

ENGLISH SHORT CROSS COINS IN FRENCH HOARDS

For the benefit of members who have no French, a brief summary of the paper is given in English.

A parcel of forty-seven Short Cross pennies submitted to the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris by a French collector, and presumed to have been found in or near Le Mans, prompted a search for records of other hoards found in France containing these coins. References have been found to no less than another thirty-one.¹ Several of the published reports are too vague or give too little detail to be precise as to their content, but for the majority a reasonably close date of deposit can be arrived at.

The majority of these hoards come from the north-west of France: from Normandy, Maine, Anjou, and Brittany, all territories held as part of the domains of the English kings Henry II and Richard I, but lost by John. The greater number of this group can be shown to be dated before 1205, by which year the lands had been completely taken over by the French king Philip II. A much smaller group has been found south of the river Loire (which forms a natural boundary between the north and the south of France), in Poitou; all of these are later than 1205. There are also three outliers in the central and south-eastern part of France.

Unlike England, where one coinage only circulated, there were very many coin issuers in France. The deniers of the King of France formed only a small part of the coinage in circulation. Outside the Paris area the issues of feudal lords formed the bulk of the money. In north-western France deniers of Anjou were the principal currency. These were of an immobilized type in the names of the earlier counts Fulke and Geoffrey. Undoubtedly coins of this type continued to be struck by Henry II, and probably his sons Richard and John. Although nominally of Anjou, they were the official coinage of Normandy and probably struck there also: it must not be forgotten that Henry was of the house of Anjou. These Angevin deniers were approximately equal in value to the majority of other French coins, and were tariffed at four to the English penny. The coins of Le Mans, also of an immobilized type in the name of Count Herbert, were unusual in being worth two deniers, or one English halfpenny. The hoards tell us, however, that the deniers of Brittany also circulated widely throughout north-west France, even forming the major part of hoards so far distant as Hotot and Aviron. The coinage of Tours formed a not inconsiderable part of the money-stock, as did also those of Châteaudun, and the smaller mints of Vendôme and Gien, these last three in Orleanais which was outside the control of the English kings. Other coinages are also found in small numbers, but the principal ones were undoubtedly those of Brittany, Anjou, and Maine, with Touraine and England usually present. It is highly significant that all of the hoards found in Normandy, Maine and Anjou that date from the reign of Philip II include some English sterlings, and of those from Brittany in the same reign only two do not include sterlings.

An ordinance of Philip II, dated 1204, soon after he had finally expelled John and the English, lays down exchange equivalents for the coins current in north-west France in terms of the deniers tournois, which he had apparently determined were to be the future standard coinage for this region. Included amongst the issues mentioned were English pennies valued at four deniers. The Norman Pipe Rolls that still survive of the English period of rule are drawn up in terms of Angevin money, but scattered through those accounts are occasional references to amounts in sterling, which are counted as being four times their value in Angevin money to make the summations agree. The documentary evidence is thus in accord with the hoards of coins: English sterlings were an acceptable currency, amongst many others, in north-western France while it was under English rule, and indeed, but to a lesser extent, after it had come under the French kings. There are several reasons why this should be. Enormous sums of money were sent from England to France to finance the wars and intrigues of the English kings. A large proportion of the English nobility and religious houses also held lands in Normandy, etc., and there was constant traffic by them across the Channel. And thirdly there was considerable trade both ways between England and the Continent.

To a Frenchman there would be some advantages in having part of his capital in English coins. They were taking on the character of an international currency as they were widely accepted as being of good silver. Moreover they were of high value, each being worth four of the local deniers, and in this connection it is notable not only that several of these French hoards have a high proportion

¹ In contrast, only one hoard has been traced which included English Long Cross pennies (see the Appendix), but there may perhaps have been a few isolated specimens elsewhere.

of the sterlings cut into halves and quarters, which would make them equivalent with the Le Mans and the Angevin deniers respectively, but that two of them, at least, also included gold coins of even higher value and universal acceptability.

It is evident that English coins did not play any considerable part in the currency of Poitou and Aquitaine, the other major provinces under Plantagenet rule. South of the Loire they seem to have been virtually excluded by the coinages in the name of Richard, these being accompanied by the local feudal issues of Angoulême and La Marche.