

ANGLO-FRISIAN TRADE IN THE LIGHT OF EIGHTH CENTURY COINS

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For some two centuries before the introduction of the silver penny into England by Offa of Mercia¹, the first great landmark in the history of our native coinage, the Teutonic invaders had settled down sufficiently to feel the need of coined money. At first it seems to have come from Merovingian Gaul by way of trade, as the earliest coins—or, rather, the first since the end of the Roman province of Britain—were Merovingian *tremisses* (Fig. 1 (a)) such as those which formed part of the great Sutton Hoo treasure². Subsequently, probably c.670, gold *thrymsas*, the earliest indigenous English coins, made their appearance (Fig. 1 (b)), derived in weight and metal from the Merovingian *tremisses*, but in types from late Roman gold or Constantinian bronze. Some time later, though before the *thrymsas* went out of use, silver coins, known as *sceattas*, appeared (Fig. 1 (c)) and these remained the staple currency of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until the time of Offa, though continuing in Northumbria as small copper pieces (commonly called *stycas*) for almost another hundred years (Fig. 1 (d)). The terminal dates of the *thrymsas* and *sceattas*, however, have not yet been satisfactorily established, but it is possible that their total life-span must have been about a century.



Fig. 1 (a) Merovingian *tremissis*; (b) Anglo-Saxon *thrymsa* inscribed *Pada* in runic lettering; (c) Anglo-Saxon *sceatta* inscribed *Pada* in runic lettering; (d) "Stycas" of Ethelred II of Northumbria (841-849), signed by the moneyer Monne.

England is not the only country where sceattas are found and it is the implications of this fact which we must consider in this paper. They have turned up in very much larger quantities, though with fewer variations of type, in north-west Germany, the Rhine valley, Holland and northern France and they were even present in a hoard from Cimiez, a suburb of Nice. Such distribution suggests considerable trade activity between the English kingdoms and the Continent and is readily explained by the fact that the Frisians, the hardy maritime tribes who had settled the seaboard of Europe from the Ems to the Rhine, were engaged at this time on a large and prosperous carrying trade.

Over a hundred different types of sceattas exist, but many of them are known in only a few specimens and most of the others are rare. Among the more common types are the following:—

- (i) The “porcupine” types (B.M.C. types 4 and 5), so-called from the obverse design of several small spikes radiating from a central spine, apparently a degraded version of a diademed bust (Fig. 2 (a)); the reverses have a square containing various attempts at letters, of which the prototype was the standard inscribed VOT/XX of certain Constantinian bronze of c.320, via the better-style *Pada* sceattas (those inscribed with the proper name *Pada* in runes, also found on thrymsas) and B.M.C. type 2a, which we shall consider later.



Fig. 2 (a) “Porcupine” type (B.M.C. type 4); (b) Runic (*Apa*); (c) ‘Radiate bust/standard’ type (B.M.C. type 2a); (d) ‘Wodan/monster’ type (B.M.C. type 31).

- (ii) The Runic types: these have a radiate bust (i.e. a bust wearing a spiked crown) and runic letters on the obverse and a similar standard type on the reverse (Fig. 2 (b)). The obverse must have been copied from either the radiate busts on late

third-century *antoniniani* or, more likely, the radiate busts which occasionally occur on Constantinian bronze, though its immediate prototype was probably the B.M.C. type 2a. In many cases the runes are quite intelligible versions of proper names, probably of moneyers, but very often they are blundered and ill-formed.

- (iii) "Radiate bust with TIC/standard" (B.M.C. type 2a—Fig. 2 (c)): these are reasonably common and are usually of good style, though what appear to be illiterate copies are occasionally found (B.M.C. type 2b). The eventual prototypes are the same as the runic coins, the TIC on the obverse being all that remains of the original imperial legend.
- (iv) "Wodan/monster" type (B.M.C. type 31—Fig. 2 (d)): this has a crude bearded head on the obverse and a dragon-like creature on the reverse.

These, then, are the commonest types of sceattas and it is a significant fact that they are the very types which turn up in such large quantities on the other side of the North Sea. The "porcupines" are by far the most prolific and constitute the majority of sceattas from both this country and the continental sites. The 'Wodan/monster' type is also extremely prolific on the Continent, but in this country it is recorded in only a single specimen at a single site (Hitchin, Herts.); this overwhelming superiority of numbers from Frisia has led numismatists to the conclusion, universally agreed, that it is of purely Frisian origin.³

Other types common to England and Frisia, though not occurring in such large quantities, are:— a type with a diademed head in a serpent-headed torque on the obverse and a bird in a similar torque on the reverse (B.M.C. type 27b); 'two heads with cross/whorl of birds' (B.M.C. type 37); and a type not recorded in the *British Museum Catalogue*, 'two heads with cross/single bird'.

