

Medieval
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THE ICONOGRAPHY OF EARLY ANGLO- SAXON COINAGE

Sixth to Eighth Centuries

Anna Gannon

Medieval History and Archaeology

General Editors

JOHN BLAIR HELENA HAMEROW

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ANNA GANNON

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*Cambridge,
Pentecost 2002*

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Abbreviations

BMA	British Museum Acquisition.
BMC	<i>British Museum Catalogue</i> : Keary 1887.
CM	Coins and Medals Department, British Museum.
<i>Coin Register</i>	see the <i>British Numismatic Journal</i> of the relevant year.
Abramson collection	The private collection of Mr A. Abramson, Leeds.
de Wit collection	the private collection of Prof. G. W. de Wit, Rotterdam.
ex-Subjack	W. L. Subjack collection, sold in London 5 June 1998: see Vecchi 1998.
EMC	Early Medieval Coinage: http://www-cm.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/coins/emc.html
HE	Bede, <i>The Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).
Hunterian	Hunterian and Coats Collection, University of Glasgow: see Robertson 1961.
MEC	<i>Medieval European Coinage</i> : see Grierson and Blackburn 1986.
MME	Medieval and Modern Europe Department, British Museum.
MoE	<i>The Making of England</i> : see Webster and Backhouse 1991.
T&S	<i>Thrymsas and Sceattas</i> : see Metcalf 1993–4.

Introduction

In his introduction to *Thrymsas and Sceattas*, Michael Metcalf stated: ‘There are two kinds of book to be written about Anglo-Saxon coins of the seventh and eighth centuries, namely one to set out the arguments which establish where and when the coins were struck, and in what percentage, and another to describe how they circulated and to discuss the purpose for which they were used: one kind of book on numismatics, the other on monetary history.’¹

This work however will attempt a third way: it will be an art-historical appraisal of Anglo-Saxon coinage, from its inception in the late sixth century to Offa’s second reform of the penny *c.*792. Artistically, this is the most exciting period of English coinage, with die-cutters showing flair and innovation and employing hundreds of different designs in their work, yet coins, with the exception of the pioneering work of Baldwin Brown,² are rarely included in surveys of Anglo-Saxon art.

Coins have often provided illustrations to history books.³ However, in contrast to Metcalf’s contribution in the book edited by Campbell in 1982, where, albeit from a numismatic perspective, the charm and variety of the types were stressed, and several specimens illustrated,⁴ no coin made it onto the pages of Wilson’s *Anglo-Saxon Art* of 1984, but only the statement: ‘coins provide a fruitful area of stylistic analysis, but, with rare exceptions, show few distinctive or important ornamental traits’.⁵ That coins are mentioned, and three specimens illustrated in Laing and Laing 1996,⁶ is probably due to the 1991 British Museum exhibition, ‘The Making of England’, and the catalogue that accompanied it,⁷ which stressed the importance of the coinage as a historical document, but more fundamentally presented it as an integral part of the visual culture of the time. The same innovative approach was apparent in the 1997 ‘Heirs of Rome’ exhibition,⁸ where emphasis was placed on the iconography of the coinage as a bearer of meaning. These efforts have certainly contributed to a new awareness of the richness of the material.⁹

¹ Metcalf 1993–4: i. 1. This work will be henceforth referred to as *T&S*.

² Baldwin Brown 1903–37, specifically vol. iii (1915), 57–113. ³ For example, Wood 1981.

⁴ Campbell 1982: 62–3. ⁵ Wilson 1984: 15. ⁶ Laing and Laing 1996: 84–5.

⁷ Webster and Backhouse 1991, here referred to as *MoE*. Marion Archibald, former Curator of Early Medieval Coinage at the British Museum, was responsible for the chapter ‘Coins and Currency’ (p. 35) and the entries for the coins.

⁸ Webster and Brown 1997, with Archibald covering the coinage.

⁹ For instance Karkov 1997: 17 and Neuman de Vegvar 1999: 259 use coins as iconographic evidence. A special mention ought to be made of Prof. G. and Dr I. Henderson, who first made me aware of the importance of the subject for art historians.

