



Coins and the Seafaring Tradition

by RAYMOND SCHUESSLER

1702 THE NUMISMATIST

Maritime history, like almost every other facet in the development of the civilized world, has been chronicled for centuries on the designs of coins from around the world. Almost every well-known ship, explorer, sea adventure and master seaman has been portrayed on some nation's coins, and new maritime commemoratives are issued each year.

Phoenician galleys were the first ships to be portrayed on money. These long, low vessels depended chiefly on oarsmen for propulsion, but were often equipped with a single mast and a square sail to supplement or relieve the rowers when the wind was right. One such vessel is depicted on a five piastre coin issued by Cyprus, an island at the western end of the Mediterranean that was colonized by the Phoenicians in approximately 750 B.C.



A Phoenician galley sails gracefully on this coin issued by the island of Cyprus, 800-1000 B.C. The steering oar can be seen at the ship's stern.

The ancient Greeks used similar galleys to transport both goods and men. In most of the Greek city-states the agricultural population met with great difficulty in their attempts to eke out a living from the rocky, mountainous mainland. Spurred by agricultural necessity, the Greeks established colonies on surrounding islands and along the shores of the Aegean, Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas, employing fleets of galleys to maintain contact with the mainland. When necessary these vessels were converted to fighting ships, with catapults and cannons mounted on the small decks at either end of the ship.

A Greek coin struck in 253 B.C. by Antigonos Gonatus carries a portrait of



The head of Poseidon and a simple representation of a bow of an ancient galley are shown on this coin of modern Greece.

Poseidon, the god of the sea. The coin's reverse features a figure sitting by the prow of a boat, a commemoration of the destruction of an Egyptian fleet by the Greeks. Another Greek issue, circa 276-168 B.C., pictures Athena, goddess of wisdom and prudent warfare, standing on the forepart of a galley with a thunderbolt raised in her right hand and the shield of Jupiter on her left arm.

The Romans also used coinage to preserve the history of many famous maritime battles. Between 250 and 225 B.C., a bronze uncia was issued featuring the prow of a Roman galley. This issue was struck to honor the Roman victory over the Carthaginians in 256 B.C. The years of the Roman republic fostered several other ship-related coins, including a 12-uncia bronze coin issued between 225 and 175 B.C. This coin depicts the prow of a galley on the reverse and on the obverse the figure of Janus, the Roman god of gates and doorways, pictured in his typical pose with two faces looking in opposite directions.



This Roman bronze 1-uncia, struck between 222 and 195 B.C., depicts the prow of a galley.

Viking seafarers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and other lands bordering the Baltic Sea, sailed along the coasts of Great Britain and Europe,

penetrating into the Mediterranean. In 1016, the Danish Vikings waged a successful campaign in England, establishing the 22-year-old King Canute as ruler of all England. During King Canute's reign, the Danes gained control of a number of mints in England as well as one in Dublin, Ireland which they kept operational for many years.

In view of the tremendous influence the Vikings had on the development of European history, it is not surprising to find coinage commemorating the adventurous Norsemen. Estonia, bordering on the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland in Northern Europe, issued a 1-kroon coin in 1934. The design of this piece clearly illustrates the "Dreki," or Dragon Ship, the prow of which was carved to resemble the



A Viking "dragon ship" is depicted on this Estonian 1-kroon coin. The reverse features the coat-of-arms of the Republic of Estonia.

head of a snake or dragon to drive away evil spirits. Steeped in Viking tradition during the Middle Ages, Estonia's capital city, Tallin, became one of the chief cities in the medieval Hanseatic League.

The Hanseatic League was formed in 1241 by the German towns of Lubeck and Hamburg for the protection of merchant ships on the high seas. At its peak the Hanse included nearly 100 towns in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Baltic countries. The most active port cities in the League were Bremen, Danzig, London, Venice, Truges, Bergen, Visby and Novgorod. Modern-day gulden issued in Danzig celebrate the city's involvement as an important member of the League. As a tribute to the rich maritime history of the city, local officials issued a 5-gulden nickel commemorative in 1935 as a tribute to the old-time glories of Danzig's busy port.



Danzig, a city-port on the Baltic Sea and a member of the Hanseatic League, issued these two commemoratives. The gulden at the left shows a galley with a poop deck; the one at the right illustrates a vessel loading at a grain elevator.

