

MINIATURE SCULPTURE  
FROM THE  
ATHENIAN AGORA



AMERICAN SCHOOL  
OF CLASSICAL STUDIES  
AT ATHENS

## EXCAVATIONS OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA PICTURE BOOKS

1. *Pots and Pans of Classical Athens* (5th Printing, 1974)
2. *The Stoa of Attalos II in Athens* (4th Printing, 1972)
3. *Miniature Sculpture from the Athenian Agora* (4th Printing, 1974)
4. *The Athenian Citizen* (6th Printing, 1974)
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AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES  
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EXCAVATIONS OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA

Picture Book No. 3

4th Printing, 1974

By Dorothy Burr Thompson

Photographs by Alison Frantz

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Cover: Terracotta rattles from a child's grave. 4th century A.D.

Title page: Lion rending bull. 4th century B.C.

Back cover: Terracotta tortoise. Late 5th century B.C.



#### OFFERINGS AT A SHRINE

Red-figured mixing bowl in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (after FR, pl. 147)

### MINIATURE SCULPTURE FROM THE ATHENIAN AGORA

Since earliest times men have loved to make small likenesses of themselves and of their animals. The ancient Greeks kept images of the gods in their houses to watch over the inmates; they placed statuettes in graves to please the dead, and they offered others to the nymphs of a spring so that water might flow fresh in the fountain (see above). Such ideas lingered long and sustained a craft that gradually turned from religious to artistic preoccupations and from the production of primitive images to true miniature sculpture.

This booklet offers a selection of such miniatures from the excavations conducted by the American School of Classical Studies in the ancient Agora of Athens. Several supplementary pieces from the School's excavation in the assembly place on the Pnyx have also been included; their numbers are 34-36, 38-40. The material in all cases is baked clay (terracotta) unless otherwise noted.

The development of these minor crafts may here be traced from the 14th century B.C. (Mycenaean period) to the 5th century A.D. (Late Roman period). Mycenaean artists were experts in carving ivory, of which one example is shown (2). In contrast their clay figurines are naive, handmade, solid, without features (3-5). These simple types continued until the 7th century B.C. when the makers of terracotta figurines (called *coroplasts*) began to use moulds, at first for the heads alone, then for complete figures; sometimes the parts of the body were moulded separately and variously combined. The

master craftsman made a free-hand model (42). This was baked hard and from it were taken moulds (see below, 1) from which casts could be made. The finished figure was gaily painted.

Our selection suggests the range in miniature sculpture: religious, frivolous, theatrical, funereal, not to mention vases and lamps. The greatest virtuosity was reached in the Hellenistic period (*ca.* 325–86 B.C.). Coroplasts created masterpieces like the famous ‘Tanagras’ (made both in Attica and Boeotia), sensitive genre scenes reminiscent of epigrams in the Greek Anthology, and studies of torsion and movement in the manner of bronzes. Under the Romans Athenian craftsmen lost their artistic flair and turned out stereotyped classical subjects, often in bronze and ivory. During the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. coroplasts grew bored with traditional subjects and began to create new types under the influence of foreign religions. They also ingeniously modelled lamps, rattles and other toys. Lively and like modern creations, these pieces enjoyed an immense popularity till the end of the 4th century A.D. after which time the craft rapidly degenerated. Finally, Christianity put an end to the making of such things; its laws forbade the worship of ‘senseless images’.

I HERMES  
GOD OF TRADE



Ancient mould and modern cast.

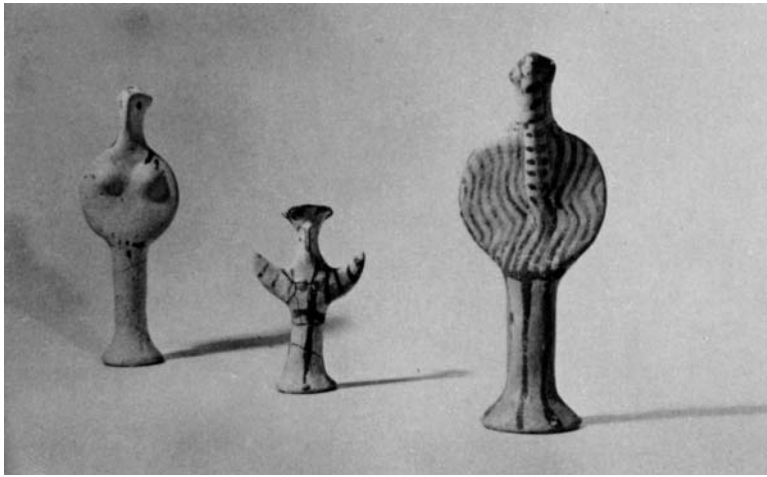


2 IVORY JEWEL BOX

14th century B.C.

