

Introduction

‘In the coming decades, greater emphasis will probably be placed on the wider economic and social implications to be drawn from the use of coinage. To contribute to these debates further work should be done on interpreting the pattern of single-finds, comparing them with other artefact distributions and historical data.’

Mark Blackburn (2011, 596).

The period *c.* 575–*c.* 867 saw several major changes: in governance and religion, in rural settlement patterns, the emergence of urban communities and of an economy which demonstrates evolving domestic and Continental trade linkages. The development of coinage is an integral part of these processes and coin recovery can help us ascertain the territorial extent and volume of coin use. However, to date too little attention has been paid to the distinctive gold, silver and especially base coinage of Northumbria in the seventh to ninth centuries, its unique characteristics and its place within the broader contemporary economic and social context.

The Northumbrian landscape exhibits a patchwork of settlements with complex linkages to interconnected exchange networks ranging from kin-based subsistence communities to towns featuring hinterlands, production, labour specialisation and long-distance trade. Settlements were formed under varying topological, agricultural, economic and social circumstances and their impact is conventionally assessed by reference to functional spheres of influence—legal, administrative, economic, fiscal, cultural, religious and defence.² Tribute, links between separated estate holdings, patronage, obligation and tradition have previously been seen as the determining factors in transforming settlement patterns.³

There is scope to consider the northern material in a similar manner to the southern, especially as regards the balance of power in the north as Northumbrian *sceattas*⁴ and *stycas*⁵ name kings and archbishops whilst *sceattas* elsewhere are predominantly anonymous.

The most recent contribution to our understanding of Northumbrian coinage in the landscape is to be found in

the work of Naylor,⁶ but this study presents a more granular analysis of a substantially larger database.

Exploitation requires an economic surplus and this is the key to understanding how settlement hierarchies developed. Surplus can remain at the domestic level, be gifted, donated or used for votive, funerary or compensation purposes, be consumed by tribute in labour, goods or services, be extracted by tax and rent or be exchanged for other consumables or ‘capital’ goods. All of this can be accomplished in markets without the benefit of a medium of exchange, as was the case in England in the period now narrowed to *c.* 470⁷–*c.* 570, when no medium is archaeologically visible; which does not exclude commodity money. However, the presence of coinage facilitates exchange chiefly both as a medium and also as an accounting mechanism and store of wealth.

The environmental and human factors which may have influenced economic activity are explained in addressing the core question: To what extent was Northumbrian economy monetized? Before proceeding some definition of terms and scope is necessary. Northumbria is essentially the territory remaining after the defeat of Ecgrith at Nechtansmere in 685,⁸ after which Aldfrith brought stability—and silver coinage—to the realm. The study also considers the earlier gold shillings of York and Northumbrian coins found elsewhere. Monetization in the narrow, practical sense used in this study refers to the *re-introduction* of coinage.⁹ At the simplest level, this occurs when coins are used to settle regular daily transactions—the purchase of dietary staples and other necessities. Monetization is here characterized by the proximity of finds of coins and portable artefacts, demonstrating that the use of coin as a medium of exchange, even when there is only one denomination, has permeated throughout society, rather than fulfilling only the needs of a social, mercantile or religious élite.

Assemblages of diagnostic material contain coins, metallic artefacts including copper-alloy dress accessories, ceramics, building materials, stonework and biological remains. In a network of settlements, different distributions of such artefacts require explanation and the use of coins for exchange, rather than other purposes, must be established. Northumbria may be a special case in

² Perring (2002, 12–16).

³ Perring (2002, 16–27).

⁴ Silver *denarius* or proto-penny essentially modelled on Merovingian prototypes. The origins of the word *sceat* are discussed by Hines (2014, 7–17).

⁵ The Northumbrian base metal successor to, and of the same module as, the *sceat*, first introduced under Eanred sometime after 810 (whereas Southumbrian coinage followed Pepin the Short’s initiative in introducing the broad penny in the 750s).

⁶ Naylor (2002, 2004 and 2007).

⁷ See section 4.1.

⁸ Woolf (2006, 182–201).

⁹ There is a paucity of literature on monetisation *per se* and what exists generally refers to the classical world where Howgego (1995), Tye (2001), Cribb (2004) and Schmandt-Besserat (2008) have made valuable contributions.

view of its distinctive coinage and particularly the phased evolution of its silver early-pennies into the unique base-metal *styca* currency.

Particular emphasis is placed on the *styca* coinage which is represented by a wealth of both hoard and single-find material.¹⁰ However, possibly due to its generally unprepossessing appearance, this coin has not always been fully appreciated as an economic driver.¹¹ As the sole denomination it would have been used for transactions of different frequencies—routine daily transactions, the regular payment of dues, and for more substantial occasional transactions such as tribute payments and the transfer of estates and people to church establishments known as ‘bookland’.¹² Both economic and political factors, such as internecine rivalry, are explored as possible contributors, not only to driving down the intrinsic value of the sole denomination to a more generally useful level, but also to erratic coin production in the north.

The primary aim of this study is to assess, in the context of other artefacts, the extent and nature of monetization during the seventh to ninth centuries, when coin use varied geographically, temporally and by transactional type. Monetization provides *prime facie* evidence of economic, technical and intellectual recovery after the dislocation of the Roman withdrawal.

Given the extent to which recent finds and new interpretations improve understanding of early Anglian Northumbria, several objectives, are pursued in support of the primary aim. These constitute pre-requisites to monetization in that an economic and political infrastructure is needed to provide a stable platform for a viable and appropriate medium of exchange. Sufficient and necessary conditions include a clear hierarchy with authority vested in responsible officials whose roles in administering the monetary and fiscal functions of state are distinct and effective. Moreover, the public must have confidence in both the organisation and the coinage if it is to operate efficiently.

