NORTHUMBRIAN COINS IN THE NAME OF ALWALDUS

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In the series of coins mostly with the names of Siefred and Cnut which formed so large a part of the great Cuerdale treasure one whole coin and a fragment are recorded from that hoard bearing on one side the name of Alwaldus and on the other the legend DNS DS REX. A third specimen is thought to be from a hoard found in Walmgate in York consisting for the most part of St Peter coins. A fourth appeared in the Carlyon-Britton sale, 1913, lot 260, without earlier provenance. This has, however, the colouring of a Cuerdale coin and is likely to be a 'stray' from that hoard from which many important coins are known to have escaped the inquest. Recently, a fifth specimen has turned up, found with a metal detector on the Humber foreshore at North Ferriby in Yorkshire (N. Humberside). The finder, Mr B. Wilson, has very kindly allowed me to illustrate it here. Details of the five specimens are as follows:

1. Obv. die 1 +AL-VVAL-DV Rev. 1 DNS DS / / REX BMC 1078; ex Cuerdale hoard. Wt: 23.2gr. (1.50g).
2. Obv. die 2 +AL-VVAL-DVS Rev. 2 DNS DS / / REX SCBI Copenhagen 583; ex Bruun (gift 191); ex Rashleigh 168; and ? ex Walmgate hoard, York, 1856. Wt: 18.4gr. (1.19g).
3. Obv. die 3 +AL-VVAL-DVS Rev. 3 DNS DS / / REX Blunt; ex Norweb (Spink sale, 13 June 1985) 36; ex Lockett 438; ex P.W.P. Carlyon-Britton 260. Wt: 18.0gr. (1.17g).
4. Obv. die 4 -ALVA-- Rev. 4 DNS DS / / REX Lord Clitheroe; ex Cuerdale hoard, fragment.

The identification of Alwaldus has been the subject of much speculation. When the first of his coins was recorded, in Hawkins's report on the 1840 Cuerdale hoard, Hawkins was unable to make any suggestion as to the possible identity. But within a matter of months of Hawkins reading his paper to the Numismatic Society on 25 November and 23 December 1841, Daniel Haigh came forward with a remarkable note in which he challenged Hawkins's attribution of the Cnut/Siefred coins in the hoard to a French mint, Evreux, and suggested York; pleaded for an anagamic interpretation of the legend ACRTEN as CNVTREX, which Hawkins had considered and rejected; and identified the Siefred of the coins as the pirate named by Æthelweard as having harried the English coast in 893, all of them views that find general acceptance today. He even went so far as tentatively to identify Cnut as the son of 'Ragnor Lodbrog'. When he came to 'Alwaldus' he confidently identified him as Æthelwald the atheling who, as the son of Alfred's elder brother Æthelred, could reasonably claim to have had a better right to the English throne than Alfred's own son, Edward, and who is

1 SCBI Yorkshire Collections (1975), p. xxxiii.
2 NC 5 (1843), 88 (p. 84 in offprint).
3 NC 5 (1843), 105-17, dated 16 July 1842.
recorded as having made a bid for it with the support of the Danish army in Northumbria. According to most versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the latter accepted Æthelwold as king and gave allegiance to him.

Haigh's identification of Alwaldus as this Æthelwold has had a mixed reception. It was supported by J. Rashleigh and by R. Ll. Kenyon, the latter in the second and third editions of Hawkins's *Silver Coins of England* (third edition 1887, pp. 91–92), but by 1876 Haigh himself had begun to have doubts about it. He had previously regarded Cnut as the successor of Siewred (a view that is generally held today), but had later reached the conclusion that the coins with the *Dus Ds Rex* legend written round the cross (e.g. *BMC* 1045, pl. xxvii, 3) were produced later than those on which it appears (with O added) in two lines, and in consequence that the coin which I formerly assigned to Æthelwald . . . must be earlier than the reign of Cnut . . . Here, then, we most probably have the name of the king whose reign intervened between Halfdene's and Guthfrith's.  

Keary in 1887 regarded the grounds for identifying him as Æthelwold to be 'very slender'. Both Oman and Brooke are, however, inclined to favour Haigh's original attribution. Lyon and Stewart, on the other hand, gave reasons in 1961 for thinking that the attribution to the atheling 'becomes more improbable' and suggested the possibility that the name might be that of a moneyer. However, they have since revised that view 'and are now inclined to believe that these are in fact coins of /Ethelwald'. Dolley says that the attribution must remain uncertain. North follows Lyon's and Stewart's first thoughts.

Curiously, few alternative suggestions have been made as to the identification of Alwaldus. One might have expected someone to have put up the case for the archbishop of York, Æthelbald, who was consecrated to the see in 900 and whose dates would therefore fit. There has been in the past a widespread belief that some at least of the coins with religious inscriptions such as *Dominus Deus Omnipotens Rex* and *Mirabilia fecit*, were ecclesiastical issues and the argument could well have been applied to the Alwaldus coins. But as far as I know it was never made. The idea may, however, have been in the mind of T. F. Dymock. In his manuscript work on Anglo-Saxon coins there is a faint pencil note against the Alwaldus illustration 'OSWALDVS ABP: Ebor 791' (a mistake for 891?). Dr Smart, on onomastic grounds, tentatively equates the name with ON *Alfvaldr* whom she regards as an 'unknown Viking ruler in Northumbria'.

The story of the revolt of Æthelwold the atheling is told in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 900 as follows:

then the atheling Æthelwold, his (Edward's) father's brother's son, rode and seized the residence at Wimborne and at Twinham, against the will of the king and his councillors. Then the king rode with the army till he encamped at Badbury near Wimborne, and Æthelwold stayed inside the residence with the men who had given allegiance to him; and he had barricaded all the gates against him, and said that he would either live there or die there. Then meanwhile the atheling rode away by night, and went to the Danish army in Northumbria, and they accepted him as king and gave allegiance to him.

