The base silver sceat (penny on a small thick flan) which is the subject of this paper (Pl. 1, 1 and 2, × 2) was found at an unknown location in France and purchased from a dealer in 1988 by the Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, (registration number, BnF 1988–54). It was immediately recognised that the striking pictorial types, although unknown before, were characteristically English and that the vestiges of the obverse legend raised the possibility that it named Offa, King of the Mercians (757–96). The chief problem is that the dies were larger than the blank so that features towards the periphery do not appear on the finished coin. This is compounded by rubbed-up sections of the flan edge, which can appear to be parts of letters or details of the type. Further, the inscriptions and images are formed by joined-up pellets, resulting in irregular outlines which add to the difficulties of interpretation. Although some aspects must remain uncertain, the following discussion hopes to show that the initial attribution is secure, thus establishing that a previously unrecorded sceatta issue in Offa’s name preceded his broad penny coinage. The coins on the plates are illustrated both natural and twice life-size.

The obverse

The obverse type is a large bird advancing to the right with wings raised (Pl. 1, 1–2). The pellet-shaped head on a medium-long neck is small in relation to the size of the body. The bill is mostly off the flan, so its length and shape are uncertain. It is probably longish as part is visible before it is curtailed by a rubbed-up section of the edge, which should not be mistaken for a curved continuation of it. The wings are denoted by two curved lines of joined-up pellets. The body is enclosed by a heavy line almost concealing the underlying pellets, and within it is a modelled area covered with vertical wavy lines. Along the line of the back is a row of large pellets forming an aureole of the sort that surrounds the animal on the reverse of Series N (BMC type 41, Metcalf 3, nos. 368–72). Thick extensions of the body outlines cross to create a tail and similar lines form the long angled legs. The feet are only sketchily defined.

The structure and proportions of this bird categorize it as a wader. Although the image is stylised, the unusual detail suggests that a specific bird was being portrayed and encourages an attempt to identify it more precisely than is usually justifiable for birds on sceattas. Since the coin first appeared, several different waders have been suggested, but recently David Owen has convincingly identified the bird as a Black-tailed Godwit (Limosa limosa; French, Barge à queue.

Acknowledgements.

We are grateful to the Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, for allowing us to publish the Offa sceat and for providing photographs (Pl. 1, 1–2). We also wish to thank the following: for permission to publish photographs in their collections, the Trustees of the British Museum (Pl. 1, 6–9, 14–15), the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Pl. 1, 12–13) and Professor G.W. De Wit (Pl. 1, 10–11, No 275 in the forthcoming Sylloge of his collection); also Professor Nicholas Brooks and Dr. Margaret Gelling for reading an earlier draft of this paper and saving us from errors, David Owen for identifying the bird on the coin and answering our ornithological questions and Dr. Anna Gannon for reading our paper and making many valuable comments as well as providing us with additional typological parallels. We alone are responsible for the paper’s final content and opinions.


2 The classification of sceattas throughout this paper follows the alphabetical and numerical system in Metcalf, as in n.1. Sceattas are cited from Metcalf by volume number followed by page number or no. to denote a coin in his plates. Where necessary, coins are cited by their BMC type number in C.F. Kearsy, Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum, Anglo-Saxon Series, vol. 1 (London, 1887).
noire), a member of the sandpiper family. It is one of the largest of the waders (15\(\frac{1}{2}\) to 17 inches, 39–43 cm, long) with the characteristic body shape and proportions just described. Its plumage in the breeding season is a striking combination of greyish-brown, pinkish-chestnut and barred black and white, making it the showiest of the marsh birds (sketch, Pl. 1, 4). The male’s spectacular courtship display includes an ascent to about 200 feet (60 m) followed by a descent ending in a steep dive to the ground, after which it runs along with wings raised and tail spread. Although other waders engage in aerial display, the terrestrial part of this performance is confined to the Black-tailed Godwit and is clearly adumbrated on the obverse. The intersecting lines of the tail shown on the coin thus represent the fanning out of the feathers in this gesture rather than literally a forked tail, not in fact an attribute of any European wader. Even when the bird is simply standing, the black tips of the tail and the wings can cross and appear like a closer fork. The Black-tailed Godwit, a resident as well as a migrant visitor, was common until the early nineteenth century in coastal marsh and wash areas of East Anglia and Yorkshire and also in fresh-water wetlands. Later, numbers declined sharply as modern drainage schemes destroyed much of its habitat, but it has recently enjoyed a revival. It would have been even more common in the eighth century, when the areas in which it thrives were considerably more widespread.

