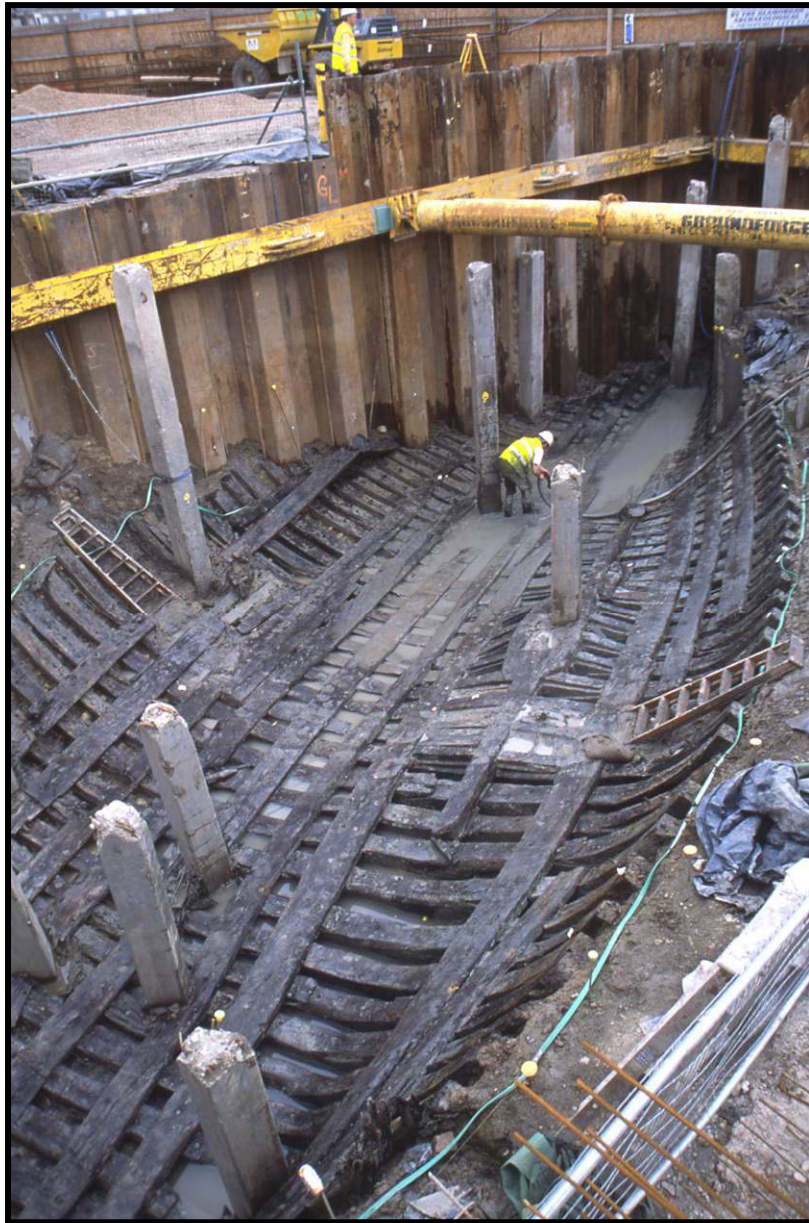


Newport Medieval Ship Project

Specialist Report:

COINS



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By Edward Besly, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum
Wales, 18 April 2006

The Newport Ship Project

Introduction

In 2002, during the construction of the Riverfront Theatre, on the banks of the River Usk in Newport, South Wales, an archaeological find of great significance was unearthed. In the summer of that year, while undertaking the excavations for the theatre's orchestra pit, the well-preserved remains of a 15th century clinker built merchant vessel were discovered.

The site, which was surrounded by a cofferdam, was being monitored by the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust at the time of discovery. The ship lay in what is locally known as a pill or small inlet, with its stern closest to the river and its bow facing into the inlet. The timbers were covered in thick alluvial mud, which created an ideal anaerobic environment for successful preservation. Seventeen strakes of planking remained on the port side and thirty-five on the starboard side of the ship. The vessel was approximately 30m in length.

