

# A NEW TYPE FOR BEONNA

By H. E. PAGAN

COINS carrying the name of a king Beonna have been known since the end of the 18th century.<sup>1</sup> All are of size and weight intermediate between *sceatta* and *penny* and with minor variations they carry the same types, on the obverse a cross or circular design surrounded by the legend +BEONNA REX, on the reverse a rectangle containing a small cross and surrounded by the legend +EFE. Numismatists assign them to a king of East Anglia reigning in the middle of the 8th century.

Five have so far been noted:

1. Hunterian Sylloge 412 acquired by 1783. Wt. 15.1 gr.
2. Hunterian Sylloge 413 acquired by 1783. Wt. 15.4 gr.
3. BMA 229 ex Montagu 339 ex Addington ex Bergne 77 ex Murchison 108 ex Dymock 71 (1858). Wt. 14.9 gr.
4. Ashmolean Sylloge 57 ex Lockett Executors ex Lockett 408 ex Montagu 340 ex Brice ex Maynard (1885) 16. Wt. 16.5 gr.<sup>2</sup> (ill. Fig. 2, left)
5. BMC 1 purchased from Messrs. Rollin 1886 ex Shepherd 30 (1885). Found near Ipswich. Wt. 16.3 gr.<sup>3</sup>

They differ most in the manner in which the name of Beonna is spelled. Some runic letter-forms are found in the obverse legend of four out of the five:

1. +BEON<sup>W</sup> REX
2. +BEON<sup>W</sup> REX
3. +BE<sup>W</sup> RE<sup>W</sup>
4. +BEON<sup>W</sup> REX
5. +BEON<sup>W</sup> REX

It is with some excitement that one contemplates the engraving reproduced below. Here is a coin of Beonna that offers both a new type and the full-blooded runic inscription that demonstrates the transitional role that Beonna's coinage fills in numismatic and alphabetic history. It requires no great skill in the interpretation of runes to identify BM[.]<sup>W</sup> RM<sup>W</sup> as BE(O)NNA REX. On the engraving only the lower half of the third letter is shown, but what is



FIG. 1

<sup>1</sup> Two were in the collection of Dr. William Hunter who died in 1783.

<sup>2</sup> The sale catalogue identifies this as the collection of 'the Rev. J. Maynard, of Orford, Suffolk'. It contained a number of Anglo-Saxon coins the majority of which were of local provenance.

<sup>3</sup> In their survey of the provenances of the coins included in *BMC Anglo-Saxon Series (BNJ XXVIII pt. i (1955) pp.26-56)* R. H. M. Dolley and Mrs.

J. S. Martin take the provenance of BMC 1 no further back than Rollin. That it is the coin from the Shepherd sale of the preceding year seems clear from annotated copies of the Shepherd catalogue that note the purchaser of lot 30 as 'Rollin'. It may be that this and the Maynard coin were found together; but it is purely fortuitous that they should have first appeared in the sale room in the same year, for Shepherd had died as long ago as 1874.

visible is not incompatible with the complete letter being  $\mathfrak{B}$ , the runic equivalent of o. The runes  $\mathfrak{M}$  (for  $\mathfrak{E}$ ) and  $\mathfrak{Y}$  (for  $\mathfrak{X}$ ) are well-authenticated English runes found on other Anglo-Saxon coins. The other runes are familiar from those coins of Beonna already reported.

As for the types, the obverse pellet is unremarkable, but new for this king; coins 1, 2, 3, and 4 have as their obverse type a pellet surrounded by a circle, dotted or plain, and coin 5 has a cross. The reverse, however, is without parallel. Perhaps the design is in some way related to that on a denier of Pippin,<sup>1</sup> attributed to the mint of Maastricht, not so far from the great trading port of Dorestadt, and also found on *sceattas* struck in the same area;<sup>2</sup> on these coins a central pellet is surrounded by four curved lines with ends hooked over to form a design that resembles a Catherine-wheel at rest, and the blank spaces left are filled with four groups of three pellets. The design on the Beonna coin is more complicated, and it may be that ultimately it derives from bird or animal motifs; certainly Beonna's other reverse type, the central rectangle and cross, is descended in line from the traditional *VOR XX sceatta* reverse. It is disappointing that no legend accompanies this reverse type and that therefore no light is shed on the mysterious inscription  $\div \text{EFE}$  on the type already known.<sup>3</sup>