Only a few letters of the inscription are visible. At seven o’clock is a lozenge-shaped O and at eleven o’clock all but the upper horizontal of a prominently seriffed Roman F. After the O is the lower half of a pellet-in-annulet motif, followed by a less certain letter made more difficult to read by corrosion and background marks on the die. The base of an upright points into the fork of the bird’s tail, and the slightly angled ‘horizontal’ has a triangular serif similar to that on the following letter, suggesting that this is another F. (A rubbed-up portion of the flan edge should not be treated as part of this letter.) The only other letter of which traces remain appears about five o’clock and consists of the base of a forward-leaning upright, with a fainter and shorter one inclined back towards it. This letter has been interpreted as an A, but we still prefer our prior view that they are the lower limbs of an X. The remnants of the inscription thus probably read OFF[ X]. The letter X is rare in Old English, almost exclusively confined to words of classical origin. Its presence here indicates a legend including the royal title or some contraction of it, and so rules out the possibility that a moneyer or anyone other than a king is named.

Pellets appear as space-fillers on many sceattas, but a semi-circular line of them here in the field above and in front of the bird seems more purposeful. Starting from the base serif of the second F it is broken by the bird’s head and bill but incorporates the larger pellet of the head into its circumference; it ends at the legs, which also project beyond it, but the placement of the O and the first F conform to its notional continuation suggesting that it is a partial inner circle. The same design quirk of a contour broken by parts of the birds is repeated on the reverse. Taking the bird and this circle as central to the type, it is likely that further letters of the inscription are missing at the right of the design beyond the edge of the present flan. Below the legs is another section of rubbed-up edge, but within it is possibly the beginning of another pellet-in-annulet motif. The position of the partially legible letters and the one, possibly two, pellet-in-annulet(s) suggest that the legend is divided into four groups of two letters by four such motifs, creating a double cruciform arrangement. A small feature cut off by the edge before the O can now be recognised as the base of a seriffed initial cross originally drafted with pellets like the rest of the legend. A pellet between the two Fs and possibly another before the square O suggest that there is probably a pellet between each of the other pairs of letters. The inscription may thus be expanded: + O F F [ ? R E ]X as shown on the suggested restoration of the obverse type (Pl. 1, 3). The forms selected for the missing letters are to some extent arbitrary, as there was considerable variation at this time, and no
doubt further pellets fill gaps. An outer circle of pellets (perhaps individually larger than shown) would almost certainly have enclosed the complete design, but none of it is visible on the flan. While some of the detail may require alteration in the light of future discoveries, we are satisfied that the attribution of this sceat to Offa of Mercia can be accepted.

Overall, therefore, the design of the obverse is a large bird, probably a Black-tailed Godwit, set in the centre of two cross-formations, the first defined by four pellet-in-annulet finials with the bird perched, as it were, on one of them, and the second by four pairs of letters of the king’s name and title.

The reverse

The reverse type is a Celtic cross of sophisticated originality (Pl. 1, 1–3), featuring four smaller birds similar to the one on the obverse. The curved angles of the cross are formed by the actual lines of the birds’ breasts and lower bodies continued through the upper element of their tails to meet a pelletted circle which, touched also by their heads, or incorporating them as on the obverse, closes the cross-ends. This outline is broken by the birds’ bills, lower tails and legs with triangular-serif feet. The birds’ wings are slightly raised, the diagnostic barred plumage is indicated by faint lines, and the tails are formed in the identical way to the obverse by crossing extensions of the body outlines. The legs are short but the birds are depicted on the point of nesting, so longer legs could already be tucked under them. An alternative view of these birds is to interpret them as nestlings which have relatively shorter legs, necks and bills than adults, although spread tails would, strictly speaking, be inappropriate. These details should not be over-interpreted as they are not cut entirely consistently and have been constrained to meet the requirements of the design. It is in fact rather imperfectly executed on this die, hardly surprising given the difficulty of fitting such an ambitious design into a tiny space. Free-standing in each arm of the cross is an I-like bar with prominent triangular serifs, one set at rather an eccentric angle and lacking its inner serif. Placed slightly off-centre is a large whorl around a small pellet-in-annulet. As the minimally visible pelletted circle is part of the central cross design, there is probably another free-standing pelletted circle surrounding the lot, but none of it is present on the flan.7 No inscription is visible and, judging by the space available, none is likely.

