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HISTORICAL PROBLEMS OF ANGLO-SAXON COINAGE—(1)

'And even I can remember
A day when the historians left blanks in their writings,
I mean for things they didn't know'.

—EZRA POUND, Cantos, XIII.

I

It is with some trepidation that I begin an Address on a theme which I hope to continue next year. What I am seeking to do is to review some of the areas of Anglo-Saxon coinage where the numismatist has the potential ability to add materially to the other sources available to the historian. I say 'potential' because I think we numismatists are prone to regard the problems of interpretation of the evidence of the coins as being capable of less sophisticated treatment than they really need. We are inclined to be too dogmatic, and too ready to take as proved a hypothesis which is insufficiently tested.

I intend to probe some of these areas more deeply than is customary in addresses of this kind and to discuss the strength of accepted numismatic theories where these could influence a historian's interpretation of such documents as might corroborate or contradict them or could help him to fill the 'blanks in their writings'. I do not plan to offer fully worked out alternatives to those theories, for these should properly be the subject of individual papers, but I shall indicate the directions in which I think the accepted views might be modified by further detailed research. I hope that I shall offend no one in the process, nor appear presumptuous, and perhaps it is as well that I should begin tonight by considering the earliest coinages to be signed systematically as a testimony to their royal authority, one of which is that of the kingdom of Northumbria.

By way of preface, however, I should like to declare my support for Mr. Grierson's view that the unsigned silver coins of the early eighth century should be known as pennies. It seems a pity to continue calling them sceattas or, worse still, sceats in the face of the evidence he has produced. The term styca for the ninth-century Northumbrian coinage, mainly of copper, seems to have no better foundation and it would appear likely that these coins too were known as pence although no doubt a Northumbrian copper penny was worth far less than a Kentish or Mercian silver one.

II

It seems unlikely that in Northumbria there was a signed coinage before the reign of Eadberht (737–758). From this reign we have a series of attractive coins struck on flans of the same size as were used for the early southern pennies. Eadberht's pence—for such we can presume they were—bear on the obverse the king's name, generally as BOTBERHTUS, without
title, and on the reverse an animal with one front leg raised and a long tail sprouting from somewhere near the middle of its back. Another series has on the reverse a standing figure holding two crosses, beside an inscription such as ECGBERHT A. This Ecgberht was Eadberht's brother and held the See of York from 734 to 767.

The coins of Eadberht, whether in his own right or jointly with the archbishop, are rare but they are by no means as rare as those of his successors. We know none of Oswulf, who reigned for no more than a year or so, and one only (or possibly two) bearing the name of Æthelwald 'Moll' (759–765). This is, in fact, a penny of archbishop Ecgberht. It bears a small cross on each side and was probably struck late in Æthelwald's reign, for it closely resembles the coins which the archbishop issued under king Alchred (765–774). In my paper in the 1956 Journal, which is the latest to have dealt with this series, I brushed aside the traditional attribution of this coin to the reign of Æthelwald and assigned it to Alchred's but an examination of the photographs in the Grantley and, more particularly, the Rashleigh sale catalogues has convinced me that I was wrong.²

It is difficult to understand why we have only one coin from Æthelwald's reign against probably seventeen from Alchred's. Twelve of these are in the king's name alone and have the animal reverse. The other five are also in the name of archbishop Ecgberht. This too is surprising, for Ecgberht appears to have died within two years of Alchred's accession and we know of no coins of his successor, Æthelberht (767–780).

Alchred was succeeded in 774 by Æthelred I, who ruled for five years before being expelled but was restored ten years later. There is only one coin known of Æthelred with the animal reverse: it was found near Hull and was first published by Grantley. Stylistically it ought not to be from his first reign, but there is some reason to believe that the animal sequence ended in the reign of Ælfwald I (779–788), before Æthelred's restoration, as we have seven pence of Ælfwald with the animal reverse, and two with a small cross on the reverse and the name Cuthbert (as CVDBEVRT). Grantley knew only one of these latter pieces and that in rather poor condition, and partly because he thought he could read an s at the beginning of the reverse legend he regarded the coin as struck in memory of St. Cuthbert. He also put into the same category, and ascribed to Æthelred I's restoration, two pence reading EDLRED

