



Three New *Agnus Dei* Pennies

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ABSTRACT

The recorded corpus of *Agnus Dei* pennies made or found in England has been augmented by three further specimens. The first two (below, [1] and [2]) are imitations of the type, probably minted in Scandinavia but uncovered in England. The third (below, [3]) is a specimen of the original English issue, representing a previously unrecorded mint-place (Dorchester, in Dorset). The new coins are presented in turn, showing how each in its own way refines important aspects of the wider understanding of the *Agnus Dei* coinage.

Æthelred II's remarkable *Agnus Dei* pennies were almost certainly produced at the height of the viking threat to England, around Michaelmas 1009. Two months earlier, a large army led by Thorkell the Tall had arrived in southeast England. It brought a new wave of suffering and destruction, building on the painful memories of other prolonged invasions that had taken place since the 990s. Faced with a crisis, the king and his leading men convened in the relative safety of Bath in the southwest, and there they considered what might be done both on earth and in heaven to help the English cause. One result of the meeting was the law-code known as *VII Æthelred*, composed by Wulfstan, archbishop of York (1002–23), in his characteristic style. This called for a concerted programme of collective penance in the three days leading up to Michaelmas. Another result may well have been the *Agnus Dei* coinage, which conceptually fits in very closely with the penitential aims and anxieties on display in *VII Æthelred*. This coin-issue did away with the traditional iconography of late Anglo-Saxon coinage: a bust of the king on one face and a cross on the other. Instead, the *Agnus Dei* pennies bear on the obverse a representation of the *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God, and on the other face a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Both images were invocations of peace; of the power of the Christian divine to settle earthly conflict. The hope, surely, was that God might intervene on the side of the pious English, as they pulled out all the stops in their efforts against the enemy.¹

¹ For recent discussion of the wider historical context, see L. Roach, *King Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven, 2016), pp. 253–87; K. Cubitt, 'A Reassessment of the Reign of King Æthelred the Unready', *ANS* 42 (2020), 1–28; and R. Naismith, 'The Coinage of Æthelred II: a New Evaluation', *ES* 97 (2016), 117–39, at 125–32. See also S. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop,

The small corpus of *Agnus Dei* pennies has received three new recent additions, which can be set alongside the twenty-two previously known examples (plus two mules with the subsequent type, *Last Small Cross*). [1] and [2] represent Scandinavian imitations of the type found in England; [3] is a specimen of the original English issue, representing a previously unrecorded mint-place (Dorchester, in Dorset). This short contribution will present the three coins in turn and offer a new review of their historical context and significance.

[1] AND [2]: SCANDINAVIAN IMITATIONS OF *AGNUS DEI* TYPE FROM ENGLAND

The first coin, [1], was reportedly found in Essex in the 1980s, but remained unpublished in a private collection until brought to the attention of the Portable Antiquities Scheme in early 2022. It is now recorded on the PAS database as LON-902122 (Fig. 1).

Obv. illegible inscription around nimbate lamb facing right, with cross-headed standard behind and tablet at feet.

Rev. illegible inscription around a soaring dove flanked by two small crosses.

Tablet: parallelogram Λ / Ω .

Weight: 3.12 g, including a pin and catch plate mounted on the reverse to turn this coin into a brooch. Obverse (display side) gilded.

Diameter: 21 mm (not including pin).

Found in Essex, 1980s, but only recorded on PAS database in early 2022.

This is not the only *Agnus Dei* Scandinavian imitation found in England: another specimen, [2], was reportedly found in East Anglia and acquired by the National Museum of Denmark in the 1990s (Fig. 2).²

Obv. illegible inscription around nimbate lamb facing left, with cross-headed standard behind and tablet at feet.

Rev. illegible inscription around a soaring dove flanked by two small crosses.

Tablet: illegible.

and the Viking Raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12', *ASE* 36 (2007), 151–220, at 179–89, with further references, and 'The Reign of King Æthelred the Unready in Multiple Maps', *Anglo-Danish Empire: a Companion to the Reign of King Cnut the Great*, ed. R. North, E. Goeres and A. Finlay (Berlin, 2022), pp. 97–112, at 104 (Map IVa).

² B. Malmer, *The Anglo-Scandinavian Coinage c. 995–1020*, *Commentationes de nummis saeculorum IX–XI in Suecia repertis*, ns 9 (Stockholm, 1997), no. 558.1660, now in the National Museum of Denmark. For provenance, see J. S. Jensen, 'Propaganda for kristendommen på nyerhvervet vikingemønt', *Nationalmuseet* 57 (1992/3), 9.

Three New Agnus Dei Pennies



Figure 1: Scandinavian imitation of *Agnus Dei* type (PAS LON-902122).



Figure 2: Scandinavian imitation of *Agnus Dei* type (National Museum of Denmark).

