ADDRESS BY STUART EBORALL RIGOLD,  

PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH NUMISMATIC SOCIETY  

Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, 28 November 1972  

REVIEW OF THE YEAR  

Again I present my report on the state of the Society as a co-operative effort, with sincere thanks to those officers and members of Council who have helped me put it together. The officers are well tried; the new editorial consortium has had a year's trial and is proving its capability. 

Before going into figures, I should like to pay a tribute to Lady Stenton, who died just after our last Anniversary meeting. Others knew her better than I did and can better judge the extent of her contribution to scholarship, though I am familiar with her work as editor to the Pipe Roll Society. Let me then commemorate her as a pupil and in every sense a fellow worker of her husband and continuator of his work, in the blessed and enviable company of the long-lived relict of Joseph Wright of the English Dialect Dictionary, of Alice Stopford Green, or even of Clara Schumann. The only other death in the Society is that of Mr. Brazenor of Brighton Museum—incidentally, a collection with several important local finds. He had been a member for twenty-four years. 

Our numbers continue to increase. For the first time in our history we have passed the 500 mark—350 ordinary members, 15 junior, and 138 institutional. Some would cheer instinctively, but I do not share this adulation of 'growth' as a good in itself. I accept that it is necessary to the survival of a publishing society, that the inflation of printing costs, epicyclic to ordinary inflation, must be offset by the progressive reduction per copy as one moves away from 'first-copy' costs, even though the dividend from any endowments is decreased with more recipients. Yet bulk, as all palaeontologists know, is generally inimical to survival. There is a more organic growth in the life of every society, reflected in the motives that make people join, which are not necessarily the 'purposes' set down in the rules. Societies take root, grow fast, find their true nature or métier, that is, they reach maturity, and, if they are wise, they stay there, not for half a century, like an individual, but, with care, for several. We came of age long ago and show no sign of senility, but must beware of straining ourselves by overgrowth at the wrong time and mistaking our métier in the process. Some mature archaeological societies are being deliberately challenged to keep up with adolescent ones, if necessary to self-destruction. Let this be borne in mind when I say that, while our finances seem sound, in the terms of Diocletian or of Edward VI rather than of Trajan or of Edward I, we must conserve our true function, as expressed in the standard of our publication and our other activities. Council will, in the near future, be looking closely at the accounts for the year just ended in the context of this unstable state of values, and some time in the next twelve months will have to consider raising the nominal sum of the annual
subscription. It is common knowledge that our sister society has just almost doubled theirs. Let me reassure you: we are not thinking in those terms. They would defeat our growth, even maintenance, of membership and of service, and probably of income too. Our commitments are our own; we do not underwrite unprofitable monographs of limited appeal, and we do not, like some American societies, have to fortify ourselves against a harsh world by large assets. Beside the good tradition of co-operating with other societies without becoming ‘passengers’, societies in Britain and France still have the inculcable support of other established institutions. We are determined neither to debase our standards nor to diminish the services we offer to all qualified and willing comers, and therefore to keep our subscription within toleration.

The ‘year’s work’ is hardly a meaningful term in a slow-moving subject such as ours (and our sister’s, where it covers our interests). The year’s programme shows something of the ruling interests of our contemporaries. Together we have offered two original contributions in the great home-field of early medieval coinage, three on tokens and allied subjects, two on medieval monetary economics, a paper of special archaeological interest (Mr. Dolley and Mr. Seaby’s paper on the Irish find of pewter tokens), beside one on the Roman Netherlands not irrelevant to Britain, and one on the parentalia of English numismatics.

