

Coins as symbols of early medieval ‘Staatlichkeit’

“... the Roman people had determined never to receive the name of the heretic emperor, his charters or gold coins of his type – so his image was not brought into church, nor his name brought into the liturgy of mass.”¹

This episode, which, according to the *Liber pontificalis*, took place in Rome in 711 after an Armenian, Bardanes, usurped imperial office in Constantinople and began to rule under the name Philippicus, clearly shows that coins along with other objects and procedures functioned as significant symbols of supreme political authority and thus ‘Staatlichkeit’. The surviving gold coins that were issued in his name between 711 and 713 illustrate well why objects of this kind were considered to be symbolically connected to the remote political power issuing them. Their obverse presents to viewers a schematic image of the ruler marked with imperial insignia: a crown, orb, scepter, and chlamys. The accompanying legend, *Dominus noster Filepicus multos annos*, echoes the pictorial claim to imperial authority by its employment of a traditional title of early Byzantine emperors, “Our Lord Philippicus,” and the acclamation “many years,” which was used extensively in imperial liturgy. The reverse of those coins communicates the same statement of Christian triumphant emperorship by presenting the image of a cross-potent and the traditional imperial acclamation *Victoria Augusti*. Altogether, the images and legends stamped on flans of precious metal at an imperial mint turned coins into symbols of supreme authority in the Byzantine empire, and their rejection carried a straightforward political message to the imperial court in Constantinople. Thus, the passage from the *Liber pontificalis* highlights the fact that, in addition to circulating as a means of economic exchange, early medieval coins functioned as important political symbols.

Although the political symbolic function of early medieval coins has already been emphasized by numismatists such as Philip Grierson and Ermanno A. Arslan,² the bulk of numismatic studies has been dedicated to the economic aspect of early medieval coinage. The situation has recently begun to change as some numismatists, under the influence of recent methodological trends in modern archeology and sociology, have called for a new approach to coins – an approach that one scholar has even named “post-modernist numismatics”.³ This new approach shifts the focus of numismatic research from the economic use of classical and medieval coins to their social and political functions, promotes a contextual analysis of coins, and turns to different material and symbolic meanings of numismatic objects in various contexts.⁴ The new theoretical framework therefore encourages numismatists to expand more actively the use of numismatic evidence beyond the traditional limits of economic

¹ *Liber pontificalis* 90, 10 (ed. Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber pontificalis*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome, 3 vols., Paris ²1955–1957) 1, 392: *Hisdem temporibus cum statuisset populus Romanus nequaquam heretici imperatoris nomen aut chartas vel figuram solidi susciperent, unde nec eius effigies in ecclesia introducta est, nec suum nomen ad missarum solemnias proferebatur*. I discuss this passage in more detail in my monograph, *Ildar H. Garipzanov, Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World, c. 751–877* (Brill’s Series on the Early Middle Ages 16, Leiden/Boston 2008) 1–3 and 27–28.

² Philip Grierson, *Symbolism in early medieval charters and coins*, in: *Simboli e simbologia nell’alto Medioevo* (Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo 23, Spoleto 1976) 601–640; Ermanno A. Arslan, *Emissioni monetarie e segni del potere*, in: *Commitenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell’alto Medioevo occidentale* (Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo 39, Spoleto 1992) 791–850.

³ Helle W. Horsnæs, *Når mønter ikke er penge, en eksempel på postmodernisk numismatik*, in: *Meta* 3 (2005) 11–20.

⁴ See, for instance, other articles in the same issue, Håkon Ingvaldsen, *Mellom object og symbol: Kontekstbaserte tolkningsteorier for minters oppkomst og funksjon fra antikken til vår tid*, in: *Meta* 3 (2005) 21–36; Christoph Kilger, *På jakt after människorna bakom mynten: Tolkningsmöjligheter inom det numismatiska och historisk-arkeologiska forskningsfältet*, in: *Meta* 3 (2005) 37–52.

history into the fields of social and political history and to explore the ways in which early medieval coins can be employed in the study of early medieval political culture and those political structures usually described with the term 'state'.⁵

Although numismatic evidence may be utilized in many ways in such research, in this paper I will emphasize three particular aspects: 1) numismatic designs;⁶ 2) the distribution of mints in a given polity; and 3) regional patterns of coin circulation. The episode from the *Liber pontificalis* illustrates well the significance of numismatic iconography and legends for contemporary political culture and perceptions of the state, and an increasing number of numismatic studies deal with this aspect.⁷ Meanwhile the distribution of mints may provide significant evidence because, in most cases, early medieval mints as important sources of profit point to local and/or regional centres of power. The study of this distribution provides additional information on the organization of state-like structures and, taken together with the numismatic design, indicates the level of their centralization and coherence. Finally, in some cases, the patterns of coin circulation might have been affected not only by economic rationale, but also by the ability of early states to enforce within their borders the exclusive use of coins issued by their central authorities. In such cases, the pattern of coin finds may delineate the zones of political influence and control as much as those of economic exchange.

NUMISMATIC DESIGNS AND POWER STRUCTURES IN THE POST-ROMAN *REGNA*

Judged by their external appearance, the coins struck in the first decades of newly created Germanic kingdoms show a conspicuous continuation of previous traditions.⁸ The mints in those kingdoms continued to imitate late Roman and early Byzantine gold coins, *solidi* and *tremisses* (3 *tremisses*=1 *solidus*), thus propagating the uninterrupted existence of late Roman political structures. This practice was usually abandoned many decades after the creation of a kingdom. For instance, the first so-called 'national' series, dominated by *tremisses*, started in the Visigothic and Frankish kingdoms around 580 and in the Lombard kingdom around 688. Yet the designation 'national' series, which has become customary in numismatic literature to describe the coins of different *regna*, is in a way misleading since the appearance of these series had nothing to do with the promotion of Visigothic, Lombard, or Frankish 'national' identities and polities. In most cases, a political authority that was behind these coins was expressed via the personal name of a king and his title *rex*. It was the personality of a king together with the name of a local political centre that exemplified 'Staatlichkeit' on these early medieval coins. This statement is particularly true in regard to Visigothic *tremisses*, which present the royal name on one side and the name of a city in which a coin was issued on the other.⁹ This design clearly mirrors the structure of the Visigothic polity and political life, in which royal court and episcopal cities (*civitates*) were distinct and complementary foci of political power. In this regard, the placing of the honorific royal title *pius* on the side with a mint name, which occurred on most Visigothic royal *tremisses*, can be seen as a sign of royal reverence to those centres of episcopal authority.

