

# FEMALE CENTAUR OR SPHINX? ON NAMING SCEAT TYPES: THE CASE OF *BMC* TYPE 47

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A CHARACTERISTICALLY brilliant scheme to classify all Anglo-Saxon early eighth-century pennies, denarii, or sceattas, as they are generally called, into newly conceived 'series' was published by Stuart Rigold in 1977.<sup>1</sup> In addition to establishing criteria for these series, Rigold made of them an expandable language for the analysis of types by labelling his series alphabetically and providing rules for combining these letter labels so that any new coin type could be described. But simultaneously, although without any specific relationship to this new system, he also substituted new names never before used in numismatic literature for the customary names of some sceattas. Among these changes are 'shield' for 'Celtic cross', 'wyvern' for 'dragon', 'wolf worm' for 'wolf torc', and 'sphinx' for 'female centaur'.

The importance of Rigold's work on the dating and ordering of the sceattas is such that his new series classifications have already begun to appear as part of the standard identification of types in published numismatic literature. Naturally enough, as this new system is applied in use, it carries along with it Rigold's name substitutions as well. For example, Ian Stewart, in his 1984 survey of the early English denarial coinage<sup>2</sup> follows Rigold's series classification, extending the *BMC*/Hill numerical type sequence. In the process, he accepts certain of the new names, such as 'sphinx', rejects others in favour of the traditional names, and offers his own variants for still others.

Neither Rigold nor Stewart has provided in their publications a rationale for their respective name changes. Yet surely, before putting these, or any other, new type names into general use, it is worthwhile to discuss whether each proposed change is for the better. Admittedly, earlier research on the sceattas has left us a legacy of unsuitable names, each usually expressing a theory current when the name was assigned, but later disproven. Some of these names have subsequently been changed to, or supplemented by, neutral designations. 'Wodan', *BMC* type 66, now Rigold's 'facing head', series Z, is an example of this process. On the other hand, the term 'sceat', although proven incorrect more than twenty years ago, seems immune to change. I would like to consider here what criteria would justify changes in widely accepted or traditional names of sceat types in the literature.

To the numismatist fluent in the use of *BMC* type numbers, these unscientific popular names may seem unimportant, but there are at least two reasons for choosing them with care. One is that the names chosen have the power to produce images in the mind's eye, and these images suggest connections with similar themes represented on either coins or art objects. In this sense it is probable that the names given to types influence the direction of research, both favourably and unfavourably. For example, 'Wodan' not only awakens very different associations than 'facing head', but points misleadingly to an earlier date than that now assigned to the type. Another reason for care in naming types is that

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<sup>1</sup> S. E. Rigold, 'The principal series of English sceattas', *BNJ* 47 (1977), 24–29.

<sup>2</sup> I. Stewart, 'The early English denarial coinage, c.680–c.750', in *Sceattas in England and on the Continent*, edited by D. Hill and D. M. Metcalf, BAR British series, 128 (Oxford, 1984), pp. 5–26.

interested readers who, like myself, are not numismatists, usually rely on these descriptive type names when reading numismatic literature, rather than on the technical languages for the definition of coin types, which are difficult to apply when not consistently used. But even the type names do not make understanding easy for the non-specialist, since they do not always coincide with the customary names for the same designs in the literature of Anglo-Saxon art, archaeology or history. Would it not be desirable, as a general rule, to work toward a common terminology for types for these various disciplines? There are two contradictory numismatic obstacles to reaching this goal: some type names are not standard in the numismatic literature, others are so embedded that any change would be difficult. None the less, we should try to use those names for sceat types which free them from inappropriate or too narrow connotations. There is at this juncture a pressing need to think through the basic problems of classification and nomenclature, and to make sure that both encourage rather than inhibit the growth of knowledge. Ideally, all names, new or old, should be neutral as to theories, and precisely and concisely describe the actual coin design, while also avoiding any specialized terms which might be stumbling blocks for the general reader.

