THE ORIGINS OF THE ENGLISH SOVEREIGN AND
THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CLOSED CROWN

By PHILIP GRIERSON

The sovereign of Henry VII, a double ryal worth 20s. which was first struck in 1489, was
the heaviest gold coin issued up to that time by any English king. It was also amongst
the first English coins to show the king wearing what is technically called a closed or arched
crown. Neither in conception nor basic design was it original, for a very similar double noble,
known as a réal d'or, had been struck two years earlier in the Netherlands by Maximilian,
king of the Romans, as regent for his son Philip the Handsome.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss three problems raised by the introduction of the
new English coin. The first is that of its precise relationship to its Low Country prototype
and the light which this throws upon the order of the earliest varieties. The second is that
of the history of the closed crown in England and the ways in which its symbolism was
interpreted and understood. The third is that of the implications, for the constitutional
historian, of the creation of the sovereign. In view of the fact that Henry VII in 1489 issued
a coin known as a sovereign on which he is shown wearing a closed crown, which was widely
regarded as imperial in character, should one not attribute to this ruler a more prominent
role in the formation of the Tudor concept of kingship than recent historians have been
prepared to allow? These last two problems lie outside the terms of reference of the pure
numismatist, but they are of a type to the understanding of which a study of coinage can
sometimes make a major contribution.

The sovereign has for so long been regarded as a characteristically English coin that most
numismatists seem to have been unaware that, like the type of the groat, it originated in
the Low Countries and not in England. Maximilian's réal d'or of 1487, which served as the
model for Henry VII's sovereign of 1489, is mentioned in none of the standard works on
English coins—Ruding, Kenyon, Brooke, Oman—and the relationship between the two
escaped the attention both of Lawrence in his study of the coinage of Henry VII 2 and of
the authors of two recent monographs on the sovereign. Only Mr. Rigold, so far as I am

1 This paper was originally drafted in 1962, and in a shortened form was read before a meeting of the
British Numismatic Society on 28 January 1964. My indebtedness to the kindness of fellow numis-
matists is considerable. The paper in its early stages
derived much help from Mr. Herbert Schneider, who
most kindly wrote to me at length on the subjects
discussed in the first two sections and whose views,
availed at independently, coincide in all essentials
with my own. A subsequent draft was read by Mr.
E. J. Winstanley and Mr. W. J. W. Potter, whose
study of the coinage of Henry VII had in the
meanwhile begun publication. My indebtedness to
their work will be obvious, even though on certain
important matters of chronology we have failed to
agree. Above all I am grateful to Mr. Ian Stewart,
who discussed the whole problem with me in detail
at an early stage and who has greatly improved and
clarified the final presentation of my conclusions.

2 'On the coinage of Henry VII', NC, xviii (1918),
295-57.

3 Sir Geoffrey Duveen and H. G. Stride, The
history of the gold sovereign (London, 1962); G. A.
Negrioli, 'La moneta detta 'Sovrano' o 'Sovrana',
Bollettino del Circolo Numismatico Napoletano,
xxxix (1954), 31-76. The second of these is mainly con-
cerned with the name 'sovereign' as applied to gold
coins of other European countries between the 16th and the 18th centuries, but its
 omission of any reference to Maximilian's réal d'or
can be understood.
aware, has called attention to the dependence of the English sovereign, as well as that of a similar coin struck in Denmark in 1496, on a Low Country prototype. 1

The English coin came into existence as the result of a commission of 28 October 1489 instructing the mint to strike a gold double ryal worth 20s. to be called a sovereign, two sovereigns to be struck in every pound (Tower) of metal—i.e. a proportion of 1 in 11½—and the design to be according to a print of lead attached to the Letters Patent 2. Since the original of this document has not survived and the lead impression 3 was not copied when it was enrolled, we can only infer its general appearance from the coins themselves. These vary a good deal in detail, but the essential feature of the obverse type is a representation of the king seated facing on a Gothic throne and that of the reverse a large double rose having on it the royal escutcheon. The coins are divided by modern scholars into either four or five classes whose distinguishing characteristics will be considered below.

The fact that the commission envisaged only a small proportion of sovereigns being struck in each lb. of gold has led some scholars to regard them as virtually ceremonial coins, intended for ostentation rather than for use 4. This was not the case. Multiples of high value, which serve as a store of wealth rather than a medium of exchange, are normally struck in small quantities, but their economic function is nonetheless a real one. Henry VII was conforming to a tendency which was widely though not universally apparent in western Europe in the last decades of the 15th century. In a number of states where the standard coin had hitherto been the ducat, double ducats in fair quantity were being added to the circulating medium. This was notably the case in Italy—Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1466-76) introduced the double ducat at Milan, Ludovico il Moro (1494-1500) struck no single ducats at all, and Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) made the double ducat a common coin at Rome—and in the Iberian Peninsula, where John II of Portugal (1481-95) introduced a heavy gold coin known as a justo, Ferdinand and Isabella inaugurated a double excelente in Castile in 1497, and John's successor Manuel the Fortunate issued in 1499 as regular currency a ten-ducat piece known as a portuguez. The causes of this tendency were primarily economic, but the phenomenon had its political overtones. If the larger denominations were both a natural response to a generally higher level in prices and a consequence of the increased supply of gold provided by Portuguese exploration in Africa, the fact that they involved the striking of heavier and more splendid coins could be regarded as augmenting the dignity of those responsible for their issue. A double ducat would have meant little in England, since the noble was already twice the weight of the commonest denominations of gold coin in regular use on the continent, but the tendency to double the weight of the standard coin was felt in England as elsewhere and resulted in the sovereign.

The exact number of sovereigns struck during the reign of Henry VII cannot be precisely calculated, since there is a gap of five years in the mint accounts between 1489 and 1494. During the last fifteen years of the reign about 28,000 lbs of gold are known to have been turned into coin 5,  

1 S. E. Rigold, 'The trail of the Easterlings', BNJ, xxvi (1949), 54.
3 The reference to a 'print and form' of lead excludes the possibility that only a drawing was involved, and implies that the dies for the first variety had already been prepared at the time that the commission was issued.
4 Cf. A. E. Packe, 'Some notes on the coins of Henry VII', NC, xi (1891), 11-7, where the attempt is made to identify the particular occasions on which the several varieties were struck.
5 G. C. Brooke and E. Stokes, Tables of bullion coined from 1377 to 1550, NC, ix (1929), 61-63. The exact figure of 30,810 lbs. is given by the accounts, but this includes the first six months of Henry VII's reign.
and if one allows about 2,000 lbs.—a high figure—for the missing years and assumes that the ratio of two in the pound as laid down in 1489 was maintained the total of sovereigns struck is likely to have been in the neighbourhood of 60,000. Some idea of the distribution of the early and late classes can be obtained from the figures for the bullion coined, as set out in the accompanying table.

