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EAST GOES WEST: BALTIC AND RUSSIAN COIN FINDS FROM TUDOR ENGLAND AND WALES

ABSTRACT: The “long 16th century” was a period of profound growth in the Anglo-Baltic trade, a phenomenon that is well known from written sources yet only poorly glimpsed in the archaeological record. In order to “fill the gap”, this article examines a previously unstudied corpus of 35 English and Welsh finds of Baltic and Russian coins dated to the Tudor period (1485–1603). The corpus consists mostly of low value silver and billon coins, whose chronology and provenances closely reflect the documented growth of English trade in the Baltic. While none of these coins were ever lawfully permitted to circulate in England and Wales, their spatial spread and composition suggests that they circulated as unofficial substitutes for similarly sized English coins, particularly low value pennies and halfpennies. The coin finds therefore not only reflect the increasingly interconnected trade routes of 16th century Europe, but also demonstrate the differences between official territorial currencies and the more informal systems that emerged in early modern towns and the countryside.

ABSTRAKT: „Długi wiek XVI” był okresem silnego rozwoju handlu pomiędzy wyspami brytyjskim a państwami bałtyckimi. Zjawisko to, dobrze znane ze źródeł pisanych, jest jednak słabo widoczne w źródłach archeologicznych. W celu wypełnienia tej luki, niniejszy artykuł prezentuje i analizuje korpus 35 znalezisk monet bałtyckich i rosyjskich na obszarze Anglii i Walii, datowanych na okres Tudorów (1485–1603). Korpus składa się głównie z monet srebrnych i bilonowych o niskiej wartości, których chronologia i pochodzenie ściśle odzwierciedlają udokumentowany rozwój angielskiego handlu na Bałtyku. Chociaż żadna z tych monet nigdy nie była prawnie dopuszczona do obiegu w Anglii i Walii, ich rozprzestrzenienie i skład sugerują, że obiegały one jako nieoficjalne substytuty monet angielskich o podobnej wielkości, w szczególności pensów i półpensów o niskiej wartości. Znaleziska monet odzwierciedlają zatem nie tylko rozwój szlaków handlowych XVI-wiecznej Europy, ale także pokazują różnice między oficjalnymi walutami terytorialnymi a bardziej nieformalnymi systemami, które pojawiły się we wczesnonowożytnych miastach i na wsi.

KEYWORDS: 16th century, early modern period, coin finds, Tudor England

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: XVI w., okres nowożytny, znaleziska monet, Anglia Tudorów

The “long 16th century” (ca. 1450–1650) was a pivotal phase in the social, cultural, and economic transformation of Europe, and marks the classic point of transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern era.¹ In England and Wales, the period is largely coterminous with the reign of the Tudor dynasty (1485–1603), whose rule was marked by major social changes including the spread of enclosure and agricultural innovations, significant (if discontinuous) population growth, the rapid expansion of the City of London, the rise of the “middling sort” in towns and villages, and the adoption and eventual consolidation of the Protestant faith.² The commercial economy of England and Wales was also no stranger to change in the Tudor period, and rode the wave of developments connected with the growth of internal and external markets stretching ever further across land, sea, and ocean.³

Though crowned by the opening of new markets in the Ottoman Empire and the New World, much of the expansion of overseas trade in Tudor England and Wales remained focused on Northern Europe, where the decline of Antwerp and the gradual disintegration of the Hanseatic League presented new opportunities for commercial profit. In particular, the lands around the Baltic Sea became increasingly important as a market for woollen textiles and a source of imported bulk goods like grain, timber, flax, and hemp. The growth of this trade is best judged from taxation records, which illustrate how the volume of cloth exports from England to the Baltic quadrupled between ca. 1560 and 1600, while imports of Baltic flax, iron, rye, and wax grew by at least as much in the same period.⁴ Although Dutch middlemen were an important feature of Anglo-Baltic trade throughout the Tudor period, the granting of monopoly privileges to two joint stock companies, the Muscovy Company (chartered 1555) and the Eastland Company (chartered 1579), ensured an increased role for English merchants and vessels in the second half of the century, and by the 1590s it would not have been unusual to have seen ships from London loading and unloading their cargoes in the ports of Danzig (Gdańsk), Elbing (Elbląg), Königsberg (Kaliningrad), Narva, Reval (Tallinn), and Riga.⁵

While textual evidence for the Tudor Anglo-Baltic trade survives in toll registers and port books, its physical remains are much thinner on the ground, reflecting the perishable nature of a bilateral trade based largely on textiles, crops, and other organic materials. Glimpses can, however, be traced in the archaeological record on both sides of the Øresund Strait (“the Sound”). Finds of 16th-century lead cloth seals bearing the Tudor rose, once affixed to textiles produced in England, have been found on sites across the Baltic region and in north-western Russia,

¹ Braudel 1983; Koenigsberger, Mosse, Bowler 1989.

² Palliser 1983; Rappaport 1989.

³ Davis 1973; Chartres 1977; Palliser 1983, pp. 266–298; Parker 2010, pp. 31–32.

⁴ Zins 1972, pp. 169, 277.

