

A SCEAT OF SERIES K MINTED BY ARCHBISHOP BERHTWALD OF CANTERBURY (693–731)

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IT IS well known that Archbishop Iænberht (766–92) minted coins with his name on one side and that of King Offa of Mercia on the other. An early date relative to most of Offa's coinage has been tentatively proposed for the bulk of the joint issue.¹ Similarly Archbishop Ecgberht of York minted sceattas under the authority of his brother, King Eadberht of Northumbria, in a series of varieties at some time during the period 737 × 758.² As Offa came to the kingship only in 757, and as it may very safely be assumed that all Ecgberht's varieties do not belong to a single year, it follows that the northern archbishop's coins begin much earlier than Iænberht's. Although there are no absolute difficulties to set against the view that the York sceattas were the first archiepiscopal coins minted in this country (given the relationship between Eadberht and Ecgberht), one cannot help thinking that precedent is more likely to have been created in the south and followed in the north, than *vice versa*, and especially not after the subjection of Kent.

If there was an earlier precedent in the south, if a previous archbishop had been permitted by the king of Kent to mint sceattas in the late seventh or during the first half of the eighth century, how might we hope to recognize them? One would expect them to be, like most sceattas, anepigraphic; and one could hope for no real help from the distribution-pattern of such coins within the pattern for all stray finds of sceattas, because the king himself presumably also minted coins at Canterbury.³ So the problem might well appear to be in principle insoluble.

The only glimmer of historical evidence might seem to lie in the Grateley Decrees' reference to the provision at Canterbury of four dies for the king, two for the archbishop, and one for the abbot.⁴ Although the law-code dates from the tenth century, it may well embody the memory of a vested interest on the part of the archbishop and the abbot, which was created much earlier. And indeed, as we have seen, there are much earlier coins of the archbishops (although none have been attributed to the abbots). It is the origin of the archbishops' minting privileges with which we are concerned here, but the mention of the abbot ought to attract our attention, because of its possible value as the basis of a historical argument.

¹ D. M. Metcalf, 'Monetary expansion and recession: interpreting the distribution-patterns of seventh and eighth-century coins', in *Coins and the Archaeologist*, edited by J. Casey and R. Reece, 2nd (revised) edition, 1988, pp. 230–53, at p.243f.

² J. Booth, 'Sceattas in Northumbria', in *Sceattas in England and on the Continent*, edited by D. Hill and D. M. Metcalf, Oxford, 1984, pp. 71–111, distinguishing six varie-

ties for Ecgberht. St Augustine's Abbey, just outside the walls of Canterbury, and at a little distance from the cathedral, became the mausoleum of Queen Bertha and her chaplain Liudhard, and eventually of several of the Kentish kings. (Similarly, Whitby Abbey was the mausoleum of the Deiran kings, and Repton served in the same way, apparently, for Mercia.) The first ten archbishops of Canterbury, including St Augustine himself, were buried in the abbey at Canterbury. That link with the cathedral was severed in 758. After a gap, Iænberht (who had previously been its abbot) was the last archbishop to be buried at the abbey.⁵ The grant of minting rights to the abbot is quite understandable while the abbey was the Kentish royal mausoleum, and in light of its status as a shrine to the conversion of the English nation, but less so after Offa's subjection of Kent. While the abbot's minting rights mentioned in the Grateley Decrees could have originated at any date up to the early tenth century, there is no obvious historical context for them after c.762 – and, of course, no signed coins. The intention of the law-code might have been fulfilled if the abbot enjoyed the *profits* of one die; but it would be illogical to suppose that the archbishop put his name on the coins while the abbot did not. During the earlier part of Offa's reign the abbot was Ethelnoth (762–87), and it is just worth noting that this can hardly be the moneyer (who continues into Group III, and into the coinage of Eadberht Praen), any more than the moneyer Iænberht (again under Eadberht Praen) can be the archbishop himself. Dr Stewart has recently pointed out that it must be put down to coincidence, or family connections. Perhaps, therefore we should be looking to the years before c.762, and to sceattas rather than broad pennies, for a period when the legal privileges and their actual enjoyment coincided.

The problem of the abbot's coinage will probably never be taken out of the realm of conjecture, and it is worth discussing mainly because it serves to draw attention to the idea that there may, by the same argument but *a fortiori*, have been archiepiscopal coins before c.762. By good fortune we now have a unique variant of a sceat of Series K, Type 33, on which the standard design of the obverse (bust, with stylized drapery, and with long cross in front of the face) has been modified by the insertion, between the

ties for Ecgberht.

³ For the ideas of 'south-of-Thames' distribution patterns and 'westwards drift', see D. M. Metcalf, 'Monetary circulation in southern England in the first half of the eighth century', in *Sceattas in England*, pp. 27–69, at pp. 43–5.

