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# CHARLEMAGNE

## EMPIRE AND SOCIETY

*edited by Joanna Story*

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# CHARLEMAGNE'S COINAGE: IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMY

*Simon Coupland*

## Introduction

Was Charles the Great – Charlemagne – really great? On the basis of the numismatic evidence, the answer is resoundingly positive. True, the transformation of the Frankish currency had already begun: the gold coinage of the Merovingian era had already been replaced by silver coins in Francia, and the pound had already been divided into 240 of these silver ‘deniers’ (*denarii*). Charlemagne brought Italy into this system, in effect creating a single European currency. He gave the medieval penny its familiar form, enlarging the size of the *denarius* from c. 16mm to c. 20mm and increasing its weight from c. 1.3g to 1.7g. He also standardised the appearance of the Carolingian *denarius*, creating a single coinage type which flowed freely across this vast territory, from the Spanish march to Frisia and from Brittany to Germany. He centralised minting processes, bringing monastic and comital mints under closer royal control and ensuring that all coins henceforth carried only the king’s name. Last but by no means least, his portrait coinage sent an impressive and influential message of imperial status and power throughout the Frankish world – and beyond, as shown by the examples that have turned up in Viking-age graves in Norway and Sweden.

For those unused to dealing with numismatic evidence, this brief survey underlines how valuable coins can be for the historian. The choice of designs and inscriptions (‘legends’) on the front (‘obverse’) and back (‘reverse’) of the coins not only often enables us to attribute coins to specific rulers and mints, but it can also, as we shall see, convey an ideological message. The fact that each coin was struck from a pair of hand-carved stamps (‘dies’) permits us to look for pairs of coins from the same dies, and dies for different mints cut by the same craftsman. The number and location of finds, both coin hoards and stray finds, give an indication of the circulation of coinage and the volume of output from the various

mints, while the number and location of the mints reflect the level and purpose of royal control. Further evidence of this comes from the effectiveness of the periodic recoinages, when the existing coin stock was completely replaced by a new design, and from the amount of foreign coinage in circulation. In addition, the weight and 'fineness' (silver content) of the coins can be a useful indication of economic prosperity. In all these respects, the coinage produced in Francia during Charlemagne's reign reflects the latter's strong and increasingly centralised control over the economy, despite the vast size of his territory. The coins are thus a very important source for understanding Charlemagne's impact and legacy.

Apart from the general surveys of Carolingian coinage,<sup>1</sup> Charlemagne's coinage has been the subject of a number of important studies. These include Grierson's magisterial survey, Völckers' corpus of finds of the pre-reform and monogram types, and Lafaurie's study of the portrait coinage, a subject to which Kluge has recently returned.<sup>2</sup> Compared with other aspects of Carolingian numismatics, this is an embarrassment of riches, all the more valuable because of the deeply flawed nature of standard reference works such as those by Morrison and Grunthal [MG] or Depyrot.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of these studies, there is little doubt about the broad outlines of Charlemagne's coinage, even if significant details remain uncertain. Three basic coinage types were minted, of which the first – the small 'pre-reform' *denarius* – can be further subdivided into an earlier phase, when the mints reproduced the king's name as they saw fit, and a slightly later one, when a standardised form was used throughout. Minting began in 768, the year of Charlemagne's accession, and Grierson has suggested that the standardisation took place three years later in 771, when Charlemagne became sole ruler on the death of his brother and co-ruler Carloman.

In 793/94 this coinage was replaced by the larger, heavier coins bearing on one face the monogram of *KAROLVS* and on the other a cross. This coinage was struck throughout the empire with only minor variations, a uniform type manufactured at a reduced number of mints. It was replaced towards the end of Charlemagne's reign by the third and final coinage type, bearing the imperial portrait. The small number of finds of this third type implies a date significantly later than the imperial coronation of 800, later even than Grierson's original suggestion of 806. He has subsequently accepted Lafaurie's proposal that the coins were minted from 812, when Charlemagne was recognised as emperor in the West by the Byzantine emperor in the East.<sup>4</sup>

References in contemporary texts reveal that large and small transactions alike involved silver, and suggest that coins were in everyday use for many people. For example, at about this time one *denarius* could buy a dozen two-pound loaves, two *denarii* a *modius* of oats, and four *denarii* a sheep or a pig, while a cobbler received seven *denarii* for two pairs of shoes with new soles.<sup>5</sup> Nor were large sums of cash owned only by merchants: in the early ninth century, a priest in Brittany

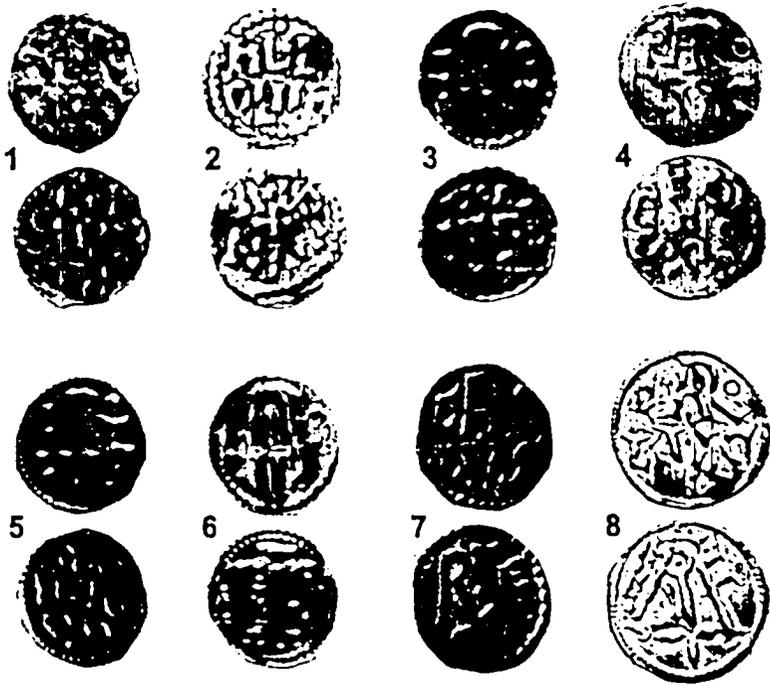
paid *XXX solidos argenti* ('30 *solidi* in silver', i.e. 360 *denarii*) for some land.<sup>6</sup> Even the poorest might have a coin or two in their purse: Corbie Abbey gave more than 1500 *denarii* per year to the travellers who spent the night within its precincts.<sup>7</sup>

