of a racing quadriga with the chariot, with the horses rearing. Look at the rearing stallions, their incredible power, their drive.

There are many representations with quadrigas on Greek coins. But if I had the money, I would buy this coin, with this quadriga and chariot on the obverse, and this Arethusa-head "en face" on the reverse.

Unfortunately, this quality of work exists only once in this excellent state of preservation. Perhaps a second one will emerge one day. No one knows what treasures the earth is still holding.

Sicily, Syracuse, Decadrachm, signed by Kimon



Again by the master-engraver Kimon, probably dated around 402-400 BC. We know that he only worked between 406-400 BC, after which his place was taken by Euainetos. This is his second die for decadrachms, also signed, on the dolphin below the neck of Arethusa. On the obverse is a quadriga racing at full speed, just before the turn.

Sicily, Syracuse, Dekadrachm



A coin struck around 400-395 BC that belonged to the excavator of Knossos, Sir Arthur Evans. He recognized that the quadriga was "Kimonian." The horses are racing forward, they do not rear up. The reverse of the coin shows the Kore-Persephone of Euainetos. But the piece is not signed. So, on one side it is similar to that of Kimon, on the other side to the piece of Euainetos. Nevertheless it is a masterpiece: The expression of the head and the details of the horses are a creation in their own right.

Sir Arthur Evans called the die engraver "the third artist." The coin was found in a hoard, in which there were other wonderful pieces, sold later through the important coin and art-dealer Jakob Hirsch. Today the piece is in the estate of "Mr. 5 percent," Calouste Gulbenkian, in Lisbon, in the museum that Kroisos of oil, a second John Rockefeller, donated to the city.

Southern Italy, Lucania, Herakleia, Stater, c. 350 BC



Kappa, Alpha, Lambda: on the upper left side, right above the club, behind the thorax of Hercules, there is the inscription KAL – perhaps the signature of the artist Kallisthenes, as he may have been called. On the right is the Ethnikon of the city of Heracleia. This is a spectacular representation of Herakles' first heroic feat: defeating the Nemean lion with his bare hands. We see the moment just before Hercules breaks the lion's neck, after having successfully taken the wild animal in a headlock. Between the legs of Hercules is an owl, the attribute of the Pallas Athene, observing us quite unaffected by the ongoing struggle. The lion's tail is wonderfully placed on the flan. For the period of ca. 350 BC this is a magnificent work. In my opinion it is a better interpretation of the subject than on the expensive 100 litre gold coins from Syracuse of around 400 BC.

Sicily, Syracuse, 4th Century BC



This last coin of Syracuse is dated about 340 BC. Zeus Eleutherios, Zeus, the liberator. Zeus is represented as a Sicilian around 340 BC imagined him to look like. The die-cutter, however, was certainly a great artist who worked in the tradition of the best die engravers of Sicily of the late 5th century.

Uncertain Mint in Western Asia Minor, Early Electrum Coinage, c. 575 BC



We now travel to the East. This is an example of the early art of die engraving. The coin was minted shortly after 600 BC in the northwest of Asia Minor, today's Turkey. A lioness with teats. In my opinion this coin is a masterpiece for this early period. The head of the lioness is turned back, the jaws wide open; the details are visible, but in general the impression the image makes is more important than the details. This stater is an early masterpiece of coin engraving, later to develop so widely.

Western Asia Minor, Electrum



Also electrum, also from the west of Asia Minor, and of around 580 BC. We see considerable progress in the representation of natural details: the horn and hoof are shown in carefully and the leg is positioned at an almost right angle. We see, on a beautiful oval flan, the beard and eye of the billy goat. The color of the coin here seems to be rather reddish; it is however the color of the Electrum, a natural alloy of gold and silver found in the rivers in Asia Minor.

Athens, Tetradrachm



Around 530 BC: the head of Pallas Athene in black and white.

Athens, Tetradrachm



The same coin as the previous one, but in color. This picture, I find, is much more effective. This is an early prototype of the coinage of Athens that was minted with a similar image for nearly 500 years until the end of the Hellenistic period. The reverse displays an owl, therefore these tetradrachms were referred to as "owls," hence "to carry owls to Athens." In the 5th century BC, the Athenian tetradrachm became an international currency that circulated throughout the Persian Empire. Its image influenced coin design throughout the east with coins weighing from about 17 to a quarter of a gram.

