



THE ANCIENT COINAGE OF MALTA

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(SEE PLATES V - VI)

The Neolithic culture of the Maltese islands existed from about 3000 to 1800 B.C., when it was followed by the Bronze Age which lasted for some eight centuries. Archaeological evidence points to the first arrival of Phoenician traders in Malta about 900 B.C., certainly before the foundation of Carthage. The Phoenicians began to build towns about 650 B.C., to which time certain round graves belong. About, 550 B.C. the Carthaginians began to arrive in Malta as friends from a sister colony rather than as conquerors. However, between the first and second Punic wars the Carthaginians levied oppressive tribute, and so in 218 B.C. the Maltese were ready to give up the Punic garrison to the Romans under the consul, Tiberius Sempronius Longus. Malta thenceforth became a Roman *municipium*. That is a very brief summary of the early history of Malta down to the period when coinage began in the island.

The earlier coinage of Malta has not, as far as I know, been subjected to any detailed study, and the simple table set out, in *Historia Numorum*¹ tells almost all that is known about the issues of the third and second centuries B.C. This table of the types is based on a small paper, hard to find, published in 1894 by Albert Mayr,² who in a larger dissertation of 1909³ refers back to his youthful publication and dates the first coin of Malta to before 218 B.C. that is before the year in which the island passed into Roman possession. In this I believe he is right.

The types of this bronze coin are as follows:

1. **Obv.** Male head with curled hair and beard to r.; in front, an upright caduceus. Border of dots.

Rev. Domed object or mound, with a columnar object made of roundels rising out, of it, below the mound apparently a loop; under this the inscription in Phoenician letters aleph nun nun; the whole in a myrtle wreath. Border of dots. Size 0.9 [P1. V. 1 a, b.]

¹ Head, *H.N.* ² p. 883. See also G. F. Hill, *Coins of Ancient Sicily*, pp. 227 ff.

² A. Mayr, *Die antiken Münzen der Inseln Malta, Gozo und Pantelleria* (Progr. d. K. Willelms-Gym., Munich), 1894.

³ A. Mayr, *Die Insel Malta im Altertum* (K. Bayr. Akademie der Wissenschaften), Munich, 1909. See also J. Weiss in Paul y-Wissowa, *R.E.* xv, 543 ff., s.v. Melite.

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First the legend. Mayr has shown that this is the Phoenician name of Malta⁴ and has discussed its reading. He inclines to support the view put forward by the Semitic scholars Gesenius and Kopp that it is to be associated with the Hebrew **'ōni** meaning " fleet ", and that it can be read as **?otilde;nan** , which as a singular in Phoenician could mean ship". At this point note that the neighbouring smaller island Gozo-Gaulos in Greek-is always called **Gôl** in Phoenician, and **gôl** means round-bottomed boat, or coble.⁵ Malta, a fine ship, Gozo a coble, while Comino, Cominotto, and Filfia, other islets of the group, looked like dinghies and coracles.

May I venture the suggestion that Phoenician sailormen, when about 900 B. C. they first sailed far west to found Cades and Tartessus, thought of these islands as a kind of group of ships? And so Malta became "the Ship", only later destined to receive the Greek name "Melite" or "Isle of Honey" from Greeks.⁶

In the second place, I should like to consider the obverse. The head upon this is called by Mayr, head, and others who have followed, Herakles. The caduceus in front of this head, however, seems quite inappropriate, though it will do for the Libyan Phoenician god *Ba'al Chamman* , "Lord of the Stone Pillars".⁷

There is ample evidence for the worship of this god in Malta from the seventh century B.C. onwards,⁸ and his cult is thought to have reached Malta from the east quite independently of its establishment at Cartilage. In the latter city there was found a stele in relief showing two columns standing on bases, each of them topped with a kind of caduciform head **[P1. VI. 7]**⁹ such as occurs on various monuments and dedications to Ba'al Chamman. This ornament is of an origin entirely independent of the Greek caduceus or the Greek herald's staff; but of that the Graeco-Phoenician engraver of this die was not aware.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 24 ff.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 23. Maltese honey is still famous.

