Some reflections on the English coinages of Sihtric Caoch, King of Dublin and of York

Michael Dolley and C. N. Moore

Some of the most intriguing Viking pennies from the Northern Danelaw of England are those which bear the name of a certain Sihtric who has been plausibly identified since the middle of the last century with the historical Sihtric Úi Ívar nicknamed variously Caoch (‘one-eyed’) and Gale (‘hero’). He was the father of the celebrated Anlaf Cuaran (‘of the sandal’), and hence the great-grandfather—not the grandfather, cf. Dolley (1973)—of the no less famous Sihtric Silkbeard whose Dublin pennies in imitation of English coins are relatively common. For a century and more English numismatists have been discussing these quite exceptional early tenth-century pennies of Sihtric Caoch, but never, as it happens, on the basis of more than a proportion of the extant specimens. Since the 1930s, however, a final and valid distinction has begun to be drawn between them and some even rarer coins of an apparently somewhat earlier Earl Sihtric (Keary (1887), no. 1077), and of yet another slightly later Sihtric nicknamed ‘of the jewels’ who seems to have been a son of Sihtric Caoch and so a brother of Anlaf Cuaran (Dolley (1957/1958), pp. 69-72). The purpose of this present note is to illustrate by an enlarged direct photograph [Fig. 1] the only penny of Sihtric Caoch, out of eight of which the present whereabouts are known, which would seem not to have been before the subject of photographic illustration in a numismatic publication, and, perhaps more importantly, to bring to the attention of numismatists a very early drawing [Fig. 3] and a more recent line-engraving [Fig. 2] of a ninth coin which seems never to have attracted informed discussion since it was correctly attributed some sixty years ago. The opportunity will also be taken of reviewing a wider spectrum of the numismatic evidence which exists for a coinage of which the historical significance is indeed considerable, and especially in the broader context of the regally anonymous post-Cuerdale coinages of York and of Lincoln.

The penny, never before the subject of photographic reproduction in a numismatic journal, is one housed today in the Royal Coin Cabinet at the State Historical Museum at Stockholm. It derives from Hjalmar Stolpe’s epoch-making exploration in the last century of the great Viking-age cemetery at Björkö (Birka) at the eastern end of Lake Malar. A somewhat inferior photograph did appear in 1940 (Arbman (1940-3), pl. 141, no. 5, cf. text, p. 320—we owe the reference to the kindness of Mr. Kenneth Jonsson), but for the new and enlarged photographs and for permission to reproduce them here we are indebted to the kindness of Förste antikvarie Docent Brita Malmer, the Keeper of the Royal Coin Cabinet, and of her assistant Antikvarie Tamás Sárkány. The coin belongs to the grouping here distinguished as the Sword/’T’ issue—though there can be little doubt that the reverse type is in fact the pagan symbol of a Thor’s hammer in its most elementary form. Other examples are in the British Museum and in the cabinet.
The penny which has escaped numismatic comment, and which today exists, despite the most diligent search, only in a pen-and-ink drawing and a line-engraving, seems to have been unknown outside a very small circle prior to 1913 when W. A. Cragg, a distinguished Lincolnshire antiquary from the early part of this century, published at Sleaford a slim volume entitled *A History of Threekingham with Stow in Lincolnshire*. Interestingly the coin is not mentioned, let alone discussed, in the main body of the text, and this could suggest that the author had come across the reference only after the work was in proof, or at least the relevant portion substantially drafted. The line-engraving is in fact rather crudely interpolated at the bottom of p. 2—beneath a couple of short paragraphs and a footnote headed *Roman Period*—and is captioned ‘Silver Coin of Sihtric, King of Northumberland, A.D. 921–926, found at Threekingham’ [Fig. 2]. The accuracy of the identification suggests consultation by a competent numismatist of Keary (1887), and the context gives the impression of a single find. Threekingham, alias Threckingham, parish church is situated, Cragg reminds us, only a few hundred yards from the intersection of two Roman roads, one branching off from Ermine Street and here running approximately north and south, and the other, known since Anglo-Danish times as the Saltergate or Saltersway, running westwards to end appropriately enough at Droitwich in Worcestershire. It is no cause for suspicion, then, that what is presumably a coin of York should have been found in the vicinity. On the other hand, it could be thought just a little curious that a coin of this importance should have disappeared from ken if it was really in existence at a date posterior to 1887 and probably as recently as the beginning of the second decade of this century.