From a woman's chamber tomb on the North Slope of the Areopagus, the box is carved with scenes of hunting griffins. These mythical creatures are here seen killing deer on a rocky hillside.

'As when a woman stains ivory  
with scarlet . . . and it lies in a  
treasure-chamber as a King's  
treasure, a glory to its owner.'  
Homer, *Iliad*



3 4 5 MYCENAEAN FIGURINES

From graves of the 14th century B.C.

The figure on the right is shown from behind with her long plait hanging down her back.

Goddess—or mortal?

Like to Artemis, daughter of great Zeus, in form and stature.'

Homer, *Odyssey*

6 7 GRAVE OFFERINGS  
9th century B.C.



Two pairs of terracotta boots, models of those actually worn, equipped a dead woman for the long journey to the Underworld.

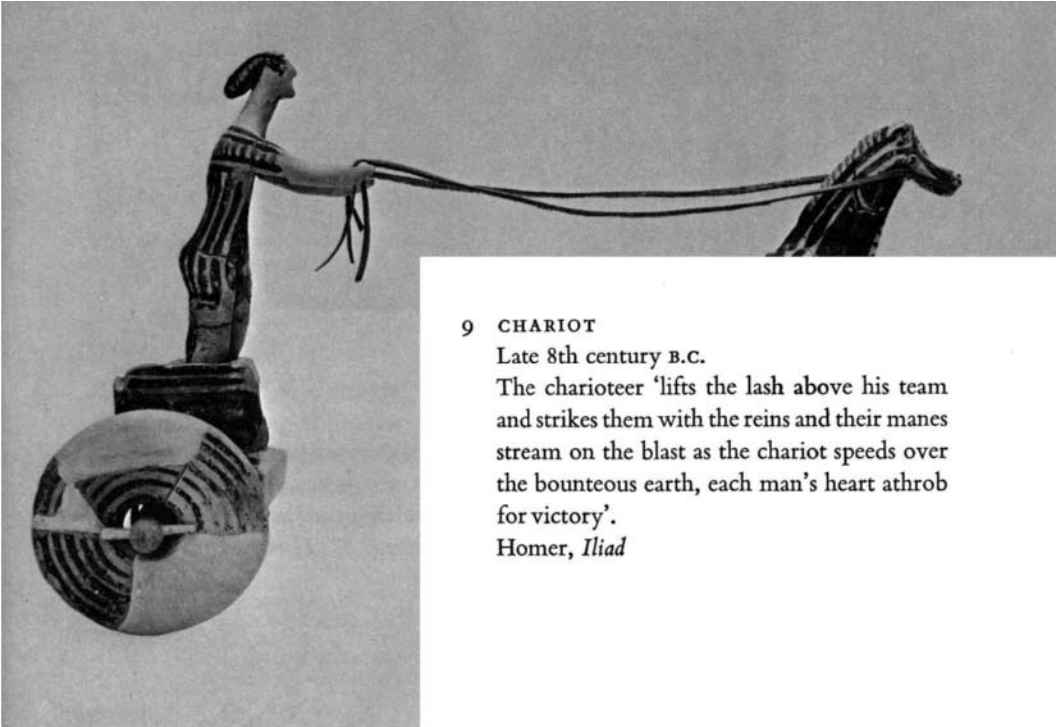


8 MOURNER

Late 8th century B.C.

On the pyres of the dead, friends threw figures of mourners 'clasping their heads as all about them wept'.

Homer, *Odyssey*



9 CHARIOT

Late 8th century B.C.

The charioteer 'lifts the lash above his team and strikes them with the reins and their manes stream on the blast as the chariot speeds over the bounteous earth, each man's heart athrob for victory'.