On the other hand there is a series of coins which occur from English sites, but only in isolated examples from Frisia. Moreover their English provenances are limited to the London area and the Thames valley and we should perhaps interpolate a word on the subject of these coins which will doubtless be of interest to this Society. This so-called "London" series may be sub-divided into the following groups:—

- (i) "London-inscribed", with a version, occasionally blundered, of the mint-name LVNDONIA (a corruption of the Latin *Londinium*) on the obverse (Fig. 3 (a));



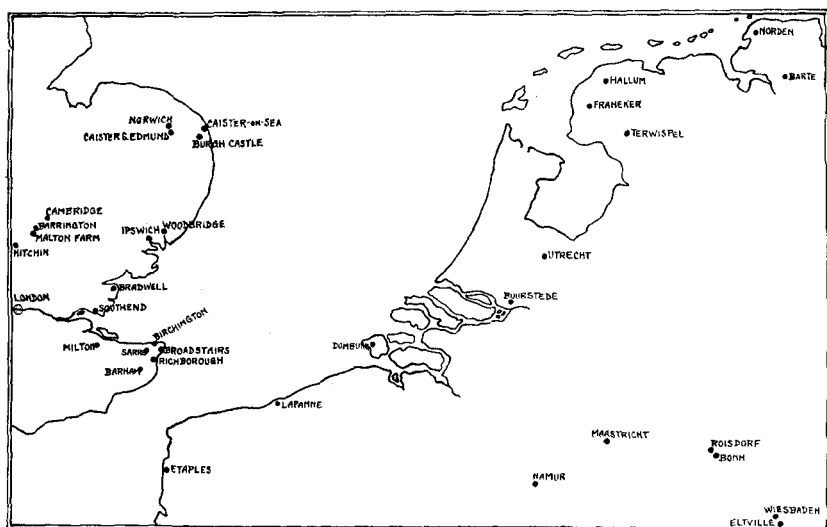
FIG. 3

Fig. 3 Representative coins of the London Series: (a) "London-inscribed" (B.M.C. type 12); (b) "London-derived" (B.M.C. type 16); (c) "London-connected" (B.M.C. type 32a).

- (ii) "London-derived", without the mint-name, but with a bust of the same fine style as on (i), delicately and charmingly drawn, and reverses which are normally found in this Series, such as two men holding a cross, one man holding two crosses, (Fig 3(b.)) and the so-called "Celtic Cross";
- (iii) "London-connected" (by far the least rare of the Series), with either the London-style bust or a type connected with the London Series on one side and a totally different type, such as an animal (Fig. 3(c)), which is not found on coins of the two preceding groups, on the other.

We must now engage in a brief résumé of the hoards and site-finds, starting with those from Holland and Germany.

(1) *The Franeker hoard*, discovered in 1868 and published two years later⁴, consisted mostly of "porcupines", struck in good silver and in a very distinctive style—coarse, with thick central spines and large pellets (Fig. 4 (a)). The facts that all the coins were in mint condition and the existence of die-identities (i.e. coins struck from the same obverse and/or reverse dies) suggest one of two possibilities: either that they were struck at or near the place of discovery or that they were exported *en masse* from this country for commercial purposes. In either case they had had no chance to circulate before being buried. If the latter possibility is the correct one, it may have been that the "porcupine" types were those generally accepted in Frisia and that they were minted specially for the Frisian trade, rather like the later Maria Theresa dollars for Abyssinia—but perhaps this is presupposing an economic intelligence which our early ancestors did not possess!



Only those sites in south-east England are shown which have yielded scattas of types common to England and Frisia. There are many others, the main concentration being south and east of the Foss Way. At least sixteen other sites in France are known, apart from Etaples (shown on the map), scattered throughout the length and breadth of the country. In Germany, three other sites along the Rhine valley could not be shown on the map; they are all clustered together just south of Eltville