The answer to the mystery ought to lie in the Cragg papers—certainly the coin was not among the antiquities which passed on W. A. Cragg’s death to the City of Lincoln.
Museum—but unfortunately these papers, essentially those of an antiquarian forebear John Cragg (1762–1832), cf. Phillips (1933), p. 113, could not be microfilmed in their entirety during the decade when they were deposited at the Lincolnshire Archive Office prior to 1960 when they were withdrawn and put into the London sale-room. By a most timely chance, however, a letter preserved in the files of the City of Lincoln Museum, and to which our attention has been drawn by Mr. John Marjoram, supplies most if not all of what the numismatist needs to know. The letter is one from W. A. Cragg to Arthur Smith who was at that time the able and enthusiastic curator of the City and County Museum. It is on a sheet of embossed letter-paper measuring approximately 18.0 × 11.3 cm. and with the heading THREEKINGHAM HOUSE, NR. FOLKINGHAM, LINCS. (Station, Billingboro. 2½ m.: Telegraph, Folkingham, 2 m.). Dated ‘29.VIII.11’ the letter runs:

Dear Mr Smith

Can you tell me what // the enclosed coin may // be?
I expect to be in Lincoln // on Sept. 8th and will call // and see you.

Yours truly
William A. Cragg

Mr. A. Smith.

Accompanying the letter is a small piece of paper measuring approximately 7.1 × 8.8 cm. with the drawing reproduced here as Fig. 3. The monogram initials ‘MC’ would appear to be those of an early twentieth-century copyist, perhaps a female member of Cragg’s family, but the first two lines of the caption give the impression of reproducing an earlier (? late eighteenth-century) hand. The much grosser addition ‘in Threekingham’ is certainly by W. A. Cragg himself, while an endorsement (not reproduced here) in the bottom left-hand corner, ‘Red. Aug. 30. 11’, is Arthur Smith’s. What we now know is
that the coin was correctly identified in the book of 1913 on the basis of a copy of an early drawing supplied by W. A. Cragg to the City Museum on 29 August 1911, and it may be inferred that the original, executed probably within months of the 1794 discovery, had been found among the Cragg MSS. It may be taken as reasonably certain, too, that by 1911 the coin itself had long since vanished, but even at second hand the drawing carries conviction, and the writers are not alone in preferring the 1911 version to the line-engraving of two years later.

The lost coin clearly belongs to the grouping here distinguished as the \textit{Sword/Hammer} type, the object on the reverse, by earlier students described variously as a 'mallet' or 'pall' or 'pallium', being a classic example where the archaeologist is concerned of the Thor's hammer device used as a symbol of good luck in pagan and even post-pagan times throughout the Scandinavian North. Other examples of coins of the grouping are in the Royal Coin and Medal Collection at Copenhagen \cite{SCBI Copenhagen I, 594} and in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland \cite{SCBI Edinburgh 70}, and the reverse legend of the former bears, as we shall see, a very close resemblance.

The third grouping of the pennies of Sihtric Caoch likewise is known from no more than three coins, and it is here distinguished as the \textit{Sword/Cross} type. Examples are in the British Museum from the Dawson ('Dean of St. Patrick') and Lockett cabinets, and in the Royal Coin and Medal Collection at Copenhagen \cite{SCBI Copenhagen I, 627}. One of the British Museum coins has the variant, and still not convincingly explained, obverse legend \textit{LVDO SITRIC}, while the other retains the more normal \textit{SITRIC REX} which is found also on the Copenhagen coin from the same reverse die—the only die-identity so far observed within the series. If we take the nine coins together, it is to find that there occur on them five names that seem certainly those of moneyers, and that there are two reverse legends where a more natural interpretation would be a mint-signature unaccompanied by a personal name. At this juncture, though, it is perhaps preferable to consider more closely the interlocking patterns of the coins’ discovery and hoard-provenances.

At the time that the Threekingham specimen came to light in 1794, only one other English coin of one or other of the Sihtrics appears to have been known, the unique penny of \textit{triquetra/standard} type in the Pembroke cabinet which in due course would find its way to the British Museum \cite{Keary (1887), no. 1079}. Struck by the \textit{hapax} moneyer ‘Ascolv’ (= \AEsculf?) it very likely derived from an Irish find, and to Fr. Daniel Haigh of Erdington must be given the credit for its final dissociation from Sihtric Caoch \cite{Haigh (1876), p. 67}. It is now given to this Sihtric’s homonymous son, nick-named ‘of the jewels’, together with the unique \textit{Cross/Cross} penny by the moneyer Rathulf in the 1883 Forum (‘Rome’ or ‘House of the Vestal Virgins’) hoard \cite{Keary (1884), p. 253, no. 388: cf. Dolley (1957/1958), p. 48}. Before, too, the coins certainly of Sihtric Caoch could begin seriously to exercise numismatic scholarship, the waters were to be further muddied by the occurrence of the Earl Sihtric pieces in the 1840 Cuerdale treasure \cite{Keary (1887), no. 1077}, though fortunately we need not waste time on a putative striking in gold with a Yorkshire find-spot \cite{Dolley (1964), passim} seeing that the coin, in fact a Merovingian \textit{triens}, had only a marginal impact on numismatic literature. In the table that follows an attempt is made to indicate the dates at which each of the nine silver pennies of Sihtric Caoch are believed to have come to light and when they were first illustrated.
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ENGLISH COINAGES OF SIHTRIC CAOCH

