Coins from
Viking Age Iceland

Ritgerð til M.A. í
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Leiðbeinandi: Gavin Lucas
Haust 2009
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*Cover: An Islamic dirhem from Mjóidalur, Iceland*
Section 1 - Introduction

1. The Role of Coins in Archaeology

Numismatics, the study of coinage, has many applications in the study of Archaeology. Coins act as a means of dating archaeological contexts and strata on account of the chronological information that can be gained from typological analysis. This is possible because coins often become incorporated in an archaeological context at a date relatively close to that in which they were struck, although archaeologists must be aware of the possibility of contamination from other contexts (Laing, 1969:71). An example of this can be seen from the Anglo-Scandinavian excavations in York, where the cutting of pits and other features resulted in the displacement and redeposition of coins in contexts 75-100 years later than their striking (Hall, 2000:2461). An indication of date can often be achieved by study of the designs on the faces of the coins, as well as the degree of wear found upon the coin, although as coins in the Viking age did not circulate in the modern sense, then they show relatively little sign of wear despite the length of time that passed between their striking and deposition (Archibald, 1980:103). Nonetheless, the design on the coin can give an initial date to no earlier than that which it was issued, and the degree of wear can give an indication as to the length of time which the coin was in circulation. This can then refine the date of the archaeological context, by relating how much time passed between the issue of the coin and its burial in the archaeological strata.

Coins also provide a means of dating by association with other artefacts. While the characteristics of a coin give an accurate period of time to which the archaeological context may date, the relationship between a coin and other artefacts helps to secure a more reliable date. For example, if a coin is found in association with a particular type of pottery, then the coin provides a general date and the pottery can refine this date due to stylistic changes and a relatively short life span (Laing, 1969:45).

The most common individual class of artefacts that survive from Viking Age Scandinavia are coins (Archibald, 1980:103) and although beads are more prevalent in Iceland, the application of numismatics to the study of Viking Age Iceland is nevertheless of great importance. The information gained from coins can add to that given in the sometimes-sparse written records and in cases where there is little or no other information available. For example, the inscriptions on coins enable the identification of the rulers who ordered the minting and many coins also carry the name of the moneyer and the place where they were struck (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:120). With the exception of the earliest Scandinavian issues, Viking age coins can usually be dated to a specific time period, often within a decade or less. The earliest Scandinavian issues generally require a wide-range date bracket of perhaps a quarter of a century or more, as do the coinages of those kings of a long reign. However, in the archaeological context, while the date of issue can be determined precisely, the date of deposition can be much more difficult to ascertain (Archibald, 1980:103).

A means of establishing the origin of most of the silver found in Scandinavia is given by coins, as they often carry information regarding where and when they were minted (Roesdahl, 1998:111). The presence of coins in an archaeological
context therefore gives information regarding the economy of the time and place that is being studied because the circulation of silver, by payment or otherwise, can be traced (Malmer, 1985:185). This provides information such as the types of coins that were available at that time and the degrees of wealth that people had access to. However, the reliability and type of information that can be gained varies depending upon whether hoards or single-coin finds are being studied. Whereas single coin finds are likely to be due to accidental loss and therefore indicating general use, hoards consist of coins which have been deliberately taken out of circulation and buried for ritual or kept for their financial or curiosity value. When coins were regarded as bullion, they were often hoarded with other artefacts, and so coins provide a \textit{terminus ante quem} for the manufacture of these objects (Archibald, 1980:103). Therefore, when found in a hoard, coins enable a quite precise deposition date to be established.

The archaeological study of coins has many applications for the study of the Viking Age in Iceland. In this project a study will be made of coins that have been found in Viking Age contexts in Iceland, either as single finds or in hoards. The study will be two-fold: one aspect of this project will be a study of some of these coins, comparing those from hoards and single finds, to identify evidence for the use of coins in Iceland. The other part will look at how coins came to Iceland and what that can inform the archaeologist about contacts between Iceland and other parts of the Viking world. In order to understand how best to apply this, it is first necessary to look at how silver was used for trade in the Viking world, and how this led to the development of the use of coinage.

2. The Use of Silver for Trade in the Viking World

Silver was the primary means of payment across the Viking World, and silver in particular, including other precious metals, came to the Nordic regions by raiding and trading from Europe, Russia and the East (Fitzhugh, 2000:19). The demand for silver was substantial; for example in hoards from Sweden 80,000 Arabic coins, 33,700 English coins and 154,776 Frankish & German coins have been found, most of which date to the 10th & 11th centuries. These large figures demonstrate the importance of silver in the Viking economy, as well as the wealth of the Scandinavian Vikings towards the end of the Viking age (Wilson, 2003:176). It is important however to note that it was the metal that was important, rather than the objects that were made out of it and it is therefore common to find a range of precious-metal objects collected together in Viking hoards, which are not necessarily related by typology, but were kept for the value of the metals.

In Iceland all metals other than Iron were imported and Bronze has been found to be the most common. However, excavations at Suðurgata in Reykjavík have shown Bronze objects to be relatively rare, making up less than 0.5% of all objects from Viking age contexts there. A small clay crucible was found, which indicates that metals were smelted, such as Bronze or perhaps even Gold or Silver (Vésteinsson, [no date]:107). If this were so, then it supports the trend across the Viking world of using precious metals either to make objects such as jewellery or to melt down the metals to use for payments by weight, albeit on a small scale as indicated by the Reykjavík evidence. This is supported by excavations at Coppergate in York,
where large numbers of crucibles, ingot moulds and evidence for precious metal refining were found, where silver working was the primary metalworking industry, which may have been related to coin production and was at its peak in the mid-10th century (Mainman & Rogers, 2000:2475).

An important aspect of the use of Silver for trade in the Viking world is Hack-Silver. Silver generally took the form of ornaments or jewellery that had either been melted down and recast into such objects, or originated as loot from raiding expeditions. These would often be given to friends or allies, as part of the gift exchange economy that was prevalent in Viking Age society (Hedeager, 2000:84). The Arabian Ibn Fadlan, who documented Viking life in the early 10th century, noted that men often gave a neck-ring to their wives, which were worn as signs of wealth. These were often made from melted-down Arabic coins (Jørgensen, 2000:75). As payment for purchases was often made by weight, it was common to cut the required amount of silver from jewellery or other objects in order to make the payment. Merchants and traders carried a small box containing a set of folding scales and weights, and in order to match the required weight, small pieces of silver would be cut from jewellery to make the payment (Roesdahl, 1998:112). Hack-silver is often regarded as evidence for an intermediary stage in the development between bullion and monetary economic systems, as the fragments of ‘hacked’ silver indicates a greater demand for a means of payment than was provided by the existing quantities of coins that were in circulation as weighed metal (Sheehan, 2000:62). This is an important point to be considered when studying the use of coins in the Viking world.

For the subject of this study, it is necessary to highlight the ways in which silver came into the Icelandic economy. Coins are key to establishing the origin of much of the Scandinavian silver, as the inscriptions upon most coins reveal where and when they were minted (Roesdahl, 1998:111). Coins are most often found in hoards, and therefore this aspect of the archaeological record, both in Iceland and across the Viking world, is of great importance. The presence of hoards suggests times of insecurity, leading people to bury their wealth (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:120), however, in reality the reasons for burial can be various, such as this security from unrest, or for storing the farm’s valuables. Therefore the size and number of hoards found do not necessarily reflect the wealth or economy of the area (Roesdahl, 1998:112), as the silver was not then in circulation. The presence or absence of coins in a hoard also does not necessarily determine the economic role of the silver, as coins were often regarded as bullion and so were used as such for payments (Sheehan, 2000:58).

The study of hoards enables the frameworks of chronology and typology of coins to be created, which can then be utilised to shed light upon the period of history in question (Laing, 1969:52). Depending upon the type of hoard that is being studied, the coins within a hoard are not necessarily representative of those in general circulation at the time. The reasons for burying hoards are various, but with regards to trade, it would be necessary to bury such valuables for security when travelling overseas. Most coin hoards in Viking Scandinavia, particularly those found on the island of Gotland in Sweden, were the result of commerce and trade, rather than violent times. This commercial activity was taking place at a time of great population movement in the 10th century, as emigrants, many of whom were
merchants, settled in the new colonies (Lieber, 1981:28). This hypothesis supports the movement of silver to Iceland along with the new settlers during the Age of Settlement from AD870-930 and later. Another aspect of hoards that must be considered is why they were never reclaimed. War and unrest are temporary and so reclamation would be expected, however the large numbers of hoards in Gotland, Sweden, does not account for this (ibid) and therefore this does not answer why so many hoards were left unclaimed. Herein lies the idea of a ritual element to the intentional deposition of hoards, which is discussed further in relation to the Icelandic material in chapters 7 & 9.

More than 1000 hoards have been found across Viking Scandinavia, providing evidence of silver connections between the east and west (Roesdahl, 1998:110). Hoards contain many artefacts such as coins, hack-silver and ingots, all of which can be used to examine aspects of Viking society. The presence of such quantities of silver in hoards is indicative of the amounts of wealth that was accumulated across Scandinavia during the Viking Age and demonstrates the impact and success that the Vikings had in Europe (Morris, 2000:99). Here a few examples of significant Viking age hoards are given.

The Hoen hoard from Norway is the largest hoard to be found in Viking Age Scandinavia. It contained many artefacts, including Arabian, Byzantine and English coins, even a gold Roman solidus (Skaare, 1976:34), and may have been collected in Frankia as insurance against further Viking raids (Price, 2000:120). It is unusual to find western and Arabic coins together in such contexts, and so Hoen is an exception (Blackburn, 2005:144). The Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon coins are chronologically close, dating to c.810-30, which coincides with when western coins were present in Norway (Blackburn, 2005:145). A notable feature of the hoard is that most of the coins have been given loops in order to hang from a necklace (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:33). This modification demonstrates that coins were not just used as a means of payment, but were also used for jewellery and decoration.