The reverse is thus another arrangement of two crosses: the main Celtic cross with bars in the arms and that formed by the four birds themselves.

Typological and design parallels

The zoomorphic features and multiple cruciform arrangements on the Offa sceat are typical of English sceattas of the Secondary period. The Christian messages which such birds and crosses were intended to convey, and their close conceptual relationship to designs on other classes of contemporary artefacts, have recently been discussed by Gannon.8 Celtic crosses and birds of various species feature in sceatta types minted in several areas, but birds and annulet crosses are both found on coins attributed to Mercia from early in the sceatta period. Primary Series B, attributed to London, shows a cross pattée, placed consistently between two (or occasionally more) annulets, topped by a bird, generally identified as a dove. In the Secondary series there is still uncertainty about where the types with birds and crosses (other than Series H from Southampton) were minted, but some at least of Series U with a crested pecking-bird type reverse were probably minted in Mercia early in the secondary period. Some ‘mules’ with this bird-type reverse associate it with the eclectic groups related to London-signed Series L (Pl. 1, 6–7). The coins of Series J, also struck early in the secondary period, with a bird-on-cross type (BMC type 85) and others on which birds feature prominently (BMC types 36, 37 (Pl. 1, 8–9), 60 and 72) used to be

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6 We owe this suggestion to David Owen.  
7 Obverses of BMC type 37 of Series J (Metcalf 3, no. 296) parallel the Offa sceat’s reverse in that they have a pelletted circle which is attached to the central design and then have a free-standing pelletted circle around it.  
considered Mercian, Grierson and Blackburn for example suggesting that 'It is possible that they come from the same mint as Series B (London?).' More recently Metcalf attributed them to York, but this has not found much support.

The birds typologically closest to that on the Offa sceat appear on Series Q, minted in the mid-to late secondary period. Although more stylised and displaying a range of variants, they share the same forward-looking aspect, raised wing(s), long legs, neck and bill, and they too have been identified as waders. The bird on types Q1 and Q1D is visibly different, with drooping tail feathers, but that on types QIII and QIV displays the same aggressive pose as on the present coin, with wings raised and a solid spread tail sometimes emphasised by additional lines at the side. On types Q1A-C the tail is represented as forked, as on the Offa sceat (Q1C, PI. 1, 10-11). The mint of this series is securely located in western Norfolk, an association to which we shall return. Crosses with finials of annulets or pellet-in-annulets occur on mid-secondary sceattas mulled with other types whose distributions are too thin and widespread to be conclusive but possibly indicate minting place(s) in the East Midlands, in the mid-eighth-century part of Mercia (e.g. BMC types 70, Metcalf no. 437). Offa's sceat is the last appearance of a bird on Anglo-Saxon coins until the tenth century, but the annulet- and rosette-cross designs survive the introduction of the broad penny and are used on the reverses of Canterbury issues of the Kentish kings and Offa (Blunt 1, 3 and 10), and also, as more devolved versions, on both obverses and, more commonly, reverses of Offa coins securely attributed to London (Blunt 33 and 66-70; Chick pl. 2, 7.)

As Anglo-Saxon sceattas generally have no inscriptions, letters in the angles of crosses occur only rarely, for example earlier on the thrimbas (gold shillings) of the LEMC type (Metcalf 1, nos 42-9), and the Intermediate period porcupine / SEDE sceattas featuring a small central cross with an annulet at each cross-end (Metcalf 2, no. 263), both from uncertain mints. This pattern is found more widely in other mediums, for example on the eighth-century sculptured stone grave-markers from Northumbria. It too carries over into the broad-penny coinage where Offa's name appears in the arms of a cross, with its pairs of letters making another cross, minted at both Canterbury and London (Blunt 50-1, 61-2).

