



DNMAV · · GRPPAV

JEWELLED COIN OF THE EMPEROR MAVRICIVS.

FOUND AT BACTON, NORFOLK.

1846-

Drawn & engraved by F.W. Fairholt. F.S.A.

SOME ACCOUNT
OF
AN ENCHASED GOLD COIN,

FOUND AT BACTON, NEAR CROMER.

COMMUNICATED BY

S. W. STEVENSON, ESQ., F. S. A.

To the Secretaries of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society.

DEAR SIRS,

Having been given to understand that some notice of the looped and jewelled coin, found at Bacton in this county, is desired as a contribution to the papers of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society, I beg to hand you the annexed as the result of my own diligent inquiries into the circumstances under which that remarkable and interesting relic of antiquity was found, and of my best attention to the peculiar claims which it possesses to high archæological consideration, as well on account of its decorative features as of its numismatic character.

Since the observations which I herewith take occasion to transmit were written, I have had the satisfaction of learning that the Bacton medallion, now deposited with other antiques of the same class in the cabinet of the British Museum, has already been made the subject of a communication to the Society of Antiquaries, from the pen of SIR HENRY ELLIS, and that it will shortly appear in the *Archæologia*.

Under circumstances then, altogether so disadvantageous to myself, let it be allowed me to add, that nothing short of the desire which I entertain to evince my respect for the

Society, could have prevailed with me to undertake the task ; especially as it does not come exactly within the scope of those researches, which our local institution has been formed to encourage and prosecute, namely, “ into the early arts and monuments of *this county*.” It is sufficient for me, however, that in making the attempt I am complying with the intimated wish of the Committee. And, although conscious of its very slender pretensions to a favourable reception, on the score of intrinsic merit, I shall not regret having tendered this memoir to the Society’s acceptance, if it only serve to *assist* in directing the attention of others amongst us (more competent than myself) to a branch of Archaeology, which has not hitherto met with its due share of illustration.

ON one of the last days of December 1845, or beginning of January of the present year, a woman was walking along the beach from Bacton to Mundesley, when, on approaching the boundaries of the latter-named parish, she saw something, that glittered, lying on the shore, near high-water mark. Having taken up and disengaged it from the branch of seaweed, in which this bright substance was embedded, she carried it home, unappreciating its worth beyond that of a small roundlet of brass, and of course totally unaware of its claim to peculiar regard. The object, however, thus accidentally brought to light, and rescued from its impending fate of being re-engulphed by the waves of the next returning tide, exhibited appearances which, on further examination, led even the unskilled finder herself to think that it must be “ a curiosity.”

Happily therefore, without being subjected to any of those ruinous experiments, which the hand of ignorance too frequently, under such circumstances, is apt to practice on the

remains of antiquity, the newly-discovered circlet of yellow metal was, almost immediately, conveyed to the adjacent village of Northrepps; and THE LADY at "the Cottage" there, forthwith became its possessor. Consigned to the minute and intelligent inspection of MISS GURNEY, the treasure-trove proved to be one of those monuments of ancient art, which are called jewelled medals. It consists of a gold coin, surrounded by a double border of open-work, of the same metal, and in most of the small cavities of which are still remaining bits of ruby-coloured glass, or, more probably, of stone, that doubtless originally filled them all. On the top of this circular frame is a ring, or loop (*une belière*, as the French term it) also formed of gold, and by which, it is evident, this piece of numismatic *bijouterie* was meant to be suspended.

The *aureus* (for it is clearly a gold coin of the ordinary module and not a true medallion) thus transformed by an ornamental enchasement into a species of locket, has for the legend of its obverse

DN MAV. ·GR PPAVC

The type of the obverse is a diademed head, with the *paludamentum* over the breast, after the usual manner of such portraitures as appear on coins, both of the western and of the eastern empire, from the age of Constantine the Great and his family, down to the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era. On the reverse we read

VICTO[RIA] AVCCV

The type of the reverse consists of a globe, surmounted by a cross, within a laurel crown. On one side of the cross is the letter M, on the other A. In the exergue, CONOB.