It might be better to speak of the ‘year’s works’: some societies have adopted this method of consolidating a plethora of reviews. I can only point to the most important: the report of the symposium in December 1970, *Methods of Chemical and Metallurgical Investigation of Ancient Coinage*; contributions by Mr. Blunt and Mr. Dolley to the *Festschrift* for Professor Whitelock, and Mr. Dolley’s *Medieval Anglo-Irish Coinage*, a Newtonian light on what had hitherto been murky for so long; in the *Sylloge* yet another part of Copenhagen, and the selective, but very useful Norweb collection; *The Bristol Mint*, by L. V. Grinsell, better known as a prehistorian, with all the precision and acumen this implies; Françoise Dumas, *Le trésor de Fécamp, et le monnayage en France occidentale pendant la 2de. moitié du Xe. siècle*, for which the second half of the title shows the scale of the work, a large volume built round one very important hoard, the first of a series of monographs initiated by the French Ministry of Education, an example that might be followed here. The English content is small but critical for dating: it is a pity that, on the map, Lynne is put at Lyme Regis (!). Among catalogues Mr. Doubleday’s Edward III collection must be mentioned: we have used one of the Society’s funds to supplement gaps in illustrations.

Finally, the customary interim survey of hoards: it begins in Hertfordshire with a pre-Roman hoard from Skeleton Green, Puckeridge (40 coins) and one of Tetarchic folles from Chipperfield (62 coins). From Eriswell, Suffolk, came a mixed hoard of Roman and Icenian silver (72 coins and 255 coins). The early medieval finds are important: 11 coins of William I, type I, from Norwich; a great hoard (?780 coins) of Henry I to type XV, but with an interrupted run of earlier types, from Lincoln; over 1,000 coins of Stephen, type I, with ‘irregulars’, from Prestwich, Manchester. There is a small, for the species (41 coins), Edwardian sterling hoard from King’s Lynn, and three of the usual late hammerd hoards (sixteenth–seventeenth century), from Gloucester, Lighthorne, near Warwick, and Broadwoodwidger, Devon. More interestingly, a Scandinavian wreck produced Swedish copper blanks for Caroline farthings and some English coins of the same period. The only recent (pre-1914) gold find was in Richmond Park.
CONCEPTS OF STYLE IN COINAGE

If I spend much of this discourse recalling and rationalizing a damnosa hereditas of the nineteenth century, it would be just to begin by calling to mind the contributions of those two eminent late-Victorians who were with us until recently, Helen Farquhar and Dr. F. Parkes Weber. It is not without significance that we meet in the Warburg Institute and that the whole procedure and direction of art-historical studies today is different from theirs and different, too, from that of Barclay Head, who furnished those stylistic periods in Greek numismatics still served up cold today. His hereditas, tidy and memorable, is still pervasive. I do not so much wish to dispel it, as to set it in its historical context and to point out that the word ‘style’ has been used with different, even anti-thetical, meanings, all of which may have facilitated genuine insights into works of art and craft, yet between which even recent speakers have glided without being aware of it. I am not arguing about forms of words but trying to disentangle muddled usage which leads to muddled thinking. I am also adopting a pragmatic and positivistic standpoint: I am looking for those definitions of ‘style’ which yield, or have yielded, the most significant results, and I recognize that the existence of a single word-form may produce not only confusions but fruitful cross-fertilizations between the senses. I shall even try a dialectical approach and seek a synthesis combining the strong points of divergent usages.

Art-history is adventitious among the humanities, and ‘style’, like many of its terms, is borrowed from letters. In that context it is possible that the manner or ‘pen’ of an individual may have priority over an agreed and general style, but when, in the eighteenth century, we hear of ‘styles’ in art and construction it is nearly always in the general, not the particular, sense, even though, as Dr. Sutherland has pleaded, general styles may be largely determined by individual master-hands and master-minds. This obvious distinction between a general style and an individual execution is often ignored. It is possible that Head thought that the latter counted for little, as indeed it does when the discipline of apprenticeship is as effective as in the Chinese imperial potteries. Even in such circumstances, as Head’s immediate disciples knew, style as an instrument for dating or otherwise classifying is not only subjective but mathematically imprecise. No date so argued can be better than a central point with a wide deviation, unless some patent innovation provides a terminus post quem.

