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The Art Of Coins

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THE prestigious *New York Times* reviews only about 400 of the 40 000 books published annually. One that it did review was *The Art of Coins and Their Photography*, with 371 illustrations, including 329 in colour, 42 black-and-white photographs, 200 drawings and 160 coin legend

facsimiles, a glossary, bibliography and index, by Cape Town's Gerald Hoberman, a professional photographer, author and businessman.

The *Times's* book reviewer said: "In *The Art of Coins and Their Photography* (Spink & Son Ltd., in association with Harry N. Abrams, US dollars 75), a spectacular vanity, Gerald Hoberman has reproduced photographs of coins issued over 2 500 years, ranging from a gold one of King Croesus (the "as rich as" man) to modern silver dollars. Skilled camera work reveals unseen artistic detail and the many colors of the metals; the pictures demonstrate silently the value of photography to numismatics."

The work has received outstanding reviews in South Africa and the United Kingdom. Says the *Numismatic Circular*: "It is doubted whether an illustrated book of this quality will be repeated this century."

Robert S. James, reviewing the work in the South African magazine, *Flying Springbok*, writes:

"The internationally acclaimed book, *The Art of Coins and Their Photography*,

places coin-making firmly among the great arts of mankind. The culmination of years of painstaking research, photography, international co-operation and meticulous production, it has rightly been described as a unique cultural statement. The author, Gerald Hoberman, is an authority on the photography of coins and a Fellow of the Royal Numismatic Society, London. The masterly technique of his celebrated photographs is unsurpassed,

1 and 2. Obverse and reverse of a gold coin which was in circulation more than 500 years B.C. It was used in Lydia, kingdom of the legendary King Croesus

3 and 4. A silver ducatoon dated 1728. The obverse shows the crest of the Dutch East India Company

5 and 6. A golden 1874 *staatspond* from the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) era. On the obverse is a relief of President Thomas Francois Burgers and on the reverse, the crest of the Boer Republic

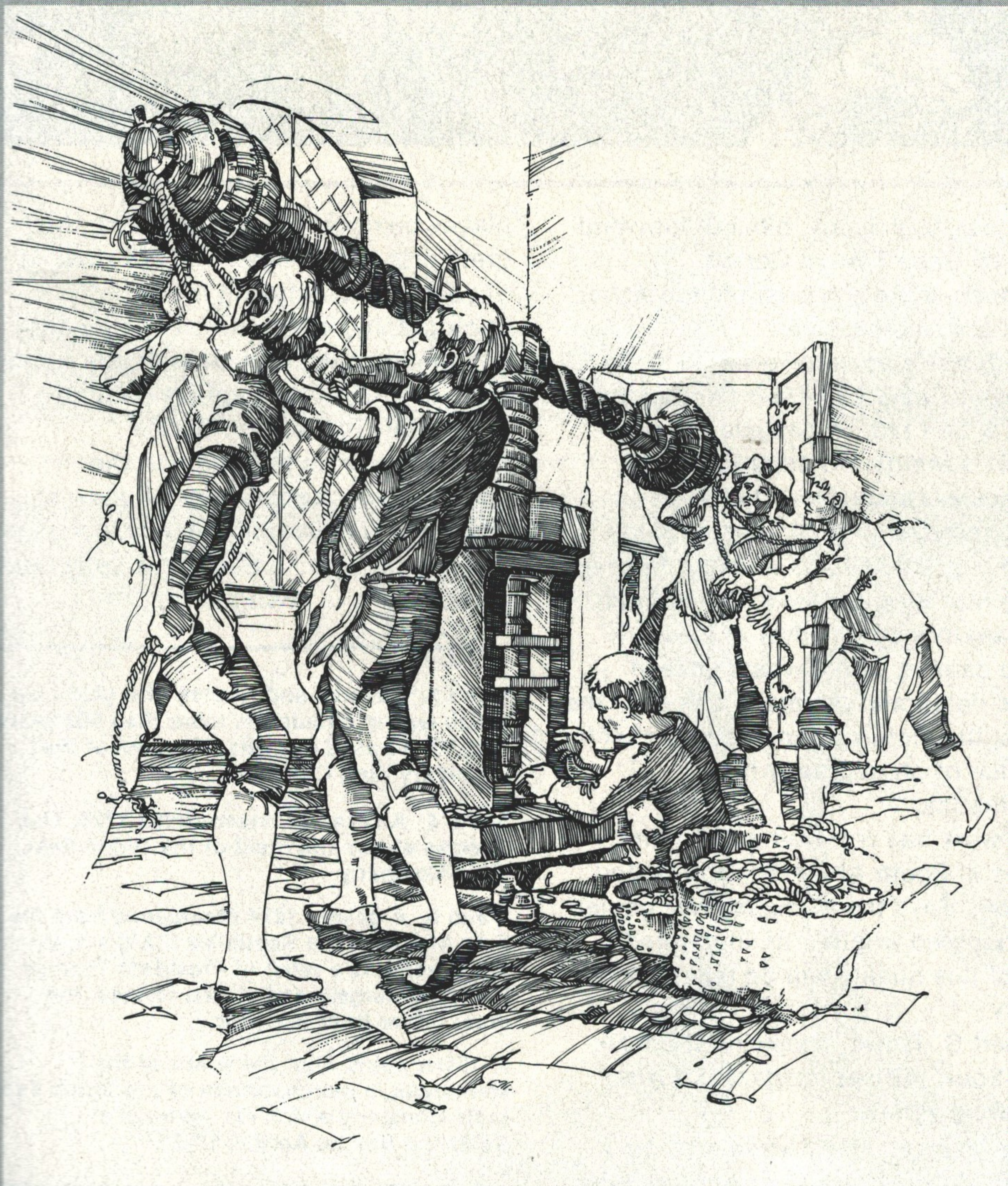
7. Silver coins from the wreck of the *Meresteijn*, a merchantman of the Dutch East India Company which ran aground at Saldanha Bay on April 3, 1702