Distributional factors and trading advantages may cause divergent degrees of penetration in different areas. Political instability and exogenous influences may disrupt steady production.

The objectives of the study include:

1. Evolution: To establish to what degree the evolution of the Northumbrian coinage was steady, to what degree erratic and to assess the relationship between the advancement of Northumbrian coinage and political and economic developments.
2. Power: To describe how Northumbrian coinage reflects the exercise and balance of power, specifically between church and state.
3. Regional Differences: To expose significant regional differences, and metro-centricity, in coin use.
4. Expropriation: To demonstrate the role of coinage in surplus expropriation by the authorities.
5. Settlement Patterns: To show how the varying mix of coins indicates different trading and settlement patterns and networks.

Part One describes the context of the numismatic and artefactual evidence. Chapter two discusses relevant contributions to the theory of monetization, including those to market models, from various related disciplines. Previous work based on analysis of artefactual data from PAS is also considered, and, in brief, the evolution of monetization in comparable neighbouring polities. This leads into a definition of terms and economic characterisation in chapter three, which proposes a hypothesis of monetization. Part One of the study is completed by the presentation of a numismatic periodization, based on the historical background in chapter four.

Part Two introduces the data describing how it has been assembled, then proceeds to analyse this in the context of the landscape and economy. Chapter five commences with a discussion of the various constraints on the integrity of the evidence before introducing the quantitative and qualitative methodological frameworks. Chapter six presents the data analyses and several analytic tools are applied by site, within a regional structure, in light of the objectives set above. The results of conventional numismatic analyses are summarised. In chapter seven the case studies are described.

In the practical, second part of this study, the quantitative methodology is to assemble a dataset compiled from existing archaeological records primarily of coins and secondarily, artefacts and to facilitate interrogation.¹³ Sources include Pirie’s *Coins of the Kingdom of Northumbria (CKN)*,¹⁴ the *Corpus of Early Medieval Coin Finds (EMC)* and *Sylloges of the Coins of the British Isles (SCBI)*, the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), the *Viking and Anglo-Saxon Landscape and Economy Project (VASLE)* and informal,¹⁵ as well as antiquarian sources. This approach includes assessment of material that may have eluded formal recording. Mapping is used to reveal

¹⁰ Found both within and beyond Northumbria.

¹¹ *The Tenth Oxford Symposium*, 1987, focussed considerable attention on the ‘wretched *styca*’ (Brooks, *BAR* 180, 1987, 398); *MEC* described ‘the least respected Anglo-Saxon coin’ (1986, 298). The change in attitudes was marked by Yorke, who stated: ‘The *styca* could be seen as evidence of efficient royal control of the economy and a sensitive response to changing circumstances rather than as evidence of decline.’ (1990, 97).

¹² Wormald (2006, 153–58). In his letter of 731 to Egberht, Bede complained about the removal of land from taxation and people from service (9).

¹³ The ultimate objective is to make the database available online, perhaps as part of *EMC* or similar.

¹⁴ Pirie’s *CKN* (Galata, 1996), was not part of *SCBI* and is therefore not in *EMC*.

¹⁵ The most significant being Elizabeth Pirie’s archive now in the City of Leeds Museum Depository.

spatial and temporal patterns in the development and use of coinage, subject to detecting bias. Significantly, I have digitized Pirie's corpus of *stycas* in *CKN*, which is the major achievement of the work presented here. It is collated with the other sources into a comprehensive database, providing a versatile tool, easily searched and sorted, for interrogation and investigation.

A numismatic-based phasing is developed. Finds at coin-rich sites have been collated according to the periods defined so that this age-profile gives a fresh perspective on site comparisons.

The qualitative analysis involves the comparison of numismatic and artefactual finds at coin-rich sites and *wics* within Northumbria. Evidence of the ready availability of coinage, whether or not local, in proximity to other artefacts, is taken as indicative of economically active sites. Sites are grouped regionally facilitating comparisons between regions.

Differences, whether of type, period or volume between selected sites are identified. The corpus of material is arranged by location and date then interrogated to establish if the presence of coinage is associated with particular types of other artefacts. The result is a fuller understanding of monetization in early medieval Northumbria, and the place of gold, silver and base-metal coinage in the contemporary social landscape. Coinage contributes to key debates in early Anglo-Saxon history: the development of towns and emporia; the rôle of 'productive' sites; the 'minster debate' and the rôle of the church.

Research has shown that there are *wics* in Southumbria which provide comparative templates for evaluating monetization in the north.¹⁶ These include *Hamwic* which is considered in detail. Finds at Rendlesham, Heckington, Royston and Sledmere are tabulated as exemplars, at *Dataset 15, Wic Comparison 1. Dataset 20*, tabulates finds at *Gipeswic* and *Lundenwic*. Again, credit is due to Pirie for compiling an archive of site reports.

These methodologies are combined to produce tabulations and maps of artefactual and numismatic find-spots. An expedient indicator, *co-occurrence* is the ratio of the number of locations with both artefacts and coins to those with just artefacts. While this is a pragmatic measure, its use as a comparative tool is justified in chapter 6.

Minor numismatic findings are given at section 6.4.3 and the general conclusions in chapter eight, closing with suggestions for future research.

¹⁶ Scull (1997, 280–89). Hill and Cowie (2001, 85).