

# WERE EALDORMEN EXERCISING INDEPENDENT CONTROL OVER THE COINAGE IN MID TENTH CENTURY ENGLAND?

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KENNETH Jonsson's recently published doctoral dissertation<sup>1</sup> is focussed on Edgar's reform of the coinage late in his reign, and the core of his research has been to assemble a new corpus of specimens of the Reform/Small Cross type, issued for some six years consecutively by Edgar, Edward the Martyr, and Æthelred II. Where Hildebrand was able to list only about a hundred specimens of the type, Jonsson pushes the total up to nearly eight hundred coins, from fifty-one mints. This impressive increase owes much, obviously, to the numerous unpublished Swedish hoards which he has been able to study, but there is English hoard-material too.

Within the total, mint output was very unequal with, for example, only one surviving coin from Barnstaple, and one from Bath, but 141 from Stamford. One can see therefore that there could well have been other small mints from which, by chance, no coin has survived: in the circumstances of very unequal mint activity, even 800 coins is far too small a sample for finality. Similarly, we should recognize that our list of moneyers for the type is likely to be equally or even more incomplete. Carefully handled, the sample should nevertheless permit many valid and interesting conclusions. Jonsson sets out the detailed evidence of regional styles of die-cutting, die-duplication, and die-links fully, mint by mint, in section 4 of his book. By tabulating the styles of some 460 (obverse) dies he brings out very clearly the swift changes in arrangements for the supply of dies to the various mints even within this one validity-period. Thus, 88 per cent of Edgar's (Reform type) dies were cut at Winchester (does statistical bias in the sample mean that this figure is too low?), whereas under Edward and Æthelred II the proportion falls to 28 and only one per cent respectively. The detailed provenances of the coins are recorded in a useful companion-volume to the dissertation, *Viking-Age Hoards and Late Anglo-Saxon Coins* (Stockholm, 1987), in which Jonsson lists, in fact, 859 Reform/Small Cross coins, and 2,690 Hand coins.

He calculates that the available Reform/Small Cross coins are the survivors from an estimated 920 dies, but that because the sample mixes coins that have had different survival-rates (southern mints being under-represented), the calculated total will be an under-estimate, and that 1,500–2,000 would be more realistic. If we assume some sort of regional consistency in the survival-rates (which can only be assessed statistically for the larger individual mints), the pattern is such that the lower of these figures would seem to make ample allowance. Even so, the sample size is considerably smaller than the probable original total of dies (e.g. 920 of 1,500), and the evidence needs to be handled accordingly. Jonsson accepts the total as demonstration that there was a very effective recoinage (spread over six years?) of the existing stock of currency. The virtual absence of pre-reform

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<sup>1</sup> K. Jonsson, *The New Era. The Reformation of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage.* Commentationes de Nummis Saeculorum IX–XI in Suecia Repertis. Nova Series, vol. 1 (Stockholm and London, 1987).

coins (a) in English hoards such as Chester and (presumably) Oakham, and also (b) in Scandinavia is perhaps better evidence for the same conclusion, although the choice of coins (a) to hoard and (b) to export could well have been selective, if their alloy was known to vary.

In order to study the historical significance of Edgar's reform, Jonsson found it advisable to begin before the reform, and to make a thorough study also of Edgar's pre-reform coinage. Here, of course, he encounters all the problems of interpretation which occur when many of the coins in the sample are without a mint-signature. To assess the whole exactly, one really needs to be able to attribute all or virtually all the coins to their mints. Using procedures very similar to those which Blunt applied to Athelstan's coins, he follows the moneyers' names through onto mint-signed coins where such exist, and makes a comprehensive and integrated analysis of the regional minting of particular types and varieties. Hand in hand with this, he gives a most interesting account of the composition of the hoards. With courage and determination, he pushes his analysis to its practical conclusion, by offering us as a summary a regional attribution for all known pre-reform moneyers of Edgar, in a series of tables in which he assigns a great many of the moneyers to specific mints (thirty-eight are mooted), and also suggests three chronological phases for the pre-reform coins, within the period 959–c.973. The tables show which types are known for each moneyer in each phase. These tables will be found on pages 70–7, and students will wish to note them as a convenient summary to consult. They are the result of Jonsson's examination of over 1,500 coins. The survival-rate seems again to have been very uneven, both regionally (there is little from the south) and chronologically (little from phase 3, but die-estimation would be needed to prove that this is not, in fact, due to dwindling output). An estimate of the volume of the pre-reform coinage, in the absence of a complete check of the dies, can only be a judicious guess. Jonsson arrives, by a sensible route, at a total of between 1,250 and 1,750 dies.