1 'A reappraisal of the scotta and styca coinage of Northumbria', BNJ XXVIII (1956) p. 227.
2 A brief corpus of the recorded eighth-century coins, post-Eadberht, is as follows:

Ælfric I, animal reverse: (1) BMC 13 from Jarrow churchyard; (2) BMC 14 ex Tyssen; (3) BMC 15 ex Careton; (4) BM Barnett 514; (5) BM Barnett 515; (6) Hunterian Sylloge 385 ex Peirce; (7) Fitzwilliam Sylloge 266 ex Lockett 286; (8) Lockett 287 ex Bascom ex Rashleigh 132; (9) Grantley 765 ex Wakefield (1918) 203; (10) Copenhagen Sylloge 182 ex Bruun 4 ex Carlyon-Britton 181; (11) Newcastle ex Gibson; (12) Seaby's Bulletin, Sept. 1963, H. 1808 (illustrated there on Plate 58).

Æthelred I, animal reverse: (1) Grantley 766 ex Robinson (1891), found at Hornsea, near Hull, in 1897.

Ælfric I, animal reverse: (1) BMC 16 ex Spurrier; (2) Hunterian Sylloge 139; (3) Lockett 288 ex Bascom ex Rashleigh 134 ex Cuff 354; (4) Lockett 289 ex Grantley 760 ex Grantham 10; (5) Copenhagen Sylloge 183 ex Bruun 5 ex Rashleigh 133 ex Brummel (1850) 11, from same reverse die as (3); (6) Lyon ex Lord St. Oswald; (7) Whitby excavations, no. 7.

Æthelred I, cvdbevrt reverse: (1) Grantley 768 ex Bateman; (2) Yorkshire Museum, illustrated in BNJ XXVIII, Pl. XVIII, 7.

Æthelred I, restored?, reverse cross on triangle: (1) Grantley 767 ex Evans; (2) Bruun ex Rashleigh 141a ex Rich ex Loscombe 1046. (Possibly coins with reverse CEOLBALD and EAHBALD also belong to this reign, but I have reservations about this.)

Ælfred (of Lindsey), animal reverse: (1) BMC 3 ex Cuff; (2) BM ex Grantley 788 ex Loscombe 1045; (3) and (4) BM ex Whitby excavations, no. 847 (rev. = (1)) and no. 1.

Archbishop Ecgberht, under Æthelwald Moll: (1) Grantley 798 ex Rashleigh 131; (2) NC N.S. IX, Pl. 1, 1a, but whereabouts unknown.

Archbishop Ecgberht, under Alchred: (1) BM Barnett 575; (2) BM no number, purchased 1858; (3) Copenhagen Sylloge 386 ex Bruun 87; (4) Grantley 799, presumably the coin ex Grantham illustrated in NC 1897, Pl. VII, 2 of which the Ecgberht die = (1); (5) Grantley 800 ex Bateman 248. (Note that in the Grantley sale catalogue the provenances of 799 and 800 are transposed.)
which have for their reverse design a cross standing on a triangle.\(^1\) This design breaks an inscription which, on his own specimen, he read as szcicvd and interpreted as representing Sepulchrum Sancti Cuthberhti. Now it seems clear to me that the letters appearing on these two coins are cvd/cils and cvd/cils respectively, and although on these early Northumbrian pence one cannot pay too much regard to the order of the letters I am unable to obtain Grantley's reading. I accept that the design probably has religious significance but I am very dubious about the intention to commemorate St. Cuthbert on any of these four coins of Ælfwald and Æthelred. Of Osred (788-9) no coins at all are known.

In this cursory review of the pre-ninth century Northumbrian coinage I have not so far mentioned coins in the names of 'Ecgfrith' and 'Aldfridus'. I am quite sure in my own mind that the four 'Aldfridus' pieces, which have a very crude variation of the animal reverse, are contemporary with those we have been discussing. Not only do they appear to be imitations rather than prototypes, but also two of them were found in the Whitby excavations. An attribution to the seventh-century king Ealdfrith of Northumbria is, I think, impossible. The only alternative seems to be Ealdfrith, the last king of Lindsey, who flourished c. 790. The Ecgfrith coins from Heworth churchyard were all from the same pair of dies. If they are genuine it is more difficult to find an alternative attribution than the obvious one of the seventh-century Northumbrian king, but they are to be the subject of a paper by Mr. Pagan, and I will say no more about them today.