The Cuerdale hoard, found on the banks of the river Ribble in Lancashire, is a significant find from England. This is the largest Viking hoard to have been found there and it was buried around AD905, containing 40 kilos of silver and 7,500 coins. The coins were mostly from the English Viking realms, particularly York, the English kingdom, continental Europe and Arabia. It even included coins from Hedeby, demonstrating the production and use of Viking-minted coins from Scandinavia (Roesdahl, 1998:110,247-8). The hoard was located on the route between Dublin and York (Logan, 1983:160), which is of significance because between 919 and 954 York was variously ruled by the Irish-Norse from Dublin, as well as Norwegian and Anglo-Saxon kings. The link with the Irish-Norse from Dublin created a route running across Lancashire and the Pennines (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:121), placing the location of the Cuerdale hoard exactly on this route. This hoard is important for studying the movement of silver and how it came into Viking Scandinavia, and then onwards to Iceland, because it demonstrates a link between different Viking centres in Britain, explaining the presence of such quantities of Anglo-Saxon coinage and links onwards to Norway and the origins of the Icelandic settlers.
The Chester hoard is another important find from the Viking Age in Britain. It was found in 1950 in a ceramic jug and contained a large quantity of hack-silver and 522 coins, mostly from Anglo-Saxon mints, but it also included coins from France and Italy. The dates of the coins suggest that the hoard was buried around AD970 (Batey & Sheehan, 2000:128). This hoard is significant to the subject under discussion because the development of trade around the Irish Sea was partly based upon the presence of the Norse population. This growth of trade in this area increased the flow of silver into Viking Scandinavia, and 10th century finds indicate a northern route and that there were certainly Scandinavians in Chester in the 11th century (Wilson, 2003:175). As the settlers of the north Atlantic islands also partly came from the Irish Sea area, then the spread of silver northwards also became possible.

Attention must also be given to silver hoards in the archaeological record of Ireland, as the concentration of wealth that is represented in the Irish hoards is not equalled elsewhere in the western part of the Viking world. By the middle of the 10th century, the Irish Sea had effectively become a ‘Scandinavian Sea’, as it was controlled by Scandinavian traders and chieftains. By the end of the century Dublin had become a major Scandinavian trading centre, where in the late 990s the first coins to be minted in Ireland were struck. The earliest coins imitate those of the English king Æthelred II and some substitute his name for those of the Norse kings Sihtric or Anlaf (Wilson, 2003:175). The large numbers of silver hoards that have been found in Ireland demonstrate the strength and wealth of this economic influence (ibid). 108 hoards dating to the 9th and 10th centuries have been found in Ireland, of which a total of 41 are exclusively coin hoards, 75% of which were deposited after c.940. Although these coin hoards are relatively small, mainly Anglo-Saxon coins have been found in these hoards, although other coins from Arabia and also from Viking-controlled Northumbria and East Anglia have also been found (Sheehan, 2000:49-51). An important aspect of Dublin to the subject of this study is the spatial distribution of those hoards that contain coins, which are concentrated around Dublin and Annagassan, as well as parts of the Irish midlands (Mytum, 2003:125). The proximity and concentration of coin hoards to Dublin indicate the importance of coins in trade there and excavations in Dublin have revealed considerable trading contact with the Scandinavian north, France and England (Wilson, 2003:175). This role of Dublin as an important trading centre during the Viking age adds importance to these hoards in relation to the subject of this paper. As one of many sources for silver entering the Viking economy, it provides another starting point for tracing the flow of silver through the Viking world and on to Iceland. The Irish connection is particularly relevant, as it is widely known that many of the settlers who moved to Iceland came from or via Ireland.

It is clear from the evidence of hoards that silver was particularly valuable during the Viking age, and its role in trade can tell us a great deal about wider aspects of Viking society, such as wealth and foreign contact. The importance of the location and contents of these various hoards are indicative of how silver entered into the Viking economy, and ultimately how silver coins came to be used in Iceland.
3. The Introduction of Coins into the Viking World

The legacy of the Viking Age can be traced through its hoards, which in quantity have no parallel in history. The numismatic contents of these hoards are almost completely foreign to where they have been buried and although the coins constituted only a fraction of the precious metal in the Viking world (Lieber, 1981:20,22), coinage is of great importance to the archaeological study of the Vikings.

Coinage gradually became more common in the Viking world through the development of bartering precious metals, which were weighed to pay for the items being purchased (Laing, 1969:3). It is therefore common to find that coins have been cut or otherwise damaged, as silver was tested and removed to achieve the required weight and quality. There was no native coinage in Viking Scandinavia until the late Viking Age, and so in this context it is often common to find foreign coins, which were used for small payments according to weight (Roesdahl, 1998:111). As the metal was of greater market value than the coin, the weight and quality of the metal was more important than the identity of the coins themselves, and so coins of a good weight and metal were used in many places away from where they were originally issued (Laing, 1969:72), becoming widely accepted as a form of bullion. This table shows the distribution of coin finds across the western part of the Viking world. It is interesting to observe that the quantities of coins in the North Atlantic is significantly less than in Scandinavia, and that within that, far more have been found in Iceland than the other islands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Coins</th>
<th>No. of Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>249,284</td>
<td>2,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>41,022</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>10,737</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faeroe Islands</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shetlands</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>301,535</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,724</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Distribution of Coins in the Western Viking World (After Jonsson, 2009)*

Raiding and trading were both important aspects of Viking life, and it is for this reason that so many coins from foreign lands found their way to Scandinavia. A great variety of coins, from Anglo-Saxon England to Arabia, have been found in archaeological contexts across the Viking world. More than 200,000 coins have been found in archaeological contexts in Viking Scandinavia, the majority of these being found in Gotland, Sweden (Roesdahl, 1998:111). Referring back to the evidence of silver in Ireland from chapter 2, Viking strongholds in Ireland, particularly Dublin, acted both as trading centres and also bases from which raids were undertaken over land and sea (Sawyer, 2001:255). Scenarios such as these facilitated the movement of foreign coins into the Viking world and this is demonstrated by the distribution maps in Figures 1 and 2. It can clearly be seen that the latter phase marks an increase in the amount of silver hoards in Scandinavia, and also shows the appearance of such hoards in the North Atlantic.
Figure 1: Distribution of Hoards between 800 & 990

Figure 2: Distribution of Hoards between 990 & 1100

(After Jonsson, 2009)
The economy expanded during the 10th century, and the Vikings contributed to this by spending, and therefore redistributing, the wealth that they had acquired through raiding and trading. This wealth was in large part silver in the form of jewellery and coins, and many hoards containing these have been found in Viking-occupied areas of the British Isles (Sawyer, 2001:256). This is significant as it was by this economic expansion that so many foreign coins came into circulation in the Viking world, albeit not as a currency in their original form.

A factor of great importance in the movement of silver to Scandinavia and the Viking economy was the payments of Danegeld. The Danegeld was a series of large payments demanded by the Vikings from the English during the period from c.AD992-1012, supposedly in return for a cease in further raids. The significant size of the payments reflected the wealth of England at the time and the Danegeld was an important means by which silver transferred to Scandinavia (Logan, 1983:173). England already had an efficient system of tax collection, which made it possible to collect and pay the money required for the Danegeld (Lieber, 1981:17), and therefore made it an attractive target for the Vikings. The payment of the Danegeld was in part how Anglo-Saxon coinage appeared in the Viking economy, as this totalled more than 150,000 lbs of silver, which was equivalent to 36 million contemporary coins (Roesdahl, 1998:110). The Slethei hoard from Norway is made up of 92% Anglo-Saxon pennies, most of which are from Æthelred II, and appears to have resulted from a danegeld payment (Skaare, 1976:56). The coins of Æthelred II are represented in large quantities in Scandinavia, and this is evidence of the large scale of the Danegeld payments (Archibald, 1980:103). This represents around a quarter or third of the total English coin production, however it is unknown whether it was paid completely in coinage or rather in bullion or commodities. However, the coincidence between the presence of Anglo-Saxon coins in Scandinavia and the Baltic and the period when the tribute payments were made is very close (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:153) and therefore cannot be ignored. Only a small number of Frankish or Anglo-Saxon coins have been found in Scandinavia despite the large payments made in the form of the Danegeld (Roesdahl, 1998:111), so it is possible that most of these coins were reinvested in the purchase of goods or land (Lieber, 1981:27), or otherwise melted down. From 1012 the Danegeld became an annual tax, which was called Heregeld and was to pay for a Danish fleet to defend Æthelred II (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:153). This ensured the continued movement of silver from England into Viking Scandinavia.

*Foreign coins in the Viking economy*

The processes outlined above for the movement of silver into the Viking economies have resulted in a great variety of foreign coins appearing in the archaeological record. The presence of foreign coins in the Viking world is particularly evident from the study of hoards, and this is significant in supporting the understanding that the face value of a coin was not, in the earlier part of the Viking Age, of importance but rather the value of the silver. This is because such a wide variety of coins could only be acceptable for trade if it were only for the value of the silver from which they were made.
Evidence of the flow of foreign coins throughout the Viking world and up into the north Atlantic islands can be seen in the finds of hoards. Such a hoard was found on Sandoy in the Faroe Islands, which was found in 1863 in the south-eastern corner of the Sandur churchyard. The Sandur hoard contained nearly 100 silver coins from across Europe and was buried in the late 11th century (Magnusson, 1973:83). Apart from a fragment of Hack-Silver, the hoard consisted mainly of coins. These date from between 1000-1090, and originate from such diverse locations as Germany, England, Ireland, Hungary, Norway and Denmark. The largest part of the hoard is a group of around 80 coins, which are mainly English and German, and there was also one Hiberno-Norse coin, which dates from c.1035. The hoard was assembled in the mid-11th century, probably in Norway. 17 Norwegian coins were later added to the hoard; these coins date to the two decades of 1080-90’s and so this provides a terminus post quem (earliest date of deposition) of c.1093 for the hoard (Graham-Campbell, 2005:129). In addition, a fragment of a single Arabic coin was found in a grave on the Faroe Islands, the only such coin to be found there. It dates to c.750-775 and was buried around between AD850 and 900 (Arge, 2000:163).

