WHY ARE THERE NO COINS IN THE STAFFORDSHIRE HOARD?

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WHEN news of the discovery of the Staffordshire hoard first became public, one of the most common initial questions was, 'What type of coins are in it?'. The answer to that question is straightforward: there are no coins as such in the hoard, although melted-down Byzantine and Merovingian coins may well have provided the raw materials for many of the gold and even silver items in the hoard, as they probably also did for other Anglo-Saxon gold jewellery, ornaments and coins in the seventh century.[1] Nevertheless, the fact that the question was repeatedly asked reflects the assumption that there should have been coins. Although there are other non-numismatic Anglo-Saxon hoards, the typical Anglo-Saxon hoard of precious metal either contains coins and nothing else, or more rarely a combination of coins and other objects. Viking hoards from England are more varied, but frequently contain a combination of coins and other items, often including hack-silver. Hack-silver (also sometimes referred to by the German term *Hacksilber*) consists of pieces of silver cut from ornaments, vessels or ingots, used as a form of currency within a bullion economy. Although, as the name suggests, this is a phenomenon linked with silver rather than gold, fragments of hack-gold have also now been recorded in Viking contexts.[2] The fragmentary nature of the finds in the Staffordshire Hoard shows some similarities with hack-silver/gold, and the discovery of the hoard came not long after the extensive publicity around the important mixed Viking hoard from the Vale of York,[3] so an assumption that this might represent something similar is not surprising, although as a Viking hoard of the early tenth century, the Vale of York hoard represents a very different context both culturally and economically from an Anglo-Saxon hoard of the seventh century.

Pushing back in the opposite direction, late Roman hoards also typically contain large numbers of coins alone, but may again contain a mixture of coins and other items (e.g. Hoxne, Norfolk), or collections of entirely non-numismatic material (e.g. Mildenhall, Suffolk), while hack-silver is known from a number of hoards on the fringes of the Roman monetary economy, including hoards from Britain, Ireland, Denmark and northern Germany.[4] So far only two hoards of the late fifth century are recorded from England – Patching in West Sussex and Oxborough in Norfolk – and these both contain both coins and bullion, although in the case of Oxborough the coins had been re-used as jewellery.[5] Three silver *siliquae* from Chatham Lines in Kent, buried in the 530s with a bronze coin of which no details are recorded, were pierced for suspension, and may represent a necklace rather than a coin hoard.[6]

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[1] Williams 2010, 60–1. A comparison between the metal content of a variety of imported coins and selected items from the Staffordshire Hoard is being undertaken as part of the wider programme of research on the hoard. This analysis, currently under way at the British Museum, will also provide a more detailed comparison of the metal content of Anglo-Saxon and Continental gold coins of the seventh century than has previously been undertaken.

[2] Hårdh 2008; Blackburn 2007; Blackburn 2011, 233–5, 259; Williams, 2011a; Williams in preparation a; Kershaw in preparation.

[3] Williams and Ager 2010.

[4] The phenomenon of hack-silver in the late Roman and immediately post-Roman periods is discussed by several contributors in Hunter and Painter 2013.

[5] Abdy 2006; Abdy 2009; Abdy and Williams 2006, 14, no. 2.

[6] Blackburn 1988.

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Moving closer to the date of the Staffordshire hoard, the purse from the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 ship burial contained a mixture of coins and bullion, with blank discs and ingots as well as Frankish *tremisses*, while the fact that the blanks were the same size, shape and weight as the coins shows that the coins were the driving force behind that bullion economy, as also implied by the use of the term *scilling* as a unit of account in the law codes of Æthelberht of Kent.[7] This does not mean that all payments were yet made in coin, but that the *tremissis* or *scilling* could be used as a measurement of weight and/or value. The term *scilling* (pl. *scillingas*), which has a meaning relating to 'division' or 'share', has parallels in other Germanic languages, most notably in Gothic sources of the fourth to sixth centuries, although there it appears to have been used as the equivalent of Latin *solidus*, or *aureus,* both of which were used to denote a larger gold coin worth three *tremisses*. Late Roman and Byzantine *solidi* were struck at a nominal weight of just over 4.5 g, or six *solidi* to the Roman ounce of 27.29 g, with a corresponding *tremissis* of just over 1.5 g, but from the sixth century a lighter *solidus* of around 3.9 g, at seven *solidi* to the ounce became common, with a *tremissis* of just over 1.3 g.[8]

Imported *solidi* are present in the finds record in England for the sixth and seventh centuries, and there are even rare solidus issues among the surviving early Anglo-Saxon gold coinage,[9] but from the late sixth century onwards, imports are dominated by the light Frankish tremissis at *c.* 1.3 g, and the same approximate weight standard seems to have been followed in the early Anglo-Saxon coinage, although this was struck in several different kingdoms.[10] While the context of Gothic and Old High German texts indicates that terms cognate with *scilling* were equivalent to the *solidus*, Philip Grierson argued that the *scilling* of Æthelberht's law code was the smaller *tremissis*, and this has been accepted by most subsequent commentators, including John Hines in his recent study of early Anglo-Saxon metrology, in which he argues that the various terms for units of gold and/or silver which appear in a variety of early Anglo-Saxon law codes can most plausibly be reconciled if the *scilling* is regarded as equivalent to a *tremissis*.[11] Why the term *scilling* should be applied to one denomination in Old English and its cognate to another in Gothic is less clear and may indicate no more than what was the dominant form of gold currency in the late fifth and early sixth centuries on the one hand and the early seventh century. There is certainly no doubt that the term *scilling* and its later form shilling came to mean many different things throughout English monetary history.