Let us apply this test to a few examples of changes of type names made in Rigold's 1977 series list. Rigold's 'type' is a 'design, generally defined by a form of words, like a heraldic blazon'.<sup>3</sup> His comparison with heraldry seems to have led him to employ such terms as 'shield' and 'saltire', which are rarely applied by art historians and archaeologists to Anglo-Saxon designs. Saltire is readily understandable, but shield would suggest to most readers a different shape than the equal-armed cross with expanded arms of *BMC* types 14, 34, 39, 48, 93 and 106, of series H and L. Moreover, 'shield' is potentially confusing because it had often been applied to the different *BMC* type 49, which Rigold names 'face and bosses', certainly a better description of this design. Rigold's series L and H 'shield' was formerly called 'Celtic cross', a name which art historians, archaeologists and others have often applied to this design when it appears in seventh- or eighth-century insular art. 'Celtic cross', although incorrect in that it is not specifically Celtic, is none the less a more accurate description than 'shield' of the design's intent, for like the 'knotted cross', *BMC* type 52, and the 'stepped cross', *BMC* type 53, the Celtic cross was an insular form of the Christian cross,<sup>4</sup> and thus analogous to the crosses and Christian monograms so prominent on Merovingian coins contemporary with the sceattas. The Christian character of the design is amply demonstrated by the similar form of seventh-century gold garnet inlaid pendant crosses from Wilton and Ixworth, the pectoral cross found in St Cuthbert's coffin, and the eighth/ninth-century bronze cross from Canterbury.<sup>5</sup>

Rigold's proposal to change the name of *BMC* types 40 and 57, both in series O, from 'dragon' to 'wyvern', is also unacceptable by the criteria we are testing. The 'wyvern' is a form of dragon popular as a heraldic emblem and in general use in medieval art from the early Norman period. These wyverns were similar to the familiar dragon in having wings, a serpent's tail and eagle-like claws, but differed in having only two legs in place of four.<sup>6</sup> The sceat animal indeed appears with only one or two hind legs, but never with the bat-like wings or the long, often knotted, tapering tail of the usual wyvern or dragon of later English art. Wyvern is thus hardly a precise description of the sceat design. 'Dragon', the traditional name for the sceat animal, is not much better, although it has sometimes been applied by art historians and archaeologists to an animal resembling that on the sceat,

<sup>3</sup> Rigold, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> W. Op den Velde, and W. J. De Boone, 'Het raadsel van het ringenornament' in *Westerheim*, 32 (1983), 355-64 have shown that the interlaced ring design on coins of the 'Maastricht' type can be interpreted as a Christian cross.

<sup>5</sup> For illustrations see R. Jessup, *Anglo-Saxon Jewellery* (New York, 1953), pls. XXVII, XXX, XXXI.

<sup>6</sup> See C. H. Gibbs-Smith, 'Notes on the plates', in *The Bayeux Tapestry*, edited by F. M. Stenton (London, 1956), pp. 86, 165, pl. 13.

whether with four legs or two, when it occurs in Germanic ornamental metalwork of the fifth to the eighth century, although plain 'animal' is more usual.<sup>7</sup> An important element in many versions of this animal design is a turned back head. This feature is incorporated in the neutral design description used by some numismatists, 'dragon looking back' or 'dragon, reverted head', as well as in the art historian's and archaeologist's 'animal with turned back head' or 'backward looking animal'.<sup>8</sup> Since the name 'dragon' has been used considerably longer than 'wyvern' by both numismatists and scholars in related fields, this traditional type name should probably be retained.

Rigold's proposed 'wolf worm' seems a radical remedy for any perceived deficiencies of the older 'wolf torc' for *BMC* type 32a, in his series K. 'Wolf serpent', the other traditional name for the motif, conveys the same form concept as 'worm', but without the bizarre dimensional and other form problems presented by 'wolf worm', especially in such extensions of it as 'wolf worm with legs'. From the art historian's point of view, if the customary name had to be changed, the 'curled wolf' adopted by Stewart would be preferable.<sup>9</sup> But this name can also be improved upon. Since the theory that the wolf types descended from *BMC* type 7, 'she-wolf and twins', has been shown by Metcalf and Walker to be incorrect,<sup>10</sup> the 'wolf' could readily be dropped in favour of 'canine', a neutral design description used by most non-numismatists for the corresponding animal in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon metalwork and manuscripts.

