

Iconic Sceats

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The author attempts to weave a single thread through the more exotic species of the complex, heavily interrelated sceatta coinage.

What constitutes ‘iconic’ when referring to sceats is largely subjective. But the *frisson* of excitement at discovering a new variety, the delight of a miniature design of exquisite artistry, the thrill of the touch of an as-struck sceat last handled 1,300 years ago, and the wonder at who may have let it slip through their chilled fingers into the long grass of a sodden meadow, perhaps at a market site or during a mass baptism are subjective factors which contribute to a sceat being considered iconic.

We may not fully understand the message conveyed by these tiny fragments of history, but the beasts writhe with life, the facing portraits are full of character, the intricate *trompe l’oeil* of the geometric patterns are hypnotic.

There are sceats held to be iconic by convention. Their desirability is hard-wired into the collector’s psyche, their value reduced to a monetary price in catalogues and sales lists. I speak here, for example, of the archer, animal mask, seated figure and fledgling types (Fig. 1a-d).



Fig. 1. a) Archer, b) animal mask, c) seated figure and d) ‘fledgling’.

Of these, only the seated figure has an inscribed reverse, in this case placing it in the enigmatic *C ARIP* group. The inscription *ARIP* seems episcopal, with the initial *C* plausibly referring to Canterbury – or Cuthbert of Canterbury, whose tenure, 740-760, coincides with the approximate dating of this type. Might the seated figure represent him at the Council of Clofesho in 747 presiding, along with Æthelbald of Mercia? A tantalising but purely speculative suggestion.

Another tentative proposal, based on chapter 12 of Bede’s *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, associates the predatory seabird on the reverse of the ‘fledgling’ type with an earlier St Cuthbert – St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne. At least we have a toehold into the possible meanings of Figs. 1 a, c and d, whereas b remains elusive.

The qualities that constitute ‘iconic’ are individual, we all have differing views – views both in the sense of opinion and literally, in that sceat designs are often difficult to ‘see’. To the practiced eye, a moment’s rotation brings the design into the correct orientation. The uninitiated may struggle to see sense in the engraver’s minimalist use of graving strokes. At an aesthetic level, what one observer sees may touch the senses more acutely than in another’s view.

Seldom do designs among the mass-produced trading currencies, issued by the large emporia or *wics*, achieve iconic status – they are, largely, too familiar. This is intentional as the issuers seek acceptance, they crave currency rather than curiosity. Their local emission, emblazoned with their civic ‘badge’ – a runic bust, “porcupine”, “Wodan” head, fantastic beast or peacock - needs to gain recognition, leading to conservative designs, which degenerate over decades.

Albeit common, Eadberht’s ‘fantastic beast’ design, aesthetically an improvement on Aldfrith’s attempt, is such a handsome conflation of biblical lion and Celtic horned deity, that it must itself rate as iconic (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Early penny of Eadberht (737-58), *Sceatta List* 70-10

However, even among these more populous survivors, there are occasional glimpses through the mist of time that excite special attention. These tend not to be in the mainstream, but outliers with exceptional motifs. Among the literate, long-lived and generally well controlled Northumbrian issues, there are a number of varieties to entice the numismatic hunter-gatherer. At Fig. 3 we have three unusual reverses: the familiar fantastic beast but here embellished by the titular **AR**(3a), the balletic flying beast version (3b) and a rare variety with a swastika privy mark (3c). Fig. 3d is the coveted obverse with a small, moustached face as the central device.



Fig 3. Some iconic Northumbria obverses and reverses of Eadberht

SL group 70, a) 70-60, b) 70-90, c) 70-308, d) 70-280

The standing figure of Archbishop Ecgberht on the reverse of the joint issue with his brother King Eadberht, is in a similar category of desirable designs (Fig. 4).



Fig 4. Joint issue of Eadberht and Ecgberht, 70-20

Furthermore, the northern coinage demonstrates that inscriptional coins can also have the lure of anepigraphic issues. Northumbrian literacy enables the identification of some issuers of the highest rarity (Fig. 5 a & b). In light of recent discoveries (*SL* 80-50. Fig. 7a), it seems that the

joint issue of Æthelwald Moll and Ecgberht (Fig. 5a) is the only emission of the reign of the patrician Æthelwald Moll.



