

AN UNPUBLISHED FRAGMENT OF A COIN OF CEOLWULF II

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OF King Ceolwulf II of Mercia not much is known. An entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 874 records that after the expulsion of King Burgred (852–74) by a Viking army the Vikings ‘gave the kingdom of the Mercians to be held by Ceolwulf, a foolish king’s thegn; and he swore oaths to them and gave hostages, that it should be ready for them on whatever day they wished to have it, and he would be ready, himself and all who



FIG. 1.

would follow him, at the enemy’s service.’¹ The same work shows that after a year’s stay in Cambridge in 875–6 and a campaign in Wessex in 876–7 the Viking army ‘went away into Mercia’ at harvest time in 877 and ‘shared out some of it, and gave some to Ceolwulf’.² It is customarily assumed that this gives the date for the division of the ninth-century Mercian kingdom into a western half which remained under English rule and the eastern half which became known as the Danelaw.³ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not otherwise refer to Ceolwulf but it is evident from an entry in it for 886 recording the submission of all the English who were not under Viking subjection to King Ælfred of Wessex that Ceolwulf’s reign had ended in or before that year.

This picture can be amplified from the evidence of charters and coins. Charters show that Ceolwulf’s authority was recognized in the West Midlands in 875 and that his sphere of influence extended as far as Oxfordshire.⁴ Another, dated 883, relates to property in the same part of the country but is issued not by Ceolwulf but by Æthelred, *ealdorman* of Mercia, which suggests that Ceolwulf’s reign may have been over by 883 rather than 886.⁵ Coins, though not numerous, are sufficient to show that Ceolwulf had the services of moneyers who had worked for his predecessor Burgred and as Burgred’s mint was—or appears to have been⁶—at London it is not unreasonable to suppose that Ceolwulf’s coinage was struck at London also. This would allow the deduction that Ceolwulf was

¹ Entry for 874 as translated in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Whitelock and others, London, 1961, p. 48.

² Entry for 877 as translated *ibid.*

³ The army itself did not penetrate deeply into Mercia in 877—it probably did not get much beyond Gloucester, where Æthelweard records that it ‘built booths’—and it left Mercian territory for Chippenham very early in 878. It is possible that the division of land

referred to was a temporary one relating to land in the south of Mercia and that the west–east partition took place on another occasion. See below p. 119.

⁴ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford, 1943, p. 249 and footnote 3.

⁵ Stenton, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

⁶ H. E. Pagan, ‘Coinage in the Age of Burgred’, *BNJ* xxxiv (1965), pp. 11–27, especially pp. 11–14 and 26–7.

recognized as king there and that would accord with evidence that London was administered by the *ealdorman* Æthelred rather than by West Saxon kings in the period 886–911.

The coins of Ceolwulf so far published number nine. One is of 'Two Emperors' type and by the moneyer Ealdwulf, and the others have as their reverse type a long cross with voided lozenge centre and are by the moneyers Cuthulf, Dealinc, Dudecil, Dunna, and Liafwald. All these moneyers except Dunna worked under Burgred and Cuthulf, Dealinc, Ealdwulf, and Liafwald struck coins for Burgred which can be attributed to the London mint and dated 870–4. Dudecil's coins for Burgred are of a different character; the most likely explanation for this is that those which are known today were struck at London rather earlier in the reign than 870–4, but another explanation might be that they were struck at some other mint.¹

The purpose of the present note is to put on record a fragment of a tenth coin of a new type which may provide fresh information about the extent of Ceolwulf's kingdom and the duration of his reign. The coin is not altogether unknown to numismatists nor is its attribution to Ceolwulf a novel one; it came to the British Museum in 1956 as part of a collection bequeathed by Mr. T. W. Armitage² and accompanying tickets show that Armitage recognized it for what it was and that Mr. Dolley when a member of the staff of the Department of Coins and Medals was also of the opinion that it was a coin of Ceolwulf and of a new type. It is, however, unpublished and there has not even been a passing reference in print to its existence. The deterrent factor has been, and remains, the interpretation to be given to a circumscriptinal inscription on the reverse of which all that is visible on the fragment are the letters CO. Armitage's ticket shows that he supposed this to be a mint signature and proposed to supplement it LIN]CO[LLA. If the supplement is correct this would be the earliest coin of the Lincoln mint known and its existence would cast a new light on the history and monetary organization of Mercia at this period. If it is not correct it would be necessary to propose some convincing alternative, and no such alternative has so far been found.

