THE KUFIC COINS FROM CUERDALE

NICHOLAS LOWICK

The oriental coins in the great Viking hoard discovered on the banks of the Ribble at Cuerdale, Lancashire, in May 1840 have, in common with those in many another hoard unearthed before the present century, suffered from neglect. Edward Hawkins in his account of the hoard as he knew it in 1843 (i.e. the mass of silver declared treasure trove and handed over to the Duchy of Lancaster for disposal) mentions thirty-one pieces, of which he describes and illustrates only one, an ‘Abbāsid dirham of Caliph al-Mu’tamid, minted in Armānīyā in A.H. 267/A.D. 880-1.’ Hawkins was interested in the presence of oriental coins in the hoard but was under the impression—no doubt owing to the absence of any English Tornberg at the time—that few of them could be identified: ‘Amongst this treasure of ornaments and coins were some pieces of Cufic money of the Caliphs of the Abbaside dynasty; they were chiefly fragments, very few entire, and only one or two in such condition as to allow of their date or mint being ascertained. It is only necessary to engrave one, the least imperfect of the number, that by the plates may be placed before the eye a specimen of the various coins of which the whole mass consisted.’ Later discussions of the Cuerdale hoard brought little improvement to this account and it was only lately, when Mr. Christopher Blunt approached me for information on those specimens preserved on the Downham Hall Estate (now recorded in his inventory of the Downham Hall holdings, of which a copy has been deposited at the British Museum), that I became aware of the desirability of a fuller study of the hoard’s Islamic element.

Of the thirty-one pieces referred to by Hawkins nine passed from the hands of the Duchy of Lancaster directly into those of the British Museum where they received a block registration (1841.7.10) along with other coins from the hoard acquired by the Museum at the same time. Their ticket numbers run from 1436 to 1444, beginning with the coin illustrated by Hawkins and ending with the fragments, two of which, nos. 1440 and 1443, have yet to be traced. It is just possible that they were exchanged or sold as duplicates, either before or after the transfer of the coins from the Department of Mediaeval Antiquities to the Department of Coins and Medals; or perhaps they became separated from their tickets and still lie in the collection. Two small dirham fragments (nos. 28 and 29) came to light amongst the pieces of bullion in the hoard, were declared at the coroner’s inquest; the remaining four, which had been retained by Mr. Assheton’s steward, were reported subsequently.

1 I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Christopher Blunt for his assistance in assembling from different sources the material here published, and for providing me with photographs of the coins on the Assheton Estate; to the Hon. Ralph Assheton, the owner of the coins; to Mrs. Joan Martin for painstakingly locating references to the Cuerdale hoard in sale catalogues and other publications which might otherwise have escaped my notice; and to the authorities of the Liverpool Museum for kindly loaning for study the five specimens in the Museum’s collection.
2 NC v (1843), pp. 4, 104. Only twenty-seven coins
were declared at the coroner’s inquest; the remaining four, which had been retained by Mr. Assheton’s steward, were reported subsequently.
3 Ibid., p. x, no. 140.
4 The term Cufic or Kufic denotes, properly speaking, a type of script. Its continued use to describe oriental coins in Viking hoards is justified inasmuch as it enables both dirhams and their (possibly non-Muslim) imitations to be entered under the same rubric.
5 Ibid., p. 94.
6 See J. D. A. Thompson, Inventory of British Coin Hoards, p. 42; and sources cited below, p. 23.
but these cannot be the missing pieces, since they received separate registration. A single whole dirham (no. 19) was presented to the Museum in 1847 by W. Assheton, the owner of Downham Hall; and a further dirham (no. 15), from the Glendining’s sale of the G. C. Drabble collection on 13 December 1943, was given by Philip Nelson in 1949. This completes the inventory of the British Museum’s holdings. The Liverpool Museum acquired five coins, all whole dirhams, also from the Drabble Sale (lot 1206). Thirteen coins, five whole pieces, and eight fragments, remain on the Assheton Estate.