The importance of the presence of foreign coins in the Viking economy is clear when referring back to the evidence from Ireland. The chronological and distributional evidence of coin hoards in Ireland indicates that it was the use of foreign coins, as opposed to the use of hack-silver, that lead to the development of coin minting in Ireland in the late 10th century (Sheehan, 2000:62). The significance of this when looking at the introduction of coins into the Viking world is that although coins were originally used as a form of hack-silver in themselves, their presence later influenced a major change in the way that payments were made and therefore the way in which the Viking economies operated. This has great benefits and implications for the study of wider social aspects, which will be demonstrated in chapter 9 in relation to the study of Iceland.

The main groups of foreign coins that are found in Viking contexts are outlined here:

- **Arabic Coins**

More than 85,000 Arabian coins dating from the 9th and 10th centuries have been found across Scandinavia (Hedeager, 2000:85). The presence of Arabic coins across the Viking world is indicative of the eastern trade routes used by the Vikings. The Islamic east was rich in silver, and the Vikings had goods such as furs that they could sell there, in return for the much-desired silver. As a consequence, coins found in the Viking world are predominantly of Arabic origin until around AD970, when the silver supplies started to dry up and focus shifted to the silver mines of Germany (Roedsahl, 1998:111). The Arabic coins are also referred to as ‘Kufic’ coins, because the type of script that appears on the coins is named after the city of Kufah in Mesopotamia. This script is very useful because it often records the name of the mint and the date of issue (Graham-Campbell, 2001:110). Although Arabic coins are known to have reached Scandinavia relatively early in the Viking Age, evidence from the Norwegian trading centre of Kaupang suggests that they only began to appear in western Scandinavia in any great quantity from the middle of the 9th century (Blackburn, 2005:143). Six hoards from Norway,
dating to the first half of the 10th century, demonstrate that the Arabic dirham came to dominate the currency there and the presence of these coins in the northern and western isles of Britain, as well as the Irish Sea, further confirm links with western Scandinavia (ibid:146-7). This is significant for the study of the Icelandic material, as most of the Icelandic settlers came from, and continued to trade with, Norway and other settlers came to Iceland from and via Ireland. The Arabic dirham may therefore prove to be instrumental in identifying the movement of silver to Iceland.

• **Coins from Continental Europe**

Over 70,000 German-origin coins have been found across Scandinavia (Roesdahl, 1998:111) and the opening of the new mines in Germany created a new influx of silver and coins into the Viking economies. However, the opening of the Rammelsberg silver mine around AD970 did not lead to an immediate export of coinage, as between 975 and 990 Germanic coins were still relatively uncommon in Scandinavia (Ilisch, 1981:135). The movement of Germanic coins into Scandinavia was generally greater than the number of Anglo-Saxon coins, and had been occurring since the early 10th century. However around 970, slightly earlier than the English coins, there was an increase which peaked between 990 and 1040 (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:154). The dating of German coins is problematic, as many do not carry the name of a ruler; this is further complicated by the fact that there were three consecutive rulers called Otto during the 10th century and several were named Henry between 1002 and 1125. There were many different mints, which largely operated independently, and imitations of the coinage were common (Ilisch, 1981:129). It is most likely that Germanic coins arrived in Scandinavia by trade as opposed to raiding, as most examples were minted in the late 10th or 11th centuries, at a time when few raids were made in that direction (Lieber, 1981:26).

The distribution of Germanic coins in Viking Scandinavia is highlighted by the variations in the contents of hoards. During the 11th century Sweden was minting its own coinage and Denmark had a strong native coinage but had not yet enforced its local issues. The hoards from both countries contained large proportions of Germanic coinage. By contrast, the hoards from Norway contain fewer Germanic coins and after 1066 these are almost exclusively native issues, however this does not prove that Norway did not trade with Germany, as Sweden and Denmark did. The Norwegian monarchy was strong enough to rule that foreign coins entering Norway were re-struck as local issues (Archibald, 1980:103).

• **Anglo-Saxon Coins**

Initially, Anglo-Saxon coins are rarely found in Viking Scandinavia, particularly in the two centuries preceding Eadger’s reform of coinage around AD973 (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:149). The earliest coin to be found in Norway was an 8th century coin from Ervik, followed by eight silver pennies from southern England, which date to the period between c.792-823. Two other examples, which are particularly interesting, are two Northumbrian ‘Stycas’ of Eanred, which were struck around AD830-40 and were mounted onto small lead cyldinders, which are thought to be Northumbrian or Anglo-Viking weights (Blackburn, 2005:144). These few coin finds indicate the development of small-scale trade, which brought these coins to Scandinavia (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:151). This early phase of coin movement
from England to Norway appears to have then ceased, until restarting again during the latter half of the 10th century.

The coinage reform of Eadger of the Reform Small Cross (c.973-9) marks an increase in the number of English coins which are found in Scandinavia. This appears to coincide with renewed Viking raids, which were recorded in 980 (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:153). This increased substantially around 990 and from the latter half of the 10th and 11th centuries, larger quantities of Anglo-Saxon coins are found in the Viking world. More than 40,000 coins have been found in Scandinavia which date from this period – more than have been found in England itself (Roesdahl, 1998:111). This significant direct contact between Norway and England is supported by evidence from hoards in Norway, which contain higher proportions of Anglo-Saxon coins than any other part of Viking Scandinavia (Blackburn, 2005:144). The main coin types, from Æthelred’s Crux (c.991-7) to Cnut’s Short Cross (1030-1035/6) are present in large numbers (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:153) and this is of interest as this is the time when the Danegeld and later Heregeld payments were made from the English to the Vikings (Lieber, 1981:26).

From around AD1030 there was a gradual decline in the numbers of English coins that were going to Scandinavia, which continued throughout the 11th century. However, this could be in part due to a reduction in the duration of coin issues to about two years, and therefore the numbers of particular issues would be fewer (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:153).

• **Viking coins struck in England**

The difference between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian coins must be considered at this point to acknowledge the difference in coinage in England at this time. The first Viking coins to be struck in England were from the Danish-controlled areas that had strong trading links with the Anglo-Saxons. The Anglo-Saxons had a highly developed coinage, so it is therefore not surprising that many of the Viking coins imitated the contemporary Anglo-Saxon issues, which had the two denominations of the silver penny and half penny. However, the Anglo-Saxons were not the only source of inspiration for the Viking coinage, and some of the early issues from York, which were struck just before 900, were of Carolingian influence (Smyth, 1975:52). This connection suggests North Sea trading links, but ultimately it was the Anglo-Saxon coinage that had the most influence upon the early Viking coin designs, and this is also the result of the Vikings in England employing Anglo-Saxon moneyers (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:121).

The Anglo-Saxon influence upon Viking coins is particularly evident in the faces of kings which appeared on the coins. These faces, which are often in profile, are copies from Anglo-Saxon examples, and in many cases the face remains the same while the name of the ruler is changed (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:122). This is also evident in Viking coins that were struck in native Scandinavia. A very rare silver coin of Svein Forkbeard, holding a sceptre in front of his face, with a legend half in Latin and inaccurate Anglo-Saxon, is the first of the royal Scandinavian coinage to carry the face of a king (Brøndsted, 1986:188).
From around AD900 until the middle of the 10th century, coins were produced by the Norwegian and Danish kings of Northumberland, bearing their names: Sitric, Regnald, Anlaf and Eirik Bloodaxe (son of Harald Fine-Hair). The details of these Anglo-Scandinavian coins are of great interest. Some of these coins bear designs of swords, banners, or a bow and arrow, while others display Christian designs and inscriptions such as a cross or the hand of God. This type of coin demonstrates the conflict between Paganism and Christianity taking place in the Viking world at this time (Brøndsted, 1986:187-8).

Archaeologically, it is interesting to note that not many of the Viking coins that were struck in England have been found in Scandinavia and this is because they were primarily used for trade in the Irish Sea and Anglo-Saxon areas. This phase of coinage ended in AD954, when Eirik Bloodaxe, who was the last Viking king of York, was expelled (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:121). The lack of these coins in Scandinavia is an interesting observation, as it highlights an acknowledgement of the difference between the British and Scandinavian economies. As trade was conducted with an agreed coinage in Britain, it was clearly unnecessary to take these coins back to Scandinavia in order to use as hack-silver, and moreover, it was beneficial to retain them in Britain for trade there. On this note, Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon merchants would not have been in favour of accepting amounts of hack-silver in payment, because they dealt in controlled currencies. It is therefore explanatory that the Viking merchants who were based in Dublin for example, would hoard Anglo-Saxon (mostly minted in Chester – see Chester hoard above) and other coins for use when trading abroad (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:38).

The production of coinage by the Vikings in England is of great importance, as it indicates the beginnings of coins becoming accepted as currency in the Viking world. This acceptance undoubtedly influenced and encouraged the further development of native Scandinavian coinage, which had already begun to be struck.

