Coins with crosses and bird heads: Christian imitations of Islamic coins?
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Coins with crosses and bird heads —
Christian imitations of Islamic coins?

By Gert Rispling


Four identical imitation coins from the Vårby hoard, province of Södermanland, are discussed as to origin and date of manufacture. A most remarkable attribute — a cross on each coin-side — indicates a Christian origin. Other imitations are added to the investigation on the basis of particular criteria. The most important are crosses, bird heads (of falcons?) and fixed die-positions. Die-linkage, generally the best grouping method, is, typically, not successful here. The question of the date, which is settled as A.D. 922—932, is given much space in the paper. The former attribution to the Volga Bulgars is rejected, although it was proved only recently that this Muslim people in the north is the source of most 10th-century imitations in the Nordic hoards. The location of the finds indicates a Swedish origin, but this evidence is probably illusory, due to faulty coin-publications abroad. Until the die-comparison method is applied systematically, many Islamic imitations will remain unrecognized. The Rus in Kiev, more exposed to Byzantine influence than other suggested imitative coin-centres (Volga Bulgars, Khazars, Khwarizmians), are tentatively suggested as the “Christian” source. Further suggestions would be welcome, esp. from another angle of approach than numismatics, e.g. heraldry, ethnology, art history or, even, zoology.

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On the occasion of the Islamic exhibition recently held in the Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm (v. Islam 1985), a remarkable imitation of an Arabic coin was reproduced as a souvenir pendant for sale. The copy raised questions about the original piece. How many specimens are known? In which hoards were they found? What can be said about the source? When was it struck? There was very little that could be said for certain. The material gathered in this paper allows some tentative answers. Some problems will remain insufficiently solved until also non-numismatic aspects have been taken into consideration.

The imitation which was reproduced belongs to the Vårby hoard. This hoard has a very interesting content, numismatically and otherwise. The find came to light in 1871 at Vårby, parish of Huddinge, province of Södermanland. Besides the jewellery silver, which will not be dealt with here (v. Graham-Campbell 1980, nos. 163, 352), the hoard contained six Islamic silver coins, which were gilt and furnished with loops. Thus, these coins have been transformed from means of payment into jewellery, meant to be worn. The most recent coin was struck in 326 A.H./937—38 A.D. at Shiraz, which is still an important town (S.W. Iran). Another coin was struck in 304/916—17 at Andarabah, a now forgotten town in Afghanistan. The greatest interest is, however, attached to the remaining four pieces. They are imitations. On each coin-side there is a sign like a flower or a cross (interpreted as a Russo-Byzantine cross of an old Christian type, Welin 1966, p. 108, and CNS I.14.67, plate 21). All the four specimens are struck from the same dies. Specimens with this particular die-combination are referred to in this paper as Cross coin I (Fig. 1 A).

There can be no doubt that the cross coins are imitations. Judging from the appearance, the prototype was a coin from Andarabah. The Arabic inscriptions are composed of the customary quotations from the Koran, but the
script is corrupt. The place of minting and the date of striking, on the obverse, are almost illegible. The mint-name is perhaps Samarqand, which is the most common mint-name on imitations. The date is better left uninterpreted. The obverse die appears to be engraved after an Andarabah coin of a type manufactured 303–07/915–19, but certain script elements of the prototype have been omitted. If the mint-name is derived from a Samarqand coin and the general type from an Andarabah coin, evidently more than one coin has served as a prototype of this imitative obverse die. On the reverse we can read the name of the caliph in Baghdad and that of the Samanid emir in Bukhara. The reign of Caliph al-Muqtadîr was 295–320/908–32. Emir Nasr ibn Ahmad reigned 301–31/914–43. Since the prototype contained both these names, it may be assigned to 301–20/914–32. In order to date the coin, we compare the prototype of each

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The earliest possible dating limit of the obverse, 303, is more recent than that of the reverse, 301. The obverse should therefore settle the date of the coin. The date produced in this way, 915 or 916, may even be stated more precisely on the basis of the terminus post quem (t.p.q.) of the hoards, but this will be discussed later.