The double cruciform layout of the obverse of the Offa sceat is partnered by the more overt cross type of the reverse. An apparently substantive coin type with similar birds featuring prominently but differently on both sides is something new. The association of birds with crosses originates in the late antique. In the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome a painted ceiling shows two quails (birds of the earth) alternated with two peacocks (celestial birds) in the angles of a 'Celtic' cross, with the Good Shepherd in a circular frame in the centre. An arrangement more closely related in era and design to that on the coin appears on a mount from a late seventh-century grave at Pfalhaim, Wurtemberg, where four stylised dove-like birds occupy the angles of a cross composed of four pellet-in-annulet motifs around a pellet-centred Celtic cross within a pelletted inner circle (sketch, PI. 1, 5). The context of the substitution of the assertive birds on the Offa coin for

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20 Metcalf 3, as in n.1, pp. 341-67, especially at pp. 341-4.
21 Metcalf 3, as in n.1, pp. 483-501.
22 Gannon, as in n.1, p. 113.
23 This complex mixed group is discussed in Metcalf 3, as in n.1, pp. 524-6.
26 Webster and Backhouse, as in n.1, pp. 103-4, nos. 71 and 72.
28 This mount is one of a suite of bronze belt and sword fittings dated to the late seventh century now in the Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart, on which the same limited range of motifs is permuted in different arrangements to suit the outline of the various components. They are discussed and illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, _Suevia Sacra. Frühe Kunst in Schwaben_, pp. 76-7, nos 26a-g, pl. 13, on which the sketch (PI. 1, 5) is based.
these more usual symbols of peace will be considered below. In eighth-century England, crosses with pictorial motifs such as the symbols of the Evangelists (including the eagle of St John) occupying their angles form a large and varied category within the manuscript and artificial design pool of the period. A close Anglo-Saxon parallel for this bird design has not been found. The suitability of a birds-and-crosses motif for a ruler is demonstrated on a Ravenna mosaic of Justinian (527–65), showing a panel on the cloak of the emperor decorated with a pattern of birds in circles with small crosses between.

Looking for a numismatic antecedent for the reverse among the cross designs on sceattas, the basic layout appears to have been developed directly from the ‘Celtic cross with rosettes’ series, particularly that of Metcalf group X, characterised by a cross with similar triangular serifs placed within the main Celtic cross, a rosette of pellets in each angle and a pellet-in-annulet at the centre (Metcalf no. 345, Pl. 1, 12–13). On the present coin the arms of the superimposed cross have been shortened and detached from the pellet-in-annulet feature, which remains but has been elaborated, and the birds replace the outer rosettes and like them form a secondary cross motif. Coins of group X have a profile head on the obverse, but the closely related group VIII, in which the superimposed cross is pommeled, have a bird on the obverse, although it is of the crested pecking bird type and related to that of Series U. As mentioned above, some of these series were probably produced in Mercia. Each group of the ‘Celtic cross and rosettes’ series is rare, and the problems of the geographical and chronological connections between them have not been resolved. Metcalf tentatively relates them to the mint-signed Series L from London and suggests that they were possibly later in date. Placing them towards the end of the series of anonymous sceattas would be consistent with their typological relationship to the Offa sceat. Although they are not strictly speaking a whorl, the four birds on the reverse here may also owe something to the widely-used designs of this type, including the earlier fine-silver sceattas of Series J (Pl. 1, 8–9), the art-historical associations and Christian iconography of which have been discussed by Morehart and Gannon. Although typological associations can be misleading, Metcalf has pertinently remarked that ‘we should not underestimate the propensity of diecutters to pick up features from the earlier issues of their mint’.

