

SHORT ARTICLES AND NOTES

TRIBRACH PENNIES OF EADBERHT 'PRÆN' OF KENT AND
EADWALD OF EAST ANGLIA

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IN the aftermath of the deaths of Offa of Mercia in late July 796 and of his son and heir Ecgfrith shortly afterwards in December, Mercian control over some outlying areas of the expanded kingdom slipped into the hands of local usurpers: Eadberht 'Præn' in Kent,¹ and Eadwald in East Anglia. The rest of the Mercian kingdom passed into the hands of Coenwulf, a distant relative of Offa, who spent the first years of his reign restoring the dominant position Mercia had enjoyed in the south east earlier in the eighth century. Kent was not recovered until 798, when, the kingdom having been ravaged by war, Eadberht was captured and taken to the royal monastery of Winchcombe in Gloucestershire. There his hands were cut off and his eyes put out, and he is said to have remained in Winchcombe as a prisoner until 811.² The only evidence for events in East Anglia comes from coinage, which suggests that Eadwald came to power immediately after Offa's death, and remained in control for several years before the kingdom was retaken by Coenwulf – certainly until 798, and conceivably down to 805 or even later.³

The products of the moneymers of Canterbury and the East Anglian mint reflect the rise of these local rulers, and for the first years of his reign Coenwulf's coinage was restricted to London. Die-cutters at all three mints stuck initially to the design instituted in the last years of Offa of Mercia (Fig. 1a), which arranged the king's name and title in three horizontal lines divided by bars. Offa and Coenwulf's coins had an uncial M for *Merciorum* taking up the first of the three lines; a feature which was not adopted by the die-cutters of Canterbury and the East Anglian mint, who entitled their kings simply *rex* on the new coinage (Fig. 1, d, e and f). There was no major change in the complement of moneymers at any mint, and in general the only substantial break between the coinages of Offa and his successors was in the name of the king: moneymers, design and also weight and fineness remained quite stable.

Even among the scarce surviving specimens of Coenwulf's Three-Line coinage there are a number of coins that prefigure the full Tribraich type, which would become standard at London and Canterbury by the end of the century (Fig. 1, b). As the name suggests, this type was characterised by a reverse design featuring a three-branched design known as a tribraich. This shape could be charged with a great deal of significance: a three-pointed cross was commonly found in Christian art from an early date, and could be understood to signify the

Acknowledgements: The new coins of Eadberht Præn and the fragment of Eadwald published here are only known via the records and photographs of Derek Chick. Thanks are also due to Tony Abramson, who provided information concerning and images of an important sceat in his collection, and to Mark Blackburn, who read and commented on an earlier draft of this paper. A full catalogue and analysis of all southern issues from the death of Offa down to the Lunettes coinage is in preparation by the author, where some of the issues touched on here will be expanded.

¹ *Præn* means 'priest' in Old English, and presumably indicates that Eadberht had at some point been a priest, and thus theoretically was unable to rule as king. He may well be the English *Odberhtus presbiter* mentioned as an exile in Frankia and Rome in a letter written from Charlemagne to Offa earlier in 796 (Dümmler 1892, no. 100; and Whitelock 1979, no. 197), and was referred to as a renegade priest in another letter of 798 (Dümmler 1892, no. 127; and Whitelock 1979, no. 205).

² These events are recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s.a. 796 and 798 (Plummer and Earle 1892, I, 56–7; and Whitelock 1979, no. 1, pp. 181–2). See also Brooks 1984, 121–5; and Story 2003, 139–42.

³ The chronological problems of Eadwald's issues will be discussed below. On the chronology in general, see *MEC* I, 293. The fundamental study by Blunt, Lyon and Stewart 1963, 26 suggested that Eadwald's coins be dated 796–8, like those of Eadberht Præn.



Fig. 1.

(a) Offa of Mercia (757–96), Heavy Coinage 792/3–6, London, Ciolheard. Chick 2008, no. 203a. Ex Dix, Noonan and Webb auction 19.6.2002, lot 130.

(b) Coenwulf of Mercia (796–821), Three-Line type 796–797/8, London, Diola. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Ex Blunt.

(c) Coenwulf of Mercia (796–821), Three-Line type 797/8–805, London, Eama. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Ex Blunt.

