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V.

THE HUMAN HAND ON HIBERNO-DANISH COINS.

The human hand as a symbol is rare on Hiberno-Danish coins. The bones of three human arms, forearms, and hands are represented in the form of a tribrach on very few coins, and the bones of a hand only on a small number.

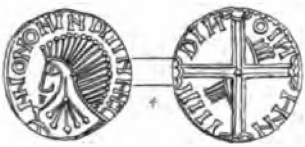
Another symbol which is usually denominated a hand appears on a large number of Hiberno-Danish coins. It consists of an upright line having three, four, or six parallel lines connected with it, which is more like a branch with linear leaves than a hand. It is placed on the reverse of the coin in one angle, or more frequently in two alternate angles of a double cross, each limb of which terminates with three crescents.

A more elaborate description of these varieties of type would fail to convey to the reader a distinct conception of the difference in form of the symbols and of their position on the coins.

Some of these types were first published by Mr. Lindsay;[1] but they are not represented in his plates with sufficient accuracy, and his book is now out of print.

It is therefore desirable to exhibit in one view all the varieties of the hand type in the Royal Irish Academy, and the most convenient mode of commenting on them

[1] "View of the Coinage of Ireland," 4to, Cork, 1839.



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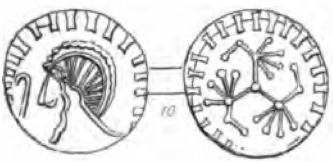

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HIBERNO-DANISH COINS.

will be first to describe in succession the accurate representations of ten coins which are engraved in the accompanying plate (Plate III.).

FIG. 1.

Obv.—A skeleton hand with fingers expanded on the king's neck; the significance of this symbol is established by the hands on figs. 9 and 10; a cross pommée before the king's face.

Rev.—A long double cross, each limb terminated by three crescents, a small pellet in each angle of the cross.

Wt. 14 grs.

This coin closely resembles the one published in Lindsay, pl. ii. fig. 30, and appropriated by him to Regnald III., A.D. 1125. The legend on the reverse is almost identical with Lindsay's coin.

I have given this coin the first place in the series because the type of its reverse, although the legend is unintelligible, corresponds with the acknowledged coins of Sihtric III., who was the first to establish a mint in Ireland.

FIG. 2.

Obv.—This rare type is remarkable for the position of the fleshy hand with the thumb applied to the king's nose.

Rev.—Long double cross, with a small pellet in two alternate angles, and the branch-like symbol with four leaves in the other alternate angles.

Wt. 16·4 grs.

Another coin of this type, but from a different die, published by Lindsay, pl. ii. fig. 29, is in the Royal Irish Academy, and it has on the king's neck a pellet which is omitted in the engraving. Weight 16·3 grains. This coin is appropriated by Lindsay to Regnald III.

Mr. Walker, in his commentary on the Hiberno-Danish coins published in Camden's "Britannia," fig. 9, tab. iv., describes the branch-like symbols on the reverse as "two hands in the opposite angles of the cross" (second edition, fol. 1722, vol. i. p. cxcviii.).

Simon, in his description of a coin appropriated by him to Ifars (pl. ii. fig. 34), says it has "what Mr. Walker calls a hand in two opposite quarters of the cross" ("Essay on Irish Coins," 4to, 1749, p. 11).

Mr. Lindsay, in his description of coins which he considers to be the first type of the coins of Sihtric III., includes ruder coins with unintelligible legends, which weigh only from ten to eighteen grains, a few of which "bear, in two angles of the cross, and sometimes in only one, a rude figure, supposed by some to be a hand, but this figure, although very common on Hiberno-Danish coins, is very seldom found on the coins of Sihtric" (p. 11). Mr. Lindsay adopts Walker's supposition and in table v. of the legends of the Hiberno-Danish coins he employs what he calls the "Irish type—hand in one quarter," or "hand in two quarters" of the cross, to distinguish the "varieties of the coins of Sihtric IV., 1034."

FIG. 3.

Obv.—Skeleton hand on the king's neck like fig. 1, and instead of a legend consisting of letters it has many straight strokes.

Rev.—A branch with four leaves in two alternate angles of the cross. In the unintelligible legend of nine letters the letter N is repeated six times in succession and also as the final letter. This coin is in the Royal Irish Academy, it weighs 18·5 grains, and is published by Lindsay (Supplement, pl. ii. fig. 84), who appropriates it to Regnald III.

Mr. Lindsay, in support of his appropriation of the

three preceding coins, says, "That the coins bearing the name of Renden or Nenden, belong to one of the Reginalds is, I believe, unquestionable; but to which of the Hiberno-Danish princes of that name they are to be assigned is perhaps the most perplexing question that could be asked, relative to the ancient coins of Ireland" (p. 15). He also observes, "The N, as in Nenden, and a great number of the Irish coins, being used as R, and often also in place of other letters; and if correctly appropriated would leave but little doubt that these coins belong to Regnald III., who reigned from 1125 to 1147" (p. 16).

A reference to the accompanying plate will enable the reader to test the accuracy of Mr. Lindsay's interpretation of the letters and straight strokes which occupy the place of legends in figs. 1, 2, and 3.

FIG. 4.

The chief difference between this coin and fig. 3 consists in the hand on the neck being turned downwards. It has more letters on the obverse, and one-half of the legend on the reverse is similar to fig. 3. Weight 13·1 grains. This variety of the hand type is not mentioned by Lindsay.

FIG. 5.