Although in recent years this early phase of Anglo-Saxon coinage has been the subject of extensive numismatic research,¹⁰ that much can be gained from comparing and contrasting coin iconography from an art-historical stance was demonstrated by Mary Morehart's contributions to the numismatic debate.¹¹ Her research has shown that there are common interests among art historians, numismatists, historians, and archaeologists and that some of the basic questions that are asked when considering the coinage are indeed the same:¹² hence the desirability of an interdisciplinary approach.

Coins in Anglo-Saxon England were not the continuation of a previous monetary tradition, but a fresh start after nearly two centuries, their inception an act of monetary policy raising questions pertaining to their patronage and function. The artistic merit and variety of the coins, which far exceed contemporary Continental ones, suggest that the designs had a special purpose. The three issues of patronage, function, and design are interlinked.

First and foremost, designs were meant to identify the coin and its issuing authority, so as to foster confidence in its economic value: this had been the minimum required of any coinage since its origin in Antiquity. However, they could also have other functions. The exploitation of the potential of coinage as a propaganda tool goes back to classical times,¹³ and it must also have been familiar to the Anglo-Saxons. In the delicate balance between the familiar and the innovative, coins must have played a central role, having the advantages of official sanctioning and wide circulation to support and diffuse new ideas and images. Were the motifs a deliberate manipulation of public opinion and, if so, was this for political or religious ends? Indeed was the coinage, whose introduction is contemporary with St Augustine's mission, instrumental in the promotion of the Christian message? In the range of iconography are we to discover echoes of controversy, of factions, or perhaps of statements to do with cultural or national identity in the choice between Roman and runic alphabets in the inscriptions? Propaganda, however, at any level and whatever the message, must be intelligible to the intended audience, and how the iconography fitted into the visual culture of the time must be borne in mind. Were the prototypes of the images always numismatic,¹⁴ or were they derived from other sources (classical or not), and did they in turn inspire other artistic works? Is there a difference between the iconography of the earlier and that of the later coinages of the period?

¹⁰ See the 1984 Oxford congress 'Sceattas in England and on the Continent', proceedings published in Hill and Metcalf 1984; the first volume of *Medieval European Coinage (The Early Middle Ages 5th–10th Centuries)* cataloguing the coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, edited in 1986 by Grierson and Blackburn (henceforth referred to as *MEC*), particularly chs. 8 and 10; Metcalf's three volumes of *T&S*, cataloguing the coins in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; and numerous publications in numismatic journals.

¹¹ Morehart 1970, 1984, and 1985.

¹² Wicker 1999, specifically on archaeology and art history.

¹³ For a discussion of the different views of recent authors on the problems of political propaganda, or lack of it, on Roman coinage, see Bastien 1992: i. 9.

¹⁴ Kent 1961; Whitting 1961.

The conscious use of art for didactic purposes in Anglo-Saxon England is witnessed in the acquisition of paintings by Benedict Biscop for his foundation at Monkwearmouth,¹⁵ but indeed decorated objects had been bearers of meaning since earlier times, as recent research on brooches suggests.¹⁶ How far we can contrast a Christian image with a 'native zoomorphic' one is an issue that will have to be addressed, bearing in mind the fresh role that traditional images may have assumed in a new context. What was the purpose of such a variety of issues, and are they related to each other in some way? Is the iconography always unequivocal or can we detect plays and shifts in the layering of meaning, therefore postulating audiences of varying sophistication and multiple roles for the coinage? Would answers to these questions concerning sources, context, and meaning of the iconography help us to understand who commissioned the coins?¹⁷

To try and answer these questions, I shall divide the material not into Series and types, according to numismatic practice, but iconographically into four main categories: busts (including attributes and drapery), human figures, animals, and geometrical patterns. Prototypes will be sought, and parallels highlighting the relationship of the designs to contemporary art will enable the material to be viewed within the culture of the time.¹⁸

Having relied heavily on the research and generous help of numismatists and other scholars, I am aware that many other cultural, numismatic, historical, and archaeological questions could and should be asked of the material gathered, from mints or die-cutters' styles, to the relationship between jewellery and coins, and the apotropaic function of motifs. As an art historian, mine is but one contribution to the subject: my hope is that it will not only serve to enhance understanding and appreciation of early Anglo-Saxon coinage, but will fire the imagination, and encourage further research.