Homer, *Iliad*

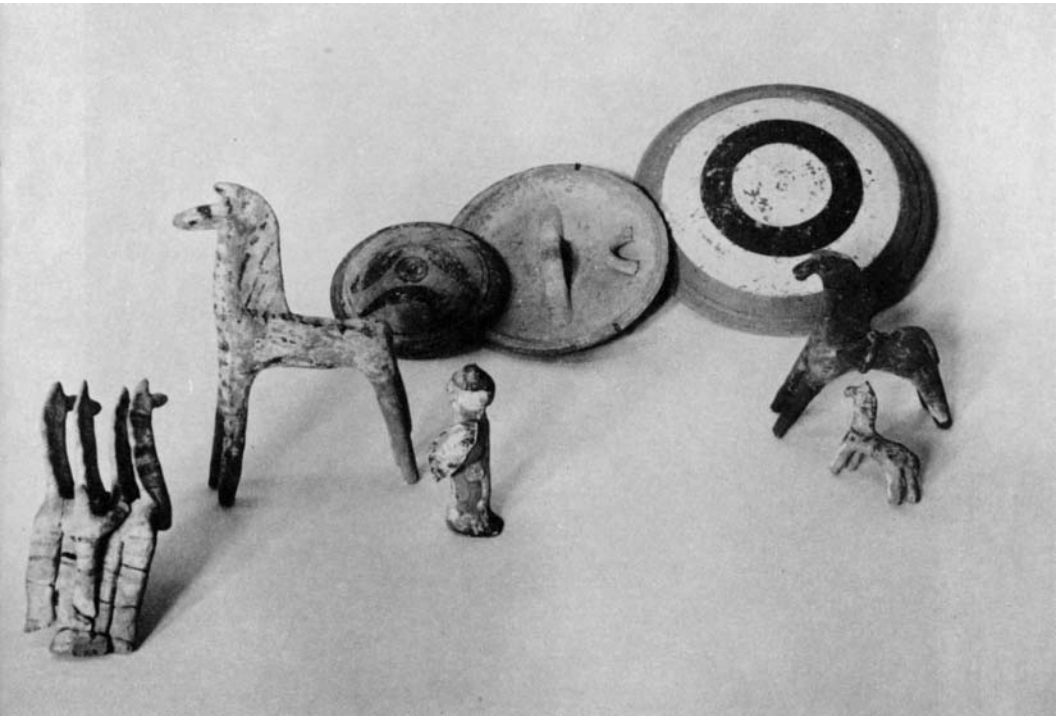
VOTIVE OFFERINGS FROM



10 PLAQUE OF A GODDESS

The head is in high relief; the dress and other details are painted in red, white, green and yellow. The goddess stands between two beneficent snakes, blessing her worshippers who may be imagined bearing offerings and singing, 'Hail Goddess! Protect our city and guide our song.' *Homeric Hymn XIII*

## A SEVENTH CENTURY SHRINE



11 A CHARIOT (for which the wheels must be imagined)

12 13 14 HORSES 'the glory of the plain'.

15 16 17 SHIELDS 'best thrown away in order to fight another day'.

18 WARRIOR WITH SHIELD AND HELMET

'Until the God of War reverse  
Our fortune, letting us forget  
Wrath and the tortures that beset  
Our hearts from that grim curse  
Of Civil War'.  
Alkaios.



19 APHRODITE

Late 6th century B.C.

'And thou, oh blessed goddess,  
Smiling on me with thine immortal face.'  
Sappho



## GODDESS AND VOTARIES

When coroplasts learned to make moulds, they produced finer work in the style of contemporary major sculpture. Most figurines were made to be dedicated in temples and house shrines. They usually represented a goddess and her votaries, the girls who served her. Each face is typical of its period.

- 20 GODDESS seated on her throne holding a child (whose legs only survive). Late 6th century B.C.



21 HEAD OF A GIRL  
7th century B.C.



22 HEAD OF A GIRL  
Early 5th century B.C.



23 KNEELING BOY

Late 6th century B.C.

Vase in the shape of an athlete: the boy is binding a fillet, symbol of victory, around his head. The hollow body held oil for the rubdown. This unique creation was probably the prize for an athletic contest.