Weight: 1.40 g.

Diameter: 22 mm.

National Museum of Denmark. Reportedly found in East Anglia, before 1993.

Scandinavian imitations of late Anglo-Saxon pennies remain extremely scarce among recorded finds from England.³ [1] is, moreover, unusual in the extent and good preservation of its secondary modifications: gilding and an attached pin,

³ Other examples include PAS SF-471D88 (modelled on Edward the Confessor, *Expanding Cross*, found at Waldringfield, Suffolk), NLM-56B216 (same type, found near Lincoln, Lincolnshire) and NLM-1EA525 (Cnut, *Short Cross*, found at Swinhope, Lincolnshire). See also Malmer, *Anglo-Scandinavian Coinage*, no. 410.1279 (imitations of Æthelred II, *Long Cross*, including one found in

which turn it from a coin into an ornament. It stands out from the bulk of other pierced or mounted coins of this type, which are overwhelmingly from Scandinavia itself (probably including [3]), and which are made to display the reverse or 'dove' side.⁴

The *Agnus Dei* imitations are now emerging as a subject of interest in their own right. It is unlikely that they were brought to England for use as currency, as analogy with other imitative series suggests production in the 1020s or 1030s: by this stage, *Agnus Dei* pennies would have virtually vanished from circulation in England.⁵ Neither coin forms part of a die-chain, so an earlier date cannot be ruled out, and one is the only representative of its dies.⁶ Even if one or both specimens were made closer to the English issue of 1009, they are best seen as curiosities and keepsakes, probably with particular appeal to Scandinavian Christians.

Coins [1] and [2] call attention to the interest that the *Agnus Dei* type generated on both sides of the North Sea, and to the fact that some coins travelled from east to west, against the prevailing flow of coins from England to Scandinavia, as well as to their occasional use as ornamental or devotional objects.

[3] AN *AGNUS DEI* PENNY FROM DORCHESTER

The third new find to be recorded here belongs to the original issue of Æthelred II Fig. 3, but is of particular interest, for it is the first to name a new mint-place since Salisbury was identified from a coin in the Kose hoard of 1982.⁷

Dorchester, WULFNOTH

Obv. +ÆÐELRÆD REX ANGLORVM around nimbate lamb facing right, with cross-headed standard behind and tablet at feet.

Kent: M. Archibald, 'Skandinavisk Ethelred-imitation funnen i England', *Svensk Numismatisk Tidskrift* 1993 (1993), 148–50.

⁴ S. Keynes and R. Naismith, 'The *Agnus Dei* Pennies of King Æthelred the Unready', *ASE* 40 (2012), 175–223, at 206–7.

⁵ B. Malmer, *Den Svenska Mynthistorien: Vikingatiden ca 995–1030* (Stockholm, 2010), pp. 60 and 272, and 'A Note on the Coinage of Sigtuna at the Time of Anund Jacob', *Festskrift till Lars O. Lagerqvist*, ed. U. Ehrensärd, *Numismatiska Meddelanden* 37 (Stockholm, 1989), 259–62. Just one mule of the type was found in the Lenborough hoard of over 5,000 coins, which was deposited late in the reign of Cnut, but with a substantial element from about two decades earlier: S. Keynes, W. MacKay and R. Naismith, 'A Further *Agnus Dei* Coin of Æthelred the Unready', *ASE* 48 (2022), 205–7.

⁶ The mounted, gilded specimen recorded here as [1] is known from at least two die-duplicates (Malmer, *Anglo-Scandinavian Coinage*, p. 229): one from the Kose hoard, now in the Estonian History Museum (SCBI 51, 1280); and one in the National Museum of Denmark (SCBI 7, 1687), with no recorded provenance.

⁷ Published in I. Leimus, 'A Fourteenth *Agnus Dei* Penny of Æthelred II', *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage in Memory of Bror Emil Hildebrand*, ed. K. Jonsson, *Numismatiska Meddelanden* 35 (Stockholm, 1990), 139–56.



Figure 3: *Agnus Dei* penny of Dorchester, moneyer Wulfnoth (Spink).

Rev. +**FVLFNÐ ON DORCSER** around a soaring dove.⁸

Tablet: parallelogram, inscribed **Λ / Ω**.

Weight: 1.46 g. Pierced twice (suggesting a Scandinavian/Baltic find).⁹

Diameter: 20 mm.

The coin's find-spot and provenance are not known. Held by Spink since December 2021.