A silver French coin was found purposely inserted into the keel of the vessel, dating the ship to after May 1447. Dendrochronological research has shown the hull planking to be from the Basque country and after 1449 in date.

After a much publicised 'Save Our Ship' campaign, it was decided that the ship would not be recorded and discarded but excavated with the aim to conserve. The riders, stringers, braces, mast step, frames and overlapping clinker planks and keel were dismantled one by one and lifted. Almost 2000 ship components as well as hundreds of artefacts were excavated.

This report examines and lists the coins recovered during the Newport Medieval Ship excavation.

NEWPORT MEDIEVAL SHIP COIN REPORT

Original Report: 18 April 2006

Updated: 3 December 2013

By Edward Besly, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales

Coins and jetton

Finds from the Newport ship include five coins and one jetton. Four of the coins, and the jetton, relate to the ship's working life. The fifth coin formed a significant part of the ship's fabric, built in at a very early stage of construction; because of its importance for the date of the ship, this deserves to be considered in some detail.

Construction

The coin set into the inboard face of the keel, at its junction with the stempost, is a base silver *petit blanc* of Louis II, Dauphin de Viennois, struck at Crémieu:

Obverse: +LVDOVICS : DPhS : VIE[NE]SIS (stops, pairs of pellets)
Arms of France (1,4) and Dauphiné (2,3), quarterly; the heraldic dolphins face right as viewed. Possible *point-secret* under the first letter,
Reverse: +SIT : NOME[] : BENEDITV (stops, pairs of pellets)
Cross pattée with fleur-de-lis and dolphin (r.) in the second and third heraldic quarters, respectively. *Point-secret* under first letter (= Crémieu:
Poey d'Avant (1862) III, 60)
Weight: 0.84g; die-axis: 270°
Poey d'Avant (1862) III, 68, no.4992 and pl. CXII, 7.

On 28 July 1440, King Charles VII of France put Louis in full possession of Dauphiné (which occupied, roughly, the present départements of Isère, Drôme and Hautes-Alpes), where the latter exercised power until forced to flee to Flanders around August 1456. He succeeded to the throne of France as Louis XI on 22 July 1461.

According to Lafaurie (1951, 108) the mints of Dauphiné (Crémieu, Montélimar, Romans), hitherto striking coins of royal types, were ceded to Louis between 12 August 1445 and 8 April 1457. An *ordonnance* of 11 August 1445 authorised the issue of gold *écus* and *demi-écus* together with silver *blancs* and *petits blancs*, in the name and with the arms of the Dauphin (Morin 1854, 363-4); the present coin will predate letters of 6 December 1456 which ordered new silver coins that were to be distinguished from the previous by the use of mullets as stops between the words (Morin 1854, 377; Poey d'Avant 1862, pl. CXII, 1-3, 8-9). Whether the right-facing dolphins on the Newport coin (most face left) have any chronological significance, cannot be said. The coin itself is fresh and uncirculated, inserted with the reverse visible: a cross and the motto 'Blessed be the Name of the Lord', widely used on the silver coinages of France at the time.

The 1445 *ordonnance* also included a reciprocity whereby the new coins of Dauphiné circulated at the same rate in France, and those of the King likewise in Dauphiné. Gold and silver coins of Louis II Dauphin are found in contemporary hoards the length and breadth of France. The fact that the coin is from Dauphiné need not be diagnostic of the ship's origin. The use of this freshly-minted coin is consistent with construction of the ship in the years around 1450.

Incorporation of coins into the fabric of ships, 'for luck', has a long history. Usually, a coin was placed in the mast step, for instance a coin of the emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), its reverse depicting the goddess Fortuna, in the second-century Roman ship from Blackfriars, London (Marsden 1994, 49); a thirteenth-century Portuguese coin (St Peter Port, Guernsey; Adams and Black 2004, 245-7); and in the Vejby cog (14th century; Crumlin-Pedersen 1979, 25). The coin as used in the Newport ship appears to invoke divine protection. The use of relatively small change appears to be typical and the practice continued into modern times: at least three of the seventeen ships scuttled by the Swedes to form a barrier off the island of Rügen in the northern war of 1715 included low-denomination coins in mast steps for foremast or mainmast; all were built in the middle to late seventeenth century (T. Förster, *pers. comm.*); Henningsen (1965) cites numerous other cases. For twentieth-century examples of placing a coin 'for luck' and to date the vessel, see Marsden 1965.