At any British university, either the reform or the pre-reform section of Jonsson's dissertation would alone have merited a research degree. By dealing with both coinages, he has given 'good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over'. Much more to the point, he has placed himself – and us – in the position of being able to compare the two phases on a critically informed factual basis, and thus to be able to draw sound historical conclusions about the character of Edgar's reform – and therefore perhaps also about its intentions. His ideas about the intentions are expressed in the title and sub-title of the book, *The New Era: the Reformation of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage*. He sees the reform as reflecting a sea-change in the English coinage and currency, no less in the administrative arrangements and the exercise of political power behind it, than in the changed outward appearance of the coins. In the middle decades of the tenth century, under two successive boy-kings, the balance of power tilted, naturally and perhaps inevitably, towards the ealdormen who governed great provinces in the king's name. Often dynastic and royally connected by birth or marriage, they were in any case *ex officio* extremely influential in the political life of the country. We are talking about a tiny group of men, very well known to each other, varying in number from time to time from sometimes only four or five to as many as a dozen, who had no superior except the king, and who were the essential members of the witan, governing the country collectively with the king, in so far as decisions affecting the whole country were being made. Jonsson perceives a pre-reform currency compartmentalized into a similar small number of regions, which seem to coincide more or less in their boundaries with ealdormanries. Different regions are producing different designs or varieties of coinage. There may possibly have been different weight-standards, and even differences of alloy between the regions (but he offers no evidence for either of these assertions, which it is permissible to doubt). He suggests that the effective control of the coinage had passed into the hands of the

ealdormen, that they may even have undertaken local recoinages, and that the geographically restricted circulation of the coins was somehow a function of the control exercised by the ealdormen. (The crucial evidence for local recoinage could in principle only come from the age-structure of local hoards, exhibiting a sharp cut-off rather than the more gradual tailing-off found in a naturally dwindling currency. There is no such evidence.) As Edgar grew to manhood and into the fulness of his powers, he sought to draw control back more into his own hands; for example, by not replacing ealdormen who demitted office – and, conspicuously, by reasserting royal control over the coinage and reforming it so that a uniform portrait type constantly presented the king's image to men everywhere.

That, in a nutshell, is Jonsson's thesis. It is a novel and most intriguing suggestion. One can see an obvious parallel in the transition from Carolingian to French feudal coinage, where the first attempts to throw off royal control were a little earlier than in England, in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Françoise Dumas has given an admirable exposition of the stages by which the coinage was feudalized, and of the political circumstances in which that could happen.<sup>2</sup> Thus, grants of immunities to abbeys were quickly followed by changes in the coin design, which omitted the royal name or title. Did a similar sequence of events almost occur in England? Did the Danish settlement in what came to be called the Danelaw, and the repeated assertion of independence by Viking or Hiberno-Norse rulers at York, in combination with the early death of Eadred and the tender years of Eadwig and Edgar, result in the transfer of *de facto* power to the ealdormen? It would of course be an exaggeration to suggest that the English kings were ever as weak as the Carolingian rulers became, and Jonsson is at pains to distinguish (p.186) between *de iure* and *de facto* power. Was the drive by Edward the Elder and Athelstan towards the creation of a united kingdom under the West Saxon dynasty temporarily halted and even reversed from 946 onwards, until Edgar reached his late twenties and was able to reassert a quasi-imperial power and to give substance to the ideal of English unity? Further, can this significance be read into the way the coinage was produced and the way it circulated? – has Jonsson, in fact, seen something no-one else has previously remarked upon? Should his radical assessment of the pre-reform situation remind one of the boy in Hans Christian Andersson's tale, who eventually pointed out that the king was wearing no clothes?

