

An Anglo-Saxon runic coin and its adventures in Sweden

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

In the years 1741–3, two scholars of Anglo-Saxon and Gothic, one an Englishman and the other a Swede, were engaged in correspondence.¹ The Englishman was the Reverend Edward Lye (1694–1767), then rector of Yardley Hastings in Northamptonshire, and the Swede was Eric Benzelius the Younger (1675–1743), bishop of Linköping and, in the last year of his life, archbishop-elect of Uppsala. For many years Benzelius had been preparing an edition of the ‘Codex Argenteus’ of the Gothic gospels, which had been in Uppsala University Library since 1669, but he had been unable to complete the work on account of his many other commitments and also through the lack of suitable publishers for such a volume in Sweden. In his frustration, he sought the help of his many highly-placed friends in England, who included Sir Hans Sloane and John Carteret, first Earl Granville, a former Ambassador to Sweden. They directed him to Edward Lye as the only man in England competent to complete the edition, and the University Press at Oxford, as the only publisher able to handle the difficult commission, as it still possessed Junius’s type fonts for printing Gothic, Old English and runic characters. So it was that, in 1738, Benzelius sent his son Carl Jesper to England to discuss the publication with all interested parties there. The negotiations between Lye and the Benzelius family were first conducted, in person and by letter, with the son, and afterwards, by letter only, with the father, who unfortunately died on 23 September 1743, well before the publication of the gospels by the University Press in 1750.

The main subject of the Lye–Benzelius correspondence was their edition of the ‘Codex Argenteus’, but, among other scholarly questions they discussed was an inscription on an Anglo-Saxon runic coin that Benzelius owned.² He

¹ The correspondence has been preserved as London, British Library, Add. 32325 and in various manuscripts of the Benzelius archive in Linköping, Stifts- och Landsbiblioteket. It is forthcoming in *The Correspondence of Edward Lye*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross and Amanda Collins, Publ. of the Dictionary of OE 6 (Toronto). Letters between Lye and Eric Benzelius have already appeared in *Letters to Erik Benzelius the Younger From Learned Foreigners*, ed. A. Erikson, 2 vols. (Göteborg, 1980) II, 1723–43, and *Erik Benzelius’ Letters to his Learned Friends*, ed. A. Erikson and E. N. Nylander (Göteborg, 1983).

² He calls it *nummus meus* in his letter to Lye of 23 December 1741 (BL, Add. 32325, 47r–48v).

wanted Lye's opinion of the meaning of the runic letters on the reverse side. He broached the subject in a letter of 26 May 1741 (London, British Library, Add. 32325, 44r): 'Obscuro Te, eruditissime Lye, doce quis sensus sit partis aversæ nummi Runicæ Offæ R., cujus ectypum dedit laudatus Serenius, & cujus sit ætatis?'³ At first Lye confessed himself puzzled by the task, worrying particularly about the features which Benzelius correctly identified as decoration (both men drew the repeated design of dots and goblet-like markings between the actual letters of the inscription in their correspondence of 10 October 1741 (Lye to Benzelius) and 23 December 1741 (Benzelius to Lye)). However, in his letter to Benzelius of 23 July 1742 (Linköping Br 10:17:107), Lye struck a more confident, and, as it turns out, correct note:

I have consider'd Your Numm. Offæ, and am inclin'd to think, it belongs to Offa King of the Mercians, who reign'd near forty years, & whose coins are of a much neater stamp than those of the other Saxon Kings. The reverse must certainly be read *Botred*, which is a Saxon name, and an argument, that the coin was struck in England. We may farther note, that upon all Offa's coins, as well as this, there is only the bare name of the person without the addition of *Monetarius*, which gen<er>ally appe<a>rs upon the reverse of the other Kings coins.

