

# Christina, Queen of Sweden

by Peter E. Lewis



Queen Christina (detail of a riksdaler)

**C**HRISTINA was an amazing woman. She was born in 1626 and was the queen of Sweden from 1632 to 1654. Coin collectors are fortunate because a lot of coins and medals were issued during her lifetime.

Before the reign of Gustav Vasa (1523-1560) Sweden was ruled by the king of Denmark as part of the Kalmar Union, which consisted of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The Kalmar Union was dissolved in 1523, and under Gustav Vasa and his descendants Sweden became a great power. Gustav Vasa promoted the ideas of Martin Luther, and as the Reformation took hold, the Lutheran

Swedish Church separated from the Roman Catholic Church. All the properties of the Roman Catholic Church were confiscated, which added greatly to the kingdom's wealth. Today the state Church is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden, and about 90 percent of the population belong to it although in recent years a large number of Muslims have migrated to Sweden.

Gustav Vasa's son Eric (1560-1568) promoted trade by gaining control of the Baltic Sea ports. Sweden was rich in iron, copper and grain, and in 1561 the Swedes negotiated with the nobles in Estonia so that their region would be

under Swedish control. Thus the foundation was laid for the Swedish Empire. (**Figure 1 – map**)

Gustav Adolf (**Figure 2**) became king in 1611. In 1630 he intervened in the Thirty Years War in Europe by landing with his Swedish army in northern Germany. He advanced southward taking Frankfurt, Munich and other major cities, but in 1632 he was killed in a fierce battle that was actually a victory for Sweden. By the Peace of Westphalia at the end of the war in 1648 Sweden gained most of Pomerania in northern Germany as well as other coastal territories. (See map) Gustav's only child was Christina (**Figure 3**) who was five years old when he died.

Until Christina was 18 years old the country was ruled by a regency of five noblemen, the chief of whom was the chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna (**Figure 4**).



Figure 1 – Map of the Swedish Empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 2 – Silver medal issued in 1632 by Christina to honour her father, Gustav Adolf. On the reverse the Hebrew letters at the top of the inner circle stand for 'Jehovah'. (Dr Busso Peus Nachfolger Auction 409, Lot 1515)



He had been the chancellor since 1612. He was a capable and wise administrator and Sweden prospered under his control. In 1644 Christina assumed power as queen of Sweden. She had a defiant, cheeky streak in her nature, and she often did not accept the chancellor's advice. She was what Australians would call a larrikin. Perceptive viewers of her

portrait in Figure 3 can see it in her expression. Although clever she was wilful, extravagant and irresponsible with money, and Sweden's economy suffered during her reign.

From 1633 to 1653 silver riksdalers (state dollars) were issued with Christina's portrait on the obverse and Jesus

*Continued overleaf*



Figure 3 – Portrait of Christina aged 26 by Sébastien Bourdon. (Wikimedia Commons. The painting is in the National Museum of Sweden)



Figure 4 – Axel Oxenstierna on a white-metal medallion made in 1634. Diameter 42 mms. On the reverse the woman holding a mirror represents Prudence. (Fritz Rudolf Künker Auction 325, Lot 8141)



Figure 5 – Riksdaler minted at Stockholm in 1647. Diameter 42 mms. (Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XIV, Lot 1447)





Figure 6 – Christina in profile on a 2-mark coin minted in 1650.

There is a coat of arms on the reverse. (Stephen Album Rare Coins, Auction 29, Lot 945)

shown like a caricature with abnormally large eyes. She did have large blue eyes but she was in fact rather ugly. A more realistic image appears on the obverse of a 2-mark coin minted in 1650, and it shows her with a large nose, high forehead, and small chin. (Figure 6) She looked mannish and was probably a Lesbian. Veronica Buckley in her excellent biography, *Christina, Queen of Sweden*,



Figure 7 – Head of Christ.  
(Detail of the reverse of a riksdaler)

Christ standing on the reverse. (Figure 5) The Latin legend on the reverse means “Saviour of the world, save us.” This reverse had appeared on Swedish dalers since 1540 and reflected the devout Lutheran faith of Christina’s ancestors. The image of Christ seems strange with his garments arranged to expose his abdomen and lower chest, but close in-

spection of a high-grade example shows a wound in his side as well as nail holes in his hands and feet. In the Gospel of John there is a verse (John 19:34) stating that one of the soldiers present at Jesus’ crucifixion “pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.”