⁷ Ba'ad Chamman was a Phoenician god assimilated to Zeus Ammon, see A. B. Cook, *Zeus* i, pp. 353 ff and PI, XXV1.

⁸ Mayr, *op. cit.*, pp. 121 ff.

⁹ G. Perrot, *Hist. de l'art* , iv, p. 291, fig. 159 = M. Ohnefelseh-Richter, *Kypros* , PI. LXXXV. 2.

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Money is for the market, and the market, divine protector for a Greek is Hermes. Let him who uses this coin in the "Ship Isle of Honey" decide for himself whether the thing on the coin is Hermes' *kerykeion* or the top of a ba'al pillar.

There is other proof of the strength of the Greek element in Malta at the time when this coin was struck-that is before 218 B.C. - in an inscription from the island¹⁰ which refers to officials with Greek titles and to *συνκλητοῦ* and *δημοῦ*. By the time this and the following coins were issued, Malta was undergoing rapid Hellenization¹¹

In the third place, we may now consider the main reverse type of coin No. 1.

Mayr called the thing a "Priestermutze", Head and Macdonald a sacrificial cap. This suggests a Roman connexion recalling the *apex*, a close-fitting cap with a short point worn by *flamines* and *salii*.¹² But what should such an object with purely Roman associations have to do with Malta? Nor does there appear to be any link with a Carthaginian type of head-dress. So we are driven to ask, is the thing a cap at all?

And here we may note that Malta's commercial importance lay in its place as an entrepôt on the east-west trade-route. It had no importance on the south-north route, since Pantellaria, not Malta, lies in the narrows between Tunisia and Sicily, and any ship sailing from Carthage to Lilybacum or Panormus would make a wide detour to call at Malta. Therefore, if we are to look for prototypes for this and other Maltese coin-types, we must not look south to Carthage or north to Italy, but east; and we shall not be disappointed.

In Cyrene there were minted late in the fourth century B.C. certain bronze coins [PI. V. 2, 3] which might well have inspired the Maltese die-sinker to imitation. On the obverse of each is a head of Zeus Ammon, short-haired, to right; on the reverse, an Ionic column surmounted by an urn and rising from a mound, the ethnic *Κυραναίων* and the name of the magistrate *Ευφριοῦ*, all in a border of dots.¹³

¹⁰ I.G. xiv, 953.

¹¹ See also Mayr, *op. cit.*, p. 84 f. Evidence for Greek settlements as early as the eighth century B.C. is dubious and inconclusive; see R. Wünsch *Das Frühlingsfest der Insel Malta*, 1902, p. 9 f. But Greek exiles in small numbers may have settled there.

¹² See Daremberg et Saglio, *Diet. des Antiq.*, s.vv. Flamen, Salii

¹³ Both coins are in Paris; see E. S. G. Robinson, B.M.C. *Cyrenaica*, Pl. XIX. 4, 5, and p. xcvi f., who cites Attic and Clazomenian parallels for the tomb. For another specimen, see *Num Chron* 1944 p. 107.

4 CHARLES SELTMAN Mr. Robinson follows Duchalais in regarding this as the tomb of the hero Battus I, founder about 630 B.C. of Cyrene and its first king - the tomb, mentioned by Pindar and Catullus,¹⁴ which lay at one end of the market.-place in the city of Cyrene. The bearded head of Ba'al Chamman on the first Maltese coin might be copied from this, or from some other Cvrenaic coin with the head of Zeus Ammon, for the Phoenician god was assimilated to the god of Cyrene . But why a clumsy imitation of the tomb of Battus, if such it be?