It is and will remain very much a matter of perspective and emphasis, how we judge power to have been shared within the ruling group. But one may reasonably doubt whether the ealdormen behaved without regard to their loyalty to the king – except in the year 957, when Eadwig was coerced into dividing the kingdom, and his brother became king of the Mercians and Northumbrians.<sup>3</sup> A modern parallel may help to make the problem clearer. The Ashmolean Museum consists of four departments, each with its keeper, and over the whole there is a director. From most perspectives, and especially from outside, the keepers may appear to be acting quite independently; and human nature is such that each of them tends to feel that he does not need anyone to tell him how to run his department. But they meet regularly with the director in private to discuss the running of the museum and to decide collectively on general policy, and the individual keepers take account of the collective decisions in laying down policy in their departments, even if they do not always explain that they are doing so. The king and his ealdormen likewise met regularly in private in the witan to discuss affairs of state. As the historian cannot see and hear their

<sup>2</sup> F. Dumas, 'Le début de l'époque féodale en France d'après les monnaies', *Cercle d'Études Numismatiques*, 10 (1973), 65–77.

<sup>3</sup> On the oath of fidelity and the importance attached to the individual's relationship to the king as his lord, see

A. Williams, 'Some notes and considerations on problems connected with the English royal succession 860–1066', *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 1 (1978), 144–67.

conversation, catching the nuances of tone of voice, and of eye meeting eye, it is a very difficult task, in effect impossible, for him to know where the initiative and where the balance of personal influence lay. The best prospect lies in assembling detailed biographies for all the leading public figures, as a guide to their upbringing and family connexions, their friends and allies, and the moments when their careers were advanced. Much of the evidence has to come from the witness-lists of charters. By carefully exploiting this method, Hart has shown that the coup against Eadwig was not so much a matter of Mercian or northern separatism, as a reaction against Eadwig's hard-line confrontation of the monastic reform party and (with it) his attempt to break the power of Athelstan 'Half-King'.<sup>4</sup>

Dr Pauline Stafford has made a distinctive contribution to Anglo-Saxon history by expounding the significance of conflicts of loyalty. She has taught us to be aware that ealdormen had to know how to wear two hats, on the one hand serving the king's interests, and on the other hand being successful locally – without arousing the king's jealousy or suspicion.<sup>5</sup> They had to secure, by their patronage and by the exercise of leadership, the loyalty to their own person of the men of their ealdormanry. The ealdormen were well rewarded by the king, both directly and by the opportunities placed in their way to benefit from their responsibilities. In a later age the earl had his third-penny from the king's revenues. He may even have had a third of any annual payments made by the moneyers within his earldom. But the right to strike coinage was by long and unquestioned tradition a royal prerogative, and to suggest, as Jonsson does, that Edgar's ealdormen took the issue of coinage into their own hands (while continuing, of course, to set the king's name on the coins) strains credulity. The evidence for something so unexpected and implausible would need to be exceptionally clear. One would not wish Jonsson to pick up the mantle of W. J. Andrew.<sup>6</sup>