In Merovingian Gaul, even the name of a king was rarely placed on coins. They were produced at hundreds of localities like royal palaces, cities, monasteries, and small *villas* (more than 800 mints are known so far), most often in the name of local moneyers who were responsible for the production of coins and their designs (several thousand moneyers are named on Merovingian coins).¹⁰ As a result,

⁵ For a similar approach to Viking Age coinage in Northern Europe, see Gareth Williams, *Kingship, Christianity and coinage. Monetary and political perspectives on silver economy in the Viking Age*, in: *Silver Economy in the Viking Age*, ed. James Graham-Campbell/Gareth Williams (Walnut Creek-Calif. 2007) 177–207.

⁶ This point has been stressed a long time ago by Grierson, *Symbolism* 608f.

⁷ See, for instance, Anna Gannon, *The Iconography of Anglo-Saxon Coinage. Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford 2003).

⁸ Philip Grierson/Mark Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage. With a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum: The Early Middle Ages, 5th–10th Centuries 1* (Cambridge 1986), offer the best overview of early medieval coinage.

⁹ George Carpenter Miles, *The Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain: Leovigild to Achilla II* (New York 1952), remains the best overview of Visigothic coinage.

¹⁰ These factors make it a very difficult task to write about Merovingian coinage, which still lacks a thorough general study. As a result, there is no general agreement on the status of the moneyers or the relation of minting to taxation. For some

the main reference to political structures was the name of the local centre in which coins were produced. In addition, coins differed in their designs according to region, for example, Aquitaine, Provence, Neustria, and Austrasia. Thus, if we take Merovingian 'national' coins as symbols of Merovingian 'Staatlichkeit', they undoubtedly point to localities as its political nodes, and demonstrate deep regional differences as well as a very low degree of centralization and control.

While speaking of coinage in the post-Roman *regna*, we shall also keep in mind that they were dominated by gold coins, which were used in large-scale transactions. On the one hand, gold had a high symbolic value; hence, in the early Middle Ages gold coins were symbols of supreme political authority *par excellence*.¹¹ Procopius' comment on Frankish kings who were the first among the barbarian kings to issue gold coins with their own images and names – a comment thought to refer to the gold coins of Theodebert I (534–548)¹² – is illustrative here. Procopius noted that by minting coins Frankish kings violated an established imperial practice by which not only other barbarian kings but also Persian rulers abided, since gold coins without effigies and names of the Byzantine emperors would not have been accepted by peoples in the Mediterranean.¹³ In this historical context, the production of gold coins in the name of an early medieval king was an important political statement in the world of Mediterranean diplomatics.

On the other hand, most people obviously had limited access to gold coins with high purchasing power, which made it less important for early medieval kings to control their production and circulation in their *regna*. The purchasing power of silver coins was a dozen times lower than that of gold. Therefore, the shift from gold coinage to silver in the last quarter of the seventh century was important not only for economic reasons but also in terms of the increased ability of coins to communicate messages to a wider social range of users.¹⁴ This circumstance strengthened the symbolic potential of coins in the early medieval West, which was fully exploited in the Carolingian realm.

SILVER COINAGE AND THE EARLY MEDIEVAL STATE: THE CASE OF CAROLINGIAN FRANCIA

How widely did silver coins circulate in the Carolingian world? Are coin finds reliable evidence for commerce and economic exchange there? To what extent was the usage of coins defined by economic and political factors? In recent decades, numismatists have been divided on their answers to these questions. The doyen of early medieval numismatics, Philip Grierson, stated in the late 1960s that "Carolingian coins seem to have circulated surprisingly little; their use in commerce was in fact of a marginal character."¹⁵ In the same decade, Karl Morrison argued that the finds of Carolingian coins could not be used as evidence for commerce.¹⁶ Yet nowadays most numismatists are inclined to disagree with them on this matter. A current consensus has been summarized by Michael McCormick in his magisterial work on early medieval communication and commerce: even though every coin find in the Carolingian world does not represent merchants' movement, in general the dissemination of coin finds are quite helpful for mapping long-distance trade in the Frankish empire.¹⁷ If we turn to numismatists, then we cannot avoid Michael Metcalf's statement that the evidence of hoards indicates the wide dissemination and circulation of silver coins in the Carolingian realm. Based on the analysis of

suggestions, see, for instance, Grierson/Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage* 97–102; Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The coinage of Tours in the Merovingian period and the Pirenne thesis*, in: *Revue belge de numismatique* 147 (2001) 79–118.

¹¹ See Grierson, *Symbolism* 605f.

¹² Grierson/Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage* 116f.

¹³ Procopius, *Bellum Gothorum III*, 33, 5–6 (ed./trans. Henry B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge-Mass./London 1916). This tradition obviously died out by the seventh century.

¹⁴ As Williams, *Kingship, Christianity and coinage* 180, puts it, "[in] societies in which coins were widely used, coinage also provided a useful medium for mass messages, whether political or religious."

¹⁵ Philip Grierson, *Money and coinage under Charlemagne*, in: Karl der Grosse. *Lebenswerk und Nachleben 1: Persönlichkeit und Geschichte*, ed. Wolfgang Braunfels/Helmut Beumann (Düsseldorf 1965) 501–536, at 536.

¹⁶ Karl Morrison, *Numismatics and Carolingian trade: a critique of the evidence*, in: *Speculum* 38 (1963) 403–432, at 432.

¹⁷ Michael McCormick, *The Origins of European Economy. Communication and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge 2001) 681. But see the criticism of his treatment of numismatic evidence in Alan Stahl, *Coinage*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 12/3 (2003) 293–299.

the many different dies that were employed in the production of Charles the Bald's coins in the Low Countries, Metcalf estimates the number of coins in circulation in his reign as no fewer than fifty million.¹⁸ Even though the number is too high since it is unlikely that every die was used to its maximum capacity, the estimate represents fairly well the possible scope of coin circulation and suggests that silver coins could have been a ubiquitous phenomenon of everyday life in that region in the mid-ninth century.¹⁹ Another factor making coins more accessible to commoners was the introduction of a half denier, an obol, possibly in the reign of Pippin III and then a visible increase in its production in the time of Louis the Pious.²⁰ Even though, in the Carolingian world, they were produced in much smaller quantities than deniers, the introduction of a smaller fraction still made silver coins more accessible to users.