The Portuguese, masters of the sea since the early 1400s, have good reason to commemorate their sea history on coins. For more than 200 years Portugal held a virtual monopoly on trade with India and the East, establishing the 15th and 16th centuries as the "Golden Age of Discovery." The motivating force behind the Portuguese explorations was Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), who encouraged and



Henry the Navigator

supervised expeditions and established a school of navigation. His school brought together mathematicians, astronomers, naval architects and cartographers whose combined disciplines raised navigation to a science. To honor Prince Henry and his accomplishments, Portugal struck a

20-, 10- and 5-escudo coin set in 1960, the 500th anniversary of Prince Henry's death. A portrait of Prince Henry the Navigator appears on the obverse of the three coins in this set.



Prince Henry the Navigator is the subject of the three-piece commemorative set issued by Portugal to mark the 500th anniversary of his death.

The combined efforts of Prince Henry's naval engineers produced the caravel ship, a fleet and nimble vessel characterized by a broad bow, a narrow poop and three triangular sails, a design that made the caravel the most seaworthy ship of its day. In 1932 Portugal issued a 10-escudo coin commemorating the caravel and its



This Portuguese 5-escudo recognizes the caravel, the most seaworthy ship of the 15th century.

role in transporting European civilization to the farthest reaches of the earth—and exotic treasures to the coffers of European monarchs.

On orders from Portuguese King Emanuel I, explorer and navigator Vasco da Gama and his fleet of four specially built ships left Lisbon in July 1497 with instructions to sail around Africa to India—or to perish in the attempt. After a long, arduous voyage, da Gama arrived on the Malabar coast of India in May of 1498, crowning the efforts of nearly a century of Portuguese naval exploration. In honor of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Malabar Coast of India by da Gama and his men, Portugal minted a commemorative 1000-reis series. The coins, however, do not bear a picture of da Gama, but portraits of King Charles I and Queen Amelia.



Vasco da Gama

The Portuguese government issued a numismatic tribute to Pedro Alvarez Cabral, the first European to reach the Brazilian coast of South America. Like da Gama, Cabral was appointed to lead an expedition to India. Cabral's voyage began in Lisbon on March 9, 1500. In an attempt to avoid the calms of the



To celebrate the 500th anniversary of Cabral's birth, Portugal minted this 5,000-reis coin.

Gulf of Guinea, Cabral sailed too far west and landed on the shore of South America on Easter day, April 22, 1500. Cabral was not well-received when he returned to his native Lisbon. The public scorned him for the losses suffered under his command; at the start of the expedition he was in command of 13 vessels but returned with only six. Finally forgiving him his losses, Portugal issued a 50-escudo coin in 1968 featuring a bust of Cabral to commemorate the 500th



The Brazilian government honored the 400th anniversary of the country's discovery by issuing a commemorative coin depicting explorer Pedro Cabral.

anniversary of his birth.

Cabral's discovery of the Brazilian coast was honored by that country in 1900, 400 years after Cabral landed on the South American shore. Two commemorative issues were struck for the anniversary, a 4,000-reis coin bearing a portrait of Cabral and a 2,000-reis coin showing a rendition of his ship.

The English shared the Portuguese' fascination for world exploration, and early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Great Britain became a leading naval power. Challenging Spain for supremacy on the high seas, England's Captain Francis Drake (1540-1596), commanded the 100-ton frigate, the *Golden Hind*, on its famous voyage. In



Sir Francis Drake

1577 Drake set out from Plymouth, England, and sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, harassing and capturing Spanish galleons as he made his way along the South American coast. Sailing as far as what is now Washington State on the North American coast, Drake retraced his route and at San Francisco set a course across the Pacific, stopping at the Philippines, Celebes and Java before continuing around the Cape of Good Hope. In September 1580, Drake returned to England, the *Golden Hind* filled with more than \$12,000,000 in treasure. Queen Elizabeth I herself



Sir Francis Drake's flagship, the Golden Hind, appeared on Great Britain's half penny for 30 years.

boarded the vessel and knighted Drake on its deck. From 1937 until its withdrawal from circulation in 1967, the British half penny featured Sir Francis Drake's flagship, the *Golden Hind*, on its reverse.