¹⁵ Bede, *The Lives of the Abbots*, ch. 6, Farmer 1988: 190–1. Henderson 1980.

¹⁶ Hines 1997.

¹⁷ *T&S*, i. 16–17; the two polarities (royal versus mercantile coinage) are nowadays not so entrenched.

¹⁸ On account of the great variation in size between coins and *comparanda*, they will not necessarily be reproduced to scale, in order to achieve the greatest possible visual impact when comparisons are being made.

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PART I

Numismatic Background

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1

Numismatic Background of Early Anglo-Saxon England

The End of the Roman System

In much of the former western Roman Empire the use and minting of coins were continued on the established Roman pattern,¹ albeit with innovations,² initially, at least, as a legacy of the old administration. Important changes consisted in a shift from the Roman system of gold, silver, and base metal towards the sole use of gold during the fifth century and in adjusting the weights of the coins to fit in with their particular Germanic system.³ In Britain, however, the use of coinage seems to have lapsed for nearly two centuries.⁴

The withdrawal of the Roman army from Britain early in the fifth century meant not only that the Romano-British population had to fend for itself, but also the end of the taxation levied to support functionaries and legions and of the need for regular supplies of coins to meet these and other fiscal duties.⁵ The breakdown of Romano-British society and its infrastructure was fairly rapid but varied from area to area, as can be seen from the distribution of the finds of the last of the Roman coins to be issued to Britain.⁶ The insecurity of the period is reflected in the non-retrieval of buried treasure—precious artefacts, as well as money.⁷ Silver coins in particular, often clipped and pared, show the growing shortage of metal.

Taking advantage of the uncertain political situation in Britain, tribes from the Continent—who came to be known as the Anglo-Saxons—established control

¹ MEC 3.

² It has been argued that Roman coinage served fiscal needs, whereas for the Germanic invaders money became an economic means of exchange. See Hendy 1988: 29.

³ MEC 8 ff. and 14.

⁴ MEC 156.

⁵ Kent 1961: 22. Britain had possessed virtually no official mint since the time of Constantine the Great (Kent 1961: 4). As coins had to be imported from other regions of the Roman Empire (Casey 1994: 9, fig. 1), the gold coinage, which served for official payments, offers good evidence for establishing a firm dating for the severance of the province from Rome. The coin evidence coincides with that offered by literary sources (Kent 1961: 21; Campbell 1982: 18–19; and Higham 1992: 69).

⁶ Higham 1992: 70.

⁷ The magnificence of some of the hoards, for instance the Hoxne treasure (Bland and Johns 1993), allows a glimpse into the wealth of late Roman Britain.

over eastern Britain during the fifth century ad, extending south and west into most of modern England over the next two centuries. The situation in Britain seems to have been very different from that of other provinces of the Roman Empire, where it is appropriate to talk of the continuity of institutions rather than of the collapse of the Imperial organization.⁸

Alternative Uses of Coins

The Anglo-Saxons, though familiar with money from looting and tribute, initially had no need for coins or their orthodox uses. Coins were regarded as bullion or used as jewellery.⁹ Evidence from the graves of the fifth to the seventh centuries shows that Roman bronze coins were often pierced and used as decorative spangles on clothes or as pendants,¹⁰ possibly with apotropaic connotations.¹¹

Even in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, when coin circulation was just starting with a net import of gold from the Continent,¹² contemporary gold coins from Byzantium, Merovingian France, and Visigothic Spain were still occasionally mounted with gold loops and suspended from festoons of beads or turned into other pieces of jewellery.¹³ Two important groups of coins mounted as pendants with suspension loops from the late sixth/early seventh century are the Canterbury St Martin's 'hoard' and the collection of six pieces from Faversham in Kent,¹⁴ a place-name combining the Latin word *faber*, (gold)smith, with the Anglo-Saxon suffix *hām*, suggesting perhaps some continuity in the art of metalwork from Roman to Anglo-Saxon times.¹⁵ Among the most spectacular pieces using coins as pendants is the early seventh-century necklace from Sarre, which includes four gold solidi.¹⁶