It emerges that no extant coin of Sihtric Caoch was known until 1838 when the still resolutely unique LUDO SIHTRIC Sword/Cross penny in the British Museum (Keary (1887), no. 1113) came to light at Glasnevin on the northern outskirts of Dublin (Lindsay (1842), p. 123, but for the find-spot see Dolley (1966), p. 28). For quite a number of years, though, the coin was attributed to Eric Bloodaxe, a contemporary of Sihtric Caoch’s sons and grandsons, on no better evidence than a misinterpretation of the reverse legend (e.g. Dawson (1842), lot 249).

Already by 1869, however, at least three further specimens of the penny of Sihtric Caoch had been found, and were available for discussion and illustration by Jonathan Rashleigh. One of these is the British Museum’s fragmentary coin of Sword/‘T’ type by the moneyer Are (Rashleigh (1869), p. 81, no. 3: pi. ii. 17) which had been purchased at the so-called ‘Dean of St. Patrick’ (recte St. Patrick’s) sale (Dawson (1842), lot 216), but registered as an Irish coin (!) and hence passed over by Keary’s great catalogue of 1887. The ultimate provenance was not recorded by its first owner, but in point of fact it is from the same Glasnevin find. The second of the three ‘new’ Sihtric Caoch pennies to be discussed by Rashleigh is the Copenhagen penny of Sword/Hammer type (Rashleigh (1869), p. 81, no. 4: pi. ii. 19) which is as it happens not at all dissimilar from the lost Threekingham coin, and, as we shall see, there is a distinct possibility that it derives from a minor English find of coins of Saint Peter type associated with Derbyshire which may well have come to light as early as c. 1850. The third of the Sihtric Caoch pennies to come under Rashleigh’s notice is, of course, the British Museum’s coin of Sword/Cross type ex the Lockett cabinet (Rashleigh (1869), p. 80, no. 2: pl. ii. 16) for which Mr. Hugh Pagan has suggested—in a letter—as the most likely provenance the collection of Col. Sempronius Stretton dispersed by his heir in 1855. Certainly there is one piece in that sale (Stretton (1855), lot 409) which does seem a very plausible candidate, and the more so perhaps in the light of a later claim (Rashleigh (1869), p. 79) that the Sihtric coin in question ‘was sold at Sotheby’s as a coin of St. Peter’. If, too, the coin is correctly identified as Stretton’s, there is a distinct possibility that the ultimate provenance was

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<tr>
<th>Coinage Type</th>
<th>Discovery</th>
<th>First engraving</th>
<th>First photographic illustration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sword/‘T’ type</td>
<td>before 1840</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>1936</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>1940</td>
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<td>University Collection, Bangor</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1946</td>
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<td>Sword/Hammer type</td>
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<td>Royal Coin and Medal Collection, Copenhagen</td>
<td>before 1855</td>
<td>1869</td>
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Irish. Mr. Pagan has added to his kindness by bringing to our attention a statement in the Rashleigh MSS., now in the British Museum, to the effect that 'the coin was probably found in Ireland with coins of the same type of St. Peter's money', and there is always the further consideration that the Stretton cabinet is known to have leaned very heavily on material acquired in Ireland (Dolley and Martin (1959), passim). In this same connection, too, it may be worth noting that Sword Saint Peter pennies are on record as having been found in more than one Irish context. The Glasnevin and 1883 Co. Dublin finds apart, two specimens have turned up at the very time of writing in a critical find of Glasnevin type unearthed in the course of a palaeoecological investigation of Dunmore Cave in Co. Kilkenny during July and August 1973.

To revert for the moment to the Sword/Hammer coin in Copenhagen, additional support for the view that it had been found before c. 1855 is afforded by its illustration in Fr. Daniel Haigh's classic disquisition on the Northumbrian series (Haigh (1876), pl. vi. 2). Publication may not have been until the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but it is specifically remarked in the course of the text (p. 21) that the plates had been prepared 'some twenty years before'. More than ever one wonders, then, whether the ultimate provenance may not have been that small hoard from an uncertain place, perhaps in Derbyshire, which allegedly had consisted entirely of coins of Sword Saint Peter type (Rashleigh (1869), p. 99). By one of the present writers, admittedly, the date of discovery has been put as late as c. 1860 (Dolley (1966), p. 28), but a reappraisal of all the evidence must suggest that a date as far back as the early 1850s—or even the late 1840s—is entirely plausible. Once again we are indebted to Mr. Pagan for drawing our attention to certain items in yet another Sotheby sale of the middle of the nineteenth century (Hurt (1853), lots 40–3) where the vendor, described as of 'Wirksworth, Derbyshire', is found disposing of really quite a substantial parcel of Sword Saint Peter pennies. Rashleigh was only one of several buyers on that occasion, and it seems perfectly credible that a misattributed coin in a lot which he did not acquire should have been purchased by one of the dealers on behalf of Bergne, while a few years earlier Haigh with his Yorkshire roots and new Birmingham residence must have been well placed to be shown and to have engraved any curious coin discovered in Derbyshire. Equally, too, the apparent absence from the parcel of the English regal coins so critical for dating the find's concealment would more than sufficiently explain the lack of real interest displayed by Haigh and Rashleigh alike in the find's precise composition and exact provenance.