[Update, 2013: See now Carlson 2007, published since the above was written, who sees mast-step coins as a Roman phenomenon, first appearing in the 2nd century BC, a continuation of earlier foundation traditions, not 'luck' coins as such.

Deborah N. Carlson 2007. 'Mast-step coins among the Romans', *IJNA* 36.2, 317-324.]

Working life

The four coins from this phase are all base-metal Portuguese issues of the fifteenth century, struck at Lisbon: one copper *real preto* of Duarte I (1433-8) and three *ceitils* of Afonso V (1438-81). The *ceitil* was a copper coin introduced in the reign of João I (d. 1433), produced in very large numbers under Afonso V. *Ceitils* would have had no formal place in the currency of England and Wales, but are found widely in south Wales and appear occasionally in south-western England.

The jetton, of brass or latten, is an early Nuremberg product, depicting a moor's head (the reverse perhaps bears a crowned head, but is obscured because the jetton is folded: cf. Labrot 2003, pl.18, 2). Nuremberg was becoming a centre for jetton production from the second quarter of the fifteenth century; precise dating of jettons is never easy, so the context here may provide a useful fixed point for this series.

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- P. Marsden 1965. 'The luck coin in ships', *Mariners Mirror* 51, 33-4.
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APPENDIX:

Additional information relating to the Petit blanc:

The coins themselves were struck and delivered between May and July 1447 and as far as I know there is no reason why they shouldn't have gone into circulation that summer.

'Boites' refers not to the crates of coins, but to the pyx - the sealed containers into which random samples from the production run were placed. At the end of the year (or relevant accounting period) these samples would be formally opened and assayed - as in our Trial of the Pyx, which takes place annually to this day - to make sure that the mint master was adhering to the terms of his contract.

The documents quoted (in a publication by a local history society in Crémieu – no bibliographic details available – made available by courtesy of Charles Ferris) read, in my translation with a few expansions and annotations, as follows:

'1447 (27 May)
Crémieux

'Boxes' [*boites*] brought by P.Trefford, warden, on 2 December 1447

Issues of petits blancs of 5 d(eniers) t(ournois) [*face value*], at 4 d(eniers) 21 gr(ains) alloy of A R [*'argent-le-roi' = the metallic standard, silver 23/24 parts fine: 4d 21gr A R equates to an alloy of silver 38.9% fine*] and at 13 s(ol) 9¾ d(eniers) to the marc [= *the weight standard: here 1.477g*].

By Millett Blondelet, master of this mint, as commanded by the grand council of His Lordship the Dauphin.

1st delivery/issue, Saturday 27 May 1447.

In all, five deliveries, of which the last is on Saturday 15 July 1447.

In all, 75 deniers put in the 'box' [*i.e., 15 coins*]

'1447 (27 May – 16 July)

At Crémieu, by Millet Blondelet, petits blancs of 5 d. t., at 4 d. 21 gr. alloy and 13 s. 9¾ d. in weight (165¾).

Put in the 'box' 5 s. 5 d. (65 d.) 65000'

(The two documents are saying roughly the same thing, though the 'box' bits differ - might need to see originals.)

'1457 (6 March)

Crémieux

Deliveries of petit blancs [*etc, as previous documents, but 13s 6d to marc*]

1st delivery Monday 6 March 1457

2nd and last, Wednesday 15 March 1457.

Put in the 'box' in all, 1s. ? d.'

[*Last figure not clear on the faxed copy – looks like a '1', but if they are petits blancs, should be a '3', i.e., three coins @5d each.*]

The coin from the ship isn't the 1457 issue, because those have added symbols in the legends.

