VIII.—*Letter from Sir HENRY ELLIS to Viscount MAHON, P.S.A.; upon a Gold Ornament found near Mundesley, in Norfolk.*

Read 18th June, 1846.

MY LORD,

British Museum, June 17, 1846.

By the kindness of Miss Gurney of North Repps, in Norfolk, I am permitted to lay before your Lordship and the Society a jewel or ornament, (Plate VII. fig. 1.) composed of an ancient cast from a gold coin of the Emperor Mauricius, set into gold of rough workmanship, with a ring or loop at top to suspend it by, and bits of red glass or stones, let in, in a double row on that side which bears the obverse of the coin, forming a border to it. To these rather a rich appearance is given by bits of stamped gold being placed under each.

The inscriptions on the cast of the coin are as follow :—

On the obverse,

DN MAV. CRPPAVC

that is,

Dominus Noster MAVricius tibCRIus Pater Patriæ AVGustus.

On the reverse,

VICTOR -AAVCCV | CONOB |

that is,

VICTORIA AVCCVsta CONstantinopoli OBsignata.*

* Eckhel, in the eighth volume of his “*Doctrina Numorum Veterum*,” p. 521, has a learned episode “*De inscriptione CONOB.*” This word occurs upon Roman coins in three forms—most generally as CONOB; in a few instances COMOB; and in two or three upon the coins of Anthemius, and upon one of his wife Euphemia, it is written CORNOB.

CONOB is first seen upon the coins of Valentinian I. A.D. 364 to 375, and continued to Leo I. Isaurus, A.D. 717 to 741. Antonius Augustus, Eckhel tells us, explains it as CONstantinopolitanum OBryzum (idem quod purissimum). Ducange, Ortelius, Occo, and Tristan, read CONstantinopoli moneta OBsignata. Morell and Rinck agree in the latter explanation. Jobert would read CONstantinopolis Officina II. taking the B in OB to be a numeral. Then Eckhel says, “*Mitto conjecturas aliorum alias, sed plane infirmas.*” All however consider CON as Constantinopoli.

It may be interesting to note that on April 2, 1761, Mr. Duane presented to the Society of Antiquaries engravings of some medals in his possession. These representations are inserted in the Minute Book, vol.

In the area of the reverse is a cross surmounted by a globe, with the letters VV at the sides.

This Jewel or Medallion, or by whatever name it may be designated, was found upon the beach of the Norfolk coast, between Bacton and Mundesley, in the month of January last. It is of the diameter of an inch and a fourth.

Three specimens of similar Jewels or Medallions are to be found in the Collection at the British Museum. One of them (Plate VII. fig. 2) like Miss Gurney's, has been a pendant Jewel. It has likewise a loop, ornamented in the Saxon manner, and surrounds the cast of a coin of Valens. The cast is of the portrait side only, surrounded with the inscription DN. VALENS. PER. F. AVG; no reverse of the coin appearing at the back. The front of this Jewel so far resembles Miss Gurney's, that it has a border ornamented in small, with a single row of squares of red glass, or of glass placed upon a red foil. The whole, however, coin and surrounding gold, scarcely exceeding in this exemplar the diameter of a shilling. The second (Plate VII. fig 3), in reality of smaller size, but with an ornament round of more modern work, presents a coin of Posthumus. On the obverse two heads, Posthumus and Hercules, circumscribed POSTVMVS. PIVS. FELIX. AVGG. On the reverse two heads also, Posthumus helmeted as Mars, and Victory. Inscription, CONSERVATORES. AVG. The third (fig. 4) has a genuine coin let-in of the elder Philip, who reigned from A.D. 244 to 249. On each side, behind, are loops, deciding the Ornament itself to have been used as a fibula, or fastening for a garment. The inscription round the head upon the obverse, IMP. M. IVL. PHILIPPVS. AVG. Reverse, a female figure bearing a tessera or measure of corn in the right hand, and a cornucopiæ supported by the left, with the inscription round, LIBERALITAS. AVG. II. Its diameter is nearly equal to a crown-piece.

