CONTEMPORARY FORGERIES OF LATE SAXON PENCE

It has often been remarked that coins from Scandinavian Viking Age hoards, and especially English pence, bear traces of systematic defacement in the shape of minute "pecks" which would seem to have been made by driving a small gouge at an oblique angle into the surface of the coin. These "pecks" appear indiscriminately on obverse and reverse, quite often on both, and are usually confined to the field, although occasionally they do intrude upon the design. Anyone who has attempted a serious study of die-links between mints and moneyers will know how a crop of these mutilations can transform the superficial appearance of a coin, and it is a little surprising that they have not received more attention. The traditional explanation is the obvious one, namely that the cuts were made in order to establish that the coins were of silver throughout, and it has been argued that the "pecking" was done in this country by recipients of the so-called Danegeld who were determined not to be fobbed off with bad coin. There are, however, certain cogent objections to the time-honoured interpretation that do not appear to have been posed and still less answered.

In the first place, there is good evidence that "pecking" was not generally practised in this country. This form of mutilation is conspicuously absent from the increasing number of coins which can now be identified as from eleventh-century British finds, and in particular from the pence in the Caldale hoard so clearly the property of a Scandinavian returning homewards. Although the "pecks" do appear on some of the hundreds of English coins in the great hoard from Igelosa in Skåne, a hoard which surely represents the annates of trade with the Viking hosts that ravaged England in the opening years of the eleventh century, they are lacking on the English coins in the parallel hoard from the island of Sylt. Moreover, the "pecks" are present even in the Igelosa hoard on a number of imitations of Anglo-Saxon coins which we now know to have been struck in Denmark and southern Sweden, and they also occur on a number of German and Arabic coins that could not well have found their way to Gotland by way of England. It is not the purpose of this note, however, to attempt to establish the chronological limits within which this form of mutilation was practised, nor indeed to seek to localize it within Scandinavia, but it is hoped that these introductory remarks will have sufficed to dispose of the romantic picture of suspicious Vikings laying

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1 e.g. Brooke, English Coins, Pl. xvi. 11—in fact a Scandinavian and not an English coin.
3 Supra, p. 52.
4 For the date of the as yet unpublished hoard from Igelosa cf. N.N.U.M., May 1954, pp. 54–55—the English element ends with long cross, but a handful of German and Arabic coins may have been added a year or so after the last accession of English pieces. For the Sylt hoard cf. Erwin Nobbe, "Ein Silberschatz der Wikingerzeit von List auf Sylt" in Nachrichtenblatt fur Deutsche Vorzeit, 1940, pp. 107–12. A detailed list of the coins kindly put at my disposal by Dr. La Baume of Cologne suggests that this hoard should be dated perhaps a year or two earlier than that from Igelosa.
aside their axes and swords in order to test the new-coined pence by which their peace was bought.

It remains obvious none the less that at one stage in their currency considerable trouble must have been taken to establish the authenticity of the English pence in the Scandinavian hoards. At least as regards the later Gotland hoards, it is probably safe to say that nine out of ten of the coins are so disfigured. Many of the coins have as many as a dozen of the "pecks", and so systematic a check must surely have been occasioned by a real need for vigilance. In consequence one might have expected to find still in existence a goodly number of plated forgeries. Of course they would not occur in the same proportion as they were originally uttered—large numbers would have been taken out of circulation as a result of the test which has left its mark on the genuine coins—but even so it is astonishing, not to say disturbing—that until now one and one only of these plated forgeries has been reported.1 Significantly enough it appears to have been an English find, but the soil of Gotland is so notably the antithesis of metallophagous that the present writer would like to put it on record that he has personally examined many thousands of coins from the Gotland hoards without finding a single piece which gave the least hint of being plated.

