

## KING CNUT'S LAST COINAGE?

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On 12 November 1035, Cnut the Great died, leaving uncertain in England the matter of the royal succession, for the king had not named a successor (O'Brien 159). Two of his sons, by different women, were preoccupied in Scandinavia: Swein, Cnut's eldest son from his earlier union with Ælfgifu of Northampton, had recently been deposed as regent or king of Norway and had fled to seek the support of his half-brother Harthacnut, Cnut's son by Queen Emma (also called Ælfgifu by the English), who was reigning in Denmark. These two sons, on good terms with each other, then apparently agreed to a geographical division of England, the southern section going to Harthacnut, the northern section to Swein. Because neither of them could leave Denmark at this time, the decision was made that Cnut's middle son Harold Harefoot, full-brother to Swein and half-brother to Harthacnut, should oversee the affairs of England in their absence (Howard 51-52). This plan, however, met with the objection of Queen Emma, who, distrusting Harold and his mother, was watching out for the interests of her son Harthacnut, and did not wish to lose her own position of power. She had even anticipated such a dreaded development when agreeing to marry Cnut in 1017; mindful of the children of the other Ælfgifu and Cnut, Emma had made it a condition of her acceptance of the marriage that no other son but her own (by Cnut) should succeed to the throne: "But she refused ever to become the bride of Knútr, unless he would affirm to her by oath, that he would never set up the son of any wife other than herself to rule after him, if it happened that God should give her a son by him. For she had information that the king had had sons by some other woman; so she, wisely providing for her offspring, knew in her wisdom how to make arrangements in advance, which were to be to their advantage. Accordingly the king found what the lady said acceptable . . ." (*Encomium Emmae* 33). As Alistair Campbell explains, this would have been a good bargain for both of them, excluding from the succession not only Cnut's sons by his former wife but also Emma's sons by her former husband, King Æthelred II (*Encomium Emmae* xlv). Cnut's assent to this condition thus gave precedence to Harthacnut as his heir, yet the threat lingered for Emma, as Cnut did not entirely cut ties to his earlier family (Howard 15-17).

Now, upon the king's death, the rivalry intensified between his two widows in a struggle for control. Ælfgifu of Northampton had the advantage because of her son Harold's presence in England; Emma urgently requested that Harthacnut return to claim his inheritance, yet he remained in Denmark, where he probably felt more at home, having lived there for several years. Regarding a return to England, Harriet O'Brien comments, "Harthacnut may well have had little inclination to rush to [Emma's] support, even if this was of potential benefit to his own position. Once in England he would effectively have been a foreigner, largely reliant on his estranged mother and in particular on her skills as a tactician and negotiator. It would have been a situation that required total trust and that may as a result have had little appeal" (171).

Shortly after Cnut's death, an emergency meeting of the *witan* (the national council) was held at Oxford to address the matter of the governance of England, as recorded in Manuscript E of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, translated here by Michael Swanton:

And soon after his passing, there was a meeting of all the councillors at Oxford, and Earl Leofric and almost all the thegns north of the Thames, and the men of the fleet in London, chose Harold as regent of all England, for himself and his brother Harthacnut who was in Denmark. And Earl Godwine and all the foremost men in Wessex opposed it just as long as they could, but they could not contrive anything against it. And then it was decided that Ælfgifu, Harthacnut's mother, should settle in Winchester with the king her son's housecarls, and hold all Wessex in hand for him; and Earl Godwine was their most loyal man. (159, 161)

A compromise was evidently reached, whereby England would indeed be divided into separately governed regions, as Simon Keynes explains: "The outcome of the deliberations at Oxford was apparently a form of shared rule, with King Harold Harefoot and Earl Leofric firmly established north of the Thames, and with Queen Ælfgifu [Emma] (for the absentee Harthacnut) and Earl Godwine established south of the Thames" (*Encomium Emmae* [xxx]). It is also worthy of note that there is no mention of Swein in the *Chronicle* entry regarding the Oxford assembly; so, as some scholars suggest, that brother may well have died by this time (Lawson 108; O'Brien xx), although Ian Howard and

