

KING STEPHEN'S REIGN: A REASSESSMENT OF THE NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

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Introduction

It is well known that the English coinage, unified from the late tenth century under royal control, fractured into a series of official, irregular and baronial coin types during the reign of King Stephen (1135–54). This was caused by the arrival from Normandy in 1139 of Henry I's daughter Matilda and her half-brother Earl Robert of Gloucester, which precipitated a civil war that lasted until 1153. The last major study of the coinage of Stephen's reign was undertaken by Mark Blackburn in 1994.¹ Despite his masterful survey of the numismatic corpus as it existed in the early 1990s, the increasing popularity of metal-detecting has expanded the volume and variety of the present corpus of these coins significantly. Therefore, an analysis of these new coins and the implications of this upon our existing understanding of the period is needed just two decades on.

Stephen inherited a strong, centralised and long-established monetary system. The late Anglo-Saxon kings from Athelstan onwards enshrined in law that only officially-struck royal coins were to circulate within the territories under their control and they ensured that imported foreign coin were converted into English coin at the mints.² King Edgar's reform of the coinage in *c.* 973 saw a uniform design for all English coins. The obverse showed a standardised portrait of the king with his name around the circumference; the reverse displayed the name of the moneyer and the name of the mint. These designs were changed every few years, and there were to be over fifty changes of type between *c.* 973 and 1135.³ Henry I reduced the number of mints from 53–4 to 21 in 1125, and it appears that he had also decided to abandon the system of regular coin issues in favour of a fixed coin type in that year, for the remainder of his reign.⁴ To assist the king in his control of the coinage moneyers were responsible for running the mints. In 1153/4–58 there were approximately 100 moneyers across the kingdom striking Stephen's type 7.⁵ The nature and effects of the breakdown of this system during Stephen's reign are the matters that this article will investigate.

The contribution of numismatic evidence to major historical debates

Contemporary and near-contemporary chroniclers describe the violence and misery of the years between 1135 and 1154, in contrast to the relatively peaceful reign of Stephen's predecessor, Henry I, and to the years of the restoration of royal power under Stephen's successor, Henry II. To quote the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

Every great man built him [the king] castles and held them against the king; and they filled the whole land with these castles. They sorely burdened the unhappy people of the country with forced labour on the castles; and when the castles were built, they filled them with devils and wicked men ... At regular intervals they levied a tax, known as 'tenserie' upon the villages. When the wretched people had no more to give, they plundered and burned all the villages, so that you could easily go a day's journey without ever finding a village inhabited or a field cultivated ... wherever the ground was tilled the earth bore no corn, for the land was ruined by such doings;

¹ Blackburn 1994.

² Attenborough 1922, II As 12 and 14; Robertson 1925, III Em 5, III Edg 8, IV Edg 6, I Atr 3, VI Atr 32.1 and II Cn 8–8.2 and 24. See also Screen 2007 for further analysis of Anglo-Saxon law and numismatics.

³ Dolley and Metcalf 1961, 148–52; Stewart 1990, 463–8; Jonsson 1987.

⁴ Blackburn 1990, 64–76; Allen 2012b, 62, 66, Allen 2016a, 181–2.

⁵ Allen 2012a, 398–403; Metcalf 1987, 290; Symons 2006.

and men said openly that Christ and his saints slept. Such things and others more than we know how to relate we suffered nineteen years for our sins.⁶

Other observers described similar calamities: for example, John of Worcester wrote of ‘the bonds of peace being torn apart’ in the West of England and in Wales, and the author of the *Gesta Stephani* recounted how the kingdom became ‘troubled and utterly disordered’, that there ‘grew up an abundance of iniquity and a seed-plot of all manner of wickedness’, and that England became ‘a teacher of every kind of rebellion’.⁷

How far these descriptions of disorder and chaos during Stephen’s reign represented the national picture or isolated accounts in particular areas remains a keenly contested subject. Scholars such as Round, Warren Hollister and more recently Thomas have emphasised the sheer scale of violence in terms of the battles, raids and land-devastation tactics described in the chronicle accounts. They have also drawn attention to the apparent silence of the Exchequer during Stephen’s reign, the diminished values of rents, dues and services described in charters, and the substantial waste entries in the early pipe rolls of Henry II’s reign.⁸

