

Medallic art and satire in the Glorious Revolution

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In December 1688, James II secretly fled into exile. Just six months earlier, the birth of the prince of Wales had triggered a political crisis as the Protestant English parliament considered the prospect of a long-term Catholic royal dynasty. Rumours rapidly spread that the boy was not his and had been smuggled into the queen's bedchamber in a warming-pan. Equally serious were suggestions that the boy was the son of the papal nuncio Cardinal d'Adda, or the powerful royal counsellor and Jesuit priest Father Edward Petre. This scandalous gossip rendered the king a cuckold by his wife's alleged infidelities, a fool tricked into raising another man's son. At the same time, a delegation of Protestant nobility plotted to replace James II with his son-in-law and nephew William of Orange. Faced with a foreign invasion force, the king first sent his family to France before following them himself the next day.

The downfall of James II was a source of ridicule, satirised in visual and material culture through the language of masculinity. In the deeply patriarchal political ideology of the seventeenth century, James was perceived to lack authority in his own family and showed cowardice by taking flight from the kingdom rather than facing down invasion. This was a denigration of his manhood and a failure to fulfil his responsibilities as head of the national household, questioning whether he was fit to rule. One source of this satire can be found in the medallic art of the Glorious Revolution, where a mixture of Williamite propaganda and demand generated by a commercial market for satire resulted in James's unmanly reputation being struck into the medallic record. My doctoral research

explores representations of masculinities in seventeenth-century visual and material culture—including medallic art—and its impact on royal legitimacy.

Last autumn I was kindly awarded a research grant from the British Numismatic Society to fund an archival visit to the Department of Money and Medals at the British Museum. I focused on the satirical work of Jan Smeltzing, a Dutch silversmith who built a reputation for his biting satires and high-quality workmanship.¹ He produced two important series of medals during the Glorious Revolution, designed for a transnational commercial market which took advantage of the political turbulence in England and its effects in the Dutch Republic. The first depicted the controversies of the birth of the prince of Wales, while the second dealt with the flight of the king into exile. While recent studies in Jacobitism by art historians such as Catriona Murray, Murray Pittock, Neil Guthrie, and Georgia Vullings have examined the role of medals and their images in court culture and identity, it remains an underused source base in other areas of historical inquiry.² The American art historian and numismatist Stephen Scher has argued that medals occupy a ‘peripheral niche’, not fully appreciated by either discipline.³ I hope to make a contribution toward rectifying this by approaching the medal as a vehicle for satire, considering its materiality and life as an object, and the political impact it had as a communicative device.

The medal in early modern Europe had a laudatory function, linked to its Roman origins in which the figures depicted on the obverse were

¹ Philip Attwood, ‘Notorious for Their Villainies’, in *Medals of Dishonour*, ed. Philip Attwood and Felicity Powell (British Museum Press, 2009), 18.

² Murray Pittock, *Material Culture and Sedition, 1688-1760: Treacherous Objects, Secret Places* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Neil Guthrie, *The Material Culture of the Jacobites* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Catriona Murray, ‘An Inflammatory Match? Public Anxiety and Political Assurance at the Wedding of William III and Mary II: Public Anxiety and Political Assurance at the Wedding of William III and Mary II’, *Historical Research* 89, no. 246 (2016): 730–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2281.12149>; Georgia Vullings, ‘Fit for a Queen: The Material and Visual Culture of Maria Clementina Sobieska, Jacobite Queen in Exile’, *The Court Historian* 26, no. 2 (2021): 123–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14629712.2021.1945325>.

