

A CELTIC SILVER COIN  
OF PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED TYPE  
FROM ST NICHOLAS AT WADE, THANET: THE PROTOTYPE  
FOR ANGLO-SAXON SCEATTAS OF *BMC* TYPE 37?

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THROUGH the kind cooperation of the finder, Mr G. Marsh, we are permitted to publish a hitherto unknown Celtic silver coin. It was found recently at the north-eastern corner of the Isle of Thanet, north of the A28, where the level of the ground begins to fall away northwards towards the hamlet of Shuart (Grid Ref. 61/273 674 approx.), that is to say, not far from the St Nicholas at Wade roundabout. The coin was submitted for identification to the Ashmolean Museum, where a heavy clay incrustation was removed. It may be described as follows:

*Obverse.* A symmetrical design comprising two similar facing heads. These have spiky brushed-back hair, corded diadems and trailing locks shown as beaded lines below the diadem. In between the heads are two devices comprising three annulets and a corded line. The complete device – viewed with coin inverted – may represent a bucranium.

*Reverse.* Spirited, Celticized horse left, with bearded mane, single strand tail and feathered feet. The ornaments surrounding the horse, particularly those underneath it, may represent a dismembered animal. The cleaned weight is 1.10g, and the die-axis ↓. In fabric the coin is slightly dished. It appears to be of reasonably good silver.

No published parallel can be found for the facing heads on this coin although Janus heads – looking in opposite directions – are quite common on coins of the continental Belgic tribes. A number of early British types do, however, have a symmetrical arrangement of facing beasts which may be relevant. A silver piece from the Le Câtillon, Jersey Hoard I (found in 1957), has two facing animals on the obverse. The obverse of a new type of silver unit<sup>1</sup> from Maidstone, Kent has two facing birds, separated by a beaded line which may relate to the corded part of the bucranium (?) on the coin in question. The

heads are Celtic and more particularly British in style although no close parallels can be cited.

The horse on the reverse can be located more precisely in terms of style. It is Kentish in feel – the feathered feet are a particular regional characteristic. It is similar to the horses on the reverse of the coins of Mack 279 and 286 type, both from this area.

The coin is unique, is most likely British rather than continental, and was perhaps minted in Kent during the last two decades B.C.

No small part of its interest is the striking similarity of its obverse to the two facing heads of the sceatta type, *BMC* type 37. We wonder whether a specimen found accidentally in the eighth century may not have provided the inspiration for the design – as seems to have happened in several other cases, including that of a Celtic *Rollier* type from the upper Rhineland, which was the prototype for type 32,<sup>2</sup> and a coin of Cunobelin, Mack 223, which seems to have been the prototype for type 66.

Professor Morehart has cautioned against the dangers of interpreting the typology of sceattas,<sup>3</sup> and she comments at length and critically on earlier students' ideas about the derivation of the reverse (four birds) of type 37.

The fullest discussion of the obverse has been given by Kirsten Bendixen, who adduces Merovingian parallels in gold,<sup>4</sup> and singles out a coin in the Savonnières hoard, minted at Savonnières and showing the local patron saints SS Gervase and Protase.<sup>5</sup> Her judgement is that it shows 'an unmistakable relationship' to the English coin, and we are inclined to agree. The only question is to say which came first. Lafaurie accepted a date in the late 730s or even after 741 for the Cimiez hoard, and placed Savonnières even later, at either c. 742–45 or c. 750–51.<sup>6</sup> Type 37, is of course, already present in Cimiez, which might

<sup>1</sup> The coin is now in the National Museum of Wales, and we are grateful to the Keeper, Mr G. C. Boon, for permission to mention it.

<sup>2</sup> H. Birkhan, 'Pfennig', *NZ* 86 (1971), 59–65. – 'Above all, the correspondence with the *Rollier* type goes so far into detail (bristly hair on the back, dotted belly, the creature's ears, the tip of the tail curved outward) that one certainly cannot think of coincidence.'

<sup>3</sup> Mary Morehart, 'Some dangers of dating sceattas by typological sequences', *BNJ* 39 (1970), 1–5.

