A GOLD PENNY OF EDWARD THE ELDER

By C. E. BLUNT

In Brooke's *English Coins*, p. 50, mention is made of a gold coin of Edward the Elder in the Musée Cantonal at Lausanne as to the authenticity of which the author, by implication, expresses some doubt. The doubt was natural, for possibly Brooke knew the coin only from hearsay.

During a recent visit to Switzerland I had the opportunity to see this piece and to receive from the honorary curator, M. Colin Martin, by whose permission the piece is here reproduced, an offprint of a paper in which details of its provenance are set out. The following is a description of the coin:

**Obv.** EADVVEARD REX; in the centre a small cross.

**Rev.** DEORV/VALD MO, in two lines; a trefoil above, three crosses between the lines and a single cross below.

Wt. 5.25 gm., or 81 grs.; the coin is pierced (Pl. fig. 6).

The weight is wrongly given by Brooke as 70 grs., a weight that would correspond approximately to that of the Arab dinar.

The circumstances in which the coin was found are reported in a letter from M. Bujard, through whom the coin reached the Lausanne Museum, published in the paper referred to above. Appreciating the grave danger of forgery in a piece of this kind, M. Bujard wrote to place on record the following facts. The coin was found in March 1909 in a garden at Lutry, a village on the Lake of Geneva a few miles to the east of Lausanne. With it were found two other pieces, both pierced and said to be jetons of no value. Further particulars regarding them are lacking. The find was made by Madame Henry Noverraz. Monsieur Noverraz believed that the coin found its way into his garden when rubble from walls in his cellar was put there during repairs. The house in question is described as having belonged to a very old family of Lutry called Burnier. The finders are described as uneducated people who, even at the time the letter was written, had no idea of the value of what they had found, a fact that is further confirmed by their having parted with it for what is described as a modest sum.

From what has been said it will be seen that the evidence, as far as provenance is concerned, points strongly to the authenticity of the coin. On the numismatic side I have been given the following information. The coin was shown to Mr. L. Forrer, of Messrs. Spink and Son, Ltd., on the occasion of the Stroehlin sale in Geneva in November 1909, and he asked that it might be sent to London for submission to expert examination there. Mr. Forrer tells me that he

1 *Revue Suisse de Numismatique*, vol. xix, 1914; the article in question is by M. A. de Molin.
himself had no doubt as to its authenticity, although he was not then aware of the details of its provenance, but that Mr. Grueber, to whom it was submitted at the British Museum, was not entirely satisfied, particularly as to the edge of the coin. It must be remembered that when expressing his doubts Mr. Grueber was not fully informed as to the coin’s provenance.

A careful examination of the edge now shows it to be for the most part sharp, as one would expect on a genuine coin, but at one point there is a mark as if it had been slightly filed. If it is a cast, this might indicate the point of entry of the metal; if genuine, it might well result from the metal having been tested on a stone. This is likely enough to have been done to ascertain if it were gold or brass. The coin bears every sign of having been struck and not cast, and a slight flaking on the surface of the reverse is a feature that would seem unlikely to occur on a cast.

My own inclination on seeing the coin was to regard it as genuine, and the details of its provenance, which are now made available, must strongly support that view. One cannot presume to say what Mr. Grueber’s views would have been had the full facts been known to him, but they would surely have gone far to allay the suspicions which so remarkable a coin not unnaturally aroused in his mind.

On my return from Switzerland I laid the facts I have set out before Mr. Derek Allen, who had been working on the later Anglo-Saxon gold in the light of the rediscovery of the gold penny of Edward the Confessor. His paper was by that time virtually complete and, as he was shortly due to leave for the Far East, he suggested that when it was read to the Society, I should at the same time read a note on the Lausanne coin and comment on the views expressed in his paper.

As he has explained, gold coins of the Anglo-Saxon period are, if one excludes the early thrymsa issues, confined to single specimens of Offa, Archbishop Wigmund, Æthelred II, and Edward the Confessor. Of what one may call the Middle Anglo-Saxon period no specimen has hitherto been known. The coin of Edward the Elder therefore fills an important gap in supplying evidence of an issue in gold, on however limited a scale, at this time. Mention should perhaps also be made of the possible existence of a gold coin of Alfred. The evidence for this is very slight, but comes from two distinct sources and may therefore have some foundation. For what use it may be to future numismatists, should the coin ever come to light, it may be useful to place it on record here.

In the margin of an old map of Gloucestershire I am informed there is a note to the effect that in a copse on the Hatherop Castle estate (near Fairford) there was found a gold coin of Alfred. I have inquired of the present owner, Sir Thomas Bazley, and of the descendant of the late owner, Lord de Mauley, but neither of them has ever heard of it. A letter to the local paper likewise produced no results. But Mr. Allen, to whom I spoke of the matter, tells me that, shortly after he joined the staff of the British Museum, a lady told him in the Coin Room
that there was in the possession of her family a gold coin of Alfred. He asked that the British Museum should be allowed to see it, but it was not shown in his time. So far as he knows, all record of the lady's name was destroyed with other papers when the Coin Room was burned. The evidence is slight enough, but it suggests the possibility that such a piece may in fact remain to be discovered.