However, scholars such as Stenton, Poole, White and Matthew have suggested that chroniclers often exaggerated the violence of the period.⁹ Green has argued that rather than judging Stephen on the government of England as a whole, over large parts of which he clearly lost control, he continued to have jurisdiction over London and the south-east of England and made more use of credit to fund his military campaigns.¹⁰ Yoshitake uses pipe-roll evidence from the early years of Henry II to show that a block of county farms paying *blanche* sums – where the coins were tested for their silver purity – to the Exchequer in the south and east of England approximately corresponded to the counties under Stephen’s control. Similarly, a block of counties in the west of England which paid their farms by *tale* – where coins were counted by number – in the mid-1150s approximately corresponded to the area under Angevin control.¹¹ Instead of central administrative collapse and disorder, it could be said that there were two different governments operating in England during Stephen’s reign – one in the east and one in the west.¹² In addition, White has recently demonstrated that although royal income at the time of Henry II’s accession had halved compared to the income enjoyed by Henry I in 1130, the income from tax had actually increased in both proportional and absolute terms.¹³

Since both disorder and relative continuity during the period can be argued, I shall re-examine the provenance and iconography of the various coinages in the light of new finds to offer further interpretations of the nature of power and authority during Stephen’s reign. I will also analyse the circulation patterns of the different currency types during the civil war, as demonstrated by the single-find evidence, to reveal further insights into the nature of the money economy in the mid-twelfth century.¹⁴ Until 1135 English coins from all mints circulated freely around the country.¹⁵ If the civil war changed these patterns then the implications need to be understood.

⁶ *ASC* *s. a.* 1137; Garmonsway 1972, 263–6.

⁷ Warren Hollister 1994, 50; McGurk 1998, III, 216–17; Potter 1976, 2–3.

⁸ Round 1892; Warren Hollister 1994, 49–54; Thomas 2008, 139–70. There is extensive literature on the meaning of ‘waste’ in the pipe rolls and also in Domesday Book. The traditional view is that the Latin terms *vastum* or *wastum* (‘waste’) denote economic damage involving physical destruction of the land. However, other scholars have argued that these terms were used by Exchequer clerks to describe a wider range of instances in which they were unable to extract revenues from the land, such as through geld exemptions, disputes over liability, or administrative problems. Amt convincingly argues for the traditional view for the pipe roll material, and I will treat the term ‘waste’ as meaning physical devastation of the land. She is, however, persuaded that ‘waste’ can have different meanings in other sources, such as Domesday Book. Amt 1991; for further discussion of Domesday waste see Roffe 2007, 250–6.

⁹ Stenton 1969, 218–19; Poole 1955, 151–4; White 2000, 323–37; Matthew 2002, 123, 127, 130, 133, 192–3.

¹⁰ Green 1991, 91–114.

¹¹ Yoshitake 1988, 958.

¹² Archibald 2001, 86.

¹³ White 2008, 28–30.

¹⁴ I initially undertook this study for my 2008 MA dissertation with my own single-find dataset. However, the single finds of Stephen’s reign have since been studied in much greater depth by Kelleher, so I will use his dataset and results to analyse and contextualise these patterns further. See Fairbairn 2008 and Kelleher 2013.

¹⁵ Metcalf 1978; Metcalf 1981; Metcalf 1998; Naismith 2013; Fairbairn 2014.

Coin types and the question of authority

King Stephen's official types

Stephen issued four official coinages during his nineteen-year reign, types 1, 2, 6 and 7.¹⁶ They account for about 90 per cent of all known coins of the period and around 73 per cent of the single finds.¹⁷ Type 1 was Stephen's first official coinage, probably struck as early as 1136. Stephen reopened many of the mints that Henry I had closed, along with opening six new ones, probably to legitimise his kingship in an uncertain political atmosphere through the royal prerogative of minting and to buy the loyalty of the earls and boroughs by allowing them to generate local profits once more.¹⁸ Mint signatures on the coins reveal that type 1 was issued from a total of 44 mints across the country. Type 1 comprises between 70 and 80 per cent of the coin-hoard material, chiefly from the Watford and Prestwich hoards, and represents about 40 per cent of the single finds.¹⁹ There has been considerable debate over the dating of Stephen's types, but Blackburn is followed here, with type 1 running *c.* 1136–45.²⁰

Type 2 circulated between *c.* 1145 and *c.* 1150 and it represents around 10 per cent of the single-find evidence.²¹ However, just 17 mints are known to have struck this issue compared with the 44 of type 1. The locations of the mints that struck type 2 were also all in the south and east of England – a vast contraction in the number of mints and the minting area. Type 6, which was issued from approximately 1150 to 1154 and accounts for about 8 per cent of the single-find evidence, was struck at just 21 mints; like type 2 it was only struck in the south and east of England.²² This large difference between the minting area of types 2 and 6 compared to that of type 1 reinforces the documentary evidence that Stephen's government had lost central administrative control of the country by the mid-1140s.²³ Type 7, which ran from 1153/4 to 1158, accounts for 15 per cent of the single-find corpus and was the final official type to be struck during the reign.²⁴ It was a national issue, agreed during the negotiations for the Treaty of Westminster in 1153 that ended the civil war, and it was issued from a similar range of mints to type 1.²⁵