Delphi, Tridrachm (?), around 475 BC



This one is a puzzle for me. The weight of 18.5 grams corresponds to the tetradrachms from Athens, but with an individual weight of an unusual 4.5 grams. Seven of the ten known coins were found in the Egyptian "Asyut" hoard, but all were minted at Delphi, in northwestern Greece, the home of the famous oracle of Apollo. On the coin are two rams heads placed side by side facing down and outwards.

Delphi, Tridrachm (?), around 475 BC



This is the same coin turned at a 90 degree angle to the left. In ancient art drinking vessels in the shape of a ram's head are well known. Ram's heads were also popular especially in Greek bronze artwork. Here we see two of them on a coin. In my opinion these two heads make a more powerful impression than any other artwork featuring the same theme. That's why I wanted to show the coin a second time.

Northeastern Greece, Ainos, Tetradrachm



Dated about 460-450 BC. A majestic severe looking head of Hermes, God of commerce, to the right. On the reverse a wonderful depiction of a goat.

Kos, Triple Persian Siglos



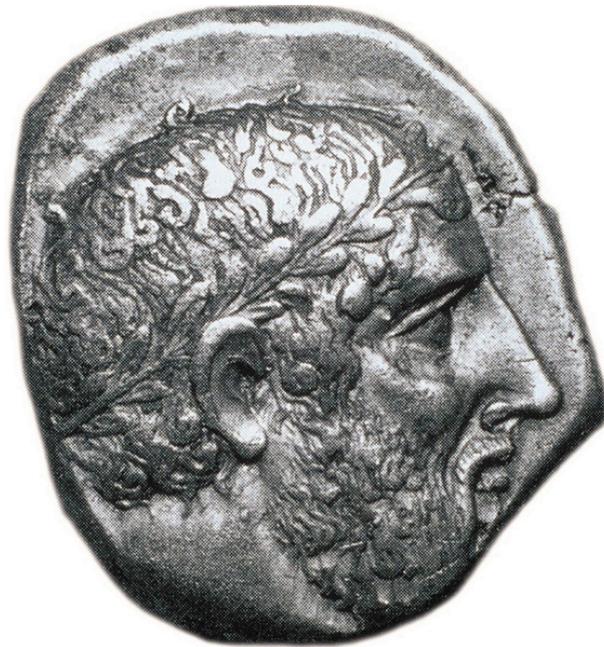
A Persian coin of three sigloi from Kos, today a favorite island for vacationers in the Aegean sea of the lower west coast of Asia Minor. Date: about 460 BC, but it looks like it was minted 20 years later. An astonishing masterpiece from this period because it already shows a discus thrower in a realistic position just before turning and throwing the discus. The left leg is behind the right, the arms are in a parallel position, the head is laid on the right upper arm. Looking at his face we see an expression of such intense concentration that I could almost say the athlete is dreaming. But the general impression is of an athlete, full of elegance, almost dancing. It is the moment right before he gains momentum prior to turning the body for launching the discus. I know of only one die and found only this one good picture. A non plus ultra piece from this period. The flaw on the flan below the discus in front of the head does not affect the beauty of the coin.

Peloponnesos, Elis Olympia, Two Staters



A plaster , unfortunately. I could not find a better picture. The piece is a cast of a coin minted around 400 BC in Olympia, the site of the Olympic Games in the region of Elis. On the left is the head of Zeus of Elis; on the right, the head of an eagle, Zeus' familiar. In my opinion the image of the eagle is extraordinary. On the oak leaf below are the letters DAI for Daedalus, perhaps a signature, which we find also on other coins from Elis. On the reverse is a stylized flash of lightning with the letters F – A for Elis. In my opinion, this eagle's head is the most beautiful animal depiction in all Greek numismatic art.

Elis, Olympia, Head of Zeus



Here again a head of the Zeus of Olympia struck from the same die, but in much better condition. The die is damaged at the neck, but the expression of the face, the delicacy of the lines around the mouth, the eyes and the nose are remarkable for this period.

Asia Minor, Tetradrachm



This late owl of Athens leads us into the 4th century BC. Athenian tetradrachms had an extraordinary impact on the east at that time, and the reverse of this tetradrachm is an imitation of one of them, a so-called "owl of the East." On the reverse is a marvelous head, not a portrait of Tissaphernes, the great satrap of the Persian king around 400-380 BC, as assumed. It has not been proven that this head is his portrait, but nevertheless, it is one of the most marvelous heads on a coin of this period.