What happened to the Northumbrian coinage after 796? That there was a break seems certain. It is otherwise impossible to explain the absence from both the Hexham hoard and, more significantly, the Whitby excavations of any coins which can properly be attributed to Eardulf, who appears to have held the throne for most of the period from 796 to 810. When minting began again during the reign of Eanred it is curious that the small module should have been retained in complete disregard of developments in southern England.

For the study of the ninth century Northumbrian coinage there is an embarrassing wealth of numismatic material but a dearth of documentary evidence against which to appraise it. Most of the hoards date from the end of the period, and one naturally looks to the disturbed state of the kingdom in the years before the Viking victory of 867—or even to the campaign which led up to that victory—as the occasion for the deposits. Fortunately the huge hoard from Hexham was put to ground considerably earlier and is crucial for the chronology of the series, partly because it included the base silver coinage of Eanred and archbishop Eanbald, which was almost entirely absent from the later hoards, and partly because it contained no coins of Osberht or of archbishop Wulfhere, nor any of the late derivative issues several of which used to be ascribed to the kings immediately before Eanred. The Hexham hoard must have been buried early in the second reign of Æthelred II, for there was a handful of coins of the moneyer Eardulf who was not a moneyer of the usurper Redulf but of whom a prolific series of coins running up to the accession of Osberht is found in the other hoards.

The general pattern that emerges from the numismatic evidence is that archbishop Eanbald was minting base silver coins at the same time as king Eanred; that Eanbald's successor Wulfisige struck no coins; that Wigmund succeeded to the See of York while Eanred still reigned but had completed his coinage by early in Æthelred's second reign at the latest since it is fully represented in the Hexham hoard; that Wulfhere succeeded Wigmund as archbishop during that reign but after the deposition of the Hexham hoard; and that the official coinage did not long outlast Osberht's accession to the Northumbrian throne. The documents

\(^1\) 'Saint Cuthbert's pennies', \textit{BNJ} VIII (1911), p. 49.
appear however to be at variance with this interpretation. Roger of Wendover says that Wigmund became archbishop in 831 and Wulfhere succeeded him in 854. Symeon of Durham gives 854 as the year in which Wulfhere received the pallium and was confirmed in his archbishopric and says it was in the reign of King Osberht. The implication is that he was appointed earlier. Symeon also says that Wigmund was archbishop for between 15 and 16 years. Both Roger and Symeon appear to have drawn their information from regnal lists which could at some stage have been miscopied. Can we suppose that the original sources really implied the dating of Wulfhere's accession to between 844 when Roger would have Æthelred II driven out temporarily by Redwulf, and 848 when Roger would have the restored Æthelred finally killed after a reign of seven years? Professor Dorothy Whitelock, in correspondence, has ruled this out because there is a letter extant which was written to Wigmund by Lupus of Ferrières and which cannot be dated earlier than 849.

Alternatively, should we accept that Wigmund in fact became archbishop in, say, 837/8 and died in 853/4, but contend that Æthelred lived until at least 854 and Eanred until 846? As a third possibility should we look towards a date much nearer to 867 for Osberht's accession and the rapid disintegration of the coinage, with Eanred occupying the throne until 850 or even later and the dates of the archbishops being wrongly stated also? This last alternative would seem, on the numismatic evidence, to require archbishop Ænbald, who succeeded in 796, to have survived until at least 840. On the other hand it would have the attraction of enabling the Trehiddle penny in the name of a king Eanred, which can scarcely be dated earlier than 850, to be regarded once again as having been struck for, or in honour of, Eanred of Northumbria.

