

## THE BRUSSELS HOARD – THE LARGEST MIEVEAL COIN HOARD IN EUROPE

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### Introduction

The Brussels hoard is by any standard the largest discovery of medieval silver coins ever in terms of numbers, weight and, probably more important for the owners of these coins in medieval Brabant, also the value. But it is not only the largest medieval hoard as such, it is also the largest ever find of Flemish and English medieval coins. And even more, it is also the largest find of Flemish and English silver from the Middle Ages, and also then, the largest discovery of precious metal.



*Sterlings from the hoard*

Thus this hoard represents a truly unique source of evidence for the study of medieval coin series in specific and monetary and economic history from the Middle Ages in general.

The Brussels hoard contained approximately 150,000 penny-sized silver coins from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century found in the very centre of the town in 1908.<sup>1</sup> The general accepted date for the deposition of the hoard is c. 1265, or certainly not later than 1268. The great number of coins was roughly divided in two portions; one of nearly 70,000 local Flemish pennies and one of approximately 83,500 English sterlings, these sterlings almost all of one type, the so called Long Cross-type introduced with the recoinage in 1247. Today less than 20,000 of the Flemish pennies and a large part, but not all of the English sterlings are believed to be in existence. The lion's share of the Flemish material seems to have disappeared, as in being melted down, most probably in the 1910s and 1920s. A portion of the English material has at one or several occasions been melted down, I have not been able to establish an exact figure, but a guestimate would be that one quarter or more of the sterlings no longer exist.

In 2003 a parcel of some 10,000 sterlings was acquired by the company Samlerhuset AS in Norway and Nordic Monetæ in Sweden and Finland. In this context the coins were made available for study. From a scientific point of view studies of the Irish, Scottish and Continental imitations elements have been published, but for the main group of these sterlings, the English Long Cross-sterlings, a number of scholars have worked on them, but the share size of this hoard has, so far, made the task overwhelming. The classification of the Long Cross-type, as we still use it, rests mainly on *L.A. Lawrence's studies*, "The Long Cross coinage of Henry III and Edward I", published in the *British Numismatic Journal* in 1912, 1913 and 1914. Mr. Lawrence divided the type into eight major classes and defined several sub-classes in each. The most complex and long-lasting class 5 was divided into eight sub-classes. This scheme is still valid today.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s a Mr. Roger Davies developed a more detailed classification based on his extensive studies of the massive English elements in the Brussels hoard.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Davies published little, but distributed his views on these coin series in a privately produced booklet. These results were later made available in the much-used hand-

<sup>1</sup> An extensive summary of the coins in the hoard is published in Aimé Haeck, *Middeleeuwse muntschatten gevonden in België (750-1433)*, Brussels 1996, 107-117.

<sup>2</sup> From a historiographical perspective it is important to establish that Mr. Lawrence had the opportunity to study the coins from the Brussels hoard, at least partly. It is clear that Mr. Albert Henry Baldwin, the man who bought the English parcel from Brussels hoard, was a member of the British Numismatic Society's council in the years 1905-1908. In the very same years Mr. Lawrence served as president of the society, from 1904 to 1908. Mr. Lawrence continued as the vice president of the society from 1909 to 1917, and thereafter on and off as vice president and council member until his death in 1949. Both Baldwin and Lawrence had been among the founding members of the Society, in 1903, and thereafter leading members throughout their lives (respectively 1936 and 1949). These two gentlemen did know each other well and must be considered two of the most prominent members of the British Numismatic establishment in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Davies, Class II coins of the Long Cross coinage 1247-1250, *BNJ* 47 (1977), 138-141.

book of J.J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, vol. I and II, (3<sup>rd</sup> editions 1994). All of this has been incorporated into a very useful guide to the identification of the Long Cross coins, titled *The Voided Long-Cross Coinage 1247-1279, Henry III and Edward I. An illustrated guide to identification* (Herne Bay 1993) by Mr. Christopher Wren.



*Exhibition of the hoard in the Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo in 2004*

Even though several scholars have studied material from the Brussels hoard, the lack of a definite publication has since long been awaited by scholars with interest in medieval numismatics. Since more than ten years two English gentlemen, Ron Churchill and Bob Thomas in London, have been working on the parcel of English coins in the Brussels hoard. Their study is very much about to be finalised, and it will contain new suggestions and additions to the classifications of the large issues of English Long Cross pennies dated after 1247, and will thus constitute an important contribution to British numismatics of the medieval period.<sup>4</sup>

