

A unique joint issue of King Eanred of Northumbrian and Archbishop Eanbald II

By Bradley Hopper and Tony Abramson

A tantalising new joint issue of a Northumbrian Penny or tertiary sceat, pairing regal and episcopal issuers, has surfaced to defy Stewart Lyon's assertion that 'There are no coins of Eanbald II, minted jointly with Eanred'.¹ The conventional dates for Eanred's reign are 810-841, although recently a new revised dating of 818-c.850 has been proposed.² Eanbald's episcopate began in 796 and ended between 833 and 836. The coin illustrated below (fig. 1, EMC 2021.0352) may illuminate the balance of power between church and state as regards the archbishop's authority to issue coins in his own name without royal dispensation and, plausibly, signify a concerted expression of unity at a time of political vulnerability.

The coin was discovered by a detectorist near Driffield in East Yorkshire, who was unaware of the coin's significance (understandably so, given the complexity presented by the Northumbrian series). The coin was subsequently acquired by a local collector who, upon having difficulty in identifying the coin, submitted it for third party appraisal.



Fig. 1: Obv. **.EA.NBA.ƿD.** inscription around small cross pattée,
Rev. **+EANRED R.** inscription around small cross pattée

Recorded as EMC 2021.0352. Image courtesy of Dix Noonan Webb (Auction 199, 1-2 December 2021, lot 45) dnw.co.uk

The regal side of the new coin carries the inscription EANRED R in bold characters reading clockwise from an initial cross. The titular R, which has a contraction mark over the top, distinguishes the royal issuer from the moneyer of the same name, who minted for Aethelred II (first reign) and the usurper Redwulf. In the centre is a small cross pattée. We are most grateful to Hugh Pagan for advising that BMC Eanred 127 (Keary 1887, fig. 2), is a die duplicate. For BMC 127 the regal die was paired with a regular reverse die, signed by the moneyer Æthelweard.

¹ S. Lyon, SCBI 68, p. 20

² S. Lyon, SCBI 68, pp. 35-7, 46. For an alternative perspective see H. Pagan, BNJ 2018, 35

Fig. 2. Tertiary sceat or Penny of Eanred by Æthelweard, BMC Eanred 127 (Keary 1887, 150).



Image courtesy of Hugh Pagan.

The inscription on the archiepiscopal side of the joint issue penny names Eanbald II as the responsible authority. The letters NB are ligate and the L inverted and reversed. The legend is clockwise and reads outward around a central cross pattée. There is no initial mark. No moneyer with the name of Eanbald is recorded for the Northumbrian series and thus, despite the absence of any titular letters, we can confidently identify the figure named on the reverse as the archbishop Eanbald II. This die is known from four duplicate specimens, again struck in combination with reverse dies signed by Æthelweard. (See figs 3a&b and 4 – the fourth coin is published within SCBI 29, as no. 123).

Of these die duplicates, that found in Whitbourn in the late twentieth century and published on the EMC website as 1997.0430 is of particular interest. The reverse die used to strike this coin was almost certainly cut by the same engraver who sunk the Eanbald die under consideration. Consistent across both are the absence of an initial cross, the broad inverted A with a prominent crossbar, the placement of pellets within the legend, and the skewed appearance of the central cross motif. On this reverse die the moneyer's name has been misspelt. Æthelweard's reverse dies are ordinarily very consistent in their spelling, reading either EDILVARD or EDILVEARD. Here the reading is EDI.L.AVBD. Evidently the engraver was unsure at the proper rendering of the name. We might therefore infer that the engraver responsible for the Eanbald die was not ordinarily employed by Æthelweard and that this penny represents a departure from the normal operations of the archiepiscopal mint.



