

Viking Silver



Currency and Jewelry

A Preliminary Analysis of Stamp-Patterned Jewelry Finds in Viking Silver Hoards

Forward into the Past XXI - April 2, 2011

Class: Norse Jewellery ... NO - not the bead guy ...

Type: Hands On Workshop

Time: 2 hours

Speaker: [Sam Falzone](#)

This class will be about Norse stamp-pattern silver jewellery. Participants will learn and discuss various topics regarding this unique form of jewellery found in abundance in Norse-era silver hoards. Photos of various well documented silver hoards such as the Cuerdale Hoard, the Huxley Hoard, the Vale of York Hoard, the Harrowgate Hoard, the Wieringen Hoard and others will be examined with special attention given to the styles, motifs and patterns used in these extant examples of stamped jewellery. We will also discuss the importance of silver as a trade commodity in the Norse-era. Participants will have a chance to examine some contemporary examples of stamped jewellery, the stamps used to make them and receive instruction on the process of making this style of jewellery and the stamps used in the process. Participants will then have an opportunity to make their own stamped bracelet or Thor's hammer using copper sheet. Tools, safety glasses and materials will be provided - participants are not required to bring their own unless personal safety glasses are preferred. Please wear natural fibre clothing (i.e. cottons, wool, etc.) as a propane torch will be used to anneal the projects. Participants are warned that this class will involve

working with potentially high temperature metal.

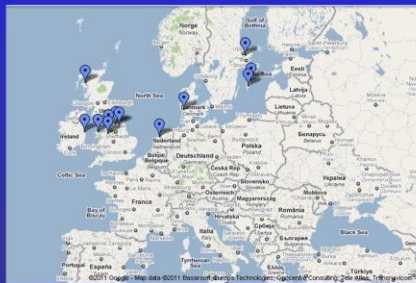
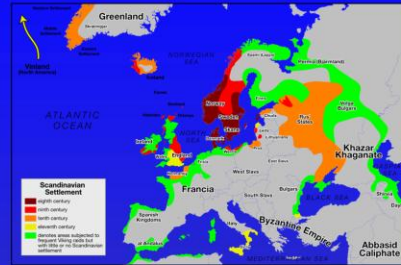
This presentation is an analysis of just information, documents and images of Viking silver hoards and stamp patterns found in Internet sources.

Silver as Trade

- During the Viking era, the most common form of trade for the ordinary person was barter for goods or services
- However the preferred "currency" of trade was **SILVER** in the form of coin, ingot, unworked rods, whole jewelry or hacksilver
- As a currency, silver was exchanged by **weight**, regardless of the silver's origin or monetary denomination (in the case of coins).
- **Hacksilver** was silver jewelry or coins "hacked" to pieces to achieve a desired weight.



Of Hacksilver and Hoards



- The Norse had extensive trade routes
- They also settled in many different countries
- As such, Viking hoards are found scattered throughout these once Norse-settled areas
- The map on the left shows just some of these hoards – the ones that were referenced in this analysis

Referenced Hoards

These are the hoards that were referenced



• **Cuerdale Hoard** –Lancashire, UK



• **Vale of York Hoard** (aka the Harrogate Hoard) –N Yorkshire, UK



• **Wieringen Hoard** –Netherlands



• **Huxley Hoard** –Chester, UK



• **Storr Highland Hoard** –Skye, UK



• **Angelsey Hoard** –Angelsey, Wales



• **Spillings Hoard** –Gotland, SWE



• **Ocksarve Hoard** –Gotland, SWE

Cuerdale hoard - It was found on 15 May 1840, on the south side of the River Ribble at Cuerdale, near Preston, Lancashire. The hoard had been buried in a lead chest, fragments of which survive, and the presence of small bone pins suggests that some of the coins or bullion had been parcelled up into separate bags or parcels, secured by these pins.-Contained around 8,600 items of silver coins and bullion when found, and weighed around 40kg.

Vale of York Hoard (also called the Harrogate hoard) – combined with and now known as The Vale of York Hoard. -it was found on 6 January 2007, undisturbed near the town of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, England. -a 10th century Viking hoard of 617 silver coins and 65 other items including whole jewellery, hacksilver, ingots, a silver-gilt vessel and a gold armband.