<sup>4</sup> Kirsten Bendixen, 'The first Merovingian coin-treasure from Denmark', *Medieval Scandinavia* 7 (1974), 85–101, at pp. 91f.

<sup>5</sup> Illustrated in *RN* 1963, pl. VIII, 33 in enlargement.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lafaurie, 'Trésor de deniers mérovingiens trouvée à Savonnières (Indre-et-Loire)', *RN* 5 (1963), 65–81.



Prototype For Type 37



(× 2)



Type 37

be thought to be a reasonably conclusive argument for its priority, if it were not for the fact that there is some small residual doubt whether individual coins in the Morel-Fatio collection should be assumed to be certainly from Cimiez.<sup>7</sup> Grierson and Blackburn have now argued for a date no later than c. 720 for Cimiez, allowing room for an earlier date than 740 for Savonnières.<sup>8</sup> It remains doubtful, nevertheless, whether Savonnières can be as early as the Garton-on-the-Wolds grave-find, in which type 37 again occurs, especially as BIIIa is already present in Aston Rowant.<sup>9</sup> The date of the introduction of the Gervase and Protase types will, admittedly, be earlier than the deposit of Savonnières, but the possibility of its being

early enough to provide a prototype for type 37 is not great. We are forced back towards the argument that the Savonnières coin type is very scarce and local, whereas type 37 is relatively plentiful and widespread, with continental finds, for example, seven specimens from Domburg, apart from Jutland.

Even though there is no accounting for the choice of prototypes, and scarce coins could as well have been chosen as common ones, if their design caught the fancy of the moment, we think that the obvious interpretation is that the Savonnières type was imitated from the English type 37. That, in its turn, may well have been copied from the Celtic coin of which a specimen has now come to light.

<sup>7</sup> A. Morel-Fatio, *Deniers mérovingiens des VII<sup>e</sup> et VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles de la trouvaille de Cimiez*, edited by A. Chabouillet (1890), introduction and note on p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> M. Blackburn, 'A chronology for the sceattas', in *Sceat-*

*tas in England and on the Continent*, edited by D. Hill and D. M. Metcalf (BAR vol. 128 Oxford, 1984), pp. 165–74.

<sup>9</sup> S. E. Rigold and D. M. Metcalf, 'A revised check-list of English finds of sceattas', in *Sceattas in England*, pp. 245–68.

## A SOLIDUS FROM YORKSHIRE

IAN STEWART

GRIERSON'S list of ninth-century gold solidi roughly copied from the original of Louis the Pious includes a number of examples found in the British Isles and these led him to suggest that, while the bulk of the series must be attributed to Frisia, some of them might have been struck in England. This possibility deserves to be borne in mind when new finds are recorded. Mr Pagan has kindly shown me his report<sup>1</sup> on a solidus found in 1971 in the Southampton excavations, which is a die-duplicate of the only

specimen recorded by Grierson of his type VII. Mr Pagan has also discovered evidence to show that two coins in the Lelewel collection (the single specimens each of Grierson types XIX and XX) had been found in Scotland in or before 1841 (perhaps with others). There are thus rather more examples of this series from the British Isles than was evident when Grierson wrote of them thirty years ago.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Richard Falkiner has provided me with information about a most interesting solidus which he

<sup>1</sup> H. E. Pagan, 'The imitative Louis the Pious solidus from Southampton and finds of other related coins in the British Isles', forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> P. Grierson, 'The Gold Solidus of Louis the Pious and its Imitations', *JMP* XXXVIII (1951), 1–41 (see pp. 11 and 34). The British provenances are: (near) Cambridge, Grier-

son XVI (c); Elgin, I (i) (a); Lewes, XVI (d); Porchester, untraced; Scotland, XIX (a) and XX (a); Southampton, VII (b); Stamford Bridge, *obv.* = I (ii)(c); and Thersfield, near Royston, XVI (b). Grierson I (ii)(c) (*BMS* 81, ex Clarke-Thornhill), XVI (a) (*BMS* 79, pres. A.W. Franks) and VII (a) could also have been British finds.