Fig 5. a) joint issue of Æthelwald and Ecgberht, 76-10, b) issue of Æthelred commemorating Æthelwald, 77-10

Joint issues (other than Fig. 4) are anepigraphic. Perhaps this eased the transition from the fantastic animal type to the inscribed reverse during the reign of Ælfwald (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6, Ælfwald, a) fantastic beast, 73-20,

b) named moneyer, 79-10

Presumably, portrayal was frowned upon as the influence of Byzantine iconoclasm spread – especially if the Northumbrian beast included pagan elements. More constructively, boldly stating the name of the moneyer responsible for the integrity of the coinage gave confidence to the user and authority to the issue.



Fig. 7, Æthelred by Ceolbald, a) with titular R, 80-05

b) with architectural central device, 80-80

While Ceolbald was one of Æthelred's prolific moneyers, there are unique and scarce varieties (Fig. 7) with an array of central motifs, a feature carried through to the later, base *styca* coinage.

The 'shrine' issue (Fig 8b) is now thought to date to the end of Æthelred's second reign after the 793 Viking raid on Lindisfarne. When compared to Æthelred's earlier named-moneyer issues (Figs. 7, 8a), the 'shrine' shows a decline in execution and fabric consistent with the economic distress consequent upon such a disruption to North Sea trade. Of the issues of Æthelred's several named moneyers, all by the same hand, Hnifula's issue is considerably rarer and better executed than the 'shrine' but it continues to be the latter that monopolizes attention.



Fig 8. Æthelred a) Moneyer Hnifula, 84-20

b) 'Shrine' issue 793-6, 85-10

Hnifula's colleagues Ceolbald and Cuthheard were substantially more prolific, particularly the latter who enjoyed great longevity, minting coins for Ælfwald, Æthelred, Eardwulf and Eanred (Fig. 9), though there are two signatures involved here, possibly suggesting two engravers.



Fig. 9, Cuthheard for: a) Æthelred, 83-10

b) Eardwulf, 86-10

c) Eanred, 86.5-10

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It is among the proliferation of lesser, typically secondary, Southumbrian issues, usually carrying an evangelising message, that the early Anglo-Saxon imagination, with its passion for riddles, is unrestrained. These provide iconic motifs with their desirability enhanced by the extreme rarity of survivals from modest production runs.

The sceat coinage offers a significant taxonomic challenge. Through archaeological and hoard evidence, it is possible to define the major chronological phases, but there is a paucity of diagnostic signposts within each phase. Nor is the territorial evidence comprehensive. Through regression analysis, Michael Metcalf identified the emporia likely to be responsible for some of the substantial Series, but this approach offers less reliable guidance for the minor Series and groups. We are more secure in using imagery – the iconography – which is bold and distinctive and allows for the grouping of characteristic varieties within thematic schemes – an approach adopted by *Sceatta List* and followed for the Southumbrian coinage below.

In order to avoid too many orphans omitted from the main themes in *Sceatta List*, the rules for inclusion within a particular theme are quite flexible. For example, the first theme is the radiate bust with a degenerate votive standard reverse (Fig. 10a). However, included in this are some other bust/standard combinations, such as the rare FITVR variety of the enigmatic SAROALDO type (Fig. 10b).



Fig. 10, bust/standard types a) VALDOBERHTVS

b) SAROALDO

Series D, type 10 (Fig. 11) may not fire the imagination, but it is a significant design link between the two major Series of the Low Countries, D and E, showing the transition from a stylized bust with flowing, braided hair, to the ineptly-named ‘porcupine’ of the secondary and tertiary phases of Series E and which also infiltrated some English issues.



Fig. 11, the ‘moon face’ of Series D, type 10, *SL* 9-10

Also related to a major trading coinage, East Anglia’s Series R, most likely the product of Ipswich, has great longevity, deteriorating gradually over decades. Again, there are some intriguing outliers; in *SL* 12-45 (Fig. 12) the crude runic bust inscribed Epa is matched with a delicately engraved reverse with backward-looking bird, closer to the artistic output of Series Q, but distinguished from that coinage by a runic inscription, beyond our current understanding.