Asia Minor, two Tetradrachms



Here once more the same coin and next to it a coin with a similar head. Below them a contemporary head of Pharnabazos, an important satrap of ancient Persia. I have no idea whether this picture has to be considered a portrait or not. The moneyer wanted to make a point that this is Pharnabazos, proven by the inscription Pharnaba behind the head. This is a local coin of Cyzicus, as shown by the prow and tunny-fish of Cyzicus on the reverse.

Northwestern Greece, Thrace, Maroneia, Tetradrachm



A coin minted around 360 BC. A wonderful galloping stallion. Take a look at how the tail and the reins are shaped and how they are placed on the flan. Below, to the left, there is a little dog, a Pommeranian, even its tail is bent to the left and shown in minute detail. The coin is both amusing and a masterpiece.

Ionia, Klazomennai, Tetradrachm



This is probably the last real masterpiece which I am going to show. The head is of Apollo "en face," minted in Klazomenai in Ionia during the great period around 360 BC. This was a time of mass production of coins, but with a few beautiful coin dies. On the left, there is the inscription "Theodotos epoie," Theodotos made me. This is the artist's signature just like those of Raphael, Rembrandt and other masters used to do. The artist was aware of his artistic achievement, or he would not have signed the die, nor would he have been allowed to do so.

Calm, powerful, majestic, perhaps one of the most beautiful male heads on a coin. In my opinion, the last amazing masterpiece from Asia Minor. I don't know whether the artist was Greek. It is very likely, but he could just as well have been a Greek from Ionia or from Aeolis. We shouldn't focus too much on whether the artist was Greek or not. He may as well have been a local die engraver influenced by Greek art from the mainland.

Lycia, Perikles, Dynast of Lycia, Stater



Another head "en face," certainly influenced by Kimon; take a look at the detailed curls. Perikles was a minor dynast of Lycia around 370-365 BC. In the Persian Empire local authorities were entitled to mint coins provided they had the necessary supply of metal. The more valuable coins of precious metal were in circulation, without debasement or inflation, the better it was for the trade and economy of the empire. The dynast even had a Greek name. Yet, the inscription is in Lycian and reads Perikle. Perhaps the coin shows in fact the very first portrait on a coin as I ventured to point out at a congress in Rome back in 1961.

Ainos, Tetradrachm, c. 365 BC



Back to Ainos, but now in the 4th century. An almost frightening, powerful Ainos-Hermes head "en face." And yet: how did the artist manage to produce such a masterpiece in this period, those eyes, such a strong-willed almost brutal, mouth, a head that astounds us?

Macedonia, Amphipolis, Tetradrachm, c. 355 BC



The cover picture of a Leu catalogue. On the reverse: a torch. The expression in the eyes is very impressive. The luxurious hairstyle with a laurel wreath that clearly states: "I am Apollo." There is a series of outstanding dies made in Amphipolis, but for me this one is among the best. It is by no means less important than the renowned masterpiece of the Apollo of Clazomenai by Theodotos, 360 BC, of number 44.

Pantikapaion, Stater, c. 350 BC



The god Pan from Pantikapaion, a Greek settlement probably founded by Miletus, on the Crimean peninsula in the very north of the Black Sea, today's Ukraine. The Greeks had a trade base there. From approximately 400 BC until the time of Alexander III Pantikapaion produced a massive coinage in gold and silver. These coins were used for the grain trade from Pantikapaion to Athens, just as later there were special coins for the grain trade from Egypt to Rome. A coin that was exclusively minted for long distance foreign trade. This piece typifies the city's wealth. Pantikapaion was never under Persian rule but always within its cultural and economic influence. It traded with Athens as well as the cities of the Aegean Sea. You see here a real "beau," a Silen looking almost like a dandy.

Pantikapaion, Stater, c. 350 BCm



Once more 350 BC and once more a gold stater. The coin served as the frontispiece of a Leu catalogue. Contrary to the previous piece, you see here a real Silen. He has the ears of an animal and a wild expression on his face, eyes, mouth and ears. Certainly a better work of art if compared to the previous one.

