THREE ANGLO-SAXON NOTES

By C. E. BLUNT

A COIN OF HEABERHT, KING OF KENT

LORD GRANTLEY’S ATTRIBUTION VINDICATED

In the *Numismatic Chronicle* for 1900 (pp. 148 ff.) Lord Grantley published the following coin which he had recently acquired in Rome.

*Obv.: +H-ABERHT, in centre R (for Rex)*

*Rev.: Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô in the angles of a cross voided in the centre with an annulet enclosing a pellet and with similar ornaments at the end of each arm.*

*Wt.: 11 gr., but chipped. (Pl. VII, 2.)*

Lord Grantley attributed this coin to a Heaberht, King of Kent, whose name is found on three charters,¹ two of them dated 764 and 765 respectively, the third undated but assigned to a period 765–91.² For this attribution Lord Grantley offered a number of reasons which may perhaps be summarized as follows (though reference should be made to his actual paper to follow in detail the trend of his argument):

1. The obverse type is similar to that of Ecgberht, King of Kent (Pl. VII, 3 and 4), whose exact dates are uncertain but who was a contemporary of Heaberht’s.³ Both kings subscribe to Birch’s Charter 196, Ecgberht making the grant and Heaberht confirming it.

2. It seemed, at the time he wrote, to be a matter of general agreement that these coins of Ecgberht were properly ascribed to a separate Kentish king of that name rather than to the Wessex king who defeated Kent in A.D. 825.

3. The type R for Rex is found on coins of Pépin who introduced the *novus denarius* in Gaul c. A.D. 755 and was probably copied by Heaberht and Ecgberht from it.

4. Eoba, the moneyer, struck early coins for Offa and also coins for Cynethrith, his queen.

The coin therefore was an early one in the penny series and the evidence of the charters provided the approximate date of issue. It filled, in Lord Grantley’s words, “another numismatic gap in the series of Kent, as I can confidently ascribe it to a King Heaberht who reigned jointly with this King Ecgberht of Kent. It also adds another unique coin to our national series”.

At about the time Lord Grantley wrote the above Sir Henry Howorth was engaged on a study of the kings who bore the name of Ecgberht and in the same volume of the *Numismatic Chronicle* he

¹ Birch, *Cart. Sax.* 195, 196, and 260.
³ Powicke, op. cit., gives Ecgberht’s date as c. 765–c. 780 or later.
published certain preliminary conclusions. These he followed up in 1908 with a more detailed survey.¹

The burden of his conclusions, so far as they concern this paper, is that Ecgberht who later became King of Wessex was in fact a prince of the Kentish royal house; that it was he who struck coins as King of Kent; that these coins were struck at the end of the eighth century; and that there is no reliable evidence of a King Ecgberht in Kent at the date indicated by the earlier charters. In a word, that all the coins with the name of Ecgberht were the product of the same monarch.

From this Sir Henry Howorth goes on to examine Lord Grantley’s coin of Heaberht which he ascribes to the Kentish upstart King Eadberht Praen, who seized the throne of Kent in 796 on the death of Offa. He points out that the initial H is of little significance, and gives reasons for considering that Heaberht and Eadberht are only forms of the same name. This attribution is a logical one if the coins with the name of Ecgberht were in fact struck as late as the end of the eighth century.

Howorth’s arguments on this subject are based on a detailed study of the documentary sources of the history of the period, many of which he finds difficulty in accepting as genuine. This is a highly specialized matter and one on which I am not qualified to write, but it is significant that Howorth’s views find little favour with historians today. Sir Frank Stenton in his *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2nd edition, 1947, pp. 205–6) accepts an Ecgberht as being a King of Kent until 779 or later, but considers that in the later part of his reign he was entirely subservient to Offa. Powicke (op. cit., p. 9) supports his view. Both also accept the existence of a King Heaberht of Kent about this time. Stenton regards him as “ephemeral” and Powicke offers no certain evidence of his ruling later than 765.

This being the verdict of the historians of today, we can ourselves consider the numismatic aspect.

In the first place it can be said with confidence that the format and weight of the Kentish Ecgberht and Heaberht coins render a date as late as Eadberht Praen (796–8) improbable.² The coins are for the most part of the small size, associated both in England and on the Continent with the transition from the sceat to the penny, and are markedly different from the larger-sized coins that were introduced by Offa in the later part of his reign and to which all coins of Eadberht Praen conform (Pl. VII, 7).

