A NEGLECTED BUT VITAL YORKSHIRE HOARD

By R. H. M. DOLLEY

In his brilliant study of the tenth-century coinage of York, Mr. Derek Allen placed the class of coins reading Raienalt "after the end of the regular Northumbrian series". As he justly remarks "they could hardly have circulated alongside the excellent pennies current between A.D. 940 and 950", and no less shrewd is his further comment that "the use of the Carolus monogram and Eboraci legend connects them closely with the later versions of the St. Peter pence". Less happy, in the opinion of the writer of this note, is the suggestion that "the hand on some of them may well be copied from the hand type on coins of Æthelraed II", and that "coins of this smaller module are more probable towards the end of the century than in the middle, since they might then have passed with coins of Æthelraed II". Thanks to the generosity of Dr. N. L. Rasmusson, the present writer has had the opportunity, denied to his predecessors, of examining the great Swedish hoards preserved in the Statens Historiska Museum at Stockholm, and in his opinion it is inconceivable that the Raienalt coins could be so late. This opinion may seem to be reinforced by consideration of an early nineteenth-century find from Yorkshire which seems to have escaped the notice of modern writers although cited both by Benson and by Caine.

The most complete contemporary account of the hoard is in the Gentleman's Magazine for 1807, pp. 1105-7. It was communicated under the pseudonym AMICUS, but Caine was able to identify the correspondent as one Robert Belt of Bossall. Most of the report is devoted to an extravagant surmise concerning the occasion of the deposit—a flight of fancy rivalling if not outstripping some of those advanced concerning other hoards at the beginning of this century—but the following passages throw light on the content of the find: "My own collection of the curiosities undermentioned is but small. The Coins are, however, in good preservation. I have sent, for the use of your Engraver, a few of those I consider as most valuable; viz. a coin of King Athelstan, a head of King Edward the Elder, and two other pieces of the York Mint, but engraved by an ignorant workman." Unfortunately the editors did not see fit to publish the two English coins on the ground that they were "not uncommon", but the description would suggest that they were a portrait coin of Edward the Elder (Br. 12), and the common type of Athelstan (Br. 1) which we know to have been struck throughout the reign. The two pieces of the York Mint "engraved by an ignorant workman" are illustrated by excellent line-drawings (Fig. 1).

They are seen to be the elusive *Raienalt* pence which Mr. Allen found so inconsistent with the rest of the “Norwegian” coinage of York, and examples in the British Museum (Fig. 2) give testimony to the accuracy of “Mr. Urban’s Engraver”. The coin, incidentally, came into the National Collection after 1813 and before 1839, and it is the suggestion of the writer of this note that the great majority if not all of the extant *Raienalt* s emanate from the Bossall hoard.

Robert Belt continues:

I have sent also a small piece of what I consider as part of a silver stirrup, of a smaller size, but similar shape, with some in the original collection; and also the piece of silver chain undermentioned.

