

DATASHEET 49

Late 13th- and early 14th-century copper-alloy jetton hooks

by

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Introduction

The use of coins as dress accessories, either as design inspiration or as a raw material to be converted, has a long history with various high points, a noteworthy one being a trend in the mid-11th century for converting coins (Williams 2001). From the late 13th century, another peak in such fashions developed and silver coinage of both large and small denominations was converted into brooches, especially groats of Edward I, the French *gros tournois* (Fig. 1) and its fractions (e.g. SF-492162). In addition to official coinage, the modification of jettons in a similar manner to that of legal tender has also been noted (Fig. 2), jettons having been recently introduced in England at that time. Many such modified jettons have been recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in addition to being published in an online catalogue by Philip Mernick

(www.mernick.org.uk/englishjettons/).

The comparatively large numbers of numismatic items from the late 13th and early



Fig. 1: Gros Tournois of Louis IX of France dating to c. 1226-1270, converted into a brooch by the application of soldered silver fittings and gilding on its outer face (DUR-977A16)

14th century modified in this way, both English and foreign, may imply that the disc brooch and its related forms achieved a resurgence in popularity during this period (Marsden 2014, 90). This fashion apparently waned towards the middle of the 14th century, as no coins of Edward III are known with the same modifications as those of around half a century earlier issued by Edward I, his continental contemporaries, and the short-lived yet varied series of English jettons dating between c. 1280 and 1340. Marsden (2014, 92) argued that the

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Fig. 2: Typical form of an English jetton converted into a 'brooch', dating to c. 1280-1340 (YORYM-BEFF87)

discontinuation of this practice as a point of fashion is also implied by a lack of modified French jettons from the mid-late 14th century, despite being adequately large and thick, with attractive obverse/reverse designs that would have made them ideal for this purpose. The latter point can perhaps be contested, with the recent discovery of three modified French pieces dating to the later 14th-early 15th century, discussed further below.

Published jetton 'brooches'

A total of 124 so-called medieval 'jetton brooches' in various conditions are currently known to the author. These objects mainly originate from metal detecting, with a number on the PAS database (33 examples recorded), though most of the rest are held within two private collections (Philip Mernick pers. comm. 2016; David Harpin pers. comm. 2016). These objects seem to be relatively rare as published finds from archaeological sites, with only two found within site reports. One example was discovered during excavations at Botolph Street, Norwich (Margeson 1993, 14-16; fig. 7, no. 66), while a second is listed by Pirie (1986, 63/Pl. XIV; no. 154), excavated at the Bedern, York. Other published examples exist, but are not excavated finds; a Lincolnshire piece is illustrated by Brian Read but erroneously assigned a 15th-century date (Read 2008, 201; no. 736; 2016, 109, 116; no. 821), while Paul Robinson noted a piece found in Corsham, Wiltshire, donated to Devizes Museum (Robinson 1990, 209-210). Mitchiner (1988, 697) additionally publishes an example (no. 169a), as does Berry (1974, 2, 59; no. 8), though both of these are unprovenanced. Two are held within museum collections, one by the York Museums Trust (acc. no. 2013.1410) and

the other in the British Museum (acc. no. 1977, 1103.1), found at Halling, Kent.

Construction

central circular-sectioned rivet

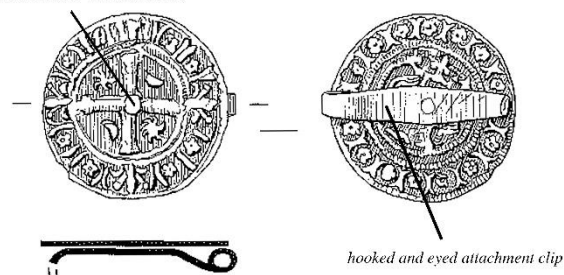


Fig. 3: Converted English jetton excavated from Norwich with its principal components labelled (after Margeson 1993, 14)

The construction of these objects is simple yet effective. Virtually all of the examples recorded are effectively two-piece and have three distinct elements: a hooked-and-looped clip for affixing; the jetton itself as the body and decorative element; and a single central rivet to secure the two together (see Fig. 3). The first step for the manufacturer presumably would have been to take a strip of copper alloy that tapered at both ends, 20-30 mm in length, bend one end around into a hook while loosely



Fig. 4: Converted English jetton showing profile view of clip (SF-A01F14)

forming the opposite end into a loop by bending the metal back on itself (Fig. 4). A rivet hole would have then been drilled at the middle of the now fully formed clasp or clip element; this latter was attached to the jetton by a circular-sectioned copper-alloy rivet, thus forming the complete object. Though riveting secured the elements of almost all of the modified jettons, soldering is also known to have been utilised; on HAMP-0DFA21 (Fig. 5) a separate hooked element and perpendicular loop (Read's type 2

attachment mechanism) have been directly soldered onto the obverse of a Florentine jetton (Read 2008, 199).