It is well known that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars and enthusiasts for northern antiquities were particularly interested in both runes and coins,⁴ so it is not surprising that a runic coin should excite the curiosity of a pair of contemporary antiquaries. Benzelius, indeed, had been interested in coins since his childhood, and had assembled a very large collection, one of the most significant in Sweden, in part inherited from his father.⁵ There is more to this particular discussion than scholarly enthusiasm, however, for it is not only witness to the extent of Lye's knowledge of the Old English language and Anglo-Saxon numismatics and the scholarly collaboration of an Englishman and a Swede, but it so happens that, in this case, it is also possible to pinpoint the exact coin that the two men were writing about and to give an account of its history after it was unearthed in the early eighteenth century. There is almost incontrovertible evidence to support the assertion that the Offa penny by the moneyer Botred, discussed in 1741–2 by Lye and Benzelius, is one and the

³ 'I beseech you, most learned Lye, inform me what the meaning of the reverse side of the runic coin of King Offa may be, of which the esteemed Serenius has supplied an engraving, and of what age it may be?'

⁴ D. M. Metcalf, 'Eighteenth-century Finds of Medieval Coins from the Records of the Society of Antiquaries', *NChron* 6th ser. 18 (1958), 73–96.

⁵ See Th. Högberg, *Svenska Numismatiker under fyra sekler. En biografisk-bibliografisk handbok* (Göteborg, 1961), pp. 35–7, and E. Nathorst-Böös and I. Wiséhn, *Numismatiska forskare och myntsamlare i Sverige fram till 1830-talet*, *Numismatiska Meddelander* 36 (Stockholm, 1987), 14.

same as the coin now in the Royal Coin Cabinet (Kungl. Myntkabinettet) in Stockholm, shown as pl. IIa.⁶

We will first examine the eighteenth-century evidence that fills in the background to the correspondence of Lye and Benzelius, and then turn to what modern research can tell us of Offa pennies bearing the name of the moneyer Botred in runes. In his first mention of the Offa coin, Benzelius indicates that ‘the esteemed Serenius’ had supplied him with an *ectypus* (an engraving or possibly a wood-cut) of the coin, which he presumably sent to Lye, though no trace of it has survived with the letter. Jacob Serenius (1700–76) was a younger Swedish contemporary of Benzelius, a clergyman, politician and scholar, who was, among other things, a noted Anglophile with many English friends and contacts. He had spent the years 1723–33 as the pastor of the Swedish Church in London⁷ and was the author of the best English–Swedish dictionary then available, *Dictionarium Anglo-Svethico-Latinum*, published at Hamburg in 1734.⁸ Benzelius had himself contributed an extensive preface to this dictionary, in which he announced his projected edition of the ‘Codex Argenteus’, and this was followed, on pp. 13–35, by a long disquisition by Serenius, entitled *De veterum Sveo-Gothorum cum Anglis usu et commercio dissertatio*, on the cultural and economic bonds between England and Sweden, tracing these right back to the earliest times. On p. 21 he adduces the evidence of runic coins in support of his argument, and, after mentioning the studies of Sir Andrew Fountaine, Ralph Thoresby and Edmund Gibson, introduces the following evidence of his own: ‘. . . proferam nunc alium nummum Runicum argenteum, indubitate Anglicum, ante quinquennium in Cantuariensi agro repertum, quem nunc ad lectissimam in Re nummaria septentrionalium Benzelianam collectionem delegatum liberalitati & amicitiae reverendi & Clarissimi Johannis Creykii debemus. . .’⁹ This

⁶ I am much indebted for their help in sifting the evidence in support of the identification of this coin to several experts in numismatics and runology, who have answered my questions and confirmed my deductions, among them Ray Page, of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Mark Blackburn, Keeper of Coins and Medals at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Gareth Williams, Curator of Early Medieval Coins at the British Museum, Derek Chick, of Broadstairs, Kent, Hugh Pagan, of London, and several Swedish scholars at the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm, including Eva Wiséhn, Inger Hammarberg and Lars Lagerqvist, former Keeper of the Coin Cabinet, together with Lars Lönnroth, University of Gothenburg.

⁷ S. Evander, *Londonsvenskarnas Kyrka genom 250 år* (Lund, 1960), pp. 44–57 and 197.