For all that, a pathetic faith in Head and his message remains—his myth of progress and decline, and his details too. When Dr. Kraay argued that Syracusan ‘Demareteion’ was fifteen years later than commonly supposed I heard a cry of despair that ‘the bottom had fallen out’ of stylistic dating. The ‘worst’ that had happened was that one ‘firm’ point had been moved fifteen years along. And was fifteen years really an appreciable difference on such a scale? Yet in Head’s day the message, not of course new in archaeological circles in 1874, was of wide importance. All the world now knew that the high classic style was not eternal but had arisen. It was unthinkable that the Trustees of the British Museum should refer, as they had sixty years before, to a late-archaic work as ‘in the Etruscan style’.

1 As used in the British Museum catalogues of Greek coins, beginning with Sicily (1876), the various general guides to the series, and even repeated in Mr. R. A. G. Carson’s Coins (1962).


3 The sculptures from the temple of Aphaia at Aigina, as restored by Thorvaldsen.
In medieval and post-medieval numismatics we do not need such clumsy instruments for dating, and when we try them, as our Director has shown, we find them defective to the point of uselessness.\(^1\) In fact we never try them on the scale where they might be significant, that is to show differences of the order of a century. The examples Mr. Stewart cites, clumsy, even barbarous dies, intermingled with more competent ones, need not be affected by general style at all, merely by disparate execution, or, in a special sense, ‘individual style’. I say ‘need not’, because even children’s drawings have some style of their age, as well as of the executant’s mental age. What an eight-year-old draws today is not what he would have drawn in the 1920s, or in the 1870s. Neither is it a perfect specimen of the art of its age.

For the fine points of die-sequence, however, and for geographical, rather than chronological classification, the ‘styles’ or ‘quirks’ of individuals have proved their use in medieval numismatics. They are the ground of Mr. Dolley’s case for an administrative subdivision in the late Old English coinage and of the strong case for more than one fleeting administrative co-ordination in the Merovingian.\(^2\) In the former the differences do not reflect any general style; in the latter it would be dangerous to argue any—an Iron-age revival might be claimed in a thing so un-Roman as the appendice-perlé group. Individual ‘style’ is usually without external reference and its uses ‘archaeological’ in the narrowest and least humane sense, uncertain links in a completely material argument. Henceforth I shall concern myself with ‘Style’ in the sense that Head used it, ‘general’ Style (hereinafter with a capital letter), protean, subjective, but not illusory. It has the widest implications, yet, in numismatics, is only one of several descriptive factors that are often confused with it. The concept becomes clearer if these factors are given distinct names: I would suggest ‘fabric’, ‘hand’, ‘transcription’, and ‘devolution’, all of which should be distinguished from ‘Style’.

‘Fabric’ is the shape of a coin and the consequence of all its ‘processing’, whereas Style is a function of the type only, and thus, immediately, of the die.

‘Hand’ is a convenient word for ‘individual style’, equally a function of the die. I would extend it to more than one worker, in so far as they cannot be readily distinguished. In my series ‘B’ of ‘Primary sceattas’ one dominant hand is recognized throughout B I and into B II (but not B III), though at some point a new die-cutter may take over. Yet at least one quite distinct hand cuts a few dies for the same mint in B I. The Scandinavian bunglers, cited by our Director, who made four different reverses for one barbarous obverse, all had different hands.\(^3\)

‘Transcription’ (I use the musical metaphor deliberately) is the interpretation of a type or design within the limitations of fabric and hand, and like these can be criticized on grounds of workmanship rather than intention.

‘Devolution’ (I avoid the moral or pathological word ‘degeneration’) is what happens to a type through a succession of incompetent hands, the process usually seen as ‘barbarization’ though it occurs in civilized contexts too. I shall enlarge on this, but submit that Style belongs to the primary aspect of the type only, and evaporates under devolution.

