

# The Morris Coin

## A Masterpiece by Euaenetus

DONALD WHITE

*"Somewhere in the misty field of the seas / where Ortygia lies by Thrinakria / Apheios's bubbling mouth intermingles / with Arethousa's streaming water-spring"*

(Words spoken by the Delphic oracle to Archias of Corinth, before setting forth to found Syracuse. Pausanias, V.7.3)

One day, longer ago than I care to recall, when I was a graduate student assistant at Princeton University's excavations at Morgantina in central Sicily (Fig. 1), a rumor swept our site like fire across a parched hay field that something spectacular ("prodigiosa, stupenda") had just been found. The prodigy turned out to be a blackened coin of exceptional weight, thickness, and diameter. After cleaning it was identified as a silver decadrachm issued some time after 405

B.C. by Syracuse, the greatest of all of the Classical Greek cities, in the west, and signed by Euaenetus. Euaenetus was arguably the most famous *celator* or die engraver ever to design a coin. This recollection is worth mentioning only to the extent that it bears witness to the excitement and wonderment that this masterpiece of the coin-engraver's craft always seems to stir in anyone lucky enough to see it or, better yet, to hold it in their hand, even when blackened and encrusted after nearly sixteen



1  
Map of ancient Greek and Carthaginian Sicily. (After A.G. Woodhead, *The Greeks in the West* [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962], p. 18.)



hundred years of lying in the wet Sicilian earth.

The University Museum is extremely lucky to possess a single specimen of the same superb coin (Figs. 2 and 3). It was presented to the Museum in 1916 by Mr. J. T. Morris (see box) as part of a larger group of gifts that included 115 coins and a number of other objects of considerable scholarly as well as aesthetic interest. The important features of the Morris coin are as follows.

*Silver decadrachm (University Museum catalog no. 29-126-41) issued by Syracuse, southeastern Sicily, between ca. 396 and 380 B.C. Max. diam. 35 mm. Wt. 42.92 gm. Condition: some faint surface scratching on obverse; reverse slightly flaked and pitted. Edges of flan worn away in places.*

*Reverse (Fig. 2). Head of a young woman facing left, with upswept hair entwined with bracts (stem leaves) from water reeds, and wearing beaded necklace, triple pendant earring. Around her face swim four dolphins. Inscribed over hair: SYRA [K OS]ION, which means "of the Syracusans." Under dolphin beneath her neck inscribed EU[AINE]-[TOU, meaning "of Euaenetus," the artist's signature.*

*Obverse (Fig. 3). A quadriga (four-horse chariot), galloping left. Above the team a winged Nike (female personification of victory) flies to crown the auriga (charioteer), who holds a long goad in right hand and reins in left. In the exergue (space below base line) a step is depicted on or against which are placed a shield, a pair of greaves to either side of a cuirass, and a crested helmet.*

*Cf. Kraay and Hirmer, Greek Coins 291, pl. 34-35, nos. 104-105.*

### **Economic and Political Background to the Coin's Issue**

Throughout the 5th century B.C. the standard currency used interchangeably between the various independent Sicilian Greek states was based on a silver weight unit called the Euboic-Attic drachma. With the noteworthy exception of an important



2 Reverse or punch side of a silver decadrachm weighing ten Euboic-Attic drachme. The coin, designed by Euaenetus for Syracuse in the first quarter of the 4th century B.C., came to The University Museum through the generosity of Mr. J. T. Morris. (UM no. 29-126-41)



3 Obverse or anvil side of the Museum's decadrachm.

commemorative ten drachme issue struck by Syracuse some time between 479 and 460 (its famous Demareteia), the largest circulating unit in use throughout most of the century was the tetradrachm or four drachme piece, a large silver coin with a roughly 25 millimeter diameter and a standardized weight of 17.2 grams (Fig. 4). After Syracuse had won its celebrated victory over a powerful expeditionary force from Athens in 413 B.C., many of its rival Greek neighboring states lost their independence either to Syracuse or to its arch-rival Carthage, which had been in possession of parts of the western corner of the island since as early as 700 B.C. The city-states of Himera and Selinus were destroyed in the Punic invasions of 410-09 B.C.; Agragas, Gela, and Camarina fell in 405-04. Syracuse meanwhile was busy absorbing Catane, Naxos, and Leontinoi. When Syracuse's infamous tyrant Dionysios I (ca. 430-367 B.C.) first took his place on the political stage in 406, apart from Syracuse there was only one independent Greek city-state left, Messana, which itself was lost to Carthage in 396 B.C.

