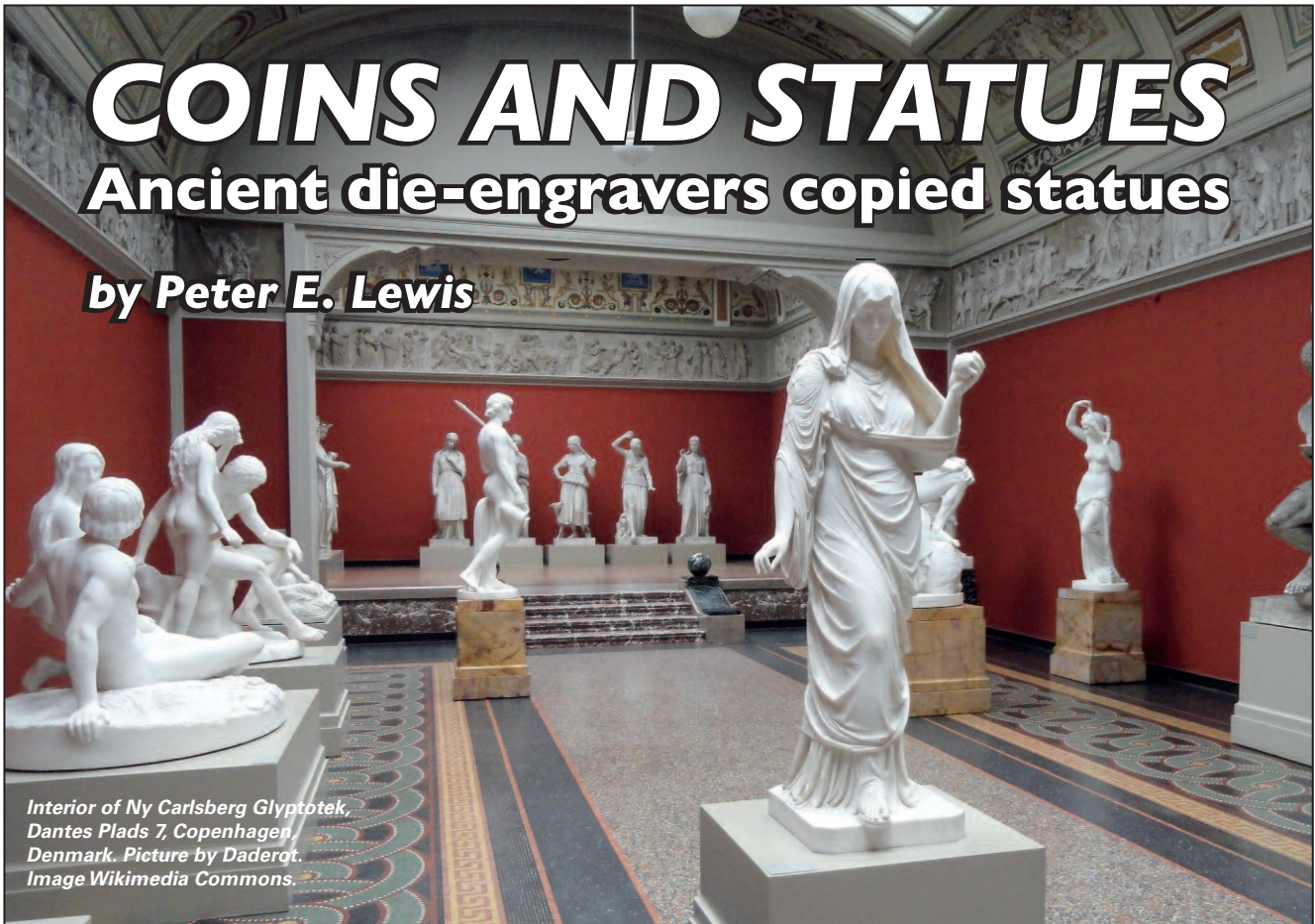


# COINS AND STATUES

## Ancient die-engravers copied statues

by Peter E. Lewis



Interior of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Dantes Plads 7, Copenhagen, Denmark. Picture by Daderot. Image Wikimedia Commons.