Irregular and independent types

During type 1, and continuing through Stephen's reign, a wide variety of irregular and independent coinages entered circulation. Many of these types have been described in detail by Blackburn, but it is worth stating here that the irregular types (local imitations and defaced dies of type 1) were struck at mints as far apart as Carlisle, Swansea, Canterbury and York. Following on from these in the mid-1140s, independent types in Stephen's name (previously thought to have been his official types 3, 4 and 5) were issued from a number of midland mints, including Huntingdon, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton, Nottingham, and Stamford.²⁶ Although it is unclear exactly when such issues began to be struck, the uncertain nature of political authority after Matilda landed in England in 1139 may have been a significant

¹⁶ These types were originally so designated in the early twentieth century by G.C. Brooke when the corpus of evidence was much smaller, but we now know that types 3, 4 and 5 were independent issues from the midlands. *BMC Norman Kings*. See Brooke 1916.

¹⁷ Blackburn 1994, 167. Kelleher 2013, 287: his dataset (Fig. 3.11) shows 464 out of 639 single finds belonging to types 1, 2, 6 and 7 (72.6%).

¹⁸ Blackburn 1994, 153; Matthew 2002, 141.

¹⁹ Blackburn 1994, 149, giving a figure of 78% for the amount of material represented by type 1 in the hoards. I have given wider parameters here to factor in other discoveries, such as the 100+ specimens found in the Box hoard of 1994 which do not feature any of Stephen's official types; Thompson 1956, no. 372; *Coin Hoards* 1, 1975, no. 360. Kelleher 2013, 287, with a dataset of 253 coins of type 1 (39.6%).

²⁰ Dolley 1968; Seaman, 1978; Seaby 1980; Boon 1986, 50 and 68n.; Boon 1988, 17; Archibald 1991; Blackburn 1994, 197–9.

²¹ Kelleher 2013, 287: his dataset shows 63 single finds of type 2 (9.9%).

²² Blackburn 1994, 162. Kelleher 2013, 287, with a dataset of 52 single finds of type 6 (8.1%).

²³ Green 1991, 110.

²⁴ Kelleher 2013, 287: 96 single finds of type 7 (15.0%).

²⁵ Allen 2006.

²⁶ Blackburn 1994, 175–82; new variants are being discovered continuously, for instance see Allen 2016a, 183–4.

moment. Coins derive part of their value from their silver content but they also obtain it from the authority of the ruler who issued them. If there was no clear monarch then who could guarantee the value of the coins and the stability of the system? This was almost certainly exacerbated by Stephen's nine-month imprisonment after his capture by the Angevins at the battle of Lincoln in February 1141 and by his inability to reassert control over the country and the baronage in the years following his release in November of the same year.

In 1138, Stephen created many new earldoms and granted out powers of *comitatus* to his loyal men in order for them to protect their counties more effectively.²⁷ Most of the midland mints which struck independent types in the name of Stephen were under the control of earls who at least nominally supported him.²⁸ However, collecting new dies of Stephen's official types may have become too hazardous during the height of the civil war, forcing the earls to strike their own issues in the king's name without renouncing their loyalty to him.²⁹ Matthews has suggested that Stephen granted permission to the earls, barons and boroughs outside the south and east of England to strike such non-official coins in order not to directly challenge his own issues.³⁰ However, if the barons were in contact with the king and were still willing to strike coins in Stephen's name then it is difficult to see why they didn't continue striking his official types. The king may have been buying the loyalty and support of the midland mints by effectively allowing them to avoid paying for official dies, but this speaks less of 'permission' and more of one's hand being forced.³¹

Some earls and barons may have wanted to assert a measure of independence by creating coinages with their own legends. Earl Robert de Beaumont of Leicester, despite remaining loyal to Stephen throughout the war, appears to have struck a coin in the style of Stephen's type 2 but in his own name, and very recently a single coin find also imitating Stephen's type 2 has been found in Lincolnshire with the legend 'Roger de' on the obverse.³² As we shall see shortly, there were further earls and barons who issued coins not only in their own names but with different obverse designs. Such evidence may support the notion that the so-called 'feudal revolution' of continental Europe did not find a completely unwelcoming home in England during Stephen's reign, because some authorities appear to have enjoyed the opportunities presented by the civil war to assert their independence.³³