On these coins Christina appears in a variety of poses, and the small head is

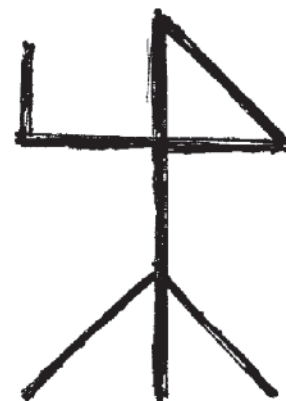


Figure 9 – Merchant mark  
on the coin in Figure 8.



Figure 8 – Riksdaler minted at Stockholm in 1646 with a merchant mark on the obverse. (Collection of St John’s Cathedral)





wrote, “She walked like a man, sat and rode like a man, and could eat and swear like the roughest soldier.” On the riksdalers Christina’s face is not the only unusual one because Christ looks as if he is a character in a horror movie. **(Figure 7)**

According to Veronica Buckley, when Christina was told by deputies from the Riksdag (parliament) that she should

marry she replied, "It is impossible for me to marry. I am absolutely certain about it. I do not intend to give you reasons. My character is simply not suited to marriage. I have prayed God fervently that my inclination might change, but I simply cannot marry." Although different in this way she took a positive attitude to life and is to be admired for her strength of character.

In the collection of St John's Cathedral in Brisbane there is a riksdaler with a symbol cut into the left field on the obverse. (**Figures 8 and 9**) As this mark had not previously been seen on one of these coins, the Swedish Numismatic Society was consulted. The secretary, Monica Golabiewski Lannby, kindly explained that although this particular mark had not been seen before it be-



longed to the group of Merchant Marks also known as identity marks, personal marks or ownership marks. She pointed out that Tuve Skånberg had written a doctoral thesis (published in 2003) about these marks. In the English summary of his paper he said that “this doctoral thesis has by statistical evaluation proved that these marks are by no means coin-

cidental, but are variations of about 80 types, being identified as medieval Christian symbols. The most common symbol is the cross and variations of the cross, making up more than half of the reference material.”

It is ironic that Christina should appear on a coin with Jesus Christ on the reverse because she was not at all

religious. She paid lip-service to religion but her heart was not in it. She was self-centred and incapable of love in the Christian sense of self-giving concern for others. According to Veronica Buckley she declared later in her life that all of Christianity was “no more than a trick played by the powerful to keep the humble people down.”

Christina’s kingdom included western Pomerania and on the reverse of the daler minted there a coat of arms is shown between two figures. (Figure 10) The figures are in flamboyant costumes. They look as if they should be in the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras, in which Christina no doubt would have delighted, but they had appeared previously on coins of northern Germany. They related to a legendary character known as the ‘wild man’ who lived in the forests in northern Germany. (Figure 11)

During her reign large copper coins worth 1 öre were minted as they had been by her father (Figure 12) but in 1644 Christina did something completely new. Because Sweden had plenty of copper but little silver she issued large square or rectangular copper coins known as Plate Money. The denominations ranged from 1 to 10 daler. They were not token coins because they were worth their weight in copper. Although heavy and cumbersome they circulated in Sweden



Figure 13 – A 10-daler coin. The central stamp is the denomination: X DALER Solff:Mnt (10 dollars silver money). The corner stamps have C above a crown which is between R and S (for Regina Svecie = Queen of Sweden). Below the crown is the date 1644. (Photocopy of Figure 127 in ‘Catalogue of Scandinavian Coins’ by Burton Hobson)



Figure 14 – Silver medallion issued to celebrate the Swedish naval victory in 1644. On the obverse Christina receives the homage of the people as Christina Triumphis. Diameter 82 mms. (Fritz Rudolph Künker, Auction 206, Lot 3300)



Figure 16 – Silver medallion by Jean Parise showing Christina putting the crown on Karl X Gustav. Diameter 42 mms. (Baldwin’s Auction 51, Lot 1588)



