

THE BATH (1755) HOARD : THE PROPERTY OF A VISITOR FROM MIDLAND ENGLAND

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The Bath (1755) hoard is the only hoard of any size deposited in the middle years of the tenth century to have been discovered in the south of England¹. A list of forty-two coins from the hoard, possibly representing the entirety of it, was compiled shortly after the hoard's discovery by Rev. George North (1710-1772), and is reproduced, with accompanying comments, in an article contributed to *BNJ* 45, 1975, by Christopher Blunt and myself². Although North's list provides no more than transcriptions of the obverse and reverse inscriptions of the coins concerned, Blunt, who was responsible for writing the text of our article, was able to make a number of well-informed suggestions as to where the coins were likely to have been struck, and also drew attention to specimens known today that might be equated with those seen by North. Our article was however written before the development of the classification for coins of this date set out by Blunt, Ian Stewart (Lord Stewartby), and Stewart Lyon in their splendid volume devoted to the coinage of this period³, and more can now be said both about the hoard in general and about the probable minting places of the coins represented in it.

As a contemporary account records, the hoard was discovered, 'under the occiput of a skeleton'⁴, in one of the graves within an Anglo-Saxon cemetery that had been exposed during the demolition during 1755 of the Abbey House (or Priory House), a building of medieval origin associated with Bath Abbey⁵. The coins seen and studied by North had been acquired by John Wood the younger (1728-1781), a widely respected second-generation Bath-based architect who designed Bath's Royal Crescent and New Assembly Rooms, and these, as North states at the head of his list, had been 'transmitted to me by James Mundy Esqr. for my inspection'. Blunt and I were not able to identify James Mundy when we wrote our remarks, but the individual involved was James Mundy FSA (c.1702-1756), a London attorney who had held an official appointment as Clerk of the Rules in the Court of King's Bench between c.1727 and January 1748, but who had then retired to Bath.

A summary list of the coins in the hoard follows at the end of these remarks. Three of the coins are of Aethelstan (924-939), twenty are of his successor Eadmund (938-946), and seventeen are of Eadmund's successor Eadred (946-955), while the remaining two coins appear to have been contemporary imitations. All the coins, other

¹ I am grateful to Rory Naismith who has kindly commented on a draft of these remarks.

² C.E.Blunt and H.E.Pagan, 'Three tenth-century hoards : Bath (1755), Kintbury (1761), Threadneedle Street (before 1924)', *BNJ* xlv, 1975, 19-32.

³ C.E.Blunt, B.H.I.H.Stewart, and C.S.S.Lyon, *Coinage in Tenth-Century England from Edward the Elder to Edgar's Reform*, London, OUP for the British Academy, 1989.

⁴ The 'occiput' is the back of the head.

⁵ The slightly conflicting contemporary accounts of the hoard's discovery were collected by D.M.Metcalf, 'Eighteenth-century finds of medieval coins from the records of the Society of Antiquaries', *NC* 1958, 73-96 (at 77-9). Metcalf was unaware at the time of the survival in the library of the Royal Mint of North's list of the coins from it.

than a single example of Aethelstan's *Circumscription Cross* type struck by the York moneyer, Ragnald, are of a design in which the moneyer's name is set out in two lines on the reverse, followed by the letters **MO** or a similar abbreviation for the word Latin word *monetarius*, but without any accompanying indication of the place where the coins were struck. It is however possible to identify, using stylistic criteria, the specific cities and towns where some of the coins are likely to have been struck, and, where this is not possible, at least to indicate the wider region from which the coins are likely to derive. This is reflected in the list below, where the arrangement is by reign and by the type varieties distinguished by Blunt, Stewart, and Lyon, but where the opportunity has also been taken to show our current understanding of where each moneyer is likely to have been operating.

What is immediately apparent from the list is that the coins that form the hoard must have been brought together not in Bath or anywhere in its vicinity but somewhere in Midland England, for among the coins of Eadred, the most recently struck element in the hoard, as many as fifteen out of the seventeen in total were struck by moneyers associable by the style of their coins either with the Midlands or (in one case) York, and only a single coin, of the probable Wallingford moneyer Aethelmund, is certain to have been of Southern English origin. The essentially Midland origin of the coins in the hoard is further underlined by the fact that, as it would seem, not one of the forty-two coins involved was struck by a moneyer operating in Somerset, Wiltshire, or Hampshire, or at any identifiable minting place nearer to Bath than Wallingford and, maybe, Oxford.