The discrepancy between the mutilation of tens of thousands of coins and the survival of a single plated forgery is a very real one, and cannot be ignored. The explanation may perhaps be afforded by a second example of a plated forgery which recently has come to light in England. Unfortunately the coin originally recorded by the late H. A. Parsons cannot now be traced, but his description of it leaves little room for doubt that it belonged to exactly the same class of forgery. The new specimen was found in the soil by Mr. D. Schooling of Much Hadham in Hertfordshire, and, on learning of its possibly unique significance, the finder most generously presented it to the National Collection whither it had been brought for identification. Superficially it is a normal penny of Æthelræd's last substantive or second small cross type (Hild. A = Brooke 1 = B.M.C. i) which the present writer believes to have been issued between c. 1010 and c. 1016. On the basis of a cast (Pl. XIV, 15) one would hesitate to condemn it, and it would seem to be if not from official dies at least from dies cut by an official engraver. The reverse legend appears to read +BYRVÆSTAN ON FINES, and the treatment of the bust is entirely consistent with the somewhat distinctive portrait that is found on coins of this type from the Winchester area.2 Examination of the actual piece, however, reveals the essential structure of the coin, which is seen to consist of a core of a soft grey metal sealed between two thin plates of silver or silver alloy. The weight of 20.06 gr. is not in


2 It is possibly significant that neither the obverse nor reverse die are recorded in Hildebrand—though it is surprising how often early eleventh-century coins found in England prove to be from dies not represented in the Scandinavian collections.
itself suspicious, but the specific gravity is far higher than would be
the case with a silver coin. Three weighings in air and water give an
average of 10.91, and for practical purposes there were only two
metals known to the Saxons with a higher specific gravity than
silver. One of these is lead, the other gold. In the case of the coin
from Much Hadham there is no room for doubt that the core is lead,
or at least a lead alloy.

The lead core and one of the silver plates are of approximately the
diameter of a normal penny, but the other plate was somewhat larger
so that its edges could be turned up to provide the coin with a silver
rim. How this turning-up was achieved is not quite certain, but a
very similar effect can be detected upon a most interesting coin in
Mr. Grover's collection which has the appearance of being struck on
a flan composed of two distinct laminations of silver. Mr. Grover's
coin, a penny of Cnut's second substantive or helmet type, does not
appear, however, to incorporate a base core, though it is from an
altered reverse die which perhaps read originally *PPYN SIE*E: ON
LVDEN. The weight is on the low side, only 15.5 gr., but this is not
exceptional for a penny of this type. Perhaps the moneyer was using
up odd scraps of metal left over after the hammering out of the sheets
from which the flans were cut, but even so it is a little odd that a coin
of such irregular fabric should be from an altered reverse die. Its
relevance to the Much Hadham coin lies in the fact that on Mr.
Grover's coin the turning-up of the edge does seem to have been
obtained in the act of striking by the use of some form of collar.
Already on quite other grounds the present writer has postulated the
use of a collar with square-headed dies as an essential of late Saxon
mint-practice, and a craftsman in silver has since informed him that
the use of a collar would be of enormous assistance in procuring a
sharp impression from the dies.¹ Incidentally, on the Much Hadham
coin the silver plating is so thin, little thicker indeed than modern
tinfoil, that many of the letters have punched completely through it,
giving a curious stencil effect. On the obverse, moreover, a large area
has flaked away, revealing both the structure of the coin and the
leaden core.

One would like to submit this tantalizing forgery to laboratory
analysis, and in particular to establish whether or not some form of
solder was used to attach the plating to the core. Visual examination
does suggest that some third metal or alloy was present, and there can
be little doubt that the employment of some adhesive would greatly
have facilitated the accurate centring of the three layers of metal
between the dies. However, neither assay nor chemical analysis are
possible, while the coin remains virtually unique, and the presence
or absence of a solder must remain for the present an open question.
Even so, the fact that the core can be identified as either lead or
a high lead alloy marks a significant step forward in our search for the
explanation of the rarity of Saxon plated forgeries. It is the sug-

gestion of this note that here we may well have the key to the whole mystery.

Every numismatist knows how capricious is the survival of a lead coin or seal. In isolation they may survive for centuries—we may remark the frequent occurrence in the English soil of remarkably well-preserved medieval papal bullae—but equally they may disintegrate almost overnight. Even more capricious is the survival of a lead object which has been in contact with other metals, and especially where the metals have lain in juxtaposition in a soil at all inclined to dampness. It is as though the different elements set up some mutually destructive electrolytic action in the soil. Even if the silver sheathing of a Saxon forgery were to remain unaffected, the destruction and collapse of the core would speedily result in it being buckled and distorted out of all semblance to a coin. Even the trained archaeologist could be pardoned for failing to recognize the numismatic relevance of two crushed pieces of foil, and away from an excavated site a disintegrated Saxon forgery would scarcely be remarked, let alone identified for what it once had been. It is indeed an attractive possibility—to put it no higher—that the reason for the disappearance of a class of forgery which once was prolific lies in the chemical instability of its composition. At least it would seem worthy of being put on record, if only to provoke some more plausible explanation of a problem that in the past has not been formulated and still less faced.