In his recent article on Charlemagne's coinage, Simon Coupland provides some references in contemporary texts supporting the thesis that "large and small transactions alike involved silver" and suggesting that "coins were in everyday use for many people"²¹. Significantly, all his examples come from the Frankish heartlands between the Loire and the Rhine.²² I can add another example to his list: The Life of Ansgar, written by Rimbert of Corbie, mentions a certain Scandinavian woman, Catla, who arrived in Dorestad, the main northern emporium of the Carolingian realm, from Birka at the middle of the ninth century. Her primary goal was to distribute alms among the poor, and some local women joined her in this honourable mission. Being fatigued by their charity work, they decided to refresh themselves with wine, for which the Scandinavian paid four deniers.²³ This passage indicates that deniers not only were used in everyday transactions but also were given as alms to the poor. Such a statement can be corroborated by normative documents. Some chapters in Carolingian capitularies directly state that not only free men but also women, slaves and people of dependent status (*servilis conditionis*) were expected to handle Carolingian coins in commercial exchange.²⁴

This overview thus suggests that silver coins were casually used in small transactions, although the availability of Carolingian deniers and obols might have varied across the realm. This is precisely the point that Adriaan Verhulst made in his book on Carolingian economy.²⁵ The lack of mints east of the Rhine could have made deniers less available there, which had much to do with a limited use of coins for economic exchange in those regions. Carolingian Italy could have been another case of regional difference. Based on the scarcity of finds of Carolingian coins in northern and central Italy, Alessia

¹⁸ See for details David Michael Metcalf, A sketch of the currency in the time of Charles the Bald, in: Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom, ed. Margaret T. Gibson/Janet L. Nelson (Aldershot 1990) 65–97, at 89–93.

¹⁹ On the circulation of coins in the West Frankish kingdom, see also Janet L. Nelson, Charles the Bald (London/New York 1992) 31–40, she argues that the volume of coinage in circulation in that kingdom suggests "a measure of sustained interest on the part of Charles the Bald himself."

²⁰ Simon Coupland, Money and coinage under Louis the Pious, in: Francia 17 (1990) 23–54, at 26. But as Grierson mentioned, they were never struck in some regions, e.g., Italy. See Grierson/Blackburn, Medieval European Coinage 194.

²¹ Simon Coupland, Charlemagne's coinage: ideology and economy, in: Charlemagne: Empire and Society, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester 2005) 211–229, at 212f.

²² For later examples from the same region, see Nelson, Charles the Bald 24–28.

²³ Rimbert, Vita Anskarii 20 (ed. Georg Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [55], Hannover 1884) 45.

²⁴ See, for instance, a relevant chapter (Frankfurt Capitulary) in Synodus Franconofurtensis (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 73–78, at 74: ... *si quis contradicit eos in ullo loco in aliquo negotio emptionis vel venditionis: si ingenuus est homo, quindecim solidos componat ad opus regis; si servilis conditionis, si suum est illud negotium proprium, perdat illud negotium aut flagelletur nudus ad palam coram populo; si autem ex iussione sui domini fecerit, tunc ille dominus solidos quindecim componat, si ei adprobatum fuerit*; for other examples in later Carolingian capitularies, see Capitulare missorum Aquisgranense alterum (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 152–154, at 152; Capitula legibus addenda (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 280–285, at 285; Capitulare missorum Wormatiense (ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 2, Hannover 1890–1897/repr. 2001) 15–17; Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio (ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 2, Hannover 1890–1897/repr. 2001) 26–51, at 30f. For women-traders, see Constitutio Carisiacensis de moneta (ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 2, Hannover 1890–1897/repr. 2001) 301–302, at 302. This case is referred to by Janet L. Nelson, Women and the word in the earlier middle ages, in: The Frankish World 750–900 (London 1996) 199–222, at 207 with n. 34.

²⁵ Adrian Verhulst, The Carolingian Economy (Cambridge 2002) 117–123.

Rovelli has argued that there was a lack of silver coins, especially south of the Po valley, which led to their higher purchasing power and predominant use in large transactions.²⁶ The consequential difference between the ease with which coins could be used in Francia, on the one hand, and in northern Italy and along the Rhine, on the other, is rather at odds with other evidence presented by McCormick in support of thriving commerce in those regions.²⁷ Verhulst partly responded to this contradiction by stating that, due to a different numismatic tradition in Italy, Frankish deniers functioned there, first and foremost, as a means of accumulating wealth rather than of exchange.²⁸ At the same time, the regional diversity discussed above supports the argument that economic rationale alone cannot account for the production and circulation of Carolingian silver coins. Political and ideological reasons seem to have had their own and significant share, especially because the Carolingian centre was capable of imposing a much stricter control over local mints, numismatic design, and coin circulation than central authorities in post-Roman successor-kingdoms seem to have exercised.

The imposition of Carolingian control over minting as early as 754/755 became a significant factor in the increasing symbolic role of silver coins for Carolingian politics.²⁹ In the Carolingian world, the design of coins was usually decided at the royal or imperial court, and the freedom of local mints in defining numismatic design was considerably limited. In most cases, the royal court seems to have sent written instructions about the design of coins to local mints, as testified by a clause in the Edict of Pîtres (864) from the West Frankish kingdom.³⁰ Strict central control over numismatic design and *ius monetae*, especially in the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, allowed royal or imperial courts to use coins in the propagation of monarchical authority across the realm. Similar to Byzantine coins, Carolingian deniers and obols carried images, signs, and short legends defining the basic ideas and principles of the Carolingian state, two of them being especially important: the figure of a king as the personification of central government and Christianity as the major ideological base of the state.

As 'metallic royal diplomas' addressed to broad audiences, deniers and obols functioned as symbols of Carolingian 'Staatlichkeit'. As such, they helped make it possible to imagine the Carolingian realm as a political entity, a meaningful whole, at royal and imperial courts and episcopal and monastic centres, tangible to most people. They might have spoken different languages and followed different legal practices. Additionally, local centres of power might have been more important in everyday life than the remote Carolingian centre. Still, the mere fact that the same coins could be used in transactions in every single locality of the vast realm was the best reassurance that the political unity did exist. Seen in this perspective, the insistence of the royal or imperial centre on the reminting of foreign coins with the symbols of Carolingian authority and on the acceptance of Carolingian coins by every person of the realm makes perfect sense. The harsh punishments prescribed in capitularies for those who violated the latter demand indicate well how significant it was for the royal/imperial centre: those of free status were threatened with the fine of 15 (in 793/794) or 60 (in 818/819 and thereafter)

²⁶ Alessia Rovelli, Some considerations on the coinage of Lombard and Carolingian Italy, in: *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. Inge Lyse Hansen/Chris Wickham (The Transformation of Roman World 11, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2000) 195–223, at 207–223.