Using this historical information, Kraay has argued that by the century's end the tetradrachm ceased to function as the preferred unit of exchange between the independent Greek states (all of which were gone except for Syracuse), but in-

### **John T. Morris**

Mr. John T. Morris was a life member and sometime president of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia from 1891 until his death in 1916. He occupied from 1887 onwards the Chestnut Hill estate known as Compton that is today the site of the Morris Arboretum. Heir to a family business—the Morris Iron Works—Morris was an industrialist who served on the boards of several Philadelphia institutions, but not, so far as can be determined, the board of The University Museum. As a Museum member, he did, however, bequeath to this institution an outstanding collection of Sicilian and South Italian Greek coins, including the Euaenetus decadrachm, as well as a group of Roman imperial coins. Although the latter formed the focus of his paper entitled "What My Coins Have Taught Me," published in the *Proceedings of the Numis-*

stead continued to be circulated almost exclusively by the cities under Punic domination (Fig. 5). Syracuse responded by diverting its coin production into high-value, prestige gold issues and silver decadrachms to pay for the mercenary troops hired to prosecute Dionysios's seemingly endless wars against Carthage. With Athenian silver presum-

*matic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia 26 (1910-12), approximately three-quarters of the Morris collection currently possessed by the Museum are Greek. The PNASP article does not mention the decadrachm, and while most of the Morris coins are known to have been purchased from various American dealers, no record survives in the Museum's archives for when or from specifically whom Morris made this major acquisition.*

It is of further interest to note that Mr. Morris's devotion to horticulture led him to the idea of turning his estate into a public arboretum soon after its acquisition. His sister Lydia carried out this wish upon her death in 1932, when the Morris Arboretum was established as part of the University of Pennsylvania. The Arboretum therefore joins The University Museum in celebrating its own centenary this year, in commemoration of the foundation of Compton a hundred years ago.

ably curtailed because of the recent hostilities, bullion must have been largely supplied from mines in Spain under Greek control and to a lesser degree from those on Sardinia and in Gaul and Britain, in exchange for Syracusan grain. Local exchange was conducted in small denomination silver issues and the recently introduced bronze coins.



4 From left to right: a U.S. dime, a didrachm of Agragas ca. 488-472 B.C., a tetradrachm of Syracuse ca. 450 B.C., the Museum's decadrachm. (Didrachm and tetradrachm in possession of the author.)



## The Minting of the Decadrachm

According to this reconstruction, Euaenetus created his decadrachms exclusively for Dionysios I during the first quarter of the 4th century. Prior to that, beginning perhaps around the time of the Athenian invasion, he was busy designing an extraordinary series of tetradrachm types for Syracuse, Camarina, and Catane. Apart from the Demareteia issue, the first decadrachms designed for Syracuse were created by Euaenetus's close contemporary, an artist named Cimon. Cimon's signature occurs on a small but magnificent series of decadrachms apparently inspired by Dionysios's victory over the Carthaginians in 405. The Cimonian type may have been succeeded by Euaenetus's design after the fall of Messana in 396.

the coin represents a highly unusual type, whose noble design, fine execution, great size, and relative scarcity insure its fame today

Fewer than 300 examples of Euaenetus's decadrachms were in existence when Albert Gallatin published the definitive catalogue on them in 1930. Even assuming that excavation and informal discovery have since then doubled that number (Dr. Cornelius Vermeule, curator of the Classical collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, tells me he doubts the total exceeds 350), the coin represents a highly unusual type, whose noble design, fine execution, great size, and relative scarcity insure its fame today and—less important to the archaeologist than the collector—its commercial value, which is considerable. The question of how many of Euaenetus's decadrachms were originally issued by Syracuse during the opening years



5 Fourth century B.C. silver Siculo-Punic tetradrachm depicting Heracles-Melkart in lion-skin helmet. (In possession of the author.)