---

\(^1\) ‘Style in Medieval Coinage’, NC 1969, pp. 269–89.
\(^2\) e.g. the whole, generally western, appendice-perlé group and several Austrasian groups, in particular that isolated by Dr. H.-U. Bauer and J. Lafaurie (for references, op. cit., in note I). The work of the same die-cutter is better explained by distribution than by casual and itinerant employment.
C. F. Keary, in a seminal paper,¹ not long after Head’s pronouncement on Style, attempted to apply strictly organic analogies (evolution, hybridization, degeneration) to coins, and combined fabric, hand, and devolution under the heading of ‘Morphology’, but he said nothing about Style, which, I submit, is that element in a given type which is common to all comparable designs, not only of coins but other classes of artefact. To judge the effect of the four other factors we should compare the English coinages from that of Edward the Confessor to the ‘Tealby’ type of Henry II. The fabric of the later coins is much less careful than the earlier, but this is not necessarily true of the hand of the later dies. Problems of transcription become less if, as appears, the range of punches increases. Devolution hardly applies when types are changed so rapidly, except when, early in Henry’s reign, the changes bring on a kind of alternating devolution. The force of Style in the earliest coins needs evaluation. A fresh and more patent Style enters late in the Confessor’s reign but the final designs are better representatives of a different, late Romanesque, manner.

It will be objected that, by thus relegating these factors, I am reviving the ancient and snobbish distinction between ‘fine’ and ‘useful’ arts, yet respecting the most colloquial use of the word Style, in the sense of conscious or instinctive elegance. I am unrepentant: I would define Style as the contribution of the artist, not the hack. The more civilized the work the more Style it has: the utterly barbarous has no Style. There is a gradation, but it is not a time-scale, and in ‘barbarous imitations’ we can recognize the priority of the archetype and no more. M. Lafaurie made a valid point, even if he overstated its implications, when he demonstrated that very barbarous imitations of Merovingian types could follow closely on the archetype. The myth of hand and type in gradual and harmonious diminution dies hard, but it is not concerned with Style.

It might also be objected that I am confusing Style, a vague and variable attribute of artistic elegance, with Styles, the distinct idioms in which it is expressed. I reply that one presupposes the other, and that in a coin, as in any artefact, we recognize a particular style, that is particular in itself but general in its application, most easily when it has most Style in the general sense. We are quick to recognize it when art-historians have packaged and branded it; when the brand-name is settling down we are not yet quite sure. Not to go outside the British series, there are coins we would unhesitatingly call Baroque, Neo-classic (of various kinds), or Gothic-Revival. We can also detect styles not yet fully ‘branded’—the applied hybrid-Gothic of the high Victorians, the fluid style we miscall Edwardian Baroque, the spare, tool-conscious style of the Arts and Crafts movement³ the massive, material-conscious reply which we now view with historical detachment.⁴ It is easiest in the age of master-dies, when the artist is only employed at the beginning of each issue, but it is not hard to apply the same tests elsewhere. Some of these styles may be first isolated, even invented, by art-historians, but others have their manifestos from the start and are quite self-conscious. Their exponents know when they have ‘arrived’.

On coins there is always some delay before a new style breaks the barrier of officialdom. I suggest that this was so also in antiquity. It is more marked on coins than on banknotes and stamps, but there are surprises. If Mucha was already rather dated when he designed Czechoslovakian notes and stamps in 1919, and Toorop stamps for Holland

² As in the work of Kruger Gray.
³ As on the Jubilee crown of 1935.
in 1924, in the supposedly stiff and conservative Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Kolo Moser, high-priest of the Sezession, produced stamps in 1906 (for Bosnia). Advanced public buildings were commissioned from his colleagues and the Jubilee coins of 1908 are almost as bold. The coinage of Edward VII is quite modish for its time.

If we then define Style, or Styles, as a quality, or particular sets of qualities, of wide external reference and transferable from one die to another, from one issue to another or from one issuing authority to another, which the designer, be he or be he not also the die-sinker, has imparted to the type by deliberate thought or assimilated training, how can we recognize this on coins without reference to other classes of artefact? How, even then, can we be sure that the resemblance to other classes is not accidental? I would suggest three criteria: over-all balance and the controlled use of space and background; consistent treatment and internal 'organization' of all iconic components; well spaced and distinct lettering, integrated into the whole design, but not necessarily immediately legible (Muslim coinage has much to teach us here). These are applicable to all periods and all civilizations.