⁵ Willan 1953; Zins 1972.

with notable specimens and assemblages recorded from Copenhagen, Gdańsk, Moscow, Vilnius, and Velikiy Novgorod.⁶ Meanwhile, in Britain itself, dendro-provenancing of 16th-century panel paintings have revealed more than 200 examples that were produced on sheets of Baltic oak, most of which were probably grown in the area of modern Poland.⁷ Numismatic evidence can also be brought into the picture, with finds of 16th-century English coins from Poland, Russia, and Sweden providing evidence of the outwards flow of gold and silver in the course of the Anglo-Baltic trade.⁸ However, the material evidence for the counter-flow of money from the Baltic into England and Wales has received far less attention, despite a significant growth in the number of relevant coin finds unearthed by metal detectorists.⁹ This article seeks to fill this scholarly gap, and provides an overview of all known Tudor-era Baltic and Russia coins found in England and Wales to the present day.

THE COIN FINDS

Table 1 presents a summary catalogue of 35 English and Welsh finds of coins minted in the Baltic and Russia during the Tudor period (i.e., between 1485 and 1603) (Fig. 1). This corpus was assembled through examination of published sources and digital archaeological databases, including the British Numismatic Journal's annual *Coin Register* (1987 to present), the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database, and the UK Detector Find Database (UKDFD). Nearly all of the coins are unstratified metal detector finds, most of which were unearthed on areas of arable farmland, with a small number found by amateur "mudlarks" searching by eye and/or with metal detectors along the foreshore of the River Thames.¹⁰ The lion's share of the data consists of single finds of coins lost individually, rather than concealed as part of hoards. These twin factors impart certain biases into the dataset: in particular, there is a pronounced distribution bias towards the arable regions of southern and eastern England, where most metal detecting is undertak-

⁶ Lieb Gott 1975, pp. 40–41; Kvizikevičius 1999, pp. 247–248; Bobowski 2009; Singkh, Stepanov 2023.

⁷ Cooper 2011.

⁸ For example, Potin 1970; Męcłewska, Mikołajczyk 1983, nos 356, 453, 598; Malmer, Wiséhn 1982, no. 59; Wiséhn 1989, no. 577. Since the Polish finds occur in hoards buried during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), they might conceivably have entered the country in the first decades of the 17th century instead. Finds of Tudor coins have also been recorded in Norway, and seem to be an outgrowth of the wider Anglo-Baltic and Anglo-Scandinavian timber trade: Gullbekk 2014; Andrews 2023; Andrews 2024.

⁹ The sole exception is Ramadanski 2015, which reviews finds of 16th- and 17th-century Russian coins from England.

¹⁰ There is now a rich literature on both metal detecting and mudlarking in England and Wales, and useful surveys include Burdon, Green, Smith 2000; Thomas 2012. For a more critical account, see Gill 2010.

en,¹¹ and there is a marked preference for smaller and lower value denominations, which are the types of coins that are easiest to lose, and whose owners would have spent the least effort trying to recover them.¹²



Fig. 1. Examples of Tudor-era (1485–1603) Baltic and Russian coins found in England and Wales: Hamburg ducat (top left), Wismar schilling (top right), Swedish ½ öre (middle left), Polish ½ groschen (middle right), Prussian 3 gröscher (lower left), Livonian schilling (lower right), and Russian kopek (bottom). Images © National Museum Liverpool, Portable Antiquities Scheme, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, Suffolk County Council, Surrey County Council, and West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service, reused under CC BY 2.0 and CC BY-SA 4.0 licences

¹¹ Bevan 2012; Andrews 2019, pp. 16–28.

¹² Mayhew 2002, pp. 6–7.

Table 1. Finds of Baltic and Russian coins dated 1485–1603 from England and Wales

No.	Material	Denomination	Issuer	Date	Mint	Findspot	Reference
<i>Denmark</i>							
1.	Billon	1 skilling dansk	Christian III	1542–1558	Copenhagen	Thornton-le-Dale, North Yorkshire	PAS NCL-CC9AA8
2.	Billon	1 skilling dansk	Christian III	1542–1558	Copenhagen	Rowington, Warwickshire	Abdy 2001, p. 188, no. 113
3.	Billon	2 skilling dansk	Frederick II	1562	Copenhagen	Thames Foreshore, London	UKDFD 21575
<i>Northern Germany</i>							
4.	AV	Ducat	Free City of Hamburg	1497	Hamburg	Aldeburgh, Suffolk	Allen <i>et al.</i> 2011, p. 281, no. 137
5.	AR	Witten	Free City of Hamburg	1506	Hamburg	Bergh Apton, Norfolk	PAS NMS-43E226
6.	AR	Sechsling	Free City of Rostock	1540–1548	Rostock	East Studdal, Kent	UKDFD 20135
7.	Billon	Schilling	Free City of Wismar	1556	Wismar	Chillerton, Isle of Wight	PAS IOW-DA80F4
<i>Sweden</i>							
8.	AR	4 mark klipping	Johan III	1571	Stockholm	Chickerell, Dorset	PAS DOR-4FF4EB
9.	Billon	1 öre	Johan III	1576	Stockholm	Dowgate, London	PAS LON-4CF329
10.	Billon	½ öre	Johan III	1582	Stockholm	Southwark, London	PAS SUR-DED8F8
<i>Poland</i>							
11.	AR	½ groschen	John I Albert	1492–1501	Kraków	Little Ness, Shropshire	PAS LVPL-E76065
12.	AR	½ groschen	John I Albert	1492–1501	Kraków	Heytesbury, Wiltshire	PAS WILT-CBB635
<i>Prussia</i>							
13.	AR	3 gröscher	Albrecht of Hohenzollern	1543	Königsberg	Sawtry, Cambridgeshire	PAS CAM-2C6065
14.	Billon	Pfennig	Albrecht of Hohenzollern	1563	Königsberg	Thames Fore-shore, London	UKDFD 32648
15.	AR	3 gröscher	Georg Friedrich	1588	Königsberg	Ridgmont, Bedfordshire	PAS BUC-15A629
<i>Livonia</i>							
16.	Billon	Schilling	Wolter von Plettenberg	1532	Reval	Wallasey, Wirral	PAS LVPL-275BC1
17.	Billon	Schilling	Wolter von Plettenberg	1532–1534	Reval	Gresford, Wrexham	PAS LVPL-075760
18.	Billon	Schilling	Hermann von Brüggeneye	1539	Reval	Moreton, Essex	UKDFD 36501

