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HEAD-DRESSES

EXHIBITED ON ANCIENT COINS.

BY

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EXHIBITED ON ANCIENT COINS.

IN glancing the eye over a cabinet of coins, one of the reflections which will most forcibly arise before the mind is that the persons there represented are shown “in their habit, as they lived:”—that those who pass in review before us are the great men of antiquity, the kings, heroes, potentates, as they once lived, and moved, and had their being. We may feel sure that we are gazing upon the costume of the era; that the garments were worn as we see them now on the coinage; that their general appearance was exactly as is there portrayed. We may rest assured that these were no merely conventional types, such as at this day prevail upon the coins of many of the States of the modern world; that no monarch who has sat upon a throne for a quarter of a century, is depicted, as in our times, with the same usage and outward appearance, untouched by the flight of years, as when his or her rule first began.

When we observe, on the money of the ancient world, the heads of the emperors bound around with laurel, or surmounted by the diadem, we know that that which we

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see is a custom of the era, and not, as we find it upon the coinage of the Guelph rulers of England, or that of the third Napoleon, a mere conventionality and empty symbol, an affectation, and bearing no real meaning, or connection with the manners of the day. The truth of the representations both of men and costume, as found upon ancient coins, has always received the corroboration of written records, and even the science of ethnology has received additions from the coinage of the rulers of antiquity, which has been preserved to us.

The intention of the present paper is to speak of the head-dresses and methods of ornamenting the hair which were in use among the Greeks and Romans, and which we find on their coins. I do not intend to do more than barely touch upon the most striking and most important of such variations of garb, as I have not the facilities for making a complete study of the subject, much as I should desire to do so.

Of head-dresses we find in use caps and crowns of various kinds, the tiara, the vitta, and the diadem. On coins we find Bacchus crowned with the ivy and vine leaves; Herakles with ivy; Ceres with ears of barley; Flora with flowers; Arethusa with sedges; and other mythological personages with appropriate emblematical devices.

Rostral crowns composed of the prows of vessels enlaced with each other, the rewards bestowed by the Romans upon a victor in a naval engagement, are sometimes found on coins. The most notable example of this occurs on a denarius of Augustus Cæsar, bearing on the reverse a rostral column, standing on a rudely represented pedestal. "The shaft," says Donalson, "has on each side a simple torus somewhat flattened, and the capital is conventionally figured of the Doric character. The shaft has on each side three projecting prows of vessels, and the whole face of the front is occupied by two enormous anchors, one over the other, out of all proportion to the other parts; a license assumed by the medalist to give greater emphasis to the characteristic features. The whole is surmounted by the colossal statue of a warrior with the parazonium in his left hand, his mantle pendant from his shoulders, and a spear in his right."

Mural crowns composed of turrets, were the premiums given to those who had captured walled cities. They occur, also, as adornments of genii and goddesses, and are found on the representations of Cybele and other tutelary deities.

Oak crowns also appear on coins. These were the rewards given to those who had saved, in battle, the life of a Roman citizen. They generally surround the inscription "OB CIVES SERVATOS." The servility and baseness of the Senate often placed this inscription upon the moneys issued by some temporary usurper or bloody tyrant, whose sole claim to such distinction was a wholesale slaughter of soldiers and citizens. Some of the very wickedest and worst of the Roman emperors, Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, Vitellius, &c., &c., were complimented with this title, "*the preserver of the citizens.*" It may possibly be, although there is no explicit authority for the suggestion, that the "true inwardness" of the expression meant that the Senate was grateful to the monarch for having spared any of the citizens at all, and because he did not include the whole body of the Roman people in one indiscriminate massacre.

The "athletes" who were triumphant in the sports of the arena, received crowns, a specimen of which is shown upon a coin of Nero.

Of all crowns, the most famous and the most ancient was the diadem. This, according to Gûsseme, was a band of purple and fine linen of about the width of three or four fingers, which kings wore around their foreheads, and whose ends tied in a flowing knot behind, hung loosely down on the back of the neck. Alexander the Great is said to have staunched with his diadem the blood flowing from a wound which he had inflicted on Lysimachus.

According to Pancirollus, (ed. 1715, ch. xi. p. 192,) the diadem was "a little cap, like one half of an hand ball of the bigger size, which, being put upon the head, was bound about with a white swathe. Both kings and emperors wore them for ornament; our crowns on coins do not a little resemble them." It was the simple, but superlatively distinctive badge of kingly power. From the earliest to the latest ages of the coinage issued by the monarchs of the various Grecian States, it will always be found upon their portraits, and wherever found the emblem is the sure and certain sign of a prince or of a god.