²⁷ McCormick, *Origins* 357–369 and 678–686.

²⁸ Verhulst, *Economy* 120. In personal communication, Alan Stahl has suggested that there might be other reasons for Carolingian coins being less frequently found and/or reported in Italy: the possible survival of pseudo-banking institutions, more civic peace, and the effect of Italian antiquity laws and numismatic traditions on the publication of hoard and site finds. In addition, there were independent or semi-independent coinages in central and southern Italy like the one of Benevento. See William R. Day, *The monetary reforms of Charlemagne and the circulation of money in early medieval Campania*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 6/1 (1997) 25–45.

²⁹ Chapter 5 of the *Vernon Capitulary* is indicative of that change: *Concilium Vernense* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL *Capitularia regum Francorum* 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 32–37, at 34. For details, see Jean Lafaurie, *Numismatique: Des mérovingiens aux carolingiens. Les monnaies de Pépin le Bref*, in: *Francia* 2 (1974) 35–44.

³⁰ *Edictum Pistense* (ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause, MGH LL *Capitularia regum Francorum* 2, Hannover 1890–1897/repr. 2001) 310–328, at 315: *Ut in denariis novae nostrae monetae ex una parte nomen nostrum habeatur in gyro et in medio nostri nominis monogramma, ex altera vero parte nomen civitatis et in medio crux habeatur*. For detailed analysis of this clause, see Philip Grierson, *The Gratia Dei rex coinage of Charles the Bald*, in: *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, ed. Margaret T. Gibson/Janet L. Nelson (Aldershot²1990) 52–64, at 54–58.

solidi; those of dependant status, with corporeal punishments.³¹ The high aristocracy in the regions was put in charge of enforcing these orders. For instance, a capitulary issued in Aachen in 809 reminded bishops, abbots, and counts of their responsibility to punish people who rejected Carolingian coins and threatened those incapable of doing so with the loss of office.³²

By contrast, a loss of effective control over mints and the inability of the royal centre to enforce uniformity in coin circulation might have signaled to coin-users the weakness of central authority and the changing balance of power within political structures. The appearance of a number of different coin designs in the early part of Charles the Bald's reign (840–864) and the free circulation in his kingdom of the coins of his Carolingian predecessors during these years might have been perceived in this way.³³ Hence, demonetization and the introduction of royal coins with a uniform design across the West Frankish kingdom, a policy-decision announced in the edict of Pîtres (864), was an important political statement on the part of Charles the Bald and his royal entourage³⁴ – especially considering that one of the main provisions of the edict regarding coinage, the reduction of the number of mints to ten, was never achieved, and that around that time Charles the Bald began to grant the right of mintage to a few of his bishops. There were special local reasons for each grant and the recipients of these grants were exceptional. Yet this practice paved the way for a long process of transferring the *ius monetae* from royal power to local magnates.³⁵

Furthermore, growing regionalization in coin circulation after 840 was probably caused not only by economic factors but also by the division of the Carolingian empire into independent kingdoms. As soon as the *imperium Christianum* ceased to be perceived as political unity, coins issued in one Carolingian kingdom seem to have been unwelcome in the others, as suggested by the letter of Lupus of Ferrières written in 849. In this letter sent prior to his visit to Italy, Lupus asked an Italian bishop Reginfridus to provide him with coins struck there since by that time deniers issued in Gaul were no longer accepted to the south of the Alps.³⁶ Such a statement is at odds with the above-mentioned assertion of Rovelli that the scarcity of Carolingian coin finds in the Po valley indicates the lack of silver coins and subsequently their higher purchasing power than in Gaul. A pure economic incentive would have forced people in northern Italy to accept silver coins without hesitation. Hence, the letter of Lupus suggests that the circulation of Frankish coins in northern Italy cannot be explained purely in economic terms. Political rationale must have played a significant role. Likewise, travellers from Italy to Gaul might have had similar problems, and this may be the main reason for the coins of Lothar I from northern Italian mints being almost entirely absent from hoards found north of the Alps.³⁷

³¹ See Synodus Franconofurtensis, ed. Boretius 74; Capitula legibus addenda, ed. Boretius 285; Capitulare missorum Wormatiense, ed. Boretius/Krause 14–17, at 15; Edictum Pistense, ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause 316.

³² Capitulare missorum Aquisgranense alterum, ed. Alfred Boretius 152: *De monetis statutum est ut nullus audeat denarium merum et bene pensantem reiectare; et qui hoc facere presumpserit, si liber fuerit, bannum componat, si servus, corporali disciplina subiaceat. Et in cuiuscumque comitatum et potestate inventum fuerit et denarius ex dominica moneta bene merus et pensantes reiectaverit, episcopus, abba aut comes, in cuiuslibet potestate ut diximus inventi fuerit et hoc emendare distullerint, honore priventur.*

³³ For details, see Coupland, Coinage 152–155. He concluded: “In sum, this evidence suggests that between 840 and 864 Charles the Bald failed to maintain the tightly controlled and efficiently run monetary economy which he had inherited from his father,” *ibid.* 155.

³⁴ About the edict of Pîtres, see Grierson, Gratia Dei rex coinage 54–58. Janet L. Nelson mentions the influence of late Roman legislation, namely the Theodosian Code and the Novels of Valentinian III, on this edict: *ead.*, Translating images of authority: The Christian Roman emperors in the Carolingian world, in: *The Frankish World 750–900* (London 1996) 89–98, at 93–96. This feature of the Edict of Pîtres points to its significance as a political statement of the royal centre.

³⁵ The first such grant was given within a year after the edict of Pîtres. For examples, see T. I. Stukalova, Nachalo svetskoy sen'orial'noy chekanki vo Francii [The beginning of secular seigniorial coinage in France], in: *Numizmatika, Bonistika, Faleristika. Issledovaniya i Materialy*, ed. A. S. Beljakov (Moskau 1992) 45–62, at 49 and 59–62; and Nelson, Charles the Bald 32.

³⁶ Lupus of Ferrières, *Epistulae* (ed./trans. Léon Levillain, Loup de Ferrières, *Correspondance 2: 847–862, Les classiques de l'histoire de France au Moyen Âge 16*, Paris 1964) 16. For details, see Jean Lafaurie, The novi denarii and forgery in the ninth century, in: *Studies in Numismatic Method*, ed. Christopher N. L. Brooke (Cambridge 1983) 137–145, at 137.

³⁷ For details, see David Michael Metcalf, North Italian coinage carried across the Alps: The Ostrogothic and Carolingian evidence compared, in: *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini* 90 (1988) 449–456, at 454–456.

