

## 'Arabella Stewart' medals

by Robert B K Stevenson

A minor medallic mystery, to which there is still no definite answer, is what unhappy early 17th-century lady is represented on the medal tentatively assigned to Lady Arabella Stewart by the British Museum catalogue *Medallic Illustrations* (Hawkins 1885, I, 207). It is there stated that all known specimens, among which silver examples in the Advocates and Hunter collections are mentioned, are 'modern' – presumably then at earliest late-18th century – though perhaps from some contemporary original. But it should be noted that, most unusually, that catalogue fails to distinguish between two varieties: (A) one, now illustrated (pl 32c), in the National Museum for which it is presumed to have been purchased with the Advocates collection in 1872, and (B) the former Cochran-Patrick collection's specimen as illustrated (Cochran-Patrick 1878

pl IV, 2 and 1884, pl XVII, 2) which, Miss M M Archibald kindly confirms, is like the two examples in the British Museum (omitted from Hawkins 1911 plates as ‘not contemporary’). One of these two was in the collection of Clayton Cracherode (1729–99). Our type A example certainly corresponds with the one illustrated (as cited by Hawkins) in *Diplomata Scotiae* (Anderson 1739, pl clxv, 27), except that its cinquefoil has been misdrawn as a star. It can indeed be traced into the late 17th century, being described (though assigned to Mary Queen of Scots, cf Way 1859, 183) in the holograph catalogue, now also in the Museum, made by Professor James Sutherland of his collection. This was bought in 1705 by the Clerk of Advocates, in return for an annuity which he drew for nearly 15 years, as the Secretary of the Faculty has noted from their Minutes.

From the style of its larger lettering type B could well be a later copy, and there are clear differences in details, such as reversed-S forelegs to R and K instead of straight, a large star instead of the small cinquefoil in the obverse legend, very large outward-curved serifs to T, a general bulkiness in the face and arms. The star suggests that it was derived from Anderson’s illustration, drawn apparently by John Sturt, who died in 1730 (Duncan 1965, 133). Miss Archibald has noticed that the lettering is clearly by the same hand as that of a version of the Elizabethan ‘Spanish Armada’ medal believed to be 18th century (Hawkins 1885, I, 149, no. 121). A cross hangs from the necklace in type B corresponding to the then accepted identification with Queen Mary, but not in type A in which the pendant merges into the rectangular object held up by the right hand. A further specimen of type A is in pewter not white metal, and so quite probably also of 17th-century date, but without provenance. It was drawn to my attention by Dr D J Rampling, and has been purchased for the National Collection, as recorded on p 232. The Hunterian Cabinet’s silver medal is of type A, as Professor Robertson has kindly ascertained. These medals, like numerous 17th-century medals, are all cast and chased, not struck.

The Scottish connection of the medal rests on the orthography of its legends: Obverse, O GOD GRANT PATIENCE IN THAT I SUFFER VRANG; Reverse, centre, QVHO CAN COMPARE WITH ME IN GREIF I DIE AND DAR NOCHT SEIK RELEIF; around border, HOVRT NOT THE (drawing of a heart) QVHOIS IOY THOV ART. I am indebted to Mr A J Aitken for confirming that this is acceptable as early 17th-century Scots, and quote the following comments from his letter. ‘Strongly Scottish-marked forms (like *vrang*) and spellings (those mentioned, *dar* and *nocht*) would be very surprising post-1660 and quite surprising post-1640 in verse of this sentiment; indeed the spelling *nocht* seems not to occur after 1630. . . . In “literary” settings like this one would rather expect *wh-* after *c* 1640. Since interrogative *quha* is mostly preferred to *quho* in lyrics as late as 1570, and *die*, *hourt*, *not* and *lov* more frequent post *c* 1550 than earlier, I would date the text as spelled here 1550–1640 (certainly) but with a strong preference for 1580–1620. I have no doubt that it is perfectly genuine. . . . The sentiments are all familiar clichés of Scottish “personal” love-lyric verse from *c* 1540 (see perhaps John MacQueen’s *Ballades of Love*), and “feel” to me Scots rather than English, but a quick look round a few authors . . . and our concordance to the Bannatyne MS failed to reveal to me a precise source.’

Though Arabella Stewart was daughter of the Duke of Lennox and first cousin of James VI, one would not perhaps expect her to have spoken Scots. She was born and lived in England, and at one time was next in succession to its throne after James. Nor are the legends of the medal distinctly relevant to her politically-objectionable efforts to marry William Seymour, for which she was several times imprisoned, dying in the Tower in 1615 aged 44. The style of the highly fashionable dress and hair is appropriate for about 1600 rather than a decade or more later, Mrs H M Bennett advises me, but could have been copied at the time of her greatest distress from an earlier portrait. A not dissimilar portrait, full length with an open neck however, dated on costume to *c* 1605, of which several copies exist, is generally accepted as a portrait of Lady

Arabella (Strong 1969, 303, pl 603); I am grateful to Mr R E Hutchison for drawing my attention to it. It is, moreover, at least curious that it was her grandmother Lady Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox, who commissioned in the 1570s and wore constantly (*DNB*) the extremely elaborate and emblematical Lennox or Darnley Jewel which Queen Victoria bought from Horace Walpole's collection (Evans 1953, 125–6; Way 1859, 163–9). For its legends are all in Scots, and include sentiments worded somewhat similarly to those on the medal, such as QVHA HOPIS STIL CONSTANTLY VITH PATIENCE SAL OBTAIN VICTORIE IN YAIR PRETENCE, and MY STAIT TO YIR (these) I MAY COMPAR FOR ZOV QVHA IS OF BONTES RAIR, and also GAR TEL MY RELAES.

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