

The Identification of an Enigmatic 12th Century Penny

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In April 2024 a unique coin was found near Gloucester and was subsequently recorded via both the PAS¹ and the EMC². In both databases it is listed as a variety of Henry I Type 9; this identification being based on review of the coin by Dr Martin Allen, whose concise note on the coin will be forthcoming in the next volume of the BNJ³. In this article I will highlight some interesting points concerning the coin and will suggest a possible alternate identification for this enigmatic penny.

Within the article most illustrations are to be found after the text, and references are included with the footnotes. Working hyperlinks are provided where available.

The penny is a metal detector find and was discovered about three miles north of Gloucester; its findspot not being insignificant, Gloucester being the focal point of Angevin power during the period of the "Anarchy" (Fig.1). When found, the coin was folded in half but was subsequently straightened and cleaned (Fig.2). The PAS record states that the coin was originally bent to form either a prayer token or pilgrims token, in this form the spine had an even, shallow curve perhaps where it had been wrapped around a cord. In medieval England, coins were sometimes intentionally folded or bent in half as a religious or superstitious act, often performed as a gesture of devotion to saints or as an offering to God, especially in situations where someone sought divine intervention or protection⁴. By folding a coin, the person was symbolically dedicating it to a higher power, ensuring it could no longer be used for regular transactions. This practice persisted across medieval Europe in various forms, and folded coins have been found in archaeological digs near religious sites.

Surprisingly, the coin passed through the Portable Antiquities Scheme without being claimed under the revised Treasure Law, and it was returned to the finder who passed it to Spink for public auction; it has been designated as being of National Importance and cannot legally leave the country without an export licence.

The coin is illustrated below, and weighs 1.05 gm with an average diameter of 19.6 mm.



¹ Portable Antiquities Scheme record # GLO-B9734A ([Link](#)).

² Fitzwilliam Museum, Early Medieval Corpus, record # 2024.0173 ([Link](#)).

³ Martin Allen, "A New Variant of Henry I Type 9", *British Numismatic Journal*, vol 94 (2024), pp 221-22 (Forthcoming).

⁴ Richard Kelleher, 'The re-use of coins in medieval England and Wales c.1050–1550: An introductory survey', *Yorkshire Numismatist* 4 (2012), pp.183-200. ([Link](#)).

The obverse is of a unique design with a bust facing three-quarters right, as seen with Stephen Types 2 & 7. The bust is uncrowned, with a somewhat feminine appearance, while in its right hand is a fleur-de-lis tipped sceptre held over the right shoulder. An inner circle separates this design from the legend which is mostly legible and can be read as "hENRICV.."

The reverse, at first sight, is similar to Henry I Type 9, but the cross enclosed by the quatrefoil is of cross fleury type, not the usual cross pattée as seen in Henry I Type 9 (See Fig.3). This is a potentially significant difference and will be discussed further below. It is this reverse style which has undoubtedly dictated the Henry I Type 9 identification. Again, the legend is only partially legible, with the moneyer's name appearing to commence "DRIV" or "BRIV" and the mint name probably ending in "ODE:"

At first sight the coin appears to have an "official snick" in it – as seen at 8 o'clock on the obverse, however this falls on the line of the fold, and is probably damage rather than an example of an official incision as frequently seen on Henry I Type 9 coins.

The fifteen Henry I types were initially described by Brooke⁵ in 1916; their order has since been revised slightly by Marion Archibald, with Type 9 now believed to have been issued after Type 6, and dating to c. 1109-11. See the survey of this subject in Mark Blackburn, 'Coinage and currency under Henry I: a review'⁶, and a useful summary of Henry's fifteen types can be found in Richard Kelleher's 2015 book⁷.

It is understandable that the coin has been assigned to Henry I Type 9 from the general form of the reverse, however there are a number of issues which point to a possible alternate interpretation.

Consideration must be given to the 1.05 gm weight – this is outside of the normal range of weights for Henry I Type 9, and in fact is exactly what would be expected from some coins of the Anarchy. The metrological data presented in Fig. 5 clearly demonstrates that the subject coin does not fall within the normal range of 1.34 +/- 0.08 gm for Henry I Type 9 but is clearly typical of Anarchy period coins of Henry of Anjou and of Matilda. Another feature potentially linking this coin with the Anarchy is the appearance of the bust – namely its uncrowned nature. This conscious iconographic decision would better align this piece better with a Baronial issue of the period.