Sources for a regally-explicit coinage

Whatever role the Mercian kings before Offa may have had in the sceatta coinage their names did not, on present evidence, appear on it. The late sceattas of Series L issued in London bore the city name, so there is a recent Mercian precedent for an inscribed coinage. Regally-explicit coins already existed in France, struck alongside those of other issuers in the case of the previous Merovingian small-flan deniers, and for the king exclusively in the contemporary fine silver Carolingian deniers on slightly broader flans struck in the name of Pepin from c.755. Unlike Offa’s coin, these two series had inscriptions on both sides. This was also true of sceattas in the name of Beonna of East Anglia (749–c.760) (except for the rare and late Interface type), in putting the Mercian king’s name on the coinage for the first time it is possible that Offa’s advisers were influenced by Frankish practice and, perhaps more so, by the appearance of Beonna’s name on the East Anglian coinage especially if he was, as has been suggested, Offa’s rival for the Mercian throne. The rest of the concept owes nothing to these innovative issues. A closer

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19 P. Brown, The Book of Kells, pls 10 (folio 27v) and 27 (folio 129v).
20 The mosaic in San Vitale, Ravenna, AD 546–7, showing Justinian and his court, is widely illustrated: in England recently in Webster and Brown, as in n.1, pl. 26. This detail was drawn to our attention by Anna Gannon.
21 Metcalf 3, as in n.1, the ‘Celtic cross and rosettes’ types, pp. 426–32, groups VIII and X, pp. 430–31.
22 Metcalf 3, as in n.1, pp. 431–2.
24 Metcalf 3, as in n.1, pp. 524–5.
25 Apart from recent coins of East Anglia, the Offa sceat is the first recorded. Explicitly regal, coin south of the Humber since the thrymsa (gold shilling) of Eadbald of Kent (616–40); also struck in London (Metcalf 1, as in n.1, p. 41, nos 50–7).
26 Crittman and Blackburn, as in n.9, Chapters 7D and 9(a) and (b).
28 Archibald, as in n.27, pp. 33–4.
parallel to Offa’s sceat as a whole is the base silver sceatta coinage of Northumbria with the name and title of the king on the obverse and an animal with no inscription on the reverse. This combination had been introduced by Aldrith (685–704) during the Primary sceatta phase and was then revived in an extensive coinage by Eadberht (737–758) (Pl. 1, 14–15). The same animal, recently identified by Gannon as a lion, was used as their only regal reverse type by all the Northumbrian kings known to have issued coins from then until the late 780s (and re-appeared once again later). This pattern of use has prompted the suggestion that it was a national or dynastic symbol, and probably had the additional purpose on the coins of locating the king named on the obverse. It could be that Offa’s sceat parallels the Northumbrian issues in these respects also and that the bird is given such exceptional prominence because it may have been a recognisable Mercian emblem, also serving in the same way to identify the kingdom or people.

Meaning and context of the type

Before exploring this aspect further it is necessary to acknowledge that we do not know whether the bird type was the only one to be used on sceattas in Offa’s name, or even that it was the first, so what follows may require revision in the light of future discoveries. Early in his reign when this coin was issued (see below), Offa had recently emerged as victor in the power struggle for the Mercian throne that had followed the assassination of Æthelbald in 757. A known national symbol accompanying his name and title would have made a strong propaganda point. The political aspect of the inscription and designs would not have superseded the Christian messages of birds and crosses, just placed another layer of meaning on top. Indeed, the king’s name arranged in a cruciform formation, and what are possibly Mercian birds innovatively replacing traditional doves and positioned as both protected by and supporters of Christ’s cross, would associate these two aspects of his kingship – temporal power and Christian piety – and make a clear statement of how Offa viewed his position, or at least how he wished it to appear to his subjects and others. The high-profile use of this bird by Offa strengthens the possibility that the wader of Series Q may have had a political dimension, and may perhaps be associated with Mercian domination of west Norfolk in the time of Æthelbald (716–57). This leads on to the question why a wader, and not one of the birds of prey such as an eagle, may have been chosen as a Mercian symbol. A wader would have been a familiar and appropriate bird for people and their leaders who had entered Britain by way of the marshlands of the Wash and Trent valley, and the Black-tailed Godwit was not some insignificant inhabitant but their most prominent bird, the seemingly aggressive behaviour of which would have made it a fitting type for victorious kings of the Mercians.