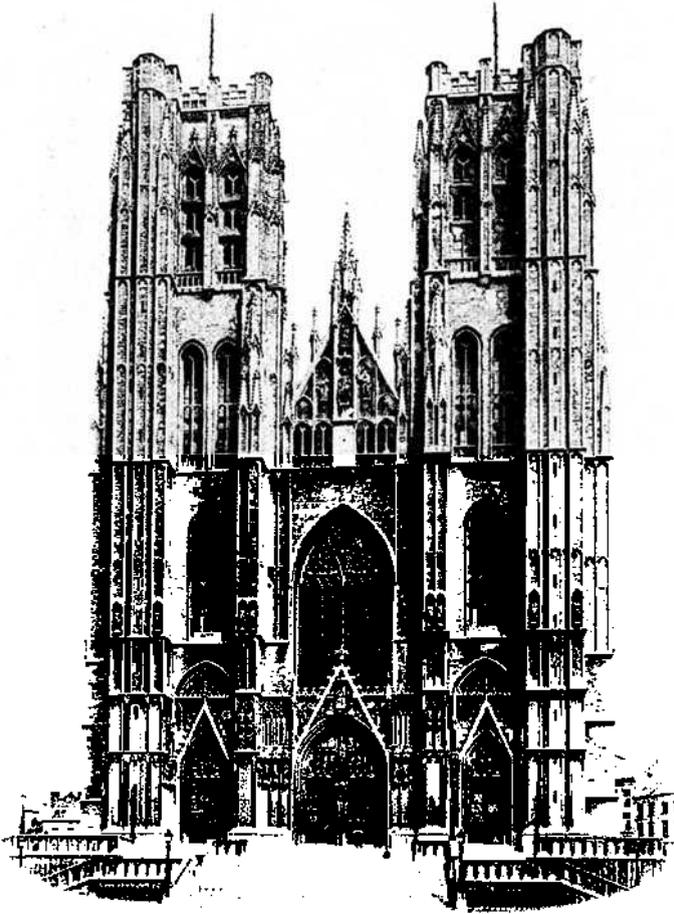
For research purpose, the number of coins in this hoard has made any attempt to create a corpus of these coins, including images of each coin, a mere impossibility. Today, as a result of the revolution in electronic databases, storage and image handling, this is now a question to be reconsidered, and will be so below.

### **The Brussels Hoard – The find spot**

What happened in Brussels in July 1908 was that workmen demolishing an old tavern in the *Rue d'Assaut* (called *Stormstraat* in Flemish) found some 150,000 penny-sized silver coins under a *cistern* in the kitchen at the back of the house.

<sup>4</sup> Ron Churchill, letter in *Numismatic Circular*, February 1994, 7.

Unfortunately, today the possibility for further investigations of the find spot is rather unlikely to gain any results. The part of *rue d'Assaut*, in which the hoard was found, was demolished as late as in 1976 due to construction of a new metro line. Anyone who wants to visit the find spot is probably going to be disappointed, as I was the first time I went there. Today it is covered with tarmac and concrete, partly under the crossing between *rue d'Assaut* and *Boulevard de Berlaimont*, and partly under the south-west corner of the *Belgian National Bank*. Friends of Brussels will recognise this as being in the very centre of the town; with the *Grand Place* and *The Central Station* a few blocks away, and just a few meters down from the *Brussels cathedral*.



*The Brussels cathedral*

In the Middle Ages, or more precisely, in the 1260<sup>ies</sup>, the situation was very different. When the hoard was deposited, the house in which it was hidden, was situated just inside the north-eastern part of the city wall, not far from the main route to *Liege*. Just outside the city wall from where the hoard was found, a nunnery was producing linen for sale. And within a radius of less than 500 meters the cattle market, the

timber market and the hay market were organised in the Middle Ages. In the later Middle Ages this was a part of town very much inhabited by priests and clergy, not a surprise considering the cathedral being nearby.

The location of this enormous sum of money in the middle of the commercial and ecclesiastical environment in Brussels is important when trying to answer or rather speculate about questions like “What was the money for”, “*Who was the owner, or rather owners of these coins*” and “*What were all these English sterling doing in Brussels*”.

### **What was the money for?**

There was nothing strange about hiding away coins and treasures in the ground in the Middle Ages. What is peculiar is that no one went back and recovered such a large sum of money. The consequence being that to recover such a grand sum of medieval money in modern times is, indeed, very rare, even unique. The obvious question, the reason for someone to hide away a huge number of English and Continental silver coins in the heart of Brussels in the 1260<sup>ies</sup>, is a question on which one can only speculate. An obvious reason would be to provide the coins in a safe place with a clear intention of bringing them to light when needed, *but needed for what?* In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Brussels was emerging as a centre for trade and finance in Northern Europe. As a major producer of cloth Brussels attracted merchants from all over Europe. And occasionally the Papal tax collectors in Scandinavia went to Flanders to deliver their money harvest to Italian bankers who exchange them for bills of exchange then brought to the Papal See in Rome (and later also Avignon).

As for the English coins peaceful activity like trade had an alternative in war and military operations, and also robbery and hostage taking. The continuous military initiatives in Continental Europe came to be a drain of resources for the English State in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Large numbers of troops and mercenaries fighting in France demanded payment in sterling. This made transfers of money over the Channel quite usual as in transfers of sterling coins. The transfer of large payments of money from England to the Continent was not a new invention. An illustration of this is the ransom paid for Richard the Lionheart in 1192. On his way back from the Third Crusade, Richard was captured by Leopold, duke of Austria, and was subsequently transferred to The Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI (1169-1197), who levied a ransom of 100,000 pounds on the English people. This enormous sum was transferred from England to the Continent partly in the form of large numbers of silver sterling.