The Dutch shared command of the high seas with England and Portugal during the 16th and 17th centuries. Vying with Portugal for a stronghold in the East Indies, the Netherlands formed the East India Company in 1602 to expand colonization and commercial activities in the East Indian archipelago. One of the islands, St. Helena, issued a 25-pence piece in 1973 commemorating the tercentenary of the granting of the Royal Charter to the East India Company. St. Helena was uninhabited when it was discovered in 1502 by the Portuguese navigator, Joao da Nova Castella. In 1633 the island was annexed by the Dutch, but no attempt at occupation



The island of St. Helena celebrates the granting of the charter to the East India Company in this 25-pence issue of 1973.

was made until 1659 when the island was annexed and occupied in the name of the East India Company. In 1673 the Dutch attempted to seize St. Helena but were quickly expelled by the English, whose merchant ships often stopped at the island to restock their supply holds. Later that year, a

charter was issued to the East India Company by King Charles III allowing the Company to occupy and govern the island.

The East India Company was also commemorated by South Africa. Jan Van Riebeeck, a Dutchman sent by the Company to establish a permanent colony at the Cape of Good Hope, landed on African soil on April 6, 1652. The 300th anniversary of this event was celebrated in 1952 with a South African silver commemorative



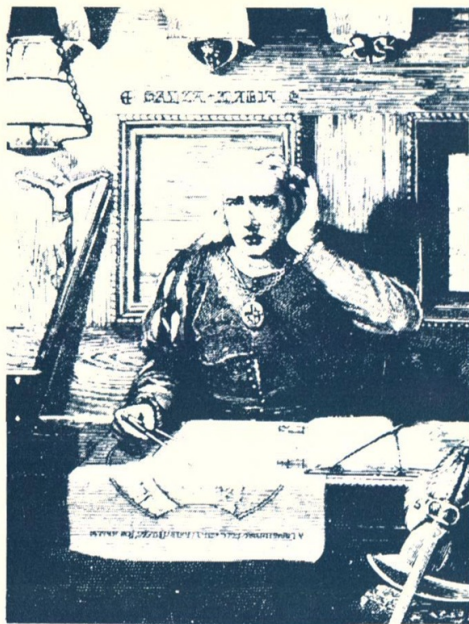
The 300th anniversary of the founding of Cape Town by Van Riebeeck is marked by the issuance of this 5-shilling commemorative showing his ship, the Dromedaris.

5-shilling coin featuring a replica of Van Riebeeck's vessel, the *Dromedaris*.

In July 1973 the British archipelago of the Bahama Islands declared its independence from Great Britain and raised a new flag over the capital city of Nassau. To commemorate this historic event the young government



Columbus' flagship, the Santa Maria (center), was ponderous and slow; his other ships, the Nina and the Pinta, were relatively fast caravels.



Columbus hears the cry "Tierra!" shouted from the poop deck of the *Pinta* to the crew of the *Santa Maria*.

issued a \$10 silver coin depicting Christopher Columbus' flagship, the *Santa Maria*. It was on board the *Santa Maria* that Columbus caught his first glimpse of the island that would become the "New World." The island was called "Guanahani" by its inhabitants, but Columbus renamed it "San Salvador" or Holy Savior in the name of Spain.

Bermuda, another self-governing British colony, issued a crown in 1959 commemorating the 350th anniversary of its founding by Sir George Somers, who was shipwrecked there in 1609. The coin displays a map of Bermuda and two sailing ships.



This 1-crown coin from Bermuda celebrates the 350th anniversary of the island's discovery. A swift Bermuda sloop constructed of cedar appears at the top, and a "fitted dinghy," also of cedar, is featured at the bottom.

Giovanni Caboto, or John Cabot as he was called by the English, a contemporary of Columbus and a fellow Genoan, set sail from England in May 1497 on board the *Matthew* with a crew of eight. Fifty-two days later he reached the northern extremity of Cape Breton Island (now Canada) and continued on to explore the coast of Newfoundland before returning to Great Britain. Canada's silver dollar of 1949 features the *Matthew*, marking the entry of Newfoundland into the Canadian Dominion.