ONE of the delights of collecting ancient coins is to look carefully at the reverse of a coin and realize that you know the statue that the die-engraver has copied. A good example is a little coin minted at Deultum in Thrace in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. It shows Cupid riding a dolphin, and if you compare it with the marble statue in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, which was made in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the similarity is obvious. (Figures 1 and 2) The original statue was made by a Greek sculptor centuries before the copy in the Hermitage was made. It became a popular image copied by other scul-

tors as well as by the engravers of coin dies.

The ancient Greeks were seafaring people and they would have seen dolphins leaping out of the water. They knew that they were playful creatures and that they jumped out of the water just for the fun of it. So who better to be riding a leaping dolphin than Cupid, who was a playful and fun-loving boy? To the Greeks he was known as Eros, the god of sexual love. He was always making mischief by firing arrows at people causing them to fall in love. He was the son of Aphrodite (Venus) and Ares (Mars), and sometimes he even

fired arrows at his mother who would punish him by taking away his wings and arrows for a while. Anyway, Cupid riding a dolphin is a joyful image and coin-collectors feeling a bit depressed should look at one of these coins. On some of them, Cupid is hanging on for dear life. (Figure 3)

Another good example is a coin of Trajan Decius minted at Tarsus in about 250 AD. On the obverse there is a bust of his wife, Herennia Etruscilla, and on the reverse Dionysus, the god of wine, leans on the shoulder of a satyr. (Figure 4) The image has been copied from a statue known as the Ludovisi Dionysus. (Figure 5) Dionysus is leaning on the satyr because he is drunk. The coin shows that his clothes have fallen down below his knees and he is leaning to the right so much that he would fall over if the satyr was not there. In modern parlance, he is legless. The satyr holds a curved staff called a lagobolon. The Greek word means “hare-thrower”, and satyrs used to throw them like boomerangs to kill hares.

Dionysus, or Bacchus as he was known to the Romans, was the god of wine and revelry. If your life is rather boring you can look at one of these coins and imagine that you are in the retinue of Bacchus and surrounded by nymphs. They are beautiful maidens who sing and dance to the sound of tambourines. These girls just want to have fun.



Figure 1 – Bronze coin minted at Deultum on the west coast of the Black Sea. Diameter 19 mms. Obverse: bust of Maximinus I (235-238 AD). Reverse: Cupid riding a dolphin. Varbanov 2042. (Author's Collection)

Also in the retinue are satyrs. They are woodland creatures who are half man and half goat, and they liven up the party with their cheeky antics. On a Roman marble sarcophagus made in 210-220 AD for a woman called Macconiana Severina, Bacchus is standing in the same pose as on the coin, with his right hand on his head and his clothes falling off. (Figure 6) He is leaning against a man who is full-size and does not look like a satyr. Perhaps he is someone known to the deceased, who is the sleeping woman about to be wakened by

the satyr to join in the revelry. Macconiana must have been a “party-girl” when she was alive.

Dionysus was essentially a nature god. He was concerned with vegetation and fruitfulness, and especially with grapes for making wine. He is often portrayed as being effeminate, as on the coin where his hair curls down over his right shoulder. The god, Apollo, was also often portrayed as being effeminate. In fact on some coins it is hard to tell whether he is male or female. They are certainly not your typical hetero-

sexual macho guys. If you are unhappy because your sexual orientation is not the majority one, i.e. you may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, then take



Figure 2 – Marble statue of Cupid riding a dolphin. Height 87 cms. It is a Roman copy of a Greek original. It is in the Hermitage Museum. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Yair Haklai)



Figure 3 – Denarius minted at Rome in 46 BC by Mn. Cordius Rufus. Cupid’s mother, Venus, is on the obverse, while he rides a frisky dolphin on the reverse. Sear, Vol. I, 442. (Numismatica Ars Classica Auction 51, lot 78)



