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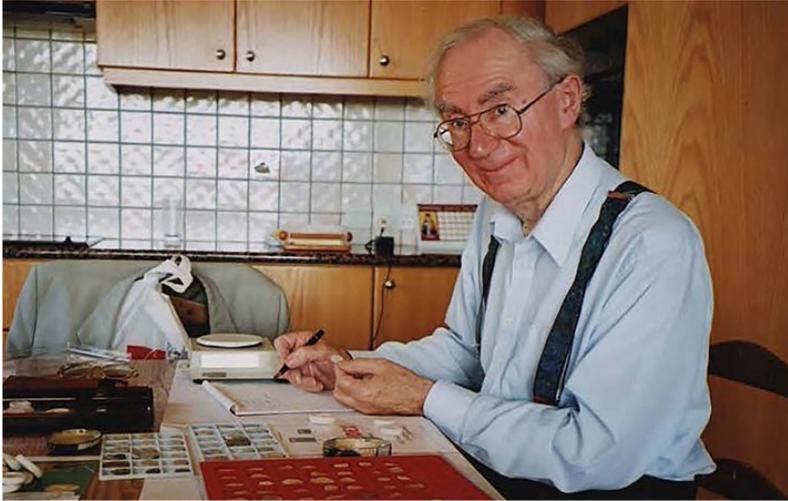
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Julian BAKER *

MICHAEL METCALF (8 MAY 1933–25 OCTOBER 2018)



With the passing of Michael Metcalf, at the age of 85 on 25 October 2018, we have lost one of the truly great medieval European numismatists of recent times. Metcalf's name is associated with the many areas of medieval Europe which he called his scientific home, between the Atlantic and the North Sea, Germany, the Balkans, the Black Sea and the furthest reaches of the eastern Mediterranean, in a period spanning the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. His name is also intricately linked to the Heberden Coin Room of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, where he spent more than thirty years of professional life. Metcalf was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, he lived in different parts of England during his childhood, and was educated and worked in southern England for many decades, but he remained a proud Yorkshireman throughout. It was in his beloved Yorkshire that he died and was laid to rest, a few months after his wife Dorothy.

Metcalf's greatness may be summed up in the following ways: he believed that the different coinage traditions – for instance Byzantine and 'Latin', or Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian/ Carolingian – had to be viewed and studied jointly, in their proper geographical and topographical settings, according to the same rigorously applied methodologies. He gained inti-

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mate familiarity with the landscapes of England, which produced for instance the prolific thrymsa and sceatta currencies of the seventh and eighth centuries, as with those of the Balkans, or the island of Cyprus, which he visited frequently until late in life. He pioneered new approaches to the material evidence, be it geographical and archaeological, statistical or archaeometric. Metcalf was extremely well informed and well connected and had an instinctive talent to spot interesting and rewarding numismatic opportunities: once a worthy body of material or subject matter was identified he would take the direct route to seeing his enquiries to publication. This has led to a remarkable body of books and articles. In Oxford, he systematically applied himself to the enrichment of the medieval holdings, contributing thereby to the formation of a collection which is both broad and representative, and highly concentrated and specialist in certain areas. At Oxford Metcalf also fostered an environment of scientific discourse and enquiry. He presided over many symposia, and he was helpful and supportive of colleagues and students, far and wide, as I have been made aware once more by the many kind communications I received after his passing in October 2018. It is telling that a large number of his published work appears in co-authorship. The archives of the Coin Room of the Ashmolean Museum now contain a large number of his scientific documents: the international web of numismatic-related communications that he maintained throughout his life is truly astounding. Metcalf also disseminated numismatic knowledge by lecturing and tutoring under- and postgraduate students of the university, in a series of courses in which numismatics has now become embedded (notably for Byzantium and Anglo-Saxon England).

Metcalf was born on 8 May 1933 to a Methodist minister father and a schoolteacher mother. He studied geography at Cambridge, and received a doctorate from the same institution in medieval Balkan numismatics and monetary history, which he completed under the supervision of Philip Grierson. In 1963 he was recruited by Humphrey Sutherland for a position at the Heberden Coin Room (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford). He led the department as 'Keeper' from 1982 to 1999, the date of his retirement. He was additionally Fellow of Wolfson College and Professor for Numismatics at the university.

From the 1950s to his death in 2018 Metcalf relentlessly pursued a path of numismatic enquiry and publication. In embarking on his doctoral research, Metcalf combined different strands of his personal interests and talents. He had been a schoolboy coin collector. The archives of the Heberden Coin Room hold the 'Accession Register' of his collection, which has entries going back to 1945: the selection of British, continental and 'oriental' coins was already back then eclectic but rigorously 'medieval', as if Michael had already decided in his early teens that this was his period of choice. He also had a talent for languages and for mathematics, and he had a university background in geography. The result was a thesis (1959), and then a book (1965, reprint in 1966, second edition in 1979, reprint in 2016), on coinage

in the medieval Balkans/Southeastern Europe, which were highly innovative. Where previously there were typologies of Byzantine and national coinages, Metcalf presented an intertwined vision of coin production and circulation, in time and space, in a fashion that is still emulated to our day. Metcalf had already, in 1955, received the Parkes Weber prize of the Royal Numismatic Society for the related essay on 'Coinage in the North Balkans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries'.