None of the surviving capitularies from post-imperial Carolingian Italy prohibits the use of Frankish coins coming from the north. Deniers struck in Gaul and northern Italy were similar in silver content. What differentiated them was their shapes, signs, and legends. After 840, Carolingian coins in northern Italy were struck on broader and thinner flans than traditional Frankish deniers. This change was a return to the shape of pre-Carolingian Lombard coins issued in the same region. Finally, both Lothar I and his son Louis II did not use the title *rex Francorum* on their coins but presented themselves as *imperator*. In these circumstances, the rejection of 'foreign' coins might have resulted from a spontaneous reaction by users to the fragmentation of the political world around them and from the absence of any imperial centre enforcing the free flow of imperial coins across the Alps. Thus, these examples of different ways in which coins were handled in the Carolingian realm demonstrate that coins could function as symbols of political consolidation or separation depending on changing historical contexts and the political goals of those who controlled mints. In short, for the Carolingians, coins became an indispensable means of political mobilization and symbolic communication.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF MINTS AND EARLY MEDIEVAL 'STAATLICHKEIT':
THE CASE OF THE LAST ROYAL COINAGE OF CHARLEMAGNE (793/794–813)

The Frankfurt Capitulary of 794 was the first normative document that demanded the acceptance of new Carolingian coins across the realm. The new coin type was introduced either in the fall of 793 or in the winter of 793/794 and presented coin-users with a new title legend, *Carolus rex Francorum* – which was a shortened form of the Carolingian titles used in the royal charters of Pippin III and Charlemagne – thus propagating Carolingian authority as linked to the *gens Francorum*.³⁸ The timing is significant here since the new title legend replaced the previous legend, *Carolus*, immediately after several plots or rebellions against Charlemagne had been suppressed: the conspiracy of Hardrad, whose followers were identified in narrative sources as Alemanni or Thuringians; the controversial case of Tassilo, duke of Bavaria; and the plot of Pippin the Hunchback, which drew on aristocratic support from Frankish regions. Around the same time as the new coin issue was introduced or slightly earlier, the first redaction of the Royal Frankish Annals was composed similarly stressing the links between the *gens Francorum* and the Carolingian dynasty.³⁹ In this wider context, the appearance of the new title legend on Carolingian coins designed at Charlemagne's court was hardly accidental. It seems that the Carolingian centre responded to the major political crisis in Charlemagne's reign by emphasizing, in the rhetoric of authority, the *gens Francorum*. This propagandistic appeal seems to have been directed toward the aristocracy and thus points to its significance for Carolingian 'Staatlichkeit'.

The distribution of mints at which these new 'Frankish' coins were produced can offer more evidence for what this symbolic reference to the Franks really meant (Map 1).⁴⁰ In analyzing this map, four mints must be left aside. The mints of Dorestad and Quentovic, the major northern *emporia* of the Carolingian realm, had to re-mint a large amount of tolls paid in foreign coins or hack silver.⁴¹ The prolific output of the mint at Melle in northern Aquitaine was due to its location near the main argentiferous mines of the kingdom, and the mint at Bourges, the main regional centre, is known to have used silver from Melle too. These mints aside, the distribution of Carolingian mints clearly shows four clusters.

³⁸ For more detailed discussion of this coin type and its wider historical context see Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language* 131–136.

³⁹ For more details and references, see Rosamond McKitterick, *Political ideology in Carolingian historiography*, in: *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen/Matthew Innes (Cambridge 2000) 162–174, at 167.

⁴⁰ The lists of mints used in this chapter is based on Georges Depyrot, *Le numéraire carolingien: Corpus des monnaies* (Wetteren²1998); with some corrections in Coupland, *Charlemagne's coinage*. The map is taken from Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language*.

⁴¹ On these two mints and toll stations in the Carolingian realm, see Simon Coupland, *Trading places: Quentovic and Dorestad reassessed*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 11/3 (2002) 209–232; Neil Middleton, *Early medieval port customs, tolls and controls of foreign trade*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 13/4 (2005) 313–358, at 319–330.

The first, in the middle Rhine region, points to the Carolingian heartlands. The second, around the Seine basin, indicates the region in which the Carolingians had been establishing themselves in the eighth century. The marginal output of some of these mints, as well as the disappearance of half of them by the reign of Louis the Pious (St Denis, Chelles, Châteaudun, and Laon), suggests that their economic role was rather negligible. The Chronicle of Moissac narrates that two great assemblies had been summoned by Charlemagne in the late spring and summer of 800 before he received the imperial title at Rome. The first (*magnum concilium et conventum populi*) was held in Tours and the second (*congregavit optimates et fideles suos*) in Mainz. Each city had a mint and was connected to the Neustrian and Austrasian clusters just discussed. Furthermore, all three royal sons of Charlemagne were present in the first assembly, and the chronicle states that certain constitutional arrangements were made there (*disposuit regnum filiis suis*).⁴² Since the initial decision to accept the imperial title most likely was made before the year 800, probably at the meeting in Paderborn in 799,⁴³ these aristocratic assemblies must have become the fora where this matter was discussed with the Frankish aristocracy (*optimates et fideles*) and received their formal approval. From this perspective, the propagandistic reference of Charlemagne's coins to his authority over the Franks was obviously welcome in the regions to the north of the Loire in which the mints were concentrated, especially among the aristocracy in Neustria and Austrasia.

South of these regions, the third and fourth groups of mints are noticeable. The third, in northern Italy, corresponds fairly well to the region controlled by Charlemagne's son Pippin, king of Italy. Milan and Pavia were major administrative centres, with many Franks in the aristocratic entourage of Pippin. Treviso on the eastern edge of his subkingdom had a toll station benefiting from growing international trade via the Adriatic. The output of Lucca and Pisa, old Lombard mints, declined in the early Carolingian period, and another mint distant from Pippin's headquarters, the one at Ravenna, had a long numismatic history and most likely produced coins with a different title legend, *Carolus rex Francorum et Langobardorum ac patricius Romanorum*.⁴⁴

The mints in the southwestern regions of the Carolingian realm constitute the fourth and final cluster. It is precisely in these regions that another son of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, was active in the 790s and the following decade. The most important centres in these regions, Toulouse, Narbonne, and Arles, had the most prolific mints. Toulouse was an important administrative centre in the subkingdom of Louis. For instance, the Astronomer informs us that Louis held a *placitum generale* in Toulouse in 790 and 797. He also mentions Louis's visits to Agen in 798 and 810, as well as his trips to Gascony: Dax must have been on his itinerary.⁴⁵ At Narbonne and Arles, as well as Marseilles, tolls were collected from merchants coming from the Western Mediterranean.⁴⁶ Farther south along the coast, four mints of marginal economic significance (Ampurias, Gerona, Roda, and Barcelona⁴⁷) were established in newly conquered territories, and the coins issued there advertised the military successes of the Franks.