Possibly Ovid can supply the answer, which seems to lurk in a curious passage of the *Fasli*. It is in Book 111, under that fateful date the Ides of March.¹⁵ Here Ovid tells the tale of Anna Perenna, part mythical princess of Carthage, part nymph and nurse of the infant Zeus, part Italic personification of the year, or Luna, or Themis, or Io; or a celestial bawd; a truly enigmatic conflation. Here we are concerned with only the first of these inventions, the legendary sister of Queen Dido-Elissa of Carthage , named Anna.¹⁶ I select the relevant lines:

"On the ides is held the jovial feast of Anna Perenna not far from thy banks, O Tiber, who comest from afar.... But since erroneous rumours are rife as to who this goddess is, I am resolved to throw no cloak about, her tale. Poor Dido had burned with the fire of love for Aeneas; she had burned, too, on a pyre built for her doom... . Straightway the Numidians invaded the defenceless realm, and Iarba the Moor captured the palace.... For the third time the new wine had been poured into the hollow vats, when Anna was driven from home, and weeping left her sister's walls; but first she paid honours due to her dead sister. . . . Having found a ship and comrades to share her flight, she glided before the wind, looking back at the city walls.

掇here is a fertile island Melite, lashed by the waves of the Libyan sea and neighbour to barren Cosura. Anna steered for it, trusting to the king's hospitality, which she had known of old; for Battus there was king, a wealthy host. `This land,' said he, `small though it be, is thine, and he would have observed the duties of hospitality to the end.'¹⁷

¹⁴ Pindar , *Pyth.* V. 99 ff.; Catullus *Carm* vii. 6

¹⁵ Lines 523 to 696

¹⁶ Anna = the Hebrew Hannah; does Elissa = Elizabeth ?

¹⁷ I quote Sir James Frazer's translation in *his Fasti of Ovid, vol. i.*

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The story goes on to tell that Battus, fearing an attack from Anna's brother, induced her to leave for Italy, where she fell in with Aeneas and aroused the jealousy of his wife Lavinia, who successfully scared Anna into a watery grave. Thereupon she became a perennial nymph

Now Ovid, though no scientific historian or archaeologist, was a good antiquarian. keen on tapping sources among Roman annals and other oral traditions.¹⁸ He was not an inventor of tales, and he can hardly have originated this romance of the wanderings of Anna. Someone long before his day had devised the story of her quest for sanctuary in Malta when Battus ruled the island, and it is conceivable that the tale was invented by Greek or half-Greek residents of Malta, not a few of whom were probably of Cyrenaic descent. Political revolutions disturbed Cyrene at frequent intervals, and some of its exiled traders settling in the friendly island are more likely than a Roman poet to have concocted a story that Battus once owned it and played host to Anna of Carthage. Such a myth could have prompted a third-century die-engraver to make a clumsy imitation of Battus' celebrated tomb which he had seen depicted on bronze coins of Cyrene struck some seventy years before.

Some of the Maltese bronze coins minted after the island became a Roman *municipium* in 218 B.C. will repay a little further study in the light of what has gone before. The three which follow may perhaps be dated to the first quarter of the second century B.C. They all still bear upon their reverses the Phoenician letters '*ain nun nun* for *?otilde;nan*¹⁹

2. **Obv** . Veiled and diademed female head to right ; she wears a pendent ear-ring, and the hair curls forward over the ear. Border of dots

Rev . Mummy of Osiris with flail and sceptre facing, centred between Isis and Nephthys, each with wings crossed in front. Border of dots. Size 1.15. [P1. V. 4a, 4b.]

3. **Obv** . As last.

Rev. Ram's head r. Border of dots. Size 0.75. [P1. V. 8a, 8b.]

4. **Obv** . As last.

Rer. Tripod; legend appears twice. Border of dots. Size 0.65. [P1. V. 7.]

¹⁸ Frazer, *op. cit.*, i, p. xi ff.

¹⁹ See p. 82 above.

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There is little doubt that the female heads on these obverses are inspired by some well-known coin-portraits of queens of Egypt.²⁰ On our Plate they are set beside a silver decadrachm and a gold tetradrachm, both of the "Arsinoe" type [Pl. V. 5, 6] which are assigned respectively to the reigns of Ptolemy III (246-221 B.C.) and Ptolemy V (204-181 B.C.). It has frequently been remarked that the head of Philistis, Queen of Syracuse, on coins of the mid-third century was inspired by the portraits of Ptolemaic queens. but these Maltese coins are even closer to the products of the royal mint of Alexandria. But who is represented? Mayr²¹ calls her Hera; Hill,²² a Hellenized representation of the Phoenician Astarte; Head²³ and MacDonald²⁴ are careful not to commit themselves beyond "veiled female head".