Metrology and technique

In outline the Offa sceat is squarish with rounded corners, measuring about 11 mm along the sides and 12 mm on the diagonal. Its die axis as shown on the plate is about 30°. The weight is 0.75 g (11.5 gr) and, at well below one gram, it is typical of coins produced late in the sceatta series. The coin is of visibly base silver, and an interim spot analysis made in 1989 provided the figure of 25% silver. This might indicate that Offa’s sceattas were struck to a contemporary standard of

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26 Metcalf 3, as in n.1, p. 576.
28 Professor Metcalf had clearly considered the possibility writing, ‘Whether that [the ‘double reverse’ of bird and lion types] has any political significance, we do not know’, (Metcalf 3, as in n.1, p. 494).
29 The coin is being analysed as part of a wider programme by Dr J.-N. Barrandon of the Centre Ernest Babelon, Paris and the results will be published later.
one part in four of fine silver, but a single survivor cannot show whether this figure was typical of his other sceattas of the same type or of the sceatta coinage in his own name as a whole. Like the late regally-anonymous Mercian sceattas, the coins of Beonna of East Anglia and even, if to a lesser extent, those of Eadberht of Northumbria, it could have begun with earlier coins of better alloy, the standard of which could not be sustained, and fallen further before the reform which introduced the fine silver broad penny of restored weight of about 1.25 g (19.3 gr).\textsuperscript{53} The present coin may therefore be neither the earliest nor the latest of the series. From their low survival rate Offa's sceattas appear to have been produced on a small scale and for a relatively short time, although it must be borne in mind that the latest coins before a recoinage are often under-represented, as they did not have as much time as others from earlier in the series to be lost or hoarded.

The complete design rarely appears on sceattas, the divergence between flan- and type-size being particularly great in the Intermediate 'Porcupine' series. This was of less consequence on design-only coins but a serious drawback when circumscriptional legends were added. Even with a free-standing outer circle, which the distinction above concluded was likely, the diameter of the reverse design would be slightly smaller than that of the obverse. Some discrepancy between obverse and reverse design size on sceattas was apparently acceptable (e.g. Series G, Metcalf 2, no. 268). In the present case it is possible that there was a third concentric pelleted circle (cf Series J, BMC type 72, Metcalf 3, no. 303), which would equalise the diameters of the designs. We have no way of knowing the size and shape of the die faces, but the evidence from off-centre strikings of other sceattas suggests that they extended some way beyond the limits of the designs. For this reason the reconstructions show just the designs and not the contours of the dies (Pl. 1, 3).

\section*{Date, mint and provenance}

This sceatt is the earliest coin in Offa's name yet known, but it is difficult to determine its precise date. The termini are his accession in 757 and the uncertain date when his broad-penny coinage was introduced, most recent opinion favouring 760–765 or just later.\textsuperscript{56} The dates of the late regally-anonymous sceattas produced in Mercia have not been established, and it is not known whether their production had ceased before Offa's accession or extended beyond it. The only relevant hoard, from Middle Harling, Suffolk, is of little help.\textsuperscript{57} It included an unworked sceatt of the rarer, finer, and presumptively earlier group of the explicitly London Series L containing 52\% silver. The commoner and baser coins of Series L which descend to 20\% silver or lower, coins of the 'Celtic cross and rosettes' group apparently of slightly better silver (Metcalf no. 345, 37\% silver), and coins in Offa's name were all absent. Since only a handful of the contents were other than the local East Anglian issues of Beonna, some of silver only about 25\% fine and themselves difficult to date precisely, the presence of the one and the absence of the others in a find deposited far from their place of production need not be chronologically significant for their periods of issue; neither can the extant coins be placed in order simply on the basis of their silver content. Theoretically, the sceatta coinage in Offa's name could thus have begun either at the start of the reign or sometime after it, in each case struck either alongside other sceattas or on its own. It is also possible to envisage other scenarios such as a brief celebratory regal issue. While a final decision on this point must await further evidence, the Northumbrian and East Anglian models would suggest that Offa's inscribed sceatta coinage probably followed the other Mercian late sceatta issues and did represent an attempt to introduce an exclusively and explicitly regal coinage in Mercia. The administrative provisions which accompanied this change are unknown but, on analogy with the Carolingian reform, it is likely to have been marked by a reduction in the number of minting places. It

\textsuperscript{53} Analyses: for Beonna: Archibald as in n.27, pp. 25–27 and, in the same paper, M.R. Cowell, 'Analysis of coins of Beonna and related issues', pp. 42–8; for Northumbria the results are less secure, since the internal chronology of Eadberht's issues cannot yet be established: M.M. Archibald and M.R. Cowell, 'The fineness of Northumbrian sceattas', Metallurgy in Numismatics, 2 (1988), 55–64; Metcalf 3, as in n.1, pp. 577–80 and, in the same volume, D.M. Metcalf with J.R. Northover, 'Chemical analyses', pp. 623–29 (discussing the problems of numismatic chronology, several analytical programmes and their varying results), pp. 676–79. For the weight standard of the broad pence: Blunt, as in n.14, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{56} Chick, as in n.15, p. 57; Metcalf 3, as in n.1, p. 608.

