INITIAL LETTERS IN THE FIELD ON SCOTTISH COINS.

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The initial letters which appear on Scottish or English coins as a part of the type are in most cases of little interest, but there are on some coins in the Scottish series other initials which must represent the signature of the mint official responsible for the issue, and in connection with these there are certain points of interest or importance.

There is, I think, only one instance in which the initials which are part of the type on a Scottish coin are not those of the reigning sovereign. On the forty-four and twenty-two shilling gold pieces issued in 1553 during the minority of Mary we find on the obverse the letters I·G and on the reverse two cinquefoils: the letters stand for "Jacobus Gubernator," that is to say, James, Earl of Arran, the Regent, and the cinquefoils are from his armorial bearings: on the earliest of these coins the cinquefoil appears also on the obverse in place of the initials.1 In some cases, as on the coins of James I, the I which invariably appears on his groats may by its varied position serve also as a mark fixing the responsibility for the issue.

On some of the groats, half-groats and pence of David II with the intermediate head there is a small D in one quarter of the reverse, and from the fact that this D appears in different quarters (first, second and fourth—more rarely in the third quarter) it should probably be regarded as a privy mark in connection with successive trials of the Pyx.

It is uncertain what the letter itself represents. A certain Donatus Mulekyn, presumably a son or brother of Jacobus Mulekyn of Florence, moneyer at the beginning of David's reign, is mentioned in the mint accounts of December 2nd, 1364.2 These record payments:—"Bonagio monetario pro tabulis de diversis imaginibus et aliis diversis rebus sculptis et depictis ad opus regis,"

and also: "Donato Mulekyn pro diversis artificiis factis ad usum regis." Donatus is not called "monetarius" and the vague expression "artificis ad usum regis" suggests rather articles of jewellery or the like than the coinage. It is evident from the rest of the account that work of that kind was done for the king by artists employed at the mint. Burns suggests that the issue with D may have been a second or supplementary portion of the issue which preceded the introduction of the Robert II head, and that the letter may represent "duplicata or some such word." 1 I should prefer to suppose that the D is here the king’s initial, as in the case of the I on coins of James I and other kings of the same name, though it is used as a privy mark, and not as a part of the regular type. Still Donatus was evidently a skilled workman, and it is possible that he may have been employed on a portion of this issue.

The I on the coins of James I is only one among numerous marks, lis, saltires, crosses, annulets, used in different combinations and permutations, for distinction of issues one must suppose, as many as eleven of them appearing on a single coin: but the invariable presence of the I, on the sceptre-handle, if nowhere else, gives it some claim to be regarded as essential to the type.

On certain groats, half-groats and pennies of Robert II we find the letter B on the obverse behind the king’s head. This is regarded as the initial of the moneyer Bonagio of Florence, previously mentioned under David II as working in the Scottish mint with another Florentine Jacobus Mulekyn. The strong confident work of these two Italian artists covers the period when the Scottish groat kept more or less on an equality with the English. The B appears on the issues of all the mints, Edinburgh, Dundee and Perth. On a variety of the half-groat described by Burns (fig. 336) as having "a square object" behind the head, the object in question may well be an erased or blurred B.

This Bonagio was at first employed in the Episcopal mint at Durham. There he got into trouble through debt and outran the constable to Scotland, where he apparently reformed his ways and prospered, for he found employment in the mint under three kings, David II, Robert II and Robert III, being master-moneyer under the last two. At the beginning of the reign of Robert III he was entrusted with the issue of a new groat of reduced weight. The Act of Parliament, 24th October, 1393, 2 arranges for certain

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1 Burns, vol. i, p. 248.
2 Cochran-Patrick, vol. i, p. 12, i.
new issues, among them "grossi quatuor denariorum, per Bonachium de Florentia, monetarium nostrum," and it repeats the mention of his name, "ad monetam fabricandam dicto Bonachio, monetario nostro, committimus potestatem." The name of Bonagius was thus intimately connected with this new groat.

In the reign of James III, Act of Parliament of 12th October, 1467,⁴ (fixing the rates of foreign and native coins) we find the following:—

"The aulde Inglis grot sall pass for xviid., the new Inglis grot of Eduarde for xiiid., the Spurryt grot (David II and Robert II) as the aulde Inglis grot for xviid., the borage as the new Inglis grot xiiid., the grot of the crowne (James II) sall have cours for xiiiid., the grot of the flour delyce (James I) for viiid."

The term borage grot has been a puzzle to Scottish numismatists. The suggestions that it was so called because the mullets on the reverse resembled the flower of the borage, or because borax entered into its composition, were rejected by Burns, but he does not offer any explanation of his own.²

The point is perhaps of no great importance, for although the name as it stands seems inexplicable, the coin has been certainly identified by Burns. "The new grot of Eduarde" is Edward IV’s light groat of 48 gr., and the groats which are equated with this must therefore be the "grossi quatuor denariorum" issued by Robert III’s moneyer Bonagio. I think that there is a simple way out of the difficulty. Mr. Langstaffe, who was Burns’ informant about the previous history of Bonagio, speaks of him as Bonage, which is the form which his name would naturally take in common speech on either side of the Border (cf. Horace for Horatius), and Burns himself speaks of him as Bonage.³

I venture therefore to suggest an emendation in the text of the printed record as it stands. The new groat for which Bonagio was known to be responsible would very probably be called by his name, just as Thomas Achesoun’s placks in the reign of James VI were called "Achesouns" and Mary’s "bawbies" were, as is now generally supposed, called after Alexander Orrok of Sille-bawbye. I thought that an error in transcription was not un-

¹ Cochran-Patrick, vol. i, p. 32. iii.
² Burns, vol. ii, p. 166.
³ Burns, vol. i, p. 239
likely, the less so because Burns remarks\(^1\) that he has detected several clerical errors in the Hopetoun MS. as printed; but it appears that my conjecture must rest upon its inherent probability and no conclusive proof of its correctness seems possible. By the kind assistance of Sir George Macdonald I have been able to ascertain that the original contemporary record is no longer to be found and that later transcripts in the Register House at Edinburgh, the earliest dated 1497, give the name clearly as "borage." However, as Mr. Angus, of the Register House, suggests, the word "bonage" having no meaning in itself, and its origin forgotten, might easily in the course of a century have been corrupted in popular speech to the form in which we find it.\(^2\)

Burns publishes (fig. 603) a Rider of James III, first series, on which \(\pi\) appears below the horse: this is probably the initial of Alexander Tod, moneyer during the first part of the reign of James III. His last extant account is dated 22nd June, 1468.

