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## Gold and Silver Coins Current Before the Christian Era.

HERBERT THOMPSON.

### INTRODUCTORY.

In the King's Library of the British Museum are two cases containing electrotypes of the finest and most interesting ancient Greek coins in the National Collection. The coins are arranged in a manner as to afford at once a synoptical view, historical and geographical, of the coinage of the ancient world, from the invention of the art of coining, about B.C. 700, down to the Christian Era.

The chief value of the Greek coins is in their being, not copies, but original works of art, and in their recording the successive phases of Greek art, in which respect no other class of sculptures, gems, monuments, fustile vases, terra-cottas, or bronzes can compete with them.

The gold and silver coins, from the seventh century downwards, and from the farthest east to the extreme west, are still extant, and in a large number of cases as uninjured as when they left the dies. The style of the sculpture, and even of the painting, of the period to which they belong are certainly faithfully represented in the devices which they bear. Therefore the student can readily and thoroughly trace the growth, the maturity, and decay of the plastic art.

For the study of mythology they present the local conceptions of the gods and heroes worshipped in the Greek world, with their symbols and attributes.

The historian will find a gallery of portraits of sovereigns, almost complete, from Alexander to Augustus, as well as the history and political revolutions of numerous independent states and cities, in these all but imperishable records.

The student of palæography will find on these coins examples of various ancient alphabets, such as Lycian

and Cyprian, Iberian, Greek, Phœnician and Latin, etc., in numerous stages of development.

The metrologist, by comparing weights of the coins of the different localities and periods, may gain an insight into the numerous systems of ancient metrology in its various standards, and get an exact view of the relative values of the precious metals, and of the great lines of trade in the Greek and Roman world.

The medallist and art workman will find this series the most reliable, as well as the most profitable guide for practical purposes.

The artist will not fail to perceive the suggestive value of the designs, which, on however small a scale, are essentially large in treatment.

The cases are divided into seven historical compartments. These compartments contain the principal coins current during the period :

I. Circa, B.C. 700-480, is the Period of the Archaic Art, ending with the Persian Wars.

II. Circa, B.C. 480-400, is the Period of Transitional and Early Fine Art, to the end of the Athenian supremacy.

III. Circa, B.C. 400-336, is the Period of Finest Art. Time of the Spartan and Theban supremacy.

IV. Circa, B.C. 336-280, is the Period of Later Fine Art. Time of Alexander and the Diadochi.

V. Circa, B.C. 280-190, is the Period of the Decline of Art. Time of Epigoni, etc.

VI. Circa, B.C., 190-100, is the Period of the Continued Decline of Art. Time of the Attalids.

VII. Circa, B.C. 100-1, is the Period of Late Decline of Art. Time of Mithridates the Great and the Roman dominion.

The divisions, it will be seen, do not exactly correspond with those of the history of Art, but are rather those of the political history of the times.

The cases contain the coins of Asia Minor, Phœnicia, Syria, Egypt, Northern and Central Greece, the Pele-