Within Æthelberht's law code the term *scillingas* appears as a measurement of value. It is not clear from the context whether the compiler of the code envisaged actual coins, or a bullion weight in gold equivalent to the *tremissis*, of simply a nominal unit of account for measuring the value of other goods. Hines notes that even in what appears to be a much more heavily monetized society in Francia, Gregory of Tours appears to refer to payment in coin in the sixth century by weight as well as by tale.[12] With more direct relevance to England, the Old English poem *Widsith* refers to a gold neck-ring measured in *scillingas*. This is a problematic source, as the poem only survives in a tenth-century manuscript, although the poem itself is likely to be earlier, but the precise date of the poem is uncertain. The poem confusingly appears to measure the ring in both *scillingas* and *sceattas*, the latter being a term which has been interpreted either as a silver coin of slightly later date than the gold shillings of the seventh century, or as a unit of weight of gold equivalent to one barley grain, or as a unit of weight for non-numismatic silver in the period of gold coinage, as well as having more generic meanings relating to wealth, portable goods or possibly treasure.[13] The precise interpretation of the Widsith reference is debateable, and goes beyond the scope of this paper, but it is more likely to indicate either weight or value than a literal number of coins melted down to make the

[7] For the Sutton Hoo coins and bullion, see Kent 1975; Williams 2005; Williams 2013. For the identification of the *scilling* as the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the *tremissis*, and as a unit of account, see Grierson 1961; Hines 2010.

[8] Grierson and Blackburn 1986, 107; Hines 2010, 156–8.

[9] Sutherland 1948, 38, 78–9; Stewart 1978, 154; Gannon 2013, 51, 71, 86–7.

[10] Abdy and Williams 2006, *passim*.

[11] Grierson 1961, 345, 350–1; Lyon 1969, 211-2; Grierson and Blackburn 1986, 157; Metcalf 1993, 29; Hines 2010, 159–61.

[12] Hines 2010, 162.

[13] Hines 2010, 156–8; Hines 2014, *passim*.

object, although unless one assumes a nominal over-value for minted coinage (for which there is no evidence in an early Anglo-Saxon context), the distinction between the three would in any case be purely theoretical, as all three would give the same total.[14]

Hines in 2010 rejected the idea of a widespread bullion economy in the seventh century on the basis that one would expect to find more evidence of hack-gold if such an economy had existed,[15] and this is undoubtedly true to some extent. However, this is more a comment on the scarcity of hack-gold than on the scarcity of bullion. As noted at p. 39 above, it seems likely that the main source of gold in early Anglo-Saxon England was imported coin, and if the equivalent of a coin in weight was the main measurement of value, one would expect coins to represent the most common form of currency, even if they functioned as bullion rather than as true coins with a face value defined by the issuing authority, and which did not correspond completely to their metal content.

The evidence for the *tremissis/scilling* as the basis of a bullion economy goes beyond the textual references. Firstly, it is difficult to account otherwise for the mixtures of different coin types (and *tremissis*-sized blanks) within both the Sutton Hoo purse and the Crondall hoard, as well as in the overall finds record. While it is possible to argue for the circulation together of coins from different kingdoms as representing a form of officially sanctioned monetary union, the presence of blanks (and in the case of Sutton Hoo also small ingots) points clearly towards bullion. The extensive use of whole coins within a bullion economy is paralleled in Viking silver hoards, although there is a more extensive and more complicated interaction between coins and other forms of silver bullion in the Viking Age, for reasons that cannot be explored here.[16] Philip Grierson argued that the blanks in both Sutton Hoo and Crondall represented special cases, with both groups of coins needing to be rounded up to fixed totals for reasons relating to symbolic rather than monetary or bullion value.[17] Alan Stahl has more plausibly argued that the blanks and ingots in the Sutton Hoo purse help to make it up to a total bullion value of forty-eight *tremisses*, while I have noted that the find circumstances of the Crondall hoard (which was disturbed and possibly incomplete) do not permit any meaningful assessment of the total contents of the hoard, while the recorded total of 101 coins/blanks does not in any case correspond exactly with Grierson's interpretation of a 100-shilling *wergild*.[18]

Grierson's interpretation was predicated on the assumption of very limited availability of gold coins, and on the fact that blanks only appeared in the special circumstances of grave goods and a hoard, rather than within the general circulating currency. We now also have an increasing body of other evidence (mostly found in the last five or six years) for interaction between coins and bullion in the late sixth or seventh centuries. These include a blank flan approximately the same size and weight as a *tremissis* and a whole *tremissis* with a cut fraction of another attached to it (presumably to increase the weight), both from the productive site at Rendlesham, near Woodbridge in Suffolk; another whole *tremissis* with a fragment of a second attached from Beachamwell, Norfolk; a whole *tremissis* with a blob of gold attached from Chipping Ongar, Essex; and a cut fraction of a Frankish *tremissis* from near Colchester, Essex.[19] In addition to the direct evidence for coin-based gold bullion, the idea that the *tremissis* formed a weight standard for measuring bullion is supported by surviving pan-weights of the period. In his study of weights and balances in sixth- and early seventh-century Anglo-Saxon graves, Chris Scull noted that weights in the graves appeared to correspond to two different standards, one of 1.5 g and one of 1.3 g. These correspond to the early, heavy late Roman and sub-Roman *tremissis* and the later, lighter Provençal and Frankish *tremissis*