⁸ A second, Swedish–English, part of the first edition was published in Stockholm in 1741, and a second edition was published at Harg and Stenbro near Nyköping in 1757. It is the 1734 English–Swedish volume, however, that concerns us here, as it contains information about the Offa penny.

⁹ ‘. . . I now make known another silver runic coin, indubitably English, found in a Kentish field five years ago, which we now owe to the generosity and friendship of the reverend and most renowned John Creyk, who sent it to the Benzelian collection, a very choice one when it comes to coins of northern provenance.’

statement is followed by an *ectypus* of the coin (pl. II*b*), made from a wood-cut or engraving, which is, as far as I know, the first published drawing of our coin, a copy of which was presumably what Benzelius sent Lye in 1741, though probably without the surrounding text.¹⁰ Serenius goes on to say that he is not sure which King Offa the coin refers to, nor is he sure of how the runic inscription should be read: ‘Quid vero illic Runæ EDBOTR, vel BOTRED velint, dicant alii’ (p. 25).¹¹ To his credit, however, he transliterated the runes themselves correctly.

Serenius’s remarks furnish us with a good deal of useful evidence for our detective work. He tells us, first of all, that the coin he illustrates was found in a Kentish field five years before the date of his dissertation, which is given as 16 February 1734 (p. 35). This would suggest that it was probably unearthed in 1729 or possibly late 1728. Serenius also indicates how the coin came into Benzelius’s collection; it was a gift from one numismatist to another. It was sent to Benzelius, possibly through Serenius’s own good offices, as the latter was living in London at the time, through the generosity of the Reverend John Creyk, who was, incidentally, a subscriber to Serenius’s 1734 English–Swedish dictionary. Two John Creyks are documented as living in the first half of the eighteenth century, but the John Creyk (or Creyke) of interest appears to have been the older of the two.¹²

¹⁰ Although modern scholarship seems largely to have forgotten the Serenius text, it was drawn to the attention of the Society of Antiquaries, in a notice of 3 December 1829, by William Hamper of Birmingham (*Archaeologia* 23 (1831), 403–5). Furthermore, in his 1958 survey of medieval coins known to antiquarians in the eighteenth century, based largely on the records of the Society of Antiquaries, Metcalf (‘Eighteenth-Century Finds of Medieval Coins’, p. 89) included a short notice of the Botred coin, drawing upon Hamper’s 1829 note with its reference to Serenius’s *Dissertatio*, p. 21. Metcalf observes that the coin ‘is now in Stockholm’, but gives no details to explain how it got there.

¹¹ ‘Whether indeed the runes there should read EDBOTR or BOTRED, is for others to say.’

¹² J. and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. I. *From the Earliest Times to 1751* (Cambridge, 1922) I, 419, list two Rev. John Creyks as having attended the University of Cambridge in the first half of the eighteenth century, the first (who is probably our man, said to be of Yorkshire descent) admitted a pensioner of St John’s, aged 17, on 7 April 1705. This gives him a year of birth *c.* 1688. The younger John Creyk was admitted sizar of St John’s on 7 April 1731 and said to be (with his brother Ralph) the son of a Ralph Creyk(e), also of Yorkshire. It seems likely that all these men were related in some way. Venn (*ibid.*) claims that the younger John Creyk was ‘perhaps R. of Eastwell, Kent, 1742–5. Died 1747’. Venn may have here conflated the older and younger John Creyks (probably relying on J. Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (1817–58, repr. New York, 1966) II, 773 n.), for there is no doubt that the older Creyk was strongly connected with Eastwell (see below). According to Thomas Hearne (*Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne* VI, edited under the Superintendence of the Committee of the Oxford Historical Society (Oxford, 1902), p. 55, entry of 22 May 1717), John Creyk senior held a Fellowship at St John’s College Cambridge and a good living in Yorkshire both of which he resigned ‘after the action at Preston’. Hearne further reports

