

Elina Screen: *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles*, vols. 65 & 66: *Norwegian Collections, Part I: Anglo-Saxon Coins to 1016* & *Part II: Anglo-Saxon and later British Coins 1016–1279*. Oxford and London: Oxford University Press & Spink and Son, 2013 & 2015. xii+413 & xi+412 pages.

REVIEWED BY JENS CHRISTIAN MOESGAARD

These two substantial volumes publish an impressive 4230 coins struck at the British Isles prior to 1279 and kept in Norwegian Museums. They are volumes 65 and 66 in the *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* (SCBI). Since the publication of volume 1 in 1958 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) this series has under the auspices of the British Academy made thousands of coins kept in public or private collections easily available and thus largely stimulated research into British coins.

It is an invaluable gift for the involved museums to have a fully illustrated and thoroughly worked-through catalogue of their collection. It largely facilitates the everyday work on collection management. One may ask whether in the 21st century, this kind of work should appear on paper. Would an on-line publication do? I am fully aware of the advantages of electronic publishing – possibility of rapid enquiries, possibility of rapid correction of errors and up-dating of references and adding of new material. But printed catalogues also have advantages. A book exists for centuries – but will an on-line publication survive? Not unless considerable effort (and cost) is put in maintaining and updating the formats. Moreover, if a scholar makes a reference to a printed book, one is able to check it in the future. If the reference is to an on-line publication, it will be hard to know what exactly the scholar referred to. Even in the event that the publication is still available, it will have been corrected, up-dated and added to meanwhile. I know that it is possible to make a track-changes function, but I doubt that it is applied systematically. So I think printed catalogues still are necessary, and the British Academy deserves gratitude for keeping up the tradition.

The 4230 coins are kept in 8 museums in Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen, Stavanger, Arendal, Bodø, Stiklestad and Tromsø (vol. I: 1–11). It is quite a challenge to gather information from so many institutions. Fortunately, Elina Screen could draw on preparatory works, in particular that of the former keeper of the Oslo coin collection, Kolbjørn Skaare, and of Professor Peter Sawyer. This has not prevented Screen from examining most of the coins herself, but in a few instances, she had to rely on photos

(f.i. no. 991) and notes of her predecessors. This is also the reason why a few coins are not illustrated (f.i. no. 81).

The *SCBI* format imposes a predefined way of presentation. The core of the books are the 225 plates providing black and white photos of virtually all the coins in scale 1:1 at the right hand page and a short note on the weight, die-axis, mint, moneyer and provenance (find spot and/or earlier owners) of each coin on the left hand page. The coins are in numismatic order, i.e. the conventional sequence combining geography, political evolution and chronology. Substantial introductions on the museums (vol. I: 1–11), the finds (pp. 12–68, 409–410) and the collectors, donors and dealers from whom the coins were obtained (pp. 69–80) set up the frame-work for understanding the material. The metal analyses carried out in 1973 and 1984 on the initiative of Kolbjørn Skaare are also listed (p. 83). Index of mints, moneyers and finds allow for quick enquiries. Volume 2 (pp. 8–9) contains a few “emendations” to volume 1 (the reviewer was happy to see that his reinterpretation of the alleged Norman coins in the Dronningens gate 10 hoard in Trondheim as imitations of unknown origin is mentioned here).

Compared to other volumes of *SCBI*, the two Norwegian volumes stand out. Like in other Scandinavian and Baltic countries the main source of English coins in the Norwegian museum collections is local finds. Indeed, if one looks at English coins from Æthelred II (978–1016) to Harthacnut (1035/1040–1042), they are much more numerous in finds from Scandinavia and the countries around the Baltic Sea than in England itself. This implies that the museums in these countries hold larger collections than many British museums. It is no wonder that no less than 20 volumes of the *SCBI* series concern collections in this region of the world. In addition, Norway has a long tradition of keeping the finds in public collections. In contrast, in some other countries private collectors were allowed to acquire the coins; and even when museums got the finds, they often only retained one specimen of each variety for the systematic collection and then exchanged or sold duplicates. Small unidentifiable fragments were frequently melted in order to recover the silver.

Consequently, Norwegian collections are not only extremely rich in coins from Æthelred II (1752 coins) and Cnut (1657 coins), they also contain many duplicates (f.i. nos. 935–947, 1372–1374, 2046–2047 and 2053–2054). This means that the Norwegian *SCBI* is more comprehensive than f.i. the Danish *SCBI* (volumes 4, 7, 13–15, 18, 22, published 1964–1975) that only present the systematic collection and not the duplicates from the finds. Moreover, Elina Screen has taken the wise decision to include many fragments, even though they are often difficult to identify (f.i. nos. 3502–3510). An additional 411 very small fragments are excluded from the catalogue, but

listed without illustrations in three appendices (vol. II, pp. 354–368). Thus the two volumes are not just a catalogue of selected, nicely struck, well-preserved specimens, but a reflection of what coins really were in Viking-Age Norway. There are fragments, bent coins, cut coins, pecked coins, many common coins etc. It must have been painstaking work to compile it, but it is most welcomed and indeed the major achievement of these volumes. It goes beyond the “collector’s perspective”, based on the individual artefact, to the “archaeologist’s global view” of representativeness and artefacts in context. Nevertheless, one should not forget that not all fragments were broken in the Viking-Age – there are several coins that broke accidentally in the soil or while being recovered (f.i. plate 57) – a phenomenon Screen has herself been a pioneer in studying (see *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad* 2006: 56–61).