With this coin, the complement of known mint-places for *Agnus Dei* rises to ten, produced by fourteen moneyers (Table 1). Dorchester fits into the general pattern of the existing corpus, which was made at a series of mostly small to middle-sized mint-places in an arc extending from Wessex through Mercia in the west midlands to the territory later known as the Danelaw in the east midlands (Fig. 2).¹⁰ Dorchester also adds a new shire, Dorset. The mint-name as represented on the coin, **DORCSER**, is apparently unparalleled.¹¹ The moneyer named on this coin,

⁸ For an argument that this image in fact represents the eagle of Isaiah, see D. Woods, 'The *Agnus Dei* Penny of King Æthelred II: a Call to Hope in the Lord (Isaiah XL)?', *ASE* 42 (2013), 299–309. We acknowledge this as a plausible reading, but prefer to identify the bird as a dove representing the Holy Spirit, on the strength of numerous other iconographic parallels (Keynes and Naismith, '*Agnus Dei* Pennies', pp. 180–1 and 204–5).

⁹ Keynes and Naismith, '*Agnus Dei* Pennies', pp. 189, 206–8; F. Audy, *Suspended Value: Using Coins as Pendants in Viking-Age Scandinavia (c. AD 800–1140)* (Stockholm, 2018), pp. 219–24.

¹⁰ Keynes and Naismith, '*Agnus Dei* Pennies', esp. pp. 198–9.

¹¹ J. Carroll and D. N. Parsons, *Anglo-Saxon Mint-Names* (Nottingham, 2007), pp. 120–6. This form is unusual in that it seems to be an abbreviation of the mint-name, in contrast to the more common practice of spelling out as much as there was room for on the die (the authors are grateful to David Parsons for discussion of this matter).

Table 1:

Representation of mint-places and moneyers in *Agnus Dei*, with numbers of dies.

Mint-place	No. of moneyers	No. of coins	No. of obv. dies	No. of rev. dies
Leicester	2	4	2	3
Nottingham	1	3	1	1
Stamford	3	3 (+2 mules)	4	3
Derby	1	2	1	1
Northampton	1	1	1	1
Malmesbury	1	4	1	1
Hereford	1	1	1	1
Stafford	1	1	1	1
Dorchester	1	1	1	1
Salisbury	2	2	2	2
Uncertain	?	1	1	1
<i>Totals</i>	14	23 (+2)	16	16

Wulfnoth, is represented at Dorchester in *Æthelred II Cross, Long Cross, Helmet and Last Small Cross*, before and after the period of *Agnus Dei*.¹²

THE NATURE OF THE *AGNUS DEI* COINAGE

As proposed by two of the authors in 2012, the best interpretation of the remarkable (and still remarkably rare) *Agnus Dei* type is that it was produced for a short time in autumn 1009, as part of a concerted programme of prayer and performative penance instigated by King *Æthelred II* to seek divine support in reaction to the arrival of a large viking force in southeast England on 1 August. *Agnus Dei* demonstrates that the coinage was highly responsive to decisions taken centrally, uniting the royal court with localities across England. It is the most impressive of several short-lived types which demonstrate that the coinage did not work according to a predetermined timetable.¹³

¹² K. Jonsson and G. van der Meer, 'Mints and Moneyers, c. 973–1066', *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage*, ed. Jonsson, pp. 49–136, at 67.

¹³ Cf. *Intermediate Small Cross* (990s) and *Transitional Pyramids* (mid-1060s), which share characteristics with *Agnus Dei*, including restricted regional production. For further discussion, see R. Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage, with a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. 8: Britain and Ireland c. 400–1066* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 247–8. There is no indication that all these coinages reflect similar circumstances to *Agnus Dei*. Moreover, conclusions about the size and nature of coin-issues must remain tentative, as recently illustrated by the discovery of two hoards of c. 880 that show the previously rare *Two Emperors* type of the 870s to have been produced on a significantly larger scale than had formerly been thought: J. Naylor, 'The Coinage of Wessex and Mercia, c. 875–79: a Re-Assessment of the Two Emperors and Cross-and-Lozenge Types', *The Watlington Hoard: Coinage, Kings and the Viking Great Army in Oxfordshire, AD 875–80*, ed. J. Naylor and E. Standley (Oxford, 2022), pp. 66–97, at 67–70.