Angevin Types

Matilda issued two coinages in her name in the early to mid-1140s, which were struck at the mints of Bristol, Cardiff, Oxford and Wareham, though the second of her coinages is only known from Bristol and Cardiff.³⁴ Additionally, a coin type identical in every respect to Stephen's type 1 but with the king's name replaced with the letters 'PERERIC' or 'PERERICM' was probably issued by Matilda during her short period in London from May–June 1141 while Stephen was in captivity.³⁵

A number of other coinages were struck by Angevin supporters and there is some debate over the reasons for their issue. Henry de Neubourg, lord of Gower in South Wales, struck coins at Swansea in the early 1140s. Boon has suggested that Henry was attempting to carve out his own lordship, using the medium of coinage to strengthen his position.³⁶ However, it is

²⁷ Latimer 1986; Davis 1990, 30–1; Dalton 1990; Vincent 2008, 6.

²⁸ Davis 1990, 130, 142–3.

²⁹ Green 1991, 102–4; White 1994, 130.

³⁰ Matthew 2002, 144–5.

³¹ Cronne 1970, 241 also doubts that the king granted coin-striking powers to his barons.

³² Mack 1966, 94–5; EMC 2009.0417. The 'Roger de' coin may have been struck by Roger de Mowbray, a substantial baron with lands in the north of England and an opponent of the earl of York. As the single-find distribution patterns became more localised during the second half of the civil war (see below), Roger is a reasonable candidate as the issuer of this coin since it was found in Lincolnshire, not far from his lands. See Thomas 2004; Rees Jones 2013, 106–7. Allen has also suggested Roger de Beaumont, second Earl of Warwick, as the issuer of this coin, Allen 2016a, 183.

³³ Bisson 2009, 269–78; Baxter 2011, 113–14.

³⁴ Boon 1986, 73–7.

³⁵ Brooke 1915, 109–13; Blackburn 1994, 173–5.

³⁶ Boon 1986, 53.

possible that these coins were struck as a result of Stephen's capture in 1141. Henry's name on the coins may have provided a more solid guarantee of their value than either Stephen's or Matilda's name at that point in time. Further, these coins directly follow on from the local Stephen issues from Swansea and continue to show the king's bust, not a different design.³⁷

In 1994, the Box hoard from Wiltshire revealed previously unknown types in the names of Earl Robert of Gloucester and his son William.³⁸ Rejecting the traditional royal bust on the obverse, these coins show a lion – an image taken directly from Robert's seal. Henry I had also used a lion as his emblem and King argues that Earl Robert was drawing attention to his status as the son of the previous monarch.³⁹ Aristocratic use of seals and heraldry developed throughout the Norman and Angevin period as a way to signify family lineage and high birth. Animals were particularly favoured symbols for their representation of power, and the lion was the most popular creature featuring on aristocratic arms in north-western Europe during this period.⁴⁰ Excepting a single find coin of the lion type of William of Gloucester discovered in 2000 the lion coinage is known only from this hoard.⁴¹ Robert's coins were struck in the west of England at Bristol and Salisbury and also at the new, more fortified and strategically located mints of Castle Combe, Marlborough and Trowbridge. His coins also appear to directly follow on from those of Matilda, since coins of both persons were struck at Bristol, yet none feature in the Coed-y-Wennalt hoard. Archibald argued that Robert of Gloucester's coins were issued after his return to England from Normandy in 1142, when he assumed leadership of the Angevin cause in England, and that there is unlikely to have been an introduction of continental coinage practice, in which the ruler (Matilda) granted coin striking powers to subordinates.⁴² Crouch has also suggested that Matilda lost control of minting to Robert of Gloucester.⁴³ In 1143 the *Gesta Stephani* describes 'the earl [Robert] and his supporters' in relation to Angevin affairs without referring to Matilda, and the English coinage system would have been known to Robert.⁴⁴ After becoming the dominant leader in the West Country following Matilda's failure to seize the initiative in 1141, he may have taken control of the whole Angevin administration.⁴⁵ The fact that Robert's coins were issued from strongholds as well as established mints may also point to the coinage having a military function in order to pay the soldiers that Robert was recruiting to carry the fight to Stephen in the mid-1140s.⁴⁶ The sophistication of the coinages of both Matilda and Robert of Gloucester may point towards a smooth and competent Angevin government operating in the west of England.