The fragment (ill. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) may be described thus:

O.]CEO[L? Profile bust, to r.?, within beaded inner circle.

R.]ANR[E? Central ornament, character uncertain, surrounded by circumscriptinal inscription]CO[; all within inner beaded circle.

That obverse is obverse and reverse reverse is certain, for the visible part of the design within the inner circle on the side with inscription CEO can only be interpreted as the curly hair at the back or top of a ruler's head and on Anglo-Saxon coins a ruler's head is found only on the obverse. Having established that, it will follow that the coin must have been struck by one of the two ninth-century Mercian kings called Ceolwulf or by Archbishop Ceolnoth of Canterbury (833–70), as these are the only issuers of coin in the Anglo-Saxon period in whose names the letters CEO appear consecutively. Considerations of style and type naturally associate the coin with Ceolwulf II or with Archbishop Ceolnoth rather than with Ceolwulf I (821–3), whose issues have larger lettering and plain inner circles, and Armitage's ticket provides the information that the coin's provenance is 'Cuerdale sweepings', which must mean that it was struck after the middle of

¹ See below, p. 19, where their resemblance to coins of Burgred by a moneyer Eanred is noted. They also resemble coins of Burgred by the moneyers Duda,

Dudeman, Tata, and Wine.

² It is registered as E 4185.

the ninth century and favours an attribution to Ceolwulf II in preference to the archbishop; the Cuerdale hoard was deposited *c.* 903 and virtually all the coins in it were struck after *c.* 875.¹ Further ground for supposing that it is not a coin of the archbishop is provided by the visible curly hair, for coins of Ceolnoth struck before *c.* 866 invariably carry a facing tonsured bust without curls and coins of Ceolnoth's profile type struck in 866–70 have curls only as adjuncts at the edges of the tonsure. It is not likely that an ecclesiastic could be represented with the full head of hair evident from the fragment. There is also extensive hoard evidence for the period 866–74 which goes to show that all coins struck in Ceolnoth's name in 866–70 were of one reverse type, an arrangement of a moneyer's name and the word *MONETA* in three lines, which is not the reverse type of this coin.

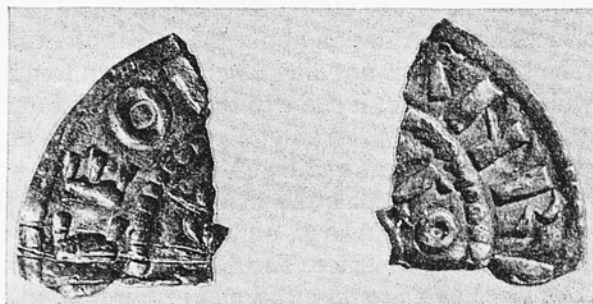


FIG. 2.

The coin must then be of Ceolwulf II and the obverse legend is presumably to be supplemented *CEO*[*L**V**V**L**F* *REX*] or *CEO*[*L**V**V**L**F* *REX* *M*], which are the two renderings of Ceolwulf's royal style found on coins already known. Study of the fragment supports the view that the legend begins *CEOL*, the letter after *O* on it beginning with a vertical stroke as the letter *L* would, but otherwise provides only the negative information that there was no initial cross before the king's name. What is visible before *CEO* appears instead to be a straight line extending from the edge of the coin into the inner circle and if this is the case it is likely to represent the shoulder of the king's bust; there exist coins of Burgred struck after 870 on which the king's shoulders are represented by single straight lines of this character.