**GOLD COINAGE STRUCK UNDER HENRY VII**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period (usually Michaelmas to Michaelmas)</th>
<th>Lbs. of gold coined</th>
<th>Presumed number of sovereigns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regnal year</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1485/6</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>1486/7</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>1487/8</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>1488/9</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>1489/94</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/14</td>
<td>1494/98</td>
<td>3,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/16</td>
<td>1498/1500</td>
<td>1,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/18</td>
<td>1500/02</td>
<td>2,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/19</td>
<td>1502/03</td>
<td>1,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/20</td>
<td>1503/04</td>
<td>1,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/21</td>
<td>1504/05</td>
<td>2,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/22</td>
<td>1505/06</td>
<td>2,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/23</td>
<td>1506/07</td>
<td>3,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/24</td>
<td>1507/08</td>
<td>5,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/1 H VIII</td>
<td>1508/09</td>
<td>1,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(30,910 lbs. after 1494)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of specimens known today is between twenty and thirty¹, and since over half the gold coinage belongs to the last four years of the reign it is not surprising that the majority of the surviving sovereigns are of the same period. Brooke's Class I is represented, so far as is known, by only three specimens² and his class II by one (BM, ex Sir John Evans), so the possibility cannot be excluded of there having been other varieties which have failed to survive at all.

¹ I have not attempted to make a complete census. There are 9 in the British Museum, 7 in the Ashmolean, and 3 in the Fitzwilliam Museum. There is also in the British Museum one double sovereign and one multiple weighing just short of 800 gr. This does not fit into the 'sovereign' pattern at all—it would be 3½ sovereigns—but was evidently intended as a ten-angel piece. These coins are noted in R. Lloyd Kenyon, *The gold coins of England* (London, 1884), 33, but are attributed to Henry VIII. The striking of such multiples was not provided for in the commission of 1489, but similar multiples, used as pièces de plaisir for presentation to persons of rank, occur in several continental coin series, notably that of Castile, in the 14th and 15th centuries. Ferdinand and Isabella's *pragmatica* of Medina del Campo, which reformed the coinage of Spain in 1497, provided for the occasional striking of multiples of 5, 10, 20 and 50 excelentes, but the list was evidently not intended as definitive and the multiples most commonly found are those of 2 and 4 excelentes.

² They are (1) British Museum, (2) R. D. Beresford Jones coll., ex R. C. Lockett, IV. 1667 (Glendining 11. x. 56), and (3) H. Schneider coll., ex V. J. E. Ryan, I. 104 (Glendining 28. vi. 50), ex British Museum duplicates.
AND THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CLOSED CROWN

The réal d’or, sometimes called the réal d’Autriche, the continental prototype of the sovereign, was created by an ordinance of Maximilian of 20 April 1487, followed up in Flanders by an instruction to the master of the Bruges mint of 4 May. This coin also was a double noble, worth 24 silver réaux and struck 17 to the mark. It weighed 229 gr. and so was a trifle lighter than the English sovereign (240 gr.). In each 20 marks of gold one mark was to be struck in réaux, so that the proportion was about half that subsequently prescribed for the English sovereign. The design was not laid down in either the ordinance or the mint instruction, but the surviving coins have on the obverse a representation of the King of the Romans seated on a high-backed throne and on the reverse the crowned shield of the Empire. The coin was struck for Guelders, Flanders and Holland, the issues of the three provinces being distinguished by small differences in punctuation and lettering and by the presence, in the cases of Flanders and Holland, of a lys and rosette respectively below the steps of the throne. The issue lasted only a short time, the coins being all dated 1487, usually in Roman numerals. A specimen of the Flemish réal dated in Arabic numerals has been recorded and it is possible that these were also employed in Holland before the issue came to an end, for the noble struck in 1496 by Hans of Denmark, which exactly copies the peculiarities of the Holland coins, has the date in this form. The mint accounts show that 5,931 réaux were struck in Guelders, the numbers for Holland and Flanders are not known. None were struck for Brabant. Only a single specimen of the réal of Guelders is known and two of that of Flanders, but up to about a dozen réaux of Holland are dispersed in various collections.

One has only to place the réal d’or of Maximilian beside the sovereign of Henry VII for it to be apparent that the one gave rise to the other. Both are double nobles, in each case the heaviest coins to be struck up to that time in their respective countries, and the essential features of their designs are the same. Their obverse type is the king seated facing on a

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[1] This was not the official name, but it appears in this form, or as the grooten reael van Oostenrijk, in money books of the 16th century.


[4] The coin is illustrated by Deschamps de Pas, *art. cit.*, pl. XV, 15, from the rubbing of a unique specimen then at the Hague. This specimen passed by exchange in 1872 or 1873 to A. Dewisme, *Geschiedenis van het Koninklijk Kabinet* (The Hague, 1946), 67-8, figured as no. 1985 in the sale catalogue of the Dewisme collection (van Peteghem, ... the Flemish gold coins there, supposes it to have been among the 157 coins known to have been stolen in 1916.

[5] H. H. Schou, *Beskrivelse af danske og norske mønter 1448-1814* (Copenhagen, 1926), pl. 1, 1496 (1). The Danish “noble” has imitated the cross-crosslet initial mark and the rosette beneath the throne of Maximilian's Dutch réal. Amongst the specimens listed by Schou are a triple noble of 1496, a double-noble of 1502, and 3 silver strikings from dies dated 1509.