The engraving appears as no. 5 on a plate of Carolingian coins (pl. viii) attached to Benjamin Fillon's *Lettres à M. Ch. Dugast-Matifeux sur quelques Monnaies Françaises inédites* (1853). Fillon's name is not one that will be familiar to numismatists in this country, but he occupies an important place in the history of the study of the French coinage. His three monographs *Considérations historiques et artistiques sur les monnaies de France* (1850), *Lettres à Dugast-Matifeux* (1853), and *Études Numismatiques* (1856), his catalogue of the French feudal coins in the Rousseau collection, and his major contribution to Poey d'Avant's *Description des Monnaies Seigneuriales Françaises* (1853), show an attachment to method and a fidelity to general numismatic principles almost unrivalled in his day. He was one of the first French numismatists to recognize the extent to which the mediæval French coinage was composed of *types immobilisés* and by the intelligent use of hoard evidence and criteria of style to distinguish phases in their issue. It is startling even today to find how in many respects he is as sensitive—or more so—to the problems involved as any of his successors in this field.

Much of this sensitivity he owed to the influence of Joachim Lelewel, the famous author of *Numismatique du Moyen Age considérée sous le rapport du type*, with whom he was on affectionate terms and to whom in the preface to the *Lettres* he pays eloquent tribute.<sup>4</sup> Lelewel was in the habit of sending Fillon drawings of coins that passed through his hands or those of other numismatists in Belgium (since the 1830's Lelewel's adopted home). Among these was the drawing of the coin of Beonna, evidently sent to Fillon because Lelewel was unable himself to identify it. It is to Lelewel also, one may assume, that Fillon owed such information about the coin as he gives. Apparently one example of the type had been found near Dorestadt, while a second 'a été rencontré dans le même pays avec des Carlovingiennes'.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear which of the two is portrayed in the drawing Fillon reproduces. No doubt because of this association of the type with a Carolingian site and Carolingian coins Fillon concludes that the

<sup>1</sup> Morrison and Grunthal, *Carolingian Coinage* (1967) no. 33 (ill. Fig. 2, centre).

<sup>2</sup> *Copenhagen Sylloge*, pt. i (1964), ed. Galster, no. 48 (ill. Fig. 2, right).

<sup>3</sup> There seem three possibilities: that EFE is a moneyer's name; that EFE is the name of the mint; or that EFE is a meaningless conjunction of letters.

<sup>4</sup> *Lettres* p. 11. Fillon expresses his admiration for

Lelewel as 'savant', as 'le noble vétéran de la démocratie militante' and as 'le martyr de la cause sacrée de la liberté européenne'. Lelewel had been involved in the Polish revolution of 1830 and after its suppression had had to take refuge abroad; he had since then been a conspicuous figure in Polish emigré circles.

<sup>5</sup> *Lettres* pp. 130–131.

coins must be of 'l'époque de Charlemagne' and that 'leur style annonce la seconde moitié du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle'; but he is no more successful than Lelewel in identifying their place of issue.

It remains to discover how the coin (or a drawing of it) came into Lelewel's hands and what happened to it subsequently. By sheer luck both questions can be answered by reference to another printed source, much more accessible to an English reader, Stephens' *Runic Monuments* (1868),<sup>1</sup> where the coin and the circumstances of its discovery are described at great length and it is again illustrated. Unhappily—and this is why Fillon's engraving is of such importance—the drawing on which Stephens' engraving is based was extremely inaccurate and partly as a result Stephens' interpretation of the runic legend was so far from correct as to obscure wholly its true meaning. In the circumstances it is surprising to find that one English numismatist of the day, the celebrated Fr. Daniel Haigh, recognised the coin from Stephens' engraving as East Anglian and, publishing it in the *Numismatic Chronicle* for 1869, noted its resemblance to coins of Beonna.<sup>2</sup> The identification did not satisfy his contemporaries and the coin has remained unattributed. It should in fairness be said that Haigh's interpretation of the legend (based on that supplied by Stephens) was evidently wrong. The error other numismatists made was to conclude that Haigh was therefore wholly wrong; a mistake that Haigh's erratic genius tended to provoke.

