

# IRREGULAR DIES OF THE DURHAM MINT c. 1300

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ALTHOUGH students of the coinage of Edward I have long been aware of the use of irregular dies at the Durham mint during the currency of Group IX, no detailed study of these has ever been published and they receive no mention in any of the standard works. In his classification of the Montrave hoard, Burns<sup>1</sup> mentions '8 Durham sterlings of rude execution, with the breast plain and the cross moline before the legends on obverse and reverse, evidently imitated from the Beck sterlings A.36 (= Fox IXa), and possibly of authentic issue'. Two irregular obverses, one with a regular reverse, were noted in the Loch Doon hoard.<sup>2</sup>

In an attempt to classify and explain these unusual dies, the writer has studied such coins as were readily available in public and private collections. However, it is possible that these represent only a minor portion of the extant specimens, as many must lie unrecognised, being classified as forgeries in the case of irregular obverses and as normal coins where only the reverse is abnormal. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate the eight coins described by Burns in the collection of Montrave coins at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Since only seven other coins combining irregular 'IXa' obverse and reverse dies have been traced, the die study of these is probably far from complete, since it seems very likely that the Montrave coins would produce further dies.

The dies fall into two distinct groups: those with the cross moline of Bishop Bek, consisting of both obverse and reverse dies, or unmarked reverses used with obverse dies (usually official) bearing that mark. One irregular obverse die with a plain cross initial mark has affinities with this group. The second group consists only of unmarked reverse dies used solely with regular obverse dies of IXb having the plain cross initial mark, normally attributed to the king's receiver. The first group has large lettering, usually with well-marked serifs, whilst that on the second is smaller, particularly the letters A and V in which the body appears to be made from a single puncheon resembling an arrowhead. All local dies may be readily distinguished from regular ones by the open E and, usually, a wedge-tailed R, while the crude portraits and wedge stops make the obverses impossible to overlook. Indeed, were it not for the muling of irregular obverses with regular reverses, one would condemn as forgeries the coins where both sides are irregular. It is further evidence of Burns's perspicacity that he suggested that such coins might be of authentic issue, when he apparently had no irregular/regular 'mules' to guide him.

The weights of coins having one or both sides from irregular dies compare favourably with those from official dies. Weights were recorded for twenty-one specimens and averaged 21.2 grains ranging between 17.4 grains (very worn) and 23.2 grains. The figure obtained from a group of eighty-two regular IXb pence from various mints was 21.0 grains with a range of 19.0–23.8 grains.

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grateful to Dr Ian Stewart, Dr Ian Taylor, Messrs C. J. Wood and P. Woodhead, who have allowed him to examine and have photographed the coins in their collections.

<sup>1</sup> E. Burns, *The Coinage of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1887), p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> *BNJ* 38 (1969), 44, Nos. 625–6 & Pl. 1.6.

<sup>3</sup> The writer is grateful to Dr D. H. Caldwell, who twice searched the 'Montrave' trays for these coins and to Mr N. J. Mayhew, who made a further search.

Some of the dies of the first group appear to be based on regular Group IXa coins since they have large lettering, contractive marks and a cross moline on the reverse, features of that group. Two of the obverse dies noted have been seen only in combination with irregular reverses, but the third was possibly used solely with regular IXb reverses. The fourth obverse may be copied from group IXb, since it has a smaller face and is found in combination with an irregular IXb reverse (omitting the cross moline) and two regular dies of that group. There are two pellets joined by a segment of a circle on the breast in imitation of the star found on many group IX coins. The fifth die, noted from only two coins, presents some difficulties as the initial cross is plain, but the lettering, although smaller than on the other obverses, differs from that of the second group. The coin illustrated was described as having a 'receiver's local obverse' when it was listed in the Clonterbrook Trust sale (lot 71), but the initial cross is visible only at the base and its form was open to question. However, the discovery by Mr C. J. Wood of a second example of this obverse die establishes unequivocally that the cross is plain and not moline. Unfortunately, the centre of the drapery is also obscure on both coins, but there appear to be traces of one or possibly two pellets and it may resemble bust 4 in this respect. The lettering is smaller than on other local obverse dies, but does not have the distinctive forms of A and V found on the second group of irregular reverses. The Roman N and contractive marks suggest that it was perhaps copied from a local die or one of the early regular IXb obverses which have these features. However, as the initial cross is plain, the die, despite differences in the lettering, could pertain to the second group of local dies, for which only reverses have been noted, but, pending clarification, is listed at the end of the first group.

