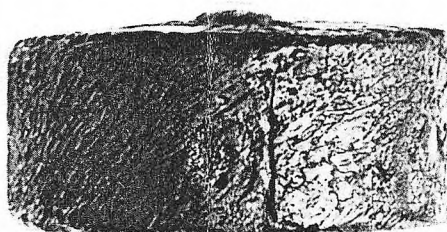




1a



1b



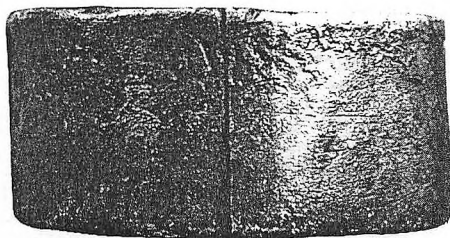
1c



2a



2b



2c



3

A German Weight Bearing the Name of an Emperor Otto Wolfgang Hess

The Staatliche Münzsammlung in Munich has recently acquired an interesting German weight from the Middle Ages (Fig. 1a-c) found in 1989 in London from the site known as the Thames Exchange.¹ The following description is consequently offered to Philip Grierson, who has frequently addressed metrological questions, as a small token of appreciation on this his birthday.²

The weight has the form of a cylinder, 31mm in diameter, 15mm high (13-14mm at the rim), and 100.91g in weight. It consists of a lead core, which is completely enclosed by a band of yellowish metal,³ and two struck flans, which form the upper and lower faces. The projecting edges of the encircling metal band have been hammered down to hold these flans in place.

The design of the upper and lower faces evidently depicts a strongly stylised, egg-shaped head *en face*, with no features, hair, or head-covering. The upper body is portrayed by five radial lines between two arcs, and behind the head is a cross-shaped nimbus. The clearly legible inscription, whose letters were formed by the use of a variety of punches, reads + ODDO IMPERATOR, and is enclosed by a circle of pellets just inside the rim. Both faces were struck from the same die, although there are slight differences: a faint double-strike on one face, and the indentation of the head on the other.

A comparable weight was recently acquired by the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier, having reportedly been discovered in 1984 during the construction of the Hilton Hotel in Mainz (Fig. 2a-c).⁴ It has the same basic cylindrical form of a lead core encircled by a band of yellowish metal,⁵ and the construction is also identical, with the upper and lower faces consisting of struck flans, both minted from the same die, and held in place by the surrounding metal band, which is hammered down at the rim. The weight, 99.825g, is just 1.085g below that of the Munich piece, and thus not of significant difference.

The design is nonetheless dissimilar. It portrays a stylised but plainly recognisable bust facing left with hair topped by a row of pellets and tied by a sort of band. Although the inscription consists of clearly distinguishable letters, these do not form a coherent whole: ICI+OIIIDIOHIGVOE. Another incidental feature deserves comment: one face is slightly indented near the nose, i.e. almost at the centre of the design.

The specimen in Trier is reminiscent of another, which was once in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz.⁶ It was in poor condition, but of identical construction and evidently of similar dimensions. The design was only discernible on one face, but unmistakably came from the same die as the piece in Trier (Fig. 3). The weight, 99g, may have originally matched that of the specimen in Trier, or was perhaps slightly higher. The damaged face likewise shows clear signs of an indentation. The piece was originally published as most likely Merovingian in origin,⁷ and the barbarous design and inscription of the Trier specimen were likewise compared to the form of Merovingian tremisses from Trier.⁸

It is therefore evident that all three pieces are identical in fabrication, even down to the apparently minor detail of the indentation on one of the faces, which at least raises the possibility that this occurred during manufacture.⁹ Given these criteria (even with different dies) and the almost identical weights, we can only conclude that the group should be seen as produced over a limited chronological period. Despite its primitive portrayal, the correct inscription of the Munich specimen indicates that it dates from the latter half of the tenth century.¹⁰ Equally certain is that the pieces originated within the Empire: one is known to have been found at Mainz, and another probably turned up in the same region.¹¹ It is thus highly plausible that Mainz itself, whose merchants' privileges are repeatedly referred to in Ottonian royal charters, and which was in the tenth century a trading centre of comparable significance to Regensburg and Cologne,¹² was the place of manufacture.