The Cross coin I is unusual. In all, there are 13 specimens known from nine finds (Table 1). There are other imitations apparently connected with Cross coin I. One type has the same obverse die, but a different reverse (Cross coin II, Fig. 1 B). Another type has a similar, cross-like sign (Cross coin III, Fig. 1 C). There are two varieties with a bird head surmounted by a cross (Bird coin I, Figs. 1 D, 2, 3, and Bird coin II, Figs. 1 E, 4). The particulars of these coins are shown below (Table 2).

Whether the sign on Cross coins I, II and III really is a reproduction of a cross is perhaps an open question. The cross on Bird coin II (Fig. 4) resembles a rosette, but this is certainly due to double striking. The cross signs and the bird heads are unprecedented in the Islamic
coinages. The chain encircling the reverse field of Bird coin I (Fig. 1 C) is also unique. These components are not derived but original. Here, and elsewhere, we have evidence that the imitative coins were not always blind copies. The crosses and bird reproductions on these coins suggest that the source is not Muslim. The ban on images in Islam applies to God, man and animal. Although there is no explicit prohibition in the Koran itself, the Muslim traditions (Hadith) forbid the reproduction of living creatures. The ban on images in Islam was obeyed rigorously in the Islamic coinage, from the time of the coin reform of the Caliph Abdalmalik in 77/696 for at least 300 years onwards. The very few reproductions of man and animal on coins do not concern coins as means of payment, but medallions and memorial pieces (Nützel 1893, Zambaur 1902a, Ilisch 1984). On our two varieties of bird coins, the ban on images has been broken, leaving scope for a beaked bird. How is this to be interpreted? Has the bird a special function as a symbol of the ruler/mint-master and his people? If so, what connection is there with Christianity? Can the bird picture alone hint at where we are to look for the original home of these coins? The interpretation will, of course, depend on what we believe the bird picture shows. The first suggestion is a falcon or a hawk. Falcons/hawks have a special significance in Ancient and Medieval times, thanks to the widespread love of falconry. They are found as a motif in early European art (Äkerström-Hougen 1981). Falconry was a popular feature also at Oriental courts (Viré 1959, 1965). The design of the bird recalls a hood, which the falcon wore when not in action. Other birds, which are proposed, are the peacock and the dove. The Holy Dove would symbolize the Christian Holy Spirit (Whittick 1960). According to another interpretation the coin-design does not represent an actual bird, but rather an inanimate object — a prow, helmet, standard or the like. I should appreciate advice and help regarding the importance which we are to attach to the crosses and the falcon heads as virtual attributes of a Christian coinage. On the other hand, the crosses need be no more dramatic than can be seen in any Islamic imitation, which reproduces the words of the Muslim creed and other Koranic words. The beginning of the imitative coinage of the Volga Bulgars, who were Muslims, may be assumed to have a religious basis, but we do not therefore have to believe that all Islamic imitations result from religious zeal. Copying the official Arabic/Islamic coins, which were known to be of good metal, was the best way to secure acceptance of the minter's own, new currency. Nor do the crosses have to be authentic. If the crosses are imitated, with a view to the coins' acceptance in territories affected by Christendom, we need not adhere to the theory of the Christian origin. The mere existence of these crosses, however, favours such a Christian origin.

It is not only the cross and the falcon that suggest a non-Muslim source. There is, on the coins, a clear contrast between the extremely well-executed engraving and the poor language and script of the inscriptions. The coins follow the model very closely. The die-cutter has succeeded in the most difficult task (the touch, impression), but failed in the easiest (linguistic correctness). The engraver ought to have been able to avoid reversing every second letter, or so. The linguistic confusion seems, in fact, to be intentional. On the one hand, the imitations must resemble the official coins, in order to benefit
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from their good reputation. On the other, the anonymous mint-master, if he was a non-Muslim, might have argued for a coinage, which would merely suggest adherence to Islam. Inscriptions, which are not written in correct Arabic, have no importance when the coins circulate among peoples who do not know that language. The main thing is that the coins convey the impression of being genuine Arabic silver coins.

There is no cross coin known to me outside Sweden, except one without, provenance from Finland (Tables 1 and 2). One specimen of Bird coin I (Table 2) has been found in Estonia (Bähr 1850, p. 54; Frank 1908, pp. 377 and 383, no. 178). It is now kept in the British Museum, London. The publication of imitations has often been neglected in favour of the authentic Islamic coins. The cross & bird coins, being exceptionally interesting, spectacular imitations, would have been lavishly published, if any specimens had been found. Inquiries concerning the falcon coins in other countries are without result.

