

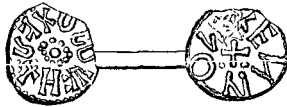
IV.

NOTICE OF AN ANGLO-SAXON STYCA OF OSBERCHT, KING OF NORTHUMBRIA. By JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

The small brass coin which I have now the pleasure of presenting to the museum of the Society, was turned up on the 29th of May last, in one of the haughs of the river Jed, close to the town of Jedburgh. It was sent to me (with a request that I would attempt to decipher it) by Alexander Jeffrey, Esq., Jedburgh, a Fellow of this Society, and author of the "History and Antiquities of Roxburghshire," now in course of publication. The coin is in fine preservation, and weighs 14 grains troy; it displays, as is usual in these coins, the legend placed in a very irregular manner, some of the letters being turned upside down, and others retrograde or reversed—some looking one way and some another; so as to make the deciphering of them in many cases by no means an easy task. As a specimen of this style of arrangement, I may spell the legend on the coin, which is as follows:—

Obv. OSBRCHT · REX.

Rev. × MONNE.



Obverse.—The legend runs from right to left. O, S retrograde, B, H inverted, and apparently also retrograde, C, H, L inverted, H inverted, A retrograde; X; = OSBRCHT·REX. In centre of field, a large pellet, with a rude circle of eleven smaller ones round it. The obverse shows also part of an ornamental border of pellets, which seems to have been intended to encircle the whole coin.

Reverse.—The legend runs from left to right. A cross ×, M inverted, partially defaced, O, N, N, E retrograde; = MONNE. In field, a cross with four pellets, one in each angle.

The Reverse of MONNE, believed to be the name of the moneyer,

it may be noticed, occurs on some of the coins of Eanred, 810 to 841; Ethelred II., 841 to 844; Redulf, 844; and Osbercht, 849 to 862.

The annexed drawing of this coin is from the pencil of Mr William Frederick Miller, London, a numismatist as well as an engraver; and for it I am indebted to his friend and our obliging member Mr George Sim.

Osbercht reigned from 848 or 849 to 862. Our Honorary Member, John Lindsay, Esq., in his valuable work on the "Coinage of the Heptarchy," Cork, 1842, says the stycas of Redulf (his predecessor) are scarce, those of Osbercht are still rarer. One or two letters of the word REX, but seldom the entire (as in this instance), are generally added to the king's name, which is spelled in various ways. Mr Lindsay does not include the form of the spelling on this coin in the list of the "Varieties of King's Name and Titles," which he gives at page 16 of his work; the nearest being OSBVEHT · REX. On looking, however, at his plate, No. I., where he figures two stycas of Osbercht, fig. 36 appears to be a coin of a somewhat similar type to this one, with the exception of the letter T on the obverse not being inverted, and the ornaments in the centre of the field being different—a star, instead of a circle of pellets. The legend is read by Mr Lindsay, OSBVEHT · REX; from the drawing, I would be almost inclined to read it as I have spelled this one, the letters V E of Mr Lindsay's reading, being not very unlike the R C of mine. The reverse of the coin, figured by Mr Lindsay, has also the legend MONNE, but differs from the one I have described in the ornament in the centre of field, which consists of merely a single simple pellet.

On examining, next, the third edition of the Rev. Rogers Ruding's "Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain," 1840, I find in the letterpress of vol. ii, p. 283, that he also describes none of an exactly similar type to this coin, the nearest being again OSBVEHT · REX, the same legend as that described by Lindsay; and on turning to his plate, No. II., the "Kings of Northumberland," vol. iii. and fig. 8, I find a coin very similar in type to the one now exhibited, and also in the irregular arrangement of the letters. The fourth letter, read by him as a V, may possibly be an imperfect R; the fifth one, however, is different, being distinctly figured, and read as an E, instead of a C as on the coin now described.

In other particulars, the two coins are very much alike, with the exception, perhaps, of the ornament on the field of the reverse, which displays a simple cross without any pellets in its angles.

The Society, I fear, will think I am entering rather too much into these details of criticism; they will at least show the care necessary in attempting to spell out the legends on these generally obscure and difficult coins.

As some of the members may not be familiar with this subject, I add a few notes of more general interest, principally from Ruding's valuable work. "The kingdom of Northumbria, which was formed by Ida about the middle of the sixth century, has this remarkable peculiarity belonging to its coinage, that from its mints issued, as far as is yet discovered, the *stycas*, the only brass coins which were struck by the Anglo-Saxons." "The earliest specimens hitherto known are (believed to be) of the reign of Ecgrith, who ascended the throne in the year 670; and they seem to have fallen into disuse after the reign of Osbercht, who began to reign in 849 and ended in 862; at least none of a later date have been found." "At a time when most of the necessary articles of life were purchased at prices so far beneath what is now considered their value; when, for instance, in the reign of Athelstan, an ox was sold for thirty pennies, and a sheep for the equivalent of one shilling, even so small a division as one-fourth of a penny could not be sufficiently minute to answer the common purposes of exchange; they therefore coined *brass* money as it is generally called"—but it is in fact a composition (whether accidental or intentional is unknown) containing in 100 parts, 60 to 70 of copper, 20 to 25 of zinc, and 5 to 11 of silver, with minute portions besides of gold, lead, and tin. "This money was termed *stycas*, two of which were equal in value to a farthing. The name is derived by Lye from the Saxon word *stycce* (*ꝛtycce*), *minuta pars*, because this money was of all other the smallest. But the propriety of this derivation may be questioned, as the *stycas* was in weight not inferior to the common-sized pennies; and *minuta pars* cannot well be applied to express *value*, distinct from *magnitude*. It must be acknowledged, however, in confirmation of his etymology, that these coins seem to be the same as those which occur in Domesday Book under the term *minuta*, from whence comes our *mite*." "All coins of this kind yet discovered, are from the mints of the

Northumbrian kings, or of the Archbishops of York. It is highly probable they circulated all over the island, as they must have been of great importance in carrying on the smaller exchanges of property."

Various hoards of stycas, as well as single coins, have been discovered from time to time, principally in Northumberland and the neighbouring counties, but in these comparatively few coins of Osbercht have been found: as, for example, Lindsay says in the large hoard of 8000 or 10,000 stycas found at Hexham in 1833, none of this king's coins occurred; and in a hoard discovered at York in 1843, and described by Mr Roach Smith, which consisted of several thousands, only twelve of Osbercht were deciphered.