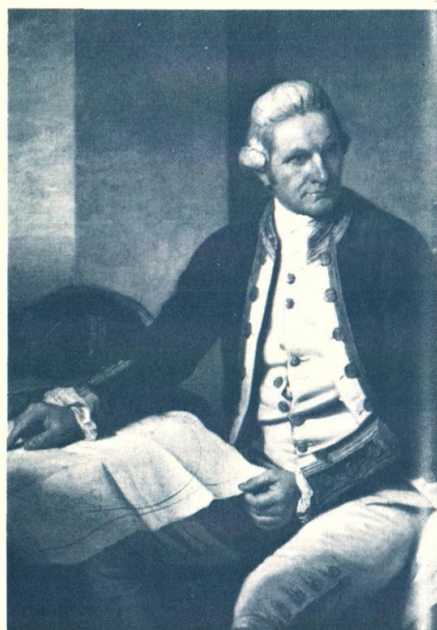
Both French explorers and the English monarchy in the 17th century realized that the Hudson Bay area of Canada held a fortune in fur-bearing animals. In 1670, King Charles II of England granted a charter to the newly-formed Hudson's Bay Company, whose goal was not only to establish a fur trade but also to colonize the area. The company's fur trade depended on the French Canadian *voyageurs* or canoemen and their Indian guides. The



A 1949 Canadian dollar, (left) features the *Matthew*, commemorating the entry of Newfoundland into the Dominion of Canada. The voyageurs motif (right) appears on a number of Canadian silver dollars.

voyageurs first appeared as a symbol of Canada on coinage of 1935 and have frequently appeared on Canadian silver dollars issued since then.

Captain James Cook, the most famous English navigator of the 18th century, is the subject of several commemorative maritime issues. Cook, who conducted three expeditions into the Pacific Ocean, was responsible for rediscovering the Sandwich Islands and introducing New Zealand and Australia into the British



Captain James Cook

Empire. During his first voyage, 1768-1771, he circumnavigated New Zealand in the *Endeavour*, charting the islands' coastlines and mingling with the Maoris, New Zealand's native inhabitants. To honor the 200th anniversary of this voyage, New Zealand minted a \$1 coin in 1969 bearing Cook's profile, his ship and his chart of New Zealand. The following year the Cook Islands issued a \$1 coin featuring an elegant figure of the *Endeavour* and a small portrait of Captain Cook. The famous explorer was further honored by New Zealand in 1974 with two silver commemoratives issued to honor Cook's second voyage and the



Captain Cook's original chart of the two islands of New Zealand in 1769 decorates this \$1 coin issued in 1969.

bicentenary of his discovery of the Hervey Islands.

Royal Navy Captain William Hobson, New Zealand's first governor, is shown shaking hands with a Maori chief on a 1935 commemorative crown issued by New Zealand. The issuance of the coin marked the 25th Jubilee of the reign of King George V and the Waitangi Treaty of 1840.

Captain Cook's arrival in New Zealand inspired a steady stream of medals portraying ships associated with the country's history. On his second expedition in 1772, Cook distributed a number of medals, two of which were struck in gold, 106 in



This New Zealand crown commemorates the signing of the Waitangi Treaty of 1840. Pictured is Royal Navy Captain William Hobson, New Zealand's first governor, shaking hands with a Maori native.

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silver and a large number in bronze. The gold and silver medals were awarded to Cook's sponsors and fellow sailors and the bronze medals were presented to the natives. Twenty-one of these medals have been found and recorded in recent times, ten of which were uncovered in New Zealand and British Oceania. Unfortunately, no medals have surfaced in New Caledonia, Cook's major discovery during his second voyage.

Medals commemorating successful voyages were also struck in Russia. In 1819 Emperor Alexander I sent an expedition to the southern polar regions on a combined mission of science and discovery. The small fleet was comprised of two vessels, the *Vostok* and the *Mirney*, and was commanded by Captain Thaddeus von Bellingshausen, a seaman who had served under von Krusenstern in the Pacific from 1803 to 1806. The expedition arrived in Port Jackson, New South Wales, in March 1820, and left New Zealand waters the following June. The Bellingshausen Sea and Mirney Base in the Antarctic are evidence of the success of his mission. On Bellingshausen's return to Russia, Alexander I ordered a medal struck to commemorate the expedition. The obverse of the medal features the portrait of the emperor and the reverse bears the words in Russian, "The Sloops *Vostok* and *Mirney*."

The most famous vessel in United States history, the *Mayflower*, is the subject of a U.S. commemorative half dollar issued in 1920. A three-masted square-rigger, the *Mayflower* measured only 90 feet in length but managed to



In 1920, the United States issued this half dollar to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth. Governor William Bradford is pictured on the obverse; the reverse bears the image of the *Mayflower*.

weather several intense storms on its route from Plymouth, England to the shore of Cape Cod. The sturdy vessel continued to make Atlantic crossings for many years thereafter.