Two early local IXb reverse dies have been noted used solely with regular IXb obverses of Bek with Roman Ns and contractive marks. One of these is found in combination with no fewer than three different obverses. The affinity of some irregular dies with group IXa, of which Durham coins from late official dies are quite rare, appears to indicate that they were in use before the commencement of IXb, but this seems at variance with the historical evidence and is discussed later. The second group of irregular dies consists solely of reverses, which are used with regular plain cross obverses, and it is possible that there was a gap between the two groups.

With their distinctive portraits, it is easy to distinguish the five obverse dies noted and these are described below with numbers to facilitate future reference. It is, however, far more difficult to separate the various reverse dies, especially in poorly struck or worn coins, and it is felt that little purpose would be served by a die-study of these, especially as there is probably still a considerable number awaiting recognition as irregular. In the case of the reverses, therefore, a general description of each group is given together with a note of the number of dies recorded.

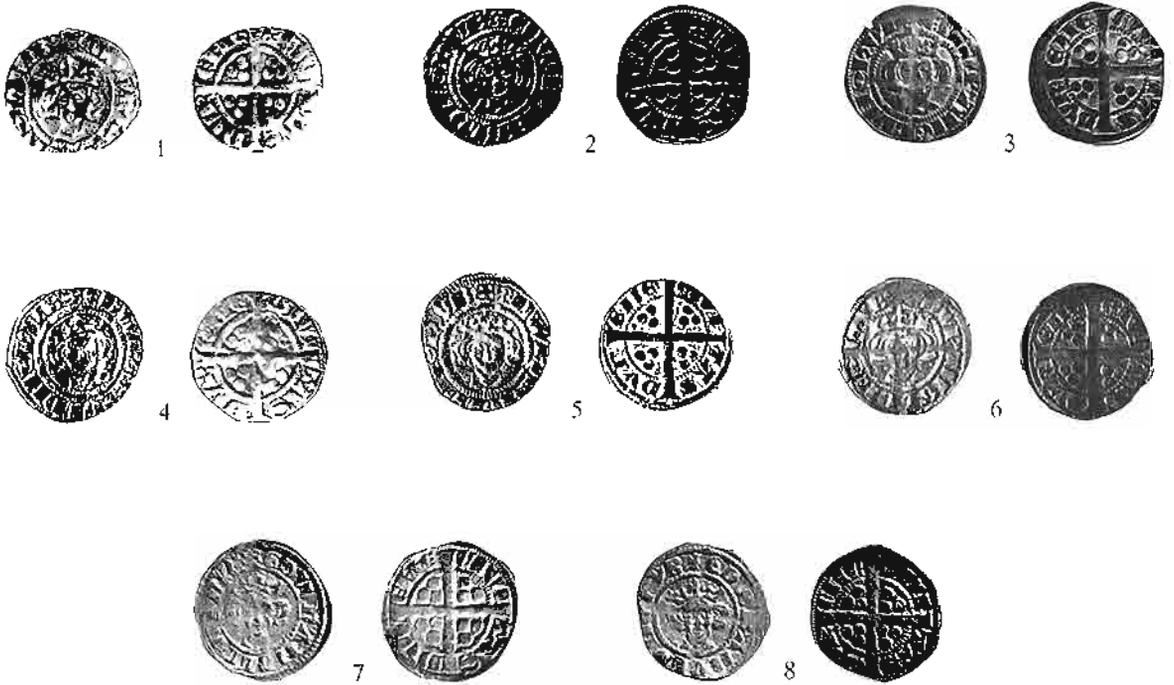
#### 1. LOCAL OBTVERSE DIES.

All have open E, Roman N (unless stated) and wedge contractive marks.