On the reverse, charged with the hackneyed inscription *Victoria Augustorum*, the only thing remarkable is the V after CC (of course meaning GG). But the legend of the obverse presents difficulties of rather a complicated nature

—difficulties which the present writer is far from pretending to have succeeded in his attempts to overcome. These, however, of themselves form a distinct subject for numismatic research and criticism, the discussion of which has not yet led to any conclusive result, and may, with the greater degree of propriety, therefore, be omitted here.

For, whatever difference of opinion exists, respecting the way in which the legend of the head should be read and interpreted, there is, and can be, no question whatever as to the *name* of the personage, to whom “the image and superscription” on the Bacton medallion are to be ascribed—that is to say, MAURICIUS TIBERIUS, Emperor of the East, son-in-law and immediate successor of Tiberius (II.) Constantinus, proclaimed Augustus, A.D. 582,* and murdered by the usurper Phocas at Constantinople, A.D. 602. The style and titles of this prince on his coins are, D N MAV. or MAVRICI PP AUG. (*Dominus Noster Mauricius, &c.*) or more frequently D N MAV TIBER PP AVG. (*Dominus Noster Mauricius Tiberius Perpetuus Augustus.*)

The coin is in a very fair (indeed, all probable circumstances considered, it may be said to be in an extraordinarily good) state of preservation; nor does its fabric, on the whole, betray greater deterioration in monetary art, than is observable in the mints of some of the earliest of the Byzantine *Augusti*. On the obverse, both legend and type are perfect, and the inscriptive letters, though ill-fashioned and differing from each other in size, are yet distinctly legible. On the reverse, small portions of the legend, as well as of the type, are worn, and others entirely effaced.

The setting, like the coin itself, is circular, and admeasures

* The double G in *Victoria Augg* (Victory of the Emperors) on the reverse has reference to Theodosius, the son of Mauricius and Constantina, declared Augustus by his father, and associated with him in the empire, A.D. 590.

(exclusive of the loop) nearly an inch and a half in diameter. This golden border is, on the portrait side, composed of about thirty-eight cells, of irregular shapes and dimensions; twenty of these are still filled with red stone or glass, the remainder are empty. The loop, or ring, constitutes the more elaborate part of the jeweller's work. It is ornamented with a chain, or braid-like, pattern, extended equally over its front and its reverse side. In this last-mentioned particular, it forms a striking contrast to the otherwise entire plainness of the back, the round central perforation through which leaves the reverse of the medal open to view. On the front side, the inner rim is raised a little above the coin which it surrounds. On the same side, the outer rim is enriched with an interlaced pattern, similar to that on the loop, and the effect of the two combined is tasteful and appropriate.

As a work of art, it is not easy to pronounce an opinion on the decorative part of this rare and curious relic of antiquity. If compared either with the chasings of *cinquecento* date, or with the jewellery of modern days, it may have to be classed in the category of rude productions. But, making all due allowances for the injurious effects, which time and rough usage must inevitably have wrought on such frail materials, the details of its workmanship, when in their pristine freshness, were probably by no means devoid of technical merit; and still, as an adornment of the person, it is a pleasing and even an elegant object.

In reply to some inquiries of mine relative to the subject under discussion, Miss Gurney was so kind as to favour me with a letter (under date of the 24th of February) from which, with that lady's permission, I gladly make the following extract:—

“I have a representation of a necklace with Byzantine coins, set in exactly the same sort of honey-comb, or filigree-work, as the Bacton medallion; but the cells are filled with

stones, as ours are with glass. The original was found in Denmark, and an engraving of it is given, amongst those of other antiquities in the Royal Museum at Copenhagen, in a Danish book of Archæological Transactions. The Byzantine imperial coins seem to have been the favourite patterns, as I find bad imitations of them in the same plates. The medals contained in the ornament alluded to are of still earlier reigns than that of Mauricius—viz. those of Valentinianus III. [*Placidius* A. D. 425—455]; Julius Majorianus [A. D. 456—461,] and others. *Bracteates** have also been found in Denmark—imitations of Byzantine coins, with inscriptions in Runic characters, also set for wearing as ornaments.