As with all his other name changes, Rigold never explained in print why he changed the name of *BMC* type 47, the sole type in his series S, from 'female centaur' to 'sphinx'. But Metcalf has published an ingenious theory in defence of this name change,<sup>11</sup> which presents the framework for a much more detailed discussion of the 'female centaur' to 'sphinx' change than is possible for any other of Rigold's proposed name changes.

'Female centaur' has long been universally applied to the design on the obverse of the *BMC* type 47 (plate, no.1).<sup>12</sup> Keary recognized the design as 'centaur like' and 'female' when he catalogued *BMC* type 47 in 1887.<sup>13</sup> The art historian, Baldwin Brown, discussed the design as a 'female centaur' three decades later.<sup>14</sup> Both numismatists and art historians have used the name 'female centaur' (sometimes 'centauress') ever since, even though they have had many differences of opinion about other aspects of the design. Some, like Keary, have seen it as a winged creature. Others have seen the centaur's wings as branches. The many different models proposed for the female centaur have ranged from Roman ornamental metalwork to a Roman legionary coin to the very imaginative suggestion of Rigold that the emperors' heads on the *Victoria Augg sceat*, *BMC* type 1, could have given rise to the breasts and Victory to the head and wings. Yet all of these discussions were concerned with a design seen by all as the same basic creature, to which the neutral design name 'female centaur' was applied, where 'centaur' means 'having the head and upper body of a human, the lower body of a horse', and 'female' is distinguished from 'male' mainly by the presence or absence of breasts, sometimes by long hair or other feminine body traits.

In short, the name 'female centaur' for the obverse of *BMC* type 47 appears to meet all the criteria for a suitable 'form of words' to define a type. It is a neutral description with a precise meaning, mnemonic value from long use, and it relates the sceat design to the same

<sup>7</sup> Even winged bipeds in mid-eighth century Anglo-Saxon metalwork, such as those on the Witham pins, are termed animals, see D. M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art* (New York, 1984), p. 67, pl. 33.

<sup>8</sup> e.g., G. Behrens, 'Das Rückblickende Tier in der Vor- und Frühgeschichtlichen Kunst Mitteleuropas', in *Festschrift des Römisch-Germanische Museums*, 1 (1952), 26-43.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> 'The "wolf" sceattas', *BNJ* 36 (1967), 21.

<sup>11</sup> 'Twelve notes on sceatta finds', *BNJ* 46 (1976), 8-13, pl. I, 8-11.

<sup>12</sup> For the 1978 Maldon (Essex) find illustrated in figs 1 and 2, see D. M. Metcalf, 'Twenty-five notes on sceatta finds' in *Sceattas in England*, p.197, no. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *BMC* I, 21.

<sup>14</sup> *The Arts in Early England* (London, 1915), III, 87f.

motif displayed on other objects. Why, then, should such an apparently useful name as 'female centaur' be changed to 'sphinx', especially when the latter name requires the qualification: 'with a horse-like body'?

Metcalf's many faceted theory in answer to this question acknowledges, and attempts to account for, the fact that the design does look like a female centaur and specifically does not resemble a sphinx. The major premise of the theory is that the coinage in the second quarter of the eighth century was a royal prerogative. This being so, a political context should be found for the 'sphinx' sceattas. A political interpretation is facilitated by the fact that the *BMC* type 47 female centaur design shares its 'whorl of animal heads' reverse (plate, no.2) with two other obverses: a standing figure holding two crosses, *BMC* type 23e, series U, and a 'scutiform' design (Celtic cross), *BMC* type 48, series H. The latter two obverse designs have been analyzed from a political point of view by Metcalf in the context of earlier sceattas of series U and H which share a 'bird and branch' reverse.<sup>15</sup> Metcalf regards the standing figure with crosses as a representation of King Æthelbald (716–57) on sceattas minted in his kingdom of Mercia, but when these Mercian 'bird and branch' sceattas were imitated in Wessex, King Æthelbald's image was replaced by a politically neutral 'scutiform' design. This same interpretation is applied to the obverses that share a 'whorl of animal heads' reverse. Thus, *BMC* type 47, assigned on the basis of its distribution to an unspecified mint in Essex,<sup>16</sup> is argued to copy an earlier 'whorl of animal heads' sceat minted in Mercia, but with King Æthelbald's image replaced by a local symbol, a sphinx, to assert East Saxon independence of Mercia.