[7] The instructions for their issue were sent to the mint of Malines in July 1487, but the accounts of the mint-master Peter Cobbe covering the period between 5 July 1487 and 3 June 1488 report that none had in fact been struck. Cf. F. Verachter, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire monétaire des Pays-Bas* (Antwerp, 1840), pp. 44 (‘In den ersten sechzehn maanden, die nachster particulier eene gouden penning van xxijij karatten fyns gouts genoemt Royaal’), 46 (‘huyen den tyd dezer rekoning niet gemaeckt’). Cf. A. de Witte, *Histoire monétaire des comtes de Lothring, ducs de Bourgogne* (Antwerp, 1890), 75-77.


[10] There are three at the Hague, two in Brussels, and a number in other collections. There are two in England, one in the British Museum and the other in my own collection. The total of about a dozen is based on information kindly given me by Dr. van Gelder.
Gothic throne. Their reverse type is a shield, which in the English case is placed on a rose in order to incorporate a favourite device of the king. There can be no question as to which coin was the earlier. The documentary evidence is conclusive, and the réal of Maximilian formed only one element in a whole series of new denominations ordered at the same time while the corresponding coin of Henry VII was added as an afterthought to the existing coinage authorized four years previously in August 1485.

II

Four classes of sovereign were ascribed by Kenyon to Henry VIII. Lawrence added to these a fifth type, transferring to Henry VII part of the class with a large portcullis below the king's feet which had previously been ascribed to Henry VIII. He also reversed the numbering of Kenyon's first two classes, and of his third and fourth. Brooke reduced the total of classes to four by conflating Lawrence's Types 4 and 5, treating the lis initial mark on the obverse as sufficient ground for combining in a single class two groups of coins with markedly different obverses, one having a throne with a high canopy and broad seat and the other a narrow throne and a portcullis below the king's feet. This arose from Brooke's overall classification of the coins of the reign, which was based mainly on the groats, but it involved a curious divergence between the concepts of 'class' and 'type'. Lawrence's reversal of the order of Kenyon's Classes III and IV seems to me fully justified, but as between Classes I and II, I believe Kenyon's order to be correct and that of Lawrence and Brooke to be wrong. Potter and Winstanley follow Brooke's arrangement.

In order to avoid confusion arising out of the conflicting numerical classifications of previous writers, it will be convenient to label the five principal varieties A–E in the order in which they seem to me to have been struck. Table II shows the way in which this system differs from those of Kenyon, Lawrence and Brooke.

II. CLASSIFICATION OF SOVEREIGNS

Previous classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Principal marks</th>
<th>Kenyon</th>
<th>Lawrence</th>
<th>Brooke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Cinquefoil</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Cross fitchee</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Dragon</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lis/dragon</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Lis/crosslet, pheon, lis</td>
<td>Henry VIII</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kenyon gives no reason for his arrangement of the coins, but it is evidently based on their general design. The king's throne on Classes A and B is relatively simple, but the field, which in Class A is plain, is in Class B diapered with fleurs-de-lis. Classes C–E have more elaborate thrones and fleurs-de-lis in the field. The design of the rose on the reverse is simple in Class A

and the royal escutcheon is crowned, while in the other classes the rose becomes progressively more elaborate and the escutcheon, which is much smaller, is uncrowned. The affinities and differences of Classes A-D, which are the only ones that affect the argument—Class E, with portcullis at the king's feet, has otherwise the same general features as D but is obviously later than it—are set out in Table III and illustrated in the line drawings on pp. 124-51.

### III. FEATURES OF THE SOVEREIGN, CLASSES A—D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obverse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of king</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throne</td>
<td>simple</td>
<td>simple</td>
<td>elaborate</td>
<td>elaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown</td>
<td>double arch</td>
<td>double arch</td>
<td>single arch</td>
<td>single arch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilies in field</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privy mark</td>
<td>cinquefoil</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>dragon</td>
<td>his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stops</td>
<td>trefoils</td>
<td>crosses</td>
<td>mullets</td>
<td>saltires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reverse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown present</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of shield</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shield with hatching</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roses with hatching</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roses in tressure with leopards and lilies in arches</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privy mark</td>
<td>cinquefoil</td>
<td>cross fitchee</td>
<td>dragon</td>
<td>dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stops</td>
<td>trefoils</td>
<td>trefoils</td>
<td>mullets</td>
<td>saltires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table and illustrations show that while Class A goes with Class B and Class C with Classes D and E, Class B is a good deal closer than Class A to Class C and the natural order of issue, based on typological relationships, would be A, B, and then either C, D or D, C, but should not start B, A. Lawrence's order is in fact based not on types but on privy marks. Class B has as privy mark a cross fitchee, which is found on one class of groats on which the crown is open; he therefore placed it the first in the series, allowing it to mark the transition from the open crown of Henry VII's early years to the closed crown of the majority of the groats of his reign. The privy mark of Class A, a cinquefoil, corresponds to that of an early class of groats with closed crown; he therefore placed it second. The dragon privy marks of Classes C and D have no counterparts on the groats.

There is, then, an apparent contradiction between the order A, B suggested by typological considerations and Lawrence's order B, A based on the privy marks. This contradiction is sharpened when Maximilian's réal is taken into consideration, for its design corresponds to the sovereigns of Class A and not to those of Class B. There is the same simple design of throne, the same plain background, the same large crowned shield on the reverse. If the throne alone were concerned, one might be prepared to assume first an elaborate design, then the adoption of a simpler design based on Maximilian's réal, and finally a revised elaborate design for the later classes, though it cannot be said that such an arrangement

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1 The réal of Maximilian is from Deschamps de Pau, the sovereigns from Kenyon. Photographic illustrations can be easily consulted, e.g. in van Gelder and Hoc for the réal and in Lawrence's or Potter and Winstanley's articles or in Brooke for the sovereigns.
would look at all probable. But if we take into consideration the design of the reverse, where all the affinities of Class B are with the later classes, it seems to me quite unacceptable.