Of the coin (which Stephens places among bracteates carrying runic inscriptions) Stephens has this to say:

This SILVER Runic COIN weighs 0.75 grammes. Tho not a bracteate, it is perhaps best placed here as it is so nearly allied to pieces, like itself, *struck from a die*. Its particular value consists in its bearing the rune  $\mathfrak{Y}$ . It was found Nov. 4, 1836, while digging at Wyk or Katwyk, by Duurstede, near Utrecht, the famous emporium Dorestatus or Dorestade of the middle age, which the Norman pirates, entering the Rhine from the sea, ravaged so often. After a great storm towards the close of the 9th century, the entrance to this place was sanded up, but previous to that event it had just been entirely destroyed by the vikings. With this piece were taken up several other coins, struck by Pepin, Charlemagne and Louis le Debonnaire; this last king dying in 840 fixes very nearly the date of the whole deposit.

These coins came into the hands of M. Balfourt of Utrecht, who lent the Runic one to Prof. van der Chijs, Director of the Coin-cabinet in Leyden, for his examination.

So much for the coin's provenance. Stephens goes on to say that 'years after' he received from Archivary Herbst, Keeper of the Royal Danish Cabinet at Copenhagen, a drawing of the coin based on one that Herbst's predecessor C. J. Thomsen had received from Van der Chijs. Presumably Van der Chijs suspected that the coin might be Scandinavian. Stephens at once saw that the runes were English, the first major step towards identifying the coin, and in the hope that the coin itself or a more faithful drawing of it would provide a clearer reading than Herbst's drawing he wrote to Van der Chijs, but to little effect:

He gave me all the information in his power, but could not get at the original. M. Balfourt some years ago sold all his Carolingian coins, as well as the Runic one, to M. Louis de Coster, one of the Directors of the *Revue de la Numismatique Belge*, at Brussels. Both Prof. v. d. Chijs and myself have written again and again to M. de Coster, but have not been fortunate enough to obtain any reply.

This last paragraph contains the answers to both questions posed earlier. The collection to which the coin of Beonna passed was one of great splendour and its owner, Louis de Coster,

<sup>1</sup> *Runic Monuments*, vol. 2, pp. 563–564, no. 70. I am indebted to Mr. C. E. Blunt for calling my attention to this passage and making available to me

the fruits of his researches into the fate of De Coster's collection.

<sup>2</sup> *NC* 1869 p. 192 and pl. V, no. 14.

another very distinguished numismatist specializing in the Carolingian series. That it was he who showed the coin to Lelewel, a fellow mediævalist also living in Brussels, seems beyond dispute. Equally clear is that if De Coster acquired the coin it was destroyed by fire with the rest of his collection when the University Library at Louvain, to which it was bequeathed, was burnt out during the 1914–1918 war. It is conceivable of course that De Coster disposed of the coin during his lifetime, but in the absence of evidence to this effect it must be regarded as destroyed. Certainly it is not to be found in the national collections at Brussels and the Hague.