Fig. 12, the Epa obverse with bird reverse

The extensive use of the EPA inscription over time and territory suggests that some special significance was attached to its recurrence. The only historical documentation touching on this may be Bede’s telling of the protection of Selsey Abbey from plague under the guiding hand of bishop Eappa (*Ecclesiastical History* IV, 14). The amuletic equivalent of a vaccine.

It is what the early medieval observer saw in and understood from these miniature images that we must try to grasp. Anna Gannon suggested that some sequences of images created a story – she referred to a ‘domino effect’. To illustrate, there are some clear examples of the conflict of good and evil told through this medium.

There are two such ‘cascades’ in Series J, carrying significant iconographic meaning, notably where sequences evince continuity between issues. A battle of good and evil, or superstition and reason, is resolved. The normal variety 20-10 (type 36. Fig. 13c) shows the conflict resolved but, by itself is difficult to interpret as it lacks the context of the challenge when viewed without the rare, varieties 20-30 and 20-40 alongside (Fig. 13 a & b). *SL* 20-30 (Fig. 13a) shows the mortal challenge on both sides and would come first from the Christian perspective. Variety 20-40 (Fig. 13b) replaces the obverse serpent with a cross, but the reverse serpent remains a deadly threat. This is resolved in the conventional issue, *SL* 20-10 (Fig. 13c).



Fig. 13, a sequence form Series J, type 36, a) *SL* 20-30 b) *SL* 20-40 c) *SL* 20-10

Another example in Series J is from type 72, itself extremely rare in the normal form, variety 19-10. The reverse portrays the challenge of good and evil, the confrontation of the bird and serpent, unresolved (Fig. 14a). The extremely rare variety 19-20, which I associate with Quentovic, pictorially resolves the threat and clearly invokes the biblical quotation “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Fig. 14b).



Fig. 14, a sequence form Series J, type 72, a) the threat, 19-10 b) the resolution, 19-20

There is a comparable sequence in Series Q, second block (*SL* 64-70 & 110. Fig. 15).



Fig. 15, a sequence from Series QII, a) the threat, 64-70 b) the resolution, 64-110

In this example, the serpent is rising from below to attack the bird, but the second coin shows the bird triumphant, trampling the serpent underfoot, the cross now ahead, not behind and the wing risen. Is this too fanciful?

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Continuing the thematic approach, the corpus of obverses with heads in profile, usually diademed and draped, include a few southern inscribed issues (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16, a) Series G, 21-10 b) *DE LUNDONIA* 23-40 c) *DE LUNDONIA* 24-50 d) *MONITA SCORVM* 24-30

At the head of Series G, which possibly emanates from Quentovic, is an inscribed issue (Fig. 16a). Again, the legend is beyond current comprehension and is subsequently replaced by a cross, evoking Constantine’s dream-vision before Milvian Bridge. The London inscriptions (Fig. 16 b-c) are clear but the precise meaning of the *Monita Scorum* type remains elusive. Marion Archibald suggested ‘money of the saints’, which certainly enhances the allure.

A number of series or groups provide a thoughtful, inscribed obverse with the crude ‘porcupine’ reverse (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17, a) Series T variety, 25-40

b) Æthiliræd, 92-10

c) ‘SEDE’, 93-10

These are not emissions from the Low Countries under the aegis of Series E, but almost certainly English. The specimen from Series T, *SL* 25-40 (Fig. 17a), has a unique reverse with a device, below the quilled crescent, resembling an anchor (a cross ancrée?). The Æthiliræd type (Fig. 17b), is better known than the rare ‘SEDE’ (?) variety with its reverse of a coiled snake protecting the cross (Fig. 17c).

More certainly part of the corpus of Series E, are a couple of inscribed issues (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18, Series E, a) variety G5, 89-50

b) 89-60

While the attribution of the extremely rare sceat (Fig. 18a) to Willibrodr, the Northumbrian missionary, is somewhat speculative, due to the incomplete rendition of the name, he does have the propinquity to be the initiator of this variant. The general style belongs to primary variety G of Series E, placing its issue in the right place and time - and duration - for it to be associated with the long-lived Willibrodr, Bishop of Utrecht (695-739), a tantalising prospect. Moreover, and perhaps crucially, the central reverse motif is a crozier – his attribute. The inscription on Fig 18b remains to be identified; a Frankish association is possible.