The function of these weights cannot at present be determined. They cannot definitely be identified as coin weights like the eleventh-century Mark weight from Zurich which is now in Schaffhausen.¹³ Yet it is worth noting that 100.91g is almost but not quite a quarter of the Carolingian fifteen-ounce coin pound of 409g.¹⁴

Translated by Dr. Simon Coupland

Notes

1. The dealer who sold it to the Staatliche Münzsammlung gave the findspot as the Thames. However, Mark Blackburn has kindly made enquires and has established that it was found early in 1989 by Mr. David Morgan in spoil that had been taken from the building site known as the Thames Exchange in the City of London, just north-east of Southwark Bridge. This site has been extremely prolific in finds of coins and other artefacts of the ninth to twelfth centuries and later. It was partly excavated by the Museum of London, but the majority of finds were discovered by amateur metal detector users in the spoil that was taken out by lorries to a dump in Kent. They were then legitimately sold to the trade. The finds are particularly rich in foreign coins of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and they also include no less than three English coin dies of the same period. This German weight was shown at the Museum of London and the British Museum in March 1989, and expressed to be a find from the Thames Exchange. The finder has recently confirmed this provenance when contacted on behalf of Mrs. Blackburn. The Munich Staatliche Münzsammlung only bought the piece after consultation with colleagues in the British Museum, who regretted that it had left the country. However, in this way it has at least entered the public domain.
2. The most important relevant contributions are listed in "Philip Grierson's Contribution to Numismatics", in *Studies in Numismatic Method Presented to Philip Grierson*, ed. C. N. L. Brooke, B. H. I. H. Stewart, J. G. Pollard and T. R. Volk (Cambridge, 1983), p. xii.
3. A more precise analysis is planned, but has not yet been possible.
4. K.-J. Gilles, "Ein neues merowingisches Gewicht", *Trierer Zeitschrift* 51 (1988), pp. 511f.
5. Described (ibid.) as bronze.
6. G. Behrens, "Merowingische Gewichte und Waagen", *Mainzer Zeitschrift* 34 (1939), pp. 17ff. The weight was lost during the last war, but photographs have survived which are reproduced here, thanks to the kindness of the museum staff.
7. Although the writer noted that "Merovingian weights are diverse in appearance" (Behrens, p. 19).
8. Gilles, p. 115, with reference to coins previously published by him: K.-J. Gilles, *Die Trierer Münzprägung im frühen Mittelalter* (1982), nos 2-5 = R. Weiller, *Die Münzen von Trier* (1988), nos 2-6.
9. Behrens (p. 17) suggested that the lead core had been drilled at this point "for analysis or to reduce its weight". However, the fact that all three specimens display the same indentation in the centre of one of the faces tells against this interpretation.
10. Otto I to Otto III ruled as emperors 962-973, 967-983, 996-1002 respectively. Nobody could have invented this inscription at an earlier date.
11. It is true that the lost Mainz specimen came from the art trade, but in the 1930s an item which had been found locally would have been offered first to the Mainz museum, which was well known for its keen acquisitions policy.
12. H. Borchers, "Beiträge zur Rheinischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte", *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 4 (Marburg 1954), pp. 78ff. L. Falk, "Mainz", in *Städtebuch Rheinland-Pfalz*, ed. E. Keyser (Stuttgart 1964), pp. 255ff.
13. D. W. H. Schwarz, "Ein mittelalterliches Gewichtsstück aus Schaffhausen", in *Jahresbericht 1955 des Museums Allerheiligen* (Schaffhausen), pp. 11ff.
14. On the Carolingian coin pound, see P. Grierson, "Money and Coinage under Charlemagne", in *Karl der Grosse*, ed. W. Braunfels, vol. 1 (Düsseldorf 1965), p. 530, reprinted in P. Grierson, *Dark Age Numismatics* (London 1979). I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Harald Witthöft of Siegen for pointing out to me that if the weight of the Munich specimen is doubled and then multiplied by 16/14, the resulting figure, 230.72g, is close to that of the Schaffhausen weight, 230.44g.