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NEW LIGHT ON THE PRE-1760 CONEY STREET (YORK)
FIND OF COINS OF THE DUURSTED MINT

by *Michael Dolley*

In the 1957 *Numismatic Chronicle* (p. 199), Dr. D. M. Metcalf has drawn attention to an important eighteenth-century discovery of Carolingian coins from Coney Street in York. A too literal acceptance of his source would suggest that Anglo-Saxon silver pennies also were present in the find, but, as we shall see, there is some reason to think that all the silver coins were of foreign origin, the native element being confined to a corroded mass of copper and/or brass *stycas*. That some of the silver coins were identified in the eighteenth century as Anglo-Saxon would appear to rest mainly on the circumstance that a few could be claimed to read *LOTHARIVS REX*, the Lothaire in question being equated with the Hlothere who is now thought to have ruled in Kent from 673 until 685. The attribution is patently wrong, and not the least of the merits of Dr. Metcalf's remarks is his thorough demolition of the myth, but still much about the find remains mysterious, and not least the circumstance that in the Carolingian series any combination of an obverse legend *LOTHARIVS REX* with a *CHRISTIANA RELIGIO* reverse is something quite exceptionally rare.

Dr. Metcalf himself has drawn attention to the existence in the British Museum trays of a coin on which the obverse legend could be read *LOTHARIVS REX*, the coin in question being presumably *Sylloge* 92 with obverse legend *+LOTHARIVS REX*, though almost certainly this coin purchased through Pfister on the Continent in 1857 does not derive from the Coney Street hoard of a century earlier¹. What there does seem to be, however, is some quite independent evidence that Dr. Metcalf's instinct was unerring when he sought to associate the Coney Street hoard with the middle years of the ninth century. It is too often forgotten that the Leeds University purchase in 1954 of the Winchester Cathedral cabinet restored to Yorkshire a collection of Yorkshire provenance — William Eyre (1699—1764) who bequeathed his cabinet to the Cathedral Library in perpetuity being of Yorkshire extraction and his English coins having a strong North Country flavour. In the Eyre cabinet there are

precisely 5 Carolingian coins. One is an *obolus* of Melle of a type that is usually associated with Charles the Bald, and seems a little later in date than the remaining 4 coins which are all *denarii*. It is not impossible, then, that the *obolus* should derive from a late ninth- or early tenth-century hoard, and one has only to glance at the Cuerdale hoard to realize to what extent these later issues of Melle circulated among the Viking contemporaries of Ælfred the Great (870—901) and Edward the Elder (901—924). It is the 4 *denarii*, however, which present a pattern as remarkable as exceptional. There are 2 which are of Louis the Pious (806—840) or, more accurately perhaps, bear his name, and both belong to the *CHRISTIANA RELIGIO* issue [*Figs. a & b*].



The first coin is noteworthy for its omission of all title, but the full implications of this will be discussed by Prof. K. F. Morrison elsewhere, and are not strictly relevant to the theme of the present note. It is interesting to note, though, that Dr. H. Enno van Gelder suggests that the phenomenon is one connected with the Lower Rhine and with Trier in particular. The remaining 2 coins both purport to be of Lothaire I (840—855), and, though of different types, both have the mint-signature of Duurstede [*Figs. c & d*]. It is indeed difficult not to conclude that all 4 coins derive from one and the same find when the provenance is so early, and the impression given that all may have been struck in the same general area and at about the same time. One may even go further inasmuch as finds of Carolingian coins from Great Britain and Ireland in which ninth-century coins predominate are far from common, and, stressing the fact that Eyre was collecting at the right date and had Yorkshire connections, claim that the obvious provenance for the 4 *denarii* in the Eyre cabinet is the Coney Street hoard from York discovered in or shortly before 1760.

The publication of the British Museum *Sylloge of Carolingian Coins* means that there is now available an additional argument in support of the hypothesis that the composition of the Coney Street find was what the assumption that the Eyre *denarii* derive from it might lead us to expect. In 1818 the English National Collection was fortunate enough to receive the so-called Banks Collection, a particularly choice cabinet of coins of many periods and countries which had been built up over a number of years by the wife and sister of the celebrated Sir Joseph Banks (1783—1820). Of their coins 38 are Carolingian, and the following table shows how they are divided chronologically, the first figure in each line giving the actual number of pieces under each head, while the percentage in the second column represents the proportion which the aforesaid total bears to the British Museum's present holding of coins of the class in question:

Pippin & Charlemagne	2	7.4 %
Louis the Pious	14	26.0 %
Lothaire I *	5	41.7 %
All later reigns	17	6.8 %

* including some pieces certainly posthumous.