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Our Reverend John Creyk was active in the Society of Antiquaries (he was elected 1723–4), particularly in the 1720s and the early part of the 1730s. A group of Fellows of the Society who were strongly interested in numismatics resolved in 1721, and again in 1724, ‘to collect accounts of all the antient coins relative to Great Britain and its dominions’.¹³ In 1724 John Creyk was assigned the English coins, while Humfrey Wanley took the Saxon group. Creyk is particularly closely associated with Heneage Finch (1657–1726), fifth earl of Winchilsea (Finch’s own spelling of the name), who was also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and interested in coins as well as other archaeological remains. His residence was at Eastwell Park in East Kent and Creyk seems to have resided there too, at least in the years 1723–6, probably as the earl’s private chaplain, both men being non-jurors.¹⁴ There are a number of extant letters from Winchilsea, mainly to the antiquary William Stukeley,¹⁵ which refer to his own and Creyk’s archaeological discoveries. It is clear from these letters that both men actively engaged in excavations themselves and that Winchilsea also employed workmen to dig for him and had antiquities brought to him which had been found by others. Many of the places mentioned in Winchilsea’s correspondence with Stukeley as yielding both Roman and Saxon artefacts are in East Kent and in the vicinity of Eastwell. While it cannot finally be determined exactly how and when Creyk acquired the Botred Offa penny, it is likely to have been either through his own or Winchilsea’s excavations in the 1720s or

(*Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne* X, ed. Rev. H. E. Salter (Oxford, 1915), p. 330) that in 1720 Creyk took over the non-juring congregation in London, as he lived in the house of his predecessor, Mr. Doughty. He was an influential member of the non-juring clergy (cf. *Remarks and Collections* X, 405). He seems, however, to have conformed to the Church of England later in life and to have enjoyed some patronage from Winchilsea family livings. Rev. John Creyk died in early 1757, according to a sermon in his honour, *A Sermon as designed to have been Preached at the Funeral of the late Reverend John Creyk, January 24, 1757*, by John Green, Church of St Saviour’s Southwark . . . (London, 1757). The few personal details afforded by this sermon are not discrepant with what is known about the antiquarian Creyk. Creyk’s library was sold, along with the library of the Rt Hon. Heneage Finch, earl of Winchelsea, in January 1758 (T. Osborne, *A Catalogue of the Libraries of the Reverend John Creyke, . . . and many other Considerable Libraries*, 2 vols. (London, 1757–8)). See also below nn. 13–15, for further evidence associating this John Creyk with Eastwell and the Winchelsea family. Neither Creyk appears in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹³ J. Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century comprizing Biographical Memoirs of William Bowyer . . . and Many of his Learned Friends etc.* 9 vols. (1812–15; repr. New York, 1966) III, 543 n.

¹⁴ Nichols (*Literary Anecdotes* I, 35) provides evidence of Creyk’s role as chaplain to Lord Winchilsea.

¹⁵ These are published in Nichols, *Illustrations* II, 769–84. Creyk’s role as Winchilsea’s confidant and chaplain is indicated by a letter he wrote to Stukeley from Eastwell (30 September 1726) describing how he ‘clos[ed] the eyes of my dear Lord Winchilsea’ (*ibid.* p. 783).

through the activities of others in Kent.¹⁶ Creyk inherited Winchilsea's coin collection after his death, and the coin could have formed part of his inheritance; equally it may have been his own property.¹⁷

