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FAMILY FEUD

*How World War I Changed the Crowns
of Eleven Royal Relatives*

The First World War led to the demise of numerous monarchies and rulers, as well as the coinage that featured their symbols and images.

WORLD WAR I ERUPTED just over a century ago. This centennial observation brings images of trench warfare, aerial dogfights, widespread destruction and prolonged peace efforts. The 1914-18 conflict involved most of Europe and drew in several dozen European monarchies and their rulers. Empires, kingdoms, duchies and principalities toppled, and by war's end, many kings had lost their crowns.

Most royal families were on either the winning or losing side of the war, with one notable exception: the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, which included monarchs on both sides. Of particular interest to numismatists are the silver "crown" coinages that were affected by the war. Just as national boundaries were redrawn by newly created republics, the monetary and coinage systems of many monarchies were modified or replaced.

Often, the largest silver coin of a country is called a "crown" (or the equivalent translation). Many depicted a crowned monarch, his jeweled headpiece, or both. Although crown coins are still minted today, they seldom are struck in silver, and their values have fallen with inflation. However, many still carry portraits of a crowned head of state, and most represent the "crowning" achievement of the coinage system. A comparison of the silver crowns of World War I monarchies with their postwar reincarnations reflects the changes wrought by the conflict, the subsequent inflation, and the realignment of nations.

Great Britain's Queen Victoria was key to expanding the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha influence in Europe. At the start of World War I, the family's males occupied six thrones representing one empire, three kingdoms, a grand duchy and a duchy. All six monarchs appeared on crown coins.

Because European royals preferred to marry "their own kind," the family's females wed four kings and one emperor. Of these 11 family members in power during World War I, four were on the side of the victorious Allied Powers, four were on the side of the losing Central Powers and three were officially neutral. The monarchs included first cousins, second cousins and cousins-in-law, but not all were kissin' cousins! By war's end, six "leaves" on the family tree had unceremoniously lost their thrones.

Birth of a Dynasty

The Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (S-C & G), a minor component of the German Empire's ever-changing patchwork of states, was formed in 1826 with the merger of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld and the Duchy of Saxe-Gotha. Ernest I, the new duke of S-C & G, had ruled Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld since the death of his father, Duke Francis, in 1806. Ernest named his brothers Leopold and Ferdinand princes of the new duchy. Ernest's sister Princess Victoria had married Edward, the British duke of Kent, and their only child, Victoria, ultimately became the celebrated queen of Great Britain.

Duke Francis' four offspring married well, yielding a dazzling mix of European monarchs. His son Albert married a first cousin, Queen Victoria. The couple's descendants ruled Great Britain, as well as Germany, the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, and the Grand Duchy of Hesse. Queen Victoria's female S-C & G descendants married the World War I monarchs of Spain, Romania, Norway, Greece and Russia. Victoria's uncle Leopold became king of Belgium, a country ruled by his descendants to this day. The offspring of her son Prince Ferdinand included kings of Portugal and Bulgaria.



▲ A POSTWAR CROWN of Great Britain's King George V.

Actual Size: 36mm

PHOTO: HERITAGE AUCTIONS

During the war, more than two dozen other European kingdoms and duchies were dissolved or struggled to remain neutral.



World War I Scorecard

For decades, the major European powers had gone to great lengths to maintain a balance of power throughout Europe. By 1900, this resulted in a complex network of political and military alliances. Although the Allied Powers—England, Belgium, Romania, the Russian Empire and the Republic of France—emerged as victors in World War I, the four “winning” S-C & G monarchs—Great Britain’s King George V, Russia’s Tsar Nicholas II, Belgium’s King Albert I and Romania’s King Ferdinand—had different fates, as did their coinage.

George V and his crown coinage continued after the war. Tsar Nicholas, on the other hand, was deposed in 1917 and executed in 1918; subsequently, Russia dropped Nicholas’ image from its silver crowns and adopted communist themes. Albert battled German occupation throughout the war, but he and his Belgian *francs* survived. Ferdinand did not appear on Romanian silver issues, but after the war he celebrated his country’s expansion with the issuance of gold coins.