The moneyers Babba and Udd on Ecgberht’s and Eoba on Heaberht’s coins all struck for Offa, but as they produced both early and late coins for him the evidence of their names alone does not contribute to the solution of the problem. The types, however, do so. An

¹ *Num. Chron.*, 1900, pp. 66 ff., and 1908, pp. 222 ff.
² The weights available to me of nine coins of Ecgberht are as follows: 17·3, 17, 18·2, 17·6, 15·7, 17·6, 15 (holed), 19, 16·8. Of Eadberht Praen I have by a coincidence weights of a similar number of specimens: 20·4, 18·4, 18·4, 18·5, 18·5, 20·9, 16 (chipped), 22·3, 19·6.
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early coin of Offa by Eoba (Pl. VII, 5) gives us the same reverse type as Heaberht’s coin and this reverse is also found on an anonymous sceat in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, hitherto unpublished (Pl. VII, 1). A sequence from sceat to penny seems clearly designated here. Of Babba there are comparable early coins of Offa (e.g. Pl. VII, 6), though the resemblance is not so close as with Eoba. Of Udd there is nothing comparable in type. On balance it would seem that the evidence available supports Lord Grantley’s original attribution of this coin of Heaberht to the Kentish king of that name mentioned in the three charters. The exact date must remain in doubt. But as Babba and Eoba struck early issues for Coenwulf who came to the Mercian throne in 796 (Udd may also have done so, but this is very uncertain), it is hardly likely that they would both have been working more than, say, twenty-five years earlier. Powicke’s tentative dating of Ecgberht to c. 765–c. 780 or later is therefore borne out by the coins and Heaberht appears to have shared the throne of Kent with him.

One small correction may perhaps be added. Howorth mentions (op. cit., p. 228) “that specimens of these very rare coins of Ecgberht exist in the Bergen Museum in Norway, probably the result of the Norwegian raid on Kent in 793”. Professor Shetelig of Bergen has kindly supplied a cast of the only Ecgberht coin in the Museum which proves to be a styca of the Archbishop of York of that name (732-4 to 766).

Since the ownership of a coin may be held to prejudice one in the views one takes of it, it is right to add that the Heaberht coin is now in my cabinet. I bought it out of Lord Grantley’s collection (lot 878) because I believed it to be what he originally thought, and subsequent study has fortified me in that view.

I am indebted to the Keeper of the French National collection for the cast of the sceat illustrated in the plate and for permission to publish it here; and to the Keeper of Coins, the British Museum, and the Curator of the Hunterian Coin Collection for the remaining casts.

KEY TO PLATE


A BURGRED-TYPE COIN WITH, APPARENTLY, THE NAME OF KING AETHILBEARHT OF WESSEX

The coin illustrated (Pl. VII, 8) is of the type of the Mercian King Burgred, B.M.C. 1d, that is, with the reverse legend divided by two crook-ended lines. This type was also struck by the Wessex King Aethelred. Its curious feature is that it appears to read Aethilbearht. Aethilbearht was a contemporary of Burgred, and there is ample
evidence from the moneyers’ names that in the time of Aethelred and
Alfred, the successors on the Wessex throne to Aethilbearht, the
Mercian coinage was, in part at any rate, produced at the same mint
as was issuing coins for the Wessex Kings.

But as all Burgred’s coins are similar to this type—with slight
variations of the reverse—and as this type is first found issued by
Aethelred, who came to the Wessex throne in 866, it has generally
been assumed that Burgred, in the fourteen years of his reign that
preceded that date, issued no coins. If, however, we have here a coin
of Burgred-type struck in the name of Aethilbearht, that date may
well be put back a year or two.

The evidence from which a conclusion may be reached is far from
satisfactory. The coin illustrated is all we have, and it is a piece not
only double-struck but unsatisfactory in certain points in the legend.
It’s reverse, moreover, might well arouse the suspicion that it is cast,
but there seems little on the obverse to confirm this view.

The following is a description:

*Obv.:* +ÆDEBEAR.HE.
  Diademed bust to right reaching to the edge of the coin.