No.	Material	Denomination	Issuer	Date	Mint	Findspot	Reference
19.	Billon	Schilling	Hermann von Brüggeneye	1539	Reval	Wallasey, Wirral	PAS LVPL-277230
20.	Billon	Schilling	Hermann von Brüggeneye	1541–1545	Reval	Dodcott cum Wilkesley, Cheshire	PAS LVPL-6FE3E3
21.	Billon	Schilling	Hermann von Brüggeneye	1535–1549	Riga	Polesworth, Warwickshire	Besly, Holmes 1994, p. 163, no. 363
22.	Billon	Schilling	Thomas Schöning	1539–1540	Riga	Wallasey, Wirral	PAS LVPL-2787F5
23.	Billon	Schilling	Free City of Riga	1575	Riga	Bolton-le-Sands, Lancashire	PAS LAN-CUM-CF90C1
24.	Billon	Schilling	Free City of Riga	1580	Riga	Clifton upon Teme, Worcestershire	PAS WMID-F83283
<i>Russia</i>							
25.	AR	Denga	Ivan IV	1533–1547	Moscow	Brightstone, Isle of Wight	PAS IOW-4A6104
26.	AR	Denga	Ivan IV	1533–1547	Moscow	Drayton Bassett, Staffordshire	PAS WMID-7CE1C4
27.	AR	Denga	Ivan IV	1535–1538	Moscow	Tower Hamlets, London	PAS LON-9C0982
28.	AR	Kopek	Ivan IV	1535–1538	Moscow	Great Yeldham, Essex	PAS ESS-B66F64
29.	AR	Denga	Ivan IV	1547–1584	Moscow	Brailes, Warwickshire	PAS WAW-BEBE72
30.	AR	Denga	Ivan IV	1560	Pskov	Sonning, Surrey	PAS SUR-7A7B71
31.	AR	Kopek	Ivan IV	1560–1569	Pskov	Copmanthorpe, North Yorkshire	PAS SWYOR-027548
32.	AR	Denga	Ivan IV	1535–1538	Tver	Hitchin, Hertfordshire	PAS BH-95A3B7
33.	AR	Kopek	Ivan IV	1547–1584	Velikiy Novgorod	Long Stratton, Norfolk	UKDFD 44820
34.	AR	Kopek	Ivan IV	1547–1584	Velikiy Novgorod	Nr. Lincoln, Lincolnshire	UKDFD 44488
35.	AR	Kopek	Boris Godunov	1600	Moscow	Bedale, North Yorkshire	PAS NCL-3E28C3

Biases notwithstanding, the corpus contains a reasonably broad coverage of Tudor-era coins minted throughout the Baltic and Russia: from Hamburg in the west to Moscow in the east, and from Reval in the north to Kraków in the south (Fig. 2). The material is perhaps best surveyed in the order that an English merchant might have encountered it, heading eastwards from Denmark, Northern Germany, and Sweden towards Poland, Prussia, Livonia, and eventually onwards into Russia.

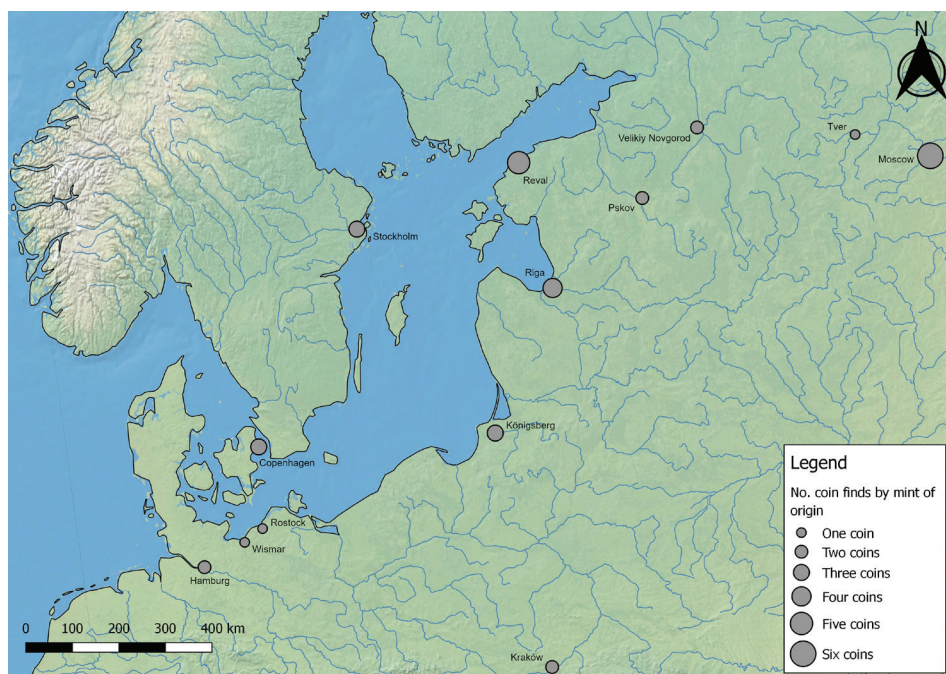


Fig. 2. Mints of origin for Baltic and Russian coins dated 1485–1603 found in England and Wales, scaled by number of recorded specimens