Pre-reform coinage: 768–793/94 (Figure 7a, 7.1–7.8)

The general pattern of these small coins, weighing about 1.3g, was an obverse bearing the royal name, *CARO-LVS*, in two lines (with the A and R ligatured), and the name of the mint on the reverse. If this was the general rule, there were exceptions. The earliest coins, perhaps minted until 771, were less regular, with a variety of obverse legends, such as *CAR-LVS* (Figure 7.1), *CA-ROL'-REX*, *RF* (for *Rex Francorum*) with *CA* (for *Carolus*) inserted, or *CARLO*, the latter coins having been mistakenly attributed to Carloman, Charlemagne's brother (MG 83, 85).<sup>8</sup> Thereafter, however, there was a remarkable degree of uniformity everywhere except Italy, indicating that the king must have laid down a design, such as we know happened in 864 under Charles the Bald.<sup>9</sup> The reverse occasionally bears an image rather than an inscription, generally following a Merovingian model: a standing figure on coins minted at Chartres, for example (MG 152) or an anchored cross with pendants, resembling a large barred *m*, at the Paris mint (MG 229).

Several mints included the name of a magnate instead of a mint-name, among them the celebrated Roland, count of the Breton march (MG 276). Other named individuals were Autramnus (MG 234), Gervasius (MG 257), Leutbrand (MG 85, 'Carloman'), Mauringus (MG 266), Odalricus (MG 272) and Walacrius (MG 300), unless this is from the island of Walcheren. Although most of these individuals remain to be identified, the names Leutbrand (Liutprand) and Mauringus are both associated with Italy, the former with the line of the Lombard kings and dukes of Benevento, the latter with the dukedom of Brescia. Another well-known magnate whose name appears on contemporary coinage is Count Milo of Narbonne, although on these coins Milo's name takes the place of the king's in a clear assertion of comital power.<sup>10</sup>

On the vast majority of coins, however, the mint-name is on the reverse. Unfortunately, a combination of the small flans, the poor skills of the die-cutters and the contemporary predilection for abbreviations and ligatures means that the interpretation of the legends is often far from obvious. Even so, many of Morrison and Grunthal's huge list of 'Indeterminate Mints' can now be attributed with a degree of confidence. In 1965 Grierson referred to fifty known mints. Now we can list at least eighty, and possibly as many as one hundred, given those which remain to be identified. They stretch right across the empire, from Dorestad to Narbonne and Rennes to Treviso. A significant number are at ecclesiastical foundations, including St-Bavo in Ghent (MG 241), Ste-Croix in Poitiers (MG 285),<sup>11</sup> St-Denis (MG 253), St-Firmin in Amiens (MG 125–6), St-Maixent (MG 267), Ste-Marie in Rheims (MG 136–8), St-Martin and St-Maurice in Tours (MG 148–51,



7a Pre-reform coinage of Charlemagne

- 1 Chartres (*CARNOTIS*) – Fitzwilliam, *MEC* (as n.1) 1.721
- 2 Louis the Pious (*hLU-DUllh*), Clermont (*ARVR+NIS*) – Étienne Page sale, 4.x.1989, 129 (Breuvery hoard)
- 3 Dorestad (*DOR-STAD*) – KPK (as n. 25), M.545 (found at Domburg)
- 4 Melle (*MEDOLVS*) – Fitzwilliam, *MEC* 1.727
- 5 Mainz (*+D-MAG-CS*) – KPK, M 550 (found at Domburg)
- 6 *CLS* – KPK, M 536 (found at Domburg)
- 7 *RF* – KPK, van Rede 21207a

288), St-Peter in Trier (*MG* 294) and St-Trond (*MG* 290), along with various others whose location is as yet unclear. Many mints are known from only one or two specimens, but others were evidently much more prolific. To gauge their relative importance, we need to consider the evidence of the finds.

Völckers laid a superb foundation in his 1965 survey of hoards and single finds, though further discoveries have since come to light. I know of four additional pre-reform hoards: from Breuvery, Dijon, Dorestad (III) and Larino,<sup>12</sup> and over forty further single finds, too many to list here. The hoard finds fall into two rough groups, and it is surprising to note that there are great swathes of the Frankish heartlands where none has yet been reported. The first group lies north of the Rhine: one hoard, Prerow-Darss, actually comes from beyond the borders of the empire (two coins of Charlemagne alongside sixty-seven Arab dirhems), another,

Krinkberg, from just inside (thirty-five plus eighteen imitations).<sup>13</sup> The other four hoards in this northern group are Dorestad III (seventeen), 'Gelderland' (eighteen), Jelsum (ten) and Zetel (four). The second group of hoards runs south-eastwards from eastern France down through Switzerland and into Italy. The French hoards are Breuvery (eleven), Chézy (three), Dijon (four), Imphy (thirty-two) and 'Jura' (seven); two are from Switzerland: Bel-Air (ten) and Ilanz (thirty-eight pre-reform and one post-reform), and three from Italy: Larino (one, but see below), Sarzana (thirteen) and Vercelli (twenty-five to thirty). This pattern of finds should certainly not be equated with a pattern of monetarisation, as is clear from both the wider distribution of the single finds and the circulation pattern which emerges from analysis of the finds (see below). What it does remind us, however, is that the discovery of a hoard in, say, Neustria or Aquitaine might add significantly to our understanding of the pre-reform coinage.

A good illustration of this is provided by the most important – and surprising – fact to emerge from the hoards which were unknown to Völckers, namely the scale of the coinage minted in the name of Louis the Pious by Charlemagne on his son's coronation as sub-king of Aquitaine in 781.<sup>14</sup> Only two such coins were listed by Völckers, one of Limoges (III.15) and one of St-Stephen, Bourges (XXV.88), but since then three have been found in the Breuvery hoard and nineteen more at Larino. These twenty-two coins were struck at five mints: one at Clermont (Figure 7.2), one at an unknown ecclesiastical mint (Lafaurie has proposed St-Romain de Blaye) and three in Bourges: the city itself, the cathedral of St-Stephen and the abbey of St-Sulpice. Significantly, only two of the twenty-five known coins were struck from the same dies, namely a coin of Bourges and one of St-Stephen. The use of several dies per mint implies that this was more than just a token coinage and must have formed part of the everyday currency of the empire, albeit for a short time.

