


THE COINS OF ÆTHELRED I. OF NORTHUMBRIA.

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TTEMPTS have been made, from time to time, to attribute coins to Æthelred I. of Northumbria, but with no very satisfactory results until Lord Grantley, in the *Numismatic Chronicle* of 1892, drew attention to a sceatta in his collection which has all the characteristics of Alchred, the predecessor of Æthelred, with the exception that on the obverse it bears the name of Æthelred. An illustration of this coin appears in the *British Numismatic Journal* of 1904, p. 64, Plate I, Fig. 9. Subsequently, Major Creeke, in the same journal, attributed to this king a usual copper, or brass styca reading, on the obverse, + EDI . . L . . RED (retrograde) and, on the reverse, + EDIƿVƿ (ƿ = runic L). The reason for the attribution appears in a note contributed by Major Creeke to the *Numismatic Chronicle* of 1902, p. 311, wherein it is stated that the reverse of the coin was struck from the same die as that used for a styca of Eardwulf, the immediate successor of Æthelred I., if we except the ephemeral king Osbald. In his monograph of 1904, Major Creeke remarked that only one of these stycas reading EDIƿVƿ is known, but I can now put on record three more, one formerly in the collection of Mr. Carlyon-Britton, and two others in the York museum. All four examples are well-struck coins with unequivocal inscriptions, and, having regard also to the fact that the moneyer appears to be known otherwise only on the stycas of Eardwulf, there can be no hesitation in agreeing with Major Creeke, that the coins were struck in the reign of Æthelred I.

Since 1904 materials have come under my notice which warrant an extension, on quite certain grounds, of the list of coins of this

monarch, at least of his second period, and it would, perhaps, be well to put them on record, more especially as the known history of the Northumbrian kings is so meagre as to render important any small details which can be gleaned respecting them.

The Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* records the accession of Æthelred I. under the year 774. The account reads, "This year at Easter-tide the Northumbrians drove their king Alchred from York and took Æthelred, the son of Moll, to be their lord. He reigned four years." In A.D. 778 Æthelred was, in his turn, deposed and driven out of the country by Alfwald I., but he recovered his kingdom again in the year 790, and reigned until his death in A.D. 796. It will therefore be seen that Æthelred's term of office is divisible into two distinct periods and, curiously enough, this is the case, not only politically but also numismatically, because, as Major Creeke shows,¹ it was during the interval between Æthelred's two regnal periods, *i.e.*, during the reign of Alfwald I., that the silver standard of the sceatta was abandoned in favour of the copper or brass standard of the styca. I am aware that there are a few silver or base silver coins known of the styca period, from and including Alfwald I.,² but these must be attributed to accident rather than design, and there can be little doubt that the monetary standard of the country, from the latter part of the reign of Alfwald I., was of copper or brass.³

Concurrently with the introduction of the styca as the standard came an essential change in the reverse, on which now appears the moneyer's name, the reverse of the sceattas having shown a fantastic animal without any inscription. In addition to the introduction of the moneyer's name, the animal design of the sceattas was abandoned, except in the case of some of the coins struck by the moneyer, Leofdegn, of Æthelred II. This moneyer, however, was remarkable, not merely for a temporary revival of the animal type, but also for the introduction of a variety of new and ephemeral designs.

¹ *British Numismatic Journal*, 1904.

² Major Creeke did not include in his monograph of 1904 a base silver styca of Alfwald I., recorded by Lord Grantley in the *Numismatic Chronicle* of 1897, p. 138.

³ *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1883, p. 26.

To the first regnal period of Æthelred I., then, is attributable the sceatta in Lord Grantley's collection above referred to, and this coin still appears to stand alone.



FIG. 1.—STYCA OF EARDWULF BY THE MONEVER EDILUTH.

Obverse.—+ EΛ+R••DVL••E, retrograde, Λ inverted, final E for F.

Reverse.—+ EDIƿVD, the ƿ retrograde.

Turning now to the second regnal period, A.D. 790 to 796, it is proposed to extend the list of coins already known by the production of a chain of others which, on the grounds of analogous workmanship and identity of die, must be attributed to the same time, and not to the reign of Æthelred II., A.D. 841-9. The starting point in this chain is the styca of Eardwulf with the name of EDIƿVƿ on the reverse (Fig. 1).



FIG. 2.—STYCA OF ÆTHELRED I., WITH SIMILAR REVERSE TO FIG. 1.

Obverse.—+ EDI••L••RED, retrograde.