So what is his case? To do him justice, he states it in a balanced and judicious way. In view of its complexity and its lively historical interest (if we believe it), the best way to summarize it will be by quoting the key sentences from Jonsson's exposition. He begins from the position that the hoards and stray finds

together . . . show that, in the respective areas, the circulation of coins was almost exclusively confined to coins struck by mints in the region . . . It is thus clear that there existed a number of monetary regions that were self-sufficient as regards coins, and that the coins in circulation were limited to those struck within the region . . . The present attempt to survey the monetary regions is based on a division of England into at least six regions.<sup>7</sup>

and, a little later,

There remains the attempt to explain the reasons for the monetary regions. It may be that they were the result of a deliberate policy, which only allowed certain coins to circulate, or that they were due to a natural restriction based on natural borders, kinship, trading tradition etc. Blunt has discerned the existence of a regional pattern in the coinage of Athelstan . . . many similarities to . . . the pre-reform coinage of Eadgar . . .

<sup>4</sup> C. R. Hart's 'Biographical notes on the Burton Charters', in *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands* (Leicester, 1975), pp.253–380 give brief biographies of some 275 of the leading figures and are a veritable who's who of the tenth century. See especially the articles on Eadwig, Edgar, and Athelstan 'Half King'. A useful earlier approach to the position developed by Hart will be found in E. John, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp.154ff.

<sup>5</sup> P. Stafford, 'The reign of Aethelred II, a study in the limitations of royal policy and action', in *Ethelred the*

*Unready. Papers from the Millenary Conference*, edited by D. Hill (Oxford, 1978), pp.15–46; P. Stafford, 'One English nation', in *The Making of Britain. The Dark Ages*, edited by L. M. Smith (1984), pp.117–29.

<sup>6</sup> On Andrew's attempt to explain the references in Domesday Book to minting in terms of the granting of mints to the feudal nobility, see D. M. Metcalf, 'The taxation of moneyers under Edward the Confessor and in 1086', in *Domesday Studies*, edited by J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1987), pp.279–93, at pp.279–81.

<sup>7</sup> p.65.

monetary regions followed borders that had been set by other factors long before . . . The boundaries of the ealdordoms are not [altogether clearly evidenced]. In general, though, the borders were along the lines of the old kingdoms, whereby the ealdormen can be seen as the successors to the thrones, and upholders of the customs, the traditions, and the self-rule of the old kingdoms . . .

(This last sentence carries generalization too far, and it really does not fit very closely with the crucial case of Mercia. After the partition of Mercia and then the extinction of its royal house, the ealdorman Æthelred governed the southern and western half (with territory stretching as far as London) under Alfred and Edward, in effect as a sub-king, and he was succeeded by his widow, Æthelflæd, lady of the Mercians. But the men of the Five Boroughs completely redrew the political map of the north-eastern parts of what had once been Greater Mercia. When the (English) kingdom was divided in 957, obviously there were precedents, but the 'Mercia' that was then created, and defined as being north of the Thames, gave an historical name to a very artificial amalgam of two 'natural' political units, namely the rump of the old Mercia and the Danelaw, – out of which ealdormanries had recently been carved at will, as Eadwig's first move against Athelstan 'Half-King'. Thus were boundaries redrawn, and kingdoms created, in central Europe in 1918–19.)

In view of the regional character of the pre-reform coinage of Eadgar, a connection with the ealdormen becomes natural . . . The progressive unification of the coinage, noticeable in Wessex, would then reflect the growing personal influence of Eadgar in the south as he grew older. The coinage as a royal prerogative would be reduced to a formality in large parts of England, if the coinage in effect to a large extent was connected to the ealdordoms.<sup>8</sup>

The conditional structure of the last sentence allows Jonsson to say what he wishes, but cannot altogether prove. The earlier part of his summary amounts, nevertheless, to a logically coherent position, which quite fairly puts before the reader the choice between a 'political' and a 'natural' explanation, and which also makes clear that the two may in any case be expected to be interdependent. Jonsson's own preference is not concealed, and in the end, he leans decidedly towards it. By the time he reaches the concluding chapter of the dissertation, he reiterates his choice:

It is not possible to state as a fact that there is a direct link between the local areas of Eadgar's pre-reform coinage and the ealdordoms, but if such a link does not exist some other link will have to be found.<sup>9</sup>

Again, the conditional form of the sentence gives expression to the writer's intellectual scrupulousness. One is reminded, however, of Voltaire's 'Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer'.

