PHILIP GRIERSON *Eaden Lilley, Cambridge*

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Philip Grierson
1910–2006

I. The Cambridge don

PHILIP GRIERSON, HISTORIAN AND NUMISMATIST, died aged 95 on 15 January 2006. He was for seventy years a Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and for over sixty of them he lived in the same set of rooms. This could be the summary of a quiet life, dedicated to the ivory tower; in his case it was nothing of the kind. He went to Cambridge as a student in 1929; in 1935 he became a fellow and lived in the college from then on, from 1945 in rooms overlooking the Market Place, until his final illness at the turn of 2005 and 2006. He was no recluse: students came to read history essays to him and to enjoy his hospitality; friends—in later years from all over the world—came to visit the most eminent living expert on the coinage of medieval Europe. He also greatly enjoyed travel, which took him to Russia, out of curiosity, in 1932, and to Germany later in the 1930s to help a Jewish family find sanctuary; later still to Italy and elsewhere for research and conferences; he was a lecturer, reader and professor in Cambridge, and a part-time professor of Numismatics and the History of Coinage in Brussels, an honorary curator of Byzantine coins in Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, and a visiting professor in Cornell University. And in all these places he enjoyed making friends and mingling in the social life about him.

In 1987 an interview was recorded in Helsinki in which he gave the most complete of a series of reminiscences of his life.[1] He described his

[1] 'A numismatic career', recorded by Knud Wallenstierna and Panu Saukkonen in 1987: see below, p. 100, for this and other sources. The quotations which follow are from this document.

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grandfather, another Philip Grierson, 'a kind and generous man but most unbusinesslike', who was in earlier life a well-to-do country gentleman who built a large country residence, Baldonnell House, near Clondalkin five miles west of Dublin; but as a landowner he lost heavily in the agricultural depressions of the late nineteenth century, and this and his extravagance compelled him to sell his house in 1903; he died 'in somewhat straitened circumstances' in 1910—a fortnight after his grandson was born in Dublin on 15 November 1910.

The second son of the elder Philip Grierson, Philip Henry Grierson, Philip's father, was born in 1859 and trained as an accountant; for some years he managed his father's estate, but 'after the Irish Land Act of 1896 he joined the Irish Land Commission', and until 1906 was a land surveyor. In the course of surveying in Donegal in 1898, 'he met and married my mother. It proved an exceptionally happy marriage, despite an age difference . . . of sixteen years.' In 1906 the Liberal government, regarding such appointments as political patronage, gave Grierson the sack, and he tried his hand at managing a small farm which had formed part of the family estate. He quickly realised that he could not rear a family in reasonable prosperity by such means, and took advantage of his training as an accountant and his exceptional numeracy to enter business. He soon acquired a reputation for financial acumen, became a director of companies, and embarked on a reasonably prosperous business career when he was already in his fifties.

Most of the friends of the younger Philip Grierson's later years came through college and university and academic contacts—and especially through the coin cabinets of the world; but he was always devoted to his family, regularly visiting his parents in Ireland while they lived—and he came from a long-lived family. By the time of his death his close relations were represented by his sister Janet, a leading Anglican deaconess, and the family of his elder sister Aileen, who had predeceased him.

Philip's mother was a doctor's daughter; and Philip himself was destined from his boyhood to be a doctor. He modestly claimed that this was because he had 'no business aptitudes'—which may have been true in a conventional sense; but hardly does justice to the way in later life he defied the iron laws of economics in building up an immensely valuable collection of medieval coins from a modest inheritance and an academic income. We may more readily accept that he had 'no inclination towards . . . the Church or the Law'. Nor was he inclined to matrimony, and he used to say that his output in research and his collection owed much to his being free of the responsibilities or costs of a family.

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From the mid-1920s England became his home: first, as a schoolboy at Marlborough, then as an undergraduate. At Marlborough he specialised in the natural sciences and was preparing for a medical degree. His early scientific training was later to help him in the technical study of coins—and to inspire his love of science fiction. But in due course his interests widened; he read voraciously among the great historical classics, especially Gibbon; and when he came up to Cambridge he was eager to transfer to history. The Director of Studies in Caius was my father, Zachary Brooke, who accepted Philip (though he had nothing remotely resembling an A level in History) and supervised his studies; and he watched with delight the development of Philip's historical talents.

Philip completed his degree in 1932 with Firsts in both parts of the Tripos, and although he was later to speak modestly of his achievement, it must have made an impression on his teachers. He had already, in the spring of 1931, before taking Part I of the Tripos, been awarded the Lightfoot Scholarship for ecclesiastical history—a prize endowed by the great theologian J. B. Lightfoot as one of the moves in the early 1870s to support the study of history in the university, then a poor relation of law and moral sciences. In 1931 it involved examination papers on the whole of church history and some more specialised region; it provided him with a modest income for the next three years. In 1933 he was awarded the College's Schuldham Plate, which is given to the student with the highest marks in the Tripos.[2] Meanwhile, he was awarded the College's Ramadge Studentship in 1932, and supplemented his income with the University's Allen Scholarship (1934). In due course Philip was registered for a higher degree—an aim which, in accordance with the custom of the time, he abandoned when he had won a college fellowship (he took the Litt.D. in 1971).[3]

On 1 November 1935 he was elected to an unofficial Drosier Fellowship at Caius; he was to be a Fellow of Caius for seventy years. He remained nominally a research fellow until 1941 (after renewal in 1938); and he came into residence in the 'New Building' overlooking the Market Place in 1936, returning to it in 1945.[4] From November 1936 he was

[2] *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1930–1, p. 979 (9 May 1931); Gonville and Caius College Archives, Gesta 1929–35, p. 241.

[3] For his early research, see below, pp. 87–9.

[4] The College records show him occupying G11 and G1, St Michael's Court, both in the New Building opened in 1936, till 1939. From 1939–45 St Michael's Court was requisitioned by the Commissioners in Lunacy and Philip shared P4 Tree Court with a colleague. He moved into G6, St Michael's, in October 1945, and it was his home until his death: Gonville and Caius College Archives, Absence Books.

