

## Fashion on Coins II: Hairstyles

By Carol Schwyzer, © MoneyMuseum

"She combs her golden hair. She combs it with a golden comb ..." In Heinrich Heine's (\*1797, †1856) poem of the Lorelei it magically lights up the seductive beauty of the woman who is styling her glossy hair.

The style of the hair arises from humans' natural need for beauty and the knowledge that the thickness and colour of the splendour of the hair helps to determine the impression which we make on the world around us. As long ago as 4,000 years BC, the ancient Egyptians styled their hair with combs, knives and hair needles, as we know from finds in their graves. But hairstyles make us not only beautiful and attractive, they also inform us about the customs and characteristics of an age or about the social standing and profession of a person.

This picture tour shows how the changes in hairstyles are reflected in coin designs in the course of time.

## The nymph's restrained hair



100 litras (double decadrachm), minted under the Syracuse tyrant Dionysius I (405-367 BC), Syracuse, around 400 BC

The charming head of a woman on this coin does not belong to a real princess, but Arethusa, the nymph who gave her name to a spring. In the classical Greek period no historical personalities were depicted on coins. A great increase in the human self-awareness emanates from the picture of the nymph in human form.

The young woman displays her hair as was the fashion in the golden age of ancient Greece: it was parted, wavy and put up in an elaborate knot, which was held in place by a star-studded slide. This hairstyle gives the impression of carefully restrained nature. The bright reflections might result from the hair having been made lighter with saffron. This was popular with the Greek women, who were naturally dark haired, as blond was regarded as the colour of the gods' hair.

Incidentally, in ancient Athens so much importance was attached to a well-kept and good appearance that a tribunal was set up to decide on matters of clothing. Women who had unkempt hair had to pay a fine.

## Still a trace of republican virtue



Dupondius, minted under the Roman emperor Tiberius (14-37 AD) for his wife Livia Drusilla (\*58 BC, †29 AD), Rome, 22-23 AD

In ancient Rome women enjoyed great respect and were more highly regarded than anywhere else in the ancient world. Livia Drusilla was the first and most important of Rome's empresses. She had accompanied the rise of her husband from triumvir Octavian to Emperor Augustus and remained a level-headed, sensible adviser throughout her whole 52 years of marriage.

On this dupondius, which her son Tiberius issued for her, Livia incorporated Justitia and reveals a relatively simple hairstyle, pinned up in a knot. Here something of the integrity of the republican matron shines through, of the ancient Roman "mater familias," who runs her household along strict lines. But here a diadem has now replaced the headbands that held the hair together.

We know from Livia that she quite flirtatiously changed her hairstyle several times and also wore wigs made of the much-sought after hair of the blond Germanic female slaves. At any rate, from now on in Rome the fashion was: women style their hair like the empress.

## A crown like a bonnet



Solidus, minted under the Byzantine empress Irene (797-802), Constantinople

In the Middle Ages the physical reality was pushed into the background in favour of the spiritual values of Christianity. It was not the individual appearance of the ruler, but the symbolic embodiment of the god-given governmental power that was important.

Thus this portrait on the coin shows the Byzantine ruler Irene, who first governed the Eastern Roman Empire for her under-aged son Constantine, then five years as an autocrat, stiffly posing in her richly ornamented gown. The crown above her stylised face is so sumptuously decorated with jewels and ornamentation that there is hardly anything to see of her actual hair.

This crown has a similar effect to one of the medieval bonnets, which the rules governing church life in Gothic times imposed on married women. For Christian theology propagated a picture of women, that was based on Paul's epistles and the Fall of Man in Genesis. For the church father Augustine (\*354, †430) the Fall of Man was closely related to the sexual drive, which blamed the woman's powers of seduction for the wickedness of the world we live in. It is clear that in view of this attitude anything as attractive as women's hair should remain invisible.

## Beautiful, clever and powerful



Scudo d'oro undated, minted under Giulia Varano, duchess of Camerino, under the guardianship of her mother Caterina Cybo (1527-1534), Camerino

"Renaissance" denotes "rebirth." This means, on the one hand, occupying oneself with ancient art and science in the 15th century. On the other hand, this world and mankind again shifted back into the centre. The latter was now allowed to proudly develop all its talents and express its individuality in its external appearance.