Jonsson rests his case mainly on the regional circulation of the locally-produced coins – a set of more or less water-tight compartments – and allows to fall into the background his own earlier observations on regional variations in the types of the coins. One should not lose sight of these differences of type: they strengthen his case.

Perhaps one should just add that the only effective 'political' mechanism one could envisage which would cause coinage to pass constantly within the ealdorman's control would be taxation. Only so could he have excluded non-local coins from use, and undertaken the local recoinages which Jonsson postulates.<sup>10</sup> Our knowledge of the scope and scale of cash taxation in the tenth century is, again, fragmentary in the extreme, so much so that it should not have found a place in Jonsson's arguments as a necessary premiss.

<sup>8</sup> pp. 67–8.

<sup>9</sup> p. 188.

<sup>10</sup> p. 77.

In effect, Jonsson favours a 'political' view of Edgar's pre-reform coinage and currency, and that (precisely) is why he sees Edgar's reform as the dawn of a new era. The title of the book expresses his leaning. If one wished to reject his interpretation of the pre-reform coins, it might be possible, using the same evidence as he has taken into account, to argue almost exactly the opposite case, namely that if royal control of the coinage never really faltered in England (and what is there to show that it did?) the reform can be seen as largely cosmetic: coins of the same value as before were struck at the same range of mints (any additional mints being tiny and of minimal significance); they had the same general validity, as enshrined in the Grately decrees, and the one really important change was that they circulated more freely throughout England. Changing the design of the coins changed their function very little, any more than it would change monetary affairs in the UK today if Scottish bank notes were done away with. Numismatists are perennially tempted to read too much historical significance into the designs stamped on coins.

We should search elsewhere (so our counter-argument might run) for an explanation for the accelerated circulation of coinage within England after the reform. A previously localized or regional circulation does seem anomalous, in the perspective of what we know about medieval monetary circulation in England south of the Humber, at any date from the late eighth century onwards. But if Edgar's pre-reform monetary regions bear such a marked resemblance to those recognizable in the time of Athelstan, we ought to be looking for an explanation that would cover both reigns – a long-term explanation rather than something tied to the political weakness of boy-kings. Two possibilities might be worth thinking about. Following the recovery of English territory from Danish control, the tenth-century kings may have held back from imposing royal taxes payable in cash. If Edgar finally did so at about the time of the reform (which is, of course, mere speculation), that might well have resulted in a greater mingling of the issues of different mints. Secondly, the reform was soon followed by radical changes in the orientation of monetary outflows from England: whereas there are numerous pre-reform hoards from Ireland and Scotland, the later coins abruptly ceased to be hoarded there, and instead went in an ever-growing flood to Scandinavia. Also, from very soon after the reform we see a new kind of hoard within English territory (Chester 1914; Shaftesbury), revealing a rapid dispersion of coins between regions. Each of these hoards looks like the money of a widely-travelling merchant. Internal and external monetary trends are likely to have been linked in some way, even if the causal links are too difficult for us to unravel.

Before seeking alternative explanations, however, it would be only fair to say where one thinks the logical flaw may lie in Jonsson's case, since it is, as we must agree, coherent and plausible. So where are the weaknesses? In order to find them we need to look, not at the logical structure of the argument in isolation, but outside it (as we have just been doing, very briefly), at its context. And we need, as always, to look at the facts for ourselves. There are, I suggest, two main criticisms to be made. First, the facts do not fully warrant the construction which Jonsson places upon them (and which he then tends to remember as if it were factual). In this respect his argument is not free from optimism. Secondly, even in so far as the facts do warrant our seeing a link, it is not essential to postulate a *direct* link between the ealdormen and the monetary regions: a rather longer and looser chain of causality would answer to the evidence. The second criticism draws some of its strength from the first.