'For surely shall I win first  
prize, and bring it to my  
home.' Homer, *Iliad*



THE GOLDEN AGE



24 HEAD OF A GIRL  
Early 4th century B.C.



25 WARRIOR'S HEAD  
Late 5th century B.C.



26 WINE JUG in the shape of a woman's head (pitcher rim missing above). She wears golden curls and a wool fillet.

Of this period also is the figure of Hermes (1), carrying purse and caduceus (snake-wand), and the tortoise on the back cover.

ANCIENT IMPRESSIONS FROM METAL WORK



27 BATTLE SCENE Relief from a vase.

‘It seems bad to me’, said Socrates, ‘to prefer armor decorated with gilded reliefs to that which fits the body properly.’  
Xenophon, *Memorabilia*



28 WARRIOR. Impression taken from the cheek-piece of a helmet.

Clay impressions taken from metal armor, vases and mirror cases retain the crisp beauty of lost masterpieces. Note also the plaque of similar style on the title page, showing a lion rending a bull. Late 5th and 4th centuries B.C.





29 ODYSSEUS MOURNING Cast from an ancient impression of a belt buckle.



30 SACRED MARRIAGE  
Cast from an ancient impression of the relief on a mirror cover. Dionysos being urged by Eros and Peitho to enjoy his bride.

## THE THEATRE

All but 33, 4th century B.C.



31 MASK OF  
COMIC SLAVE



33 TRAGIC ACTOR AS MAD HERAKLES  
3rd century B.C.



32 MASK OF OLD  
MAN



34 SATYR FROM A SATYR PLAY

35 36 SLAVES FROM COMEDY One sits pondering some mischief, another shades his eyes to peer into the distance, probably after a girl?

## LIFE AT HOME

4th and 3rd centuries B.C.

### 37 CHILD AND NURSE

'Like a tiny child  
Who runs by her mother and begs to be lifted,  
Clutching her gown and holding her back,  
Tearfully looking up, till her mother heeds.'  
Homer, *Iliad*



Coroplasts also showed intimate scenes from the home: the paedagogue (or boy's slave) guiding his charges to school (38); the old nurse kissing a baby (39); the Negro slave boy, asleep in the corner (40).



BEAUTY IN AGE



41 IVORY SILEN HEAD  
2nd century B.C.



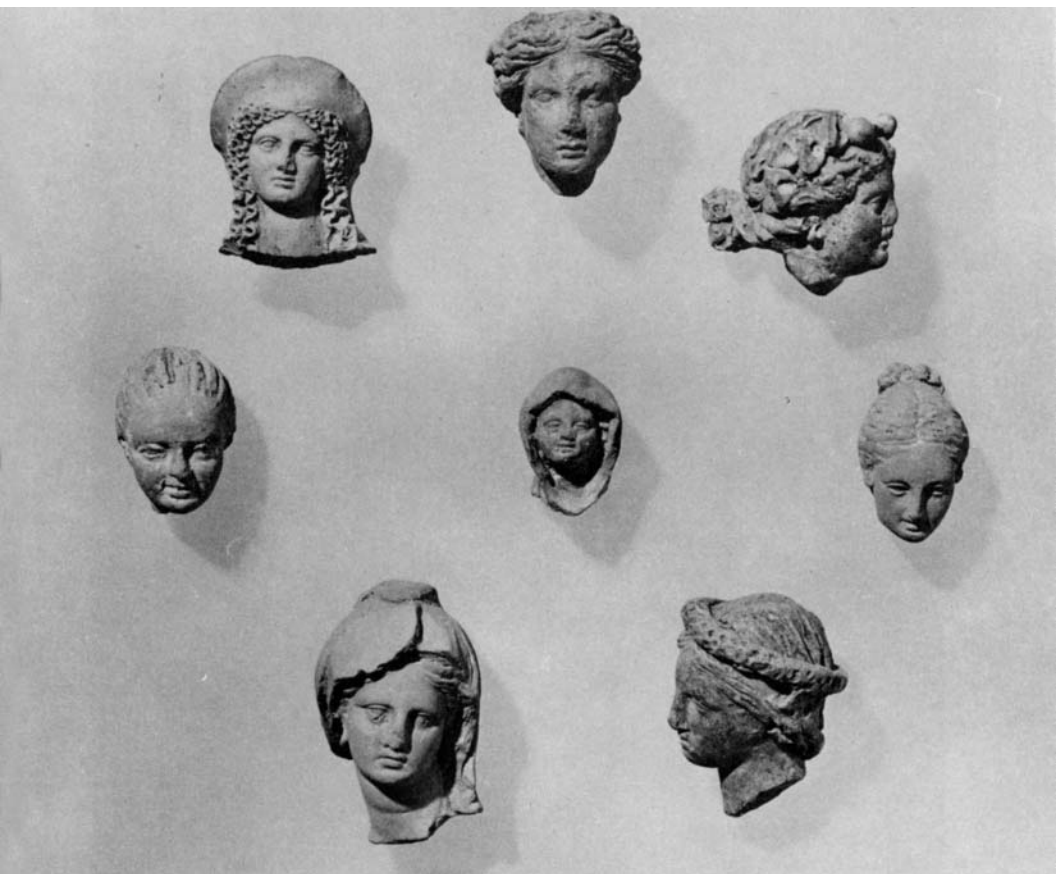
42 CLAY MODEL Handmade  
Late 4th century B.C.