More debatable is the exact status of the type relative to others of the period: was it a ‘special issue’, expected only to last for a brief time, or an aborted standard issue, on the model that had emerged over the course of Æthelred’s reign? It is important to stress that these categories are the creations of modern observers. ‘Special’ issues in particular are defined in negative against the mass of other coinages, the implication being that they should operate according to a different logic. *Agnus Dei* benefits from an alternative approach; one that begins by setting it against the background of the coinage and the kingdom more generally.¹⁴ The starting point is that it was deeply unusual to reform the coinage as frequently as Æthelred did, and that this was highly unlikely to have happened simply as a matter of routine.¹⁵ Recoinage in itself was ‘special’. The purity and quality of currency was, and had in Christian societies long been, a well-known metaphor for the goodness of the human soul. What seemed virtuous on the outside may be dross on the inside. This connection went both ways, with sound coinage reflecting a good soul; moreover, it could be seen as working on a large, collective level as well as an individual one. Consistent, pure coinage, untainted by forgery, constituted a barometer of the spiritual purity of the society responsible for it, with recoinage being one of the best ways (at least in the eyes of early medieval rulers) to maintain those standards, and indeed to reaffirm the moral fibre of the population as a whole. Coin reform as developed under Edgar (959–75) and especially Æthelred was part of this tradition: Archbishop Wulfstan (d. 1023) and others tied *feos bot*, ‘improvement of the coinage’, to the general spiritual health of the kingdom.¹⁶ It represented one among many practices calculated to foster collective religious identity, turning what was good for one into an obligation for all.¹⁷ Repeated recoinages under Æthelred emerged from the morally and spiritually charged climate of his court; they would also have generated income for the king and the moneyers, but that was probably not the primary aim of the exercise.

On the face of it, *Agnus Dei* has several qualities associated with other new coinages of Æthelred’s reign, including a new design and a significantly higher weight standard than the immediately preceding type. Several minor aspects of the inscriptions point

¹⁴ For discussion of all of the above points, see Keynes and Naismith, ‘*Agnus Dei* Pennies’, esp. pp. 196–201.

¹⁵ Naismith, ‘The Coinage of Æthelred II’, pp. 125–32.

¹⁶ R. Naismith, ‘*Denarii mixti*: Debasement and Rhetoric in the Early Middle Ages (Fifth–Twelfth Centuries)’, *Debasement: Manipulation of Coin Standards in Pre-Modern Monetary Systems*, ed. K. Butcher (Oxford, 2020), pp. 195–207. For Wulfstan and *feos bot*, see Keynes and Naismith, ‘*Agnus Dei* Pennies’, p. 198.

¹⁷ The development of Peter’s Pence (an annual offering to Rome) represents another manifestation of late Anglo-Saxon kings and their advisers forcing collective spiritual benefit onto the English: R. Naismith and F. Tinti, ‘The Origins of Peter’s Pence’, *EHR* 134 (2020), 521–52, at 533–44 and 550–1.

to a new issue that had had considerable thought lavished upon it. Yet *Agnus Dei* was also issued on a minute scale, and its design departed from usual practice. Viewed in the context of the positively electric atmosphere of England in late summer and autumn 1009, it could be taken as a sort of recoinage without the coinage: a deliberate effort to capture and accentuate the ‘special’ connotations of recoinage that had developed over the previous decades, with no expectation of long-term minting. Production probably only lasted a short time, potentially just days if it was bound up with the proclamation of special measures to be taken in the three days running down to Michaelmas (29 September).¹⁸ The resultant pennies were apparently meant for exchange purposes – they had the usual inscriptions of a coin, and conformed to a weight standard – and not just as ornamental objects, but the context for the introduction of such scarce and exceptional coins into circulation can only be imagined: they may well have been distributed through the sort of morally-charged expenditures recorded in *VII Æthelred*.¹⁹ The *Agnus Dei* pennies were followed in short order by a new, more substantive coinage (*Last Small Cross*) that made a different yet no less meaningful statement, recalling the halcyon days of King Edgar and Edward the Martyr. Seen against the coinage, charters, law-codes and exhortative literature of the period, the *Agnus Dei* pennies speak eloquently of the depth and imagination of the response to the crisis of 1009. They demonstrate effective leadership by the king and those around him.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE *AGNUS DEI* COINAGE

The Dorchester coin raises further questions about how the *Agnus Dei* coinage was produced. As noted, the issue was made only at what might be regarded as a small and arbitrary selection of mint-towns, not including most of the major centres of English coinage (Fig. 4). Attempts to unravel and rationalise this distribution have concentrated on finding possible stylistic groupings within the type. Three interpretations of the stylistic structure of the coinage have been proposed in earlier publications, which are summarised in Table 2.²⁰ These three schemes differ, though Dolley and Blackburn both associated the Hereford coin with a separate and distinct source.

¹⁸ For the context of this remarkable effort, see Keynes, ‘An Abbot’, pp. 179–89.

¹⁹ See below.

²⁰ M. Dolley, ‘The Nummular Brooch from Sulgrave’, *England before the Norman Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 333–49, at 338–9; S. Keynes, ‘An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12’, *ASE* 36 (2007), 151–220, at 195–8; Keynes and Naismith, ‘*Agnus Dei* Pennies’, pp. 191–6. The interpretation presented by Keynes and Naismith was formulated by Mark Blackburn during the final months before his death, with advice from Stewart Lyon regarding die-cutting styles in *Last Small Cross*. Cf. n. 3.



Figure 4: Map of *Agnus Dei* mint-places, with Domesday shires (using a base map created by Stuart Brookes).

