

A Fresh Look at Phase II Hiberno-Scandinavian Pennies

Robert Page

The phase II pennies were minted in Dublin from c. 1020 to c. 1035, a period in which Dublin was under the rule of Sihtric Silkbeard (989–1036) who ruled over Dublin for more than 45 years. Their obverse design is modelled on Aethelred's Long Cross type. For a comprehensive account of the Hiberno-Scandinavian series and its historical background see Blackburn¹.

In this brief study I have examined images of a number of obverse types of Hiberno-Scandinavian Phase II coins in order to determine the relative abundance of each. The images of the coins are from various sources including relevant SCBI volumes and auction archives. The rare Hiberno-Manx coins, based on Irish phase II pennies, have been excluded. Not included in this data set are the phase II coins found in the Glenfaba Hoard from the Isle of Man. Discovered in 2003, this significant hoard contains 464 coins deposited c. 1030 AD, including 323 Phase II pennies, of which most varieties are represented except those with an 'E' on the neck and which are probably therefore late in the series. Fortunately, coins from the Glenfaba hoard will soon be published in a forthcoming SCBI volume².

Phase II coins are readily identified by the four small pellets on the reverse, one in each of the four quadrants. Here we will be looking only at the obverses of these coins, and in the analysis ignoring any variations such as extra pellets sometimes seen on the reverse. Imitations of Aethelred's Long Cross type commenced with understandable inscriptions, but through Phase II the inscriptions become garbled through repeated copying, and soon become just meaningless. A number of examples of Sihtric's Phase II coins are illustrated towards the end of this article.



In this study of 209 coins, the most commonly observed obverse type on Phase II coins has a symbol, often a cross, behind the neck, but obverses are also seen with symbols before the bust and/or on the neck. With three possible locations for symbols to occur, there are a maximum of eight possible types, designated types A-H, however one of these eight possibilities has not been observed in this study. Note that symbols are occasionally also seen on Phase I imitations of the long cross type, and also on some of the phase III obverses.

Symbols include pellets, various styles of crosses, a wishbone-shaped object and a bishop's crozier, and some examples are illustrated on the following page. Dolley, in SCBI #8, gives very little mention of these symbols, however Blackburn¹ briefly discusses them but notes that the pattern of use of the symbols, and their function, await further die link studies, particularly on the coins from the Glenfaba hoard.

During the period when Phase II coins were being issued there was a progressive decrease in coin weight and also the previously mentioned deterioration in the literacy of the die-cutters, with later legends being quite garbled. Thus, through weight and legend, it is possible to have an approximate

¹ M. Blackburn, 'Currency under the Vikings, Part 4: the Dublin coinage c.995-1050' BNJ vol. 78 (2008), 111-37 ([Link](#))

² Kristin Bornholdt Collins, 'Manx Museum, Douglas, Isle of Man: Anglo-Saxon, Hiberno-Scandinavian, Hiberno-Manx and Other Coins and Currencies (to c. 1275)', *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* 73.

idea of whether a phase II coin is early or late, but at this time there is not yet a clear understanding of the progression through time of the various symbol patterns.

Some examples of the symbols are illustrated below:

Before head



On neck



Behind neck

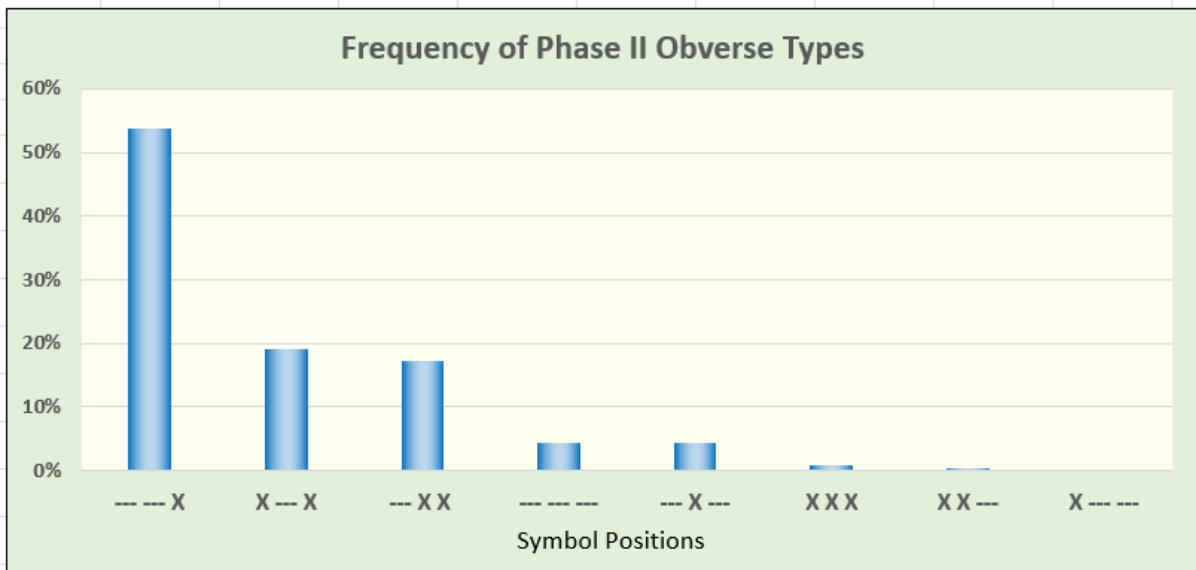


It is not surprising that some of these symbols have a Christian character as Sihtric was a sympathetic promoter of Christianity having established a bishopric at Dublin in 1028 after making a pilgrimage to Rome, and he later founded Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin. This was largely a result of the influence that England's Danish king Cnut had on Sihtric. For discussion of both church and trade see Wallace³.