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permitted to teach up to six hours a week; and in 1941 his fellowship became Official and he was appointed college lecturer—at first for three years, but by then he was so deeply entrenched that the College Council forgot to renew his lectureship until 1946, when a College Order of 8 February confirmed his appointment as from 1 October 1944![5]

His attempt to join the forces at the outbreak of the Second World War had been frustrated by his eyesight and some defect in his feet. Meanwhile, he became at an early age an important pillar both of the college and of the History Faculty. In 1938 he was appointed a Faculty Assistant Lecturer. In due course he shared with my father—and then took over—the outline course in medieval European history. I came to Caius as a student in 1945, the year in which Philip began collecting coins. He used to circulate a box of coins at his lectures, while freely making some such confession as: 'The Visigothic coins in the box are forgeries made to be sold to Napoleon's generals when they invaded Spain; but they give you a better idea of Visigothic art than genuine ones.' In supervision he was sparing of praise—'I've no quarrel with that' was his favourite reaction to what I thought was rather a good essay; this was not to discourage but because he treated his pupils as equals, as colleagues. We visited his rooms to read essays and to listen to his gramophone records and read his books: one of his most distinguished pupils has commented on the encouragement Philip gave him to read as widely as possible and to look at medieval artefacts. In a natural informal way his room was one of the most active social centres of the College.

In the Faculty, he was only promoted Lecturer (owing probably to wartime restrictions) in 1945—he was given a personal readership in 1959 and promoted to a personal Chair in Medieval Numismatics in 1971.[6] Meanwhile, he was a member of the History Faculty Board continuously from 1942 to 1951, and again from 1955 to 1958—and Secretary of the Faculty Board in succession to Herbert Butterfield from 1943 to 1946. This was an onerous post, as it still is, but in quite a different way. The equivalent officer today is supported by a substantial administrative and secretarial staff in a world-famous Faculty building. In the 1940s the Secretary administered the Faculty from his college rooms, with the aid of half a secretary in an office in Green Street. In about the same period, from 1945 to 1955, he was an efficient and conscientious Literary

[5] Gesta 1939–47, p. 296.

[6] The details which follow have been checked in the *Cambridge University Reporter*'s annual Faculty Board lists.

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Director of the Royal Historical Society; and for this and his other services he was later rewarded by appointment as an Honorary Vice-President of the Society.

Philip was naturally business-like in personal administration; but Z. N. Brooke's advice to avoid college administration by never accepting a tutorship was attended to; and Philip—in spite of being invited later in his career—also avoided ever being chairman of the Faculty Board, though in his professorial years he was a conscientious member of the Degree Committee. Characteristically for a lover of books and bibliographies, he accepted the post of College Librarian in 1944, and in the same year first became a Syndic of the Cambridge University Library. He was to remain College Librarian till 1969, and Syndic—with brief intervals when he was on leave—till 1980; from 1977 to 1980 he was Chairman of the Library Syndicate.[7] In 1980 his seventieth birthday brought his terms of office to a close; but he remained much longer a frequent visitor, devoted to the Library which he had served so long. As Chairman, he was remembered for his dedication to its needs and for his informality: he was later reprimanded for encouraging a major University Syndicate to meet without gowns.

His service to the College centred on his teaching and direction of studies, in 1944–5 and (after Michael Oakeshott's departure, first to Oxford then to LSE) from 1949 for ten years or so, after which, to his great delight, he handed over the task of directing studies in history in the College to Neil McKendrick. Apart from the Library and the College Council (of which he was frequently a member), he avoided college offices: the great exception was his term as President, from 1966 to 1976. The President of Caius is second-in-command to the Master and acts as his deputy in the Master's absence—a frequent occurrence while the Master was Joseph Needham who, for all his devotion to Caius, was a dedicated globe-trotter. He must be a member of the College Council, and in practice shares with the Master much of the committee work of the College and some of the pastoral care of fellows and staff. In 1976 Needham retired as Master, and it was Philip's task to organise and preside over the election of his successor, Sir William Wade (see below, pp. 287–310). Perhaps above all, the President presides in the Combination Room, and is the central figure in its social life, with a special responsiblity for making visitors feel welcome. Philip was no bon viveur, but he was an excellent host

[7] From information kindly provided by Jacqueline Cox, University Assistant Archivist in the Cambridge University Library, from Cambridge University Archives ULIB 1/1/8, 1/12.

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and a popular President—though he was also impatient of slow meals and liable to call colleagues to order who talked instead of eating: for his evenings after dinner were precious to him—for research or the cinema. This was one of a number of minor foibles which occasionally irritated and always entranced his colleagues; in later years he was a figure much loved by the fellowship, much admired by the students.

In course of time came many academic honours: FBA in 1958, honorary degrees at Ghent, Leeds and Cambridge; five medals, including that of the Royal Numismatic Society (1958) and the Gold Medal of the Society of Antiquaries of London (1997)—as well as a medal struck in his honour to celebrate his eightieth birthday; and several international prizes. He was besides a corresponding fellow or honorary member of seventeen international societies and academies.

In college he became a cultic figure: when he dined in hall on his birthday in his nineties he was greeted by lively cheers. For he never lost the capacity to mingle with men and women generations younger than himself. Grant Tapsell, who first met him in 1998 (when Philip was approaching his eighty-eighth birthday) enjoyed his hospitality and shared his love of films.[8]

> Philip loved movies. He even said the word 'movies' with impish relish. I used to love watching them with someone who had seen Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton films when they were first released. Indeed, I am tempted to say that if coins came to be at the heart of his professional career, movies were at the centre of his private life. When I first met him in 1998, Philip's local notoriety as a film-goer was already of five or six decades standing. He enjoyed recounting a notice put in the local paper in—I think—the 1940s announcing the opening of Cambridge's eighth cinema: 'Now Mr Grierson of Caius will be able to go to a different cinema every day, and two on Sundays.'
>
> Philip was single, but rarely solitary. Every academic year began with several parties for new students at Caius. The barely concealed purpose was to recruit students [to the] pleasant world of movie evenings . . ., the natural development of earlier social gatherings centred in music . . . But once the technology for the home viewing of movies came on stream there was no stopping Philip. His collector's heart was moved, and he amassed a collection of videos that numbered in the thousands rather than hundreds.
>
> Philip rather enjoyed playing the role of Methuselah to the students he met. But he was certainly a very active one, inviting many of us to movie and pizza evenings very frequently until his last years.
>
> It has to be said that his exquisite taste in coins was not always transferred to the screen. His shelves groaned under the weight of movies by such lumin-

[8] What follows is from Grant Tapsell's contribution to the Memorial Event in the Fitzwilliam Museum on 16 March 2006.