This is not to say that one or other of the two Sihtric Caoch pennies here tentatively associated with the Stretton and Hurt sales could not in fact derive from yet another source, and here the 1807 Bossall/Flaxton hoard comes at once to mind (Dolley (1955) passim), and especially now that Mr. Pagan has satisfied us that Sword Saint Peter really were present in that find in some quantity. What must not be overlooked, though, is the quite remarkable extent to which the English numismatic scene at the end of the 1830s was dominated by the energetic, wealthy, and extremely perspicacious Edward Hawkins. The failure of the distinctive Sword coins of Sihtric Caoch to make their mark on the pages of tomes as magisterial as those of Ruding (1840) and Hawkins (1841) cannot but raise a presumption that at this period such pennies had still to be discovered on English soil. From the first half of the nineteenth century, too, there is a certain paucity of English finds which could be said to be chronologically consistent with the
inclusion of a *Sword* element, and what is perhaps the most obvious candidate, the 1855 find from Scotby (Thompson (1956), no. 324, but see now Blunt (1974), pp. 156–8), not only came to light too late by several years really to be compatible with the Haigh illustration, but must be thought to suffer from the well-nigh fatal defect that it appears to have been strongly Chester- and not York-oriented.

The four earliest provenances that we have for the extant coins of Sihtric Caoch seem, then, to be all from Ireland and from the Northern Midlands of England. A new element is introduced by the next coin of the king to come to light, the *Sword/Cross* penny now in Copenhagen but with a sale-pedigree that goes back to the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Borghesi (1880), lot 1372). So unexpected a provenance may well reflect an Italian findspot, for all that the coin proves to be from the same reverse die as the coin now in the British Museum which the preceding paragraphs have sought to associate with the mid nineteenth-century find from Derbyshire. In 1879, too, a second *Sword/T* coin occurred as a single find in one of the Birka graves (Hildebrand (1881), p. 4). On any telling it is one of the latest Western coins to have been found in that particular context (Rasmussen (1934), *passim*), and here surely is a hint and more that the Sihtric coinage should belong no later than the very end of the first quarter of the tenth century. In 1891, furthermore, the Trotternish hoard from Skye (Stevenson (1966), pp. xiii and xiv) threw up a second specimen of the penny of *Sword/Hammer* type (Richardson (1891), pp. 236 and 238), and the concealment of this considerable find must seem securely dated a year or two before rather than after 940. Almost immediately, moreover, this ‘hard’ *terminus ante quem* was moved back a whole decade and more when in 1894 a third of the *Sword/T* coins occurred in the small but critical hoard from Bangor in north Wales (Anon. (1894), p. 104). It is a curious but scarcely significant coincidence that exactly one hundred years should separate the discovery of the first of Sihtric’s pennies at Threekingham in 1794 and this the most recent discovery in 1894, and perhaps more remarkable that eighty years should have elapsed since it has been possible to make any addition to the *corpus* of known specimens.

The hoard evidence, then, would seem to be broadly consistent with what little can be deduced from the coins’ typology and style. Their most obvious affinities are with the relatively common late group of *Saint Peter* pennies from York where a sword has been added to the obverse type—one can say relatively common since the number of extant specimens is certainly well in excess of sixty. These *Sword Saint Peter* coins appear at last to be dated with fair security to the early 920s (Dolley (1957), p. 131), and it is satisfying that an example from each of the main groupings occurs in the recent find from Dunmore Cave which there is reason to think dates from the year 929. Only less close are the affinities to the extremely rare *Saint Martin* pennies of Lincoln which appear also to belong—*pace* the older historians and numismatists—to the 920s (Stewart (1967), pp. 51–4). Again an example, the sixth known, was in the new find from Dunmore Cave. Few students of the Irish Sea scene, too, would wish to date the Glasnevin and Bangor hoards even as late as 930, so that the consequent dating for the Sihtric Caoch pennies within the approximate bracket c. 920–c. 925 is one that may be thought to agree admirably with the little that is known concerning the Hiberno-Norse adventurer’s career in England from the more conventional historical sources. It was probably in 921 that he succeeded his cousin Regnald as king of the York Vikings, and in 926 that he married—*en deuxièmes* if not *troisièmes* or even *quatrièmes noces*—a young
half-sister of King Æthelstan of England. Within the year he was dead, his effective successor being his brother—or half-brother?—Guthfrith of whom no coins are known (cf. Stenton (1971), pp. 339 and 346).

