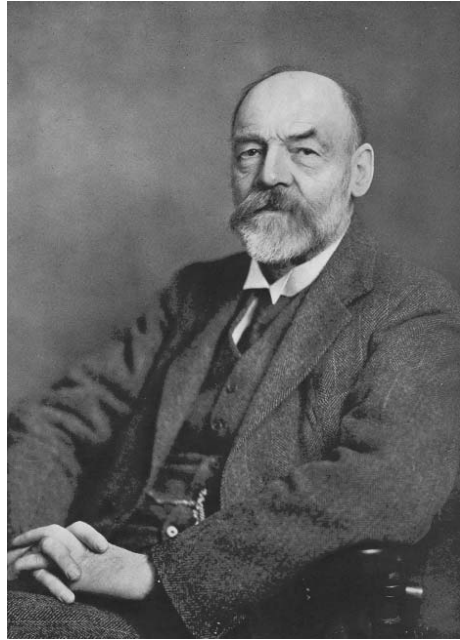


## LES GRANDS NUMISMATES

### George Macdonald (1862-1940; Kt 1927)

George Macdonald was born in Elgin on 30 January 1862 and died in Edinburgh on 9 August 1940. He was educated at Ayr Academy, where his father, Dr. James Macdonald, an archaeologist and epigraphist of some distinction was Rector, and from 1878 at Edinburgh University, graduating with first class honours in classics in 1882. After further study in Stuttgart he proceeded to Balliol College, Oxford in 1884, obtaining first classes in both Classical Moderation (1885) and *Literae Humaniores* (1887). After five years teaching classics at Kelvinside Academy in Glasgow, he transferred to Glasgow University in 1892 where Gilbert Murray, the Professor of Greek, nominated him



as his senior assistant. During the following years (1892-1904) he also became closely associated with the university's Hunterian Museum when he undertook to catalogue the large collection of Greek coins, a service eventually recognized in his life appointment as Honorary Curator in 1905. Meanwhile his career took a different and successful turn in 1904, when he joined the Scottish Education Department, moving rapidly through the ranks to become Permanent Secretary in 1922. Despite the heavy demands of his office, however, he managed to maintain a demanding research programme and was as productive as in his earlier career, in addition to holding the presidencies of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (1921-26), the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland (1933-1940) and the Royal Numismatic Society (1935-36). His contributions to public service and scholarship alike were recognized by degrees from the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow,

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Oxford and Cambridge, and by his creation as Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1927.

Macdonald achieved scholarly distinction in two different areas: numismatics and Romano-British Studies. As a numismatist, his major claim to fame rests on his three-volume *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the Hunterian Collection* (1899-1905). This remains a standard reference work a century after its completion, admired as much for its systematic presentation as for the specialized research published in *Numismatic Chronicle* and other journals in which he pioneered the solution of numismatic problems encountered in preparing the catalogue. He was also effective in presenting a lucid synthesis of complex subjects for a wider audience, as in his discriminating treatment of the Hellenic kingdoms of Bactria and Parthia and their respective coinages in *The Cambridge Ancient History of India* (1922) and in works on more general topics, such as the published version of his 1904 Rhind Lectures, *Coin Types: Their Origin and Development* (1905). Another way in which he applied his expertise to the benefit of numismatists and historians was through the many detailed reports of recent discoveries of Roman and medieval coins and hoards in Scotland that he published at regular intervals throughout his career.

Although his major archaeological publications appeared mostly in the last part of his career, Macdonald's interest in Roman Britain was surely kindled by his father's scholarly work on the archaeology of Roman Scotland. Macdonald first became involved in archaeological excavations in 1902, when he collaborated with Alexander Park in the excavation of the Roman fort of Bar Hill on the Antonine Wall, an experience that seems to have established Roman frontier studies as the focus of his archaeological research. His reputation on the subject was established by *The Roman Wall in Scotland*, the published version of his Dalrymple Lectures delivered in Glasgow in 1910, a masterly summation of what was known at the time about the Roman frontier between the Forth and Clyde. In preparing this work he became convinced that only an intensive programme of surface survey and excavation could clarify the questions that his enquiries had raised. The project absorbed most of the free time he could spare from his administrative responsibilities for over two decades, the result appearing in a much expanded and largely rewritten version of *The Roman Wall in Scotland* (1934). For its mastery of detail, logical deduction and lucid exposition, this work is still deservedly regarded as one of the classics of Romano-British archaeology, a field in which, at the death of Francis Haverfield, he had become the acknowledged leader. As in his numismatic work, however, Macdonald's horizons were never narrow, and in his later years he also played an active part in promoting international collaboration, especially with German scholars engaged in frontier research, and in contributing more than 150 entries to the Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie*.

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