



Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power

S. Solway

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Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power showcases these objects as intrinsic and highly significant aspects of medieval visual culture, and contributes to an understanding of the many ways in which they functioned as conveyors of meaning in Western European, Islamic, and Byzantine cultures from the fifth to the fifteenth century. The essays presented here, by art historians, numismatists, sigillographers, and historians on a wide variety of coins and seals, afford fresh insight into these tantalizing relics of medieval art and the vibrant cultural roles they played at the time of their creation. Through their images and inscriptions, they conveyed complex cultural attitudes by means of sophisticated visual strategies carefully constructed to further the subjective agendas of rulers and - in the case of seals - of aristocrats, ordinary individuals, towns, corporations, and government officials. The messages conveyed by these tightly controlled objects were, above all, ones of authority, identity, and legitimacy, with goals or subtexts that included the politics of self- presentation; the construction of personal, civic, national and cultural identity; the advertisement of dynastic succession; and much more. As forceful modes of visual discourse designed to carry calculated, at times propagandistic, communications to broadly dispersed audiences, coins and seals actively served during these centuries as sociocultural agents that helped mold public opinion (as they had in antiquity), and thereby shaped the medieval world.

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