That all Sihtric Caoch’s surviving coins were struck at one and the same mint has always been assumed, and the implication is that this must have been York. Dublin can safely be precluded; increasingly there is evidence that the Hiberno-Norse mint was established by his homonymous great-grandson no earlier than the very last years of the tenth century (Dolley (1973), passim). It should be stressed, though, that there appear to be two distinct series, the one mint- and the other moneyer-signed, even though the dies for both clearly emanate from one centre if not a single atelier. A similar dichotomy exists within the Sword Saint Peter coins, but here the Sword/Hammer coins uniformly exhibit incoherent reverse legends, whereas on the parallel Sword/Cross coins which are generally of neater work there will be found a consistent mint-signature +EBORACE civ(itas) which can only indicate York. As Mr. B. H. H. Stewart has hinted, too, the chronological indications as to the sequence of Sihtric Caoch’s three types are baffling in their inherent contradictions (Stewart (1967), pp. 51–3: idem (1967A), p. 270). Typologically the earliest ought perhaps to be the Sword/T coins, the one class where none of the surviving coins attempts a mint-signature, inasmuch as they give the impression of linking back through a unique coin in the Trotternish hoard (Stevenson (1966), no. 71) with an earlier (?) and regally anonymous issue which is of even greater rarity. The types of this Trotternish coin correspond exactly to those of the Sihtric pieces in question, but the completely blundered—and retrograde—obverse legend is probably to be read IDIED//ERIV, and so recalls the EIVERDE reverse legend of a penny—again with the ‘T’ form of the Thor’s hammer as its reverse type—from the 1958 Morley St. Peter hoard (Dolley (1958), p. 113, fig. 1, d). Here the obverse type is likewise a horizontal sword, with pellets above and below, but this time it is contained within an inner circle, while the surrounding legend reads +ERDVERAVIX and so even more clearly essays the name of Edward the Elder, the West Saxon king who between 899 and 924 rolled back the southern frontier of the Danelaw from the Thames below London as far as the Trent if not the Humber. A second more fragmentary coin is in the University collection at Bangor (Fox (1946), pl. ix, 7: Blunt (1954), pl. ii. 5), and again is from the 1894 Bangor find. Here, though, the spined sword points upward, but still it is flanked by pellets, while the incomplete legends run +CIE IVE and —EVIVEI, the ‘c’ being of square form. A third coin of the group occurred in the 1838 Glasnevin find (Lindsay pl. 2, no. 52), and is now in the cabinet of Mr. Christopher Blunt, F.B.A., of Ramsbury. It has the same types except that the sword now points downwards and the pellets are omitted. The legend may be read +CIOIVICIV and +CIOIVICIV, the ‘c’ again being in each case of square form. A second coin with these types but with legends closer to those on the Morley St. Peter specimen has recently turned up in the Dunmore Cave find, but is unfortunately fragmentary. Finally there is a large fragment of a coin of completely consistent fabric, type, and style in the cabinet of Mr. B. H. I. H. Stewart of Southwark, but here the formal pedigree probably should not be carried back beyond the third of the Lord Grantley sales (Grantley (1944), lot 958b)—the suggestion of a Cambridgeshire findspot almost certainly means no more than that the coin had been purchased at first or even second hand from one particular coin-dealer in business at Cambridge in the early years of this century. That these five coins belong all to the years
leading up to Æthelstan's reassertion of English authority over York in 927 cannot well be doubted, but their exact position in the sequence is far from certain. The Bangor provenance could be critical inasmuch as the find, admittedly a small one, eschews coins of Æthelstan, and is usually dated in consequence before c. 925, so that if these rare pieces are of York they probably antedate both the Sihtric pennies under discussion and the Sword Saint Peter issues. Again, though, the assumption that York is the mint is one that may have been made too lightly. Not one of the coins has a legend approximating in any way to a York mint-signature, and there is the disturbing circumstance that none of them would appear to derive from the Bossall/Flaxton find (Dolley (1955), *passim*) which must surely represent our locus classicus where coins of York from the second half of the first quarter of the tenth century are concerned.