[14] The relationship between social exchange (including the giving of neck-rings and arm-rings), bullion exchange and monetary exchange in early Anglo-Saxon England will be explored in more detail in a future continuation of Williams 2010.

[15] Hines 2010, 162.

[16] For recent surveys of different types of silver economy in the Viking age and the interaction of coins, bullion and intact ornaments, see Williams 2011a and 2011b, 69–71.

[17] Grierson 1970.

[18] Stahl 1992, 10–11; Williams 2006, 173–9.

[19] Williams 2013; Williams in preparation b.

respectively.[20] Taken together, the historical, archaeological and numismatic evidence all appear to point in the direction of a bullion economy in which *tremisses/scillingas*, whether imported or locally produced, acted as the standard measures of weight and account, as well as the most widespread medium of currency within this bullion economy, although the extent of both the bullion economy and coin circulation show both chronological and geographical variation.

If one adds to this the general background that increasing numbers of single finds now make it clear that coin use was much more extensive in the seventh century than was formerly believed (see below), the expectation that a large Anglo-Saxon hoard of the seventh century might include coins, and that coins might be hoarded alongside other gold objects, begins to look very reasonable. One may add that it might have been very useful in some ways if the hoard had contained coins, given the lack of consensus amongst both archaeologists and palaeographers on the dating of the hoard, and given the tendency of archaeologists to use (or misuse) coins to date associated non-numismatic material. Almost all commentators would place the hoard in the second half of the seventh century, although a minority would prefer to place it in the early eighth century, but opinion is more divided on where exactly in the late seventh century it belongs.[21] The same period saw a number of major developments in the Anglo-Saxon coinage, which provide relative if not absolute dates,[22] and the presence of coins could potentially have provided some clarification on when the hoard was deposited.

If coins really were to be expected in such a hoard, how do we explain their absence? The simple answer is that it is the 'wrong' type of hoard. This may well be true (see below, pp. 48–9), but such an answer risks a circular argument. Even if there were consensus on the character of the hoard, which is not the case, one of the major factors which defines that character is the absence of coins. Before reading too much into this absence, one must therefore consider whether it really is as reasonable as just suggested to expect coins in a hoard of this period, especially given the location of the hoard in south Staffordshire. To do so, one needs to consider how common coins were in this period, and also how common the hoarding of coins was. It is also necessary to consider where and when the hoard was compiled, and when and where it was buried, and how these elements fit into wider patterns of coin use, as there is both chronological and geographical variation in coin use across seventh-century England, reflecting the fact that England was still at this point divided into a number of different kingdoms of various sizes.

The circulation and function of coinage in early Anglo-Saxon England

Several hundred gold coins have now been recorded from the sixth and seventh centuries, including both Anglo-Saxon and imported coins. These are known from a combination of hoards, burials, productive sites, and single finds.[23] There is a tendency for coins from burials to show secondary usage and single finds not, but there are exceptions to both rules. In particular, the explosion in single finds since the 1990s through metal detecting makes it clear that coin use was much more extensive in the fifth to seventh centuries than was formerly believed, and that the minimalist interpretations which dominated our understanding of the period until recently can no longer be accepted without qualification.[24] However, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of that change. The period from the mid-fifth to the late seventh century remains the period in which finds suggest that fewer coins were in circulation in England than at any point between the introduction of coinage in the pre-Roman Iron Age and the present day. Coins were undoubtedly being used, but not in vast numbers, and while one may

20 Scull 1990, 205–8; Hines 2010, 163.

21 Leahy and Bland 2009; A range of preliminary interpretations of the hoard, presented at a symposium at the British Museum on 30–31 March 2010, can be found online at *http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium*.

22 Archibald with Hines and Scull 2013; Williams and Hook 2013.

23 Abdy and Williams 2006; Bland and Loriot 2010; Williams 2010; Williams 2013; Metcalf 2014. For estimates of the total volume of both Anglo-Saxon and Continental coins in circulation in England, see Williams 2006, 185–6; Metcalf 2014, 47–50.

24 Williams 2006; Metcalf 2014.

question the idea that they served for purely social rather than economic transactions, the fact that the only coins represented units of relatively high value meant that they nevertheless only had a limited monetary function, even in those areas in which they circulated. In other areas they did not circulate at all (see below, p. 47).

