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RETHINKING THE EARLY PENNIES OF THE *MONITASCORVM* AND *SEDE* TYPES

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Four main types of early penny bearing the legend *MONITASCORVM*, or some variant thereof, were struck during the secondary phase of production *c.* 710–60.¹ One pairs an obverse depicting the legend *DELVNDONIA* ('from London') around a draped and diademed right-facing bust with a reverse depicting the legend *SCORVM* beneath a so-called 'porcupine'.² Another pairs an obverse depicting the legend *MONITASCORVM* around a draped and diademed right-facing bust with a reverse depicting a so-called 'porcupine' without any associated legend (Figure 1).³ A third pairs an obverse depicting the legend *+MTASCORVM* about a square enclosing an annulet with a reverse depicting three pellets in the field to each side of a square enclosing a saltire with annulets as terminals.⁴ The fourth pairs an obverse depicting the legend *MONITASCORVM* around a torc enclosing a backwards-looking bird with the same reverse depicting three pellets in the field to each side of a square enclosing a saltire with annulets as terminals.⁵ In 1991, Archibald proposed that the legend *MONITASCORVM* should be read as *MONITA SCORVM* and expanded as *MONITA S(AN)C(T)ORVM*, meaning 'money of the saints', and this reading has won widespread acceptance since.⁶ In fact, no-one seems to have offered any alternative interpretation. There are, however, two slight problems with this interpretation that ought to give one pause to thought.



Fig. 1. Early penny of *MONITASCORVM* type (twice actual size) (Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 114 (13 May 2020), lot 1234)

The first problem is that the correct spelling of the medieval Latin term for 'money' was *moneta*, not *monita*.⁷ Similarly, the correct spelling of the cognate term for 'moneyer' was *monetarius*, not *monitarius*. Certainly, misspellings of these terms exist. A unique gold shilling struck at Canterbury *c.* 600 depicts the legend *EVSEBIIMONITA*, abbreviating *Eusebii monetarii* 'of the moneyer Eusebius'.⁸ A later type of shilling from the substantive gold phase *c.* 630–50 depicts the legend *WITMENMONITA* abbreviating *Witmen monetarii* 'of the moneyer Witmen'.⁹ Similarly, some Merovingian *tremisses* of the so-called national series struck during the late sixth and seventh centuries also bear the legend *MONIT* or *MONITA* abbreviating either *monita* 'money' or *monetarius* 'moneyer'.¹⁰ However, the gold shillings with the legend *MONITA* date from about a century before the early pennies under discussion and the

¹ I prefer 'early penny' to the traditional 'sceat' following Naismith, *MEC* 8, 67–8.

² Naismith 2014, Group 1A = Abramson 2021, Variety 24–50. The significance in what is now conventionally referred to as a 'porcupine' is not clear, although it is generally accepted that it derives from a bust. See Gannon 2003, 177–9.

³ Naismith 2014, Group 1B = Abramson 2021, Variety 24–30.

⁴ Naismith 2014, Group 2A = Abramson 2021, Variety 24–20.

⁵ Naismith 2014, Group 2B = Abramson 2021, Variety 24–10.

⁶ See Archibald in Webster and Backhouse 1991, 66 (no. 56). It has been accepted by, for example, Williams 2008, 30; Gannon 2013, 123; Naismith 2014, 92; Abramson 2021, 116. It had previously been assumed that *MONITA* referred to a mint or moneyer so that the letters *SCORVM* probably concealed a real name.

⁷ Howlett 2001, 1829.

⁸ Sutherland 1948, catalogue no. 2.

⁹ Sutherland 1948, catalogue no. 57.

¹⁰ See, for example, Belfort 499, 500, 511, 512, 515, 516, 519 (Orléans); 3502, 3508, 3522 (palace); 4982–87 (Quentovic).

general standard of Latin literacy may be assumed to have greatly increased over this time in tandem with the increased Christianization of Britain. As for the Merovingian *tremisses*, they are of much earlier date also, and they are as likely to preserve the correct spelling MONET as MONIT.