Head and his generation believed in the existence of distinct, general Styles, without necessarily defining the concept. They felt themselves, rightly in my opinion, in the presence of objective entities dense enough to keep a shape which has proved all-too-rigid. The attack on them has come not so much by the justifiable softening or redefinition of the demarcations between supposed styles but by questioning the various models that have been set up as expressing the essential nature of each and any individual style. To me all but one of these models seem fallible—hy postasizations that presume too much, yet may have limited usefulness in favourable circumstances. They are worth examining in turn, and testing, where possible, in the narrow field of coinage.

The first and most ancient, the extreme Classic model, posits that there is, at least as far as the West is concerned, one ideal, 'correct' style, implicit in all humane arts. There are recurrent attempts to capture or recapture it, but all else is barbarous or frivolous. Its antithesis, the extreme Romantic, or anarchistic, view is that there is no true, absolute style; therefore there are no styles—only fashions, 'gimmicks', all equally capricious, enjoyable and expendable, the classic 'style' being as barbarous and frivolous as the rest. No one could seriously defend either today, after two centuries of art-history, in coinage or anything else, though the anarchist protest is sometimes heard. Can we find a defensible synthesis, a relativist aesthetic, in which 'good of its kind' makes sense and which, on coinage, respects the three criteria that I have suggested? It is worth doing, for 'moderate conservative' notions, however much they pass by consent, are not uncontroversial and need defining. Such a model might imply that a style only arises in conditions of harmony and consent, when literature, art, and music are attuned and an artist's exposition has a willing audience. This works well in many situations: when there is a dominant philosophy, such as the High Gothic age of the scholastics (certainly the best coins of St. Louis or Edward I are unexceptionable); when tempers are low and art gracefully and lightly committed (as English coinage from Newton to the Seven Years War); within coterieS, such as the Pre-Raphaelites, the Symbolists, and Vorticists (all too small to produce coinage); in some revolutionary situations (the hardest point of Neo-classicism produced splendid coinages in France), but more often the artistic programme of such a moment stifles Style. This is just the burden of the Romantic antithesis to our moderate-Classic thesis: programmes are so much rationalizing cant—
either they delude an age without spirit or they poison the spirit and nullify Style. A style, according to the moderate Romantics, is the expression of the Zeitgeist, or perhaps the Volksgeist: artists work in a common style because they are what they are and of their age, not because of any manifesto or expressed philosophy. A phantom of pseudo-historical verbiage is thus invented to explain a few more facts.

Again, neither of these models is adequate. Synthesizing them in moderated terms, it is useful to examine the effect of expressed sentiments or theories on artists of different history, environment, and assumptions. It is sometimes very revealing to look at artefacts we know to be contemporaneous in terms of each other—to frame one’s questions, say, architecturally, and look for ‘Early English’ pots or ‘Perpendicular’ coins. It is quite another thing to assume that they share a common style, as the Zeitgeist proponents do. Baroque architecture and sculpture are the premiss; the idea of Baroque painting gave a precious insight; Baroque music, arguably; Baroque poetry, very doubtfully . . . and so, ad absurdum. Baroque coins there certainly are, but there are at least two distinct styles of them, not just two fabrics. Does this mean there are two Baroques? The universal Gesamtstil is a hypothesis useful only as a test, which often gives negative results. But the test is always worth applying, and coinage, of all minor arts, provides the longest range of samples for its application. It also provides the longest and most convenient range for establishing an empirical alternative to it, the model that I now propose.

I submit that a common or general style arises simply when two or more (not all) art-forms share a common idiom, and that this must have been adopted by one of them, the ‘subsidiary’ art, from another, the ‘dominant’ art. Either the practitioners of the dominant force those of the subsidiary to conform, or those of the subsidiary willingly and flatteringly imitate them. There is no need for a programme, a Zeitgeist, or any other third force. It is a piecemeal, often a chain, reaction. Subsidiaries become dominant over other subsidiaries, and if there is more than one dominant and they are in different styles, a hybrid results. The whole process is largely conscious and the moment of domination can often be found.