⁴ D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, vol. 1, (2nd. edition, 1979) p. 420, section 14.2.

⁵ *VCH Kent*, vol. 2, pp. 126–7.

face and the cross, of a very carefully depicted hand raised in benediction. In Series K, Type 32a there is often a hand holding the cross. It is as simplified as it might be in modern abstract art: two claw-like curves suggest finger and thumb. The hand on the unique variant of Type 33 is quite a different matter. The third and fourth fingers are bent against the palm, so that the outstretched thumb and first two fingers give the standard western gesture of trinitarian blessing. (In the Orthodox east, the fingers were arranged in the benediction to make the letters IC XC.) The enlarged photo of the coin (pl. 25, 7) shows what seems to be, even, a ring on the forefinger. The die is disfigured by a deep die-flaw in the centre of the design, caused perhaps by an air-bubble in the metal of the die. This makes it difficult to photograph the thumb, which is however clear if one can hold the coin and turn it about.

As regards authenticity, the coin (which came from Thames spoil⁶) is entirely convincing. Moreover, analysis of its metal contents, recently carried out by Dr J. P. Northover as part of a larger programme,⁷ shows the normal range of trace elements and minor constituents. The rather high tin : copper ratio suggests to us that the measured silver contents of over 85 per cent (quite consistent in three separately measured areas of the edge) may be somewhat on the high side because of the always difficult problems of surface enrichment. Even so, the fineness is much higher than for most coins of Series K. That, together with the unusual and careful design of the hand, suggests that this particular coin belongs relatively early in the sequence of Series K, which may be presumed to have undergone a process of debasement. The coin weighs 1.14g, which is above average but perhaps within normal limits for the series.

A corpus of Type 33, published in 1967, included only eight specimens, among which there were two pairs of die-duplicates.⁸ If the sample is representative, it suggests an original total of only a dozen dies or thereabouts. No significant additions of Type 33 to the corpus have been published since. The type exists in all three of the substantive styles of Series K, which have been labelled A-B, C-D, and 'Hwiccian'.⁹ Thus it seems to have been issued in conjunction with Type 32a, which is also known in those three styles, and in partial conjunction with Type 42.

The evidence of style, as it relates to the whole of Series K, may be thought to have a bearing on the attribution of Type 33 to the archbishop – for whom Canterbury would be the obvious mint-place. Unless Types 33, 32a, and 42 were being produced in a jumbled and repetitive sequence (which is an unreasonable assumption), their style suggests that three officinae, separate from each other in terms of die-cutting, were working in parallel, each producing first one type concurrently, and then another. Metal analyses could confirm or refute that pattern, but not until more specimens than one of Type 33 have been analysed. As there are apparently differences of weight-standard between the styles,¹⁰ one would be inclined to suggest two or three mints, working to a unified scheme, rather than three officinae in one place. Provenances are somewhat inconclusive: both styles A-B and C-D seem to be equally biased towards east Kent.¹¹ In the wider context, there is evidence, e.g. from Type 23b, of parallel styles with a different regional distribution.¹²

In any case there can be no doubt that Type 33 is from the same mint or mints as the substantive styles of Types 32a and 42; nor that Type 33 occurs in the 'Hwiccian' style – which has London associations.¹³ The series as a whole shows an essentially south-of-the-Thames distribution, and the attribution of a major part of it to Canterbury would be an obvious possibility. Could the archbishop have had minting rights at more than one mint? The above analysis of style seems to require either that he had, or that the design of Type 33 was not specific to the archbishop. Historically, the idea that he could have had minting-rights at London (in the 'Hwiccian' style), while difficult to accept, might be plausible while the Kentish kings still exercised authority in London.

The face of the 'benediction hand' specimen is so damaged by the die-flaw that the style (as between A-B and C-D) is something to hesitate over. The proportions of nose, face, and neck suggest A-B; and it is the right-hand wreath-tie which makes a loop over the straight left-hand one, not vice versa.¹⁴ This again suggests A-B. The reverse style, on the other hand, is a very exact reproduction laterally reversed, of the C-D style of no. 7 in the corpus – even down to the little row of dots trailing off above the creature's snout. There are, in a word, difficulties involved in dividing the two styles between mints, just as there

⁶ Coin Register, *BNJ* 57 (1987), 122–52, no. 76.

⁷ Publication forthcoming.

⁸ D. M. Metcalf and D. R. Walker, 'The "Wolf" sceatlas', *BNJ* 36 (1967), 11–28.

⁹ Enlarged illustrations of the three styles are given, *ibid.*, pl. 7.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15, Fig. 3.

¹¹ Note a find of Type 32a in C-D style from the Canterbury excavations (forthcoming).

¹² For an up-dated view on the styles of the 'bird and branch' coins and their distribution, see D. M. Metcalf, 'The coins', in *The Coins and Pottery from Hamwic* (South-

ampton Finds, vol. 1), edited by P. Andrews, Southampton, 1988, pp. 17–59, at pp. 21f. and 49.