The second problem concerns the function of the legend MONITASCORVM. It has traditionally been assumed that, if one translates MONITA as ‘money’, the SCORVM element ought to identify where or by whom these coins were struck.¹¹ One possibility is that these coins were struck by or at some institution named in honour of two or more ‘saints’, probably a church or monastery. Alternatively, this body may simply have possessed the relics of two or more saints rather than have been explicitly named in their honour. The difficulty here is that, as Naismith notes, ‘double dedications were common in early medieval England’ and ‘many minsters ... possessed links to numerous saints’.¹² In other words, this legend is of little value in identifying where or by whom these coins were struck. Finally, given that each of the two elements of the legend could have been more severely abbreviated in order to create room for abbreviations of the names of these saints, and that the names of these saints ought to have been of prime importance if these coins had been struck at a body dedicated to saints, one has to question whether this legend was really intended to identify where or by whom these coins were struck.

While it is not impossible that MONITASCORVM means ‘money of the saints’, this interpretation is not as assured as is usually assumed, and is certainly not the only possibility. Here one notes that *monita* is itself a Latin noun meaning ‘teachings’, so that MONITASCORVM could also be translated as ‘the teachings of the saints’.¹³ This phrase makes good sense, so there is no need to rush to assumption that *monita* must represent a misspelling of *moneta* instead. However, the translation of *sanctus* as ‘saint’ rather than ‘holy’ can be misleading. The modern English ‘saint’ suggests someone who enjoyed extensive veneration after his or her death on account of their extreme holiness, but the term *sanctus* was in fact used much more widely than this of people who never achieved such veneration. Furthermore, the adjective SCORVM may qualify some noun left to be understood, perhaps *patrum* ‘of the fathers’, so that MONITASCORVM might be better translated as ‘the teachings of the holy (fathers?)’ rather than ‘the teachings of the saints’. In either case, the suggestion is that the ‘teachings’ referred to enjoyed universal Christian agreement, that they were not peculiar to this or that saint or other holy figure. But why should any group of coins display a reference to such ‘teachings’? At one level, this is obvious, that the intention was to proclaim that these coins were struck in accordance with the teachings of the church, and one should probably assume the preposition *iuxta* ‘in accordance with’ before this legend, or something to the same effect. But what exactly did it mean to claim that these coins were struck ‘(in accordance with) the teachings of the holy (fathers?)’, or similar?

The fact that the phrase *monita sanctorum* ‘the teachings of the holy (fathers?)’, whether abbreviated as MONITASCORVM, MTASCORVM, or simply SCORVM, occurs in association with four very different designs, a draped and diademed bust, a torc enclosing a backwards-looking bird, a square enclosing an annulet, and a so-called ‘porcupine’, suggests that there is no connection between it and any of these designs. This means that it probably possesses some broader reference to the production or use of these coins instead. As far as the production of these coins is concerned, the language suggests something of more universal application than any set of local rules concerning the production of coinage in a particular Anglo-Saxon diocese or kingdom. Furthermore, one would more naturally expect the ‘teachings’ of the

¹¹ Strictly speaking, it could also mean money that was struck to be given to the saints, that is, to some body dedicated to these saints. Abramson 2021, 116, seems to suggest this when he refers to these coins as ‘tribute’.

¹² Naismith 2014, 92. Nevertheless, he proceeds to suggest that they may have been struck at old St Paul’s cathedral in London in particular, and that the *sancti* are St Paul and St Eorcenwald (d. 693), a former bishop whose relics were preserved at St Paul’s.

¹³ Glare 2012, 1243, translates the Classical Latin *monita* as ‘advice, warnings, precepts’. Curiously, Howlett 2013 does not include it. Nevertheless, it was commonly used of church teachings by authors such as Bede. See, for example, Bede, *HE* 2.12, 3.25, 4.25, 4.27, 5.21.

church, however exactly described, to refer to moral or doctrinal matters rather than the technical issues of coin-production. This leaves the use of these coins, the purpose for which they were produced. Here one notes the importance of almsgiving in early medieval Christianity as one of the principal means by which to atone for one's sins as repeatedly stressed in numerous sermons, saints' lives, and other texts.¹⁴ It is possible, therefore, that the legend *MONITASCORVM* proclaims that these coins were struck (*iuxta*) *monita s(an)c(t)orum (patrum)* 'in accordance with) the teachings of the holy (fathers)' in order to highlight the fact that they had been specifically struck for the purpose of almsgiving.¹⁵ This would explain why so few of them seem to have been struck relatively speaking. Furthermore, there are important parallels to this striking of special coins for the specific purpose of almsgiving, even if some of them occurred much later. The first Carolingian king, Pippin the Short (751–68), struck a denier depicting the term *ELIMOSINA* 'alms' in full on the reverse.¹⁶ King Alfred the Great (871–99) struck silver multiples displaying the reverse legend *ELIMO*, in abbreviation of the same term, sometime late during his reign.¹⁷ As their legends confirm, these types were struck for distribution as alms.¹⁸ Finally, the same impulse revealed itself once more about one thousand years later when the Royal Mint began striking special coins for distribution to the poor by the monarch on Holy Thursday, so-called 'Maundy money'.¹⁹