Some monarchs were in the habit of wearing diadems as many in number as were the kingdoms over which they ruled: a custom whence, no doubt, arose the triple tiara of the Pope, symbolizing his dominion over earth, heaven, and hell. Ptolemy Philadel-

phus, according to Josephus, wore two diadems, one for his dominions in Asia, another for Egypt; the same was asserted of one of the Parthian kings.

Among the Oriental potentates it was a frequent custom to braid the hair and beard, and ornament them with precious stones, as we see to this day in the Assyrian sculptures, and on the coins of the Arsacidae, whose heads additionally were bound around with a sort of a wide sash embroidered with pearls, etc., from which broad lappets, similarly ornamented, fell over the neck and ears.

The kings of Armenia are shown on their coins wearing the tiara, a well-known symbol of absolute sovereignty among the nations of the Orient. Juba of Numidia wears a remarkable sort of a conical cap, hung around with pearls in rows, one above the other.

After Julius Caesar, the laurel crown was generally adopted by the Roman emperors, the right to wear which was given him by the Senate, and subsequently accorded to his successors.

Upon examination of a cabinet of coins of the Roman emperors, we can trace the successive changes in the style of wearing the hair and the manner of head-dress. Upon the coinage of Augustus we find the hair plain; those struck upon his deification bear the radiated crown, the emblem of divinity, whose origin, no doubt, was due to the influence of solar worship. It was given to the deceased monarchs to show that they had taken rank as gods, not to any of their merits as a sovereign. Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius are represented on their coins as wearing a band tied behind with a falling ribbon. Some of the coins of Caligula, issued by the Greek cities, bore the radiated crown. Nero is said to have assumed in his lifetime the radiated crown, but no coin has come under my notice corroborating this statement. Otho bears a very palpable peruke, thus confirming the statement of Suetonius in that respect. Vitellius wears the hair plain. From Titus to Maximus the hair is tied up with a ribbon. On Gordianus III. appears the radiated crown, fillet and ribbon, and similarly down to Aurelian, who wears simply a laurel and a ribbon. From Claudius Gothicus to Diocletian, radiated crown and ribbon. Diocletian, laurel and ribbon. Maximianus, laurel and vitta, as well, also, crown and ribbon. Licinus, vitta. Constantine, vitta; also laurel and ribbon. The change from the right to wear the radiated crown when dead and deified, to the privi-

lege of bearing it while living, was soon easily effected by the artful flattery which raised a mortal emperor to the gods.

The Romans, while tamely submitting to the reality of a kingly power, hated all external insignia of that distinction. Their monarchs had for centuries worn ambiguous insignia before they dared to assume this badge of tyrannic power, and they were most careful in their policy from the days of Augustus, to avoid all symbols which savored of royalty, and to refrain from every outward manifestation that was likely to recall the hated name of king, or the recollections of the early days of the Roman kingdom.

A story is told that Pompey once appeared in public with a white fillet bound around his leg, ostensibly on account of a wound or a bruise. This trifling circumstance was looked upon as being a sign of his aspiring to supreme control, and a sturdy republican told him that it made little odds upon what part of his person he wore the diadem, the intention being in any case the same.

According to Jornandes, Aurelian was the first of the Roman emperors who assumed the diadem, adopting it from the luxurious habits of the Persians. I have first noticed it on the Roman coinage upon the money issued by Licinius.

Constantine the Great especially affected this decoration. There was something in the bent of his mind naturally tending to Oriental extravagance and the habits inculcated by a seraglio training. He dressed with the luxury and effeminacy of a woman. He wore bracelets of pearls that extended from his hands all the way to his elbows, and this not on one arm alone, but on both.

The simple form of the vitta was too plain for his love of gorgeous display. He* caused it to become a casque-shaped cap which covered the whole of his head, adorning it in the Persian manner by row upon row of diamonds, pearls and other precious stones. Even Julian, philosopher as he was, did not scruple to wear a diadem embroidered with a double row of pearls.

The Christian emperors made especial use of the diadem, renouncing the formerly commonly worn laurel crown, whose use they thought savored of idolatry and old pagan ideas.

* Some authorities say that Justinian was the first Roman monarch who wore a closed crown, sometimes deep and cap-shaped, sometimes shallow, surmounted by a cross, and often embroidered with a double row of pearls.