Furthermore, there are no assemblages of coins from the period of the Anglo-Saxon gold coinage which can unequivocally be stated to be hoards in the strict sense of groups of material deliberately deposited for safekeeping with the intent to recover them later. Using hoard in its broader sense merely of a group of two or more objects of precious metal, we have several hoards from the period,[25] but almost all of these come from graves, and as mentioned, many of the grave coins (like many earlier Roman bronze coins also found in early Anglo-Saxon graves) show evidence of secondary use as jewellery or weights, raising the question of whether they should be considered coins at all.[26] Irrespective of secondary treatment, however, they must be seen as grave goods, which places them in a different category of find from a group of coins buried by itself, whether or not that group was buried with intent to recover. We also have significant groups of gold coins from Coddenham and Rendlesham in Suffolk and the 'South Lincolnshire' (Heckington) productive site, but these are site assemblages, rather than hoards under any definition.[27] The only substantial coin hoard of the period is the Crondall hoard of 1828. The full extent of this is uncertain, since accounts of the discovery suggest that the hoard had been disturbed, but the discovery of what appear to be purse clasps together with 101 coins suggests that this was a purse and its contents.[28] This could indeed represent a deliberate deposition, but it could also be a casual loss, if an expensive one. The small size of coins of this period means that even 101 coins could be contained in a very small purse. The only other group of coins from the period of gold which is certainly neither a grave find or a site assemblage is the Kingston hoard of the early to mid-sixth century, and this is even smaller.[29] Found in the River Thames, it is unlikely to have been deposited with the intention of later recovery, but could represent either casual loss or perhaps a votive offering. None of the above indicates that coins were never hoarded in the seventh century, but the fact that the evidence is so limited does suggest that hoarding of coins cannot be considered typical for the period when compared with the steadily increasing corpus of single finds.

Looking more widely at coin use, we can observe both geographical and chronological trends relating to coin use and coin production. Firstly, looking at coin use in general, the pattern shows a concentration in eastern England. Kent has the highest concentration of coin finds, followed by East Anglia, then Essex, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. There is a lesser concentration along areas accessible from the south coast, but very little in the area north of the Thames Valley, and west of a line from London up to Lincolnshire via Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire.[30] Only two finds have so far been recorded from Staffordshire. One, from Forsbrook, near Stoke-on-Trent, consists of a *solidus* of Valentinian II (375–92), mounted as a pendant in a gold cloisonné frame, inset with garnets.[31] The style of decoration shows similarities with some of the objects from the hoard, as well as with East Anglian finds such as the Wilton Cross and some of the ornaments from Sutton Hoo, but as with other coin-pendants, the secondary usage means that the Forsbrook pendant should be considered as an item of jewellery rather than evidence of coin circulation. It is also unclear whether the pendant setting was created locally or elsewhere. However, a single find of a Merovingian *tremissis* from the Twycross area, which shows no sign of secondary usage, does provide an isolated piece of evidence for penetration of imported coin into the West Midlands. [32]

[25] Abdy and Williams 2006, 13–22; Williams 2010, 61–2.
[26] Moorhead 2006.
[27] Blackburn 2003; Newman 2003; Daubney 2007; Plouviez 2010; Scull 2014.
[28] Akerman 1843–44; Akerman 1855; Ponton d'Amécourt 1872; Sutherland 1948; Williams 2006, 174–7.
[29] Rigold 1975, 665, nos. 3–12; Abdy and Williams 2006, 14, no. 3.
[30] Abdy and Williams 2006; Williams 2010, especially p. 60; Metcalf 2014. Although Metcalf does not include detailed listings, he provides a useful discussion of the distribution patterns of different groups of Merovingian and Frisian coins in England.
[31] Abdy and Williams 2006, 22–3, no. 3.
[32] I am grateful to Mr Rob Edwards for drawing this coin to my attention.

Chronologically, the importation of Byzantine coins both to Francia and to England appears to have stopped during the reign of Heraclius (610–40),[33] and it is possible that the interruption of the coin supply may also have reduced the availability of gold in Anglo-Saxon England, resulting in a decline in the gold content both of the native Anglo-Saxon coinage, and in jewellery, sword fittings and other ornamental metalwork. Merovingian (and Frisian) coins, which also suffered a gradual decline in gold content in the course of the seventh century,[34] continued to be imported until the middle of the seventh century and perhaps a little later, but most of the imported coins are issues of the mint-and-moneyer type, and cannot be closely dated.

The attribution of early Anglo-Saxon coin types

Local minting also follows a broad pattern, in so far as individual coin types can be firmly attributed. Very few types can be explicitly attributed to specific rulers or mints, but it is possible to make attributions to individual kingdoms or sub-kingdoms on the basis of distribution, while at the same time there appears to be some correspondence between metal content and date with a gradual decline in gold content from coins with a high gold content at the beginning of the seventh century through successive phases of 'pale gold' and 'transitional' coinage until the gold coinage was entirely replaced by silver around the third quarter of the seventh century. However, it should be noted that this is not necessarily a straightforward linear progression, and that there can be significant variation in metal content within specific types, so that metal content alone is not a secure basis for dating individual coins.[35]