The hoards and single finds alike emphasise the outstanding importance of two mints in Charlemagne's realm, Dorestad (Figure 7.3) and Melle (Figure 7.4). This comes as no surprise: Dorestad was the largest emporium in northern Europe, and its coinage was so familiar in the north that contemporary imitations were produced by Frisians or, less probably, Scandinavians.<sup>15</sup> Evidence of Dorestad's widespread influence is provided by the discovery of its coins in Austria (Carnuntum) and England (St-Albans), as well as at Kregme in Denmark and in the Slav hoard at Prerow-Darss, not to mention the finds at Breuvery (two), Domburg (fifteen stray finds), 'Gelderland' (eleven), Ilanz, Jelsum (three), Krinkberg (thirty-one, and eighteen imitations), Mainz, Sarzana, Schouwen, Worms and Zetel (two).<sup>16</sup> In addition to this are the finds from Dorestad itself: the 1972 hoard mentioned earlier, which included nine local issues, and seventeen stray finds, of which three were minted locally.<sup>17</sup>

The second major mint was located at the silver mine of Melle in Poitou, whose coins have been discovered at Breuvery (two, plus one imitation),

Chalonnès-sur-Loire, Fontenay-le-Comte, Imphy (two), Melle itself, Neuville-en-Poitou, St-Cyr, Vercelli (two) and two other uncertain findspots in Vendée. There are also finds further afield: Dorestad, Krinkberg (three) and Speyer, as well as Carnuntum (two) and Southampton.<sup>18</sup> The significance of Melle is further demonstrated by the fact that silver from the mine was used to produce not only the pre-reform coins of Melle itself, but also those of Rennes.<sup>19</sup>

After Dorestad and Melle, the finds suggest that the next most significant mints were Mainz (Figure 7.5) and two uncertain sites, whose coins bore the legends *CLS* and *RF* (Figure 7.6–7). Next in importance came Chartres, Dinant, Milan and St-Martin in Tours. Mainz was a major urban centre and archbishopric, but what was the location of the ateliers which produced the *CLS* and *RF* coinages? The distribution of finds of the *CLS* coinage points to a northern mint: Cologne, Mons and a lost toll port near Bruges, *Clusas*, have all been suggested.<sup>20</sup> Mons is too insignificant for the scale of the coinage, and although Cologne initially seems attractive, the scarcity of its post-reform issues (and similarly those of Louis the Pious and Lothar I) indicate that it was not a prolific mint, nor is there a plausible explanation for the letter S in the legend. Yet the lost port also suffers from a major difficulty, namely that charters continued to refer to tolls at *Clusas* long after the *CLS* mint had ceased operation in the 790s. Nor were these toll points necessarily major mints: although Dorestad was, just one find of a pre-reform coin of Quentovic has been recorded (at Krinkberg), a situation paralleled in the post-reform finds (three coins of the monogram type), and indeed under Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald. This cumulative evidence should incidentally cause historians to question the long-held assumption, based on written sources, that Quentovic was a wealthy mercantile site in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. It does not appear to have been in the same league as any of the mints listed above, let alone Dorestad.<sup>21</sup> As for the source of the *CLS* coinage, regrettably, it remains unknown.

Before considering the identity of the mint that produced coinage with *RF* – for *Rex Francorum* – on the reverse, we must briefly review the situation in Italy, where coins with the same reverse legend were also produced. When Charlemagne took power in Italy in 773/74 he allowed Italian mints to continue manufacturing gold *tremisses* in his name: forty of them were present in the Ilanz hoard. Although other gold coins or medallions were struck in Charlemagne's name in other parts of the empire, such as Dorestad (MG 643, wrongly 'Charles the Bald'), Uzès (MEC 1.734), *Aurodis* and Arles,<sup>22</sup> none of these was intended for general circulation, unlike the Italian gold coinage. In 781 it was withdrawn from circulation, when the Capitulary of Mantua laid down: 'After August 1 no-one shall dare to give or receive those coins which we can be seen to be using now'.<sup>23</sup> In its place the king introduced the silver *denarius*, bearing the standard *CARO-LVS* obverse as seen elsewhere in Francia, but distinctive in three ways (Figure 7.8): the flans were larger than those of the rest of the empire, the lettering was sprawling and spiky,

and the *RF* legend on the reverse was accompanied by a letter or group of letters indicating the mint. The most common of these was *ME* (ligatured) for Milan; other mints included Bergamo, Pavia, Piacenza, and perhaps Cremona and Verona (or Vercelli). Later in the reign, possibly in 787 when Charlemagne was again in Italy, these coins were replaced at some if not all mints by a more standard form, on smaller flans bearing the mint-name.<sup>24</sup>

Having described the Italian coinage, we can return to the quite different, and more common, group of coins bearing the reverse legend *RF*. These are on standard flans, have no abbreviated mint-name, and were minted outside Italy. The find distribution suggests a mint somewhere in modern France, ruling out the possibility of the palace at Aachen, but we cannot at present locate the mint more precisely.

The hoards and single finds reveal not only which were the most important mints at this time, but also something of the pattern of circulation of the coinage, although we must bear in mind the absence of hoards in the west. Finds naturally tend to be concentrated close to their place of origin, as is illustrated by the cluster of finds around Melle listed earlier. Nonetheless, as we have seen, other coins from Melle found their way to the northern and eastern borders of the empire and across the Channel. Similarly, a coin from Angers was found in the Great St-Bernard pass in the Alps; one from Avignon at Minnertsga in Friesland. Coins from Bingen on the Rhine have turned up at Middelstum in northern Holland and Vercelli in Italy; a coin from Condé was found at Bel-Air in Switzerland and one from Parma at Domburg.<sup>25</sup> Many other similar examples could be cited, all of them showing that there was regular long-distance movement of coins across this vast empire, surely due in part, if not indeed in the main, to trade. This marks a significant change from the end of the Merovingian era, when coins circulated within local currency pools close to their place of origin.<sup>26</sup>

