

Die Sinkers Signatures on the Long Cross Coinage of Henry III

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At a time of high accountability in the production of coins, it is likely that die sinkers would want to be able to distinguish their work from that of others employed at the same time. Most of the time this can only be conjecture, however, scattered throughout the issue of the Long Cross Coinage of Henry III, there are instances of coins where the die sinker appears to have deliberately altered the design slightly so as to identify the work as his own. Whether this was personal pride or for some other reason we cannot tell, but the outcome is that it is possible to identify the work of at least one individual as surely as if the die sinker had signed the coin.

One of the most impressive examples of a die sinkers signature is to be found on some of the coins of Class 5 for London, Bury and particularly Canterbury. The die sinker concerned produced an elaborate form of R2, largely on the reverses of coins. All the other lettering was produced in keeping with other coins of the class and where there were two of these letters in the legend only one was altered. We can only wonder why this particular letter was selected. Perhaps it was the die sinker's own initial but its production, disappearance and re-emergence produces a fascinating group of coins that many collectors are unaware exists.

From its introduction in Class 3dii until Class 5a the tail of the letter R ceased to be a simple wedge shape (R1) and instead was ended with either a hooked shape or a ball tail. In Class 5b this was dropped and the simple triangular tail (R1) was re-instated. When a coin of Bury was discovered that had R1 on the obverse and R2*(C/T R6) on the reverse, it was assumed that it was a mule and catalogued as 5b2/5a3. (The Abbey and Mint of Bury St Edmunds – Robin. J. Eaglen P.314 Die 305 Aa). This seemed such a reasonable assumption that it initially went unchallenged. John (Ion) was the moneyer for 5a3, so there was no opportunity for the sinker to incorporate the letter R into the reverse legend. At this point the moneyers name occupied a single quadrant and the mint name occupied slightly more than two quadrants: ION /ONS'/EDM/VND



When Randolf began minting coins the length of his name required an entire redesign of the reverse legend so that his name could be incorporated along with a much shorter mint name; RAN/DVL/F:ON/S'ED. It could be argued that the R2 letter shape generally used for other mints in 5a3 was carried forward and used in the first reverse die produced. Churchill and Thomas correctly placed the coin into 5b2 and recognised the letter R as an anomaly; but this doesn't go quite far enough. When coins from other mints are examined exactly the same letter shape can be discovered, added to the reverses of other 5b2 coins although it is not to be found on the reverses of coins of 5a3. Furthermore there are multiple dies with the same kind of letter form that exist beyond 5b2. Evidence shows that this letter type was produced, seemingly at whim of the die sinker and was not restricted to a particular class.

What is known is that the die sinker, “R”, began to mark coins in this way in class 5b2. He may have produced dies before this date but from about late 1251 he decided to begin adding his own special letter and he didn’t stop when class 5b ended.

If further proof is needed that the die sinker “R” was using the letter R as a way of identifying his work, rather than utilizing the normal letter set of a particular class, consider the coin featured below. At a glance this coin of Davi has the bust of a typical 5b2 coin and the first letter R is exactly what might be expected, R1. The second letter, however, is very different, (R2*). Is it possible to have an obverse that is both 5b2 and 5a3 at the same time? It is clear that R2* was created by deliberately adding a curve and a pellet to R1 but the die sinker of this particular letter form, only added this distinctive ending to one letter R in a legend never two.



Davi on London
Class 5b2
Type Biii



The letter R2* is most commonly found on reverses and there is good evidence to suggest that the obverse and reverse of many coins were created by different die sinkers. Obverses displaying R2* are rare, suggesting that the die sinker was occupied mainly with the production of reverses. It is not clear whether the die sinker of the obverse legend actually produced the complete obverse or whether the creation of the bust was handled by a more skilled craftsman after the legend had been cut in. Supporting this theory is the fact that the bust can be shown to have been added after the creation of the legend on some coins and, sometimes, in later classes, (notably the coins of Renaud), the quality of the bust fell dramatically but the legend remained of a relatively consistent quality.

Dies where one of the letter Rs has been given an extension to produce R2* may be found for Henri Class 5b2, where the first letter has been converted but not the second; Nicole also shared this obverse.



Although we have not seen an obverse die for Ricard with R2* there is at least one reverse where the obverse is clearly that of 5b2 but R2* is featured on the reverse. There may well be other dies yet to be discovered.



Sinking the reverse dies for moneyers at Canterbury appears to have provided an irresistible temptation and the coins of the moneyers Gilbert and John (ION) showing the letter R2* are not particularly scarce. The dies of the moneyers Nicole and William did not offer the letter R as part of the reverse wording but no obverse alterations have yet been discovered. Again, it is quite possible that die sinker “R” was not given the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the obverse dies.

However “R” continued to use his signature letter when class 5c2 was introduced and some of the reverse dies of Gilbert and particularly those of John received the embellishment both where the name is represented as IOH and as ION. When the longer tailed version of R, which was normal in 5c2, was used on the coin “R” adapted it, rather crudely, to produce the signature letter, leaving the long tail exposed beneath the curve. This begs the question, “Did the die sinker “R” produce the whole of the lettering or simply modify someone else’s work?” After all why would he use IOH one time and ION another? - unless, of course, these two spellings represent two different moneyers.



It seems strange that few examples of R*² have been discovered for Ioh on Canterbury in Class 5c3, although the coinage is plentiful. It is possible that the curve without a pellet end was used (R1* = C/T R5). Walter on London is represented by examples in 5c2 but not 5c3 although it is possible that this is because of the comparative rarity of dies of Walter found in the Brussels Hoard.