Before and after his arrival at Oxford, and in parallel with his Balkan interests, Metcalf spent the earliest years of his scientific life on quite diverse numismatic subjects. His interest in English landscapes and coinages was constant. In a very early series of publications he extrapolated medieval English coin finds from historic publications. From about 1964–1965 he experienced a surge towards the earliest Anglo-Saxon coinages, so-called thrymsas and sceattas. Maybe this was inspired by his new scientific base, for example the presence there of the Crondall Hoard and of Humphrey Sutherland himself, and the fact that the Thames Valley was a very active centre of production and circulation (see his early note on 'An eight-century find at Banbury')? In the 1960s a string of articles on sceattas followed, and also his own 'Accession Register' notes a profound interest in the series, the pinnacle of which would be the definitive study on *Thrymsas and Sceattas in the Ashmolean Museum* in three volumes in 1993–1994. Even then, quite typically, he was unable to shake off this subject matter entirely, and until recent times he was active again in the evaluation especially of the Frisian and Low Country side of this story. See, in this respect, for example 'The circulation of sceattas in the southern Low Countries', presented to the *Revue belge* in 2014 with his Dutch friend and colleague Wybrand op den Velde. In parallel, developments in France also sparked his interest: see his lengthy discussion 'Monetary circulation in Merovingian Gaul, 561–674' in the *RN* of 2006. Already in the early 1960s Metcalf also moved into the later penny-style coinages of England and, invariably, to the coinages and reforms of the great continental contemporaries, Pepin the Short, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious etc.: he focussed, amongst others, on the period of Offa, Eadgar, or Cnut. In specific studies of 1963 and 1964, and later additions of 1968, he sought to quantify coin production under Offa. For these he came under severe criticism from his old teacher Philip Grierson. Metcalf was equally interested in the classic period of the danegelds and the parallel rise in English monetisation in the later tenth and eleventh centuries. Stray find data from England and Wales, which became available gradually, and then in large numbers in the early years of the twenty-first century, seem now to vindicate Metcalf's quantitative approach to Anglo-Saxon coinage as a whole. In fact, Metcalf himself was one of the first scholars to understand the potential of stray finds with respect to attributions and to monetary history in general. For the later Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods, his systematic collection of data has resulted in the publication of a 'Coin Atlas' (1998), a remarkable

piece of writing built around 39 pertinent questions that can be asked from the material. British coinage is one of the great strengths of the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, which in itself combines materials from throughout the collegiate university and the Bodleian library, some of significant historical pedigree. Metcalf applied himself to coins that were outside of his immediate research interest with unfailing energy and competence: the result are two *Sylloge of the Coins of the British Isles* volumes respectively on the period 1066–1279 and the reign of Henry VII. His former colleague and then successor Nick Mayhew is currently in the process in bridging the remaining gap in the publication of the collection, between the beginning of the Edwardian coinage tradition and the advent of the Tudor period (1279–1485), on a digital platform: see <http://hcr.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>

Metcalf's work on the Balkans had a very substantial middle and late Byzantine component. However, it appears that he may have felt that the earlier copper coinages of the sixth centuries were perhaps better suited for the kind of meticulous analysis which he applied to other coinage traditions. This resulted in early publications on the subject, and eventually in corpora and die studies for the period of Emperors Anastasius (published in 1969) and Justinian (1976). In parallel, Byzantine coin distributions for the sixth to eighth centuries – the transition period from ancient to medieval times –, between the Balkans and the Aegean, Anatolia and the Near East, have intrigued Michael since the early 1960s. The methodology he applied in essays such as the 'Slavonic threat to Greece' and the 'Aegean coastlands under threat', is still being debated today. In 1966, the *International Byzantine Congress* came to Oxford, and it was on this occasion that Metcalf and Grierson famously clashed in public on the possibilities, or not, of ancient and medieval coin quantifications based on die counts (the episode was even reported in *The Times* of London on 16 September 1966). Metcalf's approach to middle and late Byzantine coinages rested on different foundations to the museum-based tradition exemplified by Grierson. Metcalf visited Greece and the Balkans. He was for example one of the few medieval numismatists to consult directly the stray finds at Corinth and the Athenian Agora. He also continued to pay great attention to the numismatic materials from sites as well as those arriving through the antiquities market. He maintained communications with scholars in the countries concerned. In this way Metcalf managed to gain great familiarity with the lower denominations of Byzantium and the successor states between the ninth and the fourteenth century. He had a keen eye for stylistic developments and often had the metrological, archaeological, and hoard evidence to back up his theories on chronology and attribution. However, from the 1970s onwards he found himself at odds with a parallel scientific endeavour in the field of Byzantine numismatics, overseen by Grierson and partially conferred on Michael Hendy, namely the catalogues of the coin collection of *Dumbarton Oaks* in Washington. Hendy himself had initially acknowledged Metcalf's methodology and assistance in the study

