

NEW LIGHT ON THE ABBOT OF PETERBOROUGH IN THE NORMAN PERIOD

By F. ELMORE JONES

THE object of these notes is to record the readings of three individually unique pennies of Henry I's fourteenth type with an annulet on the king's shoulder, and to consider the evidence as to whether the annulet is of significance as an ecclesiastical symbol. The reverse readings of the three coins are as follows:

1. ✠LEFTIEN: ON: SIFAN (Stamford)
2. ✠ALGAR: ON: EANTA- (Canterbury)
3. ✠WILLEM: ON: LANP: (do.)

Until recently I had regarded the coin of Stamford (no. 1 above), which was lot 1409 in the Carlyon-Britton sale (ill.), as the only known example of the type on which the annulet occurs. I was delighted therefore to come across a second specimen with a similar obverse feature of the mint of Canterbury—the coin of the moneyer Willem (no. 3 above). The fact that this latter mint also had an undoubted ecclesiastical background made me wonder whether the Canterbury might not tie up the Stamford and vice versa.

We are indebted to Mr. Derek Allen for the publication of documentary evidence that the Abbot of St. Augustin continued to exercise the privilege of having one die in eight at the Canterbury mint right down to 1161 when the abbey was seized by the king on the death of Abbot Sylvester. The moneyer holding the die at that time is now identified as the Alferg of the Cross and Crosslets coins of Henry II, but it is important to note that Alferg's coins do not bear any ecclesiastical mark or symbol whatsoever. Reverting to the coins of Henry I the following footnote appears in the Carlyon-Britton sale catalogue relative to the Stamford piece: "It is suggested that the presence of the unusual annulet or ring upon the king's robe in this type may be the Abbot's privy mark which distinctive symbol is also seen upon some of the London coins presumably struck for the Abbot of Reading."

Presumably the later part of this sentence refers to a coin or coins of type 15 of the London moneyer Baldwin upon which it is claimed that an annulet appears on the king's cheek. I myself have very little confidence in this claim and believe that the so-called annulet (if not a die flaw) is an eye punched in in the wrong place. Documentary evidence has, however, established that the London moneyer Edgar, whose coins are not uncommon, held office under the abbot's authority during the issue of type 15, but so far as is known none of his coins bear any distinguishing symbol.

Going back to type 14, it seems certain that the annulet on these three coins must be a definite addition to the design and that it cannot

be explained away as anything else. But whether the addition is of ecclesiastical significance or not is a matter on which I am keeping an open mind.

Even in a very short paper on this subject reference must be made to the type 14 coins of the moneyer Ordgar of London hitherto claimed to have a scallop shell in one quarter of the reverse and therefore to have been struck on behalf of the Abbot of Reading. This theory has been exploded through the research and keen eyesight of our member Mr. F. Pridmore who has found that the so-called scallop is merely a flaw in the die.

The British Museum does not possess a specimen of these annulet coins, but *B.M.C. (Norman Kings)* no. 114 is from the same reverse die as no. 3 above. The obverse die of *B.M.C.* no. 114 is quite different and is without the annulet on shoulder.

The second annulet coin of Canterbury, that of the moneyer Algar (no. 2 above), came to my notice subsequent to my acquisition of the Willem coin. It is in the ownership of Commander Mack, by whose kind permission I am recording it here. It was illustrated in the *Journal*, Vol. XXVI, pl. B, 5 (facing p. 234), without any reference to the annulet; no one, myself included, had then noticed it. It came from the Carlyon-Britton collection and the Canterbury find. Commander Mack frankly admits that he has had it for thirty-five years without having noticed this interesting feature.

What is the chronological order of the two Canterbury coins, bearing in mind that there was presumably only one moneyer striking for the abbot at any one time? Willem is known to have continued to strike at Canterbury in the succeeding type (type 15) and in type 1 of Stephen. He is unknown prior to type 14. Algar is unknown altogether apart from this coin. Assuming the annulet to have ecclesiastical significance one must therefore deduce that Willem succeeded Algar, the former having first been a royal moneyer during type 14 when *B.M.C.* no. 114 was struck with the ordinary obv. die and with a rev. die which Willem continued to use whilst operating for the abbot.

Is the apparent great rarity of these annulet coins a point in favour of ecclesiastical origin? There are probably other coins which have not been noticed, but even so the total number seems to represent a very small proportion of the whole and it is perhaps significant that this coin of Algar and the Stamford coin of Leftien are unique of those two moneyers.

On the other hand, the symbol may simply represent the whim of one particular die sinker. If use of the annulet is merely coincidental in Henry I's reign could this also be the case with the well-known rarities of Edward I which have an annulet on the king's breast and which are generally accepted as being an ecclesiastical issue of the Abbot of Reading from the London mint? Documentary evidence may well give the answer in this latter instance. In the former my purpose is served by pointing out that Canterbury now seems to come

forward in support of Peterborough. Members will decide for themselves whether the former does in fact throw new light on the latter.

Presumably the emergence of an annulet coin of London of the same type would make the evidence in favour of ecclesiastical origin well-nigh conclusive; alternatively that of an annulet coin of a mint which could not possibly have ecclesiastical significance would seemingly be conclusive in the opposite direction.

So far as I am aware these three coins of Henry I, type 14 (plus the extremely doubtful annulet on cheek in type 15), are now the only ones of the reign having any claim to ecclesiastical origin by reason of the presence of a symbol. There are none of the reigns of the first two Norman kings.

I must make a brief reference to the distinctly complicated range of regular, and I stress regular, coins of Stephen's first type considered to be ecclesiastical on account of "annular" features. In very general terms these embrace (1) coins having one or more small annulets incorporated in the king's crown and/or sceptre and (2) the quite characteristic coins without inner circle which have a large annulet as a finish to the king's shoulder. I have only made a superficial study of these rare coins but am very much inclined to the opinion that one would find the weight of evidence against ecclesiastical attribution on a detailed analysis of all known specimens being made. For instance, I know of an Ipswich coin of the former category and the unique Bedford coin in the British Museum is of the latter; neither of these could presumably be associated with any ecclesiastical background.

Even in a paper of this length I must make an allusion to the late Saxon period in view of the prolific use of the annulet symbol on the reverse of the coins of Edward the Confessor of York and to a lesser degree on those of both Edward the Martyr and Ethelred II, in his first type only, at the Stamford mint, but I will only mention the fact that one must not overlook their presence in the overall picture.