##### *Based on group IXa?*

Initial cross moline

- a1. Spread crown with protuberant angle at the base of the outer fleurs. Ropy hair. Almond eyes with only the lower lid indicated. Distinct neck. The extreme crudeness of this die has led to its condemnation as a forgery by several eminent numismatists in the past. However, the general characteristics, apart from the style of the crown, resemble those of other dies of this group. Recorded with one local 'IXa' reverse (Fig. 1).
- a2. Neater style. New crown. Eyes are pellets in well-marked ovals. Long thin neck.



1. Local obverse die a1. Local reverse type a.
2. Local obverse die a2. Local reverse type a.
3. Local obverse die a3. Official IXb reverse.
4. Local obverse die b1. Local reverse type b1.
5. Local obverse die b1. Official IXb reverse.
6. Local obverse die b2. Official IXb reverse.
7. Official IXb obverse (cross moline). Local reverse type b1.
8. Official IXb obverse (plain cross). Local reverse type b2.

Author's collection  
 Collection of Mr P. Woodhead  
 National Museum of Antiquities of  
 Scotland, Edinburgh (N.M.A.S.) (ex  
 Loch Doon).  
 Author's collection.  
 British Museum (ex Carsphairn).  
 Collection of Mr. C. J. Wood.  
 N.M.A.S. (ex Montrave).  
 N.M.A.S. (ex Montrave).

Recorded with three local 'IXa' reverse dies (Fig. 2).

- a3. More compact crown, but otherwise similar in style to a2 and, therefore, placed in this group although it has only been seen used with two regular IXb reverse dies both with unbarred N (Fig. 3).

*Based on group IXb?*

Initial cross moline.

- b1. 'Squashed' face with little mouth or chin. Crude v shaped neck. Two crude pellets on breast. Noted with local 'IXb' reverse (Fig. 4) and two regular IXb reverses with unbarred N (Fig. 5).

Plain initial cross.

- b2. Large round face and bushy hair. Neck similar to b1. Possibly one or more pellets on breast. Smaller lettering. Recorded used with two regular IXb reverses with pothook N (Fig. 6).

## 2. LOCAL REVERSE DIES.

*Based on group IXa*, (Cross moline CIV/ITAS/DUR/ENE).

- a1. Normally wedge-tailed R, but one die has a curled tail. Four dies noted all used with local obverses (one with die a1; three with die a2) (Figs. 1 & 2).

*Based on group IXb* (No initial mark CIV/ITAS/DUR/ENE).

- b1. Lettering similar to previous. Three dies noted – one with wedge-tailed R used with a local obverse (see Fig. 4); two with curled tail to R, of which one is used with three regular IXb obverse dies and the other with a further similar die. All the regular obverses have the cross moline initial mark, Roman Ns (on one the second N is unbarred), star on the breast and contractive marks (Fig. 7).
- b2. New smaller lettering with distinctive A and V (see *supra*) and wedge-tailed R. Six dies noted used with seven regular obverse dies of IXb having a plain initial cross, unbarred Ns with star on breast – two dies, or pothook Ns with breast plain or obscured – five dies (Fig. 8).

*Number of Coins Recorded*

Reverses	<i>Local obverses</i>					Obverses	<i>Local reverses</i>		
	<i>a1</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>b1</i>	<i>b2</i>		<i>a1</i>	<i>b1</i>	<i>b2</i>
Local	2	5	–	1	–	Local	7	1	–
Official	–	–	2	3	2	Official	–	5	10

In his description of the Montrave hoard,<sup>4</sup> Burns mentions a number of IXb/IXa mules of Durham mint – ‘as A37 (= Fox IXb), of the Durham sterlings, 4 non-episcopal, with the breast plain, had their reverses from dies of A.36 (= Fox IXa); 2 episcopal of Beck, with the star on the breast, had their reverses from dies of A.36’. The first is an improbable mule since the Durham reverses of IXa have the episcopal mark at the head of the legend and it seems likely that the coins in question have local reverses. In the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, there are three plain cross and two cross moline coins having regular IXb obverses with local reverses, all ex Montrave, and these are probably the coins to which Burns was referring.

