Wybrand Op den Velde * & Michael Metcalf **

THE CIRCULATION OF SCEATTAS
IN THE SOUTHERN LOW COUNTRIES

Abstract – In the 8th century the territory of Belgium was divided by the frontier of the regions where Merovingian deniers and sceattas made up the dominant currency. In the primary phase (c. 670 – c. 720) few sceattas were in circulation in Belgium. Late in that phase (not earlier than c. 710) the porcupine stepped cross type made its appearance. It may have been minted in Belgium or northern France, but that is far from certain, as the hypothesis is based on a very limited number of recorded find-spots on the Continent.

The hexagram sceatta-type (old name: Herstal type) was probably minted at a site in Belgium with easy access to the North Sea. The interlace sceattas (old name: Maastricht type) are relatively frequently found in Belgium, and seem to have been manufactured in the upper Meuse valley.

A small group of secondary-phase porcupines with a distinctive reverse design could belong to Belgium, as a similar specimen has been found at Namur.

Resumé – Au VIIIe siècle, le territoire de la Belgique était divisé par la frontière des régions où les deniers mérovingiens et les sceattas composent la monnaie dominante. Pendant la première période (c. 670 – c. 720), très peu de sceattas circulaient en Belgique. Vers la fin de cette période (c. 710) apparaît le type porc-épic/croix à redans. Il est possible qu’il a été frappé en Belgique, ou dans le nord de la France, mais c’est loin d’être certain, parce que l’hypothèse est basée sur un nombre de trouvailles très limité.

Le type d’hexagramme (nom ancien : type de Herstal) a probablement été frappé en Belgique sur un site avec accès facile à la mer du Nord. Les sceattas « au quatre-feuille » (nom ancien : type de Maastricht) sont trouvés relativement fréquemment en Belgique et semblent avoir été frappés dans la vallée haute de la Meuse.

Un petit groupe de sceattas ‘porc-épic’, portant un dessin caractéristique au revers, est peut-être d’origine belge, étant donné qu’un exemple semblable a été trouvé à Namur.

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Introduction

From c. 500 onwards a coinage of gold tremisses was in use on the European mainland, and also in England. Around c. 670 this gold coinage, which had become severely debased, was no longer suitable to meet the needs of the proliferating local markets, petty economy, and the growing international trade. In a remarkably short period of time the gold coins were replaced by rather chunky silver coins of around 1.2 grams\[1\]. These new coins from the Frankish realm were called ‘saigas’, a name that fell in disuse, and they are now indicated as ‘Merovingian deniers’. The new silver coins in England and northern Europe are called ‘sceattas’, a far from appropriate name, but one that is now generally accepted.

During the period 670-750 England was divided into several independent kingdoms. On the Continent, the territory south of the river Rhine was under Frankish control, whereas the area north of the Rhine was ruled by the Frisians, who were active merchants and gained great wealth from their international trading operations.

The Merovingian background

The age when sceattas were the currency of the North Sea world (late 7th – first half of the 8th century) was preceded, in Belgium and more widely, by the circulation of Merovingian gold tremisses and local copies of them. Depeyrot has compiled a systematic list of the places in Belgium where tremisses were minted, in some places plentifully, in others hardly at all. There are just ten places on the list\[2\]. His suggested attributions, together with the number of recorded specimens, most of them without provenance, merits consideration as a background to our understanding of the subsequent sceatta phase.

Anvers (ANDERPVS) 1
Aulne (ARICIS) 1
Battignies-lez-Binche (BATENEGIARA) 1
Courtrai (CVRTARIVM) 1
* Dinant-sur-Meuse (DEONANTE) 16
* Huy (CHOAE) 66
* Namur (NAMVCUM) 22
Nethen (NETIS ... QX) 1
Ostrevent (AVSTREBANTVM) 2
Tournai (TVRNBCUM) 5

\[1\] Grierson & Blackburn 1986, p. 138-139.
\[2\] Depeyrot 1988 & 2012; see also Vanhoudt 1983.
Huy is surprisingly prominent; Liège is absent from the list. The three places marked with an asterisk account for c. 90% of the Belgian mint-output. Together with Maastricht (TRIECTVM) they resume minting in the early Carolingian period. The focus of our enquiries is thus very markedly on the valley of the River Meuse.

