A CAROLINGIAN DENARIUS WITH A DEVONSHIRE PROVENANCE

MICHAEL DOLLEY AND NORMAN SHIEL

A whole indiction ago a paper sought summarily to list recorded insular findings of coins struck in the period c.750–c.1050 for the Frankish dynasts ruling western Europe from the Baltic as far south as the Pyrenees and the Appenines. From Wessex the tally was quite exiguous, and for practical purposes did not extend beyond an obolus ('halfpenny') of Lothaire II (855–69) found at Pin's Knoll, Litton Cheyney in Dorset (Nat. Grid 541905)—in part the occasion of that paper—and perhaps two denarii ('pennies') from the first half of the ninth century occurring in the 1774 hoard from Trewhiddle near St. Austell in Cornwall. That a useful addition can now be made is due to the courtesy of the Revd. R. S. Chalk, MA, the retired Rector (1959–75) of Stoke Fleming, who is the possessor of a denarius in the name of Charles the Bald (840–77) and struck at Melle in Aquitaine just under forty miles to the south-west of Poitiers.

The coin is one that came to him in 1920 after the death of his maternal grandfather the Revd. Joseph Heald Ward, MA (1839–1920), sometime Rector (1869–1894) of Gussage St. Michael, Dorset, and later Rector (1894–1909) of Silverton, Devon. Mr Ward, as befitted a correspondent during his Dorset days of Sir John Evans (1823–1908), kept meticulous records of the provenances of such coins, mostly Roman, as had been found locally and added by him to a modest collection which reflected a very wide range of scholarly interests. It was during the Silverton incumbency that there was acquired—and presumably found—the Charles the Bald denarius that is the subject of this note. It was described on the original envelope now mislaid as 'Charlemagne. Found at Culm Davey', and this provenance is further

2 Ibid., p. 79, 9.
vouched for by a note written for her son by his daughter, the late Mrs Laetitia J. Chalk, in the last year of her life (1952). This runs 'CARLVS REX, found at Culm Davey and purchased from the finder by your grandfather'. Before her marriage in 1904 she had shared in full her father's antiquarian enthusiasms, and the venerable Dorset archaeologist General A. H. L. Pitt-Rivers (1827–1900) is supposed to have remarked of her 'Miss Ward is the only young lady I know who has any worth-while conversation!' Culm Davey (Nat. Grid. ST 1215) nestles on the southern slopes of the Black Down Hills which constitute the Devon and Somerset mearing in the extreme northeast corner of the former county. The Culm of the place-name, incidentally, represents an etymological misconception engendered by the proximity of the R. Culm. The Domesday form is Comba (OE cumb—'combe'), a good description of the remote locality, while the Davey perpetuates the name of David de Wydeworth (Widworthy), a thirteenth-century holder of the manor.3

Charles the Bald, a grandson of Charlemagne, has an English—indeed a West Saxon—connection in that his daughter Judith, named after her redoubtable paternal grandmother from Alemannia, by her marriages with Æthelwulf (839–58) and Æthelbald (857–60) was successively the child-bride stepmother and sister-in-law of Ælfric the Great (871–99), though she had returned to the Continent a decade or so before his accession. Technically, Charles, born in 823, came of age in 838—and provision for him as future king had been made as early as 829—but one may doubt whether in fact he was in a position to strike coins before 840, the date usually accepted for his regal coronation,4 and it was perhaps only after the 842 Oath of Strasburg and the 843 Partition of Verdun that his power outside Neustria became even intermittently effective. The great majority of his coins appear to conform to two types,5 and the problem for the numismatist is to try to determine where exactly the line should be drawn between them—some of the later pieces partake of the character of a type immobilisé persisting at least as late as into the tenth century, while Charles's imperial interlude (875–7) was so brief that nothing should be read into the continuing occurrence on them of the regal title. That Morrison and Grunthal 1063, the issue to which Mr Chalk's coin undoubtedly belongs, begins relatively early in the reign, emerges clearly enough from a consideration of two of the four insular provenances. In a minor Welsh find from Penard in the Gower peninsula6 a single specimen is accompanied by an Italian denarius of Lothaire I (817–55) and a West Saxon penny of Ecgberht (802–38) which seems to belong to the early 830s, but more critical still perhaps is the occurrence of several examples, beside several of the parallel issue of Pippin II (838–65), in the Irish hoard from Mullaghboden in the Co. Kildare7 which seems to mirror events of the year 847 when a Westfalding fleet which since 843 had wintered at Noirmoutier off the Loire mouth suddenly abandoned its base there and apparently switched operations to Ireland. Nor is it altogether without significance that in the great Cuerdale hoard from Lancashire, concealed c.903, coins corresponding to Morrison and Grunthal 1064 heavily predominate, while the odd piece believed to have occurred in the Harkirke find from the same county, but concealed a few years