One hypothesis is that the money formed a part in ecclesiastical economy. It is to be connected to the building of the cathedral which had started in 1222, some decades before the coins were abandoned. The local coinage and international currency would be needed to buy goods and services to keep the building process going ahead. The location just a few meters away from the construction place and within an area of ecclesiastical institutions would have been very useful when making payments related to the building of the cathedral, and such a project is one of the few in medieval Brussels that would have needed such a large sum of money.

In the same way as gold coins later came to be used, the English sterling represented an international currency, and, in a Brussels hoard context, the small Flemish pennies represent the local currency at the time. Anyone with the financial power and operations in Flanders would be ready to invest in a large sum of such coins. If not an international banker maybe one or several merchants, Italian bankers or an ecclesiastical institution was the owner of the treasure.

Again, it might not be that the coins that were buried in the *rue d'Assaut* reflected one financial transaction. Another possibility is that the container or, maybe more plausible, containers, might have been used as a treasure chest for a wealthy family, merchants or a powerful institution. In that context the hiding place for this treasure might have been a place that was consulted when large sums of money went in and out of the treasure. The possibilities are many, and we can only speculate, but such speculations are often the starting point for important investigations and results in historical research, so it should, in principle, not only be confined to museum and university staff, and most certainly be encouraged rather than abandoned.

Having said that, I must emphasise that whatever hypothesis that are put forward, the question why no one recovered this enormous sum of money remains to be answered. One should think that many or at least several people would have known about such a chest of money, and for anyone not to be able to recover that sort of money must have meant a serious loss indeed. This is of course the case in question not only for the Brussels hoard, but for all hoards. What makes the Brussels hoard different, is the sheer size and contemporary value.

## Container

As we are trying to understand the nature and bearing of the Brussels hoard, there are several specific questions to consider. One of them is the question of what were the coins kept in, i.e. was it one or several bronze chauldrons, one or several wooden chests, ceramic vessels, or something else? There is no evidence for containers of any sort having survived. The only source I have come across that has said something about this matter, is an article presenting the sale of the hoard in the weekly newspaper *Belgian Gazette* addressing English people in Brussels. In an article on the hoard the journalist stated that the coins were kept in bronze containers, but only dust from these containers was left.<sup>5</sup> During my studies of these coins I have come across a few examples with remains of what clearly look like iron dust on their surface. I am still awaiting proper analysis of these coins, but as a preliminary report I am inclined to say that the containers in which these coins were kept must partly have been made of iron. As I have handled some 10,000 of these coins I can assure you that only a few have traces of iron attached to them. This also explains the fact that the container mentioned in the newspaper article being dust. If the container had been made of bronze, the excellent preservation of many of the coins does indicate that the container also would have been intact, or at least partly intact. If the container, on the other hand, was partly made of iron, as for example one or several barrels with iron fittings, the traces of dust observed make a good reason.

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<sup>5</sup> *Belgian Gazette*, Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November 1909

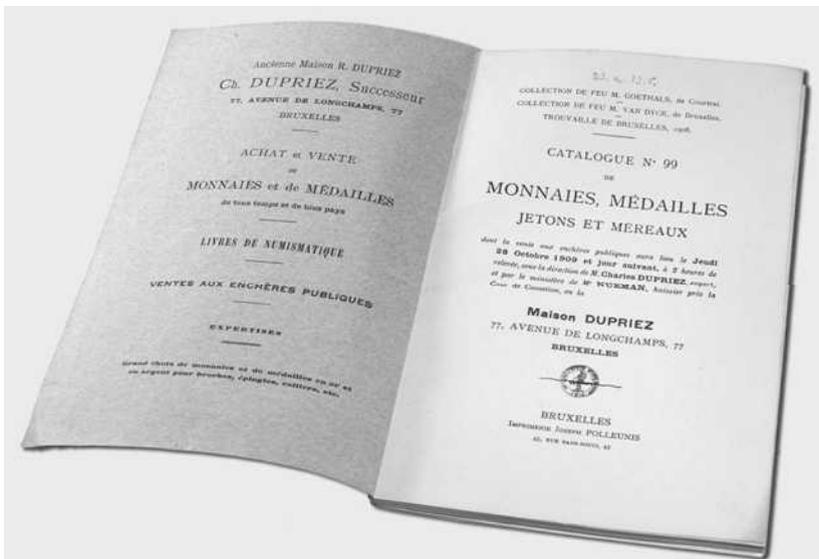


The answer to this is to be found in the treasure trove laws at the time. According to the law, treasure trove was the property of the owner of the soil upon which it was found. In this case, the owner of the tavern, one *Mr. Coenegracht*, put the whole hoard up for auction organised by the coin dealer *Charles Dupriez* in Brussels, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1909. While the local Flemish coins added up to approximately 70,000 specimens divided on a number of lots, the British parcel of 80,927 coins was sold as one lot to *Mr. Albert Henry Baldwin*, the prominent English coin dealer.