Figure 4 – Bronze coin minted at Tarsus by Trajan Decius (249-251 AD). Diameter 31 mms. Obverse: bust of Herennia Etruscilla (wife of Trajan Decius). Reverse: Drunken Dionysus leaning on a satyr who holds a lagobolon. Dionysus’ clothes are below his knees. SNG Levante 1170. (Author’s Collection)



Figure 5 – The Ludovisi Dionysus. This oversized marble statue of Dionysus was bought by the City of Rome in 1901 and is now in the Palazzo Altemps. It is considered to be a 2nd century Roman work. Having the right hand on the head was a posture of the marble figure known as the Lycean Apollo, which was made by the Greek Sculptor, Praxiteles, in the 4th century BC. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 6 – Detail of a Roman marble sarcophagus showing Bacchus with some of his retinue. It was discovered in Rome in 1873. Today it is in the Getty Collection. (Wikimedia Commons).

heart from these coins. For the ancient Greeks sexual orientation was part of nature. It could vary just as there was variety in nature, and you could not turn an apple into an orange. They would have wondered why it causes so much distress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

An obvious example of a coin that was copied from a statue is the tetradrachm of Augustus that was minted at Antioch in Syria (today Antakya in Turkey) from 5 BC to 14 AD. On the reverse Tyche, the city goddess, sits on a rock while the river-god, Orontes, swims at her feet. (Figure 7) The image was copied from a bronze statue that stood in a shrine in the city. It was made by a Greek sculptor, Eutychedes of Sicyon, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. There is a marble copy of it in the Vatican Museums. (Figure 8)

Another obvious example is the image of the Three Graces that appears on many ancient coins. Figure 9 is a good example. The image has been copied from an ancient Greek statue that was copied by other sculptors in ancient times. The statue of the Three Graces

in the Borghese Collection is a Roman copy made in about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. (Figure 10) It was largely restored for Cardinal Borghese in 1609. The original statue would have been made in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

On a number of coins Hercules (Hercules to the Greeks) is shown leaning on his club, which is set on a rock. (Figure 11) The image has been copied from a marble statue known as the Farnese Hercules. (Figure 12) It was discovered during excavations at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome in 1546 and was housed in the palace of the Farnese family for two hundred years. Today it is in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples. It was made a few years before the baths were dedicated in 216 AD and we know that it was made by a sculptor called Glycon because he put his name on the base. He copied it from a statue made by the famous Greek sculptor, Lysippus, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The original statue no longer exists. On these coins Hercules is presumably resting after one of his labours. His head is turned slightly

down and to the right, which emphasizes his relaxed and nonchalant attitude. He appears to have his right hand on his hip, but all is not as it seems. If you go behind the statue of Hercules in the Naples Museum you will see that his hand is behind his back and in his hand are the golden apples of the Hesperides! (Figure 13) Hercules stole these apples from a tree in North Africa. But why is he trying to hide the apples behind his back? He must be in the presence of Hera, the goddess who owned the tree. She was the wife of



Figure 7 – Silver tetradrachm of Augustus minted at Antioch in Syria in 4/3 BC. Obverse: head of Augustus. Reverse: Tyche of Antioch. Prieur 52. (Roma Numismatics, Auction 4, Lot 518)



Figure 8 – Roman marble copy of the Tyche of Antioch in the Vatican Museums. (Wikimedia Commons)

Jupiter, the chief of the gods. She was very powerful and always trying to harm Hercules. So the situation was one of great tension. Just as people can go behind the statue today and smile when they see the apples, so the bathers in ancient Rome would have been amused when they went behind the statue. After all, the baths were for refreshing the mind as well as the body.