Two or three similar specimens of Roman coins of gold, imbedded in the same material, are likewise to be found in the Cabinet of Medals at Paris.

The conclusion arising out of the consideration of these several specimens, and more particularly from the character of the ornament upon the loops of Miss Gurney's, and of the first of the Museum specimens, seems to be, that in early times, apparently in the Saxon period, such Jewels were used as ornaments or

viii. p. 318. One of these was a gold piece, set in a hoop, with a loop or ring on one side for suspension, as in the case of Miss Gurney's ornament. Duane read the legend AVITVS AV, and stated that Avitus was declared emperor in Gaul, A.D. 455; he resigned, and became Bishop of Placentia. On the reverse appears in the exergue the letters CONOB. This was found in a barrow, in 1758, on Bloodmore Hill, near Pakefield, Suffolk, suspended with a similar ornament set with an onyx, apparently an antique intaglio, about the neck of a skeleton therein interred.

fastenings of garments; and, since specimens occur in the Cabinet at Paris, so ornamented with Roman coins, it may be presumed that the practice of wearing such, extended to other countries as well as our own.

The specimens in the Museum may probably be ascribed to the sixth or seventh century.

Miss Gurney in a note to me upon the jewel before the Society, says,—

“I forget whether I mentioned having found that the Danes were in the practice of imitating Byzantine medals. You will find examples of such imitations (very bad ones) in a plate of some antiquities found in Denmark, in the second volume of the *Nordisk Tidskrift for Oldkyndighed* (or *Northern Periodical for Antiquarian Science*) published by the Royal Society for Archæology (B. ii. Vol. I.) 8° Copenhagen, 1833.”

I in consequence examined this work. At p. 170 a neck-ornament is engraved, strung with Byzantine coins, of Placidius Valentinianus, Julius Majorianus, Leo I., Zeno, and Anastasius I.; whence we may infer that this ornament also is probably of the sixth or seventh century.

At the end of the volume I found the Plate referred to by Miss Gurney, containing five or six specimens of gold medallions, all having loops, shewing them to have been used as pendant ornaments; and one or two of the larger size, surrounding Byzantine coins, which have inscriptions. These are apparently of a period later than what is called the lower Roman time.

Upon referring to the text, it appeared that these specimens were in the Royal Museum at Copenhagen, and had been found in Denmark; but no mention is made of the exact locality of their discovery.

These, however, though ornaments used for the same purpose, are very different in character. They are peculiarly northern.^a

^a Other Ornaments, similar in general appearance, but without Coins imbedded in their area, and larger in diameter, are occasionally noticed by the Northern antiquaries. Such are those engraved in Scheffer's *Dissertation “de Orbibus tribus Aureis nuper in Scania erutis;”* 12°. Holm. 1675. They had been found the year before, with some swords and other military weapons, by a husbandman at Wææ, near Christianstadt. The device of each, in the centre, consisted of a head of disproportioned size to a small animal, apparently of the deer kind, upon which it was resting. Various ornamental circles surrounding them. See also Christian Dettler Rhode's “*Cimbrisch Hollsteinische Antiquitäten Remarques.*”

Sjöberg, in his *Collections for Lovers of Northern Antiquity*, “*Samlingar for Nordens Fornälskare,*” 3 tom. 4to. Stockh. 1822-30, vol. ii. pl. XLVII., XLVIII., fig. 156, 157, and p. 187 of his text, gives a pendant ornament of *silver*, found in Schonen, the southern peninsula of Sweden, in 1729, with a Coin imbedded in the centre. It is 2½ inches in diameter. It was found, together with some coins and silver work, in an urn. The imbedded coin, however, is so unintelligible in itself, or so unintelligibly represented, that nothing can be made either of the head or the inscription which surrounds it. Sjöberg thought he could read the words *Alexiu Autokra* . . . upon it. The reverse was of Byzantine appearance. He thought it Persian.

Fortunately, whilst engaged in this inquiry, I had the pleasure to fall into company with Mr. Worsaae, the eminent antiquary of Copenhagen, whose attention has been more immediately directed to the illustration of this particular class of antiquities, and who has noticed them in his work entitled "*Danemarks Vorzeit*."