The sceatta-phase

But what happened in the intervening period, the age of the sceattas? There are none with the name Huy, Dinant, or Namur, nor any other place in Belgium. That is only to be expected, because sceattas rarely if ever name their mint-place. We can therefore ask the rhetorical question, if sceattas had been minted at Huy, how would we know? The only way, in principle, by which we can discover where particular sceatta types or varieties originated is from archaeological evidence showing where they circulated, or in other words, from a distribution-map of single finds. And even that is not straightforward. Because sceattas were used in long-distance trade, conclusions need to be set into a broad comparative context.

The distribution-maps 1 and 2 show for Belgium only few finds of sceattas (13 scattered single finds) and of the contemporary Merovingian deniers (9) [3]. This is in contrast with the state of research in the Netherlands or in England.

In an Antwerp sale appeared a small cardboard box containing at least 100 sceattas. On the box was written ‘found in Duffel’ (near Antwerp), but further information is lacking. In 1966, the Brussels coin dealer M. Franceschi offered a parcel of 35 porcupine sceattas. It is possible, although purely speculative, that this so-called ‘Franceschi parcel’ is part of the Duffel hoard [4]. Excavations at and near the site of the so-called ‘Roman camp’ in the dunes of De Panne yielded twelve sceattas and one denier. In the collection of the Royal Library at Brussels 40 sceattas and 36 Merovingian deniers are kept, without provenance, and several more in local museums [5]; many of them have no doubt been found in Belgium.

The place of production of many Merovingian deniers could be established, based on the interpretation of the names of cities, ruler and moneyers on them. For most sceatta types, including the so-called ‘porcupines’, about which we will say more in a few moments, the region of issue is now no longer controversial. The kingdom of origin of most English series is well established [6]. Similarly, the continental runic type is now known to

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For the Netherlands: numis database www.geldmuseum.nl.


be from Friesland [7]. The Wodan/monster type was in all likelihood struck in Denmark [8].

Finds of sceattas of Series G (bmc Type 3a) are relatively plentiful in northern France, and scarce in the Netherlands. This supports the hypothesis that they were struck at Quentovic. A concentration of finds of Type 3a in West Sussex may be explained by a direct cross-Channel contact with northern France [9].

The circulation of Merovingian deniers and sceattas was not restricted by the political frontiers. It seems that both coin types were accepted everywhere at par, and were used to facilitate large scale trading (Table 1) [10].

Table 1 – The number of stray and grave finds of sceattas and Merovingian deniers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SCEATTAS</th>
<th>MEROVINGIAN DENIERS</th>
<th>% OF MEROVINGIAN DENIERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The porcupine/standard sceattas are the most plentiful of all sceatta types. For a long time their origin remained elusive. The number of proposed mints places is almost equal to the number of serious studies. Until the second half of the 20th century the dominant view was that they were minted in England. The bewildering number of varieties were once interpreted as the

currency of various regions. Gradually it became clear that most ‘porcupines’ were struck in the realm of the present-day Netherlands\textsuperscript{[11]}. The main varieties are better understood as the issues struck during successive phases: primary phase 695 – c. 720; secondary phase c. 720 – c. 740; tertiary phase c. 740 – 800?

\begin{center}
\textbf{Map 1 – Findspots of Merovingian deniers. Each dot represents one or more finds, hoards as well as single finds}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{[11]} Metcalf & Op den Velde 2009-10.
Map 2 – Findspots of sceattas. Each dot represents one or more finds, hoards as well as single finds
The very plentiful secondary phase ‘porcupines’ fall into two main stylistic groups, each with its own weight standard. The stray find distribution of these samples in the Netherlands reveals a clear regional contrast. It is very plausible that during the secondary phase two major production centres operated in the Netherlands. The largest was in the Big Rivers region, most likely at the important commercial centre Dorestad, and there was another one in the Frisian terpen area, perhaps in or near Wijnaldum. These two mints each used their own characteristic design. In the Frisian group, the military standard is misunderstood, and is re-aligned diagonally.

It is not surprising that such a popular coin type with a very wide circulation, and an easy-to-copy design, was imitated. The total volume of the porcupine sceattas, based on an estimate of the number of dies used to produce them, is 55 million coins. The number of what seem to be unofficial imitative coins, recognizable by stylistic analysis, is c. 30% of the total. These copies, mainly from the secondary phase, are not necessarily fraudulent: their silver content is not inferior, and the weights are in between that of the two main groups of secondary phase ‘porcupines’. The find pattern of the various samples of unofficial issues indicates that many were produced in the vicinity of the main official mints, but also further away. Some groups of imitative porcupines seem to be English, and the characteristic design was imitated on types that are certainly English.

