
Volume 29 in the Sylloge series records more than eleven hundred coins from the Celtic period to the thirteenth century. The holdings of coins of this period in Merseyside County Museums, formerly the City of Liverpool Museums, are unusual for a public collection in that they largely derive from a single private collection which was bought intact when the owner died. Dr Philip Nelson (1872-1953) was a man of independent means who devoted much of his energy and resources to antiquarian pursuits. He was well known in numismatic circles for a number of publications including monographs on 'The Coinage of the Isle of Man' in NC 1899 and 'The Obsidional Money of the Great Rebellion 1642-1649' in BNJ 2 (1906). The papers written during his first period of numismatic activity (to 1916) were mostly devoted to coinages of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but during the last ten years of his life he turned his attention to the coinage of York in the Anglo-Saxon period and between 1943 and 1950 he contributed seventeen notes on this or related subjects to the Numismatic Chronicle. At the same time he became an energetic collector of coins of the York mint. He combined this with a strong interest in the greatest of all the Anglo-Viking treasures, the 1840 hoard from Cuerdale, on the banks of the river Ribble near Preston, in which the earliest Viking royal coinages of York, in the names of Siefred and Cnut, were so strongly represented.

Among the groups of coins which came to the museums from other sources, mention should be made of a number of items from the Dark Ages which were presented by Joseph Mayer (1803-86). Mayer acquired the collections of Anglo-Saxon antiquities formed by the Rev. Bryan Faussett (1720-76) and by W.H. Rolfe (1779-1859), both of whom lived and collected in Kent. The most important part of the Mayer gift was the hoard of coin-ornaments from St Martin's, Canterbury which was republished by Professor Grierson in BNJ 27 (1953). Local finds from the north-west are represented chiefly by the important series of single finds from the beach at Meols, on the west coast of the Wirral, representing a lost settlement which was apparently abandoned in the late fourteenth century. Most of the Meols coins in this volume are of the post-Norman period, but several earlier items are included beginning with two Armorican billon staters.

Nelson's York collection begins with 120 Northumbrian stycas of the ninth century. In addition to the Cuerdale coinages, he had a useful group of nineteen St Peters, a few of the extremely rare issues of Anlaf and Eric Bloodaxe, and more than four hundred York coins struck between Edgar's reform and the time of Stephen. The York coinages of the late Anglo-Saxon
period represented in the volume are second only in importance to those of the Yorkshire collections (SCBI 21) and their value is enhanced by an important note by Mrs V.J. Smart on the York moneyers' names.

The series of Northumbrian Cuerdale coins at Liverpool amounts to 220 specimens, the largest group that has yet been published. Nelson acquired other Cuerdale coins when he could, and the St Edmund coinage of East Anglia is also well represented, while some Frankish and Kufic coins from the hoard are included at the end of the volume. In recent numismatic literature the date most usually assigned to Cuerdale is c.903, but this may be a little too early. As Mr Lyon has noted, among the West Saxon and Mercian coins of Edward in Cuerdale there are some of the second group of each of these series, in addition to those of the earlier phase in which features of the last coins of Alfred are continued. A burial date c.905 may therefore be more appropriate. The Cuerdale element in the Merseyside volume also brings out an interesting contrast with the hoard from Morley St Peter, near Norwich, recently recorded in full in SCBI 26 (East Anglia). Although containing a coin of Athelstan, and so buried not earlier than c.925, the Morley hoard is not a cross-section of the currency of eastern England at that date but consists in the main of two parts separated in date by ten or fifteen years. The later part has, as well as the irregular coinage in Edward's name from East Anglia which comprises the bulk of the hoard, a good run of English coins struck in the last few years of Edward's reign in eastern Mercia, after he had recovered the area from the Danes, and two of the Viking coins with the sword type which probably belong to the 920s. The earlier part of the hoard is of a date relatively close to that of Cuerdale. It includes a group of English coins of late Alfred and early Edward, with (like Cuerdale) a small admixture of coins of Guthrum-Athelstan. Curiously, the English coins in this part of the Morley hoard do not run as late as those at Cuerdale, being confined to the earliest phase of Edward's coinage, but the York series extends later, with several very early examples of the St Peter type but only one specimen of Cnut. It looks as if the various component groups in the Cuerdale hoard were not removed from currency at quite the same time, and the same must be true of the first part of the Morley hoard.

