CHRONOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF THE PINECONEMASCLE COINAGE OF HENRY VI

By HERBERT SCHNEIDER

A PINECONEMASCLE noble of Henry VI illustrated on Plate XVI, 33, was sold in the Rooms of Messrs. Glendining on 19 May 1964 (lot 283) and attracted my attention mainly because of the unusual features of the reverse. Neither obverse nor reverse die of this coin was listed in Whitton's paper on the heavy coinage of Henry VI (BNJ XXIII) and the legends read as follows: ($ = pinecone)

Obv. HENRIC' $ DL' $ GRA' $ REX <> ANGL Z FRANC $ DNS $ HIB

The obverse legend is thus a mixtum compositum between Whitton's die 21 which also reads HIB and die 24 on which the saltires before and after $ were omitted. The mark $ is curiously made up on the obverse of the noble under review: to the normal small Lombardic letter I a sort of pothook was attached, and the standard z punch of the period which we find on all the other dies was not used, unless it was partly obliterated by the Lombardic letter I which may have been, strangely enough, punched over the z mark. The pinecones are predominantly of Whitton's variety No. 3, but there is clearly a cone No. 2 after FRANC and an unrecorded pinecone variety after DI. This resembles Whitton's pinecone No. 1a but the exceptionally long stem curls to the left instead of right.

The reverse legend is similar to that of Whitton's die No. 21: ($ = pinecone)

IHC' $ AVT $ TRANCIENS $ PER $ MEDIUM $ ILLORV $ IBAT

but there is a pinecone after PER and we find the mascle after MEDIUM. The lis above the lion's head in the second quarter of the reverse is omitted and the cones are all of Whitton's variety No. 3.

The obverse of the coin yields a new die variety and yet a further pinecone design but presents basically no problems. By Whitton's standards of classification, its logical position on the list would be between die 24 and 25a where even the HIB legend would not be particularly disturbing considering that he placed one of the HIB dies at the very beginning and the other at the end of his list, anyway. (BNJ XXIII, p. 228). Noteworthy, however, but probably of no special significance is the fact that this appears to be the only obverse die of a pinecone-mascle noble on which pinecones of different designs were mixed—a feature not unusual on the reverse of the coins.

To assign the corresponding place in Whitton's list to the reverse die meets, however, with formidable obstacles, considering the ILLORV legend on the one hand and the absence
of the lis mark in the second quarter on the other. Although the mascle after 
\textit{MEDIVM} is unpublished and appears to be unique it creates no chronological problem, for it could have been placed in this unusual position at any time during the pinecone-mascle coinage. In contradistinction, the spelling \textit{ILLORV} points very clearly towards the earliest reverse die of Whitton's list (No. 21) with an identical legend which occurs nowhere else, but if we moved the coin higher up and placed it between die 21 and 22, the cones on the obverse would be out of place.

Whitton took it for granted—and the assumption is entirely conjectural—that the minute changes in the shape of the cones provided the key for the order in which the coins were struck. Actually, before and after the pinecone-mascle coinage there is no evidence of the use of rosette or leaf stops for privy marking, and the cones would have been a particularly unsuitable punch for this purpose. For any striking weakness or the inevitable double striking makes the identification of the cones variety exceedingly difficult, and as minute a punch as this produces the most astonishing distortions if it is applied to the die at the slightest angle. The Master Worker at the Tower must have been fully aware of this and a larger and different design would, I think, have been adopted had the cones really been singled out for a coherent system of privy marking. Whether all the pinecone varieties Whitton has listed are in fact varieties in the accepted sense of the word is debatable: in some cases the almost microscopic difference may be due to the distortions referred to above, and in other cases one wonders whether the same punch in different stages of breakage, repair and recutting was not recorded more than once.