How did this East Saxon local symbol come to be a sphinx, a hybrid monster generally associated with classical mythology? It is assumed in Metcalf's argument that the *BMC* type 47 design is known to be a sphinx: the goal of the theory is to explain how this known sphinx became a local symbol. Metcalf argues that in the eighth century the East Saxons associated sphinxes with the British king Cunobelin and with his former capital, Colchester. Not only have a number of sphinxes been found in Colchester in modern times, but Cunobelin's name and *Camulodunum* (Colchester) appear together on coins which display sphinxes and other mythical creatures. The impressive surviving Roman walls of Colchester recalled to the East Saxons, not the might of Rome, but the glories of the past associated with Cunobelin. The choice by the East Saxon king of a 'sphinx' design for the sceat, by recalling these glories, was an assertion of East Saxon nationalism opposed to Mercia.<sup>17</sup>

But why does the female and winged 'sphinx' chosen for *BMC* type 47 have the body and long legs of a horse, instead of the lion's body of the classical sphinx, and why is it standing instead of sitting or reclining like a normal Roman sphinx? The answer according to Metcalf lies in a silver Cunobelin coin, portraying a male centaur brandishing a branch, which is now in the Colchester Museum.<sup>18</sup> A coin of this same type is postulated to have been discovered in the eighth century in the East Saxon kingdom, and to have been given to the die-engraver as the model for a sphinx. The die-engraver, 'aware in general terms of sphinxes and their local significance', misunderstood the male centaur's nipples for breasts, its brandished branch for a wing, to which he added another. 'Thus the East Saxon "sphinx" derived its equine characteristics.' The borrowing from the Celtic coin demonstrates 'that the king or his advisers knew enough about Cunobelin to associate him with Colchester'.

In sum, the craftsman and the king and/or his advisers believed that both the Cunobelin

<sup>15</sup> 'Sceattas from the territory of the Hwicce', *NC* 1976, 64–74.

<sup>16</sup> For a recent discussion and map of the coin finds from Essex, see D. M. Metcalf, 'Monetary circulation in southern

England in the first half of the eighth century' in *Sceattas in England*, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Metcalf, 'Monetary Circulation', p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Metcalf, 'Monetary Circulation', p. 11, pl. I, 10.

coin's male centaur and the sceat's female-looking centaur design represented sphinxes. Presumably the die-engraver did not have access either to Cunobelin coins which actually display a sphinx or to the sculptured sphinxes found in Colchester, which belong to the standard Roman seated or reclining type.<sup>19</sup>

It is implicit in the arguments of Metcalf and others who rely on a 'misperception' theory to explain the female centaur design<sup>20</sup> that it did not exist in any form that could have served the die-maker directly as a model. Yet it was demonstrated long ago by Baldwin Brown that the female centaur existed well before the eighth century in many forms potentially available to sceat die-makers, although Baldwin Brown himself selected an unlikely model.<sup>21</sup> The fact that the female centaur on the sceattas has wings but no arms cannot be taken as evidence in support of the 'misconception' theory. Representations of female centaurs with wings and without arms are not uncommon in the Roman period, especially in small scale depictions, or on the mass-produced Samian pottery of Gaul and the Rhineland.<sup>22</sup> It occurs, for example, in a form clearly resembling that of the sceattas, although on a quite unrelated Celtic silver coin struck by the Boii of Pannonia about the middle of the first century B.C. (plate, no.3),<sup>23</sup> and it is generally agreed that most of the motifs found on this coin series derive from models in classical art.

Still, it is no more necessary to reach as far back as Roman art proper for a prototype for the female centaur than it is to look back to a misinterpreted coin of Cunobelin, since the female centaur has a secure place in the legacy of motifs from Roman art which were transmitted to the Middle Ages. Centaurs, male and female, sometimes winged, but most often not, are depicted both in England and on the Continent in a variety of ways which can be traced directly to classical forms: the centaur family, the female centaur suckling her babe, centaur couples and male and female centaurs singly.<sup>24</sup> Often these centaurs are to be found with other animals and birds in an inhabited vine scroll, itself a legacy from Roman art, which was especially popular in Anglo-Saxon art in the eighth century. The many animal, bird, and vine motifs of the Secondary sceattas which can be shown to derive from elements of the inhabited vine scroll also attest to this popularity.<sup>25</sup> In sharp contrast, very few Secondary sceat motifs are directly derived from Roman coins, and none, I believe, from Celtic coins. This usefully narrows the search for a model for the sceat female centaur to the most likely source: Anglo-Saxon art exhibiting the inhabited vine scroll motif.