I venture a suggestion that, since the head is so obviously queen-like, it is an imaginary picture of the legendary Queen Anna. A little State like Malta was bound to rise in the world's esteem by associating itself with a character who lay within the pattern of Homeric epic, and since Anna was reputed a Libyan queen, she must look like a queen of Egypt. Many years later it occurred to a Roman proconsul, who minted in Spain about 82 B.C., and whose family seems to have claimed Anna as an ancestress, to set an imaginary portrait of this person on denarii which his quaestors struck for him. The proconsul was Gaius' Annus Luscus, who had campaigned in North Africa under Sulla. Now, the die-engraver who made a picture of the proconsul's ancestress also went for inspiration to the portrait of a Ptolemaic queen, though this time it was Arsinoe III, wife of Ptolemy IV [Pl. VI. 5 and 6]. If Anna in 82 B.C. is made to look like an Egyptian queen, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that the Egyptian queenly person on Maltese coins struck a century earlier is also Anna.

The die-engravers of Malta were naturally influenced by coin-types of Cyrenaica, of Egypt, and of middle-eastern countries with which the best trade-relations existed; but they showed an original gift, of design as well.

²⁰ The point did not escape Mayr, *op. cit.*, p. 99, but he has not followed it up.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

²² *Coins of Ancient Sicily*, p. 229.

²³ H. N. 2 p. 883.

²⁴ *Hunter Catal.*, Glasgow, iii, p. 605.

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The picture on the reverse of their largest bronze coin [Pl. V. 4a, 4b] is not copied from any known coin-type, but from some other Egyptian monument which took their fancy. An embossed and chased silver bowl comes to mind as a possible model. The pictures on the reverses of the smaller coins of the "veiled queen" series are, however, dependent on other coin-types. A ram's head occurs on several coins of Barce in Cyrenaica²⁵ [Pl VI. 9], the latest being a bronze coin recently published by Mr. Robinson and dated by him to about 300 B.C.²⁶ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a coin like this bronze [Pl. V. 10] influenced the dies of Maltese coins [Pl. V. 8a, 8b]. The other small coin with the "veiled queen" obverse has an tripod on the reverse side [Pl. V. 7]. This is so common a subject on coins of the Hellenistic Age that it is not possible to derive it from any particular source, though it is worth mentioning that it occurs on the money of at least fourteen different Seleucid rulers. It is thus probable that bronze coins from the eastern Mediterranean once again suggested a type for Malta .

The Hellenization of Malta,²⁷ which proceeded under its Roman administration resulted at last, in the abandonment of Phoenician script. Melita was the name used by Greeks and Romans alike, and so the word **MEΛΙΤΑΙΩΝ** came to replace the older *Ῥοδίαν*, perhaps about 150 B.C.

5. **Obv** .. Head of Isis to left; she wears a formal wig crowned by *uraei* and plumes. In front, an ear of corn on a stalk. Behind, the Greek legend. Border of dots.

Rev. Male figure, four-winged, kneeling left, wearing the double crown of Egypt , and holding the royal crook and flail. Border. Size 1.0 . [P1. VI. 1 a, 1 b.]

6. **Obv** , , . As last, but in place of the ear of corn is a conical stone on which two drooping banners rest, and over them a caduciform Sign.

Rev . As last. Size 1.0. [P1. VI. 2.]

²⁵ *B.M.C. Cyrenaica*, Pl. XXXIII. 3 to 7 ; Pl. XXXVI. 1.

²⁶ 1 *Num. Chron.*, 1944I, p. 106, fig. 3.

²⁷ See footnote 10, above.