Granted that the British Museum collection is dominated by a selection as judicious as extensive from the great Cuerdale hoard of 1840, this weight of coins of Louis the Pious and of Lothaire I in the Banks cabinet must surely be deemed likewise to reflect the accident of discovery. That the source should be once again the eighteenth-century Coney Street hoard from York may seem suggested very strongly by the following table which breaks down the Banks coins of Louis the Pious and of Lothaire into the following groups:

	Duurstede	Christiana Religio	Other types
Louis the Pious	1	4	9
Lothaire I	3	1	1

Surely it cannot be coincidence that almost exactly half of the Banks coins in the names of these rulers belong to the two classes which already there was reason to associate with the Coney Street find, and it may not seem too far-fetched a supposition that this York provenance attaches to most if not all of the coins recorded in the first two columns.

There is a temptation, indeed, to carry this line of argument yet further where the English National Collection is concerned. For example, there is still another Louis the Pious coin *ex Banks* which is of *Christiana Religio* type, an *obolus* (*Sylloge* 74), while another eighteenth-century cabinet, that of Charles Townley (1737—1800) is the source of no fewer than 5 *denarii* of the selfsame issue (*Sylloge* 52—55 and 76). Among the Lothaire coins, too, there is a Duurstede *denarius* (*Sylloge* 83) which might well go back to an eighteenth-century origin, but the present writer would prefer not to spoil what it is hoped may be thought a good case by special pleading. There is nothing, for example, in our original authorities to suggest that the silver coins found at Coney Street were not all of one and the same denomination, while the Townley coins were much more plausibly acquired by him on the Continent and may be supposed to reflect an antiquarian interest in the strongly classical type of the reverse. Significantly, too, there are no particular affinities of style with the coins believed to be from the Coney Street hoard, and they appear to belong to a quite different period and milieu. The Lothaire coin, indeed, although of suspiciously low weight, is the only piece additional to the Banks coins which could possibly derive from the York find in question, and even its acceptance as such scarcely adds substantial support to a line of argument which must stand or fall on very much more judicious premises.

The prime suggestion of this note, then, is that we can now be reasonably certain that the Lothaire coins found in or shortly before 1760 at Coney Street in York were of a class more or less firmly associated with Lothaire I though in part at least posthumous. Accordingly there must now be made some minor modifications of the attributions which were suggested by Dr. Metcalf in his original publication, and by Professor Morrison and the present writer in their 1964 listing (*BNJ* 32 (1963), pp. 75—87) of those hoards from Great Britain and Ireland which are on record as containing one or more Carolingian coins, though it should perhaps be pointed out that in neither case was the Lothaire II attribution meant to be other than tentative in the extreme. Probably, too, one should bring back a little, but only a very little, the date of concealment of the Coney Street find which has been suggested on p. 48 of the recent British Museum *Sylloge of Hiberno-Norse Coins*.

Paradoxically as it may be thought, it is this modified dating which now inclines the present writer to even greater confidence that his *Sylloge* was right when it asserted that English silver pennies were absent from the

Coney Street find, and this despite positive statements to the contrary in the early authorities which have been mustered by Dr. Metcalf. On any telling it would now appear that the Coney Street hoard was concealed after rather than before the middle of the ninth century — the Lothaire pieces have late features, for example, the blundering of the legends, which make them almost certainly posthumous as far as Lothaire I is concerned, and if anything is stressed by the early account it is that the two finds from Coney Street, the silver coins and the mass of corroded *stycas*, were associated. Granted that the *Hiberno-Norse Sylloge* may have erred in dating so late the Hexham hoard, the fact remains that the run of *styca* hoards, and in particular those from York itself, are to be associated with the 860s.

The interest of this for the student of the English series is that a date in the middle of the ninth century has implications for the nature of any silver penny content which simply cannot be ignored. For practical purposes there was no silver coinage of Northumbria after the *sceatta* was debased early in the ninth century until the Vikings struck their pennies on a Continental model shortly before 900. In other words, if English silver pennies were present in the Coney Street hoard, it must be supposed that they were pennies of the adjacent kingdom of Mercia, and the strongest candidates would be coins of Ceolwulf I (821—823), Beornwulf (823—825), Ludica (825—827), Wiglaf (827—840) and Berhtwulf (840—852). Not a single coin of any of these rulers figures in the Banks collection, nor in the Eyre cabinet, and a glance at the recent definitive account of the coinage of Mercia in the period c. 796—860 (BNJ 32 (1963), pp. 1—74) should make it clear that there is no obvious pool of unprovenanced coins to give colour to any theory that there might have occurred a major discovery of such pieces in the eighteenth century. The names of these princes, too, were — and indeed still are — names to conjure with where Anglo-Saxon numismatics is concerned, and it seems unlikely in the extreme that an eighteenth-century antiquary could have failed to recognize them with a shout of triumph. It is precisely in this connection that we should recall just how blundered are the legends that appear on the Lothaire coins *ex Eyre* (IOTAMVSIPERAT and HLOTIARIVSHPE) and *ex Banks* (HIOTIAIVSHEIA, IOTAMVSIPERAT and IOTAMVSIPIPERAT), while the amateur of two centuries ago could be pardoned who failed to recognize the name of Louis or Lewis in HLVDVVICVS. Those who examined the Coney Street hoard would have been out of their depth, and only too anxious to seize on anything that might illumine their per-

