

Special exhibit

Mediaeval European coin

From a coin minting perspective, the Middle Ages in Europe began with the downfall of the West Roman Empire and the rise of the Germanic states in the fifth century. Gold coins were minted for a time, but by 700 they had disappeared almost completely from circulation in western Europe. A decisive coinage reform took place in 793-94 under Charlemagne: the silver penny (denarius) became the sole coin in circulation and spread throughout Europe. A gold coin minted in the late Roman tradition under Louis the Pious was probably a commemorative coin, which may have been struck in Aachen to mark his coronation in Rheims in the year 816.

In Spain, the Arab conquerors who had swept in from north Africa minted gold coins (dinars) for payments beginning in the tenth century.



German Empire
(983-996)



England
(1189-1199)



France
(1196-1209)



Italy
(1039-1125)



Poland
(1138-1146)



Carolingian Empire
(814-840)



Morocco
(1088-1107)



Spain
(1158-1214)

The authority to strike coins, originally claimed by kings, was increasingly conferred on the clergy and secular authorities from the tenth century onwards. The upshot of this was that, at times, over 200 mints were in operation in the German empire, primarily in the Netherlands, on the Rhine and in the Harz region.

Mediaeval coin images initially resembled those of Roman coins but soon became increasingly different in appearance. At first they were adorned exclusively through writing and Christian symbols, but later the motifs included numerous pictures, though none of these could be considered portraits.

From the 12th century the appearance of coins started to change markedly in some parts of the German empire. Pennies, their diameter increasing constantly and their thickness decreasing, ended up being engraved only on one side, as “bracteates”. The following compilation of selected coins gives the observer an overview of the variety of motifs and the technical differences in the manufacturing of mediaeval coins.



Lindau
(1215-1250)



Ireland
(1000-1020)



Fulda
(1177-1192)



Sicily
(1197-1250)



Basle
(1191-1213)



Wetterau, Hesse
(13th century)



Schleswig
(11th century)



Hungary
(1172-1196)



France
(1148-1194)



Brunswick-Lüneburg
(1195-1213)



Meissen
(1197-1221)



Italy
(872-882)

Recommend reading

Philip Grierson, *Coins of Medieval Europe*. London 1991
 Deutsche Bundesbank, *Mittelalterliche Goldmünzen*. Frankfurt am Main 1982
 Deutsche Bundesbank, *Brakteaten der Stauferzeit*. Frankfurt am Main 1977