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> aries as Sylvester Stallone, Jackie Chan, Steven Seagal, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. In keeping with his *Who's Who*-listed interest in science fiction, there were also any number of variations on the theme of humans being hunted in space by creatures with very large teeth and even bigger appetites . . .. But woe betide historical films that wallowed in inaccuracies or anachronisms—I remember spirited demolitions of both *Gladiator* and *Troy*. Philip was thus not a film *auteur* in the way that he was a great historian and numismatist. But that made him endlessly human and accessible, as well as quite simply a lot of fun.

Tapsell first met him in 1998; I knew him from my childhood. Real contact between us began in 1945 when I travelled to Cambridge to be interviewed for an entrance scholarship. 'I know all about you', he said 'and I have read your general paper and disagree with every idea in it.' In recognition of this I was given a major scholarship and was soon sitting at his feet in supervisions and lectures, and enjoying his gramophone records. In 1948 I was approached by two colleges, one in Cambridge, one in Oxford, as a possible candidate for a fellowship. Philip is alleged to have denounced this as 'baby-snatching'. Philip and others among the fellowship must have been active in the months that followed, since it was early in 1949 that I received a letter from the recently elected Master, Sir James Chadwick, offering me a fellowship at Caius. My chief recollection of my admission as fellow in July 1949 is seeing Philip sitting opposite to me—he only went willingly into the College chapel for the admission of fellows and masters. We thought differently on many things from religious faith to strip lighting (which he loved); but the bond of respect and affection between us was not the least affected—I am one of many who counted his friendship among the happiest experiences of our lives.

It is fitting that the last words of this part of our appreciation should be from the pen of his closest colleague in the study of medieval coins, Dr Mark Blackburn, Keeper of Coins and Medals in the Fitzwilliam Museum and so custodian of Philip's collection—whose election as a Fellow of Caius in 2005 was one of the prime comforts of Philip's declining months.

While describing Philip as collector and the meaning of his collection, he noted that:[9]

> Philip prided himself on his fitness and longevity. This was the man who in his 20s had walked back to Cambridge after an evening at the theatre in London, who in middle age rode a racing bicycle and who had regularly played squash until he was 80 . . . [and was hard at work on *Medieval European Coinage* well

[9] Also from the Memorial Event of 16 March 2006.

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into his nineties. Blackburn went on to pay tribute] to a scholar, benefactor, colleague and friend who was held in the highest esteem; a private man with forthright opinions and a powerful intellect that could be intimidating; yet one who was sociable to the core with a mischievous sense of humour and a generous nature . . . He loved Caius and he loved Cambridge, yet his friends were spread across the globe.

II. The historian

Philip Grierson will be remembered above all as a numismatist. But he was a historian first, and a knowledge of medieval history—east and west, Byzantine and Latin—of extraordinary width and precision underpinned his study of coins. The switch to history from medicine when he came up to Cambridge was entirely his own decision, the fruit of wide, discursive reading, with Gibbon directing his thoughts to the Middle Ages. One of his Marlborough mentors, congratulating him on getting a First in Tripos, confessed that he had warned him he would get a Second if he transferred to history. In an interview with Edward Timms printed in *The Caian* in 1978,[10] Philip listed the Cambridge historians who had influenced him. He had been taught in Caius by Z. N. Brooke, whose concern for his welfare is witnessed by a string of surviving letters, and Michael Oakeshott—a great intellectual historian whom Philip much admired though they had little in common; most of all he confessed his debt to the supervisor of his postgraduate studies, Professor C. W. Previté-Orton.[11] He also attended G. G. Coulton's lectures, which were followed by informal seminars in Coulton's college rooms in St John's and at home; and a letter in the Coulton archives shows that the association flowered into friendship: Philip, by now a research fellow of Caius, wrote familiarly in a manner which would have been congenial to Coulton's anti-Catholic sentiments about the merits of the great American historian H. C. Lea and the weakness of a Roman Catholic defence of the Inquisition.[12] 'Otherwise I had virtually no contacts with senior members of the College or University, although I suppose I was influenced by the choice of books that lecturers suggested for further reading.'[13]

[10] *The Caian* 1977–8, pp. 33–55.
[11] Cf. *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1933–4, p. 623.
[12] St John's College Archives, Coulton Box 3, 23 July 1937—kindly communicated to me by Dr Peter Linehan.
[13] *The Caian* 1977–8, p. 34, where he also says he looked about for university scholarships and settled on the Lightfoot.

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In 1931 Philip won the Lightfoot Scholarship. Z. N. Brooke had held it before him, and it would be natural to suppose that his influence lay behind Philip's interest in it; but there is another possibility, for there is one striking omission from his own list of his Cambridge mentors. The most prolific of his Cambridge correspondents (to judge from available evidence) was the kindly, eccentric, elderly Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History, J. P. Whitney (1857–1939): nine letters and cards from Whitney survive, ranging in date from 24 November 1930, early in Philip's second year as an undergraduate, to 13 May 1933. The first evidently related to reading for the Lightfoot Scholarship, and the Lightfoot question papers are in the archive, comprising (as always down to the 1970s) three papers on the whole of church history, a special subject and an essay. The special subject was 'The Church in the Frankish kingdom in the Eighth Century'. He was duly awarded the scholarship in May 1931. Whitney sent a card, saying Philip's success was 'not a surprise'. Z. N. Brooke also congratulated him, saying he only remembered one previous occasion when an undergraduate had won it; soon after, in congratulating him on his First in Part I of the Tripos, Brooke admitted that he had been 'a little anxious whether the Lightfoot had not taken too much of your time'.[14] After Part II, with a knowledge of the whole of church history behind him, and a detailed knowledege of the eighth-century Frankish church for immediate background, Philip embarked on postgraduate research under Previté-Orton's supervision, on the ninth-century Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims. Philip's own account is that he was attracted to the field by Helen Waddell's *Wandering Scholars*, 'a learned and beautifully written evocation of the lives of Irish and other scholars in Western Europe between the late Roman Empire and the thirteenth century. Some of the Irish scholars had frequented the Carolingian courts, especially that of Charles the Bald', and so another Irish scholar was inspired to study the career of Archbishop Hincmar (845–82). The remaining letters from Whitney—four, ranging from 30 October 1932 to 13 May 1933—all relate to Hincmar, sometimes giving advice, sometimes asking Philip for help.