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Once again the Maltese die-sinker produced a coinage that is interesting and attractive. The head of Isis is not like any other presentation of that goddess on Hellenistic money, though it must: be related to monuments of other kinds. The nearest prototype could be a bronze struck by Antiochus IV Theos Epiphanes in Egypt , when he invaded the Delta in 171-168 B.C. Here [PI. VI. 4] a rather charming head of the goddess has a certain degree of Egyptian formality, but nothing as definite as the heavy wig and head-dress of the Maltese engraver's idea of Isis. The wig is very like that, worn by the Ptolemaic queen on a bust preserved in the Antiquarium in Rome²⁸ thought to be a portrait of Berenice II , Queen of Cyrene in 258 and of Egypt from 217 to 222 B.C.

The ear of corn before the face on coin No. 5 is, of course, appropriate to any goddess concerned with the earth's fertility; and the other symbol, which on coin No. 6 replaces the corn, links up with the first coin of Malta and its caduceus.²⁹ The connexion between this object and the things shown on the stele from Carthage [PI. VI. 7]. belonging to Ba'al Chamman. the Libyan Lord of the Stone Pillars, is obvious.

Finally, there is the attractive reverse-type of the coins Nos. 5 and 6. This has not, as far as I am aware, been properly described. Yet it is clear [from PI. VI. 1a] that the divine being wears the double crown of Egypt , and, from all the three specimens shown, that, he carries the royal insignia, the crook and the flail. Furthermore, the general pose of the figure finds its exact parallel on a much earlier coin from the Middle East , a unique silver triobol of the fourth century B.C. belonging to the group known as Philisto-Arabian and probably minted in Gaza [P1. VI. 3].³⁰ Here it cannot be claimed that the Maltese engraver imitated a much older coin from Philistia; but it is evident that, such a kneeling four-winged Being belonged to the general artistic repertoire of the ancient Middle East whence the Maltese die-sinker drew his ideas for his coin-types. The Being might be thought of as a kind of spirit of the divine kingship of Egypt -a *genius Pharaonis*.

It has always been something of a puzzle that the coinage of Malta at this time took on so strongly Egyptian a character, for the island was, after all, a Roman municipium. Commercially her ties were, as already indicated, 31 with the East rather than with Italy or Carthage . But this is hardly enough to account for the propagandist nature of the coinage last described.

²⁸ R. Delbrueck, *Antike Porträts*, p. xli f., and Pl. 28.

²⁹ pp. 81 ff., above.

³⁰ G. F. Hill, *B.M.C. Palestine*, p. lxxxvi and Pl. XLII. 2, where this figure is called "Isis(?)". But I think it is a male figure.

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Now, between 149 and 147 B.C. the Roman Republic sustained a number of reverses which to the eyes of the Hellenistic Maltese must have appeared severe. The third Punic war started badly, the Romans failing in their siege in 149; in Spain Viriathus roused the Lusitanians and defeated the Romans; in Macedonia the Pretender Andriscus, calling himself Philip VI, defeated the Praetor Juventius. In the following year Lucius Piso had no success in his attack on the Carthaginian coast towns, while Viriathus gained further victories in Spain . Even in 147 B.C. the Carthaginians managed to raise a fleet, the Spanish war was still disastrous, and the Achaean League thought Rome was sufficiently embarrassed to be defied with impunity. If the Greeks could take such a view, it would not be surprising that the people of Malta thought Rome was beginning to totter. None foresaw that the year 146 B.C. was to bring the destruction of both Carthage and Corinth .

When, however, the Maltese turned their eyes towards their eastern friends they could behold a series of startling successes. Ptolemy VI Philometor, one of the best of the great house of Lagus, was on the throne of Egypt . Between 153 and 146 B.C. he was continually successful, inflicting on Home a diplomatic defeat by preventing his brother, whom the Romans were backing, from obtaining Cyprus , and intervening in Syria with great effect. In 149 B.C. and the following year, in support of Demetrius II, he defeated a Syrian usurper, Alexander Bala, subdued the whole country, and entered Antioch, where, by the acclamations of the people, he was hailed King of Syria as well as of Egypt. And, though he refused the honour and set his son-in-law Demetrius on the throne, the Syrian kingdom was near to being a vassal of the Egyptian.