First, then, the facts about monetary circulation. Jonsson identifies six 'monetary regions', defined in terms of the circulation only of locally-minted coins within each.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> p.66.

They are: the North-East, including Northumbria; the North-West; Central Mercia (i.e. the Severn basin); East Anglia; the South-East Midlands; and Wessex (including Kent, London, and Essex, three former kingdoms). Hoards and stray finds of Edgar's coins show us what the age-structure of the currency was and what varieties of coinage were in circulation in each region. They are our only possible source of first-hand information on these topics, and there are far fewer of them than one could wish. Two of the three useful hoards (Tetney, and Chester 1857) each show a 'single-region' composition, namely the North-East plus Northumbria (but should not that have been two regions if the 'political' thesis were correct? – the Northumbrians were not the East Mercians' best friends) and the North-West respectively. The Chester 1950 hoard, on the other hand, includes coins from all six regions, and Jonsson has to play it down as not typical. The hoards from Ireland and Scotland are made up mostly of northern coins, often with more from the North-East than the North-West (surprisingly?) but in any case normally with a mixture. The support they add to the recognition of two separate northern regions (which are in any case obviously separated by the Pennine moorlands) is thus limited or even negative.

From the regions south of the Humber there are virtually no hoards, (and therefore there is no possibility of information about the age-structure of the local currency). We have to rely on stray finds. These offer in principle much better, less ambiguous, evidence than hoards – provided there are enough of them. There are not. Jonsson distinguishes NWI (Chester) from NWII (Derby/Tamworth) *as regions of monetary circulation* on the strength of the hoards plus *one* stray find, from the coast at Meols. This is methodologically unjustified, or let us say very optimistic. For the pattern to have any statistical validity, one would need a thick scatter of finds, giving a tolerably complete coverage of the regions to be defined. It would be reasonable to look for at least a dozen single finds from each region, and nine or ten out of the dozen from NWI (for which we can accept the Chester hoard in lieu) would need to be of the Chester mint, and eight or nine from NWII of the Derby and Tamworth mints, before one could claim to have distinguished, on a factual basis, between two regions of monetary circulation. The best one can do, for NWII, is to point to the considerable activity of the Derby mint.

Similarly, from the Central Mercian region we have the grand total of one stray find, from Worcester. Consider: if the currency of the region had in fact consisted of 20 per cent locally-minted coins, 40 per cent Chester coins, and 40 per cent 'Wessex' coins, how many single finds would one need in order to recover those three percentage figures at all reliably? Forty would not be excessive. This region is important to Jonsson's thesis because it impinges on the historical problems of the areas ruled over by Mercian ealdormen, and the interpretation of the coup of 957 by reference to Mercian separation.

Again, Jonsson admits that his South-East Midlands region 'could be part of Wessex' so far as the types minted there are concerned. Of the seven single finds, the three from the eastern half of the region (thus nearly half the total) are in fact East Anglian. Another question of methodology: are the boundaries that have been drawn monetary, or merely political? – If it is claimed that they define regions of monetary circulation, why were they not drawn in accordance with the available facts, such as they are, i.e., why was the 'East Anglian' region not extended westwards to cover the three finds from the Cambridge/Royston area? (And in any case, what is the justification for defining East Anglia as consisting of Norfolk and Suffolk, when, as Jonsson himself notes, Athelstan Half King's East Anglian ealdormanry ran from Thames to Welland, and was bounded by Watling Street and the territory of the Five Boroughs?)

Jonsson's 'Wessex' is a very large region, and it is not surprising that coins from the many mints within it made up the bulk of the local currency. The single finds show London coins circulating freely as far as the Winchester area and *vice versa*, – although these were not within the same ealdormanry. Here, south of the Thames, the model of monetary

regions and ealdormanries obviously does not fit very well, and Jonsson admits that within the power-base of the Western Saxon kings his thesis is less applicable.