The porcupine/stepped cross type

A distinctive group of imitations combines the ‘porcupine’ obverse with a cruciform pattern on the reverse. This porcupine/stepped cross type is, because of the purity of its silver, of primary phase date (695-720). Although its alloy standard is of excellent quality, it does not occur in the English late primary-phase hoards (Aldborough, Alpington, Aston Rowant, Kings Lynn) nor in the Remmerden hoard. It is unlikely, therefore, to have been introduced until at least c. 710. The scale of the issue was c. 600,000 coins. It seems to be continental, not English.
There are a find from Artois, and specimens in an old French collection, the Brussels cabinet and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The matching tally of primary phase 'porcupines' from Belgium and northern France is very limited. Even though the numbers are very small, the ratio is good enough to suppose an attribution of the stepped cross type to perhaps the upper Meuse basin or a coastal wic in Belgium/northern France[^12].

The hexagram type

Two coin types – the hexagram and the interlace pennies – fall iconographically in the borderline between Merovingian deniers and sceattas. Most of the single finds of these types are in the areas where sceattas are predominant, and they are also present in quantity in several large sceatta hoards, but rare in hoards of Merovingian deniers. This is one reason to label them as sceattas. Another is the volume in which they were minted.

There is a sceatta type with a simple obverse design of a six-pointed star composed of two overlapping triangles with a cross in the centre. The reverse shows an untidy picture with radiating strokes around a central cross.

As early as 1859, De Coster considered deniers with a similar obverse and a large A on the reverse (de Belfort 5702) as the prototype. He believed that the star design and the large A referred to the palace of Aristallium (Herstal), a locality now submerged in the outskirts of Liège. This speculative attribution was accepted during a long period, and the sceattas with a six-pointed star were usually indicated as the 'Herstal' type or the 'Star of David' type. The more neutral name 'hexagram' type is to be preferred[^13].

Most sceattas have a diameter of c. 12 mm, but the hexagram coins are struck on broader flans of 14-15 mm. Their average weight is 1.1 g. The silver content ranges between 44-85%; for three die-linked specimens silver contents as disparate as 54 and 75% were reported. Within the group of hexagram sceattas there is hardly evidence for a stylistic development.

The interlace type

In 1610 the Parisian collector P. Pétau (Petavius) was the first to publish a drawing of a sceat. On the obverse it shows a head, and on the other side two interlaced figures forming a quatrefoil knot with groups of dots.[14]

The archaeologist Janssen excavated a coin with an interlace reverse at the location of the ancient trading centre Dorestad. He described the obverse as ‘it seems to depict a basket with a hinge, containing vases … In the middle rises a tree trunk’. The coin illustrated by Pétau was studied by De Longpérier (1858). He interpreted the quatrefoil figure on the reverse as a flower, and he refers to a Merovingian denier with in his opinion also a flower and the legends QVINT.P.P. and Ab bA Ti. He interpreted this as Quintilienus, abbot of Auxerre, and attributed the coin type illustrated by Pétau to that city. De Ponton d’Amécourt (1854) saw a letter T before the bust on some of these coins (illustrated below); he suggested Tongeren as place of origin. In 1868 he changed his opinion, and accepted Auxerre, following De Longpérier. Much better founded is Menadier’s conclusion (1888), based on stylistic analysis and find distribution: he advocated a production in Flanders.[15]

However, this type used to be known as the ‘Maastricht’ type, because of its affiliation to an early Carolingian type with a similar reverse. Gariel (1883) supposed that the letters T R on one of these Carolingian deniers is not a corruption of R F (Rex Francorvm), but an abbreviation of Trajectvm (Maastricht). That the interlace sceattas and Carolingian interlace coins are from the same mint, we need not doubt. However, the attribution of the Carolingian coins to Maastricht is speculative and unconfirmed. It is intriguing that, as well as finds from Belgium, there are numerous finds from the provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland, but not from Limburg province.