One Anglo-Saxon inhabited vine scroll is on the fragments of an eighth-century sculptured frieze built in the wall of the present church of St Mary and St Hardulf at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire,<sup>26</sup> or, in terms of eighth-century political geography,

<sup>19</sup> For the sphinx on Cunobelin's coins, see R. P. Mack, *The Coinage of Ancient Britain* (London, 1964), nos 230, 237; D. Allen, *An Introduction to Celtic Coins* (London, 1978), no. 101.

<sup>20</sup> e.g., P. V. Hill, 'The animal, "Anglo-Merovingian", and miscellaneous series of Anglo-Saxon sceattas', *BNJ* 27 (1952), 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Baldwin Brown, p. 87. The Roman silver cups he cites are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, illustrated in E. Babelon, *Le trésor d'argenterie de Berthouville* (Paris, 1916), pls 9, 10. G. M. A. Richer, *The furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans* (London, 1966), p. 82, figs 422, 424.

<sup>22</sup> F. Oswald, *Index of Figure Types on Terra Sigillata*, ('Samian ware') (Liverpool, 1936-37), pl. XXXV, 735a, 735, pl. XXXVI, 745.

<sup>23</sup> H. de la Tour, *Atlas de monnaies Gauloises* (1892), no. 10141; Allen, pp. 12, 30, no. 17.

<sup>24</sup> The material on the female centaur in medieval art is

too extensive to be cited here. For some Continental examples see J. Adhémar, *Influences antiques dans l'art du moyen âge français* (London, 1939), p. 181f. pl. XIII, figs. 42, 44; E. P. Evans, *Animal symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture* (New York, 1896), p. 319.

<sup>25</sup> For examples see M. J. Morehart, 'Anglo-Saxon art and the "archer" sceat', in *Sceattas in England*, pp. 181-192.

<sup>26</sup> A. W. Clapham, 'The carved stones at Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire, and their position in the history of English art', *Archaeologia* 77 (1927), 222, 232, pl. XXXIII, fig. 2. For Anglo-Saxon art, besides the Breedon example, there is a female centaur with baby on her back on the Nunburnholme cross-shaft of the 9th-11th century. Baldwin Brown, VI: 2 (1937), 191, pl. LVII; and two female centaurs in the border of the Bayeux tapestry, Gibbs-Smith, p. 165, pl. 13. Other female centaurs appear in later medieval art, e.g., a centaur family on a 12th century capital at Ifly, Oxford, R. T. Stoll, *Architecture and sculpture in Early Britain* (New York, 1967), pls. 85-87.



in Mercia. Among other winged creatures in the convolutions of the vine is the winged centaur (plate, no. 4). The delicacy of its upper body and its narrow waist strongly suggest a female, but the relief is too worn for its sex to be certain. Some among the winged company crouch in the position native to one form of the classical sphinx, which indicates that Anglo-Saxon art of this period offered good models for both sphinx and female centaur.

The stock of Anglo-Saxon motifs originating in Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean, centaurs among them, came to England with the objects known to have been imported in connection with Christian and secular activities in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. These objects were generally portable, durable and precious, like Baldwin Brown's Roman silver cups, whether expressed in ivories, metalwork, jewellery or textiles. They would have been very like the silver pin with a head in the form of a female centaur from a woman's grave in the late sixth/early seventh-century Lombard cemetery at Castel Trosino, Italy.<sup>27</sup> Or, in a different material, like the ninth-century Carolingian ivory panel depicting Adam and Eve in Paradise, with a centaur couple and a siren couple, both faithfully copied from some earlier classical prototype.<sup>28</sup>

The female centaur, and centaurs generally, are demonstrably fully assimilated into Christian art. The vine scroll itself, together with each of its inhabitants, acquired Christian meanings, but the popularity of these vine scroll motifs, especially for the eminently secular sceattas, may have arisen rather from the strong medieval interest in fabulous creatures so frequent in the art of the period. The sphinx motif, on the other hand, experienced neither of these developments: it was neither assimilated into medieval Christian art, nor was it popular. Indeed, if the *BMC* type 47 design really resembled a sphinx, it would be both surprising and significant.