The Reverse Design

Before considering questions raised by the obverse, further analysis of the coin's reverse is warranted. The form of the enclosed cross has already been highlighted, and in fact fleur terminations of crosses are not uncommon in other reverse types. This is seen in some Henry I types (e.g. 1, 10, & 15), in Stephen type 6, and also in the baronial York group of Eustace Fitzjohn for example. However, when looking for a Quatrefoil reverse with an enclosed cross fleury, I have only located one example so far and this is on a coin whose obverse has been ascribed by Martin Allen to Stephen Type 2. The coin in question has been documented in a 2021 BNJ article⁸ and can also be found in the EMC database⁹ where it is described as an issue of Henry of Anjou. This coin is illustrated in Fig. 6 and is in poor condition, however the reverse design is quite clear. The cross has arms with a pellet, unlike the subject coin, but the reverse cross fleury design is a closer match than the Henry I Type 9 pennies with their cross pattée. It is a shame that the obverse is not in better condition, as there are hints that it may share the same uncrowned bust style as the subject coin, but the style of die engraving is radically different.

⁵ Brooke, G.C., *A Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum: The Norman Kings*, 2 vols., London, 1916.

⁶ *Anglo-Norman Studies* 13 (1990), 49–81, at pp. 55-73.

⁷ Kelleher, Richard, *A History of Medieval Coinage in England*, Greenlight Publishing, 2015.

⁸ Allen, Martin, *The mints and moneyers of England and Wales, 1066–1158: addenda and corrigenda* (2), BNJ vol. 91 (2021), 77-102.

⁹ Fitzwilliam Museum, *Early Medieval Corpus*, record # 2017.0269 ([Link](#))

Mint and Moneyer

The correct identification of the coin would be made far easier if the reverse legend were fully legible. The obverse and reverse both exhibit letters having wide uprights with serifs; a style as seen in Henry I Type 9 pennies also, but also seen in some coins of the Anarchy. The letter style on many Angevin coins is crude, however some Angevin coins also show a more refined letter style, as for example on the penny of Henry of Anjou from the Bristol mint illustrated in Fig. 9. The conclusion from this is that one cannot use lettering style to reliably identify the coin.

In Martin Allen's forthcoming BNJ note he clearly recognises the problem of deciphering the reverse legend accurately, suggesting a reading of **+BRIV[~]:[O?][~]:[L OR C?]VDE**: This he interprets as probably indicating the moneyer BRIUN which may be resolved with BRUN at Derby, who is known in Henry I types 13 and 14. However, in the PAS record for the coin¹⁰ the reverse is given as **+DRIV:[] [N?]:[C, E or L]ODE**: The report accordingly states "*this is a coin of a previously unrecorded moneyer in the coinage of Henry I, Driu, which is a name recorded at Hereford in Stephen type 7 and Henry II's Cross and Crosslets (Tealby) coinage*". We thus have two alternate moneyer suggestions each of which depends on the decipherment of the initial letter of the reverse legend.

A photographic enlargement of the legible part of the moneyer text is shown in Fig. 7a, with an interpretation overlay in Fig. 7b. From the image the moneyer's name does in fact appear to begin with a "D," and that the moneyer's name is, or begins with, "DRIV" for the name Driu. The possibility that the coin was minted at Hereford should therefore be a serious consideration; the findspot is only about thirty-two miles by road from Hereford. The question now is whether the mint part of the reverse legend can be correlated with Hereford, which is usually portrayed on coins as **HERE**, **HEREFOR** or **hFRD** – i.e. with the last two letters being 'RE', 'OR' or 'RD'. The reverse of the subject coin appears to have 'DE' as the last two letters, which is not an obvious fit for Hereford, so other mint possibilities should be considered. As some moneyers did move around it is not impossible that this Driu is the same moneyer known at Hereford for Stephen type 7^{11, 12} and Henry II's Cross and Crosslets coinage class C1¹³, but it is highly unlikely that this same moneyer was working on Henry I Type 9 due to the long timespan involved; or perhaps there are two moneyers named Driu, maybe father and son.

