

THE COINAGE OF THE MARIANS IN EDINBURGH CASTLE IN 1572

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ON June 1572 Lord Burghley was sent 'certain of their coin, which is coined in Edinburgh, – not for the value, but for the novelty – which is prohibited by the Leith party to be current'.¹ These particular specimens cannot be traced² but, given the date, were almost certainly counterfeits of the James VI base half-merk pieces (and perhaps forty-penny pieces), as struck by the Marians then holding Edinburgh castle.

Numismatists have not ignored the 1572 Marian coinage, at least not since R. W. Cochran-Patrick published documentary evidence concerning it, but there are several reasons to give further consideration to this episode. E. Burns did not illustrate the counterfeit half-merk which he described and suggested as a Marian piece.³ The credibility of his tentative attribution is enhanced by comparison with an early official variety, unknown to him. New evidence is now available about the fineness of 1572 half-merks. Lastly, the question of the other types struck by the Marians merits further discussion.

The Marian coinage began in March 1572, according to the *Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents*.⁴ This is one of two valuable unofficial sources of information about this coinage: it was written by a contemporary observer residing in Edinburgh, but has reached us through an ignorant and often careless transcriber. The other source is the Hopetoun manuscript entitled 'Anent Cunyie ane ample discours'.⁵ On internal evidence it is highly probable that this was the work of John Acheson, who was master moneyer from December 1558 to early in 1582, and it clearly dates from 1582 or later. It is particularly valuable where the writer was able to use mint registers and account books, but naturally it is less authoritative for the 1572 Marian coinage, struck at a time when the king's mint was at Dalkeith, for safety. The *Diurnal* records under 12 March that 'be this mene tyme, thair wes ane cunyiehus erectit in the castell of Edinburgh, efter the xxx shillings peice of the quene' and early in April 'about this tyme, thair wes ane cunyie hous in the castell of Edinburgh, quhilk cunyeit the auld cunyie of the quene; quhilk wes xxx, xx, and x shilling peices, togidder with the cunyie of the plackis cunyeit be umquhile the quene regent'.⁶ The Hopetoun manuscript names 'xxx s. peices of all sortis crownis of the sone plakis and lyonis', but there is some reason to doubt the types additional to those in the *Diurnal*, while there is apparently no confirmation for the statement that the Marians also struck coins in Lochmaben and on the borders. After the surrender of Edinburgh castle, one of

¹ *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots*, IV, edited by W. K. Boyd (1905), p. 339. The writer was Sir William Drury, the marshal of Berwick, who was then at Restalrig near Edinburgh, as a special envoy trying to settle the disputes in Scotland.

² I enquired whether these coins were at Hatfield House, in view of the large archive of Cecil papers there, but the Librarian and Archivist to the Marquess of Salisbury, R. H. Harcourt Williams, knew nothing of them.

³ Edward Burns, *The Coinage of Scotland*, (Edinburgh,

1887), II, 355, no. 3.

⁴ *A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents that have passed within the Country of Scotland*, edited by T. Thomson, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1833) and Maitland Club (Glasgow, 1833), 261.

⁵ R. W. Cochran-Patrick, *Records of the Coinage of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1876), I, 94–106. As the relevant part is on a single page, 102, footnotes will not be given for further references to this Hopetoun manuscript.

⁶ *Diurnal*, 261 and 297.

the questions put to Sir Robert Melville was, 'quha wer the principall furnissaris of money to the Castell or of silver to the cunyeous thair?'; no mention was made of gold for the mint.⁷ Moreover, the money provided from France and from the pope was largely in gold crowns, which circulated freely in Scotland. Thus 10,000 crowns of the sun, together with armour, were recorded as reaching the castle from France in May 1571, and in April 1572 there were 60,000 crowns of the pope's money in Flanders, destined for Mary's supporters.⁸ (Although Leith was held by the king's party, foreign aid could reach Edinburgh through Blackness, the port of Linlithgow, and perhaps by other routes.) The value of the Marian coinage must have been very modest in comparison with the money from abroad, but a shortage of coins of lower value than gold crowns may have been the reason for striking it.

