

THE TOWER GOLD OF CHARLES I

PROBLEMS OF SURVIVAL RATIOS

THREE NEW ANGEL DIES

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I

FOR a coinage as prolific as that of Charles I's gold, I have refrained from recording every die and every punctuation variety in my earlier publications.¹ The number of coins consulted runs almost twice into four figures, and I am very conscious of the fact that my research work was inevitably confined to the evidence in the museums, a very few major private collections, illustrated sale catalogues, and the trays of the leading London dealers over a considerable period of time. However, this constituted in my opinion a numismatic substance large enough for a coherent paper on the Tower Gold Coins of Charles I, but that the evidence submitted was not complete and possibly not entirely conclusive in a few cases was perfectly obvious.

By and large my paper still stands except for the Group C issues of the unites which should be rewritten. In what can only be called an almost desperate attempt at condensing the enormous number of varieties during a period of only about 2½ years, I over-simplified and my record became inaccurate in parts.²

However, the purpose of this short paper is not an addenda and corrigenda to my 'Tower Gold of Charles I' but a comment on the two issues which form, as it were, an exception to the rule. Whereas it proved undesirable to record the dies of Charles I's unites, double crowns, and gold crowns, such a record was possible—and was compiled—in respect of Briot's mill coinage of 1631/2 and of the angel series. My lists of these two issues obviously claimed a high degree of completeness and must therefore be kept up to date from time to time when new varieties come to light.

Within the scope of Briot's mill coinage there is no bullion worth mentioning to be accounted for in respect of his gold crowns and angels³ which appear to have

¹ *BNJ* xxviii, xxix, xxx.

² Many years after the publication of my paper J. J. North wrote in his preface to volume 2 of his *English Hammered Coinage*, 'Some readers may feel that an undue amount of space has been devoted to the reign of Charles I. It has, however, proved impossible to condense further the numerous types of this coinage without sacrificing clarity and completeness.' How right he was; I should have been more keenly aware of this when I recorded Charles I's unites of Group C.

³ I still oppose Mr. R. B. K. Stevenson's views (*BNJ* xxix, 133), subsequently endorsed by Mr. Ian Stewart and, in this volume by Noël Woolf, that Briot's mill angel is a Scottish coin, struck in Edinburgh and specifically

minted for a touching ceremony at the Chapel Royal in June 1633. This simply makes no sense to me (*BNJ* xxx, 317–18) considering that the ship on Briot's coin is flying the cross of St. George and has the English arms in the first quarter of the royal crest. The mere fact that there is a mill angel of Briot pierced for use as a touch piece in the Hunterian collection does not in my opinion prove the 'Scottish theory'. It was pierced—when? Used as a touch piece—when and where? Meanwhile, a second unpierced Briot angel has come to light (Bridgewater sale, Glendining's, 15 June 1972) and this makes the attribution to Scotland as an Edinburgh touch piece even more doubtful than before.

remained in a purely experimental stage. But we find four obverse and five reverse dies for the unites and five obverse and two reverse dies for the double crowns. This was certainly not to be expected for we have evidence of a number of dies which, in theory, should have been capable of striking hundreds of times the 26 lb 11 oz. of bullion issued to Briot for his trial mill coinage. Breakage ratios of Briot's dies must have been terrific considering the number of die varieties and the amount of bullion coined, but what worried me even more when I wrote my paper was the almost impossible survival ratio of Briot's mill coins.

I discussed this problem with Mr. Derek F. Allen one evening, and he asked: 'What degree of rarity would you assign to Briot's mill double crowns and unites?' I suggested that the double crowns were just about rare but certainly not very rare, and the unites no more than uncommon and could perhaps be described as 'scarce' by commercial standards. Derek Allen nodded and replied: 'Yes, this is fully agreed, but considering that only some 26 lbs of gold was minted, and most of it into unites, it does not make sense, unless we accept that they were kept in almost unbelievable numbers by the public because of their beauty and their somewhat curious aspect. But if this is true, how do we stand for the coins of Eloi Mestrelle, Antoine Levers and Simon's mill broads? Do we have to admit that we simply cannot fathom survival ratios and that they depend largely on the technical skill and the artistic qualities of the engraver?'

