

Runes and Lettering

The generally accepted spelling of the king's name is now *Beonna*, as found on coins of Type A, D, E and F, in preference to *Benna* in Type B, *Beorna* in Florence of Worcester, (*Hun*)*beanna* in Simeon of Durham and (*Hun*)*bearn* in the Chronicle of Melrose. However, the bar above the *o* in coin D.1 almost certainly suggests the letter *r* is to be understood and therefore lends weight to Florence of Worcester's spelling. *Beonna*, *Benna*, *Beanna* and *Hunbearn* are all acceptable variants of a hypocoristic name deriving from one in *Beorn-* (Page 1973, 129), itself a common element in Old English personal names. There was for example, a contemporary king of Mercia and an archbishop of Sens both of whom were called Beornred (*HE* II, 287). Dr. Page also says that the spelling *ress* for *rex* may be to do with the way that the word was pronounced. The unknown rune at the end of *Benna* (Type B) is presumably an abbreviation of his title. It can hardly stand for *rex* or *cyning* (OE king) and does not match any letter in the Anglo-Saxon futhorc (Page 1973, 44). It is closest to *ƿ*, the runic *w* (but is not the same form as the *ƿ* in *Wilred* on the reverse of the coin) and might therefore stand for *walda*, 'ruler' (compare *bretwalda*). If *Beonna* is not here styled king but some other kind of ruler this may reflect either the ascendancy of the kingdom of Mercia over East Anglia or *Beonna's* status in a kingdom shared with *Hun* and *Alberht*. The runic *a* in *Beonna* (with a slight variant on example C, 2) is only known in this form in Anglo-Saxon England and Frisia (Page 1973, 45), so the Pakenham and Dorestad provenance of the two examples in Type A indicate both a linguistic and a trading connection between Suffolk and Holland in the 8th century.

On the only example of Type F the moneyer shows inexperience in cutting letters in mirror image and unfamiliarity with the Roman alphabet. The letters *N* are retrograde and the *X* is formed of two opposing *C*'s.

It is not surprising to find runes being used on *Beonna's* coinage or to find them interspersed with Roman letters. The earliest (Germanic) runic inscription in England comes from Caistor-by-Norwich and is dated to near the beginning of the 5th century (Page 1973, 21). Runes were introduced into England from Scandinavia and had been familiar already on East Anglian sceattas. It is surprising not to find them on any of the surviving goods in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial in view of the other strong links between Sutton Hoo and Sweden. Runes were still occasionally to be used in East Anglia, mixed with Roman letters, as late as the striking of the St. Edmund memorial coinage but not thereafter (Blunt 1969, pl. XXXI; Page 1973, 133).

Moneyers

No moneyer is named on Type A. The moneyer's name on Type B is *Wilred*. This may also be the name of a moneyer of King Offa of Mercia, known however only from a single coin which is thought to be a continental imitation of a penny of Offa (Metcalf 1966, 389, pl. 17, no. 15). There the name is spelt in Roman not runic letters (possible reading VILRED) and occupies two lines separated by a row of pellets in the style of the two- and three-line Offan pennies. The style of the two coins is completely different and the name *Wilred* is a common one.²⁹ It is scarcely conceivable that the two coins are by the same moneyer: that either *Wilred* migrated to Mercian territory when East Anglia fell under Mercian rule (c. 780, which would antedate *Beonna's* coins of type B); or that he was sent by Offa to coin for *Beonna* after 780 — hence the rune *ƿ* which cannot stand for *rex*. The political history here is too little known for either of these explanations to be developed further. What is important about *Wilred's* coins is that they display the style and craftsmanship of an accomplished and independent moneyer and are the match of contemporary coins of Mercia and Northumbria.

Types C, D, E and F bear the Roman letters EFE on the reverse. The style of their lay-out is similar to the design of Offa's name on some of his silver pennies of the Canterbury mint (e.g. Blunt 1961, pl. IV, no. 18). EFE presumably signifies the moneyer, less likely the mint. Page (1973, 129) has suggested EFE could be related to the name *Aefi* which is recorded elsewhere. The letters could be an abbreviation.³⁰

Provenances and Possible Mints (see Map, Fig. 8)

Except for the Dorestad (Holland) find, the Harling (Norfolk) hoard and the three or four of unknown provenance, *Beonna's* coins all come from Suffolk. Barham, Burrow Hill, Debenham and Ipswich are at most 15 miles apart; Orford (though this provenance must be treated with caution) is only a mile from Burrow Hill. These very localised provenances suggest that the coinage circulated in only a limited part of East Anglian territory and that the mint itself may have been in East Suffolk. Where exactly this was is pure speculation but the likelihood of several places may be mentioned here.

The 10th-century Norwich mint is the earliest one recorded in East Anglia (*BNJ* XL, 17) but it is suggested on numismatic grounds that Offa had established a mint somewhere in East Anglia by about 790 (Blunt 1961, 50). The places in Suffolk that have generally been suggested for mints of the period lie some ten or more miles to the west of Ipswich, namely: Bures where Edmund was anointed king in 855 (Whitelock 1969, 224), Hadleigh where King Guthram was buried in 890 (*EHD*, 184) and Sudbury where