From Mr. Worsaae I have learned that, though one or two specimens of Roman gold within ornamented circles are to be found in the Museum at Copenhagen, the most numerous are of the bracteate kind, such as are exhibited in the plate referred to in the "*Nordisk Tidskrift*," frequently ornamented with rude figures only, and occasionally with Byzantine coins. He informs me that of the Byzantine coins so imbedded a few are those of the last half of the fifth and first half of the sixth centuries, and that they grow more numerous as the dates of the coins go on, chiefly to the middle of the eighth. Few coins occur so imbedded of a later period.

Mr. Worsaae finally referred me to a note in Mr. Laing's recent translation of the "*Heimskringia* ; or, Chronicle of the Kings of Norway, from the Islandic of Snorow Sturleson," which bears strongly upon the history of the Danish medallions: it is in vol. iii. p. 4, in the account of the *Væringers*.

"The *Varingers* were the body-guard of the emperors, and were composed mostly of northmen. Gibbon speaks of them, chap. 55, and refers to Boyer, Du Cange, and other authors who have written of the *Varangi* or *Varagi*, at Constantinople. *Væringers*—the defenders—appears to have been the true name of this body-guard, taken from the words *Wehr*, *Vær*, *Ware*, which belong to every branch of the great northern language in the meaning of active defence. The best proof that this body-guard was composed principally of northmen is, that almost every year coins of the Greek emperors, Cuftish^a coins, and gold chains, and other ornaments, apparently of Eastern workmanship, are found in Norway about the houses of bonders, being probably the hidden treasures of their forefathers, brought with them from their service in Constantinople. The number of Greek and Arabic (Cuftish) coins found in these hoards, with scarcely any admixture of Anglo-Saxon or other northern money, is very considerable."

Since the above was written, a friend has supplied me with the following translation of a passage in Mr. Worsaae's "*Danemarks Vorzeit*," corroborative of Mr. Laing's note, and calculated to throw further light upon this singular class of ancient ornaments. It is in comment upon some antiquities which had been discovered:—

"These large gold rings for the neck were further adorned with wrought plates of gold, which were inlaid with pieces of coloured glass, or, which was more fre-

^a Cufic.

quently the case, these rings were hung round with the so-called gold bracteates. These were formed of a thin plate of gold, one side of which was often stamped with the imitation of some coin of a foreign country. These impressions, however, are usually of so peculiar a nature that it is with the greatest difficulty, if at all, that we can determine what was the original coin from which the impression was copied. The Runic inscriptions which are frequently introduced in the margin have hitherto afforded but little information in this respect, since it has not yet been possible to interpret the peculiar Runes of which the inscriptions consist. In general, however, we may safely maintain that the coins of the eastern Roman empire and of Arabia have formed the original of these imitations. Roman and Oriental coins themselves were also used for ornaments of this kind, being furnished with a margin and ring for the purpose of appending them. The gold bracteates have been found from half an inch to a quarter of an ell (twelve inches) in diameter. They are usually found united with several others, so that they originally formed complete necklaces, or with beads of various kinds."

From the specimens described, and the extracts here made from Mr. Laing's and Mr. Worsaae's works, there can be little doubt but that in the times answerable to our Saxon period gold coins imbedded in or surrounded by masses of the same material were a favourite ornament in various parts of Europe, sometimes as single pendant jewels, sometimes strung numerous together, and at others used as fibulæ or fastenings for the dress.

I am happy to say that the Jewel found near Mundesley, when it has been exhibited to our Society, is destined by Miss Gurney's liberality to enrich the Medal Room of the British Museum,^a where antiquities of the rarer kind, such as these, have their greatest interest for the observer when they are viewed and compared as a Series.

I have the honour to be, my Lord,

Your Lordship's faithful servant,

HENRY ELLIS.

To the Lord Viscount MAHON, P.S.A.

^a It is now deposited there.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

*Gold Ornament found near Mundesley in Norfolk,
accompanied by three Jewels of similar character; all preserved in the British Museum.*