Alexander Rumble have him living into the early part of 1036 (Howard 53; Rumble 5). Thus Harold would soon enough be laying claim to the land in his control—his inheritance from his brother Swein, as he would see it—and would next be setting his sights on all of England. Testifying to the rivalry and political uncertainty surrounding the king's death, moreover, is the contemporary coinage. As O'Brien remarks, "Surviving pennies produced at this time offer evidence of the division of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. They also reflect the general confusion" (170). From that confusion we must now attempt to find order through an examination of coin types, varieties, and their sequence, and try to determine the most likely type actually being struck during King Cnut's final days.

During the reign of Cnut and into the subsequent reigns of his sons Harold and Harthacnut, five different coin types were produced in England bearing the name "Cnut": Quatrefoil, Pointed Helmet, Short Cross, Jewel Cross, and Arm and Scepter (North nos. 781, 787, 790, 797, and 799, respectively). The first three types all were produced in order during Cnut's lifetime, but the order and nature of issuance of the last two types remain a matter of conjecture. In the 1950s Michael Dolley directed his attention to these coin types and their sequence. Initially, assuming that Cnut's Quatrefoil type was first struck in 1016 and allowing six years per coin-type issued during Cnut's reign, Dolley believed that the Arm-and-Scepter type bearing Cnut's name was his last issue, begun in 1034 but interrupted by his death in November 1035. The Jewel-Cross type then followed posthumously, he supposed, while other coins of this type were struck also in the names of Harthacnut and Harold. Dolley regarded the striking of the Jewel-Cross "Cnut" pennies as an attempt "partly perhaps to emphasize continuity and partly to disarm objections to those [other coins] with the name of the uncrowned and absentee Harthacnut" ("The 'Jewel-Cross' Coinage" 274). However, he soon found himself needing to revise his ideas about both the Jewel-Cross and Arm-and-Scepter coinages in Cnut's name. First, he found plausible Peter Seaby's suggestion "that the 'arm-and-sceptre' coins of Cnut likewise [were] a posthumous issue and contemporary with those that bear the name of Harthacnut [datable to 1040-42]" and proceeded to readjust his dating of the coin types so that the Jewel-Cross issue now followed Cnut's Short-Cross issue, solving, among other things, the previous puzzlement presented by the existence of a couple of Short-Cross/Jewel-Cross mules—i.e., pennies struck from obverse and

reverse dies for different coin types (Dolley, “The ‘Jewel-Cross’ Coinage” 275, Postscript; Seaby 112-13). Then, as Ian Stewart explains, Dolley reworked his chronology in 1958 so that the Quatrefoil type would begin in 1017, the Pointed Helmet in 1023, the Short Cross in 1029, and the Jewel Cross in 1035 (Stewart 460; cf. van der Meer 186). The striking of Jewel-Cross pennies would thus agree perfectly with Dolley’s theory of sexennial issues of coin types during this period, yet he could not rid himself of the notion that the Jewel-Cross issue was a posthumous one, for, as theorized, coins of a current design would be demonetized after six years and would need to be exchanged for those of a new design during a period of grace which likely occurred between Michaelmas (29 September) and Martinmas (11 November) (Dolley and Metcalf 152-54; Metcalf 50, 94-99); yet the proximity of Michaelmas to Cnut’s death in 1035 was troublesome for Dolley, who already had been proven wrong about his attribution and dating of the Arm-and-Scepter “Cnut” coins. In his mind, it seems, these two coin issues were linked to each other, and to Harthacnut. So, in 1968, Dolley reconsidered his dating yet again, pointing out “how ill a Michaelmas type-change in 1035 introducing *Jewel Cross* accords with Cnut’s death in the November of that year,” deciding therefore to “resolve difficulties that he himself [had] long appreciated by bringing down the inception of *Quatrefoil*, *Pointed Helmet* and *Short Cross* to 1018, 1024 and 1030 respectively, and by attributing to Harthacnut the *Jewel Cross* coins with the name of Cnut on the analogy of the *Arm-and-Sceptre* coins inscribed ‘Cnut’ which are certainly all of the son” (“A Further Die-Link” 117n5). Thereby, not only did Dolley push the Jewel-Cross penny out of the realm of possibility as a lifetime issue of Cnut, but he separated that type from that king entirely. However, I see no solid reason for such an exclusion. In fact, as Stewart explains, Dolley’s adjustment of his chronology of Cnut’s coin types specifically for this purpose actually causes problems at the *other* end of Cnut’s reign: “Dolley therefore revised his dating of Cnut’s types in the only way consistent with his sexennial scheme, by assuming that type 9 [Short Cross] was still in issue at Cnut’s death and so working back from 1036 instead of 1035. . . . But it meant delaying the introduction of type 7 [Quatrefoil] until 1018. Having gained full control of England in 1017, however, I cannot believe that Cnut would have waited for a further year before establishing his own coinage, either by keeping the mints closed or by allowing them to continue type 6 [Last Small Cross] in Æthelred’s name” (Stewart 479). Furthermore,