I can hazard only a guess as to the meaning of the female centaur to the users of the sceattas from the fact that the sceat centaur is not the first in Germanic art. A male centaur appeared with many other figures of men and animals on an early fifth-century pair of gold horns from Gallehus in Danish Schleswig, now lost.<sup>29</sup> Since the figures on the horns represented Germanic cults and ceremonies, the centaur must have been adapted to Germanic ideas as it found its way north. The scene from an unidentified Germanic myth on the right end of the whalebone Franks casket, probably a Northumbrian work of the first half of the eighth century, includes a mysterious horse-headed creature with wings and hooves. It has been suggested that this may be a Valkyrie, who 'could assume the form of a centaur, a wolf, a swan or a raven'.<sup>30</sup> In the light of these two examples, the female centaur on the sceattas may have suggested to the Anglo-Saxons a creature of Germanic mythology, rather than having either Roman or Celtic overtones.

Whatever its meaning may be, my view is that the name, 'female centaur', for the *BMC* type 47 obverse is a perfectly suitable neutral description of the design, given that the representational vocabulary of medieval art is drawn from that of antiquity. This traditional name, in addition, also embodies my view that the weight of the evidence favours the adaption of the sceat motif from other female centaurs in Anglo-Saxon art, as seen by the die-makers. In short, I do not accept the theory that the *BMC* type 47 obverse design is a sphinx, strange looking only through a series of accidents.

The political interpretation of the *BMC* type 47 design does not turn on whether it is called sphinx or female centaur, but on the 'whorl of animal heads' reverse (plate, no. 2)

<sup>27</sup> R. Mengarelli, 'La necropoli barbarica de Castel Trosino presso Ascoli-Piceno', in *Monumenti Antichi dei Lincei*, 12 (1902), col. 228, pl. IX, 9.

<sup>28</sup> R. Delbrück, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin, 1929), no. 13; J. Hubert, *et. al.* *The*

*Carolingian Renaissance* (New York, 1970), p. 237, fig. 218.

<sup>29</sup> M. Todd, *Everyday Life of the Barbarians* (London, 1972), pp. 135-37, fig. 65.

<sup>30</sup> J. Beckwith, *Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England* (London, 1972), p. 16, fig. 7.

common to the obverses seen as of Mercian and East Saxon minting. Without the common 'whorl of animal heads' reverse, the Mercian 'Æthelbald' motif could not be argued to have been replaced elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> In this sense the animal whorl is the most important of the motifs discussed in the proposal to change the name 'female centaur' to 'sphinx'. What are the origins of the 'whorl of animal heads' design, and why did it become popular as a sceat motif?

Whorls without zoomorphic additions are common in early Celtic metalwork in the British Isles. But whorls with animal or bird heads placed toward the centre of the design, such as those displayed on the sceattas, do not occur in insular art before the late seventh or early eighth century. After its introduction, this new animal whorl is commonly found side by side with the older whorl form.

Although the animal head design appears as early as the first half of the eighth century in illuminated insular manuscripts (plate, no.5),<sup>32</sup> and continues in use in the ninth century, the only surviving example of it in southern English metalwork, apart from the sceat designs, is on a silver-gilt sword pommel found in Fetter Lane, London, generally assigned to the close of the eighth century. Wilson has pointed out the parallels between this pommel design and the animal whorl types on the sceattas, adding that the barbed tail of the animal seen from above on the back of the pommel is probably related to the finlike barbs of the single whirling animal of the sceat type *BMC* 32 called 'curled wolf' by numismatists.<sup>33</sup>

On the basis of these datings, the animal whorls on the sceattas must be among the earliest examples of this new ornamental motif in metalwork. The animal head whorl may even have been adapted from the older Celtic whorl by the goldsmiths of south-east England for use on the larger ornamental metalwork objects which regularly supplied, in my view, the models for the early sceat designs. For each of the other canine types on the sceattas, for example, there are parallels in eighth-century insular art.