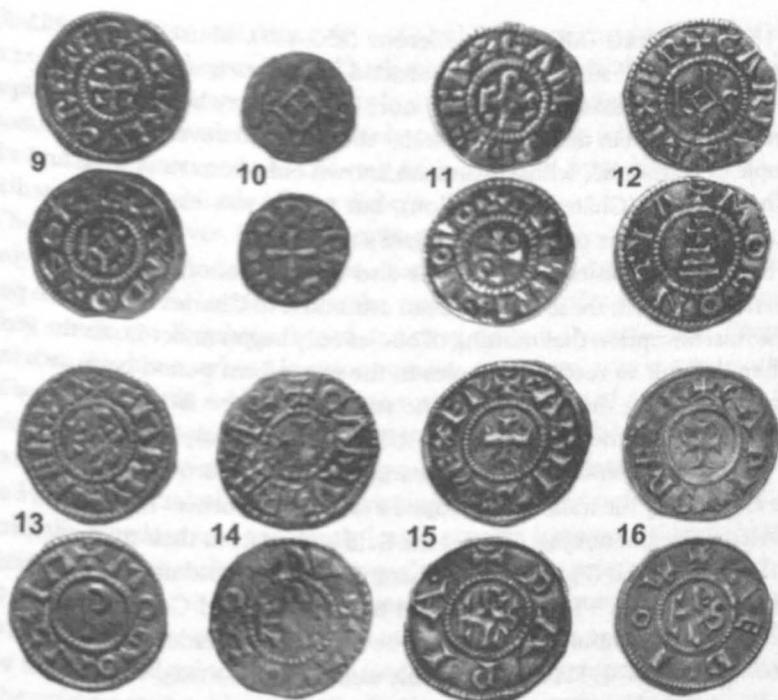
Finally, what was the fineness of these pre-reform coins? Several coins include more than 90 per cent silver,<sup>27</sup> though the coins in the 1987 Dijon hoard all contained less than two-thirds silver.<sup>28</sup> Among the first group, it is not surprising that two coins from Melle had a high silver content, 93 per cent and 93.4 per cent, but a coin of Mainz was even finer, with 94.52 per cent silver. A coin of Lyon contained 92.39 per cent, and a coin from Dorestad 90 per cent. Among the coins of the Dijon hoard, however, the finest was one of St-Martin in Tours, at 65 per cent; next came a coin from Paris, at 61 per cent, then one from an uncertain ecclesiastical mint, *SCISEPHF* (St-Stephen?), containing just 50 per cent silver. Yet even this surpassed a coin from Troyes, with a mere 38 per cent. It is hard to account for the discrepancy between these two sets of figures, but if they are accurate, they demonstrate the need for a reform to bring a consistent standard to coinage which was freely circulating and mingling, good alongside poor, across the empire.

## Monogram coinage 793/94–812 (Figure 7b, 7.9–7.16)

In 794 Charlemagne issued a capitulary at the Synod of Frankfurt declaring that 'these new *denarii* shall be legal tender in every village, town and market, and shall be acceptable to everyone'.<sup>29</sup> These were the broader, thinner, heavier deniers, struck to the new weight standard of 1.7g which, as the capitulary stated, bore 'the monogram of our name', the stamp of royal authority: *KRLS* around a lozenge. It is unclear from the text whether or not they were already in circulation; Lafaurie has suggested that the recoinage took place at Martinmas, 11 November 793, since that was the date chosen for coinage reforms in 825 and 864.<sup>30</sup>

In the nineteenth century there were heated debates over which coins bearing the name 'Charles' should be attributed to Charlemagne and which to his grandson Charles the Bald, but hoard evidence now enables us to resolve virtually all the issues. There are unfortunately fewer recorded finds than of the preceding type and, astonishingly, again none from the west – in this instance, not even single finds. There are two hoards from the south of France: Château Roussillon (six coins of Charlemagne) and Limoux (145–160 coins),<sup>31</sup> but nothing else from modern France or Switzerland. From Italy there is just one hoard, Bondeno (only five mints recorded from a large find).<sup>32</sup> Most of the rest of the hoards lie close to the Rhine: Biebrich (only forty-eight coins were recorded from a large hoard, forty-four of them of Charlemagne), Ibersheim (fifteen, all of Charlemagne), Leer (just two) and Dorestad I (twenty-one monogram coins out of forty-eight in total).<sup>33</sup> One hoard has also been found in the eastern Netherlands (Borne: fifteen monogram coins and one pre-reform).<sup>34</sup>

Certain of these hoards are indisputably from Charlemagne's time, and demonstrate the general uniformity of the coinage, as well as the minor variations. Usually the mint-name surrounded the cross on one side, and the king's title – *CARLVSREXFR(ancorum)* – encircled the monogram on the other, though the mint-name could encircle the monogram, and the title the cross. Occasionally there were points around the cross, as for example at Dorestad (*MG* 103–4) or Laon (*MG* 130), and sometimes more unusual marks: crescents at Bourges (*MEC* 1.740), wedges at Dorestad (Figure 7.9), semicircles at Cologne (*MG* Plate IV, 106), circles at the mint producing the 'Ex metallo novo' coinage (Figure 7.11). At Mainz the die-cutters sometimes put the cross with points on the obverse, sometimes without points on the reverse, and at other times put the cross on steps or replaced it with a large letter P (Figure 7.12–13). On most coins the mint-name is the locality without any further designation, though some coins from Agen bear the title *AGINCIVITAS* (*MG* 1088, 'Charles the Bald', but present at Biebrich). These characteristics allow us to attribute to Charlemagne similar coins from Chelles (*MG* 856, present in the Dorestad I hoard), Orléans (*MG* 946, single find at Dorestad), Paris (*MG* 828–9), Quentovic (*MG* 1371, a single find at Domburg and two single finds at Dorestad), Sens (*MG* 983, not present at Zelzate) and *TVNNIS*



7b Monogram coinage of Charlemagne

- 9 Dorestad – KPK, 1978-336
- 10 Dorestad obole – KPK, van Rede 21211b
- 11 *Ex metallo novo* – KPK, 17647
- 12 Mainz – Fitzwilliam, MEC 1.742
- 13 Mainz – KPK, 17487 (found at Dorestad)
- 14 Toulouse – KPK, 17620 (found at Dorestad)
- 15 Pavia – Fitzwilliam, MEC 1.745
- 16 Milan – Fitzwilliam, Blunt 1-2844-1990

(MG 1373–4, single find at Dorestad).