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The Art Of Coins

highlighting every possible feature of the design of the coins. Portraits of important historical figures, sometimes the only actual likeness of evidence that they existed at all, appear to come alive in sculptural relief. Then there is heraldry, calligraphy, symbolism, quotations from the Bible, mottoes, declarations, petitions, advertisements, propaganda, mintmarks — the numismatic equivalent of a hallmark — a microcosm of world history. Enlarged, his photographs capture for the first time the subtle hues and textures of the metals and the juxtaposition of the actual sized originals with that of their enlargement dramatically demonstrate the power and vitality of these miniscule works of art.

"The book features a cross-section of diverse cultures spanning two-and-a-half thousand years. There are the unrivalled coins of the ancient Greek world, of Byzantium, Medieval Europe, Japan and

the early Americas.

"For those who wish to improve their own methods of photographing coins, no better teacher could be found, and in simple language he has detailed the equipment necessary and the basic rules that he personally adheres to.

"This unique publication gives a clear and concise picture of the evolution of coinage."

James ends his review:

"This book is destined to become the standard introductory work on the art and history of coins. As such, the first impression is being sought by book collectors, but more highly prized is the special collectors' edition, signed, numbered and hand bound in selected Niger Morocco. Exclusive to Spink & Son, it is limited to 250 copies, one of

8. Intricate heraldry on the Swiss *Schulzentaler*, a silver coin dated 1842

9 and 10. The profile of a youthful Queen Victoria appears on the British silver crown of 1847. On the reverse, English, Scottish and Irish symbolism are intertwined

11. Line drawing of a screw press used for minting coins in the 16th century. The artist is Tobie Beele

12 to 15. Dutch East India Company coins of the 18th century. The 1756 coin with identical obverse and reverse is a rare piece known to collectors as a "mule"



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The Art Of Coins

which has been acquired by the Bridgestone Museum in Tokyo.”

The 440-page work is an entirely South African production which involved about 100 people. Gerald Hoberman spent five and a half years researching early coins and photographing them himself. Amongst the august institutions he visited were the Royal Mint, London, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, and The International Bureau for the Suppression of Counterfeit Coins (IBSCC), London. Specie from the wrecks off the South African coast of the *Meresteijn* and the *Fame* were photographed by him in South Africa.

At the Frankfurt Book Fair, said Gerald Hoberman, there was total disbelief that the book came from Africa. Seventeen publishers from

Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Japan negotiated for the rights. “All the publishers concerned preferred to have the colour plates printed in Cape Town under my supervision.”

The Cape Town firm of Hirt and Carter produced the colour separations, using laser scanners, and the ABC Press, also of Cape Town, undertook the printing and binding. Gerhard Schwekendiek was responsible for the design and layout of the book, and Tobie Beele did the superb line drawings.

Says Robert S. James in his review:

“Of particular interest to South Africans and the Dutch are coins from the wreck of the *Meresteijn*, a Dutch East Indiaman that foundered on the rocks off Jutten Island, Saldanha Bay, Cape of Good Hope, on April 3, 1702, as well as examples of the coinage of the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) — The (Dutch) United East India Company — and the Batavian Republic. South Africa’s first coin, the Burgerspond, is described in detail and the accompanying photograph is superb. The dies for this gold coin were engraved by L. C. Wyon (cousin to William Wyon) and struck by Ralph Heaton & Sons, Birmingham, England,

from gold discovered at Pilgrim’s Rest in 1873.

“The obverse of this gold piece is seen with the effigy of President Burger. There are said to be five different obverse dies on various coins. The reverse shows the arms of the South African Republic, six unfurled flags flanking the shield represent the Vierkleur.”

The Art of Coins and their Photography, by Gerald Hoberman, was printed in South Africa and is published internationally by Spink & Son Ltd in association with Lund Humphries Publishers Limited, London, and in USA/Canada in association with Harry Abrams Inc, New York. It sells at £40/75 US dollars for the standard edition, and in South Africa at R85 inclusive. □

16 to 17. The golden Japanese koban from the 19th century is a coin with an unconventional shape

18 and 19. A golden ten dollar piece of 1859 bears the personification of liberty and the eagle emblem of the USA

20. An image of Richard III on the obverse of a 15th century English coin