Dolley's assertion that a late September type-change does not accord well with Cnut's death in November is weak at best, for such an assumption implies a degree of foreknowledge of the event; additionally, as D. M. Metcalf admits, the suggested interval for the period of grace—i.e., from Michaelmas to Martinmas—is based “on the flimsiest of evidence” (50). It is possible, therefore, that the type-change occurred at another time during the year, when the king's health was not a concern.

In his 1986 analysis of the Jewel-Cross type, Tuukka Talvio found himself in agreement with Dolley's theory, commenting, “We know for certain that the *Arm-and-Sceptre* coins of ‘Cnut’ belong to Harthacnut's sole reign, and there seems to be no reason why he should not have used Cnut as a short form of his name earlier” (“Harold I and Harthacnut's” 275). Further, it has become the prevailing view that all of the Jewel-Cross pennies were struck after Cnut's death. Yet, more recently, in volume 40 of the *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* [SCBI] series, Talvio has suggested that “one could still in principle claim that [the Jewel-Cross coinage in Cnut's name] was his last coin type which was continued by his sons.” However, he goes on to say, “It is unlikely that such an issue, not known from any major mint apart from London, could have been initiated in Cnut's lifetime as a normal periodic type” (*Royal Coin Cabinet* 2-3). Also, whereas Dolley believed that the direction of the bust on the obverse of Jewel-Cross pennies had chronological significance—the right-facing bust of Harthacnut replacing his left-facing variety to distinguish his coins from Harold's, which are all left-facing—Talvio believes that it simply “depended on the die-cutter,” explaining further that “Harthacnut and Harold clearly had their own die-cutters, probably working in Winchester and London respectively.” At these two main facilities, sets of dies were fashioned to be supplied to the various mints in England for the striking of pennies during the joint rule of Cnut's sons. Workers at the London die-cutting center produced left-facing portraits for Harold, “Cnut,” and Harthacnut, Talvio theorizes, while those at the Winchester center produced right-facing portraits for Harthacnut (*Royal Coin Cabinet* 3; North nos. 802, 797, 808, and 809, respectively). Talvio does, however, divide the Jewel-Cross coins chronologically according to the diadem worn, the early style distinguished by two bands, “often with a row of pellets between them or coinciding with the upper band,” the late style distinguished by one band. Whereas coins of the early style were struck in all three names, all coins of the late

style bear the name of Harold and “can only belong to the time when Harold had consolidated his position as the sole ruler” (*Royal Coin Cabinet* 2).