The plain cross coins with obverse or reverse from local dies again throw doubt on the attribution of any Group IXb coins of Durham to the king’s receiver, since it seems extremely unlikely that he would use or have fabricated unofficial dies. For many years students have been concerned with the apparent irreconcilability of the historical and numismatic evidence<sup>5</sup>. The position is aggravated by further evidence indicating a date somewhat later than 1 July 1302, which numismatists have long accepted, for the commencement of the first receivership. An assize roll (No. 1/226) shows that Bek’s moneyer, Henry Pysane, was continuing to strike coins until 31 July 1302<sup>6</sup> and it is possible that the confiscation of the liberty of Durham did not become really effective before September. About that time, Robert de Clifford advised the king that he had taken the

<sup>4</sup> Burns, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> J. J. North, ‘Variations in the lettering on Edward I Class IX pence’, *NCirc* 85(1977), 299. See also Dr Ian Stewart in this volume pp. 81–5.

<sup>6</sup> The case is a plaint against the bishop’s moneyers, Henry Pysane and Gregory monetarius, that they had been minting after the confiscation of the liberty, in contempt of the king. They stated in answer that they had struck coins on

31 July, but none after that date, claiming ignorance of the confiscation, having had no notice of it. A jury concurred and it was stated that on the day in question they had made £30 worth of coin, which they paid to Alice, wife of William Servat, without her husband’s agreement. A case was also brought against her that she had exchanged coin in contempt of the king.

mint etc. into his hands and asked for advice as to what he should do. Edward's reply in September 1302 (PRO, SC 1/12/155) was that he could not answer until the matter had been discussed in parliament.<sup>7</sup> In the face of this evidence, it is no longer possible with certainty to attribute to the king's receiver any coins of Group IXb, which ended mid 1302 at the latest<sup>8</sup> and it would be more satisfactory in the future to refer to such coins as Durham (plain cross).

Before examining possible reasons for the manufacture of dies locally at Durham, some details of the history of the bishopric and palatinate at the relevant period are essential. The year 1300 was a watershed in the fortunes of Antony Bek and the following summary of the complex events of that year is based on several books, to which the reader is referred for greater detail.<sup>9</sup>

Since the commencement of Edward I's reign, Bek had been the king's trusted servant and had risen to become one of his leading councillors. His enjoyment of the king's favour had enabled him to extend the bounds of his palatinate, which was a quasi-autonomous state whose rights were jealously guarded by Bek and often exceeded by his agents. The king's protection had saved the bishop from the consequences of many of these excesses and supported him in his battles with the archbishop of York. There was, however, a point beyond which the royal authority could not be flouted. The first minor rift occurred over the wholesale desertion of the Durham contingent serving in the king's army in Scotland, about which Edward complained to the bishop in January 1300. Bek's imprisonment of the deserters brought to a head the seething unrest amongst his tenantry, leading later to complaints against the maladministration of the franchise. However, the main friction between the king and the bishop arose from Bek's lengthy quarrel with Richard de Hoton, prior of Durham. The convent was a royal foundation, especially venerated by Edward as the resting place of the bones of St Cuthbert, and, on 20 March 1300, its autonomous rights against the bishop were confirmed by the king. Bek took up the prior's challenge to his episcopal rights of control and made a visitation to the convent on 20 May. In the dispute which arose over procedure, both parties appealed to the king who decided on personal mediation. At Evenwood near Durham on 20 June, Edward suggested a compromise to which both parties agreed verbally, albeit with great reluctance on the part of the bishop. Subsequent disagreement over the wording of the formal agreement prevented it being ratified and Bek laid siege to the convent. By 4 August the king was informed of this and is reported to have been enraged, exclaiming 'quis enim in mea terra, me vivente, auderet talia perpetrare'.<sup>10</sup> He ordered the bishop to appear before his council at York on 20 August, but Bek failed to appear and the sheriff of Northumberland was ordered to produce him in court before the king on 6 October. Meanwhile, the bishop's forces had captured the priory on 19 August, subsequently imprisoning Hoton and installing Bek's nominee, Henry de Luceby, as prior. Shortly afterwards, before the king and council at Rose Castle near Carlisle in September 1300, a writ was secured by the tenantry of the palatinate against Bek, but was not obeyed by him and a further complaint was made to the king. The Hoton affair dragged on for nearly two years until the meeting of parliament on 1 July 1302, when judgement went against Bek, who was absent in Rome where he had been summoned by Pope Boniface VIII. For his disregard of the king's protection of