### Glossary

- auriga* — charioteer  
*celator* — die engraver  
*chiton* — a tunic worn by men and women in ancient Greece  
*cuirass* — armor for covering the breast and back  
*exergue* — space on coin below base line  
*flan* — the metal blank upon which a coin is struck  
*greaves* — armor worn on the legs below the knee  
*quadriga* — 4-horse chariot

of the 4th century is quite another matter. Circulation estimates are largely worthless, but it has been determined through experiment that a modern facsimile of a hardened bronze die used to strike an ancient coin will withstand between 10,000 and 15,000 strikes before breaking down. Numismatists have identified 24 separate reverse dies used for Euaenetus's decadrachms, which could indicate a minimum original circulation of something between 240,000 and 360,000 coins and hence a modern survival rate ranging between .08 percent and .25 percent.

Engraver signatures never appear with any regularity on Greek coins at any period. Fewer than perhaps 45 complete or abbreviated names of coin engravers are preserved from all the coins minted throughout the entire Greek world, of which more than four-fifths are to be asso-

ciated with 5th and 4th century South Italy and Sicily. The practice was more common in Sicily than Magna Grecia, and here Syracuse heads the list with 9 signatures. Of these 9, Euaenetus also designed types for Catane and Camarina, while his colleague Cimon worked for Messana and perhaps Himera as well as Syracuse.

The assumption is frequently made that at least some of the celators who signed their names were Athenian artists, traveling about the western Mediterranean to practice their skills as itinerant silver-smiths and gem cutters, as well as coin die engravers. The fact that as coin engravers they were permitted to add their signatures is taken as proof of the unusually high social esteem in which they were held in the western Mediterranean cities. Seltman in particular is anxious to push the theory of an Athenian derivation, but weakens his case by basing his argument on overly simplified stylistic considerations, coupled with a strong personal prejudice against the very idea that western Greek artists were able to create anything of lasting value on their own. Vermeule, on the other hand, has shown that the Sicilian coin designers were the supreme masters of their chosen medium, capable of producing reinterpretations of the artistic designs worked out by later 5th century Attic painters and sculptors that are of striking beauty and the highest originality. Silver vessels, molded vases, and jewelry provide the most obvious vehicles for the transference of such motifs from mainland Greece to the west.

### The Meaning of the Coin's Design

What do the obverse chariot scene and reverse profile of the young woman really signify? Variants of both types appear on silver tetradrachms of Syracuse from the end of the 6th century throughout most of the 5th century. They are used on other denominations until the 3rd century B.C. Certainly in some non-particularized sense the combination comes in time to mean 'Syracuse' in the eyes of her western Greek neighbors, if

not the rest of the Greek world—one of the oddities of Syracusan coins being that relatively few ever circulated outside of Sicily. From the outset of the series, around ca. 510 B.C., the chariot group connotes 'victory.' Whether this was interpreted in a narrow 'agonistic' sense, meaning stemming from a win achieved in a race staged as part of religious games, or as a broader metaphor for success won on the battlefield remains moot. By as early as 500 B.C. the charioteer is shown crowned by a flying winged Nike in order to make explicit the allusion to victory. Down until ca. 425 B.C. the team is always shown walking slowly (Fig. 4, second from right), in other words caught at rest following the actual race. After that the motif invariably depicts an agitated plunging gallop, which, when checked against stop-motion photos of actual horses galloping, turns out to reflect a conflation of different gaits collapsed into a single time-frame. Throughout the century the standard charioteer is a male, but on one occasion the driver is a Nike being crowned by a second Nike, which seems a strangely tautological conceit. On yet another example (Fig. 6) the driver is the goddess

Demeter, brandishing a blazing tree for her whip, *not* Persephone as is frequently but quite erroneously stated, since it is the mother-goddess who according to the Sicilian version of her myth wrenches a pine from the slopes of Mt. Aetna and lights it from the volcano's fiery summit to serve as a torch while searching for her lost daughter. In the case of the Museum's decadrachm, Euaenetus has chosen to use once again a male auriga, depicted here with exposed muscular arms, wind-whipped hair, and billowing *chiton*.