The most West-Saxon version of the Chronicle, MS A, omits all reference to Æthelwold's acceptance as king. Instead, it says merely: 'and the king ordered them to pursue him, and then he could not be overtaken'. The revolt was short-lived; Æthelwold came south to Essex in 901 and, after ravaging in Mercia and Wessex, was killed at the battle of the Holme in 902.

Stenton wrote of Æthelwold's acceptance as king by the Danes: 'the statement — improbable in itself — can hardly be accepted in face of the silence of the almost contemporary MS. A', and, referring to the Alwaldus coin, adds 'in view of the form of the name, the attribution to Æthelwold is unsafe'. But Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge have recently suggested that the wording found in MSS. B, C, and D 'probably represents the original form of the annal; in MS. A the acceptance of Æthelwold as king in Northumbria was suppressed, perhaps to obscure this evidence of dissension within the West Saxon royal dynasty'.

Unless we are to put into reverse the weight of current thinking, we must reject the possible

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4 NC new ser. 8 (1868), 156–57 and 9 (1869), 76–77.  
5 *Arch. Æliana* 7 (1876), 62.  
6 *BMC* I, 230.  
8 *English Coins* (1932), pp. 35 and 39.  
14 In the possession of the writer (unpublished).  
19 Keynes and Lapidge, p. 292n.
identification of Alwaldus as Æthelbald, archbishop of York. The view now being generally held is that the coins in this series with Christian legends, and the St Peter coinage too, were not issued by an ecclesiastical authority. Dr Smart's suggestion, valid of course from a study of the name in the form found on these coins, may, I would suggest, be overruled if a more acceptable alternative can be produced.

We are thus thrown back to the question whether the atheling Æthelwold provides the most likely identification and as a first step must turn to consideration of the coins themselves. All five are from different dies, both obverse and reverse, and no die link with the remainder of the series has been established; when this legend is found elsewhere in two lines it normally has an o added – Dominus Deus Omnipotens Rex (no. 7: BMC I, 1069). One coin, however, with the Mirabilia fecit obverse is known that omits the o (no. 6: SCBI Oxford, 200) but the die differs from those used by Alwaldus.²⁰ It may, however, be one prepared for, and perhaps even used by, Alwaldus on a coin that has not survived, because, like his, it has a pellet in the centre of the reverse whereas nearly all the Mirabilia fecit coins have a cross at that point. Be that as it may, this 'mule' serves to tie the Alwaldus coins into the York series. The existence of five coins in his name, all from different dies, points to there having been a larger issue than the surviving number might suggest.

In judging whether these coins may be attributed to the atheling Æthelwold, an important point to consider is whether the form Al- may properly be taken, at this time, to be an acceptable form of Æthel- as it often is at a later date. On this subject I am very grateful for the advice of Dr Smart and Miss Pirie. Dr Smart writes that in her Nomina paper²¹ she suggested that the Ægel- spelling (in which g represents the modern English consonant y or is practically silent) was adopted in the 1020s to regularize a pronunciation that had already been spelled as Æl-. According to Dr Colman this tendency to lose [5] between vowels, the second of which is followed by a front i' (i.e. just the conditions in Æthel-) is extremely early in OE and possibly even goes back to primitive Germanic.²²

Miss Pirie, who has made a special study of the series, calls my attention to certain stycas of the Northumbrian king, Æthelred II, where the name is spelt aeilred.²³ These she attributes to Æthelred's second reign, i.e. post 843/44.

So we may, I think, be satisfied that the form Alwaldus that appears on these coins is not inconsistent with the fuller reading Æthelwaldus.

This should, I suggest, dispose of one of the objections that Stenton saw to the attribution. The other, the statement in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that the Danes accepted him as king and gave allegiance to him, was, in Stenton's view, improbable in itself and hardly to be accepted as it does not appear in the Peterborough version of the Chronicle. This is a more serious objection, but would be disposed of if the arguments put forward by Keynes and Lapidge are found acceptable.

What is clear from the hoard evidence is that the Alwaldus coins are in the right date bracket to be coins of the atheling. These would have had to be produced between 899, the date of Alfred's death, and 902, the date of the death of Æthelwold. The loss of the Cuerdale hoard is now put at c. 905. If the volume of this coinage was as large as the survival of five specimens all from different dies might suggest, more than three might have been expected from the Cuerdale hoard, but this hardly seems sufficient grounds for rejecting an otherwise acceptable solution to this little problem.

My conclusions are that, on the evidence available, the best interpretation of the name Alwald, in this instance, is Æthelwald; that, if this is accepted, the most likely Æthelwold is the atheling; and that, in consequence, in spite of the fact, which we must not overlook, that he bears no royal title on the coins, we may go back to Haigh's original identification and suggest that we are looking at an abortive, though possibly not unsubstantial, issue of coins by the nephew of Alfred who may have had a better claim to the English throne than his cousin Edward who in fact secured it.

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²⁰ SCBI Oxford, no. 200. From the Bodleian; ex Cuerdale hoard. I owe this reference to Dr Stewart. The reading is not recorded on this type by Hawkins and he appears to have missed a unique variant that, in consequence, failed to find its way into the National Collection.

²¹ Nomina 7 (1983), 91.

²² Notes and Queries new ser. 28 (1981), 295–301.

²³ E.g. BMC 343–351 by the moneyer Eanred, and 492 by Leofthegn.