Fig. 8 shows an interpretation of the full reverse, which appears to read **DRIV : [ON] : []ODE**: or if the third letter from the end is a "V" rather than an "O" then we have ... : []VDE: which could be SVDE for Southwark, however this letter is very different to the "V" of DRIV and so this suggestion is discounted. Also note that Southwark mint would have struck regular issues for Stephen, and not irregular Angevin issues.

One wonders if the moneyer DRIU moved between Hereford and Gloucester or another mint town in the south-west due to the impact of the civil war, especially given the fact that during the civil war between Stephen and Matilda Hereford was besieged and changed hands several times. Driu may have chosen to blunder the mint legend in order to disguise his location.

Hereford, located near the Welsh border, was a key strategic location. Control of it and other border towns was crucial for both factions, namely because it served as a gateway to the west and the Welsh Marches, a region where local lords had considerable autonomy. Whomever controlled Hereford could

¹⁰ Portable Antiquities Scheme record # GLO-B9734A ([Link](#)).

¹¹ F. Elmore Jones, 'Stephen type VII' BNJ vol. 28 (1955-57), 537-54. ([Link](#))

¹² M. Allen, 'The English coinage of 1153/4–1158', BNJ 76 (2006), 242–302, at p. 271

¹³ D.F. Allen, *A Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum. The Cross-and-Crosslets ('Tealby') Type of Henry II* (London, 1951), pp. cxxxv-cxxxvi, 53

exert considerable influence over these borderlands. Like many towns and lords during The Anarchy, the people of Hereford, along with the powerful Marcher lords who controlled the surrounding lands, frequently switched sides between Stephen and Matilda, depending on which faction seemed stronger at any given time. This lack of consistent loyalty made it difficult for either side to establish lasting control.

One of Matilda's key supporters, Robert of Gloucester, was active in the west of England and would have considered places like Hereford vital for his military campaigns. Gloucester was Matilda's half-brother and one of her most able commanders. He held significant territories in the region and used them as bases for resistance against Stephen. Specific accounts of a major battle for Hereford are sparse, castles in the region were often under siege or changing hands during the broader conflict. Though neither Stephen nor Matilda gained lasting control of Hereford during The Anarchy, the conflict concluded in 1153 with the Treaty of Wallingford, which allowed Stephen to remain king for the remainder of his life but recognized Matilda's son, Henry of Anjou, as his successor. Following Stephen's death in 1154, Henry of Anjou subsequently ascended the throne as Henry II in the same year, bringing stability back to England after years of civil strife. Given that peace returned in 1153 this date likely provides a backstop for the issue of the subject coin.

Driu is not recorded as a moneyer for Henry I but, as previously noted, is recorded at Hereford in Stephen type 7 and Henry II's Cross and Crosslets coinage. Whether Driu at Hereford is the same Driu that minted this coin remains to be seen. Useful lists of moneyers by mint are to be found in Allen (2012)¹⁴ and Allen (2022)¹⁵.

The Obverse

The unique form of the obverse is of significant interest. Fig. 10 shows the obverse, together with an enlargement of part of the coin. The legend reads hENRICV[S] and it is unclear whether or not there are a further one or two letters, 'RE' for example, after the hand and before the initial mark. The lettering on the obverse, as with the reverse, is quite crude. Is the Henry referred to in the legend meant to be Henry I or perhaps Henry of Anjou for example?

As previously noted, the bust is uncrowned and this would be highly unlikely if the bust were intended to portray Henry I himself, raising the question of whom the bust represents but note that the Henry I round halfpennies have an uncrowned bust, e.g. as shown on the right. I do note, however, that the general form of the obverse design is similar to that of Henry I Type 15 (Fig.12).

Fig. 11 highlights the possibility that the figure could represent a woman, in which case Matilda, Henry I's daughter, is the obvious candidate, but the figure could be male, in which case the hENRICVS name in the legend combined with the mint town suggests Henry of Anjou as both the issuer and featured person on the obverse. Note that some coins in the name of Henry replace the normal crowned bust of Stephen type 1 with one wearing a cap that can be interpreted as Henry of Anjou's cap of maintenance, as an uncrowned member of the nobility.