6 Dolley and Morrison, op. cit., p. 78, 2.
7 Ibid., p. 78, 4.
later, may owe its very provisional classification as Morrison and Grunthal 1063 to ‘improvement’ by the engraver of the seventeenth-century copper-plate which is our only evidence for what the hoard contained.8

The legends of Mr Chalk’s coin are inscribed with considerable neatness and run:

+ CARLVS REX FRANCORUM (‘Charles, King of the Franks’)

and:

+ METVLLO (‘at Melle’)

while the execution of the types, a simple cross pattée and the Karolus monogram, exhibits the same sophisticated exactitude on the part of the engraver. The weight is 1·70 g (26·2 gr), and the die-axis a regular 180°, and the coin, which is superbly preserved, evidences very little wear, and appears to be of very fine silver. Although, then, the Culm Davey denarius corresponds very closely to a Cuerdale piece in the British Museum,9 there seems no good reason to preclude striking in the 840s or 850s when Charles was disputing effective control of Aquitaine with his nephew, the official king Pippin II. We are reinforced in this view by the authoritative and coincident opinions (in letters) of Mme F. Dumas-Dubourg of the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, and of Dr D. M. Metcalf of the Heberden Coin Room of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Granted that in 845 Charles had formally to recognize Pippin’s de jure claim to the regal title,10 the gesture was very much in return for territorial concessions while the situation in the march north of the River Charente was particularly confused, with both the cousins under threat from first the Westfaldings and later the Danes. For most if not all of this period Melle may even have struck simultaneously for both the kings—ninth-century concepts of sovereignty do not necessarily coincide with those of nineteenth-century theorists—and students of the contemporary English series should ponder the mounting body of evidence that in the later 860s and the 870s London struck without discrimination the major coinages alike of Wessex and of Mercia. If it be accepted, then, that Mr Chalk’s coin is unlikely to have been struck much later than c.855, it must be admitted that the Culm Davey provenance accords reasonably well not only with the little that is known of the internal history of ninth-century Wessex, but also with the somewhat better-attested fact of a dynastic link forged at this juncture between the royal lines of Cerdic and of Pippin of Heristal.

Most probably after his return from Rome and France in the winter of 856/7, Æthelwulf appears to have implemented a major reform of the West Saxon coinage, one element in this being the demonetization of the mixture of specie of very diverse appearance which had been current before its supersession by the new pennies of one standard type. It cannot be pretended that absolute uniformity was achieved at the first attempt, but over the next thirty years or so the hoard-evidence indicates that there was progressive elimination of the obsolete and of the alien. On the face of it, then, a date not substantially later than one c.857 should be preferred for the casual loss at Culm Davey of a coin of which the English currency after that year was technically invalid. Given the remoteness of Culm Davey, too, it must seem doubly unlikely that there

8 Cuerdale, ibid., pp. 80 and 81, 13; Harkirke, ibid., p. 82, 14.
should be any connection with the events of the year 876 when a Danish horse host from Wareham traversed Dorset only to be bottled up in Exeter before being shadowed northwards across Somerset to Gloucester,\textsuperscript{11} or of the year 878 when the southern wing of the Great Army based on Chippenham overran and ravaged Somerset before Ælfred emerged from Athelney and fought it to a standstill at Edington.\textsuperscript{12}

It had been on 1 October 856 that Æthelwulf \textit{en deuxièmes noces} had married Charles the Bald’s daughter at Verberie-sur-Oise some twenty-five miles to the northeast of Paris,\textsuperscript{13} and it will be the suggestion of this note that the most likely occasion for the introduction into Wessex of Mr Chalk’s Melle denarius of the French king is his English son-in-law’s return home with his child-bride and her Frankish entourage. Culm Davey, we may note, even if once more in private possession on the day in January 1066 when King Edward was alive and dead, marched with Hemyock (\textit{Hamihoc}), its royal hundred-manor,\textsuperscript{14} and ecclesiastically today the two churches constitute a single cure. In this connection it may be noted that Mr Chalk’s father, the Revd. E. S. Chalk, MA, BD (1874-1936), Rector (1904-36) of Kentisbeare and Blackborough, in the first of his Devonshire Association histories of those parishes\textsuperscript{15} (nos. 3 and 4, n.p., 1934) remarks Ælfred’s disposition of estates in east Devon well to the south and west of Hemyock, and a reminder that West Saxon royal demesne land was by no means confined to Somerset. We are further grateful to Professor H. R. Loyn who suggested at this point that we should consult Dr Simon Keynes of Trinity College, Cambridge, who has made a special study of that college library’s thirteenth-century transcript (MS R.5.33) of the summary headings from a lost cartulary of c.1100 with the texts of more than 130 Anglo-Saxon charters relating to early endowments of Glastonbury Abbey. Dr Keynes confirms (in a letter) that one such charter, now lost,\textsuperscript{16} appears to have recorded the grant of \textit{Cumbe iuxta Culum}—i.e. Culm (Davey) beside Culmstock—by King Cynewulf (756–86) to a layman in the later 750s, while another lost charter\textsuperscript{17} of King Eadred (946–55) suggests that by the early 950s at the latest Culm Davey was again in the gift of the West Saxon king, so that the intervening non-regal grants c.760,\textsuperscript{18} by which part at least of the estate had passed to the Church, had not proved permanent.