A detailed examination of Eanred's coinage might throw some new light on the whole problem, and I am happy to say that Mr. Pagan is currently engaged in this. I hope he will not close his mind to the possibility of more than one mint having been in operation at that time, for this might explain the rarity of coins of Eanred and Æthelred of certain moneyers, notably Cuthheard, Tidwine and Tidwulf, who do not fit into the general pattern of die-linking, and the lack of any such linking between Osberht's moneyer Wimberht and the other moneyers of that reign.

III

That in southern England the early unsigned pennies gave way to a coinage bearing the stamp of royal authority during the reign of King Offa of Mercia is not a matter for dispute. Exactly when this happened and who was responsible for it are, however, still open to question. The starting point for any discussion of Offa's coinage must be the corpus published by Mr. Blunt in *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, which represented the culmination of many years of thorough and painstaking work. In his paper 'The Coinage of Offa', Mr. Blunt essentially divides the coinage into two distinct periods. The first covers the issues of kings Ecgberht and Heaberht of Kent, and of archbishop Jaenberht of Canterbury under Offa, as well as those coins of Offa himself that were struck on relatively small flans and to a weight standard which was probably intended to be 20 grains—namely Mr. Blunt's Groups I and II. The second period, during which larger flans were used and the coins were struck to a weight standard perhaps 1¾ grains higher (i.e. Mr. Blunt's Group III), is dominated by the three-line type of Offa but also includes a group of coins issued by archbishop Æthelheard under Offa's temporal sovereignty. The transition has been dated convincingly by Mr. Blunt to approximately
the year 792 on the grounds that archbishop Jaenberht died in that year and did not strike coins bearing Offa’s three-line obverse. What, though, of the beginning of the series?

I must confess that I have serious reservations about the chronology of the coinage of the first period. I have never found it easy to believe that this highly original series was instituted by the minor Kentish kings Ecgberht and Heaberht. I will therefore with great diffidence venture to advance some numismatic arguments in favour of the dozen known coins of these kings having been struck quite late in what I shall refer to as Period (A) rather than at its beginning. These are based on stylistic evolution, supported by the sequence of moneyers.

Period (A) includes the finely conceived portraits and a range of non-portrait designs of comparable artistic standard, most of which fall within Mr. Blunt’s Group II. There is also, however, a group of coins, roughly corresponding to his Group I, where the delicacy of design, epigraphy and engraving is lacking and where the stylistic affinities are with the coinage of Period (B). I think that the sequence of moneyers confirms that these two groups are consecutive rather than concurrent, but in the reverse order from that suggested by Mr. Blunt, and that it is possible to detect the point at which the change of style—and presumably also of engraver—occurs. ¹ For instance, the moneyer Osmod may well have begun work at just this time, in which case the Ashmolean coin which illustrates Blunt no. 19 must have been one of his earliest. The obverse is from a worn die of what, for want of a better name, I will call the ‘quadrant’ group in which the legend is divided into +O/FF/AR/EX/. The obverse lettering is small and neat, and the whole design is closely comparable with that on coins of the same group by the moneyers Ealred, who is not found in Period (B), and Eoba, who is. But there is another example of the Osmod coin in the Fitzwilliam Sylloge (no. 393), and in this case the obverse lettering and engraving are much coarser. Now Osmod is otherwise only known from two coins of Period (B) of the ‘three-line’ type and another which is transitional between the two periods, and I think it is reasonable to suppose that he began minting late in Period (A).

Another ‘quadrant’ obverse with coarse lettering similar to that of the second Osmod example is found on Blunt no. 20 of a moneyer whose name is spelt as Udd. This obverse has the first letter of the king’s name in the form of a diamond. While this does occur on some of the neatest portrait coins it is also found, I think invariably, on coins of the ‘three-line’ type. Another coin of the same moneyer, Blunt no. 33, has a very crude portrait which may mark the new engraver’s only attempt to emulate the outstanding work of his predecessor. ‘Udd’ is not found as a moneyer of Period (B), but if he is synonymous with Dud he worked virtually throughout Period (A). Now ‘Udd’ shares with Eoba and Babba the distinction of having been a moneyer of king Ecgberht of Kent, and Eoba was also the moneyer of the only known coin of his associate, king Heaberht. Eoba’s reverses for his coins of the Kentish kings are evidently from the same period in time as those on his ‘quadrant’ coins of Offa. Babba also struck coins of this ‘quadrant’ group, though of slightly different design, but is otherwise only known in Period (B) of Offa and subsequently as a moneyer of Eadberht Praen and of Coenwulf.