Coins struck by other figures associated with the Angevin cause may have been issued in the period after both Robert of Gloucester (who died in October 1147) and Matilda (who left England for Normandy in February 1148) had left the scene with an uncertain legacy. Patrick of Salisbury, created earl of Wiltshire by Matilda between 1141 and 1147, struck his own coins which featured a bust of a knight holding a sword on the obverse. Norman and Angevin aristocratic seals usually featured the knight on horseback in imitation of the reverse of William the Conqueror's seal. By the mid-twelfth century the knight in such images also held a sword, which had been a status symbol of counts, earls and dukes in north-western Europe since the tenth century.⁴⁷ One of Patrick's coins has been found in the Winterslow hoard, deposited around 1150, and it may be suggested that he remained an Angevin supporter after Matilda's departure and was waiting for Henry of Anjou to make good his claim to the throne. This reason could also explain the lion issues of earl William of Gloucester (after his father's

³⁷ Blackburn 1994, 176.

³⁸ Archibald 2001.

³⁹ King 2010, 212.

⁴⁰ Pastoureau 1985.

⁴¹ EMC 2000.0057.

⁴² Archibald 2001, 79, 83–4.

⁴³ Crouch 2000, 331.

⁴⁴ Potter 1976, 148–9.

⁴⁵ King 2010, 210.

⁴⁶ Archibald 2001, 79.

⁴⁷ Bartlett 2000, 245–9; Crouch 1992, 190–8.

death) and the coin which has been tentatively attributed to Brien fitzCount, lord of Wallingford, who was, according to the *Gesta Stephani*, Matilda's 'inseparable companion'.⁴⁸

Henry of Anjou and William of Gloucester probably issued further types towards the end of Stephen's reign which share a similar design, that of William I's 'Two Star' type.⁴⁹ Other unofficial types in the name of Henry of Anjou, which include one boasting Henry as 'REX FUTURUS' may have been struck by Henry in England or by other Angevin loyalists.⁵⁰ It is possible that the main Angevin issues ran in a sequence from Matilda to Robert of Gloucester to Henry of Anjou as the figureheads for their cause. More probable, however, is the striking of coins at specific moments in time for political and practical purposes by whoever was in charge of their region or locality.

*York types*⁵¹

There has been debate whether William of Aumale, earl of York from 1138, supported Stephen for the duration of his reign or whether he became more independent and motivated by self-interest with time. William had fought for Stephen against the Scots at the Battle of the Standard in 1138 and came to fill the administrative vacuum in Yorkshire with the powers provided by Stephen in that year. Nevertheless, the earl also used his position to acquire more territory and influence, and frequently came into conflict with other lords.⁵²

York moneyers struck Stephen's type 1 yet did not strike types 2 or 6. What we see instead is a large variety of unofficial types, many with a decorative lettering style that resembles contemporary Flemish coins.⁵³ In 2005 a coin in this group in the name of William of Aumale himself came to light at auction, with the obverse showing an armoured knight on horseback wielding a sword, which supports the position that the earl of York was steadily asserting his own interests and independence.⁵⁴ A second specimen of this type has since been discovered.⁵⁵ As none of the York series, including those discussed below, are found in any of the hoards of the early to mid-1140s, Blackburn argued that these coins began life no earlier than *c.* 1145.⁵⁶

There are other coin types issued in the names of various leading men of Yorkshire.⁵⁷ This may point towards William of Aumale issuing coins on behalf of his close associates. Robert III de Stuteville had a type imitating Stephen's type 1 but in his own name, and a further type with an image of an armed knight on horseback, like the earl of York. Eustace fitzJohn, constable of Chester, also had coinages in his own name, one with an image of a prancing lion and the other featuring a standing, armed figure brandishing a sword.⁵⁸ Both men have been linked to William of Aumale during different phases of the civil war, and the earl may have rewarded their loyalty by granting them their own coinages.⁵⁹ There is also an issue in the name of Henry Murdac, archbishop of York, which was probably struck under William of Aumale's authority in 1149–50 once the former had gained the earl's support after the recent archiepiscopal contest.⁶⁰ The various issues from York may at best represent the assumption of regional power forced upon William by the protracted conflict and physical distance from Stephen's practical authority, or, more probably, the symbol of an ambitious lord who had taken advantage of the situation to enhance his own power and that of his associates. In *c.* 1198 William of Newburgh, writing from York, commented on the civil war of Stephen's reign that there

⁴⁸ Potter 1976, 89; Blackburn 1994, 189.

⁴⁹ Archibald 2001, 78–9, 83.