On the reverse, the outer inscription is easy enough to supplement. The letters *ANR* are clear—only the top and the right-hand limb of the *A* are really visible, but it certainly is the letter *A*—and it is natural to see them as part of a moneyer's name. A moneyer's name followed by the word *MONETA* in a full or contracted form was an essential part of the legend of an Anglo-Saxon coin of this date and given this particular reverse type it must appear in the outer inscription as only there would there be room for both the name and the letters *MO* or *MONETA*. Of possible names *E*] *ANR*[*ED* would accord with the letters visible and the fact that the letter after *R* begins with a vertical stroke; if the coin was less well executed *ANR* could be a rendering of the *AHR* of a name

¹ There is a summary list of the coins of Ælfred in the Cuerdale hoard in C. E. Blunt and R. H. M. Dolley, 'The Hoard Evidence for the Coins of Ælfred', *BNJ* xxix (1959), pp. 220–47. Coins of Ceolwulf from Cuerdale are listed by R. H. M. Dolley, 'An Unpub-

lished Hoard-Provenance for a Penny of Ceolwulf II of Mercia', *BNJ* xxxii (1963), pp. 88–90, where the nine whole coins of the king are catalogued and illustrated.

such as Beahred, but ANR seems in this instance deliberate and Eanred is known as a moneyer for Burgred while Beahred is not (though see below, p. 20, for remarks that indicate that this last may not be a relevant consideration). There would be sufficient room after EANRED for the word MONETA in full and there might perhaps be room after MONETA for two or three further letters or some other space filler; there are coins of Archbishop Ceolnoth dating from c. 850 with circumscriptional reverse legends such as LIL MONETA DORVER and DIALA MONETA DORO, the extra letters forming a mint signature, and there is a coin of a king Eanred of the same date with a symbol filling space after DES MONETA.¹

The inner inscription is a shorter one, probably of not more than eight letters. There are perhaps four things that it might have been intended to convey: a mint signature; the name of a kingdom, district, or people ruled by Ceolwulf; the name of another ruler ruling jointly with Ceolwulf; or an abstract concept. There are instances of such inscriptions on other coins struck in England and in Western Europe during the ninth century, and the only other kind of inscription ever found is that giving a moneyer's name, which it has just been seen is a role performed on this coin by the outer inscription. It is to be noted at this point that if the outer inscription in fact ended with a mint signature this would not mean that the inner inscription necessarily conveyed something else, for there could be a carry-over of the mint signature, e.g. if the outer inscription ended MONETA LIN the inner inscription might read COLLA, COLLA CIV, or whatever was necessary to complete the reading; the inner inscription might even just be a word such as URBS, CIVITAS, or VILLA.

When it comes to making a choice between the kinds of inscription outlined the governing considerations are the need to find a legend that would be of the particular kind and would incorporate the letters CO and the requirement that when the reverse of the coin is considered as a whole there should if possible be a contemporary parallel for it. These considerations tell against the second and fourth possibilities. It would be perfectly possible from a theoretical point of view that the inscription should give the name of a country, district, or people ruled by Ceolwulf—coins of Æthelwulf with a moneyer's name and the word SAXONIORUM on the reverse provide an exact parallel²—but no territorial name incorporating the letters CO and with Mercian connotations seems to exist. Conversely, it would not seem impossible in practice to find a word such as PAX or CRUX but incorporating the letters CO that would fit the space required, but there is unfortunately no ninth-century parallel for the use of an abstract legend of this kind without an accompanying type to which it relates. Ninth-century coins with the legend MUNUS DIVINUM carry the type of a wreath and ninth-century coins with XPSTIANA RELIGIO (Christiana Religio) carry a church.³ It does not seem probable that a single abstract word other than PAX or CRUX, which are words themselves customarily accompanied by the type of a cross, would have so clear a reference that the engraver could inscribe it by itself.⁴

¹ J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, vol. i, London, 1963, pl. iii, nos. 7 and 8, and pl. viii, no. 26; the Eanred coin is also illustrated G. C. Brooke, *English Coins*, London, 1932 and subsequently, pl. iii, no. 2.

² North, *op. cit.*, pl. viii, no. 11; Brooke, *op. cit.*, pl. xii, no. 11.

³ In K. F. Morrison and H. Grunthal, *Carolingian Coinage*, New York, 1967, 465 pp.+xlvi plates, there is a useful introductory chapter on 'Interpretation of Types' (pp. 22–31), where pieces with these legends are discussed.