On the 14th of Sept. 1807, a leaden box, containing about 270 Silver Coins, and some pieces of Silver, the latter weighing about two pounds, was turned up by the plough, in the parish of Bossall, in the county of York, at a farm occupied by Benjamin Wright, and belonging to Henry Cholmley, esq. near the Lobster House, and eight milestones on the road from York to Malton. Most of the Coins appear to have been struck at the Mint of St. Peter at York. From several Coins of Alfred, Edward the Elder, and Athelstan, having been found with the St. Peter’s penny, it is conjectured that they were struck in the reigns of those Monarchs; deposited in the Treasury of the Cathedral of York, in King Athelstan’s time, and taken from thence previous to the battle between Harold and the King of Norway in 1066. They have the name of the Master of the Mint, or of the City of York, on the reverse; and are in perfect preservation, seeming almost fresh from the Mint, and at all events cannot have been in much circulation, if any. . . . It appears evident from the pieces of Silver found with the Coins, that the whole was the plunder of a field of battle. Some of these appear separated or chopped off from others of them, and to be pieces of stirrups. Others seem to have been ornaments for horses. There is also a small piece of a Silver Chain of coarse workmanship, which, no doubt, was either part of a bit, or of the headstall of a bridle. In addition to these was a plain Silver Ring, curiously twisted at the joinings, and some broken ones, and a small Silver Crucifix.
The presence of ornaments and "hacksilver" is unusual, but not without precedent. Indeed, it is a feature of a small group of early tenth-century hoards from northern England and the shores of the Irish Sea, and the finds from Cuerdale, Goldsborough, and Bangor come at once to mind.\(^1\) Unfortunately the presence of "hacksilver" in the 1950 Chester hoard means that we cannot regard the inclusion of broken and cut silver ornaments as an infallible indication of early tenth-century date, although in that instance the "hacksilver" almost certainly represented an earlier agglomeration arbitrarily added to the hoard on the occasion of its deposit.\(^2\) In the Scots finds "hacksilver" does occur in later contexts, but it is easy to overlook an essential distinction between hoards from English territory and those from areas never incorporated in the English kingdom as such. Prima facie, then, the presence of "hacksilver" is entirely consistent with the inclusion of coins of Edward the Elder and Æthelstan, and indeed may seem to confirm any dating of the hoard to the first half of the tenth century.

Considerably more precision can be given to such a line of reasoning if we refer to Marsden's *Numismata Orientalia Illustrata* where on p. 80 we find described a dirham of the Samanid prince Ahmed ben Ismail struck at Al-Shash in 299 (911-12). Marsden continues:

> It was kindly placed in the Collection by Sir William Strickland, Bart. of Boynton in Yorkshire, who communicated to me at the same time, the particular circumstances attending its discovery, in the following note: "Sir William Strickland begs Mr. Marsden's acceptance of the Cufic coin which he shewed him in London, and which he should have had great pleasure in adding to his curious and interesting Collection at the time, had it not belonged to his brother-in-law, Mr. Cholmley, on whose estate, called the Haverholms, in the parish of Flaxton, near York, it was found. It was ploughed up in the autumn of 1807, in a field some years taken off from the antient forest of Galtres, and was enclosed in a leaden box, which time had almost entirely decomposed, along with one other imperfect coin of the same country, which Sir W. believes Mr. M. saw in the possession of Mr. Weston, two pennies of Edward the elder, son of Alfred the Great, a hundred and fifty or more Saxon Peter-pennies, several rings and armlets of curious construction, and lumps of sculptured silver, the use of which cannot be ascertained, as they appear to be fragments only of some massive ornament or vessel. Sir W. has requested his son to present the coin to Mr. M." York, Jan. 22d, 1809.

This inclusion in the hoard of Samanid coins, one of them now in the British Museum (Fig. 3), is another pointer to its being early in date. As will emerge so very clearly from Mrs. U. S. Linder Welin's forthcoming study of the Kufic coins in English, Scots and Irish hoards, the Samanid contribution is confined to a small group deposited between c. 915 and c. 930 and obviously associated with the Hiberno-Norse attack on York. To date, not one Samanid coin has occurred in a find with English coins of a king later than Æthelstan, and indeed there is only one isolated instance of a Kufic coin of any description occurring in a hoard datable to the second rather than the

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1 For a map bringing out the importance of the hoards of the Dublin-York "axis" see the forthcoming paper by D. M. Wilson in *Acta Archaeologica*.  
first half of the tenth century. Even in this instance, the solitary Kufic coin has the appearance of being a survival and is accompanied by coins of Æthelstan. Taken in conjunction, the presence both of Samanid coins and of "hacksilver" in the same find argues pretty strongly for the hoard being dated before rather than after 930, and, as we have seen, a date c. 927 is strongly suggested by the English coins which run from Alfred to Æthelstan. A date much later in Æthelstan's reign is surely precluded by the apparent absence of spectacular but now by no means uncommon pieces of Anlaf which beyond doubt would have exercised the early nineteenth-century antiquary.