'After some months' work, however, I realised that the project was premature, for a new edition of the archbishop's letters was in progress' and he would be duplicating work elsewhere. 'Amongst his correspondents,

[14] These letters and exam papers are in Gonville and Caius College Archives, Grierson files. In *The Caian* interview Philip recalled the Scholarship gave him £70 a year for three years; *The Times*, 11 May 1931, announcing the award, assessed it about £78 a year.

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however, was a certain Count Baldwin, who had eloped with a daughter of Charles the Bald and was to become the first count of Flanders'—and this seemed a promising field. It seems likely indeed that the shift from a primarily clerical to a primarily lay theme also reflected a shift in his own outlook and interests. And so he began to study 'the sources for the history of the Low Countries between the ninth and the twelfth centuries'.[15] He submitted fellowship dissertations on this theme, unsuccessfully in 1934, successfully in 1935. In the course of these years Philip was put in touch with the eminent Belgian historian François-Louis Ganshof of Ghent;[16] from this stemmed his long friendship with Ganshof and his family—and an association with Belgian scholars which lasted into his nineties.

Most of his early articles reflect two lines of interest: secular and ecclesiastical. Much of the material for the history of Flanders in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries was of its nature ecclesiastical: his first book was an edition of the annals of two major religious houses.[17] His articles[18] show Philip's delight in minute detective work, reconstructing the materials and infrastructure of Flemish and Frankish history. 'The translation of the relics of St Donatian to Bruges' is a *tour de force* of inference from tiny fragments of evidence and brilliant conjecture. His studies of the early abbots of St Peter's and St Bavo's Ghent reflect his love of lists and dates. In 'The early abbots of St Bavo's' he first laid out the fourteenth-century list of abbots, noting with relish of abbot after abbot: 'He is certainly a fictitious character'—then deploying a rather shorter, genuine list. He continued his list for St Peter's down to 941 in 'The translation of the relics of St Amalberga'.[19] Some of the materials he worked were more secular; and one can see emerging in two of the articles of 1938–9 his interest in other Carolingian lords beside the counts of Flanders. He devised a plan, frustrated by the war, to collaborate with

[15] From 'A numismatic career' (n. 1), pp. 7–8.

[16] From Z. N. Brooke's letters to Philip it seems clear that Ganshof had already commented on Philip's first submission in 1934; and since Brooke and Ganshof were friends it would be surprising if the former had not arranged for Philip to meet Ganshof at an earlier stage.

[17] *Les annales de Saint-Pierre de Gand et de Saint-Amand*, (Brussels, Commission royale de l'histoire de Belgique, 1937).

[18] 'The early abbots of St Peter's of Ghent', *Revue Bénédictine*, 48 (1936), 129–46; 'The early abbots of St Bavo's of Ghent' and 'The translation of the relics of St Donatian to Bruges', *Revue Bénédictine*, 49 (1937), 29–61 and 170–90.

[19] 'The translation of the relics of St Amalberga to St Peter's of Ghent', *Revue Bénédictine*, 51 (1939), 292–315. For what follows, see 'La maison d'Évrard de Frioul et les origines du comté de Flandre', *Revue du Nord*, 24 (1938), 241–66; 'L'origine des comtes d'Amiens, Valois et Vexin', *Le Moyen Age*, 49, 3rd Series, 10 (1939), 81–125.

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Jean Dhondt on a book on Flanders; and he clearly planned other work now represented in print by his studies of 'La maison d'Evrard de Frioul' and the counts of Amiens, Valois and Vexin. In the mid-1940s he encouraged his pupil Janet Sondheimer to work on the early Carolingian aristocracy, which issued in an excellent thesis, never published. But after the war Philip found that Dhondt was engaged in his major study of the Carolingian aristocracy, and so felt no longer inclined to pursue this line of study. This revelation approximately coincided with his debut as a coin collector in 1945.

His work on Flanders also inspired his major article on 'The relations between England and Flanders before the Norman conquest' (1941).[20] But he was meanwhile much involved in a far wider study of the political history of medieval Europe. Already in the late 1930s, as the original *Cambridge Medieval History*—edited latterly by Brooke and Previté-Orton—drew to a close, Brooke suggested to Philip 'the idea of compiling a supplementary volume of genealogical tables. So over a period of three years or so I did a good deal of work on the family relationships of the ruling dynasties of Europe in the Middle Ages'—work which was never published, presumably owing to wartime restrictions.[21] But the drafts he compiled 'familiarised me with the primary sources and much of the secondary literature on the political history of most of Europe in the Middle Ages. I have never consequently been at a loss over references to Peter the Ceremonious or Charles of Anjou . . .'—'information . . . which every numismatist needs to have at his fingertips'. From the mid-1940s on he was regularly engaged in giving a long course of lectures, not narrow in concept but with a strong political core, on the whole of medieval history. To the 1940s belong both his article on Germanic kingship (1941) and the start of his labours in editing Previté-Orton's *Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*—on which he embarked after Previté-Orton's death in 1947, and saw into print in 1952.[22] These labours help to explain a very striking feature of his numismatic studies: that he was equally at home in early and late medieval Europe, in Byzantium and the West. To this his formidable memory made a fundamental contribution. But even more conspicuous in his later work are two preoccupations: his love of dates and lists, of the foundations of historical science;

[20] *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, 23 (1941), 71–112.
[21] 'A numismatic career' (n. 1), pp. 9–10.
[22] 'Election and inheritance in early Germanic kingship', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 7 (1941), 1–22; C. W. Previté-Orton, *The Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. P. Grierson, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1952).

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and his zealous pursuit of the origins of money and coinage, and their social and economic function in the early Middle Ages.

