SHORT ARTICLES AND NOTES

TWO NEW HALFPENNIES OF EDWARD THE ELDER AND ATHELSTAN

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HALFPENNIES of the tenth century must have been produced on a small scale, for they remain rare even among the prolific metal-detector finds, which generally favour the smaller denominations. This note publishes two new finds that have been acquired by the Fitzwilliam Museum – an unrecorded type of Edward the Elder (899–924) and the first known halfpenny of Athelstan (924–39).[1]

Edward the Elder, Hand type

The first piece is of Edward the Elder's *Hand of God* type (pl. 12, 1). Some sixteen pennies of this issue are known by six moneyers (Alhstan, Athulf, Deormod, Eadred, Fugel and Gunne), who form a group distinct from the moneyers of the other 'Exceptional' types of Edward the Elder. The type emanates from a mint or mints in West Mercia, perhaps Shrewsbury, and Lyon dates it to the middle of the reign, *c*. 910–15.[2] The design of the divine hand takes a variety of forms: a 'mailed' hand, an 'open' hand pointing down or up, a hand in benediction, etc. A penny of the 'Mailed' Hand variety in Mr Lyon's collection is illustrated here (pl. 12, 2). The reverse inscription on the pennies usually gives the moneyer's name and an abbreviation of *moneta* in two or more lines either side of the hand. On one die of Deormod the name is preceded by the letters DX,[3] which so far as I am aware have never been commented upon. There is a fair degree of die-linking among the Hand pennies, fifteen of them being struck from seven obverse and ten reverse dies, which suggests that the issue was not very extensive.

The new halfpenny was found in 1993 on a ploughed field near Clare, Suffolk, by Mr Peter Carter using a metal-detector. Unfortunately, the silver was highly mineralised, and as the soil was removed the coin fell into three pieces, breaking along the lines of two ancient bends, for it had been almost curled up in the Anglo-Saxon period. The pieces have since been stuck together in a more open form, so that the design can be seen, although in consequence they do not make close fitting joints.

The coin can be described as follows:

Edward the Elder, silver halfpenny, 'Mailed' Hand type (North[4] 664/3, this specimen), *c*. 910–15. West Mercian mint, moneyer Hrodberht.
Obv. +EADVVEARD REX, small cross (saltire-wise)
Rev. DEX T̄Ē / HᵒR DB / ERHT, nimbate ('mailed') hand downwards, with three parallel lines to the left of it and two to the right, the triangular cuff decorated with two rows of crescents.
Weight: 0.54g (8.04gr.), chipped, broken and metal leached. Die-axis: 90°.

There are several interesting features to this coin. The moneyer is clearly Hrodberht, and the 'o' (a small letter typical of this West Mercian style) was probably placed above the letters HR because there was insufficient room after them. Hrodberht was not previously known from coins of the Hand issue, or indeed from any of the 'Exceptional' types, but there is one coin of 'Rodberht' in the British Museum of the Horizontal type (HT1) in a style that Lyon has classified as West Mercian from late in Edward's reign.[5] His appearance, then, in this issue is not surprising. From subsequent reigns there seem to be two moneyers of this name recorded, one operating in the north-east under Athelstan (BC type) and Anlaf Sitricsson (HT1 type), and another in West Mercia under Eadred (946–55; HR1 type).[6] It is doubtful whether either is Edward the Elder's West Mercian moneyer.

The word DEXT̄Ē in the first line of the reverse, preceding the moneyer's name, is evidently a

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[2] C.E. Blunt, B.H.I.H. Stewart, and C.S.S. Lyon, *Coinage in Tenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1989) [hereafter '*CTCE*'], pp. 38–9, 42, 79–81.

[3] *BMC* Edward the Elder no. 108.

[4] J.J. North, *English Hammered Coinage* I, 3rd edition (London, 1994), p. 129, and pl. 11, no. 11.

[5] *CTCE*, p. 69, no. 256.

[6] *CTCE*, p. 143, no. 170; p. 229, gp. III (g): p. 306. There is also a coin of Edmund (HT1 type) in a style that is unlocated.

contraction or abbreviation of the Latin *dextra*, meaning 'hand' or 'right hand'. However, the precise form on the coin requires explanation. As Michael Lapidge has pointed out,[7] if the T̄ (with a suspension mark above it) appeared in a manuscript it would stand for *ter*; in which case DEXT̄E should be expanded *dextere*. This is the genitive ('of the hand [of God]'), but surely the nominative (*dextera*) is more likely to have been intended. It may be that the die-cutter was a poor Latinist and made a mistake in giving it an ending -E rather than -A. Alternatively, the bar above the letters TE may in fact be a mark of abbreviation, as it is when used elsewhere on Edward the Elder's coinage above the letters MO, MON or MONE, standing for *moneta*.[8]

The occurrence of a West Mercian coin as a find in East Anglia is surprising, for the currency in this period had a distinctive regional character, and a pictorial issue such as this cannot have been familiar in eastern England. Five other official halfpennies of Edward the Elder are recorded, all of the Horizontal type, by the moneyers Biornwald, Ciolulf, Leofhelm, Wyneman?, and Wynberht. The fact that these are in various styles (Winchester, London, and West Mercian) and from different periods in Edward's reign suggests that they were a general issue and produced in larger numbers than the surviving specimens would imply. Although this is the first official halfpenny of the 'Exceptional' types, an irregular halfpenny of Edward's Floral type was acquired by Stewart Lyon, together with two pennies, also irregular, of similar type.[9] This suggests that official halfpennies of the Floral type were also issued.