(d) Eadberht 'Præn' of Kent (796–8), Three-Line type 796–797/8, Canterbury, Babba. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

(e) Eadwald of East Anglia (c.796–?), Three-Line type 796–?, East Anglian mint, Eadnoth. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Ex Blunt.

(f) Beorhtric of Wessex (786–802), Alpha/Omega type, West Saxon mint, Weohtun. British Museum. Ex Lockett.

Trinity,⁴ or as an emblem of the choices – the two roads branching from one – that man faced in life, making it an *exemplum vitae humanae* according to Isidore of Seville (d. 636).⁵ A recently discovered sceat now in the Abramson collection (Fig. 2 below) foreshadows this widespread use of the voided tribrach at the end of the eighth century, as does an East Anglian penny of Offa,⁶ and it can also be found on a range of other Anglo-Saxon artefacts. Other coins of the same group of London Three-Line pennies include further highly symbolic designs, such as a tall standing cross on a unique coin of Pendwine,⁷ or an unusual variant of the tribrach on another unique coin of Winoth. This carries on the reverse a long pelleted cross with uncial-M-like devices at the terminals, with one of the limbs framed by two lines, creating another form of standing cross.⁸ Despite the lack of portraits or other figural elements, the crosses and tribrachs on this early London coinage clearly belong to a background in which variation and subtle meaning could be appreciated.

The beginnings of the Tribrach coinage can thus be found among the earliest Three-Line coins for Coenwulf of the London moneyers Ciolhard, Diola, Ibba and Winoth, who are only known in this earliest (796–7/8) phase from coins with a tribrach design on the reverse, suggesting that these types were current from the very beginning of Coenwulf's coinage. The



Fig. 2. Series Q variant (?).

Obv. bird (peacock?) stepping right within pelleted border.

Rev. voided two-line tribrach with curled finials; I and T in two angles.

1.01 g.

T. Abramson collection.

⁴ Gannon 2003, 163.

⁵ *Etymologiae* I.iii.7 (Lindsay 1911 I, 27).

⁶ Chick 2008, no. 162 (moneyer Botred).

⁷ EMC 1997.0115.

⁸ EMC 2005.0123.

date when the tribrach was combined with the new circumscription obverse type and made common to all moneyers was previously believed to be 798, coinciding with the recovery of Kent in that year.⁹ No other coins of Coenwulf from Canterbury used an earlier type,¹⁰ and it appeared that this new tribrach design accounted for all production at London and Canterbury until the establishment of a new portrait coinage in about 805.

A number of recent finds have altered this understanding of the introduction of the Tribrach type significantly, and have important ramifications for the nature of coin production in eighth- and ninth-century England. The coins in question include one Three-Line/Tribrach penny (Fig. 3) and two Tribrach pennies in the name of Eadberht Præn (Figs 4–5), and two unusual Three-Line pennies (Figs 7–8) and one Tribrach penny (Fig. 6) in the name of Eadwald. All were discovered in the last twenty years, but for various reasons have for the most part escaped publication until now.



Fig. 3. Eadberht 'Præn' of Kent (796–8), Three-Line/ Tribrach type.
Obv. [EÆ]Ð / BE[ÆR]HE / REX in three lines, divided by beaded bars.
Rev. EÐ / EL / [N]OÐ in angles of two-lined tribrach.
British Museum.
Found in excavations at Burrow Hill, Butley, Suffolk, 1980s.
No wt. (fragments).



Fig. 4. Eadberht 'Præn' of Kent (796–8), Tribrach type.
Obv. EÆDBEÆRH REX around plain circle containing M̄.
Rev. DV / DΛ / M̄ in angles of two-lined tribrach moline.
Private collection. Chick archive.
Found in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, August 1996.
1.32 g.



Fig. 5. Eadberht 'Præn' of Kent (796–8), Tribrach type.
Obv. EÆDBEÆRH REX around plain circle containing M̄.
Rev. DV / DΛ / M̄ in angles of two-lined tribrach moline.
Private collection. Chick archive.
Found at Fordwich, near Canterbury, Kent, 24.9.1993 (EMC 2001.0953).
1.10 g (chipped), 270°.

⁹ Blunt, Lyon and Stewart 1963, 7.