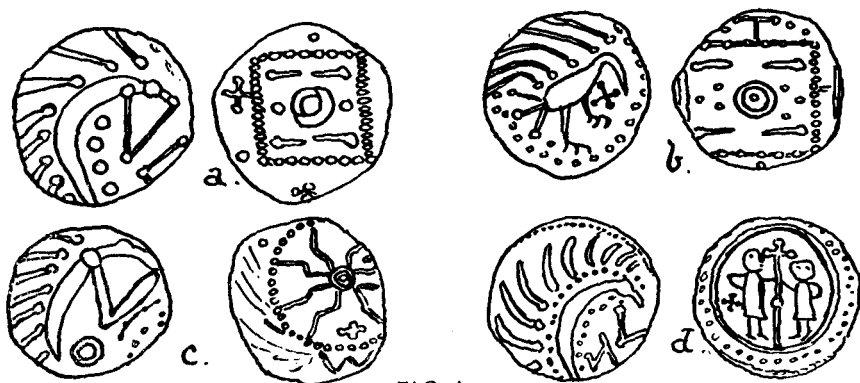


FIG. 4

Fig. 4 Coins from Frisian hoards: (a) "Porcupine" type from Franeker; (b) (c) "Plumed bird" and "Saxon jewel" types from Kloster Barte—the latter is so-called from the resemblance of the reverse type to certain Saxon brooches; (d) a "porcupine" obverse linked with a "man-with-crosses" reverse (a London type) from Hallum.

(2) *The Kloster Barte hoard* (Fig. 4 (b) (c)), found near Emden in 1838, also consisted mainly of “porcupines”, 756 pieces in all, the condition and die-links of which lead one to the same conclusions as in the case of the Franeker hoard, as do—

(3) and (4) *The Lutje Saaksum hoard* from near Baflo in northern Holland, and one from an uncertain site in *Groningen*. Both of these consisted entirely of “porcupines”.

(5) *The Hallum hoard* (1866), although mostly of the “porcupine” and ‘Wodan/monster’ types, contained a purely Anglo-Saxon piece (‘diademed bust with cross/standard’—B.M.C. type 3a) and also one of which the reverse may have been copied from an Anglo-Saxon coin (Fig. 4 (d)).

(6) *The Terwispel hoard* (1863) contained nothing but the ‘Wodan/monster’ type.

The possibility that the “porcupines” as well as the ‘Wodan/monster’ types were minted in Frisia is also supported by die-links between coins from Kloster Barte and coins in the Lutje Saaksum hoard. The Franeker and Hallum hoards are both unlinked with these hoards and with each other. These facts suggest definite “spheres of influence”—assuming, of course, that these pieces originated in Frisia—with the Kloster Barte, Franeker and Hallum spheres being mutually exclusive. In other words, each mint seems to have catered for the needs of its own district and the issues were more or less local, even though the coins were frequently exported in the course of trade. In England the London Series provides an outstanding example of the same phenomenon. On the whole I incline to this hypothesis, though the possibility of the mass export of “porcupine” sceattas from England must not be altogether ruled out.

The most prolific source of site-finds in Holland is Domburg (Fig. 5 (a)) on the island of Middelburg in the Rhine Delta. It was one of the two principal trading-centres in Frisia—the other being Duurstede, a few miles to the east—and if the quantity of the sceattas discovered there, particularly those of purely English types, is any guide, it was the main centre by which trade with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was carried on. Even if we postulate numerous Frisian copies among the Domburg coins, such as those struck in base metal, many of them of poor style, we may also recognize importations in others of English style and type and in good metal (Fig. 5 (d)). Among the possible imitations was a small base version (Fig. 5 (c)) of the undoubtedly English

MONITASCORVM coin (Fig. 5 (b)), while one of the obvious importations was an example of the very rare *Aethiliraed* (Ethelred) coins (Fig. 5(e)).—with a “porcupine” obverse and the name in runes occupying the whole of the reverse.



Fig. 5 Coins from Domburg: (a) “Porcupine” type (B.M.C. type 5); (c) a “Monitascorum” coin of light weight and poor metal, probably a Frisian imitation—compare with (b) a coin of the same type from Eastcote (Northants); (d) a hybrid of two “London-derived” types (B.M.C. types 20/18); (e) the “Porcupine” with the reverse type of *Aethiliraed* in runes.

English hoards are considerably less numerous and much smaller in content and site-finds are less frequent. Moreover, no type which can be *definitely* given a Frisian origin has been found here except a single ‘Wodan/monster’, although, apart from the “porcupines”, there are two other types, one found in Cambridge and the other at Richborough (Kent), which may be Frisian. This in itself is significant and is precisely what one would expect under the circumstances in view of the Frisian carrying trade. These active merchants had established emporia in several towns, including London and York, as well as along the northern coasts of Gaul. Purely English sceattas are therefore likely to turn up in greater quantities in Frisia than are Frisian over here and the opportunities for the imitation of Anglo-Saxon types by the Frisians must have been greater than those for the imitation of Frisian types by the English.