Unfortunately, an identical type was struck by Charles the Bald in the south-west of his kingdom over fifty years later, with the result that for some mints it is now impossible to attribute individual coins to one or other ruler without a context. This is the case at Bourges and Melle, where hoard evidence shows that identical issues were produced under the two rulers, but as we shall see, not at Toulouse, where a distinction can be made. Nor is it the case at Clermont, which is only known to have struck monogram coinage after 864. With regard to the mints at Agen (MG 177–9, 1087–9), Arles (MG 192–7, 1110), Béziers (MG 183), Dax (MG 180, 1090–4), Lyon (MG 166, 1037) and Vienne (MG 191), hoard evidence at present shows only that they were active under Charlemagne. As for Ampurias

(MG 186), Barcelona (MG 188–9), Gerona (MG 187), Marseille (MG 202–3) and Roda (not in MG),<sup>35</sup> single finds at Dorestad or comparison with the other mints listed here suggest that they, too, are more likely to have been in operation under Charlemagne than in the time of Charles the Bald. However, we should note the example of Narbonne, whose issues are known only from stray finds and a hoard of Charlemagne (Château Roussillon), but which was explicitly named in the Edict of Pitres as one of Charles the Bald's mints.<sup>36</sup>

Several of Charlemagne's mints also struck monogram 'oboles', or half-deniers. In the past, these have all been attributed to Charles the Bald, in part due to the misconception that minting of oboles only began under Louis the Pious.<sup>37</sup> It is often difficult to recognise oboles in the pre-reform period because of weight variations among the *denarii* and the small size of the flans, but following the reform of 793/94 the oboles are distinctive, being not only smaller in size and half the weight of the *denarii*, but also bearing the monogram filling the field on one face and usually the mint-name around a cross on the other. That they are coins of Charlemagne and not just Charles the Bald is clear from their manufacture at, for instance, Dorestad (Figure 7.10), where Charles the Bald never minted, since he never ruled there.<sup>38</sup> The oboles listed by Morrison and Grunthal under Charles the Bald's name should consequently be restored to Charlemagne (MG 914, 1037, 1060, 1089, 1106–7, 1110 and probably also 1131 and 1152), although as we have seen, some of these were minted under both rulers.

The clarification of this misconception makes it plain that the five deniers and one obole of the Château Roussillon hoard, sometimes attributed to Charles the Bald, are actually of Charlemagne, as is confirmed by the presence of monogram coins from Dorestad and Pavia. A coin in the same hoard minted at Toulouse bears the short reverse legend *TOLVSA*, supporting the thesis that all such coins can be attributed to Charlemagne, while those with the longer mint-name, *TOLVSACIVI(tas)* (or variant) should be ascribed to Charles the Bald.<sup>39</sup> This is also borne out by the Biebrich, Borne and Ibersheim hoards and the eight single finds from Dorestad, all of which have the short title (Figure 7.14), and by the coin from the Roermond hoard of c. 850, which reads *TOLVSACIVI*.<sup>40</sup> This in turn indicates that we should also attribute to Charlemagne the Limoux hoard, which contained 120–130 deniers and 25–30 oboles, all from Toulouse and all bearing the short title.

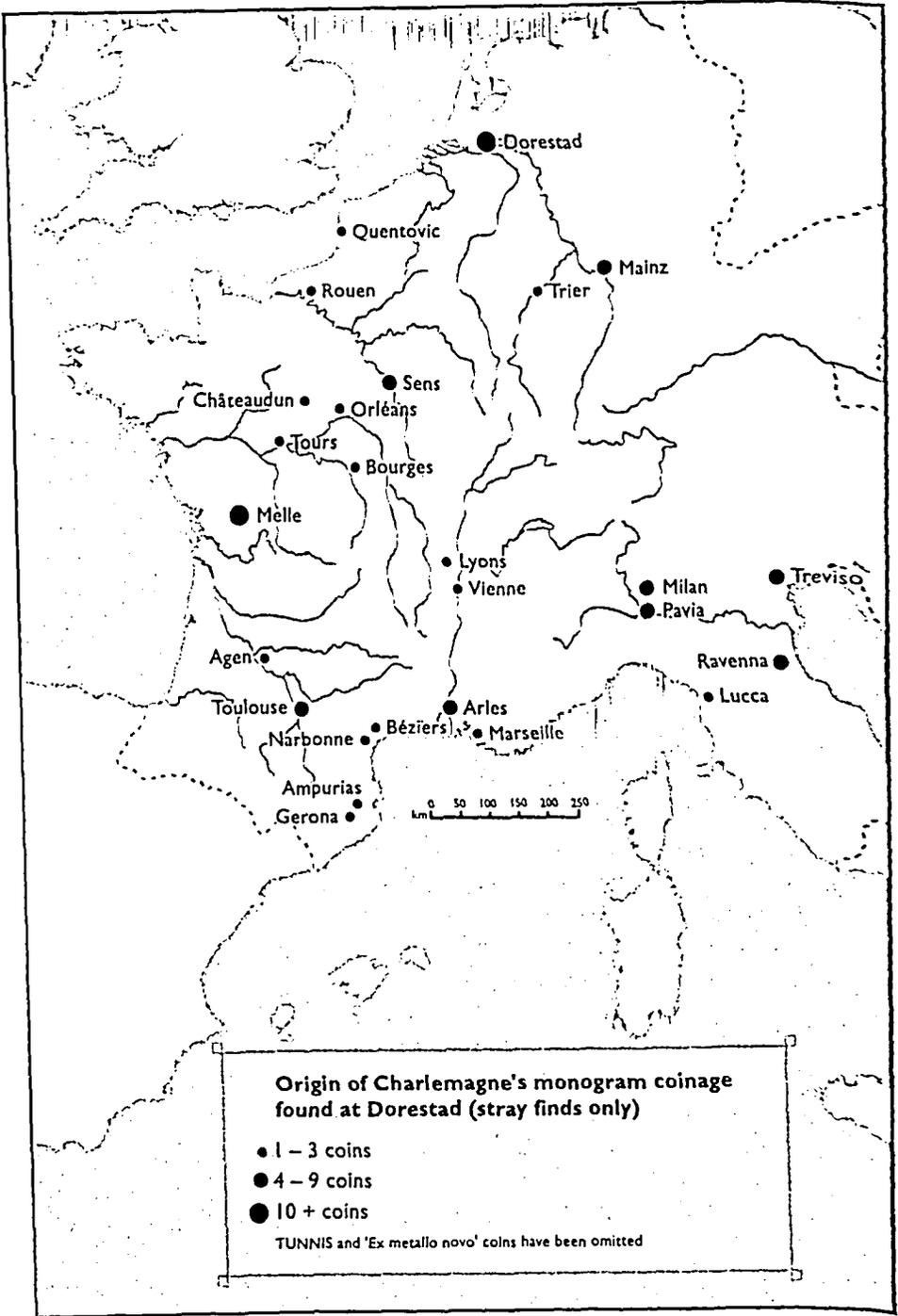
The hoards demonstrate the effectiveness of the recoinage which accompanied the reform of 793/94. Only two included both pre-reform and post-reform issues together, Borne and Ilanz, and they contained just one of the old coinage type and one of the new *denarii* respectively. Was there a similar recoinage in 768, when Charlemagne's pre-reform type was introduced? Although two hoards, Imphy and Ilanz, contained Pippin's coinage alongside Charlemagne's, none of the others did so. (Dorestad III, which also included a parcel of Louis the Pious's Class 2 coinage, is presumably a so-called 'savings hoard', in which a group of

coins has been added to an existing deposit.) It therefore seems possible that there was a recoinage at the beginning of Charlemagne's reign, which the coins at Illanz and Imphy somehow escaped. The hoards also reveal how effectively foreign coin was excluded from circulation, with only two containing foreign issues: Illanz, with three Anglo-Saxon pennies and two Arab 'dirhems' from North Africa, and Biebrich, with a single North African dirhem.