As so often, I think Derek Allen was right and the answer to his question is 'yes'. However, this 'yes' should perhaps be qualified, and it should be added that the imponderables of treasure trove may influence survival ratios to a sometimes appreciable extent.⁴ Generally speaking, I think all well-engraved and well-struck coins have a higher survival ratio than poorly minted specimens with no artistic merits. But this can hardly explain the exceptional survival ratio of Briot's mill coins, and the same is almost certainly true for Mestrelle's mill coins. Unfortunately, we have not been able to establish how much gold Mestrelle minted within the scope of his 1561/72 coinage but the amount of bullion must have been very small, for what survives of Mestrelle's attractive coins is virtually in mint state whereas the majority of Briot's coins show at least some signs of wear. In some respects there seems to be a technical resemblance between Briot's and Mestrelle's coinages: in both cases there must have been an extremely high breakage of dies, because we have for Mestrelle's half-sovereigns no less than five obverse dies with mint-mark Stars or Lis. However, the three varieties of large module with the Star mark were all struck from the same reverse die, and one of the obverse dies with the so-called 'shilling bust' was perhaps experimental and must have been very short-lived, for I believe only two specimens have come down to us.⁵ Although there are, I believe, three die varieties of Mestrelle's gold crowns with Stars or Lis marks, the number of coins on record is very small indeed, and his gold half-crowns can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand. What was true for Briot also applied to Mestrelle: the bulk of his bullion was used for the minting of half-sovereigns.

Antoine Levers is a problem which cannot be fully fathomed, for unlike Mestrelle and Briot there has never been a 'Levers Coinage' in the accepted sense of the word.

⁴ Fishpool Treasure Trove, for example. ⁵ BM and Lockett no. 2038.

But there can be little doubt that Antoine Levers was responsible for the first portrait coins of the young king Edward VI. Henry Bayse was by then too old and too weak to prepare entirely new designs and cut portrait irons. With the help of Robert Pitt, he was presumably dealing with the coining irons of what is usually referred to as the 'posthumous coinage' of Henry VIII with Henry's or Edward's legends and the old and young portraits of the kings. Robert Pitt hardly qualifies for the profile portraits of Edward VI, for he obtained his formal grant as chief engraver only in March 1550 and died very soon afterwards. However, the first profile coins of Edward VI can be fairly conclusively dated back to 1549. They include uncrowned portraits of Edward VI in profile—something unheard of in English numismatics in those days but quite common in France—and we find here and there rather unusual abbreviations of the legends. If we consider that some 600 dozen of irons were delivered by Antoine Levers and his assistants to the Tower minting establishment between 1547 and 1550 it seems obvious that Edward VI's first profile portraits were designed and engraved by Antoine Levers and they are rather 'continental' in style. Actually, they were, in the gold series, the first profile portraits ever struck in England. We find earlier profile portraits in the silver series, but these were engraved by Alexandre de Bruchsell—a another continental engraver.

