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This monograph will delight those readers, collectors and scholars, who are interested in the sceattas of the title per se. But while it contains a great deal of information, based on archaeological finds, about the Western European silver coins called sceattas, because of a scarcity of sources it contains few historical facts on the early monetary economy of the Netherlands, and fewer still on trade with England. That is not to deny the useful features which the book does have. For the historian the book contains the authors’ speculations relating these sceattas to a number of facts from the history of Europe in the 7th and 8th centuries. It will also interest in the broadest sense those readers who have ever held a warm true silver (not cool cupro-nickel) coin of whatever period and provenance, and who wish to learn more about these ones with their enigmatic, alchemical-like symbols and designs. Numismatists, historians, artists and cryptologists, metallurgists and chemists on dipping into the book may be rewarded with some new thoughts and ideas.

The monograph contains three main sections, divided into 5, 6 and 9 subdivisions respectively. Their headings are an aid to locating information in the book, which otherwise lacks a subject index. These sections are followed by a literature list, appendices with statistical and geographical data relating to the sceattas discussed, an impressive collection of drawings and photographs of individual coins, and numerous tables, bar charts and geographical sketch maps. The Introduction defines Type and Series; Series D (one of several series) comprises sceattas of Types 2c, 8 and 10. Their designs, ancient imitations and ancient counterfeits are described, together with modern forgeries, because of course there is money to be made from them. Earlier literature is reviewed. Two main questions centre on whether these sceattas were minted in the Netherlands or in England, and what were they used for? The second main section, the study proper, describes the compilation of a die-corpus, with estimations of the numbers of dies used, statistics and numerical analyses of sceatta types by styles and weights, chemical and physical analyses of the metal contents of a small number of coins, and an overview of the finds and find places of Series D coins, both as single finds and as hoards. The third section contains the results and a discussion of the whole study. Its subdivisions are: the chronology, the estimated
volume of Series D sceattas, the obverse/reverse die ratios, survival rates, mint places of Series D, a discussion of regional single finds of Series D coins in England, the role of export coinages for trade with England, and finally historical perspectives created by the sceattas of Series D.

To some readers the numbers cited, actual and estimated, may come as a surprise. A corpus of 1272 coins was used in the study, for most of which (1071) the weights as well as the provenance are recorded. Coins were examined for style, and checked for the two dies, obverse and reverse, used in its manufacture. The stylistic criteria noted are discussed. Type 2c sceattas make up about 85 percent of the whole of Series D, and there are considered to be nineteen sub-varieties of them. Types 8 and 10, fewer in number, make up the remainder. They are all of good quality silver, estimated at better than 90 percent of the metal content, and averaging about 1.2 grams in weight. But it is the estimated numbers of coins minted which may cause readers the most surprise. The number of reverse dies for the sceattas of Series D may have been as high as 2900. The authors propose that the dies were used in principle until either they broke or otherwise became useless. In practice this was more likely to happen to the reverse dies. On the basis of data for medieval coins minted, the authors assess the production of coins per die, and arrive at grand totals in the millions for all the sceattas of Series D.

There are a number of questions raised which will interest historians as well as collectors. Among them, where were the sceattas minted? What were they used for? Where did the makers obtain their silver from? In proposing possible answers to some of these questions the authors are creative with their hypotheses. The Foreword to the monograph contains this statement: »We cannot over-emphasize the scientific importance of the randomness of the database«, based as it is on a large number of individual finds. This statistical randomness creates room for a number of hypotheses intended either to answer the questions raised, or as proposals for further investigation. The authors are aware of their responsibility and repeatedly invite the reader to be critical of the arguments presented.

What are some of their main findings and conclusions? Series D sceattas were made in the relatively short period c. 695–c. 710, during the reign of the Frisian King Radbod and the Frankish leaders Pepin II and Charles Martel. Sources for this period in European history are scarce, but the authors speculate (p. 115) that »the economic context for the dramatic rise in mint-output in the 690’s may well have lain in the interaction of Frankish and Frisian interests following Pepin II’s victory over Radbod in c. 692«. Large numbers of the coins have been found in the Netherlands and in England, with small numbers found elsewhere in Western Europe. Type 2c makes up 85 percent of Series D sceattas, Type 8 fourteen percent and Type 10 one percent On the basis of styles and silver contents, Type 2c, the largest group, can be allocated to within four shorter chronological periods, and into 19 sub-varieties. Until late in the series almost all the coins of
Series D were made of good quality silver, comprising about 90 percent of the alloy or more, and had an average weight of about 1.2 grams. The places where they were minted are obscured by the existence of early English imitations, but many sceattas of Types 2c and 8 may have been produced in Friesland, and Type 10 in the Big Rivers area of the Netherlands. The numbers of sceattas found and their find-places indicate that they may have formed about 90 percent of the currency circulating in the Netherlands in the period c. 695–c. 710, and in England they may have formed about 23 percent of the currency at that time. The Netherlands and adjoining regions of Western Europe were thoroughly monetized, and trading with England. Consequently, it is concluded that the Continental sceattas were minted and used as an export coinage to pay for imports. These may reasonably have included wool, hides and slaves, the authors propose. A question which they raised but had to leave unanswered is, where did all the silver come from?