Obverse of a Henry I halfpenny - Salisbury, Sawine, facing uncrowned bust with hair composed of eight stylised ringlets, image credit: Noonans

¹⁴ Allen, M., 2012. 'The mints and moneyers of England and Wales, 1066–1158', BNM 82, 54–120 ([Link](#)).

¹⁵ Martin Allen, Mints and Moneyers, 1066–1135, in 'Interpreting Early Medieval Coinage – Studies in Memory of Stewart Lyon', edited by Martin Allen, Rory Naismith and Hugh Pagan, 2022, British Numismatic Society, Special Publication No 15.

In an article on coins of Matilda by Johanne Porter¹⁶ she states that Henry of Anjou was highly unlikely to have issued coinage in England until the late 1140s. This fits well with the time range deduced above. An interesting account of coinage during the reign of Stephen and the Anarchy is provided by Fairburn¹⁷.

Conclusions

Based on the above, I propose an alternative hypothesis alongside that set out by Martin Allen. Based mainly on its obverse design, findspot and low weight I have concluded that the coin most likely represents an Angevin issue, probably of Henry of Anjou and thus probably dating to the late 1140s. It was minted by the moneyer Driu, maybe the Driu of Hereford. The moneyer Driu is not known for any other mints during the reign of Stephen, and is not known at all during the reign of Henry I. Possibly Driu minted elsewhere before later moving to Hereford. The obverse of the coin may show a bust of Matilda, in which case it was likely issued by Henry of Anjou in support of his mother; alternatively, the bust may represent Henry himself.

There are two other possible interpretations:

- a) It may, as suggested by Martin Allen, be a variety of Henry I Type 9 issued by Henry I c. 1109. This interpretation is supported by the similarity of the reverse to that of Henry I type 9. The low weight of the coin is a notable factor against this interpretation.
- b) It may also be a later issue of Henry I: Martin Allen has noted it could have been minted by Briun of Derby – who was active in Henry I Types 13 and 14. This would require the first letter on the reverse to be a “B” not a “D”. This interpretation could make sense from a historical perspective; Henry I had lost his son and heir William Adelin in 1120 in the White Ship disaster in 1120, which left Henry without a male heir and set the stage for a succession crisis. After 1120 Henry I would have had an interest in promoting his daughter Matilda as the new heir to the throne and may have issued the low-weight coin in her support prior to the assize of the moneyers in winter 1124/25. This period from 1120-24 would have been when Types 13 and 14 were current. However, if Bruin at Derby did issue such a coin, one wonders why he used the particular reverse of the subject coin rather than a Type 13 or 14 reverse. Interestingly, the general form of the obverse is not dis-similar to that of Henry I Type 15.

Three interpretations of the coin have been presented, and it is now up to the reader to consider which is the most likely.

Acknowledgments

With thanks to Alex Bliss and Dr. Martin Allen for reviewing drafts of this article and providing useful feedback. Thanks also to Martin Allen for the preprint of his forthcoming BNJ note. Any factual and grammatical errors remain my own though.

¹⁶ Johanne Porter, ‘A new coin type of the Empress Matilda?: The “Rex Matilda” Cross Moline type’, *British Numismatic Journal* 89 (2019), 109–17. ([Link](#))

¹⁷ Fairbairn, Henry, ‘King Stephen’s Reign: A Reassessment of The Numismatic Evidence’, *BNJ* vol. 87 (2017), 43-54 ([Link](#)).

FIGURES

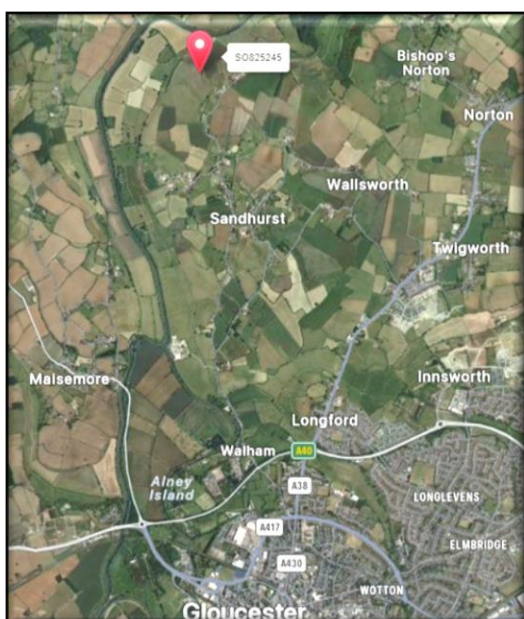


Fig.1. (Left)

Red marker shows the approximate findspot on the east bank of the River Sever¹⁸.