His interest in Byzantium now appears most fruitful, no doubt, in his great Dumbarton Oaks catalogues; but it was also represented in his brilliant Spoleto lecture 'The Carolingian Empire in the eyes of Byzantium' (1979, published 1981), in which he suggested that the western empire worried observers in Byzantium a good deal less than Russia disturbed the western powers in the Cold War—and the lists of Belgian abbots were followed in 1962 by a fundamental tool for Byzantinists, 'The tombs and obits of the Byzantine emperors (337–1042)'.[23]

Philip's collection of coins and his published studies were mostly Continental; but his interest in the origins of coinage seems to have stemmed particularly from his studies of Anglo-Saxon England for the Ford Lectures in Oxford in 1957. The lectures were never published, but they played a key role in his Spoleto lecture of 1960 (published 1961), 'La fonction sociale de la monnaie en Angleterre aux VIIe–VIIIe siècles', in which he tackled the problem of how early medieval economies worked with little or no regular currencies.[24] His knowledge of English sources, and versatile use of them, also bore fruit in 'Sterling', in *English linear measures: an essay in origins* (Stenton Lecture 1971) and his article on the geld *de moneta* and *monetagium* in Domesday Book (1985).[25]

He had already extended his reading into anthropology and archaeology, and trailed his coat in his celebrated Royal Historical Lecture 'Commerce in the Dark Ages: a critique of the evidence' (1958, published 1959).[26] He carried these adventures still further in *The Origins of Money*, the Creighton Lecture in London for 1970 (published 1977), which extended his range of learning into the ancient Middle East. But the drift of all these studies is that in the early Middle Ages money and coins were

[23] *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 27 (1981), 885–918; 'The tombs and obits of the Byzantine emperors (337–1042)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 16 (1962), 1–60.

[24] *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 8 (1961), 341–85: see esp. p. 362 n. 46, where the relation to the Ford lectures is acknowledged. The typescripts of the lectures are now in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

[25] 'Sterling', in R. H. M. Dolley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins: Studies presented to F. M. Stenton on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday, 17 May 1960*, (London, 1961), pp. 266–83; *English Linear Measures: an Essay in Origins* (Stenton Lecture 1971, Reading, 1972); 'Domesday Book, the geld *de moneta* and *monetagium*: a forgotten minting reform', *British Numismatic Journal*, 55 (1985), 84–94.

[26] *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 9 (1959), 123–40 (several times reprinted, finally in 1979, in Grierson, *Dark Age Numismatics* (London, Variorum), ch. II).

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primarily for gift exchange or the payment of wergelds, with trade trailing far behind. He stimulated a lively debate, whose end is not yet.

I conclude with some examples of his range and virtuosity. In 'The Roman Law of Counterfeiting' (1956) he invaded the abstruse mysteries of Roman Law, with conspicuous success; he was to return there, in company with J. A. Crook and A. H. M. Jones, in 'The authenticity of the "Testamentum S. Remigii"' (1957) in which he overturned the doubts he had expressed the year before. In later years, from 1977 to 1987, he was Chairman of the British Academy's project on the Prosopography of the Later Roman World. In the Prothero Lecture for 1970 (published 1971), 'The monetary pattern of sixteenth-century coinage', he drew a picture of fundamental importance to the economic historian as well as the numismatist.[27] In 'The European heritage', his contribution to *Ancient Cosmologies*, edited by Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe (1975), he revealed, perhaps, something of his own world picture. He quoted Walter Lippmann, a distinguished American publicist[28] who 'wrote of revealed religion (as Philip observed) in terms as trenchant as they were disrespectful'. Lippmann concluded: 'The modern man does not take his religion as a real account of the constitution, the government, the history, and the actual destiny of the universe. With rare exceptions his ancestors did.' 'Whatever one may think of other aspects of this judgement', Philip observed, 'in the field of cosmology it is wholly true.' The essay which followed deployed wide learning and deep understanding. Although we may suspect that Philip had a good deal of sympathy for Lippmann's own point of view, it did not deter him from devoting exceptional talents and a very long life to adding immeasurably to our knowledge of many regions of medieval history, some far removed from money and coins. But coins were paramount.

[27] 'The Roman Law of Counterfeiting', in *Essays in Roman Coinage presented to Harold Mattingly*, ed. R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland (Oxford, 1956), pp. 240–61; A. H. M. Jones, P. Grierson and J. A. Crook, 'The authenticity of the "Testamentum S. Remigii"', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 35 (1957), 356–73; 'The monetary pattern of sixteenth-century coinage', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 21 (1971), 45–60.

[28] Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (London, 1929), pp. 68–9, quoted on p. 226 of P. Grierson, 'The European heritage' in C. Blacker and M. Loewe (eds.), *Ancient Cosmologies* (London, 1975), pp. 225–58.

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III. Philip Grierson as numismatist

What made Philip Grierson the foremost medieval numismatist of our time, or indeed perhaps of any time?

In personal terms he was someone well equipped by nature for a long and distinguished academic career. Daily walks to the Fitzwilliam or the University Library, squash into his eighties, and a robust constitution kept him in good health until near the end of his life, and contributed to his remarkable stamina and powers of concentration. As a scholar Philip's qualities were formidable: his intellect was of the first order, combining flair and intuition with keen critical qualities, an amazing memory, and a ravenous appetite for knowledge and ideas. He combined the enthusiasm and energy of a collector with the application and thoroughness of a scholar. His aptitude for languages gave him readier access than most enjoy to the fragmented literature of medieval coinage; and amongst other things he had a wide knowledge of science, metallurgy, engineering, metrology, mathematics and even statistics. His one significant weakness (to which he readily confessed) was to allow himself to be sidetracked into studying any interesting problem or detail that he came upon.

Grierson's work on the *Cambridge Medieval History*, culminating in his production of the *Shorter History* in 1952, brought him an encyclopaedic knowledge of the political structures of medieval Europe. This gave him a much broader historical background than most historians or numismatists can command. He was equally at home in the fifth century and the fifteenth, in western Europe or the Byzantine east. Indeed, Philip was something of a numismatic polymath, for unlike most western medievalists he not only understood the essentials of oriental coinage but also, having taken Ancient History as an option in his Tripos, he gained a good working knowledge of Greek and Roman coinage. Thus, when he wanted an example of mistaken historical attribution, he chose not a medieval coin but one from fourth-century Delphi; he was joint editor of an unfinished work by his late friend Otto Morkholm on *Early Hellenistic Coinage*; and he wrote a learned article on the Roman law of counterfeiting.