In Malta , no less than in the Peloponnese , it must have seemed that the star of Egypt was in the ascendant, and Malta , already bound by trade to Alexandria , declared her pro-Egyptian sentiments upon her coins.

The remaining Maltese coins with Greek legends probably fall after 146 B.C. and need scarcely detain us. Their types are of no special significance. The obverses bear a veiled head, perhaps Anna, or a head of Apollo; the reverses, a tripod or a lyre. Among Hellenistic coin-types there is nothing more usual than Apollo, his tripod, and his lyre, and the blameless neutrality of such types could betray no political bias.

31 p. 83, above.

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To sum up: the earlier issues of Maltese bronze coins appear to fall into three periods; (1) about 220 B.C., (2) about 200 to 175 B.C., (3) between 150 and 146 B.C. Their types owe little to Carthage and nothing to Italy or Sicily, but, can be linked with the art and history of Cyrene, Egypt, and Philistia, lands which interested the people of Malta for a variety of reasons.

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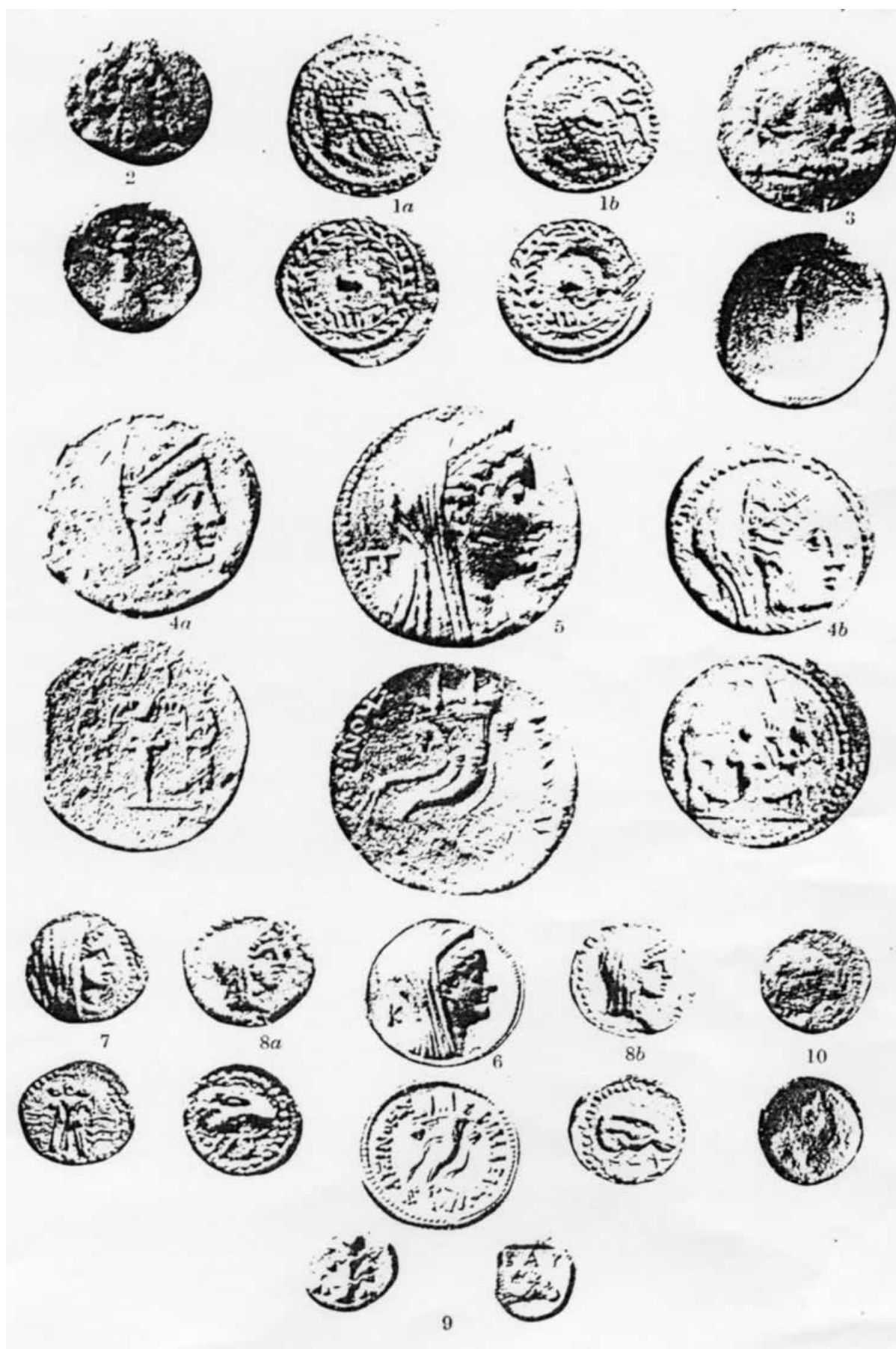
PLATE V