Thus hair and the body were again to be seen in the Renaissance. In Botticelli's famous painting *The Birth of Venus*, the goddess is standing naked on a mussel shell, wafted around by long, flowing hair – and in doing so appeared rather more sensual than her Greek and Roman examples.

The young duchess of Camerino, Giulia Varano, was allowed to reveal her hair, but, of course, in a restrained form in keeping with her position. Following ancient hairstyles, here she has her hair in a balloon-shaped structure held in place by precious ribbons. By tucking up the hair at the front and putting up her hair at the back of her head the ideal of a high forehead was aimed at. In the Renaissance this was regarded as the expression of exceptional intelligence. Many rulers, both male and female, of the Italian city-states distinguished themselves through cleverness and an understanding of art.

## The fashionable man



**Ecu aux trois couronnes, minted under the French king Louis XIV (1643-1715), Reims, 1709**

Hair does not have to be genuine to make an impression, and men can be just as fashionable as women. The best proof of this is the portrait of the Sun King Louis XIV.

The extremely high full-bottomed wig reaches down in curls onto the chest and back, while leaving the shoulders free. On account of its fullness, it suggests the greatness, super-human vitality and royal charisma. This not least thanks to the technique of "papillote" that allowed the hair to be curled and to lie in waves.

Louis was not only an absolute ruler, he was also a perfect gentleman. He liked to go riding and to dance, loved music and beautiful women. He compensated his rather small stature with high heels and a raised hairstyle.

By means of his personal taste, the Sun King set the fashion of his time. Soon the majestic cloud-like wig became a must in fashion, in spite of its high price. After 1700 the wig was powdered white. As the state wig, it increased the dignity of its wearer and his office. The magnificent setting of the Baroque court with its extensive castle grounds and gardens required people to adopt an appropriately grand appearance.

## An erotic note



10 roubles (Imperial), minted under the Russian tsarina Elizabeth I (1741-1762), St. Petersburg, 1756

In the late Baroque or Rococo, gallantry and refinement became more important than a demonstration of power. Fashion was now to become light, flexible and coquettish. The aim was to make a natural impression irrespective of an extravagant presentation.

Tsarina Elizabeth I appears here absolutely in keeping with the fashion, wearing a coronet with loosely falling corkscrew curls, a corseted body, small ribbons and a plunging neckline. She thus radiates courtly elegance as well as natural sensuousness. It would be easier to imagine this monarch dancing at a festival than studying documents submitted to her by her ministers.

The daughter of Peter the Great, famous for her beauty, did not have the political vigour of her father. When dealing with state affairs she relied on her advisers and favourites. In Russia she was regarded as the epitome of an absolute ruler. The wasteful way in which she held court and had numerous Baroque palaces built resulted in Elizabeth leaving an empire behind that was deeply in debt.

The relationship of skirt and hairstyle is interesting, by the way: when the crinoline was largest, the hairstyle became quite small and flat. When the crinoline and dress again became tighter and shorter, the hairstyle increased proportionately.

## Liberté, even for hair



Convention Nationale, pattern coin of the French Republic, Lyons, in year 1 of the French Republic (1792/93)

"Revolution" means "upheaval." The French Revolution of 1789 introduced a radical change in society with the slogan "liberté, égalité, fraternité."

But parallel to the abolition of the monarchy everything fell into disrepute, which recalled court fashion and the Ancien Régime. Now anyone who appeared with a powdered wig risked being accused as a royalist and beheaded.

Thus Marianne displays freely flowing hair on this coin. The simple, natural girl with the popular name Marie-Anne became the symbol of freedom for the French Republic. Her image was to adorn the new seal of the republic, after Louis XVI's royal seal was melted down. The thick head of hair refers to the freedom and independence of the new democratic form of government.

Marianne also proved her symbolic force by the fact that the Americans adopted her image for their first copper cents in 1794. In the new world the young woman with the flowing hair also incorporated the freedom and independence of a young nation.

