

THE LOCATION OF THE PRE-ÆLFREDIAN MINT(S) OF WESSEX

By MICHAEL DOLLEY

RECENT work by Mr. P. V. Addyman, F.S.A., and Mr. D. H. Hill has underlined the importance of 'Hamwih' as a flourishing emporium in the eighth and early ninth centuries in particular.¹ This picture of prosperity is not in any way prejudiced by an element of continuing uncertainty as to the exact location of the town(s) of 'Hamwih'/'Hamtun' within the general area of the modern Southampton. More recently still, Miss Margaret Jesson has made a meticulous study of the sceattas of BMC types 39 and 49, a study which it is understood not merely vindicates earlier suggestions that these two types, and possibly type 48 as well, were struck at Southampton about the middle of the eighth century, but goes on to establish for the first time that the emission was on a very considerable scale.² At the same time, the extensive excavations conducted at Winchester over the last ten years by Mr. Martin Biddle, V-P.S.A., have given historians as well as archaeologists a new insight into the essential nature of that community in the centuries immediately preceding a decision of Ælfred late in his reign to refound the city, entirely remodelling what had been little more than the seat of a bishopric and one of the principal residences of the West Saxon kings.³ What is beginning to emerge with remarkable clarity is that the Roman walls still standing around eighth- and ninth-century Winchester enclosed a very large proportion of open ground, and that the only buildings of real importance were the Old Minster complex and the adjoining royal palace that between them occupied the south-east quadrant of the old Roman and future tenth-century town.

All this has prompted one numismatist to reconsider very carefully what evidence there is in fact for the present very general assumption that there was a mint at Winchester which struck pence for three of Ælfred's precursors as kings of Wessex in the century preceding the issue very late indeed in Ælfred's reign of the extremely rare pennies which have as their reverse type the first three letters of the Winchester mint-signature.⁴ The late eighth- and early ninth-century material at present attributed to Winchester falls into three groups which in turn coincide with the reigns of the intrusive Beorhtric (786-802), and of the legitimate Ecgbearht (802-839) and Æthelwulf (839-858). The extant coins may be summarily listed as follows:

BEORHTRIC

Type (a): *obv.* letter A; *rev.* cross with pellets in angles. Moneyer: Ecghard (2 coins known - British Museum (found at Sunbury) and Hunterian Museum, Glasgow).

¹ P. V. Addyman and D. H. Hill, 'Saxon Southampton: A Review of the Evidence: Part I', *Proc. Hants Field Club*, XXV (1968), pp. 61-93.

² Unpublished BA Dissertation in Department of Archaeology of the University of Southampton.

³ Martin Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1967', *Antiq. Journal*, XLVIII (1968), p. 252, fig. 1; Martin Biddle and D. H. Hill, 'Late Saxon Planned Towns',

ibid., LI (1971), forthcoming; Martin Biddle and D. J. Keene, 'Winchester', *Historic Towns*, II (ed. M. D. Lobel, Oxford, 1971), forthcoming.

⁴ J. J. North, *English Hammered Coins* (London, 1963), no. 647 - only four examples are known, two from the Cuerdale hoard and two from the Morley St. Peter hoard.

Type (b): *obv.* monogram of *alpha* and *omega* (?); *rev.* *omega*. Moneyer: Peochthun (1 coin known – British Museum (found near Andover)).

For many years these coins were attributed to an unknown king of East Anglia.⁵ In 1930, however, a West Saxon attribution was proposed by Carlyon-Britton,⁶ and this was endorsed by Brooke⁷ in his standard work of 1932 where it was further remarked that the mint was 'presumably at Winchester'. Both verdicts have been accepted by the present writer,⁸ though it is interesting that the mint-attribution was given in the form 'Winchester(?)'.

ECGBEORHT

Type (a): *obv.* SAX/ONIO/RVM; *rev.* plain cross. Moneyer: Eanwald (1 coin in British Museum *ex* Middle Temple (London) hoard).

Type (b): *obv.* monogram of SAXON (*um*); *rev.* plain cross. Moneyers: Beornheard (1 coin in British Museum (reading BEORNEHART); 1 coin in Hunterian Museum, Glasgow).

Bosa (1 coin in British Museum).

Ifa (1 coin in British Museum *ex* Middle Temple hoard; 1 coin in Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

Tideman (2 coins in British Museum (1 *ex* Middle Temple hoard); 1 coin in Hunterian Museum, Glasgow; 1 coin in Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

Tilred (1 coin in British Museum *ex* Middle Temple hoard).