“Otto Sperling, a renowned Danish antiquary of the last century (in a letter to Rhode, another antiquary who published a German volume of lectures on Cimbric-Holstein antiquities, 1720) speaks of a medal which, by the description, appears to resemble the Bacton one; furnished with a loop like that, and with three exterior rims marked with ‘radii and triangles.’ And referring to others described by Scheffer, he observes that he does not believe these were manufactured by the Goths in the north, but by those in Spain, or in Italy. But then he says, that these Gothic imitations are not of pure gold—not ‘*obryzum*.’ We know that Northmen of all nations composed the Varægian, or Varangian, guard of the Byzantine emperors, and at all events the connection between Constantinople and the north of Europe, in the ages before the Crusades, is so well known, that I should not be surprised at finding any such spoils, either of the sea-kings, or of warriors returning from foreign service, who may have perished on our dangerous coast;

* Coins of coarse fabric, struck on thin, and in some instances very broad, leaves of gold and other metal, during the middle ages.

for our medal seems to have been washed up from the depths of the sea, as it was found near high-water mark in a branch of sea-weed."

Besides the shrewd conjecture offered by Miss Gurney, that this Maurician *aureus* had been possessed by one of those northern chieftains, who, in their predatory voyages, may have suffered fatal shipwreck on the Norfolk coast—there is another supposition which also claims consideration. I allude to the possibility of its having been buried in the ground *above* cliff, and of its having fallen, with one of those innumerable portions of soil, which the undermining force of the tidal waters, or the scarcely less destructive filtrations of the land springs, or the combined workings of both those powerful agents, have from time to time, through successive ages, caused to be detached from the top, and more or less gradually brought down upon the beach, within the full range and sweep of the sea. Of these two modes of attempting to account for the extraordinary fact, that such a gem of antiquity should have been discovered, as it was, on the shore at Bacton, the latter appears to me to have the greater probability to recommend it. For, even though we may assume, as on the former hypothesis, that its enclosure amidst the decaying timbers of some foundered vessel had afforded it a certain degree of protection against attrition of sands and waves, yet such protection could hardly have been very lasting. And, without saying a word about the effects of such abrading upon the coin itself, I own that it does not accord with my ideas of likelihood to imagine, that so fragile a piece of work as its surrounding ornament should have been found in a state of such good preservation, after being submerged for many centuries in a restless and destructive element.

And now a few further remarks on the decorations of this monetal relic. The custom of enchasing gold coins and medallions in a circular or octagonal border of the same

precious metal—a custom which became common during the lower empire, especially amongst the Constantinopolitan emperors, and which was imitated long after the western division of the Roman world had fallen a prey to the Goths and other northern invaders—may be traced to as early a period as the reigns of Hadrian and the Antonines. Some of these medals are set in elegant filigree-work; the rims of others are perforated simply with round holes; others again, like the one found at Bacton, have their tracery filled with ruby, or sapphire-coloured glass, or with precious stones such as garnet; set in triangular or oval compartments. It is moreover to be noticed that, whilst the front side of these imperial portraitures is thus adorned, the back part of them, with the sole exception of the reverse of the coin itself, presents only a smooth plain surface, with scarcely the slightest ornament, apparently as if that side was not expected to be looked at; a sign probably that such jewelled money served, amongst other purposes, occasionally for military donations and rewards, wherewith to gratify and stimulate both the legionaries themselves, and their barbaric auxiliaries.

I am aware that some English antiquaries, of established character for learning and science, are much disposed to doubt the wearing of ornamental coins by *Roman* soldiers. But in order to show that on this point I have not expressed myself unadvisedly, or without at least *foreign* authority of eminence to support my opinion, I shall here take occasion to cite what the late Professor Steinbüchel has said, respecting certain Roman gold medallions which were found in Hungary in the years 1797 and 1805, and which are now in the Imperial and Royal Museum at Vienna.*

* “Notice sur les Médaillons Romains en Or, du musée Imperial et Royal, trouvés en Hongrie dans les années MDCCXCVII. et MDCCCv.; par Ant. Steinbüchel, Directeur du Musée, I.R., Membre des Académies de Vienne, de Rome, de Naples, &c.—Vienne, De l’Imprimerie D’Antoine Strauss,