It was thus with the benefit of wide historical training that Philip, at the age of 34, suddenly became aware of medieval coins and their potential as a primary source for historians. In January 1945 he was rummaging through a box of miscellaneous coins accumulated by his late father, and happened to notice a copper coin that he could not identify. When he was advised that it was a Byzantine coin of the Emperor Phocas, his inter-

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est was aroused and he thought of acquiring a few more to show his history students. He explained to Spinks, the best known of the London dealers, that he was prepared to spend up to £5 to buy a few coins, but that he was not a collector and had no intention of becoming one. But there were latent collector genes in his make-up—his father had had a taste for scholarly collecting (focused first on freshwater snails, later on stamps) of the kind that involves the keeping of careful records and a systematic effort to study and understand the material involved.

The timing of Philip's entry into the coin collecting arena was, if not absolutely ideal, at least highly favourable. The largest private collection of the twentieth century, that formed by the fifth Lord Grantley, consisting of some 50,000 coins of most countries and periods, was sold by auction in 1943–5. Of the eleven sales involved, Philip only arrived in time for the last which had few coins to interest him. But missing the others was not too much of a setback, since most of Grantley's coins had been bought for stock by London dealers as there was no competition from abroad during the war. As a result the London dealers had hundreds of coins in stock at very low prices and Philip was able to amass a sizeable collection very rapidly—within two years he had 4,000 coins, and within five, 7,000. Baldwin had sold a number of good Grantley coins to their largest client, R. C. Lockett, but Philip obtained many of these in 1956 when Lockett's own collection came onto the market. Elsewhere in Europe the coin market was more difficult in the post-war years, with travel on the Continent restricted by circumstance, and payment across national borders hampered by exchange controls. But Philip began to travel as much as he could and soon got to know most of the serious Continental dealers, as well as curators, collectors and others of the European numismatic fraternity, whose activities had been seriously dislocated by the war.

Philip's reputation as an historian of Flanders led soon to an opening in Belgium which was to become one of the major overseas commitments of his career. In the interests of restoring academic links that had been ruptured by the war he was invited through the British Council to lecture in Brussels, Liège and Amsterdam in 1948. He chose to discuss the light that could be thrown on the decline of the Roman Empire and the transition to the Middle Ages by the changes in Roman coinage of the fourth and fifth centuries. Two of the professors in his audience called on him the next day to ask if he was willing to be a candidate for the recently vacant Chair of Numismatics and the History of Money at the Université Libre in Brussels. Philip accepted without hesitation, and was to hold the

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post until his retirement in 1981. It involved giving fifteen lectures a year, carried a modest stipend in local currency (which was a convenience in the era of exchange controls) and led to him spending about six weeks a year in Brussels, at times which fitted in conveniently with vacations in the annual Cambridge calendar. It gave him great pleasure over the years and, quite apart from the prestige associated with the appointment, 'not the least of its services to my career was that it compelled me to take up the study of numismatics seriously'.

Philip's inaugural lecture at Brussels had an unexpected consequence. In 1951 an English version of it was published by the Historical Association under the title *Numismatics and History*. The President of the American Numismatic Society was moved by the plea it contained for more regular teaching in the subject. From this developed a plan for the Society to hold an annual summer seminar for up to a dozen selected students from American universities, to whom some visiting scholars would be asked to lecture. In its second year, 1953, Philip was invited to visit the Society for six months during which time at the suggestion of Alfred Bellinger, Professor of Classics at Yale, he went to Washington to see the coins at Dumbarton Oaks, an institution established for the furtherance of Byzantine and other studies which had recently acquired an important private collection. By this date Grierson had already made his mark as a Byzantine numismatist, largely as a result of three substantial articles on seventh-century coins that had appeared in the *Numismatic Chronicle* for 1950 and 1951, and which Madame Morrisson has described as models of clarity and logic. Bellinger and Grierson were asked to advise on how to make the best scholarly use of the coins at Dumbarton Oaks. The upshot of this was an invitation to Grierson to become honorary Adviser in Byzantine Numismatics, with a view to making the Dumbarton Oaks collection of Byzantine coins the best in the world, and then with Bellinger to publish it. Grierson set about the task of building the collection with enthusiasm. It enabled him to visit dealers and auctions all over Europe, and he greatly enjoyed 'the fun of collecting at other people's expense'. He had himself formed a collection of Byzantine coins, but in order to avoid a conflict of interest he ceased to collect the Byzantine series upon appointment and sold most of his coins to Dumbarton Oaks at an independent valuation.

For more than forty years Grierson was to spend about two months each summer at Dumbarton Oaks working on the catalogues. The first volume, on the sixth century, published in 1966, was by Bellinger alone, and consisted of a meticulous catalogue on traditional lines, without an

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introductory survey. Grierson, who was responsible for the massive volumes II (1968), III (1973) and V (1999), wanted his to provide the basis for a critical re-examination of the whole sequence of Byzantine coinage. His three volumes therefore included comprehensive introductions, as did volume IV (1999) by Michael Hendy, who had become involved with the project after Bellinger's death in 1978. At one time Grierson contemplated writing an introduction to Bellinger's first volume of the catalogue, but much new work on the sixth century by other scholars was being published or in preparation and he decided to concentrate on other priorities. These included a joint volume with Dr Melinda Mays, which appeared in 1992, on the fine collection of fifth-century Roman coins at Dumbarton Oaks, thus providing an overture to the volumes on the Byzantine series itself. Grierson felt that his Dumbarton Oaks prefaces, though large in scale, were 'not all that distinguished in content', but other scholars have taken a more favourable view of them. Alongside the Dumbarton Oaks volumes Grierson was, intermittently, also writing a general survey which was published in 1982 as *Byzantine Coins*, a book that contains the best available account of Byzantine coinage as a whole and is especially good on the seventh to eleventh centuries as a result of his work on the Dumbarton Oaks catalogues of that period.