Athelstan, Horizontal type

The second halfpenny (**pl. 12, 3**) is the only coin of this denomination to be recorded for Athelstan. It was found in 1990 near Stowting, Kent, some ten miles south of Canterbury,[10] and purchased by Spink and Son Ltd. In 1992 it was acquired by the Fitzwilliam Museum in an officially sanctioned exchange for six duplicate Anglo-Saxon coins from the collection of C.E. Blunt,[11] and it now resides among his outstanding series of Athelstan's coins. The piece may be described as follows:

Athelstan, silver halfpenny, Horizontal or Two-line type, HP6 (Blunt *Athelstan*[12]–; North 668/1, this specimen). Uncertain southern mint, moneyer Clip.
Obv. +EÐELSTAN REX (NR ligatured), small saltire-cross.
Rev. • / CLIP: • / • • • / MO ⁻ / • (the O lozenge-shaped)
Weight: 0.63g (9.7gr.), chipped. Die-axis: 220°.

The moneyer Clip was not previously known for Athelstan or subsequent kings, but several of his coins for Edward the Elder survive. They are in a die-cutting style attributed to Wessex, probably Winchester, and belong to the Middle II and Late I phases of Edward's coinage as defined by Lyon.[13] A specimen in the Blunt collection is illustrated here (**pl. 12, 4**).

The lettering on the halfpenny, however, is of a style associated with the die-cutter at Canterbury,[14] as shown particularly by the form of the A, M, and S, the alignment of the central cross on the obverse (saltire-wise), and the minutely serifed contraction mark on the reverse (cf. Blunt 19, moneyer Alfeau). The association of the halfpenny with this die-cutting style is confirmed by the unusual use of an NR ligature in the obverse legend. This ligature is extremely rare, but it is to be found on some coins of Burhehem (*SCBI* BM v 12), Folcred (Blunt 55), and Wealdhelm (*SCBI* Edinburgh 140 = *CTCE* pl. 3.25) all of Canterbury style; indeed Folcred is a Kentish (Dover) moneyer. Two features of the design are quite foreign to Athelstan's coinage and hark back to that of Alfred. First, the lozenge-shaped O, with wedges at the corners, is characteristic of dies cut at Canterbury under Alfred, but is not found on coins of Edward the Elder or Athelstan. Secondly, the arrangement of three pellets across the centre of the reverse and one at top and bottom (class HP6) is only found on dies of Alfred and the very earliest ones of Edward, and again it is typical of the Canterbury style at that time. Evidently the Canterbury engraver when producing dies for the halfpenny in the mid 920s chose to model the reverse on coins struck at Canterbury some 30 years earlier. The archaic nature of many of the designs used for halfpence in the third quarter of the tenth century has also been noted,[15] their types often harking back to those of Alfred or Edward the Elder. Why this should be is something of a mystery, although it may imply that they were not a regular element in the monetary system, a view supported by their great rarity. Clip was not alone in drawing dies from two different die-cutting centres, Winchester and Canterbury. In other cases it has been seen as evidence that the moneyer was perhaps operating at some intermediate mint, although only occasionally can it be identified, e.g. for the moneyer Iohann who subsequently struck mint-signed coins of Chichester.[16]

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[7] In personal correspondence; I am grateful to Professor Lapidge for his advice on the inscription.

[8] Cf. *CTCE* pls. 1–6. *passim*. esp. pl. 6. nos 1, 4. 5–8. 10.

[9] The three coins were purchased in 1990 by Spink as a group from a representative of an anonymous French collector. but the circumstances of their discovery are unknown. I am grateful to Mr Lyon for allowing me to mention these. His collection is on deposit at the Fitzwilliam Museum.

[10] For information about the findspot, I am grateful to Derek Chick who met the finder.

[11] Details of the exchange are given in the Fitzwilliam

Museum's *Annual Report* 1992, p. 28.

[12] C.E. Blunt, 'The coinage of Athelstan, 924–939', *BNJ* 42 (special vol.. 1974), pp. 35–160.

[13] *CTCE* p. 63, nos 131–3.

[14] *CTCE*, pp. 49–51 defines the Canterbury die-cutting styles under Edward, the last of which (series 3) continues into Athelstan's reign.

[15] *CTCE*, pp. 203–4; M.M. Archibald in *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966–1066*, edited by J. Backhouse *et al.* (London, 1984), p. 176.

[16] *CTCE*, pp. 50–1.