Fig.2. (Right)

The coin as found¹⁹.

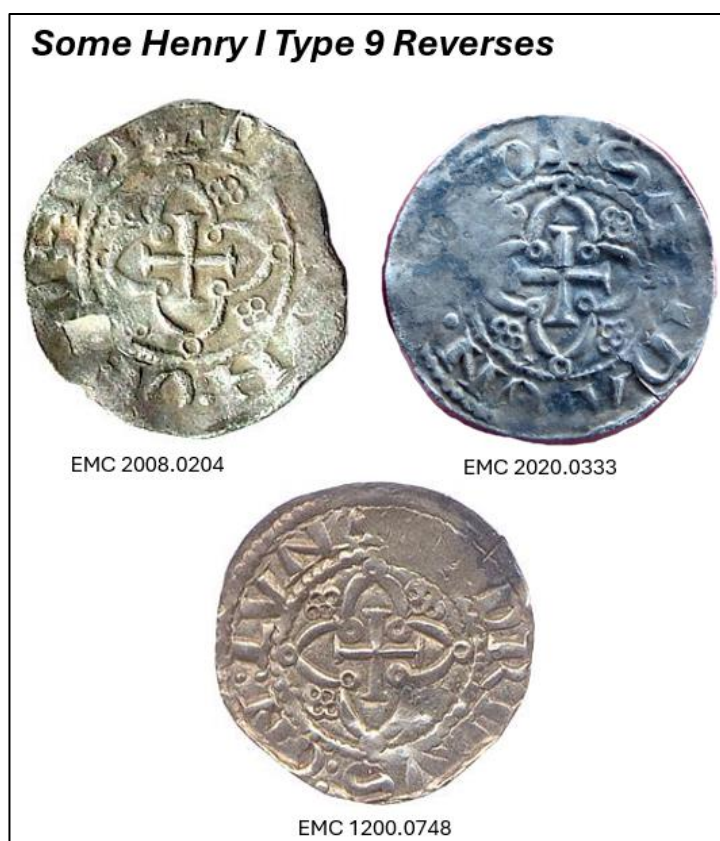


Fig.3 (Left)

A number of examples from the EMC – all showing the characteristic cross pattée.

¹⁸ Google maps

¹⁹ Cropped image from an illustration in the PAS record.