On the majority of the specimens pierced as pendants, the orientation of the obverse with the bust seems to have been a concern.¹⁷ This shows some interest

⁸ For an account of the problems of the transformation of the Roman Empire: Higham 1992. Webster and Brown 1997 present valuable comparative material.

⁹ However, there is some argument for unmounted coins lost at this period having been used in a monetary sense (*MoE* 35). Finds of broken objects and scraps of metal carefully threaded and kept suggest their use as token currency.

¹⁰ King 1988: 224. See also his argument concerning the use of other Roman coin finds from settlements at p. 227.

¹¹ Meaney 1981: 213 and 220.

¹² Metcalf 1988a: 231.

¹³ The fashion is thought to derive from contacts with the Merovingians and, through them, with Byzantium: *MoE* 47; Vierk 1978. Geake 1997: 108 sees a more direct influence from Byzantium. For a list of finds of Merovingian and Visigothic coins in England, other than those from Sutton Hoo: Rigold 1975, and note Metcalf's comment (*Metcalf* 1988a: 231).

¹⁴ *MoE* 23, nos. 5a–b and p. 53, nos. 34a–f.

¹⁵ Gelling 1978: 80.

¹⁶ *MoE* 48, no. 31b.

¹⁷ On the coin and bead necklace from Brighthampton (White 1988: fig. 43, p. 299) seven out of ten coins are pierced so as to present the wearer, not the onlooker, with the upright view of the bust. This form of 'private viewing' seems to have been widespread, as in the case of the Winkel pendant (Fig. 4.4), and as suggested by Anne Taylor for the orientation of the zoomorphic lobe terminals on cruciform brooches when worn (cf. MacGregor and Bolick 1993: 95–111).

in the iconography, though whether on account of its own artistic merits or for the magic virtues ascribed to the head, and in particular to one in profile, turning away its sight and hence the evil eye, is of course debatable.¹⁸ On coin pendants of the Christian period, the reverse with a cross was probably the preferred side for display,¹⁹ as was the case with the Wilton Cross.²⁰ It has been argued that such pendants would have been worn as specifically Christian protective amulets, not just as jewels.²¹

The proportion of finds of unperforated coins appears to increase in the Christian period,²² parallel with the sixth/seventh-century fashion for keeping coins in a purse.²³ The Sutton Hoo purse contained thirty-seven unperforated Merovingian gold coins minted between *c.* 575 and *c.* 620 (plus three blanks and two billets).²⁴ Grierson's interpretation of the hoard as a grand Charon's obol has not been universally accepted.²⁵ The tradition, of classical origin, later adopted by the Franks, is not common in Anglo-Saxon England,²⁶ and the coins might well represent a statement on the same lines as that made by the other exotic treasures that accompany the burial.²⁷ The sixteen up-to-date coins in bags from Finglesham and Garton-on-the Wolds deposited after the Conversion (*c.* 690–700 and *c.* 720–5) might represent a changing attitude to money, but the evidence is ambiguous.²⁸

Coins in Anglo-Saxon society must have enjoyed special prestige both before and after the introduction of native coinage. Their status can be compared to that of the medallions and bracteates produced by another coinless people, the Scandinavians, in response to contacts with the Roman world and its gold coinage. These were manufactured from the fourth century onwards, as direct copies of Roman *solidi* and their multiples, and were worn, in showy mounts, in a fashion derived from the Roman sporting of medallions and ranks of honour.²⁹ By transforming the image of the deified imperial ruler into that of their god Woden and incorporating symbols and runes from northern mythology, they were a means of showing religious and political allegiances and embraced new

¹⁸ Meaney 1981: 220. On the head as the seat of the soul: Harnham, Molleson, and Price 1981: 167. On the reverence paid to the head as bringing good luck: Thacker 1995: 102, for further bibliographical references.