Denmark

Lying at the interface between the Baltic and the North Sea, the kingdom of Denmark was a major beneficiary of the Anglo-Baltic trade, and derived as much as two-thirds of its 16th- and 17th-century royal revenues from tolls (“Sound Dues”) levied on ships passing through the Øresund Strait, the main waterway in and out of the Baltic region.¹³ These tariffs became a persistent source of disputes between English merchants and the Danish crown, which on more than one occasion required formal diplomatic resolutions.¹⁴ Indications of these international connections are provided

¹³ Degn 2017.

¹⁴ Cheyney 1929, pp. 15–19.

by three English single finds of Danish billon coins, consisting of one 2 skilling and two skillings of Christian III (1534–1559) and Frederick II (1559–1588), all of them minted at the royal mint of Copenhagen (Table 1, nos 1–3). These coins are all of small to medium size (22–25 mm) and low weight (ca. 1.98–2.60 g), and have a fairly diffuse spatial distribution, stretching as far apart as Yorkshire in the north, London in the south, and Warwickshire in the west.

Northern Germany

Despite long-running conflicts with the declining Hanseatic League, the ports of Northern Germany played an important role in Anglo-Baltic commerce throughout the Tudor era, and English commodities like coal and salt continued to supply the towns of Mecklenburg and Western Pomerania well into the latter years of the 16th century.¹⁵ These links seem to be reflected in the English and Welsh finds, which include four single finds of Northern German coins dated to the Tudor era. The coins are all city issues struck in gold, silver, and billon: a ducat and a witten of Hamburg dated 1497 and 1506, a sechsling of Rostock dated 1540–1548, and a schilling of Wismar dated 1556 (Table 1, nos 4–7). They are all of small to medium size (19–23 mm), and the silver and billon specimens are quite light (0.60–1.26 g), although the ducat is of reasonable weight (3.46 g). Compared with the Danish coins, the spatial distribution of the Northern German coins is rather more constrained, with a distinct south-eastern focus around Norfolk, Suffolk, and Kent, and an outlier along the south coast on the Isle of Wight.

Sweden

The historical trajectory of Sweden in the long 16th century is almost the antithesis of that of the Hanseatic League, and was defined by the transformation of a territory of the Kalmar Union into a powerful independent state with expansionist aims throughout the Baltic region. Though never more than marginal players in the Tudor Anglo-Baltic trade, Swedish ports like Stockholm, Kalmar, and Älvsborg and Nya Lödöse (the predecessors of modern Gothenburg) were nonetheless occasionally visited by English merchants from at least the 1560s, and represented small but useful markets for the sale of woollens and the purchase of iron, flax, timber, and tar.¹⁶ Hints of these connections are provided by three single finds of Swedish coins from England, which consist of a cut half of a silver 4 mark klipping dated 1571, a billon 1 öre dated 1576, and a billon ½ öre dated 1582. These coins were all minted at Stockholm in the reign of Johan III (1569–1592), and are of medium to large size (20–34 mm) and varied weight, the billon pieces being relatively light (1.63–2.83 g) and the silver klipping noticeably heavier

¹⁵ Olechnowitz 1965, pp. 94–95.

¹⁶ Zins 1972, p. 138; Grimshaw 2023, pp. 28–30.

(5.66 g, cut down from an original weight of 12.69 g). They have an essentially southern English distribution, with two finds recovered from the Thames Foreshore at London and the third from Dorset – the most south-westerly find of a Baltic or Russian coin hitherto recorded in England and Wales.

Poland

The long 16th century forms part of the Polish Golden Age, a period that saw the transformation of the kingdom of Poland (and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) into one of the largest and most powerful kingdoms of Central and Eastern Europe. In line with its stature as the main economic hub of the southern Baltic, Poland played a pre-eminent role in the Tudor Anglo-Baltic trade, and the seaports of Danzig and Elbing – the latter serving from 1579 as the overseas headquarters of the Eastland Company¹⁷ – had a particular significance as markets for imported Polish rye and timber and exported English cloth, rabbit skins, and lead; indeed, these two ports were the destination of nearly 80% of all English shipping voyages within the region between 1562 and 1600.¹⁸ Links of this kind are reflected in the single find record, which includes two English finds of silver ½ groschen of John I Albert (1492–1501) issued at the Kraków mint (Table 1, nos 11–12). These coins are quite small (18 mm) and very light (1 g), and are distributed entirely in the west of Britain, with one specimen recorded from Shropshire in the Welsh Marches and another from Wiltshire in the south-west.