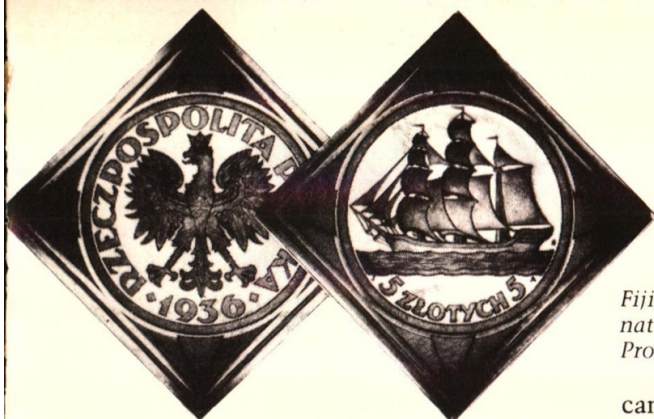
In 1936 the United States issued a legal-tender coin picturing the Swedish ship, the *Kalman Nyckel*. This ship carried a Swedish expedition that landed on the shores of present-day Delaware and established the first permanent white settlement in 1638. To commemorate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the colony, the United States minted a special half dollar depicting the *Kalman Nyckel*. Following suit in 1938 Sweden also issued a commemorative featuring the ship.

Poland, one of the world's largest exporters of herring and cod fish, minted a 5-zlotych coin in 1936 to recognize the country's fishing industry. The silver issue displays a Polish merchantman, a vessel used to transport cargoes of fish across the Baltic Sea.

Even remote regions of the world have issued maritime coins. In 1890



Commemorative coins were issued by both the United States and Sweden to celebrate the founding of New Sweden, the present-day Delaware. The U.S. half dollar at the left pictures the Old Swede's Church. Both coins depict the Swedish vessel, the *Kalmar Nyckel*.



The Polish sailing vessel depicted on this 1936 5-zlotych coin carried cargoes of herring and cod across the Baltic.

Ceylon released a coin depicting a Singhalese sailing craft. In 1932, China minted a silver 1-yuan dollar showing a Chinese "djong" or junk. Contrary to its appearance, the junk is quite stable and can withstand rough waters without capsizing. The Fiji Islands in the Pacific Ocean included a maritime piece in its 1982 Proof set. The 50-cent piece in this set bears a likeness of a native Fiji sailing vessel.



Pictured is the Rising Sun version of the Chinese junk silver dollar of 1932. Soon after the coin's issuance, relations between China and Japan became strained and the coin was withdrawn. The Chinese junk appeared on later issues without the birds and sun.

This short list of numismatic items bearing maritime images is by no means complete. A determined collector of coins that display ships



Fiji issued a 50-cent piece depicting a native island vessel as part of its 1982 Proof set.

can accrue a collection of close to 200 pieces in a relatively short period, and those who have enjoyed this specialty for several years will find that some of their pieces are now quite valuable. The fascination with maritime numismatics not only offers collectors the rewards of a rich specialty field, but also affords a prime and safe source of investment as well. These coins have steadily increased in value because of limited mintage and increasing demand as more people take up the hobby. The 1935 New Zealand Waitangi commemorative now sells for \$1,500. A 1963 Israel seafaring coin depicting an ancient oar-powered sailing vessel originally sold for \$6; today it sells for \$300. Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator commemorative set was issued for \$5 in 1960 and since then has more than quadrupled in price. The 1982 Fiji Proof set is still available at a price affordable by most collectors, but if it shows the value increases shared by most other maritime coins, it too will soon be a valuable addition to any collection of ships on coins.

As the collector of any specialty is well aware, rarity and grade are the most important factors in determining the price of any issue, but to the fancier of maritime issues, the value of any maritime coin can only sail onward and up in the hearts of collectors, regardless of price.

RAYMOND SCHUESSLER, a native of Buffalo, New York, gave up a career in professional baseball to devote his energies to full-time journalistic writing. Schuessler's work has appeared in hundreds of national publications, including *Numismatic News*, *American Heritage*, *New York Times*, and *Science Digest*.