¹⁹ Meaney 1981: 220–1.

²⁰ *MoE* 27, no. 12. In the Wilton Cross, the back of the jewel guards the upright orientation of the bust, whereas the front has the cross-on-steps reversed. It is possible that the jeweller might not have realized that the cross mounted in this way was upside-down, or one might consider this another instance of 'private viewing' for the wearer, as suggested in n. 17 above.

²¹ Meaney 1981: 221. The fact that some of the coins used sometimes had already been worn smooth in antiquity indicates that they were prized for their apotropaic virtues. See White 1988: 99.

²² Meaney 1981: 216; *MEC* 160; King 1988: 225.

²³ Owen-Crocker 1986: 125.

²⁴ Kent 1975.

²⁵ Grierson 1970, 1974.

²⁶ Geake 1997: 32.

²⁷ Care Evans 1994: 89.

²⁸ Geake 1997: 32.

²⁹ Hauck 1976; Magnus 1997.

ideas as well as advertising their owner's wealth and power in society.³⁰ It has been argued that the bracteates originally had a political function and also served as a sort of special-purpose money within a society of non-commercial transactions.³¹

Authority established through gifts, forging relationships and bonding individuals together, played an important role in the Germanic world, as testified by the title of *beagifa*, the ring-giver, often used to describe the king in *Beowulf*.³² Apart from being a convenient means of economic exchange, coins in early Anglo-Saxon society may have been appreciated as an exotic variant on the more usual prestigious gifts that played such a major role in social interactions.

The Beginning of Coinage: Gold Issues

From the second half of the sixth century the concentration of wealth in Kent, as witnessed by jewellery and coin finds, indicates how intense and profitable contacts were with the Continent, and with Merovingian Gaul in particular.³³ The archaeological evidence shows how far trade routes stretched and that the sea surrounding Britain, far from being a hindrance, facilitated contacts;³⁴ it is again through archaeology that the early importance of the ports of Sarre (on the Wantsum Channel) and Dover is evident.³⁵ However, the benefits of trade and the flow of Continental coinage were not restricted to Kent alone.³⁶

By the early seventh century, thanks to familiarization with coins, accumulation of precious metals, questions of prestige, and possibly because the demand for coins outdid the foreign supply, the earliest Anglo-Saxon coins began to be produced, some copying large Roman solidi, others the smaller Merovingian *tremissis*. Christianity also played an important role: it is symptomatic that the first coin-like object, which had been produced in England in the late sixth century, was a looped *tremissis* bearing the name of Bishop Liudhard, who accompanied the Merovingian princess Bertha to England on her marriage to Æthelberht of Kent.³⁷ This extraordinary piece is much celebrated because of its connections with early Christianity in Kent and the delicacy of its execution. Perhaps the earliest Anglo-Saxon coin intended to have a monetary function, a *tremissis* with the name of both the mint, Canterbury, and the moneyer, Eusebius, shows strong Frankish influence and may even have been struck from dies made in Francia.³⁸

³⁰ Andrén 1991: 253; Axboe 1991: 200.

³¹ Gaimster 1992: 12–13.

³² See the discussion in Chaney 1970: 148.

³³ Sutherland 1948: 25; Rigold 1975 on coin finds; Chadwick-Hawkes 1981 for Merovingian finds in Kent.

³⁴ Adelson 1957; Werner 1961; Verhulst 1970; Carver 1990; Milne 1990; Lebecq 1999.

³⁵ Chadwick-Hawkes 1981: 51. Sarre and Dover are mentioned as royal toll stations in charters of the early eighth century. Faversham may also have been a port. See Evison 1979: 61, and maps 2 and 3.

³⁶ Sutherland 1948: 24.

³⁷ Grierson 1979; Werner 1991. See Fig. 5.1.

³⁸ Sutherland 1948: 32; Grierson 1952; MEC 161; MoE 37, no. 24, where Archibald suggests that Eusebius might have been a cleric.

