Lidanport: a New Mint-Place for Edgar's Pre-Reform Coinage

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The coin below recently came to the author's attention. It is reproduced and discussed here with kind permission of the current owner.

Obv. +EãDèãR REX ãNèLOVM around inner circle containing small cross pattée.
Rev. +ÄLFELM MÖ LIDãNPORT::: around inner circle containing small cross pattée.
1.14g (chipped), 180°
Found near Nizy-le-Comte, dép. Aisne, France, 2018.

It forms part of a growing body of Anglo-Saxon coin-finds from France.[1] However, having been found outside the UK, it is not included in the major British-based corpora of coin-finds such as the EMC or PAS.

The coin in question is a silver penny of the 'Circumscription Cross' type, which was widely produced in Edgar's reign (959–75) prior to the major coin-reform of the early 970s.[2] In most respects it conforms to the usual characteristics of the type, and carries the regular design and royal style. The obverse spelling ANGLO[r]VM is less common, and will be argued below to form one clue to the coin's regional attribution.

The most intriguing feature of this coin is the name of the mint-place found on the reverse, which is otherwise unknown in the reign of Edgar or indeed of all Anglo-Saxon kings. This coin therefore represents a new mint-place for the reign, becoming the thirty-third known in the pre-reform period of Edgar's coinage.[3] It is legible as LIDANPORT, a name which consists of two elements. The first, LIDAN, is similar to the mint-signature used in subsequent times for Lydford in Devon. This was typically HLYD, LYDA or LYDAN in the earlier part of its known history, which began with a penny of Edgar's reform issue and continued under

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[1] J. C. Moesgaard and M. Gooch, 'Anglo-Saxon Coins in France', in *Studies in Early Medieval Coinage. Volume III: Sifting the Evidence*, ed. T. Abramson (London, 2014), pp. 141–52.

[2] R. Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage, with a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. 8: Britain and Ireland c. 400–1066* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 207–10 and 260–1.

[3] Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage*, p. 209 (with the addition of 'MI', an unidentified mint-place omitted from the list in this volume).

Edward the Martyr (975–8) and Æthelred II (978–1016). Longer forms of the mint-signature, LYDA(N)FORD or similar, sometimes occurred in Æthelred II *Last Small Cross* and after.[4] LIDAN is also close to the place-name normally interpreted as the first reference to Lydford in the Burghal Hidage (probably from the early tenth century): *Hlidan*.[5] This and the similar elements found on coins refer to the river Lyd beside which Lydford sits. The latter's name derives probably from the Old English *hlyde* (from *hlud* meaning 'loud': i.e. a roaring watercourse).[6] As Eilert Ekwall noted, this was a common name for streams or rivers in England, and others can be found in several counties.[7]

The second element of the mint-name is more puzzling, at least if one assumes that the coin refers to Lydford, for there is no indication that it was ever known as 'Lyd-port' or similar. No other obvious derivative of LIDANPORT has survived elsewhere in England. However, there are reasons to suspect that the mint-name on this coin may refer to Lydford after all (in which case this coin represents its first occurrence as a mint-place), or to somewhere nearby.

First, stylistic aspects of the coin point towards Devon. A moneyer of the same name, Ælf(h)elm, was active at Barnstaple in the *First Hand* coinage of Æthelred II, who might be the same individual that issued the present coin.[8] The omission of R in the obverse inscription is also paralleled in pre-reform coins of Edgar from Exeter and Totnes, and others of similar style which do not carry a mint-name.[9]

Within Devon there is only one river *hlyde*: the Lyd. Provisionally accepting the mint-name as 'the port of/on the river Lyd',[10] the question therefore becomes where that port may have been, and whether it might be identical with Lydford. This is a conundrum presented by several other tenth-century mint-names that refer only to watercourses, such as BRIDIAN (probably referring to somewhere on the river Brit in Dorset)[11] and DARENT (probably the river Dart in Devon, perhaps signifying Totnes).[12] Consideration should be given to the possibility of a location elsewhere along the Lyd – perhaps the prominent Iron-Age hillfort at Brent Tor, a mile south of the Lyd and three miles from Lydford.[13] Yet one hesitates to multiply mint-places beyond necessity, for which reason Lydford remains an attractive prospect. It boasts a set of ramparts which still survive in good condition where they cut across the neck of Lydford gorge, but apparently once extended all the way round the

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[4] B. E. Hildebrand, *Anglosachsiska mynt i Svenska kongl. myntkabinett funna I Sveriges jord*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm, 1881) [hereafter BEH], nos. 3022–57. For a fuller account of coins from Lydford see J. Allan, 'The Anglo-Saxon Mint at Lydford', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association* 134 (2002), 9–32; the latter records the first known Edgar reform-type penny of Lydford (p. 11).

[5] A. R. Rumble (ed.), 'An Edition and Translation of the Burghal Hidage, together with Recension C of the Tribal Hidage', in *The Defence of Wessex: the Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. R. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 14–35, at 26–7. Cf. A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton and J. E. B. Gover, *The Place-Names of Devon* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 191; J. M. Dodgson, 'A Linguistic Analysis of the Place-Names of the Burghal Hidage', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, pp. 98–122, at 110.

[6] E. Ekwall, *English River-Names* (Oxford, 1928), s.v.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] G. Galster, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles 7: Royal Museum, Copenhagen. Part II. Anglo-Saxon Coins: Æthelred II* (London, 1966), no. 2; BEH 6.

[9] M. M. Archibald and C. E. Blunt, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles 34: British Museum. Anglo-Saxon Coins. Part V: Athelstan to the Reform of Edgar 924–c. 973* (London, 1986), nos. 1088–9; Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage*, no. 1715; C. E. Blunt, B. H. I. H. Stewart and C. S. S. Lyon, *Coinage in Tenth-Century England from Edward the Elder to Edgar's Reform* (Oxford, 1989), no. 253.

[10] *Port* in this context referring to a town, usually with a commercial element: A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1956), II, 70–1. It did not necessarily signify a place that served as a maritime port.

[11] J. Carroll and D. N. Parsons, *Anglo-Saxon Mint-Names. I. Axbridge–Hythe* (Nottingham, 2007), pp. 36–40.

[12] Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage*, no. 347.

[13] However, there is no evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity at this site.

promontory.[14] These ramparts predate a twelfth-century castle, so probably belong to the Anglo-Saxon era, though more specific evidence for their date was not found when they were excavated in the 1960s.[15]

An alternative name for Lydford at this early stage is by no means impossible. Other attestations of the name before about 1000 (which are confined to mint-signatures and the entry in the Burghal Hidage) only include its first component, so its second element may not yet have been fixed. 'Port' in this case could, alternatively, have been more a description than a name, analogous to the utilisation of the Latin *civitas* and *urbs* on other tenth-century coins to define the status of certain towns. That would explain why, in later times, the place-name which stuck emphasised a different attribute of the place's role, fastening on the river-crossing.

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[14] D. Hill, 'Gazetteer of Burghal Hidage Sites', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, pp.189–231, at 208–9.

[15] See the short reports, based on work led by Peter Addyman, in *Medieval Archaeology* 8 (1964), 232; 9 (1965), 170–1; 10 (1966), 168–9; 11 (1967), 263; and 12 (1968), 155.