I shall be arguing here, in support of Dolley’s assumption, that, within the early Jewel-Cross style, further distinction may indeed be made between earlier and later coins, based on the direction of the portrait, and that this development is evident in the coinage of Winchester. Furthermore, in response to Talvio’s assertions that die-cutting for the “Cnut” Jewel-Cross issue was limited to London and that no other major mint was striking that coin, I shall investigate possibilities for a wider production of coins for “Cnut.” By demonstrating that “Cnut” Jewel-Cross pennies were actually produced at Winchester, indeed a major mint city, and that these coins preceded Harthacnut’s right-facing-bust variety, I hope to open the way for reconsideration of the “Cnut” coinage, which, by Talvio’s own reasoning, now seems more likely to be an issue actually begun during Cnut’s reign. Whether or not Cnut’s coin-production at Winchester, beyond the striking of pennies, included the fashioning of dies as well, is debatable. Talvio attributes the “Cnut” dies to a workshop in London (‘National A’), which, while supplying northern mints with dies in the name of Harold, “also supplied dies with the name of Harthacnut or ‘Cnut’ [for coins with left-facing portraits] to a number of mints on or south of the Thames, including Winchester” (“Harold I and Harthacnut’s” 283), although elsewhere Talvio seems to imply that “Cnut” dies were not actually used for striking at the Winchester mint, as we have already observed. In any case, by the time of the designing and striking of Harthacnut’s distinctively different right-facing-bust variety at Winchester, moneyers would have had access to—and did in fact make use of—reverse dies from an *earlier* Jewel-Cross issue, namely, the coinage of Cnut.

Whatever we consider the “Cnut” issue to be—lifetime or posthumous (struck either for Cnut himself or for Harthacnut, named in abbreviated form)—Emma’s involvement in continuing or initiating the coinage can be understood. Her intention may have been multipurpose in nature: honoring her late husband, while retaining a degree of control herself as his queen and acting on behalf of her absent son as well, asserting Harthacnut’s claim to the throne with a name suggestive of his royal parentage—a suitable reminder that he, not Harold, was Cnut’s legitimate successor. Curiously, however, as Metcalf has observed, Emma’s presence in Winchester seems to have had little

effect on the output of the Jewel-Cross type there (145), where the “Cnut” issue appears to be conspicuously absent. Of all places, it would seem that the city of the queen’s residence should have been a center of production for such coins. So, we might wonder, were Jewel-Cross “Cnut” pennies in fact struck at Winchester, as would have been fitting? This question I can answer with a degree of certainty: Yes, they were. Evidence of this nearly lost production exists in the form of an unrecorded “Cnut” penny from Winchester (ex Conte Collection, Classical Numismatic Group Sale 60, lot 2250; ex Baldwin’s Auction 13, lot 1691) which was struck from the same reverse die of the moneyer Godwine as were at least two extant pennies of Harthacnut’s variety with a right-facing obverse bust (SCBI 20, no. 1118; and SCBI 40, no. 69; see the Fitzwilliam Museum’s *Early Medieval Corpus* for online images of all SCBI coins). Furthermore, it seems clear that the obverse and reverse dies of the “Cnut” penny were made to match and that this coin was struck earlier than the two “Harthacnut” coins: the front and back of the “Cnut” coin closely resemble each other stylistically, with similar lettering and identical triple-pellet ornamentation at the end of the respective legends. Talvio has observed that “the reverses of late Anglo-Saxon coin types often repeat details of the obverse” (“Harold I and Harthacnut’s” 278) and indeed such repetition is clearly evident here, especially in the design element neatly ending each legend on this coin—i.e., the trefoil stop, a decorative mark of punctuation consisting of three pellets arranged in a triangular fashion. The “Harthacnut” pennies, in contrast, lack this careful symmetry. The “Cnut” penny is a true Winchester coin. In fact, to illustrate the “Winchester style,” Talvio uses as an example one of the specimens struck from the same reverse die as the “Cnut” coin (“Harold I and Harthacnut’s” 279, fig. 14.1, coin no. 2 [SCBI 40, no. 69]). Furthermore, the weight of the “Cnut” penny (1.15g) is in keeping with the consistently high standard maintained at Winchester throughout the Jewel-Cross issue (averaging 1.11-1.12g), unlike the average weight of early-style Jewel-Cross coins produced at London, including the “Cnut” pennies struck there (1.08-1.09g) (Talvio, “Harold I and Harthacnut’s” 286).