To revert to the coin which is the subject of this paper, the moneyer Deorwald is known to have struck silver coins for Edward the Elder of both the portrait type and the type with the cross pattee in the centre on the obverse. A moneyer of the same name struck also for Alfred, including coins that bear the name of Canterbury,¹ and for Athelstan and Edmund.² In the latter reigns his coins bear no evidence as to their mint of origin. The name, not an uncommon one, is therefore struck over a minimum period of forty years, and it seems unlikely that one moneyer would have held office for so long. The Deorwald who struck for Alfred and Edward the Elder may, however, well be the same person, in which case the coins of the latter should probably be attributed to Canterbury. This is the view that was apparently held by Brooke, judging from a pencil note in his copy of the British Museum Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Coins.

In discussing the question whether these rare Anglo-Saxon gold coins could be regarded as struck for the purpose of paying Peter's Pence to Rome, Mr. Allen points out that the evidence of the two coins of Æthelred II and Edward the Confessor is against such an association.³ That they were struck at minor provincial mints and found locally supports this view. The evidence of the Edward the Elder coin, struck probably at one of the principal mints and found on the road to Rome, and of the Offa dinar, which may have been found in Rome itself, would, on the other hand, lend colour to the idea that they were Peter's Pence, provided other evidence were forthcoming that gold coins were used for that purpose. As Mr. Allen has pointed out, such further evidence is lacking and it would therefore be hazardous to propound the theory on the sole evidence of these few coins.

The assertion also, made on more than one occasion,⁴ that gold coins circulated freely in this country in later Anglo-Saxon times seems equally without substantiating evidence. In fact such evidence as there is points in the opposite direction. Cufic coins have occurred in a number of hoards, but in only one that I have traced is there a reference to their being of gold, and in this case they are described as fragments. It is noteworthy also that Sir John Evans when writing of this hoard makes no mention of the Cufic coins being of gold; this is only recorded in the Victoria County History.⁵ It seems unlikely that Sir John would have failed to mention so important and unusual

¹ B.M.C. ii, p. 19.
² Ibid., pp. 101 and 122.
³ Above, p. 268.
a feature, so that one must regard even this one piece of evidence as to Cufic gold being found in English hoards as open to grave suspicion.

Two Cufic coins, one a dinar of Hesham ben abd-el Malek (A.D. 724–743), are recorded as having been picked up on the sea-shore in Sussex,¹ but would seem more likely to have come from a shipwreck than from a domestic hoard.

The only other cases of gold coins of this period that I have found—and I am indebted to valuable notes of Mr. Anthony Thompson’s for my hoard data—are a mention by Richard Fenton in his Tours in Wales (1804–13) that he “passed near the spot where skeletons were found, accompanied by Saxon coins, one of Edgar, one gold—all given to Mr. Hughes of Cymmel, who owns the whole territory round.”² In a large find at Halton Moor, near Lancaster,³ buried c. 1030–40, reference is made to “6 pieces of stamped gold” which appear from the description to be Scandinavian bracteates. One can hardly, on such slender evidence, assume a free circulation of gold coins in Anglo-Saxon England.

I have gone into the matter in some detail because it is largely, though not entirely, on such an assumption that the case rests for regarding the few surviving Anglo-Saxon gold coins as evidence for the existence of a small circulation of gold currency issued in this country. In the absence of documentary or hoard evidence to support it, and in view of the demonstrably mono-metallic state of the currency in northern Europe as a whole at this time, this case, I feel, must fail. If it does so, it does not necessarily mean that the coins must be accepted as having been struck to pay Peter’s Pence. This indeed is one possibility, though, as has been said, there is little enough evidence to support it.

Essentially these gold coins fall into two classes: the one struck from dies specially prepared, namely, the Offa and Wigmund coins; the other struck from the dies of the silver coinage. The first class must surely have some special significance. That it is not an economic or commercial one is suggested by the survival of no more than two unique specimens. That they may have been struck to impress a foreign potentate is in the case of Offa, from what we know of his character, not improbable. Whether Offa issued his dinar to show himself the equal of Charlemagne, with his gold coinage in Italy, or to impress his grandeur on the Pope, we shall probably never know.

It is possible that the coins struck from the penny dies may, as Mr. Allen suggests, have been issued for commercial purposes. But in this case it would seem more likely that they were intended for trade in the Mediterranean, where gold coin was current, than for circulation in this country.

To my mind the most satisfying explanation, and one that would account for all these issues, is to regard them as struck for a special

² Arch. Camb., 1917, p. 268.
³ Archaeologia, xviii (1815), pp. 199 ff.
purpose such as offering at shrines. The practice of offering gold coin in this way was widespread in the Near East at this time and resulted, as Professor Lombard has pointed out,\textsuperscript{1} in the sterilization in the treasuries of the Syrian and Egyptian churches of a substantial portion of what should have constituted the medium of trade. In the West matters never reached such a pass, but the practice on a more limited scale may well have existed and documentary research in this direction might perhaps produce fruitful results.

If this theory proves correct it will not be necessary to seek to interpret the coins in terms of English pence.

\textit{Postscript.}—While this paper was in the press a silver penny of Edward the Elder with the same obverse die as the gold penny has been found. It is in the British Museum and is illustrated (Pl. fig. 7). This should prove conclusively the authenticity of the gold coin.

\footnote{\textit{Annales — Économies, Sociétés, Civilisation} (Paris, 1947), pp. 143 ff.}