Fig. 2. Early penny of SEDE type (twice actual size) (EMC 2019.0031; Spink & Sons, The Tony Abramson Collection of Dark Age Coinage – Part I (18 March 2021), lot 66)

A final point is necessary concerning two types of early penny bearing what appears to be the Latin legend *SEDE* on the obverse, since these have often been discussed in conjunction with the *MONITASCORVM* types, partly due to their common display of literate Latin legends at a time when this was highly unusual and partly due to the fact that these legends could be interpreted to refer to similar ecclesiastical origins.²⁰ One type pairs an obverse depicting the legend *SEDE* around a central cross where the letters are separated by crosses with a reverse depicting a snake with radiating 'quills' encircling a central cross (Figure 2).²¹ Another type pairs an obverse depicting the legend *SEDE* around a central cross where the letters are separated by annulets with a reverse depicting a so-called 'porcupine'.²² Naismith groups the *SEDE* types with the *MONITASCORVM* types on the basis that both legends prove an eccle-

¹⁴ On the importance of almsgiving in early medieval England and Francia, see Shuler 2010.

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that a common formula in tenth- and eleventh-century wills from Catalonia recording money given in alms is phrased similarly: *Audientes predicacionem et monita sanctorum patrum, quia elemosina a morte liberat animam* 'Heeding the preaching and teachings of the holy fathers, that almsgiving frees the soul from death'. See Zimmerman 2001, 348.

¹⁶ Morrison and Grunthal 1967, 83, no. 53.

¹⁷ See Dolley 1954; Naismith 2012, 282–4. Gannon 2018, 137, suggests that some of the more unusual and carefully executed types of early penny 'may have been minted as celebratory issues, or for some special purpose', but does not explore the topic further. Theuws 2018, 71 argues similarly.

¹⁸ As to why those responsible for striking the *MONITASCORVM* types did not prefer to use the more explicit term *ELIMOSINA* instead, they may have intended, as a referee suggested, a play on the similarity between the terms *monita* and *moneta*.

¹⁹ On the history of this practice, see Robinson 1992.

²⁰ It is not certain that these types do bear the legend *SEDE*, since there is no indication which letter starts this legend and the apparent letter D may be an A instead. It is not even clear that these letters were intended to be read together as a single word rather than in abbreviation of two or more words. However, no-one has yet proposed any other reading of these letters that makes sense. A referee pointed out that the S could be doing double service so that the legend might actually read *SEDES* instead. This could be nominative singular, nominative plural, or accusative plural, but the implications of any of these readings remain unclear.

²¹ Naismith 2014, Group 3A = Abramson 2021, Varieties 93–10, 93–20.

²² Naismith 2014, Group 3B = Abramson 2021, Variety 93–30.

siastical origin for these coins. In the case of the SEDE types, he reaches this conclusion as a result of reading SEDE as the ablative singular of the Latin noun *sedes* ‘seat’, where this term was commonly used in reference to the ‘seat’ of a bishop, that is, his cathedral throne, so that SEDE means ‘at the seat (of the bishop)’.²³ While this is possible, one wonders why some effort was not made to name the cathedral or the town where it was located instead. Furthermore, it is possible to read a very different meaning into SEDE. It may equally well be the present imperative active singular of the verb *sedere* ‘to sit, rest, stay still’, meaning ‘Stay still!’.²⁴ But what would the significance of such a command be? Two possible answers suggest themselves. One possible answer lies in the depiction of the snake encircling a cross on one of the reverse types associated with this legend, where the snake had long been regarded a symbol of evil in Christian tradition.²⁵ This combination of obverse and reverse could suggest that the snake is being told to stop, to stay still, by the power of the cross.²⁶ If that is the case, then the legend was probably originally intended to be used with the reverse depicting the snake encircling a cross rather than that depicting a ‘porcupine’. An alternative possibility is that the reader is being urged to stay still in accordance with God’s instruction at Psalm 45:11 (Vulgate), ‘Be still and know that I am God’, that is, that he or she is being called to prayer.²⁷