plexity. That the silver coins were not hopelessly corroded is shown by their recognition of *Hlotarius* as a personal name, mistaken though they were when they identified the bearer as Hlothere, and here it should be remembered that the epigraphy of English coins of the ninth century is generally straightforward and presents very few difficulties. It seems, to the present writer at least, impossible that a name Ceolwulf, Ludica or Wiglaf would not have been immediately recognized, and the fact that so much attention was paid to the coin alleged to read *LOTHARIVS REX* must suggest that Drake and his *confrères* already were making heavy weather of the run of the coins, surely an almost decisive argument that the names of the ninth-century English kings did not appear upon them.

The copper and/or brass *stycas* found at Coney Street would suggest a date of concealment after 850, and perhaps after 860². Equally they suggest a *terminus ante quem* around 870. Perfectly consistent with the tenor of this evidence is the presumptive date of the Lothaire and *CHRISTIANA RELIGIO* coins in the Eyre cabinet, and the writer is particularly indebted to Dr. Enno van Gelder for allowing him to quote his verbal opinion on the coins which is that they should be assigned to the second half of the ninth century. In other words we may safely accept without reservation the contemporary evidence that the two lots of coins were found together on the same occasion. One understands that any dating-evidence is welcome to our Dutch colleagues where the ninth-century issues of Duurstede are concerned, and the present writer has especial pleasure in offering this paper to his Dutch colleagues in the Royal Coin-Cabinet at the Hague since it was an invitation to participate in the festivities of the 150th anniversary of that collection which gave him an opportunity of discussing the problems presented by the Eyre and Banks parcels with Dr. van Gelder and with Drs. G. van der Meer. The evidence is not perhaps conclusive, but illustration of provenanced coins seems always worthwhile, and especially where the *CHRISTIANA RELIGIO* series is concerned, while it may be thought by no means unsatisfactory that we are now able to add Duurstede to the not overlong canon of Carolingian mints of which ninth- as opposed to eighth- or tenth-century coins have certainly been found in England.

¹ R.H.M. Dolley & K. F. Morrison, *The Carolingian Coins in the British Museum*, London 1966.

² The duration of the *styca* coinage has been established with fair precision by Mr. C. S. S. Lyon, cf. *British Numismatic Journal*, 28 (1956), pp. 227—242, the issue beginning "probably not before 830" and petering out not later than "855" and perhaps as early as "850 or 851". One major hoard seems to have been concealed as early as 845, the quite exceptional find from Hexham, but other hoards seem all to belong to the period c. 855, and there seems really no reason to dissociate the Coney Street find from so well-attested and close-knit a grouping. In theory, of course, the "late" finds might fall even later, but an absolute *terminus ante quem* would seem to be afforded by the Viking capture of York in 867.

SAMENVATTING

Nieuw licht op een vondst te York (voor 1760) van munten uit Duurstede — In 1957 vestigde Dr. Metcalf de aandacht op een summier bericht over een 18e eeuwse vondst van Karolingische munten in de Coney Street te York, vroeger in verband gebracht met de 7e eeuwse koning Hlothere van Kent.

De auteur bevestigt Metcalf's veronderstelling, dat de beschreven munt aan keizer Lotharius I moet worden toegeschreven: hij acht het nl. waarschijnlijk, dat uit dezelfde vondst afkomstig zijn 4 munten van Lodewijk de Vrome en Lotharius I, de enige 9e eeuwse munten in een collectie in Yorkshire bijeengebracht door William Eyre (1699—1764), thans opgenomen in de verzameling van de Universiteit van Leeds; eveneens kunnen zeer goed uit dezelfde vondst afkomstig zijn de karolingische munten uit de verzameling van Sir Joseph Banks (1783—1820), thans in het Brits Museum, waarin dezelfde keizers onevenredig sterk vertegenwoordigd zijn.

Hieruit volgt dat de Coney Street vondst met vrij grote waarschijnlijkheid kan worden toegeschreven aan de periode van Lotharius I, dus iets vroeger dan wordt aangenomen. Tevens mag geconcludeerd worden, dat de vondst geen Engelse zilveren pennies bevat heeft, die noch in de verzameling-Eyre en -Banks voorkomen, noch elders terug te vinden zijn, en die bovendien zeker door de 18e eeuwse beschrijver herkend zouden zijn. De combinatie met koperen *styca's* is daarentegen wel in overeenstemming met de hier voorgestelde datering.