Where did the silver for this recoinage come from? One new mine had evidently opened, as is indicated by the existence of coins reading *Ex metallo novo* (MG 309–12, Figure 7.11). However, the small number of surviving specimens (including one in the Ibersheim hoard and stray finds at Dorestad and Tournai) suggests that this mine, whose location remains unknown, was not particularly large. There is very little evidence of large-scale importation of Arab silver at this time. Military conquest may have brought in plunder and tribute,<sup>41</sup> but the question as stated earlier may reflect a false assumption. In 864, when Charles the Bald reformed the West Frankish coinage, increasing its purity and restoring the weight standard,<sup>42</sup> the kingdom was apparently losing silver in large quantities to Viking raiders. Seventy years earlier, Charlemagne's reform was primarily a reform of weights and measures,<sup>43</sup> designed at the same time to increase royal control over the currency and bolster confidence in its use. As long as the exchange rate of old coins for new was judged to be fair (a point on which contemporary sources are silent) the reforms may not have required a significant injection of extra silver.

Hoards and single finds also shed light on the operation of the mints producing the monogram type. There were significantly fewer – around forty – and this was evidently part of a concerted effort to bring coin production under stricter control. A capitulary of 808 stated: 'Let coinage be struck nowhere other than at court (*ad curtem*); and these palace coins shall be traded and circulate everywhere'.<sup>44</sup> This cannot mean that production was restricted to a single palace mint, with the coins transported to their places of emission: the distances involved are too great, the coins too numerous.<sup>45</sup> A more likely interpretation is that the mint was to be located at a royal site, or *curtis*, in each place.<sup>46</sup> This is consistent with a fragmentary capitulary issued by Louis the Pious, which laid down, 'Let the town mint be under the protection of the count on behalf of the state ... These moneyers shall not presume to [coin] money on behalf of the state elsewhere, nor anywhere inside or outside the town apart from the appointed place'.<sup>47</sup> It is thus significant that there were fewer ecclesiastical or monastic mints after the reform: the only known examples are St-Denis (MG 139a) and Ste-Marie in Laon (MG 131–2). Moreover, Charlemagne's name was now the only one to appear on the coinage.

A few mints cannot be identified with any certainty (the new mine or *metallum novum* mentioned earlier, DVNNOS, SENNES and TVNNIS), but none of these seems to have been particularly prolific. Melle was again among the most important, though it now shared this honour not with Dorestad, but with Pavia and Milan (Figure 7.15–16). Nor is this because of a large number of Italian finds: there



8 Origin of Charlemagne's monogram coinage found at Dorestad

is only one hoard, Bondeno, as well as a few single finds.<sup>48</sup> Rather, it is because large numbers of Italian coins were finding their way northwards and westwards:<sup>49</sup> for example, at Dorestad eight Pavian coins have been found (two in a hoard and six single finds) and nine coins from Milan (one in a hoard and eight single finds). This trend continued under Louis the Pious, although by then Venice had evidently overtaken Milan.<sup>50</sup>

Other prolific mints at this time, though not apparently as significant as these three, were Dorestad and Mainz, as in the pre-reform period, but also Agen and Toulouse. This is all the more remarkable given the absence of hoards and single finds from the south-west. True, the hoards from Limoux and Château Roussillon both contained Toulousan issues, but the mint's importance is also attested by other finds: Biebrich (five), Borne, Dorestad I and Ibersheim, as well as eight single finds at Dorestad, two at Schouwen and one apiece from De Houw and Münster. Agen is similarly represented at Biebrich (two), Dorestad I (four) and Ibersheim, and in single finds from Bolsward, Dorestad (two deniers and one obole) and Jutland.<sup>51</sup>

Taken together, these finds again indicate that coinage was flowing freely across this enormous empire, with the finds at Dorestad in particular coming from virtually all parts of the Carolingian world (Figure 8). The monogram coinage is especially common at Dorestad, second only to the *Christiana religio* issues of Louis the Pious. This is significantly different from nearby Domburg, where just eight monogram issues have been found, compared with twenty-seven pre-reform coins and twenty-three of Pippin III. The early ninth century thus appears to have been a period of intense economic activity at Dorestad, the beginning of a boom which reached its peak in the 820s.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, as yet only two monogram coins have been analysed to determine their silver content: one from Pavia and one from Milan.<sup>53</sup> They contained 97.5 per cent and 98 per cent silver respectively, both exceptionally high figures, higher than any of the pre-reform deniers. This is, however, too small a sample to draw any conclusions about the coinage as a whole.

#### Portrait coinage 812–814 (Figure 9, 1–11)

Charlemagne's third coinage type, bearing the imperial portrait, is arguably the least economically significant of the three, but ideologically the most important. Its purpose was undoubtedly to convey an image of imperial power and prestige, depicting Charlemagne as successor to the Roman emperors on whose coinage this type was modelled.<sup>54</sup>

The coinage's lack of economic importance is apparent from the very small number of finds: one in the Dorestad I hoard and one in the much later Achlum hoard represent the sum total of hoard finds. As for single finds, six have turned up at Dorestad (Figure 9.2), three elsewhere in the Netherlands – at Minn

(Figure 9.5), Oosterbierum and Tiel – two at Trier, one at Market Weighton in Yorkshire (Figure 9.6), and two in Scandinavia, at Moksnes and Birka. Indeed, only about forty coins are known in total.<sup>55</sup> This undoubtedly reflects the fact that they were minted for only a short period, probably from Charlemagne's recognition as emperor by Constantinople in 812 until his death in January 814.<sup>56</sup>

The great majority of the coins are anonymous, bearing the reverse inscription *Christiana religio*, or more accurately, *Xpictiana religio*. This legend surrounds a temple, which may represent the palace chapel at Aachen or perhaps the 'Christian Church' more broadly. Some have a letter beneath the obverse bust: C, F, M, V and perhaps B (Figure 9.3–6). The first four have been identified as Cologne, Frankfurt, Mainz and Worms, and the fifth – if correctly read – presumably represents either Bingen or Bonn, both of which struck pre-reform coinage and are situated, like the other mints, on the Rhine. Other coins bear mint-names on the reverse: Arles, Dorestad (Figure 9.8), Lyon, Quentovic (Figure 9.9), Rouen,<sup>57</sup> Trier and *METALLGERMAN* (Figure 9.2), the latter almost certainly signifying the mine at Melle, bearing in mind its economic importance (i.e. *germanum*, meaning 'genuine', not *Germanicum*, 'German').