This brings the number of Kufic coins of which the present whereabouts is known to twenty-nine, not counting the two missing British Museum pieces. The total tallies neatly with that of Hawkins; but it is unfortunately clear that the thirty-one he recorded were not by any means the only Kufic coins in the hoard. During the scramble among the workers following the discovery many coins were pocketed and not all were later surrendered to the authorities. They evidently included certain Kufic coins which (later) found their way into private collections and were eventually reported in sales, not, alas, in such detail as to make accurate identification possible. Three and a half dirhams in the collection of W. Chaffers, F.S.A., were auctioned by Sotheby’s in February 1857. One of these (in lot 118) was retained by the owner; one and a half (in lot 119), described as very fine, went to Lincoln, a dealer; and one (in lot 212) went to Whelan, also a dealer. A further dirham, Lot 282 in the Bateman sale of May 1893, went to ‘Money’. None of these coins can now be traced. Yet another batch of Kufic coins from Cuerdale appeared in Sotheby’s Sale of 2 February 1920 (‘The Property of a Lady’), where it formed part of lot 172. This comprised six dirhams, described as ‘not fine’, given to Mr. Jonathan Richardson, tenant of the farm on which the find was made, by Mr. W. Assheton, lord of the manor. The coins went to W. Shaw and were reauctioned in the Shaw sale of July 1924 (lot 566), when they were acquired by the firm of Baldwin. We cannot be absolutely sure of their subsequent fate, but everything points to their being identical with the six coins acquired by Drabble, a Baldwin’s client, and auctioned with the rest of his collection in 1943, when they were acquired by the British Museum and the Liverpool Museum respectively.

All in all, then, the number of Kufic coins and coin fragments in the Cuerdale hoard must have been not less than thirty-six, of which only twenty-nine can be described here. These, though not a large number by the standards of Scandinavian and Russian hoards, include sufficient identifiable pieces to admit of fruitful comparisons with other Viking-age finds of Islamic coins, particularly where mint representation is concerned.

The twenty-nine pieces consist of fourteen whole coins and fifteen cut fragments—already something of a contrast with Hawkins’s ‘chiefly fragments, very few entire’. The fragments are isolated, that is, no two of them can be proved to belong to the same coin; nor is this surprising, considering that the coins were probably cut far from their place of discovery, in Scandinavia or still further east. The ratio of whole to cut pieces is normal for Viking hoards, where the presence of large quantities of Hacksilber shows that silver ornaments and coins were often converted into bullion by their Scandinavian owners. At the same time, the occasional presence of dirham fragments in Islamic hoards found in the Middle East suggests that coins were sometimes cut to provide small change in the Caliphate.¹ Two of the Cuerdale fragments (nos. 2 and 5)

weigh almost exactly half a legal dirham of 2.97 gm.; but this is probably coincidental, for the fragments are very roughly shaped and, moreover, individual dirhams of this period do not always conform accurately to the legal standard.

The dates legible on the coins range from 156/772-3 to 282/895-6. As the burial of the hoard is currently dated to c. 903, the coins must have travelled from the Caliphate to Lancashire in no more than eight years, a fairly short interval bearing in mind that they probably did not come directly but passed through various hands en route. Richard Vasmer, in his important analyses of north European hoards containing Islamic coins, lists only two that exhibit a shorter interval between their latest Kufic coin and their presumed date of burial.¹

The group may be subdivided in accordance with the normal method of classification of Islamic hoards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Umayyads of Spain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Abbasids</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Dā'ūdids</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa’id b. Sa’id</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Abū Dā’ūdīd governor?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So far from containing only 'Abbasid coins, as Hawkins’s account might lead one to suppose, the group as subdivided above is seen to contain coins of at least three and possibly four dynasties, as well as a number of imitations (which may or may not have been manufactured within the confines of Islam). As a parallel to the Cuerdale group, albeit on a much grander scale, one might cite the Stora Velinge hoard from Gotland,² which lacks the Spanish element but otherwise includes coins of all the classes named above, as well as of many others not represented at Cuerdale (Ṭāhirids, Idrīsids, Ṣaffārids, etc.). From this and other Scandinavian, Polish, and Russian hoards a fairly comprehensive picture emerges of the composition of the currency of the Caliphate in the ninth and tenth centuries.