One reason to doubt whether this coinage included lions (better known as hardheads) is that these were not mentioned when circulation of the 1557 placks was prohibited in the summer of 1572.⁹ It should be pointed out that those placks and the hardheads had almost certainly *not* been devalued in the first parliament of James VI. The item which has been interpreted as ordering a devaluation occurs only as one of 'certane articlis Referrit to the Lordis of articlis', and this one was noted, but not marked as approved.¹⁰ Moreover, in March 1575, when the countermarking of genuine hardheads and 1557 placks was ordered and they were to pass at one penny and twopence respectively,¹¹ the treasurer of the burgh of Haddington recorded a loss of over £4 on £10 10s. by their being cried down, with a further loss of 26s. 6d. 'that was cassing away of thame' when taken for counter-marking, presumably as recognised counterfeits.¹²

As remarked by Cochran-Patrick, old dies may have been used for the thirty-shilling pieces and their parts struck in Edinburgh castle, in which case one cannot expect to identify them.¹³ (The storage of dies in the castle is recorded occasionally for earlier reigns, but also their destruction by hacking.) The availability of dies for the 1557 placks is less probable than for the Mary thirty-shilling pieces, but the known counterfeits of these placks may be considered too crude to be the work of the same engraver as was responsible for what we identify as Marian copies of the 1572 half-merks. The best-known of these counterfeit placks have the date on the obverse in the form of 57, instead of in full, and the lion's tail in the Scottish arms is represented by an annulet.¹⁴ These may be some of the counterfeits of which there were complaints well before 1572.

In an act of the privy council, on 6 August 1572, the 1557 placks were referred to as 'of late counterfaiittit and adulterat, as alsua the silver money laillie sett furth in half merk and fourty penny pecis'; and on 18 August the *Diurnal* noted the proclamation 'dischargeing quhatsumevir cunyeit that was cunyeit in the castell the tyme of the cummeris'.¹⁵ We may classify the placks and thirty-shilling pieces as an irregular coinage rather than counterfeits, but Marian half-merks, being in James' name, were certainly counterfeits. The writer of the *Diurnal*, after describing under 21 May the half-merks minted at Dalkeith, remarked

⁷ *Cal. S. P. Scot.* IV, 621.

⁸ *Diurnal*, 212; *Cal. S. P. Scot.* IV, 266.

⁹ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 140-41.

¹⁰ *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, III, edited by T. Thomson (1814), 43; Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 108. The dates given by Cochran-Patrick are misleading. The heading for the proposed articles is in fact dated 15 December 1567, and the enactment of those adopted was on 20 December. Cochran-Patrick used the marginal dates given in *APS*, which are possibly those of copying these draft articles into the official record.

¹¹ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 109 and 142. Unfortunately, the date given on p. 109, with the text of the act of

parliament, is three years earlier than the correct date given on p. 142 for the act of privy council, of which the text is not printed, since it is exactly the same. This wrong date was followed by Burns for the hardheads (p. 329), and copied by I. Stewart in *The Scottish Coinage*.

¹² *Day Book of James Cokburn, Treasurer of the Burgh of Haddington*, Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian Society, 8 (Haddington, 1960), 9, 10.

¹³ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, cxlv.

¹⁴ Burns, III, fig. 871, and apparently *not* fig. 872 as stated in the text.

¹⁵ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 140; *Diurnal*, 312.

that 'the samyne . . . as was alledgit conterfeit in the castell of Edinburgh'.¹⁶ This may mean that he himself had no evidence then of such strikings, rather than that he would accord them a different status. He also explained that 'the party of Edinburgh' coined no more thirty-shilling pieces and their parts because such coins were then being bought at a higher price in Leith, 'the xxx s. peice for xxxij s.', for taking abroad.