There are several variants\cite{16}. The smallest group has a naturalistic right-facing head with a cross and a letter T in front, and forms either the initial issue or a later imitation. On this specimen, and on a few others, the interlace rotates in the opposite direction. This obverse design is reminiscent of the Series G sceattas from Quentovic (illustrated above), and a Merovingian coin from Rouen (de Belfort 6679), apparently types that inspired the die-cutters.

\begin{itemize}
  \item A small group shows a grotesquely degraded left facing head
  \item Another variant with a more stylized left-facing bust is on thin flans, in a delicate style with thin lines, with less pronounced relief
\end{itemize}

The largest group, in all likelihood also the latest, has a bold relief with thick lines and dots. The interlace pattern is rather blunt and clumsy. Zedelius named this style A, and those with thin lines style B. It is uncertain whether these two varieties are successive issues from one mint, or the output of different workshops.

\footnote{Zedelius 1980.}
Besides the main groups of interlace sceattas there are rather irregular specimens, probably privately cast imitations. The average weight is around 1.05 g. The few available metal analyses yielded rather variable silver quantities in the alloy. The only metallurgically examined coin from the initial variant contained 56% silver. Two coins of the second variant (Zedelius B) had 86 and 74% silver. The values for variant Zedelius A range between 42 and 79%. Based on the number of dies used to strike the interlace sceattas the total volume was estimated to be around 4 million coins.

Hoards are important for the determination of the date of production of the various sceatta types, in particular if hoards contain independently dateable coins. Hexagram and interlace coins are not present in any hoard concealed before c. 720; see Table 2.

Table 2 – The presence of hexagram and interlace sceattas in hoards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t.p.q.</th>
<th>Hexagram type</th>
<th>Interlace type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hallum</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodham Walter</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice-Cimiez</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Föhr</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franeker</td>
<td>&gt;755</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

t.p.q. (terminus post quem) is the date of issue of the most recent coin in the hoard; if one can only give a date-range, it is the earliest possible date of issue

The date of issue lies between c. 720-755 or perhaps even later. The hexagram sceattas in the Hallum hoard show signs of wear, and some are die-linked to specimens in the Franeker hoard. Those from the Franeker hoard look almost new, and must have been struck shortly before they entered the hoard. This indicates an extended period of production of at least three or four decades.

The pattern of single finds gives an indication of the place of issue. In general, stray finds are more concentrated around the production site. At first sight, the distribution of finds of the hexagram sceattas (Table 3 and Map 3), and their presence in two hoards found in Friesland (Hallum and Franeker), point in the direction of a mint-place in the Frisian realm. However, there are strong arguments against a Frisian attribution. The secondary ‘porcupines’ minted in Friesland at that time used a completely different design style. What would have been the background of the simultaneous production of two series of sceattas in the same region, with an entirely different design, an average diameter of 14 mm as opposed to 12 mm, and an average weight of 1.10 g and 1.27 g respectively?
Enormous quantities of porcupine sceattas, struck in the Netherlands, were carried to England, as payment for goods which were distributed by Frisian merchants all over Europe. In France and Belgium, a total of 41 secondary-phase porcupines have been found (41% of them in hoards). For England, 523 finds of secondary porcupines are reported (of which 4% in hoards). The ratio secondary porcupines : hexagram sceattas is for England $87 : 2$, and for France : Belgium together $11 : 2$. If the hexagram coins had been from Friesland, one would have expected them to be much more plentiful in England than they actually are.

Based on the limited find information available in 1993, Metcalf concluded that the best guess one can make at their place of origin is the Meuse valley. Five finds from France – although poorly documented – also point to a production more southerly than Friesland. Over all, the hexagram coins behaved more like Merovingian deniers than like Dutch sceattas. The presence of hexagram deniers in the northerly hoards of Hallum, Franeker, and Föhr may be explained in terms of money carried northwards. The best guess that one can at present make is that their mint-place was somewhere in or near modern Belgium. The infrequency of finds from Belgium is not necessarily a counter-argument, but very probable a function of the under-reporting of finds. In 1859 Louis de Coster writes about finds of hexagram coins: “… le denier ou saiga … s’est fréquemment retrouvé le long de la Meuse et en Hollande ; il représente deux triangles enlacés …”[17]. More evidence is desired, preferably from archaeological excavations.

### Table 3 – Single finds of hexagram and interlace sceattas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hexagram type</th>
<th>Interlace type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the interlace type there is less doubt about a Belgian origin. Seven recorded single finds of an elsewhere scarce type on a total of 26 sceattas is quite convincing.

Map 3 – Findspots of hexagram sceattas. Each dot represents one or more finds, hoards as well as single finds.
Map 4 – Findspots of interlace sceattas. Each dot represents one or more finds, hoards as well as single finds.
A group of imitative ‘porcupines’ from Belgium?