As we have seen, survival ratios of exceptional coins with great artistic and technical merits are not easy to establish. In actual fact, we have full particulars only in respect of Briot's mill coinage of 1631/2 and of Simon's short-lived mill issue of 'broads' of 1661. I refuse to use the traditional term 'pattern broads'. These beautifully engraved coins are not patterns but form part of the ordinary gold coinage of Charles II. The fact that Thomas Simon's issue of mill broads was a complete failure is, of course, admitted, but this is totally irrelevant so far as the official and legal character of the broads is concerned. The breakage of Simon's dies was so enormous that he could coin only about half of the 167 lb. of bullion issued to him. Within less than five weeks all his dies were broken so that his engines came to a standstill. No more than 82 lb. of gold was minted exclusively into mill broads and this represented 3,362 coins of 20s. Since a pair of unite dies of the hammered coinage is supposed to have been capable of striking 10,000–12,000 specimens and since Simon's dies of the mill coins were appreciably smaller than those of the unites, the production figures per pair of dies must have been almost absurdly small. A single pair of hammered broad dies should have minted much more than 82 lb. of bullion, but I frequently wonder whether the usually accepted production figures for the larger hammered gold coins are not rather high—perhaps much too high. In any case, they cannot possibly apply to mill coins, and it must not be forgotten that the enormous breakage of the mill dies remained a disturbing factor in the mint for a very long time and applied not only to the very small and early experimental mill coinages such as Mestrelle's, Briot's, and Simon's. As late as the eighteenth century, and taken over a period of some ten years, a pair of dies produced on average no more than a thousand guineas. Since coining presses infinitely superior to the rather primitive machines used by Mestrelle, Briot, and Simon were used then, it is not surprising that the output of coins per pair of dies was exceedingly small for the experimental mill coinages of the seventeenth century.

I have done no research on Simon's broads and cannot say how many dies are

known, but there are, after all, three distinct varieties, and this alone is strange for only 82 lb. of bullion minted.

For Simon's broads we are facing an anomaly which seems to be inconsistent with my comments relating to the high survival ratio of attractive and well-struck coins. If we add up Briot's mill coins which came down to us we arrive at a total higher than for Simon's broads, regardless of the fact that Simon minted more than three times the amount of bullion issued to Briot. Why, if we consider that the coins have roughly the same weight and value and have comparable artistic merits? At first sight this makes no sense, and the only suggestion I can make is not conclusive. The broads were of a size and type totally untraditional in English numismatics. Such coins had not been struck before and were minted in such small numbers that the eyes of the public never became used to them. Mestrelle and Briot struck coins of well-established and orthodox denominations which tally basically with the ordinary Tower issues. Also, only two years later, the new guinea pieces of smaller and perhaps more convenient size were struck for circulation, and Roettiers's portrait of Charles II was extremely attractive. In these circumstances Simon's broads were probably not kept as curiosities or hoarded to the same degree as Mestrelle's or Briot's coins.

Before I finish with the mill series, a word is necessary in connection with my record of Briot's mill unites of 1631/2,⁶ for this seems to have created some confusion. It has been suggested that the chronological order of variety 3, 1 and 2 should be reversed. This is perfectly possible but not absolutely certain, for the variety 3 unites were all struck from the same reverse die, and we cannot really tell whether Briot punched his privy mark Daisy III on the obverse die before or after privy mark Daisy IV. Moreover he appears to have used the HIB and HIBER legends more or less at random. But this is really beside the point, and what applies to Briot's unites applies to the lists of my paper on the Tower Gold of Charles I in toto. Within the obvious limits of type varieties and privy marks, I have simply drawn up statistical charts, and not made a strictly chronological record. To demonstrate this, let us take mint-mark Lis, Group A, class II of the hammered unites. I have never suggested that coins with the MAG BRIT FRA ET HIB legend were struck earlier than specimens bearing the legend MAG BRI FR ET HI. This should be clearly understood, for in this series a strictly chronological record would be largely conjectural and wrong in too many cases.

II

So far as the angels of Charles I are concerned they present a different problem in regard to survival ratios. As touch pieces used by the 'Martyr King' they had a greater sentimental value for many people than other pierced angels and it is almost certain that, even today, quite a few specimens are still in private hands and cannot be recorded. I was conscious of this when I started recording the die varieties. However, the existing evidence gave us an over-all picture of Charles I's angels which seemed both, logical and coherent, except for the simply unbelievable absence of

⁶ *BNJ* xxviii. 379.

specimens bearing mint-mark Star. I had recorded no less than four obverse and three reverse dies for this mark,⁷ and this was a comparatively high figure compared to other marks if we consider the pyx evidence. However, all the dies I listed were recorded from overstrikes only, and no 'true' angel die with the Star mark was known. Such a specimen was almost bound to turn up sooner or later for I knew that an angel with a Star mark existed. The late Mr. Sam Spink had marked it in his 'working Kenyon', and he was notoriously careful when recording rarities. Unfortunately, Mr. Spink had indicated no other particulars relating to this angel so that it could not be included in my list. The coin came to light again a few years ago and I am grateful to Messrs. Spink & Son Ltd. for allowing me to record and illustrate it. At one time this angel had been in the collection of the Duke of Leeds.