Less easy to decide is whether one coin or two coins were involved. Given that Fillon's coin found 'avec des Carlovingiennes' is the coin found at Dorestadt in 1836 and acquired by De Coster in whose collection it was seen by Lelewel, should one accept the report of another found 'près de Dorestadt' at about the same time? One piece of evidence (which incidentally gives some idea of the possible composition of the hoard (?) in which the coin illustrated by Stephens was found) could be used to show that the coins involved were two. A list published in the *Revue Numismatique* for 1853 shows that M. Balfoort acquired 110 coins of Carolingian date from the Dorestadt site. Of these most (59) were in the name of a king Charles (Charlemagne or Charles the Bald); 36 were of a king Louis; 5 were of a king Pippin; 6 in the name of Lothair; 2 are described as 'obols of Aquitaine'; and 2 more are simply described as Anglo-Saxon. It is tempting to conclude that these last two were the coins of Beonna, if only because had they been coins of Offa or another known Anglo-Saxon king they might have been described as such. If these are the coins of Beonna, both the specimens referred to by Fillon passed into De Coster's possession; Lelewel probably saw both; and both have probably perished.<sup>1</sup>

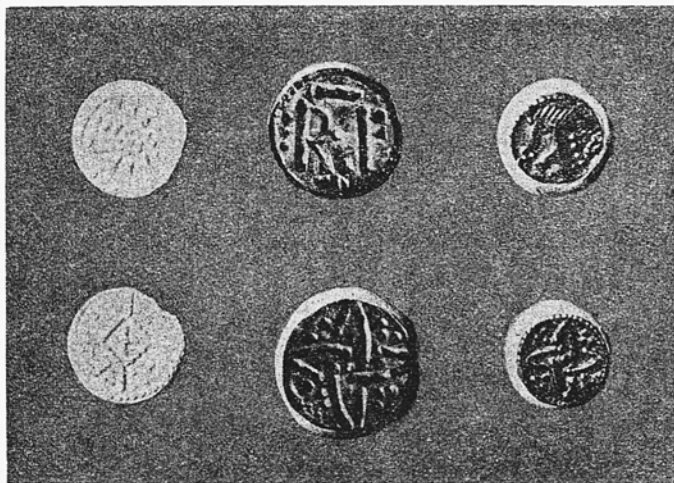


FIG. 2

Most numismatists would agree with Fillon that these are coins of the second half of the 8th century. There is room for argument, though, on where they belong in this period. There are features of size, of shape, of weight, and of fabric that mark them as not far removed from

<sup>1</sup> Stephens' statement that the coin he illustrates was found with others on Nov. 4, 1836 does not entirely square with the details given *RN* 1853 pp. 363–367. Balfoort's acquisitions are there treated as

site-finds, not as coins from hoards, and the principal finds are said to have been made in 1838, 1839, and 1842.



the time when *sceatta* gave way to *penny* and there are features of design and legend that by a different route lead the numismatist to assign the coins to the same intermediate position. It is important to be clear about what this position is. It is no longer sensible to maintain that there was between the issue of the last Southumbrian *sceatta* and the first issue of the *penny* a period in which coins of an intermediate weight and shape were generally current, for the change from *sceatta* to *penny* in the main Heptarchic kingdoms was a conscious reform rather than a continuing process. The explanation for the hybrid nature of the coins of Beonna must lie in the fact that the area where they circulated was one where the effect of reform elsewhere was being felt but where the principles of that reform had not yet been applied. To recognize this is, however, not of much assistance in dating them. In kingdoms outside the hegemony of Offa the change from *sceatta* to *penny* is first evident only in the 790's and then not in Northumbria and possibly not in Lindsey. Even the *post quem* date supplied by the date of the reform in Mercia and Kent—not earlier than 760 or much later than 770—is not certain, for conceivably the reform the coins of Beonna reflect may not have been that of Offa or a Kentish contemporary but the earlier reform by Pippin.<sup>1</sup>