A break-down of the group by mints yields the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mint</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arminiyah</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madinat al-Salam</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andarabah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Urmiyah al-Salam'</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-Andalus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mint not read (incl. fragments)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardha’ah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-Banjhir</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mints exhibit a—for the period—characteristically wide geographical spread, ranging from al-Andalus (Cordova) in the west to al-Banjhir (Panjhir in the Hindu Kush) in the east. The coin of al-Andalus (no. 1) is immediately worth singling out, as the only piece from the western part of the dār al-islām. Its presence in so small a group is somewhat surprising, for no other coin of the Spanish Umayyads has occurred in a hoard from the British Isles,³ and from the whole of Scandinavia only thirteen

¹ R. Vasmer, *Ein im Dorfe Staryi Dedin in Weissrussland gemachtter Fund kufischer Münzen* (Stockholm, 1929), p. 41. The Obrzycko, Posen, hoard, buried after c. 973, contained a Kufic coin datable to 970/1; the Tempelhof, Brandenburg, hoard, buried after c. 954, contained a Kufic coin of that year.


³ An isolated Spanish Umayyad dirham of c. 390/999–1000 was, however, found in the ruins of Cerne Abbey, Dorset, in 1807; see R. H. M. Dolley, ‘A Spanish Dirham found in England’, in *NC* 1957, pp. 242-3.
dirhams of this dynasty have been reported. Certain of these, in the view of Mrs U. S. L. Welin, followed a western route to reach Scandinavia, while others are shown by their hoard context to have travelled east within the Caliphate before beginning their journey northwards. The Cuerdale specimen is to be reckoned amongst the latter. It is pierced, and hence had presumably been converted into an ornament, very possibly before it passed into Viking hands.

The central area of the Caliphate is represented by eight coins from the mints of Madinat al-Salam (Baghdad), Arminiyah and Bardha’ah. Baghdad, the capital of Iraq and, except for a brief period in the ninth century, of the ’Abbasid Caliphate as a whole, furnishes the latest coin in the Cuerdale group, a freshly minted complete dirham dated 282/895-6 (no. 13). Arminiyah and Bardha’ah were located to the north of Iraq, in the Transcaucasian territories of the Caliph. The name Arminiyah on the coins must be regarded as standing normally for Dabil (Dvin), capital of the Arab province of Armenia; while Bardha’ah (Partaw) was the chief city of Arrān or Caucasian Albania. Arrān, which had its own ’Abbasid governor, is usually classed by the Arab geographers as a separate province. However, a problem arises from the fact that a number of Arminiyah dirhams of the later ninth century (267-77/880-91)—including nos. 7 and 8 in the present group—show the name Bardha’ah on the reverse, beneath the usual area legend. The reason for this apparent contradiction is probably that the Arabs, unlike the Armenians, Romans, and Byzantines, extended the name Arminiyah to the whole of the area between the river Kūr and the Caspian, i.e. to Jurzān (Georgia, Iberia), Arrān, and the Caucasus mountains as far as Darband. Thus coins minted at Bardha’ah were struck within the confines of Armenia in its widest sense. The area was, however, not a true political or administrative entity under Caliph al-Mu’tamid and his successor, since Armenia proper was ruled by the Bagratid Ashot the Great (862–90), a tributary of the Caliph, while Arrān owned the sway of the semi-independent Sājid governors of Azerbaijan. Not until the early tenth century were the two districts to be merged under Sājid domination. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for a period of at least a decade during the ninth century two mints were operating under the name Arminiyah: one of these must have been located at Dabil or Dvin, while the other, which inscribed the additional mint-name Bardha’ah on its coins, was presumably at Partaw.

The easternmost part of the Caliphate is represented at Cuerdale by only two coins, from the mints of Andarābah and al-Banjhir (nos. 15 and 16). The two mints were located several miles from each other, on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush range. In monetary history they are closely associated, for Andarābah, according to a geographer, was the place where silver from the great mines of al-Banjhir was struck into coin; and during the second half of the ninth century both mints issued coin for the Abū Da’ūdīds, a local dynasty in eastern Afghanistan. The two pieces in the Cuerdale hoard were struck at about a dozen years’ interval and probably travelled westwards at the same time to join the other coins in the group.