The *Christiana religio* issues bear three different obverse inscriptions. Some have a long title, *DNKARLVSIMPAVGRFETL*, for *D(ominus) N(oster) KARLVS IMP(erator) AVG(ustus) R(ex) F(rancorum) ET L(angobardorum)* ('Our Lord Charles, Emperor Augustus, King of the Franks and Lombards'), the latter title suggesting an Italian connection (Figure 9.1). Others bear the legend *KAROLVSIMPAVG* (Figure 9.3–6), while a third group read *KARLVS IMP AVG* (Figure 9.7). Within each of these groups there are also stylistic affinities, suggesting that each die-cutter consistently used the same title. There is also at least one distinctive feature on the reverse of the portrait coins which parallels to an extent those on the obverse: the coins reading *KARLVSIMPAVG* and some of those with the longer Italianate title include small flame-like darts on the horizontal roof line, but these are not found on any of the known coins reading *KAROLVSIMPAVG*. Putting this evidence together, it would seem that the dies for the coins reading *KAROLVSIMPAVG* were

## 9 Portrait coinage

- 1 *DNKARLVS Christiana religio* – Courtauld collection, University of Zimbabwe. Photo courtesy of Graham Pollard
- 2 *DNKARLVS Melle* – ROB 7335 (found at Dorestad)
- 3–4 *KAROLVS Christiana religio 'M'* (Mainz) – Paris, Prou (as n. 10) 981
- 5 *KAROLVS Christiana religio 'B'?* – KPK, 1995-1005 (found at Minnertsga)
- 6 *KAROLVS Christiana religio 'M'?* (found at Market Weighton)
- 7 *KARLVS Christiana religio* – Paris, Prou 983
- 8 Dorestad – Brussels, de Jonghe 34
- 9 Quentovic – Fitzwilliam, MEC 1.749
- 10 Louis the Pious Class 1, Dorestad – Brussels, no inv. no.
- 11 Louis the Pious Class 1, Quentovic – Paris, Prou 187

CHARLEMAGNE'S COINAGE



produced at a different location from those bearing the other titles; whether the latter were produced together is less clear.

Among the mint-signed coins, those from Dorestad, Lyon, Quentovic, Rouen and Trier read *KAROLVSIMPAVG*, as do some from Arles. Some of these are unquestionably the work of the same die-cutter, notably the coins from Dorestad and Quentovic (Figure 9.8–9). Indeed, the same hand evidently produced both these dies and those for the *Christiana religio* issues with the same title: the coin from Mainz illustrated here is a good example (Figure 9.3–4). The portraits and lettering of the coins from Arles, Lyon and Rouen are also of a comparable style, though not the single specimen from Trier. The dies for these mints were consequently cut at a single location although, as was said earlier, it is unlikely that the coins themselves were produced centrally. This is particularly obvious in the case of Dorestad and Quentovic, where imported coin and silver were surely turned into coin on site. The portrait coinage produced by Louis the Pious at the two *emporium* reveals a significant change: the ships illustrated on the reverse not only differ in style from those on the coins struck locally by Charlemagne, but now those at Dorestad also differ from those at Quentovic (Figure 9.10–11). The implication is that after 814 both ports went back to cutting their own dies. As for the possible location of Charlemagne's die-cutting centre, the most likely place to have produced dies for Arles, Bonn or Bingen, Cologne, Frankfurt, Dorestad, Lyon, Quentovic, Mainz, Rouen and Worms was undoubtedly the palace at Aachen. The high standard of the portrait on the coins is consistent with this.

By contrast, the anonymous coins with the title *DNKARLVSIMPAVGRFETL* were presumably produced in Italy, most likely at Milan or Pavia, even though coins with the same obverse legend are also known from Arles and Melle. In the case of the coins from Arles, there are clear stylistic differences distinguishing these from the coins with the title *KAROLVSIMPAVG* (the gold '*solidus*' belongs to the Italianate group).<sup>38</sup> Those with the longer title have points in the mint-name; those with the shorter title do not. On those with the shorter title the city gate on the reverse is comparable to that on coins from Lyon and Rouen; on the Italianate coins it is quite different. On the latter, the mint-name begins above the gate; on the former, below. Since it is unlikely that Arles' coinage was struck in two different places, presumably the source of its dies changed from one die-cutting centre, in Italy, to the other, at Aachen.

Finally, at Melle the picture is different again, with the reverses of the single known coin with the Italianate title (Figure 9.2) and the one surviving specimen of the two known coins reading *KARLVSIMPAVG* appearing virtually identical, if not indeed from the same die. Yet the bust on the latter is nothing like the bust on the *Christiana religio* issues with the same legend, but of a unique style. Perhaps Melle was initially supplied with dies from Italy, but subsequently began manufacturing its own dies. The place of origin of the anonymous coins reading *KARLVSIMPAVG* remains unclear.

To summarise, towards the end of Charlemagne's reign the centralisation of coin production was taken yet further, with a very few centres producing dies for a handful of mints. The fact that Louis the Pious evidently abandoned this practice two years later, as the evidence from Dorestad and Quentovic shows, might suggest that it was not viable, or might simply mean that Louis was able to train additional skilled die-cutters. Whichever was the case, Louis' choice of a portrait coinage as his first type implies that this imperial coinage was perceived as having achieved the desired ideological impact.

### Summary: ideology and economy

As we look back over the forty-six years of Charlemagne's reign, the coinage bears clear and impressive testimony to the emperor's control and development of the economy. The evidence includes not only the transformation of the size, weight and possibly fineness of the *denarius*, but also the exclusion of foreign coinage, the move from gold to silver in Italy, the standardisation of the coinage types and the tighter control over die and coin production. It is equally plain that these changes would have had a powerful ideological impact, as they were undoubtedly intended to do.