- **Native Scandinavian Coins**

The native production of coinage in Viking Age Scandinavia is divided into two periods: the first phase was during the middle and latter parts of the 9th century, and the second phase during the second half of the 10th century, around AD960-980 (Brøndsted, 1986:186). The earliest coins that were minted by the Vikings were Imitations, dating from the 8th-9th centuries, which copied Frankish, Carolingian and Arabic coinage, as well as those of Charlemagne, which were minted in Dorestad. Production was on quite a small scale, and even stopped in the latter half of the 9th century, but this later resumed around AD900. It was not until the reign of Harold Bluetooth that coin production increased with the increase in the number of mints, striking coins based on Byzantine models (Roesdahl, 1998:113). Later in the 10th century, Viking coins began to imitate the Anglo-Saxon coin style, and often carried the name of the Viking king who minted them (Hedeager, 2000:85). These carried Christian symbols, and were issued across the three Scandinavian countries (Gräslund, 2000:61).

The first coins to be minted in Scandinavia came from Denmark as early as the 8th century, and these coins are known as Scéattas (Roesdahl, 1998:112). These were probably minted at Hedeby around AD825, and the designs of the coins were
copied and modified from those of the Carolingian Empire from Dorestad, with which Hedeby had strong trading links. They often have a Carolingian obverse, with a Scandinavian design of a ship or animal on the reverse (Lagerqvist, 1992:220). These appear to have been a quite short-lived issue, as they are rarely found away from the early trading centres (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:121).

It was only during the last part of the Viking Age that the Norse began minting their own coinage in a controlled and regulated manner, and this began at around the same time in each of the three countries: Around AD1000 in Denmark by Svein Forkbeard (988-1014), in Sweden by Olaf Skotkonung (994-1022) and in Norway by Saint Olaf (1016-30). Apart from the imitated Dorestad coinage, the system of the Anglo-Saxon coinage laid the basis for native coin production in Scandinavia (Brøndsted, 1986:188). These developments in the 11th century led to payments being made according to the face value of the coin, rather than to their weight or standard (Roesdahl, 2003:155). The coins of the second phase of production, from the latter part of the 10th century, are relatively lightweight and thin. These are often only struck on one side and therefore are referred to as 'half-bracteates' (Brøndsted, 1986:187).

The importance of coinage is demonstrated by the fact that the same moneyers were often employed by different rulers to strike their currencies. An example is in York, where the various Irish-Norse, Norwegian and Anglo-Saxon rulers all employed the same moneyers for this purpose (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:121). In addition, Anglo-Saxon moneyers were taken to Sweden to mint money for king Olaf Skotkonung (Brøndsted, 1986:190). The skill of the Anglo-Saxon moneyers, both artistically and technically, was exceptional and the inscriptions were often in Latin. Evidence for foreign moneyers acting in Scandinavia is further advanced by the fact that coins carrying runic inscriptions, such as an example of Svein Eeastridsson in the 11th century are rare (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:122).

An important aspect of the development of coinage in the Viking world occurred around the year 1000, when a limited number of coins were struck, based upon the Anglo-Saxon style. The name of the kings appeared on the coins: Svein Forkbeard (Denmark), Olaf Tryggvason (Norway) and Olof Skötkonung (Sweden) (Roesdahl, 1998:113). In the 10th century a reliable system of coinage was required for the development of trade, particularly at towns such as York (Graham-Campbell & Kidd, 1980:121), and so towards the end of the Viking Age, coins began to be introduced as a monetary system. Knut, King of Denmark and England, who is also referred to as Cnut the Great (AD1018-35), attempted to introduce into Denmark a coinage system based upon the English pattern, striking coins modelled on those in England (Lund, 2001:173). The coins of Cnut the Great often carry the name of the mint, the moneyer, and also a royal portrait and Christian symbol (Brøndsted, 1986:189).

Around the time of Harald Harðraði (AD1047-66) a more developed coin economy began to become established, and it is interesting to note that around this time hoards containing a mixture of coins and jewellery begin to disappear from the archaeological record. In addition, ingots and hack-silver also cease to appear in
hoards, indicating that a sufficiently strong coin-based economy had been established, thus rendering the need to store silver obsolete. This was finalised with a reform of coinage around 1070, after which foreign coins cease to appear in the archaeological record, as only native coins were accepted (Roesdahl, 1998:114).

*The Use of Coins in the Viking World*

Coins were often made into ‘wearable wealth’ in the form of jewellery and ornaments (Hedeager, 2000:85), either by being melted down to reuse the metal, or the coins were incorporated into the jewellery themselves. These were either pierced or had a loop attached to enable hanging from a necklace or chain. A most popular coin for this use was the Arabian dirham, which is indicated by the production of imitations specifically for this purpose as jewellery hangings (Edgren, 2000:112). Wealth in the Viking world was not directly regarded as the accumulation of silver or other precious objects, but rather richness in status, alliances and connections (Hedeager, 2000:84). This is important to consider when studying coins in Viking society, as they themselves are not valued as wealth, but as a means of gaining richness in society.

During the early 8th century there was a decisive change in the way that coins were used in Scandinavia. Up until this time there was a ‘secondary coin economy’, whereby foreign coins were used for exchange, but not in the way intended in their country of origin. This later transformed into a ‘primary coin economy’, which used native-issue coins for exchange and taxation. It became necessary for foreign coins to be re-minted as native sceattas; this was an important development in the use of coinage in the Viking world, and is most identifiable in the Hedeby coins (Nielsen, 2002:186). The use of coins in the Viking world clearly changed considerably throughout the course of the Viking Age and the archaeological study of coins can tell us much about life at this time, both through the study of the coins themselves and the contexts in which they are found. Having established how silver and coins came to be used in the Viking world, attention can now be turned to the archaeological evidence for coins in Iceland.
Section 2 – The Archaeological Material from Viking-Age Iceland

4. Roman Coins in Iceland

To date, a total of six Roman coins have been found in Iceland. All have been single finds, and are made of Bronze. Although these are of unreliable provenance (Holt, 2003:2), they are included here because some have been found in Viking age contexts in Iceland. Much discussion has been made about how these coins arrived in Iceland and why. The fact that they are all of Bronze indicates that they were only intended as trinkets (*ibid*), as silver was the precious metal used for trade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ruler/Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Bragðavellir, Suður-Múlasýsla</td>
<td>Probus (AD276-282)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Krossanes, Suður-Múlasýsla</td>
<td>Diocletian (AD284-305)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Bragðavellir, Suður-Múlasýsla</td>
<td>Aurelian (AD270-275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Hvítárholt, Árnessýsla</td>
<td>Tacitus (AD275-276)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Vestmannaeyjar</td>
<td>Orbiana (AD226-240)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Aurelian (AD270-275)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Roman Coins found in Iceland (After Holt, 2003:2)*

Although these coins are not a contemporary currency, they indicate foreign contact and show another perspective on the use of coins in the Viking world. An interesting comparison for the presence of Roman coins can be made with finds from Norway. These include examples of silver denarii and the gold solidus, and it is evident that their main function was as jewellery. The circumstances in which these coins have been found suggests that they were not regarded for monetary use (Skaare, 1976:34-8) and it is likely that the same applies to the Icelandic examples. While it is possible that these coins arrived in Iceland by way of Norway, a route from Britain is also likely, especially due to the stronger Roman history there. However, as the information relating to these Icelandic Roman coins is so unreliable, then no firm conclusions can be drawn.

5. Silver Hoards in Iceland

Four hoards from the Viking age have been found in Iceland, and although only two contain coins, they vary considerably in size, and consist mainly of Hack-Silver (see Eldjárn, 2000:423-6). All four have been included here because those that do not contain coins do provide information about the use of silver in Iceland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>No. of Coins</th>
<th>Total Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Sandmúli, Suður Pingeyjasýsla</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>304g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Gaulverjabær, Árnessýsla</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>496g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Keta, Skagafljarðarsýsla</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>135g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Miðhúsi, Suður Múlasýsla</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>654g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Viking Age Hoards found in Iceland (After Holt, 2003:4)*
Sandmúli

The hoard found in the ruins of a farmhouse at Sandmúli, in Barðardalur in north-eastern Iceland, is a coinless hoard containing 36 pieces, mainly hack-silver, as well as some plain finger-rings and dates to the 10th century (Jóhannesson, 2006:329; Graham-Campbell, 2005:134). One particular piece is of interest, which Shetelig identified in the 1930’s as being a fragment of the terminal of a ‘bossed’ penannular brooch. This is similar to an example from Ireland, and so this item from Sandmúli is of relevance as it highlights connections between Iceland and the Irish Sea (ibid:135). Further connections between Iceland and abroad are supported by the similarities of both the Sandmúli hoard as well as that found at Skail in Orkney. This is the largest silver hoard to be found in Scotland and is similar in size to Scandinavian hoards, although the number of coins contained in it is rather small (Crawford, 1987:128). The presence of ring money and ingots in both hoards, as well as the inclusion of coins in the Skail hoard, indicate that the silver from these hoards was used for trade. The Skail hoard was deposited around AD950-70, and it is likely that the Sandmúli hoard was deposited around the same time, due to the similarities in the contents of both hoards. However, the presence of the bossed brooch fragment indicates a late date for such a fragment to be in circulation as hack-silver, as comparative finds from Yorkshire and Skye indicate an earlier date of c.920 and 935-40 respectively (ibid). However, this chronological pattern would indicate a movement northwards over time, and therefore the later date for the Icelandic fragment may not be so unusual in a wider context of the movement of silver in the Viking world.

