

Early groats from the Melrose area and a Trapezuntine asper from the Hebrides

by Ian Stewart

Mr Walter Elliot, in Selkirk, has recently shown me two mid-14th-century groats which are apparently survivors of an unrecorded hoard. The two coins are: (a) David II, Edinburgh, heavy coinage, B, no extra marks on rev., generally of B. fig 279A, but double cross stops after all words on obv. except single cross after *David*, ornamental A both sides; (b) Edward III, pre-treaty series E/F mule, same obv. die as Lawrence plate VIII, 4, similar rev. The antique dealer from whom Mr Elliot obtained the coins bought them from the grandnephew of the finder, who was an itinerant labourer occupied in ditching, hedging, etc, in the Melrose area; the discovery is thought to have been made in or about the first decade of the 20th century and to have consisted of a 'guid handfu' (? perhaps about 50). The English groat would not be later than 1356 on any of the proposed schemes of dating for the series, and so the heavy Scottish groat, struck between 1357 and 1367 (perhaps c 1360) is the later coin; it is slightly worn, but the English coin scarcely shows any wear at all, so that a burial date in the early or mid-1360s would be indicated if the two coins are typical.

It is a great pity that no account of the contents of this hoard exists, since it might have provided valuable evidence for a more precise chronology of the early Scottish groat coinage. Any information about other possible survivors from the find would therefore be welcome.

Trapezuntine asper from the Hebrides

The following item occurred in the catalogue for sale on 16 April 1969 published by Messrs Morrison, McClhery, auctioneers of 98 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow:

- 324 Empire of TREBIZOND (Asiatic Turkey) – John II. (1280–1297) small Silver coin (22 mm – 2.42 grns) – Emperor stdg holding 'Sceptre' / St. Eugenius facing with long Cross, Fair. 1.

* Dug up some years ago on a Hebridean Croft.

From the description, this coin would appear to be an asper, the standard silver coin of Trebizond, of the kind illustrated in the *British Museum Catalogue* on plates XXXV (7–11) and XXXVI–II. Although coins from the Byzantine world sometimes reached NW Europe in the Viking age, it is distinctly unusual to find a late 13th-century example so far afield. There are records of Geoffrey of Langley, an envoy of Edward I, passing through Trebizond twice in 1292 (Bryer 1975, 119ff), but it seems hardly likely that a coin which he brought back would have found its way to the Hebrides, and the old Viking route across Europe and through Scandinavia seems to be more of a possibility.

REFERENCE

Bryer, A A M 1975 *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 29