The location of the finds brings to the fore the question of a possible Swedish origin. It has been said before that imitations of Arabic coins have been manufactured in the Nordic countries especially Finland (Appelgren 1898; Welin, in Serning 1956, pp. 198–210; Talvio 1978). It is a matter of a small group of very primitive, mostly one-sided (bracteate) imitations, which seem to be made primarily for decoration. I cannot confirm, nor reject, the theory of a Nordic origin. These bracteate coins, however, seem to have nothing to do with our group of cross & bird coins.

The prime mover of the theory of a Nordic origin was Ulla S. Linder Welin, who took a special interest in the Islamic imitations found in Sweden. Her favourite hypothesis was the Volga Bulgarian origin (Welin 1962, p. 306). Like several other orientalists, she based her opinion on general reasoning concerning trade relations and a subsequent authentic Volga Bulgarian coinage. The scholars who have been most important for spreading knowledge about the Volga Bulgar coinage, though not so much the imitations, are R. Vasmer, Leningrad (Vasmer 1925) and S. A. Yanina, Moscow (Yanina 1962). Richard Vasmer, who advocated the Volga Bulgarian theory, had lively debates at the beginning of this century with E. Zambaur, Vienna, concerning the origin of the imitations. Zambaur thought that it was not the Volga Bulgars but the Khazars, who were the source (Zambaur 1902b, 1911). Zambaur was wrong, as were those who advocated the Khwarizmian theory (Kmietowicz 1973) and that of Caliphate, esp. Transoxiana (Czapkiewicz 1980).

The progress achieved in recent years in the field of Islamic imitations is entirely due to the die-comparison method, which has now been applied for the first time. Large die-chains could be built by following the dies from coin to coin. The largest die-chain holds 1,115 specimens, struck from 74 obverse and 52 reverse dies in 144 die-combinations. The old hypothesis about the Volga Bulgarian origin is now numismatically confirmed by die-linkage between anonymous imitations and official Volga Bulgar coins. The Islamic imitations in the Nordic Viking-age finds amount to approximately 4,000 specimens, which is 10% of the total Islamic material. Roughly 25% of the imitation specimens belongs to the 9th century. Of the remaining 3,000 imitations, from the 10th century, at least 80% can be attributed to the Bulgars. By reason of their frequency, every identification at issue has to be judged from the point of view of a possible Bulgarian origin. The Vårby imitation specimens have been suggested in previous accounts to be Bulgarian (Arbman 1962, p. 163, on the authority of Ulla Welin). There are several reasons for rejecting this Bulgarian attribution.

The discussion on the geographical origin and the date of minting of the cross & bird coins would benefit, if we could widen the framework of coins under study. The difficulty lies in finding adequate criteria, which could govern the grouping of more coins. Depending on kind and quantity of group constituent criteria, or typological elements, the cross & bird coins can be assigned to three imitation groups. Firstly, there are imitations, the affinity of which is proved by die-linkage. Secondly, imitations similar in type and style. Thirdly, all the imitations from the finds of a certain area, e.g. Northern and Eastern Europe in the 9th and 10th centuries.

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Die-linked coins

The typological element is the die-identity. We may presume that die-linked coins were manufactured at the same place at the same time. Such a presumption could be refuted only by strong proof or e.g. a die transport. A die-link, generated by a die transport, unites coins from two different coin groups. Such a mule, struck from two inconsistent dies, would be an exception to the rule. Since die transports seem to be rare in the Viking-age Islamic material in the Nordic area, die-linkage appears as a very reliable way of grouping Islamic coins. With the help of die-links and type attributions (see below), 220 pieces, representing 55 types (die-combinations), of “Christian” imitations could be singled out. This is roughly 7% of the 10th century imitations. While the Bulgarian imitations, on the one hand, demonstrate a high frequency of die-linkage within the existing find material, the “Christian” imitations display the opposite behaviour. Despite numerous die-duplicates, only one die-link has been found. Cross coins I and II are linked to each other by virtue of the same obverse die. This lack of die-linkage in the “Christian” material is not fortuitous. It is a consequence of the use of fixed pairs of dies.