The second main criticism is that the causal link between ealdormanries and the supposed regions of monetary circulation is too tightly drawn. A similar, but more familiar argument may help to make clear the force of the objection. Michael Dolley and I once suggested that Edgar's reform mints, as supplemented by his successors, were established in order to create a network, with 'the intention that men should not have to travel an unreasonable distance in order to reach a mint'.<sup>12</sup> To which one might reply that that need not have been the intention. Mints were in towns, for obvious reasons of security; and towns formed a network, in response to military, economic, and other needs, so that men should not have to travel an unreasonable distance to reach a town. Thus one introduces a middle term into the syllogism, an extra step in the argument.<sup>13</sup> One would be at a loss to know how to adduce evidence which proved the tighter causal link as against the looser one – especially as the number of mints operating before the reform, over and above those already known, is virtually impossible to determine. There are enough unassigned pre-reform moneyers to raise the total significantly above thirty-eight.

Similarly, one might reply to Jonsson that between Edgar's pre-reform monetary regions and the ealdormanries there was an indirect rather than a direct connexion, namely that a monetary region tended to coincide, especially north of the Thames, with the geographical or economic region that was tributary to a major provincial centre (which sometimes included among its functions a die-cutting establishment) and that ealdormanries also tended to coincide with these natural regions, and to reinforce them. As we have far too little find-evidence to define the monetary regions precisely, and as the documentary and other written sources are vague and incomplete in the extreme about the boundaries of the ealdormanries, it is hard to see how one could ever hope to prove the tighter causal link as against the looser one.

Christopher Blunt summed up his views of Athelstan's coinage in a memorable passage which the reader should now be ready to scrutinize critically:

... in the second quarter of the tenth century, the coinage of England was still being organized on a regional basis and ... the regions were related to the areas of the former kingdoms and reflect the division of the country following the Treaty of Wedmore. This is clearly shown by the distinctive coinages of Wessex and Kent (combined), Mercia, East Anglia (using this term in the sense of Norfolk and Suffolk) and Northumbria. The Danish shires south of the Humber (other than Norfolk and Suffolk) equally had an organization of their own, as did the north-midland area round Nottingham, Tamworth, and Leicester, and there is some evidence of a separate organization for an area on the Welsh border. The distinctive styles, as well often as types, of the coins show that the regions maintained their own die-cutting workshops from which neighbouring mints were supplied.<sup>14</sup>

There is nothing in this to which one can object, because Blunt's 'regional organization' is strictly a matter of the supply of dies, in other words of style and often type, not of monetary circulation as defined (necessarily) by finds, and certainly not of politics. We should remember that dies were often regionally supplied after Edgar's reform, and that those *ateliers* clearly do not prove a loss of royal control over the coinage. Nor would anyone, presumably, wish to argue that in the time of Athelstan the regional pattern for the supply of dies, and the use of local varieties, demonstrates royal weakness or separatist tendencies to such an extent that royally-appointed ealdormen had taken the coinage into

<sup>12</sup> R. H. M. Dolley and D. M. Metcalf, 'The reform of the English coinage under Eadgar', in *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, edited by R. H. M. Dolley (1961), pp.136–68, at p.148.

<sup>13</sup> 'We would suggest that when a place had both burghal status and a mint, the real connexion is that many of the

same considerations governed the establishment and geographical distribution of each', Dolley and Metcalf, p.147.

<sup>14</sup> C. E. Blunt, 'The coinage of Athelstan, 924–939. A survey', *BNJ* 42 (1974), 35–160, at p.114.

their own hands. So we need not concede any compelling force to the same argument when applied to the reign of Edgar.