¹⁰ One moneyer, Seberht, struck a type for both Coenwulf and Cuthred with an unusual reverse design similar to one used in Offa's heavy coinage based on a bone-like device separating the legend into two lines (Blunt, Lyon and Stewart 1963, 7). These unusual issues could belong early in the Tribrach coinage when more flexibility may have been tolerated, although Seberht's absence in earlier phases might indicate that his coinage began slightly later. Either way, the existence of these Two-Line coins combined with the survival of regular Tribrach-type pennies by Seberht for both Coenwulf and Cuthred and of Cross-and-Wedges pennies for Coenwulf alone suggests he probably produced coins for both rulers simultaneously.



Fig. 6. Eadwald of East Anglia (c.796–?), Tribrach type.
 Obv. **ÆA[DU]ALD R[EX]** around **ᛞ** within beaded circle.
 Rev. **ÆAD[NOD]** inside curves of quatrefoil, divided by a beaded saltire (?).
 EMC 2008.0110.
 0.64 g (fragment).
 Found at Elmsett, near Hadleigh, Suffolk, early 1990s.



Fig. 7. Eadwald of East Anglia (c.796–?), Three-Line type.
 Obv. **E[Λ]+D** || **ÆΠΠΛΓD** || **REX** separated by beaded bars with opposed hooks at centre.
 Rev. **BO / TR / ED** around small cross in beaded inner circle, with three **ᛞ**-like ornaments splitting legend.
 Found at Ramsholt, near Woodbridge, Suffolk, August 1989. Illustration and information from Chick archive.
 No wt. (small fragment).
 Probably same reverse die as EMC 2007.0223.



Fig. 8. Eadwald of East Anglia (c.796–?), Three-Line type.
 Obv. **E[Λ]+D** || **ÆΠΠΛΓD** || **REX** separated by beaded bars with opposed hooks at centre.
 Rev. **BO / TR / ED** around small cross in beaded inner circle, with three **ᛞ**-like ornaments splitting legend.
 EMC 2007.0223.
 1.20 g (large chip), 90°.
 Found near Southwell, Nottinghamshire, 23.8.2007.
 Probably same reverse die as the fragment listed above.

The crucial point for the chronology is that the fully-fledged Tribrach type must have been introduced before the defeat of Eadberht Præn in 798. Given the rarity and tribrach reverse design of many surviving examples of Coenwulf's Three-Line type,¹¹ which must have been very short-lived indeed, it might be possible to push the introduction of the Tribrach type at London back even into 797. There can only have been a short time between the establishment of the Tribrach type and the end of Kentish independence, perhaps resulting in a short final phase of swift change and greater receptivity to different and widely-accepted coin designs at the Canterbury mint around 797/8, which saw certain moneyers adopt the new Tribrach design and related devices. This is suggested by the comparative rarity and limited uptake of Tribrach-influenced designs: only one Canterbury moneyer, Duda, is known from the full Tribrach type and another, Æthelnoth, from a Three-Line/Tribrach type, yet both of them also struck the regular Three-Line coins that account for most of Canterbury's production under Eadberht Præn (Fig. 1d). Æthelnoth's Three-Line/Tribrach penny spans the gap between the two designs, presumably inspired by coins of similar type from London: it bears

¹¹ Seven of fifteen known examples of this type, representing the work of two out of seven moneyers, bear a tribrach on the reverse. No moneyer struck more than one type in this phase, presumably because of its short duration.

a tribrach on the reverse,¹² and a variant on the standard Three-Line obverse design, with hooks on the horizontal bars that are universal on Three-Line coins issued at London (Fig. 1b).

Unfortunately, no clear chronological conclusions are possible for East Anglia at present. The Tribrach penny of Eadwald is a poorly-preserved fragment, found at Elmsett, Suffolk, in the early 1990s; and the two Three-Line/Tribrach pennies of Eadwald include one fragment (of which only line drawings are available) found at Ramsholt, Suffolk, in 1989, and an almost whole coin found at Newark, Nottinghamshire, in August 2007. The Three-Line/Tribrach pennies belong to the moneyer Botred, and like their Canterbury counterpart of the same type replicate the hooked bars of the London coins and an adapted form of the tribrach reverse – though in this case it is almost identical to a reverse design that had already been used by Botred in the light coinage of Offa.¹³ These are the only coins of Eadwald known for Botred, and presumably belong to much the same time as the other Three-Line issues from East Anglia, or perhaps slightly later. The Tribrach fragment bears the name of Eadnoth, a moneyer well-known from other issues of Offa and Eadwald,¹⁴ who was also responsible for the only other known type of Eadwald to deviate from the Three-Line obverse (Fig. 9): a Circumscription type, on which the king's name was arranged round a central cross (e.g. EMC 1989.1001, 1990.0196 and 2001.0150; one other specimen is known). This too must have been a small type, as all four surviving specimens are struck from two obverse and two reverse dies. The design of the Circumscription type bears a general resemblance to the Tribrach obverse, but is simple enough that it could have been created independently. All three of Eadnoth's designs use the same reverse design.