This is not to claim that Culm Davey can be shown to have reverted to the Crown by the 850s, and it would be going light-years beyond the evidence to assert that the manor formed part of Judith’s morning-gift on the occasion of either of her English marriages, but it remains intriguing that there should have been in the later Anglo-Saxon period continuing royal interest in a property within the bounds of which Mr Chalk’s denarius may be supposed to have been found. Admittedly Æthelwulf, and after him Æthelbeorht (858–865/6) while Æthelbald lived, appear to have accepted physical exclusion of their persons from Wessex proper in the interests of ‘national unity’, but it may be thought that they could well afford to do so when all production of coin was concentrated in south-east England which they controlled. Since the Viking

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 255-7.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 245.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{VCH Devon}, i. 508.
\textsuperscript{15} E. S. Chalk, \textit{Kentisbeare}, 1934, and \textit{Blackborough}, 1934; Parochial Histories of Devonshire, nos. 3 and 4.
\textsuperscript{16} P. H. Sawyer, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography} (1968), p. 458, no. 1683.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 466, no. 1745.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 459, no. 1691, taken in conjunction with William of Malmesbury’s \textit{De antiquitate Glastoniensis ecclesiae}, ed. T. Hearne (Oxford, 1727), p. 64.
sack of Southampton in 842, Wessex as such had been without a mint, and between 857 and 860 Æthelbald’s lack of access to coining-facilities may well have blunted the impact on Devonshire of his father’s monetary reforms, with a situation created thereby where a coin of such patent excellence as the Culm Davey denarius enjoyed a limited, if formally illicit, currency.

Much of what has gone before is frankly speculative, but we do well to remember that Anglo-Saxon Devonshire is characterized by a quite singular paucity of material remains. More than seventy years ago this dearth was remarked by R. A. Smith in his discussion of the tenth-century sword-guard found in 1833 at South Street, Exeter,¹⁹ and what is true of artifacts in the widest sense of the term holds good particularly for coins. Too long it has gone unremarked that Devonshire is one of the very few counties lying within the jurisdiction of the tenth- and eleventh-century English kings from which there is no record of an Anglo-Saxon coin-hoard, and even the single-finds of Anglo-Saxon pennies can be ticked off on the fingers of one hand. Here mention may be made appropriately of another ninth-century silver coin with a find-spot from east of the Exe, a Canterbury penny of Archbishop Ceolnoth (833–70) which came to light in 1932 in the course of archaeological excavation in the Deanery Gardens to the south-west of Exeter Cathedral. From a printed description,²⁰ corroborated by some notes among papers in the Dean and Chapter Library, it appears to have been of the type of ‘Hawkins 147/148’ (i.e. BMC 34—North 241) and so to belong relatively early in the long pontificate. The legends, which appear from a grotesquely reduced-scale illustration (ibid., pl. xiv, no. 18) and transcriptions contemporary with the finding to have read + CIALNOD ARCEP and + BIORNMOD MONET, are entirely plausible, and reliance can be placed on the excavators’ identification, though the actual coin seems to have been a victim of the air-raid of 4 May 1942 when a high-explosive bomb extensively damaged the south aisle of the cathedral choir where the coin, along with other archaeological finds from the Close (some salvaged), was on exhibition. It is in the context of the county’s numismatic poverty where the Anglo-Saxon period is concerned that students, not only of Devonshire but also of the English coinage generally, are placed under such obligation to the memory of the Revd. J. H. Ward and of his daughter who noted so meticulously the provenance of an early medieval silver coin so far removed from the Victorian country parson’s normal collecting interests.