Age also was a theme that interested the artists. Some saw age as benign and meditative, as in the philosopher type (42); others, as wild and drunken, in the form of Silens (41, 43), followers of Dionysos, god of wine.



43 IVORY DECORATIVE RELIEF  
2nd century A.D.

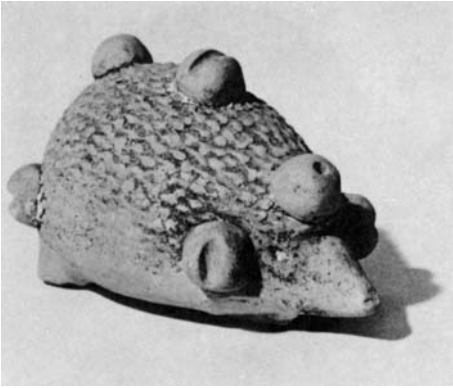
## AND IN YOUTH



In feminine beauty, all types were appreciated, from the grave face at the top of this page (44), through 45–49 clockwise, to the woman with long curls (50) and the mischievous girl (51) in the center.

‘Put off old age  
For many a year;  
It is our fear,  
O, Aphrodite.’  
Ancient Greek Folk Song

## HUMOR



### 52 HEDGEHOG

'Bristling with sharpest of spikes  
and with arrogant pride, | This  
fruit-stealing hedgehog was caught  
rolling grapes on his spine.'

*Palatine Anthology*



### 53 GROTESQUE HEAD

4th century B.C.

A toothless grin from a village farce?

### 54 LAMP IN THE SHAPE OF A NEGRO'S HEAD 3rd century B.C.

The head of a sleepy Negro  
serves as a lamp: his ears were  
pierced to receive a metal  
wick-probe; his mouth, open  
to hold the wick, is charred  
with use.





55 SEATED GIRL

She holds in her lap a 'bronze mirror that tells the truth'.

*Palatine Anthology*



56 SEATED YOUTH (Modern Cast from an Ancient Mould)  
2nd century B.C.

'I swear by all the gods that I would not take the kingdom of Persia in exchange for my beauty.' Kritoboulos in Xenophon, *Symposium*



## STRENGTH

57 BRONZE HERAKLES RESTING  
1st century B.C.

Herakles, the mighty hero, was regarded during the Hellenistic period as the ideal of manhood in strength and courage. Sculptors studied his muscular vigor in both struggle and repose; their themes were echoed in clay and copied in bronze statuettes, such as this copy of a famous statue by Lysippos, known as the 'Herakles Farnese'.



58 STRUGGLING HERAKLES  
3rd century B.C.



59 HEAD OF HERAKLES  
2nd century B.C.



60 IVORY STATUETTE, APOLLO LYKEIOS  
3rd century A.D.



60 IVORY STATUETTE, APOLLO  
LYKEIOS (detail of head)  
3rd century A.D.



61 CLAY VERSION OF THE APOLLO  
TYPE  
2nd century A.D.

Mended from over 200 pieces, this ivory statuette (left) is a miniature copy of Praxiteles' Apollo that stood in Aristotle's famous school of philosophy, the Lyceum. The god held his silver bow in his left hand as he relaxed after releasing his arrows of plague or punishment.