¹³ M. A. S. Blackburn and M. J. Bonser, 'Single finds of Anglo-Saxon and Norman coins – 3', *BNJ* 56 (1986), 64–101, under no. 29, sets out the evidence for finds of Series L in the 'Hwiccian' style from other parts of England, and argues for an origin 'in the south east or Thames valley'. I accept the force of this argument.

¹⁴ See Metcalf and Walker, *loc. cit.*, where this criterion is fairly consistent, and obviously a valid feature of the stylistic analysis. Note, however, that Type 33 does not normally have looped wreath-ties, in any style!

are difficulties arising from their similar distribution-pattern.

Against that numismatic background, how should we assess the 'benediction hand' coin historically? The primary phase of English sceattas had established a tradition of coins with a head or bust in sub-classical style on the obverse.¹⁵ Although it was obviously not a portrait, the assumption that this was an icon of the king would follow easily in people's minds. In Series K, beginning soon after the end of the primary phase, a distinction is made: the bust is accompanied by either a hawk or, commonly, a cross. The hawk is plainly a secular symbol, apt for a king, whereas the cross is of universal relevance. There are far too many sceattas with crosses for us to contemplate giving them all to ecclesiastical issuers. But a hand raised in trinitarian blessing is unambiguously priestly. It implies, with no room for doubt, that the person represented by the bust is to be understood as an ecclesiastic. We have rehearsed all the numismatic background, against which this judgement is offered; but almost whatever it had been, the verdict would have had to be the same.

Although the symbolism does not serve to distinguish between an archbishop and an abbot, Iænberht's coins minted a generation later encourage the hypothesis that what we have here is a coin of an earlier archbishop.

If there is one, there are probably others, even if

their designs are not as unambiguous as this precious coin. The implications could spread some way through the sceatta series. Among the varieties attributable to Canterbury, should we be looking for a four-to-two, or even a four-to-three ratio of royal to ecclesiastical coins? The only touchstone upon which we could test the plausibility of such ratios is the proportion of coins of Iænberht to those of Offa alone, and the corresponding proportions for Ecgberht and Eadberht. It is difficult to see the Kentish kings surrendering a third or more of the profits of minting, but perhaps such profits were only a modest proportion of their total income from various sources, e.g. tolls. The hostility between Offa and Iænberht may have curtailed the archbishop's average share for Offa's reign as a whole.

The alloy of the 'benediction hand' coin points to a date relatively very early in Series K and in the secondary phase generally. Translating the relative date into an absolute date depends upon a wide range of considerations.¹⁶ If, as Dr Northover and I argue elsewhere, Series A is the coinage of King Hlothere of Kent rather than King Wihtred, Type 33 may have begun as early as the 690s rather than, say, the 710s. In any case its inception will fall within the pontificate of Archbishop Berhtwald, 693–731, who was abbot of Reculver before his election to the see. He and Wihtred collaborated well in political affairs,¹⁷ and a grant of minting rights is quite thinkable.

¹⁵ Series A, B, and C.

¹⁶ M. Blackburn, 'A chronology for the sceattas', in *Sceattas in England and on the Continent*, pp. 165–74,

suggesting that Series K was introduced c.720.

¹⁷ N. P. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, Leicester, 1984, pp. 76–80.

A PLATE OF ANGLO-SAXON COINS FOUND AT RECVLVER, KENT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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THE purpose of this note is to publish a group of seventeen sceattas which are illustrated, together with eight later coins, on a single sheet of paper preserved in the British Library among the miscellaneous papers of James West (Stowe MS 1049). The coins add to our knowledge of the range of material found at Reculver, which is one of the richest sites in England for finds of sceattas. To some extent they duplicate material already well known from two plates by John White, published as a supplement to Wither and Ryall's *Twelve Plates of English Silver Coins*, in 1756. As the drawings are in both cases somewhat sketchy, an acquaintance with the coins themselves is called for, to decide whether the same specimen is illustrated in both sources. If only one or two examples of a type are now in existence with eighteenth-century provenances, one may feel more confident about the

correspondence between the drawing and the similar coin, although in judging the probabilities one must allow for the possibility that the original has been irretrievably lost. A good number of the actual coins from Wither and Ryall were identified in 1956 by Dolley and Strudwick among the 'undated' coins in the *ancien fonds* of the British Museum (pre-1838), not always convincingly. The plate now published serves to confirm and sometimes correct the earlier identifications. It establishes that several coins from Reculver were acquired by William Hunter, and that at least one other surfaced again after two hundred years, in the Lockett collection. The West coins include seven sceattas which are new to the published list of finds from Reculver.

The coin of Cuthred, no.25 on the plate, was included in their corpus of the coinage of 796–840 by