Likewise ambiguous is the position of the Sword/Hammer coins of Sihtric Caoch which are generally inferior in execution even if superior in their degree of sophistication. The penny from Threekingham and its counterpart in Copenhagen which this note has suggested is from a nineteenth-century find associated with Derbyshire exhibit between them an unusual consistency of reverse legend—\(+\)IE\(\text{i}\)\(\text{o}\)\(\text{i}\)\(\text{i}\)\(\text{o}\)\(\text{i}\)\(\text{n}\) (or \(+\)I\(\text{N}\)E\(\text{i}\)A\(\text{i}\)O\(\text{i}\)N\(\text{i}\)?) and \(+\)I\(\text{N}\)E\(\text{i}\)A\(\text{i}\)O\(\text{i}\)N—so that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they are essaying the same mint-signature, and it has occurred to both the writers quite independently that this could be for Lincoln. Against all this, the \(+\)IE\(\text{Vicrimot}\) of the Trotternish coin of the same type must suggest a more conventional reverse legend with the name of the moneyer and a contraction to indicate his status—cf. the Eric coin of the Sword/Cross grouping—and we are left in consequence with the first coin with a highly literate obverse tied to the second by a markedly inferior reverse, while the third is tied to the second by the degree of degeneracy of their obverses. It is noteworthy, too, that the spine down the blade of the sword of the obverse type is found in the case of two of the three coins under discussion—the feature is one that persists from the issue considered in the previous paragraph. It is too easy to forget that blundering is not necessarily a symptom of degeneration, and one should never preclude the possibility that one is dealing not with deterioration but with the prentice work of a tiro engraver in the process of finding his feet.

To turn now to the Sword/Cross coins, the implication at least of Mr. Stewart's as usual highly perceptive remarks is that they belong relatively early (Stewart (1967), pp. 53–4), but the sword seems consistently without spine which seems to suggest a certain divorce from the perhaps transitional pieces where the sword of the obverse type is contained within an inner circle (*supra*, p. 40). Transitional pieces, of course, can come at the end as well as the beginning of a series, but the whole tenor of the hoard-evidence does suggest for them a slot before 921 rather than after 926, and we do well to remember that if they were in fact from Guthfrith's time they would be among the very latest coins in the finds from Glasnevin and Dunmore Cave, as well as the latest pieces in those from Bangor and Morley St. Peter. A further nexus between the Sword/Cross and Sword/Hammer pennies of Sihtric Caoch is the fact that one of the former is seemingly moneyer-signed, whereas the other two are from the one \(+\)CACT\(\text{Dae}\)\(\text{E}\)\(\text{G}\)RT reverse die that seems so clearly to enshrine a mint-signature, even if one must resist the temptation to read Latin *castra* into the first six letters, and leave open the question whether the antepenultimate letter is 'G' or 'O'. It is interesting, though, that this putative mint-signature appears to bear no relation to that essayed on the Sword/Hammer
coins, and that epigraphically the Sword/Cross pennies of Sihtric Caoch have little in common with their typological analogues in the Sword Saint Peter series, the generally superior pennies consistently essaying the unequivocal mint-signature +EBORACE CIV(itas). At this stage at any rate one would not wish to rule out the possibility that Sihtric's coins may have been produced at three places, one of these being the centre—not York?—where the dies may have been produced for all of them.

Neglected in our opinion is a certain resemblance between the +IEIVIONI (or +INEIAIONI?) and +INEIAION of the Sword/Hammer pence of Sihtric Caoch and the +INCOIACIVT of the most blundered of the Saint Martin pennies (Stewart (1967), p. 47), though one would hesitate to go so far as to claim that Lincola or Lincolnia is what the regal coins are attempting. There is, on the other hand, just a little prosopographical evidence to suggest that some of the Sihtric pieces might conceivably have been struck south of the Humber. Sibrant is, as we have seen, a perhaps significant hapax, and it is difficult to make much of IEVICRI, though the 'r' could reflect an ON. nominative ending. In the same way, Adel—d is tantalizing in its incompleteness. If for Æthelfrith or Æthelferth, York might seem indicated (Blunt (1974), p. 90), but, and the reservation is an important one, the flavour of these names, if indeed there are two names, is essentially 'late' where Æthelstan's coinage is concerned. Chronologically more attractive would be Adelbern for Adelbert, and Adelbert is a hapax moneyer in the so-called 'church' type of Æthelstan—the reverse in fact adapts the masonry altar from the well-known Constantinian BEATA TRANQUILLITAS type—which Mr. Blunt accepts as a York issue, even though only one moneyer employs the York mint-signature and the others have no obvious York connection (Blunt (1974), p. 92). With Are and Eric we are on firmer ground. Both are considered by Mr. Blunt moneyers of his North-Eastern I (Two-Line) grouping which is associated with the Northern Danelaw but not with Northumbria (Blunt (1974), pp. 81–3). In other words prosopographical considerations link the coinage of Sihtric Caoch both with York and with an ill-defined area lying immediately to the south of the Humber, and what seems to emerge from all this is the reflection that on the basis of nine coins we are in no position finally to resolve what are in fact inextricably tangled problems of attribution and of relative chronology. Inasmuch, too, as the new Dunmore Cave find seems certainly to have been concealed in 929 and contains both major variants of the Sword Saint Peter issue, Irish students at least will continue to attach considerable significance to the total absence of coins assignable to Guthfrith Ui Ivar, and to regard 927 as the natural terminus ante quem for the whole Saint Peter coinage.

