

1. Greek Coins – An Introduction

Greek coins technically refers to coins minted with an Ancient Greek inscription. However, sometimes coins of other ancient cultures, such as Celtic (Britain, Gaul and Spain) or Jewish, are included in a general Greek category. Greek coins can be broken into three distinct stages:

Archaic (c650 to 470BC)

From the introduction of coinage until the Persian Wars

- “Crude” or “stiff” style
- Scarce
- Emblems of City States or portraits of Gods



“Owl” Tetradrachm of Athens, c500 BC
Photo courtesy CNG (Sale 82, Lot 502)

Classical (c470 to 337 BC)

From the Persian Wars to the reign of Alexander the Great

- More “refined”
- Still emblems of City States or portraits of Gods



“Owl” tetradrachm of Athens, c450 BC
Photo courtesy CNG (Nomos 2, lot 78)

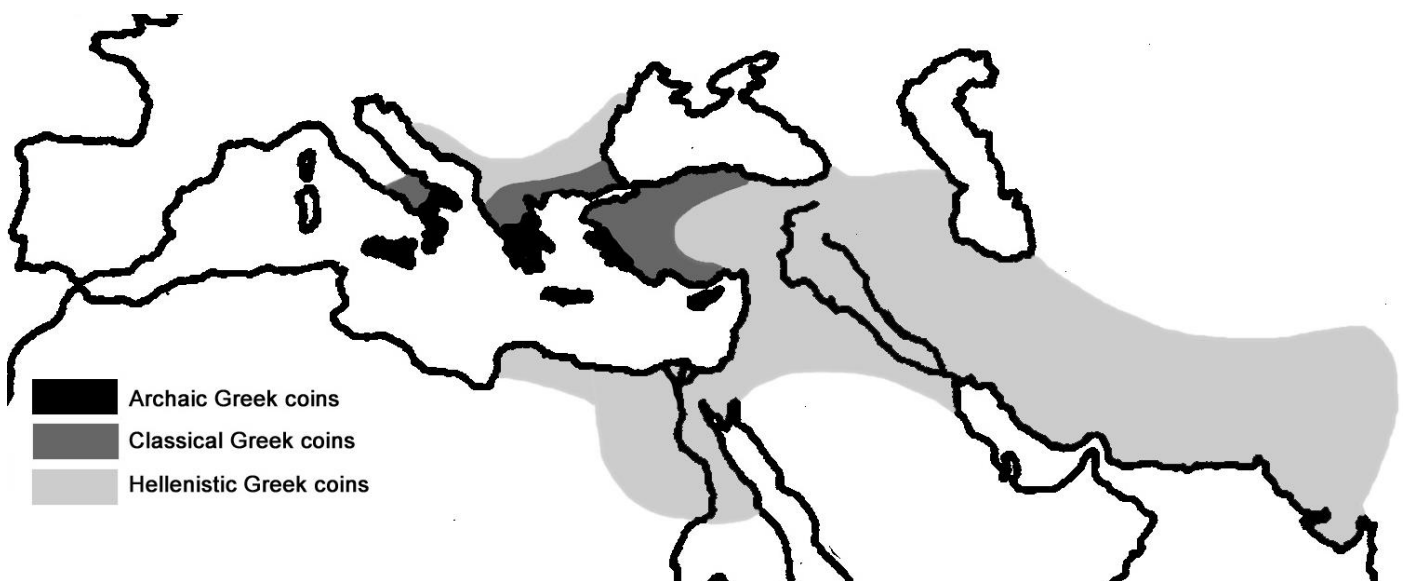
Hellenistic (c337 to 30 BC)

From the reign of Alexander the Great to the fall of Cleopatra

- Introduction of “naturalistic” portraiture.
- Portraits of reigning monarchs
- Coinage representing large kingdoms as well as city states



“Owl” Tetradrachm of Athens, c 160 BC
Photo courtesy CNG (Triton XIII, lot 1212)



During the Hellenistic period, Greek kingdoms and city states were gradually absorbed by the Roman empire. Greek city states continued to issue coins under the Roman Empire, usually in bronze, and these are known as *Roman Provincial* or *Greek Imperial* coins.

Greek Denominations

A number of different coin standards were used in Ancient Greece, of which the Attic, used by Athens, was the most popular. Other denomination/ weight systems used were the Persian (based on the siglos), Corinthian (the stater) and those of Magna Graecia (the Nomos). Electrum (EL) and Gold coins were used, but rarely.

Attic Standard (silver)

Dekadrachm (43g)	= 10 drachms
Tetradrachm (17.2g)	= 4 drachms
Didrachm (8.6g)	= 2 drachms
Drachm (4.3g)	= 6 obols
Tetrobol (2.85g)	= 4 obols
Triobol (2.15g)	= 3 obols
Diobol (1.43)	= 2 obols
Trihemiobol (1.07g)	= 1.5 obols
Obol (0.72g)	

Greek Gods on Coins

Aphrodite – Goddess of Love and Beauty. Usually appears nude or semi-nude and may carry an apple.

Apollo – the sun god and the god of prophecy and music. He holds a lyre.

Ares – god of war, usually appears helmeted but naked.

Artemis – the Moon goddess and goddess of hunting, usually holds a bow and arrow.

Athena – goddess of wisdom. Usually shown helmeted, holding Nike or holding a shield.

Demeter – goddess of agriculture. She sometimes carries ears of corn.

Dionysos – god of fruits, especially grapes -usually appearing as a youth holding grapes.

Hermes – messenger of the gods. Depicted as or with a winged caduceus.

Nike – Goddess of victory – depicted as a winged woman holding a wreath and palm.

Poseidon – god of the sea, usually represented by a trident and dolphin.

Zeus – king of the Gods, depicted bearded and holding a thunderbolt or sitting on a throne.

Famous Greek Cities and their Emblems

Here is a list of some of the Greek cities that famously issued coins. Sparta, one of the more famous city states of Greece only issued coinage late in its history, and its coins are quite scarce.



Athens – “Owl”



Aegina – “Turtle”



Corinth – “Pegasus”



Thebes – “Shield”



Metapontum – “Wheat”



Thasos – “Satyr & Nymph”



Ephesos – “Bee”



Istros – “Two Heads”