On a groat of James III (mullets of six points, first series) we find the letters \(\tau\ u\) at the sides of the king's neck. The \(u\) is obscured by the shoulder, which appears to have been struck over it, on all the specimens of this coin which I have seen, including those in the S.S.A. and Ferguslie collection. All these are from the same obverse die. To quote Burns: "The letters \(\tau\ u\) ... are by Lindsay erroneously represented as \(\tau\ \pi\) and regarded as the initials of the Christian names of the moneyers, Thomas Tod and Alexander Levinstoun. Lindsay is probably correct in supposing the letters ... to be the initials of the moneyers' names, but if so these letters in this case are the initials not of their Christian names but of their surnames."\(^3\)

On a rare half-groat of James III, of the five-pointed mullet series (B. 608), the letters \(\pi\ T\) appear at the sides of the neck, and these most probably represent the initials of the same two moneyers. If so it is odd that such a change should be made: one would expect the use of the Christian name to precede that of the surname which was slow in coming into general use. This half-groat has also the letter \(I\) within the tressure above the crown.

\(^1\) Burns, vol. ii, p. 321.

\(^2\) As examples of the tendency to corrupt foreign and unintelligible names into something which is more English and intelligible, I may instance "Birdcage Walk" (Bocage Walk) and "Bog water" (Boca d'aqua). The British forces in France and Flanders provided many examples of this tendency. This process may often suggest false derivations.

\(^3\) Burns, vol. ii, p. 110.
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on the obverse and in the centre of the cross on the reverse. No
groat corresponding to this appears to be known.

The attribution of the Thistle and Mullet groats with bust
three-quarters to right to James III is one of the few points in
which Burns’ arrangement has not been universally accepted, and
the case against it has been much strengthened by Sir George
Macdonald’s paper on the Perth hoard which, together with a
large number of coins of James I, II and III, contained also six
numeral groats of James IV, but not a single specimen of this
Thistle and Mullet groat. There is, however, a specimen of this
issue on which the letter T appears on the left of the bust.1 As

this can only represent the initial of Thomas Tod, and Cochran-
Patrick gives his tenure at the mint as from 1476 to 1487,2 I at
first regarded the T on this coin as providing some support for
Burns’ arrangement; but I find that there are records from the
Lord High Treasurer’s accounts under James IV, which
Cochran-Patrick has perhaps overlooked or disregarded:

5th Febr: 1496. “—resavit fra Sir Thomas Tod of
the cunyee (i.e. mint) silver of the pennys—xxti.”

27 July 1496. “—resavit fra Schir Thomas Tod for iii
pund wecht four unce and three quartaris of ane unce of gold
in xxxvi linkis of the gret cunyeit by the King’s
command iiiic. xxii unicorns.”

4th Aug: 1496. “—resavit fra Schir Thomas Tod of

1 Published in Spink’s Numismatic Circular, January 1927.
3 “‘The Great Chain’ consisted of seven score and six links and weighed
about thirteen pounds and a half. James IV coined it and other ornaments
to raise funds for his abortive invasion of England in 1497.—HUME BROWN,
It appears, therefore, that the letter T might still appear on a coin issued under James IV, though its presence on a groat of the first issue of James V, to which the Thistle and Mullet groat is often assigned, still seems difficult to explain.

On some IN VIRTUTE testoons of Mary of the year 1558 (B. 795) there is an A on the obverse under the R, and on a half-testoon of the same year under the M (B. 802). This, as Burns says, "may represent the initial letter of the surname of John Achesoun, who appears to have been master of the mint when these pieces were struck." The IN VIRTUTE issue is attributed to David Levison who also coined Mary's placks and hardheads, but it does not appear that this moneyer worked after 1558, as the hardheads of 1559 were coined by Achesoun. It is possible that Achesoun took over the last portion of the 1558 issue of these testoons, and this would provide a reason for the putting of his initial on these coins. The coins are rare, so that the issue was probably a small one.

The fact that this signing of coins is only occasionally permitted and that its occurrence is not sporadic but confined to certain defined issues or portion of issues points to some exceptional reason in each case for thus marking the coins.

If the D on the coins of David II can reasonably be attributed to Donatus Mulekyn, who certainly was not the regular moneyer, we have an exceptional case to explain this exceptional use. In the case of Bonagio's signature of coins of Robert II these may have been either the first coins which he produced or the first for which he was responsible as master-moneyer. Similarly in the case of Achesoun if, as I suppose, he took over a portion of the issue of another moneyer, we have again exceptional circumstances to justify his signature on the coins.

The very imperfect records which we possess of the Scottish mint do not enable us to arrive at certainty in such matters as this.

Briot's initial appears regularly on his coins, very occasionally in the field, generally in a much less conspicuous position, and his son-in-law, Falconer, follows his example on many of his issues. F appears again on coins of Charles II as the initial of Sir John Falconer.

1 Cochran-Patrick, vol. i, p. 51, xii, xiii.