Fig. 3a: Tertiary sceat or Penny of Archbishop Eanbald by Æthelweard. Image courtesy of CNG (CNG eAuction 492, lot 1019) www.cngcoins.com



Fig. 3b. Tertiary sceat or Penny of Archbishop Eanbald by Æthelweard. Image courtesy of CNG (CNG Auction 111, lot 1057) www.cngcoins.com



Fig. 4. Tertiary sceat or Penny of Archbishop Eanbald by Æthelweard. Image courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (EMC 1997.0430)

The fact that both dies used to strike the new joint authority penny were otherwise employed for separate archiepiscopal and regal issues by the moneyer Æthelweard raises the possibility that our coin was not an official issue, but rather an accidental muling of types. Adopting this hypothesis requires the new joint issue penny to be a double obverse mule. Early Medieval obverse dies were fitted with securing spikes, which extended out of the bottom of the die into the block or anvil. In order for an obverse die to be employed in the capacity of a reverse die the securing spike would need to be removed to allow the die to fit within a hand held punch. If our joint regal and archiepiscopal penny is indeed a double obverse mule it cannot have been created by the promiscuous use of dies by overworked moneyers working in close proximity. Rather, it must reflect a deliberate decision on the part of the moneyer.

We know of no other coins struck from two obverse dies within the Northumbrian series, or indeed the wider Anglo-Saxon series as a whole (a fact which serves to reinforce the impracticality of preparing an obverse die for use within a punch). There are, however, several double reverse mules known from the Northumbrian series. As such, it is more likely that our joint rule penny was struck from a true obverse and a true reverse die and that the latter die was then re-used as an obverse to strike either regular archiepiscopal or regal pennies by the moneyer Æthelweard.

Unfortunately, consideration of die state offers only limited insights into the relative order in which these inter-related coins were struck. One of the Eanred-Æthelweard pennies was clearly struck from

the Eanred die in a considerably more worn state than when that die was used to produce the joint rule penny (see figs. 1 and 3a.). Whilst we can be confident that this coin was produced after the joint rule penny, the other four known die duplicates either suggest a similar level of die preservation at the time of striking or are represented by photographs of insufficient quality to allow judgements to be made.

It has been the convention to describe (and until quite recently, denigrate) Northumbria's unprepossessing, base coins as token *stycas*, but it is better to regard them as an attempt by Eanred to resurrect the silver penny or sceat following a three-decade long period of economic stagnation. The success in this renovation of minting through the, sometimes chaotic, mass production of base coins by Eanred and his successors and episcopal contemporaries, is due to the denomination being commensurate with the quotidian needs of the populace.

Exactly when the Northumbrian king took the initiative to recommence minting is uncertain, as are many aspects of chronology surrounding Eanred's rule. More clear is the division of the coinage into distinct phases, with a significant gap between Eanred's first issue (Phase I), which contained a nominal amount of silver, and his second issue (Phase II) which was base. The ten moneyers involved in the first issue are referred to as 'Group A'. Only one of these, Æthelweard - who minted principally for Eanbald II and Archbishop Wigmund (837 – 849/50) and, rarely, for Eanred - bridged the gap to the second issue.

Æthelweard was the last of four successive moneyers who signed dies of the archiepiscopal series during Eanbald II's pontificate. Very approximately this places Æthelweard's tenure, and by extension the joint rule penny, somewhere in the late 820s or early 830s. In 829 Northumbria suffered a significant blow with the submission to King Ecgberht of Wessex at Dore. War, and the threat of war, would have destroyed the commercial confidence that allowed the kingdom to import silver through trade, just as it had done in 793 following the Viking raid on Lindisfarne. As regards minting, it no doubt took some time to recover from this setback. As such, it seems plausible that neither Eanred nor Eanbald II was able to continue striking coin of relatively good silver in the years following 829 and that the joint rule penny was minted in the years before this event. Perhaps the new coin reflects an attempt to demonstrate political unity between crown and church in the face of Ecgberht's expanding dominion. This last of the northern joint issues extends this distinctive Northumbrian practice to nearly a full century.

