

A Guide for Identifying Some Variants of the Crux Penny of Æthelred II

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The Crux penny was likely the largest issue of coinage in the reign of Æthelred II. The four biggest towns, and by extension those therefore likely to have had the largest minting output, were Lincoln, London, Winchester and York¹. It is thought that these four towns contributed over half of the total coinage of Æthelred II. Lincoln, Winchester and York, in particular, have been the focus of several large-scale studies that have attempted to collate and analyse the entirety of the surviving coinage for each mint²⁻⁴. Such studies then allow projected estimations to be made for the total number of dies, for each type, across all mints. In all estimations, the Crux penny is predicted to have had the largest number of dies, by a substantial margin, with the highest estimates for both reverse and obverse dies reaching upwards of 7000⁵. Even looking at the lowest estimates in these studies for the total number of Crux dies, we could extrapolate that close to 28 million crux pennies were struck, with a simple average of the sets of data would give us a value closer to 50 million. This is based off of the assumption that a die could produce 10,000 coins before wearing out, and not more⁵. In any case, potentially a third of all coinage produced in the reign of Æthelred was that of the Crux penny. The vast majority of crux pennies appear to be struck in the “standard” Crux type which is generally easily distinguished. There is however, considerable variation in, and deviation from, this standard Crux type and some of these coins can be difficult to distinguish. Many publications over the last half century have sought to describe and classify these different coins, but the information is widespread. The purpose therefore, of this note, is to bring the relevant information into a single place. The particular coins under discussion here are the standard Crux, Small Crux, the variants of Early Transitional Crux (including the mules with Benediction and Second Hand types, as well as the other Early Transitional variants), the Intermediate Small Cross-Crux mule, and the four Late Transitional Crux types (both “true” and mule). The author has created a “phylogeny” of these crux types to categorise the features they share in common, and those that allow for easy distinction (see appendix A).

The first branch in features is the separation of those coins that have a left facing bust and those to which the bust faces right. Of the left facing busts, a number of features can be identified as being fundamental to distinguish them. The list of features here is far from exhaustive: they are simply those that the author has determined to be enough to distinguish one type from another. The coins with a left facing bust can be grouped into those that have a sceptre and those that do not. For those with a sceptre, they can be subdivided into those that have a single fold in the drapery (an inverted ‘V’ shape) and those that have a double fold⁷⁻⁸. Those with a single fold include the standard Crux (Pl. 1 no. 1) and the Small Crux types (Pl. 1 no. 2). These can easily be distinguished by a closer examination of the sceptre. For standard Crux, the sceptre is thicker and more upright; for Small Crux the sceptre is thinner and also cuts through the drapery⁶. The Small Crux type is of course also typically characterised by being smaller, and having a lighter weight than standard Crux, but larger examples are known that still display the characteristic thin sceptre that cuts through the drapery⁶. Whilst less essential for identification, Small Cross sometimes, uniquely, displays hair that is swept back at the front, so that the hair strands have two unique directions, and the inscription is

also typically sans serif. Small Crux variants have been found where the sceptre does not cut through the drapery, and in such cases they can be easily classified based off of their size and weight.

Of those coins with a double fold in the drapery, they can be classified as Late Transitional Crux (Pl. 1 no. 3-7). There are four Late Transitional obverses, two that hold a sceptre and two that do not. Those that display a copulative MΩO have been designated “true types” and those displaying M'O (such as Pl. 1 no. 7) have been identified as having a standard Crux reverse (therefore being a Late Transitional-Crux mule)⁷⁻⁸. Of the two that hold a sceptre, one variety exists with curly hair (Pl. 1 no. 4) and the other has straight hair and a diadem (Pl. 1 no. 3). This pattern holds true for the two varieties that do not have a sceptre (Pl. 1 no. 5 & 6). There is one other main type of coin that is left facing without sceptre, with a Crux reverse, and that is the Intermediate Small Cross-Crux mule (Pl. 1 no. 8)⁷. This one can be distinguished from Late Transitional Crux by the fact that they have a single fold in the fabric. A diadem is always present in the hair with this type, and they typically have ‘ANGLO X +’ in the inscription, rather than ‘ANGLORX’: the ‘x’ in the contraction of ‘Anglorum’ is usually a separate, and distinct, letter⁷.

