

# **Continental Imitations of Henry III Long Cross class 5f**

by  
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The good reputation of the English coinage during the mid-thirteenth century gave rise to it being copied on the continent, with most imitations originating in Frisia or Westphalia. Some of the imitations are good enough to be easily mistaken for English coins, others less so. The key diagnostic features are often small details of style, both portrait and letters. A key feature is that the reverse legends are often blundered to the point where it is difficult to establish the prototype coin on which the imitation is based. Some coins however are easy to recognise when they purport to have been issued from moneyers known to not have been active for the class of coin in question. The example below is an imitation of long cross class 5c, characterised by the sceptre and the almond shaped eyes but with a reverse reading ION / ON / GLO / VCE , i.e. a coin of ION from the Gloucester mint. The Gloucester mint, along with all the other provincial mints was closed by 1250, well before the introduction of class 5.



By their nature, imitations are difficult to classify, indeed until Churchill and Thomas' excellent summary, few attempts have been made at any sort of classification. The earliest was the work of Jules Chautard, published in 1871. This remains the key reference for the

subject. It was not until 1995 that J.J. North published a comprehensive analysis of imitative issues and forgeries of English and Irish long cross pence of Henry III (BNJ 65 and BNJ 66).

Broadly speaking, it is possible to separate these coins into four principal groupings. Firstly, there are those coins which whilst keeping the appearance of English coins show both obverse and reverse legends with what are clearly ‘foreign’ legends, both obverse and reverse, rather than copies of English prototypes. Secondly there are those that closely copy their English prototypes, with varying degrees of success.

Both these groups can be further subdivided on the basis of key diagnostic features of the English coins, the main such being the absence or presence of a sceptre on the obverse. This roughly equates to class 1-3 and 4-5. (It is possible that imitations based on class 6 and 7 may exist but any such would be most unusual and exceedingly rare.) Bearing in mind the bewildering number of possible variations, it is often very difficult to establish the detail of the prototype coin. There are of course a few interesting exceptions.

The following coin turned up in November 2024, a metal detecting find.



The coin is clearly imitating a regular issue of Henry III long cross class 5f, characterised by the double band to the crown. The obverse legend (correctly) reads hENRICVSREX \ III’,

however the style of the portrait leaves little doubt as to its imitative nature. The reverse legend is not as clear as we might wish, it seems to read RIO / VNO / ARIC / RIE. Blundered reverse legends are a clear indicator of imitative coins.

In their account of the 1908 Brussels Hoard, Mr. Churchill and Mr. Thomas listed 3750 contemporary imitations of English long cross issues of Henry III. Churchill and Thomas identified a group of nine imitative coins where the identification of the coin obverse copied cannot be in any doubt. All the coins share the same obverse but are listed with no fewer than seven different reverses.



hENRDVS REX III'

The double banded crown is a key diagnostic feature of class 5f, the only subclass in which it appears.

The reverses readings are as follows:

RIE /ORI/EVI/CNR            (two coins)  
hEI/RHO/INV/NDE  
HIC/OLE/DIB/ANT  
hEN/RIO/NLV/NDE  
WNL/LEM/ONC/ANT  
DAV/NON/LVH/DEN            (two coins)  
NIC/OLC/ONL/VND

It is interesting to speculate as to why one obverse should be paired with (in the case of the Brussels coins) so many different reverses, and what this might tell us about the practices of the continental mints. At the time of publication of the Brussels Hoard volume in 2012,

neither the authors nor Jeffrey North were aware of any other examples of imitations based on class 5f, possibly reflecting the relative scarcity of the sub class in the English series.

In his article on the subject, Jeffrey North noted the use of blundered reverse dies with accurately reproduced obverse ones. He noted that Dannenberg had suggested that this might indicate English forgeries. It is obvious from recorded examples that the die sinkers were perfectly capable of producing accurate legends, so it is difficult to see why they would not produce equally correct reverses...? The suggestion that this might have been done to protect the English moneyers from accusations of forgery seems improbable, given that most of the people using the coins would probably be illiterate, consequently the accuracy of the reverse legend would not be a concern.

There is much variation in the accuracy (or lack of) of the reverses with some being an unintelligible mix of seemingly random letters while others are near exact copies with perhaps one or two letter being different which suggest a lack of any specific intent in this respect.

North also observed that similarity of style is an unreliable link between Long Cross Imitations and that the sharing of dies seems to have been relatively common in most other imitative issues, leading to some lengthy die-chains. Dolley and Seaby's die study of Irish imitations revealed that in their Class II (Irish type obverses with 'English' reverses) no more than three obverse dies are in use but with no fewer than twenty-two different reverses, but no reverse die occurs with more than one obverse.

**Further reading:**

Benders, J. 2002. *Sterlings from Gelre (Gelderland)*. NC 162 pp. 365-372.

Chautard J. 1871 *Imitations des Monnaies au Type Esterlin frappées en Europe pendant le XIIIe et le XIVe siècle*

Churchill R. & Thomas R. 2012 *The Brussels Hoard of 1908. The Long Cross Coinage of Henry III. Baldwin* / BNS  
Dannenberg H. 1888 *Der Sterling-Fund von Ribnitz* ZfN 15 pp.302-24  
Dolley M. & Seaby W.A. 2006 *The Anomalous Long-Cross Coins in the Anglo-Irish Portion of the Brussels Hoard* in *Mints, Dies and Currency* (Routledge)  
Mayhew N.J. 1983 *Sterling Imitations of Edwardian Type* RNS (London)  
Mayhew N.J. (ed.) 1979 *Coinage in the Low Countries (880-1500)* BAR International Series 54.  
North J.J. 1995 / 1996 *Imitative issues and forgeries of English and Irish long cross pence of Henry III* in BNJ 65 and BNJ 66  
Spufford P. 1963 *Continental Coins in Late Medieval England* in BNJ 32