Prussia

The Duchy of Prussia was a Polish fief for much of the 16th century, and its main Baltic port at Königsberg was well attended by English merchants dealing in cloth, skins, lead, flax, grain, and timber.¹⁹ Its status in the Anglo-Baltic trade network is indicated by the Sound toll registers, where it is listed as the third busiest point of departure for English ships crossing westwards through the Øresund Strait out of the Baltic Sea.²⁰ The importance of Königsberg is echoed by the coin finds, which include three single finds of coins minted at Königsberg during the rule of Albrecht of Hohenzollern (1525–1568) and the regency of George Friedrich (1577–1603). These coins consist of two silver 3 gröschers dated 1543 and 1588 and a billon pfennig dated 1563 (Table 1, nos 13–15), which are all small to mid-sized coins (12–22 mm) with relatively low weights (0.35–2.70 g). Their distribution is spread mainly across the south and east of England, with finds known from Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and the Thames Foreshore at London.

¹⁷ Groth 2015, p. 7.

¹⁸ Zins 1972, pp. 138, 171–183, 192–201.

¹⁹ Zins 1972, pp. 194, 198, 224–225; Groth 2015, pp. 9–14.

²⁰ Zins 1972, p. 138.

Livonia

While the territory of Livonia (“*Terra Mariana*”) was fragmented over the course of the 16th century, its two historic centres of Riga and Reval nonetheless maintained their significance as Eastern Baltic ports, and were among those monopolised by the Eastland Company after its foundation in 1579.²¹ Compared to many of the other Baltic territories, Livonian coins are reasonably well represented within the English and Welsh finds corpus, with nine billon schillings recorded to date (Table 1, 16–24). Six of these coins were minted at Reval and Riga for Wolter von Plettenberg (1494–1535) and Hermann von Brüggeneye (1535–1549), Masters of the Livonian Order, while the remainder include one specimen minted for Thomas Schöning (1528–1539) as Archbishop of Riga and two others minted for the Free City of Riga in 1575 and 1580. Like their Polish counterparts, these coins are quite small (18 mm) and very light (ca. 1 g), and their distribution has a pronounced skew towards the north-west, with a concentration of finds in the northern Welsh Marches and along the Wirral Peninsula. The latter include a group of three coins found near the mouth of the River Mersey at Wallsey (Table 1, nos 16, 19, 22), whose close dates and shared Livonian origins are highly suggestive of a scattered hoard or shipwreck cargo.

Russia

Like Poland and Sweden, Russia was an expanding power in the 16th century, and constituted one of the largest potential markets accessible to English merchants at the eastern edge of Europe. While Hanseatic merchants had been exporting Russian furs, wax, and grain to England throughout the later middle ages, the direct involvement of English merchants in the Russian trade began in the 1550s after the opening of a northern sea route via the White Sea, and would expand further after the 1558 conquest of Livonia opened a new Baltic route to Russia via Narva in the Gulf of Finland.²² Though of lesser importance than the southern Baltic ports, Narva was nonetheless frequently visited by English merchants throughout the 1560s and 1570s, and was the main transshipment port for Anglo-Russian trade until its conquest by Sweden in 1581 and its eventual replacement by Arkhangelsk in 1584.²³ These connections across the Baltic and White Seas are reflected by 11 finds of Russian silver coins from England, which consist of four kopeks and six dengas of Ivan IV (1533–1584), most of them postdating the reform of 1534,²⁴ and one kopek of Boris Godunov (1598–1605) (Table 1, nos 25–35). These coins are all single finds, and have a broad coverage of the imperial mints, including

²¹ Zins 1972, p. 114.

²² Willan 1953; Etkind 2011, p. 167

²³ Zins 1972, pp. 40, 48–49.

²⁴ Spassky 1967, pp. 111–114.

six examples struck at Moscow, two at Pskov, two at Velikiy Novgorod, and an early specimen from Tver. They are all very small (11–16 mm) and very light (0.34–0.68 g), and have a widespread distribution across England, stretching from Yorkshire in the north to the Isle of Wight in the south, and from Norfolk in the east to Staffordshire in the west.

DISCUSSION

Though relatively small in size, the corpus of coin finds presented in this paper is an important source of independent archaeological evidence relating to the Anglo-Baltic trade in the Tudor period. In many respects, the dataset reinforces our understanding of the nature and scale of the trade as established from written sources. The importance of the long 16th century as a growth period in Anglo-Baltic trade, for example, is supported by the overall number of coins recorded, which is more than twice as large as the equivalent corpus of 15th-century Baltic coins found in England and Wales.²⁵ Moreover, the chronological distribution of coin finds (Fig. 3) displays “peaks” in the second and third quarters of the 16th century, so is broadly consistent with the established dating of Anglo-Baltic trade expansion from the mid-16th century onwards. The coverage of the dataset also represents most of the Baltic region, and includes all areas where English merchants are known from written sources to have traded in the 16th century.

There are, however, certain aspects of the corpus that challenge our expectations. In the first instance, it is clear that, while the coins discussed above must have arrived in England and Wales by means of the Anglo-Baltic trade, they are nonetheless unlikely to be the kinds of coin that were actually used by merchants transacting English cloth or Baltic timber. Thalers, the main trade currency used in the late 16th-century Baltic,²⁶ are notable for their absence, and there is only one gold coin (Table 1, no. 4) recorded in the entire corpus. By contrast, there is no shortage of lower value coinage struck in silver and billon (Table 1, nos 1–3, 5–7, 9–35), many of which would not have looked out of place in the taverns or market stalls of the Baltic ports. This discrepancy cannot simply be due to a lack of high value foreign coin entering the country, as numerous references to “yokindales” and “yohandaryes”, the English names for the thaler, appear among the cash bequests recorded in 16th-century wills.²⁷ The most likely explanation is that it reflects something of the nature of the dataset as a corpus of primarily single finds, which are skewed towards small coins of low denominations. While it was quite

²⁵ Kelleher 2012, pp. 183–184; Andrews 2019, pp. 156–164.

