THE MYTHICAL 'HELMET'/'LONG CROSS' MULES OF ÆTHELRÆD II

By R. H. M. DOLLEY

In the 1881 edition of *Anglosachsiska Mynt* Bror Emil Hildebrand has listed two pennies of Æthelræd II which he describes as belonging to his 'Type E. Var. b'.[1] Such coins *prima facie* rank as Helmet/Long Cross mules, but, if Hildebrand's sequence is right, such mules ought not to exist, it being an almost invariable rule that the obverse of a late Saxon mule is of an earlier and not a later type.[2] Although indeed there has recently been published in these pages a mule coin of Æthelræd II where the obverse certainly is later than the reverse—the Second Hand/First Hand penny of Lewes in Mr. H. H. King's cabinet—these alleged Helmet/Long Cross mules cannot but cause the student to wonder whether perhaps Parsons and Brooke were right after all to transpose Hildebrand's sequence, and to place Helmet after Crux and before Long Cross, an arrangement which at least brings into juxtaposition the Crux coins proper and the excessively rare variety of Helmet which disposes the letters C-R-V-X in the angles of the reverse type.[3]

It must be said at once that the hoard evidence is quite decisive that Long Cross precedes Helmet—one has only to bring together such major hoards as those from List on Sylt, Igelösa in Skåne, Digeråkra on Gotland, and Gaulverbajær in Iceland, not to mention the Yholm hoard from Jutland which was known to Parsons and Brooke, to realize that Long Cross must be the earlier type.[4] Consequently the coins of Lincoln and Wallingford which Hildebrand describes as of his 'Type E. var. b' are mules 'the wrong way round', and the purpose of this note is to suggest that there are arguments against their being English which enable us to leave them out of our calculations with a clear conscience. They do not 'fit'—and this may be thought in itself an argument against their authenticity—but patently it is much more satisfactory if they can be rejected on other and perhaps less subjective grounds.

A glance at the obverses of the two coins (**Pl. V, A1 and B1**) is sufficient to establish that they have one feature in common which sets them apart from the run of Helmet coins. This is the curious prolongation of the 'tail' of the helmet and its termination in a trefoil thus:

[1] B. E. Hildebrand, *Anglosachsiska Mynt*, 2nd ed., Stockholm, 1881, p. 97, no. 2018 and p. 153, no. 3914; cf. ibid., p. 28.

[2] Cf. R. H. M. Dolley in *Commentationes de nummis saeculorum ix–xi in Suecia repertis*, Stockholm, 1961, pp. 155–72, &c.

[3] Hild. Type Ec—*pace* Thompson (*Inventory*, p. 20) coins of this excessively rare variety were not present in the Burray hoard (*Inventory*, 61) which in fact has the same composition as that from Quendale (*Inventory*, 144 and 161), both finds being datable *c.* 1000.

[4] Cf. R. H. M. Dolley and F. Elmore Jones in *B.N.J.* XXVIII. i (1955), pp. 77–79.

I have found this feature elsewhere only in the case of three obverse dies which purport to be used by the London moneyer Edwine, and here it is remarked by Hildebrand in a footnote.[1] There is no doubt of course that an Edwine was an authentic London moneyer of Æthelræd II, and certain of his Helmet coins are of impeccable style and weight, e.g. Hild., nos. 2493, 2496, 2498, 2498 *bis*, and 2499 where the weights of unbroken specimens range between 1·16 and 1·50 grammes (18 and 23 grains). Significantly these certainly English coins are not die-linked with the three anomalous obverses already mentioned, and metrologically as well Hild. nos. 2492, 2492 *bis*, 2494, 2495, 2497, and 2635—the last misread and given to Godwine—stand quite distinct, the weights of unbroken specimens struck on round flans ranging between 1·45 and 1·81 grammes (22·5 and 28 grains). This far exceeds the norm for Helmet, and in itself is suggestive of Scandinavian workmanship. Suspicion can only harden when we find that the coins are from three obverse dies but only one reverse, and a Scandinavian origin may be thought clinched by the circumstance that Hild. 2495 and 2635 are struck on square flans with weights of 2·27 grammes (35 grains) and 2·52 grammes (39 grains) respectively. These critical coins are here illustrated (**Pl. V, a–f**).