⁵⁰ Allen 2012a, 34.

⁵¹ The local coinage of York and its chronology is the subject of a recent article, see Allen 2016b.

⁵² Dalton 1990; Dalton 1994, 144–95, esp. pp. 151–2 and 177–8.

⁵³ Blackburn 1994, 182–7. Some of these coins copied the obverse of Stephen's type 1 but also displayed the name WISEGNETA (or variants of this inscription) on the reverse. This has been plausibly linked to a moneyer called Wiz or Wizso of Ghent, which would strengthen the link to Flanders, Allen 2016b, 284–5.

⁵⁴ Blackburn 2005, 66.

⁵⁵ EMC 2011.0025.

⁵⁶ Blackburn 1994, 183.

⁵⁷ See also n. 32.

⁵⁸ Dalton 1990, 163; Dalton 1994, 161; Blackburn 1994, 182–7.

⁵⁹ Allen 2016b, 291, 295, 297–8.

⁶⁰ Allen 2016b, 290–1.

were many 'tyrants' who each minted their own coinage, and the numismatic evidence from Yorkshire certainly bears witness to a plethora of issues.⁶¹

Scottish types

King David I of Scotland and his son Prince Henry minted coins in the north of England both before and during the civil war in a period linked to the beginning of Scottish coinage. David invaded England in late 1135 in support of his niece, Matilda, and captured Carlisle. He crossed into England twice in 1138, and despite his defeat at the Battle of the Standard Stephen ceded Northumberland, of which Prince Henry was made an English earl, and Cumbria to the Scots in 1139.⁶² A further reason for Scottish ambitions in northern England was to secure the newly discovered silver mines of the region.⁶³ The Scottish types were the only ones not struck by Stephen to have kept the 21.5–22 grain weight standard of the English royal types, and this was *probably* due to the possession of these mines. David struck his own coins in Scotland at Edinburgh and Roxburgh, and in the 1140s in England at Carlisle and Newcastle. Prince Henry struck coins in his name at Corbridge, and in the mid or late 1140s at Bamburgh. Carlisle also struck coins for Henry.⁶⁴ These issues were clearly not the result of minting rights granted by Stephen to the Scots. They were issues of a developing Scottish monarchy, taking advantage of the crisis in England and of the valuable mines in Cumberland, Northumberland and Durham.

The economy and the question of violence

It is often argued that single coin finds best represent casual losses of coin in circulation.⁶⁵ This is because it is considered easier to lose a single coin than it is to lose a group of coins. It is possible that single coin finds may have represented single-coin hoards, and it is probable that some single finds have been disturbed from their original date and place of loss. Nevertheless, taken as a whole the single-find corpus best approximates to casual coin loss. This is important because it allows for analysis of patterns of the money economy during Stephen's reign and any effects that the civil war may have had upon them. Although one must always be wary of treating the single-find evidence at face value, this corpus has allowed scholars to ask new questions of previously intractable issues.⁶⁶

Kelleher's research into the geographical distribution of the single finds of the various coinages of the reign has yielded some intriguing patterns.⁶⁷ The single find distribution for Stephen's type 1 is national and broad, although biased towards the south and east of England, which is a typical spread that one finds from the late tenth century onwards.⁶⁸ The single-find distribution of the early irregular types in the name of Stephen is also broad. The Prestwich hoard of c.1144 from Lancashire contains many different coin types including Stephen's type

⁶¹ Howlett 1884–9, I, 69.

⁶² Bartlett 2000, 79.

⁶³ The output of these mines has been subject to much recent debate. Claughton has claimed that the mines became the principal source of silver for the English coinage in the later twelfth century, and Blanchard has argued that from c.1125 to 1198 these mines dominated European silver production. Allen has criticised both propositions and the accompanying sets of estimates for the amount of silver mined, citing unsustainable assumptions (by the former, that mining farms were related to the profits that the king enjoyed from a tenth of the produce of the mines, and by the latter, that mining revenues can be equated with minting charges). Allen further argues that Blanchard's high mining-output estimates do not correspond to the relatively low currency-circulation estimates during the second half of the twelfth century, and that the low numbers of dies used to strike coin in the north of England during the same period do not suggest that these mines supplied the majority of silver for the English coinage. This author agrees with Allen's stance. In addition, a large increase in the amount of silver in circulation from the 1120s would probably have led to inflation, yet prices appear to have remained fairly stable until the end of the twelfth century. See Claughton 2003a; Claughton 2003b, 41, 85, 93–103, 105, 108–9, 120–1, 258–9; Blanchard 1996, 29–30 and 39; Blanchard 2001, 599–610, 687, 692, 700, 709, 737, 910; Allen 2012a, 246–50. For prices, see Fairbairn 2014, 49–87.