Geographically, the spread of coinage appears to reflect the spread of Romanized Christianity, with the first attributable coinage appearing in Kent, and other relatively early issues in the kingdoms of the East Saxons, the East Angles, and Deira.[36] Another relatively early group carrying variations on a runic inscription *benutigo*, has a distribution suggesting an origin somewhere along the Thames valley, but it is uncertain which kingdom controlled this area in the first half of the seventh century.[37] This area later formed part of the kingdom of Mercia, but Mercia expanded dramatically in the course of the seventh and eighth centuries, coming to absorb a large number of smaller kingdoms and peoples, listed in a text known as the Tribal Hidage, although some of them are also known from other sources. These can plausibly be seen as being listed more or less in order around the borders of the core Mercian kingdom, but the exact dating of the Tribal Hidage remains the subject of dispute, and not all of the smaller kingdoms can be located with any certainty.[38] It seems likely that the *benutigo* coinage was the product of one of these smaller kingdoms, rather than of Mercia, since it did not penetrate into the Mercian heartlands of the Midlands, while other unattributed coinages may also have been struck in other peripheral kingdoms further east. It is likely that Mercia itself in the early seventh century covered little more than an extended area to either side of the River Trent, with the Trent forming a division between what Bede labelled as the North Mercians and the South Mercians.[39] Mercia thus probably included modern Staffordshire (and thus the find-spot of the Staffordshire hoard in Hammerwich) together with parts of neighbouring counties, although the modern county of Staffordshire would have been divided between the North Mercians and the South Mercians, with the location of the hoard in Hammerwich south of the Trent would place it under the South Mercians. No coins can be plausibly attributed as having been minted anywhere in the Mercian heartland during the gold, pale gold or transitional coinages of *c.* AD 600–75, or indeed anywhere in western England

[33] Kent 1967, 28; Bland and Loriot 2010, 86; Williams 2010, 60–1

[34] Kent 1967; Kent 1972.

[35] Williams and Hook 2013.

[36] Williams 2007a; Williams 2013, 130–1; Williams and Hook 2013, 61–2; Naylor and Allen 2014; Metcalf 2014, 64–5. The question of attributions of individual coin types to specific kingdoms is discussed in more detail in a continuation of Williams 2010 currently in preparation.

[37] Metcalf 2014, 64.

[38] Dumville 1989; Yorke 1990, 106–8; Yorke 2003, 20; Featherstone 2003.

[39] Brooks 1989, 160–2; Yorke 2003, 19–20.

in this period, with the exception of the *benutigo* coinage, although it is true that some of the types currently known only or primarily from the Crondall hoard have yet to be attributed. Nevertheless, given the apparent correspondence between Christianity and minting mentioned above, this absence of evidence for minting in the west is consistent both with the relatively late date of Christianization of both Mercia and the West Saxons, and with the absence of any mention in Bede of the conversion of some of the smaller western kingdoms.

The Staffordshire hoard in its historical and numismatic context

What are the implications of this for the Staffordshire hoard? As yet there is no agreed dating for the hoard, and although a research programme around the hoard aims to address this amongst other issues, a precise date is likely to remain elusive.[40] It is clear that the hoard contains metalwork produced over an extended period, but while, as noted above, the hoard was probably deposited in the course of the second half of the seventh century, the exact date within that period has significance both for the political and religious context of the burial. The period in question began with the reign of the pagan king Penda of Mercia (d. 655), who exercised a form of over-kingship over many of the smaller kingdoms, and who exacted plunder and tribute from many different parts of England, including coin-using areas such as East Anglia and Northumbria. His death was followed by a brief period of Northumbrian domination, and then by a resurgence of Mercian power south of the Humber under Penda's son Wulfhere (658–75), and to a lesser extent Wulfhere's brother Æthelred (675–704), although Mercian over-kingship on the scale of that exercised by Penda does not seem to have re-emerged until the reign of Æthelbald (716–57).[41]

This period also saw the conversion of at least the Mercian elite to Christianity, under the influence of the Northumbrian Church. In terms of attitudes to Christian kingship, the fact that the influence came from Northumbria may be significant. As mentioned above, the correlation between coinage and Christianity is not complete, but rather apparently formed part of a concept of Christian kingship promoted by the Roman Church. This style of kingship was not adopted in all areas, and it is probably not coincidental that coinage was not adopted in the post-Roman period by the British (Welsh), Irish, Scots and Picts despite the fact that there was undoubtedly trading contact with Continental Europe via the western sea-lanes to the Irish Sea and up into Scotland, and despite the fact that all these peoples adopted Christianity.[42] Perceptions of differences between Roman and 'Celtic' Christianity in the seventh century may well be partly exaggerated, not least because of the partisan accounts of Bede and Stephanus, both of whom adhered to the more Roman tradition, but it is probably true to say that there was a difference in approach between the more institutional approach of the Roman Church, which saw the establishment of episcopal sees linked to former Roman centres together with (coincidentally or not), the introduction of minting, written law, etc., and the Irish tradition which placed a greater emphasis on personal piety, simplicity, and the establishment of communities removed from society. Northumbria was directly influenced by both traditions, with Aidan extending Irish tradition from Iona into Bernicia, and Paulinus leading a Roman mission to Deira. Doctrinal differences between the two traditions were formally settled in Northumbria in favour of Rome at the Synod of Whitby in 664, but this does not mean that all Northumbrian churchmen adopted a thoroughly Romanized approach, and senior figures such as St Chad (d. 672) and St Cuthbert (d. 685) appear to fit more obviously into the Irish tradition than the Roman.[43]

This tension between traditions is directly relevant to the Christianisation of Mercia, since it was against the background of this tension that the Mercian Church was established. The

[40] A recent major study (Hines and Bayliss 2013) proposes a model for dating early Anglo-Saxon artefacts by linking typology and chronology through the presence of particular object types and decorative styles in scientifically dated graves. This may well contribute to a more precise dating for the Staffordshire Hoard.