It seems therefore necessary to query Lawrence's assumption that the privy marks used on the gold were necessarily identical with those used for the silver of the same issue, or rather, since 'issue' is itself a question-begging term, of the silver being struck at the same time. Mint practices tend to change and become less systematic in their application with the passage of time, and rules which can be validly applied in the second half of the 14th century would not necessarily operate in the last decade of the 15th. The fact that the later sovereigns (Classes C and D) have as their privy mark a dragon, which does not appear on the silver at all, is sufficient proof that identity of privy mark was not necessary to the working of the mint. It also carries with it the implication that even where the same marks are found on both gold and silver they are not necessarily related to one another or being used at the same date. They might be so to begin with, but the fact that only two sovereigns were to be struck in each lb. of gold would involve such a disproportionate rate of wear on the dies as between sovereigns and other coins that the mint would soon find itself in difficulties over synchronizing the privy marks in the different denominations. One remedy would be that of recutting the privy marks on the dies, as was done under Henry VIII, but it would be simpler to abandon any attempt at adjustment and allow those of the sovereigns to follow a pattern of their own. A superseded privy mark from the silver might well come into use again for such a purpose, and this is what I believe occurred in the case of the cross fitchee.

The typological arguments in favour of Class A preceding Class B seem to me overwhelming, but quite apart from them the contrary argument based on mint marks breaks down on points of detail. It is argued that the cross fitchee should link the earliest sovereign with the groats of Type I. This class of groats, however, has an open crown; Type II groats have a

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1 The obverse die used for the sovereign of the first coinage of Henry VIII had as initial mark a portcullis, which was subsequently overstamped with a sunburst for the second coinage and again later with a fleur-de-lis (Brooke, op. cit., 183). Another example of recutting seems to be the new variety of Class D without an inner circle on the obverse published by Messrs. Winstanley and Potter in BNJ, xxii (1963), 162-3 and pl. X.4. They regard it as probably the first variety of the class to be struck, but Mr. Stewart has pointed out to me that the obverse die seems to be the same as that of their pl. X.5, but with the inner circle removed—traces of it can be seen under the Henricus and elsewhere—and various minor changes made. Here the cause for recutting would have been the need for repairing a damaged die, for there is a conspicuous die-flaw bottom left.

2 I follow the classification and numbering of the groats used by W. J. W. Potter and E. J. Winstanley, 'The coinage of Henry VII', BNJ, xxx (1960-1), 262 ff.
crown with two plain arches; and not till Type III groats come into existence do we find crowns with either one or two jewelled arches corresponding to the crowns of the sovereigns. The evidence of the crowns would therefore be in favour of making the earliest sovereigns more or less contemporary with Type III of the groats, thus placing the cinquefoil sovereigns earlier than the cross fitcheé ones. Further, since the cinquefoil mint-mark also occurs on the latest groats of Type II, the issue of Class A of the sovereigns can reasonably be supposed to have begun before that of Type II of the groats had ended. Such a supposition is immensely strengthened by the existence of the unique groat in the Hunterian collection with the seated figure of Henry VII instead of a facing bust. Messrs. Potter and Winstanley have shown that its lettering and punctuation place it towards the end of the issue of Type II groats while many details of its design (the folds of the robe, the shape of the throne, etc.) link it equally with the sovereigns of Class A. A ‘seated figure’ type was in fact being experimented with for the groat at the same time as it was being introduced on the new denomination of gold.

Such a conclusion is important for the dating of the groats, of which the order of issue is well established but whose absolute chronology is a matter of surmise. If the earliest class of sovereign is that with cinquefoil (Class A), and this was contemporary with the cinquefoil groats of Type II, variety 5, we can assume that Type II of the groats was nearing its end in the last months of 1489, since variety 5 comes late in its own series and was preceded in Type II—i.e. the groats with plain, double-arched crown—by extensive issues with no privy mark at all. This seems to me more likely than assuming the earliest class of sovereign to have been that with cross fitcheé (Class B), contemporary with the cross fitcheé groats, for in that case the whole chronology of the groats would have to be moved forward. The last groats (with rose) of Type I (open crown) would have been struck in 1490, the groats of Type II with no privy mark would have dated from later in 1490, and the cinquefoil groats of Type II could scarcely be earlier than 1491. My belief is rather that when the design of the sovereign was first put forward (autumn 1489), it would have been natural to give it the same mint-mark as the groats of the day. At the same time, an experimental sovereign type was tried for the groat but was not adopted. Subsequently—and probably almost immediately, for only one specimen is known of the cinquefoil sovereign—the decision was taken to use privy marks for the sovereigns—and for the half-sovereigns or ryals—which were different from those used on the silver. There followed the sovereign with cross fitcheé of Class B and subsequently those with dragons of Classes C and D.

1 The crowns on the sovereigns of Class A are of two forms, the large one on the reverse having both arches jewelled while the small one on the obverse has only the outer arch jewelled.

2 Potter and Winstanley, art. cit., 276 and pl. xx. 7.

3 Potter and Winstanley compare it with their variety no. 5 (out of 7) of the normal Type II groats with the cinquefoil mint-mark (p. 276).

4 A further argument against dating the introduction of the closed crown on English coinage as late as 1490 is the fact that the same symbol had already appeared on the last Scottish groats of James III, who died on 11 July 1488. Cf. I. H. Stewart, The Scottish coinage (London, 1956), 65–7. Though this is not conclusive — these groats of James III are those with an actual portrait and not an impersonal representation of the monarch — it is at least a pointer to the dating of the changes that were taking place. Under James IV (1488–1513) a closed crown of the English type became an accepted part of the Scottish regalia. Cf. the portraits of James IV and his wife Margaret Tudor in a MS of c. 1500 reproduced in Lord Twining, A History of the Crown Jewels of Europe (London, 1960), pl. 205 c.d.

5 The mint indenture of the king with Sir Giles Dawbeney and Bartholomew Reed of 4 November 1486 had provided for the striking of ryals, half-ryals, and quarter-ryals, as well as for the angel and angelot, but none of the first group of coins is known and probably none were struck. The only known ryals of the reign — about ten are recorded, all from the same dies — have cross fitcheé privy mark and correspond to Class B of the sovereign.
The sovereign of Henry VII, like the réal d'or of Maximilian, shows the ruler wearing a closed or arched crown, but on both coins this is a quite secondary feature. It is on the groats of Henry VII that the form attributed to this particular symbol of majesty plays a really conspicuous role. For nearly a century and a half, since the introduction of the groat under Edward III, the king's crown had been an open one, as it was on the pennies and as it had been on the earlier groats of Edward I. This traditional type of crown was retained on the earliest groats of Henry VII. Then it was suddenly abandoned in favour of a quite different type. At first the new crown was shown with two plain arches meeting in a point below the central orb and cross. Later there were designs on which only the outer arch was jewelled—this perhaps represents an attempt to show two of the arches in perspective, since one is seeing their plain undersides—or, as on Class C of the sovereigns, only the frontal arch and the two side arches were shown; the fourth one, which would be invisible to the spectator, is suppressed. Later still, on both sovereigns and groats and on other denominations where a closed crown was used, the whole design was simplified to a single jewelled arch reaching from one side of the crown to the other. Although in the 16th century there seems to have been a good deal of variation in the forms of crown actually worn by successive rulers, the fact that the single jewelled arch can be shown extending from left to right on the facing-bust groats of Henry VII and from front to back on his profile groats implies that these and other variations cannot be taken too literally as representations of real crowns. They are rather divergent attempts to show a difficult detail on a very small scale.

