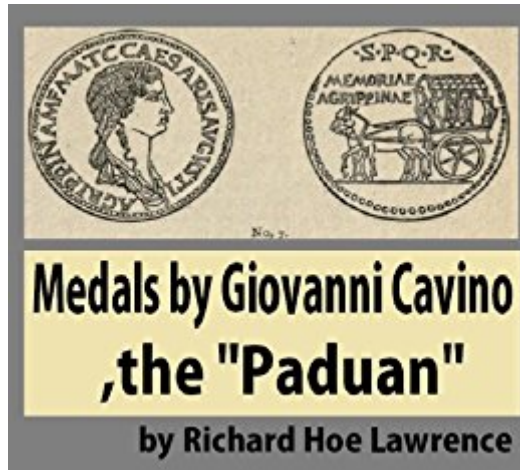




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Medals By Giovanni Cavino, The "Paduan"



Synopsis

GIOVANNI CAVINO. Giovanni Cavino, an Italian medallist, contemporary with Benvenuto Cellini, was born at Padua in 1499 or 1500. We know almost nothing of his life. It is probable that his medals were all executed in Padua, where he resided until his death in 1570. He was buried in the church of S. Giovanni di Verdara, and for a long time the stone bound by an iron ring, which he used in coining, was preserved in that church. He left a son, Vincenzo, who seems to have aided him during the last years of his life, and who probably continued to use his dies after his death. Cavino's medals are very numerous. Many of them bear portraits of distinguished jurists of Padua and of professors at the University. But his best known and most numerous works are his imitations of Roman large-brass coins and medallions which are known as "Paduans."¹ The imitation of Roman art seems from an early period to have been traditional at Padua, which contained one of the greatest universities of Europe. The earliest Italian medals were struck in that city and are quite classical in style. In the case of Cavino, this close adherence to the style of his Roman models is very marked and it prevented him from equalling the best medallists of his period as an artist in portrait medals. At the same time it enabled him to produce very perfect copies of Roman coins. In this last work he was assisted by his friend, Alessandro Bassiano, a scholar and antiquarian of Padua, of whom little is known, except that he left in manuscript the 'lives of the twelve Caesars. We learn of their association from a medal struck about 1540 to commemorate the event (No. 79). One hundred and twenty-two of Cavino's dies have been preserved and are at present in the Bibliotheque Nationale at Paris. They were brought from Italy in the seventeenth century by Th. Lecomte, who obtained them from the Lazzara family of Padua, and who bequeathed them to the Abbey of Sainte Genevieve in 1670. They are described and illustrated by Claude du Molinet in his work, entitled : *Le Cabinet de la Bibliotheque de Sainte Genevieve*. Paris, 1692, f. 11. Cavino's imitative medals were not originally designed as forgeries, and it was against his wishes that they were passed off as genuine antiques. But as such many of them found their way into the most celebrated collections of Europe and were the subjects of numerous dissertations. Even during the present century several of them were regarded as antique by such numismatists as Mionnet and Barthélemy. The greater number of the coins usually termed "Paduans" are cast from moulds and are of little value and easily detected ; but the pieces struck from Cavino's dies possess much artistic merit and are often not readily distinguishable from ancient coins. There are, however, several general points of difference which become apparent after careful comparison with the genuine coins. The "Paduan" is usually too round and regular, and the flan is too thin ; the dots of the border or engrailment are large and in irregular relief; the letters are flat and square, especially N

; M is broad at the base and narrow at the top ; H and D are square and heavy, and A and V are too narrow and sharp. The coins struck by Cavino himself (the dies were used after his death) are usually composed of red and yellow copper, poorly alloyed. Several of Cavino's medals are found in silver ; but most of the examples in this metal have been melted down in later times, consequently but few of them have been preserved. All of Cavino's medals are rare, imitative pieces as well as portrait medals, and all are worthy of preservation as the work of an Italian medallist of the sixteenth century.

Book Information

File Size: 500 KB

Print Length: 44 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publication Date: April 19, 2012

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B007VU29W4

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #3,206,074 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #96

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