After disposing of his Byzantine coins Grierson concentrated his collecting on the coins of Western Christendom from the fall of the Roman Empire to the end of the fifteenth century. The collection had initially arisen out of his own teaching interests, which were limited to the Continent. In deciding to exclude the coinages of the British Isles, he felt there were others capable of dealing with them; but also he had as early as 1949 conceived the idea of putting together a collection that would complement the Fitzwilliam Museum's, and there was already a good collection of British coins in the Museum. Although he set out initially to acquire a representative collection of Islamic coins from the more westerly provinces, these never exceeded some five hundred pieces, and from the early 1950s he made few additions—apart from coins of Norman Sicily with Arabic inscriptions and comparable issues of Italy, Spain and the Crusaders. As his European collection grew he gradually developed the idea of using it as the basis of a work of reference, as no book along those lines had been attempted since a three volume work published by Engel and Serrure in 1891–1905. His aim, since the 1950s, had therefore been to put together as representative a collection as possible of types, denominations and mints, and this objective was magnificently fulfilled over the next fifty years. Although he inherited some family money in

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1970, his coins were essentially paid for out of his own earnings or pension. By the early 1990s the collection contained some 16,000 to 17,000 coins, but he continued to acquire more specimens at a rate of perhaps two or three hundred a year, and on his death they numbered in all around 20,000 pieces. He had recently estimated that they had a market value of £5–10 million. This figure could however be an underestimate, since the prices of good coins have risen strongly in the last few years and his collection contains many rarities that are no longer obtainable. Although his series of each country is surpassed by the holdings of its own national museum, Grierson was able to claim that he had the second or third best collection of almost every European country. This means therefore that overall his coins constitute by far the best and most balanced general collection of medieval European coinage anywhere. In the 1970s he made it clear that he intended to bequeath his collection to the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the provision of additional space in the Coin Department enabled him in 1979 to transfer his coins, hitherto insecurely housed in his college rooms, to the new 'Grierson Room', on loan to the Museum during his lifetime.

In 1955 Philip had been invited by the newly established British Academy Committee for the Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles to be the author of what was to become the first volume in its new series of catalogues of the major public collections. With only minor refinements, his volume on the Fitzwilliam collection (up to the Conquest) has served as a starting point and model for all subsequent authors in a project that has now reached its sixtieth volume. Although the coinages of the British Isles were not directly within Grierson's purview, he nevertheless made some typically incisive contributions in this field. These range in date from the sixth-century find of coin ornaments at St Martin's in Canterbury to the symbolism of the closed crown on the gold sovereigns of Henry VII, and include a reconstruction of the 1902 find of late ninth-century coins from Stamford in the Danelaw, and a penetrating analysis of references in Domesday Book to the geld *de moneta*. He was also struck by the fact that the only two material finds of gold coins in England from the seventh century each consisted of a round number—forty in the ship burial at Sutton Hoo and one hundred from Crondall Heath in Surrey. Grierson's suggestions that the former might have represented a sort of 'grandiose Charon's obol' for each of the forty rowers, and the latter a sum equivalent to the wergild of a Kentish ceorl have not found universal acceptance. But no one has proposed another explanation for the round numbers and Grierson had a better understanding than

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most that the functions of coinage in emerging societies were not entirely monetary in the ordinary sense. The theme of his 1956–7 Ford Lectures in Oxford was *Coinage and Society in Early Anglo-Saxon England*; he also wrote on the commercial and social functions of money in the Dark Ages more generally; and his interest in anthropology led him in 1970 to choose *The Origins of Money* as the subject of his Creighton Lecture in the University of London. He was the first scholar with a broad enough view to be able to look at coinage of different regions on a wide canvas, seeking to explain the movement of bullion between the Islamic, Byzantine and Western spheres in terms of metrology and gold : silver ratios, or identifying the impact, from the late fifteenth century, of African gold, of silver from the new Germanic mining areas, and of more from the New World, on the structure as well as on the volume of European coinage. Yet Grierson's wider perspectives did not preclude him from attending to the more technical areas of numismatics when he felt they could yield valuable information. Thus, for example, he compiled a corpus by dies in his study of the gold *solidi* of Louis the Pious, and analysis of die-cutting styles and features often underlies his identification of the products of different mints in the Byzantine series.

By the 1960s Grierson was beginning to think more specifically about the possible format for publication of his collection, but for many years he was too much immersed in the Dumbarton Oaks project to launch himself into a multi-volume work on western coinage. He did however produce a general survey entitled *Monnaies du Moyen Age* in 1976 which, with some additions and adjustments, was reproduced in English as *The Coins of Medieval Europe* in 1991. Western medieval coinage is extremely complex, because most of what are now modern countries had not yet developed into unitary states, and coinage rights had anyway often been ceded by rulers to ecclesiastical or other authorities, so that the number of different issuers was legion. Grierson's account of this complicated picture, which treats the subject from many angles—political, economic, cultural—is a brilliant synthesis and is written with magisterial authority. Great collectors are not often also great scholars, but Grierson regarded himself as fortunate to have gained much of his detailed knowledge of medieval coinage from his activities as a collector. He enjoyed the process of collecting, and was excited by the successful pursuit of rare items that he needed. In 1964 he bought a unique portrait denier of Charlemagne for £1,060, an acquisition that gave him a mixture of acute pleasure and a sense of guilt for what he saw as such an extravagance (it would now be worth tens of thousands).