Before proceeding further it will be as well to explain very briefly what is involved in the difference between an open and a closed or arched crown, since the latter term is used to cover two types of crown which are in fact distinct but of which the implications of one were very commonly held to apply to the other.

An open crown is one which consists basically of a golden circlet elaborately worked and decorated with precious stones or enamels. Whether it is made in one piece or consists of a series of separate plaques soldered or even hinged together is immaterial; its essential feature is that it is not 'closed' above with anything crossing the top of the head. The medieval French crown was of this type. In opposition to it was the closed crown, which had bands of metal crossing usually from one side to the other and from back to front so that they met in the middle, at the top of the head. These bands of metal might be broad and relatively flat, as in the Hungarian crown of St. Stephen, or narrower and higher, as in the Bohemian crown of St. Wenceslas, or very slender, with the arches depressed in the centre, as in most modern crowns. These arches are in part utilitarian, since they serve to strengthen the crown, in part decorative, since they are normally made to serve as supports for a central cross or jewel, and in part traditional, since a contributing element to the evolution of many medieval crowns was the structure of the early Germanic helmet, which had metal bands crossing at the top of the head to protect the skull from injury.

1 Twining, op. cit. 138-40. This sumptuous and comprehensive work is a mine of information, but the details sometimes have to be treated with caution. More scholarly, and going into much greater detail for the medieval period, are vols. ii and iii of P. E. Schramm, Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom dritten bis zum sechszehnten Jahrhundert (Stuttgart, 1955-6).

2 Twining, op. cit., 138, distinguishes between this last shape as that of 'royal' arched crowns, 'imperial' arched crowns being those on which the arches curve continuously upwards to a central apex. This is a fair approximation to conventional usage, though the Nuremberg crown of the Holy Roman Empire did not correspond to either pattern.
A special case of a closed crown was that of the Holy Roman Empire. This was originally an open crown, made up of eight separate richly jewelled sections incorporating four magnificent enamelled plaques, but the Emperor Conrad II (1024–39) had added to it a kind of jewelled crest, running from front to back, to which he had thoughtfully attached his name, CHVONRADVS DEI GRATIA ROMANORV(M) IMPERATOR AVG(VSTVS)

1. This jewelled crest was so closely associated with the notion of the imperial office that when the Hapsburgs made a new imperial crown in the 15th century in which they incorporated two large cusps resembling a mitre seen sideways, they provided it with a similar crest running from front to back and topped with a central jewel. The existing Hapsburg imperial crown of this mitre type dates from 1602, when it was made for the Emperor Rudolf II, but it replaced an older one which is known to us from earlier designs, as for example the portrait of Maximilian I by Albrecht Dürer. Strictly speaking, therefore, the only type of crown whose characteristics can properly be regarded as imperial was one with a single crest running from front to back. In practice, in countries unfamiliar with closed crowns at all, any kind of closed crown was assumed to be imperial in character.

The crowns worn by Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings, as shown on coins and in illuminated manuscripts, were sometimes of the closed variety, but their varying designs reflected the whim of the engraver or illuminator rather than the object depicted and it is impossible to say how closely they correspond to reality. The crowns of the 13th and 14th centuries were like their French counterparts of the open type, having the form of a gold band ornamented with fleurs-de-lis and precious stones. The only one that has survived into modern times is the funeral crown of Edward I, but their general aspect is known from plenty of contemporary illustrations. It is true that descriptions and illustrations, as Schramm, the greatest living expert on Staatsymbolik, has justifiably pointed out, must be used with caution. On the one hand old designs may be repeated from force of habit long after they have ceased to represent reality, on the other there will often be an element of fantasy in the work of the artist, particularly when he was not in a position to know the details of the objects he was trying to represent. This reserve must apply even where reproductions in sculpture or metalwork are available, though here the danger of inaccurate representation arising out of the technical incompetence of the artist is probably less. But the evidence is sufficiently abundant and clear for there to be no doubt that the English crown of the 13th and 14th centuries was of the open variety.

No English crowns of the 15th century have survived, and for our knowledge of their appearance we have to rely on contemporary descriptions and illustrations. The accounts of the royal household are less helpful than one might expect, though they often describe the precious stones used to ornament the crowns—for the court jewellers were constantly

1 Twining, op. cit., 329 ff.; fuller details and bibliography in H. Fillitz, Die Insignien und Kleinodien des Heiligen Römischen Reiches (Vienna-Munich, 1954), 15-21, 50-55. This crown, which was formerly amongst the imperial insignia kept at Nuremberg, is now in the Imperial Schatzkammer at Vienna. The common view that it represented the imperial crown par excellence, from the Ottonian period onwards, is incorrect, a wide variety of crowns having been used by different emperors. Cf. Twining, op. cit., 307 ff., and on the role of this particular crown the article of A. Huyskens, 'Die Aachener Krone der Goldenen Bulle, das Symbol des alten deutschen Reiches', Deutsches Archiv f. Geschichte des Mittelalters, ii (1938), 401-97.


3 The best accounts of English medieval crowns are in Twining, op. cit., 99 ff., and Schramm, Herrschaftszeichen, ii, 392-5, iii, 755-68, 1033-46.

4 Schramm, op. cit., iii, 1041.
being called upon to repair or ‘modernize’ these or even break them up—and record their value, the latter being essential in view of the frequency with which royal crowns were called upon to serve as security for royal debts. Schramm's view is that the closed crown was introduced in England under Henry VII, and he discounts the evidence for its earlier use on the ground that the illustrations and descriptions are not necessarily reliable. English writers on the regalia tend to date its introduction a good deal earlier, ascribing it usually to Edward IV or Henry VI, or even to Henry IV.