To summarize, the distribution of mints in the subkingdoms of Aquitaine and Italy is limited to the places under the firm personal control of Charlemagne's royal sons and their Frankish followers, who were appointed to most administrative offices and were responsible for those mints. The Astronomer writes that when Louis was made king of Aquitaine in 781, Charlemagne appointed to Aquitaine many abbots, counts, and lower officers (*vassi*) *ex gente Francorum* and entrusted that kingdom to their

⁴² Chronicon Moissiacense (ed. Georg H. Pertz, MGH SS 1, Annales et chronica aevi Carolini, Hannover 1826) 280–313, at 304.

⁴³ For details and references, see 799 – Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Große und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn: Beiträge zum Katalog der Ausstellung Paderborn 1999, ed. Christoph Stiegemann/Matthias Wemhoff (Mainz 1999); Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung. Das Epos 'Karolus Magnus et Leo papa' und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799, ed. Peter Godman/Jörg Jarnut/Peter Johaneck (Berlin 2002).

⁴⁴ Grierson/Blackburn, Medieval European Coinage 208 and 644.

⁴⁵ Astronomus, Vita Hludowici imperatoris (ed. Ernst Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [64], Hannover 1995) 53–155, 279–555, at 299, 306, 308 and 333.

⁴⁶ McCormick, Origins 642.

⁴⁷ Barcelona, the city captured by the Franks in 801, is an exception here since it had a toll station and hence a steady income of Muslim dirhems for reminting.

care.⁴⁸ This remark suggests that the newcomers from the north took many leading positions in the newly created kingdoms, and the representation of their supreme ruler as king of the Franks gave them the authority to establish themselves in these subkingdoms in the 790s and the first decade of the ninth century. Hence, the numismatic appeal to the *gens Francorum* there seems to have had a very elitist nature and was addressed first and foremost to the faithful men (*fideles*) of Louis the Pious and Pippin.

The absence of mints is as indicative as is their presence. Although their absence in Saxony, Thuringia, and Bavaria can be explained by the fact that these regions were less accustomed to the use of coined money, this economic argument is hardly applicable to Alsace and Rhaetia, where the use of coins in transactions was expected. Therefore, a political interpretation seems to be more persuasive. Unlike southern Aquitaine and northern Italy, these regions lacked royal households as foci of power. Thus, the dissemination of Carolingian mints in the latter reign of Charlemagne presents his state as a constellation of *regna* consolidated around the royal households and the Frankish aristocracy. This pattern makes the requirements in capitularies issued at Thionville (805) and Nijmegen (808) much more meaningful: coins were expected to be issued at palaces and imperial/royal courts and not elsewhere.⁴⁹ This policy, albeit not implemented entirely, suggests that some marginal mints like those at St. Denis, Chelles, and Pisa must have ceased to function in the last years of Charlemagne's reign.

The situation with regard to minting changed early in the reign of Louis the Pious. His coins presented Louis as *imperator Augustus* or simply emperor. Unlike the earlier coinage of his father, his coins have no reference to the Franks, but rather propagated a more universal, imperial message. These coins became the symbols of a unified Christian empire, and the mints that produced them were much more evenly distributed in the empire.⁵⁰ Instead of marginal mints in the clusters that no longer operated by that time, new ones opened in the regions that had lacked them in the latter reign of Charlemagne, such as Alsace, Rhaetia, and Bavaria. The propagation of the Christian empire was taken a step further in 822, with the introduction of new coinage. The new deniers and obols lacked the name of a mint but presented a propagandistic legend, *Christiana religio*. Regardless of their places of issue, all coins of the new type had exactly the same design. Used in markets and fairs, distributed as alms among the poor, and paid in inns, they 'materialized' in everyday life the 'imagined political community' that written sources describe as *imperium Christianum* and that we define as the Carolingian empire.

COIN FINDS AS MARKERS OF POLITICAL BORDERS: NINTH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIA

As stated above, not only numismatic designs and the distribution of mints but also the patterns of coin circulation can be employed to study early medieval 'Staatlichkeit'. The dissemination of Carolingian and early Scandinavian coins in ninth-century Scandinavia offers an illustrative example on this point. The early Scandinavian series, also known as the Haithabu coinage, was issued in the second quarter of the ninth century (KG3-6 according to Brita Malmer).⁵¹ These coins were struck in Haithabu and Ribe, two *emporia* in southern Jutland, and Carolingian coins paid in at toll stations there must have

⁴⁸ Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. Tremp 290: *Ordinavit autem per totam Aquitaniam comites abbatesque necnon alios plurimos, quos vassos vulgo vocant, ex gente Francorum, ... eis que commisit curam regni ...*

⁴⁹ Capitulare missorum in Theodonis villa datum secundum, generale (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regnum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 122–129, at 125: *De falsis monetis, quia in multis locis contra iusticiam et contra edictum fiunt, volumus ut nullo alio loco moneta sit nisi in palatio nostro, nisi forte iterum a nobis aliter fuerit ordinatum; illi tamen denarii qui modo monetati sunt, si pensantes et meri fuerint, habeantur; Capitula cum primis constituta* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL Capitularia regnum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883/repr. 1984) 139–140, at 140: *De monetis, ut in nullo loco moneta percutiatur nisi ad curtem; et illi denarii palatini mercantur et per omnia discurrant*; for interpretation of these chapters, see Jean Lafaurie, *Moneta Palatina. Avec Catalogue des monnaies frappées par les ateliers des palais*, in: *Francia 4* (1976) 59–87, at 66–68.

⁵⁰ See map 3 in Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language* 144.