The only other mint name legible on the Cuerdale dirhams is ‘Urmiyah al-Salām’, which appears on an imitation (no. 17). This obviously concocted signature is discussed below.

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How did the Islamic coins in the Cuerdale hoard come to reach Lancashire? Hawkins in his original 1843 account cites the friendly relations between Hārūn al-Rashīd and Charlemagne, as well as trade through Russia and other contacts, concluding: ‘These Cufic pieces may have found their way into this find either through France, which has supplied to it so many undisputed coins, or by means of the northern warriors who have been conjectured to have been the issuers of another large portion of it.’\(^1\) J. J. A. Worsaae of Copenhagen, at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in March 1847, expressed the view that 'the Cufic coins . . . had probably been brought over by Norse merchants'.\(^2\) More recently, J. Duplessy, writing of ninth- and tenth-century hoards of Kufic coins discovered in the British Isles, commented: ‘L’on peut penser que leurs dirhems furent apportés par les envahisseurs vikings.’\(^3\)

Whether the coins came to England as booty in the hands of Viking warriors, or whether they were brought by merchants, is perhaps difficult to say. It is, however, possible to be more definite on the question of the route by which the coins travelled. One thing of which we can be quite sure is that they did not come northwards from Muslim Spain. True, the group includes one coin of the Spanish Umayyads, an unusual feature in a European hoard. But this coin is by no means the latest in the group, which otherwise contains coins of the central and eastern parts of the Caliphate only. Not a single Islamic hoard of the ninth or tenth century has come to light in the Carolingian territories of western Europe. The coins are therefore most unlikely to have been amongst those seized by the Vikings from the Franks during their raids on the Seine estuary or further south.

Hawkins, and his Danish helpmate Worsaae, were already convinced by 1847 that the Kufic coins came from the Baltic, together with a large part of the silver ornaments and bullion in the hoard; and they cited the great number of Kufic coin hoards found in Scandinavia, and especially on the island of Gotland, in support of their view.\(^4\) There is, in fact, everything to favour the theory that the Cuerdale dirhams are a residual part of the great mass of silver brought by the Vikings from the east to Scandinavia. As such they are contributory evidence of the intensive trade between the Rūs (Scandinavians, probably Swedes) and the inhabitants of the Islamic lands; a trade that was most active on the middle and lower Volga, where the Rūs exchanged ambergris from the Baltic and furs and slaves from the Slav countries against silks and other luxury goods, but above all silver, brought by Khwārizmians and other merchants from the Caliphate.

Very important in the tracing of the initial stages of the route followed by the Cuerdale dirhams is the heavy representation amongst them of Transcaucasian mints. Six of the twelve coins on which a mint-name can be read clearly were struck either at Armāniyāh (i.e. Dabil) or at Bardha’ah in the adjacent province of Arrān. They include three of the four latest coins in the group, the latest of all being a coin of Baghdad. The inference seems inescapable: the coins, or the majority of them, travelled from the central port of the Caliphate northwards via Armenia. From there they may have proceeded either eastwards along the lower courses of the Kūr and the Aras to Bākū on the Caspian Sea, or west to Trebizond and thence across the Black Sea to the mouth of the Dnieper. The former route is the more likely, for dangerous rapids on the lower

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\(^1\) NC v (1843), p. 95.  
\(^2\) Gentleman's Magazine, 1847, p. 528.  
\(^3\) Revue Numismatique, 1956, p. 106.  
\(^4\) Archaeological Journal, iv (1847), pp. 94–6, 200–2.
Dnieper impeded commerce by river, whereas from Bākū it was an easy journey by sea to Astrakhan and thence up the broad lower reaches of the Volga to the lands of the Bulgars and Slavs. Itil, in the Volga delta, was a great international emporium, where the Caspian route joined the eastern caravan route linking Russia with Khwarizm and Transoxiana. If the coins travelled this way, then it may have been at Itil that they passed from Muslim into Viking hands.