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In the early 1980s, after years of encouragement from Ian Stewart and other friends, the long-contemplated plan to publish the collection ('something to do in my retirement') at last began to become a reality. Philip was not a natural project manager, but steered by others, in particular by Christopher Brooke, in 1982 he put a proposal to the British Academy which led to its adoption as an Academy Research project. Cambridge University Press agreed to undertake the publication of *Medieval European Coinage (MEC)* in fourteen volumes, and funding was secured from the Leverhulme Trust to employ Mark Blackburn, a specialist in Anglo-Saxon coinage, as a research associate for the first three years. In 1985 conditions were favourable to secure the joint support of the Academy and of Gonville and Caius College, an arrangement that happily continued for eighteen years, the Academy's share of the funding latterly being assumed by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (later Council). The first volume, a collaborative effort of Grierson and Blackburn, appeared at the end of 1986; it covers the whole of Europe from the fifth to the mid-tenth century, but subsequent volumes were to be arranged on a regional basis. Next, therefore, they started work on the Low Countries, the region to which Grierson had devoted his early career, but its coinage, like that of the rest of the greater German Empire, is very complex; with more than a hundred authorities having issued coins, the scale of the work grew and progress was slow. On Blackburn's appointment as Keeper of Coins and Medals at the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1991, he was replaced on the *MEC* project by Dr Lucia Travaini, a specialist in the coinage of Norman Italy. Grierson had also published extensively in this field, and together they turned to the preparation of the volume for Southern Italy, which was duly published in 1998.

By 1996, with Grierson now in his mid-eighties, it had become apparent that the original concept by which he would be the principal author of all fourteen volumes was unsustainable, and he agreed to a new strategy of commissioning leading authorities in the various series to prepare appropriate volumes, supported by additional research staff based in Cambridge under his guidance. By 2000 seven new volumes had been commissioned with foreign experts, assisted by three research associates employed in the Fitzwilliam. Grierson himself returned to working on the Low Countries, while still aiming to make significant contributions to the other volumes underway. On his death he left more than a thousand pages of typescript for two substantial volumes on the Low Countries, with two volumes by other authors on the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Italy close to completion, and five more in preparation. The project will con-

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tinue under the direction of Dr Blackburn, and there is every hope that most of it can be completed by the present generation of scholars. As is not unusual with ventures of this kind, the amount of work needed to produce a thorough and balanced survey of medieval coinage has proved much greater than anticipated. But this is understandable since the volumes are designed to serve as authoritative reference books for historians as well as numismatists, and nothing of this breadth and depth has ever previously been attempted.

Grierson saw it as the primary objective of the medieval numismatist to establish where, when and under whose authority the coins had been struck. With the multitude of issuers, and prevalence of imitation, this is often not a simple task. When Grierson came to the subject he discovered that relatively few professional historians in the medieval field had bothered with coins and that for the early Middle Ages they were still a largely unexploited form of evidence. Conversely, numismatists often seemed to work in a world of their own, with insufficient understanding of the general historical context. Grierson described his own approach to this situation as one of benevolent scepticism. In his first President's Address to the Royal Numismatic Society in 1962 he remarked that 'the enquiries into the validity of accepted conclusions should often be directed not at the conclusions themselves but at the means by which they were obtained'. This led him to develop a keen interest in numismatic methodology—the interpretation of the types and inscriptions of coins, the assessment of documentary evidence, the operation of mints, dies and die-output, the weights and fabric of coins and their methods of production, the analysis of hoards, the behaviour of coins in currency, and so on. In 1975 all of these topics were covered in the very concise but perceptive exposition of numismatic method in his little book entitled *Numismatics* which, despite its small scale, also incidentally includes the best general account of oriental coinage in the English language.

It was no accident that the title of the festschrift presented to Philip in 1983 was *Studies in Numismatic Method*. Topics covered in his Presidential addresses had included weight and coinage, coin wear and finds, and his own gradually developing thoughts on these and other questions may be found in many of his subsequent articles. In the 1960s and 1970s he was planning a general book on the techniques of medieval numismatics with Ian Stewart, and drafts of several chapters were written; but time and opportunity for completing this, in the face of competing priorities, did not prove to be available. Much of the material did however find its way into print in other forms. Grierson was particularly

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interested in the weights, values and contemporary names of coins; in their fineness and metallic composition; and in volumes of mint output and ways of estimating them that involved counting the dies used (an area in which his familiarity with Greek numismatics was useful). He was of course only one of many scholars working in these areas but one of the reasons why his influence was so great was the breadth of his knowledge of coinages of other times and places. This universal view was reflected in the *Numismatic Bibliography* which he compiled for the Historical Association as early as 1954; twenty-five years later a successor edition in French was more than four times its size, reflecting the huge expansion in numismatic activity in the intervening period. This growth was accompanied by great improvements in understanding between historians and numismatists, to which Grierson made a pre-eminent contribution. Quite apart from all his other writings, to have played the major role in the Dumbarton Oaks work on Byzantine coinage, to have planned and launched the first comprehensive account of western medieval coinages, and to have created the collections on which each of these is built, constitute a phenomenal and unique achievement.

PARTS I AND II CHRISTOPHER BROOKE
Fellow of the Academy

PART III LORD STEWARTBY
Fellow of the Academy

Note. The chief source has been personal knowledge. In Parts I and II C.B. gratefully acknowledges the kind help of friends, Ian, Lord Stewartby, Peter Spufford, Neil McKendrick, Lucia Travaini, and most of all Mark Blackburn. For Philip Grierson's early career his reminiscences, 'A numismatic career' recorded in Helsinki in December 1987 by Knud Wallenstierna and Panu Saukkonen, re-edited as 'A numismatic career', *Spink's Numismatic Circular*, 99 (1991), 223–4, 259–60, 291–2, 334–6, and 100 (1992), 3–4, 43, and Edward Timms, 'An interview with Professor Philip Grierson', *The Caian* 1977–8, pp. 33–55, have been especially useful (though occasionally needing minor correction from other sources). A perceptive appreciation is L. Travaini, 'Philip Grierson, storico della moneta, economica monetaria, barbe russe e origini della moneta', *Rivista di Storia Economica*, 22 (2006), 267–79. Philip's personal papers have been divided between the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Gonville and Caius College Archives—including more than 300 pages of biographical notes, mostly compiled in the 1990s. Details of his college and university career have been checked by the Gonville and Caius College Archives, by the *Biographical History of Gonville and Caius College*, VIII (ed. J. Whaley and C. N. L. Brooke, Cambridge, 1998), pp. 53–4, and the *Cambridge University Reporter*. I am very grateful to

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C. B.

Supplementary Bibliography

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BNJ	*British Numismatic Journal*
BSFN	*Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique*
CISAM	*Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, Spoleto
NC	*Numismatic Chronicle*
RIN	*Rivista italiana di numismatica*

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