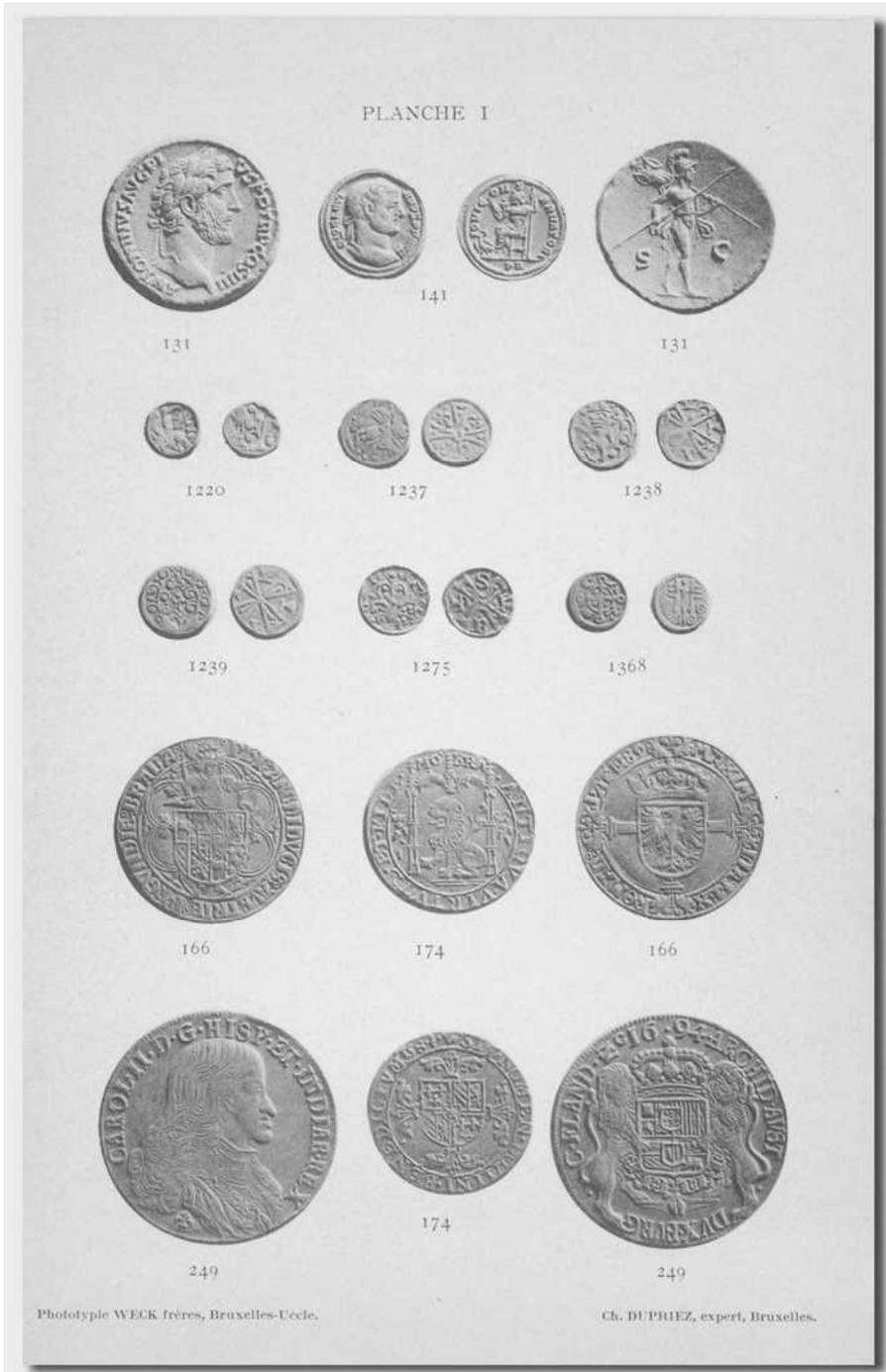
There is no doubt what so ever that this was considered an exceptional collection of coins. The English parcel was presented as the last number in the auction, *lot no. 1,372*. And even though there has been sold some very grand coins and collections of coins through the years, this must be considered one of the most, if not the most spectacular ever to be sold in the history of numismatics. In the catalogue the conservation of the sterlings are described as *excellent, very fine, fine, and not so good*. The sterling-lot was knocked down at 15,250 Belgian francs (*Francs Belges*), plus 10 % commission, in total 16,775,-

As for the auction, the story is told that the English coin dealer *Mr. Albert Henry Baldwin* was almost the sole bidder for the sterling parcel, since other possible English bidders, as a *Mr. Carlyon-Britton* and the scholar *Mr. Lawrence*, who as we have heard, later published a detailed study of medieval English coins, were both delayed by fog in the English Channel.

The mythology surrounding this hoard has grown with the passing years. Accordingly, some coins were stolen from the hoard shortly after discovery. *Mr. Baldwin*, determined to collect all the British sterlings, was a few months later able to gather more than 2,000 stray coins among antiquity dealers in Brussels and Antwerp. In the 1960<sup>ies</sup> a group of some thousand coins was illegitimately removed from *Baldwin's* premises in London. Quite a few, but not all, were recovered by the Scotland Yard in the north of England, and mostly returned to the owner.