Type-grouped coins

The official Islamic coins, e.g. the Abbasid or the Samanid, are easy to group with the help of typological elements. The Arabic script on the coins is rich in variations and details, which can be used for identification, even if the mint-name and the date are missing or unclear. It is more difficult to find relevant criteria as regards the imitations. They do not follow certain types as regularly as the official coins. How fortunate that the “Christian” coins, which fail in respect of die-linkage, do have some very clear affinity criteria in the shape of technical and decorative typological elements. As is seen from the presentation of Cross coin I (Table 1), the die-axis of all the specimens is at 345 degrees. This fixed die-position is most remarkable. The examination of large quantities of die-identified Islamic coins, as well as comments on the subject in the literature, give the unambiguous answer that at least the coins relevant to the Viking-age display loose, irregular die alignments. The fixed die-axis is the fundamental element, by which the “Christian” imitations are brought together. Bird coin I always is at a 180° die-axis, Bird coin II at 270°, etc. Beside the fixed die-axis, there are other, independent typological elements, indicating a non-Bulgarian origin. With the features of the Volga Bulgarian imitations as a back-ground, there are a number of easily distinguishable peculiarities in the “Christian” group. There is the strongly corrupt script, alternating between correct letters, in the positive, and retrograde, negative (mirror-image) letters. This is very different from the contemporary, pseudo-Samanid Bulgarian imitations. Then there is the strong concentration on prototypes from Andarabah, a feature, not documented for the Bulgarian coins. The crosses should, of course, be used in the typology. The falcon head, which is the interpretation I prefer, is a violation of the ban on images. There is another picture coin, unfortunately fragmentary, depicting a sun and sunbeams or a heart (fragment of 54%, 1.68 g, 0°; Fig. 1 F).

Islamic imitations generally

It is generally acknowledged that it is difficult to establish objective criteria for the purpose of distinguishing the imitations from the official coinages. It is, however, important that we try. Questions, such as import routes and circulation of the coins in Russia and the Baltic area, are largely dependent for their solution on the correct identification of the non-caliphate coins in the hoards. The problem of how to distinguish between official and unofficial coins is aggravated since the die research has revealed numerous non-barbarous imitations beside the barbarous. When the coin-design is not corrupt, but vaguely suspect, help may be sought from contradictions, which easily arise when dies with different prototypes are combined, and when different prototypes have been used for a single imitation die. Which these imitation criteria are, will not be discussed here, as these questions have been dealt with elsewhere (Rispling 1983, 1985).

The final division of imitations into different groups ends with the largest group, embracing
all Islamic imitations during the Viking period. This grouping has no bearing on the question of the source, as I believe we have several sources among the imitations. Instead, this group will provide us with arguments concerning the dating. It is evident that the stock of imitations in Northern and Eastern Europe has a latest dating limit at 320/932. Most imitations seem to be derived from authentic coins struck in the period 301–20/914–32. Very few imitations indicate a manufacture later than 320/932. Out of 2,000 imitative obverse and reverse dies in the Nordic area, only 0.75% bear later prototypes. The quick disappearance of the imitations should be considered in the light of the fact that the supply of official Islamic post-320 coins must have been abundant, as our hoards are full of them. If there was a substantial imitative coinage after 320/932, there should have been more imitations with later prototypes. Or is there another explanation? Had al-Muqtadir such a good reputation outside the Caliphate that his name on the coins was immobilized? It was he who sent Ibn Fadlan to the Bulgars on the Volga, so they could at their own request be taught the true, Islamic faith. The Bulgarian emir is even said to have taken his Muslim name, Jafar, after the caliph’s first name (Togar 1939, p. 46). This Bulgar, who is named “Emir Yiltawar” on some coin dies, is the real mint-master of numerous anonymous imitations in the Viking-age hoards. An immobilization of al-Muqtadir’s name is, however, not self-evident. His name on the imitations is often more illegible than that of the Samanid emir. On some dies his name is even omitted.

The previous consensus that the manufacture of imitations continued until 950 or later no longer seems valid. Assuming that the “Christian” imitations are contemporaneous with the bulk of the 10th century imitations, our preliminary date 915 or later can be changed into 915–32.