Huxley hoard –discovered in 2004. -the hoard is thought to date to the first decade of the tenth century AD -22 silver objects consist of one small cast ingot and 21 bracelets or arm rings that had been folded flat, probably for ease of burial. Sixteen of the bracelets are intricately decorated with stamped designs using a distinctive type of punch work.-The hoard weighs nearly 1.5 kg in total.

Storr Highland hoard -these pieces of silver were buried by a Viking trader or settler on the Isle of Skye.

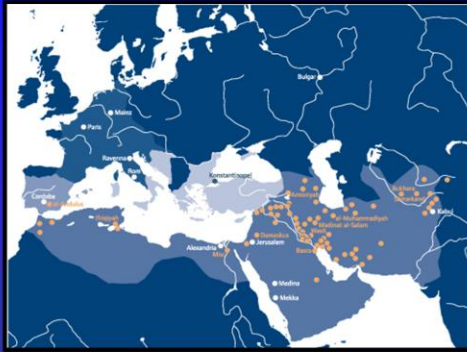
Angelsey hoard -five complete early tenth-century silver Hiberno-Scandinavian broad band arm-rings - found in the nineteenth century on the north-west side of the Penmon Peninsula in Wales (Red Wharf Beach) -weighed total 434.4g of silver

Wieringen hoard -silver treasure was found in 1996 in a pasture at the hamlet of [Westerklief](#), in Wieringen, the Netherlands. - approx. 9th century -the hoard is approx. 1.7 kilograms of silver coins and jewellery and small silver ingots.

Spillings hoard -In the early summer of 1999 the biggest hoard so far was found at Spillings farm in Othem parish, situated in the Northeastern part of Gotland -illustrates the enormous influx of Arabic silver in its epoch, weighing more than 66kg, of which 17.5kg are made up of about 14,000 coins.

Ocksarve hoard -found at Ocksarve in Hemse parish, Gotland, Sweden in 1997 -contained 370 silver coins and over 3.5 kg of hacksilver and twisted silver rod as well as a 90g silver sword chape.

Sources of Silver in the Viking Era



- The Islamic Caliphate and Europe around 800.
- The sites where the Arab silver coins found in the Nordic countries were minted are indicated.

- Silver was first introduced in large quantities into Denmark in 900 AD
- Originated in the Muslim provinces in central Asia and likely came via the Russian trade routes, such as the Volga and Don rivers
- By the end of the 900's, the flow of silver from the Arab states ended as mines such as the ones around Baghdad dried up
- After the 900's, silver largely entered Denmark and Norway from European sources such as the Harz mountains in central Germany as well as the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain
- It is estimated that in 25 years during the late 10th and early 11th centuries, 150,000 pounds of silver (68,000 kg) entered the Norse kingdoms as **Danegeld**

http://oldtiden.natmus.dk/udstillingen/vikingetiden/vikingernes_soelvskatte/soelvets_vej_til_danmark/language/uk/

http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/Towns.htm

Coins

- The Norse were a far-ranging people as traders, explorers and raiders and collected a wide variety of coins in their travels
- It is common to find a mixture of coins in Viking hoards including Arab coins, Saxon, Germanic, Irish and others, as well as Swedish and Norwegian coins
- The only thing they had in common was that they were made of silver
- Rather than keep track of currencies and exchange rates, the Norse determined the worth of silver by **weight**
- It was also common for tradesmen to melt down silver coins and recast them as ingots, rods or even jewelry



The actual purity of the silver used in coins varied from one king to the next. Norse silversmiths had the ability to refine silver to a level of about 99% purity. In some cases, impurities were added to make the silver harder, while in other cases, impurities were added to debase the value of the silver. Relatively pure silver was called **brannt silfr** (burned silver), while debased silver was called **bleikt silfr** (pale silver).