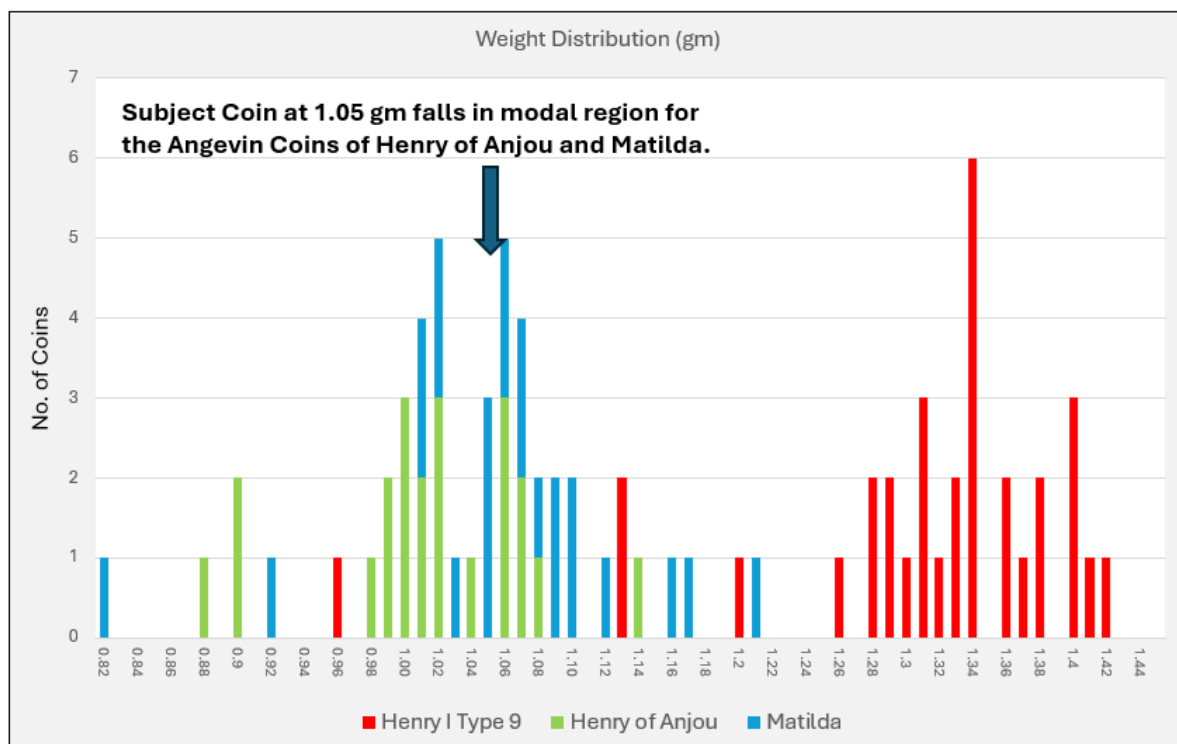


Fig. 5.



Fig. 6. 'Henry' obverse with cross fleury in quatrefoil reverse, and with uncertain mint and moneyer. Found near Elmley Lovett, c. 10 miles north of Worcester. ([EMC 2017.0269](#))

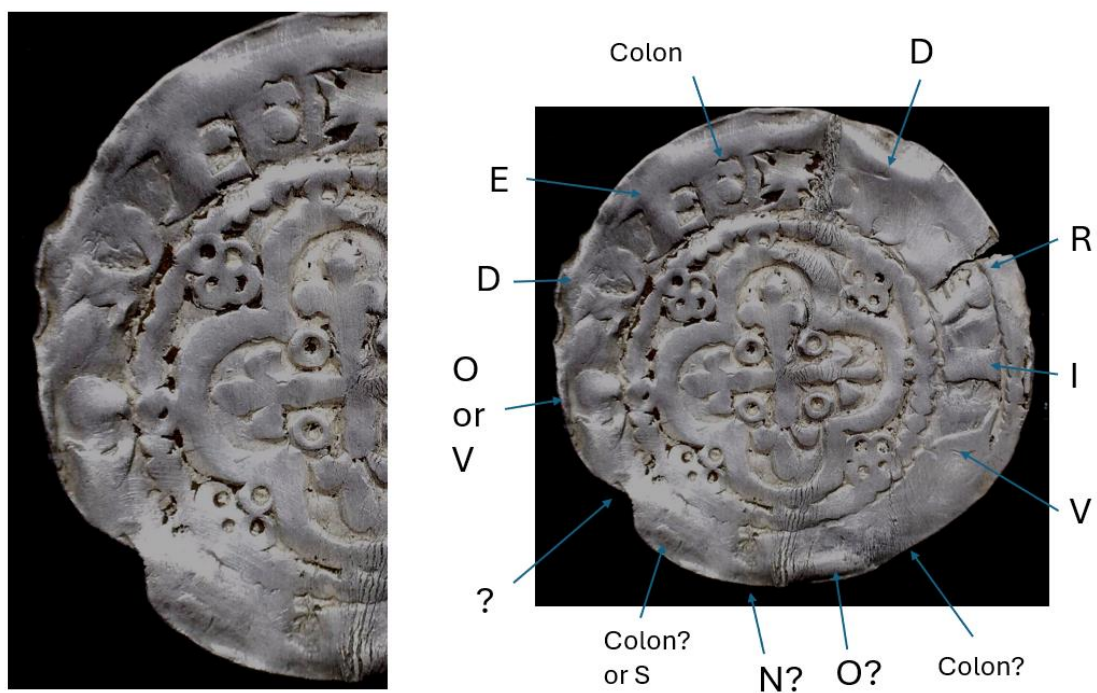
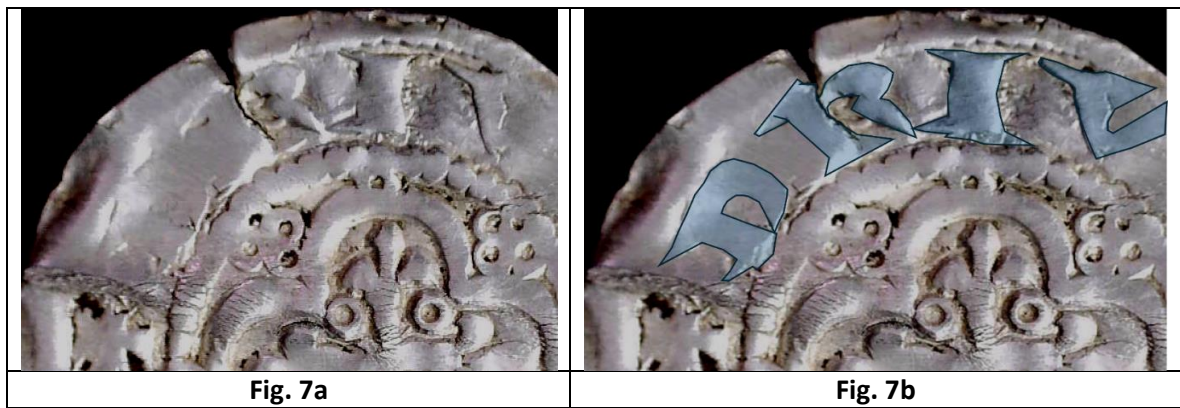