Three counterfeit half-merk pieces, here referred to as Marian ones, are known to me, from two obverse and two reverse dies. The Lockett specimen (**pl. no. 1**) does have an inner circle on the obverse, unlike that described by Burns (a duplicate of no. 2). The other unusual feature mentioned is that the arms of the ornate cross on the reverse carry pellets instead of bars, but this feature also occurs on a 1572 official die, used for no. 3. The treatment of the cross ends on the same die is likewise similar in style to that on the Marian pieces, the central ornament spreading outside the curlicues, whereas the normal form has a crown-like centre fitting partly between the more florid and looser curls. The same punch was used for the cross ends on another 1572 die, with the normal barred cross arms,¹⁷ and there can be no doubt that both that and no. 3 were products of the regular mint. Forty-penny pieces with pellets on the cross arms are also known, from a single 1572 reverse die, as no. 6. One such piece was illustrated in 1845 by John Lindsay, from his own collection, but he did not draw attention to the cross arms: if Burns noticed the pellets in that illustration, he may have doubted the accuracy of the engraving, which in fact is good enough to make it certain that the specimen is that shown here as no. 7, from the Lockett collection.¹⁸ In the case of this forty-penny piece reverse die with pellets (and the associated obverse ones) all the punches used appear to be normal, a particularly distinctive one being that for the crowns in alternate angles of the reverse cross, which shows an inward swelling on the base.

The rarity of the official dies with pellets, and their restriction to 1572, suggest that this was the earliest variety, and that the change to bars may have been made after the Marian copies had been observed, in order to improve the chances of recognising and condemning the counterfeits. The Hopetoun manuscript states that the Marian counterfeits began 'howsome ony of thame' (the half-merks from the king's mint) 'came [to] Lycht', so they could be expected to copy the earliest official varieties. Those here identified as Marian are reasonably accurate copies, although of rather coarser execution.

Burns described the Coats specimen of a Marian half-merk as of debased appearance, but this again does not provide a reliable criterion for identification. In fact, investigation of the fineness by X-ray fluorescence has produced surprising results.¹⁹

	Cu	Pb	Au	Ag
No. 2, Marian, 1572	6.5	0.7	tr	92.7
No. 4, normal, 1572	4.3	0.7	tr	94.9
No. 5, normal, 1573	17.3	0.6	tr	82.1
with no Zn or Sn detected				

¹⁶ *Diurnal*, 297.

¹⁷ 1218/A in *SCBI* 35: *Scottish Coins in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow* (1987). The coin is ex Lingford (part lot.1146) and Spink sale no. 20, lot 200.

¹⁸ John Lindsay, *A View of the Coinage of Scotland* (Cork, 1845), plate 10, 205; R. C. Lockett, the first of two 1572 forty-shilling pieces on the British Museum photographs. The second is from the same reverse die, although the pellets

cannot be distinguished. The identification is made easy, by edge irregularities.

¹⁹ The investigation was carried out by Ms Catherine Mortimer at Oxford University Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, and I am most grateful to her and to Dr Metcalf, who requested this on my behalf. Their letters dated 8 April 1987 gave the details and comment.