⁶⁴ Blackburn 1994, 191–3; Mattinson and Cherry 2013.

⁶⁵ For example, Metcalf 1998, 16; Moesgaard 2006, 418.

⁶⁶ Bevan 2012; Robbins 2013.

⁶⁷ Kelleher 2013, 392–7.

⁶⁸ Metcalf 1998, 15; Fairbairn 2014, 291.

1, several irregular variants of type 1, specimens from Scotland and coins struck by Matilda.⁶⁹ This may suggest that until the mid-1140s different issues of coins still circulated and were used across England.

The find spots of Stephen's official types 2 and 6 are almost entirely limited to East Anglia and Kent, reflecting the contraction in minting area of the two issues and the observations of Green and Yoshitake that Stephen's financial administration became confined to the south and east of England during the 1140s.⁷⁰ Angevin single finds are overwhelmingly concentrated in the west of England (which mirrors the find spots of the major hoards containing Angevin coins – Coed-y-Wennalt in Glamorgan and Box in Wiltshire).⁷¹ The independent Midland issues circulated just outside the area of Stephen's control in central and south-central England. The York single finds are concentrated in the north of England, although a few coins left the region southbound since one appears in the Winterslow hoard from Wiltshire.⁷² Scottish single finds in the name of Stephen, David and Prince Henry are distributed across the north, east and south east of England.

The single finds, together with the hoard evidence, demonstrate that the civil war had a profound impact on the English economy, but how should these finds be interpreted? One possibility is that it had become too dangerous to travel beyond local and regional boundaries because of the constant raiding and fighting. This 'violence' theory would correspond with chronicle accounts of the period and with those scholars who have argued that the chroniclers should be believed, not scorned, for exaggeration. The recent article by Thomas, mapping the sheer quantity of violent events that occurred during Stephen's reign in comparison to the reigns of Henry I and Henry II, fits this theory well. He also draws attention to the higher number of coin hoards per year of Stephen's reign compared to the reigns of the aforementioned kings – spikes in such data are often a sign of war and disorder.⁷³

A second possible interpretation of the single-find patterns is that there was a policy of coinage control operating within respective zones of jurisdiction. As previously stated, the late Anglo-Saxon kings enshrined in law that only one coinage should circulate throughout England, and they were followed in this policy by their Norman successors. Since the techniques to implement this policy would have been widely known across the kingdom, it is possible that the Angevins and other barons took advantage of this knowledge to cull any 'foreign' coins entering their zones of jurisdiction, and may have done so for two principal reasons. Firstly, the legitimacy that coinage bestows upon the issuing ruler is powerful; coins issued by outside authorities that circulated in one's zone of jurisdiction may have provided a direct challenge to one's authority.⁷⁴ Secondly, the culling of Stephen's coins for their silver by other minting authorities may have been a widespread practice.

Few studies have been undertaken to assess the fineness of coins during Stephen's reign, but an analysis of coins from western mints and the Coed-y-Wennalt hoard show that Matilda's coins had a silver fineness of 89–97%, which matched the traditional royal standard of over 90%.⁷⁵ More is known about weight standards. With the exception of some coins towards the end of type 1 which display lower weight standards of between 13 and 21 grains, Stephen's average weight standard for types 1, 2 and 6 was 21.5–22.0 grains. The other minting authorities almost always produced coins of lower weight (except the Scots who were in control of the silver mines in the Pennines). For example, two Angevin weight standards at Cardiff of *c.*13 and *c.*14 grains have been identified, Midland coinages usually fall between 15.0 and 19.0

⁶⁹ *Coin Hoards* 1, 1975, no. 360.

⁷⁰ Green 1991, 110; Yoshitake 1988, 958.

⁷¹ Boon 1986, 73–7; Archibald 2001, 83.

⁷² Thompson 1956, no. 378. Allen 2016b, 299–300, analyses the locations of 41 single finds of York coins in EMC. The York coins in this sample include the Wisegnetta and Flag types, and those struck by William of Aumale, Eustace FitzJohn, and Archbishop Murdac.

⁷³ Thomas 2008, 159–70.

⁷⁴ Blackburn 1994, 162.