As I have stated, although Jewel-Cross pennies with a left-facing portrait were struck in all three names, those with a right-facing portrait are unique to Harthacnut. Furthermore, there appears to be stylistic uniformity to the right-facing portraits, which has led Talvio to suppose a single workshop for die-production, regardless of the differing

locations for coin-striking: “The stylistical unity is such that there is no doubt about all or practically all the dies having been produced by one atelier, and it is even possible to attribute to this workshop two coins of variety L1 (with left-facing busts) of Winchester and Exeter which share the same obverse die. . . . [T]he most likely location for this workshop is Winchester” (“Harold I and Harthacnut’s” 278-79). That two left-facing Harthacnut coins (SCBI 40, nos. 80 and 90, struck at Exeter and Winchester respectively) are so stylistically similar to the right-facing coins is quite telling, especially if we consider again Dolley’s suggestion that the obverse dies for Harthacnut’s right-facing-bust variety were cut later so that his coins could be easily distinguished from Harold’s. These two coins may well represent a transitional stage in obverse-die production, between the former left-facing portraits of Harthacnut (contemporary with or succeeding the “Cnut” issue) and the newer right-facing portraits. In particular, the left-facing penny of Harthacnut from Winchester bears a certain similarity to the right-facing “Harthacnut” coins that share the same reverse with the “Cnut” coin from Winchester: that is, the front and back lack the balanced look of the “Cnut” penny. In this case, on the reverse, the moneyer Godwine is identified more specifically with the addition of the abbreviated byname “CEO” (for “Ceoca”), leaving less room at the end of the legend for the spelling out of “Winchester” (abbreviated “PINC” on the other three coins under discussion). Yet, rather than supply the additional letter “N” to the mint name—or any further letters to the byname—and thus match the obverse legend by having no final decorative element, the die-fashioner has deliberately stopped short at “PI” to allow room for a trefoil stop, identical to the design gracing the two sides of the “Cnut” coin (cf. especially the obverse legend of *that* coin, where, as on other Jewel-Cross “Cnut” pennies, the designer abbreviated “Anglorum” with the single letter “A,” leaving room for the ending decoration). Also, the style of the jewel cross on the reverse of the left-facing “Harthacnut” penny from Winchester is strikingly similar to that of the cross on the “Cnut” penny (quite *unlike* that of the Exeter penny with which it shares its obverse). Interestingly, this coin of Godwine Ceoca shares its *reverse* die with one of that moneyer’s pennies of the right-facing variety (SCBI 40, no. 72), and the match to the obverse of that coin is the same as that of the others struck in Harthacnut’s name—i.e., lacking the stylistic balance of the “Cnut” penny. More “Harthacnut” coins also appear similar in their reverse design and style to the Winchester “Cnut” coin, but again

with no better obverse-reverse match (among Harthacnut's right-facing coins struck at Winchester, see SCBI 18, no. 719; and SCBI 40, nos. 63-65, 70, and 75 [limiting the listing here to only pennies ending with "PINC" followed by a trefoil in their reverse legend]). Admittedly, the trefoil stop was a common design, but the matching placement of this ornament on the two sides of the "Cnut" penny, in contrast to the "Harthacnut" pennies, conveys a sense of thoughtful planning. The evidence suggests that an earlier coinage had taken place at Winchester—a "Cnut" coinage of deliberate artistic design, with complementary obverse and reverse features. That coinage, if it had actually continued beyond Cnut's death, was most likely discontinued by the time of Harthacnut's change to a right-facing bust. Salvaged from the "Cnut" coinage, however, were the reverse dies, which were reused in the striking of the new "Harthacnut" variety. The continuation of a type from one king to another, as well as the practice of reusing reverse dies in the process, was not without precedent in Anglo-Saxon England. Let us recall, for example, the ongoing production of small-cross pennies from Eadgar, to Edward the Martyr, to Æthelred II. Also noteworthy is the one important exception to the general rule for the striking of mules, as stated by Seaby: "at the beginning of a reign when mules sometimes occur with an old reverse die used with the obverse of the new king" (119)—a situation certainly in keeping with our supposition here.