Gaulverjabær

The Gaulverjabær hoard is of great archaeological importance, and has been studied extensively by Anton Holt in Viking Age Coins of Iceland (2003, see also 2005). The Gaulverjabær hoard is the most significant in relation to this study, as it almost exclusively contains coins and is of a sufficiently large size that a great deal of information can be gained from it. It contained 360 items, of which 356 were coins or coin fragments. The remaining items were three flans and a fragment of decorated and engraved jewellery. The hoard was found in 1930 at the Gaulverjabær church in southern Iceland, when the churchyard was being extended. The hoard was located on the south side of the church, on a small rise, buried at a depth of one metre, and the coins appeared to have been originally held in a wooden container, although the preservation was poor (Holt, 2003:6).

An aspect of great interest of this hoard is the varied places of origin of the coins, with the distribution being thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>No. of Coins</th>
<th>% of Hoard</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavian Imitations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bohemia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Places of Coin Origin from the Gaulverjabær Hoard (After Holt, 2003:6)
The Anglo-Saxon coins have a clear cut-off date of c.1002/3 and the slightly fewer Germanic coins extend further to c.1010. This was a savings hoard, similar to that found at Sandur in the Faroe Islands (see chapter 3), which was initially assembled in Norway. The 8 Scandinavian imitations that are present, the 4 coins of Olof of Sweden (994-1022) and the 5 half-bracteates of Harald Bluetooth indicate a Scandinavian connection, however the inclusion of two Hiberno-Norse coins indicate an Irish link and the Islamic/Kufic coins (Graham-Campbell, 2005:133-4) demonstrate that foreign contacts with Iceland were more complex. A deposition date for the Gaulverjabær hoard has been suggested as c.1010-1015 (Eldjárn, 2000:425). The Gaulverjabær hoard is the most significant find from Viking Age Iceland with regards to the subject under discussion here.

**Keta**

The Keta hoard, found on a farm, contains mainly hack-silver – 35 pieces – but it also contains 6 coin fragments, one being an Otto-Adelheid penny dating to circa AD1000, and the others were fragments of Islamic dirhems (Eldjárn, 2000:426). Two fragments are illegible, but of the others one is of Nasr ibn Ahmed (AD913-942), another is of al-Mutadhir (AD908-932) and the remaining two are part of the same coin of al-Mutamid from Baghdad (AD883-884) (Holt, 2003:4). The Otto-Adelheid coin indicates that the hoard was deposited in the 11th century, and therefore it is broadly contemporary with the Gaulverjabær hoard above. The hack-silver is of notable interest, as it appears to be Scandinavian in origin, reinforcing connections with that part of the Viking world. A significant difference between the Keta and Gaulverjabær hoards is the quantities of Arabic coins – 80% in Keta, while only 1% in Gaulverjabær (Graham-Campbell, 2005:134).

**Miðhús**

The hoard from Miðhús consists entirely of Hack-Silver and contains no coins. It is the largest to have been found in Iceland, weighing 654g (Magnússon, 1980) and closely resembles the Sandmúli hoard (Graham-Campbell, 2005:135). A fragment of an annular narrow-band arm-ring from this hoard is decorated with two rows of a heart-shaped stamp containing three pellets. This is of notable importance, as a similar but complete example has also been found in Iceland as a stray find, although on this example the decoration is more elaborate (Graham-Campbell, 2005:130; Eldjárn, 2000:391). The Miðhús hoard contains a complete example of ‘ring-money’, as well as the terminal of an ingot (Graham-Campbell, 2005:135) and so indicates that the silver was used for trade. As with the Sandmúli hoard, parallels can be drawn between this and the Skaill hoard from Orkney. Two pennaunular brooch hoops, one complete, are comparable to a similar penannular brooch from the Skaill hoard, as is an Insular ringed pin. Although silver ringed pins are very rare, this example from Miðhús exactly matches another from the Skaill hoard; further still, a faint diagonal step-pattern, lightly incised between contour lines, is exactly matched on both examples (ibid:136). An instance where such exact parallels can be drawn suggests a strong link in this case between Iceland and Orkney. The Miðhús hoard can be dated to the latter half of the 10th century, as it is broadly contemporary with those at Sandmúli and Skaill (ibid).
6. Single-Coin Finds in Iceland

Individual coins from both the Viking Age and Early Medieval period are very rare in Iceland (Kristjánsdóttir, 2004:71), however there have been several instances of single-coin finds in Iceland dating from the Viking Age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Ruler &amp; Date</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1725?</td>
<td>Mosfell, Kjójarðarsýsla</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Möðruvellir, Eyjafjarðarsýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td>Nasr Ibn Ahmed [917-8/926-7]</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1840</td>
<td>Mýidalur, Mýrarðarsýsla</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td>Æthelred II (978-1016)</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Flágharanholt, Rangarvallasýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>Ólafsfjarðrstaðir, Norður Múlasýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stray</td>
<td>Edward the Confessor (1042-1066)</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1920</td>
<td>Pingvellir, Ærnessýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In Mound</td>
<td>Cnut (1016-35)</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Bjarnastaðir, Ólafsfjarðarsýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stray</td>
<td>Æthelred II (978-1016)</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Patreksfjörður, Vestur Barðastrandaröðsýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Boat Grave</td>
<td>(850-950)</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Ólafsarðalur, Ærnessýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stray</td>
<td>Otto III / Adelheid, c.983-1002</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Skriðulur, Suður Múlasýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td>Eadwig, (955-959)</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Bessastaðir, Gullibringursýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In Ruins</td>
<td>Anonymous Issue, 1080-95</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Pingvellir, Ærnessýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In Ruins</td>
<td>Anonymous Issue, 1065-80</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Þórarinstaðir, Norður Múlasýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In Ruins</td>
<td>Harthacnut (1035-42)</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Póssel, Kárahnjúkar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shieling</td>
<td>Harald Harðráði (1047-66)</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Pingvellir, Ærnessýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In Mound</td>
<td>Anonymous Issue, 1065-80</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Pingvellir, Ærnessýsla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In Mound</td>
<td>Harald Harðráði (1047-66)</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>S-Hingeyjarsýsla</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td>(Not Yet Analysed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5: Single-Find Coins in Iceland (After Holt, 2003:18 & Pers. Comm.)*

With regards to interpretation and analysis, while large collections of coins from hoards can provide quite accurate results, an individual coin find is not so reliable (Laing, 1969:73). However, such finds can prove useful in demonstrating how coins were used in Iceland. Although single coins may be interpreted to indicate local circulation, it must be considered that some have been found in graves and therefore have been deliberately placed out of circulation.

The earliest finds were of three coins found in Mosfell around 1725. At least one of these coins is thought to be of Anlaf Guthfrithsson, who was a Viking king of York, but these may in fact date to the 11th century (Graham-Campbell, 2005:133). Excavations at a Conversion-age church at Þórarinsstaðir in Seyðisfjörður, in eastern Iceland, unearthed a quarter of a Danish silver coin, dating from the middle of the 11th century. It is the only coin in Iceland to have been found on a church site. It is an imitation of an Anglo-Saxon coin, and such coins began to be imitated in the Viking world from around 1014. The coin was probably minted during the reign of Harthacnut, between 1035 & 1042. This has been the only Danish coin to be found in Iceland (Kristjánsdóttir, 2004:71). Another find of interest was the discovery of two coins of Harald Harðráði in association with a shieling in north-eastern Iceland. These coins had both been pierced for use in jewellery (Lucas, 2008). The single-finds are a very interesting collection of coins because of the varying ways in which they have been used, lost and deposited.
Section 3 – Artefact Study

7. Sample Study of Coins from the Icelandic Viking Age

Here a study will be undertaken of a selection of coins from the Icelandic archaeological record, in order to identify evidence for the use of coins in Viking Age Iceland, through the comparison of the evidence from hoards and single finds.

Aims & Objectives

The aim of this study is to identify the evidence for coin use, such as pecking or piercing, with the objective of suggesting how coins were used in Viking Age Iceland. The majority of coin data used in this study comes from the database from Anton Holt’s thesis Viking Age Coins of Iceland (Holt, 2003), and the reference number of each coin refers to the records in this database. The coins used in this study are from the Gaulverjabaer and Keta hoards, as well as those from single-find contexts. Due to the quantities of coins in the Gaulverjabaer hoard, as well as the poor condition of some of the single-find coins, only a sample selection has been taken. These are listed in Appendices A & B.

The difference between the contexts in which coins are found may be of interest in identifying the uses for coins in Viking Age Iceland, so this study will be made from a comparison of coins from hoards and single-find contexts. Coins in hoards have been deliberately taken out of circulation, whereas those found as single finds are more likely to be the result of accidental loss while in circulation. In this context, ‘circulation’ is used to mean regular use, either for payment or decoration, as coins were not used in the modern sense in Viking Age Iceland.

Evidence of Use

In order to make an equal comparison between the coins from hoards and single-find contexts, four categories will be used to study the evidence for their use:

- **Pecking**
  The term ‘pecking’ refers to small nicks or ‘pecks’ that were cut into the coin in order to test the quality of the silver, and so this indicates a use for trade.

- **Bending**
  The bending of coins varies, as some have been bent once, while others multiple times. It has been suggested that the bending of coins may have ritual connotations (Merrifield, 1987), and so this may indicate how the coins were used and deposited. The significance of this may be supported by the context in which they were found, such as a hoard or a burial.

- **Cutting**
  In situations where coins were used as hack-silver, they were often cut into smaller pieces in order to make payments of lesser value than the silver from which the coin was made, and so this also demonstrates a use for trade. Broken or cracked coins have also been included in this category, as these also result in the fragmentation of coins, which could then have been used for smaller payments. Ritual must also be considered as a motive in this category, as cutting may also resemble the ‘killing’ of the coin, in a similar way to bending.
• **Piercing**

The piercing of coins indicates a decorative use of a coin, as the piercing would allow for the suspension of the coin from a necklace. The purpose of piercing can be two-fold. The first is simply for decoration, however the second relates to the use of hack-silver, as discussed in chapter 2. If coins were used for payment in this context, then piercing would provide a means of displaying wealth and also carrying silver in order to make payments when required.