Schramm's view would seem to find confirmation in the evidence of Henry's coinage, but it is irreconcilable with the testimony of other 15th century sources. It is true that these do not follow a consistent time-table, but a consistent time-table is not to be expected. The household accounts show that a monarch normally possessed a number of crowns varying appreciably in design, and that no one of them was considered so important that it was the only one which the king would be necessarily represented as wearing. Different types of object on which the king traditionally figured would in any case be in varying degrees resistant to change; coins and seals might reasonably be expected to alter more slowly than funeral effigies or illustrations in illuminated manuscripts. On small-scale representations the growing custom of wearing the so-called ‘cap of maintenance’ inside the crown sometimes makes it difficult to determine with certainty whether a particular crown is intended to be closed or not. The general tenor of the evidence, however, is to the effect that a closed crown was in general though not exclusive use throughout the 15th century, and that it achieved self-consciousness, so to speak, not as an imitation of the imperial crown but as a crown of a type distinct from that worn by the kings of France.

The earliest clear evidence for the use of a closed crown in England is on the occasion of the coronation of Henry IV on 13 October 1399. Froissart, who was writing at the time and seems to have had his account from an eye-witness, refers to the ‘arched’ crown of St. Edward which was placed on the king's head by the archbishop of Canterbury. In a representation of the coronation of Henry V in the chantry chapel at Westminster the crown there used is also shown as ‘arched’ and surmounted by an orb and cross. Though the chapel dates from the reign of Henry VI and its testimony cannot be regarded as contemporary, the fact that its evidence for the use of an arched crown at the coronation of 1413 bears out that of Froissart (who is contemporary) for the use of one at the coronation of Henry IV justifies us in believing that a closed crown was used on this occasion and consequently existed at least as early as 1399. Since Henry IV is shown wearing a magnificent open crown on his tomb effigy in the Abbey, however, it is clear that the crown used at the coronation was not yet in any way regarded as determining the typical form of the royal crown in England.

1 See the excursus by W. H. St. John Hope, 'The Cap of Maintenance', in L. G. Wickham Legg, English coronation records (Westminster, 1901), Ixxxii-lxxxviii. This fur-lined cap, the precursor of the velvet lining of the modern crown, came into use in the middle of the 14th century. For continental counterparts cf. Schramm, op. cit., iii. 1042, n. 3.

2 Jean Froissart, Chroniques, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, xvi (Brussels, 1872), 207-8: ‘Et puis fut apportée la couronne saint Edouard, et estoit ladite couronne archeie en treiz (leg. croix), et fut bénie, et puis luy assist l'edite archevesque sur le chief’. The emendation to croix is justified both by the sense—the four supports of the central orb and cross made a cross—and by the reading (archie en croix) in the later 15th century chronicle of Jehan de Waurin, who copies Froissart verbally (Recueil des chroniques, iv. 5. 1; ed. W. Hardy, ii (Rolls Series, London, 1868), 6).

3 Twining, op. cit., pl. 46c; better in M. R. Holmes, 'The crowns of England', Archaeologia, lxxxvi (1937), pl. XV, fig. 2.

4 Schramm, op. cit., pl. 113, fig. 149. The accompanying effigy of Queen Joan, not shown in his illustration, bears a similar crown.
Whether Froissart is correct in his assertion that the closed crown used in 1399 was the crown of St. Edward is a matter on which those writers who have accepted the essential veracity of his account have held divergent opinions and which is perhaps incapable of solution. It is quite conceivable that a crown going back to late Anglo-Saxon times—or to Norman times if its supposed connection with the Confessor be regarded as mythical—might have been of the arched type. It has also been suggested that the crown might have been that once owned by the Emperor Henry V and brought to England by his widow, the Empress Matilda; this famous crown is referred to several times in chronicles and inventories of the 12th century and survived at least into the 13th century. It is difficult to believe, however, that if either of these crowns had been 'closed' and in use during the 13th and 14th centuries there would have been no representation of them during this long period. A more probable solution is that a new crown was made during the reign of Richard II—if it were used at Henry IV's coronation it must have already been in existence before that date, and it is natural to identify it with the crown which Richard handed over to his successor in the pathetic scene of his abdication—under the influence of Anne of Bohemia, who was the daughter of the Emperor Charles IV and would thus have been familiar with crowns of the closed type. Her influence and that of her entourage on the artistic life of this country is well known, and the household accounts show that the court goldsmiths did much work on the crowns during Richard's reign. Though there is no proof one way or the other, the hypothesis of the making of a closed crown under Richard II would account both for its existence in 1399 and for the fact that it is not heard of at any earlier date.

In addition to the closed crown used at his coronation, Henry V had a helmet-crown of the arched type which he wore over his basinet at Agincourt and which was damaged in the fighting. It is mentioned in most of the accounts of the battle, and the French knight St. Remy, who was present, observes in passing that it was 'circled', which in the context can only mean arched, 'like the imperial crown'. A Book of Arms of the mid 15th century in the British Museum (Harleian MS. 2169) includes a handsome sketch of the king on horseback in full armour wearing such a closed crown over his helmet.

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1 Cf. W. H. St. John Hope, 'The king's coronation ornaments', The Ancestor, i (1902), 133-4; and Holmes, art. cit., 79-80. Twining, op. cit., 132 ff., discusses the appearance of St. Edward's crown and concludes that it was arched, but on p. 127 he suggests that the later arched crown was only made in 1416, when Sigismund visited England in order to obtain Henry V's support in his plans for ending the Great Schism, and that its object was that of establishing the equality of the English king with the emperor. If the arched crown were used at the coronations of Henry IV and Henry V, however, this is out of the question, and in any case, as we shall see, there is no evidence of any ideological reason behind the form of the English crown at so early a date.

2 This idea is casually put forward by H. D. W. Sitwell, The Crown Jewels of the Tower of London (London, 1953), 26, only to be abandoned later (pp. 27-8) in favour of the theory that — pace Froissart — the arched crown was first definitely used at the coronation of Henry V.