In the beginning, coins paid as Danegeld by the English was of relatively pure silver. Later, in order to reduce the impact of the Danegeld payments on England's purse, the coinage was debased, and the silver content was considerably reduced. King, Haraldr harðráði had the silver content of his coins reduced from roughly 90% (the norm in other lands) to about 33%.

[In chapter 30 of Morkinskinna, when Halldórr Snorrason received his pay from the king in debased coins, he contemptuously swept the coins into the straw on the floor. Later, he said, "Why should I serve him any longer when I don't even get my pay in genuine currency?" Eventually, King Haraldr paid him in pure silver.]

Website: http://www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/Towns.htm

- Today's sterling silver is an alloy of silver containing 92.5% by weight of silver and 7.5% by weight of other metals, usually copper.

Why Hoard?

- **There are many different possible reasons for hoarding**
- **Prestige hoards**
 - usually associated with grave-finds
 - relatively whole pieces of jewelry
 - presence of gold if of high rank (e.g. Sutton Hoo and Snettisham hoards)
- **Wealth hoards**
 - most likely composed of coins and jewelry (whole and hacksilver)
 - wealth buried for safe keeping to be retrieved later (e.g. savings, war chest, profits, raid spoils)
- **Resource hoards**
 - mostly jewelry, hacksilver, unworked rods and ingots along with coins
 - materials stockpile for a tradesman (e.g. jeweler)



Jewelry



- Gold jewelry was largely considered to be a prestige item (and still is)
- Master works of silver jewelry were also considered to be prestige items (e.g. the Visby Lenses) though a significantly large proportion of silver jewelry in Viking hoards takes the form of **stamp-patterned jewelry** of various levels of quality
- While gold jewelry represented prestige and power, silver jewelry represented portable wealth
- As shown in the abundance of hacksilver associated with Viking hoards, it was not uncommon to break up a piece of silver jewelry as part of a payment

1 ounce of silver = 27 grams (approx)

8 ounces of silver = 1 mark

8 ounces of silver = 1 ounce of gold

8 ounces of silver = 4 milk cows

8 ounces of silver = 24 sheep

8 ounces of silver = 144 ells (about 72 meters) of homespun woolen cloth 2 ells wide (about 1 meter)

12 ounces of silver = 1 adult male slave

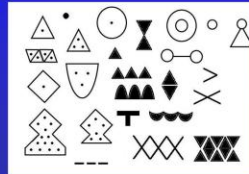
One indication that the rings were more than decorative comes from Professor Dan Carlsson of Gotland University. Of over 400 arm rings found in Gotland none were in graves, all in hoards. (http://mycoinpage.com/SCA/viking_arm_rings.htm)

At a current market price of **\$36.93C per ounce** (as of April 5, 2011), **1 mark of silver** would have a current market value of **\$281.41**

Stamp-Patterning



- Stamps would have been made of iron and shaped with files
- An example was found in the Mastermyr chest find
- Could suggest that silver stamping may not have been a specialist skill
- Examining silver jewelry finds – both whole and hacksilver – shows an extensive range of motifs and patterns



Stamp-Pattern Motifs

Norse stamp motifs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dot -the imprinted dot, along with incised lines are the simplest of motifs -a wide variety of line patterns can be made with imprinted dots
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • circle -basic motif of small circles
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • circle-connector-circle -2 circles connected with an incised line -likely made with a circle stamp and a small straight chisel or fuller
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • circle-in-circle -a smaller circle incised inside a larger circle -due to the complexity of the pattern, this was likely achieved with 2 stamps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triangle-circle -a combination of stamped triangles tipped with a small circle
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • circle-dot -very common motif in bone artifacts, mirrored in silver artifacts -the circle is stamped and the dot can be either raised or imprinted
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triangle-dot -a very common motif of a stamped triangle shape with a raised dot in the centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triangle-dot-row -using the triangle-dot motif in a repeated pattern as a line element
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triangle-3 dot -similar to the triangle motif with one dot, except this stamp has 3 raised dots in the centre -NOTE: triangles are not always equilateral