Reverse.—As Fig. 1.

As has previously been shown, this reverse is absolutely identical with the four coins of Æthelred I. reading EDIƿVƿ already mentioned (Fig. 2), and in continuation of these, I have now to bring under notice a coin (Fig. 3), the obverse of which is identical in all respects with the obverse



FIG. 3.—STYCA OF ÆTHELRED I., BY THE MONEVER EADWIN
FROM THE SAME OBERSE DIE AS FIG. 2.

Obverse.—As Fig. 2.

Reverse.—+ E/DNIH ; E retrograde, H = N.

of the stycas reading EDIƿVƿ, being, in fact, struck from the same die, as the illustrations, Figs. 2 and 3, will show.

From the obverse of this last coin we will turn to the reverse which reads E/DNIH (E retrograde, H = N). This is, undoubtedly, a corruption of EADVIN. In connection with this moneyer it is now requisite to bring forward the next coin in the series which reads, obverse:— + EDREDILC (retrograde) = EDILRED C[VNVNƿ]; reverse:— + EADVINI (retrograde) Fig. 4.



FIG. 4.—STYCA OF ÆTHELRED I., BY THE MONEYER EADWIN,
REVERSE IDENTICAL WITH THAT OF FIG. 5.

Three features about this coin call for special comment: (1) the local or colloquial form of the king's title, (2) the retrograding of the legends, and (3) the reverse die.

Naturally, the local form of the king's title, *Cunung* = king, would appear more frequently on the early than on the later coins of the period, and we find that it is not uncommon on some pieces struck just before the time of Æthelred I., viz., on the coins of Archbishop Ecgbercht with the names of the kings Æthelwald Moll, A.D. 759–765, and Alchred, A.D. 765–774, on the reverse. This feature, however, interesting though it may be, is not, by itself, conclusive, because it is also found on a styca of Osbercht, A.D. 849–867; but as, in this later reign, we have the readings REX and CX for the king's title, the C being, no doubt, an incomplete E, the coin reading OSBERCHE C in Major Creeke's list¹ may be intended to read OSBERCH RE. In any case it may be remarked that the coins of Osbercht indicate, in other directions, a return to earlier and cruder methods of minting. For instance, the orthography of the inscriptions is worse than that of the legends of the issues immediately preceding, and there is a greater proportion of coins with retrograde inscriptions, and without the king's title. On the whole the

¹ *British Numismatic Journal*, 1904, p. 95.

stycas of Osbercht corroborate the historical fact that the kingdom had deteriorated.

To take the second point concerning the coin under notice. The retrograding of legends is, comparatively speaking and having regard to the great number of his coins, uncommon on the undoubted stycas of Æthelred II. Of course, there is a fair number of coins of this king with retrograde legends, but in the beginning of the styca series they were more the rule than the exception, as is evidenced by the coins of Æthelred I. already dealt with.

But although the foregoing features about the coin are not conclusive, a close examination of its reverse die puts the question beyond reasonable doubt. It was struck from a die from which coins, bearing the obverse legend FL•EVALD R, retrograde (for EL•FVALD R), are also known of Alfwald II., A.D. 806–808, as a comparison of the piece under notice (Fig. 4), with a similar styca of Alfwald II. (Fig. 5) will show. Several of the letters of the moneyer's name on these coins



FIG. 5.—STYCA OF ALFWALD II., BY THE MONEYER EADWIN.

Obverse.—FL•E(for EL•F)VALDR, retrograde, AL inverted.

Reverse.—As Fig. 4.

have distinctive features which may be particularised. The upright stroke of the E to the left of the initial cross is longer than is required, and the semicircular section of the D is curled round slightly at the bottom. The degree of obliqueness in the transverse stroke of the letter N and the position of the central and initial crosses also leave no room for doubt that the two stycas were struck from the same die.

The coins of the moneyer Eadvini—*i.e.*, Eadwin—are the most frequent of the stycas of Alfwald II., and on all the specimens extant the inscription is, as on the piece under notice, retrograde. Of course it might be argued that the coin under notice reading Edilred followed the Alfwald stycas, in which case it would belong to Æthelred II. but,

having regard to the fact that Æthelred II. did not ascend the Northumbrian throne until A.D. 841, *i.e.*, 33 years after the death of Alfwald II., this theory would be highly improbable, and I think the more reasonable conclusion is that the die was cut in the time of Æthelred I., more especially as the moneyer's name is not only in evidence on the next real reign, that of Eardwulf, but also occurs on the coin of Æthelred I. previously considered, a coin which, on the evidence of its obverse, unquestionably belongs to the earlier reign.