The criteria on which these divisions are based are summarised in [Table 3](#). This shows why three sharp observers of late Anglo-Saxon coinage could arrive at such different conclusions: there are several patterns of agreement and divergence to weigh against each other. Dolley gave precedence to the shape of the tablet, while Keynes also took into account the presence or absence of ON in the reverse inscription, and it was the discrepancy between these two criteria that led him to leave Derby as a possible member of either group. Blackburn based his proposed structure on a broader range of stylistic affinities, as well as the length of the ethnic element of the obverse inscription; he also looked to regional organisation at the beginning of the next type.²¹

²¹ Stylistic divisions in *Last Small Cross* are assessed in S. Lyon, 'Die-Cutting Styles in the *Last Small Cross* Issue of c. 1009–1017 and Some Problematic East Anglian Dies and Die-Links', *BNJ* 68 (1998), 21–41, at 21–8. See also S. Lyon, *The Lyon Collection of Anglo-Saxon Coins*, SCBI 68 (Oxford,

Table 2:
Suggested stylistic divisions in the *Agnus Dei* coinage.

Mint-place	Dolley 1971	Keynes 2007	Blackburn (in Keynes and Naismith 2012)
Derby	'London'	1/2	A ('Winchester')
Dorchester	-	-	-
Hereford	'Chester'	1	C ('Gloucester')
Leicester	'Winchester'	2	A ('Winchester')
Malmesbury	'London'	1	A ('Winchester')
Northampton	'London'	2	A ('Winchester')
Nottingham	'Winchester'	2	A ('Winchester')
Salisbury	-	1	B ('Exeter')
Stafford	'London'	1	D (uncertain)
Stamford	'Winchester'	2	A ('Winchester')
Uncertain	-	-	B ('Exeter')

The Dorchester coin is affiliated with those of the Wiltshire mint of Salisbury in the shape and inscription of its tablet, though not in its ethnic. But it also shares a small yet important detail with the unique coin from Stafford: wavy curves at the base of the dove's tail on the reverse. Both these coins, together with those from Salisbury and the uncertain mint, feature a well-modelled lamb with a gently textured fleece, and a finely proportioned head to the standard cross. It is possible that Blackburn's separate B and D groups represent a single cluster (or perhaps different stages of work in a single cluster), to which the Dorchester coin belongs. These can be set alongside two other distinct elements of the coinage. Malmesbury and the Danelaw mint-towns form a coherent group, distinguished by the shape and inscription of the obverse tablet, and also by an often spindly appearance to the standard cross. Finally, the Hereford coin stands alone. It looks more towards the Dorchester/Salisbury/Stafford group in its typological details, but is highly idiosyncratic in execution, with an unparalleled form of abbreviation for the ethnic element of the obverse inscription, distinctly few and heavy pellets, sharp and 'streaky' modelling on the lamb's fleece and dove's feathers, and also two additional crosses added on the reverse (Fig. 5).

There are points of contact between the two main clusters. The lamb and dove display similarities in terms of shape and texture, while some specimens of the Malmesbury/Danelaw group have less spindly standard crosses. It is

2016), pp.107–8. It should be noted that new types also often brought new arrangements for the production and distribution of dies: Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage*, pp. 246 and 260–71.

Table 3:
Typological affinities between mint-places in the *Agnus Dei* type.

Mint-place	Tablet shape		Tablet inscription	Tablet border		Ethnic	ON in rev. inscription
	Parallelogram	Trapezoid		One line	Two lines		
Leicester		•	AGN, AGNV	•		ANGLORVM	
Nottingham		•	Blank	•		ANGLORVM	
Stamford		•	AGNV	•		ANGLORVM	
Derby	•		AG	•		ANGLORVM	
Northampton	• (?)		AG	•		ANGLOR	
Malmesbury	•		AGN, AGNV	•		ANGLORVM	
Hereford	•		A∅	•		AGLO	•
Stafford	•		A∅	•		ANGLORVM	•
Dorchester	•		A∅		•	ANGLORVM	•
Salisbury	•		A∅		•	ANGLO, ANGLOR	•
Uncertain	•		A∅		•	ANGLORVM (?)	• (?)