By definition the coins of Sihtric Caoch fall between 921 and 926, and one may well ask if there is any reason why the Saint Martin and the Sword Saint Peter issues should not be confined to the same bracket, in which case any groupings within the series are more likely to possess geographical rather than chronological significance. The numismatist must not forget the limitations of his methods, and until such time as he can point to a whole range of finds neatly dated c. 923 and consistently including certain types of Sihtric and excluding others, he is really in no position to argue that a particular coin is 'early' or 'late' within a series that does not seem either to grow out of one coinage or to shade away into another. In other words it may well be thought inappropriate in the present state of knowledge to insist on there being any clear sequence in the three groupings into which the nine recorded pennies of Sihtric Caoch appear to fall.
This is not to say that consideration of these nine coins in depth has been entirely negative. It is by no means without interest that there appear to be two parallel series, one mint-signed and the other without mint-signature but exhibiting what seem to be the names of individual moneyers. In the same way some significance surely must attach to the observation that a certain homogeneity of style points to the dies all having been engraved at one centre if not indeed by one hand. The hypothesis we would like to put forward for serious consideration is that this centre of die-production may have lain south of the Humber—conceivably at Lincoln—and not at York. Increasingly it is becoming clear that numismatics and history alike have been unduly shackled by nineteenth-century concepts of strict constitutional propriety, and it is doubtful if due weight has ever been given to the differences of political climate that must have obtained under the temperamentally very different Edward the Elder and Æthelstan, differences that may be thought to be very neatly mirrored in the circumstance that we have coins of Archbishop Plegmund but not of his successor. From the Bossall/Flaxton hoard it seems abundantly clear that by the middle of the second decade of the tenth century the situation within the York mint—or mints?—had degenerated to the point that complete collapse was inevitable. The last of the Swordless Saint Peter coins and of the secular issues associated with them, the so-called ‘Raienalt’ issues traditionally linked with Regnald Uí Ivar and if so dating most probably from the years immediately preceding his definitive usurpation of 917/919, together constitute a coinage as wretched in its execution as of inferior weight if not fineness. The Hiberno-Norse triumph could well have proved the last straw with as one numismatic consequence of the political débâcle the disappearance of a failing school of die-sinking. For an economy long habituated to the use of coin such a disaster would have been indeed a serious matter, and it would have been only natural for York to turn to an alternative source of dies when the new order brought stability and a recrudescence of commercial prosperity.

Our provisional hypothesis is that c. 920 a die-cutter south of the Humber, and very probably at Lincoln, was invited to supply dies to York, and that under Sihtric Caoch the output of what was probably a quasi-ecclesiastical minting-authority was supplemented by an issue of more overtly secular coins with the Hiberno-Norse king’s name. That all the Sword Saint Peter coins were actually struck at York, though some at least from dies supplied from Lincoln (?), must still appear the hypothesis that has most to commend it, but it could be that the secular issues should be thought of as amenable to other reasoning, and it seems feasible, to put it no more highly, that Sihtric Caoch, a pagan at least until his marriage to Æthelstan’s half-sister, might have preferred to have had some if not all his coins struck elsewhere, and particularly if in the area directly controlled by him racial as well as religious tensions were conspiring to induce in him a certain reluctance to depend in fiscal matters exclusively on the goodwill of any one section of his subjects. As we have seen, there is some reason to think that a proportion at least of Sihtric’s coins may have been struck at a mint or mints to the south of the Humber, and we hesitate entirely to preclude the possibility that Edward the Elder may not in fact have succeeded in establishing the plenitude of English sovereignty over the whole of what is now Lincolnshire. Nowhere in the historical record are we told precisely when Lincoln accepted the English king’s authority, a possibly significant contrast with the position obtaining in the case of the more western of the Five Boroughs, but even within the received version of the events of the last years of Edward’s reign
there seems room for a new interpretation of the Sihtric issues. Might not the tolerant
and far-sighted English king given permission for the men of Lincoln to supply the
Norse king with dies or even coin? Later in the same century the Welsh king Howel Dda
seems to have been granted either by Eadmund or Eadred a licence to strike coins in his
own name at the English mint established at Chester, and we are satisfied that if only we
can rid ourselves of nineteenth-century preconceptions of sovereignty there is no inherent
improbability in Sihtric Caoch having recourse in the same way to the mint of Lincoln
where we now know that there was being put out at this very juncture the Saint Martin
pennies which ignore totally Edward’s kingship. What one would dearly like to know,
however, was what terminated the arrangement. Was the cessation of an autonomous
coinage of York something agreed on as part of the marriage-contract between Sihtric
Caoch and Æthelstan’s half-sister, or was it something imposed upon the men of York
when Æthelstan deposed Guthfrith? Whatever our answer, though, if York by c. 925
was depending for its dies on a centre now effectively controlled by Æthelstan, the
apparent total absence of coins of Guthfrith Úi Ivar becomes something that is very
much more explicable than has been the case heretofore. Historically as well as numis-
matically, then, an interpretation of the York coinages of the early 920s along the lines
suggested in this note may be thought to present fewer difficulties than some of its
precursors, and it only remains for us to express our indebtedness to Messrs. Christopher
Blunt, Hugh Pagan, and Ian Stewart who have given up so much of their time to dis-
cussion with us of certain facets of the extremely complex problems involved, but with
the proviso that this acknowledgement is not to be taken as implying that all or any of
our conclusions are necessarily acceptable to them in whole or in part.