Nelson occasionally acquired other coins of the same period as his York collection, but this was sometimes accidental. For example, he had seven of the rare coins of Eadwig of the rosette three-line type (BMC II) which used to be attributed to York because the central line on some specimens reads ON+EO (the two Os are in fact annulets, and NE is a continuation of the word MO/NE from the bottom line). Among other non-York coins which found their way into Nelson's collection through misattribution is no.905, a unique Thetford (?) coin of Henry I's Pax type. But much the most interesting case is the 'church' type (BMC IV) of Athelstan.

There are no less than four specimens of this rare type in the Merseyside Sylloge (nos.440-43). Although doubts have been expressed on occasions,1 the coins of this type have generally been attributed to York because those of the moneyer Regnald carry the York mint signature; and the apparently ecclesiastical nature of the design has led to the suggestion that they were issued for the archbishop of York.2 In part this idea derives from the view that the archbishops, in whose own names coins had been struck in the days of the old English kings of Northumbria, had also exercised minting rights in the period immediately preceding Athelstan under the Vikings, at first in the time of Siefred and Cnut with coins that carried liturgical mottoes but no ruler's name, and thereafter with the coinage in the name of St Peter. But these propositions are themselves open to question.
Of the Cuerdale York coinages without a king's name, there are three types: Vb, with DNS DS REX obverses and York reverses (SCBI Merseyside nos. 374-75); Vla, with MIRABILIA FECIT obverses and reverses with the inscription DNS DS/O REX in two lines (nos. 377-84); and Vlc, also with MIRABILIA FECIT obverses but with York reverses (nos. 385-97). Each of these types is die-linked into the coinage with royal names, but type Vla much less comprehensively than the other two. The rare type Vb and the relatively plentiful type Vlc, both with the patriarchal cross on the reverse and connected to each other by a common reverse die, are intimately linked through their obverses with coins respectively in the names of Siefred (type Va) and Cnut (type VId) with the same reverse type. Type Vla, scarcer than type Vlc although from more obverse dies (fourteen against nine), stands more apart from the rest of the series. Only one obverse die links this type with the coinage of Siefred (type Vlb) and Cnut (type VId) and the two-line reverse type in this form is not found paired with any other obverse type (the extremely rare coins of Alvaldus have a similar reverse type, but reading DNS DS/REX without the 0). On the evidence of the die-linking, therefore, types Vb and Vlc do not have to be seen as the result of deliberate pairing of dies without a king's name and could have resulted from a degree of unconcern in the mixing of dies from a common pool, but the DNS DS reverses of type Vla do seem to have been made exclusively for use with obverses reading MIRABILIA FECIT. There are, however, possible explanations of this avoidance of a royal name in type Vla, even if intentional, other than as the identification of an episcopal issue. One is that there may have been occasions at this period when the kingship was in dispute, or even vacant. But it is well to remember that, apart from the coins of Siefred and Cnut which would themselves have been of extreme rarity without the chance discovery of the Cuerdale hoard, the great majority of the Anglo-Viking coins of the late ninth and early tenth centuries did not carry a ruler's name and special significance does not therefore necessarily attach to an anonymous issue. Although the archbishops of York probably had minting rights in the late Saxon period, their coins were not otherwise distinguishable from those struck for the kings after 867, and it seems best therefore to leave open the question of their having been so at the time of the Cuerdale coinages.