The terracotta head (above, right) and the tiny ivory Muse also follow the classical tradition that was ardently admired in Roman days.



62 IVORY MUSE  
3rd century A.D.



63-66 EROS AND APHRODITE in bronze and terracotta  
3rd century A.D.

During the Roman domination of Greece, Athenian coroplasts catered to the collector's taste and copied bronze statuettes. The Greek Aphrodite now resembles the Roman Venus; Eros turns into Cupid, who adopts exotic attributes, carrying the horn of plenty that belonged to the Egyptian child-god, Harpokrates, or leaning on the inverted torch of the spirit of death.

## LAMPS

In the later Roman Empire, coroplasts created specialty lamps in the form of figurines. The body of the figure held the olive oil and the nozzle was ingeniously worked into the composition.

67 HOODED SLAVE BOY  
(compare 40)



68 HARE NIBBLING LEAVES

69 THE ANCESTOR OF PUNCH,  
licking his gums.  
(compare 53)

## SACRED AND

70 SEATED GODDESS WITH  
CHILD  
4th century A.D.



71 MUSE  
Late 3rd century A.D.



By the 4th century A.D. terracottas had become very crude, coarsely rendered in linear style and decorated with crass colors. Among the favorite subjects was the Mother Goddess, an old type (compare 20) vulgarized and yet the prototype for the Early Christian Madonna. Even classical types like the Muse (compare 62) were debased.



72 BEARDED HEAD  
4th century A.D.

PROFANE

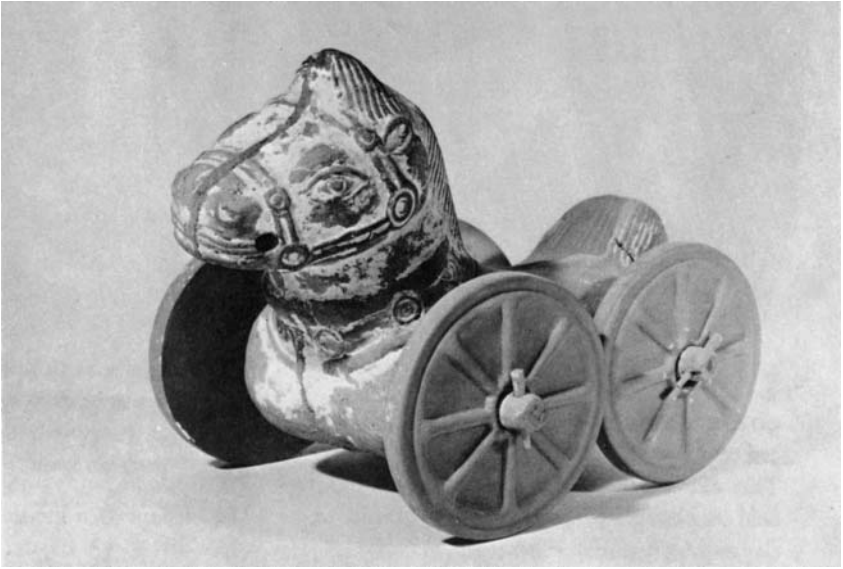


73 DOG 3rd century A.D.



74 DOVE 4th century A.D.

Toys and rattles were immensely popular, especially the horse on wheels. Compare also the group of animals from a child's grave of the 4th century A.D., shown on the front cover.



75 HORSE ON WHEELS 4th century A.D.



76 COMIC MASK  
3rd century A.D.

That old favorite, the mischievous slave of Greek Comedy (compare 35-36), held its popularity down into the Roman Empire. This example is a life-size clay copy of a genuine stage-mask.





77 BULL'S HEAD MASK

4th century A.D.

This mask recalls the heads of victims that were suspended after sacrifice on the wall of a sanctuary.



78 PARADE MASK

A copy of a gilded metal helmet of the type worn at military exhibitions, made to be hung as decoration on the walls of houses.



79 GLYKON

This bronze serpent with human head and flowing locks is Glykon, a reincarnation of Asklepios, as created by a magician in Anatolia in the 2nd century A.D. His story is related by Lucian in his *Alexander, The False Magician*.

Glykon also appears on coins issued by Lucius Verus (160–169 A.D.).