It is my argument, therefore, that the legend MONITASCORVM may reveal why rather than where, or by whom, the coins with this legend were struck. Of course, it remains possible that they may have been struck at ecclesiastical sites, exactly as inferred when this legend was translated as ‘the money of the saints’ rather than as ‘(in accordance with) the teachings of the holy (fathers)’, but this is no longer a necessary inference from the legend itself.²⁸ They may well have been struck by some secular authority instead. Indeed, some of them may even have been struck for distribution to the poor by an early eighth-century king in anticipation of the ‘Maundy money’ of a much later era. Similarly, it remains entirely possible that coins with the legend SEDE, perhaps better translated as ‘Stay still!’ rather than as ‘at the seat (of the bishop)’, were struck at the seat of a bishop, but it is no longer a necessary inference from this legend either.

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²³ Naismith 2014, 92, following Gannon 2003, 189.

²⁴ Glare 2012, 1901.

²⁵ On the snake as a symbol of evil, see Ogden 2013, 187–239. Gannon 2003, 136–8, interprets motif-encircling snakes in an entirely positive fashion. While it may well be true that in some cases they are depicted encircling protectively around some object, I suggest that in other cases, particularly when they seem to surround a cross, they are in fact being held at bay or subdued by the power of the cross.

²⁶ For a discussion of several types of early penny where the obverse and reverse seem to be thematically matched, see Gannon 2018.

²⁷ One should note, however, that neither translation of the psalms by Jerome uses the verb *sedere* here. In his *iuxta LXX*, he translates: *vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus*. In his *iuxta Hebraicum*, he translates: *cessate et cognoscite quoniam ego sum Deus*.

²⁸ Theuws 2018 argues strongly that minsters played a key role in the production of sceattas due to their need to pay for imported goods, wine in particular.

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'SHAGGY HEAD' MEROVINGIAN DENIERS

MARC PARVERIE AND ERIC VANDENBOSSCHE

This note is prompted by two English finds of Merovingian *deniers* (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. 'Shaggy Head' Merovingian *deniers*: (a) EMC 2022.0029; (b) EMC 2022.0036 (both twice actual size)

Obv. Pseudo-legend: + F [...] O ϕ Λ ∞, degeneration of a shaggy head on a large ∞.

Rev. Pseudo-legend: + L I – Y Λ, cross with pellets in the lower quarters.

Found Fyfield, Hampshire, 22 March 2020 (EMC 2022.0029). Weight: 0.84 g. Figure 1a.

Obv. [...] T – E [...], bust right with a shaggy head partially covered with pellets, a round eye and a prominent nose; the garment is A-shaped.

Rev. A2QVOBE∞V (retrograde), cross with pellets in each quarter.

Found Dorchester area, Dorset, 18 January 2022 (EMC 2022.0036). Weight: 0.8 g. Figure 1b.

This series is characterised by a shaggy bust usually facing right, partially covered with pellets, with a round eye and a prominent nose; the garment is A-shaped. On the reverse, the cross is cantoned with pellets. In a first group,¹ the reverse legend around the cross consists of nine letters in which the following letter sequences generally appear: VS / VD, oBE and RCA / RGA with a large A with chevron. The complete legend could be something like VDoBERSCA or variants. Even the two coins from the Nice-Cimiez hoard² belong to this group, since their retrograde legends, which are partially off the flan, VS [...] RC / GA show that four letters are missing rather than just one (E). The mint name clearly cannot be VSERCA, the *castrum* of Uzerche in the *civitas* of Limoges, whose name is too short. The obverse legend is read + TE – LAF<> (with a long diamond-shaped O) by Prou, Deloche and Depeyrot,³ and as + TE –

¹ Parvérie 2014, groups A1–2, B1 and D together. At least sixteen specimens are known, mostly from detectorists or the numismatic market. Most of them are in private collections. Two of the four coins found in England belong to this group: EMC 2022.0036 and EMC 2014.0155.

² Morel-Fatio 1890, 181–2.

³ Prou 1892, nos 2771–2, Deloche 1863, nos 129–30 and Depeyrot 2001, 132, no. 1