<sup>7</sup> C. M. Fraser, *A History of Antony Bek, Bishop of Durham, 1283-1311* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 182-83. The king's letter is recorded from a draft which is on the same parchment as two others, all for issue under the Privy Seal. Although none of them is dated, the membrane is inscribed 'Scinte Radegunde', where the king is known to have been from about 24 September 1302 to the end of that month.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Stewart favours a date as early as December 1300 - see this volume p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*; R. K. Richardson, 'The Bishopric of Durham under Anthony Bek, 1283-1311', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 3rd Ser. 11 (1913), 89-229.

<sup>10</sup> R. K. Richardson, *Gesta Dunelmensis A.D. MDCCC* (Camden Miscellany XIII), pp. 1-53.

Durham priory, the regalian franchise of Durham was taken into the king's hands on 7 July and, ten days later, Robert de Clifford was appointed keeper.

In the absence of documentary evidence, the explanation of the irregular dies and the possible use of plain cross dies by Bek must be a matter of conjecture. In view of the numerous mules with regular dies, there can be little doubt that the irregular dies were made locally to supplement those supplied officially, but the problem remains as to why this should have been necessary. Since there is no historical indication of an interruption of communications between London and the North, it seems reasonable to assume that the cause must be associated with the increasing differences between Bek and the king. Perhaps the severance of the supply of dies was a sanction applied by the latter in an attempt to bring to heel the increasingly truculent bishop. The confiscation of the franchise was a grave and lengthy affair, which was normally dealt with by parliament, whereas the cancellation of the supply of dies could no doubt be applied rapidly by writ under privy seal on the sole authority of the king, since the grant of them to ecclesiastical privilege mints was in his gift.

As remarked earlier, the local dies fall into two distinct groups and are separately considered commencing with those having a cross moline or associated with regular dies bearing this mark. Despite the apparent affinities of some with group IXa, it is possible that their use did not commence during the currency of that issue. If they were contemporary with this prototype, an unsatisfactory pattern emerges of two breaks in the supply of official dies with the cross moline, since coins of IXb from regular dies exist for Bek and are of the earliest variety of that group. It would also indicate a date for the first use of irregular dies in early 1300, if not before, and there appears to be no reason for them at such an early date. An alternative hypothesis is that the supply of official dies was stopped shortly after the commencement of group IXb, which can be dated to May 1300. The only regular group IXb obverse dies with the cross moline have Roman Ns<sup>11</sup> and contractive marks, features found mainly on the earliest coins of that issue. The fact that the official reverses used with such obverses have unbarred Ns is of no significance, since this combination is also usual at London and Canterbury.<sup>12</sup> Faced with the cessation of the supply of official dies, the existing ones could have been eked out by using them in combination with the locally made ones until the official ones finally became unusable, when the irregular ones would be used in combination. This would indicate a date of c August/September for the commencement of the local dies, which coincides with the beginning of Bek's serious differences with the king.

When we come to consider the plain cross issues the position is even more obscure. The local reverses employed are from new puncheons and none of the old type appear to have been used. Since it seems reasonable to assume that they were made especially for this issue, the implication is that only official obverse dies were available. A tempting, but most unlikely explanation, is that Bek obtained such obverse dies from a nearby mint and fabricated his own reverses. It is difficult to envisage any mint surrendering its dies without

<sup>11</sup> On some dies the letter N has pothook uprights with a transverse bar, a feature found on some reverses of Bury and most of Exeter. They are possibly the work of a different die-sinker, since the second variety of the IXb crown is used, whereas all obverses with normal Roman Ns have the crown from the same iron as coins of group IXa. It is not certain that Crown 2 superseded Crown 1, which it closely resembles, since they appear to be used concurrently throughout much of Group IXb and most of the obverse dies found muled with group X reverses have Crown 1. However, in a lecture to the BNS, Mr C. J. Wood showed that there was a progressive reduction in flan size throughout Group IX and

that the second crown was found only on the smallest flan coins. He is at present engaged on a study of this Group, which should clarify this. No obverses with pothook uprights to Roman Ns have been noted in combination with local reverse dies, but no conclusions can be drawn from this in view of the small number of Bek IXb regular/local coins seen.

