

A New London Mintmark for Constantine the Great?

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Roman Imperial Coinage (RIC) Volume VII records a series of mintmarks for London beginning with M. The exergual marks of these coins are MLL, MLN and MSL. The first of these has the letters S and F in the field; the others have either S and F or S and P. They were issued around 314-15 AD.

It has been known for some time that there were two coins in existence with the mark MSN in the exergue but, until now, it had been assumed that these were simply the result of a die engraver's error. While completing the last letter of MSL, the engraver reverted back to the last letter of the previous MLN issue. This is much like we might write the year 2008 on a cheque during the early weeks of 2009 – a common example of the influence of previous activity. This theory does, of course, assume that these issues were in the sequence suggested by RIC.

The first of these "errors" was discovered in the Appleford Hoard (Appleford, Berks. RBCH 1261) and is recorded in the footnote to the entry for RIC 68 (a coin of Constantine), "*1 in AH, m.m. S/P//MSN. Probably an engraver's slip*". This coin was retained by the Ashmolean museum. The other is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge and is recorded in the footnote to the entry for RIC 79 (a coin of Licinius I) thus, "*In CF 1 ordinary coin, another with MSN in the exergue*". It is not recorded whether these two coins were ever checked to see if the reverses came from the same die. A third coin was later recorded in the Waddington hoard as RIC 68n (Waddington p.32). No further comment was made in the hoard report but the coin was retained by the

British Museum (BM 1977, 1005.67). Another MSN example of Constantine was discussed on a French website in 2006 (www.numis-media.fr); the find spot and current whereabouts of this coin are unknown but I have been provided with an image of it.

Earlier this year, through the trade, I acquired an example of Licinius I with MSN in the exergue. This coin would, like the Fitzwilliam coin, also be RIC 79 if it had MSL in the exergue.



Obverse

Reverse

Obverse IMP LICINIVS P F AVG
Reverse SOLI INVIC - TO COMITI
Die Diameter 19mm. Weight 3.41g.

I have now been able to compare images of four of the five coins for die matches. The Appleford hoard Constantine coin is a reverse die match with the French Constantine coin. The obverses of these coins are not a match. The Waddington coin, despite its poor condition, can be identified as both an obverse and a reverse die match for the French example and a reverse die match with the Appleford specimen. The reverse die of these coins do not, however, match my Licinius reverse which is clearly struck from a different die. I have been unable to obtain an image of the Fitzwilliam coin as it has not been possible to locate the coin in the collections. Those results are summarised in the table below.

Emperor	Source	Obverse die match	Reverse die match
Constantine I	Appleford	Die I (C)	Die A
Constantine I	Waddington	Die II (C)	Die A
Constantine I	French example	Die II (C)	Die A
Licinius I	Fitzwilliam	-	-
Licinius I	Author's collection	Die I (L)	Die B

We have, therefore, at least two dies with MSN in the exergue, thus increasing the likelihood that this is a deliberate mintmark rather than simply a die engraver's error. To misquote Oscar Wilde, "One die error looks like an accident, two looks like sheer carelessness, three looks like a new mintmark!" We shall await a further example with interest.

I am most grateful to Lord Stewartby, Richard Abdy, Adi Popescu and a French correspondent for helping in the preparation of this note and especially to Cathy King who braved the renovation work at the Ashmolean to provide me with an image of the Appleford coin.

I would be delighted to hear of any other London mint examples with MSN in the exergue.

I can be contacted at lee@leetoone.co.uk and further information on the London mint of Constantine is available here - <http://thelondonmintofconstantine.blogspot.com/>

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