The hoard is thus likely to have been the property of a visitor to Bath who had arrived there at some point during the first half of the 950s, the likely date of the hoard's deposit, from somewhere in the Midlands, whether on business, for pleasure, for health reasons, or for some other purpose. The good representation within the Midlands grouping in the hoard of coins struck by moneyers operating at Northampton or at as yet unidentified locations elsewhere in the East Midlands may indeed serve to identify more precisely the area in Midland England from which this visitor had come.

One other interesting feature of the hoard is the place of its discovery, for it was not customary for Christian burials in the Anglo-Saxon period after the end of the seventh century to be accompanied by coins or by other grave goods. Blunt and I stated in 1975 that this was "clearly a deliberate grave burial"⁶ but although that might have been the case with the hoards of mid-tenth century coins from churchyards at Kintbury, Berkshire, and at Hundon, Suffolk, which we then treated as parallels, it now seems to me doubtful that the 1755 Bath hoard necessarily belongs to the same category. Although one of the contemporary accounts of the hoard collected by Metcalf states that the coins "seem to have been laid up in a wooden box, which time had rendered of the same consistence of it's surrounding clay", which would certainly point to the burial being a deliberate one, this may not have been a correct interpretation of the coins' archaeological context, and it would certainly seem strange that so large a group of coins would have been deliberately buried in a substantial Christian cemetery in the heart of a well-developed urban community such as Bath

⁶ Blunt and Pagan, 1975, 24.

was at the time, particularly if their owner had been a visitor to Bath rather than a long-term Bath resident⁷.

An alternative hypothesis might be that the body was buried in circumstances when a purse or similar container concealed by the deceased individual's clothing was overlooked by whoever was responsible for putting the body in the ground. If this was the case, it is a reasonable conjecture that the deceased had been unaccompanied at the time of death by any one, whether a family member or a personal servant, who might have been familiar with where the deceased's money was kept. Beyond that, all would be mere guesswork.

LIST OF THE COINS

Where the name of a city or town is given in brackets, this is because although no mint signature appears on the coin or coins, the numismatic evidence is sufficient to associate the coins securely with the particular minting place involved.

It should be noted that the names of the moneyers are given here in normalised form, except where no obvious normalised equivalent suggests itself.

AETHELSTAN (3 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (2 coins)

(Southern) Ealhstan 1
(East Midlands) Fugel (?) 1

Circumscription Cross type (1 coin)

York, Ragnald 1

EADMUND (20 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (15 coins)

(Canterbury) Aelfric 1
(London) Beornheard 1
(Wallingford) Heremod 1
(Southern) Baldwine 1⁸; Beornsige 1; Burhwig 2

⁷ For an overview of the history and development of the city of Bath in the Anglo-Saxon period see B.Cunliffe, 'Saxon Bath', in J.Haslam, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England*, Chichester, Phillimore, 1984, 345-58. The 1755 Bath hoard and the cemetery are mentioned briefly on p.353. One further grave from this cemetery came to light during Prof.Barry Cunliffe's excavations on the Roman Baths site in 1968, and archaeological excavations carried out in the same general area during the late twentieth century and under Bath Abbey itself between 2018 and 2022 have revealed a significant number of 'charcoal' burials dating from the later Anglo-Saxon period which are likely to have been made within the boundaries of what would clearly have been a large urban cemetery in active use during the tenth century.

(Northampton) Baldric 1; Wigheard 2
(East Midlands, not localised) Baldwine 1; “Biurene” 1; Gundfrid 1
(York) Ingelgar 1
(fragment ?) []red 1

Horizontal Cross 1 type (?) (1 coin)

(Canterbury) Aethelsige 1

Horizontal Pellet 1 type (?) (1 coin)

(Southern) Wulfric 1

Horizontal Rosette 1 type (3 coins)

(Chester) Maeldomen 1
(Derby) Aethelraed 1; Andreas 1

EADRED (17 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (14 coins)

(Wallingford or Oxford) Aethelmund 1
(Northampton) Asfrith 2; Waerin 1
(East Midlands, not localised) Bese 1; “Eann” 1; Englbred 1; “Namna” 1; Sigeferth 1
(North East Midlands) Theodmaer 4
(York) Ingelgar 1

Horizontal Rosette 1 type (2 coins)

(Northampton) Baldric (S in obverse field) 1; Osweald (S in obverse field) 1

Uncertain Horizontal type (1 coin)

Ealhsige 1

IMITATIVE temp EADMUND-EADRED (2 coins)

Horizontal Trefoil 1 type (2 coins)

(Blundered) 2

⁸ It is clear from the transcriptions of the reverse inscriptions of the two coins of this reign and type that these coins belonged to different stylistic groupings, and I have taken the view here that two different moneyers of the same name may have been involved. Baldwin is evidenced as a Bedford moneyer by mint-signed coins of Eadwig, and it is likely that one or other of the coins was struck there.