[41] Yorke 1990, 105–13; Yorke 2003, 18–19; Tyler 2005.

[42] Williams 2006, 186–8.

[43] Williams 2011c, 23.

first Christian king was Peada (655–6), son of Penda, who ruled as a sub-king under Northumbrian overlordship. He was succeeded by his brother Wulfhere (656–75), who re-established Mercian independence, but also took forward the process of Christianisation in Mercia. Wulfhere provided a refuge for Wilfrid, bishop of York, during his exile from Northumbria, and it is also during the reign of Wulfhere that we hear of the first bishops of the Mercians. These were Diuma, Ceollach, Trumhere and Jaruman, who held the position in succession, *c.*656–69. None of these four is linked with a specific episcopal seat, but the first three all appear to have been trained in the Ionan tradition, although Jaruman's background is more obscure.[44]

A permanent bishopric was established at Lichfield *c.*AD 669, although there are conflicting accounts of this. Bede attributes this solely to Chad, who was moved to Lichfield to make room for the restoration of Wilfrid at York, while Wilfrid's biographer Stephanus of Ripon indicates that Lichfield was given to Chad by Wilfrid himself, who had received the land during his Mercian exile.[45] In contrast to Chad, Wilfrid, who had led the Roman faction at the Synod of Whitby, might be expected to take a consciously Romanizing approach to the establishment of the Mercian Church. I have suggested elsewhere that the establishment of the bishopric at Lichfield may have been related to its proximity to the Roman site at Wall. The name Lichfield incorporates *Letocetum,* the Roman name for Wall, and the location of a bishopric at or close to Wall would be consistent with the establishment of bishoprics at other former Roman centres such as Canterbury, London and York.[46] Wall was never as important as any of these, but it appears to have been something more than a minor fort, with a continued (or revived) importance in the post-Roman period. It appears in the Ravenna Cosmography (dating from the seventh or eighth century) as *Lectoceto*,[47] although as this text is derived from earlier sources, it does not necessarily indicate that the settlement was still active at the time that the Cosmography was compiled, despite the tempting coincidence of date with the hoard. More usefully, the name appears in the Old Welsh form *Cair Luitcoyt* in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, where it is listed among the leading *civitates* of Britain. This list includes Roman centres which went on to become important under the Anglo-Saxons, as well as bishoprics, including London, York, Canterbury and (probably) Leicester. However, it also includes places without strong Roman associations but which were certainly important earlier medieval centres for either royal power, like Dumbarton on the Clyde, or bishoprics, such as Lindisfarne.[48] To find Wall (or conceivably Lichfield) on such a list suggests a settlement of similar status, and with some Roman association, not least of which was the fact that the walls of the Roman fort were still standing long after the establishment of the bishopric of Lichfield, or the deposition of the hoard. It is interesting to note in this respect that the Staffordshire hoard was found little more than a mile from Wall, and close to a major junction of Roman roads, at the very heart of the Mercian kingdom. Interestingly, a Welsh heroic poem, the *Marwnad Cynddylan* ('Lament for Cynddylan') describes a raid from Powys on *Caer Lwytgoed* at some point in the mid-seventh century, in which a 'wretched bishop' and 'book-holding monks' were among the victims.[49] While the precise dates of both the event described in the poem and the composition of the poem itself remain uncertain, and there is certainly no reason to assume that the hoard relates directly to the raid in the poem, the *Marwnad Cynddylan* provides background to the importance of Lichfield/Wall as a rich target for raiding.

With the establishment of a permanent bishopric at Lichfield in *c.*669, Christianity was thus firmly established in the region in the middle of the period in which the hoard is likely to have been deposited. The question of whether the hoard was deposited before or after the establishment of Christianity is significant not only for the possible implications for the introduction of minting in the area, but also for the social and religious context in which the hoard was

[44] Colgrave and Mynors 1969 [Bede HE], iii.21, 24.
[45] Colgrave and Mynors 1969 [Bede HE], iv.3; Webb and Farmer 1998, 123.
[46] Williams 2011c, 24–5.
[47] *http://www.kmatthews.org.uk/Ravenna_Cosmography/reconstructed_text.html* (accessed 24 May 2014).
[48] Morris 1980, 40, 80.
[49] Brooks 1989, 168–9; Williams 2011c, 24–5.

accumulated and deposited. While it is possible that the dating of the hoard may yet be settled on stylistic grounds as either pre-dating or post-dating the Christianisation of Mercia, there is nothing in the character of the hoard that points firmly to a Christian context for the deposition, while the destruction (and implicit desecration) of a number of ecclesiastical items within the hoard seems more obviously plausible in a non-Christian context, although the account of the *Marwnad Cynddylan* provides a warning against the assumption that churchmen and their possessions were necessarily sacrosanct in the eyes of Christian attackers. In any case, the establishment of a bishopric does not necessarily equate to immediate and all-encompassing social change, so it would be rash to assume that the deposition of the hoard *must* pre-date the bishopric at Lichfield, or even the episcopates of the early Mercian bishops not specifically linked with the immediate area.