of this material, but for about three decades there were at times intemperate exchanges in print between the two on the mint and denominational structure of Komnenian and post-Komnenian times, and the identity of different imitative coinages. The *Dumbarton Oaks* series may lend some of the proposed constructs of Hendy (and endorsed by Grierson, and by Dumbarton Oaks as an institution) an authoritative air (see Metcalf's critique in *NC* 2000, p. 396–401). However, in the long term Metcalf's instincts may yet prevail on these issues. Many of these matters may superficially seem quite technical, yet they can have significant historical implications. What was the state of the economy in the middle Byzantine provinces in the Balkans and Anatolia, did money circulate predominantly through commerce or the fisc, was the second Bulgarian empire at all monetised, how did Byzantine and then crusader coinage reflect the momentous political changes around the time of the Fourth Crusade (1204)? One area in which Metcalf had, over the years, to be reined in with some justification was his propensity to create new mints from typological diversity. He applied this methodology, which he may have acquired from his dealings with early Anglo-Saxon coinage, to the copper coinage of Emperor Theophilus and to later copper issues of the empire, as well as to issues of Latin Greece in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Current numismatic trends keep the levels of proposed mints in these areas to a minimum.

Crusader coinages, especially in Greece and the Aegean, are closely related to Metcalf's Balkan interests. As early as 1962 he published on the subject with Jean Duplessy (in the *RBN*, on the Samos hoard). Towards the end of the decade he moved further east, writing for example on the coinage of Antioch or the spread of western coins along the southern coast of Anatolia. 'Crusader' coins became, beside thrymsas and sceattas, one of the main curatorial preoccupations of Metcalf's. The resulting publication of the Ashmolean collection (1983, expanded in 1995) forms, much as the three-volume work on the Anglo-Saxon material which has already been mentioned, a standard reference for the entire series. Metcalf commented himself on the difficulty of replacing Schlumberger's famous nineteenth-century work on this subject on the occasion of the Brussels Congress: 'A New Catalogue of Crusader Coins: Problem and Strategies', in *Actes du XIe Congrès International de Numismatique*, p. 141–145.

One particularly happy offshoot of these endeavours was his introduction to the island of Cyprus. In terms of Metcalf's long scholarly career this interest developed rather recently. No specifically Cypriot output of his is documented before the 1980s. It was at this point that Metcalf began to hone in on the higher silver denominations of the Lusignan kingdom, a particularly handsome and prolific coinage of great international importance. Over the next couple of decades Metcalf applied himself with all his skill and experience to this coinage. The results are the three-volume *Corpus of Lusignan Coinage* (partially with A. Pitsillides, 1996–2000), a die corpus of great completeness – and therefore of high statistical coverage –

which has few if any rivals in medieval numismatics. The opportunity to work on the island obviously also rekindled his interest in earlier periods. Two impressively large volumes, published by the Cyprus Research Centre, on the island's Byzantine sigillography and history (491–1191) followed in 2004 and 2009.

Metcalf's interests in metallurgical coin analysis also goes back to earliest times: see for example his publications in *Archaeometry* 1966 or *NC* 1967, and the co-authored volume *Studies in the Composition of Early Medieval Coins* (1968). He was co-instigator of the series later known as *Metallurgy in Numismatics*, which followed on from the founding colloquium in London in 1970 (*Methods of chemical and metallurgical investigation of ancient coinages*).

In closing we must mention that there was not one region of Europe whose medieval coinages and monetary history Metcalf did not touch upon in his writings. He had a sustained engagement with Iberian numismatics during Visigothic and later times. With respect to Italy, he published on the Ostrogoths and the Normans, as well as on the great central and northern coinages of the later middle ages (Ancona, Siena, Milan, etc.). One of his earliest areas of numismatic interest was southern Germany, but he has equally explored the relations of German coinage with the entire Baltic region, or indeed the spread of Scandinavian coins into central and western Europe.

Metcalf's long and distinguished scholarship has resulted in the receipt of numerous prizes and memberships: Parkes Webe Prize, Royal Numismatic Society (1955); Jeton de Vermeil, French Numismatic Society (1979); Honorary member, Romanian Numismatic Society (1979); Honorary member, Cyprus Numismatic Society (1983); John Sanford Saltus Gold Medal, British Numismatic Society (1984); Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society (1987); Honorary member, Croatian Numismatic Society (1988); Huntington Medal, American Numismatic Society (1991); Honorary member, Netherlands Society for Numismatics and Monetary History (1992); Honorary member and medal, Hellenic Numismatic Society (1998); Brønsted medal, Norwegian Numismatic Society (1999); Honorary Fellow, Royal Numismatic Society (2007); Meshorer Numismatic Prize, Israel Museum (2008); Derek Allen Prize, British Academy (2008); Honorary Member, INC (2009)