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The 'World of Money' CD-ROM

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THE 'WORLD OF MONEY' CD ROM

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Museums are increasingly interested in broadening their popular appeal while at the same time maintaining high standards of collection management and academic research. The desire to popularise presents particular problems in the case of numismatics and other areas dealing with small objects or specialised interests.

A broader appeal can in part be achieved by changing the style of presentation of exhibitions to reflect social and historical contexts rather than simply displaying rows of more or less similar objects. Both the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum and the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm have adopted this approach in their new displays, with an emphasis on the history of money in place of traditional coin galleries. A further means of broadening appeal is to explore new methods of display, and here computers come to the fore. On-site computer access systems are becoming more widely used in museums, and increasingly museums are reaching out through computers to an audience that never comes to the museums themselves. If the public don't come to the museum, the museum must go to the public, and both websites and collections-based CD ROMs are becoming commonplace.

The CD ROM is a medium particularly suitable for object-based displays. The facility exists to combine high quality

digital images with powerful and flexible databases, while moving images and sound provide an accessible interface for a generation brought up with computer and video games as standard forms of entertainment. The medium is especially suited to the display of coins and banknotes, since the problem common to most other objects of providing adequate 3D imagery is rarely relevant. A number of museums are now beginning to take advantage of the CD ROM format to display their numismatic or para-numismatic collections, although the style of presentation varies considerably.

One approach is to take a very defined topic, and present a limited number of objects with very detailed images, plus accompanying text. If the total number of images is low, there is the capacity to produce extremely high-resolution blown-up images for every object on the CD. A number of such CDs have now appeared, or are currently in the process of development, which take this approach. These vary between a catalogue style presentation and those which view each image in a thematic or historical context.

Another approach, and the one adopted by the British Museum's 'World of Money' CD ROM, is to attempt a more comprehensive coverage, with large numbers of images covering a range of periods and cultures. Such an approach is not without its problems. The

capacity of a CD ROM is finite, and a balance has to be found between the optimal number of images and a company of coins, notes and other forms of money from all over the world, from the earliest recorded use of money to the present day. It is simply not possible to have so many images at the highest resolution that digital technology permits. Nevertheless, every image will be available at a considerably enlarged size, generally with obverse and reverse shown together.

The choice to go for a broad range of material at high resolution rather than a much more limited range of material at the highest possible resolution stems from the motivation behind the publication of the 'World of Money.' The CD is only one part of a larger project, sponsored by HSBC Holdings plc, to present the subject of money to the public in an accessible and comprehensible manner. The new HSBC Money Gallery at the British Museum displays monetary objects physically, through a combination of chronological development and thematic interpretation. Two books, *Money: a History* for adults, and *The Story of Money* for children also make the material available, and a Teacher's Pack has been produced to help schools make the most of the educational opportunities available through the gallery and the books.

The 'World of Money' is partly intended to complement the gallery and the books. For school groups or individuals who have visited the gallery, it makes large quantities of material available in a flexible format, rather than the linear

presentation of gallery or book. The CD contains several activities, and an automatic link to a dedicated website at the British Museum provides access to a constantly developing programme of events and information. However, the 'World of Money' will also bring the subject of money to a public which for any number of reasons cannot or will not visit the museum, or read the books. Unfortunately, many people (especially children) no longer view reading as an entertaining way of spending leisure time, and not everyone can easily visit the British Museum.

The 'World of Money' is aimed at an audience of 10-11 years old and upwards. It is likely that a large part of the market will be educational, and the topics covered in the CD are relevant to a number of school subjects: art, design, religious studies and technology as well as the more obvious history, geography and economics. A number of features have been included on the CD with educational requirements particularly in mind. These include the facility to print text and images (at a low resolution, and accompanied by a copyright notice) for use in school assignments; galleries of related images for key areas of the British school curriculum (e.g., the Roman empire, or the Anglo-Saxons); and a book-marking function which allows the user to return quickly and conveniently to any selected point in the program.

The main interface for the program is the foyer of a 'virtual museum'. This interactive space provides

access to the three main sections of the program (all housed in different parts of the 'museum'), as well as an options menu and a help function, both of which are accessible throughout the program. The three main sections are: a history of money, covering as far as possible all periods and all geographical areas; a series of five thematic approaches to money; and a set of five games/activities.

The historical section contains nearly 300 topics, from the earliest recorded payments in grain and precious metals to the development of 'smart cards' and banking on the internet. Inevitably, it has not been possible to be completely comprehensive, but a wide variety of topics is presented, drawing on the expertise not only of all the curators in Coins and Medals, but also colleagues in other departments of the British Museum. Topics may cover changes in the forms which money has taken, or the images presented, or the uses made of it, as well as examining the spread of particular types of money across the world. The main interface for the section is a combination of a world map and a timeline. At any selected point on the timeline, the world is divided into a number of regions, each of which may contain up to five topics which the user can then select. Obviously, not all areas of the world are accessible at all dates. The Americas do not become active until AD 1000, and Australasia until later still, reflecting the lack of early evidence about the use of money in these areas. A single topic, covering the whole world, considers the future of money beyond the year 2000.