Of more robust Anglo-Saxon workmanship are the mid-seventh-century gold solidi copied from Roman originals, some with runic legends.³⁹

More sustained coin production began in the second quarter of the seventh century, as exemplified by the contrasting contents of two hoards, possibly divided by about twenty years. Whereas the Sutton Hoo purse (c.625) contains only Merovingian coins, the Crondall hoard (c.640) shows 70 per cent of the coins as Anglo-Saxon and the remainder Continental.⁴⁰ These Anglo-Saxon gold coins, modelled on contemporary Merovingian production, are commonly known as *thrýmsas*—but they are probably the *shillings* of Anglo-Saxon laws.⁴¹ The sixty-nine Anglo-Saxon coins from Crondall fall into twelve different types,⁴² and the numerous die-links within these, and with contemporary coins found elsewhere, suggest that at this stage, the second quarter of the seventh century, native coin production was quite small. Even taking account of the presence of imported Continental coins, the currency in the mid-seventh century must have been tiny, and the high-value gold coins must only have been used for special transactions.⁴³ The map of the circulation of Continental gold coins and of the first Anglo-Saxon issues in the first half of the seventh century extends from east Kent and Essex up the Thames and the east coast.⁴⁴

The third quarter of the same century witnessed an increase in coin production, but, parallel to this, a decrease in the gold content, which gradually fell from c.40 per cent in the latest coins from Crondall to 15 per cent or even less.⁴⁵ This debasement is parallel to events in Merovingian France, where in c.675 gold minting was suspended in favour of silver. A comparable weakening of the gold alloy used for Anglo-Saxon jewellery can be observed, even if its dating is less precise than that of the coinage.⁴⁶

Because of the paucity of die-links among the known coins, the ‘pale gold’ issues are believed to have been produced in slightly larger quantity, and, judging by the location of their finds, seem to have been concentrated mainly in Kent and East Anglia.⁴⁷ Among these, two transitional groups, bearing the names of the moneyers Pada and Vanimundus, will influence the successive issues of silver coins.⁴⁸

³⁹ Sutherland 1948: 51; MEC 158. On coins with runic inscriptions, see Blackburn 1991.

⁴⁰ For the Sutton Hoo coins: Kent 1975; Rigold 1975; for the Crondall hoard: Sutherland 1948. On Anglo-Saxon gold coins: Stewart 1978. Kent 1975 dates Sutton Hoo c.625 and associates it with Rædwald, though it could have been deposited any time in the 620s or even marginally earlier. Crondall is dated in MEC 127 ‘650 or a little earlier’, while Metcalf prefers c.635 × c.645 (*T&S* i. 31).

⁴¹ MEC 157.

⁴² *T&S* i. 30.

⁴³ MEC 161; *T&S* i. 37–8. It has been argued that the hoard had been assembled to pay a *wergild* (Grierson 1970; MEC 126).

⁴⁴ See maps in *T&S* i. 34–5. However, Metcalf (ibid. 33) points to the absence of Anglo-Saxon gold coins among the single-finds from East Anglia, contrasting it to the presence of foreign ones.

⁴⁵ MEC 163.

⁴⁶ Chadwick-Hawkes, Merrick, and Metcalf 1966: 120. Much as jewellery was often made with metal from old pieces gone out of fashion, it is often in the added elements, such as loops, that one finds standards matching the numismatic.

⁴⁷ *T&S* i, map p. 45.

⁴⁸ MEC 164; *T&S* i. 73–9 and 80–3.

The transition from pale gold shillings (i.e. ones heavily alloyed with silver) to silver pennies (also, if erroneously, known as *sceattas*)⁴⁹ was broadly contemporary with the Merovingian reform of the 670s. Although of similar weight and fabric, the new pennies were given distinctive designs and they mark a radical development in English monetary history.