¹ It seems to me to be unrealistic to postulate, as does Dr. D. M. Metcalf in ‘Offa’s Pence Reconsidered’ (Cunobelin, 1963, p. 48), that ‘each moneyer was responsible for the provision of his own dies, but that there was some joint enterprise where it proved necessary or convenient.’ The consistently high level of engraving of the dies for the portrait and associated non-portrait coins of Blunt Group II was never again to be reproduced. When taken with the many stylistic affinities between coins of different moneyers, it suggests instead perhaps two engravers covering all the moneyers outside East Anglia during this stage of the coinage.
The evidence for a stylistic deterioration towards the end of Period (A) is to my mind clearly illustrated by the coins of the moneyer Ealhmund, who is not known as a moneyer of the Kentish kings but otherwise runs throughout the coinage. His coin illustrated by Mr. Blunt in Group I can surely not have been struck long before his ‘three-line’ coin in Group III.

I would therefore suggest that the coinage of Ecgberht and Heaberht should be placed late rather than early in Period (A). Archbishop Jaenberht’s also appears to be late in the same period: it is almost entirely associated with obverses of Offa of the ‘two-line’ type, nearly all of which, in Jaenberht’s case, have the diamond o and lettering of the style of the ‘three-line’ type of Period (B). It may be significant that the archbishop’s title is, I think invariably, spelt $\text{AR}_x$EP or $\text{AR}_x$P, in parallel with the central design $\text{AR}_x$ on the coins of the Kentish kings. Where, then, I would seek to modify Mr. Blunt’s classification is to put most of the coins of his Group II at the head of the series—that is to say, the coins of the highest artistic merit—and to follow these with the coins of his Group I and those of the Kentish kings, together with the ‘two-line’ type. I would not pretend at this stage to have any ideas on chronology within these two re-groupings. It can perhaps be said in defence of this suggested arrangement that it would restore to Offa the credit for the introduction of a coinage which at its inception was of the highest quality of design and engraving and was also in the same tradition as the unsigned coinage that went before it. Also, the placing of the moneyer’s name sometimes on the obverse and sometimes on the reverse of the portrait coins suggests that this was an experimental phase of the coinage and therefore more likely to be early than late. But how would any such arrangement fit in with the documentary evidence?

We have first to look back to the battle of Otford, fought in 776 between the Mercians and the Kentishmen. Sir Frank Stenton challenged the assumption that this resulted in victory for Mercia and thought it significant that Offa cannot be shown to have possessed any authority in Kent during the next ten years. If Stenton was right in his inference, Offa could not have been in any position to begin or to continue a coinage in his own name in Kent between 776 and, say, 785. In that case, ignoring for a moment the numismatic evidence, there are four possible hypotheses. Firstly, Offa might have begun the coinage before 776 but lost control of the Kentish mint or mints for some years after that date, during which period Ecgberht and Heaberht struck their coins. Secondly, Offa could have initiated the coinage at London during those years and Ecgberht and Heaberht could have imitated it at Canterbury. Thirdly, Offa might have started minting after he recovered Kent and then at a later date permitted Ecgberht and Heaberht to strike coins in their own names—assuming, that is, that they were still sub-kings as late as, say, 785. Lastly Ecgberht and Heaberht could have begun the coinage at some time after the battle of Otford and Offa could have taken it over when he recovered Kent: this is essentially Mr. Blunt’s standpoint.