Although the original statue of Hercules by Lysippus no longer exists we know what it looked like because it appears on a coin minted in North Africa by Scipio in 47 BC. (Figure 14) Hercules had been in North Africa to get the apples. What is interesting about this coin is that the right hand of Hercules is actually on his right hip. He is not holding any apples. So we can conclude that putting the hand behind the back was a change that Glycon had made for his statue. It is unusual for sculptors in ancient times to make changes in their copies of famous statues, and very unusual for them to sign their work (because it was attributed to inspiration from the gods). Glycon must have been very pleased with his statue, as we are today.

*Continued overleaf*



Figure 9 – Bronze coin minted at Tarsus. Diameter 37 mms. Obverse: bust of Maximinus I (235-238 AD). Reverse: the Three Graces. SNG BN 1606. (Author's Collection)



Figure 10 – Marble statue of the Three Graces in the Louvre Museum. (Wikimedia Commons)

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Another interesting example is a large bronze coin that was minted in Tarsus in the third century AD. On the



Figure 11 – Gold aureus of Gordian III (238-244 AD) minted at Rome. Hercules is on the reverse. Sear, Vol. 3, 8595. (Roma Numismatics, Auction 8, Lot 1061)

obverse there is a bust of Philip II who was the Roman Caesar from 247 to 249 AD. On the reverse Hercules stands proudly. (Figure 15). He is a macho guy who would whack you with his club if you gave him cheek. His image on this coin has been copied from a Roman statue that was made in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Today it is in the Getty Villa in California. (Figure 16)

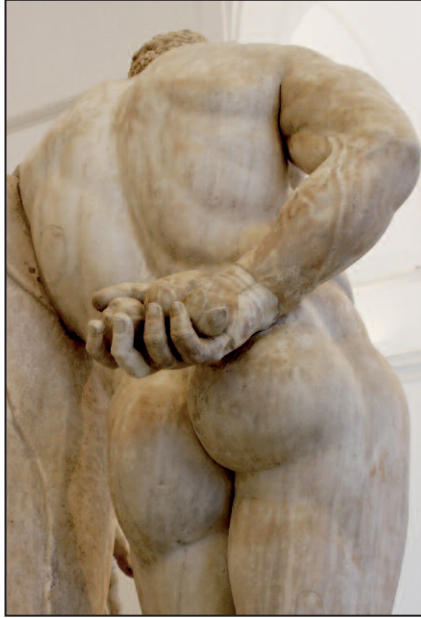


Figure 13 – Back of the statue in Figure 12. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Miguel Hermoso Cuesta)

Most ancient statues are incomplete when they are found after being buried in the earth for many centuries. Often arms and legs are missing and they have to be reconstructed before the statue is displayed in a palace or museum. On the Ludovisi statue in Figure 5 the legs of Dionysus and the satyr, as well as the base of the statue, were missing when it was found buried on



Figure 15 – Bronze coin minted at Tarsus. Diameter 34 mms. Obverse: bust of Philip I (244-249 AD). Reverse: Hercules stands with his lion's skin over his left forearm and several golden apples in his left hand. SNG France 1741. (Author's Collection)



Figure 12 – Roman marble statue known as the Farnese Hercules. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Sailko)



Figure 14 – Denarius of Scipio minted in North Africa in 47 BC. Obverse: head of Africa wearing an elephant headdress. Reverse: Hercules stands with his right hand on his hip. Sear, Vol. 1, 1380. (Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 86, lot 8)



Figure 16 – Roman marble statue of Hercules made in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. It is in the Getty Villa in California. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 17 – Bronze coin minted at Apameia in Phrygia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Obverse: bust of Serapis with a modius (container for grain) on his head. Reverse: Marsyas seated on a rock playing an aulos. It is unlisted in the standard references. (Author's Collection)

the Quirinal Hill in Rome in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Dionysus was literally legless. His legs were reconstructed and the panther added before the statue was displayed in the palace of Cardinal Ludovisi. Obviously the restorers were unaware of the coin; otherwise they would have shown Dionysus with his clothes below his knees. On the statue of Hercules in Figure 16 his right arm and left hand are missing. His right hand supported his club, but what was in his left hand? The answer can be seen on the coin in Figure 15: in his hand he holds the apples of the Hesperides. So coins can show us how statues looked originally when they were complete.