**Results**

In total, 45 coins were studied from hoards and 13 from single-find contexts. The small sample size available for the single-finds can be problematic in producing a comparative and accurate representation for the use of coins in these contexts, because there are not enough coins from single-find contexts to give an equal representation against the hoard evidence. The significant difference in numbers between the hoards and single-find samples can be problematic in their comparison, as the difference may add bias to the results. Therefore, the accuracy to be gained from such a small sample is potentially unreliable, as distinct patterns in usage cannot be definitively defined or tested. The results have therefore been presented as an average in order to reduce the bias between the two samples and make them more comparable.

![Figure 3: Comparison of Coins from Hoards & Single Finds](image)

As can be seen from the graph in figure 3, there are marked differences in the comparison of coins from hoards and single-find contexts. It is of great interest that the pattern of use is reversed for the single-find coins, as opposed to those from hoards.
Pecking

The difference in the evidence for Pecking between the two contexts is considerable, as 37 out of 45 coins from hoards show evidence for pecking, whereas this was only 2 out of 13 in the single-finds. As coins were pecked in order to test the quality of the silver, then this indicates the importance for wealth and trade. Therefore, the evidence suggests that hoards were stores of wealth, to be used at a later date for trade. However, it must be borne in mind that it was the silver that was of value, not the coin itself. This is supported by the close similarity between pecking and bending, both for testing the quality of the silver. The relative amount of pecking evident on the single-find coins is substantially less, suggesting that those coins did not require the testing of the silver, which may be related to Cutting and transactions.

The majority of Scandinavian Imitation coins are copies of Anglo-Saxon coinage, almost exclusively of Æthelred II. The imitations studied here are listed in Appendix C. It may be considered that the Anglo-Saxon coins would carry fewer pecks as it was a more established and reliable coinage, whereas the imitations may have more peck marks, as by their nature, the quality of the silver may have been more uncertain. However, a comparison of imitation and genuine Anglo-Saxon coins from the Gaulverjabær hoard demonstrate that pecking was common, almost universal, on both sets of coins. This can be explained by the fact that, although the Anglo-Saxon coinage was known and trusted closer to the place of origin, in Iceland both coinages were imported to Iceland, and therefore would be regarded with an equal necessity to test the quality of the silver. It is interesting that while the pattern of pecking is similar between imitation and original in the hoard, in the context of single finds, the pattern is reversed as no evidence of pecking is seen. It may be concluded that whether a coin was an imitation or not, the pattern of usage remains the same in relation to other coins from the same context.

Bending

Bending was evident in 38 out of 45 coins from hoards, but only 3 out of 13 had been bent in the single-finds. It has been suggested by Merrifield (1987) that the bending of coins relates to the ritual ‘killing’ of a coin. There is a very high rate of bending in the hoard evidence, and the significance of the bending of coins may be further understood from the evidence of graves, because in both contexts coins have been deliberately deposited. At least 8 coins have been found in burial contexts from Viking Age Iceland, of which 5 have been studied here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coin No.</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Pecking</th>
<th>Bending</th>
<th>Cutting</th>
<th>Piercing</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Type/T.D.</th>
<th>Ruler &amp; Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>Mjoðidalur</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>dirham</td>
<td>Nasr ibn Ahmed, 917-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>362</td>
<td>Mjoðidalur</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>dirham</td>
<td>Nasr ibn Ahmed, 926-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>370</td>
<td>Flagjarnarholt</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
<td>Long Cross</td>
<td>Æthelred II Unready, 978-1016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>364</td>
<td>Vatnsdalur</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>dirham</td>
<td>[850-950]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>366</td>
<td>Skreiðdalur</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>SCBI Edinburgh 448</td>
<td>Eadwig, 955-959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Coins found in Graves
Table 6 shows that in this context, pecking is the most unusual characteristic, whereas the cutting of coins is the most common. Evidence for bending is present, but is not as frequent as may have been expected if ritual bending was associated with the ritual of burial. The two Islamic coins found in a grave in Mjóidalur (Rafnsson, 2001:124) have been bent several times and then flattened, which demonstrates that bending was not directly associated with the burial of the coin.

It is likely that the bending of coins was not a ritual process, but rather associated with the testing of the quality of the silver. This is because the evidence for pecking is closely matched by bending, in both hoard and single-find contexts, and that if ritual were the reason, then the frequency of bending should be higher in grave contexts.

**Cutting**

Coins with evidence of cutting amounted to 24 out of 45 in the hoards and 7 out of 13 of the single-finds. Coins were often cut in order to make smaller payments in the value of silver, and so the evidence for cutting indicates the use of coins for trade. However, if there was a ritual aspect of ‘killing’ coins, then cutting is also a possibility as Table 6 shows that this is the most frequent for coins found in graves. The relatively high and very similar figures for cutting between the hoards and single finds suggests that the role of cutting coins was important in both contexts. Whereas Pecking and Bending are examples of testing the silver quality, the cutting of coins is demonstrative of the use of coins for payment. This explains the close similarity between both contexts in this case, as the coins from both hoards and single-finds were both used for trade, albeit in different ways. The low rate of pecking and bending in Single-find contexts is likely to be because the cutting of the coin would enable the silver quality to be tested when making a transaction, therefore rendering the other tests unnecessary.

**Piercing**

Pierced coins amounted to only 5 out of 45 in the hoards, but 7 out of 13 in the single-finds. The piercing of coins is primarily associated with their use for decoration, as the piercing would allow the coin to be suspended from a necklace or other jewellery. In the context of Viking Age Iceland, where coins were not used as ‘money’ in the modern sense, then the piercing of coins would allow regular use in everyday life as they could be easily carried. The lack of evidence for piercing in hoards suggests that the display of wealth was not associated with hoard deposits, but the frequency of piercing in single-finds supports the idea that these were in regular use. The use of coins for jewellery is supported by those pierced coins that also had loops attached to them. Coin number 377, an Anglo-Saxon coin of Æthelred II found in Bjarnastaðir, is pierced with a slightly decorated loop and riveted mounting. Coin number 360 is another Anglo-Saxon coin from Valþjófsstaðir in Fljótsdalur, of Edward the Confessor, which is pierced with a decorated and ornate loop, with a riveted mounting. These could be for a display of wealth and may also signify foreign contacts. The piercing of coins is discussed further in chapter 9.
A comparison of pierced coins from both the hoards and single-find contexts demonstrates that there is not an evident pattern in the selection of coins to have been pierced. There appears to be no emphasis upon any particular type of coin, although there are slightly more Islamic coins that have been treated in this way. However, this may be affected by the sample selection, and may not be representative of the entire archaeological record.

**Conclusions**

The comparison of these four categories has created some interesting observations. It is of great interest that the pattern of coin use is reversed between hoards and single-find coins, suggesting (given sample size problems) a distinctly different use of coins in each context. For example, cutting and piercing are common in single-find coins, which indicates use as ‘wearable wealth’, whereas the very high rates of pecking and bending show that the quality of the silver in hoards was of great importance. It is clear that bending was not a ritual act of deposition, but the presence of coins in burials and hoards demonstrates the importance of silver nonetheless. It appears that coins in hoards were used primarily as a storage of wealth, which was only used for trade occasionally, perhaps for overseas transactions. Single-coins, however, were used as a display of wealth and for smaller payments.
8. Comparisons with Viking-Age Norway & Britain

It is well known that the Icelandic settlers came from both Norway and the British Isles and so, as all coins were imported into Iceland, it is interesting to compare the Icelandic coinage evidence with similar finds in each of these countries.

Norway
The evidence from Norway is extensive and varied, comprising of coins such as dirhems from the east, Frankish deniers from Europe and Anglo-Saxon pennies from England.

The trading centre of Kaupang in southern Norway was connected with international trading routes, which aided the movement of foreign coins into the country. Of the coins found here, none have been pierced, while some have been deliberately cut, indicating use for payment as hack-silver (Skaare, 1976:45). It is also interesting to note that the vast majority of coins found at Kaupang are Islamic and were struck between AD698 & 955, whereas only six Western coins have been found, each dating to the 9th century (Blackburn, 2008:29). Norway has the fewest Kufic coins in Scandinavia, the majority of these being struck between AD890 & 950. Kufic coins are present in the Norwegian archaeological record from the beginning of the Viking Age until the middle of the 11th century. Kufic, or Islamic, coins could circulate for a long time before their eventual deposition in the ground, and it is rare for Kufic and European coins to be found mixed together; the Hoen hoard and Kaupang being the exceptions. Where coins were used as jewellery, it was unusual to mix Kufic dirhems and European pennies, as each varied noticeably in size and appearance. If they had been used as money, then their circulation would have been greater, resulting in more mingled finds. While it cannot be determined whether all of the Kufic coins in Iceland came via Norway, it is certain that at least some of them did. Certainly the presence of these coins in Norway reflects the importance of Islamic silver in Scandinavia (Skaare, 1976:48-52). It is notable therefore that the coins of earliest date in the Icelandic archaeological record are Islamic, and all date to within the striking period of the Norwegian examples. Although it is uncommon for Kufic coins to be found in association with other coin types in Norway, it is rather common in Iceland.

The decline in the flow of Islamic silver from the east in the latter half of the 10th century meant that a new source of silver was required by the Vikings, and this was found in the form of Germanic, and also Anglo-Saxon, coinage. Around the middle of the 10th century, Germanic pennies arrived in Norway, reaching large proportions. This was a result of the opening of the Rammelsberg silver mines in Harz. The presence of Germanic coins in Norway began at around this time, as there is no evidence for these coins in Norway prior to this date. Spectroscopic analysis has demonstrated that the most common Germanic coin, the Otto-Adelheid penny, was struck from silver from these mines (Skaare, 1976:54). The Otto-Adelheid type is also common in the Icelandic archaeological record.