The essentials of the case against Jonsson's thesis, then, are these. His claim that royal control over the coinage faltered in the 950s and 960s relies upon the assessment of events and of the ealdormen's loyalties that is unlikely to command the historian's assent. The topographical evidence would have to be full and unambiguous in order to compel us to postulate mechanisms for the regional control of the currency within the boundaries of each ealdormanry, or even of some ealdormanries. Some day, in the distant future, we may be in a position to undertake a decent and sober regression analysis, based on two or three hundred finds. Year by year a few more become available, but at present their evidence is sketchy in the extreme. It is barely enough to support the case for the much looser links of a 'natural' regionalism.

It remains a mystery why, from the introduction of Alfred's Two Line type and more particularly from the 930s through to Edgar's reform, the English coinage should have consisted in varying proportions of portrait types, circumscription types, and two-line types alongside each other. The metrology of the Rome (Forum) hoard<sup>15</sup> shows very clearly that there was a single weight-standard, with a modal value of c.1.54g for all three types, exactly maintained through the reigns of Edward, Athelstan, and Edmund, and the same in the North-West and the North-East as in Wessex. Such analytical evidence as there is suggests that the alloy was equally uniform as between types and regions even if it became progressively less reliable from the 940s onwards. We do not know whether the uniformity of weight and type persisted right up to c. 973, but any general explanation of coin-types in the period c.890–c.973 must certainly assume that coins from north and south, whatever their type or mint, were carefully controlled and of the same value.<sup>16</sup>

So what, after all, was Edgar's reform about? Were periodic type-changes foreseen from the very beginning? Might it not be enough to say that naming its mint-place on every coin improved accountability, and that the portraiture emphasized royal power and the uniformity reflected the ideal of English unity? Jonsson suggests eight main objectives of the reform type (p.189) which the reader may wish to ponder for himself. Nos 1–4 are unexceptionable, but nos 5–8 are each speculative in one way or another. He might have added a ninth, from the positive evidence of metal analysis. The reform type was of a quite exceptional purity of silver, reflecting a strenuous attempt by the moneyers to achieve a high standard; and the immediately pre-reform issues, conversely, certainly included some very debased issues. Thus, five specimens of *BMC* Type iii, the Circumscription Cross type, minted at Oxford and Wallingford, have silver contents varying between only 55 and 68 per cent – whereas the Reform type was 96 or even 97 per cent silver.<sup>17</sup> The analyses published in 1972 by McKerrell and Stevenson show an increasing unreliability of alloy beginning under Eadred. A proximate reason, and a serious reason, for Edgar's reform was to set the house in order by sweeping away a currency that was defective and therefore damaging. Throughout the middle ages that was, of course, quite a standard reason for undertaking a coinage reform.

It is not obvious, then, that Edgar's reform marked the dawn of a new era in the English *coinage*, unless one assumes that its main purpose was to inaugurate periodic type-changes, and that that intention was present already in c. 973. On the other hand, the reform did coincide quite closely with a sea-change in the *currency* – above all, a shift from outflows

<sup>15</sup> The evidence is presented in a forthcoming study by the writer in the *Bollettino di Numismatica*, on the basis of a re-weighing of the entire hoard since its cleaning.

<sup>16</sup> There are irregularities of weight among the coins minted in East Anglia, Northumbria, and (surprisingly)

Kent, which do not, however, affect the general argument centred on Mercia.

<sup>17</sup> D. M. Metcalf and J. P. Northover, 'Interpreting the alloy of the later Anglo-Saxon coinage', *BNJ* 56 (1987), 52–3.

towards Ireland and Scotland, to outflows towards Scandinavia. The mint of Chester suddenly sank from major to minor importance, and much the same is true of Derby. Concurrently, the circulation of coinage between regions within England, specifically between north and south, or perhaps between the Danelaw and the rest of England, increased greatly.

Jonsson has presented a valuable new body of numismatic data – a task which he hopes to round off by publishing a sylloge of the Reform/Small Cross type – and he has also offered a stimulating historical interpretation of the coinage during Edgar's reign. For this especially he deserves our gratitude. With his volume, the new series of the *Commentationes* has got off to a good start.