Fig 9. Eadwald of East Anglia (c. 796–?), Circumscription type 796–?, East Anglia, Eadnoth. British Museum.

This and other aspects of the chronology and organisation of East Anglian minting will be revisited in more detail in future. The two separate but related questions that must be addressed for now are when and in what sequence Eadwald's coinage was produced, and when it ended and Coenwulf's East Anglian coinage began to be produced. In terms of date, there is nothing to confirm when after 797/8 the Tribrach and Circumscription types were struck: they could conceivably belong to 800 or after, and there are only portrait coins of Coenwulf from East Anglia, which would suggest that minting in that part of his kingdom did not begin until 805 or after, when a portrait type was adopted at all other mints under his control. An earlier date is not out of the question: East Anglia did not always keep in step with numismatic developments elsewhere, and the portrait type could have begun earlier than at other mints, or alternatively there could have been a hiatus in minting following Mercian reconquest. But general adherence to a common design was a significant concern under Coenwulf, as suggested by the adoption of the Tribrach type at Canterbury upon its reconquest, and in the time of Offa and Coenwulf it was more common for East Anglia to follow developments

¹² It is interesting that Æthelnoth's Three-Line/Tribrach coin bears a tribrach of two lines, whereas the full Tribrach pennies of Duda (probably struck at around the same time) have a tribrach of three lines. The Three-Line/Tribrach issues of London all use a three-lined tribrach, but there are many examples of two-lined tribrachs in the main Tribrach type from London moneyers. Two- and three-lined tribrachs thus seem to have both been current from quite an early date, and there is probably no chronological significance to them.

¹³ Chick 2008, no. 162.

¹⁴ Another moneyer with the same name produced coins for Beornwulf, Ludica and Æthelstan of East Anglia in the 820s and later. He is presumably a different individual, though the shared name may indicate a familial connection of some sort – perhaps father and son.

at other mints than to set numismatic trends – which would imply a reconquest of East Anglia in 805 or after. At present, all that can be said with confidence is that Eadwald's coinage began *c.* 796 and lasted for at least a couple of years, and conceivably for more than a decade.

Unravelling the relative chronology of the coins of Eadwald is problematic as well, and there is little evidence for how the Tribach and Circumscription coins of Eadnoth related to those of other moneyers. It is possible that he alone continued to strike coinage later in Eadwald's reign, moving from one type to another after other moneyers had fallen by the wayside. Alternatively, several moneyers may have continued to produce Three-Line coins throughout Eadwald's reign, and Eadnoth was alone in changing type. This is perhaps more likely, as Eadnoth is also the sole moneyer of Eadwald who did not survive to strike coins for Coenwulf. Either way, the most probable internal chronology of Eadnoth's own types would put the Three-Line type first, as it is closest to the coinage of Offa and to that produced by other moneyers of Eadwald. Second comes the Tribach type, and third the Circumscription type. The logic behind this arrangement derives from the interpretation of the Tribach obverse design. This was based on a central uncial M, which completed Coenwulf's title of *rex Merciorum*, and was probably inspired by the design used on the coinage of Offa's queen, Cynethryth, produced a decade or so earlier at Canterbury.¹⁵ Obviously it is strange to find the kings of Kent and East Anglia theoretically styling themselves 'king of the Mercians', as is implied by straightforward adoption of the Tribach type. It is possible that Eadnoth – or even Eadwald himself – noticed this oddity and altered the design accordingly to the more innovative Circumscription type. Sensitivity to the political significance of the Tribach design was not unique to East Anglia. In contemporary Canterbury, coins of Coenwulf's brother, Cuthred, who was appointed sub-king of Kent in 798,¹⁶ omit the central M. Similarly, in Wessex the Tribach type influenced the coinage of one moneyer of Beorhtric (786–802) by the name of Weohtun (or possibly Peohtun) (Fig. 1g):¹⁷ in this case, the central uncial M was subtly reinterpreted as an omega by conjoining it with an alpha, and an inconvenient political message was neutralised as a religious emblem whilst retaining general similarity with the dominant Mercian coinage.

