A PARCEL OF LATE ELEVENTH-CENTURY HIBERNO-NORSE COINS FOUND IN NORTHERN ITALY

By MICHAEL DOLLEY AND S. N. LANE

In June, 1968, one of the writers (SNL) noted what was an obviously integrated series of coins in the Hiberno-Norse trays of the Royal Coin Cabinet at Copenhagen. The parcel consisted of ten eleventh-century coins of Phases IV and V according to the classification proposed in the recent SCBI fascicle devoted to the Hiberno-Norse coins in the British Museum. Reference back to the register (Bytteprotokol) for the financial year 1889/90 establishes that the coins were purchased in 1889 from the well-known Frankfurt coin-dealer Adolf Hess. They were sold as nordiske ('Nordic') but in the register this is followed in parentheses by the queried refinement norske ('Norwegian'). At some subsequent date the description irske ('Irish') was written in above the latter term, and with this identification there can be no quarrel. The dating originally proposed (fra det 10-11 Aarh. = from the 10th-11th centuries) also is capable of being narrowed, there being little doubt that all the coins belong to the third quarter of the eleventh century. Last but not least the coins are described in the register as having been fundne i Nord-Italien (found in North Italy), a provenance which we do not see any reason to call in question.

Already there is believed to have been a Hiberno-Norse element in an eleventh-century coin-hoard from Rome itself, and a single-find of a coin of 'Dunbrody' type (Phase III) is on record from the excavations below St. Peter's. Certainly a North Italian hoard with Hiberno-Norse coins comes as no surprise to those familiar with the pattern of finding of Anglo-Saxon coins astride the traditional pilgrim routes to Rome. There is literary evidence in plenty, too, for intercourse between Ireland and Rome in the period to which the coins under discussion belong. As Professor Gwynn has recently put it:—

'... pilgrimages are noted in the Irish annals under the years 1030 (king of Ailech), 1034 (Olaf of Dublin), 1042 (Ua Domnaill), 1051 (king of Gailenga in Meath) and 1064 (Donnchad, king of Munster). This series of royal pilgrimages ends abruptly in this year; the conquest of England by the Normans and the political difficulties in which Gregory VII became involved during his conflict with Henry IV are both possible causes of interruption. But we shall see that contacts between Ireland and Rome became increasingly close in the next forty or fifty years.'

At this point, however, it is necessary to consider the exact composition of the parcel acquired from Hess.

The coins may be listed as follows:—

PHASE IV

(a) With left-facing portrait and modified 'long-cross' reverse
   (1) As Roth 154 0-63 g. (9-7 gr.) [Pl. XXI, 1]

(b) With right-facing portrait and modified 'long-cross' reverse
   (2) Roth 137 (Actual Coin) 0-49 g. (7-6 gr.) [Pl. XXI, 2]

What emerges at once is that this parcel is critical for our understanding of the precise shading off of Phase IV into Phase V, and it should be noted that this is the first hoard to straddle the two series. Also remarkable is that so many of the coins are unrepresented in the English National Collection. Indeed, it is only no. 2 that finds any sort of parallel there (cf. SCBI BM H/N 146), and the position as regards the Royal Irish Academy’s cabinet in the National Museum is only less unsatisfactory with nos. 3, 5, 9 and 10 corresponding more or less closely to O’Sullivan 40, 39, 46 and 49 respectively. On the other hand, there are numerous affinities, including the die-identities, with coins now in the Ulster Museum (ex Carlyon-Britton) and the Royal Coin Cabinet in Copenhagen (ex Bruun), and we have a strong suspicion that the two collectors concerned were fortunate enough to be able to purchase, perhaps again from Hess, other coins from the North Italian hoard in question. Certainly we would be reluctant to assume too readily that the ten coins purchased in 1889 represented the whole of the find. It does seem to us unlikely, though, that Anglo-Saxon coins were present in the same hoard. On the one hand a selection at least would almost inevitably have been offered to and purchased by the Royal Danish Coin Cabinet, and on the other they would have supplied a rather more precise indication of the date of the Irish pieces than that which found its way into the Copenhagen register.

A consequence of the new evidence is that it is now possible to establish with confidence the place of O’Sullivan 45, 46, 48 and 49 within Phase V, and the generally ‘late’ dating proposed in the SCBI by one of the authors (MD) must be abandoned. As remarked there (p. 104) the obverse type is absent from the Kirk Michael, Glendalough and Dunamase finds, but this is, it now appears, because it is earlier and not later. How, then, should it now be dated? The reverse types are suggestive in this context. O’Sullivan 45 incontrovertibly goes back to an English prototype to be dated a year or so before 1060, and O’Sullivan 46 and 49 were conceded by the SCBI fascicle to have ‘early’ as well as ‘late’ features (pp. 104 & 105). The one harps back to the Dunbrody hoard and the 1040s, while the other has strong affinities with an English type believed to have been current c. 1060. The ‘odd man out’ is O’Sullivan 48 which seems to have affinities with English issues from the second half of the reign of the Conqueror, but in the light of the new evidence one must wonder whether too much attention was not paid to details. The obverse common to all four types is, after all, very like that of the Confessor’s penultimate type in issue between 1062 and 1065, while

\[ W. \text{O’Sullivan, The Earliest Irish Coinage, 2nd edn., Dublin, 1961.} \]
the particular reverse, one not represented in our parcel incidentally, must bear the whole weight of any later dating. Our present inclination is to date the obverse c. 1065, and to regard it as very much the bridge between O'Sullivan 47, incontestably of Phase IV, and O'Sullivan 44, just as certainly of Phase V.