Further dating attempts
A more sophisticated dating would be achieved by using the dates of the most recent official coin in each hoard attested with a “Christian” imitation. The earliest hoard containing a cross coin or a bird coin is Alva (CNS 1.1.14), the most recent coin of which was struck in 335/946–47. The coin next to it is much earlier, struck in 318/930–31 (Table 1). The coin of 946 may be a true indicator of the real date of deposit of the Alva hoard, but may also be an admixture after the deposit. It appears, in any case, to be an exception in the chronological distribution of the coins in the hoard. As the dating of the imitations should not be based on exceptions, 930–31 is chosen as the actual t.p.q. If specimens of Cross coin I were circulating in 930 or 931, we may conclude that the date of manufacture is one of these years or earlier.

With the help of type attributions, the group of 25 pieces listed in Tables 1 and 2 is increased by 195 additional pieces. There are 190 from 72 known finds, while 30 lack provenance (Sweden). The earliest finds are listed below, in chronological order (Table 3).

Table 3. The earliest finds with “Christian” imitations. — De tidigaste fynden med kristna imitationer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Find-spot</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of Islamic c.</th>
<th>t. p. q. A</th>
<th>Eu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kallefors</td>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>914</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Asa</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>923</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Alva</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>930(946)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Broa</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>932</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jurisnäs</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hallföse II</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>1056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Vårby</td>
<td>Sö</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>937</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nors</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>939</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Båta</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>940</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lilla Tollby</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>943</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first two finds, Kallefors and Asa, have very small numbers of coins, and therefore seem inappropriate for dating. The circulation date obtained through the Alva hoard (930, above) is confirmed by the Broa date, 932, and further supported by the dates of Jugenäs and Hallfose II. We should not exclude the possibility that the “Christian” imitations circulated even before 318/930–31, as there is a marked lack of hoards from that time. There is certainly no lack of coins struck at the beginning of the 10th century, but these, which are generally early Samanid, were deposited in the Nordic area around 950 or later. In my opinion, there is a 40-year period of crucial importance for our understanding of the Islamic imitations, viz. c. 282–323/895–934. This is the peak of the Samanid mintage, and also of the imitative mintage, according to the coin testimony left in the Viking treasures. This period, so rich in coins, is very poor in numbers of finds and hoards. I have recorded only 35 hoards containing 15 coins or more in the Nordic area. As many as 16 of them are dispersed. Of the remaining 19, 17 contain imitations. According to the archives, most of the hoards now dispersed did contain imitations, but there is no way of knowing what kind. Towards the middle of the century the hoards increase in numbers, reaching a peak in the 950s. (Table 4, the 950s excl.)

Despite some short comings in the material, the t.p.q. dating seems to give sufficient indication of the first circulation dates of the imitations. The “Christian” imitations of the type described in this paper can be dated to 318/930–31, at the latest. The prototype dating says 310/922, at the earliest. There are several prototypes from Andarabah 303, 306, 307, 309, 310 and al-Shash 308, 309. Some pseudo-Andarabah coins of high quality have illegible dates but bear the name of Ahmad ibn Sahl, governor, and later rebel, at Andarabah. He was put to death in 307/920. A specimen of this type, with a 75° die-axis, is shown in Fig. 1 G.

When the t.p.q. dating technique is applied to the Russian hoards, the date of the first circulating Volga Bulgar coins (“half-imitations”, struck from one official and one imitative die), is 315/927–28 (Noonan 1982). The first fully anonymous imitation of certain Bulgarian origin is, however, attested in much earlier hoards. The earliest evidence is from Viken, Alfta parish in Hälsingland, Sweden (195 coins, t.p.q. 294/906–07).

The geographical origin again

With more material to hand, we may now resume discussion of the origin. There are only five “Christian” imitations known to me from finds outside Sweden. There are two from Den-