⁷⁵ Archibald 2001, 83; Blackburn 1994, 173.

grains, and the York issues tend to fit into a range between 18.0 and 19.5 grains.⁷⁶ Stephen was almost certainly able to maintain the weight of his coins due to his control of south-eastern England, which was where the ports receiving most foreign silver of the period were located.⁷⁷ The relative lack of access to imported silver by minting authorities outside south-eastern England may have turned Stephen's coins into a source of silver in south-western, midland and northern England. That same lack of silver may have provided these minting authorities with an opportunity to maximise the amount of silver derived from this source: for example, two pennies of Stephen's type 1 could have been converted into three of Matilda's lighter issues.

The 'violence' and 'coinage control' theories for the localisation of currencies in circulation after the mid 1140s are not mutually exclusive. There may have been a fear to travel over long distances due to the political uncertainty and the persistence of armed conflict, and this would have limited the movement of coins across England. However, if competent governments and lordships continued to function administratively across the country then control of the coinage in those areas may have developed as the civil war endured. Taxation may have been one medium to achieve this control. For example, according to the *Gesta Stephani* Robert of Gloucester levied scutage in Angevin-controlled England and this may have provided him with the opportunity to draw in any non-Angevin coin types, however large or small in volume, to be re-struck into his own issues.⁷⁸

A third possibility relates to the acceptability of coins with different iconographies, especially non-royal designs, to the general population. If a peasant in the midlands were attempting to sell a pig at his local market and was offered eight pennies with either a lion design or an image of an armed figure, then he may have been faced with a dilemma. Would these coins be treated as legal tender in future transactions, especially in more distant markets, considering that standard royal images, such as busts, profiles and enthroned monarchs, had featured on all English coins for the past century? If the answer was no, and the peasant refused the transaction, then the fear of unusual and potentially invalid coins may also account for the reduced areas of circulation of these types.

The use of royal images on coins struck by other issuing authorities, such as the Scots, Matilda and those midland barons striking coins in Stephen's name, may explain the national circulation of these types until the mid 1140s. However, this does not explain why Stephen's types 2 and 6 were restricted to the east and south east of England during the second half of his reign, nor why Prince Henry's cross fleury reverse types of the mid to late 1140s (albeit a small sample) were limited to the far north of the country, since all three issues bear royal images of crowned heads.⁷⁹ It is possible that these types were culled for their silver, but this would lend weight to the theory of coinage control within the different zones of jurisdiction. The confinement of Stephen's types 2 and 6 to the east and south east of England after the mid-1140s speaks against the notion that coins with royal images were always accepted, either by the population or by the authorities in control of the coinage.

Conclusion

While Stephen issued official types throughout his reign, the middle years saw a vast reduction of his minting area. The Angevins had clearly usurped the king's minting prerogative in the west in an attempt to legitimise their authority. In the midlands and the north various issues were struck in reaction to the competing claimants to the throne and because it seems that communications between Stephen and the midlands had been weakened. Some barons even seem to have enjoyed this confusion. As the civil war continued into the later 1140s and early 1150s the hoards and single finds become more confined to the areas where the coins were

⁷⁶ Blackburn 1994, 169–73. Allen's recent study has shown that the York coins were probably issued at between 1.1 and 1.2 grams (17 and 18.5 grains), thus still lower than the royal weight standard, Allen 2016b, 300–1.

⁷⁷ For the source of England's silver as foreign bullion see Allen 2011.

⁷⁸ Archibald 2001, 83; Potter 1976, 150–1.

⁷⁹ EMC 2010.0082, 2010.0238, 2011.0014, 2011.0165; Blackburn 1994, 193.

struck. This may suggest that either the violence in England prevented people from travelling beyond their own localities or that coins were being culled for their silver and for political reasons. This localised pattern may even represent a combination of both positions, and if some people were resistant to using coins with non-royal iconography this would have exacerbated the situation further.

Coins were a regular part of daily life in the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods for practically everyone in society, high and low, from the payments of taxes, rents, dues and fines to regular commercial transactions, such as for land and on items of conspicuous consumption.⁸⁰ The ubiquity of coins therefore made controlling their supply and the images upon them either a key propaganda tool or a way of maintaining order in local economies. All issuing authorities seemed to be aware of the multi-faceted potency of coinage control.

Metal detecting continues to increase the corpus of numismatic material in terms of both volume and diversity. Without it, the lion coinage of the Gloucester earls or single finds such as the coin in the name of 'Roger de' would never have come to light. It forces us to continually reassess our ideas about the civil war, and it also increasingly supports the chroniclers who bemoaned the conditions of the period, despite historians' tendency to minimise such apparently dramatic statements.

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⁸⁰ Fairbairn 2014, esp. pp. 343–51.

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