The flow of English coins to Norway was in two phases – in the first, the presence of Anglo-Saxon pennies in Norway prior to c.840 is unique in Scandinavia (Skaare, 1976:47). The examples of two Northumbrian stycas mounted upon lead weights (see Blackburn, 2005:144) indicate a connection with the early Viking raids, which began with the attack of Lindisfarne in 793. It would appear feasible at first that
the few coins making their way from England to Norway in this manner could then be taken to Iceland by the settlers from 870 onwards, however the evidence does not support this because the earliest English coin to be found in Iceland is of Eadwig (AD955-959) as a single find from Skriðdalur.

In the second phase of English coins appearing in Norway, the Anglo-Saxon coinage remained very popular with the Vikings. This was because it was a stable currency due to the political unification of England, and the silver content was very high – often 85-90%. The evidence from Norwegian hoards shows that Anglo-Saxon coins came to Norway in the latter half of the 10th century. A key point in the history of the English currency at this time was the great coinage reform of King Eadgar in 973, in which he demonetised all previous issues and replaced them with a new, uniform, penny that was standard across England. After this reform, there was a continuous flow of these coins into Norway. Anglo-Saxon pennies reappear in earnest in the Norwegian archaeological record from around 990 in large quantities, ending in a decline around 1050. The Slethei hoard from Norway consists of 92% Æthelred II coins, which appears to have resulted from a danegeld payment (Skaare, 1976:54-56). From England, coins from Æthelred II are by far the most common in the Icelandic archaeological record from this period.

Nearly all of the coins from the Norwegian archaeological record show evidence of testing, such as peck marks. There appears to be a connection between the pecking and bending of coins, both in order to test the quality of the silver. Piercing is rarely found, and the presence of attached loops is extremely rare (Skaare, 1976:57). This indicates that, for the most part, coins were used for payment by silver, rather than primarily as jewellery. In comparison with the Icelandic archaeological record, this scenario is similar to the evidence found in hoards, where the study in chapter 7 demonstrated the frequency of such test marks on these coins. It is clear from the Norwegian archaeological record that there are some similarities with the evidence from Iceland. However, the use of coins in Norway and Iceland is not the same and so it does not definitely determine a link between the numismatic evidence of each country.

The British Isles

The majority of coins from Viking Age Iceland are originally from Britain, and so a study of similar evidence from this area may be of use in further understanding those coins from the Icelandic archaeological record.

In Scotland some finds of silver from the 10th and 11th centuries have included large numbers of coins and the range of origins of these suggests that little preference was given for certain issues. However, these do not represent direct foreign contact, and probably came from the silver weight economies of the Irish Sea. A significant contrast with the archaeological record of the Irish Sea area is that there is a scarcity of hoards that only contain coins, which suggests that the use of silver in the form of artefacts was more preferable to coin (Kruse, 1995:190). This matches with the Icelandic evidence, as coins of different origins are found mixed together, which is perhaps most notable with regards to the Islamic coins, as discussed above. In the Icelandic case as well, the presence of
foreign coins does not necessarily represent direct foreign contact with the place of coin origin. This can be demonstrated by the indiscriminatory manner in which the coins have been tested with peck marks. As in Scotland, the lack of exclusive coin hoards is noticeable because even the Gaulverjabær hoard was made up of other items of silver; this pattern indicates that even where silver was used for trade, coin was not the only favoured form for silver to be used.

The single-finds of coins are often interpreted as resembling local circulation. In Scotland very few single coins have been found, the majority of these in the Northern Isles (Kruse, 1995:198). Again, the Icelandic evidence is very similar, and is it interesting to note that the concentration of coins in Scotland is focused upon the northern isles, which was a focus of Norse settlement in Britain. As discussed in Chapter 6, although single coins may be interpreted to indicate local circulation, it must be considered that some have been found in graves and therefore have been deliberately placed out of circulation.

The evidence from Ireland shows that the Vikings did not begin to mint their own coins until the 10th century, although for a long time the coins which did circulate were mainly English pennies, along with a small amount of Hiberno-Norse issues from York (Dolley, 1965:11). Although we know that some of the Icelandic settlers came from Ireland, there are very few Irish coins in the Icelandic archaeological record.

The coinage evidence from England, in relation to the Viking world, is primarily associated with the large payments of Danegeld and the results of raids. The Icelandic archaeological record is dominated by coins of King Æthelred II (978-1016), who is often known as Æthelred the Unready, however the Saxon word ‘Unræd’ actually translates as ‘Ill-Advised’. Æthelred’s kingdom was anything but unready, as it was wealthy, efficient and well equipped with a strong sailing fleet. However, England was the subject of renewed and relentless Viking attacks from the 980s, due to instability in Scandinavia and an interruption in silver supplies from the east (Haywood, 1995:118). Although Æthelred’s reign was disastrous for England, it is of the greatest interest numismatically (Dolley, 1964:26), particularly in relation to the Icelandic material, where pennies of Æthelred are by far the most common.

The large numbers of Carolingian coins in the Cuerdale hoard discussed earlier suggests that much of the silver in England came from continental Europe (Blunt et al, 1989:102), which would help to explain how England was so wealthy in Silver. This wealth in silver is therefore why Britain was so attractive to the Vikings, resulting in the large quantities of English coins that made their way to Viking Scandinavia and onwards into the North Atlantic.
Section 4 – Interpretation & Analysis

9. The Role of Coins in Viking-Age Iceland

Silver was a valuable commodity in Iceland during the Viking age, as indeed were other precious metals such as Bronze. Coins were never minted in Iceland, but the early settlers brought Silver and foreign coins with them to use as a means of payment and trade (Byock, 2001:315) and Silver was the Icelanders’ primary measurement of value (Jóhannesson, 2006:329). In this chapter the evidence for the use of coins studied in chapter 7 will be studied in the wider context of the role of coins in Viking Age Iceland.

During the Commonwealth period in Iceland (AD930-1262), standards and values varied considerably, however the units of currency were based upon the Norwegian system. These began as units of weight, but during the 11th century they became units of value (Byock, 2001:315). The units of currency were the Mörk (pl. Merkr), which equalled 8 Aurar (singular Eyrir - Ounce), which equalled 24 Örtugar. In Norway, the Mörk weighed approximately 214g, and was therefore the weight adopted for use in Iceland. It is interesting to note that the Miðhús hoard discussed in chapter 5 weighed 654g, which equates to 3 Merkr (Magnússon, 1980:20). These units of measurement were used across the Viking world (Jóhannesson, 2006:329) and so this demonstrates how Iceland was influenced by and maintained connections with Viking Scandinavia. In Iceland the coarse home-spun cloth called Vaðmál became an additional medium of exchange, the value of which was linked to that of Silver. This was of a standard width and length per measure, which was called an ell. The importance of Vaðmál to the discussion of the use of silver and coinage in Iceland is that Silver was not in immediate or regular use, whereas goods and products were in demand and were more readily available. This resulted in one ell of Vaðmál equating to one ounce (Eyrir) of Silver. During the 10th century this changed to due to an increase in cloth production and also the rising price of Silver (Foote & Wilson, 1970:55). This is likely to be linked to the decline in the import of silver into Iceland during the 11th century.

Although coins were present in Iceland during the Viking age, they were not used as coins in their own right, but rather for the metal from which they were made. The Silver had to be weighed, whether or not it was coined or uncoined, as they were of different sizes even if they originated from the same mint and sovereign (Jóhannesson, 2006:329). The presence of foreign coins is indicative of foreign contact, as in the country of origin the coin would be accepted as face value, whereas in the Viking economy it would be accepted by weight. This is supported by the presence of foreign coins that have been cut for the purpose of payment by weight (Foote & Wilson, 1970:197). Evidence for the use of silver for payment by weight is supported by the finds of many weights and scales that have been found in Iceland (Friðriksson in Eldjárn, 2000:608).

The burial of hoards in Iceland may relate to times of unrest, as an accumulation of wealth, or for ritual. The 13th century Icelandic chronicler Snorri Sturluson suggested that it might have been a religious custom, whereby anything that was buried could then be enjoyed in the afterlife (Edgren, 2000:113). An alternative is that is was a secure means of storing the valuables of the owner, as the Keta and Sandmúli hoards were found on farms. Icelandic Archaeology has often been
studied in relation to the sagas (see Friðriksson, 1994), and an interesting insight into the burial of hoards in Iceland is given in an extract from *Egil’s Saga* (Scudder & Óskarsdóttir, 2002:203). The passage refers to two chests full of English silver, which were given to Egil by King Æthelstan of England:

“One evening when everyone was going to bed at Mosfell, Egil called in two of Grim’s slaves. He told them to fetch him a horse, ‘because I want to go to bathe in the pool’. When he was ready he went out, taking his chests of silver with him. He mounted the horse, crossed the hayfields to the slope that begins there and disappeared. In the morning, when all the people got up, they saw Egil wandering around on the hill east of the farm, leading a horse behind him. They went over to him and brought him home. But neither the slaves nor the chests ever returned, and there are many theories about where Egil hid his treasure. East of the farm is a gully leading down from the mountain. It has been noticed that English coins have been found in the gully when the river recedes after floods caused by sudden thaws. Some people believe Egil must have buried his treasure there. ... Egil himself said that he had killed Grim’s slaves and hidden his treasure somewhere, but he never told a single person where it was.”