²⁶ Vorel 2022.

²⁷ These terms are anglicisations of *joachimsthaler*, but were used more generally to describe thaler-sized European silver coins. Examples of these bequests include the “yokindale of sylver” left in the 1557 will of Christopher Gryme of Richmond, North Yorkshire, and the “yohandaryes of silver” given to friends of William Wrixham, late parson of Birmingham, in his will of 1578: Raine 1853, p. 103; Geater 2016, no. 77.

easy to lose a Prussian pfennig or Russian deniga and never notice it, it would be rather more difficult to accidentally drop a thaler without someone – preferably its owner – noticing it and picking it up again.

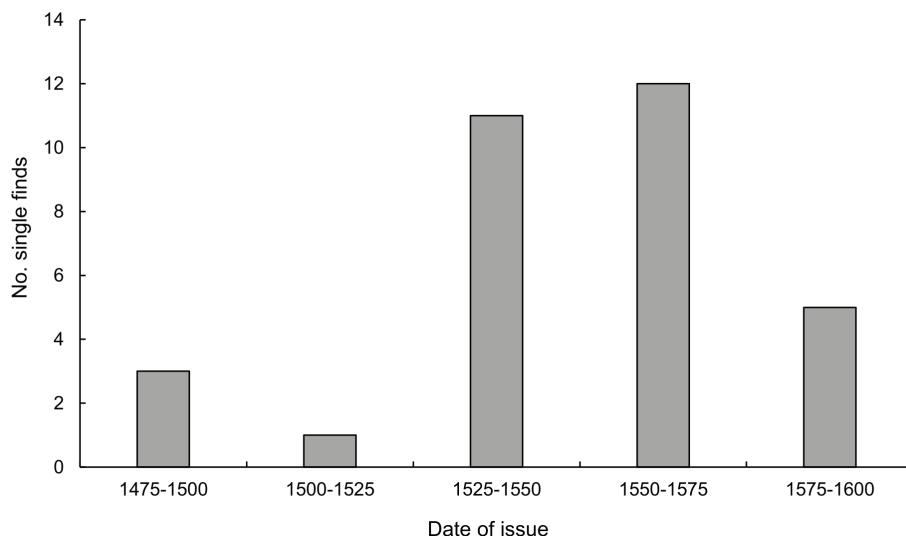


Fig. 3. Chronological distribution of single finds of Tudor-era Baltic and Russian coins found in England and Wales. This graph omits the three Livonian coins found at Wallasey (Table 1, nos 16, 19, 22), which are likely to represent a hoard or shipwreck find (see main text)

Secondly, the representation of different mints and regions in the corpus is a little surprising. Given the pre-eminent role of Danzig and Elbing in the Anglo-Baltic trade, it is remarkable that there are only two Polish coins recorded among the English and Welsh finds corpus – fewer than even Sweden, whose involvement in the trade seems from documents to have been much less important. Why should this be the case? One possibility is that the discrepancy simply reflects the small size of the sample, which consists of just 35 coins – a very small number when compared to the more than 33,000 single finds of English coins recorded from the same area and period.²⁸ However, it might also reflect certain regional variations in the nature of mercantile exchange within the Baltic region. In this context, we might note Zins’ observation that, due to unfavourable exchange rates and the fluctuating value of Polish money, English merchants dealing with Danzig and Elbing preferred to engage in direct commodity-to-commodity exchanges, trading cloth for grain and timber instead of using cash.²⁹ The bias towards

²⁸ Data collected by the author as of September 2024.

²⁹ Zins 1972, pp. 309–310.

exchanges of this kind, as well as those rendered in credit, meant that English ships bound for these ports carried relatively little coin, with the necessary consequence that those on-board – whether merchants or sailors – would find themselves with fewer opportunities on arrival to pick up local coin and carry it back home with them. This situation might not have applied to ships bound for other Baltic ports, where exchange rates could prove more favourable, and where coins might be more useful.

While the coins described in this paper must have entered England on ships arriving from the Baltic, their spatial distribution (Fig. 4) is clearly not restricted to the east coast port towns that were involved in the trade: London, Hull, Newcastle, Ipswich, Aldeburgh, Kings Lynn, Dover, and Harwich. Instead, we find coins distributed across a wide swathe of urban and rural England and Wales, with regional concentrations mainly – but not exclusively – reflecting broader underlying patterns in the spatial distribution of coinage in the Tudor period. These observations beg the question – to what extent, if any, did Baltic and Russian coins circulate in England and Wales during the Tudor period?

