

Ceolbald of Northumbria: a new look at an old moneyer

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In the Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles (SCBI), volume 68, a coin is presented (SCBI 68:60) of what appears to be a new moneyer for the Northumbrian king Æthelred I. Five moneyers are known, and represented by multiple specimens in public and private collections- Ceolbald, Cuthberht, Cuthgils, Hnifula, and Tidwulf. The moneyer-named coins have been traditionally assigned to that king's second reign (789-796) apart from Cuthgils who may have been active during the first reign (774-779). A sixth named person, Eanbald, is thought to represent Archbishop Eanbald I (or II), and is generally considered a joint regal-ecclesiastic issue, though the possibility of a moneyer named Eanbald is not completely eliminated. In SCBI 68, a potential sixth moneyer was brought to light in a single specimen in the Lyon collection, resembling the coinage of Æthelred I, but with a new reverse reading. The coin has minor edge damage, but is mostly legible, with an inscription that appears as L[A]TLBEOt. This is interpreted by Lyon as EATBEOt, or a somewhat irregular representation of Eotberht. Eotberht, or Eadberht, is a known Northumbrian name, having been the name of a prior king whose coinage is quite prolific. Unfortunately, this has been the only specimen of this type known.



SCBI 68:60



YORYM-A9F71F

It has come to light a second specimen of similar style which was recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in 2018, record number YORYM-A9F71F. This example has some apparent surface corrosion but is intact and fully readable. The obverse depicts the name AEDILRED, with a central R in a beaded ring, and the reverse is +CEOtBATD. The lower case 't' is probably an L with a line through the top to form a cross. Thus, it can be read CEOLBATD, which is undoubtedly Ceolbald. Shifting focus away from the reverse, we see the obverse with its R in beaded circle, which is a familiar motif for coins of Ceolbald. It also appears on a rare type with Æthelred's name on both obverse and reverse, which is likely also an issue from Ceolbald's dies, and will be addressed further.

The known coins of Æthelred I are unequally distributed between the known moneyers. Of 75 coins of Æthelred I's second reign listed on the Early Medieval Corpus, 31/75 (41%) are from Ceolbald; of the others two are of the double obverse type. The remainder are distributed among the four additional moneyers plus Archbishop Eanbald. Hnifula is particularly poorly represented, with only 4/75 (5%), and only two distinct die pairs. Of the coins of Ceolbald, there is a reasonable variety in the central motifs, with the already mentioned R in circle, also R in a beaded circle, a cross mounted on square, a cross and wedges, and a central boss. The number known, combined with the variety and number of dies, suggests a more lengthy period of activity than the other moneyers. Generally, Æthelred

is spelled AEDILRED, Ceolbald is CEOLBALD. The 'C' in Ceolbald varies from rounded to squared off, but other than that there is minimal variety in the spelling. The PAS coin is fairly different in its approach to the name Ceolbald, with a rhomboid 'O', the cross added to the 'L', and the erroneous 'T' for the second 'L'. That being said, there is little doubt it represents Ceolbald.

The comparison to SCBI 68:60 are numerous, including the same style and lettering of the obverse, and similarity with the reverse legend. The 'L' with line through it is present on both coins. The second letter 'L' may represent a 'D' with weakness in the upper curve. If started at the 'B', it can read BEOt[BA]TD. While not identical, these appear to be from the same hand, and presumably both coins can be attributed to Ceolbald.



YORYM-A9F71F



SCBI 68:60

Further evidence can be obtained by following what appears to be a die chain involving two other coins- one a double obverse type of Æthelred, the second another type of Æthelred/Ceolbald with a small cross central motif on both sides.



YORYM-A9F71F



EMC 2008.0358 (side A)



EMC 2008.0358 (side B)



EMC 2012.0039

That the Æthelred 'R' type preceded the more conventional central cross motif can be seen with this chain of die links. The "B side" of the double obverse coin is an earlier die state of the obverse of EMC 2012.0039. The die was somewhat crudely recut.

Can anything be learned from this, besides to raise doubt on the existence of a new moneyer for Æthelred? One could consider whether the irregular Ceolbald coins are older than the well executed coins more commonly seen. It appears the emission sequence is the 'R' type earliest, and the more conventional small cross motif later. Certainly the spelling of Ceolbald on the specimens of this discussion is aberrant and may be reminiscent of earlier coins, before the orthography was standardized, such as those of the animal type of Æthelred I, and Alchred with Archbishop Ecgberht. It appears there was later standardization of the moneyer's name. It remains unclear as to whether this would place the coin in the first or second reign of Æthelred. Generally the Ceolbald issue is considered to be from Æthelred's second reign. Irregularity is commonly seen in the later styca coinage of the 9th century, but is not as commonly found in this earlier coinage.

The significance of the double obverse is also worth examining. The 9th century brass and bronze styca coinage is frequently encountered "irregular" with double obverses, double reverses, and die links between different moneyers. But this is not seen with frequency in the 8th century. As far as I am aware, this is the only type of a double obverse in the pre-debasement silver coinage of Northumbria. There are multiple specimens known, so this is

not a "one-off". Given its place between the 'R' and the small cross coinage, the design could possibly represent a transitional coinage between the varied earlier coinage of Ceolbald and the more traditional small cross type central motif. Whether this change has anything to do with the separation of the two reigns of Æthelred, or with the cataclysmic Viking attack on Lidesfarne in 793, remains to be seen.

Metallurgic analysis of these coins may be helpful, but it is likely that unless more coins are located, and especially a hoard, it will be hard to draw strong conclusions from this material.

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