Fig. 5: Converted Lombardic jetton issued by the Albizzi bankers, dating to c. 1250-1280, with a separate soldered hook and eye (HAMP-0DFA21)

Terminology

The word ‘brooch’ implies an object utilised for both decoration and the fastening of clothes, the likely function of these objects. However, the defining factor that separates a brooch from a pin or clasp is that it possesses a distinct catch-plate and hinged pin (in a variety of forms). However, the way in which many jetton ‘brooches’ are manufactured is far more reminiscent of a post-medieval clothing fastener that utilises a hook and loop/eye mechanism, or rather ‘clip’, instead of a pin. Therefore, perhaps it is more accurate to consider such modified jettons as having been stitched to items of clothing rather than acting as a removable and independent element (Marsden 2014, 90; Read 2008, 199), though this likely depended on the preference of the wearer. Furthermore, one might suggest that these objects were attached to integrally sewn cloth loops, or even to ring/hook clasps that could equally have been sewn onto garments. However, as none have ever been discovered attached to clothing this remains supposition. Taking all the evidence into consideration and especially the form of the clip, the author has elected to refer to these objects as ‘hooks’ rather than ‘brooches’, a term which better describes their probable original form and function.

Use of precious metals and secondary decorative techniques



Fig. 6: Converted English jetton with silver fittings soldered to its obverse face (NMS-A282A3)

In most cases the attached fittings are manufactured from copper alloy, although NMS-A282A3 (Marsden 2014, 92) and NMS-A3CC33 are exceptions, having soldered silver fittings (Fig. 6). These two pieces are curious since the back-plate would not have been visible to anyone (Marsden 2014, 92) thus rendering them relatively pointless from the point of view of prominently expressing personal status and wealth to anyone except the owner. The use of precious metal is also visible in PAS record ESS-D413CD (Treasure case 2016 T679) though here silver has uniquely been utilised for the rivet rather than the rear mountings. Another find from Norfolk (NMS-02A2C1) has an iron attachment plate and central rivet, while an unprovenanced example possibly from Hampshire (SWYOR-559A57) is unique within the current corpus in being thickly gilded on both its obverse and reverse. It must be noted that the examples with soldered silver fittings are markedly different to those with riveted attachment clips, though clearly belong to the same ‘tradition’ of re-use.

Preferential selection of specific reverse designs for modification

The jettons utilised in the manufacture of hooked clasps and brooches are almost exclusively larger English types (generally measuring c. 23-27 mm in diameter) belonging to Mernick series 1a, 1b and 2, dated c. 1280-1340. This is a bias noted by Marsden (2014, 92), and there are few exceptions to the use of these series, notable among them occasional foreign pieces, to be discussed below. It is important to acknowledge that in my dataset I

have omitted jettons with a central piercing, even a significant one, as one cannot state with certainty whether they were converted or not; also examples that retain only their rivet, when it is unclear which face was displayed.

Selection of these jetton types for modification does not largely seem to be based on the obverse designs (with most examples having their clips attached to this face), but rather with the appearance of the reverse. Out of the 121 examples able to be assigned to a distinct type, a total of 76 (62%) display the same broad reverse design. This usually consists of a central long cross with alternating stars and crescents in the angles, within a border often comprised of a repeating pattern or foliate scrollwork (Fig. 2; Fig. 7a), though short-cross designs (e.g. LVPL-7489C5) are also known. The active selection of this specific reverse is almost certainly deliberate. Marsden (2014, 92) has suggested that this may be explained as a quirk of the manufacturer(s) who produced these items, but he also highlights the fact that star and crescent jettons are uncommon, and for them to be so well represented within the known corpus of these objects is highly unusual. He also notes the use of the star and crescent as a motif by the Plantagenets, and, taking this in conjunction with the use of crosses on the obverse, states that to display such symbols would show both one's loyalty to the king and church simultaneously (Marsden 2014, 92), a factor which would explain the preferential selection of these particular reverse types in the first instance.