Fig. 8.



Spink, auction 19007, lot 77

Fig. 9 A penny of Henry of Anjou, Bristol mint



Fig. 10 (above) The obverse, with enlargement and interpretation of part of the legend.

Fig.11 (below)

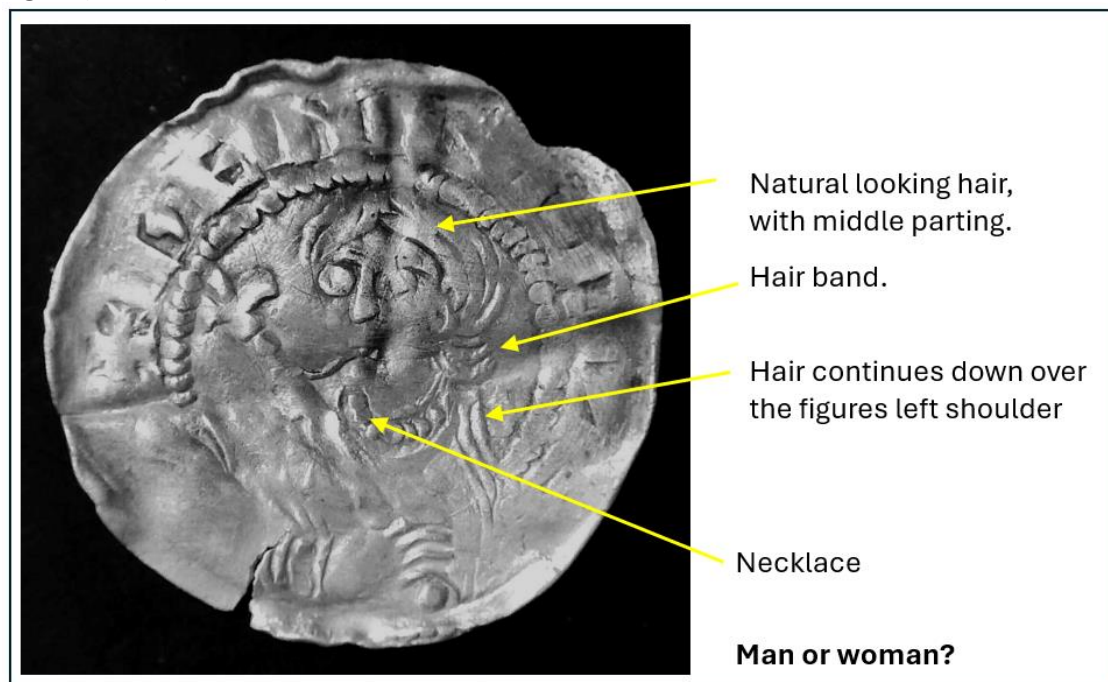




Fig.12 - Comparison of the obverse of the subject coin to a Henry I Type 15 penny.