Newport Ship Coin Catalogue

MSG 173:

Silver *petit blanc* of Louis II, Dauphin de Viennois, struck at Crémieu.
Struck and delivered between May and July 1447

MSG 178:

1 Coin, Portugal, Afonso V (1438-81); copper ceitel, Lisbon, 1.89g.

MSG 179:

1 Coin, Portugal, Duarte I (1433-8), copper real preto, Lisbon, 0.76g.

MSG 180:

1 Coin, Ceitel, Afonso V (1438-81); copper ceitel, Lisbon, 1.44g.

MSG 181:

1 Coin, Portugal, Afonso V, copper Ceitel, Lisbon, 1.47g.

MSG 182:

1 Copper alloy jetton, 20mm, 0.61g. Obv: 'African' head to left, border of lozenges; rev: uncertain (folded), with border of fleurs-de-lys. 14th - 15th centuries, Nuremburg.

MSG 197:

1 Cu Coin. Portugal, Afonso V, copper ceitel, Lisbon?, 1.26g.
Portugal, Afonso V, copper ceitel, Lisbon?, 1.26g. Cf Ado A 1165,
general type. Rev: AFONS[...]?

MSG 198:

1 metal disc, coin-like, unknown.

MSG 173

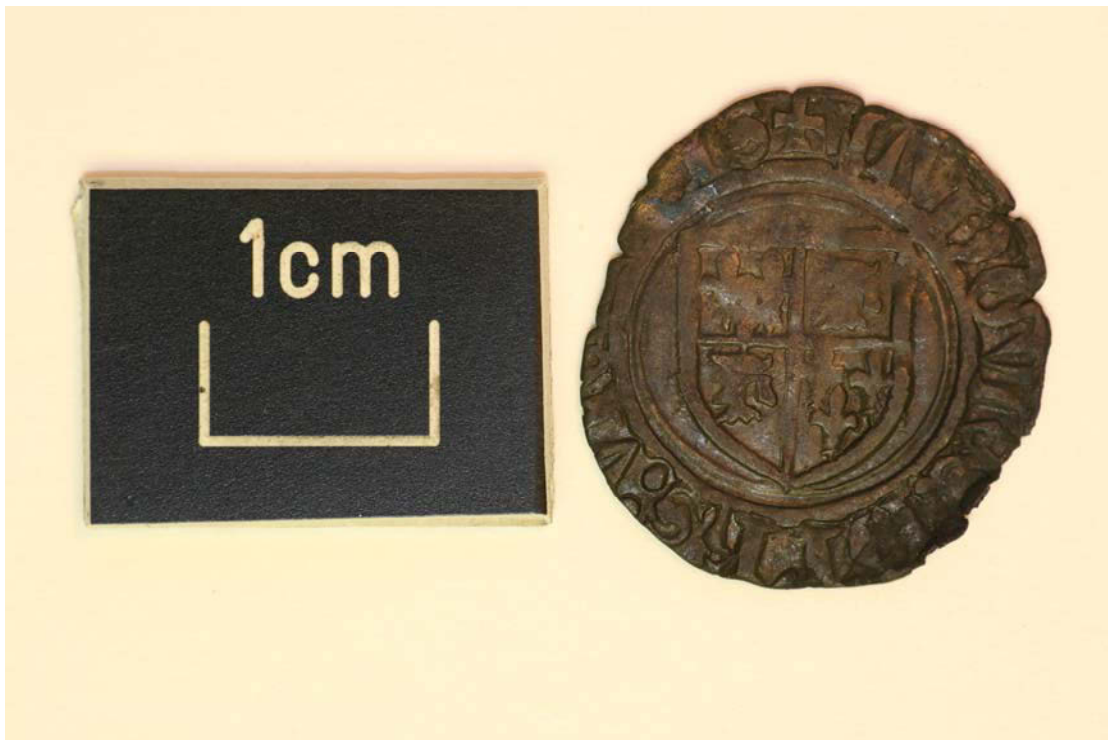


No scale





No scale





No scale





MSG 178



MSG 179



MSG 180





MSG 181



MSG 182



MSG197



MSG 198