*Auction catalogue of Dupriez 1909*



*The six pennies, no. 1220-1368, were the only coins from the Brussels Hoard that were illustrated in the Dupriez-catalogue no. 99, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1909, plate I.*

## A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd

It is clear that when Albert Henry Baldwin travelled across The Channel at the age of fifty, he was already an established and well-known coin dealer. He was born in 1858 at a small town in Gloucestershire, north-west of London. His interest in coins began at an early age, and his numismatic career can be traced back to 1872, when he is thought to have made his first coin deal when still a schoolboy. After having moved to London in 1881, he worked as a schoolteacher for the next twenty years. His involvement with coins continued, and in his early forties he began to issue detailed lists of coins for sale. In 1901, he left teaching and set up a coin and medal shop together with his eldest son, Percy. The firm has since then been in the family, and today it is very much a part of the British and international numismatic scene with offices and regular auctions in Hong Kong, Singapore, Sydney, New York and London. It is now run by Edward Baldwin, grandson of Albert Henry.



*Albert Henry Baldwin*

The enthusiasm for the subject has been an important part of the Baldwin reputation. Albert Henry Baldwin was one of the founding members of British Numismatic Society – present at the inaugural meeting on St. Andrew's Day, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1903. He was member of the society's council in the years 1905-1908, 1912 and again in 1914.<sup>7</sup> In the post-First World War years a regular gathering were organised at Baldwin's on Saturday mornings. At these gatherings, that came to be known informally as *The Saturday Morning Club*, friends met to discuss problems of mutual interest, to consult the firm's library, and to look at coins. It was an unwritten rule of the *Club* that nobody was expected to buy on a Saturday – and, indeed, it is said that it was rather a matter of surprise if anyone tried to do so. Instead, if anyone became interested in a particular piece, the usual way of conducting business was to pay Baldwin's a visit the following Monday.

Since the Baldwin family for a large part has retained control of these sterling for nearly a century, one can ask what was his motivation for buying this extremely large parcel of medieval coins in the first place.

Quite apart from the mythologies surrounding the history of these coins, the sheer size of the hoard is genuinely important. Every hoard represents a sample of the currency from which it was drawn, and larger samples naturally have a better chance of being properly representative. The Brussels hoard is certainly the largest and therefore most authoritative sample of medieval currency we have. It provides an invaluable guide to rarity, and allows us to judge the proportions of different mints

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Pagan, Members of the British Numismatic Society 1903-2003, *BNJ* vol. 73 (2003), 216

and issues in the currency as a whole. Finally it provides unforgettable evidence for the use of English coins on the mainland of Europe in very large quantities. All important issues presumably appreciated by Mr. Albert Henry Baldwin when he bought the coins in 1909.

This was also, most probably, the reason why these coins were kept more or less as one group for many years. Apart for a few well established collectors in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, who were allowed to *cherriepick* complete sets of coins from different mints and moneyers, only small parcels were dispersed of these coins. Eventually, several of the most important collections of English medieval coins formed in that period contained a set of Brussels hoards coins when put up for auction (in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s).

### **The Sterling – The English coin that became a European currency**

The question of the sterling's role in the *monetary history, economy and society* at the time is important not only to understand the Brussels hoard, but also for placing the Brussels hoard in a wider context.

In the introduction to his book *Sterling – The Rise and Fall of a Currency*, professor Nicholas J. Mayhew, keeper of Heberden Coin Room at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, says that “Perhaps more than any other European currency, the sterling has had an almost religious role in the nation’s life and its continued health or indeed survival is something about which many people care deeply. Like an underground stream which rarely comes to the surface but which nevertheless irrigates all of the countryside through which it flows, sterling runs through the history of Britain, from the Conquest up to the present day. From its modest beginnings through its world dominance, sterling has created and destroyed fortunes, impoverished or enriched whole sections of the country and has made or unmade monarchs and governments”.



*Sterling, scale 2/1*

On one side this is a very vivid and colourful description of a currency, on the other it is precise in the way that it underlines the important consequences a stable or unstable currency could have, and indeed also had, in states of the past.

English money has been known from at least the late 11<sup>th</sup> century until the present day as ‘sterling’. The same name also came to mean the alloy of the English silver

coinage – 92.5 % pure silver. However, its origin is not known with certainty, though it is probably related to old Anglo-Saxon words meaning strong or stable. By the thirteenth century the reputation of the currency was so good that sterling came to be synonymous with reliability and high value. By that time merchants all over Northern Europe were ready to accept them because they were always struck of good metal to the right weight. It was a reputation the sterling currency retained for seven centuries – until after the Second World War.

Since the ninth century most of Europe operated a monetary system based on silver pennies. Twelve pennies made a solidus or shilling, and twenty shillings or 240 pennies made a pound. Very quickly the amount of silver in these pennies began to fall, but the rate of decline varied from place to place in Europe. The pennies in England changed less than elsewhere, so already by the late eleventh century English pennies were worth more than French, Italian, Flemish, Danish and Norwegian ones.