Each historical topic contains 1-5 screens. Each screen contains a short piece of text and an image with a caption. Most images can be flipped (to reveal the other side of a coin or note), and all images can be enlarged. In the case of paper money, this may not enlarge them much beyond the actual size of the object, and large items such as Swedish plate money or Yap stones are obviously smaller than the originals, but the bulk of the coins on the CD ROM are enlarged considerably from their actual size. Not only does this permit the study of details, it also makes numismatic material accessible to those with vision impairments that make close examination of small coins impossible or inconvenient.

Some images contain several different objects, usually for comparison of type or style. In these cases, the whole group can be enlarged together, as far as the screen allows, and then individual objects enlarged further. Further options which may appear in any given topic include maps, video clips and anecdotes, the last presented either as audio or pop-up text, depending on length.

Each topic contains links to other material in the program. The text itself is relatively simple, reflecting both the intended market, and the medium: large blocks of densely-written text do not appear attractive on a computer screen. Nevertheless, we have not avoided the use of technical vocabulary. Instead, a glossary function is provided. Where words seem likely to prove challenging to the user, they are highlighted, and selection of the

highlighted words links the user directly to short explanations of those words and phrases. The entire glossary, arranged in alphabetical order, is accessible throughout the program through the options menu. Highlighted words in the text also provide direct links to other topics, and each topic also has, where appropriate, menus of related topics and related images.

The initial interface for the thematic section is somewhat different. Each theme is accessed through a 'virtual room', which reflects as far as possible the subject of the theme. Within the 'room', attention is focused on a central feature (a desk, a coin cabinet, a cash machine, etc.) which acts as a menu for the main sub-themes. Below this level, the layout is similar to that of the historical section, with a series of topics containing both text and image. Unlike the historical section, the themes are arranged hierarchically, so that each topic contains further options until the 'bottom level' of the program is reached. As in the historical section, each topic has direct links to the glossary and related topics and images.

The 'What is Money?' theme examines the fundamental nature of money. Its sub-themes examine the many forms which money has taken (from cowrie shells and cattle, to credit cards and computerised money), and the uses that are made of it. It is these uses that define an object as money or not; a cow used as currency would be a form of money, while a coin worn as jewellery might be considered as an ornament rather than a monetary

object. A short overview of different historical theories on the nature of money is also included. 'Money and Society' also examines the different ways in which money is used. In particular it examines the role of money in relation to social functions such as warfare, belief, and entertainment. Moral attitudes to money are also considered.

'Saving Money' examines the different means that people have used to store and build up their wealth, from hoarding, through strongboxes and safes, to banking and investment. 'Studying Money' considers the ways in which different groups of people study money: archaeologists, historians, and numismatists. This theme also includes sections on collecting and conserving coins.

The remaining theme, 'How Money is Made' examines the manufacture of coins, paper money and credit cards from ancient times to the present day. It covers various stages from the mining and refining of metals to the striking or casting of coins, and also contains sections on design and forgery / anti-forgery.

'How Money is Made' makes particularly heavy use of video and animation, since this is the subject within the CD ROM which most benefits from moving images as a means of explanation. Thus, there is video footage of the modern reproduction of Anglo-Saxon hand-struck coins, as well as modern minting and banknote manufacture. However, the other themes, like the historical section, also contain occasional moving

images and audio. The themes are firmly based on historical material, drawing on examples from a wide variety of periods and cultures to illustrate the various thematic points. There are thus a number of direct links between thematic and historical topics and vice versa, and the user can follow his or her own route flexibly through the whole program according to what he or she finds particularly interesting.

The remaining section of the program, the activities, draws to varying degrees on the data provided in the historical and thematic sections. 'Money Gallery' involves matching objects with labels to create a museum display. The objects (including coins, notes, credit cards and more unusual forms of money) can be enlarged to help the user identify them, and then dragged to the appropriate label. The user also has the opportunity to jump out into the main program to find and identify the objects. A multiple-choice quiz also feeds directly off the information presented in the historical and thematic sections.

The other three activities are more freestanding: a design your own money game provides a choice of money types and materials as blanks, and the user can then create his or her own designs. A number of images are provided, but there is also the option to import external images, so that users can put their own portraits on if they so desire. There is also a treasure game, which involves bringing a ship full of gold safely back from the New World (a topic covered in the historical section).

The largest and most complex activity involves running the finances of a modern state. The user has to balance expenditure between different government departments in an attempt to control inflation, unemployment and other economic targets. The activity is based on the idea of a four year term of office, with the aim being for the user to perform well enough across the various targets to be 're-elected' at the end of the four years.

The combination of these interactive activities with the factual information and images of the historical section, and the conceptual exploration of the thematic sections make this CD an exciting and unusual way of looking at the vast subject of money. While there will continue to be an important role for galleries and books in the presentation of numismatics both to specialists and the broader public, computer technology offers a real opportunity to bring the subject to a different audience in a very different way.