Mr. Whitton has very neatly arranged the sequence of the pinecone-mascle nobles on the basis of the cone varieties on the obverse. If we examine the corresponding reverse dies, however, we find disturbing evidence of 'muling'—if the term can be used in this case—so far as the pinecone varieties are concerned. (cf. \textit{BNJ} XXIII, p. 228). To make things worse, Spink's had a pinecone noble in 1951 with cones 3 on the obverse but legend as Whitton's die 26, and on the reverse cones 2 and 8 mixed with the legend of die 24. I took a cast of it which was unfortunately destroyed in the inundations in Antwerp in February, 1952, so that only the written record of it remains, but the coin is no doubt still extant somewhere in the U.K. However, even without this specimen Whitton's list of the reverse dies of the pinecone-mascle nobles is somewhat illogical. Cones 1, 2 and 3 occur on rosette/pinecone mules, and we find cones 3 and 8 mixed on die 25d. By Whitton's standards we must therefore assume that cones 3 were used all through the pinecone-mascle coinage. Considering the evidence of Spink's noble referred to above, the same applies to cones 2. Whitton's record of obverse die 22 with cones 1a combined with a reverse die showing cones 8 and providing a die link with noble 29b adds to the confusion, and I find it difficult to understand why he assigned such paramount importance to what is perhaps no more than the inevitable little differences of execution of a very small punch. For there are so many tangible signs of privy marking apart from the pinecones that there is absolutely no reason to assume that they constituted the sole chronological criterion.

On the obverse, the absence or presence of punctuation before and after \textit{z} may have no special significance, and a cone instead of the usual saltire before \textit{z} on one die is perhaps as accidental as the absence of a cone—replaced by an abbreviation mark after \textit{DNS}—on another. However, we find \textit{HIB}, \textit{HYB} or \textit{HIB} on the obverse of pinecone nobles and this can hardly be regarded as unintentional.
The reverse dies read ILLORV or ILLORVM, MEDIVM, MECIVM, or MEDIVVM, and even if we assign no importance to the occasional omission of the abbreviation mark after IHC and the unusual position of a cone below the letter I in IBAT on one die, we cannot possibly ignore the spelling of the word TRANSIENS. This occurs as TRACIENS, TRACIENS, TRANCES, or TRACENS or TRANCES, and there can be no question of an isolated error. For the matter of that it is really quite unthinkable that the mascle should have been placed sometimes after PER, sometimes after MEDIVM and sometimes after ILLORVM in a completely meaningless and haphazard manner.

The contention that only the cones were used for privy marking seems therefore rather improbable, particularly if we consider the manner in which they were mixed, and there is no evidence that they served a purpose other than serial marking.

What are we to make, however, of the missing lis mark in the second quarter of the reverse? One could dismiss the anomaly as a mistake on the part of the die sinker, but I feel that this explanation, although not impossible, is improbable and will satisfy no-one. For the obvious problem will have to be faced: does the absence of the lis mark on the reverse constitute a link with the leaf-mascle coinage or not?

Let us recall the position of the lis punch on the obverse and reverse of Henry VI’s nobles between 1427 and 1435 as recorded by Whitton:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obverse:</th>
<th>Reverse:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lis by</td>
<td>Lis in one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sword arm</td>
<td>quarter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Rosette coinage | Yes |
| Pinecone coinage | No |
| Leaf-mascle | No |

The lis appeared on the coins when the rosette nobles superseded the annulet issue in the year 1427. On the obverse, it was omitted on the pinecone nobles of 1430/34 and, until now, we had every reason to believe that it was maintained on the reverse until the leaf-mascle nobles were introduced in 1434. Have we now tangible evidence that the lis mark on the reverse was actually abandoned before the end of the pinecone-mascle issue, and should the noble of the Glendining sale on 19 May 1964 be placed at the very bottom of Whitton’s list?

However tempting and logical such a conclusion may be, I feel that an entirely new arrangement of the pinecone nobles should not be based on an isolated coin so long as a modicum of doubt remains whether the omission of the lis mark on the reverse was deliberate or due to a mistake. Apart from that, one is instinctively reluctant to upset the classification of a paper such as Mr. Whitton’s which comes so very close to perfection if we consider the numismatic evidence at present available.

If the varying designs of the pinecone puncheons are ruled out as criteria of establishing the chronological sequence of the dies, it must be admitted that several other classifications of the coins would be possible and plausible. Only the discovery of a major hoard may allow us to solve this problem and to list the nobles in their correct order of issue. For the time being it would, I think, be wise to leave Whitton’s list of the pinecone-mascle coins undisturbed, but to regard it as a statistical rather than a strictly chronological record.

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1 Recorded at Spink’s in 1966 from a noble struck from Whitton’s obv. die 29. The reverse die is almost identical with 29b except for the spelling MEDIVVM.
2 No true half-noble of the pinecone coinage is known but on the two surviving rosette-pinecone mules which are from different reverse dies, the lis is absent. This, however, is almost irrelevant, for the lis punch is sometimes missing even on the obverse of rosette half-nobles, and markings of nobles and half-nobles differ so frequently that the evidence of the latter can hardly be taken into account for the solution of the problem under review.