The inscribed *CARIP* group is graced with many exceptional varieties (e. g. Fig. 1c). Another compelling reverse in the group, is the standing figure with cross-hatched tabard. Both hands hold a long cross to the right and a floral array is displayed to the left (Fig 19a). The arabesque in Fig. 17a, is also seen at Fig. 19b. A specimen from the rare Rosette group, shows the standard bearer enveloped in foliage (Fig. 19c).



Fig. 19 a) *CARIP* group, 26-75

b) Series K/N related

c) Rosette group, 32-50

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Mainstream Series K sceats may not be as exotic as some of the above early pennies, and are certainly relatively common, yet there are elements of the Series that attain the pinnacle of early Anglo-Saxon art, not just numismatic art.

Progressing from the charmingly simple coiled serpent (Fig. 20a), to more stylized serpents (Fig. 20b), to the wolf-whorl, occasionally with protective serpent (Fig. 20c), then the wolf head (Fig 21a), sometimes with serpent tongue (Fig 21b-c), the wolf with forelimbs (Fig. 22a), eventually to the more complex quadruped (Fig. 22b) a masterpiece of the art, we have a sequence of charismatic obverses and reverses of captivating power and attraction.



Fig. 20, a) serpent/annulet cross, 14-90 b) serpent, 42-10 c) Series K, wolf-whorl, 39-50



Fig. 21, Series K, wolf heads, a) 38-10 serpent tongues, b) 38-10 c)38-20



Fig. 22, Series K, wolf with forelimbs, a) 40-10 b) 40-20

Series K continues at this elevated level of artistry with a quadruped, a leopard according to Anna Gannon, rounding an angled bush heavy with fruit (Fig. 23a). The leopard motif is not rare, but the execution is outstanding and deserves to be held in high esteem. A unique variant has a geometric reverse divided into eleven compartments, rather like a simnel cake recalling the exclusion of Judas from the twelve disciples.



Fig. 23, Series K, a) 41-40 b) compartmentalized reverse, 41-50

Serpent whorls show how motifs are borrowed and recombined (Fig. 24). The three or four rotating beasts typically have their tongues meeting centrally, except in one variety of Series S, where the reverse central device is a rosette (Fig. 24c).



Fig. 24, a) serpent whorl, 43-10 b) Series H, Celtic cross, 47-10 c) centaur, rosette reverse 68-80

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The bird in a vine-scroll forms a discrete theme. Berries are pecked from foliage either on the ground or hanging above. There are vine-scrolls in all forms of Anglo-Saxon art, which, Anna Gannon informs us, is ‘a visualization of salvation and Paradise’. Often the bird itself is cruciform, or of *Chi-Rho* shape.



Fig. 25, Series U, a) elaborate figure, 45-60 b) double reverse, 45-80 c) tribrach reverse, 45-90

Series U presents a distinctive design of a standard bearer in a crescent boat with a pecking bird reverse. From the large array of variations, three striking designs are illustrated in Fig. 25. The elaborate standard bearer in Fig. 25a has two tiny creatures either side of the head. Fig. 25b is not only a classic example of the type but is a non-identical, double reverse. A quite different, perhaps simplistic, representation of the bird is shown in Fig. 25c, where the reverse is a tribrach with individual letters enclosed by two of the branches.

The peacock issue of Series H is a common, well executed and controlled currency being that of the major trading centre of Hamwic. The bird representing incorruptibility of the flesh and hence immortality, is devoid of foliage but adorned by attractive privy marks in the field. While an attractive and characteristic design, the prolific output probably denies status as an iconic sceat, but the extremely rare, subsidiary issue of *SL* 48-10, does merit that accolade (Fig. 26). The facing bust on the obverse of the standard issue is replaced by a tiny peacock, left, looking back.



Fig. 26, Series H, 48-10

The pecking bird variety in the Triquetra group, shown at Fig. 27a, presents an ambiguity. Certainly, a bird is walking right, with his head turned back to bite berries. However, to the left, a rotund bird pecks the ground. The feathers over its back end in the branch of berries sustaining the first bird. The execution of the bust in this group, typically with bulging eyes and mouth, is rather imprecise.



