

Spink Sells Rare Gold Solidus



By Kerry Rodgers, World Coin News
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British treasure hunters continue to strike it rich. The latest significant find consists of an extremely rare ninth century Anglo-Frisian gold solidus. It was brought into Spink earlier this year by a lady who uncovered it in a field near Salisbury, England, in March. Once the earth had been dusted from the coin's face, she knew she had scored something special. On June 25 it was sold by Spink for a tidy £9,300 (US\$15,200.00).

Most of the coinage struck in Northern Europe and England in the ninth century was silver. Back in 793 C.E. Charlemagne had put the finances of his empire on a silver standard and introduced his new heavy penny. This and its imitations became the coin of choice in ninth century trade and commerce.

Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pius, reintroduced the gold solidus c. 816 C.E., although quite why is still debated. Nonetheless, his new coin became widely copied, particularly in northern Europe where its imitations joined the other relatively few gold coins produced.

Today about 100 examples of ninth century European gold coins are known. Most come from finds on mainland Europe. Examples from England are extremely rare but include two specifically struck in the name of English rulers Coenwulf of Mercia and Archbishop Wigmund of York. However, the majority of these coins are imitations of Louis' gold solidus and the present coin is the seventh such example found in England.

In some respect the new coin resembles the Coenwulf mancus sold in 2006 for £357,832. They have similar weights: 4.42 grams for the solidus and 4.33 grams for the mancus. Other English-found imitation solidi range from 4.30 to 4.56 grams in weight. A gold mancus, by the way, was worth thirty silver pennies.

Among the English finds of gold solidi imitating those of Louis, three share the same dies, suggesting they were produced in England. The new coin has similarities to these three English coins but differs insofar as the wreath, bust and inscriptions are far better executed. But, it too may well have been struck in England.

The Spink catalog entry reads: "Anglo-Frisian, Solidus, 4.42g, c.825-850, imitating a Solidus, c.816, of Louis the Pious (814-840), laureate, draped bust right with long vertical bar for nose, fine hairlines, inverted trefoil for eye, dn lvdovs inii avg, (dn lvdovicvs imp avg), rev. suspended wreath containing a large cross pattée linked to wreath on vertical axis, nivnivio ivnvm (mvnus divinvm) (Grierson Group III- cf Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Prou, no. 1075- different dies), in good style, with high gold content, creasing from coin having been straightened, very fine, an example of a ninth century gold coin from Anglo-Saxon England, only one other known of this type, extremely rare."

The term Anglo-Frisian, by the way, refers to a group of Germanic people who spoke closely related languages that include Old English and Old Frisian. They lived around the coasts of The Netherlands and Germany. Many migrated to England in the middle ages, bringing words like "cheese" and "church," as well as a penchant for gold coins imitating those of Louis the Pious.

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