As far as the Central Powers were concerned, three monarchs within the German Empire states, as well as the king of Bulgaria, were S-C & G fam-

ily members. All were deposed, their monarchies dissolved, and their crown coins discontinued.

The three “neutral” European kings with S-C & G ties were Constantine I of Greece, Haakon VII of Norway and Alfonso XIII of Spain. However, remaining neutral did not guarantee longevity on the throne. Although Haakon VII kept his crown for four decades after the war, Constantine lost his throne, and Alfonso abdicated in 1931. All three discontinued their previous silver crown coinage.

During the war, more than two dozen other European kingdoms and duchies were dissolved or struggled to remain neutral. Significantly, the powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire was defeated and dismantled. Emperor Francis Joseph of the Habsburg dynasty had ruled for 68 years when his 1916 death ended his reign mid-war.

His overwhelmed successor, grandnephew Charles I, was forced from the throne when the empire was abolished and divided among six new nations. Charles was not pictured on any coinage, but Emperor Francis Joseph had appeared on wartime crown pieces, notably Austrian silver *coronas* and Hungarian silver *koronas*. When the empire was split up after the war, these crowns were replaced by six new denominations: the sil-

British crowns were discontinued briefly after 1902, replaced by the half crown of similar design, but half the weight.

PHOTOS: HERITAGE AUCTIONS (SWEDISH KRONA & BRITISH CROWN & HALF CROWN), WIKIPEDIA.ORG (GEORGE V) & EBAY



▲ **COINS KNOWN AS** "crowns" included (from top) Norway's krone, Sweden's krona, Austria's corona and Hungary's korona. The first two survived the war; the other two did not.

Actual Size: 25mm (krone), 24mm (krona) & 22mm

ver schilling (Republic of Austria), pengo (Republic of Hungary), korun (Czechoslovakia), zloty (Poland), leu (Romania) and dinar of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (which soon became Yugoslavia).

British Crown

The British crown was one of many silver coins that appeared in various countries from the 16th century onward, perhaps the most famous example being the Spanish 8 reales ("piece of eight"), all of which were of similar size and weight. The crown weighed about an ounce, yet during the 19th and 20th centuries it devolved from a useful means of exchange to a coin minted for commemorative purposes only. The subdivision of the British pound into 12 shillings (240 pence) resulted in a variety of denominations, such as the groat (4 pence), florin (2 shillings), half crown (2½ shillings), double florin (4 shillings) and crown (5 shillings), familiar around the world. Most of these coins (4 shillings and less) were struck virtually every year, during and after the war.

British crowns were discontinued briefly after 1902 and replaced by the half crown of similar design but half the weight. Crowns were reinstated from 1927 to 1936, while half crowns were struck annually until 1970; both had a silver content of 50 percent.

King George V was a grandson of Queen Victoria and, on his mother's side, a grandson of King Christian IX of Denmark, who was building a growing dynasty. In contrast to his ambitious grandmother and his father, Edward VII, the humble George did not exert his political influence nor try to manipulate the destiny of nations. He strived to embody those qualities that his country saw as its greatest strengths: diligence, dignity and duty. In an era when his royal relatives were being displaced by warfare, popular uprisings and communist takeovers, George maintained his family's beloved position in Britain. He established a standard of conduct for British royalty that reflected the values and virtues of the

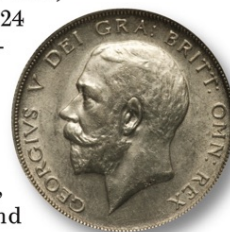
upper-middle class rather than the lifestyles and vices of the upper class.

Anti-German sentiments were prevalent among British citizens during the war. Consequently, George V changed his family name from Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to the House of Windsor in 1917, and he and his English relatives relinquished their German titles.

Russian Rouble

Russia's silver rouble featured the Romanov tsars and was the empire's "crown" throughout the 19th century and up to 1915. The Bolshevik Revolution brought an end to the empire, as well as its coinage and Tsar Nicholas II's reign, but the rouble was retained as a denomination. The government changed names and forms several times until 1921; silver roubles were struck only in 1921-24 and featured communist themes. Despite "winning" the war, the Russian Empire lost territory to five new republics on its western border, where Russian roubles were replaced by Finland's markka, Estonia's marka, Latvia's lat, Lithuania's litai and Poland's zloty denominations.