Fig. 27, Triquetra group a) pecking bird, 110-57, b) Mary in *orans* posture, 110-40 c) DE LONDUNIA, 110-80

The Triquetra group includes a winged figure of Mary praying (Fig. 27b), as identified by Anna Gannon, making this an iconic and highly individual piece with special significance in the Christian repertoire. A sparkling rendition of the triquetra cross type inscribed **DE LONDUNIA** is given at Fig 27c, (*cf* Fig. 16b-c).

Returning to pecking birds, the swan in the extremely rare Archer and Hen groups, does not have the ambiguity of Fig. 28a. It reaches back to peck hanging fruit.



Fig. 28, swan, a) Archer group, 50-20

b) Hen group, 51-20

Gannon discusses the meaning of the archer type (*The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage*, 105-6), wherein the sides must be read together – the arrow is a warning shot ‘to instil fear, leading to repentance.’ Gannon suggests ‘hens came to symbolize Mother Church, gathering and protecting the faithful.’ (Gannon, 123-4. Fig 28b). The association of similar swans with the contrasting meanings of images projecting fear on the one hand and protection on the other, remains to be resolved.

The swan is looking back to bite the low-hanging berries, a convenient use of the round module. This is also the case for the many backward-looking animals in the coinage. Gannon traces the posture from the Steppes, through Germanic tradition.



Fig 29, Series X a) Ribe, 103-10

b) Insular, 104-35

The privy marks on Ribe’s coins evince controlled production (Fig. 29a). The obverse facing head has radiating hair and beard and appears bespectacled. The close proximity of crosses to the face challenge the notion that this is pagan, i. e. Wodan. The backward-looking animal on the reverse has a long crest, raised tail, clawed (Gannon says ‘froned’) feet tucked beneath and a conspicuous phallus. The imagery is striking, the issue prolific. The reverse was emulated in England beyond insular imitations of the “Wodan”/monster type, which tend to be less accomplished (Fig. 29b).

The backward-looking animal of Series N differs in that the head is modelled and appears less passive than that of Series X. The obverse shows a pair of standard bearers in various stances, sometimes naked, and typically, rather clumsily executed. There are exceptions.



Fig. 230 Series N a) facing figures, 52-10

b) feeding bird, 52-70

Fig. 30a shows facing figures flanked by crosses and is a more pleasing accomplishment than elsewhere in this Series. The feeding bird variety (Fig. 30b, a corvid?) is extremely rare and presumably suggests that the bird brings sustenance, recalling the ‘fledgling’ reverse (Fig. 1d).

A more vigorous backward-looking animal is encountered on a rare group (‘fleeing biped’ *SL* 107) descended from Series F. A triangular figure embellished by crosses, right, and a *globus cruciger*, left, is a misconceived neck shield from the helmet on the obverse bust of Series F (Fig. 31a). The legs of the biped on the reverse could be interpreted passively as a cruciform motif, or actively as an animal in flight, its mane flying, as it looks back in terror (Fig 31b). Other specimens show the animal to be bellowing. The same animal motif is also matched with an artistic and original departure of pleasing symmetry. A pair of backward-looking birds sit above and below a central cross fourchée, streamers on the cross give the impression of rotation (Fig. 31c).



Fig. 31, a) Series F obverse *SL* group 107, b) triangular figure, 107-1 c) symmetrical, seated birds, 107-40

Discussion of the obverses of Series X and N segues towards the “Wodan” group (*SL* 105. Fig. 32), where the hirsute bust is backed by two variously gendered, cowled, naked figures, sometimes bird headed (Fig. 32a). Some variants replace the standing figures with a Series N styled monster.



Fig. 32, “Wodan” group a) bird head, 105-10

b) keyhole bust, 105-70

A subset with more tidily engraved keyhole bust and well-attired standing figures, which Gannon suggests may be female (*Gannon* 103. Fig. 32b). And a further variety has a broad faced obverse (Fig. 33a). Fig. 33b matches the keyhole bust with an annulet cross reverse.



