

XVI. *An Account of Moulds for casting Roman Coins found at and near Edington, in the County of Somerset, by the Rev. J. Poole, in a Letter to Charles Joseph Harford, Esq. F. A. S.*

Read May 14, 1801.

MY DEAR SIR,

HAVING noticed, in Camden's *Britannia* [a], an account of some clay moulds for fabricating Roman coins, found about the beginning of the last century at Edington, in the county of Somerset, and understanding, from persons in the neighbourhood, that they still continued to be discovered there, I was induced, some time since, to go thither with a party of friends; and we were fortunate enough to be directed to a spot where, in less than an hour's search, we picked up several hundred of them.

The field in which they were found is a meadow that bears no marks of ever having been ploughed; which accounts for the moulds remaining so long undiscovered. It is situated at the north edge of Polden Hill, at about a quarter of a mile to the north of the village of Chilton. We were led to this particular spot by a person who had some time before cut through a bed of them in digging a drain. They were lying promiscuously scattered over a

[a] Gough's *Camden*, Vol. I. page 71. A reference is made to Aubrey's MSS. but I searched for it to no purpose amongst his papers, preserved at the Museum at Oxford: as his MSS. however are not arranged, I may have overlooked it.

space about four feet square; and from six inches to a foot below the surface of the ground.

On carefully clearing away the earth which adhered to the moulds, we perceived that we had a much greater variety as well as a larger number than had been elsewhere discovered. Such moulds have been heretofore met with in small quantities at Ryton in Shropshire [*b*], and at Lingivel in Yorkshire [*c*]; and great numbers of them at Lyons in France: but all these appear to have been of the Emperor Severus, Julia his wife, or Antoninus (i. e. Caracalla) their son; whereas, in our collection, there are not only numerous impressions of these, but also of Geta, Macrinus, Elagabalus, Alexander Severus, Maximin, Maximus, Plautilla, Julia Paula, and Julia Mamaea; besides a very considerable number of reverses. Most of these moulds are in such perfect preservation as to admit of good casts being made of them in fulphur, coloured with vermilion; some of which, together with a few of the moulds themselves, I now send for your satisfaction, and that of the Antiquarian Society, if you should think this letter worth communicating.

In the accounts that have been published respecting them in England, there is very little more than the bare mention of their discovery, and of the use to which they were applied; but in the “*Histoire de l’Academie des Inscriptions*,” Tome III. p. 200, there is a very well written paper on the subject, entitled, “*Observations sur l’usage de quelques Moules antiques de monnoyes Romaines, decouvertes a Lyon*,” the principal part of which I insert in the annexed note [*d*], as being extremely curious in itself, and not accessible

[*b*] Phil. Trans. Vol. XLIV. page 557.

[*c*] Phil. Trans. Vol. XLV. page 2139.

[*d*] “*La matiere de ces moules est une argille blancheâtre cuite; leur forme est plate, terminée par une circonference ronde d’un pouce de diametre; leur épaisseur est*

ceffible to every lover of antiquity: contenting myself, to avoid repetition, with briefly observing, that the object of the paper is to shew

est de deux lignes par les bords, et est diminuée dans cet espace de l'un ou des deux côtes du moule, qui a esté cavé par l'enfoncement de la piece de monnoye, dont le type y est resté imprimé. On dit de l'un ou des deux côtes du moule, parceque la plupart ont d'un côté l'impression d'une tête, et de l'autre celle d'un revers, et que quelques uns ne font imprimez que d'un côté seulement. Chacun de ces moules a un endroit de son bord ouvert par une entaille ou crenelure, qui aboutit au vuide formé par le corps de la piece imprimée; et comme la forme plate et l'égalité de la circonference de tous ces moules, les rendent propres à être joints ensemble dans un arrangement relatif des types des têtes, à ceux des revers, dont ils ont conservé l'impression, et dans une disposition où toutes ces entailles se rencontrent; on s'apperçoit d'abord que le sillon continué par la jonction de ces crenelures servoit de jet au groupe ou rouleau forme de l'assemblage de ces moules, pour la fusion de la matiere destinée aux monnoyes. Un lingot de billon, dont la rouille verdâtre marquoit la quantité de cuivre qui dominoit sur la portion d'argent qui y entroit trouve en même temps et au même lieu que ces moules, ne laisse aucun lieu de douter qu'ils n'aient servi à jeter en fable des monnoyes d'argent plutôt que d'or. Il paroît par cette description, et par l'usage que les anciens faisoient de ces moules, que leur maniere de jeter en fonte étoit assez semblable à la notre, et que ce qu'ils avoient de particulier, étoit la qualité du fable dont ils se servoient, qui étoit si bon et si bien préparé, qu'après 1400 ans, leurs moules sont encore en état de recevoir plusieurs fusions."