The numismatic evidence for contacts, commercial or otherwise, between the Viking countries and the centralmost area of the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate will be developed in a future article. Worth mentioning here, however, is that the existence of an ‘Armenian connection’ was already known in the 1840s to the Swedish numismatist C. J. Tornberg, who distinguished two major routes, one running from Transoxiana to Bulgaria on the Volga, the other from Khurasan through Persia and Armenia to the Black Sea and thence north through Russia.¹ There are a number of continental hoards in which the Transcaucasian element is significant, though few where it constitutes such a striking portion of the whole as at Cuerdale. Equally remarkable, it would appear, was the great Sandby hoard from Öland, discovered in 1840 and summarily recorded by Tornberg before its regrettable dispersal. He writes: ‘Quum numi, in Armenia et provinciis adjacentibus cusi, haud exiguam inventorum partem constituerent, Samanidici autem non nisi tres imessent, nihil dubium mihi erat, quin per Armiam ad mare ponticum primum essent delati et hinc postea per Russiam in nostra littora devenissent.’² The point could scarcely have been made more forcefully.

In the last analysis, the solution to the problem of the routes followed by Islamic coins leaving the Caliphate for Europe may prove to hinge on the identification of the dirham imitations accompanying them. It may fairly be claimed that there is not a single Islamic coin hoard of any size found upon European territory which does not include at least a few such imitations—coins, that is, with barbarous legends or exhibiting some features of style or striking which marks them out as semi- or unofficial issues. The Cuerdale hoard contains at least five such pieces, two of which (nos. 17–18, discussed below) may have Armenian associations. Some of these imitations may have been struck at official mints, but from out-of-date or fabricated dies; others may have been produced outside the domains of the Caliph (for instance at Itil in the Khazar Khanate)³ by Muslim merchants or silversmiths sufficiently conversant with the Kufic script to counterfeit an Islamic coin die competently; while others again may be the barbarous handiwork of Scandinavians or Slavs. Research in this area has still a long way to go.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COINS
(Numbers corresponding to those on Plates II and III.)

UMAYYADS OF SPAIN


1. Al-Andalus, 256/869–70. BMCO ix, p. 114, no. 639; Miles, The Coinage of the Umayyads of Spain, no. 148 g. Clipped, pierced. ²R 23 mm., 1.63 gm. Liverpool Museum 53.114.B.


² C. J. Tornberg, Numi Cufici (Uppsala, 1848), p. xxiv.

The coin has been slightly reduced by clipping, which partly accounts for its low weight. At
the same time the British Museum specimen, which does not appear to have been clipped, weights
very little more (1.84 gm.). The average weight of this ruler's coins is 2.51 gm. (Miles, op. cit.,
p. 90).

'ABBĀSIDS

Al-Mansūr (A.H. 136–158/A.D. 750–775)

2. Mint missing, probably Madīnat al-Salām, 156/772–3. BMCO i, no. 76. Fragment. 23 x 16 mm.,
1.45 gm. B.M. 1841.7.10.1441.

The fragment weighs almost exactly half a legal dirham of 2.97 gm., but this is probably coinci-
dental as the clipping has been performed roughly, with three cuts of the shears.

Cf. BMCO i, nos. 58 f. (al-Kūfah, a.h. 139–47). 24 mm., 2.38 gm. Liverpool Museum 53.114.D.

The triple circle on the reverse is characteristic of al-Mansūr's coins, but I have been unable to
discover any issue that also has a pellet above the reverse legend. The obverse, though struck with
a die, is almost totally blank, resembling in this respect no. 4 below and many other coins in
north European hoards: the Lilla Vågome hoard from Gotland, in the Stockholm Royal Coin
Cabinet (S.H.M. 18098; Stenberger, Die Schatzfunde Gotlands, no. 376) furnishes many examples;
likewise the Czechow hoard from Poland (A. Czapkiewicz, T. Lewicki et al., Skarb dirhelmow
arabskich z Czechowa, Warsaw, 1957). These coins may have been struck from worn-out dies,
or from false dies cast from genuine coins. It would be tempting to interpret them as 'export
issues', but for the fact that similar weakly struck pieces occur in at least one hoard from
within the Caliphate (G. C. Miles, 'Trésor de dirhems du IXe siècle' in Mémoires de la Mission
Archéologique en Iran, xxxvii, 1960, pp. 37–8). It is likely that weakly and irregularly struck coins
at all times formed a substantial part of the currency of the Caliphate, but that a large number of
them were systematically channelled off to non-Muslim countries where silver was in demand and
a high standard of minting was not called for.