Fig. 33, a) "Wodan" group broad face, 105-100

b) annulet cross group, keyhole/annulet cross 14-60

This is not dissimilar to the facing head of primary Series Z (Fig. 34), conventionally taken to be Christ. The reverse creature is conventionally described as a hound, but in *Sceatta List*, is described as a wild boar, a venerated symbol of power and fertility for both the Romans and Celts. The designs evolve through gradually decaying renditions, Figs 34a and b are, perhaps fancifully, described as a death mask and haunted face respectively. Ultimately, the design deteriorates to almost meaningless lines and pellets (Fig 35a). A rare variety, loosely associated by the quadruped, was described by Metcalf as a Maltese cross reverse.



Fig. 34, Series Z, a) death mask, 102-42

b) haunted face, 102-60



Fig. 35, late Series Z a) Aston Rowant type, 102-70

b) Maltese cross variety 102-80

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Returning to portrayal of two standard bearers, the combination of standing figures and backwards-looking monster carries into Series Q, arguably the most creative assembly of designs in the entire sceatta coinage.



Fig. 36, a) Series QI, 63-10

b) Series QI, 63-30

c) Series O, block 1, 54-10

This innovative East-Anglian coinage is a stark contrast to the rigidity of Ipswich's Series R, prompting thoughts that the former may be ecclesiastical and the latter regal. The monster depicted in Fig. 36 a-b (and in Fig. 33a) looks far more assertive than that of Series X or N. Fig. 36b shows the monster with raised foreleg, borrowed directly from Series O (Fig. 36c) and a reminder of the confusing interconnectedness of the entire coinage. Both Series Q and O diverge internally, the common thread in the former is the depiction of lively animals on both

obverse and reverse, and in O it is the bust with swept-back hair or the biped with raised forelimb.

A unique specimen in Series O, block 2 (Fig. 37a) has an obverse standard bearer boasting seven separate cruciform elements – a triquetra and cross pommée at either side, a pelleted pectoral cross and two pellet crosses inverted at the hem of the robe. [The reverse is not the feeding bird variety of Series N, Fig 26b, but has a metal flaw on the upper right.]



Fig. 37, Series O, a) block 2, 55-30 b) block 3, 57-10 c) Series W, 108-50

The third block of Series O pairs the monster with interlaced crosses in group 56 and geometric reverses in group 57. Perhaps noteworthy among these is a reverse which seems to emulate a contemporary Anglo-Saxon brooch with inlaid garnets (Fig. 37b). Fig 37c combines a well engraved standard bearer, wearing a tunic, with a symmetrical cruciform reverse. In the Part I auction of this cabinet, Greg Edmund described this coin as *possibly depicting the perihelion of Halley's Comet over Europe in AD 684 and, further, tantalising hints of peripheral vestigial legends.*

The interlaced type continues into group 60, which is largely Continental and where the obverse is a bust with exaggerated features. An extremely rare English version has a modelled bust (Fig. 38).



Fig. 38, modelled bust with interlaced cross reverse

The symmetry of the reverses of Figs. 37b-c and 38, can also be seen in other geometric types. Of these, the double cross ancrée is rare and noteworthy (Fig. 39a). Somewhat less scarce, but arguably with more eye-appeal, are the Celtic cross designs. These are paired with profile busts, single and double standard bearers, pecking birds, wolf-whorls and serpent-torc types (SL groups 27-31). A crisp example of the latter is given at Fig. 39b.



Fig. 39, geometric types a) double cross ancrée b) Celtic cross 13-150, 31-10

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Not all monsters are backward-looking; the mainstream types in Series M show a sinuous animal. A couple of variants are exceptional (Fig. 40).



Fig. 40, Series M a) flying animal type, 61-70

b) pascal lamb, 61-80

An example of the excessively rare ‘flying animal’ version of Series M (Fig. 40a), displays an almost balletic stance counterbalanced by the curling tongue and tail. Known from a small number of specimens, is a variety exhibiting a more conventional animal than the sinuous beast typical of the type (Fig. 40b). Anna Gannon has expressed the view that this is a pascal lamb.