3 Charles IV's Bohemian florins sometimes show him with an arched crown, though on the commoner variety the crown is open (E. Fiala, Beschreibung d. Sammlung böhmischer Münzen und Medaillen des Max Donauber (Prague, 1888), pl. XVIII, 833, 835). Schramm, op. cit., 1043, n. 2, calls attention to a miniature in the late 14th century MS of the Chronica Aulae Regiae, written at the great abbey outside Prague which was closely associated with the kings of Bohemia, in which the mother and the two wives of Charles IV are depicted; the two latter, who had the imperial title, have closed crowns, while his mother Elizabeth, who was only queen of Bohemia, has an open one. The crown shown on the Prager groschen, first struck in 1306, is an open one, the surviving crown of St. Wenceslas, which is closed, dating only from the 14th century. Cf. Twining, op. cit., 64 ff., and Karl Fürst Schwarzenberg, Die Sankt Wenzels-Krone und die böhmischen Insignien (Vienna-Munich, 1960).

4 Twining, op. cit., 123-5.

5 Chronique de Jean Le Fevre, seigneur de Saint-Remy, i. 69 (ed. F. Morand, i (Paris, 1876), 244): 'une riche couronne d'or serquelle comme imperiale couronne'. Cf. Holmes, art. cit., 80-1. Richard III's crown at Bosworth is another well-known instance of a royal ornament being taken into battle.

6 'A 15th century Book of Arms', The Ancestor, iii (1902), plate facing p. 185.
The evidence for the use of a closed crown becomes more plentiful under Henry VI, since the fact that he was king of France as well as England underlined the differences between the emblem of royalty in the two countries. The companion design to that of Henry V just alluded to, one of Henry VI in armour, shows on the helmet the two crowns of England and France superimposed on each other, one closed and the other not. The distinction is most clearly brought out in the so-called Warwick MS in the British Museum. This remarkable series of pen-and-ink sketches illustrating the life of Richard Beauchamp, father-in-law of Warwick the Kingmaker, was executed between 1485 and 1490. Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI and their respective queens are all shown wearing closed crowns, the kings of France wearing open ones. The contrast is perhaps clearest in the two drawings showing the double coronation of the infant Henry VI, for as king of England he receives a closed crown, as king of France an open one. It is apparent, however, that the artist did not regard the closed crown as in any way an 'imperial' crown, for the Emperor Sigismund is depicted wearing a triple crown like the triregno of the popes. Though the Warwick MS. is not contemporary with the events it records, it shows that the peculiarity of the design of the English crown was very generally recognized in the later 15th century.

The use of the closed crown continued under Edward IV. A Lambeth MS. contains a very beautiful miniature of the king and Elizabeth Woodville, both wearing arched crowns, receiving from Caxton a copy of the first dated book printed in England, The Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres. It was under Edward that the closed crown first appears on the Great Seal, where it is a striking innovation of the king's second reign (1471-83). On his earlier seal, captured by Henry VI in October 1470, the crown worn by the king had been open, but the new seal made in 1471 and first known attached to surviving documents of 1472 shows a distinctive closed crown. This was continued on the seals of Richard III. Edward IV, and probably Richard III also, used a different seal, with an open crown, for French affairs, and it was the latter that Henry VII took as the model for his own seal, which shows him wearing an open crown with a cap of maintenance beneath. The first seal of Henry VIII was of a similar character, but his second seal, used between 1532 and 1542, and his third seal, used between 1542 and his death in 1547, shows him with a closed crown, as does the even more distinctive design on the gold bulla used for the Treaty of the Field of the Cloth

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3 Loz. cit., fig. p. 188. Henry VI's charter of 1416 to King's College, Cambridge, has a miniature of the king wearing a closed crown (E. Auerbach, Tudor artists [London, 1954], pl. 16.), and the shield above the initial of the charter is surmounted by a magnificent crown on which the arches are shown in great detail.


5 E.g. plis. XXV and XXVIII, which show the contrast very clearly.

6 Twining, op. cit., pl. 46.d.

7 A. B. and A. Wyon, The Great Seals of England (London, 1857), no. 87. Line drawings of a number of crowns of this period, taken from seals and coins, can be conveniently studied in Sir George Young-husband and C. Davenport, The Crown Jewels of England (London, 1919), 13-15. Davenport considers that Henry VI's first seal for French affairs (Wyon, no. 79 B) shows him wearing an open crown, and not the closed crown which is worn over the cap of maintenance. Under Edward IV there can be no question that the crowns are closed.

8 Wyon, no. 91.

9 Ibid., no. 89, attached to the Treaty of Amiens of 1475.

10 Ibid., no. 93.

11 Ibid., no. 97.

12 Ibid., no. 99.

13 Ibid., no. 101.
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of Gold in 1527. From Henry VIII’s reign onwards the closed crown was that invariably used.

IV

The closed crown, as a material object, was thus in regular though not exclusive use by English kings throughout the 15th century: it was not an invention of the first Tudor monarch. Its employment on the coinage by Henry VII, however, brought its design before the public eye in a way that had never been done before, and must have greatly enhanced its significance. It is here that the wider implications of the innovation become apparent, for by the 16th century it had come to be very generally accepted that the closed crown was specifically ‘imperial’ in character, and the concept of England as an ‘empire’ is one which, from the Reformation Parliament onwards, played a conspicuous role in the constitutional history of the Tudor period. The Act of Restraint of Appeals of March 1533 (24 Henry VIII c. 12) opens, it has been happily said, with a roll of drums:

‘Whereby divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one Supreme Head and King having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial Crown of the same.’

The term ‘crown’ had long since been extended from the physical emblem of sovereignty to cover the possessions of the monarch and subsequently the state which he ruled, but now it was a question of the ‘crown Imperial’, and the physical form of the crown actually worn by the kings of England played its role in the transition from one to the other.

It is generally believed that either Henry VIII or his minister Thomas Cromwell, who drafted the Act of Restraint of Appeals, was the chief architect of this concept of England. Although there can be no doubt that Cromwell did much to further it and develop its political implications, he did not originate it. Henry VIII manifested ‘imperial’ notions very early in his reign, baptizing two of his ships the Mary Imperial and the Henry Imperial in honour of his sister and himself and dismaying More by the confident assertion that he owed his ‘crown Imperial’ to the see of Rome. The connection between the metaphorical sense of the crown imperial and the physical form of the crown is most clearly expressed in a letter

1 Ibid., no. 103. For a remarkable series of representations of Henry VIII wearing a closed crown see the decorated initials to the Plea Rolls of the King’s Bench reproduced in the plates of Miss Auerbach’s Tudor artists.