1a	Malta	Æ	B.M.	<i>Hill, Sicily, Pl. XV. ii.</i>
1b	"	"	Weber	<i>Catal. Weber, 8521</i>
2	Cyrene	"	Paris	B.M.C Cyrena?ca Pl. XIX. 5.
3	"	"	"	B.M.C Cyrena?ca Pl. XIX. 4
4a	Malta	"	Glasgow	<i>Hunter Catal., iii, Pl. XCV. 2.</i>
4b	"	"	B.M.	Hill, Sicily, Pl. 1V. 12.
5	Temp. Ptolemy III	AR	-	<i>Catal. Lucerne, XV. 1174.</i>
6	Temp. Ptolemy V	AV	—	<i>Catal. Lucerne, XIII. 955.</i>
7	Malta	Æ	B.M.	<i>Hill, Sicily, Pl. XV. 14.</i>
8a	"	"	Weber	<i>Catal. Weber, 8522</i>
8b	"	"	B.M.	Hill, Sicily, Pl. XV. 13.
9	Barce	AR	B.M.C.	<i>Cyrena?ca Pl. XXXIII. 5</i>
10	"	Æ	Schleman	<i>Num. Chron., 1944) p. 106, Fig 3.</i>

PLATE VI

1a	Malta	Æ	B.M.	Hill, Sicily, Pl. XV. 15.
1b	"	"	Weber	<i>Catal. Weber, 8525.</i>
2	"	"	"	<i>Catal. Weber, 8526.</i>
3	Philistia	AR	Massy	B.M.C. Palestine, Pl. XLII. 2.
4	Antiochus IV	Æ	B.M.	B.M.C. Seleucids, Pl. XII. 2.
5	C. Annus Luscus	AR	-	<i>Catal. Lucerne, XV. 1240.</i>
6	Temp. Ptolemy IV	AV	B.M.	B.M.C. Ptolemies. Pl. XV. 6.
7	Carthaginian Stele; see footnote 9.			

Besides the coins of Malta illustrated in *Hill's Coins of Ancient Sicily*, the Hunter Catalogue, and the Weber Catalogue, I have examined specimens in the Fitzwilliam Museum and in the collections of Mrs. Chittenden, Professor A. B. Cook, and A. J. Seltman.





1a



1b



2



3



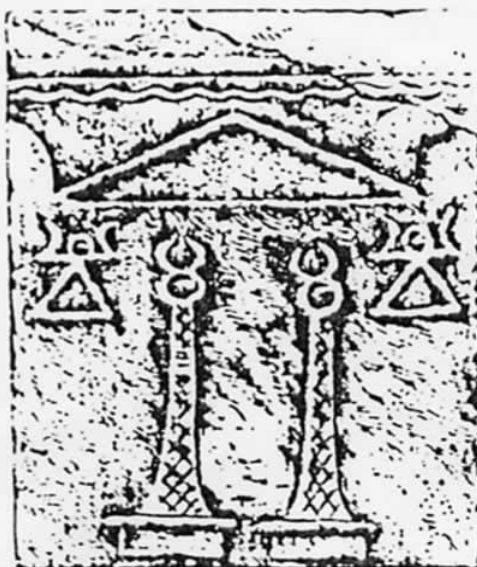
4



5



6



7