There remains the question of the identification of the moneyer who uttered the particular forgery from Much Hadham. Under the provisions of III Æthelræd 8, the penalty for forgery was death, and there is some reason for thinking that at the time that the coin must have been struck the capital penalty had not been repealed by the enactment known rather arbitrarily as IV Æthelræd. In this connexion it may be significant that the name BYRVHSTAN appears deliberately ambiguous. Although a legitimate form of Burhstan—we may compare slightly earlier London coins of the prolific moneyer Byrhsige reading BYRVSIGE—there may seem an intentional risk of confusion with the contemporary coins of the moneyer Brunstan whose pence read BYRVNSTAN. Philologically the two names cannot be the same, but the epigraphical distinction rests on the subtlety of the difference between an H and an N. The careers of the two moneyers may throw some light on the problem of whether justice was done. Burhstan is known at Winchester from only two coins, both of Æthelræd's second small cross type, one reading BYRVNSTAN (Hild. 4133) and the other, the Much Hadham plated forgery, reading BYRVHSTAN. Brunstan, on the other hand, was striking at Winchester in the previous type, i.e. before c. 1010, struck numerous coins in the next type (e.g. Hild. 4125, 4127-9, and 4180-3), and continued striking for at least a time under Cnut (cf.

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1 Cf. Mr. R. S. Kinsey's forthcoming studies in these pages.
Hild. 3720–2). One remarks, too, that under Cnut a name approximating to Burhstan occurs on only two coins (Hild. 3434/5), allegedly of Taunton, but not recognized as of that mint by Brooke. Thus the evidence would seem to point to Brunstan’s being a solid and worthy citizen of Winchester, while Burhstan’s career there would seem to have been ephemeral in the extreme. Consequently the philological equation of Byruhstan with Burhstan despite the occurrence in the same mint and type of a moneyer B(y)runstan seems to be vindicated by due consideration of the evidence of the coins. Unfortunately there is not yet the evidence to decide whether the Winchester Burhstan paid at once the due penalty for his crimes, or whether he escaped for a time, possibly to strike the coins reading O TA which, pace Brooke, must surely be given to Taunton.

R. H. M. Dolley

AN UNPUBLISHED MULE OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

The two coins illustrated (Pl. XIV, 14, 15) are early pennies of Edward the Confessor by the very rare moneyer Wineman whom we know to have struck at Salisbury in this reign and in Canute’s last type. Since one (the Brooke type 1) is of Wilton and the other (the Brooke type 4) is of Salisbury it is pertinent to see the extent to which they fall into line with the seemingly conclusive evidence of the York and Steyning mints (the latter so ably dealt with by Mr. King in his article in Brit. Num. Journ. 1941/2) which demonstrates that Brooke type 1 is the first substantive type of the reign and that type 4 moves up two places and becomes second. A study of the details of the very close association between the neighbouring mints of Salisbury and Wilton makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Wineman of these two coins is one and the same individual, but this cannot be proved.

Should this conclusion be wrong the coins are of no significance for type chronology, but if it is right we have here the opposite of a tie-up with the York/Steyning evidence unless, as might well have been the case, Wineman worked for a short time at Wilton towards the end of his spell of office at Salisbury. This possible explanation of the dual mint signature sounds far-fetched but it is not without parallel. I am grateful to Mr. Dolley for having suggested it to me and for having pointed out that the same thing happens in the case of the Salisbury/Wilton moneyer Alfred under Canute. Coins of this moneyer are known of Salisbury only in Canute’s first type, of both Salisbury & Wilton in his third type and then again only of Salisbury under Harold I.

A few more Wineman coins might give a conclusive answer but Hildebrand and B.M.C. between them record only three coins of his of Salisbury and the Wilton seems to be unique.

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