

A TUDOR GROAT REVISITED

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Those who collect coins of the Tudor period may be tempted to say that to see one Mary Tudor groat is to see them all.

Mary came to the throne on 19th July 1553 after the death of her half-brother Edward VI, marrying Philip of Spain in the July of the following year. The coinage changed on her marriage, thus the mint had barely twelve months' production of coins in her name alone. The only fine silver coinage of that 12 month period was the groat, half-groat and penny, the two smaller coins being particularly rare. All have the portrait of Mary looking left (although there was also a base penny without a portrait).

The obverse legend on the groat and half-groat is **MARIA D G ANG FRA Z HIB REGI** with annulet stops and a pomegranate (the badge of her mother, Katherine) after **MARIA**. This privy (private or secret) mark is a device which allows the mint to identify the particular production run and eventually would have changed. However her marriage brought a new coinage, with the privy mark becoming a lis. Until her reign, these mint marks had been placed at the start of the legend, thus being known as initial marks but, under Mary, they are placed within the legend after the first word. Why this departure from the norm? It was short lived as, from her marriage onwards, initial marks return for the remainder of the English hammered series.

From 1351, under Edward III, the reverse legend on groats and halves had been (with the exception under Henry VIII for those not minted at the Tower) **POSUI DEUM ADIUTOREM MEUM** (or **MEU**) – “I have made God my Helper”, from Psalm 54, but with Mary this changes to the enigmatic **VERITAS TEMPORIS FILIA** – “Truth, the Daughter of Time”. Some scholars say this is a reference to her deep desire to see England restored to the faith of Rome but surely there were Biblical extracts which would have expressed this more succinctly. So why this adage?

One needs only to look at her gold coinage for a clue. The reverse legend on this reads (abbreviated) **A DOMINO FACTUM EST ISTUD ET EST MIRABILE IN OCULIS NOSTRI**. From Psalm 118, it translates as “This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes”, certainly referring to her accession which for years had been in doubt. Not, as often supposed, a reference to the Catholic faith as Elizabeth and James, her Protestant successors, also use it. They are most unlikely to have done so had it had Catholic connotations.

So “Truth, the Daughter of Time”, meaning that if one waits long enough the truth will out, must surely refer to Mary's joy that the claim by her father (Henry VIII) that his marriage to her mother was incestuous and invalid, resulting in Mary being proclaimed illegitimate, had been universally disproved by her Accession.

After her marriage to Philip, she obviously felt there was no longer any need to make reference to her troubled youth and the reverse legend reverts to the normal wording, pluralised (and abbreviated) **POSUIMUS DEUM ADIUTOREM NOSTRUM** – “We have made God our helper”.

The reverse design of the Mary groat continues that introduced by her grandfather, Henry VII: A long cross fourchee over the royal shield. The cross divides the reverse into four and so the legend, consisting of three words of 7, 8 and 5 letters, has to be split into four.

The final word **FILIA** sits nicely in the fourth quarter but the other two words have to overrun. Perhaps, because the first word must end in the second quarter, the die sinkers were told that, rather than use the pomegranate as an initial mark, it would be better to use it after the first word.

(# = pomegranate, o = annulet)

Thus we have **VERITA|S#TEM|PORIS|FILIA** and this is what one will see on the vast majority of these coins. However there are at least three further versions:

VERIT|AS#TE|MPORI|SoFILIA variation (a)

VERI|TAS#|TEMPO|FILIA variation (b)

VERIT|ASo#T|EMPOo|FILIA variation (c)

These are not die sinkers' errors. Ivan Buck, in his treatise on Medieval Groat (Greenlight Publishing 2000), devotes several pages to die sinkers' errors for the groats of Henry VI and gives some 45 examples. Strangely, he makes no reference to Mary's variations so he may have been unaware of them, evidencing their rarity. The Henry VI errors he identifies consist of spelling mistakes and letters struck over others, not at all like the variations in Mary's groats which do not exhibit a careless approach. Much more likely is it that the mint gave each die sinker freedom of expression and each variation may well have been from the output of one die only.

Variation (b), by abbreviating the second word, is quite pleasing but (a) and (c) are extremely unattractive. However, the inclusion of annulets as stops in these two examples shows that thought went into their preparation. With a new monarch starting her reign, surely everyone was going to take the greatest care to please thus one may assume that the common example was considered to be the most acceptable becoming the final and most prolific version.

The story does not end quite there however as there are groats of Mary with the pomegranate on the obverse but not on the reverse. The author has not seen an example of this rare type and one must wonder what reverse legend spacing is used.

It is hoped that these comments will encourage collectors to give this coin a second look and perhaps discover some further variations.