Russia's Tsar Nicholas II, a first cousin of George V, was from the house of Romanov, but his wife, Alexandra, was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and therefore a first cousin of George. When Germany signed an alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy, whereby each of the three nations agreed to come to the other's aid in the event of attack by either Russia or France, Russia naturally saw Germany as its enemy, even though



► **BRITAIN'S LARGEST** wartime silver coinage was the 2½-shilling half crown (top). After the war, King George V (pictured) reinstated the 5-shilling crown.

Actual Size: 31mm (top) & 36mm

After Germany occupied Belgium in 1914, production of the 1 centime and all silver and gold coins ceased.

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA.ORG (NICHOLAS & GEORGE V) & HERITAGE AUCTIONS



▲ **TSAR NICHOLAS** (top left) and his first cousin Britain's George V (top right) could have passed for brothers. Nicholas appeared on Russia's silver rouble (left) through 1915. After the war, roubles were struck only in 1921-24 and bore communist themes (right).

Actual Size: 32mm (left) & 33mm

Nicholas was a cousin of German Kaiser Wilhelm II. Consequently, it entered into an alliance with Britain and France, the "Triple Entente."

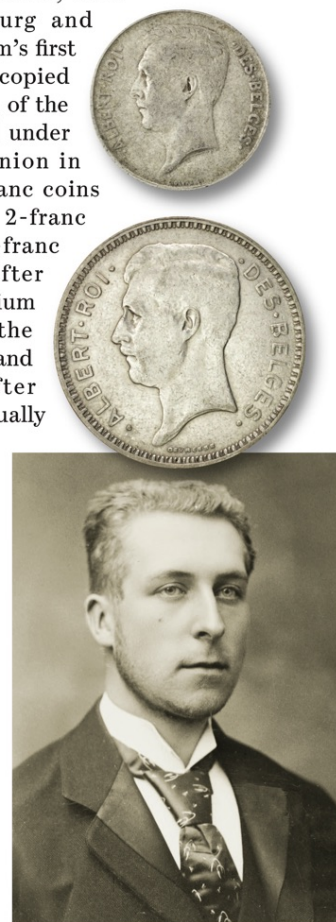
Industrial upsets and military problems plagued Russia's entry into the war. Nicholas became dissatisfied with the army's leadership and took personal command in 1915. Meanwhile, the Russian army was fighting on the Eastern Front, and its ongoing lack of success was causing dissension at home. Continued failures reflected directly on the

tsar's supreme command policies, and his popularity dwindled. More serious problems and uprisings forced Nicholas to abdicate in 1917. The British government initially offered him asylum in England, but withdrew the offer at the direction of King George V, who did not wish to be associated with his autocratic cousin—a controversial decision. Nicholas and his family were executed by the Bolsheviks in 1918.

Belgian Franc

Franc coins (valued at 100 centimes) were introduced in Belgium in the 1830s, when Leopold of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha was named Belgium's first king. The Belgian franc copied the French denomination of the same value, as provided under the Latin Monetary Union in 1865. Crown-sized 5-franc coins were struck until 1876, 2-franc coins until 1912, and 1-franc coins through 1914. After Germany occupied Belgium in 1914, production of the 1 centime and all silver and gold coins ceased. After the war, coins were gradually phased back in: nickel francs in 1922 and crown-sized silver 20 francs in 1933. During the war, Belgium's largest silver "crown" was a 1-franc coin picturing King Albert I.