The hauntingly lovely young woman captured on the reverse is part of an equally lengthy series of depictions of female subjects, spread over nearly three centuries of time. In speaking of the silver tetradrachm series preceding the decadrachms of the late 5th, early 4th century, Jenkins says, "We are hardly aware of outside influences, so inexhaustible seems the invention of the Syra-

convincing proof for the portrait's identity is extremely sparse

cusan artists with the infinite variety of heads each differing from the next in coiffure and individuality." From the beginning it is hard to be sure who she is, which, it is fair to say, has not deterred a great many numismatic experts from simply labeling her Arethusa. Others, adopting a more stealthy attitude, call her either Arethusa-Persephone or Artemis-Arethusa, in a move to impute some kind of ambiguous religious duality to the core of her persona. Sometimes she is simply Persephone or Nike.

Arethusa, which in Greek seems to mean 'waterer,' was a water-nymph personifying a spring, celebrated in both prose and verse, that was located by the western shore of Syracuse's island of Ortygia, the original site of the Archaic town. The young woman, so her story runs, was pursued from her home in the Peloponnese by the love-besotted river-god Alpheus. To escape his unwelcomed advances she dove beneath the waves and re-emerged in the freshwater spring on Ortygia. The close proximity of spring to sea is argued by some to be reflected by the four dolphins swimming round and through her hair, but the dolphins can also just as well symbolize



6 Syracusan tetradrachm, ca. 412-400 B.C. (Kraay and Hirmer, pl. 38, no. 109 R)



7 Syracusan tetradrachm, ca. 412-400 B.C., inscribed 'Arethusa' and signed by Cimon. (Kraay and Hirmer, pl. 44, no. 122)



the city's naval strength and maritime-based economy and therefore have nothing to do with Arethusa.

The fact of the matter is that convincing proof for the portrait's identity is extremely sparse throughout the whole development of Syracusan coinage. Arethusa's name is, however, inscribed on a single breathtakingly successful frontal portrait created by Cimon in ca. 410-400 B.C. for a tetradrachm, in which loose strands of the nymph's hair float off to the edges of the flan's circular border as if trapped in a watery marinescape filled with four leaping, twisting dolphins (Fig. 7). No other coin ever again labels the nymph by name, but whenever it reappears on other Syracusan issues, the treatment of hair floating loose in water must identify the subject as Arethusa.

A few additional coin types convey the identity of their subject by iconographic attribute: ears of wheat in the hair on a tetradrachm designed by Phrygillos around 412 B.C. (Fig. 8) should, *pace* Kraay, identify the woman as Demeter/Persephone. Athena is easily picked out by her helmet on a tetradrachm designed by Eucleidas from roughly the same period. Artemis is identified by a small quiver over her right shoulder on a 100-litra electrum coin issued at the end of the 4th century. The hair tied into a tight topknot at the back of the crown (Fig. 9) as portrayed by an anonymous artist, 410-400 B.C., *may*, on analogy with certain extant free-standing statues, link the subject with Nike. Otherwise a nearly impenetrable veil of anonymity shrouds the series.

The Museum's coin may prove an exception. The one clue left us by Euaenetus is the water reed bracts entwined in the young woman's hair. Taking these with the sea imagery of the dolphins, Kraay calls her Arethusa. Both Head and Jenkins prefer 'corn (i.e., wheat) leaves' to 'water reeds' and name the young woman Persephone on the strength of that goddess's well-attested association with the nutritive grains, as well as with Syracuse where she and her mother, Demeter, were honored with dual temples. Since it seems to be open season on naming Euaenetus's subject, may I offer a new



8 Syracusean tetradrachm, ca. 412 B.C., signed by Phrygillos, Demeter-Persephone with ear of wheat in hair. (Kraay and Hirmer, pl. 37, no. 107)

candidate, who I would like to suggest was named Cyane?

I too prefer water reeds to wheat leaves. Cyane was another water-nymph, whose sacred spring, still boasting as of 1962 a thick stand of Egyptian papyrus said to have been presented by Ptolemy Philadelphus, is located 6 kilometers west-southwest of the city of Syracuse (Fig. 10). Legend says that a mortal girl, Cyane (in Greek, 'Blue-Girl'; also the name for corn-flower), tried to prevent Pluto from carrying off Persephone, but was changed into a spring and condemned to weep forever.