Amongst other observations, the following are those with which that celebrated numismatist (the successor to Eckhel in the directorship of the vast and splendid collection above-named) has prefaced his graphically illustrated descriptions of the different pieces, comprised in these extraordinary "finds"—many of them being of excellent workmanship, in fine preservation, of transcendent rarity, and of a size till then unknown :

"In examining these medallions (says M. Steinbüchel) we perceive, that a portion of them are only gold coins of the ordinary size, and it is solely by means of the enchasings, with which they are ornamented, that they are made to exceed the common dimensions. [The Bacton medal answers exactly to this description.] It is also observable that even the other medallions, of a decidedly larger die, have, almost all of them, a similar framework. It is evident that all these medallions were meant to be suspended. The rings, which are stronger in proportion as the medallions are heavier, show that everything was calculated, even the effect of continual friction. These gold pieces represent the heads of the emperors, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, M. Aurelius, Caracalla, Carus and Carinus, Maximianus Hercules, Constantine the Great, Constantius the Younger, Valens, Valentinian the Younger, and Gratian. Adding to these the pieces which are preserved in other museums and published by different authors, we shall have an almost unbroken series of gold medallions of the Roman emperors, even to nearly the end of the empire; with this particularity, that the more the Roman empire decayed the more the size of these medallions increased, so that it appeared as though their merit was measured by their weight."

1826." There is a plate in the *Catalogue D'Ennery*, which also represents some of the earlier specimens of Roman medallic jewellery now in the *Cabinet du Roi* at Paris.

Steinbüchel goes on to say, that these larger-sized pieces were assuredly not money, but *véritables médaillons*—pieces struck, out of the usual course, to make presents with. And he then adds—“Quand les forces de l’empire diminuèrent, les empereurs pour garantir leurs provinces des incursions des barbares, suppléèrent à *la valeur* des hommes par *celle* de l’or.” After this momentary indulgence in the luxury of a French *jeu de mots*, the learned *Directeur*, resuming his German gravity, thus proceeds:

“It was these large medallions that the kings of those dreaded nations shewed themselves the most eager to possess, as we find it related in Gibbon, when alluding to the King of Austrasia.* But this last and sad fate was very different from their original destination. Medallions of the kind in question were minted at first for the purpose of serving as so many signs of public rejoicing. They were struck on the occasion of victories. (See the famous gold medallion of Augustus in reference to the defeat of Sextus Pompey.) They were also struck when solemn vows were made for the health of emperors; and for the honour of the consulate which from time to time the emperors caused to be conferred upon themselves; and lastly, they were issued in memory of great warlike expeditions. These pieces served to recal to mind events too auspicious not to have been chosen, in preference to others, for the presents (*les cadeaux*) which the emperors, in conformity to an ancient custom, were in the habit of sending to their friends on different occasions, such as the Saturnalian festivals (Suetonius Aug. 75; Vesp

* The passage alluded to is as follows: “Childebert, the great grandson of Clovis, was persuaded [during the reign of the Emperor Maurice] to invade Italy, by the payment of fifty thousand pieces; but as he viewed with delight some Byzantine coin of the weight of one pound in gold, the king of Austrasia might stipulate, that the gift should be rendered more worthy of his acceptance by a proper mixture of these respectable medals.” —*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, c. XLV. p. 151, *Milman’s* edition.

19), the new year, the consulship, &c.; so much the more as it is distinctly recorded of Augustus, that he was fond of appropriating rare medals to this purpose. We have not mentioned the *Congiaria* [gratuitous distributions] made to the people; and, what much more concerns the point before us, the military gratuities, for which, we believe, that, in an especial manner, the greater part of these [meaning these ornamented] medallions were employed.”