Table 4. Survey of Nordic hoards with 15 or more Islamic coins, deposited in five-year periods between 895 and 950. — Översikt över skandinaviska fynd med 15 eller fler islamska mynt, nedlagda i depå i femårsperioder mellan 895 och 950.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of hoards, ≥ 15</th>
<th>Dispersed hoards</th>
<th>Existing hoards</th>
<th>Number of Islamic coins in all the hoards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>895–899</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900–904</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>905–909</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>910–914</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>915–919</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>920–924</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>925–929</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>930–934</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>935–939</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>940–944</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>945–949</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3. Bird coin I. Kvarna, Vamlingbo, Gotland. 3.84. 2:1. — Fägelmynt I.
mark (Jutland and Bornholm), two from Estonia (USSR) and one from Finland. Of the 67 Swedish finds, 55 are from Gotland (with 36 parishes involved). There are two from Öland and 11 from the Swedish mainland (distributed among eight provinces). The preponderance of Swedish finds, which we saw already when dealing with the cross & bird coins, continues even after the increase of the material. This picture is probably false. At the present stage of knowledge, the idea of a Swedish origin seems too fantastic to be accepted. Islamic imitations form a well-known element in most Viking-age hoards in Russia, Eastern Europe and the Nordic area, but relatively little is known about them. They are often overlooked in the findlists. Even if they are recognized as imitations and published as such, it is impossible to identify them in detail. For a detailed classification, the dies have to be identified, which is impossible without photographs. Until we have established that there are no “Christian” coins, or only a few, in finds outside the Nordic area, the question of a possible Swedish origin remains unsolved.

Instead of postulating a single anonymous coin-producer, which was the attitude until today, several, or at least two, seem to be likely. There is now, in my opinion, ultimate evidence of the Bulgarian imitative coinage. There are strong reasons to believe that the Khazars also minted a coinage. The late Russian numismatist, A. Bykov, Leningrad, has made us aware of a group of early, pseudo-Abbasid Islamic imitations, which in his view (and mine) should be attributed to the Khazars (Bykov 1971). There is no trace of an official Khazarian coinage. The evidence of an imitative Khazarian coinage will therefore be weaker than that of the Bulgarian imitative coinage. Bykov’s hypothesis did not gain general support (Zcapkiewicz 1974, Noonan 1982). Bykov’s coin-type has been found also in Nordic finds. Die-link research on this imitation group supports Bykov’s theory. There is hoard dating evidence that Khazar coins were in circulation in 209/824-25 and prototype evidence that this coinage continued at least until 223/837-38. When we arrive at the appearance of the cross & bird coin-group, 310-18/922-30, the traces of the Khazar coinage seem to be lost. Attributing the “Christian” imitations to the Khazars is by no means an obvious choice. The Christian cross does not befit the Jewish faith, which the Khazars are known to have adopted (Dunlop 1954).

The most recent contributions to the debate on the origin of the imitations have come from Polish numismatists. According to one of the new theories, the Khwarizmian merchants, south of the Aral Sea, are responsible for imitating Arabic dirhams (Kmietowicz 1973). The Khazars and Volga Bulgars are rejected as possible sources. I am convinced that Kmietowicz is wrong so far as the Khazars and Volga Bulgars are concerned, but is he right in attributing imitations to Khwarizm? Is the “Christian” group of Khwarizmian origin? It seems to be common that, before an official coinage is established, there is a phase of imitative minting, promoted by the coinage of a powerful or influential neighbour. The earliest official Khwarizmian silver coin is attested for 348/959-60 (Welin 1961). The Khwarizmians could have had an imitative coinage before that, but the large chronological lacuna, 30-40 years, be-
tween the general end of the imitations and the beginning of the official coinage of the Khwarizm Shahs does not favour the Khwarizmian theory.

Another Polish numismatist, Maria Czapkiewicz, has maintained that the imitations came from unofficial, clandestine minting workshops within the Caliphate, especially in Transoxiana (the present Uzbekistan) (Czapkiewicz 1980). Personally, I do not believe in any substantial imitative minting anywhere in the Caliphate. Imitations are today extremely rare in the Middle East. There is a slight possibility that there was some imitative minting in the territories of Tukharistan, the present Afghanistan. Some coins from there present features typical of imitations. In the “Christian” group there is a strong concentration of prototypes from Andarabah, which was situated in Tukharistan. Andarabah was at that time the third Samanid mint in size. If the Andarabah coins dominated locally, we have an argument for localizing our “Christian” group to the neighbourhood of this mint. I would reject even this thought. Certain dies in our imitation group are represented by very many specimens in the Nordic finds, 39 at most. The die examinations of the official Islamic coins have revealed that the dies of coins struck in the northern and eastern parts of the Caliphate are represented in the Viking-age hoards in higher numbers than the dies of central or southern Islamic mints. But the northern/eastern coins cannot match the coins from outside the Caliphate. The Volga Bulgar coins are more common per die. This is, of course, due to the fact that non-Caliphate coins have had a shorter way to go, with a smaller risk of being mixed. The “Christian” coins are similar to the Bulgar coins in this respect. Thus, there is no reason for putting the “Christian” place of manufacture very far away, and definitely not the Caliphate itself. Besides, the coins are far too corrupt to have been accepted as currency there. Why, then, were the Andarabah coins copied to so great an extent, if not that they were numerous? For want of a better explanation, I think that the reason was their obvious beauty. The Andarabah coins are very legible and beatiful until year 308.