I have explained why I do not think that the evidence of the coins fits the fourth hypothesis very well. Nor does it fit the first any more satisfactorily if Ecgberht and Heaberht had control of the Canterbury mint for any length of time, for the scarcity of their coins, taken in conjunction with the relative abundance of those of one of their moneyers, Eoba,

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1 I cannot support Dr. Metcalf’s assertion (art. cit. p. 41) that, despite the existence of coins reading Ealhmund, the spellings Alhmund and Ealmund are to be interpreted as representing different moneyers. (On the other hand Eoba may well not be synonymous with Coenwulf’s and Cuthred’s moneyer Eoba.) And I think that Blunt no. 8 is to be read, not as Dr. Metcalf reads it (viz $\text{off}_{\text{X}}\text{A}$ for $\text{Anglorum vice off}_{\text{X}}\text{M}$ for $\text{Merciorum}$) but as $\text{o}$ (r implied) $\text{far}_{\text{X}}$. 
for Offa and Cynethryth, would seem to rule out a long break with Offa at the Kentish mint in the middle of his coinage. The second hypothesis accords no better with the evidence of the moneyer Eoba. The third would seem to be at variance with Stenton's statement that ten years after the battle of Otford Offa 'was on the worst of terms with the Kentish people', although if, as I think it must, archbishop Jaenberht's coinage dates from the last years of his life one cannot necessarily associate personal enmity with denial of the right of coinage. A further point which is perhaps in favour of the third hypothesis is, as I have mentioned, the use of the contraction $\text{r}_x$ both by the Kentish kings to denote $\text{rex}$ and by Jaenberht in his title as a contraction of $\text{-rchi}$, so that these series of coins may be virtually contemporary with one another. On the other hand, so far as I am aware, we have no evidence of Eogberht's existence after about 780, nor—curiously—Heaberht's after 765. Thus none of the first three hypotheses is really satisfactory, but this does not make me any happier about the validity of the fourth.

So here we again have a situation in which it is difficult to reconcile fully the historical and the numismatic evidence. If only we could have a new hoard from early in the coinage! In the absence of this, or of any other means of establishing the time scale of the coinage of Period (A), we need, I think, to see whether the recent apportionment of Coenwulf's moneyers between the mints of Canterbury and London can be carried back into Offa's reign beyond the 'three-line' type. We should bear in mind that London was a mint for the early eighth century coinage, and that there must have been some reminting of that coinage when the signed coinage began. Nor should we lose sight of Sir Frank Stenton's conviction, expressed very firmly in a lecture to this Society in 1958 at its first meeting in this building, that the coinage was begun by Offa as early as 764. Stenton believed that he introduced it then, when he was first in a position to exercise authority in Kent, as a demonstration of his royal descent in contrast to the non-royal lineage of his Frankish contemporary Charlemagne. However, the evidence of the moneyers Ealhmund and Eoba, who seem to have worked throughout Period (A) (whether on Mr. Blunt's chronology or mine) and who were still at work in Period (B), must cast doubt on the possibility of a duration as long as 28 years for Period (A). If nevertheless Stenton proved to be right in this I do not think the evidence of the coins could then sustain his inference that Offa had no authority in Kent for an extended period after 776.

Finally, if any of my arguments for a review of the numismatic evidence are held to be valid, let us not forget that whatever new conclusions we may reach the credit will remain Mr. Blunt's for making it possible to discuss the subject in what I hope will always be a constructive way.

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2 Nor is it easy to envisage Eogberht and Heaberht—if they were both then ruling in Kent—being granted the right of coinage by Offa in the 780's if they had defeated him at Otford in 776.
3 In 'The Coinage of Southern England, 785-840' (BNJ XXXII (1963) p. 7) Offa's moneyer Ludoman is given to London and the mint of three others, Ciolhard, Eama and Toba, is regarded as undetermined. Despite the close stylistic affinity between portrait coins of Ibbi and Eoba (and, for that matter, Eadhun, Ealred and certain coins of Ealhmund, Dud and Lulla), Eoba must surely have been a Kentish moneyer since he worked for Eogberht and Heaberht. Admittedly it is not easy to explain why a Kentish rather than a Mercian mint (if there was one) should have issued a series of coins in the name of Offa's queen, but this seems to me less unlikely than the alternatives, viz that the coins of the Kentish kings were struck at a Mercian mint or that there were two moneyers named Eoba.
4 I have taken the liberty of altering the wording of this section of my Address in a few places so as to try to make my meaning clear beyond all doubt. These alterations in no way alter the sense of the Address as delivered.