Silver Issues

The earliest silver coinage seems to have been produced and to have circulated mainly in the south-east,⁵⁰ with the exception of the coins produced in Northumbria, which bear the name of King Aldfrith (685–704).⁵¹ Very little in the way of foreign coins appears to have come from the Continent during this so-called ‘Primary’ phase of the early silver pennies, c.675–700, to judge from the hoards and grave groups deposited in this period.⁵²

The beginning of the eighth century, however, saw a huge influx of coins from Frisia, mirroring the flourishing Anglo-Frisian trade at the time.⁵³ The Aston Rowant hoard (c.710) indicates the effect this had on the English currency, as only a quarter of the 350 coins in the hoard were Anglo-Saxon.⁵⁴ This phase, covering the first decade or so of the eighth century, is referred to as ‘Intermediate’. It heralds a further expansion in coin circulation in areas such as East Anglia, the East Midlands, the Thames Valley, and the south-west, which in turn stimulates a proliferation of minting activity into Wessex, Essex, East Anglia, and Mercia, leading to the ‘Secondary’ phase of the silver coinage.⁵⁵

Artistically, this is the golden age of the coins. Apart from the sheer quantity and variety of production, for a period of about thirty years we are confronted with an extraordinary flourishing of inventiveness on the part of the designers and die-cutters, who introduced many new motifs to their repertoire. The numerous specimens show relatively few die-links, suggesting that it was indeed a large coinage, and the profusion and location of the finds (including sites by roads, rivers, and trackways, as possible fairs, ports, or *wics*) indicate a thriving commercial function for the coins.⁵⁶

However, whereas the Primary and Intermediate issues maintained a high

⁴⁹ On this misnomer, now quite established, see MEC 15 and 157.

⁵⁰ Metcalf 1984a; MEC 167; *T&S* i. 67.

⁵¹ Until the 730s, with the coins of King Eadberht in Northumbria, and the second half of the eighth century with King Beonna in East Anglia and King Offa of Mercia, Anglo-Saxon coins do not bear the name of kings, but follow the Merovingian example of indicating solely the names of moneyers and of mint places. The series of Aldfrith, a king famous for his learning, is an exception, for which the only precedent is to be found in the gold coins with the legend *avdvarld reges*, ascribed to Eadbald of Kent (616–40). For these, see Fig. 4.25 and Fig. 2.32.

⁵² MEC 167; *T&S* i. 63–72.

⁵³ MEC 167. For the commercial relations between England and Frisia: Belaiew 1932; Jellema 1955; Lebecq 1983, 1990, and 1997b. See also pp. 176–77 for a fuller discussion.

⁵⁴ Kent 1972; MEC 167–8.

⁵⁵ MEC 168; Metcalf 1988a: 236–9.

⁵⁶ Metcalf 1974: 1–3; Hinton 1986: 15; MEC 169.

silver content (*c.*90–5 per cent), the Secondary phase saw a progressive debasement down to 20 per cent or less.⁵⁷ By the middle of the eighth century we are confronted with the virtual collapse of the currency in the south, with output falling, if not altogether ceasing at many mints.⁵⁸ Northumbria was not immediately affected, probably on account of its relative isolation, and East Anglia also seems to have been an exception, with King Beonna (749–58 or later), and King Æthelberht I (died 794) managing to raise standards and production in the middle of the century.⁵⁹ Their coins were modelled on contemporary Northumbrian issues, which were of finer silver (40–60 per cent), and cited the king's name,⁶⁰ while keeping the East Anglian tradition of indicating the moneyers' names.⁶¹

Offa's Coinage

In the mid-750s Pepin the Short (751–68) had re-established tighter control over the Frankish coinage, bringing it under stricter state monopoly. The coins were thinner and broader, with restored standards of weight and fineness, and incorporating a royal monogram or legend and the mint name.⁶² This was also the pattern of the new Anglo-Saxon coinage under Offa of Mercia (757–96),⁶³ but with two fundamental differences: on the Anglo-Saxon coins the choice of designs remained freer and more artistic than on their Carolingian counterparts, and in addition to the king they named the moneyers, but not the mint.⁶⁴ The interest in monetary developments in the Frankish kingdom mirrors commercial links generating the need for some uniformity in the coinage,⁶⁵ although Offa's coins were always lighter.