The deposition of hoards has been thought to relate to the symbolic confirmation of boundaries. In relation to the Icelandic landnám, Svarfdøla saga describes the symbolic deposition of silver on the boundary of the newly-taken land, and witnesses had to be present in order to legitimate the ritual deposition and therefore the claim to the land (Olsen, 2003:24). The biggest problem with this is that the deposition dates of the Icelandic hoards are much later than the Settlement period (see ch.5). Nonetheless, the theory does have interesting and relevant points. The Gaulverjabaer hoard was located on a slight rise in the terrain, and this was also the case for the Miðhús hoard (Magnússon, 1980:19), yet neither were directly associated with other evidence of human activity. There is the possible exception of a connection between the Gaulverjabaer hoard and the sanctity of the nearby church, as a parallel can be made with the Sandur hoard from the Faroe Islands. The prominence of the location in the landscape may be linked to this idea of hoards acting as boundary markers. This is an interesting observation, as it indicates that the location in which a hoard was buried was of importance and that a prominent location in the landscape away from other areas of activity was preferred.

The evidence for the use of coins in the Gaulverjabaer hoard indicates that it was intended as a store of wealth, which was occasionally used for trade. This fits the aspects outlined above of how silver, while an important source of wealth, was not used as a primary means of payment in everyday life in Iceland. Therefore other means of payment, such as vaðmál would otherwise be used. The Keta hoard shows that the coinage circulating in Iceland could remain very static, as the dates between the dirhems and the Germanic Otto-Adelheid coin range between the late 9th c. and the turn of the millennium (Blackburn, 2005:147). From the study in chapter 7, it is clear that the role of coins was very different whether they were from a hoard or as a single find. In order to place the findings of this study into the context of this chapter, it is necessary to identify the extent and distribution of silver and coins in Iceland. This is shown on the map in figure 4, which shows that there was relatively little silver in Iceland in the first phase of settlement, but that this greatly increased during the 11th century.
The piercing of coins is a strong indicator for the role of coins in Iceland. The two examples in Figure 5 show how coins were pierced. The coin on the left is from Pálssel/Pálstóftir in Kárahnjúknar (Lucas, 2005 & 2008) and the second on the right is from Mjóidalur in Mýrarsýsla. It is clear that they have been pierced for suspension from jewellery because of the deliberate location of the piercings. Indeed, the Mjóidalur coins were found attached to a necklace (see Eldjárn, 2000:103). It is interesting to note that the first coin has been pierced twice symmetrically, whereas the other has only been pierced once. In addition, the piercing of the Mjóidalur coin has a slightly elongated shape, demonstrating that it has been suspended for some time. Such evidence supports the idea of coins being incorporated into jewellery as a form of ‘wearable wealth’.

The role of coins in Viking Age Iceland was clearly of importance, even though their presence was on a relatively small scale. While it is expected that the majority of coins would be found in hoards, it is interesting that the amount of coins found as single-finds is also high enough to demonstrate that coins were commonly circulated. The fact that weights, measures and values were linked to those of silver demonstrates the importance of silver in the wider Viking economy, and coins were a convenient means of carrying wealth, for display or payment.
10. The Origin of Coins and Indications of Foreign Contact

The aim of the second aspect of this study is to look at Iceland in the context of the wider Viking world, through the evidence of coinage. This concluding chapter will look at how the origin of coins indicates links between Iceland and other parts of the Viking world, how coins came to Iceland, and how that can inform the archaeologist about contacts between Iceland and other parts of the Viking world.

The origin of coins indicates links with the Viking world on the basis of the route between the place where they were struck and the archaeological context in which they were found in Iceland. A particular difficulty when studying coins from Viking Age Scandinavia is that the imported coins could remain in circulation for decades or even centuries after their production date (Blackburn, 2008:29). This also applies to the Icelandic material, and so in the Icelandic context, coins therefore are problematic as a precise method of dating. The coins of earliest date to be found in Iceland are Islamic dirhems, both in Hoards and single-find contexts. This does not necessarily mean that they arrived in Iceland first, before other coins, but it does fit the pattern of the influx of Islamic coins into Scandinavia in the early Viking age.

Coins came to Iceland with the settlers as well as through ongoing trade, which maintained links between Iceland and the Viking world. The finds in Iceland indicate that coins were arriving by the mid-9th century, and that these came from Scandinavia and the British Isles (Blackburn, 2005:147). The majority of those who settled Iceland were from the west coast of Norway, while others had lived in parts of the British Isles, such as Ireland and the Hebrides, before moving to Iceland (Foote & Wilson, 1970:52). This is of significance as it adds to the interpretation of how silver and specifically coins came to Iceland. It is generally accepted that those Norse who were raiding and settling in Ireland and northern Britain had come from Norway, whereas those in the south in England were primarily Danish. The south of England had an established silver coinage, whereas the north of Britain consisted of almost coinless economies (Dolley, 1965:9-10). This is an interesting point to consider with regards to the numismatic evidence from Iceland, as although it may at first be considered that the settlers brought coins with them, the evidence suggests that coins did not come to Iceland by such a direct route.

The indication that Iceland had strong and frequent contact with other parts of the Viking world is supported by evidence from the Faroe Islands, where the Sandur hoard was found to contain coins from Britain, Scandinavia and Europe, and these coins were probably obtained in exchange for wool or other Faroese goods (North, 2005:61). This demonstrates one way that coins came to Iceland; through trade. Further comparisons on the basis of trade can be made between Iceland and the other North Atlantic islands. In each of these islands there have been several silver finds from graves. Of two graves found on the Faroe Islands, one burial of a young man contained a leather purse with lead weights and some fragments of silver and bronze. The second burial, of a woman, included a clipped silver coin, which was an imitation of an Islamic dirhem originating from the lower Volga. Reaching Denmark or Norway before c.925, it is thought that it was buried in the mid-10th century. This is similar to the find of a cut halfpenny of Eadmund (939-46) in a
male burial on Orkney (Graham-Campbell, 2005:131). This can be compared with the Icelandic evidence, where 12 graves have been found to contain artefacts of gold or silver, and at least 8 have included coins. The evidence outlined here demonstrates trade links between the North Atlantic islands and the Viking world, as not only does it show evidence for the use of silver as ‘currency’ by weight, but also the origin of the coins demonstrates links with distant lands.

The coin evidence from Iceland is of valuable use to the archaeologist, because it helps to identify and trace contacts between Iceland and other parts of the Viking world. With regards to the hoard evidence, many interesting observations can be made. The evidence of coinage from the North Atlantic forms a consistent pattern, and so the hoards in Iceland may have been a store of wealth to be used as an international currency (Blackburn, 2005:149). The origins of the coins from the Gaulverjabær hoard are typical of those from Scandinavia, and the quantity of Anglo-Saxon coins refines this to an identification with Norwegian hoards specifically. A Norwegian origin is supported by the fact that the Islamic coins are also consistent with such 11th c. finds from Norway (Holt, 2003:7). It appears therefore that this hoard came from Norway, but it is unlikely that it was added to once it had arrived in Iceland (Blackburn & Jonsson, 1981:175). The evidence of the Gaulverjabær hoard demonstrates contacts between Iceland and Norway in the 11th century and this is important in understanding how Iceland fitted into the context of the wider Viking world. As discussed in chapter 9, the fact that this hoard appears to have been intended as a storage of wealth, for occasional use for trade, supports the idea that this was used for trade between Iceland and, most likely, Norway.

The single finds indicate links with the British Isles as much as Scandinavia (Blackburn, 2005:149) and perhaps give the most varied indications of foreign contact. Two examples are of great interest in demonstrating how the origin of coins can indicate foreign contacts. The two coins shown in figure 6 were found at Þingvellir (Friðriksson, 2006:32), which originate from Norway and date to the mid-11th century. Finds such as these reinforce our knowledge of contact between Iceland and Norway, and also provide a means of tracing the movement of coins to Iceland.

![Figure 6: Two Norwegian Coins from Þingvellir, mid-11th Century](image)

It is surprising that the amount of Islamic coins present in Iceland is relatively few, despite the fact that Islamic silver was so predominant in Scandinavia in the earlier part of the Viking Age. Evidence from Kaupang in Norway suggests that Arabic dirhems only reached western Scandinavia in great numbers from the middle of
the 9th century onwards (Blackburn, 2005:143). This matches with the dates of the dirhems found in Iceland, therefore supporting the idea that these coins also came to Iceland via Norway. The vast amount of Anglo-Saxon coins to be found in Iceland, more than of any other origin, must not be taken to indicate direct contact between England and Iceland. The discussions in the previous chapters have shown how coins moved from England to Scandinavia by way of raiding and trading. This, in addition to the fact that we know that most of the Icelandic settlers coming from the British Isles came from areas with predominantly coinless economies, demonstrates that the presence of such quantities of English coins must have come to Iceland by a different route, most likely through Norway. The presence of two Hiberno-Norse coins indicates links with the Irish Sea area, however as these were found in the Gaulverjabær hoard, which is thought to come from Norway, then this serves to demonstrate how complex the matter of coin origin and foreign contact can be.

The study of coins in Icelandic archaeology is of great interest because it provides a trace of contacts, through settlement and trade, between Iceland and other parts of the Viking world. The evidence identified in this study has shown that contact between Iceland and particularly Norway was strong and sustained, whereas contact with the British Isles does not account so much for the direct flow of coins to Iceland, as contact was not so significant. While the role of coins in Iceland was small, due to their relatively few numbers, they were nonetheless significant in providing a means of wealth, for payment and display. It is clear from the origin and date of the coins found in Iceland that although there was a limited amount of silver in the initial phase of settlement, the most silver was around in the 11th century. The nature of such finds indicates that the primary use for such silver was directly related to foreign contact, such as trade, and that Iceland maintained contact with the Viking world.
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