3 Cf. especially A. Ogle, The tragedy of the Lollards’ Tower (Oxford, 1949), 311-13, discussing Cromwell’s early drafts of the ‘Supplication against the Ordinaries’ of 1522. Although in the phrase ‘your most excellent Realm and Empire’ the last two words are crossed out and do not appear in the final version, the phrase ‘imperial jurisdiction’ is used later in the document, and Ogle suggests that the elimination of ‘and Empire’ was due to Henry’s uncertainty over the propriety of its use; only a year later, in the Act of Restraint of Appeals, had he come round to accept his minister’s view.


of Cuthbert Tunstall to Henry of 12 February 1517, pouting cold water on Maximilian’s absurd proposal to resign in favour of the English king.

"One of the chiefest points in the election of the emperor, is that which shall be elected must be of Germanie, subject to [the] Empire; whereas your Grace is not, nor never sithen the Christian faith the kings of England were subject to the empire. But the Crown of England is an Empire of itself, much better than now the Empire of Rome: for which cause your Grace werith a close crown." (1).

In tracing the antecedents of this concept it is necessary to make a distinction between the actual use of a closed crown in England and the interpretation placed upon it. The form of a cult object and the order and details of a ceremonial are not necessarily determined by the symbolism which later generations or even contemporary observers read into them; they may originate from the taste of an artist or the convenience of a court official and the interpretation be added later. Wickham Legg has noted how the 15th century was prolific in its elucidation of the details of coronation ritual, the explanations tending to increase in number with the passage of time², and, as an American scholar has happily expressed it, "things royal can never remain long without some meaningful explanation"³.

The history of the closed crown in this country has already been traced, and there seems no reason to suppose that it had at first anything like the significance subsequently attached to it⁴. St. Rémy, a Frenchman, noted in passing its similarity to the imperial crown, but the general impression we get from its representation in English art and references to it in 15th century records is that its chief interest lay in the fact of its being different from the crown of France. As long as English interests abroad were closely bound up with that country this was natural enough. A different situation obtained from 1482 onwards. In that year Maximilian became regent of the Netherlands in the name of his son Philip, and the niceties of imperial symbolism obtruded themselves upon Englishmen in a way impossible at an earlier date. Quite apart from the closer diplomatic contacts which the regency brought about between England and the Empire and growing acquaintance with the imperial emblems now used at the Burgundian court, closed crowns proliferated on the coinage of the Netherlands during the long minority of Philip the Handsome (1482-94). Flemish coins were the normal currency of Calais, and coins from all the provinces would be well known to English merchants through the cloth trade. Sometimes the King of the Romans is shown wearing the crown himself, as on the splendid réal d’argent regarding which William Cely wrote anxiously in December 1487 to enquire how acceptable it was in England⁵; sometimes

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¹ H. Ellis, Original letters illustrative of English history [1st Series], (London, 1824), i. 136 (my italics). For the circumstances in which the letter was written see C. Sturge, Cuthbert Tunstall (London, 1938), 44–46.

² Wickham Legg, English coronation records, 193.

³ R. E. Giesey, The royal funeral ceremony in Renaissance France (Geneva, 1960), 26. Cf. what he says in his preface, "Time and time again . . . I have emerged with the conviction that some crucial innovation in the ceremonial first occurred quite haphazardly, although a contemporary chronicler may have tried to give it some plausible explanation ex post facto, and later generations when reenacting it embellished it with cleverer symbolism. That is to say, on the level of the events themselves, chance frequently reigned; but symbolic forms affected the thought about the events, especially when they were consciously repeated at later funerals." This does not exclude the fact that sometimes the symbolism was thought of first.

⁴ Unless perhaps under Richard II, who, as Dr. Elton has noted, used the term 'empire' in a markedly 'Tudor' fashion (England under the Tudors, 161, n. 1). But it is significant that a contemporary record of the coronation of Richard III which assigns symbolical meanings to many of the royal ornaments does not do so to the crown (Wickham Legg, loc. cit.).

⁵ The coins are termed 'new grottys de Meclin'. I owe the reference to Mrs. A. Hanham, who is preparing a new edition of the Cely papers, this particular passage being omitted from H. E. Malden’s edition. Malden wrongly identified these 'groats' as coins of Milan, not of Malines (Mechelen).
the coin type is itself a crowned escutcheon or crowned initial M in the field. In either case
the 'imperial' implications of the closed crown were plain for all to see.

It is in the light of this fact that the creation of the gold sovereign and the sudden
extension of the use of the closed crown on the coinage under Henry VII are to be interpreted.
The copying of coin types from one country to another is so common that if it stood by itself
there would be no justification for attributing any deep significance to Henry’s use of
Maximilian’s réal as his model for the sovereign. Even his choice of the term ‘sovereign’
for its name need not have had any far-reaching implications, since sovereignty was something
that went with monarchy and was not peculiar to the imperial office. But the use of the
closed crown on the groats, whose type had undergone no appreciable change during the
preceding century and a half, would have called men’s attention to a detail previously regarded
as of little moment, and the identity of Henry’s crown with that shown on the coins of
Maximilian struck in the Netherlands would have underlined its possible ‘imperial’
implications and prepared the way for the view expressed by Tunstall and very generally
held in the 16th century. Henry VII’s adoption of the closed crown on his groats and his
issue of the first English sovereign in 1489 may consequently be regarded as inconspicuous
but not unimportant contributions to the development of the imperial idea in England
in the Tudor period. If to most numismatists the introduction of portraiture on some of
Henry’s later coins forms the most striking feature of his reign, as showing him to be in
touch with the new ideas of the Renaissance, the use of the closed crown and the introduction
of the sovereign are in their own way of equal or perhaps even greater significance.

\[1\] It is perhaps worth noting that Maximilian, who
had not been crowned by the pope and was technically no more than King of the Romans, contented
himself with calling his chief gold coin a réal d’or. The form of the crown worn by the King of the
Romans, however, did not differ from that worn by the Emperor.