From king Henry II in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (1154-89) until the reign of king Edward III in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (1327-77) the English sterling weighed about 1,44 grams of silver 92.5 % pure. This percentage of pure metal was consistently maintained until the twentieth century – only king Henry VIII in the 16<sup>th</sup> century debased the coin. This stability became a trademark of the ‘sterling’ to the degree that it came to be applied both to the currency and to silver bullion or plate of this purity.

To understand why the English coinage remained so pure, when most other currencies in Europe declined, we need to think first about where the silver came from. Apart from small mines in Devon, Derbyshire and Cumbria, England herself mined relatively little silver. The metal supply for the sterling coinage came instead from Continental Europe, and it was brought to England chiefly by merchants wishing to buy English wool. Thus the strength of the medieval English currency depended on the strength of English exports, just as today any nation’s currency is strengthened by a healthy balance of trade.

Continental merchants brought silver to England and did so in huge quantities. Mint accounts show that the mints of London and Canterbury regularly struck around 20,000 pounds worth (equivalent to 4,800,000 pennies) every year through most of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Two or three times each century the entire nation’s coinage was ordered to be melted down and re-struck with new designs, and then as much as 1,000,000 pounds (or 240,000,000 pennies) was struck within a decade.

The reason for these recoinages is to be found in that coins became worn in ordinary



*Odd and clipped sterlings*

use and were sometimes clipped, meaning that people clipped small pieces of silver from the edge of the coins, a practice very much illegal. After twenty or thirty years 240 pennies weighed significantly less than the 350 grams they were suppose to weigh. Since the King also took a tax on coin struck in his mints, the decision to recoin a worn currency, not only replaced worn coins with new ones of full weight, it also made significant profits for the King.

For a population at the time of about *five million* people, the large mint outputs represented a lot of money. Like any export-led boom today, easy money boosted the economy, but also raised prices. And regarding prices, the price of wheat roughly doubled between the beginning of the thirteenth century and the end.

During the early years of King Henry III (1216-1272), the mint began to strike halfpennies and farthings as well as pennies. Although these smaller coins do not seem to have been struck in large numbers, and are extremely rare today, they are important since they indicate awareness on the part of the government that a smaller denomination was required. As well as government action to provide a smaller denomination, the people themselves simply cut pennies into halves and quarters as they were required. These fractions occur as stray finds all over England in quite large numbers, indicating that the need for them was real. Since a loaf of bread commonly cost a farthing at this time, it is not surprising that people wanted coins that were smaller than a penny. This development also provides evidence that people were buying their daily requirements with coin more and more frequently. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the market was genuinely monetised. That was also partly the case in the countryside where peasants became increasingly more conscious of their money. By the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century there can be no doubt that money was very widely used. Everyone must have used coins at least a few times a year, and many people will have handled it almost daily.

### **Imitations of Sterlings**

The Brussels hoard also provides evidence of mints in mainland Europe striking imitations of English sterling. Sterling was welcome on the continent, but it was expensive to buy in England. The foreign exchange rate reflected the good weight and metal of English coin, and its reliability and convenience as a standard of unvarying reliability, and the constant demand for sterling created by the desirability and expense of English wool. It did not take too long for merchants in Germany to realise that they could make sterling more cheaply in German mints, than in English where the king and the moneyers also took their cut. It is estimated that the Brussels hoard could contain as many as 4,000 sterlings from dies of unofficial work.

At first it seems to have been almost enough for the copying mints to strike coins of good weight and metal, equal to the genuine article, the purpose being to acquire sterling without paying English mint charges or travelling to England. Very soon, however, the opportunity for further profit was recognised. Considerable savings could be made if the imitations were made a little lighter or of slightly less pure silver. Eventually the appearance and the metal content of the imitations were so poor that they could be picked out of a pile of genuine coins without difficulty.

This gradual decline in the quality of imitation does seem to have been broadly chronological. The earliest copies seem to have been those struck in the name of the Saxon hero Videkind at the Lippische mint in Blomberg. But Blomberg also struck more accurate copies, which are only betrayed by minor divergence from the English coins. Lippe in Northern Germany seems to have established itself as the headquarters of the production of sterling imitations in the 1250s. The neighbouring counts of Schwalenberg and Ravensberg were also striking imitations.

Later in the century the focus of imitation shifts to the North, where a small fief on the coast of Netherlands, Zuiderzee, dominates production in the 1280s. Here the Long Cross type was continued to be struck after the type had been replaced in England. The continued production of imitations of a type no longer acceptable in England is clear evidence of the popularity of these coins along the North Sea and Baltic coasts.

In Scandinavia the only coins to be issued on English model in the 13<sup>th</sup> century were Norwegian pennies in the name of Magnus Lawmaker (1263-1280) and his son Eirik Magnusson (1280-1299). Especially the pennies issued in the years c.1280-1285, resembles careful imitations of contemporary sterlings of the new type introduced in England in 1279. Contrary to the English sterlings Norwegian coinage was heavily debased and never intended for use outside Norway. All the same, the sterling enjoyed a strong reputation, always a valuable asset for a new currency.