Albert tried to keep Belgium neutral in World War I, but Kaiser Wilhelm, a distant cousin of Albert's Hohenzollern mother, Marie, nevertheless invaded the country as German forces moved on France. Albert joined the Allied Powers, took command of the Belgian army, and battled the Germans, who occupied most of his country for the duration of the war. He tried

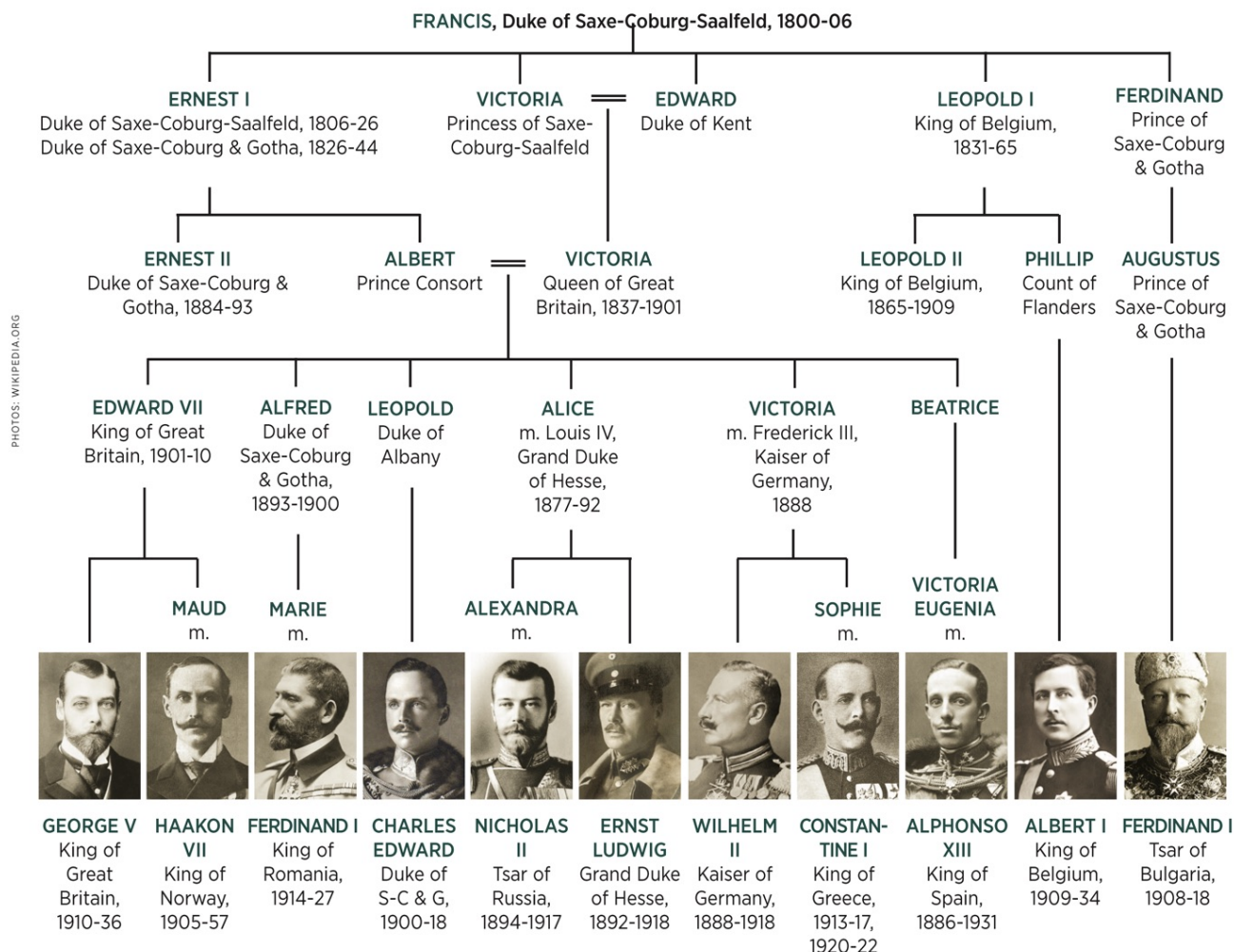


▲ **KING ALBERT I** of Belgium was featured on a silver franc (top) until 1914. No Belgium silver was struck until the larger 20-franc coin debuted in 1933 (bottom).