What can make a coin really fascinating is when the original statue is missing completely. With a little detective work the existence of the statue can be confirmed and its appearance known. Such a coin is a little bronze coin of Apameia in Phrygia minted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. It is only 18 mms in diameter but it shows a satyr called Marsyas who is sitting on a rock playing a double flute called an aulos. (Figure 17) Actually he is more correctly called a silenus. A silenus has a horse's tail but no goat features. He appears with Apollo in a painting by the Italian painter, Perugino, made in about 1500 AD. (Figure 18) Art historians consider that the figure of Apollo was copied from a well-known statue of Hermes known

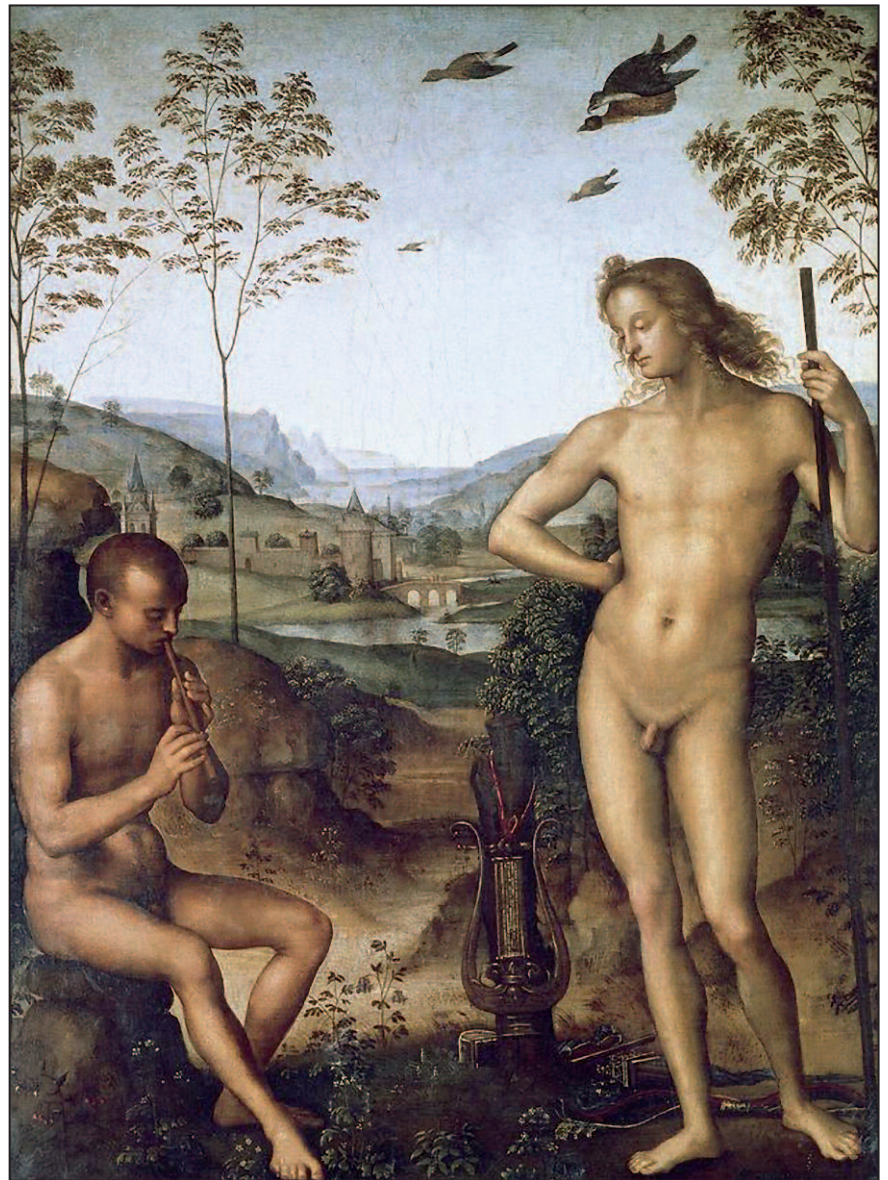


Figure 18 – Painting by Perugino showing Apollo and Marsyas. Oil on wood, circa 1500. It is in the Louvre. (Wikimedia Commons)