\textsuperscript{57} Archibald, as in n.27.
is impossible to say whether there was any gap before the start of the broad-penny coinage, but several mid-eighth-century Southumbrian sceatta coinages give the impression of having been intermittent and episodic initiatives which attempted to improve the silver standard in some measure at the start but sooner or later ran into the ground. This too may have been the fate of Offa’s first regally-explicit issue. Although not necessarily diagnostic, there is no continuity of design with the earliest known broad-penny issues. They are still on smallish flans, with inscription-only types of Carolingian derivation where the king’s contracted name and title are set out in two lines OF / RM, struck for Offa by Beonna’s moneyer Wilred in East Anglia (Chick Pl. 1, 4) and by the otherwise unknown Mang, probably based in London (Chick Pl. 2, 12–14). The Anglo-Saxon typological characteristics of the Offa sceat resurface in his fine-style broad pennies with cross designs and quadripartite inscriptions already mentioned, which are without mint signature but almost certainly from London.

At the start of his reign Offa’s authority was effectively confined to Mercia, and the closest numismatic connections of his sceat established above are with Mercian and London issues. Although the chronology of his acquisition of power in Kent remains uncertain, it was apparently not before broad pennies had already been introduced. In East Anglia, the extant coins suggest that there can have been little if any interval between the imposition of Offa’s authority and his early broad pennies by a local moneyer, Wilred. Had sceattas been issued for Offa in East Anglia they would probably have followed the existing local style of Beonna and had a moneyer’s name on the reverse. A Mercian mint for the Paris coin seems certain, most probably London.

A findspot in France is explained by long-established trading contacts and by the fact that one of the routes to Rome used by churchmen, royal ambassadors and pilgrims passed through it by way of the Rhone valley.38 Eighth-century French hoards include English sceattas, but all were deposited by about 720, the date of the Cimiez hoard which included sceattas of the mid-secondary phase but none of the latest issues.39 Few later English coins have been found on French soil, probably as a result of the increasingly strict imposition of a monopoly for the national coinage, but Pieresc recorded a broad penny of Offa found in the Narbonne region of southern France.40 The occasional Anglo-Saxon sceat and more coins of Offa have been found in Italy.41

Conclusions

The coin of previously unrecorded bird types found in France in 1988 may now be accepted as the sole known survivor of an issue of base silver sceattas struck in Offa’s name, probably at London sometime during the first few years of his reign. The design of the coin is highly sophisticated but still conforms to earlier eighth-century English conventions, and its base silver also places it firmly in the sceatta era. The chief motivation for the departure from earlier Mercian practice in adding the king’s name and title would appear to have been political: to advertise Offa’s emergence as king of the Mercians, possibly underlining this by associating them with types featuring a bird which may already have been an established national symbol. The issue could have been simply an occasional or celebratory one, but it seems more likely that it was intended as a substantive coinage. It was only some years later, with increasing wealth from his expanding dominions and greater trading and other contacts with the continent, that Offa was able to introduce and sustain a reformed coinage of fine silver and higher weight initially showing Carolingian influence in its utilitarian design. Insular tradition reasserted itself with the fine-style London coins in the next phase of the broad pennies, with their typological echoes of Offa’s sceatta issue.

38 St Augustine had used the route through France in the reverse direction on his missionary journey to England in 596–7. See generally W. Levison, England and the Continent in the Eighth Century (Oxford, 1946), especially p. 39. Offa’s contacts with Charlemagne, the rocky course of which is charted in Alcuin’s letters and papal correspondence, was in the future at this time.
39 Grierson and Blackburn, as in n.9, pp. 140–3, tumor at pp. 142–3.