

A Scandinavian coin of Carolingian type from the Cuerdale hoard

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Dating the earliest indigenous coinages has proved to be one of the most intractable problems of the Scandinavian series. Brita Malmer in her *Nordiska Mynt före år 1000* (Lund, 1966) has revolutionized the approach to these chronological questions by complementing a masterly use of traditional numismatic techniques with innovative methodological procedures which she has herself devised. It is therefore especially pleasing and appropriate to be able to salute Professor Malmer on her birthday by drawing attention to a valuable piece of English dating evidence which has only recently come to light: the presence in the Cuerdale hoard of a Scandinavian coin of Carolingian type.

The coin, British Museum number 1920, 1-12-151, illustrated on *fig. 1*, 1 (life-size) and 2 (twice life-size), belongs to Professor Malmer's important transitional combination group KG 7. The obverse corresponds to her *pl. 7*, A2 24 and the reverse to *pl. 18*, A2 2 *ie* combination CE III A2/CD III A2. The weight, 0.59 gm, and the diameter, 18.5 mm, are both typical of the KG 7 series which averages 0.56 gm and 18.6 mm respectively; its regular die-axis of 270° is also normal. On its arrival at the British Museum, it was described in the accession register as 'uncertain medieval' and consigned to a rarely-consulted tray of unidentified material, which explains why no account has been

taken of it until now. Since it could not be attributed, a drawing of it was made in the register, so that we can



Fig. 1. A coin from Brita Malmer's combination group KG 7 from the Cuerdale hoard (deposited c. 905) in the British Museum. 1 (life-size) and 2 (twice life-size).

be quite certain that we are dealing with the same coin. It was one of a group of one hundred and sixty-four coins and medals presented to the British Museum in 1920 by H. M. King George V. Although the royal gift was rather miscellaneous in content, it included eleven coins, among them the Scandinavian piece, which were specifically entered in the Departmental Minutes recording the donation, and on the coin-tickets written at the time of their acquisition, as deriving from the Cuerdale hoard. The presence of Cuerdale coins in the royal collection is to be expected since the hoard was found within the Duchy of Lancaster, an extensive land-holding enjoying the franchise of treasure trove and then, as now, under the direct control of the sovereign. In the years following its discovery in 1840, Queen Victoria gave groups of material from the find to the British Museum and to other cabinets in Britain and on the Continent. There were no other Viking-age coins in the 1920 donation with which any of the Cuerdale parcel might have become confused, and the various coin-series represented in it can be paralleled exactly in the hoard: Carolingian coins including Louis the Child and Berengar as king (but not as emperor), a blundered penny of St. Edmund Memorial type and four coins of the Viking kings Siefert and Cnut of York, 99 % of whose coins derive from the Cuerdale find (1). Although no Scandinavian coins were recorded in the original report (2) and no coins of group KG 7 have ever been noted before, two fragments of the earlier Scandinavian group KG 5 from the find were published in 1974 (3). As coins of the celebrated English kings known to have been included in the hoard are absent from this parcel, the 1920 donation would appear to be the residue of a group of coins retained for the royal collection in 1840. Finally, as the coins

from it display the characteristic greenish-white patina by which all uncleaned Cuerdale coins are instantly recognizable, there can be no doubt that the Scandinavian coins of group KG 7 came from that hoard.

Although the precise date of the Cuerdale hoard still presents difficulties (4), it is certain that it was deposited in the very early years of the tenth century, in round terms *c.* 905. Cuerdale clearly falls into Professor Malmer's category of 'best-dated hoards' and provides a secure *terminus ante quem* for the start of the Scandinavian group KG 7. Nor was the Cuerdale coin new when it was included in the hoard. It has two piercings at the edge, one peck on the obverse and two (possibly three) test marks on the reverse; its peck-count is thus among the highest in the hoard (5). While the varied currency history of the groups of coins making up the Cuerdale hoard means that too much should not be read into direct comparisons of condition, it remains true that the KG 7 coin must have seen considerable circulation, most of it probably in Scandinavia, before reaching its destination. What this signifies in terms of years is impossible to say, but it would seem reasonable to suggest that 900 is about the latest possible date for its minting.

The evidence of the Continental finds was set out by Professor Malmer in tables 33 and 34 of her 1966 study. Fig. 2 abstracts from those tables the hoards (with Malmer numbers given in brackets) and the finds from the Birka graves in which certainly identifiable coins of group KG 7 are associated with more closely datable foreign coins, hence providing *termini post quem* for their deposition. Since then, Professor Malmer and her collaborators have also drawn to wider attention the contents of another relevant hoard from Lund (Landeryd) (6).

Fig. 2 Finds associating KG 7 with other coins.

Find	T.P.Q/date
Cuerdale hoard	c.905
Birka grave 943	907-912
Birka grave 961	910-930
Bräche hoard (M 47)	c.925
Pålstorp hoard (M 56)	c.936
Lienen hoard (M 2)	938
Terslev hoard (M 40)	c.941-946
Sejerø (M 36)	953
Birka grave 738	mid-10th century
Lund (Landeryd) hoard (1879)	965

In discussing the chronology, Professor Malmer emphasized (*op.cit.* p. 340) 'the considerable methodological difficulties which always accompany any attempt to determine the dating of a hoard'. The deposition of the Scandinavian and German hoards including KG 7 were, as the above table shows, datable no earlier than c.925; only the Birka grave finds, too small to provide reliable evidence, suggested a possibly earlier date for the group. The Cuerdale evidence now vindicates Professor Malmer's judgement in deciding to place the start of her bracket for the tentative dating of group KG 7 around the year 900.

This is not the place to discuss the significance of a secure date of 900, or even possibly a little earlier, for a coin of group KG 7 for Scandinavian archaeology. Its importance is that KG 7 was the sole type in the Steinfeld hoard, was the type associated with the weights and bars in the ninth layer of the Hedeby trench and was the latest Scandinavian issue in the Birka graves, and so has implications for the date of its decline as a commercial centre.



Enlargement ca. 4:1.

Notes

1. Lyon & Stewart 1961, p. 97.
2. Hawkins 1843.
3. Dolley and Talvio 1974.
4. Lyon 1970, pp. 193-197, gives a useful summary of the dating problems although considerable, as yet unpublished, work has been done on this aspect of the hoard since then. Cuerdale's deposition was there dated c.903.
5. The author is currently working on this evidence for the relative and absolute chronology of the different constituents of the hoard. It may be noted that the larger of the two fragments of Scandinavian coins of group KG 5 from the hoard, published by Dolley and Talvio, is also heavily pecked: with 4 pecks on about half the coin, it is even more mutilated than the coin of KG 7 and its condition confirms its earlier date. The tiny fragment of about a quarter of a coin is however un-pecked, with only a score possibly made when the coin was cut up.
6. Malmer 1983, p. 31.

Literature

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