

THE KING'S LYNN FIND, *T.P.Q.* c.720

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THE quality of the evidence as regards provenance vouchsafed by detectorists has not always been what one could have wished for. In 1991, a man walked into a well-known London firm of coin dealers (Spink & Son Ltd) and, laying twenty-one *sceattas* on the counter, said that he had come a long way to bring these coins to them. More information than that he did not offer. All but one of the coins fell within a date range ending a little later than the Aston Rowant hoard, while the twenty-first coin was very late, being of the East Anglian Type R11 (*Tilbeorht*), and was probably a separate stray find. The twenty coins (listed below and illustrated on **Pl. 2**) are probably a small hoard, of the kind sometimes described as a purse hoard, but it is not impossible that they constituted a grave-find, as there are other grave-finds numbering twenty coins.¹ All but one or possibly two of the King's Lynn coins are of primary-phase date, and all but one of the twenty had traces of the same soil adhering. The exception had been severely over-cleaned, leaving it bright and almost polished. The London dealers kindly allowed me to take impressions and to weigh the coins.

A note was published in a magazine read by detectorists, in the hope of eliciting more information. A response was quickly forthcoming from a man who claimed to have found the coins near Thetford. This response provoked a rejoinder from another party, who was dismissive of the claim, on the basis of his knowledge of the claimant and of what he knew about how the coins had changed hands.² I was given to understand that the coins were found in the vicinity of King's Lynn, but it must be admitted that this is perhaps not the highest grade of information. Since 1991 a variety of single finds have been published in the Coin Register from 'near King's Lynn', which helps to make the find locality of our find credible. The integrity of the group of coins, meanwhile, looks very secure. The find may be summarized as follows.

English coins		Continental coins	
<i>Primary phase</i>		<i>Primary phase</i>	
Series A	1	From Friesland:	
Series B	3	Type D, 8	1
Series C	5	Type D, 2c	2
Series F	1	From Dorestad/Domburg:	
Series R	1	Series E	3
Type Z, 66	1	<i>Secondary phase</i>	
<i>Primary/early secondary</i>		From Friesland?	
Type BZ	1	Series E	1
Total	13	Total	7

It is not demonstrable that the transition from the primary to the secondary phase happened at exactly the same moment in England and on the Continent. There could have been a discrepancy of a year or two. All thirteen English coins from King's Lynn could, therefore, belong to the (English) primary phase in spite of the association of one early secondary continental coin type.

So much for the relative chronology. As regards the historical date of transition in England (which was a sea-change, involving several completely novel designs), it has traditionally been determined by extrapolation from the date of the Cimiez hoard, found in the outskirts of Nice. Grierson and Blackburn argued that Cimiez was lost in c.715–20.³ As the hoard contained some secondary-phase English types (and not the earliest), it was necessary to push the beginning of the English secondary phase back to c.710, and the date of the Aston Rowant

¹ The Milton Regis and (?)Southend grave-finds, Rigold 1960–1, Finds II and VI. It is more usual, however, for grave-finds to contain eight coins.

² I made a note of what was said, while memory of the conversation was fresh.

³ Grierson and Blackburn 1986, 185.

hoard somewhat before that. Lafaurie flatly disagreed with their dating of Cimiez, describing it bluntly as false. His arguments were unanswerable: the hoard contained a series of historically dateable deniers of various bishops of Paris.⁴ Lafaurie proposed 741. We may hesitate over the exact date, but it can be no earlier than *c.*735–40. There is therefore no need for the deposit of the Aston Rowant hoard, late in the English primary phase, to be much earlier than *c.*720.

Closer to home, the transition in Friesland and the northern Netherlands, from Series D to Series E, can be interpreted as following, probably quite swiftly, on the death of King Radbod in 719, when those regions fell under Frankish control. The so-called ‘porcupine’ design of Series E had for a long time been in use in the Big Rivers region of the southern Netherlands, and its extension northwards was evidently a political gesture.⁵

That may be as close as we can get to the date of deposit of the King’s Lynn find. It is one of a growing group of late-primary hoards from England, of which Aston Rowant is much the largest. The next is the Aldborough hoard, from seven or eight miles south-east of Holt, Norfolk, which came to light from 2010, and which now comprises seventy *sceattas*. Next, there is the Loddon hoard (previously referred to as the Alington hoard), from about ten miles south-east of Norwich, comprising thirty-eight *sceattas* found between 2011 and 2013. These three hoards, and also the King’s Lynn find, are close to each other in date of deposit, and are all either primary or very early (English) secondary phase: in any case, from *c.*715–20. The same dating applies to the little Lambeth hoard, from the mud of the Thames foreshore, which included, among four coins, a secondary-phase specimen stylistically quite similar to that from King’s Lynn, again on the diamond-shaped alignment.⁶ Another, with the same alignment, occurred in the tiny Fingringhoe hoard, where the three coins were stuck together when found, thus guaranteeing their association.⁷

