

Two Anglo-Saxon coins from Sprotbrough, South Yorkshire

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Excavations carried out at Sprotbrough, North Yorkshire, revealed two Anglo-Saxon coins, both recovered from the same deposit, context 4006. The coins were stabilised, packaged and x-rayed at Lincoln Conservation Laboratory and submitted to Dr Martin Allen at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for identification.

The coins

- 1) Context (4006). Type N 179 (Series Y: Alhred). Weight 1.06gm. Legend. ALCHRED. Cross. Reverse similar to N 177 (Fantastic quadruped right with long tail and raised foreleg), with cross below. The piece was produced for Alhred of Northumbria between 765 and 774 AD.
- 2) Context (4006). Type N 128. (Series J Type 85 (Rigold BIIIb)). Weight 1.07gm. Obverse: double border of pellets; diademed head right. Reverse: Double border of pellets; cross flanked by annulets with bird perched above. Dr Allen comments that the appearance and style of this piece suggest that it might be a contemporary imitation.

Discussion

Sprotbrough lies in a part of Yorkshire for which there is extremely little archaeological evidence for activity before the 10th or 11th centuries. The village of Sprotbrough lies 3 miles west of Doncaster, where excavations have demonstrated faint traces of occupation in the early to middle Anglo-Saxon period. It is also close to the Roman road from Littleborough to York, via Doncaster and Tadcaster. This route was certainly in use for trade during the Anglo-Scandinavian period, and two sherds of Torksey ware, of late 9th to mid 11th-century date, were also found in the excavation. Finds of similar date occur in Doncaster itself but Sprotbrough is one of a very few south Yorkshire rural settlements to have produced finds of this period.

These two coins, however, take the history of the settlement back a further two hundred years. Coin 2 is a late *sceatta*, coins struck on a small ball of silver, often producing cracks around the edges, like a squashed pea. The mint for Series J is not known for certain, but is most likely to have been in Southeast England, perhaps London. In southern England these coins were superseded in the later 8th century by the broad flan coinage of Offa and his contemporaries. These coins were struck from sheet metal and are consequently both wider and thinner than the earlier coins. By the time the broad flan pennies were minted the earlier *sceattas* were no longer in use and the two coinages are separated in time by a period in which coinage was not circulating south of the Humber. Coin 1, the Alhred piece, belongs to a period subsequent to the introduction of this broad flan coinage on the continent at the time when coinage does not seem to have been circulating in Mercia. The discovery of these two pieces together might have several implications. Firstly, Sprotbrough clearly belongs to the Northumbrian

monetary zone during the later 8th century. Series Y *sceattas* circulated most widely in the Yorkshire Wolds but coins have been found on sites in the Pennines and the Peak district, as well as on sites south of the Humber, mainly in the lower reaches of the Trent valley but also on sites in the Lincolnshire Wolds.

The discovery of the two pieces in the same deposit most likely indicates that settlement extended over some period of time during the 8th century. However, it is just possible, considering that there was no break in minting method, that *sceattas* continued to circulate in Northumbria later than in the south. Given that coin 1 may be an imitation or forgery it might well be that it was actually produced in Northumbria and was still in circulation when the Series Y piece was minted.

Conclusions

These coin finds, and the previous finds of Torksey ware, show that the Sprotbrough site was of unusual importance in the Anglo-Saxon period. The second element of the place-name, -brough, is probably indicative of a contemporary fortified site, although it was also used for Roman forts and small walled towns. It seems very likely that the Anglo-Saxon finds and the place-name element together point to fortified settlement occupied from the 8th to 9th/11th-centuries. If so, the site is of considerable importance and has the potential to cast light upon a very poorly-known class of site in a part of the country where any archaeological evidence for occupation of this period is almost unknown.

A full publication of the coins should be prepared. This would involve the cleaning of the coins, which are at present too corroded for the detail to be photographed successfully. Furthermore, the silver content of the pieces should be determined using non-destructive methods.

Acknowledgements

Dr Martin Allen, of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, identified the coins. Conservation was carried out at Lincoln Conservation Laboratory.