In terms of sheer scale the Brussels hoard stands alone as conclusive evidence of the association of sterling with Flemish and Brabantine coin on a huge scale.

Almost 400 different hoards containing English pennies of Edward I and II have been found on the Continent, stretching from Bordeaux to the Baltic, while the earlier pennies of Henry II and III have been found as far south as the Balkans and the Greek isles. The Venetian merchant who reported a theft in 1225 did not only include Venetian grossi and pennies, but also 60 English sterlings among other coins. This is a typical example of how sterlings had become an integral part of the international monetary scene.

In the North Sea and Baltic area the sterling established itself quickly as the major currency in early Hanseatic trade. Over 100 separate finds of medieval sterling are known from Scandinavia. From customs rolls it is clear that merchants from Brandenburg exported English sterlings from Hamburg to buy cloth in Flanders. In Norway values of land were often expressed in English sterlings and payments also made in such.

Medieval English sterling was thus a currency that was widely accepted across much of Europe. From a modern perspective there is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that the sterling now remains outside the euro zone, when it was actually one of the earliest currencies to enjoy widespread international acceptance across the continent. Of course currencies and fashions change, and by the nineteenth century, when sterling enjoyed widespread acceptance across the whole world, its usual international form was the gold sovereign rather than the silver penny. But the idea of an international currency, which combined a highly reliable intrinsic metal content together with a dominant trading position, was very similar to the sterling's role in the Middle Ages.

## Scandinavian hoards – a comparison

In the introduction of this article, I compared the Brussels hoard with English hoards from the same period. This made it clear that the parcel of English coins in the Brussels hoard was roughly six times larger than the largest English hoard. If we make a similar comparison between the Brussels hoard and large hoards in Scandinavia in general, the largest Norwegian hoard contains some 5,000 coins, the largest Swedish some 21,500, and the largest Danish hoard, the Kirial treasure, which is one of Europe's largest, contained approximately 81,500 coins from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Brussels hoard contained nearly two times as many coins as the largest Scandinavian hoard from the Middle Ages. If we compare the weights of the two hoards, due to more solid coins, the Brussels hoard is more than four times as large, and a comparison that takes the silver quality into consideration, the Brussels hoard proves to be more than eight times as large as the largest Scandinavian hoard.

## The small hoards

As for hoards in general I have since a few years argued that the size and importance of coin hoards as evidence for understanding of economies in past societies according to the size of the hoards, as for example medieval society, is to a large extent overvalued. When archaeologists and numismatists discuss how to classify coin finds, they usually end up defining two-three coins found together as a hoard. In this case a hoard meaning coins put away intentionally. One can of course argue that two-three coins found together could have been perfectly well a result of coincidence. More important in this context is that most hoards registered contain less than a couple of hundred coins, in other words represents rather small sums of money compared to what comes to light in contemporary documentary sources. Even though medieval documentary sources give evidence for coins and money being used in large sums and numbers and research in recent year has been more aware of the documentary evidence for coinage and monetary history, the attraction of hoards and treasure is well established, and thus the hoards are often presented as evidence for the use of coins and monetary importance, even though most of them cannot be said to contain sums which had a bearing on the economy. If we return to the Brussels hoard, this is one of the few coin hoards that actually accounts for large sums of medieval money.

## Concluding remarks

If we are to take a broad perspective on Medieval coinage, it is fair to say that the developments of states in the Middle Ages made European rulers in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century systemise the minting of coins, thereby enhancing their power, enriching their treasuries, and providing a more reliable medium of exchange.

As money was in general use, the need for security led more and more medieval people to hide their valuables in the ground. This practice is not only confirmed by the large numbers of hoards being discovered, but also a large body of documentary sources. In most cases the owners of these treasures recovered them, but in some instances the owners, for unknown reasons, never returned, and it is hoards like

these that provide us with the archaeological and numismatic evidence for the study of past societies. These hoards represent unique and valuable sources for study of, in this case, medieval numismatics monetary history, economic history, social history in particular and the society in general. As I already have mentioned, of all the many thousand medieval hoards that has been discovered during the years, the Brussels hoard was, and still is, the largest medieval coin find ever.

## Bibliography

This article has been written with the starting point in a book about the Brussels Hoard and the sterling parcel in this hoard: Svein H. Gullbekk and Nicholas J. Mayhew, *Sølvskatten fra Brussel – det største funnet av middelaldermynt i Europa*, Oslo 2004, 60 pp. (Norwegian edition), Brysselin Hopea-Aare – kaikkien aikojen suurin keskiaikaisten rahojen löytö Euroopassa (Finnish edition, 2004) and *Silverskatten från Bryssel – det största fyndet av medeltida mynt i Europa* (Swedish edition, 2004) and lectures on the topic presented at the Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo and one scheduled in Helsinki, but which was cancelled due to strike among airport staff in Oslo in July 2004.