To return to the Swedish side of this narrative, Eric Benzelius is said to have sold his coin collection *hel och hållen* ('altogether') to Baron Gustaf Rålamb in 1733 for 3,000 Swedish dalers.¹⁸ After Rålamb's death his large collection of coins and books was bought by the National Bank of Sweden (Riksbankens Ständers Bank) in 1756, and was eventually, from about 1940, placed in the custody of the Royal Coin Cabinet.¹⁹ However, it is unlikely that the Botred coin was ever part of the large collection that Benzelius sold to Rålamb, even though it is now in the Royal Coin Cabinet. From the way in which he refers to it in his correspondence of 1741–2 with Edward Lye as *nummus meus*, it sounds as if he still owned it then, in which case it could not have been included among the coins he sold to Rålamb in 1733, when, indeed, he would not have owned it for very long if it was only discovered in Kent in c. 1729. In fact, it is possible that Benzelius actually acquired the Botred coin after he had sold the major part of his collection to Rålamb, and kept it, in which case it is likely to have still been in his possession at the time of his death in September 1743. Another piece of evidence, to be discussed below, makes it clear that Carl Jesper Benzelius must have come into possession of the Offa penny, along with many other effects belonging to his father, after the latter's death. This evidence indicates, furthermore, that the Royal Coin Cabinet acquired the Offa penny that Eric Benzelius described to Lye as part of the coin collection of Queen Lovisa Ulrika, wife of King Adolf Fredrik.

Before we discover how this came to pass, however, we must set out the modern evidence for the number and distribution of Botred's Offa pennies in order to underline the singularity of the Stockholm example. In 1961 C. E. Blunt listed and exemplified photographically about 270 coins of the reign of King Offa of Mercia (757–96), including two specimens bearing the name of

¹⁶ Derek Chick, who is compiling a catalogue of all known coins of Offa of Mercia, informs me (letter of July 2001) that 'Eastwell Park is little more than two miles from Wye, site of an early, Kentish royal vill and manor and close to the junction of important trackways. I have records of three coins of the Offa period within three or four miles of the area . . .'

¹⁷ See letter of Lord Hertford to William Stukeley of 20 April 1727, printed in Nichols *Illustrations* II, 784: 'By his [Winchilsea's] will he left me his Imperial Medals, and his Sark Antiquities; – what he wrote upon them is in the possession of Mr. Creyk; – whether he will publish them or not I do not know; – he has the disposal of everything; – he has promised me the refusal of the Athenian Medals, and some of the books'.

¹⁸ Nathorst-Böös and Wiséhn, 'Numismatiska forskare', *sub* Benzelius, Erik d. y.

¹⁹ Information given to me, 8 and 14 March 2000 and 21 February 2002, by Eva Wiséhn of the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.

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the moneyer Botred in runes, nos. 108 and 109 in his list.²⁰ These two coins share the same obverse die, with the Latin legend 'Offa rex', but have a different reverse. No. 108 is slightly damaged, as a result of having at some time been pierced for suspension as a pendant, and then having been broken around the hole (pl. IIc). As a consequence the runic text of the reverse is not complete (something that would presumably have been mentioned by Benzelius if his coin were this specimen). It is now in the British Museum and was purchased in 1912.²¹ The other known Botred runic penny is the specimen in the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm (pl. IIa), undamaged, and which matches closely the 1734 *ectypus* (pl. IIb). Blunt evidently regarded these as one and the same coin,²² which he dated late in the Offan light coinage period to c. 790–2.

Botred was an East Anglian moneyer and his coins for Offa are notably rare, though he also coined for Offa's successor Cenwulf (796–821), and the East Anglian king, Eadwald (c. 796–c. 800), who seems to have led a rebellion against Mercian rule subsequent to Offa's death in 796. It is interesting to our enquiry, and suggestive of the infrequency of Botred's coinage for Offa, that we still know so few coins for Offa from this moneyer, in spite of the overall massive increase in our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon coins since the widespread use of metal detectors from the 1970s onwards. Derek Chick put the situation succinctly in a letter to me of 21 April 2000: '... I have recorded well in excess of 300 new [Offa] coins, principally the fruit of metal detector activity since the 1970's. Almost all of Offa's 30 plus moneyers have been represented amongst these new finds and several previously unrecorded moneyers are now known.'²³

²⁰ C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Offa', *Anglo-Saxon Coins: Studies Presented to F. M. Stenton on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday 17 May 1960*, ed. R. H. M. Dolley (London, 1961), pp. 39–62.