A style that passes quickly and with little alteration from one medium to another I call a ‘primary’ style. When a medium ceases to nourish itself on its dominant and develops in isolation along lines conditioned by its own fabric it acquires a ‘secondary’ style. This, too, is usually conscious. In many media the secondary soon withers and leaves the way open for a new primary. In coinage, with its premium on conservative types, the secondary is often very tenacious but ultimately dies of malnutrition. Coinage is almost always a subsidiary art and hardly ever acquires subsidiaries of its own. Late Saxon coin-jewellery is an exception. Coinage has a continuous tradition of fabric: stylistically it is reshaped at long intervals, living off secondary style between them. Revivals are common enough in many arts: the classical tradition depends on a recurrent renascence, or re-examination of sources. Determined revivals produce new primary styles, as in the Romanesque age, the complex we call the Renaissance, or what most call the Neo-classic phase, but the Italians the Little Renaissance. This very seldom happened in coinage. At best, during a phase of secondary style, there is a short glance backward, not to the archetype but to fairly recent precedents, as Edgar to Alfred and Athelstan. Truly Romanizing coinages are extremely rare and usually clumsy: there is one in medieval Sicily. Despite the admiration for Roman coinage in the days of Justinian, or Geraldus Cambrensis, or Petrarch, or Memling, classicism enters coinage one motif
The art that raised coinage to an art-form in the beginning and called numismatics into being as a branch of art-history before it became a branch of political history, was gem-engraving, the minute sculpture so highly prized throughout the Hellenic and Hellenistic age. Punch-marked coins were known in pre-Alexandrine India and pre-Han China. By definition they have no Style, nor do the most elementary coins of the east-Greek world, the start of Head’s series, which are simply punch-marked. Repoussé metalwork may have had occasional effect, but it is the intimate interdependence of gem-cutting and die-cutting, working on the same small scale, that kept the art of coinage so vital to the age of Augustus and never allowed the secondary style to stray far from the primary.

In the late Julio-Claudian period another dominant enters, with another primary style, that of the tondo or patera, of small relief-sculpture, used architecturally or by silversmiths. The result was the monumental Aes of Nero and his successors, but it was too monumental—the discrepancy in scale was too great. Within a few generations contact was broken and a weak secondary style took over, with only a brief refreshment at the sources, including painted tondi, under Diocletian and Constantine, and a mere gulp in the parched fifth century. The classical tradition was tiring, the experimental idioms still unsure. What is new, or ‘Byzantine’, makes a very poor showing on coinage, and Justinian’s is a miserable advertisement for either style—the spacing and lettering are dreadful. In short, there is no new dominant art or primary style worth speaking of. It is a case of secondary style, ever losing impetus until the eighth century, in the eastern empire as much as in the sub-Roman west. To go to its limits, in England, what style the best of the ‘thrymsas’ and ‘primary sceattas’ have is vestigially Roman. The worst are simply barbarous, with fabric but no style. Teutonic metalwork, at its vigorous peak, could have contributed something, and later did so, but was not yet allowed to at this stage.

In the eighth and ninth centuries several new primary styles arose. Unfortunately, in the west, neither they nor the coinage were co-ordinated or persistent enough to make a really strong new idiom. The first of these new styles was entirely English. Some ‘secondary sceattas’ and the coinage of Offa assimilated enough of the best of Germanic ornament, presumably from metalwork, to make a viable new style, and, by early medieval standards, Offa’s coinage, which owes little to Rome, has all the qualifications—good spacing, good lettering, consistent design. The next is the aniconic style, or styles, of Islam and the Carolingian empire. Spacing and lettering are all, and occasionally, even in the west, they are very good. The dominant art was some form of calligraphy, but in the west the uncial or majuscule traditions were growing feeble and it came to little. This address is printed, essentially, in a Carolingian minuscule. The third is the style of the revived empire, based on Constantinian Aes, the nearest plentiful Roman coinage to hand. For once an ancient coinage provided the dominant art and at first the spacing, lettering, even the portraiture were passable, but contact broke as soon as made and a secondary style hardly appeared. This owed nothing to the new Byzantine