The origins of the subject of the obverse of Series V are unambiguous: a she-wolf feeds twin infants. Though Romulus and Remus are intended from the Roman foundation mythology, other pairings may be more appropriate for England and its Christianization. Might there be a veiled allusion to the founding Anglo-Saxon mythology of Hengist and Horsa? Or to Saints Peter and Paul? The subtlety of syncretic sceat iconography is its appeal to different traditions.

In the first version shown in Fig. 41, nourishing drops of the she-wolf’s milk drip down to sustain the infant twins. In the second, the drips of milk are replaced by a cross pommée, an evangelising message.

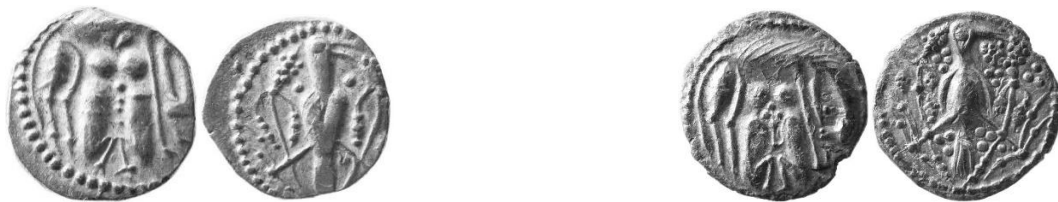


Fig. 41, Series V, 62-10 a) drops of milk

b) cross pommée

However, the reverse design shows greater originality. The budding stalks flex sufficiently to bear the weight of the bird. The bird brings its song and the means of seed dispersal. The allusion here is to collaboration and cooperation. The same could be true of the obverse – the wolf brings nutrition; the twins hope.

We can now return to Series Q, with its proliferation of quadrupeds and birds. Beautiful imagery is so abundant in this series that one is tempted to treat the entirety as iconic, but a few examples will suffice (Fig. 42).



Fig. 42, Series Q, block 1, a) 63-65

b) 63-80

c) 63-100

Quality specimens remain rare but block 2 has some unique varieties. Fig. 43a has creatures with bifurcated tails, while in Fig. 43b the crests and tails are extended to emulate vine scrolls.



Fig. 43, Series Q, block 2, a) bifurcated tails, 64-30



b) animal-scrolls, 64-35

However, the most striking design in this block is the stag (Fig 44). This bold variety parallels the contemporary ‘fantastic beast’ coinage of Northumbria.



Fig. 44, Series QII stag, 64-80

In common with the northern coinage of Eadberht, triquetra privy marks feature in Series Q, block three. But here they are more dynamic than Eadberht’s issues as an embellishment to the quadruped or bird rather than a privy mark (Fig 45a). The reverse of the unique Fig. 45a has a strong claim to iconic status. The reverse shows a hybrid, possibly a gryphon, staring straight at the observer.



Fig. 45, Series Q, block three, a) gryphon, 65-30



b) spreadeagle, 65-60

The unique spreadeagle reverse of Fig. 45b holds the promises of higher grade finds surfacing in good time.

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And finally, at the tail end of the Southumbrian early pennies, is the coinage of Beonna of East Anglia. His dominant moneyer is Efe, but the coins of Wilræd and Werferth are rare (Fig. 46).



Fig. 46, Beonna of East Anglia, a) Wilræd, 113-20



b) Werferth, 113-30

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In conclusion, a number of factors may endow a sceat with the special status of iconic: rarity, aesthetics, condition, tactility, a significant legend – in both senses – and the tantalising

prospect that solving a difficult inscription, such as the Willibrodr sceat, could open a door to history or resolve a point of numismatic debate. Another example arises from the earlier gold coinage, with its higher denominational value, giving a different perspective on Anglo-Saxon life. To illustrate, when carrying out mass-baptisms, it is arguable that rather than receiving donatives, Paulinus handed out fragments of King Edwin's wealth to support fledgling local communities. Put you feet in the shoes of the detectorist who was the first to touch this *scillinga* (Fig 47) since St Paulinus lost it!



Fig 47, The Paulinus shilling.

This selection is subjective and incomplete. It would be a considerable task to assemble a gallery of all those held in high esteem, let alone a representative cross-section of all sceat varieties.