⁴ There are late ninth-century issues of the York mint with the inscriptions DNS DS REX and MIRABILIA

The possibility that the inscription provides the name of another ruler does not seem any more likely, for a name with *co* in it cannot be that of Ælfred, Halfdene, or Guthrum (Æthelstan II) and there is no evidence for the rule of other kings in the area at the period. Yet the possibility cannot quite be rejected out of hand, for there is at least one reason for taking it seriously. This is the fact that when the reverse type is considered as a whole it appears to be paralleled by the obverse type of some rare coins struck in the 870s by Carolingian rulers on which there are similar circumscriptive inscriptions of which the inner gives the name of a king. The coins in question are coins struck at the Lotharingian mints of Metz and Marsal.¹ Their exact date is uncertain, for the king Louis whose name they carry may either have been Louis the German (d. 876) or his son Louis the Saxon (876–82) but both attributions would allow their having had an influence on Ceolwulf's die-engraver's choice of type.² That there is a relation could be argued not merely from the resemblance the coins bear to each other and from the coincidence of date, but from the fact that the coins of Metz and Marsal are as exceptional among contemporary Carolingian issues as that of Ceolwulf is in the English series; and that the relation, if there is one, would be that of English imitation to Carolingian original is indicated by the Carolingian coins' superior style and by the fact that on them the circumscriptive design occupies the more dominant obverse position.

It does not necessarily follow that Ceolwulf's die-engraver would have chosen to place a king's name where the Carolingian engraver did, for the relationship may only be between the designs, but the parallelism does at least make it possible that he acted thus. He was, however, producing a reverse die, not an obverse die, and in the absence of any suitable regal candidate the presumption must be on balance that the word with *co* in it is not such a name. Just worth a glance is the possibility that the engraver copied the inner inscription wholesale from such a Carolingian model and that the *co* word is *LVDOVICVS* carelessly rendered, but this seems out of keeping with the coin's otherwise deliberate execution.

This leaves the possibility that the word is a mint signature. If the letters *co* come in the name of the mint town and the mint town is one where mint signed coins were struck at some other date before the Norman Conquest, which are both reasonable supposi-

FECIT (to be taken together, though on different sides of the coin) on which the only type is a cross; connection between the type and the legend is therefore a little vague, but there is a connection and the legend is full enough to make up for any lack of explicitness about the type.

¹ Morrison and Grunthal, *op. cit.*, p. 270, nos. 1241 and 1243. The coins of Metz resemble that of Ceolwulf most closely and it is interesting to see that on them the central ornament within the inner inscription is a lozenge from the corners of which four short vertical limbs spring; there is a line on the Ceolwulf coin coming away from the central ornament below and to the right of the *o* of *co* and it may be a limb of the same character.

² Morrison and Grunthal, *ibid.*, attribute these coins to Louis the Stammerer (877–9) or to his son Louis III (879–92), kings of the West Frankish branch of the Carolingian house. This is incorrect, for a

partition of Lotharingia in 870 gave '*civitatem Mettis cum omnibus villis in eo consistentibus*' to Louis the German and Metz remained in his family for the rest of the century (cf. C. Robert, *Études Numismatiques sur une partie du Nord-Est de la France*, Metz, 1852, pp. 16–17, where the text of the treaty making the 870 partition is given in full; and for a modern account of the history of the area after 870 see E. Hlawitschka, *Lotharingen und das Reich an der Schwelle der Deutschen Geschichte*, Stuttgart, 1968, 258 pp., which is particularly useful for the period 887–911).

Of other coins attributed by Morrison and Grunthal to Louis the Stammerer or Louis III those of Huy, nos. 1231–4, Namur, nos. 1235–8, Trier, no. 1239, and a coin of Metz of a different type, no. 1242 (for which the hoard provenance is Rennes, not Saumeray as given), are better attributed to Louis the Child (900–11); and coins of Rheims, nos. 1246–50, and of Paris, nos. 1251–2, appear to be of mid-tenth-century date and are most probably of Louis IV (936–54).

tions, the coin must, it would appear, have been struck at Lincoln or Colchester, as these are the only mint towns between Thames and Humber in the mint signatures of which the letters CO would appear. Of the two Lincoln is much the more probable; statements in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that Essex belonged at the time to Wessex and not to Mercia are not perhaps altogether decisive on the point,¹ but even so, Lincoln, a major city where a mint was certainly in operation by the end of the ninth century,² is a much more likely candidate than Colchester, of which the earliest Anglo-Saxon coins otherwise are coins of Æthelred II (978–1016).³ There is also the argument that a mint signature of Lincoln, whether LINCOLLA, LINDCOL, or LINCOL, could be fitted more easily into the space available than one of Colchester.