The majority of coins found in this period are in King Offa's name, and they are outstanding in their variety and artistic quality, especially with regard to his portraits and those of his wife Cynethryth.⁶⁶ Thirty-seven moneyers are believed to have worked for him at three mint places (London, Canterbury, and somewhere in East Anglia, possibly Ipswich), and one of them, Wilred, was also one of Beonna's moneyers. Offa's reformed coinage on light, broad flans is likely to have begun *c.*760–5 in London, with an awareness of developments in

⁵⁷ MEC 168 and 172. Peter Northover has performed electron probe microanalyses (EPMA) on a large sample of coins (*T&S* iii. 660–79).

⁵⁸ MEC 187.

⁵⁹ Archibald 1985 and Archibald, Fenwick, and Cowell 1995.

⁶⁰ *T&S* iii. 576–93.

⁶¹ MEC 271 and 278.

⁶² *Ibid.* 204.

⁶³ Blunt 1961; Chick 1997. A very useful analytical survey of Mercian coinage is presented in Williams 2001a: see particularly pp. 211–19 for a discussion of Offa's times.

⁶⁴ MEC 278.

⁶⁵ As testified by the well-known letter of 796 from Charlemagne to Offa, concerning merchants, *petra nigra* (now generally accepted probably to refer to Tournai marble: Welch 2001: 157), and cloaks (Dümmler 1895: no. 100; Whitelock 1968: no. 197).

⁶⁶ See Figs. 2.23a and b.

Francia and East Anglia.⁶⁷ Towards the end of his reign, *c.*792, a new reformed coinage was introduced, and coins were struck on larger, heavier flans, with more standardized designs, stifling the artistic flair of the earlier coinage. The broad flan penny established by Offa remained the principal denomination, with only minor changes, until the fourteenth century.⁶⁸

Manufacturing of Coins

The idea of impressing a design on precious metal to produce a coin—an object giving concrete expression to monetary values—is very ancient, and carried out in order to guarantee its weight and standard and to distinguish issues from those of other locations.⁶⁹ Designs can be obtained either by casting metals in prepared moulds or by transferring the design to pieces of metal through the blow of a hammer (the so-called *hammered coinage*), this latter method being preferred in the West, as more difficult to counterfeit.⁷⁰ The making of hammered coinage involved three processes: the cutting of the *dies* (the parts carrying the required design), the preparation of the blank metal pieces to be impressed (the *flans*, which must be of a specified metal alloy and of consistent quality and weight), and the actual striking

The eight early medieval coin dies so far retrieved are bars several centimetres long, made in two sections: a shank of wrought iron, which could be replaced if worn, and a die-cap of carbon steel, which carried the design. The manufacturing technique and the handling of the metal show great sophistication.⁷¹ In order to have designs on the two faces of a coin, a blank flan was placed between two engraved dies, so that when the top one was struck with a hammer, both sides would be impressed. The lower one, the *pile* or anvil die, was tapered so as to be fixed firmly into a block of wood, and carried on its die face the design for the *obverse* of the coin. The upper die, the *trussel*, used for the design of the *reverse* of the coin, had a flat head to receive the blows of the hammer. A reversed image of the desired designs and inscriptions was made on the die faces by means of different types of tools: broad- or narrow-headed graving tools and punches. Graving tools would be used to carve away at the metal freehand, while punches with various ready-made patterns could simply be hammered into the die.⁷²

⁶⁷ Chick 1997.

⁶⁸ MEC 277 and 280.

⁶⁹ The earliest coins were struck in western Asia Minor in the seventh century bc and were small pieces of electrum (a natural alloy of silver and gold) stamped with a single design. Nearly a hundred of these were found at the temple of Artemis at Ephesus. Greek tradition, backed by the historian Herodotus, records the Lydians as the first people to have struck and used coinage of silver and gold. Grierson 1975: 9–10; Carradice 1995: 21.

⁷⁰ Grierson 1975: 94 ff.

⁷¹ Archibald, Lang, and Milne 1995: 175.

⁷² For a description of the various stages involved in the striking of hammered coinage, see Grierson 1975: 100.