Little enough is known about the period which we call the Dark Ages, but at least we may hope that, from the point of view of the coins, the mists are lifting to a slight extent. We have known for some time about the existence of the Frisian emporia and the carrying trade with the Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian kingdoms⁵, but until recently that knowledge has not been employed to throw light upon the enigmatic coins which were the media of that trade. Much work still remains to be done and many of our former ideas may have to be swept

away, but the problem is not insoluble and we can at least hope that we are progressing, however slowly, towards a solution.

I should like to express my grateful thanks to the Keeper of Coins, the British Museum; the Conservateur des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Dr. A. N. Zadoks-Jitta, of the Royal Coin Cabinet, The Hague; Dr. P. Berghaus, of the Münster Museum; and the Curators of the Middelburg and Leeuwarden Museums for kindly allowing their coins to be illustrated.

NOTES

- 1 Formerly considered to have taken place c. 790, but now thought to be about 20 years earlier at the beginning, rather than at the end, of Offa's reign.
- 2 For the dating of the Sutton Hoo coins and the conclusion that the hoard was not buried earlier than 650 and that it was "unlikely to have been buried at any date later than 660", see Philip Grierson in *Antiquity*, June 1952, pp. 83-86.
- 3 C. H. V. Sutherland in *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1942, p. 60.
- 4 *Revue belge de numismatique*, 1870, pp. 276-277.
- 5 For the whole question of commercial relations between England and the Continent in the seventh and eighth centuries see Col. Beldiaew in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 1932, pp. 190-215.

APPENDIX: PROVENANCES

- I *Frisian Types found in England* :
 'Wodan/monster' (B.M.C. type 31): *Herts*, Hitchin.
- II *Probable Frisian Types found in England* :
 "Porcupines" (B.M.C. types 4 and 5): *Beds*: (Uncertain site); *Berks*: ? Abingdon; *Cambs*: Barrington; *Dorset*: Dorchester; *Essex*: Bradwell-on-Sea; *Kent*: Barham, Broadstairs; *Lancs*: Meols; *Oxon*: Binsey; *Staffs*: Compton; *Sussex*: Cackham; *Yorks*: Whitby.
 'Two busts with cross/bird' (obv. as B.M.C. type 37): *Kent*: Richborough.
 'Bird/beast': Cambridge.
- III *English Types found in Frisia* :
 'Radiate bust/standard' (B.M.C. type 2a): Domburg, Duurstede.
 Type 2a, degraded style (B.M.C. type 2b): Domburg.
 Runic: Domburg, Duurstede.
 " (Aethiliraed): Domburg.
 'Diademed bust/standard' (B.M.C.3a): Domburg, Hallam.
 MONITASCORVM type: Domburg (? Frisian imitation). (The legend *Monitascorvm* has yet to be satisfactorily explained: the connexion with *moneta* (mint) is obvious.)
 'Diademed bust in torque/bird in torque' (B.M.C. type 27b): Hallum, Utrecht, Etaples.
 'Two busts with cross/whorl of birds' (B.M.C. type 37): Domburg.
 'Bust with cross/wolf' (B.M.C. 32a, a "London-connected" type): Domburg.
- IV *English Types imitated in Frisia* :
 Runic (blundered)—(a) with standard reverse: Domburg, Duurstede.
 (b) with cross-and-pellets reverse: Domburg.
 Standard—(a) with cross-and-pellets obverse: Domburg.
 (b) with 'plumed bird' obverse (B.M.C. type 6; derived from the "porcupines"): Domburg, Hallum.
 'Man-with-crosses'—with "porcupine" obverse: Hallum.
 "London-inscribed" bust—with "porcupine" obverse: Domburg, Hallum.
 "London-derived" bust—with (?) Frisian-style bust reverse: Hallum.

If the theory that the "porcupines" originated in Frisia be accepted, we can only conclude that those which have a typically English type on the other side are English imitations of the Frisian "porcupines". They are as follows:

- (a) "Porcupine" reverse with English-style diademed bust (B.M.C. type 9):
Lincs: Stamford.
- (b) As (a), but with legend MONITASCORVM on the obverse: *Northants*: Eastcote.
- (c) "Porcupine" obverse with runic reverse (*Aethiliraed*): (No English provenances so far recorded).