as the Hermes Farnese, but because there is no known statue of Marsyas as in the painting they have concluded that Perugino just used somebody as a live model. Although he probably did have a live model in his studio the coin shows that there was such a statue and it would have been in existence when

Perugino was alive. In the painting Perugino has painted Marsyas with only one flute, probably because it was simpler to portray, whereas on the coin he has a double flute.

An indication that a die-engraver has copied a statue is if the statue's pedestal appears on the coin. On a



Figure 19 – Bronze coin minted at Deultum. Diameter 24 mms. Obverse: bust of Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus (193-211 AD). Reverse: statue of Marsyas on a pedestal. Jurakova 5. (Author's Collection)



Figure 20 – Denarius minted at Rome in 82 BC. Moneyer: L. Marcius Censorinus. Obverse: head of Apollo. Reverse: Marsyas stands with a wine skin over his shoulder. Presumably he is drunk and making rude gestures with his right hand. The column on the right stood near his statue in the Roman Forum. Sear, Vol. I, 281, (MPO Auctions, Auction 38, lot 206)

small bronze coin minted at Deultum in about 200 AD a pedestal is shown below the figure of Marsyas. (Figure 19) This statue would have stood in a prominent place in the city, which was a Roman colony. The statue was a copy of the one that stood in the Roman Forum. It no longer exists but it is shown on a denarius minted at Rome in 82 BC. (Figure 20) This Marsyas is a drunk silenus with a wine skin over his shoulder. He is known as the Marsyas of the Forum and he is different from the Marsyas who is playing an aulos on the coin in Figure 17. He is known as the Marsyas of the Contest because he challenged Apollo to a musical contest. Many Roman colonies had a statue of Marsyas of the Forum to emphasize their Roman-ness, but usually the pedestal of the statue is not shown on their coins.

Another indication that a die-engraver has copied a statue is if a strut or other support for part of the statue appears on the coin. It is usually shown as a column. Some parts of marble statues, such as an outstretched arm, would be heavy and break off if not supported in some way. Obviously there is no need to show the support on a coin. An example is a bronze coin of Julia Domna, the wife of the Roman emperor, Septimius



Figure 21 – Bronze coin minted at Pisidian Antioch. Obverse: bust of Julia Domna. Reverse: the god, Mên, stands with his left forearm supported by a column. (ACR Auctions, Auction 5, Lot 609)



Figure 22 – Bronze coin minted at Pisidian Antioch. Obverse: bust of Philip II. Reverse: the god, Mên, stands as in Figure 17, but his left forearm is unsupported. (Dr Busso Peus nachfolger, Auction 403, Lot 727)

Severus. It was minted at Pisidian Antioch in about 200 AD. It shows the god, Mên, standing and holding the goddess Victory in his left hand. His forearm is supported by a thin column. (Figure 21) Surely if he is a god he would not need to rest his arm on a column! Another die engraver during the reign of Philip II, 247-249 AD, has realized this and omitted the column altogether. (Figure 22) Given these clues we can conclude that the idol of Mên that once stood in a great temple just a few miles south-east of Pisidian

Antioch actually looked like the image on Julia's coin.

The aim of ancient die-engravers was to make clear what was on the reverse of the coins, and one way of doing this was to copy well-known statues. Many of these statues were idols in temples, e.g. Mên in the temple near Pisidian Antioch, and the people in the surrounding regions would have seen these idols and recognized their images on the coins. All of this makes collecting ancient coins a fascinating hobby.

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