³ Stephen K. Scher, ‘An Introduction to the Renaissance Portrait Medal’, in *Perspectives on the Renaissance Medal*, ed. Stephen K. Scher (Garland Publishing and The American Numismatic Society, 2000), 6–7.

associated with images representing their great attributes on the reverse.⁴ It had been popularised in the Low Countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with many Dutch silversmiths becoming prolific medal-makers. Their skills and reputations had been developed through taking commissions, including for propagandist activities by supporters of William of Orange.⁵ This commercial practice was much less common in other countries, including England, where medal-making was monopolised by the state mints. Using the medal as a satirical device was therefore a powerful subversion of its intended purpose, a parodic reversal which aimed to take down its subjects.⁶



Fig. 1: Jan Smeltzing, *Flight of James II*, 1689, silver, 49mm diameter, British Museum, BM G3,EM.136. Obverse and reverse. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence

⁴ Philip Attwood and Felicity Powell, *Medals of Dishonour* (British Museum Press, 2009), 11; Mark Jones, *The Art of the Medal* (British Museum Publications, 1979), 28-29; Scher, 'An Introduction to the Renaissance Portrait Medal', 5.

⁵ Attwood and Powell, *Medals of Dishonour*, 11; Jones, *The Art of the Medal*, 48, 50; Mark Jones, 'The Medal as an Instrument of Propaganda in Late 17th and Early 18th Century Europe (Part 1)', *The Numismatic Chronicle* 142 (1982): 118.


⁶ Attwood and Powell, *Medals of Dishonour*, 12; Jones, 'The Medal as an Instrument of Propaganda (Part 1)', 118-19.

Above is one of the medals struck by Jan Smeltzing in his second series of satires on the Glorious Revolution, depicting the flight of James II (**fig. 1**). The obverse of this medal shows James II in an almost imperial manner which would not be out of place on supportive propaganda. His wig, however, is curiously tied in a bag as if preparing for rapid flight. This was a common motif in satirical representations of James II and seen on several other medals, indicating his cowardliness in the face of danger as William of Orange arrived off the south coast of England with his invasion fleet. The text mimics the expected Latin form of words describing the king but includes the appendage '*rex fugitiv[um]*'. As Christopher Fletcher has argued, courage and honour in the face of battle were important characteristics of royal manhood and underpinned the authority of the king.⁷ James's flight represented an emasculating abdication of his responsibilities.

The fate of the king is sealed on the reverse of the medal in which Smeltzing provides a powerful representation of divine intervention. Perched on a hill overlooking the city of London, an ionic column—used in seventeenth-century artworks as part of the iconography of royal power and stability—is struck down by a lightning bolt emerging from a cloud revealing the tetragrammaton, the Hebrew name of God. Inscribed above the scene are the Latin words '*non ictu humano, sed flatu divino*', roughly translated as 'not by human blow, but by divine breath'. It was the will of God that James II be removed from power, a divine intervention on behalf of the Protestant cause. In both English and Dutch seventeenth-century political discourse, the sectarian debate between Protestant 'liberty' and Catholic 'tyranny' intersected with ideas of gender which emphasised rationality and self-control as features of early modern masculinity. This made it necessary for a Protestant monarch to restore the patriarchal social order as ordained by God. The dates of James II's flight are inscribed beneath the image, noting his recapture and escape, implying his cowardliness and continued failure to take responsibility.

⁷ Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

This medal gives a brief illustration of the way that James II's manhood was attacked in the medallic art of the Glorious Revolution. I am intending to present some of my findings on Jan Smeltzing's satires at the Royal Studies Network's annual *Kings & Queens* conference in Prague this September. I will also be looking further at the materiality of medals to understand their function as material objects in early modern culture. As my research develops, I will be studying how the supporters of William of Orange represented him as a superior manly alternative, a campaign which faced its own problems, not least due to his position as a co-sovereign with his wife Mary.

Alexander Ryland is a PhD researcher in Art History at the University of Aberdeen, co-supervised at the University of the Highlands and Islands. His thesis is provisionally titled 'Masculinities and political legitimacy in the visual and material culture of late Stuart kingship, 1660-1694'. He has presented work internationally on the gendered performance of fertility, fatherhood and family in the reigns of Charles II, James VII & II and William III. He has a forthcoming book chapter on Charles II's performative display of fatherhood through his eldest illegitimate son James, duke of Monmouth. He is also a secondary school teacher of History in north-east Scotland. ORCID  0009-0004-3486-2642