## The fragility of a queen



Crown, minted under the British queen Victoria (1837-1901), 1844

Queen Victoria, the ruler of the British Empire, who gave her name to a whole age, is to be seen on this coin as a woman of about 25 years of age: without a crown, without any ornamentation, girlish and with a fashionable hairstyle à la Grecque. It may be that Victoria, who had ascended the throne as an 18-year-old, wanted with this unpretentious portrait to tell her nation, which had been struck by a famine in the mid-forties: "I am a human being like you and I feel with you." But perhaps she also simply adapted herself to the picture of a woman of her time.

Accordingly this woman was a fragile, highly moral person who left affairs of state to the men and found her sense in life by devoting herself to bringing up her children. The crown of such a woman was hair that, if possible, was never cut, but freshly washed, and coiled round the head into a simple style because this was regarded as very attractive.

The British monarch, the mother of nine children and from 1876 also the empress of India, tended to trust in the advice of men in government affairs. Above all she largely left governing the country to her husband, her beloved cousin Albert, prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, during her successive pregnancies.

Victoria survived Albert by 40 years, and in the course of her long reign gave back a new dignity to the British monarchy.

## A child of nature instead of the heroic Helvetia



20 francs (Vreneli), minted by the Swiss Confederation, Bern, 1897

The best-known Swiss gold coin, the Goldvreneli worth 20 francs, was designed by the Neuenburg medal-maker Fritz Landry (\*1842, †1927) and was first minted in 1897. It emerged at a time when people were becoming tired of the strict hairstyle to portray ancient heads to represent the republics.

Here a Swiss girl appears in traditional costume with an edelweiss garland round her shoulders as the embodiment of Helvetia. The ample hair is partly braided into a plait and untied, and partly fluttering freely in the wind. Thus the impression of freedom and naturalness is produced. The plaited hair indicates that this freedom is not only unspoiled and unrestrained, but is also creative and orderly.

In his first designs for the new coin Landry had still portrayed the young woman he wanted to symbolise Switzerland with a freely flowing mane. The jury, however, considered this Helvetia to be too young, too individual, too impassioned. For the first trial minting Landry therefore gave his model more mature features. He shaped the hairstyle with a plait and a saucy forelock. The latter became a stumbling block because an anxious magistrate thought it gave the woman a frivolous appearance and this could not be consistent with the dignity of a personification of Switzerland. So the lock was omitted in the final minting.

## Short hair as a symbol of the new femininity



1 penny, minted under the British queen Elizabeth II (since 1952), London, 1967

This young woman with the short, wavy hair served in the British Army in 1944 under the service number "230873 Second Subaltern Elizabeth Windsor." The later British queen Elizabeth II wanted to do this to serve her country in the Second World War (1939-1945). She took her driving test and was trained as a driver and car mechanic – and did a fine job as innumerable women had done in the two world wars.

The absence of men forced the women to assert themselves in public life. Now they no longer wanted to give up the independence that they had acquired. They documented this with short hairstyles and adopted male proportions for their clothing.

It was significant that the short hair cut for women first appeared after the First World War (1914-1918). Up to then long hair had stood for femininity. The fashion of the first half of the 20th century was characterised by the very individual French Coco Chanel. She propagated short hair and plain clothes for a new woman, who was independent, slim, uncomplicated and sporting. Women's suffrage, introduced around 1920 in many countries, also contributed to female self-assurance.

## Back to the roots



1 dollar (mini dollar), minted by the United States of America, Philadelphia, 2000

This USA mini dollar has been in circulation since 2000. On the obverse it shows the Shoshon girl Sacagawea (\*c. 1788, †1812) with her son on her back, her straight hair tied up in a pigtail. The young Indian girl served in the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806) to explore a route between the Pacific and Atlantic as an interpreter and scout. Through her knowledge of nature and languages as well as through her courage she thus helped the expedition to succeed and unconsciously contributed to the subjection of the Indians by the whites.

The USA honoured Sacagawea's achievements posthumously in many ways: ships, mountains, a river, a lake and even a crater on Venus bear her name. Statues, monuments, a park, stamps and this dollar are dedicated to her. And, last but not least, under President Clinton she was appointed an Honorary Sergeant of the US Army in 2001.

In the case of these honours, a growing awareness of the injustices, which whites had inflicted on the seemingly primitive indigenous Indian inhabitants from a feeling of civilisational superiority may have played a part. And probably – as the result of a growing ecological sensitivity – also the increasing respect for their way of living, originally so close to nature.