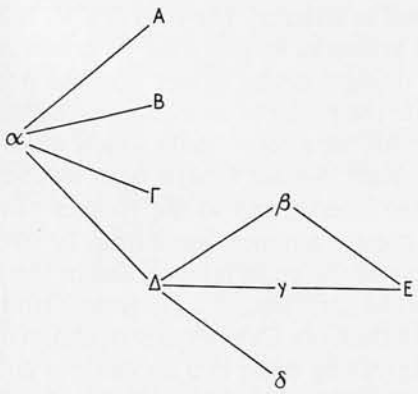
Already, therefore, there is a stylistic analogy which must cause suspicion to be thrown on the mule-coins of Lincoln and of Wallingford, and obviously they must be reconsidered very carefully with the possibility of Scandinavian workmanship very much to the fore. To take first the coin of Lincoln (**Pl. V, A 1**) it is perhaps noteworthy that Wulfmær ('Wulmær') is not known for the mint from a true coin of Helmet type. What is even more disturbing is that the mule (Hild. 2018) is of suspiciously high weight (1·71 grammes = 26·4 grains) for a coin presumptively struck to the Helmet standard, though Parsons and Brooke would be perfectly entitled to argue that this favoured their sequence of the types. What is not remarked by Hildebrand, however, is that Hild. 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 are all from the same reverse die (cf. **Pl. V, A 1–A 4**), and this has consequences which are disastrous for any theory that the Wulfmær in question was an English moneyer. Hild. 2016, for example, is of execrable style (**Pl. V, A 2**) and weighs 2·04 grammes (31·5 grains), while Hild. 2017 (**Pl. V, A 3**) is of only less peculiar workmanship and is struck on a square flan weighing 2·15 grammes (33 grains). It is Hild. 2015 weighing 2·02 grammes (31·0 grains) (**Pl. V, A 4**), however, which provides the real surprises. This obverse is of a style which cannot possibly be associated with the British Isles, and it also occurs with no fewer than three reverses concerning which Hildebrand himself wrote eighty years ago 'måste anses som falskmyntares arbete' ('they must be considered the work of forgers').[2] There are in the Systematic Collection at Stockholm five combinations of these dies, and the weights as well as the pattern of die-linking suggest a Swedish origin. From what we may call Die A (**Pl. V, A 5**) there is only one coin, but it weighs no less than 2·32 grammes (just under 36 grains), and this same reverse is used with a second obverse (**Pl. V, A 6**) to strike four coins weighing respectively 1·66, 1·74, 1·77, and 1·80 grammes (25·5, 27·0, 27·5 and 28 grains). From Die B (**Pl. V, A 7**) we have three coins weighing 1·44, 1·58, and 1·92

[1] B. E. Hildebrand, op. cit., p. 110, n. 2: 'På Adv. är nackskärmen på hjelmen prydd med 3 punkter.'

[2] B. E. Hildebrand, op. cit., p. 493.

grammes (22·0, 24·5, and 29·5 grains), and this die also is found combined with the same obverse die as Die A (**Pl. V, A 8**) to produce coins with the extraordinarily divergent weights of 1·09 and 2·00 grammes (say 17 and 31 grains). There are two coins from Die C (**Pl. V, A 9**), and they weigh respectively 1·80 and 1·95 grammes (28 and 30 grains).