It has been assumed that the find described by Belt and that discussed by Strickland in a letter to Marsden are one and the same hoard, and any lingering doubts are resolved by a consideration of the find-spot. The Lobster House stands on the boundary of the parishes of Bossall and Flaxton, and is the obvious point of reference for any find in the vicinity if only because it appears on contemporary maps whereas the farm occupied by Wright is omitted. Both finds are described as having been contained in a leaden box, in both St. Peter's pence predominate, and both contain "hacksilver" and pence of Edward the Elder. The landowner is in each case a Mr. Cholmley, and the discovery was made in both instances in the autumn of 1807. So many coincidences cannot be brushed aside, and the few discrepancies between the two accounts are readily explicable in the case of a hoard which was never the subject of a coroner's inquest. The damage done by nineteenth-century contempt for the law of treasure-trove cannot be stressed too much, and in this particular case there can be little doubt but that it has delayed by more than a century recognition of the true place in the Northumbrian series of two major issues. Even more important, possibly, than the reattribution of the Raienalts is the incisive indication given of the date of the great emission of the so-called St. Peter pence. In fact the hoard evidence was already ample to put the earliest before 915—Harkirke alone would suffice—but the present writer would suggest that even the late Dr. Philip Nelson failed sufficiently to take into account the

1 I am most grateful to my colleague Miss H. M. Wallis of the British Museum Map Room for placing at my disposal contemporary large-scale maps of the area.
incidence of other finds.¹ Is there really any good reason for supposing that the issue continued after Æthelstan's occupation of York? Elsewhere in this Journal Mrs. Strudwick publishes an important hoard from near Keswick which seems to provide irrefutable evidence that the type had begun to degenerate soon after 920.² Eric's coins are not true imitations but rather evocations, and the suggestion of this paper is that Mr. Allen's courageous redating of the St. Peter pence was not in fact drastic enough. Far from beginning c. 925, this curious ecclesiastical coinage was by then already on the point of expiry. Incidentally, one important consequence of this early dating of the St. Peter pence is that there is no longer any obstacle to our giving the St. Martin pence to the second decade of the tenth century, historically their most plausible setting.

If the numismatist deplores the absence of a complete list of the Bossall/Flaxton hoard, and in particular details of the weights which would have confirmed the presence of degenerate St. Peter pence, how much more must the archaeologist regret the disappearance of the ornaments, and especially of the small silver crucifix. The Yorkshire Museum, however, does possess one of the armlets mentioned

¹ The present writer knows only one hoard where a St. Peter penny appears to occur in conjunction with English coins later than Æthelstan—the rather dubious "second" Trewhiddle hoard (Num. Chron. 1955, pp. 5-9). On the other hand, they do occur in hoards containing no coins apparently later in date than 925, for instance Harkirke, Dean and the St. John's Hoard from Chester, and in these three cases at least with St. Eadmund pennies.

² Infra, p. 177.
by Strickland, and the present writer is grateful to Mr. G. F. Willmot, F.S.A., for permission to publish it here (Fig. 4) and to his colleague Mr. David Wilson who supplies the following authoritative note:

The armlet, illustrated in Shetelig but erroneously described as from York, has a maximum external diameter of 8.0 cms., and the maximum breadth of the band is 2.4 cms. The weight is 67 gms. It is of silver and of C-shaped section, the terminals tapering to unite in a hooked clip. The edges are slightly scalloped, and the whole is decorated with bands of punched ornament, a central band of coarse beading dividing a series of punches, the larger one a very rough and angular trefoil, and the smaller leaf-shaped and occasionally grouped in twos and threes. The large stamps are opposed in a complementary tooth pattern with two rows on either side of the midrib.