Finally, let us turn our attention to Harold. If Harthacnut's new issue furthered the use of Cnut's reverse dies, might not Harold's moneymen likewise have reused reverse dies from the "Cnut" coinage? This indeed appears to be the case. As Talvio notes, four out of the fifteen whole pennies of "Cnut" in SCBI 40 have been identified (by Stewart Lyon) as having reverse die-links to coins of Harold—27%—a significantly high percentage (*Royal Coin Cabinet* no. 96, n. 1; the pennies of the sylloge with reverse die-links: nos. 96 ["Cnut"] and 204 [Harold]; nos. 100 ["Cnut"] and 385-86 [Harold]; nos. 101 ["Cnut"] and 408 [Harold]; nos. 108 ["Cnut"] and 531 [Harold]). Elsewhere, Dolley addresses the rarity of such occurrences of shared reverses, but between Harold and Harthacnut, noting two instances of "a right-facing Harthacnut obverse employing the same reverse die as a Harold, a remarkable fact when we remember how rare it is for two obverses to be found in conjunction with one reverse at this period, and the comparative rarity of 'jewel-cross' coins generally" ("The 'Jewel-Cross' Coinage" 273 and n. 2; the paired coins are all in SCBI 40: nos.

18 [Harthacnut] and 199 [Harold]; and nos. 54 [Harthacnut] and 521 [Harold]). In both cases, Harold's coin is of his later variety with a single headband, so the moneyer might have simply been reusing a left-over reverse die of Harthacnut during the period of Harold's sole reign. Yet, the possibility must be considered that moneyers for *both* Harthacnut and Harold were reusing reverse dies here from their father's discontinued coinage. In comparison, only one out of the five coins of Harold that share reverse dies with "Cnut" coins is of his later style with the single headband. It seems evident, then, that moneyers were reusing reverse dies from the "Cnut" issue for Harold's coins from early on. The percentage of die-reuse, furthermore, suggests a more widespread, although shortened, issue for "Cnut." Few coins remain from that issue, but they testify to its likely nature: the final coin type of Cnut the Great.

Despite the threatening atmosphere of divisiveness in England at the time of Cnut's death, there was also a degree of continuity in the transition from father to sons, which is apparent in the coinage. Cnut's new Jewel-Cross issue was cut short, but his sons (Harold in person, and Harthacnut through the agency of his mother) continued to strike that same type in their joint succession. As the tension between Harold and Emma intensified, careful distinctions were made, the most notable of which was the reversal of the portrait on Harthacnut's pennies. The line was thus drawn between the two rulers: Harold and Harthacnut, Left-facing and Right-facing, North and South. Eventually, however, Emma lost the support of Earl Godwin and was driven into exile in 1037, while Harold "was everywhere chosen as king, and Harthacnut forsaken because he was too long in Denmark" (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [MS. C] 160). And still there was continuity in the coinage for a time under Harold, as he retained the jewel-cross design on the reverse but changed the look of the diadem to a single band on the obverse portrait. Ultimately Harold would change to a coin-design wholly his own, unshared with father and brother—the Fleur-de-Lys type—but the Jewel-Cross coinage, seen in all of its stages, shows us something of the flow in this royal family line: not always straight, sometimes turbulent, but ongoing.

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