There are found, then, springing from our 'Lincoln' mule no fewer than nine combinations of five obverse and four reverse dies which may be expressed diagrammatically thus:



and any student who has troubled to work out the pattern of die-linking among coins of the period which are incontrovertibly English will be reluctant to admit to the English series dies which are used in such intricate combinations to little or no apparent purpose. On purely stylistic grounds many of them would be rejected by the purest novice, and the average weight of the sixteen specimens readily accessible in the Systematic Collection at Stockholm is of the order of 1·80 grammes or 28 grains which would seem improbably high even if the median weight did not give the same result in a more significant form.[1]

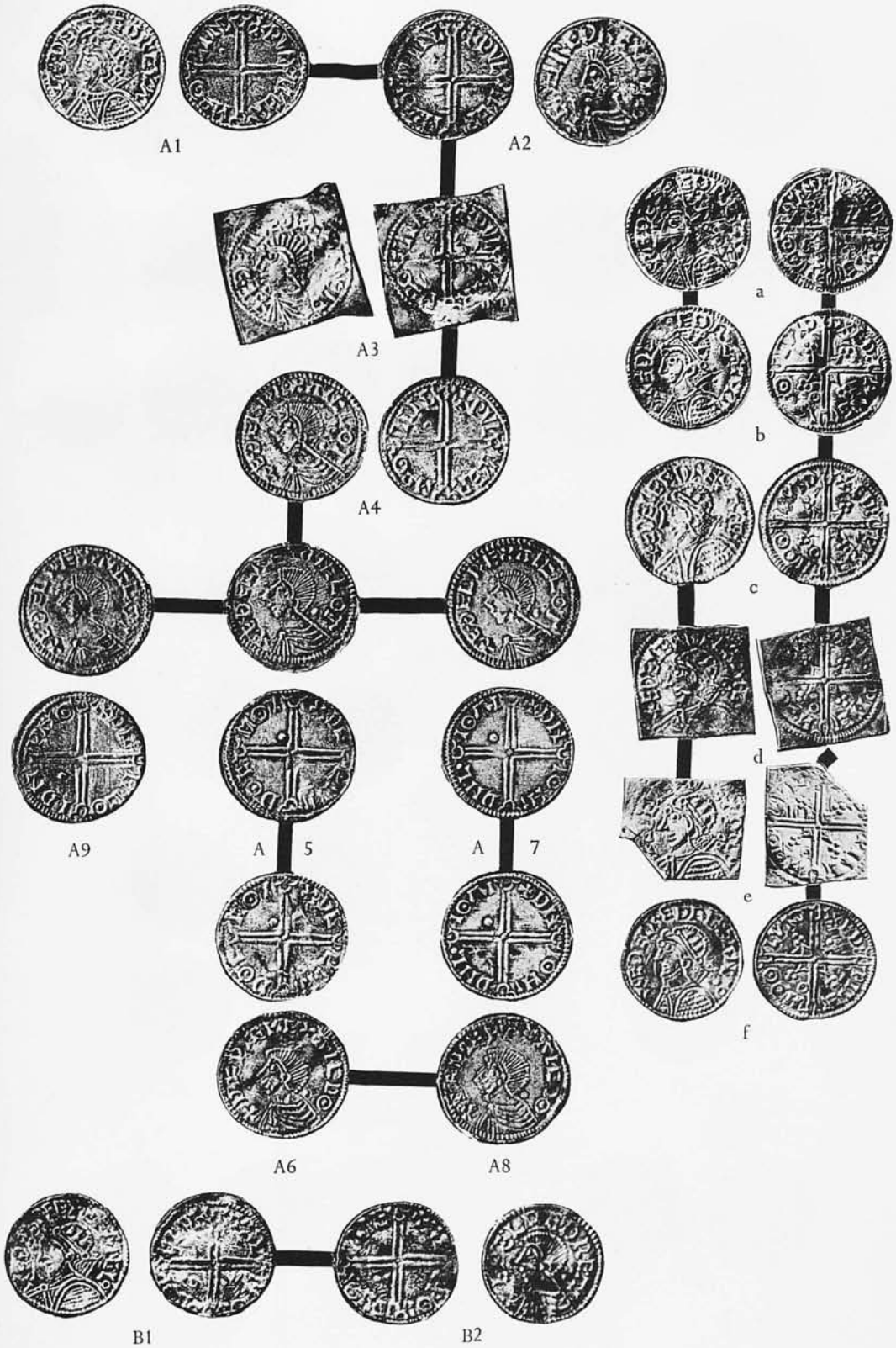
The position as regards the Helmet/Long Cross mule of Wallingford is only less unsatisfactory even though superficial respectability is conferred by the fact that the moneyer concerned, a certain Alfwold, is an undoubted Wallingford moneyer in the Crux, Long Cross, and Helmet types (cf. Hild. 3905–8 and 3910–13 which are of impeccable style and weight). If, however, we take the alleged mule, we find cause for suspicion in the weight as well as in the style. There are two specimens in the Systematic Collection at Stockholm, and one weighs 1·58 grammes (24·5 grains) and the other no more than 1·23 grammes (19 grains). Presumptively such mules were struck to the same standard as the Helmet coins proper—or to the Long Cross standard if Parsons and Brooke are correct—and it is a little disturbing, to say the least, that there is so great a discrepancy between these already too divergent figures and the weights of the other Long Cross and Helmet coins of Wallingford in the Systematic Collection. There are twelve Long Cross coins which are certainly English—Hild. 3890, 3892, 3898, 3899, 3910, 3911, 3917, 3919, 3924, 3927,