²¹ The coin's registration number is 1912, 7–4–1; see G. C. Brooke, 'Anglo-Saxon Acquisitions of the British Museum', *NChron* 5th ser. 2 (1922), 214–44, at 221 (no. 30), and R. C. Lockett, 'The Coinage of Offa', *NChron* 4th ser. 20 (1920), 57–89 with photograph at pl. VI (no. 11 BM). Neither Brooke nor Lockett give details of the history of this coin before it was acquired by the British Museum. According to Gareth Williams, present curator of the Museum's Anglo-Saxon coins, 'the coin was purchased in 1912 from W. P. Seabright for the sum of £8, but the register gives no indication of its provenance or findspot' (email to me of 6 July 2001).

²² Blunt, 'Coinage of Offa', p. 59, no. 109 ('Stockholm, found in Kent c. 1729'). He gives no source for the information that the coin was found in Kent c. 1729. However, Metcalf notes, in his discussion of this coin ('Eighteenth-century Finds of Medieval Coins', p. 89, n. 3), 'I am indebted to Mr. Blunt for giving me his opinion on the coin', so it is clear that these two scholars discussed it in 1958 and that Blunt would have been aware, either through his own research or through Metcalf, of Hamper's 1829 note in *Archaeologia*.

²³ See further D. Chick, 'Towards a Chronology for Offa's Coinage: An Interim Study', *Yorkshire Numismatist* 3 (1997), 47–64. Gareth Williams confirms that 'despite a considerable number of finds of coins of Offa in recent years, no new examples in the name of Botred have come to the attention of the BM' (6 July 2001). M. Blackburn, 'A Survey of Anglo-Saxon and

Yet not a single specimen of Botred's coinage has come to light. In addition, even the two known examples (Blunt 108 and 109) share an obverse die.' The significant inference from this data is that Botred Offa coins are very rare, so that the likelihood that the coin Eric Benzelius owned and described to Edward Lye in 1741–2 being other than the one now in the Stockholm Royal Coin Cabinet is very small. Historical, cultural and geographical circumstances support their being one and the same, as does the modern evidence.

There is, indeed, additional Swedish evidence relating to the Offa runic penny, which has not previously been published, and which clinches the identification of Benzelius's coin as the one still in Stockholm. In the archives of the Royal Coin Cabinet there is an eighteenth-century, handwritten note with an accompanying illustration of the coin, very similar to that in Serenius's 1734 *Dissertatio*, which reads in part as follows: 'Detta mynt har Hennes Kl. höghet fått af Magister Benzelius. Wid. förtalet af Serenii Engelska Lexic.' ('Her Royal Highness acquired this coin from Magister Benzelius. See the preface to Serenius's English Dictionary').²⁴ The fact that there is both an illustration and a verbal reference to Serenius's description of the coin in this note provides strong support for the hypothesis of this article. All that remains is to clarify the identities of the two named persons in the transaction whereby the coin entered the Swedish royal collection.

'Her Royal Highness' refers to Lovisa Ulrika, sister of Frederick II of Prussia, who married the Swedish prince Adolf Fredrik in 1744. Adolf Fredrik became king of Sweden in 1751, his and Lovisa Ulrika's coronation taking place on 26 November of that year. These dates are important, as the reference

Footnote 23 (*cont.*)

Frisonian Coins with Runic Inscriptions', *Old English Runes and their Continental Background*, ed. A. Bammesberger (Heidelberg, 1991), pp. 137–89, and R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 117–29 offer an overview of Anglo-Saxon runic coins, Page illustrating the Stockholm coin (without specifying its provenance) as fig. 37 on p. 128. Blackburn illustrates the British Museum coin as pl. 6, no. 31. The Stockholm coin is included as 1958.0003 (Ref. *NChron* 1958, p. 89) in the electronic *Corpus of Early Medieval Coin Finds from the British Isles, 410–1180* hosted by the Department of Coins and Medals, Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge (<http://www.medievalcoins.org>).