Figure 15 – Largesse money for the coronation of Karl X Gustav. The coin was worth 2 marks. See ‘Medallic Issues’ on page 1155 of the Standard Catalogue of World Coins (for the 17<sup>th</sup> century) by Krause and Mishler. (Myntkompaniet/ AB Philea, Coin Auction 10, Lot 29)





figure 17 – Pope Alexander VII on a bronze medal of 1664. Diameter 42 mms. On the reverse he is being carried in the Corpus Christi Procession. Protestants did not agree with the Catholic teaching that the bread and wine actually changed into the body and blood of Christ (Transubstantiation). (Baldwin's Auction 66, Lot 1136)

for more than a century. There was a round stamp in the centre and stamps in the four corners. The largest (**Figure 13**) was 14 by 24 inches and weighed 20 kilograms. It was the largest metal coin ever made until 2011 when the Perth Mint produced a gold coin 80 cms wide and weighing one tonne.

In 1644, the year that Christina took power as Queen, there was a great naval battle near the island of Fehmarn in the Baltic Sea. Known as the Battle of Fehmarn it was a decisive victory for the Swedes over the Danes, and Sweden

became dominant in the region. As the queen, Christina basked in the glory of it all, and a very large silver medallion was struck in celebration. (**Figure 14**)

In 1654 Christina shocked the world by abdicating in favour of her cousin, who became King Karl X Gustav (1654-1660). It was a drastic thing for her to do, but Christina had decided that she could no longer live in the austere environment of Sweden with its long cold winters. Special silver coins were minted to be thrown to the people at the coronation (**Figure 15**) and the legend, CAROLVS

GUSTAVUS REX A DEO ET CHRISTINA, means 'Karl Gustav King by God and Christina.' Large silver medallions were issued showing Christina putting the crown on her cousin. (**Figure 16**)

Christina further shocked the world by announcing that she would convert to Roman Catholicism and live in Rome. The pope, Alexander VII (**Figure 17**), was delighted. According to Veronica Buckley, "She was enraptured by the thought of Rome, the thought of living there in the warmth, among the paintings and the beautiful squares and *palazzi*. Stockholm was nothing by comparison; it was boring, and sterile, and there was no new thinking, no vibrancy, no life."

Christina with a large entourage travelled to Rome via Paris, and a bronze medal minted in 1656 shows her arriving in Paris. She rides side-saddle on a large horse with the Duke of Guise on a horse behind her. Magistrates walk before her into the city. (**Figure 18**) Another bronze medal shows her entering Rome through the Porta Flaminia. (**Figure 19**) She lived in a palace in Rome for most of the rest of her life. A portrait of her in 1667 when she was 40 (**Figure 20**) still shows a far from feminine image. When she died in 1689 her body was entombed in St Peter's Basilica. According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*

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Figure 18 – Bronze medal made by Mauger in 1656 showing Christina arriving in Paris. Diameter 41 mms. Louis XIV is on the obverse. (International Coin Exchange LDT, Auction 3, Lot 2515)

‘Christina is best remembered for her lavish sponsorship of the arts and her influence on European culture.’

On a visit to France in 1657 she stayed at the chateaux of Fontainebleau near Paris, and it was there that an event occurred that caused people to turn away from her. She ordered that one of her

courtiers, the Marchese Monaldeschi, be killed because of treachery. The execution took place in the chateaux and when the gruesome details were revealed Christina was perceived to be a proud pitiless woman. Even Veronica Buckley, her biographer writing in 2004, turned away. She said, “When she had the Marchese

Monaldeschi killed I really thought I couldn’t go any further with her. But you have to look at what’s behind it all, imagine yourself into her perspective, and then of course things become very different.” Veronica went on to say, “I watched her change from an infuriating teenager to a dangerous loose cannon, and finally to a whimsical if impossible old aunt, and I have to admit I grew fond of her in spite of everything.” The present writer is not so sympathetic. Christina belongs in a world that is foreign to us today, a world where society revolved around kings and queens while most of the people lived in poverty. The coins and medals give us a tangible connection to that strange world.

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Figure 19 – Bronze medal by Gaspare Morone Mola showing Christina arriving in Rome in 1656. Diameter 36 mms. Pope Alexander VII is on the obverse. (Spink Auction 17006, Lot 509)



Figure 20 – Portrait of Christina in 1667 when she was 40. It is attributed to Wolfgang Heimbach. (Wikimedia Commons)

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