

Unusual Iconography on three R8 Sceatta.

C Timms

I first acquired a sceat of this variety, which I have classified as an R8 Type 16, from a dealer in 2016. Fortunately, a findspot was provided allowing registration with the Early Medieval Corpus (EMC). A further coin was purchased in 2018 and yet another in 2019, no findspot was known for the second coin but the last coin was also registered with the EMC. Having recently carried out some research on the R8 group of Sceatta I recognized the different and unusual combination of both the runes and symbols on the obverse and the symbols within the standard on the reverse. I have searched the EMC at the Fitzwilliam, Thrymsas & Sceattas Metcalf, The British Museum Sylloge 63, Gannon, and by permission of Dr Tony Abramson the images of his collection, and cannot find similar coins. I would be pleased to know if any others are known of. The R8 coins were minted somewhere in East Anglia during the reign of King Ælfwald 713 to 749AD, probably in the middle of that period. See Blackburn's Chronology of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage in Abramson Sceatta List 2012 ⁽¹⁾.

The obverse does not have a neck putting it in Abramson's "Third Block Secondary Series". The R8 is catalogued as S/11/120 by Abramson ⁽²⁾. Unlike some varieties of R8 sceatta it has a crown above the head, a radiate bust/head. Unusually for the R8 coins it also has a short back to the head extending downwards at an angle from the crown line/top of head. The ear is not crescent shaped as in most R8 coins but almost a 90° corner pommée (ending in a pellet). Behind and below the ear is a horizontal chevron, below this is an annulet. There are two pellets before the annulet. The nose, which is slightly pointed has a large pellet as an eye placed fairly centrally within it. There is a prominent "sausage" shaped cheek bulge with only two large pellets as lips, most of the R8 coins also have lines attached to the pellets. Below the cheek are two slightly curved beaded exergual lines, one coin possibly has a third.

The runes EPA in front of the head read in an anti-clockwise way from the exergual lines upwards to the crown. There is a large pellet after the "A" rune. The "E" rune, looking like a capital M is just above the exergual lines. The "P" rune is next with the "A" rune looking like a capital F with an upward pointing element to the end of the top line. The tops of the runes face in towards the center of the flan. This rune combination is described as In/In/In tops of runes pointing inwards. Some R8 coins have a variety of combinations In/In/Out etc. See below. Most of the R8 coins have the runes reading in a clockwise manner starting at the forehead and extending downwards to the exergual lines.



EMC 2016.0321

Many of the other varieties of R8 coins depicting the “A” rune show it as a stylized character without the upward pointing element on the end of the top element of the character. Page⁽³⁾ and Pollington⁽⁴⁾ both discuss the use of runes and the development of the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc*.

Establishing an exact date for the minting of a sceat is almost impossible at present. Although the coins have an “E” (Porcupine) reverse it does not follow that striking took place at the same time as the “E” series (Type F3) was in production on the continent. Metcalf⁽⁵⁾ commented “*Assuming the coin is English, it would be from a date when the R8 is still in circulation and familiar.*” It is possible that this combination of symbols within the standard on the reverse was used only for a short time as very few of examples of either the “E” (F3) or the coins described here appear to exist.

Gannon⁽⁶⁾ discusses the iconography of the R Series and briefly comments upon the bust and other symbols on the obverse. Certainly the head and it’s features during the A/C/R continuum and during the R series life “...moves towards abstraction and pattern making.” Gannon further mentions the horizontal double chevron behind the head, “Figure 2.30a shows a coin where the ‘A’ behind the head has become a zigzag,...”. The exergual lines on the bottom of the coin’s obverse are observed above, Gannon⁽⁷⁾ entertains the possibility that these lines may be drapery.



EMC 2019.0220



CT84

The reverse of the flan has a beaded standard that has inside it a central annulet which is surrounded by four crosses pommée. Outside of the standard there is one unbarred cross pommée midpoint on each side. Where the strike is contained within the flan a 45° angled corner line can be seen. All three coins have a large beaded standard on the reverse. A pellet is visible centrally above and below the central annulet, there is also possibly one to each side but that is not clear on each coin. This configuration is very unusual for the R8 continuum of coins, it is much more usual to see the LOLII format around the central annulet.

Coin EMC 2016.0321 has two chips on the flan edge, it only weighs 0.62g, it was found near Thetford in Norfolk. Coin 2019.0220 found near Clipstone, Nottinghamshire and weighs 0.89g; CT84 weighs 1.06g and has no findspot. All three measure approximately 12mm in diameter. Metcalf⁽⁸⁾ described these coins as a “Contemporary Copy”, an R8/E3 mule. Stating that “*the reverse belongs to a Porcupine of a variety F, Metcalf & Op den Velde 2009-10 cat no 3228-3436*”.

The obverses of the three coins appear to be a die match, although very similar I'm not sure if the reverses are a match.



The silver content of the R continuum of coins appears to deteriorate as time progresses. The R1 and R2 coins have a content of about 90%, by the time the R8 coins were minted this had reduced to between 20% to 30%, Metcalf⁽⁹⁾. No coins of this R8 Type 16 Timms⁽¹⁰⁾ were described or analysed for silver content in T&S.

1. Abramson, T. 2012 *Sceatta List*. p250 Anglo-Saxon-Coinage.co.uk
2. Abramson, T. 2012 *Sceatta List*. p67 Anglo-Saxon-Coinage.co.uk
3. Page, R. I. 2006 *An Introduction to English Runes 2nd Ed.* The Boydell Press
4. Pollington, S. 2011 *Rudiments of Runelore* Anglo-Saxon Books
5. Metcalf, M. Personal Communication 23/11/2016
6. Gannon, A. 2010 *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage* p45 Oxford University Press
7. Gannon, A. 2010 *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage* p55/6 Oxford University Press
8. Metcalf, M. Personal Communication 12/11/2016
9. Metcalf, M. *Thrymsas & Sceattas in the Ashmolean Museum* 1994 vol. 3 p647/8 Royal Numismatic Society & Ashmolean Museum
10. Timms, C. www.r8sceattatypes.website