Armitage's supplement LIN]CO[LLA is thus a supplement to which the logic of the situation points. It does not follow that it is correct, for the actual legend may prove to be one which could not reasonably be foreseen, but it is a sufficiently probable supplement for it to be profitable to consider the consequences it entails for knowledge of Ceolwulf and his coinage. There are three of importance. First, it would indicate that Ceolwulf's authority was recognized at Lincoln, and that is not by any means improbable; suggestions that Ceolwulf's kingdom was from the start confined to the West Midlands rest on the absence of the bishops of Leicester and Lindsey from among signatories of his charters, but this may as readily be ascribed to their age, their health, or the difficulties of travel to the Mercian court as to their not giving their allegiance to Ceolwulf. Second, should the design of the coin be copied from the design of the coins of Metz and Marsal and should these be of Louis the Saxon (876–82), which is the attribution favoured by the best continental opinion,⁴ it would seem that Ceolwulf's coin cannot have been struck earlier than c. 877 and may have been struck after 877; this would raise questions about the date at which the Danelaw formally passed out of English control. Third, and this is the consequence of most immediate import to numismatists, the juncture of the moneyer's name Eanred and the Lincoln mint signature would raise the question whether coins of Burgred by the moneyer Eanred were struck at Lincoln also, and, if so, whether any other ninth-century Mercian coins without mint signature were struck at Lincoln. This issue is one that must be considered in detail in a future study of the coinage of Burgred and it would be inappropriate to say much about it here, but it should be said that the coins of Burgred by Eanred very much resemble coins of Burgred by Dudecil and that as with Dudecil the possibilities are either that the coins were struck at London some time well before the end of Burgred's reign or that they were struck nearer the end of Burgred's reign at a different mint; the first view was

¹ Entries in the *Chronicle* for 839 and 855 describe members of the West Saxon royal house as being, *inter alia*, kings of the East Saxons, but the references to the East Saxons are not made in all manuscripts of the *Chronicle* and it may be that they are interpolations. London certainly remained in Mercian hands until the 870s and it would have been difficult for West Saxon kings to have ruled Essex if Essex was separated from their kingdom by Mercian territory.

² For the Lincoln mint H. R. Mossop, *The Lincoln Mint c. 890–1279*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1970, cii plates, is essential reading. There are six coins of the mint that may be dated before 900; they are described in Mossop, *op. cit.*, facing pl. i, as 'Viking copies of

coins of Alfred', but the copying is not slavish and they may reflect a distant allegiance to Ælfred felt locally in the 890s.

³ The mint did not open until Æthelred's *Crux* type, struck c. 991–c. 997.

⁴ Such was the view of Longpérier, *Collection Rousseau*, 1847, p. 230, and it was also the view of Robert, *op. cit.*, pp. 207–8, and of Engel and Serrure, *Traité de Numismatique du Moyen Âge*, 1891, vol. i, pp. 260–1. Engel and Serrure remark of the coins that 'ces pièces peuvent compter au nombre des monuments les plus beaux que nous aient laissés les rois de la deuxième race'.

the one taken in a paper by the present writer written in 1965¹ and is the view to which he still inclines—on this view the Eanred at London and the Eanred at Lincoln would be different persons or one man resuming production at a different mint after a gap of some years—but the second view is one which must now be ventilated.²

¹ *BNJ* xxxiv (1965), p. 13.

² I must express my thanks to Miss M. M. Archibald, who drew my attention to the coin in the BM trays at a time when it was not incorporated in the

main collection, and has generously waived her own claim to publish it; and to Mr. C. E. Blunt who with his usual kindness read and commented on an earlier draft of this paper.