An imitative ‘porcupine’ variety – belonging to sub-variety k – shows an obverse with a cartoon-like animal’s mask, and the reverse has a square outlined by unusually numerous, tightly-packed dots. Within the square are T-shaped letters and figures with striking extensions. This sub-variety is from the later part of the secondary phase date (c. 730-740). Finds from Rouen, Cambrai and Namur, from a region with very few finds of porcupine sceattas, could point to an origin in northern France or Belgium [18].

If both the hexagram and interlace type were minted in Belgium – during the same period given the hoard evidence – and not far from each other, imagine for example mints in Namur and Huy, one would expect their distribution in the Netherlands to be comparable.

Table 4 - Provenanced single finds of hexagram and interlace sceattas in the Netherlands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hexagram type</th>
<th>Interlace type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domburg</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westenschouwen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wijk-bij-Duurstede</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other Big Rivers region finds</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern provinces</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is, however, not the case (Table 4): the interlace type is overrepresented in the region of the Big Rivers, and much scarcer in the northern provinces. An explanation could be that the interlace type is from a mint in the course of the Meuse, and reached primarily the Big Rivers region, while the mint of the hexagram type was closer to the North Sea coast or the Schelt, and that this type was transported via Domburg, and from there by coastal shipping further to Friesland. The former attribution of the interlace type to Maastricht by Ernest Gariel was not so bad at all.

Another explanation might be that between 650 and 800 thorough alterations took place in the Frisian mercantile relations \[19\]. The Frankish influence extended to the north, and Dorestad was lost by the Frisians. After c. 740 a recession began, and the Frisian contacts with England and Merovingia declined. During the period 690–740 the number of monetary transactions increased considerably in Domburg and Dorestad, given the numerous coin finds from that period, apparently a reflection of prospering trade. After c. 740 the coin finds near Domburg show a sharp decline, while those at Dorestad steadily increased. If the main part of the hexagram coins dated from before c. 740, and the bulk of interlace sceattas was issued after c. 740, this may explain the strong representation of the latter at Dorestad and the surrounding Big Rivers region. Yet, the occurrence of many hexagram sceattas in the Föhr and Franeker hoards, deposited after 750, does not support this hypothesis.

Discussion

The relatively few recorded sceatta finds in Belgium as compared to the Netherlands (26 \(\div\) 1410) could give the misleading impression that during the 8th century the economic development of the Low Countries was less advanced in the south than more to the north. The difference with the Netherlands is largely caused by two important productive sites, although this is not the whole explanation. On the beaches of Domburg and Westenschouwen – from the 17th century onwards – over 900 sceattas were found \[20\]. Due to erosion and recession of the coastline remains of settlements, graves and coins have been laid bare by the sea. These coins were eagerly collected by local inhabitants. Many came in the hands of local collectors with historical knowledge and interest. At Wijk-bij-Duurstede, the remains of the important trading centre Dorestad have been excavated, and the archaeologists collected some 90 sceattas there \[21\]. Furthermore, the number of recorded coin finds depends on the diligence of finders and coin dealers to report them to the authorities. The Netherlands has one central institution where coin finds can be confidentially reported for determination, if necessary professional cleaning, and registration in the freely accessible numis database on the internet. General historical and archaeological evidence indicates that already in the 8th century the southern Low Countries was the homeland of well-developed and flourishing societies.

Although the number of finds is limited, map 1 and 2 imply that the boundary between the regions where Merovingian deniers and sceattas respectively were the dominant currency is a virtual line from Le Havre to

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\[21\] numis database www.geldmuseum.nl.
Liège/Maastricht. In north-west France and Flanders sceatta finds are evidently more prominent than finds of Merovingian deniers. The monetary dividing line does not seem to follow the political frontier of the spheres of influence of the Franks and the Frisians. This border seems to coincide with the modern language frontier between Wallonia and Flanders. In the region around Dunkirk a French-Flemish dialect was spoken. Is this just accidental, or meaningful?

For the scarcity of sceatta-finds in Belgium two possible reasons come to mind. One, there has been a prolonged failure, ever since the nineteenth century, to record what has been discovered. A find of four sceattas in the river Meuse is mentioned in a letter from Renier Chalon to Jacob Dirks, without any details. In more recent years, the legal restrictions on the use of metal detectors certainly play a role. Or the facts are approximately as they seem to be, namely that hardly any sceattas circulated in the territory of the modern Belgian state, and specifically in the Meuse valley.