*"We found Cyane out in the fields nearly dead. She wore a garland and a crown of blackened leaves. We asked about the child. She had*

## The Plague

"Now the plague attacked first the Libyans, and, as many of them perished, at first they buried the dead, but later, both because of the multitude of corpses and because those who tended the sick were seized by the plague, no one dared approach the suffering. When even nursing was thus omitted, there was no remedy for the disaster. For by reason of the stench of the unburied, and the miasma from the marshes, the plague began with a catarrh; then came a swelling in the throat; gradually burning sensations ensued, pains in the sinews of the back, and a heavy feeling in the limbs; then dysentery supervened and pustules upon the whole surface of the body. In most cases this was the course of the disease; but some became mad and totally lost their memory."

Diodorus Siculus, *World History*, Loeb trans. (14.70.6-14.71.3).



9 Syracusean tetradrachm, ca. 450 B.C., perhaps depicting Nike. (Kraay and Hirmer, pl. 30, no. 90 R)

## The Pennsylvania Academy Collection

It is an astonishing fact that when Albert Gallatin wrote his study of the Euaenetan decadrachms in 1930, 21 were owned by The University Museum's sister institute, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, a total exceeded only by the Berlin, Naples, and Syracuse museums. As a matter of fact the Academy possessed a truly incredible collection of 23 decadrachms, of which 2 were attributed to our artist's great rival, Cimon. According to the Academy's authorities, to whom I am much indebted for the following information, the bulk of the coins originally came from the Santa Maria di Licordia hoard in 1886. Sixteen were sold in 1896 by Spink and Son in London

to an American collector for the truly bargain-basement price of 550 pounds. Soon after they passed for an undisclosed sum into the hands of Mr. and Mrs. George H. Earle, Jr., who in turn presented them to the Academy in 1899. There they remained until 1950 (not, however, without incident, as they were stolen only to be safely returned in 1939), when a decision was taken by the Academy's Board of Directors to offer them for sale. At that time all 23 left Philadelphia to enter the distinguished private collection of Arthur Stone Dewing, who in due course bequeathed them to Harvard's Fogg Museum. Harvard's gain was Philadelphia's loss, but under the circumstances we may feel doubly grateful for the perspicacity and generosity of Mr. J.T. Morris!

*been a witness. Then we asked about the horses and their driver. She said nothing but turned to water as we watched; her body, as though it were eaten by poison, melted until our feet were standing in a stream."*

(Claudius Claudianus, *The Rape of Proserpine*, lines 245-251)

In time the area around her spring was consecrated into a sanctuary, historically recorded to have been passed by Dionysios in 396 B.C. on his way to free Syracuse, besieged by the Punic forces of Himilcon. By Cicero's day (1st century B.C.) an annual festival honoring Persephone was conducted in the sanctuary by the spring. In a curiously atavistic rite, bulls were immersed in its water before their sacrifice, and the role of the nymph Cyane was largely forgotten. On the other hand, Persephone's cult had in all likelihood been syncretized with Cyane's long before Dionysios's day. The great Paolo Orsi many years ago was able to demonstrate that the Archaic early 6th century B.C. limestone woman's head in the Syracuse Museum, known as the Laganello Head, should be associated with a formal sanctuary next to Cyane's spring, making a dual identification of our young woman as Persephone-Cyane as probable as any. The syncretism becomes even more explicit a century after the Museum's coin was struck, when a splendid gold issue by Hiketas makes use of a variation of the same type of female head, while at the same time displaying an ear of wheat, the sacred gift of Persephone, behind the goddess's neck (Fig. 11).

## The Victory Symbolized by the Museum's Coin

In 396, the year of Dionysios's raid, the Syracusans had experienced a bewildering series of checks and successes in their ongoing confrontation with the Carthaginians that climaxed with Himilcon placing Syracuse under siege by land and sea. For his headquarters he arrogantly took up residence in the extramural Temple of Zeus,





10 The fountain of Cyane. The stand of Egyptian papyrus here is said to have been a gift of Ptolemy Philadelphus.

about 2.5 kilometers away from the Cyane-Persephone sanctuary. Himilcon's undoing came after he had unleashed his North African "Goums" to plunder the twin temples of Demeter and Persephone, since shortly after that his siege army was struck by a highly contagious, lethal plague (smallpox, according to Hans Zinsser; see box on "The Plague"). Dionysios, opportunistic as ever, then seized his chance to lead the aforementioned nocturnal raid against the Punic camp which brought him past Cyane-Persephone's sanctuary. The raid broke the siege and brought about Himilcon's eventual disgrace and suicide.