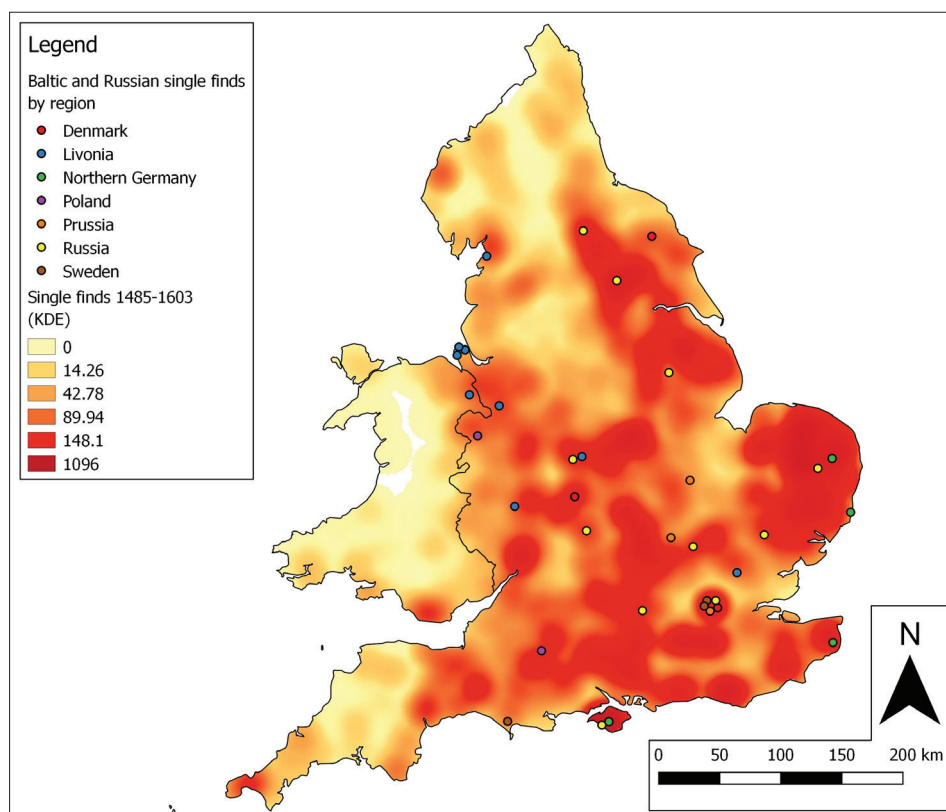


Fig. 4. Spatial distribution of Tudor-era Baltic and Russian coins found in England and Wales, plotted against a kernel-density estimate heatmap of all single finds dated 1485–1603 (source: author’s database)

It is notable that, despite various royal proclamations permitting the use of specific foreign coins in late 15th- and 16th-century England and Wales, references to the state-sanctioned use of Baltic and Russian coins in the Tudor period are totally absent from the historical record.³⁰ From an official perspective, then, none of the coins recorded in the finds corpus – with the possible exception of the Hamburg ducat (Table 1, no. 4) – would have been counted among the “lawful money of England”, and would theoretically be unable to pass in payment. There is, however, the possibility that these coins might instead have circulated unofficially. Peter Spufford has drawn attention to the tendency in medieval Europe for foreign coins struck to similar standards of weight, size, and fineness as domestic coins to be unofficially acceptable,³¹ and it is not inconceivable that this might also apply to some of the 16th-century coins recorded among the English and Welsh finds. The Hamburg witten (Table 1, no. 5), for example, was similar in size and weight to the contemporary English halfgroat, while the Danish 2-skilling (Table 1, no. 3) bore some comparison to the sixpences of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), but was significantly more debased. Coins of this kind might conceivably have circulated among the ill-attentive as equivalent to similarly sized English coins, with some possible reductions for fineness and weight differences. Some kind of unofficial circulation might particularly apply to the smaller silver coins, like the Russian kopeks and dengas, whose size, weights, and fineness were not entirely different to the smallest English coins, the penny and halfpenny, which were in high demand yet struck in relatively small numbers.³² In this context, it is not inconceivable that commercial necessity facilitated the circulation of these petty foreign coins in the town squares and inn houses of Tudor England and Wales.

CONCLUSION

The coin finds presented in this article are a key source of archaeological evidence for the Tudor Anglo-Baltic trade, and offer glimpses of commercial exchanges and interactions in a period marked by growing international ties and connections. Their chronology and diverse origins, which stretch from Denmark and Northern Germany to Livonia and Russia, reflect the ever-widening reach of English trade networks during the long 16th century, which connected the towns and villages of England and Wales to new markets and resources from across the Baltic Sea, and in this respect offer a valuable corroborative to the known historical record.

³⁰ On the circulation of foreign coins in late medieval and Tudor England, see Challis 1978, pp. 214–218; Cook 1999; Andrews 2021.

³¹ Spufford 1999, p. 332.

³² Challis 1978, pp. 202–204. Small change shortages were a recurrent problem in medieval and early modern Europe, and the informal circulation of foreign petty coinage was a common response among coin-using communities: Muldrew 2001; Sargent, Velde 2003.

Though evidently brought to England on ships arriving from the Baltic, it is nonetheless clear that very few of the coins described here actually represent the kind of money used by merchants while transacting cloth, grain, timber, and flax in ports like Danzig, Elbing, and Königsberg. For the most part, they are typical of the kind of everyday petty cash in use in taverns and on market stalls, and are rather more likely to have left the Baltic in the purses of sailors than in the coffers and strongboxes of merchants and shipmasters. While none of these coins ever received official recognition as part of the “lawful money of England”, their spatial spread and composition nevertheless suggests that at least a few may have circulated unofficially after their arrival in England and Wales, possibly as substitutes for similar-sized domestic coins – particularly where the latter were in short supply, but were in high demand in the marketplace. Though wholly unattested in written sources, this kind of pragmatic use of foreign currency was not unusual in the late middle ages and early modern period, and offers an important reminder of the potential discrepancy between official territorial currencies as delineated by law and the more informal arrangements that could emerge on the ground in the towns and countryside of 16th-century Europe.