This is not the occasion to attempt a full assessment of the Aldborough hoard, but one or two comments may help to create perspective for the King’s Lynn find. The thirteen primary-phase porcupines at Aldborough are all of Variety G. That is most unusual, and it is perplexing, as is the extent of die-duplication among the English coins. Everywhere else in England the single finds show a mixture of the four distinct varieties of primary porcupine.⁸ Their relative proportions are essentially similar in the twelve regions of England for which they have been mapped, Suffolk being a partial exception.⁹

There is a huge disparity in the numbers of single finds of primary-phase porcupines between England and the Netherlands: more than 360 in England, but only 17 in the Netherlands, other than at Domburg, where there are 59, among the thousand finds from the site. Before we rush to any ill-considered conclusions, such as that the primary porcupines were, after all, minted in England (and Variety G specifically in East Anglia), we should consider all the implications of their regional circulation in England, and the resumption of their designs in the tertiary phase on the Continent. Only one broad answer survives that scrutiny: it is a major perspective that the primary-phase porcupines were, like Series D Type 8 from Friesland, first and foremost an export coinage.

But how did Aldborough come to contain only Variety G? Were the four varieties struck at different places in the Big Rivers region? Had the Aldborough coins been carried direct from e.g. Dorestad? – but they are not all of one date (G1, 6 specimens, G2, 1 sp., G3, 6 sp.); and the hoard is of late primary date. These coins may have entered Suffolk via Coddham. As mentioned above, the relative proportion of single finds of Variety G in Suffolk is abnormally high (67 per cent, against a more typical 45 per cent or less),¹⁰ which implies ongoing inflows,

⁴ Lafaurie 1998, 68.

⁵ Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 279–84, section entitled ‘Attaching political significance to the porcupine design: the date of transition from Series D to E in Friesland’.

⁶ It is illustrated, alongside a drawing of the King’s Lynn coin, in Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 129.

⁷ Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 288 (ill.).

⁸ Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 191, Table 7.3.

⁹ Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 193, Fig. 7.5.

¹⁰ Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 191, Table 7.3b.

not just a one-off event. The four specimens of the VERNVS type in the Aldborough hoard are also a pointer towards Suffolk, rather than Norfolk, as the region where the hoard was assembled. As Dr Marsden has quite rightly pointed out, it 'could easily represent an assemblage of coin formed some miles from Norfolk'¹¹ – perhaps with a few extra coins added locally, for example, the Aldfrith, and the specimen of Type BZ.

If the presence of only Variety G is strange, the amount of die-linkage, mainly among the English coins, is even more problematic. It is seen in Series BI (4 specimens among 5, including copies), Series F (5 specimens among 8), and Series R1–2 (2 among 4), in other words, among coins from various mint-places. No explanation comes to mind.

We now turn back to the King's Lynn find, to look at one or two of the coins in more detail. Nineteen of the twenty are from the primary phase (which ended in *c.*720) or in the case of one of them, from very early in the secondary phase (Type BZ, catalogue no. 13). This and also Type Z/66 (cat. no. 12) are very scarce, and their absence even in the large hoard of Aston Rowant does not prove that they are not of late primary date. Type Z/66 has been analysed, and found to be of an alloy of the very highest quality, for example, 95 per cent 'silver',¹² which is a good reason for regarding it as a primary-phase type. (The related type, with a stick-like animal, was however present in the Aston Rowant hoard: its alloy is distinctly less good, and its relationship, if any, to Type Z/66 is conjectural). Type BZ is not represented in Aston Rowant, but as it is a very scarce type, struck from only four pairs of dies, that does not amount to proof that it is not of primary-phase date. There are other types which are absent from the hoard and which are certainly primary. The design of BZ, which is derivative from Series B, is so clumsy and defective that it must surely be the work of some local die-cutter. That makes it additionally difficult to judge, or to guess, whether it is of primary or very early secondary date. The type has been mapped,¹³ but it has not been chemically analysed, which might help to show whether it was of primary or early secondary date.

