

## A new sceat of the Dorestat/Madelinus-type

---

By ARENT POL

The gold tremisses struck by the Frankish moneyer Madelinus at Dorestat between *c.*630 and *c.*650 were followed by numerous imitations from unlocalized workshops in Frankish and Frisian areas (Grierson/Blackburn 493 and 494-495). These imitations were initially made at the same fineness as the originals, i.e. *c.*50 % gold, but this alloy declined in the following decades to some 5 or 10 % gold. More or less the same development occurred everywhere in the Frankish empire and in the end it resulted in the abolition of gold as metal for coinage in favour of silver: the (Frankish) denarius and (Anglo-Saxon/Frisian) sceat were born.

In the ever-repeating process of imitation, the outward appearance of the Madelinus imitations gradually changed in their detail. The type of the original was largely unchanged, but its execution became ever more erratic – the designs were blurred and the legends became corrupted. At the end of the series there is a group of coins that were made completely of silver, and that probably date from the last quarter of the 7th century (Grierson/Blackburn 633; Metcalf p251-254). Although probably remote in character, place and time of production from the original, they can still be fairly well recognized as related to the Dorestat products of moneyer Madelinus.



fig. 1 – tremisses of Dorestat / Madelinus: gold original (Geldmuseum, Utrecht)



fig. 2 – gold imitation of Dorestat/Madelinus-type (Geldmuseum, Utrecht)



fig. 3 – silver imitation of Dorestat/Madelinus-type (Kantonnale Archäologische Sammlungen, Brugg CH)

This relation with the original tremisses is not so apparent when one takes a first look at a small silver coin that was discovered in Dongjum (Friesland) in 2001. Because of the material, its size and execution it almost immediately was labelled 'sceat' and with this it fell outside the scope of the category 'tremisses'. It shows a head and a cross, like most tremisses do, but for the rest there was no immediate match visible at first sight. Only when one takes a closer look does it become clear that certain elements in the legends – although this word seems barely applicable here – are also found on many Madelinus imitations



fig. 4 – sceat of Madelinus-type (Geldmuseum, Utrecht): silver 1,09g 10-11mm 11h

Obverse: The obverse shows, under a rounded cheek, a double row of thick pellets that together form a bust. At the top two smaller dots form the eye and the typical nose knob, before that two thin convex lines make a pointed nose and behind that there is a half circle as the ear: here is a head to the right. Behind the ear can be seen, offstruck, half of the character O of the legend DORESTATFIT, whilst before the head, without difficulty, the last part of this legend can be recognized – although what seems to be an A has previously been interpreted as the nose.

Reverse: The reverse shows the well-known cross on a base; underneath it, the globe surrounded by thick pellets, as observed on originals and imitations, can still just be seen. The pellets in the quarters of the cross make a detail that is present only on the very last, rough silver Madelinus imitations. The legend is totally unreadable, but in the “characters” that are present some likeness can be found with the shape of those in the garbled MADELINVSM of the most crude imitations; it begins with a tilted N (that represents an M), followed by a V (that makes an inverted A), nearly at the top an inverted L and then at the end VSI where the last character should be interpreted as a half M. The die-cutter made a half-hearted attempt to emulate his example of the original, but in this effort many elements were turned, twisted, misshaped, halved, dropped or left out.

Although in detail the designs and legends do not show any resemblance with that of the original Dorestat/Madelinus tremisses, the overall impression cannot be misinterpreted: this silver coin is an imitation after a (late) example from the Madelinus-series. However, this coin is of a quite distinct style and in every respect – metal, projection of designs and legends – it much more resembles the well-known sceats of the continental runic type dating of *c.*700 (Grierson/Blackburn 639-644; Op den Velde/Metcalf) than the earlier tremisses do. It can therefore be seen as the ‘missing link’ between the earlier silver coins of the Madelinus-series and the other sceats.



fig. 5 – sceat of continental runic type (private collection)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- P.GRIERSON / M.BLACKBURN *European medieval coinage*, I (Cambridge 1986)  
D.M. METCALF *Thrymsas and sceattas in the Ashmolean Museum Oxford*, II (London 1993)  
W. OP DEN VELDE / D.M. METCALF The monetary economy of the Netherlands, c. 690 – c. 715 and the trade with England: a study of the sceattas of Series D *Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde* 90 (2003) 1-211  
A.POL Madelinus naar het uiterlijk beoordeeld *Willem van Rede, 1880-1953. Een hartstochtelijk verzamelaar* N. ZEMERING ed (Den Haag 1990) 85-92  
A.POL Madelinus *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, XIX (Berlin/New York 2001) 92-95