Thus, at the start of Charlemagne's reign, a Frankish merchant with a bag full of silver might have had in his purse coins bearing the names of Pippin, Carloman, Charlemagne and Milo of Narbonne. By the time of the emperor's death, all his coins would have borne Charlemagne's name, and some would also have displayed his portrait, as grand as his Roman predecessors'. Even the illiterate would have noticed the changes, for contemporary texts reveal that many common people were using coin. The bigger, heavier coins must have been impressive, their uniformity would have made clearer which coins were legal tender, and the portrait coins were a source of wonder, as the specimens retained as jewellery bear witness. In short, in putting his stamp so firmly on the Frankish coinage, Charlemagne's people, rich and poor alike, cannot but have been impressed by the emperor's power and prestige.

### Notes

Many thanks to all who kindly permitted me to photograph coins in their collections, particularly the Koninklijk Penningkabinet, Leiden (KPK) and Mark Blackburn at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

- 1 The best general survey of Carolingian coins is Grierson and Blackburn (1986), pp. 205–10.
- 2 Grierson (1965); Völckers (1965); Lafaurie (1978); Kluge (1999) and (2002).
- 3 Morrison and Grunthal (1967); Depeyrot (1993). See *Numismatic Chronicle* (1969), pp. 346–50; *RN* 6.9 (1967), pp. 291–5; *RN* 6.36 (1994), pp. 352–6.

- 4 Grierson and Blackburn (1986), p. 209.
- 5 *Synodus Franconofurtensis* (794), c. 4, *Capitulare missorum Niumagae datum* (806), c. 17; MGH *Capit.* I, no. 28 and 46, pp. 74, 132; *Polyptyque de l'abbé Irminon*, cc.42, 35, ed. Guérard (1845), II, pp. 5, 74, 308–9 (*Statutes of Adalhard of Corbie*, I c. 3).
- 6 De Courson, ed. (1863), p. 129.
- 7 Duby (1962), p. 301.
- 8 Lafaurie (1974), pp. 39–40.
- 9 Coupland (1985).
- 10 Prou (1892), no. 834; Grierson and Blackburn (1986), no. 1497.
- 11 RN 4.35 (1932), pp. xxxi–xxxii.
- 12 Breuvery, Marne: *Numismatic Circular* 76 (1968), pp. 150–4; Dijon, Côte d'Or: *BSFN* 44 (1989), pp. 577–81; Dorestad, Utrecht: van Es and Verwers (1980), pp. 215–21; Larino, Molise: RN 153 (1998), pp. 217–43.
- 13 Hatz (1985), pp. 125–32.
- 14 Coupland (1990), pp. 24–5.
- 15 Malmer (1966).
- 16 Finds not included in Völckers (1965) or n.12 above are Carnuntum: *MOuG* 21 (1979), pp. 33–4, 57–8; *MOuG* 24 (1984), pp. 12–13; *MOuG* 27 (1987), p. 84; St-Albans: Blackburn, ed. (1986), p. 129; Kregme: pers. comm. C. Moesgaard; Mainz: Wamers (1994), p. 178.
- 17 Coupland (2002).
- 18 Finds not included in Völckers (1965) or nn.12 and 16 above are Southampton: Blackburn, ed. (1986), p. 129, and a number listed in Jeanne-Rose (1996).
- 19 Barrandon and Dumas (1990).
- 20 Grierson and Blackburn (1986), p. 635.
- 21 Coupland (2002).
- 22 Martin (1997).
- 23 *Capitulare Mantuanum* (781), c. 9, MGH *Capit.* I, no. 90, p. 191; trans. Loyn and Percival (1975), pp. 49–51.
- 24 Lafaurie (1972).
- 25 Finds not in Völckers (1965) or nn.16 and 18 above are Great St-Bernard: *BSFN* 42 (1987), p. 155; Minnertska: KPK, 1991–07–03.
- 26 Lafaurie (1974), p. 34.
- 27 Metcalf and Merrick (1967), p. 179; Metcalf and Northover (1989), p. 106.
- 28 Depuyrot (1993), pp. 122, 202, 244, 248.
- 29 *Synodus Franconofurtensis* (794), c. 5, MGH *Capit.* I, p. 74; trans. King (1987), p. 225.
- 30 *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines* (825), c. 20, MGH *Capit.* I, no. 150, p. 306; *Edictum Pistense* (864), c. 10: MGH *Capit.* II, no. 273, p. 315.
- 31 Haertle (1997), nos. 21 and 48.
- 32 Morrison and Grunthal (1967), Find 12.
- 33 *Revue Belge de Numismatique* (1857), pp. 34–6; Haertle (1997), no. 7. The coins were mistakenly listed by Völckers (1965) among the single finds: III.20, 29, 35 (*recte* six coins), 44, 48, 69, 72, 78–9, 86 (but not 85).
- 34 *Overijsselse Historische Bijdragen* 105 (1990), pp. 147–51.
- 35 Crusafont i Sabater (1983).
- 36 *Edictum Pistense* (864), c. 12, MGH *Capit.* II, no. 273, p. 315.
- 37 Grierson and Blackburn (1986), pp. 206, 213; Grierson (1965), p. 518; Coupland (1990), p. 26.

- 38 Coupland (1988).  
 39 Pierfitte (1933).  
 40 *JMP* 72 (1985), p. 44.  
 41 Reuter (1985).  
 42 Coupland (1991), pp. 152–5.  
 43 Grierson (1965), pp. 528–30.  
 44 *Capitula cum primis constituta* (808), c. 7: *MGH Capit.* I, no. 52, p. 140.  
 45 Lafaurie (1976), pp. 66–9.  
 46 Coupland (1986).  
 47 *Capitulare de moneta* (c.820), cc.1–2, *MGH Capit.* I, no. 147, p. 299.  
 48 Rovelli (2000b), p. 216.  
 49 Metcalf (1988).  
 50 Coupland (1990), p. 32.  
 51 Finds not in Völckers (1965) or nn. 3–4 above are De Houw: KPK 02–04–1998; Münster: Stiegemann and Wemhoff, eds. (1999a), p. 389; Bolsward: Haertle (1997), no. 528/001; Jutland: Bendixen (1988), p. 38.  
 52 Coupland (2002).  
 53 Metcalf, Merrick and Hamblin (1968), p. 57.  
 54 Kluge (1999), pp. 82–3.  
 55 Coins not in Kluge (2002) are Dorestad: van der Chijs (1866), p. 132 (pl. XII.36, 37); Trier: Gilles (1985), p. 46; Market Weighton and Courtauld Collection, University of Zimbabwe (Figure 9.1 and 9.6), unpublished.  
 56 Lafaurie (1976), p. 67.  
 57 Delaporte (1989).  
 58 Martin (1997).