The most obvious other indication of date is the obverse inscription BEONNA REX. Who was King Beonna? The general verdict is that he was a king of East Anglia. It is as well to review the evidence for this verdict. Genealogies of the East Anglian royal house end with King Aelfwald, whose death is recorded by Simeon of Durham's *Historia Regum* under 749. Between 749 and the report in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of King Aethelberht's execution by Offa in 794 the only information about the kings of East Anglia that survives is a statement in the *Historia Regum* that on Aelfwald's death 'regnum . . . Hunbeanna (sic) et Alberht sibi dividerunt'; a statement in the chronicle known as *Florence of Worcester* under 758 that 'his temporibus' Swithred was king of the East Saxons, Osmund king of the South Saxons, and 'Beornus' (sic) king of the East Angles; and a note in the lists of kings attached as appendix to *Florence of Worcester* that 'regnante . . . Merciorum rege Offa' 'Beorna' (sic) was king in East Anglia. In her *English Historical Documents*<sup>2</sup> Professor Whitelock redivides Simeon's annal to partition the East Anglian kingdom between three kings, Hun, Beanna, and Alberht, which helps to establish the name of the king in question as Beonna or Beanna rather than Beorn and so to identify the issuer of these coins as that king. This redivision of the annal is influenced of course by the existence of these coins, so the argument is circular; but for all that the identification seems not unreasonable, and the difficulty of placing the coins among the issues of another Heptarchic kingdom lends it fairly decisive support. The late Dr. G. C. Brooke was inclined to consider them Northumbrian,<sup>3</sup> but he had made an attribution to East Anglia unnecessarily difficult for himself by attributing two coins certainly of Aethelberht of East Anglia (d. 794) to Aethelberht II of Kent (748–762), and in fact the detailed account of 8th century Northumbrian history preserved in the *Historia Regum* and *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* not merely mentions no king Beonna but has no gap into which a king Beonna might fit.

Once attributed to East Anglia it is not difficult to find additional reasons why they should be so attributed. Fortunately they fit the context contemplated for them rather well. One was found 'near Ipswich' and another can be traced to the collection of a clergyman at Orford on the Suffolk coast 20 miles east of Ipswich. To the *sceatta* coinage of East Anglia belong the

<sup>1</sup> The chronology of these reforms is difficult to establish. Dr. D. M. Metcalf (*Hamburger Beiträge zur Numismatik* Heft 20 (1966) pp. 380–384) places the introduction of the *penny* in the decade 760–770

as assumed here.

<sup>2</sup> *English Historical Documents* p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> *English Coins* (1932) p. 11.

interesting group of *sceattas* that carry on their obverse the inscription EPA in runes beside a bust and on their reverse a variant of the VOT XX design by no means dissimilar to Beonna's EFE reverse. In the *penny* coinage issued at an East Anglian mint for Aethelberht (d. 794) and for Offa (794–796) both the mixture of runic and Roman lettering and the arrangement of the obverse design round central pellets enclosed in circle or square recur;<sup>1</sup> on a coin of the moneyer Hun(la?)c that has on its obverse a design centring on a pellet and on its reverse a design centring on a pellet within a dotted circle, the Catherine-wheel type of construction also occurs.

The coins have still to be given a date. Because Beonna is last mentioned in 758 it might seem safer to place them as early in the post-*sceatta* series as possible by dating them *ca.* 760; to date them any earlier would place them before the effects of any reform could have been felt in East Anglia. However, although Aethelberht must be assigned a reign of a certain length before 794 to account for the significance attached by contemporaries to his execution, there is no reason to suppose that Beonna's reign was a short one. That he is mentioned as king so early in Offa's reign as 758 need not imply that his reign only just overlapped with that of Offa; the chronicler is simply concerned to show who reigned in England at the time of Offa's accession. It would be possible to extend Beonna's reign well into the 770's or even into the 780's, and to date the coins provisionally *ca.* 770 seems a reasonable step to take, since it would make the point that the coins are not necessarily coins of the 760's (as has always been assumed) without divorcing them wholly from that context.

POSTSCRIPT: A footnote to p. 124 of J. Y. Akerman's *Numismatic Manual* (1832) reads: "Only two (coins of Beonna) were known a short time since, and they were in the Hunterian collection; but I am informed by Mr. Till of Great Russell-Street, that a very fine one, found at Ipswich, has lately passed through his hands". Presumably the coin involved was BMC 1.

<sup>1</sup> C. E. Blunt, *The Coinage of Offa*, in *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, ed. R. H. M. Dolley, pp. 49–50 and nos. 108–115.