Mysia, Cyzicus, Stater, c. 350 BC



The Hirmer publishing house gave me this slide of a coin of Cyzicus dated approximately 350 BC. The city with its two harbors on the Sea of Marmora minted in high quality electrum from 550 to 333 BC, until Alexander III conquered Asia Minor. The electrum coinage of Cyzicus had the same importance as the currency of Athens during this period. The coins of Cyzicus were very valuable and were an accepted currency all over the Ancient world. One could compare them to the American dollar of the 20th century. In the inventories in the temple of Pallas Athena we find the exchange rates: A stater of Cyzicus was worth 24 Athenian tetradrachms. They were made of an artificial electrum alloy, yet no one questioned the amount of gold or silver they were made of. The staters of Cyzicus appeared either pale, yellowish or reddish, according to the alloy content. For their economic value, however, this wasn't decisive. People knew that the trading partners would accept this money, the same as we accept a credit card today. The coins of Cyzicus were thus a convenient currency par excellence: a surprising fact in that period. Cyzicus was part of the Persian Empire that was organized as a confederation (by the way the only one in Antiquity). The coinage of Cyzicus is proof of the liberal administration of the Persian Empire, which left local matters to local authorities.

Egypt, Tetradrachm



A tetradrachm with Heracles wearing an elephant scalp. Struck around 315 BC by Ptolemy I, a genius in financial matters and a friend and a general of Alexander the Conqueror. On the reverse, we see the Greek inscription Alexandroy, which means, that this is only a coin of Alexander. Therefore, it is commonly believed today, that this is an authentic portrait of Alexander.

For my part I am not quite sure. All I can say is that if there is a portrait of Alexander on a coin, then this is it. It shows an important man: the eye is turned upwards, as is the head, just like the earliest contemporary heads of Alexander sculpted in marble.

In 315 BC it was too early for Ptolemy I to have his portrait on his own coins. At the beginning of his reign he continued minting Alexander's world currency with the head of the world conqueror, but wearing the scalp of the Indian elephant as headgear. On the reverse there still is a seated Zeus. Around 300 BC Ptolemy put his own portrait on his currency.

There are various dies for this coin. I have chosen this particular one with its broad flan, although the picture is off center, and the surface of the flan corroded below the chin. This is the best die with the strongest effect.

**Asia Minor, Magnesia on the Maiandros (today Menderes), Philip II,
Stater**



In my opinion this is another wonderful Apollo head. The picture comes close to a portrait, but is a mystery like the coin I showed from Delphi. This coin was minted in 322 BC, the great Philip II had already been dead for 15 years, his son Alexander III having died a year before. The coin was produced in Magnesia on the river Maiandros and the die was cut by an outstanding engraver. Over the past few years over 100 coins from a recently found hoard turned up in the market. The coin you see is one of the best pieces of this hoard.

Magnesia on the Maiandros (today Menderes), Stater



From the same mint as the previous stater, some 20 years later, about 295 BC. Lysimachus, in a rather yellowish gold, but nevertheless extremely expressive. Again this head with the horn of Ammon, which later became so famous. Lysimachus wanted to express: I am the legitimate successor of Alexander the Conqueror.

Egypt, Ptolemy III (246-222 BC), Octodrachm, Ephesus



240 BC, under Ptolemy III, the portrait of Berenike II, his wife. An octodrachm in gold from the coin cabinet in Berlin, in a magnificent photograph. For me one of the most beautiful portraits of living queen. Look at the expression of her lips. Even in these late times there were still die cutters who were able to produce such masterpieces.

Kingdom of Macedonia, Philip V (221-179 BC), Tetradrachm, Pella



A tetradrachm of Philip V, probably minted 215-210 BC. Also made by a great artist who could in this period cut such a beard, such an expressive mouth and impressive nose into a die. In 197 BC, Philip V was defeated by the Roman Praetor Quinctius Flaminius at Kynoskephalae, at the so-called "dog-head." The battle began a process which resulted in the permanent loss of autonomy for Greece. It became a Roman province, which, as I always say, was probably not the worst thing that could have happened to them. The province was well administrated, the economy boomed, people lived under Roman rule and were not enslaved. In this context, one can understand why some historians speak of a liberation of Greece.

Macedonia under the Romans, Stater, gold



The last coin of my dream collection. A gold stater with the portrait of Quinctius Flamininus, the victor of the battle of Kynoskephalae. The die was possibly cut by the same artist who made the previous coin of Philip V, or at least from the same group of artists. Compare the beards and you see clearly how similar they are. But the Greek engraver could not picture a Roman general looking like a Greek king. Therefore, he depicted him as a serious, almost fierce looking warrior and military leader. Yet nonetheless this is the last important Greek masterpiece made by of a Greek die engraver, but on a Roman coin. On the reverse, there are the Latin letters, Quincti (for Quinctius Flamininus). And so, this is the last coin of the collection of Greek coins I am dreaming of.