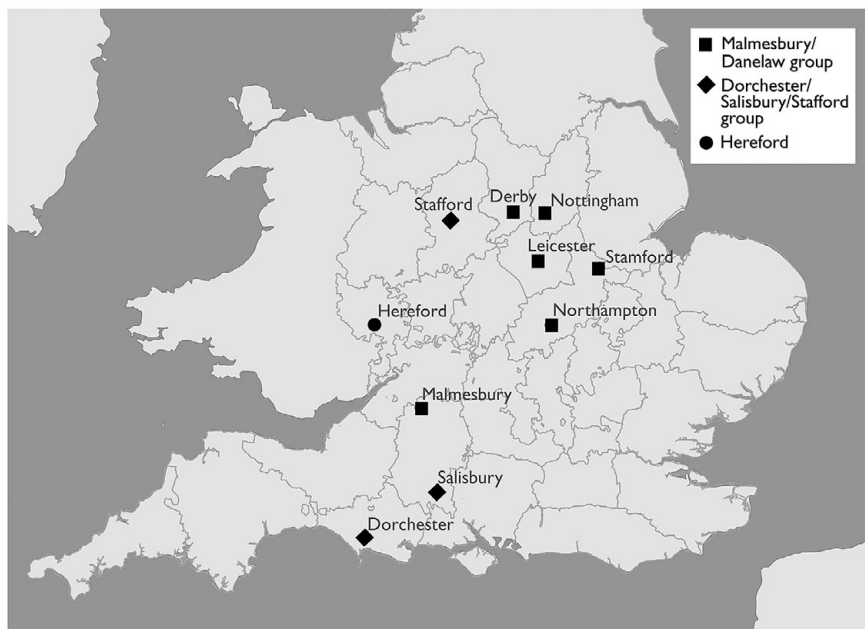


Figure 5: Map of *Agnus Dei* mint-places showing proposed groups for die-distribution, with Domesday shires (using a base map created by Stuart Brookes).

therefore possible that they represent two workshops or craftsmen in dialogue with one another. Given the exceptional nature of the *Agnus Dei* coinage and its probably very brief duration as part of a carefully conceived spiritual enterprise, points of origin should not be multiplied more than is necessary. Indeed, it is possible that the dies were produced in the immediate orbit of the king's court, where the decision was made to issue the *Agnus Dei* coinage on such an unusual and rapid basis. An assembly of the kingdom's leaders convened in late summer 1009 at Bath in Somerset, where the law-code promulgating Æthelred's programme of prayer was issued.²² As the prologue to these laws put it, the king met there with *sapientes eius*, 'his advisers/wise men' (presumably translating Old English *witan*),²³ and the occasion – in a place charged with the memory of Æthelred's revered father Edgar, and with deeper Roman resonances – would

²² The king's exact movements in the rest of this calamitous year are obscure: besides Bath, the CDE manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, with various Latin sources derived from them, refer to the king leading an army against the vikings at an unspecified inland location. For broader context, see S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978–1016: a Study in their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 216–21; and Roach, *Æthelred*, pp. 267–85.

²³ *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann, 3 vols. (Halle, 1903–16) I, 260.

very likely have attracted many of the great and the good from across the kingdom, or at least all who could travel there easily without danger of viking molestation.²⁴

The assembled company would have included more than just ecclesiastics and aristocrats: a whole array of support staff would have been present, some of whom might have been makers of seals and dies, or moneyers, perhaps grouped around their lord or patron, or participating in a prearranged supplementary meeting, as was done in ninth-century Francia when Charles the Bald (843–77) initiated a new coinage.²⁵ On a practical basis, there is little doubt that this was feasible: modern experimental archaeology suggests that the full complement of thirty-two known obverse and reverse dies could have comfortably been made within a single day by the two or three engravers thought to have been responsible.²⁶

In other words, it is conceivable that the royal assembly at Bath, or another one like it held soon after, was itself the venue for die-production, or at least the beginning of die-production; had the issue been intended to continue, other mechanisms may well have come into play, probably based in the larger mint-towns. The same artisans could have served in all cases,²⁷ moving between assembly-places, towns and other regular bases, and being drawn from those who accompanied high-status visitors to the court.²⁸ This might help to explain the patchy and overlapping pattern of die-distribution, and the lack of coins from the southeast. No diplomas from the gathering at Bath survive to show who was present, but it is possible that the stylistic clusters among the surviving coins reflect the major aristocratic interest groups at the assembly and networks of distribution based on them. The group that spans Mercia and Wessex (Dorchester/Salisbury/Stafford) might be associated with Eadric Streona, who had since 1007 been ealdorman of Mercia, but is also known to have had landed interests in Dorset.²⁹

²⁴ Roach, *Æthelred*, pp. 268–73.

²⁵ The edict of Pitres, promulgated on 25 June 864, commanded that every count in charge of a mint was supposed to have his viscount, two other aristocrats and the moneyer gather at Senlis one week after (on 1 July); the timeframe is tight enough that this must have been planned in advance: edict of Pitres, c. 14 (*Capitularia regum Francorum II*, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, MGH Capit. 2 (Hanover, 1897), 315–16).

²⁶ D. Sellwood, 'Medieval Minting Techniques', *BNJ* 31 (1962), 57–65, at 58–9. Sellwood reported that even as a non-specialist, he was still able to produce a passable obverse within twenty-five minutes and a reverse within fifteen minutes.