APPENDIX

A CORPUS OF THE KNOWN COINS OF SIHTRIC CAOCH,
KING OF DUBLIN AND OF YORK

TYPE A. Obverse type a sword Reverse type a Thor’s hammer in the form of a ‘T’

1. Obv. —STR // -CRE
   Var. Zig-zag pattern along blade of sword.  Var. Crescents flanking and above ‘T’.
   Large fragment.
   British Museum, ex H. R. Dawson (1842), lot 216 (? ex 1838 Glasnevin find).
   Illustration: Rashleigh (1869), pi. ii. 17: Haigh (1876), pi. vi. 1: Allen (1936), pi. 3: Brooke (1950),
   pl. lxvi. 6.

2. Obv. SITR // ICREX
   Var. Sword with spine.
   Weight: 13.7 grains (0.89 g) but chipped.
   Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm: found in 1879 in Grave 845 at Birka (Björkö).
   (1943), p. 320.
   Illustration: Hildebrand (1881), p. 4: Arbman (1940), pl. 141, 5: supra, p. 34.

3. Obv. SITR // ICR—
   Var. Sword with spine.
   Weight: 13.7 grains (0.89 g) but chipped.
   Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm: found in 1879 in Grave 845 at Birka (Björkö).
   (1943), p. 320.
   Illustration: Hildebrand (1881), p. 4: Arbman (1940), pl. 141, 5: supra, p. 34.
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ENGLISH COINAGES OF SIHTRIC CAOCH


TYPE B. Obverse type a sword

Reverse type the outline of a Thor’s hammer


**Weight:** not recorded.

Present whereabouts unknown: found at Threeckingham (Lincs.) in 1794.

Discussion: Cragg (1913), p. 2.
Illustration: Cragg (1913), p. 2: supra, pp. 34 and 35.


**Weight:** 17-7 grains (1-15 g).

Royal Coin and Medal Collection, Copenhagen, ex Bruun [Galster (1928), 227], ex Montagu (1895), lot 424, ex Brice, ex Bergne (1873), lot 101 (?): ? ex Hurt (1853), lot 40 or 43: ? found in Derbyshire.

Illustration: Rashleigh (1869), pl. ii. 19: Haigh (1876), pl. vi. 2: Galster (1964), 594.

6. **Obv.** +ITR // ROOL **Rev.** +IEIVICRIMOT—the ‘M’ made up of five strokes.

Var. Sword with spine. **Weight:** 21-4 grains (1-38 g).

National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh, ex 1891 Trotternish (Skye) hoard.

Discussion: Richardson (1891), pp. 236 and 238.
Illustration: Stevenson (1966), 70.

TYPE C. Obverse type a sword

Reverse type a plain cross with crescents and pellets in opposed angles

7. **Obv.** LVDO // SITRC

Var. Trefoil at point of sword and Thor’s hammer in exergue.

**Weight:** 17-2 grains (1-11 g).

British Museum, ex H. R. Dawson (1842), lot 209; ex J. Humphreys: ex 1838 Glasnevin hoard.


8. **Obv.** SITR // ICREX **Rev.** +CACTDAEGRIT (retrograde).

**Weight:** 17-5 grains (1-13 g).

British Museum, ex Lockett (1955), lot 439, ex Bascom (1914), lot 46, ex Rashleigh (1909), lot 170, ? ex Stretton (1855), lot 409, ? found in Ireland.


9. **Obv.** SITR // ICREX **Rev.** From the same die as the preceding coin.

**Weight:** 21-3 grains (1-50 g).

Royal Coin and Medal Collection, Copenhagen, ex Bruun [Galster (1928), 192], ex Montagu (1895), lot 423: ex Brice, ex Borghesi (1880), lot 1372, ? found in Italy.


1 The same coin described twice as no. 7 and 7a.
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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ENGLISH COINAGES OF SIHTRIC CAOCH


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