Al-Amin (A.H. 193–198/A.D. 809–813)

4. Mint and date illegible. Obv. Almost blank, part of outer circle only visible. Rev. In the name of
al-Ma'mūn as wali 'ahd (heir apparent); double circle round area. Type as BMCO i, no. 237
(Balkh, 194). Several small radial cuts at rim. 25 mm., 2.76 gm. Liverpool Museum 53.114.E.

The same considerations apply to this coin as to no. 3. It is very weakly struck on one side and
perhaps for this reason was put aside for export to the north. Regular coins of the same type
were struck at many Persian and Transoxine mints, and it is not possible to tell whether this
piece was minted in the central or eastern territories of the Caliph.

Al-Mu'tazz (A.H. 251–255/A.D. 865–869)

Fragment. 21 x 13 mm., 1.43 gm. B.M. 1841.7.10.1439.

Like no. 2 the fragment has been made by three rough cuts of the shears.

Al-Mu'tamid (A.H. 256–279/A.D. 870–892)

6. Arминiya '250'. Struck from an old obv. die. Cf. E. Pakhomov, Moneti Azerbaydzhania, ii (Baku,

The reuse of an old obverse die may have been due to the sudden need for coin in an emergency
which left no time for the engraving of new dies; or it may be that this is yet another 'export
issue'. Similar 'mules' are common under the earlier Sāmānids, especially Ahmad b. Isma'il and
Nasr b. Ahmad. They occur in finds both within and outside the Caliphate.

7. Arминiya/Bardha'ah, 267/880–1. Rev. Beneath area, Bardha'ah. BMCO i, no. 367; NC 1843,
pl. 10, no. 140 (engraving of this coin). 24 mm., 3.26 gm. B.M. 1841.7.10.1436.

The coin is buckled and has a deep cut running half-way across its diameter. On the combina-
tion of the mint-names Arминiya and Bardha'ah, see above, p. 22.
8. Arminiyah/Bardha’ah, 277/890–1. Similar to no. 7 but for date. Tornberg no. 405. \( \text{\textit{R}} \) 24 mm. Assheton Estate.

   The execution is weak in places, especially on the reverse.

9. Arminiyah 277/890–1. As above but without Bardha’ah. BMCO i, no. 369. \( \text{\textit{R}} \) 24 mm. Assheton Estate.

   The obverse shows a long hairline cut or scratch.

10. (Arminiyah), 277/890–1. BMCO i, no. 369 (same dies). Fragment. \( \text{\textit{R}} \) 20×15 mm., 1.29 gm. B.M. 1841.7.10.1442.

   The mint is off the fragment, but the fortunate circumstance of a die link-up between this and the British Museum coin leaves no doubt of its being Arminiyah.

11. Bardha’ah, 267 or 277/880–1 or 890–1. BMCO i, no. 371 (Bardha’ah, 277); Tiesenhausen, \textit{Moneti Vostochnavo Khalifata}, no. 2040 (Bardha’ah, 267). Poorly struck. \( \text{\textit{R}} \) 25 mm., 5.26 gm. Liverpool Museum 53.114.C.

   The exceptional weight of this coin, almost twice that of a normal dirham, seems to be characteristic of Bardha’ah’s issues at this period.


   The fragment has been made by a single clean cut of the shears. The style suggests Arminiyah or Bardha’ah.


   The coin has a freshly minted appearance, in keeping with its distinction as the latest coin in the group.

14. Mint and date missing, late eighth or early ninth century. Small fragment. \( \text{\textit{R}} \) 13×10 mm. Assheton Estate.

   The obverse shows part of the normal three-line faith formula and a portion of the margin. The reverse shows part of what must be either a four- or a five-line legend, but is too worn for the Caliph or governor to be identified. However, the coin cannot be later than the reign of al-Ma’mūn (d. 218/833).


   Besides being poorly struck the coin is oddly pitted, as though the blank had been cast.