²⁷ For the likelihood that the same figures were responsible for both seal matrices – closely associated with elite society – and coin dies, see J. Kershaw and R. Naismith, 'A New Late Anglo-Saxon Seal Matrix', *ASE* 42 (2013), 291–8, at 297–8.

²⁸ A similar approach to aspects of the organisation of the coinage more broadly was advanced in P. Stafford, 'Historical Implications of the Regional Production of Dies under Æthelred II', *BNJ* 48 (1978), 35–51.

²⁹ For Eadric more broadly see S. Keynes, 'Eadric Streona', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, in *Association with the British Academy: from the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and

The other *Agnus Dei* cluster is notable for its concentration in the east midlands, where all significant mint-places in the region contributed to the coinage, with the interesting exception of Lincoln, but also the addition of an outlier in Malmesbury.³⁰ A connection might be drawn between this cluster and the brothers Morcar and Sigeferth, prominent thegns strongly associated with the east midlands. The pair were established magnates in 1009, appearing high in the pecking order of diploma witness-lists, and they would eventually be killed in 1015, as retaliation for having turned to Swein Forkbeard in 1013–14.³¹ Suggestively, after their murder Æthelred ordered that Sigeferth's widow Aldgyth be taken to Malmesbury.³² The nature of the Malmesbury connection is left vague. Pauline Stafford and Susan Kelly suggested that this amounted to imprisonment, perhaps at either a royal estate or monastery,³³ though there is no other evidence of Malmesbury having served this role; nor was it especially prominent in Æthelred's regime.³⁴ Another possibility is that Malmesbury was chosen for Aldgyth's honourable retirement because of some sort of family or property connection, which might also lie behind the close alignment of its *Agnus Dei* coins with those from the east midlands.

B. Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004) XVII, 535–8 and Roach, *Æthelred*, esp. pp. 210–13. His property in Dorset is mentioned in S 933 (*Charters of Sherborne*, ed. M. A. O'Donovan, AS Charters 3 (Oxford, 1988), no. 15).

³⁰ The reason for Lincoln's exclusion can only be guessed at. As one of the largest mint-places in the kingdom, which might have been expected to produce its own dies in due course, it perhaps fell outside the remit of the short-lived operation of 1009.

³¹ Roach, *Æthelred*, p. 285; see also S. Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670–1066* (Cambridge, 2002), no. LXIII (thegns of Æthelred), demonstrating how swiftly the two brothers rose through the ranks from the mid-1000s. Morcar was in fact the beneficiary of one of the few charters issued in 1009 (S 922 (*Charters of Burton Abbey*, ed. P. H. Sawyer, AS Charters 2 (Oxford, 1979), no. 32)); it gives no exact location for its issue or an exact date, but the attestation of the successor to Ælfweard, abbot of Glastonbury (whose death was commemorated on 19 December), suggests sometime around Christmas (Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 263–4; Roach, *Æthelred*, p. 284; S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Glastonbury Abbey*, AS Charters 15 (Oxford, 2012), 178–9).

³² *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* CDE 1015 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition. Volume 7: MS E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 71–2; *English Historical Documents. Volume I: c. 500–1042*, trans. D. Whitelock, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), p. 247) describes Morcar and Sigeferth as 'the chief thegns belonging to the Seven Boroughs' (*þa yldestan þægenas in to seofonburgum*), and adds the detail about Sigeferth's widow being taken to Malmesbury (though she is only named in John of Worcester, *Chronicon s.a. 1015* (*The Chronicle of John of Worcester. Volume II: the Annals from 450 to 1066*, ed. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. J. Bray and P. McGurk (Oxford, 1995), pp. 478–81)).

³³ P. Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II, a Study in the Limitations on Royal Policy and Action', *Æthelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. D. Hill, BAR British Series 59 (Oxford, 1978), 15–46, at 36; S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey*, AS Charters 11 (Oxford, 2005), 26.

³⁴ D. Thomas, 'Incarceration as Judicial Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England', *Capital and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. J. P. Gates and N. Marafioti (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 92–112, esp. 95.

CONCLUSION

The scenario that led to the making of the Dorchester *Agnus Dei* penny, and the other twenty-two like it, might be imagined as follows. A viking army landed in Kent at the beginning of August 1009, causing panic and consternation. Æthelred headed for the comparative safety of Bath, where he quickly convened a gathering of his leading men. The assembled worthies agreed that, with the military situation against them, a robust spiritual defence was needed, and a document laying out various measures (now known as *VII Æthelred*) was promulgated. In it, they called for a supreme spiritual effort over the three days running up to Michaelmas. Another aspect of the discussions held at Bath concerned the coinage. There were recent precedents of recoinage as a signal of renewal at times when Æthelred and his advisers felt God was testing them, and August/September 1009 could well have been seen as another such occasion. But the gravity of the situation led the Bath assembly to go a step further than previous arrangements: it was commanded that a special issue should be prepared to form a part of the programme of supplications to God in the run-up to Michaelmas (with a more regular issue anticipated to follow soon thereafter). The new issue might even have been intended primarily to fulfil the several monetary demands of *VII Æthelred*, which ordered that every member of a household should offer a penny as alms, or get their lord to do so if they could not.