A branch having only *three* leaves terminated by pellets in only one angle of the cross, of which the other angles are blank. Weight 17·3 grains. This rare variety of the branch is not noticed by Lindsay.[2]

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[2] Since the accompanying plate was engraved, I discovered in the cabinet of the Royal Irish Academy a Hiberno-Danish coin similar to the type of fig. 3. Instead of a skeleton hand

FIG. 6.

A branch having only three *pointed* leaves in one angle, a small linear cross or pellets in the other angles of the cross. Weight 16·9 grains. Not mentioned by Lindsay.

FIG. 7.

A branch with four leaves terminated by pellets in one angle, and a linear cross or pellets in the other angles of the cross. Weight 15·9 grains. Coins of this type are published by Lindsay, pl. ii. figs. 44, 45, 46, and 47, and are by him classed as "Uncertain."

FIG. 8.

A branch with *six* pointed leaves in one angle of the cross. It has an annulet with a pellet in its centre in another angle, and in other particulars it bears a close resemblance to figs. 6 and 7. Weight 11·2 grains. This very rare variety of the branch is not mentioned by Lindsay.

FIG. 9.

Two human upper extremities like those on fig. 10, one above and the other below a transverse band with straight lines upon it. Weight 14·8 grains.

This coin is similar to one found at Glendelach, in the county Wicklow, in 1639. The figure of a coin of this type, published by Simon, pl. i. fig. 12, is a copy of the woodcut first published by Ware in 1654 ("De Hibernia et Antiquitatibus ejus Disquisitiones").

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on the king's neck, it has a branch with three pointed leaves like that on fig. 6; and on the reverse a branch with four leaves, terminated by pellets in two alternate angles of the cross, and a pellet in each of the other angles. Weight 14·2 grains.

FIG. 10.

A tribrach of three human upper extremities, each consisting of the bones of an arm, forearm, and hand, with fingers expanded, the three thumbs meeting at a central point; straight lines instead of a legend. Weight only 8·5 grains.

Fig. 51 in Lindsay's pl. iii. is a variety of this type, having in the centre of the reverse a pellet within a circle to which the three thumbs are attached. It is properly classed as "Uncertain."

It is very improbable that the fleshy hand on the obverse of fig. 2 and the branches with four leaves in two alternate angles of the cross on its reverse have the same signification as symbols.

There is some resemblance between the fingers of the hand on the obverse and the branches on the reverse; but Mr. Walker, who first described the latter as being hands, had not seen a Hiberno-Danish coin bearing a perfect hand or a skeleton hand. His appellation, however, has been adopted by Simon and Lindsay, and no one, to my knowledge, has dissented up to the present time. The signification of the five radiating lines on the obverses of figs. 1, 3, and 4 would be questionable were it not for the demonstration that it is a skeleton human hand, which is furnished by the skeleton arms, forearms, and hands which are represented on the reverses of figs. 9 and 10.

The branch-like symbol with four leaves, called a hand by Mr. Walker, appears in one, or more frequently in two, angles of the cross on the reverse of a large number of Hiberno-Danish coins, and Mr. Lindsay correctly observes that the rude figure called by some a hand (which name

he adopts in his tables of the "Descriptions and Legends of Hiberno-Danish Coins") is very seldom found on the coins of Sihtric III. (p. 11).

The workmanship of Sihtric's coins is superior to all others, and the intelligible legends on them furnish the only complete evidence of the coinage of money in Dublin by a Hiberno-Danish king.

The fleshy hand on the obverse of fig. 2 is unmistakable, and it is very improbable that the symbol on the reverse is intended to represent a human hand. A similar symbol is on the reverses of figs. 3 and 4, each of which has a skeleton hand with expanded fingers on the obverse, and fig. 1 has a skeleton hand on the obverse, but there is not any symbol or particular mark on its reverse.

A branch with only three leaves (fig. 5) is found on a few coins. There are only three coins of this type in the Royal Irish Academy. The legend on each side consists of unintelligible characters, and is preceded by a cross patée.

There are five coins in the Royal Irish Academy which have a branch with three *acute* leaves (fig. 6). The branch with four leaves terminated by pellets, on fig. 7, occurs in two alternate angles of the cross on the reverses of figs. 2, 3, and 4. Fig. 8 has a branch with six leaves in one angle of the cross and an annulet in another angle; in other particulars its type corresponds with figs. 6 and 7. The letters of the legends on the obverses are arranged with remarkable uniformity, but are unintelligible, and are preceded by a cross patée; their reverses have only straight lines in place of letters.

Not one of the coins represented in the accompanying plate can be appropriated with certainty or even probability to any person or place of mintage, nor can its place in the chronological series be fixed with precision.

Sihtric III., King of Dublin A.D. 989 to 1029, is the only king whose coins are known with certainty. The chief guide for the chronological arrangement of all Hiberno-Danish coins after his time must be the consideration of the varieties and analogies of types, when legends are unintelligible, and when straight lines are substituted for letters, as in figs. 3, 6, 9, and 10 in the plate.

The legend ✠ IIIITRLREIDIFIII on the obverse of fig. 5 presents some of the elements of the name Sihtric, and the coin may possibly belong to Sihtric IV., King of Dublin A.D. 1034 to 1041. It weighs only 17·3 grains, and the branch-like symbol does not appear on the known coins of Sihtric III.

Fig. 10 has not a letter on either side, and it weighs only 8·5 grains. It appears to be the latest in the series, and is probably contemporary with the Irish bracteates of the close of the twelfth century.

The chief object of this communication is to stimulate further investigation for a satisfactory explanation of the signification of the human hand, and also of the branch-like symbol which appears on so many of the Hiberno-Danish coins found in Ireland.

AQUILLA SMITH.

20th November, 1882.