Actual Size: 23mm (top) & 32mm

PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (ALBERT I) & EBAY

The Saxe-Coburg & Gotha Dynasty



unsuccessfully to broker a peace settlement, but at the conflict's conclusion, he returned to a hero's welcome in Brussels. Belgium has been ruled by Albert's S-C&G descendants ever since.

Romanian Leu

Romania's leu (meaning "lion") was equal to 100 *bani* and was struck until mid-1914, when King Carol I died. Thereafter, a few minor coins were produced by this Balkan monarchy, but none featured an image of the wartime King Ferdinand. Not until 1932 did silver coinage resume with the issuance of 100-leu pieces showing Ferdinand's son King Carol II.

Romania did not join the Allied Powers until 1916, and Wilhelm considered this move a betrayal on Ferdinand's part and erased the latter's name from the Hohenzollern House register. Romania witnessed its share of fighting, but the country emerged from the war with additional

territory. Although Ferdinand never appeared on his country's silver coinage during his 13-year reign, he celebrated his enlarged realm with a spectacular coronation ceremony and the striking of beautiful 50-leu gold coins depicting him and his wife, Marie.

German Mark

The German Empire's coinage up through the World War I era consisted of minor *pfennig* coins and the silver *mark*, none of which carried portraits of the emperor. Germany's several dozen states struck larger, crown-size silver 2-, 3- and 5-mark pieces, as well gold coins, each showing their respective monarchs. After the war, as the empire dissolved and its borders were redrawn, the marks were discontinued and replaced by the *reichsmarks* of the newly created Weimar Republic, while the surrendered territories used French francs and Polish zloty.

*“To think that George and Nicky should have played me false!
If my grandmother had been alive, she would never have allowed it.”*



▲ **ROMANIA'S FERDINAND I** never appeared on his country's silver coinage. The largest wartime Romanian silver coin—a 2 leu (top)—was issued for his father, Carol I, in 1914, just before he died. However, gold commemoratives (bottom) were struck for Ferdinand's coronation in 1922. Actual Size: 27mm (top) & 40mm

As Queen Victoria's eldest grandchild, Wilhelm II was king of Prussia, by far the largest of the German states, which included the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt and the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the family seat. These states were ruled, respectively, by Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig and Duke Charles

Edward, both scions of the S-C&G dynasty. They, too, were



▲ **ON THE LOSING SIDE** of the war were three first cousins: King Wilhelm II of Prussia (left, with his silver crown-sized 5 marks), Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse (represented by the 3 marks, center) and Duke Charles Edward of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (2 marks, right). All lost their crowns. Actual Size (from left): 38mm, 32mm & 27mm

grandsons of Victoria, and first cousins of both Wilhelm and England's George V. Ernst Ludwig, who also was brother-in-law to Russia's Tsar Nicholas.

Wilhelm's upbringing reflected his mother's English leanings (as Victoria's oldest child, she was Britain's "Princess Royal") and his father's Hohenzollern sternness. Despite his mother's efforts to imbue her son with British principles of democracy, Wilhelm aspired to German autocratic rule. His most contentious relationships were with his British kinsmen. He craved their acceptance, but most of them found him arrogant and obnoxious.

He had an especially strained relationship with his uncle, Edward, prince of Wales and future king of England. Edward treated him not as the emperor of Germany, but merely as a nephew. In turn, Wilhelm often snubbed his uncle and later lorded his position as emperor over him. Wilhelm was surprised by France's alliance with Britain and Russia, and is reported to have said, "To think that George [of England] and Nicky [of Russia] should have played me false! If my grandmother had been alive, she would never have allowed it."

Ernst Ludwig, the grand duke of Hesse, was the son of Grand Duke Ludwig IV, who had married Queen Victoria's daughter Alice. The grand dukes were shown on Hesse's silver 2-, 3- and 5-mark coins. During World War I, Ernst Ludwig served as an officer at Kaiser Wilhelm's headquarters. At the end of the war, he refused to abdicate, but lost his throne during the revolution that led to the formation of the Weimar Republic.

PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (FERDINAND I & WILHELM II) & HERITAGE AUCTIONS

The Allies allowed Bulgaria to remain a kingdom, with Boris III on the throne and on a crown-sized 100-leu coin in 1930.

