

An Unlisted 'Irish' Medieval Jetton

A G Bliss

1.1 Introduction

While employed as one of the FLOs for Suffolk in October 2017, Mr T Pratt of the Mildenhall and District Metal Detecting Club handed in for recording a highly distinctive jetton depicting a harp. After further research, it transpired this piece was unlisted in Michael Mitchiner's standard catalogue¹ – although a very similar example had previously been recorded by the PAS in 2006 (Fig.2). Noting the similarity to this previous find, a PAS record was created and the object returned to its finder. In February 2021, a third jetton (albeit incomplete) of similar appearance appeared on a popular online auction website as part of a mixed lot of jettons and tokens (Fig.3). The vendor was extremely helpful to the author, providing high quality images of the piece along with dimensions and weight. These three jettons of hitherto unlisted type are therefore the subject of this note.



Fig. 1: Copper-alloy jetton from Beck Row, Suffolk. PAS reference SF-1E6EF2. Image courtesy PAS/SCCAS.



Fig. 2: Copper-alloy jetton from Great Thurlow, Suffolk. PAS reference ESS-B4F413. Image courtesy PAS/CIMS.

¹ Mitchiner, M. 1988. *Jettons, Medalets and Tokens: The Medieval Period and Nuremberg*. London: Hawkins Publications
BNS Research Blog



Fig. 3: Copper-alloy jetton from the King's Lynn area of Norfolk, offered for sale online. Images courtesy vendor.

1.2 Catalogue

Piece: 1 (see Fig.1)

Obverse description: Harp left, rosette between two pellets to each side - all the latter within a double concentric circular border (struck from same obverse die as piece 3)

Obverse legend: (rosette and pellet stops, commences at 6 o'clock) *+.IOIE*.SAN[....].FIN.*.*

Reverse description: Cross fleury with rosette centre, single rosette and trefoil of pellets within each angle

Reverse legend: (rosette and pellet stops) *+MA[..]GRACI*AVE*²*

Weight and dimensions: 1.43g, 24.22mm

Findspot: Beck Row, Suffolk

Comments: Crudely perforated in right obverse field, the square shape of the aperture and minor ferrous corrosion products inferring it may have been nailed to something (?)

Piece: 2 (see Fig.2)

Obverse description: Harp left, rosette between two trefoils to each side – all the latter within a double concentric circular border

Obverse legend: (rosette and pellet stops) *+AVE.*.MARIA.*.GRAC (quatrefoil of pellets)*

Reverse description: arcuate cross fleury with lozengiform centre, lis within, angles empty

Reverse legend: (rosette and pellet stops) *+AVE*MARIA GR*

Weight and dimensions: 5.22g, 26.58mm

Findspot: Great Thurlow, Suffolk

Comments: the weight of this jetton infers that it is a thick 'piedfort' style piece, in contrast to pieces 1 and 3

Piece: 3 (see Fig.3)

Obverse description: Harp left, rosette between two pellets to each side - all the latter within a double concentric circular border (struck from same obverse die as piece 1)

Obverse legend: (rosette and pellet stops, commences at 6 o'clock) *+.IOIE*[.....].FIN.*.*

Reverse description: Arcuate cross fleury with lozengiform centre, pellet within, trio of pellets surrounding single rosette in each angle – all the latter within a double concentric circular border

Reverse legend: (rosette and pellet stops) *+AVE.[.....]RAC.*.*

Weight and dimensions: 2.06g, 25.5mm

² Likely this garbling is the result of a die-cutter's error, probably intending to render AVE MARIA GRACI but instead mis-ordering the words and ending up with MARIA GRACI AVE.

Findspot: King's Lynn area of Norfolk

Comments: n/a

1.3 Discussion

The use of a harp as the central design on the obverse of these jettons is, as previously stated, a feature not noted in any examples catalogued by Mitchiner. While the casual observer might fairly theorise that use of such an image indicates some connection with Ireland (and indeed, the PAS record for piece 2 posits that these may have been produced for the Irish Exchequer), the use of this motif on coinage struck in Ireland did not appear until Henry VIII's 'harp coinage' of 1534. By contrast, the reverse design of an arcuate or plain cross fleury with ornamented angles is commonly utilised on French jettons struck during the 15th century. Additionally, each jetton demonstrates a variation on its reverse face of the Old French formula '*AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA*' (Hail Mary, full of grace). This inscription is widely known, occurring commonly on many other French jettons of the 15th century. This formula is repeated on the obverse face of piece 3, but pieces 1 and 2 differ in that they utilise the less-commonly encountered inscription '*IOIE SANS FIN*' (Joy without end). The latter is mainly found on 'three circles' type jettons issued at Tournai between c. 1461 and c. 1521/1547 (C.f Mitchiner no. 607). Taken together, these features of the design and inscription heavily suggest that all the pieces discussed here were likely manufactured in France around the second half of the 15th century.

1.4 Closing thoughts

The author would be grateful to know of any other jettons corresponding to the type outlined above, whether they have associated findspot information or not.

1.5 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the vendor of the most recently discovered piece for his helpful supplying of images, dimensions and findspot information, as well as Mr T Pratt of MADMDC and the unknown finder of the piece from Great Thurlow for reporting their finds to PAS. Rob Page of the BNS and Andy Bliss of Aldwic Heritage Consultancy must also be thanked, for proofing the text.