For the right facing busts, they can be grouped into those with either a cross headed sceptre, or a trefoil sceptre⁹. The type that exists with the cross headed sceptre has no diadem, and can therefore be identified as a mule of Benediction Hand obverse and standard Crux reverse (Pl. 1 no. 9). This likely represents an early transitional form of Crux from the start of the coin issue. For those with a trefoil sceptre, the type that exists with a diadem is another early transitional coin: this one a Crux with Second-Hand obverse and standard Crux reverse (Pl. 1 no. 10). Two very rare varieties exist without a diadem. These were described by Stuart in 1971 and were seen as an extension of Hildebrand’s type Cc⁹. One, he named ‘Ccii’ and is characterised as being, essentially a Benediction Hand obverse, but with a trefoil sceptre instead of the usual cross head (Pl. 1 no. 11). The second characterising feature is that the drapery gathers to the left, above the bust’s shoulder. The second variety, that he named ‘Cciii,’ can be considered a mirrored version of the standard Crux coin; it displays the typical features of standard Crux but in reverse, with the drapery gathering to the right (Pl. 1 no. 12). Note that the trefoil sceptre variety with a Second Hand obverse was classified by Stuart as the type originally described by Hildebrand as ‘Cc’ and he therefore decided to rename this ‘Cci’ for clarity⁹.

References:

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Appendix A

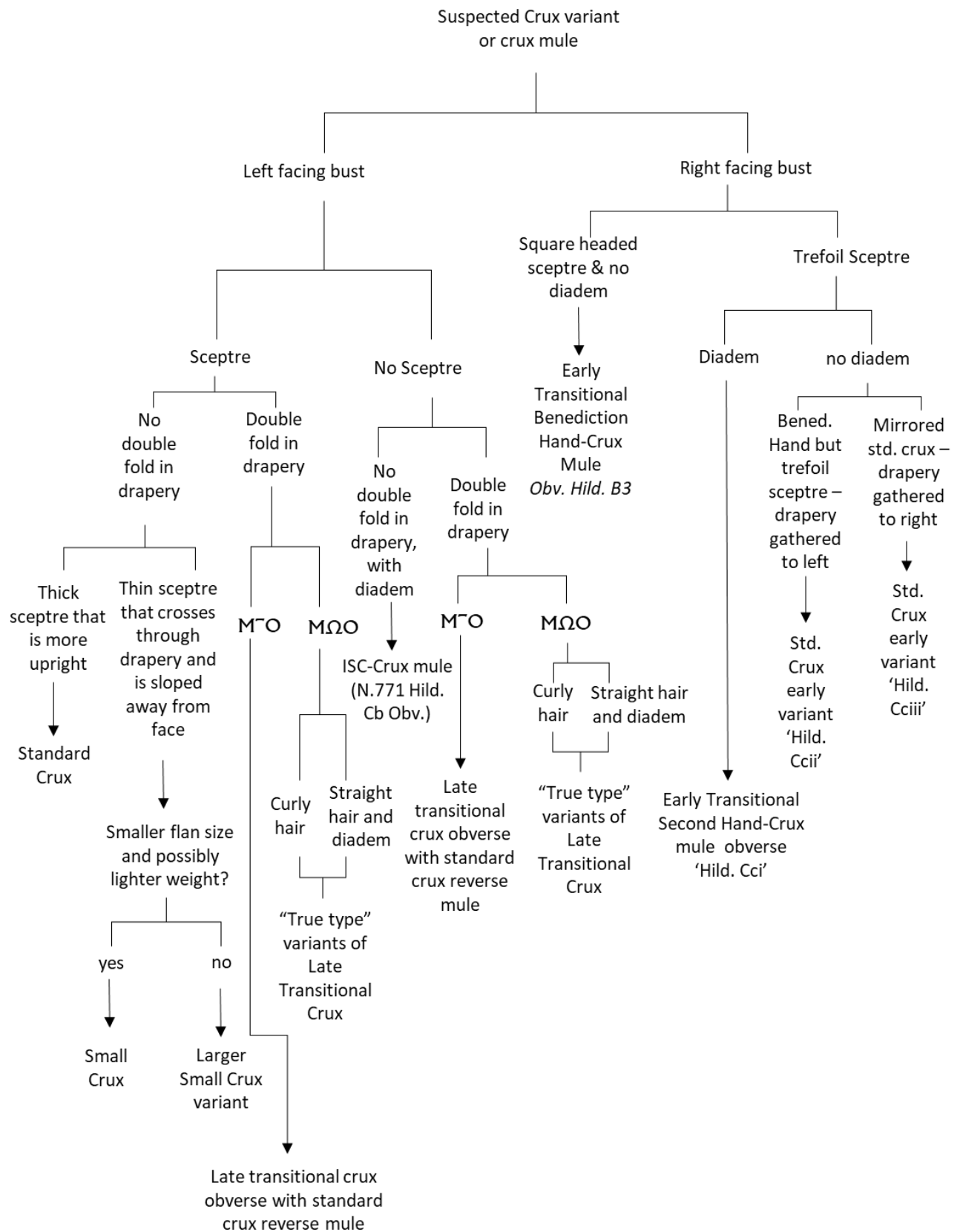


Plate 1

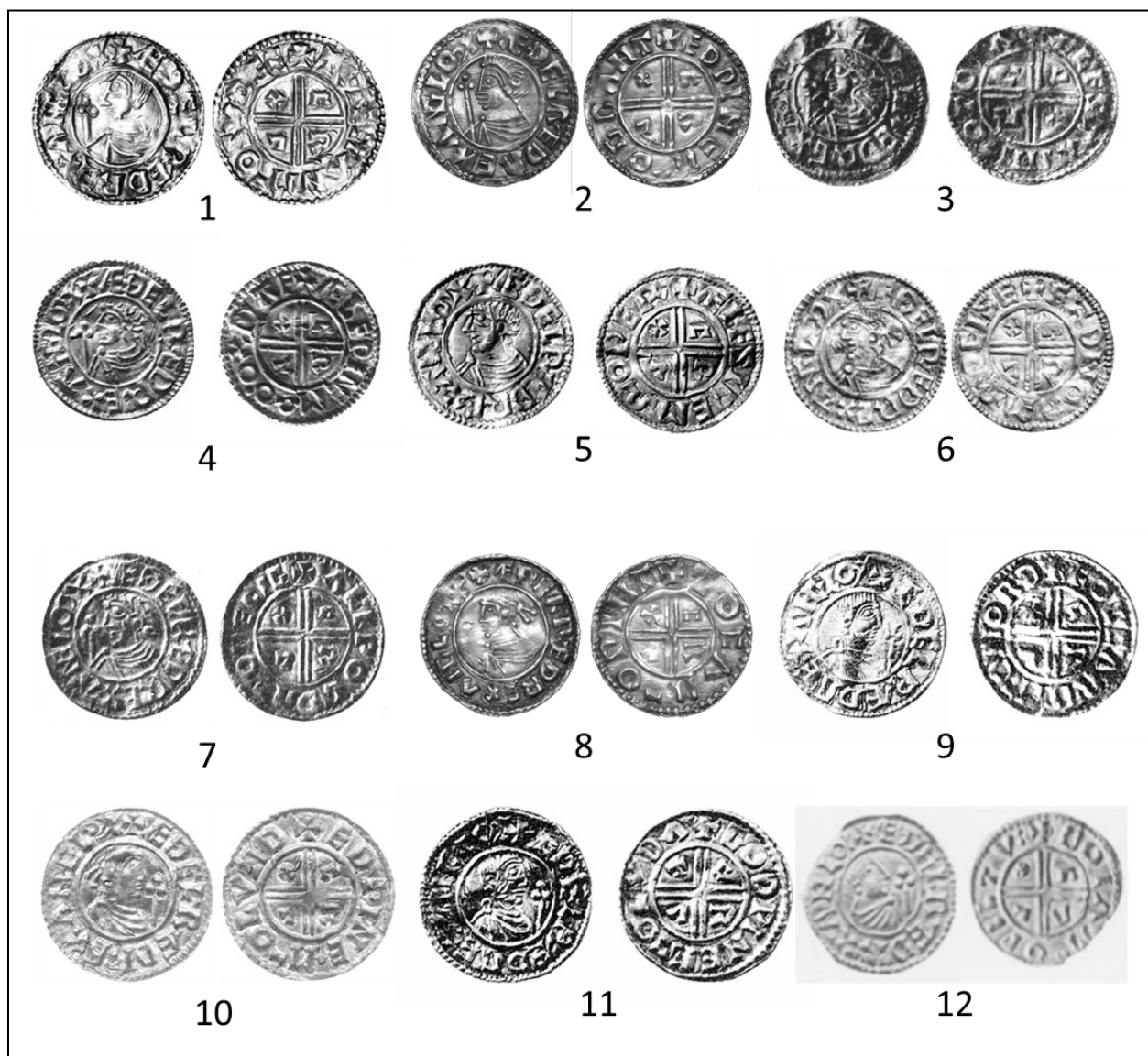


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