Since 1991, two more single finds of Type Z/66 have been published as having been found near King's Lynn.¹⁴ There are a few others from various locations in Norfolk. Given the general scarcity of the type, perhaps one should contemplate the possibility that King's Lynn was their mint-place. They will in any case have been produced somewhere on the eastern edges of the fenlands or in western Norfolk.¹⁵ And the presence of even one specimen in the King's Lynn find gives that find something of a local character.

The secondary porcupine (cat. no. 20) is full of interest. It uses the diamond-shaped alignment of the standard on the reverse, as seen in the Friesland sub-varieties e and g. Arguably these post-date the death of King Radbod in 719.¹⁶ The King's Lynn coin, which is very neatly engraved and struck, clearly has half-circle rather than L-shaped elements to left and right. The marginal ornaments on the reverse are completely irregular. And the obverse 'porcupine', which is not outlined with pellets, but with three short strokes within the curve, is inappropriate to varieties e or g. The nearest parallel that has been found is a coin in the small Lambeth hoard. Is the King's Lynn coin a very early member of the Friesland mint-output, of a variety which has had a low survival rate, or is it a copy? Because of the neat quality of the dies, the former option seems preferable. On the other hand, the weight (1.01 g) is relatively low. Either way, a date after the introduction of the diamond-shaped alignment (arguably after 719) is required, and as such the coin provides a firm *t.p.q.* for the King's Lynn find, while the specimen of Type BZ cannot be narrowly dated.

With only twenty coins in all, the composition and age-structure of the King's Lynn find cannot be judged exactly. The margins of statistical uncertainty are too great. Taking it at face value, and compared with hoards and site finds from Norfolk, it contains a residue of older coins. Types Z/66 and BZ, two among twenty, are certainly more than expected.

¹¹ Marsden 2012, 251.

¹² Metcalf 1993–4, 662–3, nos 140 (95.0% 'silver') and 141 (95.7% 'silver').

¹³ Metcalf 1993–4, 135.

¹⁴ Coin Register 2005, 98 and 2010, 99.

¹⁵ Cf. the remarks on the mint-place of the Saroaldo type (Rudham?), in Metcalf 2016, 107–8.

¹⁶ Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, 279–84.

CATALOGUE

1. Series A. Unusually, the crosslet attached to the base of the standard is large and there is an annulet immediately to the left of it. The style of the obverse is very similar to Ashmolean 95. The lips are aligned vertically. The same large crosslet and annulet are seen on an early specimen of Series C (no. 5 below). This raises wide-ranging questions about the relationship of Series A and C. The weight is good: 1.17 g.
2. Series B. Type BIA, 4. (?)iii. 1.20 g.
3. Series B. Type BIG, 3. *Rev.* Bird laterally reversed, and with groups of 3 pellets to left and right of the cross. 1.00 g.
4. Series B. Cf. BII, 3 (no crosslet in field). 1.18 g.
5. Series C. Type C1, with large head and no neck. *Obv.* Annulet beside chin. *Rev.* Annulet in margin to left of lower cross (Cf. no. 1 above). Close to Rigold 1960–1, Hoard VI, 4. 1.23 g.
6. Series C. Type C1 inverted. 1.15 g.
7. Series C. Type C1 inverted. Similar to no. 6. 1.15 g.
8. Series C. Type C2. 1.15 g.
9. Series A/C. Coarse imitation. 1.23 g.
10. Series F. Same dies as *SCBI British Museum* 155, ex Aston Rowant, and also as the South Lincolnshire productive site, no. 54. 1.19 g.
11. Series R. Type R1–2, variety 1. Corpus 2c. Metcalf 2007. 1.17 g.
12. Type Z, 66. 0.98 g.
13. Type BZ. Same dies as Oxford 138. 1.25 g.
14. Series D, Type 8. Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, Cat. no. 89. 1.19 g.
15. Series D, Type 2c, var. 3a. ‘KhK’ runes. Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, cat. no. 611. 1.11 g.
16. Series D, Type 2c, var. 3d. Op den Velde and Metcalf 2003, cat. no. 743. 1.21 g.
17. Series E, VICO variety 2. Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, cat. no. 0264. 1.38 g.
18. Series E, VICO variety 3. Metcalf and Op den Velde 2009–10, cat. no. 0290. 1.20 g.
19. Series E, Variety G3. 1.19 g.
20. Series E, secondary phase. See text above. 1.01 g.

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PLATE 2



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