Ron Churchill, letter in *Numismatic Circular*, February 1994, 7.

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## Executive Summary – Korte Inhoud

### De Muntschat van Brussel: de grootste middeleeuwse muntschat in Europa

*De Brusselse muntschat is de grootste muntschat ooit, zowel in termen van aantal stukken als in termen van gewicht en in termen van waarde in het middeleeuwse Brabant. Naast het feit van de grootste middeleeuwse muntschat is deze schat tevens de grootste vondst ooit van Vlaamse en Engelse middeleeuwse zilverstukken. De schat bevatte zowat 150.000 zilveren stukken van het type “penning” (denier) daterend van vóór 1265 en werd gevonden in het centrum van Brussel in 1908 bij afbraakwerken in de Stormstraat in de keuken achteraan een huis. Rond de jaren 1260 bevond de vindplaats zich net binnen de stadswallen niet ver verwijderd van de weg naar Luik en niet ver weg van de Grote Markt en de kathedraal in aanbouw.*

*Ongeveer 70.000 stukken waren Vlaamse denieren en ongeveer 83.500 stukken waren Engelse sterlings van het “lange kruis” type. Vandaag blijven er minder dan 20.000 Vlaamse denieren over en zijn, op een kwart na, alle Engelse sterlings nog steeds intact. Men neemt aan dat het leeuwendeel van de Vlaamse stukken werd hermolten in de jaren 1910 en 1920.*

*De stukken werden geveild op 28 oktober 1909 door Charles Dupriez: de 70.000 Vlaamse stukken werden aangeboden in verschillende loten terwijl de Engelse stukken één enkel lot vormden dat werd aangekocht door de heer A.H. Baldwin, gereputeerd Brits numismaat, voor 15.250 goudfrank plus 10 % commissieloon. A.H. Baldwin blijkt de enige bidder geweest te zijn. De auteur besteedt verder aandacht aan het levensverhaal van de heer Baldwin.*

*In 2003 werd een lot van ongeveer 10.000 sterlings aangekocht door een Skandinavische maatschappij: deze stukken worden nog steeds bestudeerd en het grote volume maakt dat deze taak erg omvattend is. Een publicatie hierover is nog onderweg.*

*De auteur tracht te antwoorden op de hamvraag: wie was de eigenaar van de stukken en wat deden deze stukken in de Stormstraat? Het juiste antwoord vinden is pure speculatie maar de auteur verwijst ondermeer naar de bouw van de kathedraal die werd aangevat in 1222, jaren voor de schat werd afgesloten (1265). Ook de samenstelling roept vragen op; de auteur wijst in de richting van continue militaire initiatieven op het continent waar de vraag naar Engelse sterlings groot was teneinde troepen en huurlingen te betalen in Frankrijk. Sterlings hadden nu eenmaal de*

reputatie van “goed” geld. Misschien was een internationale bankier of een kerkelijk instituut de eigenaar. Voor de auteur is de vraag waarom deze enorme geldhoeveelheid niet is opgehaald een intrigerende vraag aangezien hij er van uitgaat dat meer dan één persoon op de hoogte moet geweest zijn van deze grote hoeveelheid geldstukken. De bijna perfecte toestand van bewaring duidt op de aanwezigheid van een “container” waarin de stukken werden bewaard; een spoor van deze “container” is echter niet gevonden.

In de 13<sup>de</sup> eeuw was de sterlingreputatie zó goed dat sterling synoniem was van “betrouwbaar en van hoge waarde”. De auteur vindt het ironisch dat juist vandaag de Engelse munt buiten de Europese zone blijft terwijl in de 13<sup>de</sup> eeuw en in decennia later de sterling gold als een echte Europese sterke munteenheid. Van koning Henry II in de 2<sup>de</sup> helft van de 12<sup>de</sup> eeuw tot Edward III in het midden van de 14<sup>de</sup> eeuw behield de sterling zijn gewicht van 1,44 gr en zijn zuiverheidsgraad van 92,5 %.

In die tijd waren in Engeland slechts enkele zilverbijlen actief en kwam het zilver via import van uit het continent in Engeland; handelaars in wol brachten het zilver mee en dus was de sterkte van de Engelse munt gerelateerd aan de sterkte van de Engelse export. De auteur ziet in de grote hoeveelheid munten o.m. het bewijs dat in de 13<sup>de</sup> eeuw de gewone mens vaak betaalde met zilveren munten voor allerlei producten en diensten en dat het gebruik van munten zeer verbreid was.

De auteur concludeert dat het normaal was voor de middeleeuwse mens, omwille van veiligheidsredenen, om zijn munten te verbergen, liefst in de grond. In de meeste gevallen recupereerden de eigenaars hun voorraad munten, maar in dit uitzonderlijke geval reikt deze muntschat vandaag een overvloed aan aan archeologische en numismatische materialen, waarvan de verdere studie nog moet worden opgeleverd en mogelijk interessante inzichten zal verschaffen wat betreft de middeleeuwse gemeenschap in het algemeen.

Samengesteld door Willy Geets