Later tradition is explicit in attributing Syracuse's salvation to the Punic general's desecration of Syracuse's temples: it is Demeter and Persephone who send the plague after Himilcon has plundered their sanctuaries. As we have seen, the beginning of Euaenetus's decadrachm series may be dated to the same year, 396 B.C. The 'victory' symbolized by its racing quadriga must therefore be the city's recent deliverance. This event surely provides a better explanation for the design than Dionysios's farcical attempt six years later to monopolize the games at Olympia, where his verses were ridiculed and his prize teams of horses ran into each other on the track! The captured arms in the exergue reiterate the motif of military victory, perhaps mainly for the benefit of the mercenaries whose services the new coin issues were theoretically intended to secure. On the reverse the mysterious nymph would once again inspire the Syracusan people to recall their debt of thanks to the timely intervention of their ancestral gods. And finally, on a deeper level, the unforgettable image of Cyane-Persephone must symbolize mankind's ultimate triumph: in her role as the Bride of Hades and Queen of the Underworld, Persephone provided most Greeks of this period with their chief hope for a life after death, surely a more profound message and one more in sympathy with the aspirations of this complex and sophisticated age than merely the commemoration of a town's water supply. 2

11 Gold Syracusan drachma, time of Hiketas (288-279 B.C.). Head of Cyane Persephone, with water-reed bracts in hair and ear of wheat to right of neck. (Kraay and Hirmer, pl. 49, no. 138)



After receiving a B.A. at Harvard, Donald White undertook graduate studies at Princeton University. While pursuing a Ph.D., he spent three seasons excavating and conducting research in Sicily at the Archaic through Hellenistic Greek site of Morgantina on the island's interior, 55 kilometers west of Catania. This led to articles dealing with Sicilian Greek milling devices, the involvement of Demeter's cult in Sicilian politics, and the conflation of Greek and Carthaginian cults in the island's Punic-controlled western corner. Since then his work has centered on the Greeks in Cyrenaica and Egypt. After co-directing the excavation and publication of the port city of Apollonia, he spent a decade excavating the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Cyrene

and serves now as editor for its final publication series, to which he has contributed the opening introductory volume. His latest field research is being undertaken at the Late Bronze Age island settlement at Marsa Matruh, northwest Egypt.

#### Bibliography

- Diodorus Siculus  
1954  
*World History*. Bk. 14. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 6.
- Gallatin, A.  
1930  
*Syracusan Decadrachms of the Euaenetos Type*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Guthrie, W.K.C.  
1950  
*The Greeks and Their Gods*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Head, B.V.  
1874  
*On the Chronological Sequence of the Coins of Syracuse*. London: John Russell Smith.
- 1911  
*Historia Nummorum, A Manual of Greek Numismatics*. 2d ed. P. 937. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jenkins, G.K.  
1972  
*Ancient Greek Coins*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Kraay, C.M.  
1976  
*Archaic and Classical Greek Coins*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kraay, C.M., and M. Hirmer  
1966  
*Greek Coins*. New York: Harry Abrams.

Orsi, P.  
1916  
"Daedalia Siciliae." *Monuments et memoires publies par l'Academie des inscriptions et belles lettres, Fondation Piot* 22:131-162.

Poole, R.S.  
1876  
*Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum: Sicily*. London.

Seltman, C.  
1949  
*Masterpieces of Greek Coinage*. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer.

Stillwell, R.  
1961  
"Excavations at Morgantina." *American Journal of Archaeology* 65:281, fig. 18.

Vermeule, C.C.  
1955  
"Chariot Groups in Fifth-Fourth Century Greek Sculpture." *Hellenic Studies* 75:111-113.

Zuntz, G.  
1971  
*Persephone*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.