M. Steinbüchel has supported these opinions of his, by referring, among other authorities, to some Roman military figures, on certain antique bas-reliefs, respecting which he makes the following remarks: “We do not pretend that the ornaments which we find represented on the body armour of different centurions were medallions like ours; but we believe that they afford us a glimpse into a system of military decoration, according to which gold medallions (similar to those in the Imperial Cabinet and other collections) may have served as marks of honour for military men who had eminently distinguished themselves—a system which warrants us in classing these particular pieces among those military rewards (*dona militaria*), for the distribution of which the emperors would, by preference, fix on various occasions of public celebration, announced by the types and inscriptions of these medals.”*

With proofs like these before us, that, from an early age of

* In concluding his observations on this branch of his subject, our author has quoted an inscription in honour of one L. Sicinius Dentatus, which the old writers have handed down, and in which is found an almost complete enumeration of the rewards given to officers, or private soldiers, who had acquitted themselves valiantly in the field of battle. These honours, according to the inscription, consisted of spears (*hastæ*), trappings for horses (*phalerae*), collars (*torques*), bracelets (*armillæ*), and crowns (*coronæ*.) It appears that in discovering the medallions in Hungary, and also in digging up some medallions in Holland (1715), there were found united with them, in each instance, chains and bracelets of gold—a fact to which Steinbüchel adverts as to a strong additional testimony in support of his assertions.

the empire down to a very low æra of Roman domination, the custom was more or less prevalent of converting gold medals of the reigning prince into articles of personal adornment, to be worn as imperial gifts, or as badges of loyalty, may we not look upon this gold coin of Mauricius as owing its garniture to hands contemporary with his reign, and subject to his sway, or that of some other Christian emperor after him? To me, I confess, it seems unnecessary to go down to so low a period as that of the Danes, Normans, or Anglo-Saxons, for specimens of such application of the goldsmith's and the jeweller's crafts to the ornamenting of Roman coins. And allowing all due weight to arguments founded on the fact, that the Northmen, like other semi-civilized tribes, were prone to *imitate* the productions of art emanating from the skill of more polished nations, I am still of opinion, that the *enchassure* of the Bacton medal, looking to the characteristics of its design, and to the style of its fabric, was wrought within the confines and by subjects of the eastern empire; in other words, that the locket, as well as the coin, is *Byzantine Imperial*.

Since the foregoing observations were written, Miss Gurney has presented the medallion found at Bacton to the British Museum, the numismatic authorities of which national institution have pronounced it to be an *Anglo-Saxon* ornament; and the coin in its centre they consider to be an ancient *cast* made from a gold coin of the Emperor Maurice.

It appears then that those, under whose official care this valuable relic is now placed, have come to a decision respecting it, unfavourable, in two material respects, to the view which I have taken. With the deference, however, to which their knowledge and judgment on such subjects of investigation are peculiarly entitled, yet at the same time in the spirit of that free interchange of sentiment which has tended on so many occasions to elicit truth, and which ought to be a primary object of encouragement in archæological, as well as

in all other liberal, pursuits, I own that my already expressed opinion remains unchanged, with regard both to the coin and to its enchasement.

In the first place, as to the coin itself: having had no suspicion of its being a *cast*, I did not so narrowly examine it as now to feel competent to speak positively on that point. It is true that a *roundness* of angle is perceptible in some parts; but this, as numismatists well know, is no unusual thing to note. Such appearances are not unfrequently to be observed on ancient coins, respecting the authenticity of which, as hammered money, no doubt is entertained; whilst, on the other hand, I recal to mind that in the Bacton medal there are several parts which could hardly have been so forcibly brought out by any other process than that of striking. Certainly, I saw no reason to think that it was not a genuine coin. And it will, therefore, be a matter of real interest with an amateur like myself to become acquainted with the grounds on which the decision above alluded to is based. Bearing, as the coin in question does, that *crux criticorum nummaria*, the exergual inscription CONOB, it would, under the present circumstances of the case, be extremely desirable to learn, whether the *fineness* of its gold be considered such as to bear out the interpretation, which some learned writers have assigned to those much controverted abbreviations, viz. *coxflatum obryzum*. It would be no less acceptable to know, whether the *custodes*, whose practised eyes and erudite experiences so eminently qualify them to be our guides and arbitrators in difficulties of this kind—whether they look upon the *casting* as well as the enframing of the coin to be the work of Anglo-Saxons, or of Anglo-Danes; and if so, what is the evidence, in form of examples, or at least of analogies, from which such a conclusion has been drawn. Because discoveries made in different parts of England, and also in France, have reduced it almost to a certainty that *moulds* were used, during the period of the lower empire, (to quote