The investigation of the established theories of origin has not indicated any of them as a probable home for “Christian” imitations. There is, however, another possibility, which has not previously been suggested in the debate. What about the principality of Kiev? From the end of the 9th century, Kiev pursued a strong expansionist policy vis-à-vis its neighbours, not least the Khazars. Its geographical position made Kiev more exposed to Byzantine influences. The Bulgars and Khazars were more oriented towards the Caliphate (for background, v. Callmer 1981). The contacts with Byzantium introduced the Kievian Rus to Christianity, which, however, was formally accepted much later (c. 988). At the time of the assumed date of minting, Prince Igor (913–945) ruled Novgorod and Kiev. Is he the mintmaster of our Christian-Islamic imitations? A negative fact is the gap of 50–70 years between our imitations and the first Russian coinage (Sotnikova & Spasski 1982), minted by Vladimir (980–1015). We are not without a parallel (Haithabu), but cf. the arguments above concerning the Khwarizmian coinage. There are ancient Russian coins from this period, minted by Vladimir and struck with the help of hinged dies (Spassky 1967, p. 53). This technique produced coins with a fixed die position.

Without regard to the source of the coins found in the Vårby hoard, some objects from this hoard have aroused debate as to their origin. While some objects are described as being of pure Nordic types, others are interpreted either as true Islamic products or Nordic, but made in Russia. More precisely, the Vårby belt, consisting of 19 mounts with pendants, of which six are the coins, is said to be the product of a Nordic goldsmith working in Kievian territory (Arbman 1962, further ref. in Graham-Campbell 1980). According to another opinion, there is little evidence to support this suggestion (Graham-Campbell 1980, no. 352).

Ulla Welin determined her attribution of the falcon coins as follows: “According to their prototypes, they can be dated to c. 930 A.D. We may assume that the imitations have been struck by some barbarian prince among the northern neighbours of the Caliphate.” It is easy to agree with this statement. Welin planned a paper on the falcon coins, to be published in
I have taken advantage of some of Ulla Welin’s notes. I am also grateful to Bengt E. Hovén, Kenneth Jonsson and the late Nicolas Lowick for good advice.

Abbreviations

A  Arabic/Islamic
Bl  Blekinge
Bo  Bohuslän
By  Byzantine
Eu  European
Go  Gotland
KMK  Kungl Myntkabinettet, Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm
NMmk  Coin Cabinet of the National Museum, Helsinki
Sö  Södermanland
t.p.q.  terminus post quem, earliest possible date
Up  Uppland
UUMK  Uppsala University Coin Cabinet

References

Vasmer in Leningrad in 1927. Despite his access to the large collections of the Hermitage, Vasmer only knew of Bähr’s drawing of the Dorpat specimen (Bird coin I).
Sammanfattning


De intressantaste mynten är otvivelaktigt de med enbart kors (Korsmynt I, II, III) och de med både kors och fågelhuvud (Fågelmynt I, II). Det finns 25 exemplar av dessa mynt, varav endast två med proveniens utanför Sverige. Av hela den "kristna" gruppens mynt hänför endast fem från fynd utanför Sverige. Denna omständighet aktualiserar frågan om ett tänkbart svenskt ursprung. På grund av både felaktiga och bristande (inga foton) myntbeskrivningar från öststaterna, dit ursprunget i första hand bör lokaliseras, måste denna fråga lämnas öppen.

En annan tänkbar, men inte trolig, källa är khazarerna. Det kristna korset på mynten rimmar illa med den judiska tro som khazarerna är kända för. De mynt som först nu med numismatiska medel bevisats vara volgabulgarska tillskrevs khazarerna av somliga historiker/numismatiker. Khazarerna, som åtminstone tidvis var volgabulgarska överordnade, bör ha