The massive inflow of English coins started in the last decade of the 10th century. Probably due to its geographical position, Norway however witnessed a more modest wave of English coins already in the 8th–9th centuries. Some of these coins are published here with photos (nos. 4, 6–8, 23–26, 30). One also notes the efforts put into creating a representative systematic collection of coins of the Viking kingdoms of the Danelaw (nos. 31–65). One is from a Norwegian find (no. 57), and one is on loan from the National Museum of Denmark (no. 63), but the others are from the coin market. Fortunately, many of them have more or less securely documented find provenances from English hoards (cf. vol. I: 53–54). The particular interest in this series is probably due to its link to the Viking heritage common to Norway and England. Several coins were acquired from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, when Vikings were popular as identification for the growing Norwegian patriotism. Another substantial parcel comes from the B. F. Brekke collection. It was bought by the Norwegian Central Bank in 1983 and put on deposit in the Oslo Coin Cabinet (vol. I: 71).

As usual in the *SCBI* series, the extensive list of finds is most useful (vol. I: 12–68). For each find, there is a summary list of content, a short bibliography and a comment, that often summarises the newest research and discussions. The find list is almost up-to-date. Thus finds from 2009 and 2010 – found by metal detectorists – are included (finds 76–77).

A few details in the way of presenting the finds are however confusing. The finds are divided into three categories: “hoards”, “church finds” and “single finds, excavation and grave finds”. The presentation of the hoards is straight-forward: first come 37 hoards from Norway and listed in chronological order (according to the *TPQ* = *terminus post quem*, i.e. the youngest coin in each hoard) (finds 1–37), then follow six English, one Russian and one Belgian hoard (finds 38–45). When it comes to the

church finds (finds 46–49), the *TPQ* is also used, but only for Anglo-Saxon component, which is misleading for the whole find complex from the church floor which often covers several centuries. When there is only one Anglo-Saxon coin (finds 46 and 48 – find 47 contains two coins of identical type), the use of *TPQ* is just a complicated way of indicating the date of the coin. When there are more (find 49), it just becomes meaningless.

The same can be said for the category “single finds, excavation and grave finds” (finds 50–85–86–87 are Swedish finds). Here, the *TPQ* of non Anglo-Saxon coins are sometimes given beside the Anglo-Saxon one, f.i. for the Kaupang finds (find 56). This confuses the reader, as it gives the false impression that the coins were deposited at one single moment. Quite on the contrary, these finds are single finds, being lost (or deposited) one by one over time. So the use of a global *TPQ* should be abandoned (except for hoards in graves which are confusingly included here, see below). Instead one could give the chronological bracket of the coin assemblage or, even better, a count of coins by decade, half century or century.

The category “single finds, excavation and grave finds” is heterogeneous and ought to have been defined better and maybe split into more categories. One stray coin is to be considered as a single find. Several coins found separately on a site, whether during excavation or not, are to be labelled as a series of single finds, unless it can be argued that it is a scattered hoard, f.i. by ploughing. Some numismatists quite confusingly consider a series of single finds as a separate category “cumulated find”, but Screen rightly avoids this. However to regard grave finds as a distinct group is problematic. One coin in a grave (f.i. find 52) is to be labelled as a single find with a particular interpretation, namely of being grave goods. Several coins in a grave (f.i. find 53) should be seen as a hoard with the same particular interpretation of being grave goods. Thus these “grave hoards” ought to have listed in the “hoards” category. If one insists on regarding hoards and single finds in graves as group of its own, they should at the least be separated from the single and excavation finds.

I think that the reader will agree with me that it is a symptom of the high quality of the two volumes that the only substantial critique I have been able to find are details in presentation of the – after all subordinate – find lists!

I had the luck in June 2015 to visit the Viking-Age rooms of the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo that will soon be dismantled for rearrangement. My interest was captured by the find of coins in the excavation of Vesle Hjerkinn in Dovre parish. Beside a nice model of the site, the finds were exhibited, among them several coins from the 11th–13th centuries and metal mounts from purses. The site was presented as a hostel for kings, pilgrims and other travellers on the track passing the mountain

from Gudbrandsdalen to Trøndelag, i.e. one of the most important roads in Norway. Put otherwise, a place where people meet and trade and loose coins. Screen also mentions this find, as an Anglo-Saxon penny was found there (no. 3500). However, she quotes the interpretation of the place as a royal residence (find 73). So what is right? Who lost the coins? Ordinary pilgrims, traders and travellers? Or the king's men? The answer is important in the ongoing debate on the role and importance of coins in medieval Norway.

Thus the huge material made available by *SCBI* 65 & 66 will stimulate curiosity and research. Screen has herself shown the path by drawing on this material for studies on "The Norwegian Coin Finds of the Early Viking Age" (*Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift* 2003–2005 (2008): 93–121) and "Currency Conversion: Coins, Christianity and Norwegian Society in the Late Tenth and Eleventh Centuries" (In *Early Medieval Monetary History: Studies in Memory of Mark Blackburn*. Farnham-Burlington 2014: 349–376).

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