Another 'pure' mint-mark Star angel appeared in a miscellaneous sale at Christie's in the year 1972. The coin was correctly described and was illustrated, but attracted no attention. It provided us with another two unpublished die varieties so that five obverse and five reverse dies bearing the Star mark are now on record. Quite an exceptionally high figure of £3. 10s. in the pyx.

The relevant features of the two new angels—both pierced as touch-pieces—are as follows.

Spink & Son Ltd.

Obv.: 0-17c. This confirms my record of the die.

Rev.: Unpublished. Mint-mark Star at end of legend, ship ornaments 1, Lis on poop, rigging V, legend twice divided. Reads: AMOR / POPVLI PRÆSIDIVM / REGIS. This is reverse die no. 22 and rigging V is illustrated as on Fig. 1.



FIG. 1



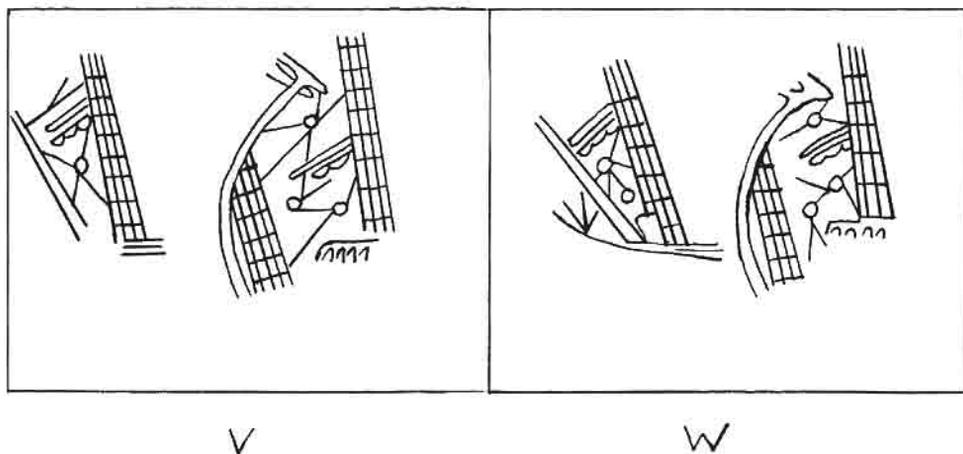
FIG. 2

Christie's, 13 January 1972, lot 135.

Obv.: Unpublished. Mint-mark Star. Reads: CAROLVS D'G' MAG' BRI' FR' ET HIB' REX. Mark of value by dragon's tail. This is obverse die no. 24.

Rev.: Unpublished. Mint-mark Star at beginning of legend. Ship ornaments 1, Lis on poop, rigging W. Reads: AMOR POPVLI PRÆSIDIM / REGIS. This is reverse die no. 23 and rigging W is illustrated on Fig. 2.

⁷ *BNJ* xxx. 322-6.



The discovery of three new dies with mint-mark Star does not upset the numbering of my general list⁸ for they are, from a chronological point of view, the last dies at present on record for the angel coinage of Charles I. All the coins with the ⊙ privy mark are known only from overstrikes of earlier dies. My list of angels bearing privy mark Star should therefore be amended as follows.