the words of an excellent antiquary,) "in common by forgers and by the *Triumviri Monetales*. By the *former*, at Lingwell Gate [in Yorkshire], for the purpose of procuring a private supply of counterfeit money; and by the *latter* at Bibé [not far from Rheims], for the purpose of filling the exhausted coffers of the state with a debased coinage of the ancient Cæsars."* It was under Constans and Constantius II. (A. D. 337 to 361) that, in the imperial mint of the Gallic provinces, large quantities of money were cast in moulds with the types of emperors who had reigned, from Caracalla to Postumus (i. e. from A. D. 211 to 258.)

If then such practices, with the obvious sanction and for the immediate use of the Roman government, are shewn to have prevailed in the fourth century, are we not warranted in supposing, that at still lower periods of an increasingly corrupt and wretchedly degenerate empire—periods when the *pura divinaque Moneta* no longer existed in the "eternal city," and when the imperial power of the Cæsars had ceased to have either name or local habitation in the west—similar expedients were probably resorted to, under that long succession (with few exceptions—Mauricius himself being one) of weak or wicked princes, who, holding their court at Constantinople, swayed the sceptre of imbecility or of oppression, over a disordered and exhausted State?

In suggesting these points for consideration, I am neither forgetful of, nor indifferent to, a remark of that able numismatist, Mr. Akerman, who thinks that "there is not any evidence to shew that the Romans ever cast their *gold* coins." But, with the pages of the historian before us, proving to what miserable pecuniary straits the unscrupulous administrators of public affairs in the eastern empire were continu-

* See the Rev. J. B. READE'S "Observations on Roman Coin Moulds," in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. i. p. 147, et seq. See also, in AKERMAN'S *Descriptive Catalogue*, his Remarks on Roman Forgeries, p. 5.

ally reduced, it can scarcely be called visionary, to imagine that *casts* in gold, *below* the standard purity, might, in financial emergencies, have been made from the genuine *aurei* of a Byzantine prince, by the monetal officers of some amongst his more or less distant successors.

Next, with regard to the looped border of gold and inlaid work within which the medal is enclosed. On this point, however open to criticism may be the opinion to which I still adhere, it is impossible for me to be otherwise than strongly influenced by the fact, that the setting exhibits the *reverse* as well as the portrait side of the Bacton relic, exactly after the manner of the small gold coins, enlarged by their *bordures* into medallions, as shewn in the engravings appended to Steinbüchel's Notice of the Hungarian *Trouvailles*, and which are undeniably Roman. Far am I from being disposed to characterize Byzantine workmanship as a model of excellence; nor would I, on the other hand, throw the least disparagement on the talent for imitating Byzantine fashion, displayed in the specimens of what is termed Saxon and Danish jewellery, although it must be confessed that *imitations* of the Roman mint, ascribed to Anglo-Saxon and Danish ingenuity, are *barbarous* in the extreme. But I am unable to discover any just cause or impediment why the merit, such as it is, of the goldsmith's work, as well as the coinage of the medal which it enshrines, should not, in the present instance, be awarded to the liege *subjects* of Mauricius, or of some later occupant of the imperial throne, in preference to either coin or decoration being assigned to the Northmen, whose chieftains seem, even during *his* reign, to have been more ready to receive such splendid baubles as honorary gifts, at the hands of a Greek emperor, than capable themselves of furnishing, from any class of their own people, the actual fabricators of these much-coveted ornaments.

In conclusion, apologizing for the length at which I have, almost unavoidably, taken advantage of the invitation of the

Committee, it only remains for me, as a mode, very superior, indeed, to my own, of *illustrating* the medallion found at Bacton, to place at their disposal a graphic representation of the same, the exact size of the original in every respect, drawn and etched by that intelligent archæologist and most ingenious artist, F. W. Fairholt, Esq., F.S.A.

I remain,

Dear Sirs,

Very faithfully yours,

SETH WM. STEVENSON.

Surrey Street, Norwich,

October 1st, 1846.