⁵¹ On this coinage, see especially Brita Malmer, *Nordiska mynt före år 1000* (*Acta Archaeologica Lundensia* 4, Lund 1966); ead., *South Scandinavian coinage in the ninth century*, in: *Silver Economy in the Viking Age*, ed. James Graham-Cambell/Gareth Williams (Walnut Creek-Calif. 2007) 13–27.

provided the source of silver for this series.⁵² Since economic exchange in ninth-century Scandinavia was primarily based on hack-silver, the Haithabu coins had a very limited economic function and are mostly found pierced and looped as pendants. The appearance of these coins can be linked to the emergence of a polity under the leadership of Danish kings in southern Jutland early in the ninth century. The creation of this polity was partly a reaction to Frankish expansion towards that region, and the Danish ruling elite needed symbolic markers for a new political community.⁵³ Hence, although the designs of the 'Haithabu coins' were influenced by Frankish coinage, their images and signs stressed Nordic symbols like the Scandinavian ship in opposition to Frankish Christian ones like the cross or Christian basilica. Re-minting the Carolingian coins with Nordic symbols would have demonstrated well the political authority of Danish kings.⁵⁴ This practice also recalls a similar policy undertaken by the Carolingians with regard to foreign coins. Carolingian coins were likewise limited to circulation in southern Jutland; they seem to have been either re-minted or turned into silver objects. The latter suggestion agrees with the much higher concentration of silver finds in this region than in the rest of ninth-century South Scandinavia: the average weight of silver hoards in southern Jutland is more than five times higher than in the rest of South Scandinavia.⁵⁵

Furthermore, most finds of Carolingian coins in Scandinavia that have been dated to the ninth century are located in southern Norway, southern Sweden, Sjælland, and the north of Jutland around Limfjord (Map 2).⁵⁶ Such finds are extremely rare in the rest of Jutland and on Fyn – limited to Haithabu and a central place on Fyn known as Gudme. Unlike the Carolingian coins from Sjælland and the north of Jutland, most of the coins were found in Haithabu and Gudme in a settlement context and are not pierced. The nature of these finds suggests that they were most likely lost by travelers from the Frankish realm to Sjælland and further to East Scandinavia. Sjælland alone, in contrast, has sixteen Carolingian coins found in settlements or as stray finds. The vast majority of them are pierced, which indicates their use as pendants.

The pattern of dissemination of early Scandinavian coins, however, is quite different (Map 2).⁵⁷ According to Brita Malmer, about thirty-four coins have been found in southern Jutland, and only eighteen in Sjælland. It is noteworthy that all graves with coin-pendants in the Angeln region, adjacent to Haithabu, contain only early Nordic coins, while Carolingian coins have been found in ninth-century graves in Lower Saxony.⁵⁸ This difference supports the argument that the latter were somehow excluded from symbolic communication around Haithabu. Most of the other finds of the early Scandinavian coins are on the route from Haithabu to the major political centre in central Sweden, Birka. The latter is the place with the highest concentration of finds of these coins in Scandinavia, and

⁵² For details, see Ildar H. Garipzanov, *Frontier identities: Carolingian frontier and gens Danorum*, in: *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs. Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov/Patrick J. Geary/Przemysław Urbańczyk (*Cursor mundi* 5, Turnhout 2008) 113–142, at 135–141.

⁵³ For more details about the emergence of this polity, its description in ninth-century written sources, and all relevant references, see Ildar H. Garipzanov, *Frontier identities* 115–135.

⁵⁴ This interpretation has been suggested by Björn Varenus, *The Hedeby coinage*, in: *Current Swedish Archeology* 2 (1994) 185–193, at 187–189.

⁵⁵ Klavs Randsborg, *The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of a State* (London 1980) 145.

⁵⁶ The following analysis is based on an updated database of Carolingian coins, which is available in my article *Carolingian coins in early Viking Age Scandinavia (c. 754–c. 900): Chronological distribution and regional patterns*, in: *Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift 2003–2005* (2008) 65–92, at 87–92. Some data is also available in Ildar H. Garipzanov, *Carolingian Coins in Ninth-Century Scandinavia: A Norwegian Perspective*, in: *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005) 43–71, at 55–58.

⁵⁷ The following numbers are based on an updated database of the early Scandinavian coins composed by Brita Malmer, which she has kindly shared with me. I have presented these data in a simplified form without any attempt to show precise locations and contexts of those finds. The detailed presentation of these data will appear in her forthcoming publication: *Brita Malmer, Serpents and Crosses. Scandinavian Coinages from the Time of Louis the Pious, Knut the Great, Harthacnut and Anund Jacob (Commentationes de nummis saeculorum IX–XI in Suecia repertis, NS 14, Stockholm forthcoming)*.

⁵⁸ Ralf Wiechmann, *Karolingische Denare aus Bardowick – Münzumlaufl an der nördlichen Peripherie des Frankenreichs*, in: *Delectat et docet. Festschrift zum 100jährigen Bestehen des Vereins der Münzenfreunde in Hamburg*, ed. Manfred Mehl (Hamburg 2004) 13–44, at 33; and *id.*, *Hedeby and its hinterland: A local numismatic region*, in: *Silver Economy in the Viking Age*, ed. James Graham-Campbell/Gareth Williams (Walnut Creek–Calif. 2007) 29–48, at 36–37.

most of them have been found in graves.⁵⁹ This numismatic connection between Birka and southern Jutland corresponds to the statements of Frankish sources that some Danish leaders found a refuge in Sweden while fighting pro-Carolingian competitors for royal power. In contrast, the finds of early Scandinavian coins are extremely rare in southern Norway, northern Jutland, and in the southwestern part of modern Sweden. Thus, there is a strong negative correlation in the circulation patterns of Carolingian and Scandinavian coins in the ninth century, which means that the abundance of Carolingian coins goes hand in hand with the lack of Scandinavian ones and vice versa; Sjælland is a border zone for these patterns. Such a distribution of coin finds indicates that southern Jutland and Fyn are the regions in which Carolingian coins had a limited use and Scandinavian coins were much more predominant. This data agrees with the recent argument that southern Jutland and Fyn constituted the main territory of the *regnum Danorum* in the first half of the ninth century,⁶⁰ whereas the place of Sjælland in relation to this polity is less clear.