A few coins, too, are in private possession, and add little to the above pattern except that a fragment reading . . . F+AM+O . . . suggests that Ifa may have struck both of the types of Ecgbearht. Nineteenth-century writers did not suggest Winchester as the mint of these rare coins, and there was something of novelty about Brooke's 1932 claim that 'Winchester is doubtless the mint'.⁹ In his definitive study of the coinage of this reign in 1957, however, Mr. C. E. Blunt, F.B.A., could write 'there seems no valid reason to question Brooke's attribution of these coins to Winchester'.¹⁰ It has since been accepted without qualification by the present writer.¹¹

ÆTHELWULF

Sole type: *obv.* monogram of SAXON(*um*); *rev.* cross with wedges in angles. Moneyer: Eanwald (1 coin known – in British Museum *ex* Sevington hoard).

In 1932 Brooke gave this coin to Winchester without reservation,¹² and further

⁵ e.g. E. Hawkins, *The Silver Coins of England* (3rd edn., London, 1887), pp. 61–63; C. F. Keary, *A Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum: Anglo-Saxon Series*, vol. I (London, 1887), p. 89.

⁶ P. W. P. Carlyon-Britton, 'A Penny of Beorhtic, King of Wessex', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1930, p. 39.

⁷ G. C. Brooke, *English Coins* (3rd edn., London, 1950), p. 41 – the pagination of the three editions is here identical.

⁸ M. Dolley, *Anglo-Saxon Pennies* (London, 1964),

pl. II, 6 – on p. 15 the attribution had taken the form 'almost certainly at Winchester'.

⁹ Brooke, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁰ C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Ecgbearht, King of Wessex, 802–39', *British Numismatic Journal*, XXVIII, iii (1957), pp. 467–476, *cf.* more immediately pp. 474 and 475.

¹¹ Dolley, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹² Brooke, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

attributed to the same mint two types with SAX/ONIO/RVM reverse, one without name of moneyer and one by the Canterbury moneyers Diar, Herebeald, Manna, Osmund and Torhtwald. His suggestion that there was a translation of mint-personnel from Hampshire to Kent has an element of special pleading, and in 1957 it was rejected by Mr. Blunt.¹³ Mr. Kolbjørn Skaare, now Keeper of the University Coin Cabinet at Oslo, and the present writer in a joint study of the coinage of Æthelwulf which appeared in 1961¹⁴ endorsed Mr. Blunt's arguments, and so there has been until now fairly general agreement that there is extant today only one coin of Æthelwulf struck in Wessex, the mint being Winchester.

There are, then, perhaps two dozen late eighth- and early ninth-century pennies which are acceptable as struck at a mint or mints in the old West Saxon kingdom, and examination of them reveals considerable homogeneity of style and of fabric. For obvious reasons *monetæ non sunt multiplicandæ præter necessitatem*, and it is unlikely that the view that only one mint is involved will be seriously disputed. Eight moneyers are concerned, and a prosopographical review may be found suggestive. Two of the names, Bosa and Ifa, are uncompounded – unless hypocorisms – and of a type that virtually disappears from coins by the middle of the ninth century. Ifa, indeed, is a *hapax* where Searle is concerned, while the same authority gives no certain West Saxon occurrence of Bosa or of a name with *Bos-* as prototheme. The six compounded names comprise as many protothemes and five deuterthemes. Of the former, *Beorn-* is the only one effectively to survive into the eleventh century, and significantly it is recorded in Hildebrand¹⁵ as the first element of a moneyer's name only at Hertford, London and York – 'Beorhnoth' at Winchester is for 'Beorhtnoth' with dissimilation of 't'. *Ean-* is alleged for London under Æthelræd II but the coin is misread, and the prototheme makes its last appearance at Lincoln under Edward the Martyr, and even this is something of a comeback. With *Eg-* the position is that we have no certain instance of it as a first element in a moneyer's name later than Æthelstan, and here the mints are London and Shrewsbury. *Peocht-* is an extremely rare prototheme, and on coins is otherwise attested only under Offa, while *Tid-* in the tenth century appears only at Chester under Æthelstan, and in the eleventh century only at Thetford under Cnut. *Til-*, too, disappears from coins by the middle of the tenth century. It is instructive to consult Searle for all these protothemes, and it will be found that none is characteristic of Wessex. Much the same obtains if less obviously where the deuterthemes are concerned. If *-man*, *-ræd*, and *-weald* persist throughout the Old English period, there is no regional pattern, and certainly not a West Saxon one, while *-heard* and *-hun* are elements that scarcely survive into the tenth century. Notably absent from the West Saxon coins of the three reigns under discussion are elements that are characteristically West Saxon, and *Æthel-* here comes at once to mind¹⁶ with *Ælf-* a close second. It may

¹³ Blunt, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

¹⁴ (R.H.) M. Dolley and K. Skaare, 'The Coinage of Æthelwulf, King of the West Saxons, 839–58' in *Anglo-Saxon Coins* (ed. (R.H.) M. Dolley, London, 1961), pp. 63–76.