Hinton (2005, 229) has argued in reference to the aforementioned example excavated in Norwich that, '*...people were prepared to sport things that were almost literally valueless*'. English jettons likely only had a nominal value as accounting pieces or possibly 'token' coinage circulating simultaneously with silver pennies, halfpence and farthings. Nevertheless, though their economic worth may have been low, their value from an aesthetic and ideological point of view might have been higher through prominently displaying images simultaneously associated with both the sacred and secular. Such

symbolic interpretation of these hooked clasps is borne out further by the lesser proportion of



Fig. 7: Common designs displayed on jetton hooks. From left to right: long cross with stars and crescents, cross moline, lions passant, sterling bust, long cross and pellets, long cross and saltire (NMS-2940C6, LON-75C145, WILT-E1EF82, SOM-277FCA, NMS-0F0C7E and LEIC-6903B6; not to scale)

hooks that use jettons with designs other than the (standard) long cross with stars and crescents. These other designs primarily consist of a cross moline (Fig. 7b), lions passant (Fig. 7c), 'sterling bust' (Fig. 7d), cross/pellet (Fig. 7e) and cross with saltire (Fig. 7f). Use of the lion and 'sterling bust' obverses (though rarer), perhaps relates more strongly to the demonstration of solely royal or national allegiance as opposed to religion, potentially as supporter's pieces. Of course, it is not impossible that jettons were modified in this way simply due to their large size and intricate designs, though aesthetics cannot explain the predominance of one specific reverse type over all others.

Use of foreign jettons

Four examples are known currently of foreign jettons converted into dress accessories; a 13th-century Florentine jetton (Fig. 5) of the Albizzi bankers found in Hampshire (HAMP-0DFA21), an early unscripted French issue (Mernick collection), and two 'paschal lamb' jettons (Mernick collection) attributed to Charles VII of France (c. 1418-1437; compare Mitchiner 1988, 198; no. 553). The latter (Fig. 8) are interesting as they date much later than the usual converted English pieces, yet

demonstrate relatively similar methods of construction. The provenances of these later pieces are not known, but if they were found in this country then they, to some extent, counter the theory that the fad for converting these objects had died out by the early to mid-14th century. These examples may indicate a minor resurgence in this particular form of fastener, or possibly an expedient ‘quick fix’ dress accessory. Nevertheless, they are very much the minority within the current dataset.



Fig. 8: French ‘paschal lamb’ type jetton demonstrating double-ended hook riveted to one face

Distribution

Of the 124 sufficiently complete jetton hooks known to exist by the author, 81 have spatial context known down to at least a county level with the rest originating from various sources, being either attributable to only a broader region or completely unprovenanced (not included within spatial analysis). A listing of the numbers known or recorded from each county is visible below:

- 37: Norfolk
- 5: Lincolnshire, Suffolk
- 4: Cambridgeshire, Kent
- 3: Essex, Hampshire, Wiltshire,
N Yorkshire, Oxfordshire
- 2: E Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire
- 1: Dorset, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire,
Leicestershire, Northumberland, Peebleshire,
South Yorkshire

Such a pattern would on first sight suggest that jetton brooches concentrate almost entirely in Norfolk, and are restricted primarily to the eastern half of England with comparatively few pieces penetrating south of Essex and west of Oxfordshire. The implications of this are interesting; on the one hand, it could be argued

that this bias towards East Anglia is indicative of the high levels of detecting and historic co-operation between detectorists and archaeologists prior to and after the institution of the PAS. However, it is also important to note the other counties and unitary authorities possessing these attributes (take, for example, Sussex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Hampshire, Greater London and the Isle of Wight) are themselves either devoid of these objects or record them in drastically lower numbers. The factor that centrally perforated jettons, a common occurrence for pieces of English extraction (Fig. 9), have not been taken into account here, due to their ambiguity, could potentially indicate a level of bias in that examples separated from their clips would not be thus counted in distribution analysis (see SUSS-70CD97, DOR-8A3322, and YORYM-33D147 for possible examples of this).



Fig. 9: English medieval jetton with central perforation (DOR-8A3322)

Even taking the latter into account, it seems reasonable based on the current evidence to suggest that this is very much an object with an East Anglian origin, perhaps reflecting a local fashion largely restricted to eastern England, in a similar manner to the later medieval Bury and Ely series of ‘boy bishop’ type tokens. It has additionally been suggested that these finds could possibly reflect the output of a specific workshop manufacturing them ‘en masse’ for the local pilgrim souvenir market, which equally might explain this pattern of distribution (Matthew Stevens, pers. comm. 2017).

Closing remarks

The study of modifying and transforming currency into everyday objects has only relatively recently been undertaken on any

scale, and these modified jettons specifically are an important element within the body of such data due to their straddling both the realms of numismatics and artefacts, thus providing a tangible link between the two. Future research on this topic will include a detailed study of English jettons with a mind to improve and re-adapt the current classification system, incorporating previously published works with many of the new finds on the PAS database as well as comparing both the distribution of English jettons themselves alongside modified pieces. This will be undertaken to potentially ascertain a source of production for these pieces, as well as investigating how much the

current concentrations visible within eastern England are the product of detectorist bias as opposed to legitimate medieval patterns of deposition and loss.

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