CONCLUSION

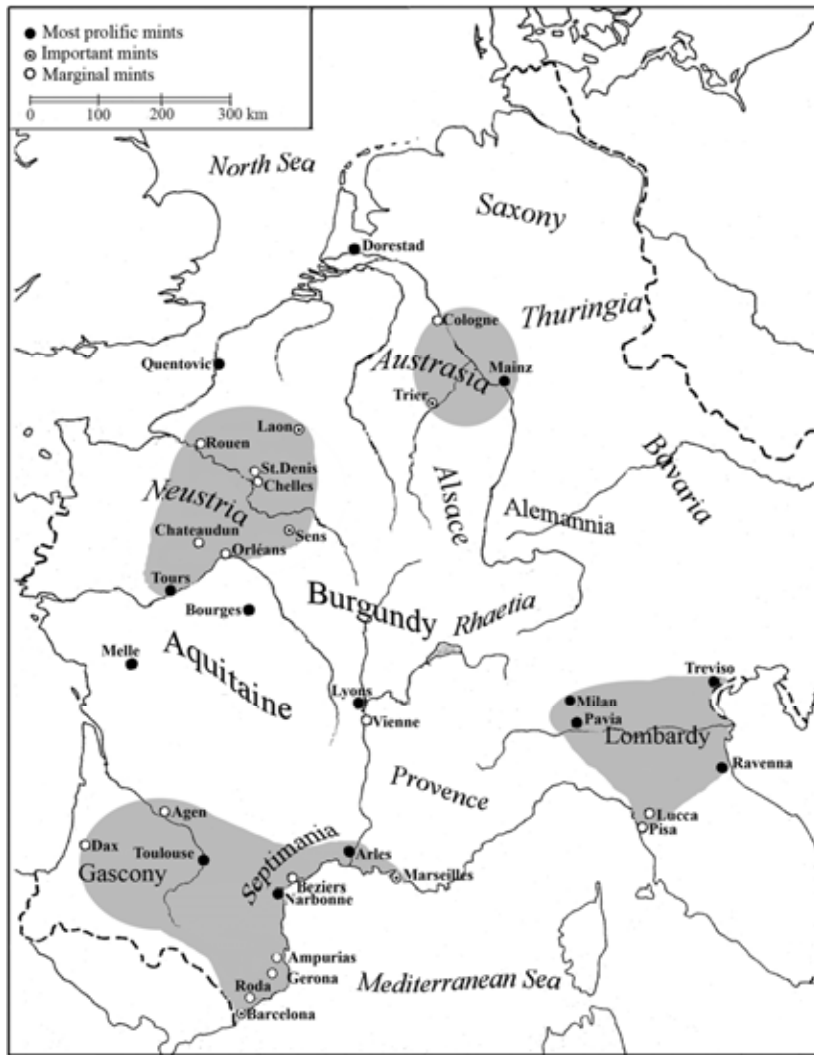
In sum, early medieval coins were capable of communicating political messages between, on the one side, leaders controlling their production and circulation and, on the other side, the people using them. Hence, they must be counted as important symbolic markers of early medieval 'Staatlichkeit', and the evidence presented in this paper shows that their designs and patterns of production and dissemination offer rich material to students of early medieval states and politics.

Late Roman and early Byzantine gold coins, made of metal with a special symbolic value, were viewed as symbols of supreme political authority in the *orbis Romanus*. As such, they were taken over in the majority of the post-Roman successor-kingdoms. With the transition to silver coinage in Europe, which began in the late seventh century, coins lost the symbolic value attached to gold, but their ability to reach wider audiences made them a better means of political communication with society at large. This new potential of silver coins was fully realized by Carolingians and their advisors, who not only exploited economic benefits deriving from control over mints and the circulation of coins in their realm, but also turned them into a symbolic resource for their authority. As such, they were symbols of the Carolingian state. To rephrase Max Weber, the state has control not only over the legitimate use of violence within a fixed area, but also over symbolic communication facilitated by various means, among which coins are not least important.⁶¹

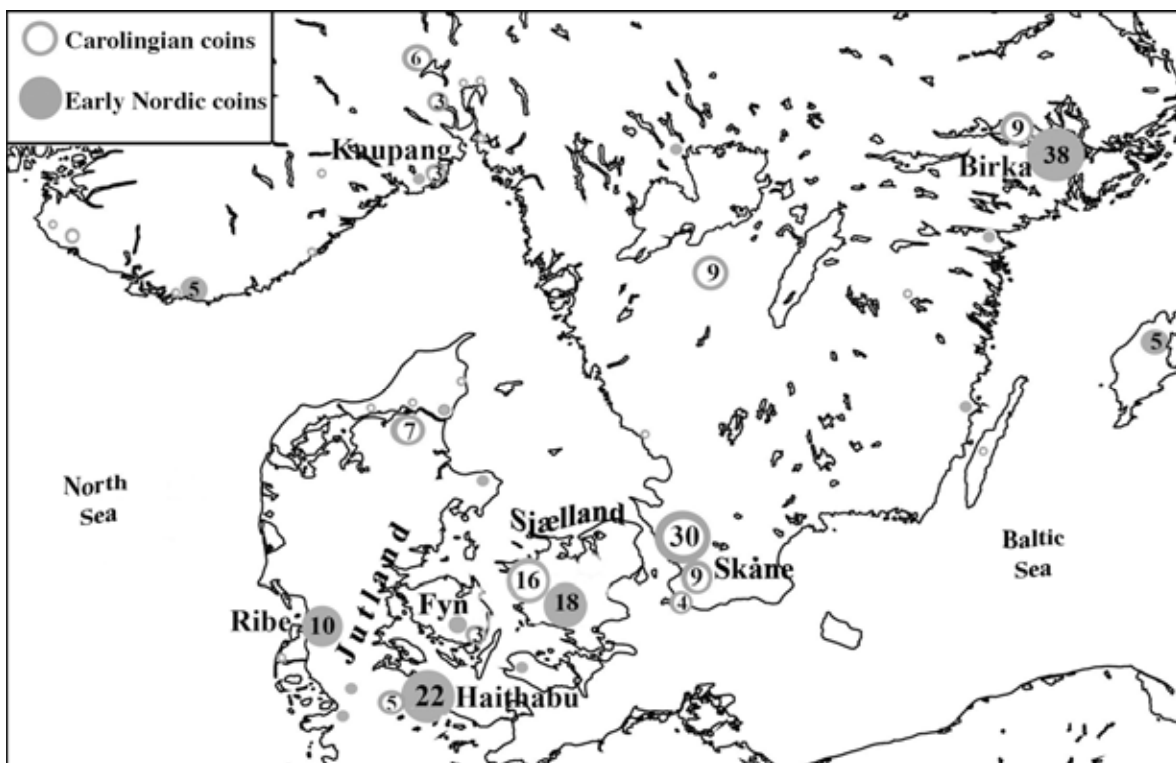
⁵⁹ See Malmer, South Scandinavian coinage 20–22.

⁶⁰ Tina Thurston, *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict. State Formation in the South Scandinavian Iron Age* (New York 2001) 148–161; Garipzanov, *Frontier identities* 131–135.

⁶¹ I am grateful to Janet L. Nelson and Alan Stahl for reading through this paper and for suggesting a number of valuable corrections to its style and argument. Responsibility for any remaining error remains my own.



Map 1: Carolingian mints between 793/794 and 813



Map 2: Carolingian and early Nordic coins in ninth-century Scandinavia