After the Second World War, in the period historians refer to as the “short” twentieth century, many of the world’s monarchies fell. This remarkable collection features issues from some of the world’s last kings.

Monarchy is the oldest known form of government. In Sumeria and Egypt, the ensi and pharaoh, respectively, ruled over their people with an iron fist; it was believed that these individuals were conduits to the gods, an idea that became known as the Divine Right of Kings. From the dawn of recorded history until recent memory, almost every civilization was ruled by a sovereign, whether king or queen, sultan or tsar, kaiser or khan, pasha or shah.

Parliamentary rule, the earliest form of democracy, appeared in Athens and Rome and elsewhere, but anti-monarchism did not begin in earnest until 1649, when the British Parliament overthrew King Charles I. Even then it took three centuries and countless false starts for republicanism to prevail.

1. Afghanistan: Mohammed Zahir Shah (1933-73)
Devout followers of the Prophet Mohammed, the Afghans know that to create a graven image is to incur the wrath of Allah. For this reason, Islamic money tends to feature calligraphy and design, not representations of living creatures—and never people. Only once did the government of Afghanistan dare to violate this strict prohibition: in 1961, when the last Afghan king, Muhammad Zahir Shah, ordered his visage to be struck on the obverse of this five-Afghani coin. The king’s brazen act of blasphemy was not well received. Coins entered circulation only to be destroyed in vast quantities by an angry people. Few survive. The king was deposed in 1973, and lived in exile in Rome. He died in 2007.

2. Bulgaria: Boris III (1918-43)
The son of King Ferdinand I, Boris took the throne when his father abdicated after the First World War. Like Germany, Bulgaria was on the losing side in the war and had to pay reparations which crippled the economy, so the reign of Boris was a difficult one. He reluctantly joined the Axis Powers, to acquire territory that had been lost in the previous war, and also to save his country from being destroyed by the Nazis. He refused to surrender Bulgarian Jews to Hitler, a courageous position under the circumstances, and died of heart failure shortly after meeting with Adolf Hitler—allegedly a victim of assassination by poison.

3. Yugoslavia: Peter II (1934-45)
Peter was a boy when he became king in 1934, when his father, King Alexander, was assassinated in Marseille during a state visit to France. Because of his youth, his cousin Prince Paul served as regent. On March 25, 1941, Paul decided that Yugoslavia would join Nazi Germany in the Tripartite Pact; two days later, Peter was proclaimed of age, and immediately withdrew from the Pact, recognizing that Hitler was evil. He fled Yugoslavia after the Nazi invasion, and was deposed at the end of the war by the Communists. He died in 1970 in the United States.
4. Ethiopia: Haile Selassie (1930-74)
The last king of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie rose to international renown when he addressed the League of Nations in 1936 concerning the use of chemical weapons by the Italian occupation forces. Although he drew criticism for suppression of rebels in Ethiopia, his promotion of multilateralism was ahead of its time. The Rastafarian church regards Haile Selassie as the second coming of the Messiah. He died while in prison, some believe a victim of assassination.

5. Italy: Victor Emmanuel III (1900-46)
World War II was, and remains, the deadliest conflict in history. Some 70 million people died during the fighting—about 2.5% of the total world population. King Victor Emmanuel III, whose bust appears on this 1-lire coin, reigned during both wars—although Italy was ruled for much of that time by the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. This remarkable coin was issued in 1940, the year Italy declared war on Great Britain and France. Struck at the Rome mint, this coin is embellished with numerous Fascist symbols. The “XVII” is a regnal year—not of Victor Emmanuel’s reign, but of Mussolini’s.

6. India: George VI (1936-47)
The British king who presided over the Second World War, George was forced to surrender the Crown Jewel of the British Empire after India’s independence. Because of the lead time associated with minting coins, his title of Emperor of India continued to appear on some issues until 1948.

7. Egypt: Farouk (1936-52)
One of the most colorful international figures of the twentieth century, Farouk was the tenth and last ruler of the Muhammad Ali dynasty. He was the epitome of regal excess, treating himself to extravagant shopping sprees; at one of these, he bought the 94-carat Star of the East Diamond. Among his considerable numismatic collection was a 1932 U.S. Double Eagle, which later sold at auction for over $7 million. He spent most of his reign living in opulent European exile, after his overthrow in 1952.

8. Greece: Constantine II (1964-73)
The last King of the Hellenes, Constantine was a popular sovereign until his participation in the overthrow of Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou. In the Colonels’ Coup of 1967, Constantine was forced to flee the country, where he ruled in exile until the abolition of the monarchy in 1973.

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1. AFGHANISTAN: MOHAMMED ZAHIR SHAH, 1933-73

<table>
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<tr>
<th>KM 955</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denomination: 5 Afghanis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight: 8 g; Diameter: 29 mm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metal: Nickel clad steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obverse: Bust of Mohammed Zahir Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse: Wheat sprigs flank denomination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>Yugoslavia</td>
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<td>Ethiopia</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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6. BRITISH INDIA: GEORGE VI, 1936-47

KM 545
Denomination: British 1/4 Rupee
Weight: 2.9 g; Diameter: 19.08 mm
Metal: Silver (asw. 0.0469 oz)
Obverse: Bust of George VI
Reverse: Denomination and date within circle, wreath surrounds

7. EGYPT: FAROUK, 1936-65

KM 365
Denomination: 2 Piastres
Weight: 2.8 g; Diameter: 19 mm
Metal: Silver (asw. 0.0749 oz)
Obverse: Bust of Farouk
Reverse: Denomination and dates within tasseled wreath

8. GREECE: CONSTANTINE II, 1964-73

KM 100
Denomination: 5 Drachmai
Weight: 9.3 g; Diameter: 28 mm
Metal: Copper-nickel
Obverse: Bust of Constantine II
Reverse: Soldier in front of phoenix

All coins in each set are protected in an archival capsule and beautifully displayed in a mahogany-like box. The box set is accompanied with a story card, certificate of authenticity, and a black gift box.

Coin images show typical coins, not to scale