As usual, a small area on the edge of each coin was cleaned before the XRF analysis, which should minimise the effect of surface enrichment, but it is admitted that a single analysis of one area of a coin may give misleading results, because of inhomogeneity. The agreement between the two 1572 pieces tested, however, provides some confirmation that they were struck on the same standard, at least eleven deniers fine (91.7 per cent), rather than the eight deniers which is the only recorded standard for the official pieces. In fact, the first specific statement of this standard is found in a contract of March 1577,²⁰ but its earlier use can be deduced from the accounts of Robert Richardson, as considered below. The earliest record of the half-merk coinage is an act of parliament dated 31 March 1572, which stated the fineness to be as agreed between the regent and the master moneyer.²¹ The weight, at four and a half pieces to the ounce, meant a currency value of thirty shillings to the ounce, as in the preceding coinage of fine silver, but the preamble certainly showed that the new coinage was intended to give a greater profit. Writing on the same day, Drury reported that 'the coining of baser money is in hand at Dalkeith, which will breed of the common people great misliking'.²² The *Diurnal* described the new coins as 'bot slycht, and vj pennies fyne layit money' an unsupported figure, presumably based on rumour.²³ The proclamation of 12 May, ordering acceptance of the new coins, naturally gave details of the types but not of the fineness.²⁴ The writer of the Hopetoun manuscript emphasised that the new coinage was 'allayit money sa basse hes bene befoir specifiyt quhilk be sum wes altogidder refusit'. He made an understandable error, which need not affect our acceptance of his accuracy in general, in designating Robert Richardson as treasurer at the beginning of this coinage: Richardson had been replaced in that post on 1 July 1571, but he continued his intromission with the coinage (and paid out large sums for the war) until Regent Morton took it in hand on 7 March 1573. Richardson accounted for profits from the mint in two periods, at the rate of £14 10s. 10³/₄d. for every stone coined, in accordance with the profit of £20 per stone of eleven deniers fine 'quhilk he had of before of xxx s. peces'.²⁵ These two rates do represent virtually the same on the fine silver content of the coins, if the standard of eight deniers applied in the first case ($120 \times 8/11 = £14$ 10s. 10d. and 10/11 of a penny). This was in conformity with the contract made with Mar, who was regent until his death on 28 October 1572. This contract was effective from the beginning of the half-merk coinage, as shown by a little arithmetic on the available figures. The Hopetoun manuscript states the weight coined from 2 May 1572 to 7 March following as 375 st. 12 lb. 4 oz., which at the profit rate of £14 10s. 10³/₄d. per stone gives £5465 8s. 8d., thus agreeing with the total of £3805 10s. 2d. in Mar's regency and £1659 18s. 6d. for the second period in Richardson's accounts. (The first figure for profits might have been thought to apply from 1 July 1571, in accordance with the dates for the officers' fees, but no change was made in the conditions of Richardson's tack, for a yearly payment of 5000 merks, during the coinage of thirty-shilling pieces, and this payment also continued until 7 March 1573, in addition to the accountable profit per stone coined.) This calculation does not actually prove that the standard of eight deniers was always used, but certainly the accounts, made up after Mar's death, were on that basis.

All this documentary evidence is hard to reconcile with the XRF analysis, which suggests that a higher standard than eight deniers, if indeed used, was of short duration. The Marians would not want to coin at a higher standard than the king's mint, and there need

²⁰ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 142–43.

²¹ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, p. cxlv.

²² *Cal. S. P. Scot.*, IV, p. 195.

²³ *Diurnal*, 297.

²⁴ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 140.

²⁵ Cochran-Patrick, *Records*, I, 245–46. Richardson's last account as treasurer was continued to include his intromissions with the mint after the change of treasurer; *Accounts of the Treasurer of Scotland*, XII, edited by C. T. MacInnes, (1970), xxix.

be no difficulty in accepting that the piece described by Burns is baser than its die duplicate, no. 2.

A truce for two months was signed on 30 July 1572, the terms of which included a promise to cease coining in the castle, but on 1 August Mar declared that counterfeiting of the king's coin had been practised within the castle since the lull in hostilities.²⁶ The same was reported during the further truce, from 8 October.²⁷ The castle held out until 28 May 1573, surrendering after eleven days of bombardment by English siege guns.