After producing many arguments to prove that the only legal method of coining among the Romans was with the hammer, the author asks, "Que doit-on juger de ceux-ci, si non qu'ils ont servi d'instruments à des faux monnoyeurs, du genre de ceux qui joignoient à la contrefaçon par le jet en fable, la corruption du titre, en augmentant considérablement l'alliage du cuivre avec l'argent; ce qui paroît par la qualité du lingot qui a fait partie de la decouverte, et qui se rapporte à ce caractère de fausse monnoye que le code Theodosien désigne en ces termes: "Si quis nummum falsum fusione formaverit, universas ejus facultates fisco addici præcipimus, ut in monetis tantum nostris cudendæ pecuniæ studium frequentetur." De là vient cette différence notable de titre qu'on observe assez souvent dans beaucoup de pieces d'argent, de même revers, et de même époque, sous un même empereur. Cette maniere de falsifier la monnoye avoit prévalu sur la fourrure dès le temps de Pline, qui remarque qu'elle se pratiquoit avec tant d'adresse qu'il étoit alors si difficile de distinguer une piece fabriquée en monnoye d'une jettée en fable par un habile faussaire, que cette connoissance

shew that these moulds were the instruments of illegal coiners; which supposition is rendered very probable by the arguments there adduced; and is still farther confirmed by the following circumstances attending this last discovery of moulds at Edington.

Though we have frequent instances, as in the moulds at Lyons, of a head on one side, and on the other side a reverse, yet it often happens that there are reverses on both sides; and these entirely different from each other; which, as both impressions must have been made at the same instant, whilst the clay was moist, can only be accounted for on the supposition that the coins of several emperors were fabricated at one and the same time; and this, it is evident, could only take place in the hands of illegal coiners.

The discovery of the wedge of base metal, found together with the moulds at Lyons, affords certainly a strong presumption that they were designed for the fabrication of base coins; but it is no more than a presumption: that such, however, was the use made of these which are in our possession, cannot well be doubted; since we not only found, as at Lyons, a lump of metal, but likewise, in one instance, the very coin itself, lodged in its mould, and formed, like the lump, of a white metal resembling silver, but which, upon examination, proves to be principally tin.

connoissance étoit devenue un art particulier, et qu'il y avoit de ces pieces si bien imitées, que les curieux en donnoient souvent beaucoup de vraies pour en acquérir une fautive. Le decadence de la gravure, qui sous Septime Sévère étoit déjà considerable, et l'alteration qu'il avoit introduite dans le titre des monnoyes, favorisoient de plus en plus les billoneurs et les fauffaires, en rendent leur tromperie plus facile; en sorte que la quantité de ces moules qu'on a découverts a Lyon en differents temps, fait assez juger qu'il devoit y avoir un grand nombre de ces fauffaires. Ce nombre devint depuis si prodigieux dans les villes mêmes, ou il y avoit des préfectures de monnoye, et parmi les officiers et les ouvriers qui y étoient employes, qu'il fut capable de former à Rome, sous l'empereur Aurelien, une petite armée, qui dans la crainte du chatiment dont on les menacoit, se revolta contre lui, et lui tua dans un choc, 7000 hommes de troupes réglées."

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The nature of these moulds, and the unlawful purpose to which they were applied, being thus ascertained, it is natural to inquire whether we are likely to derive any useful knowledge from the great variety of figures and inscriptions found upon them? To this I am reluctantly obliged to answer, that, in my opinion, we are not. The reverses of coins have frequently been of the greatest service, by illustrating doubtful points of history, and even by bringing to light circumstances and events unknown to us before: but I do not see how the reverses on moulds can ever be made this use of; since it does not appear possible to apply, with certainty, any given reverse to its proper front, unless it should happen that we are authorized by the coin itself; in which case the additional testimony of the mould is not wanted. This consideration has deterred me from troubling you with the legends, or any particular description of the fronts and reverses. I cannot, however, help mentioning my hope that, though of no great use in elucidating general history, these moulds, found at and near Edington, in such vast quantities, and in such various places, may possibly hereafter contribute towards clearing up the ancient topography of that particular neighbourhood.

That the Romans had a settlement there, is evident, I think, not only from the great profusion of these remains of theirs, which form the subject of the present communication, but from a tessellated pavement having formerly been found there [*e*]; and also, from the recent discovery, about four miles to the west of Edington, of those most curious pieces of brass ornaments, apparently of Roman workmanship, which are now in the possession of our friend Mr. R. Antice of Bridgwater [*f*]. That a Roman road passed this way, I am not, at present, prepared to prove; though I cannot but think it very probable, as well from the discoveries above

[*e*] Camden, as before.

[*f*] Described in No. XIV. of this Vol.
mentioned,

mentioned, as from the names of three places in the neighbourhood, *Street*, *Walton*, and *Coffington*; the two former, whose etymology is obvious, very common on many of the Roman roads, and the latter, as it appears to me, of a similar signification, meaning, probably, *a place situated on a causeway*. If these suppositions are well founded, and a Roman road really passed through these places, it was perhaps, the twelfth in the *Iter Britanniarum* of Antoninus; concerning part of which Dr. Henry has observed, “that the real course of this rout, from Muridunum to Iscalegua Augusta, is very uncertain [g].” These suggestions, however, are thrown out merely as conjectures, to confirm or confute which, must be deferred to some future occasion, when we may have it in our power to examine together, at our leisure, the whole extent of this district.

Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Overflowey,
April 27, 1801.

Very sincerely yours;

J. POOLE.

[g] Henry's History of Great Britain, Vol. II. page 435, 2d edit. 8vo.