*Rev.:* DVDDA/MOH/ETA in three lines divided by crook-ended
lines. Weight 23 grs.

The coin comes from the Brown, P. W. Carlyon-Britton (333), and
Ryan (708) collections.

In the Carlyon-Britton catalogue is this comment: “This type for
this King is unknown. It may of course be urged that the moneyer
and type are Aethelred’s, but the coin clearly reads Aethilbearht’s
name, and the bust is unlike that of his successor.”

The cataloguer of the Ryan collection was obviously less happy
about the coin. Although cataloguing it under Aethilbearht (with
another coin) he described it as “a piece of Burgred type 3, possibly
reading AEDEBEARHE on obverse and DVDDA MONETA on reverse,
the obverse is very double struck”.

Since the Carlyon-Britton sale one of the objections mentioned in
that catalogue has been overcome by the discovery of a coin of
Aethilbearht of *B.M.C.* type II struck by the moneyer Dudda. This
coin is in the Hunter collection in Glasgow (*Pl. VII, 9*). There is no
question that it is not from the same obverse die as the coin under
discussion.

What, then, should one make of this coin?

Its weight is slightly heavier than most coins of Burgred, though
two in the British Museum catalogue exceed it. This is in its favour,
as Aethilbearht’s coins are generally slightly heavier than Aethelred’s.

If one can accept it as a genuine coin—and, as I have said, there
is nothing on the obverse to suggest a cast—one is faced with the
difficulty of the mistakes in the obverse legend. Dudda’s coin in the
Hunter collection is an excellent piece of work, and letter perfect. This
coin has several defects: the absence of the L, unlikely to arise from
the double-striking; the H, which is not a ligated HT(HT) as is usual; and the solitary E at the end in place of REX.

The possibility of an overstrike has to be considered, but must, I think, be entirely ruled out. Were it overstruck on a coin of Aethelbearht, which would account for the end of the king's name and leave the initial part to stand for Aethelred, a corresponding weakness would appear at the same place on the reverse. But this is not the case.

I do not feel that it is possible to reach any definite conclusion on the evidence of this coin alone. In my own cabinet I have followed Major Carlyon-Britton and Mr. Ryan in placing it under Aethilbearht, because this seems on the evidence of the legend the most likely attribution. But I have done so with considerable reserve, and it must await the discovery of another and, one may hope, more perfect specimen before it is prudent to add this as a type to the two at present recorded for that king. Meanwhile, however, it seemed worth while to place this specimen on record, and at the same time to illustrate the Hunter coin which was first published in the Brooke supplement. Another specimen of the latter is recorded in a manuscript note of Brooke's as having been brought up at some time to the British Museum.

A DIE-IDENTITY BETWEEN A COIN OF ALFRED AND ONE OF AETHELSTAN II OF EAST ANGLIA

The two coins illustrated here (Pl. VII, 10 and 11), which bear the names of Alfred and Aethelstan respectively, share a common reverse die by the moneyer Elda, who adds the words me fec(it) after his name. The following is a description of them:

**Obv. EL FR ED REX** Small cross pattée in plain circle.

**Rev. ELDA*/•/MEFEC**

Ex Lawrence sale, 1951, 230.

**Obv. ED EL TAN RE** A slightly larger cross pattée with a pellet centre, all in a plain circle. Larger lettering.

**Rev. Same die as preceding.**

Ex Cuerdale hoard, Drabble sale, 1939, 363, and Ryan sale, 1952, 663.

For comparison there is also illustrated a third coin of Elda's which has the reverse legend retrograde:

**Obv. +EL EE ED RE** Small cross pattée in plain circle.

**Rev. ELDA///MEFEC* (retrograde). 22.3 gr.**


This coin Major Carlyon-Britton attributed to Aethelstan II of East Anglia, but the name would seem rather to be a blundered version of Alfred, a feature commonly found on Danish imitations at this time.
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Its workmanship falls far short of the standard of the first two Elda coins.

It was recognized that Aethelstan’s moneyers either worked for Alfred or struck coins in his name, but this is, I believe, the first instance recorded of an actual die identity being found. It does not seem possible to say which of the two coins was struck first.

The three coins illustrated are now in my collection.