The decade immediately after 796 stands out as one of the most eventful and best known in Anglo-Saxon history, and is extremely well served by coinage as well as letters, narratives and other sources. However, changing political fortunes in southern England may be followed more effectively through numismatics than any other single category of evidence, and the coins provide a vital counterpoint to the account extrapolated from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and other texts. One of the greatest benefits of coinage is that new evidence is constantly emerging to revise earlier interpretations and fill in some of the gaps in the story. Thus it can now be seen that the Tribach type did not appear in the wake of Coenwulf's reconquest of Kent, but was already in existence by that time; indeed, it seems to have prompted a certain amount of emulation at Canterbury and in Wessex and East Anglia. Mercian coinage, and that of London in particular, evidently enjoyed some sort of special status, and it set the trend for design at the other southern mints for much of the late eighth century – perhaps as a reflection of the greater economic importance of London, or of the military and political strength of Mercia, or as a hangover from the reign of Offa, when it appears that London's die-cutter(s) exercised considerable influence.¹⁸ This is all the more striking given the relative size and output of the three mints: by the last years of Offa's reign London's production was already significantly smaller than that of Canterbury,¹⁹ and in the Tribach phase of

¹⁵ Chick 2008, nos 138–48.

¹⁶ This can be deduced from the regnal years occasionally given in contemporary charters: Sawyer 1968, no. 40, for example was issued in July 805 and is dated to the eighth year of Cuthred's reign. However, it does not automatically follow that Cuthred produced coins from the outset of his reign: for the possibility of an early phase of coinage issued by Coenwulf alone, see Blunt, Lyon and Stewart 1963, 72.

¹⁷ Weohtun's coinage for Beorhtric is represented by just one surviving specimen in the British Museum; however, the moneyer is also known from two recently discovered pennies of Egbert (EMC 2008.0137 and 2008.0138 – see Naismith 2008).

¹⁸ Chick 1997.

¹⁹ Chick 2008.

797/8–805 London's output declined even further so that it became merely a fraction of that of Canterbury. East Anglia too came to eclipse London in productivity by the second half of Coenwulf's reign.

The new finds of coins from the period 796–805 discussed here also highlight the distance there could sometimes be between kings and moneyers. The apparently apolitical use of the Tribach type in Kent and East Anglia reinforces the impression that those who designed and cut dies were not always particularly concerned by the political significance of what they were producing, and presumably received quite scant and sporadic instruction on design from the ruling authorities. The focus instead may have been on conforming to established standards of weight and fineness as well as appearance, and also on proper recognition of royal authority on coinage – though this normally did not go much further than including the appropriate king's name. For these reasons, the coins of this period are doubly valuable for providing a unique insight into not only high politics and the unfolding of historical events, but also into the more obscure workings of moneyers and die-cutters.

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BURGRED 'LUNETTE' TYPE E RECONSIDERED

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IN December 2003, metal detectorists Mark Ainsley and Geoff Bambrook uncovered a small Viking hoard on a riverine site in North Yorkshire. This is a multi-period productive site, showing evidence of occupation/use from prehistory to the post-medieval period, but with a particular concentration of activity from the eighth to tenth centuries. The site has been investigated by the York Archaeological Trust (YAT), and forms the subject of a joint research project between YAT and the British Museum. This includes YAT's fieldwork, the hoard and other Treasure finds from the site, and a group of over 800 single finds from the site, uncovered over a period of several years, of which the majority are Anglo-Saxon or Viking. The Viking element of the finds assemblage has marked similarities with the assemblage from the Viking site at Torksey,¹ and is apparently of similar date, beginning with the take-over of an existing Anglo-Saxon site in the mid 870s, and remaining active into the early tenth century. A preliminary note on the hoard, which has been acquired by the British

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¹ Blackburn 2002.