Charles Edward, the duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, inherited his title at age 16 from his uncle Alfred, Queen Victoria's son, who died without a male heir. Charles Edward was raised to be a proper English gentleman, and preferred his British title of Duke of Albany over his German one. World War I caused a conflict of loyalties for Charles Edward, but finally he supported Germany and appeared on the duchy's silver 2- and 5-mark coins. He received a commission as a general in the German Army, but never held a major command. The citizens of Gotha relieved him of his dukedom in 1918. After England formally took away Charles Edward's titles, he was effectively exiled from Great Britain. He later joined the Nazi Party and served in the German Reichstag during World War II.

Bulgarian Lev

Formerly an Ottoman and Turkish principality, Bulgaria was overseen by Prince Regnant Ferdinand. Although he was an S-C & G descendant, the family considered him unfit to rule. However, to everyone's surprise, in 1908 he declared himself tsar of an independent kingdom.



▲ **ANOTHER COUSIN** who surrendered his crown was Ferdinand I of Bulgaria. He was depicted on his country's 2 leva of 1916 (top). Bulgaria did not issue a crown-sized coin again until 1930, this time picturing Tsar Boris III (bottom).

Actual Size: 27mm (top) & 35mm

At the start of the war, Ferdinand I signed a treaty with Austria and Germany in hopes of expanding his kingdom, but he despised his wartime partners—the emperors of Austria, Germany and the Ottoman Empire. (War creates strange bedfellows!) When Ferdinand sensed the end of the war was near, he abdicated in favor of his son Boris III, who surrendered Bulgaria and its captured territories to the Allies. (Ferdinand retired to Coburg.)

Introduced in 1881, the country's *lev* denomination (meaning "lion," like Romania's leu) was equivalent to 100 *stotinki* and on par with the French franc. Crown-sized 5-lev coins were issued in the 1890s, but Bulgaria's largest silver denomination during World War I was the 2 leva picturing the tsar. After Ferdinand's abdication, the Allies allowed Bulgaria to remain a kingdom, with Boris III on the throne and on a crown-sized 100-leu coin in 1930.

A CONTEMPORARY CARTOON shows England's George V sweeping aside the German titles he relinquished in 1917.



Greek Drachma

Greece struggled to maintain its neutrality during World War I, despite the fighting in the adjacent Balkan states. Constantine, the son of Greek King George I, was on the throne at the start of the war. His wife, Sophie, had ties to both sides of the conflict: she was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, the daughter of Britain's Princess Royal Victoria, and a first cousin to George V. But her father was Germany's Hohenzollern Kaiser Frederick III, and her brother was Kaiser Wilhelm. Despite these ties, she was pro-British.

Constantine's popularity had soared when he led Greece to victory in the First Balkan War (1913), but plummeted during national disputes about taking sides in World War I. Constantine initially favored the Germans and rebuffed the Allies' overtures, much to the consternation of his wife and his government. The internal unrest eventually caused Constantine to abdicate his throne in 1917. He was recalled to the throne in 1920, only to be deposed in 1922. His son George II became king, but after several failed coups, he also was deposed, and the monarchy ended in

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA.ORG (CARTOON) & HERITAGE AUCTIONS

King Haakon VII appeared on Norway's silver 50 ore, krone and crown-sized 2 kroner until 1917. After the war, no silver coins were struck.

► **KING CONSTANTINE I** of Greece did not appear on Greek coins. His father's 2 drachmai (bottom left) of 1911 was the last silver crown produced until the 20 drachmai of 1930 (bottom right), which pictured the mythical god Poseidon.

Actual Size: 28mm (left) & 29mm



1924 with the establishment of a republic.

Greece boasted a long numismatic history, with its oldest coin denomination, the *drachma*, dating from the 5th century B.C. The coin closest to a silver wartime crown in size and use was the 1911 2 *drachmai*, showing King George I. George died in 1913, and no silver coins were struck from 1912 to 1930, when a similar-sized 20-drachmai coin (which, because of inflation, contained less silver) was issued depicting the Greek god Poseidon. Greece's love-hate relationship with its monarchs flared for decades, and no kings appeared on any coins produced during the war years.