Whereas the anonymous coins of the York series in Cuerdale amounted to less than ten per cent of the total, the St Peter coinage of York constituted the great bulk of the Viking issues from northern England in the years between Cuerdale and 927. It hardly appears likely that more than ninety per cent of the surviving Anglo-Viking coins of this period would have been struck for the benefit of the ecclesiastical authorities, with the inference that royal or 'secular' coins may from time to time have been issued along with them. Indeed, although widely assumed by numismatists and historians, this interpretation of the St Peters is not supported by the numismatic evidence. For analysis of the York coinage bearing the personal name Raienalt or Racnoldt, which may be attributed to Regnald I c.919-21, suggests that it did not accompany the St Peters but succeeded and replaced the swordless St Peter coinage (SCBI Merseyside nos. 414-26). This alone must cast very serious doubts on the supposed ecclesiastical nature of the St Peters. But the assumption is in any case intrinsically questionable, since there are countless examples to demonstrate that a saint's name does not of itself make an episcopal coinage in the middle ages. Indeed, such an explanation does not suit the St Martin coins struck at Lincoln in the 920s and copied from the post-Regnald St Peter type with the sword added (SCBI Merseyside nos. 427-32); there was no bishop of Lincoln in Anglo-Saxon times, when the principal church (later the cathedral) was not St Martin's but St Mary's?
The St Peters therefore were probably issued by the leaders of the Danish community in York, using the name of the saint to whom York minster was dedicated, a coinage similar in kind to that in the name of St Edmund who was venerated in East Anglia.

There is thus no clear evidence to indicate that the archbishops of York ever had independent minting rights under the Vikings before Athelstan and it is equally difficult to detect the exercise of any such privilege during the period of revived Viking rule in the 940s. The case of Athelstan's 'church' type should accordingly be considered on its own and without the support of a pattern of episcopal coinage at York in the time of his Viking predecessors. The type indeed seems to be ecclesiastical in concept; the design could be seen either as a church or as a shrine, it is raised on a plinth, but also appears to be set on a ground line. It is somewhat reminiscent of the Carolingian temple type and of its German version, the holzkirche, best known in the Otto/Adelheid coinage from the end of the tenth century but first used in the reign of Athelstan's contemporary, Henry the Fowler (918-36). But whether an ecclesiastical design should be taken to denote an ecclesiastical coinage is another matter. The Athelstan case is not obviously different from his father's church and reliquary types which were part of the normal royal coinage at Chester in the middle of the reign of Edward the Elder (899-924). Further, it may be relevant to note that Athelstan was the first Mercian or West Saxon king since Offa to deny the archbishop of Canterbury the right to a distinctive coinage of his own.

The 'church' type coins of the moneyer Regnald are the only York coins of Athelstan not to carry the title Rex To Brit. As such they seem unlikely to have been an intrusion into Regnald's long series of circumscription type, and the natural place for them would be at the start of his coinage. During most of the tenth century prior to Edgar's reform, the York mint was managed on a different basis from most other mints in the country, and a very small number of moneyers, sometimes only a single master-moneyer such as Regnald under Athelstan, was named on the coinage. But in the 'church' type there are five moneyers in addition to Regnald and where their associations are known they are not with York. The moneyer Frothir (SCBI Merseyside no.441) could be the same man as struck the circumscription type (with both cross and rosette) at Shrewsbury, with the spelling Frother. Turstan might be identified with Thurstan of Leicester in the circumscription-cross type. The 'church' type coins have certain features in common, such as the exceptional spelling of the king's name AED(E)LSTAN, with A and E as separate letters and D for thorn, and the three wedges at the end of the obverse inscription. But they differ in style and in the use of ornaments and do not seem all to be the work of the same engraver.

There is therefore some question whether all the coins of the 'church' type were struck at York. If not, a possible explanation would be to see them as a Mercian issue produced early in Athelstan's reign, which was extended to York when the Viking rulers were driven out in 927, York being named to mark Athelstan's repossession of it for the English. If the type was in fact struck at several mints, however, it would differ in that respect from most, perhaps all, of the other pictorial types of the tenth century. It also (unlike Edward's) stands on its own, and it may therefore have been chosen for some special, and perhaps exceptional, purpose.

This is one of many topics for which the Merseyside Sylloge provides valuable material. It is a rich collection, admirably recorded by Mrs Margaret Warhurst, and the volume is an important addition to English numismatic literature.
NOTES

1. For example by M.Dolley and C.N.Moore, 'Some Reflections on the English Coinage of Sihtric Caoch, King of Dublin and of York', *BNJ* 43 (1973), 45-59 (at p.54)