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shield-3 dot -named for the medieval shield shape of the stamp--dots are raised in the centre -may be a separate motif style or a pattern made with a worn triangle stamp
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • square-dot -same idea as the triangle-dot motif, except square shaped
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combo-dot -seems to be a combination of triangle-dot and square-dot motifs but images of artifacts do not support the use of multiple stamps--this seems to be a single stamp
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combo-dot-truncated -similar to the combo-dot except lacking the lower "shoulders" portion -evidence seems to point to a separate stamp motif
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • solid triangle -usually small and used in a similar manner as imprinted dots -often seen as a border effect
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triangle-triangle -can either be arranged tip-to-tip or base-to-base -often seen as a border effect
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triangle-row -composed of any number of triangles in a line making a saw-tooth motif
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fish-scale-row -similar to the triangle-row, the pattern could resemble fish or snake scales -seen mostly as single or double rows
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crescent-row -also resembling scales, this motif however seems to have a slightly curved base rather than a straight base

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "T"-row -often found in rows, this motif can also invert every other T in the pattern -strong resemblance to the Greek key-pattern borders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dots-dashes -often resembling a line of Morse code, this motif uses small incised dots and/or dashes to make line patterns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "V"-pattern -the regularity of the imprints seen in artifacts leads to the idea that this may have been a specific patterned stamp rather than a pattern made with a straight chisel or fuller
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • double-V -even though this pattern resembles an X, on some artifacts, a skew in the pattern lends to the idea that this pattern may have been made with a V stamp rather than a chisel or fuller
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X-line-incised -this is a simple pattern of linked incised X's using either a small straight chisel or fuller
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X-line-raised -this similar pattern uses a specifically made stamp where the linked X's are filed into the stamp surface resulting in a line of raised X's as the impression

•These are some of the pattern motifs identified in examining available online images of silver jewelry found in Viking hoards

Reasons for Stamp-Patterning

- Obvious reasons would be ornamentation
- The Norse had a very strong sense of ornamentation and artistic expression
- The Mastermyr stamp could also suggest other reasons
- The Mastermyr chest is believed to be the tools of an itinerant tradesman – not necessarily a jewelry specialist
- Stamping could also have served the purpose of **identification** – much like a tradesman's touchmark
- In this case, possibly identifying a specific tradesman's work or the possession of wealth to a specific person





Remaining slides are images of Norse jewelry set up on a 20 second delay.
The last slide is the Stamp motifs chart.