The other surprise of the North Italian parcel is the light thrown on the place in the series of O'Sullivan 39 and 40—types once again unrepresented in the English National Collection. Again the dating proposed by one of the writers (MD) in the British Museum fascicle stands in need of modification. It was there argued (p. 102) that the types in question belong late in Phase V, the absence of a hoard-provenance being interpreted as an argument that the coins belong after Dunamase, even though with certain misgivings. As a result of the North Italian provenance these pieces can now be brought back to the 1060s, and it is an interesting question whether they bring with them O'Sullivan 38 which has never been satisfactorily—or satisfyingly—at the end of Phase V. The inclination of the present writers is to accept that they do bring it forward, and that coins such as SCBI BM H/N 229–231 do not figure in Kirk Michael because they are too early and not too late. From the point of view of the reverses such an arrangement has certain advantages. No. 229, for example, clearly owes its inspiration to one or more types of the Confessor. It could be argued, too, that the affinities of nos. 230 and 231 with the Conqueror's fifth type are not all that close, and that the prototype could as well be the reverse of the sole type of Harthacnut with or without influence from the penultimate type of Æthelraed II. Much more problematical, on the other hand, is the question of the prototype of O'Sullivan 40. At first sight the resemblance to the reverse of the fifth type of the Conqueror is so immediate, and even convincing, that one is reluctant to depart from the verdict of the British Museum Sylloge (p. 167). The problem is one critical for the dating of the North Italian parcel, though, and cannot be shirked. If BMC type V of William the Conqueror really is the prototype of O'Sullivan 40, then the coins were brought to Italy not earlier than 1075. If, on the other hand, the resemblances are dismissed as coincidental, the whole parcel can be dated an entire decade earlier. To our minds the latter interpretation seems more likely to be correct, and we would stress the absence from the North Italian parcel of those Kirk Michael types which imitate with great fidelity the earlier issues of the Conqueror. In other words, it is our suspicion that the hoard should be associated rather with the period of secular pilgrimage that came to an end with the Norman Conquest of England than with the period of ecclesiastical diplomacy which had as its most prominent early manifestation the letter of c. 1076 from Pope Gregory VII to Tairdelbach mac Taide mac Briain Bórama, perhaps better known to English readers as Turlough, King of Munster, grandson of Brian Boru.

Dare one go further and suggest that the North Italian find be associated with the 1064 pilgrimage of Domnchad mac Briain Bórama? The possibility is one that merits very serious consideration, though the time factors may be thought dangerously tight. The date of Domnchad's pilgrimage is known from a Munster chronicle which ought to be well informed, even though his death the same year is ignored and known only from the Annals of Ulster. Essentially, then, the problem is whether one can or cannot plausibly fit in before 1064 the first two busts in the progression now so usefully established which runs (a) O'Sullivan 47 (Limerick & Clondalkin finds), (b) O'Sullivan 45, 46, 48 & 49 (North Italian find), and (c) O'Sullivan 44 (Kirk Michael find). The terminus post quem for O'Sullivan 47, 1 M. Dolley, The Norman Conquest and the English Coinage, London, 1966, pp. 15-21. 2 S. Mac Airt, The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503), Dublin, 1951, pp. 223 & 459.
though, does seem to be the introduction in England of the penultimate type of the Confessor, the patent prototype, and it is not easy to set aside the chain of interlocking argument which would place this event in the autumn of 1062.\(^1\) Can two busts be fitted into as many years? In theory at least it is possible, but can one ignore the consideration that the obverse of the first coin in the parcel published here has certain affinities with those of coins such as \textit{SCBI BM H/N 220 & 221} where the prototype of the reverse is unquestionably an English issue belonging to 1066? It is our opinion that we do better to stress points of difference, and especially the treatment of the neck where the flowing curves of the coins with the Harold reverse seem to mark a further departure from tradition.

Any association of the find with the pilgrimage of Donnchad mac Briain remains, however, problematical in the extreme, and we would prefer to suggest a provisional dating which is deliberately ambiguous—c. 1065. It is one unlikely to be wrong by more than a year or two, and does not rule out an eventual association, but may serve to discourage premature attempts to connect the hoard with Brian Boru's last surviving son, attempts that only too easily could be discomfited by the discovery of a coin or coins certainly from the find but with an anachronistic prototype. Much more important, or so it seems to us, is that we should now be given a critical hoard-provenance for several Hiberno-Norse pieces of which the exact position in the series has too long been open to doubt. If, too, they have not fitted in quite where expected, at least there can no longer be any question that the British Museum Sylloges was right when without hoard-evidence it intercalated the 'scratched-die' coins of Phase IV between the more conventionally produced coins of Phases III and V epitomized by the Dunbrody and Kirk Michael finds respectively.\(^2\)


\(^2\) For the direct photographs that form the basis of the accompanying collotype plate, for permission to publish the parcel here, and for every assistance to study the actual coins and surviving documentation, the authors are indebted to the kindness of the authorities of the Royal Coin Cabinet at Copenhagen, and in particular of the Keeper, Dr. Otto Mørkholm, and of his assistant Mr. Jørgen Steen Jensen.