¹⁵ B. E. Hildebrand, *Anglosachsiska Mynt* (2nd edn., Stockholm, 1881).

¹⁶ Mrs. V. J. Smart ('Moneyers of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage', *Commentations de Nummis Saeculorum IX–XI in Suecia Repertis* (ed. N. L. Rasmusson and B. Malmer, Stockholm, 1968), pp. 193–276) accepts 12 *Æthel-* moneyers from Winchester and the six nearest mints (Chichester, Dorchester, Shaftesbury, Southampton and Wareham plus Wilton/Salisbury) under Æthelræd II.

well be thought that the pattern of the eight names under consideration accords at this relatively early date rather better with the hypothesis that the mint was situated at a 'cosmopolitan' sea-port than with the traditional assumption that the site was inside the West Saxon 'capital' where one might have supposed that the moneyers would have been drawn, in part at least, from the West Saxon lesser nobility.¹⁷ It is not pretended, of course, that this line of argument is in any way final, but it may serve to raise doubts as to the general plausibility of the attribution to Winchester of coins that omit from their types and legends any overt indication of where they were struck. Taylor Combe, Ruding, Hawkins and Keary, to name just four of the highly competent numismatists of the nineteenth century, knew a selection of the material, and an attribution to Winchester seems never to have crossed their minds. Curiously, too, a proportion of the contemporary pennies of Canterbury, London and Rochester, all like Winchester the seats of bishoprics, do contain in their types or legends allusions that enabled nineteenth-century scholarship to identify these three places as mints.

We know that there was a mint at Southampton in the middle of the eighth century, and also that the site of this the principal port of Wessex exhibits archaeologically a remarkable degree of continuity from the eighth century into the ninth. It could be thought, too, that on the face of it Offa of Mercia would be more ready to tolerate his son-in-law Beorhtric continuing coinage at a commercial centre such as Southampton than initiating one at a political 'capital' such as Winchester – and Coenwulf's attitude *mutatis mutandis* could have been much the same if we suppose the coins of Ecghard and Peochthun to have been struck after 796 and before 802. Such arguments may be negative, but there is no positive argument for the existence of a mint at Winchester before the **VIN** coins of the late 890s. Moreover, and this cannot be ignored, the identification of the mint of Beorhtric, Ecgbeorht and Æthelwulf as Southampton is peculiarly consistent with the survival of only one of its coins struck for the last of these kings. Clearly the West Saxon mint was closed very early indeed in the reign of Æthelwulf who came to the throne in 839. If we turn to the *Old English Chronicle*,¹⁸ it is to find that the annal for '837' *recte* 840 tells how 'Ealdorman Wulfheard fought at Southampton against the crews of 33 ships, and made great slaughter there and had the victory'. The point was taken by Mr. Blunt in the context of Winchester, and in 1957 he wrote 'It may be that the action fought at Southampton by Ealdorman Wulfheard in 840, although a victory for the men of Wessex, called attention to the vulnerability of Winchester . . .'.¹⁹ Here the Continental evidence comes into its own. As the late Sir Frank Stenton reminded us, Nithard records the actual plundering of Southampton in 842.²⁰ What this note suggests in short is that the identification of the West Saxon mint as Winchester in essence reflects historical preoccupation between the world wars with political and constitutional theory. The time has now come to

¹⁷ Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 218 summarises admirably what is known of the status of moneyers in the Anglo-Saxon period, and one is brought back to the apparent absence of substantial *hagæ* from pre-Ælfredian Winchester.

¹⁸ Ed. D. Whitelock, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation* (London, 1961), p. 42.

¹⁹ Blunt, *op. cit.*, p. 475. We may compare Brooke, *op. cit.*, p. 43, who was rightly reluctant to postulate a Danish capture of Winchester before the storming of 860.

²⁰ F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1947), p. 241.

THE LOCATION OF THE PRE-ÆLFREDIAN MINT(S) OF WESSEX

review with perhaps fewer preconceptions a wider band of evidence, and it is the claim of this note that a better case can be made out for the mint being Southampton. Certainly it is 'Southampton (?)' that is going to figure as the mint of Beorhtric, Ecgbeorht and Æthelwulf in any future edition of the author's *Anglo-Saxon Pennies* – unless that is the case for Winchester can be restated by its protagonists in a more convincing form and preferably on the basis of additional evidence.