The *BMC* type 47 obverse and reverse designs may be seen, from my point of view as an art historian, as summarizing the process by which the Anglo-Saxon metalworkers of the first half of the eighth century were integrating motifs drawn from Celtic, Germanic and Mediterranean sources. The *BMC* type 47 reverse is the Celtic/Germanic wolf whorl, its obverse the Mediterranean female centaur. In turn these *BMC* type 47 motifs also exemplify a process at work in the Secondary sceat series as a whole. Each sceat motif will have been adapted to the tiny coin die from the same motif as expressed in another, probably larger and more complex, form of Anglo-Saxon ornamental metalwork.

In sum, the proposal to change the name 'female centaur' to 'sphinx' fails to meet the criteria being tested here in several respects. Since the name 'sphinx' incorporates a theory, much as did 'Wodan' or 'sceat' in their original uses, it is not a neutral description. Nor is 'sphinx' a precise description of the *BMC* type 47 design, as testified both by Metcalf and, with his earlier *Victoria Augg* suggestion, by Rigold. Within numismatics proper, the name 'sphinx' introduces a misleading distinction between the sceat and any other coin with the same design, of which the Pannonian winged female centaur need not be the only example. Retaining the name 'female centaur' rather than changing to 'sphinx', would spoil Rigold's plan to tie in his alphabetic series with names wherever possible. The series

<sup>31</sup> Moreover, if M. Blackburn's earlier dating for the series U is accepted, the figure holding two crosses is unlikely to be an image of King Æthelbald of Mercia. See M. Blackburn, 'A Chronology for the Sceattas', in *Sceattas in England*, pp. 165–74, table 2.

<sup>32</sup> e.g., the Gospel book of St Chad, Lichfield Cathedral Library, J. J. G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts, 6th to the*

*9th century* (London, 1978), no. 21, and the Vespasian Psalter, London, British Library, Cotton Vesp. A.1, fol. 30v.; C. Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting*, (New York, 1977), pl. 32.

<sup>33</sup> D. M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon metalwork in the British Museum, 700–1100*, (London, 1964), pp. 20–21.

called S, which contains only *BMC* type 47, was intended as a mnemonic of 'sphinx'. Losing this series mnemonic by keeping the name 'female centaur' may well be an advantage: a truly neutral classification system is preferable to one with built-in biases. Eventually, as new types or sub-types are discovered, other changes will undoubtedly have to be made to Rigold's system as well.

A number of examples of changes of type names proposed by Rigold have been argued here to be unacceptable, but he none the less gets the last word. The criteria applied are essentially his own. He suggests retaining 'sceat' because of its precise current meaning, whatever its past theoretical failings. He argues for names with mnemonic value 'where convenient', which for traditional names discourages change. He remarks that the Secondary sceattas are 'much more varied and often distinctly Anglo-Saxon in motif'. Since both numismatics and art history are concerned with such Anglo-Saxon motifs, he would surely have regarded it as desirable that the descriptive terminology of both should converge, not diverge. On the whole, the names given to designs by art historians and archaeologists tend to be more general and more prosaic, and thereby more immediately understandable, than the often colourful names of numismatics. When the terms used in these two disciplines are already the same, as with 'dragon' and 'female centaur' or 'Celtic cross', no change is needed. Where the terms used are different, as between 'wolf torc' or 'wolf worm' and 'curled canine', probably the best choice for any change is toward the most neutral expression. Naturally such restraint in changes of nomenclature should be shown by all other disciplines which touch on the motifs common to coins and other art objects.

## KEY TO THE PLATE

1. Sceat, *BMC* type 47, *obv.* Female Centaur. Found at Maldon, Essex. Coll: James Booth.
2. Sceat. *BMC* type 47, *rev.* Whorl of four animal heads. Found at Maldon, Essex. Coll: James Booth.
3. Celtic silver tetradrachm, Pannonia. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des médailles.
4. Frieze with centaur in inhabited vine scroll. Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire. Photo: National Buildings Record, London.
5. Whorl of animal heads. Detail, Lichfield St Chad's Gospels. Photo: Courtauld Institute, London.





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