Obverse Class 5c2
Decorative letter R2* in reverse legend
WAL / TER / ONL / VND

The letter R2* does not seem to exist in classes 5d or 5e or 5f.

However in Class 5g, R2* once again reappears amongst the highly recognisable normal lettering for that class. Examples have been discovered for Alan, Ioh and Walter at Canterbury.

The die sinker clearly had a preference for adding his signature R where the final letter of a reverse quarter ended in R. Hence specimens for Ricard on London or Ambrose and Robert on Canterbury, if they exist at all, would be very rare. The reason to suppose that they do exist rests upon the appearance of two rare dies of Class 5h. The first is a coin of Robert on Canterbury which is the only class 5h coin of Canterbury with the letter R2* encountered. The coin has a number of unusual features including the fleur of the crown which is commonly associated with Class 5c3. (See below). The second coin of Renaud of London and is rare despite the number of different dies issued in his name.



Obverse Class 5g
R2* in reverse legend
WAL / TER / ONC / ANT





Illustrations (above):

Top (left to right): Obverse R, Second quarter of reverse legend, obverse fleur of crown.

Second Row: Obverse and reverse Class 5h Robert on Canterbury.

Third Row: Obverse and reverse Class 5h Renaud on London.

Bottom: First sector of the reverse of Renaud.

If further proof is required this example of furtively hiding the letter R within the legend should remove all doubt.



The additional pellet on the curved foot of the letter H of HENRICVS is easy to spot but the letter R has been carefully hidden by use of the final upright of III, the apostrophe following it and by a slight alteration to the shape of the head of the sceptre. Clearly the hand and sceptre were created as part of the legend although they are sometimes described as though part of the bust.



There is only ever a single letter in any legend changed to a non-standard R. and in this case particularly the apparently hidden letter suggests that the die sinker didn't really want to draw attention to its existence at least in the production stages.

In addition to R2* there are a number of coins that bear an extended end to the letter R but without the pellet ending (R1* = C/T R5). These are possibly the work of the same person. They have been recorded in the Brussels Hoard and are worthy of note, particularly since they appeared on different dies but at the same time as R2*.

Those dies featuring R1* and issued at London also began in 5b2 on dies of Henri Frowik where they featured on at least three different reverse dies. They exist on reverses of Walter where they feature on at least two dies of 5c2 and are recorded by Churchill and Thomas on reverses for both Ricard (1 die found) and Walter in 5c3 (two dies found).

For the coins of Canterbury they feature for ION in 5c2 and Ioh in 5c3 and reappear in 5g for Ioh (2 dies found) and Walter (1 die found).

Just as R2* was crudely struck over an existing letter R1 at times, R1* follows exactly the same pattern.

Placing an example of R1* alongside similar examples with R2*, it becomes clear how likely it is that these two styles have a common source. It appears that when a long-tailed letter R was used it was corrected by over-stamping a shorter hook shaped version. Although the shapes are not a progression, i.e. the pelleted end type R2* was already in use when the "corrected" versions were introduced, there is a common theme of interference with the letter shape for no obvious reason.



N.B. All coins illustrated are 5c3:

Top line: Left - Iohs on Canterbury unaltered and Right - detail of correction (C481 & C484 Brussels Hoard),



Centre - Obverse second letter R, Iohs on London.

Below: Walter on London, Iohs on Canterbury, "corrected" versions. Note the extended "Angel" wings of the letter T R*1 over long tailed R1



Below (All coins 5g):






Top - Alein on
Canterbury and
Ioh on
Canterbury –
Both R1*b
(Excessive curl
added)

Below: –Ioh and Walter on Canterbury – Both R2*
Note the extreme double axe head appearance of the letter T in 5g.



(Continued on next page).

Canterbury	R1* (C/T R5)			R1* ^b	
5b2	ION (1)				
5c1				Ricard (1)	
5c2	ION(1)	Gilbert (1)			
5c2*					
5c3	Ioh(2)				
5g				Ioh (1)	Walter(1)
London					
5b2	Henri(5)	Walter(1)			
5c2		Walter(2)	Ioh(1)		
5c3	Ricard(1)	Walter(2)	Ioh(1)		
5g		Walter(1)			
Bury	R2* (C/T R6)				
5b2	Randulf (1)				
Canterbury					
5b2	Gilbert (4)		ION(3)		
5c2	Gilbert (1)		ION(4)	IOH(4)	
5c2*	Gilbert(1)		IOH(3)	ION(1)	
5c3			Ioh(1)		
5g	Alein (1)		Ioh(2)	Walter(1)	
5h	Robert(1)				
London					
5b2	Davi(1)* ^{obv.a}	Henri(1)* ^{obv.b}	Nicole(1)* ^{obv.b}	Ricard(1)	
5c2				Walter(1)	
5c3					
5g					
5h	Renaud(1)				

The number of different dies identified for each moneyer is in brackets following the moneyers name and is thus a guide to the rarity.

*^a Obverse second letter R.

*^b Obverse first letter R, die shared by Henri and Nicole.

In conclusion, these very deliberate letter forms cannot be explained in terms of accident or misunderstanding since they are repeated again and again and are included on some coins where the correct type of letter is also used in the same legend. It is extremely unlikely that multiple die sinkers would utilise the same form across the classes therefore the conclusion has to be that these coins are the work of one man who signed his work thus.

The relative scarcity, particularly of later pieces, is something of an enigma however there are other adapted letters to be found and it is possible that “R” didn’t always use just one letter to identify his workmanship.

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