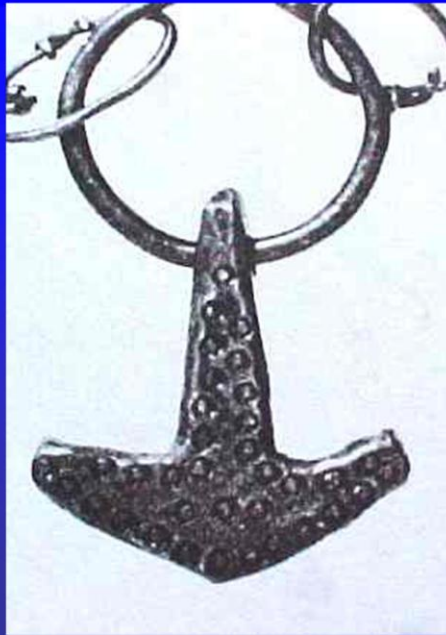


















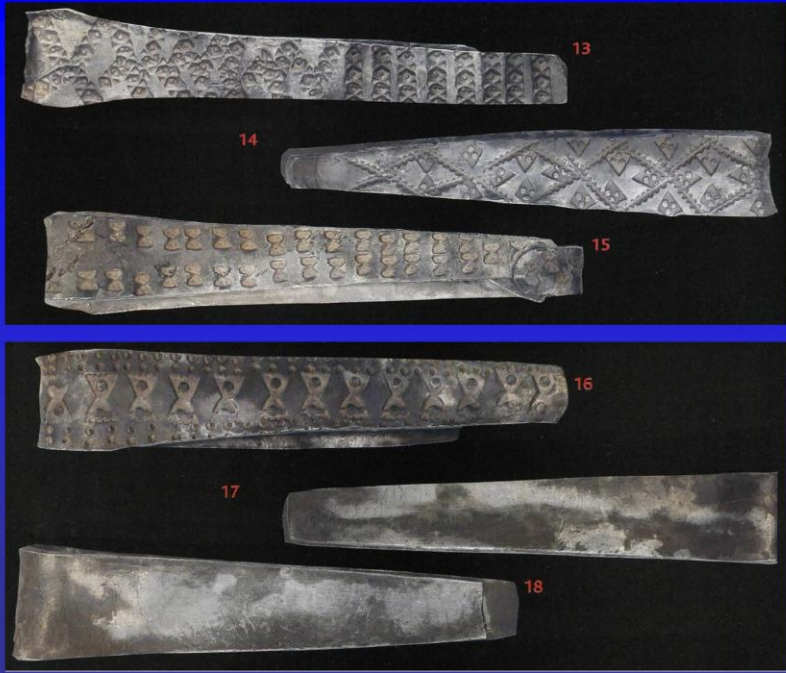






Fig. 1. The Ocksarve hoard of 1997 (in the custody of the Statens Historiska Museum 33128), now exhibited in Gotlands fornsal, Visby (photograph by R. Hejdström, after Thunmark-Nylén 2006).









(Fitzhugh, 2000)











Information Resources

PDF Documents

Reasons for hiding Viking Age silver hoards

http://www.mcu.es/museos/docs/MC/ActasNumis/Reasons_for_hiding_Viking_Age.pdf

A hoard of Hiberno-Viking arm-rings, probably from Scotland

http://mycoinpage.com/SCA/ArmRings/Scottish_ArmRings.pdf

The Viking-age silver and gold hoards of Scandinavian character from Scotland

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adssdata/PSAS_2002/pdf/vol_107/107_114_135.pdf

Two Large Silver Hoards From Ocksarve On Gotland:

<http://mycoinpage.com/SCA/ArmRings/SilverHoardsFromGotland.pdf>

Evidence For Viking Period Trade And Warfare In The Baltic Region

-Two Viking-Age Silver Ingots From Ditchingham And Hindringham, Norfolk: The First East Anglian Ingot Finds

http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/adssdata/arch-769-1/ahds/dissemination/pdf/vol37/37_222_224.pdf

The Huxley Hoard – Viking Silver Unearthed

http://www.archeurope.com/_texts/00023a.pdf



Hoard Websites

Cuerdale Hoard

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/cuerdale_01.shtml

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_mla/t/the_cuerdale_hoard.aspx

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuerdale_Hoard

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cuerdale_hoard_viking_silver_british_museum.JPG

http://web.mac.com/ianuk/ianuk/Silver_Hoard_files/10th%20Century%20Viking%20Silver%20Hoardfinal.pdf

Vale of York (Harrogate) Hoard

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vale_of_York_Hoard

<http://www.yorkshireremuseum.org.uk/Page/ViewNewsArticle.aspx?ArticleId=22>

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe/v/vale_of_york_hoard.aspx

<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23737363-british-museum-buys-viking-treasures.do>

Spillings Hoard

<http://www.frojel.com/Documents/Document09.html>

Storr Hoard

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/trade_and_exploration/

Wieringen Hoard

<http://www.missgien.net/vikings/tressure.html>

Huxley Hoard

<http://www.archeurope.com/index.php?page=huxley-hoard>

<http://www.archeurope.com/texts/00023a.pdf>

Angelsey Hoard

[National Museums & Galleries of Wales](#) (Item reference: 28.215)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/25639089@N08/2429467558>

























<http://www.gtj.org.uk/en/small/item/GTJ31612/>

http://mycoinpage.com/SCA/viking_arm_rings.htm

<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/251/>

Oksarve Hoard

<http://mycoinpage.com/SCA/ArmRings/SilverHoardsFromGotland.pdf>

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Click the mouse to end the slideshow

Other Websites

General

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Source of Silver

http://oldtiden.natmus.dk/udstillingen/vikingetiden/vikingernes_soelvskatte/soelvets_vej_til_danmark/language/uk/