The armlet is of a comparatively rare type, the form of its terminals and its C-shaped section being found but rarely in association. In England the only definite and distinct parallel known to the writer is to be found in the great hoard from Cuerdale which is now dated by Mr. C. E. Blunt and by Mr. Dolley independently rather nearer 905 than 911. The Lancashire hoard contains half of a similar arming of C-shaped section with one of the single-twist loops surviving, and it is possible that two or three other fragments in the find belong to the same class.

The type is of Scandinavian inspiration but it is rarely found in that area. It is not listed in Petersen’s Norwegian type series, although a C-shaped arming with blunted arms (op. cit., fig. 188) is presumably a variant. Nor does it appear in Rygh or Müller, and only rather doubtfully in Stenberger’s great corpus of the silver from the Gotland hoards, though in the latter work the variant noted in Petersen is of frequent occurrence. It would seem in consequence that the Bossall/Flaxton armlet is in all probability a Viking type, a cross perhaps between the early arming of D-shaped section and the neckring with hooked terminals which in turn foreshadows the later type with blunted terminals so common in Viking silver finds.

The punched design is a rather coarse variant of one found on many Scandinavian armrings, and close parallels are to be seen, to take only two examples, in the Gotland finds from Suderby (SHM Inv. 8890) and Buters (SHM Inv. 4164), the latter hoard to be dated from the coins to the seventh decade of the tenth century. For the archaeologist perhaps the greatest importance of the new example from the Bossall/Flaxton hoard is its provenance and its occurrence in a closely dated context.

In conclusion it seems worth remarking that the National Collection has a run of nineteen St. Peter pence which there is reason to think the armlet found in a field at Flaxton near the Lobster house on the road to Malton”. The immediate provenance is “the collection of J. Croft, Esq.”, and in 1891 Canon Raine adds the information that it was presented to the Yorkshire Museum in 1824.

1 I am grateful to Mr. Willmot for the following information concerning the provenance of the armlet. In V.C.H., vol. ii, p. 102 it is given as from Flaxton. In the 1852 handbook to the Museum it is recorded as “a silver armlet found in a field at Flaxton near the Lobster house on the road to Malton”. The immediate provenance is “the collection of J. Croft, Esq.”, and in 1891 Canon Raine adds the information that it was presented to the Yorkshire Museum in 1824.
2 Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland, vol. iv, p. 31 and fig. 8.
3 Ibid., vol. iv, pp. 119 f. and fig. 12.
4 Vikingtidens Smykker, Stavanger, 1928, pp. 150 f.
5 Norske Oldsager, Christiania, 1885.
6 Ordning af Danmarks Oldsager, Copenhagen, 1888-95.
7 Der Schatzfunde Gotlands der Wikingerzeit, Lüneburg, 1947, Pl. 257.
8 Ibid., figs. 38, 107, &c.
9 Stjerna K. Bornholms Befolkninghistoria under Jarnalderen, Stockholm, 1905, figs. 179 and 181. In this context it is interesting to note that Petersen (op. cit., p. 159) claims that the Viking armlets developed directly out of the armlets of the period immediately preceding the Viking Age. Professor Stenberger has suggested in correspondence a similar idea with the addition that this arm-ring may be an English copy of a Scandinavian type.
10 Stenberger, op. cit., figs. 124:1 and 125:1.
11 The 500-odd Arabic coins and fragments thereof span the period A.D. 739-959. The hoard is thus among the latest to consist purely of Kufic coins, and a date substantially later seems precluded by the absence of German and English coins.
were acquired during the decade immediately following the Bossall discovery.¹ Eighteen of them belong to the so-called “light” series. Certainty is impossible but it is difficult not to see some connexion between so notable an accession and the dispersal of an unprecedented hoard containing as many as 200 of the pieces in question. It only remains to express the hope that the appearance of this note may bring to light the present whereabouts of other coins and ornaments from a find which is clearly of cardinal importance for the student of tenth-century coinage.

¹ Cf. infra, p. 45.