[1] For a recent numismatic exposition of the median, cf. B. Malmer in *Commentationes*, &c. (*supra*, p. 54, n. 1), pp. 281–8.

3931, and 3941—and their weights all fall between 1·63 and 1·73 grammes (25·0 and 26·5 grains), the average being a little over 1·67 grammes (just under 26 grains) and the median only fractionally lighter. Of five Helmet coins—Hild. 3902, 3902 *bis*, 3912, 3913, and 3942—two weigh 1·44 grammes and the others 1·45, 1·47 and 1·48 grammes, which suggests a weight-standard of at least 1·46 grammes (22·5 grains) with a tolerance of less than 0·05 of a gramme or half a grain on either side.

It will be noticed that I have left out of my calculations a thirteenth Long Cross coin allegedly of the mint, Hild. 3909, and here again my arguments are metrological as well as stylistic. The coin (**Pl. V, B 2**) is of wretched style, and weighs only 1·18 grammes or just over 18 grains so that it is something like 0·5 of a gramme or eight grains lighter than the norm. Significantly, too, it does not die-link into the group of coins that are certainly English, but there is a reverse die-link with the alleged mule which must surely be fatal to the authenticity of them both. So far I have been unable to find this obverse employed with another reverse, and so the Helmet obverse from the alleged mule remains for the present a nonce, but it must be stressed that my searches have not extended beyond the material recorded in the 1881 edition of *Anglo-sachsiska Mynt*. It will be surprising if a systematic study of the Scandinavian imitations preserved in the Coin Cabinet at Stockholm does not reveal a whole chain of die-linking involving these two anomalous coins from a reverse die purporting to be of Wallingford, but even if this should prove not to be the case it is abundantly clear that they have no place in the English series.

Consequently it must now be accepted that the Helmet/Long Cross mule is a myth, and thus there vanishes one of the last arguments that could still be advanced in support of the Parsons and Brooke transposition of the Long Cross and Helmet issues, a transposition which, as we have seen, flies in the face of the whole of the hoard-evidence. It is satisfactory, too, that there should now be vindicated the general principle that the obverse of a mule is the earlier of the two types, and this is of some importance for the student who wishes to place correctly in Æthelræd's sequence of coin-types the *Agnus Dei* pennies which have been the subject of such wild speculation.



MYTHICAL HELMET/LONG CROSS MULES OF AETHELRAED II