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ZE WSCHODU NA ZACHÓD: MONETY KRAJÓW NADBAŁTYCKICH I ROSJI Z CZASÓW TUDORÓW ZNALEZIONE W ANGLII I WALII

(Streszczenie)

„Długi wiek XVI” (ok. 1450–1650) był okresem istotnych zmian w całej Europie podczas przejścia od średniowiecza do okresu wczesnonowoczesnego. W Anglii i Walii okres ten w dużej mierze zbiega się z panowaniem dynastii Tudorów (1485–1603), której rządy charakteryzowały się znacznymi zmianami społeczno-gospodarczymi i kulturowymi, w tym innowacjami w rolnictwie, ekspansją miast, wzrostem liczby ludności i ustanowieniem protestantyzmu. Gospodarka i handel również przechodziły znaczące zmiany, w szczególności w wyniku rozwoju handlu międzynarodowego w Europie, Azji Zachodniej i Ameryce Północnej. Jednak głównym rynkiem zagranicznym Anglii pozostała Europa Północna, a zwłaszcza obszar wokół Morza Bałtyckiego, gdzie kupcy kupowali wełniane tkaniny od angielskich kupców i eksportowali zboże, drewno i len do Londynu i innych prowincjonalnych portów. Rosnące znaczenie handlu angielsko-bałtyckiego w okresie panowania Tudorów jest wyraźnie widoczne w rejestrach podatkowych i rejestrach portowych, które odnotowują czterokrotny wzrost eksportu angielskich tkanin do państw bałtyckich w latach 1560–1600, a także wzrost angielskiego importu bałtyckiego lnu, żelaza, żyta i wosku. Podczas gdy holenderscy pośrednicy odgrywali znaczącą rolę w tym handlu, angielscy kupcy i statki zyskały na znaczeniu dzięki monopolom przyznanym spółkom akcyjnym, takim jak Kompania Moskiewska (Muscovy Company, 1555) i Kompania Wschodnia (Eastland Company, 1579).

Ze względu na nietrwały charakter towarów, źródła archeologiczne dotyczące handlu anglo-bałtyckiego w okresie Tudorów są nieliczne. Znajdźiska plomb ołowianych z tkanin na obszarach okołobałtyckich dają wgląd w zakres angielskiego eksportu, podczas gdy import drewna bałtyckiego został wykazany poprzez analizy dendrologiczne XVI-wiecznych angielskich obrazów. Kontakty te są poświadczone również przez znajdźiska monet Tudorów z części regionu Bałtyku, Rosji i południowej Skandynawii, które odzwierciedlają przepływ angielskich pieniędzy na wschód w tym okresie. Jednak napływowi monet krajów nadbałtyckich i rosyjskich do Anglii i Walii poświęcono jak dotąd niewiele uwagi i są one przedmiotem tego artykułu.

Analiza opublikowanych źródeł i cyfrowych baz danych pozwoliła stworzyć listę 35 znajdźisk monet krajów nadbałtyckich i rosyjskich wybitych w latach 1485–1603, z obszaru Anglii i Walii. Prawie wszystkie z tych monet to pojedyncze znajdźiska z pól uprawnych, przy czym większość z nich reprezentuje nominały srebrne i bilonowe o niskiej wartości. Obraz rozprzestrzenienia znajdźisk jest zaburzony przez współczesne wzorce aktywności poszukiwaczy skarbów, natomiast struktura nominalowa zdominowana jest przez monety małe i o niskiej wartości, bowiem takie najczęściej gubiono. Pomimo tego, widzimy szeroką reprezentację monet z całej strefy nadbałtyckiej, która odzwierciedla rozwój handlu angielskiego w regionie od Hamburga na zachodzie po Moskwę na wschodzie i od Rewala na północy po Kraków na południu.

Choć monety te zostały przywiezione do Anglii na statkach przybywających ze strefy nadbałtyckiej, bardzo niewiele z opisanych w tym artykule znalezisk monet faktycznie reprezentuje rodzaj pieniądza używanego przez kupców handlujących sukniem, zbożem, drewnem i lniem w portach bałtyckich. W sytuacjach, kiedy nie dokonywano transakcji kredytowych lub towarowych, do obsługi handlu używano dużych srebrnych talarów, których obecność w XVI-wiecznej Anglii potwierdzają źródła pisane, lecz nie znaleziska monet. Zamiast tego, bałtyckie i rosyjskie monety znalezione w Anglii i Walii są bardziej reprezentatywne dla waluty o niskiej wartości używanej w tawernach i na straganach, i prawdopodobnie opuściły Bałtyk w sakiewkach marynarzy. Choć żadna z tych monet nigdy nie została prawnie dopuszczona do obiegu w Anglii i Walii, ich rozprzestrzenienie i skład sugerują, że niektóre z nich krążyły nieoficjalnie, być może jako substytuty monet angielskich o podobnej wielkości, które były w niewielkiej podaży, ale cieszyły się dużym popytem. Obiekty te nie tylko odzwierciedlają rozwój szlaków handlowych XV-wiecznej Europy, ale także ilustrują potencjalne różnice między oficjalnymi walutami terytorialnymi a bardziej nieformalnymi systemami, które pojawiły się w miastach i na wsi we wczesnym okresie nowożytnym.

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