²⁴ It is not certain whose hand wrote this entry, nor its precise date. One possibility is that the hand is that of Carl Gustaf Tessin, who was himself a coin collector, but sold his collection to Princess Lovisa Ulrika in 1744, and later became the custodian of her collection. Another possibility is that the note was written by a certain Berch, who took over the coin collection in 1754, after Tessin had fallen into disgrace. I am very much indebted to my colleague Lars Lönnroth for investigating the archives of the Royal Coin Cabinet, and to Inger Hammarberg and Lars Lagerqvist for supplying the document and giving their opinions on its date and provenance. My own view is that the note is more likely to have been written by Tessin, on the ground, as discussed in the main text, that its reference to 'Her Royal Highness' would be appropriate to Lovisa Ulrika between the years 1744 and November 1751, but not later than that.

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to 'Her Royal Highness' could only have been appropriately made from the time of Lovisa Ulrika's marriage to Adolf Fredrik in 1744 until the date of their coronation. The identity of 'Magister Benzelius' is more problematical. It is unlikely to refer to Eric Benzelius, the first Swedish owner of the coin, as he was already dead in 1743, before Lovisa Ulrika came to Sweden and married Adolf Fredrik. It is most likely that 'Magister Benzelius' is Eric Benzelius's son Carl Jesper (1714–93), who gained the degree of *magister* at the University of Lund in 1738. In June 1743 he undertook a period of study towards a doctorate in theology at the University of Helmstedt in Germany, which he was awarded in May 1744. Subsequently he became private tutor in Swedish to Lovisa Ulrika and accompanied her in that capacity when she travelled to Sweden for her marriage.²⁵ Until 1750, when he left Stockholm for Lund, Carl Jesper Benzelius was in attendance at court, and it seems probable that he either sold or gave the Offa penny to Lovisa Ulrika at some time during the years 1744–50. The fact that he was also the custodian of his father's many letters and papers, which he deposited in the Linköping diocesan archives where they still remain, supports the hypothesis that he also inherited the Offa penny after his father's death and, knowing Lovisa Ulrika's interest in coins, made it available to her.²⁶

In conclusion, we can outline a tentative story of the life of this particular Offa penny. It was minted, somewhere in East Anglia, by the moneyer Botred, some time around 790. It was committed to the ground somewhere in Kent, at an unknown date, but probably not much later than Offa's coinage reform of *c.* 792 when the weight of the penny was increased. It was probably discovered in Kent at some time in the 1720s and acquired by the Reverend John Creyk(e), Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, who, for reasons that can only be guessed at, but which probably concerned the admiration of one coin collector for the work of another, sent it as a present to the learned Bishop Eric Benzelius in Sweden. It seems likely that Jacob Serenius, then pastor of the Swedish Church in London, acted as an intermediary in this transaction. The coin, acquired by Benzelius in the early 1730s, seems likely to have remained in his possession until his death in 1743. In 1741–2 we find him asking Edward Lye for his opinion of the sense of the runic inscription on its reverse side. At some date after

²⁵ G. Walli, 'Carl Jesper Benzelius', *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon* 3 (Stockholm, 1922), 274–8 at 274 and 276.

²⁶ The wording of the Swedish note does not specify whether Benzelius gave or sold the coin to Lovisa Ulrika. Although he did not publish information on how the coin came into the Royal Coin Cabinet, Christopher Blunt was apparently aware of some part of the story. Derek Chick (letter to me of July 2001) has kindly made available the text of Blunt's filing card for this coin: 'The coin was in the colln of Queen Louisa, sister of Frederick the Great, who bought it from Benzelius.'

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Benzelius's death in 1743, but before her coronation in November 1751, the coin came into the possession of Queen Lovisa Ulrika of Sweden, probably as a gift from her former Swedish tutor and courtier, Carl Jesper Benzelius, and thus into the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm, where it remains, one of only two known Botred runic coins for Offa of Mercia.



IIa Offa penny. Stockholm, Royal Coin Cabinet; photo Jan Eve Olsson



IIb Ectypus of Offa penny in Jacob Serenius, *Dictionarium Anglo-Suehico-Latinum* (Hamburg, 1734), p. 21



IIc Offa penny. London, British Museum, registration no. 1912, 7-4-1