Thus, the distribution of coin-finds suggests only a minimal use of coins in Mercia at the time that the hoard was probably deposited, while neither the numismatic evidence nor the general historical background suggest that minting is at all plausible in Mercia before the final decades of the seventh century, and therefore not until the latter part of the current date window for deposition of the hoard. Together with limited evidence for the hoarding of coins in England in the seventh century (in contrast to the growing evidence of coin use from graves, productive sites and stray finds), this indicates that there is no reason to suppose that coins would form part of any hoard deposited in the heart of Mercia in the mid-late seventh century. On that basis, the absence of coins from the Staffordshire hoard is not particularly significant for the character of the hoard when taken in isolation.

The character of the hoard reconsidered

However, the fact that one should not expect coins in a hoard deposited in that time and place does not necessarily mean that their absence is entirely without significance, for two reasons. Firstly, the fact that the hoard was deposited in the Mercian heartland does not mean that it was accumulated there. Warfare is recorded in the seventh century both between Mercia and East Anglia, and between Mercia and Northumbria. As discussed on p. 44, both East Anglia and Deira (in Northumbria) adopted coinage of their own, probably in the second quarter of the seventh century, and distribution of single finds shows that foreign coins circulated in both kingdoms. Thus, if any part of the hoard was accumulated in either kingdom, as might, for example be the case if any part of the hoard represented loot gathered during the raiding expeditions of Penda of Mercia (d. 655) or his successors, as has been suggested by some,[50] then one might expect to find coins if the hoard represents no more than a random selection of loot, since some of the fragments are no larger than coins (although many are significantly larger and heavier). The same might also apply to a random assortment of loot if it was taken from an enemy defeated within Mercia, but originating in a coin-using area, such as the defeated Northumbrian army after the Battle of the River Trent in 679.[51] We cannot, of course, say definitively that the hoard necessarily represents loot, whether from one battle or many, or that loot from an area in which coins are known to have circulated would necessarily include coins. Nor can we state categorically whether any of the material in the hoard derives from either Northumbria or East Anglia, although there are similarities between the style of decoration on some finds in the hoard and objects in the Sutton Hoo ship burial, and other finds of presumed East Anglian origin such as the cross-pendants from Wilton, Norfolk and Ixworth, Suffolk,[52] which could suggest a possible East Anglian origin at least for those items. None of these possibilities can be precluded, so the absence of coins may be more significant than patterns of monetary circulation in Mercia alone would suggest.

Furthermore, we can be fairly certain that the hoard does not represent a purely random selection of items quite apart from the absence of coins. The material is fragmentary, and the

50 For example, Leahy and Bland 2009, 11.
51 Colgrave and Mynors 1969 [Bede HE], iv.21–2; Williams 2011c, 21–2.
52 Webster and Backhouse 1991, 26–7; Archibald 2013.

jumbled disposition of the hoard means that the exact relationship of individual fragments can only be ascertained by painstaking research, lacking the spatial contextualisation of a grave. As a result, not all of the items in the hoard can be clearly identified. Those that can be identified fall into two groups: decorative fittings from weapons, scabbards and helmets; and ecclesiastical items, including at least two cross pendants, a large but unusually flat cross which may perhaps come from the front of a gospel book, and a gold strip with a biblical inscription, which is pierced for rivets, and may also have been mounted on a gospel book or something similar. The military character of some of the material is no longer quite as unambiguous as initially seemed to be the case. What appears to be a hinged cheek-piece from a helmet can be interpreted as slotting into another item in a way that precludes the cheek-piece interpretation, while a millefiori stud which appeared to parallel the two studs apparently used to secure the scabbard of the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 sword into a sword-belt, is now interpreted as the cap for a gold tube which in turn fits into a larger flat piece of gold decorated with *cloisonée* garnets, the purpose of which is unknown, but which probably as a whole represents a decorative mount or handle from a larger object.[53] Nevertheless, while the function of a number of items at present remains uncertain, the emphasis within the group of identifiable objects on items with a military or ecclesiastical character is striking, and points to a very deliberate selection. Anyone rich enough to possess the sword pommels and other expensive items in the hoard must have possessed significant wealth, whether or not any of that took the form of coin. The absence not only of coins but of identifiable personal ornaments, belt fittings, arm-rings, as well as less personal items such as drinking vessels, plate, etc., suggests that this is not simply a bullion hoard.