The following chart is based on the data presented in the Appendix. In the horizontal legend the presence of an "X" indicates where symbols are located, in front of the head, on the neck and behind the head. Clearly the commonest obverse type is the one that only has a symbol behind the head. Other types are scarcer, some particularly so. Coins with a cross behind the neck sometimes also show one or more pellets behind the head, however this type has not been differentiated here.

See chart overleaf...

³ Wallace, Patrick F., 1986, "The English Presence in Viking Dublin" in *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History - Essays in memory of Michael Dolley*.



It may be that symbols were used by illiterate die cutters to identify their work, however, examination of the images in this article indicates that variation in symbols and their placement is observed for coins which are apparently from the same moneyer. Inspection of the images shows that many of the coins refer to the moneyer Færemin; however, in many cases this part of the legend is blundered. It may be a case of illiterate moneyers attempting to copy Færemin's name, and hence the possibility of different symbol combinations relating to different moneyers cannot be ruled out.

One other possibility is that minting was not under the total control of Sihtric at the time, but that leading Norsemen could take their own bullion to the mint and have it turned into coin; the symbols thus perhaps being an identification of different batches of coins struck for different persons.

Further examination of Phase II symbology is a topic for future research and is beyond the scope of this article; it is not the intent of this article to propose a definitive explanation of the symbols but to highlight both the need for further research, and the relative scarcity of the different types. The latter should prove of interest to collectors. It is hoped that this brief article may act as a catalyst in generating interest in pursuing a better understanding of this fascinating coin series.

SOME EXAMPLES OF PHASE II TYPES



Obverse Type A

Early Phase II silver penny, with pellet behind the bust.

Obv: + SIHTRIC REX DYFLN.

Rev: + EIRI EMNO NMDI LHBI (EIREEMNON)

Weight: 1.47 gm

Hiberno-Norse sylloge, Dolley, #63. Rob Page collection (RP-1068).



Obverse Type A

Common obverse type with a symbol behind the neck, but with a few additional small pellets behind the head, which are discussed by Blackburn (p.129).

Obv: SIHTRCRE+DYFLN

Rev: FIE/REMI/NMO/DYFLI

Moneyer: Færemin

Weight: 1.35 gm.

Images courtesy of Stephen Liu.



Obverse Type A

A single symbol behind the neck – the commonest obverse type. In this case a cross potent.

Moneyer: Færemin

Weight: 1.05 gm.

Rob Page collection (RP-2498).



Obverse Type A

Inverted crozier behind head.,

Obv: INTRC RE+ IDYFNI,

REV. INRIFNM IIO DICI,

blundered legend but probable moneyer: Færemin

Weight:1.21g

SCBI BM 80; SCBI Copenhagen

85-6, same dies; SCBI Ulster

109, same dies. Image credit:

Noonans



Obverse Type B

Symbols before and behind bust; two pellets before bust and a cross behind. Also note the extra pellets in two of the reverse quadrants.

Obv.

Rev.

Weight: 1.18 gm.

Rob Page collection (RP-2510).



Obverse Type C

Symbols on neck (wishbone) and behind it (cross).
Moneyer: Færemin,
Weight 1.37 gm.
Image courtesy of Noonans.
15/03/17, lot # 569.



Obverse Type D

Symbols on neck only.
Moneyer: Færemin,
Weight 0.77 gm.
Image courtesy of Noonans,
11/03/20 lot # 3.



Obverse Type F

Rare obverse type having symbols in all three locations.
[\(CNG link\)](#)
Obv: ZHITR · C RE + DY
Moneyer: Færemin
Weight: 1.32 gm.
Images courtesy of Stephen Liu.

APPENDIX

This is the raw data that the bar-graph in the main text has been prepared from:

Type	Symbol Locations			British Museum (SCBI 8)	Belfast (SCBI 32)	Merseyside (SCBI 29)	DNW Archives	CNG Archives	SCBI 22 Copen - hagen	Francis & Brand Parcels	Rob Page Collection	Totals	Percentage
	Before Face	On Neck	Behind Neck										
A	---	---	x	11	50	1	20	4	23	2	2	113	54.1%
B	x	---	x	6	15		3	1	13		2	40	19.1%
C	---	x	x	3	17	1	3	1	5	5	1	36	17.2%
D	---	x	---	1	3		2		3			9	4.3%
E	---	---	---	3	4				1			8	3.8%
F	x	x	x				2					2	1.0%
G	x	x	---		1							1	0.5%
H	x	---	---		0							0	0.0%
Totals:				24	90	2	30	6	45	7	5	209	100.0%

At left, under “Symbol Locations”, an “x” denotes the presence of a symbol in that location, so, for example, type h has a symbol before the face and a symbol on the neck, but nothing behind the neck.

Additional References:

SCBI 8. British Museum. Hiberno-Norse Coins. By R.H.M. Dolley. 8 plates, 1966.

SCBI 22 - Royal Collection of Medals National Museum Copenhagen, Part V Hiberno-Norse and Anglo-Irish Coins, Georg Galster, Michael Dolley, Jørgen Steen Jensen, published by British Academy, 1975.

SCBI 29 –Merseyside County Museums v. 29, Margaret Warhurst, published by Oxford University Press 1982

SCBI 32 - Ulster Museum: Belfast Part 2: Hiberno-Norse Coins, Wilfred Seaby, published by Oxford University Press, 1985