Norwegian Krone

Norway remained officially neutral during the war, but was pressured to provide shipping support and sailors for the British fleet. Popular King Haakon VII had married his first cousin Maud, the daughter of Britain's Edward VII and sister

of George V. Haakon VII, Britain's George V, Greece's Constantine I and Russia's Tsar Nicholas were grandchildren of Denmark's Christian IX and thus were first cousins.

Norway's *krone* (crown) coinage paralleled the Swedish *krona* and Danish *krone* denominations, each equivalent to 100 *ore*. These three countries had formed the Scandinavian Monetary Union in 1870s. The war's outbreak in 1914 brought an end to the union and free circulation. (Although the three countries still use the same currencies, coins lost their one-to-one parity in 1914.) King Haakon VII appeared on Norway's silver 50 ore, krone and crown-sized 2 kroner until 1917. After the war, no silver coins were struck; the largest crown struck during this period was the 1925-27



PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA.ORG (CONSTANTINE I & HAAKON VII), HERITAGE AUCTIONS (2 DRACHMAI) & EBAY



▲ **NORWAY'S KING HAAKON VII** was depicted on a World War I 2 kroner, but did not appear on his country's coinage again during his more than four-decade reign. The 1917 coin shown here was Norway's last silver crown.

Actual Size: 31mm

Since 1888, when he was 2 years old, King Alfonso XIII had appeared on silver 1- and 2-peseta coins, as well as the crown-sized 5 pesetas.

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA.ORG (ALFONSO XIII) & HERITAGE AUCTIONS



copper-nickel krone.

Haakon survived to face the Germans a second time in World War II. However, during his 52-year reign, his image did not appear on Norway's coinage again.

Spanish Peseta

Alfonso XIII was from the venerable Bourbon dynasty and was proclaimed Spain's king at birth. On a state visit to Britain's King Edward VII in 1905, he met his future wife, Princess Victoria Eugenie, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Alfonso's mother Maria Christina was from Austria's Habsburg dynasty, so he had connections with both sides in World War I. Popular opinion in Spain also was divided, so the country remained neutral during the war.

In the mid-19th century, Spain's historic silver real and golden *escudo* were replaced by the *peseta* (equal to 100 centimes). Since 1888, when he was 2 years old, King Alfonso XIII had appeared on silver 1- and 2-peseta coins, as well as the crown-sized 5 pesetas. But Spanish coinage was halted after 1905, except for occasional centimos struck in the 1920s.

Continuing troubles and nationalist sentiment in Spain caused Alfonso to flee the country in 1931. The growing unrest precipitated a civil war



◀ **KING ALFONSO XIII** appeared on Spain's crown-sized 5 pesetas (above) in the 19th century, but the Spanish Civil War ended his monarchy. Multiple conflicts also signaled the end of Spain's silver crown. The symbols of the Bourbon dynasty on the reverse disappeared for decades after this coin was struck.

Actual Size: 35mm

in 1935, led by Francisco Franco, who established a nationalist government. Spain did not strike another large crown-size coin until 1949—a nickel 5 pesetas showing Franco. The monarchy was restored to Alfonso's grandson Juan Carlos in 1975.

A War to End All Wars?

King Farouk of Egypt, himself an extravagant numismatist whose lavish lifestyle caused his downfall, said in 1948: "The whole world is in revolt. Soon there will be only five kings left—the King of England, and the Kings of Spades, Clubs, Hearts, and Diamonds."

During World War I, despots, tyrants and ne'er-do-wells lost their thrones, and the monarchies that survived to the present have been converted to constitutional monarchies. Modern kings and queens are focused not on political, military and governmental matters, but rather on ceremonial duties and representing their citizen's interests.

World War I optimistically was called "The War to End All Wars." Sadly, this proved untrue, as many of the participants replayed similar battles with familiar consequences two decades later. However, the war did spell the end of many monarchies and rulers, as well as the coinages that featured their royal symbols and images. Numismatists might rue the horrific conflict, but they can marvel at the crown coins and other denominations that the war ended and created. ■