If we are inclined towards accepting the second reason, it is because there are published records of quite a good number of (single) finds of gold tremisses in Belgium. From experience elsewhere, in the Netherlands and in England, one would expect finds of sceattas (and Merovingian deniers) to outnumber finds of gold by a factor of between five and ten. Surely, therefore, there should be some mention of finds of silver? An extenuation we can think of is local patriotism, namely that tremisses attracted interest because they named their mint-places, whereas sceattas did not. Depeyrot mentions 14 finds of tremisses of his ten mint-places, from Belgium or nearby (plus two from Domburg, and four from Dronrijp). Four of the 14 are coins of Huy, found at or near Huy, which suggests that monetary circulation tended to be localized. Some of the 14 are in local museums in Belgium, which also hold coins for which no exact provenance is recorded. If sceattas, as well as tremisses, had been found, would they also have entered the collections of these local museums?

As regards Merovingian deniers, just ten provenanced finds in Belgium are on record, again with an emphasis on the Meuse valley. The same locations of finding recur: five are from Namur, two from Huy, one from Liège, and one from Ophoven. So far as is known, however, these deniers were not locally minted.

That brings us to the major perspective for monetary history that this survey can yield. Both the hexagram and the interlace sceattas belong to the secondary phase of sceattas, which began c. 720. They do not occur in primary-phase hoards from the Netherlands; but both are already present in the Hallum hoard (t.p.q. c. 720). And the ‘porcupine’ group with a possible Belgian origin are from the later years of the secondary phase. Ten of the 23 recorded finds of sceattas are of primary date, four of them were struck in

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England, six in the northern Low Countries. Where, then, are the primary-phase silver coins from Belgium? Were the last of the tremisses, in pale gold, followed by several decades between c. 670 and c. 710 when minting was in abeyance? The Merovingian deniers could in principle be from those years, but there is the general problem that they are very difficult to date, and most of them could in fact be contemporary with the secondary phase of the sceattas. Was the resumption of monetary activity in the Meuse valley an off-shoot of the intense activity in the Rhine mouths region, and in particular at Dorestad? Certainly, the commercial links were in that direction, and even beyond, into Friesland, a trend confirmed by the provenances for the early Carolingian deniers, which show a similar pattern of dispersal northwards. But the designs of the sceattas, in particular of the interlace coins (which are surely from the Meuse valley) are distinctive, and not, as one might perhaps have guessed, imitations of the ubiquitous porcupines.

One (not very strong) candidate to fill the gap is in fact the porcupine variant with a ‘stepped cross’ reverse design (Series E, Type 53). Its place of origin is by no means obvious, perhaps the upper Meuse valley or northern France. It is unlikely, however, to have been introduced until at least c. 710. That still leaves a gap of roughly four decades. In those years it seems that the Meuse valley was virtually without domestic (locally produced) coinage, and the same is no doubt true of most of Belgium. During the subsequent phase of Carolingian deniers, coins were produced in twenty Belgian cities.

It is well known that sceattas, of many types, were subject to copying or imitation, and we might return for a moment to our rhetorical question, and ask whether, for example, imitation primary-phase porcupine sceattas could have been minted at Huy, or at Namur. Given the limited number of sceatta finds in the Meuse valley it is not yet possible to formulate even a tentative answer to this question.

Conclusions

In the 8th century the territory of Belgium was divided by the frontier of the regions where Merovingian deniers and sceattas made up the dominant currency. This border seems to coincide with the modern language frontier between Wallonia and Flanders.

The relatively limited number of recorded sceatta finds in Belgium does not contradict that this coin type has played a prominent role in the monetary economy of the southern Low Countries.

The find distribution of the porcupine/stepped cross type and another distinct porcupine/standard sceatta sub-variety could indicate production in Belgium or northern France, although with reserve because this hypoth-

esis is based on a very limited number of find spots. The hexagram sceatta-type (old name: Herstal type, or Star of David type) was probably also minted within the territory of modern Belgium, at a site with easy access to the North Sea. The interlace sceattas (old name: Maastricht type) are relatively frequently found in Belgium, and seem to have been manufactured in the upper Meuse valley.

For the initial phase of the silver currency, from c. 670 to c. 710, we have been unable to find indications of local minting activity.

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