1 See A.N.S. Museum Notes, iii (1948), pp. 145-8. These are of gold with only a fortieth part alloy. Several hoards are reported from Anhwei since 1969.
tradition, for an assured Eastern primary style had not yet appeared. It did so later in the ninth century, when the iconoclastic quarrel was settled. In the beautiful, consistent, well-lettered coinage of Leo VI and his successors, not without reflections in the west, all relics of Roman secondary style are swept away and the dominant art is the new, clean, low-relief sculpture, particularly in ivory.

The aniconic Carolingian tradition proved very tenacious. It was a secondary style, drawing little from outside, but when the spacing and lettering are well set out it rises above the barbarous. England came to share it and shows up very well in this respect, but after Edgar’s reform the English coinage and some issues of the Ottonian and Saxon emperors stand outside it. We can therefore posit a new primary style or styles, parallel with the proto-Romanesque and sometimes orientalizing art of the period, but by no means entirely Byzantine, even in Germany. The spacing and lettering are passable, the inventiveness considerable, but the dominant art is hard to find. One candidate is the rising art of seal-cutting, but, like all aspects of early Romanesque art, it needs investigation. It is courtly, not popular, probably eclectic and certainly full of surprises, including portraiture.

Middle and late Romanesque style, with its new mastery of relief from seal-engraving upwards and its new domination by scaled-down architectural motifs, is another matter. All this can be seen on coins when size and fabric allow it, particularly, as Mr. Porteous has pointed out, on the bracteates of Germany. But the shallow aniconic style had put relief on coins at a disadvantage which lasted, as we shall see, not until a change in fabric but until a change in the dominant art. Throughout the Gothic period, when the coins rise above the aniconic, the dominance of seal-cutting is unmistakable but they are never allowed the parity they enjoyed in antiquity. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries seal-cutting at its best was superb, but the finest gold coins could only give flattened versions of it. The relationship remained the same with the new broad silver of c. 1500. Coins and seals are both stamped and their affinity is natural, but the inhibition of low relief remained.

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries there is generally a discontinuity between the arts of the coin and of the medal which arises from the great difference in relief. Throughout this period, which we can still call, for short, and with endless reservations, the ‘Renaissance’, and include the ‘Mannerist’ and early Baroque phases within it, the medal is not nearly so often the dominant art as commonly supposed, nor is that of ancient coinage. The most constant and powerful dominant is the new stamped art, of printing. From the moment when that ceases just to counterfeit manuscripts, coinage, whether Gothic or Italianate, takes on a new face. Both arts are two-dimensional but skilled in illusions of relief. Coiners’ letter-punches are precisely analogous to type and the spacing and forms of their legends improve hand-in-hand beyond measure. The purely inscriptive coin-types of Scandinavia, the provincial title-page effects of Charles I’s Oxford issues, the fresh approach to heraldic devices and stampe all have close parallels in printing. The firm, linear handling of profiles, the near-frontal images of early Baroque coinage come from the line-block cutter and the engraver, and the two meet on de Passe’s engraved medalets. Need I press the parallel further? The printing-press was the salvation of numismatic art, ironically, until the coining-press was finally accepted.

It is only with the late Baroque and Neo-classic phases that the art of the medal gains
unquestioned dominion over that of coinage. With improved metallurgy, with the mill and other mechanical devices, the discrepancy in relief is resolved and there is almost a recapitulation of earlier medallic art. Besides a pretty recent Italian piece, it is no accident that the first effigy of our present Queen is inspired by Pisanello. In the new issue the marriage has broken and it badly needs mending. The head, to be sure, has virtues of originality; the spacing is fairly civilized; the lettering, ill-spaced, illegible and playing no part in the design, is downright barbarous; some at least of the reverses suggest a new dominant art in that of the pseudo-military button-maker. We pass behind the dignity of the Soho mint into the thin grass-roots of Brummagem.