The two goldsmiths who 'made the counterfeit money in the castle' were condemned for treason, and hanged on 3 August, together with Kirkcaldy of Grange and his brother, while Maitland escaped the gallows by his previous death 'not without suspicion of poison'.²⁸ These goldsmiths were James Mosman and James Cokky, the latter name generally appearing as Cokir in the *Diurnal*. Mosman was paid as assayer of the king's coinage as late as March 1572: the letter of appointment of his successor, dated 24 April, explains that Mosman 'hes convoyit himself within the castell of Edinburgh and thair remanis . . . devysand and forgeand false and counterfut cunye'.²⁹ The punches and dies for the Marian half-merks may be attributed to Cokky, in view of earlier evidence of his work as an engraver. In 1558 he was paid for engraving a gun with the royal arms, and engraving a clock.³⁰ In the autumn of 1559 the protestant lords of the congregation, whose forces then held Edinburgh, forced him to work for them, for fear of his life, making a signet and beginning on dies for a projected coinage.³¹ According to his testimony the following February he had said that he was not accustomed to such work, but the assembled lords would take no excuse, having been informed that he would do it well. He was then about twenty-four years old. Cokky and Mosman could hardly fail to realise that they were risking everything by coining for the Marians at a time when that party was already on the decline. Theirs was the same sentence as that of ordinary counterfeiters or importers of false money, if apprehended, but unlike those it was not for personal profit that they had openly undertaken the risks.

The Marian origin of the illustrated counterfeits cannot, of course, be established with certainty, but the use of such rare official pieces as the model would be unlikely after the half-merks were in wide circulation. The fineness of the analysed piece provides another and perhaps stronger argument against these being the work of ordinary contemporary counterfeiters, who were likely to use tin or pewter for silver or to concentrate on the baser billon types. In the absence of known hoard provenances, it is also desirable to consider the question of forgery for collectors, since struck forgeries were made in the nineteenth century. Against this is the use of two pairs of dies, when the total market would be small. Moreover, these pieces do not bear the hallmarks of Jons, the Dunfermline forger of Scottish coins around 1861, who made his dies with the help of impressions of coins in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland: in 1984 there were no half-merks with pellets on the cross arms, except the Coats specimen described by Burns.³² Jons forgeries of silver pieces were struck on then-modern British silver coins and were usually overweight,³³ 'Mr

²⁶ *Cal. S. P. Scot.*, IV, 370.

²⁷ *Cal. S. P. Scot.*, IV, 453.

²⁸ *Cal. S. P. Scot.*, IV, 602, 585. Kirkcaldy and Maitland had opposed Mary in 1567. The former owed his appointment as captain of Edinburgh castle to Regent Moray, after Mary's deposition, while Maitland had served the new regime as secretary, for over a year.

²⁹ *Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland*, VI, edited by G. Donaldson (1963), no. 1576.

³⁰ *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, X,

edited by Sir J. B. Paul (1913), 438 and 386.

³¹ 'Report by de la Brosse and d'Oysel on Conditions in Scotland 1569-1573', *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, IX (Scot. Hist. Soc., 3rd ser., 50, Edinburgh, 1958), 123-24.

³² Letter from Dr D. H. Caldwell, 9 February 1984, which also confirmed that the specimen described by Burns is from the same dies as no. 2 of this article.

³³ Burns, I, 9.

Emery's mint' can also be ruled out, on stylistic grounds, although these concoctions, in the 1840s, did include several which purported to be of Mary Queen of Scots (some sharing the portrait die with Mary Tudor ones).³⁴

KEY TO THE PLATE

Nos 1 to 5 are half-merks, 6 and 7 forty-penny pieces. All except 1 and 2 are official.

1. Marian, ex Lockett.
2. Marian, writer's collection; ex Lingford (part lot 1146); Spink sale no. 20 (part lot 201).
3. 1572, with pellets.
 - a. ex Lockett.
 - b. ex J. K. R. Murray, Spink sale no. 57, lot 261.
4. 1572, normal; same source as 2.
5. 1573, same source as 2, but catalogued as 1572.
6. 1572, with pellets, writer's collection; ex Lingford (part lot 1149); Spink sale no. 20 (part lot 206).
7. 1572, with pellets, ex Lockett.

The Lockett coins are illustrated from British Museum copies of the photographs made before they were auctioned, and are reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. Their lot numbers and present ownership are unknown.

³⁴ H. E. Pagan, 'Mr Emery's Mint', *BNJ* 40 (1971), 169-70.

PLATE



1 (× 0.9)



2



3a (× 0.9)



3b



4



5



6



7
(× 0.9)