THE ANGELS OF CHARLES I

OBVERSES

Privy marks	Die number	By Dragon's Tail	By Dragon's Head		Occurs with reverse die	Remarks
Star	0-17c	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FR ² ET HI ² REX	R-22	Privy mark Star replaces Δ over ↔ Sp. 1971.
	0-21a	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FRA ² ET HI ² REX	?	Privy mark Star replaces Δ. Not recorded in this stage. Known from overstrike (die 0-21b).
	0-22	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FR ² ET HIB ² REX	?	Not recorded in this stage. Known from overstrike (die 0-22a).
	0-23	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MA ² BR ² (?)	?	Not recorded in this stage. Known from overstrike (die 0-23a). This might be 0-18b.
	0-24	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FR ² ET HIB ² REX	R-23	Christie's, 13 Jan. 1972, lot 135.
⊙	0-17d	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FRA ² ET HI ² REX	R-19a	⊙ Mark struck over Star and over partly removed previous privy marks.
⊙	0-21b	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FRA ² ET HI ² REX	R-20a	⊙ Mark struck over Star and over Δ.
⊙	0-22a	×	—	CAROLVS D ² G ² MAG ² BRI ² FR ² ET HIB ² REX	R-21a	⊙ Mark struck over Star. [List continued overleaf]

⁸ BNJ xxx. 320-7.

Privy marks	Die number	By Dragon's Tail	By Dragon's Head		Occurs with reverse die	Remarks
⊕	0-23a	×	—	CAROLVS-D'G'MA ² BR' (?)	?	⊕ Mark struck over Star. Recorded from Montagu Sale 1897, 5th portion, lot 333. This might be 0-18c in which case it is liable to have the privy mark ⊕ (over Star over △ over ↗) to the left of the archangel's lance. Reverse of coin unknown.

REVERSES

Privy marks	Die number	Ship ornaments (1 = Lion-Lis, 2 = Lis-Lion)	Emblem on poop	Rigging	Legend divided: AMOR/POPVLI	Legend divided: PRÆSIDIVM/REGIS		Occurs with obverse die	Remarks
Star	R-19	1	Lis	S	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	?	Not recorded in this stage. Known from overstrike (die R-19a).
	R-20	1	Lis	T	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	?	Not recorded in this stage. Known from overstrike (die R-20a)
	R-21	1	Lis	U	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	?	Not recorded in this stage. Known from overstrike (die R-21a).
	R-22	1	Lis	V	×	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	0-17c	Sp. 1972 Duke of Leeds Coll.
	R-23	1	Lis	W	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIM·REGIS	0-24	Christie's, 13 Jan. 1972, lot 135. Privy mark at beginning of legend.
	R-19a	1	Lis	S	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	0-17d	Privy mark ⊕ struck over Star. Straight Æ punch in PRÆSIDIVM.
	R-20a	1	Lis	T	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	0-21b	Privy mark ⊕ at beginning of legend. Struck over Star (HFV 1957).
	R-21a	1	Lis	U	—	×	AMOR·POPVLI· PRÆSIDIVM·REGIS	0-22a	Small privy mark ⊕ struck over Star.

It is now well over fifteen years ago that my paper on the angels of Charles I was published, but apart from the two coins recorded above nothing really important or disturbing has come to light. There are two new die-links:

Mint-mark Tun. 0-17/R-12b (AHB and Archbishop Sharp's sale, Glendining's, 5 Oct. 1977, lot 1.)

The reverse die R-12b had not been previously recorded with mint-mark Tun struck over Crown and over Bell but had of course been listed for the latter two privy marks.

0-20a/R19a (AHB). Here the overstrike 0-20a had not been published before, but the 0-20 die was known from an angel in the Ryan sale with privy mark (Glendining, 30 June 1950).

In this connection I would like to place on record my most sincere thanks to Messrs. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. and Messrs. Spink & Son Ltd. for their great courtesy and collaboration at all times. My thanks are also due to Miss Mary Carey Wilson who made the drawings of the rigging varieties V and W of the ships, and I am equally grateful to Mr. K. A. Howes of the British Museum for the casts which illustrate this paper.