<sup>12</sup> North, p. 298. Since publishing this note the writer has noted a Canterbury IXb penny with Roman/unbarred Ns. A London coin with Roman Ns on both sides has some anomalous features and may be a trial striking (*NCirc* 91 (1983), 151).

official sanction, but, as Bek consistently denied the validity of the king's writ within the franchise of Durham, it is remotely possible that he used his authority to obtain dies outside his palatinate.<sup>13</sup> An alternative explanation for the absence of the cross moline on these coins, which now seem possibly to have been struck by Bek, could again stem from the royal displeasure. Perhaps the king regarded the unprecedented use of a personal mark on the coinage as an intolerable infringement of the royal prerogative and forbade its use when relationships became strained.<sup>14</sup>

Although it is not relevant to the present discussion, the following information regarding the receivership of 1305–7<sup>15</sup> has an important bearing on the dating of the coins of that period and does not appear to have been recorded in any numismatic literature. Students have naturally assumed that on the restoration of his temporalities in July 1307 Bek recommenced striking coins, but it appears that the king still retained the dies of the Durham mint as late as 4 November 1307.<sup>16</sup> In fact these do not seem to have been released until 25 May 1309 when 'Edward II ordered restoration to the bishop of the dies of his coinage in Durham'.<sup>17</sup> It is not proposed to discuss here the difficulties in reconciling this information with the existing coin evidence, but it does raise the question whether the bishop's right of coinage was considered to be separate from the privileges of his franchise. In October 1292, the king's attorney drew attention to Bek's dual role in the following words: 'the bishop of Durham has a double status, the status of bishop as to his spiritualities and the status of earl palatine as to his temporal holdings'. There seems to have been no doubt that the mint was part of the liberty in 1293 when *quo warranto* proceedings were brought against Bek without effect, as the sheriff of Northumberland listed the bishop's franchises, which included 'et habet monetarium suum apud Dunolm' habet eiam coronatores suos infra libertates suas videlicet unum apud Sadberg' et tres in tribus wardis libertatis Dunolm'.<sup>18</sup> The same view was taken in 1302, when the bishop's moneymen were summoned for minting after the confiscation of the liberty and the royal keeper automatically took the mint into his hands. His letter advising the king of this and asking for instructions was presumably to ascertain whether he should reactivate the mint on the king's behalf. In the absence of the king's reply, it is uncertain whether any coins were struck by him during the first receivership and numismatic evidence indicates that there were possibly none. However, the historical records of the second confiscation suggest that the minting rights may then have been considered separate from the rest of the liberty.

<sup>13</sup> In 1955, Mr H. G. Stride suggested that it was the practice for dies for the northern mints to be held locally at Knaresborough Castle.

<sup>14</sup> An alternative hypothesis for the use of plain cross dies at Durham in group IXb is given below, pp. 83–5.

<sup>15</sup> It was not until 8 December 1305 that the sheriff of Northumberland was ordered to take the regalian administration of Durham into the king's hands on the grounds of maladministration and 'by reason of his (Bek's) audacious assumption of royal power in his liberty' (PRO. Coram Rege Roll, KB 27).

<sup>16</sup> Fraser, p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> PRO.LTR Mem Roll E 368/79. What was probably the first pyx trial after the restitution of dies to Bek was ordered by a royal mandate dated 12 January 1310 from The Grovc, Herts. 'Edward II orders the patriarch and bishop to deliver

his pyx of the Durham mint by his master moneymen to the royal Exchequer on 16 February for assay, since the royal coin of the mints of London and Canterbury has recently been assayed there' (Close Roll: CCR 1307–13, p. 241).

<sup>18</sup> *Placita de Quo Warranto*, edited by W. Illingworth (Record Commission, 1818), p. 604. A translation of the full text is given in C. M. Fraser, 'The Records of Antony Bek, Bishop and Patriarch, 1283–1311', *Surtees Society* 162 (1947), 37–41.

P.S. When this paper was read to the Society in March 1985, Mr Peter Woodhead suggested that the irregular dies may have been fabricated locally to supplement the regular ones when large quantities of silver were being received at Durham for recoinage.