The responsibility of lords to pick up the slack perhaps reflects the way in which production went on to be organised. With speed being of the essence, the *Agnus Dei* design was conceived and approved in a matter of days, and manufacture of dies began. All of this might have happened in the course of the Bath assembly. Figures such as Eadric Streona, Morcar and Sigferth, may have brought or summoned men – metalworkers, and perhaps also moneyers – who could implement the work immediately, and begin the process of distributing dies to selected mint-towns; conceivably those towns with which the moneyers or die-cutters present at Bath in the entourage of major lords had the best connections. They must have known who and where the dies were intended for, which might have been one limiting factor, in that it took time to gather this information, and part of the explanation for why *Agnus Dei* was minted at locations connected with some of the major power blocs in the kingdom's political establishment.³⁵

In the event, the tight schedule meant that the *Agnus Dei* coinage only ever made it into production at a few mint-places. Yet the impression they made would have surely been electrifying. Its imagery, consisting of the Lamb of God and the Holy Dove, represented a departure from the usual iconographic fare of

³⁵ R. Naismith, 'Writing, Communication, and Currency: Dialogues between Coinage and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England', *The Languages of Early Medieval Charters: Latin, Germanic Vernaculars, and the Written Word*, ed. R. Gallagher, E. Roberts and F. Tinti (Leiden, 2020), pp. 488–521.

the coinage, and on several levels the design crystallised the mindset of the moment. The Lamb and the Dove, immersed in centuries of Christian iconography and thought, were both widely recognised as symbols of innocence, divine power and sacrifice in Æthelred's troubled reign. The Dove features prominently in homilies of Ælfric (d. c. 1010), where it was described in one instance as 'a very peaceful bird, innocent, without gall, and gentle with its claws', for which reason it was the form in which the Holy Spirit chose to descend to earth at the baptism of Christ.³⁶ Ælfric also, in the same homily, linked Christ to the innocent, sacrificial Lamb, a holy creature that held special significance in Æthelredian discourse. It stood out most strongly and meaningfully in a remarkable diploma issued for Rochester Cathedral on Easter Sunday (17 April) 998. Written in the persona of the king himself, and laced with the deeply charged language of ritual penitence for Æthelred's earlier misdeeds, the diploma's dating clause emphasises how it was issued on the day when the 'true Lamb' (*verus agnus*) had sacrificed itself 'for the redemption of us all' (*pro nostra omnium redemptione*), returned from death to life and shown the faithful the way to heaven.³⁷ The Lamb came again to mind at some point in 1012, as signalled in a charter dating clause that framed the incarnation in terms of the Lamb, 'who, fixed to the cross, later saved the world'.³⁸ These two documents, bookending the *Agnus Dei* coinage and coming from separate archives, hint at a recurring line of thought on the part of the king and his inner circle. For the exceptional new coins of 1009 to replace the king with the Lamb therefore evoked not just a generalised religious message, but a very direct and palpable signal of desperation. The choice might be construed as a deeply personal one, and a signal that the coins are an orchestrated projection of royal, courtly rhetoric and anxieties.

Much of this is informed conjecture. But the Dorchester find adds a welcome extra piece to the puzzle, and as more details continue to emerge the context of the *Agnus Dei* coinage as a fascinating expedient of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom in a moment of crisis might become even clearer.

³⁶ 'Heo is swiðe gesibsum fugel, and unscæððig, and buton geallan, and unreðe on hire clawum'. Ælfric, *Sermo in Aepiphania Domini* ll. 159–60 (*Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series / Text*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 5 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 23–4). For further discussion and examples, see Keynes and Naismith, 'Agnus Dei Pennies', p. 180.

³⁷ S 893 (*Charters of Rochester*, ed. A. Campbell, AS Charters 1 (London, 1973), no. 32). For discussion, see S. Keynes, 'King Æthelred the Unready and the Church of Rochester', *Textus Roffensis: Law, Language, and Libraries in Early Medieval England*, ed. B. O'Brien and B. Bombi (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 315–62, at 344–7; Roach, *Æthelred*, pp. 146–9.

³⁸ 'Agnus Dei ... postmodum secula stauro affixus saluauit'. S 925 (*Property and Piety in Early Medieval Winchester: Documents Relating to the Topography of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman City and its Minsters*, ed. A. R. Rumble (Oxford, 2002), no. 28).