FIG. 6.—STYCA OF ÆTHELRED I., BY THE MONEVER EADWIN,
FROM THE SAME REVERSE DIE AS FIGS. 4 AND 5.

Obverse.—+ EDELRE : V (runic K), second E retrograde, R inverted.

Reverse.—As Figs. 4 and 5.

The next new coin to be brought under notice is connected with the preceding piece, Fig. 4, because the reverses of the two were struck from the same die, and if the one belongs to Æthelred I., the other must follow. The obverse of the coin reads EDELRE : V (the second E being retrograde and the R inverted), Fig. 6. The last letter is a very remarkable feature, and it has every appearance of being the runic *ƿ* (= K) in its later form, in which case it would undoubtedly stand for *kunung* (king) and is connected thereby with the use of the same title on the preceding coin, Fig. 4, except that the latter gives the initial in its Latin form, C. Mixed Latin and runic letters are, of course, fairly common to the period.



FIG. 7.—STYCA OF ÆTHELRED I., BY THE MONEVER EADWIN,
FROM THE SAME OBTVERSE DIE AS FIG. 8.

One more coin of the moneyer Eadwin remains to be now referred to. It reads on the obverse, + EILREDR •• E (retrograde), and on the reverse, + E •• ADVINI (retrograde), Fig. 7. This coin has the early and

peculiar lettering noticeable on the better struck coins of Eardwulf's reign, *e.g.*, the R, which is simply a complete D with a tail added ; compare Fig. 1, a coin of Eardwulf. The attribution of this coin to Æthelred I. is further strengthened by a styca struck from the same obverse die but reading on the reverse EAEDWLF instead of EADVNI (Fig. 8). This coin,



FIG. 8.—STYCA OF ÆTHELRED I., BY THE MONEVER EARDWULF,
WITH REVERSE ALMOST IDENTICAL WITH FIG. 9.

Obverse.—As Fig. 7.

Reverse.—EAEDWLF, second E = R.

by its reverse, is a connecting link between the coins reading EADVNI of Æthelred I. and one of the two only known stycas of Alfwald I. (Fig. 9). At first sight the reverse of Fig. 8, the Æthelred coin,



FIG. 9.—STYCA OF ALFWALD I., BY THE MONEVER EARDWULF.

Obverse.—ΛIL••FLDXX[S], Λ inverted, F retrograde.

Reverse —EARDWLF.

appears to be identical with that of Fig. 9, the Alfwald piece. A close examination shows, however, that this is not actually the case, but the difference is so slight, and the similarities are so marked, *e.g.*, the angle of the letters, the spacing and the position of the central in relation to the initial cross, that they prove that the dies for the two coins were the work of the same cuneator. Indeed, I am indebted to Mr. Andrew for the suggestion that the coins were actually struck from the same reverse die, the explanation of the difference in the third letter of the legend being that, after the period of Alfwald, when Fig. 9 was struck, the surface of the die having become worn down, was renovated in places with the old punches—a by no means unusual operation—and the faint traces of the letter R mistaken for, and so

reproduced as E, which created the blundered legend of the Æthelred coin, Fig. 8, subsequently issued. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the serifs of the E in question are both deeper (in the die) and broader than the average of the other letters. In any case, however, the practical identity of the two reverses necessarily forces the coin shown under Fig. 8 into the reign of Æthelred I., and not into that of Æthelred II.

The attribution to Æthelred I. of these stycas inscribed on the reverse with the names Eadwin and Eardwulf suggests the possibility that there are others of the same moneyers which should be transferred from the second to the first Æthelred. In looking through any considerable collection of stycas of Æthelred II., it will be observed that there are coins of both moneyers which stand out from their fellows by reason of their different and more archaic workmanship; and one can go further and say that there are a few coins of other moneyers, those inscribed *CVDCILS* might be specially mentioned, which also differ essentially from the bulk of the coins of Æthelred II., and which one is therefore tempted to dissociate from the reign of that monarch. I feel, however, that the evidence available for a change is not, at present, sufficiently strong to warrant, with the assurance of certainty, a transfer from the one king to the other.

It will be observed that the number of coins attributed to Æthelred I. has now been raised from two in 1904, when the subject was last previously treated, to ten.

All the coins illustrated are in the writer's collection.