Returning to the earlier question of what type of hoard this is, a full discussion of the possible functions of the hoard lies beyond the scope of this paper, and indeed will not be possible until the conclusion of the ongoing major research project on the hoard, which considers in detail not only the hoard itself but its historical and landscape contexts.[54] Nevertheless, it is possible to offer some interpretations derived from the nature of the material recovered. The absence of coins, along with the absence of other types of objects, contributes to the identification of the Staffordshire hoard as a deliberate selection of precious metal high-status objects of military or ecclesiastical character, all of which have been deliberately damaged. This suggests that the purpose for the initial accumulation of this material was symbolic rather than purely economic. Not only has a selection been made of some types of precious metal objects over others, but these objects appear to be fittings which have been forcibly removed from larger objects. The hoard contains hilt fittings from an unprecedented number of high-status weapons, for example, but the blades were not deposited with them. Is this because the hoard is only one of a number of deposits, with the ironwork deposited elsewhere? Or were the blades destroyed in other ways while the hilt fittings were preserved and hoarded? Or were the blades, valuable in themselves, recycled in combination with new decorative fittings? Personally, the last of these seems most plausible. Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature tend to stress the social importance of swords with distinct identities, and often with names, which might be passed down within individual families as heirlooms, or given as rewards for loyal service or in other forms of social exchange. However, while such weapons had a function in battle, they would spend most of their time sheathed, and the features which made swords immediately recognisable not just to the owner but the casual beholder were the hilt and scabbard fittings, not the blades.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that many of the pommel caps in the hoard show signs of wear. As conservation of the hoard is still ongoing, it has not been possible to examine them all in detail, but this appears to be not battle damage but the sort of wear derived

[53] I am grateful to Deb Klemperer of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, for drawing my attention to these re-interpretations, and for the opportunity to examine these and other pieces in person. However, the discovery of a second parcel of the hoard in November 2012, containing what appears to be the matching cheek-piece, has re-opened the possibility that the original interpretation may be correct.

[54] The partial re-excavation of the find-spot in November 2012 may yield new information on the context of the hoard, but the results of that excavation were not yet available when this article was written.

from being constantly worn, rubbing against the wearer's body and arm. This reinforces the view of swords as display items, as much as functional weapons.[55] This relates to the generic role of the sword as status symbol, and also to the role of individual swords of high value as symbols of honour and personal worth, as reflected in references to swords and their owners in Anglo-Saxon poetry.[56] In a period in which sword and scabbard fittings were hand-made, and in many cases elaborately decorated, the sword was a visible and recognisable reminder of both the personal and family status of its 'wielder', and potentially of a wider network of social ties between that person and others. While less apparent in historical and literary sources, high-status symbols of ecclesiastical authority may well have been equally personal and were certainly equally recognisable: the pectoral crosses from Wilton (Norfolk), St Cuthbert's coffin and the Staffordshire hoard, for example, are all immediately recognizable to the modern Anglo-Saxon scholar, and would have been no harder to distinguish from each other in the seventh century.

Against this background, it is tempting to see the hoard as representing the symbolic destruction of the visible identities of a number of defeated enemies. It is impossible to state for certain whether all the items in the hoard were obtained on one occasion, but it is certainly feasible. Guy Halsall has pointed out that the total number of pommel caps corresponds to the sort of number described in historical accounts of elite households/warbands of the period,[57] so the hoard could plausibly represent the destruction of a single enemy force, whether or not it can ever be dated sufficiently precisely to be identified with any historically attested battle.[58] The presence of high-status ecclesiastical items within the hoard is no less appropriate for this interpretation since both Bede and the Welsh poem 'Lament for Cynddylan' provide evidence for the presence of churchmen in battle, and in two cases of their killing.[59]

This is not, of course, the only possible interpretation of the hoard, and in any case raises further questions concerning the purpose of the deposition (rather than simply the accumulation) of the hoard and whether or not the hoard was originally intended to be recovered. A full discussion of this point goes far beyond the scope of the current paper. Nevertheless, there seems no reason to doubt that the mixture of what is and is not in the hoard represents a deliberate selection process informed by the purpose for which the hoard was accumulated. In the light of the evidence of the circulation and minting of coinage in England (and particularly Mercia) in the mid- to late seventh century, the absence of coins is in itself inconclusive for determining the character of the hoard, but the overall selection of material in the hoard suggests a selection process from which coins would probably have been excluded even if they were available. As an answer to the initial question of why there are no coins in the hoard, this may not represent much of a step forward from the simple answer that it is a type of hoard which does not contain any coins. Even so, that absence can now be seen in the wider context of monetary circulation in the period rather than simply against the background of the assumption that where there are hoards there should be coins.

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[55] Similar patterns of wear can be observed on other swords of the period, indicating that in this respect at least the objects in the Staffordshire Hoard are representative. I am grateful to Sue Brunning for useful discussion of this point, which is addressed in more detail in her recently completed PhD thesis, 'The 'Living' Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: An Interdisciplinary Study'. She also argues independently of this article, based on a detailed analysis of grave finds from Kent (together with comparative material elsewhere) for a close identification between sword and 'wielder', which is consistent with the argument presented here for sword fittings as symbols of identity and status.

[56] Hill 2011.

[57] G. Halsall, 'The Staffordshire Hoard: Its Implications for the Study of Seventh-century Anglo-Saxon Warfare', unpublished paper. A version of this paper was presented at the Staffordshire Hoard symposium at the British Museum on 30–31 March 2010. I am grateful to Professor Halsall for providing me with a more developed version of his paper.

[58] This interpretation of the hoard is developed in more detail in another article currently in preparation.

[59] Williams 2011c, 20–1.

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