The inscriptions are of good style and literate, which suggests that the engraver was a native of the Muslim world, perhaps an employee of an official mint. An exactly similar coin, struck from the same obverse die and almost completely blank on the reverse, occurs in the hoard from Kin ner (Lummelunda parish), Gotland (SHM 8873, Stenberger p. 141, no. 346). The hoard contains 'Abbasid coins dated up to 267/880–1 and a great number of poor-quality imitations, the latest of which are dated 270/883–4. This provides a convenient terminus ante quem for the issue in hand. The bifurcation of the upper terminals of the letters assists further to its dating, for this feature does not make its appearance on regular 'Abbasid coins until near the end of the third/ninth century.

The mint-signature is, of course, a fictitious hybrid, compounded of 'Urmlyah', a mint in western Azerbaijan, and the end of 'Madlnat al-Salam' (Baghdad). The earliest recorded coins of Urmlyah were minted in 289 and 290, too late to have served as models for this imitation. Perhaps there exist some earlier, unpublished coins of Urmlyah; or perhaps the moneyer intended to engrave the name Arminiyah and accidentally omitted two strokes—the result would be the same. However, there is no need to insist on a sensible reading of the mint: an otherwise similar imitation in the Kin ner hoard repeats the 'al-Salam' element but interpolates the word for 'year' (sanah) before it!

On the almost blank reverse, see nos. 3–4 above.


The coin has the appearance of a normal Armenian dirham but for errors in the lettering: the last two 'teeth' of the shin in sharika are joined at the top, forming a mim, and the fa of al-Muwaffaq is embryonic. The name of the mint is slightly double struck and partly off the fragment.


The register carries the entry 'JR Oriental—Abbasides—al-Motamed. Presd. W. Assheton, Downham Hall, Lanes. Found at Cuerdale with the great find of Saxon coins.' This imitation, and no. 20 below, have the appearance of being slightly later than those already described. A similar piece, with legends retrograde, occurs in the Goldsborough, Yorkshire, hoard which includes Sîmarid coins of the tenth century. The obverse may be based on a coin of al-Mutawakkil with the name of al-Mu'tazz as heir.

The piece is mentioned in the Gentleman's Magazine, June 1847, p. 639: 'Mr. W. J. W. Vaux exhibited a very remarkable coin of al-Motamed alallah ben Motawakkel the XV. Khalif of the house of al-Abbas, who reigned at Baghdad between the years of the Hegira, 256–279, A.D. 870–892. Mr. Vaux observed that this coin was a very curious one for two reasons; 1, that all the legends on it are reversed, of which very few instances occur; 2, from its having been discovered with the great hoard of Saxon coins at Cuerdale in Lanes' (Account of the meeting of the Numismatic Society, 22 April). See also Proc. Num. Soc. 22 April 1847, p. 15.


The blundered obverse is stylistically similar to no. 19. The reverse, though struck from a false die, is more regular in appearance. It resembles the reverse of a mid- to late-ninth-century coin, without the Caliph's name. Comparable pieces occur in the early tenth-century hoard from Klukowicz, Poland (M. Czapkiewicz, A. Gupieniec, et al., Skarb monet arabskich z Klukowicz powiat siemiatycz, 1964, pl. viii).


The coin was struck from the same pair of dies as an imitation in the Klukowicz hoard (M. Czapkiewicz, A. Gupieniec et al., op. cit., pl. vii, no. 893). The Caliph's name, missing on this fragment, is clear on the Klukowicz specimen. The reverse is far more regular in style than the obverse and obviously the work of a different engraver.
22. Mint, date, and Caliph’s name missing. Third/ninth-century style. Fragment. 16.5×14 mm. Assheton Estate. The coin may be a regular issue.


27. Mint and date missing. Similar to no. 26. Small fragment. ± 10×10 mm. Assheton Estate.


29. Totally illegible fragment. ± 22×14 mm. 1.97 gm. B.M. 1975.7.10.5 (transferred from Department of Mediaeval and Later Antiquities; original registration 1841.7.11.476). The fragment has been partly melted in a crucible, hence its deformed shape.
LOWICK, KUFIC COINS FROM CUERDALE