



CHICAGO JOURNALS



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Author(s): Howard L. Adelson

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Jan., 1960), pp. 271-287

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of the [American Historical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1842869>

Accessed: 15/02/2012 22:09

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# Early Medieval Trade Routes

HOWARD L. ADELSON\*

THE techniques and methodology of numismatics as an ancillary science were developed through the study of the ancient world. The application of numismatics to the study of the medieval world is of much more recent origin. This, of course, is not to say that some great medievalists such as Henri Pirenne and art historians of the stature of André Grabar have not utilized numismatic data in their own researches. By and large, however, scholars of the Middle Ages have neglected the vast mine of material available to them in the form of thousands of monetiform objects which have resisted the onslaught of time.

Perhaps the study of a single limited problem in which a new synthesis is reached can serve to demonstrate the utility of numismatic research. The problem we shall attack had its origins in a simple numismatic oddity that escaped mention by most numismatists and virtually all historians. Its solution appears to have vital implications and ramifications for the interpretation of the history of the early Middle Ages. Historians and numismatists have been struck by the longevity of the Byzantine solidus from the time of Constantine to the siege of Constantinople by the Turks and by the persistence of the Byzantines in maintaining that coin at a given weight and fineness for the entire early Middle Ages. There are, however, three generally ignored series of Byzantine solidi that were issued in the sixth and seventh centuries which deviated from this legal weight and standard, though both the weight and fineness were expressly stipulated in the Theodosian and Justinian recensions of Roman law. This variation from the norm in the case of coins obviously marked to indicate excessive lightness and a lesser degree of fineness cannot be the result of anything but a manifestation of an imperial policy which was deliberately carried out. Coinage in gold was a jealously guarded prerogative of the Byzantine emperor, as we know from statements by Ammianus Marcellinus, Procopius, Zonaras, and other late Roman authors as well as from the numerous laws regarding

\* Mr. Adelson, who is assistant professor of history at the City College of New York and associate editor of the American Numismatic Society, is principally interested in medieval economic history. The numismatic problems connected with this paper, which was delivered at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Washington, D. C., December 29, 1958, are treated in the author's recent book *Light Weight Solidi and Byzantine Trade during the Sixth and Seventh Centuries* (New York, 1957).

the striking of gold.<sup>1</sup> In one instance the Byzantines fought a war against the rising power of Islam because the tribute payments had been made in a new variety of gold coin which was not of imperial origin.<sup>2</sup> Still there are three series of gold solidi of twenty siliquae, twenty-two siliquae, and twenty-three siliquae respectively which are clearly of Byzantine origin and noticeably different from the normal solidus of twenty-four siliquae.

On the bases of two passages in Procopius referring to the issuance of light weight solidi in terms of disapproval, the introduction of these coins can be dated to A.D. 547-548.<sup>3</sup> They continued to be issued until about A.D. 670. Thus they cover a crucial period for the understanding of the Pirenne thesis.

What was the purpose of these coins and why was their issue stopped about A.D. 670? A survey of the finds of these solidi shows a distinct concentration of them along a route from northern Italy over the Alps and down the Rhine to Frisia and Britain. Another concentration, but one of later date, occurs in the Ukraine along the Dnieper. Three scattered specimens were found in the upper Balkans, one in North Africa, and some few in a single hoard from near Antioch in Syria. Only the single coin from North Africa and those from the Syrian hoard were found on territory that was at the time under Byzantine domination.<sup>4</sup> From this distribution

<sup>1</sup> In A.D. 365 the usurper Procopius sent men bearing *aureos nummos* with his portrait to secure Illyricum for himself. Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVI, 7, 11 (ed. Viktor E. Gardthausen [Leipzig, 1893-95], II, 81). He failed in his attempt, but the fact that he could expect results from such a maneuver is indicative of the belief that the striking of gold was an imperial prerogative. Previously the Emperor Julian, in the course of describing his actions against Constantius II, made a point of saying that he enjoyed the right to coin in gold and silver as a justification for his imperial position. Julian, *Epistola ad Senatam Populumque Atheniensem*, 287A (ed. Frederick C. Hertlein [Leipzig, 1875-76], I, 369). Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VII, 33, 5-6 (ed. Jacob Haury [Leipzig, 1905-13], II, 442-43) and Zonaras, XIV, 22 (ed. Ludwig A. Dindorf [Leipzig, 1868-75], III, 321), specifically state that it was not lawful for anyone but the Roman emperor to issue gold currency.

<sup>2</sup> Zonaras, XIV, 22 (ed. Dindorf, III, 321), tells us that Justinian Rhinotmetus went to war against 'Abd-al-Malik because the Caliph had dared to pay tribute in the newly established Arabic gold coinage. James D. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II (685-695, 705-711 A.D.)* (New York, 1959), 69-70, presents extremely cogent arguments for denying the accuracy of the account by Zonaras.

<sup>3</sup> Procopius, *Anecdota*, XXV, 11-12 (ed. Jacob Haury [Leipzig, 1905-13], III, Pt. 1, 155), indicated that these coins were struck while Theodora was still alive. The Empress died in A.D. 548. In another passage (*ibid.*, XXII, 38 [ed. Haury, III, Pt. 1, 140]) Procopius dates the issuance of these solidi during the tenure of John Barsymes as treasurer for the second time, i.e., from 547 to some time after A.D. 555. Thus it must have taken place in 547-548. Cf. Ioannis Malalas, *Chronographia*, XVIII, O, 231C (ed. Ludwig A. Dindorf [Bonn, 1831], 486), where it is stated that in March 554 there was a disturbance among the lower classes because of the changing value of the *kermata*, copper coinage, but that when news of the riots was brought to the Emperor Justinian, he ordered that the coins be restored to their former value. This cannot refer to the same event.

<sup>4</sup> The find spots are: Udine and Cividale in northern Italy; Hoischhügel in Carinthia; an unknown site in southern Germany; Munningen near Nordlingen; Müllingsen near Soest; Sinzig near Ahrweiler; Wonsheim near Alzey; Pfahlheim near Ellwangen; Wieuwerd, Cornwerd, and Nietap in Frisia; Mons in Belgium; Kent in England; Wilton in Norfolk, England; an unknown

of the finds it is evident that these light weight solidi were not intended for use within the boundaries of the Empire. In fact, a great deal of literary and legal evidence can be cited to prove that their circulation within the Empire was forbidden.<sup>5</sup>

These coins were struck in the period immediately following the *Völkerwanderung*. The appearance of the Germanic tribes on the Roman side of the *limes* was not without its effect, even though there was a cultural continuum. Merchants of western origin had declined in importance during the period of the Roman Empire, and their position had been taken by easterners—Syrians, Jews, and Greeks.<sup>6</sup> This process, which began quite early, was greatly accelerated by the Germanic invasions. The importance

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site in the Balkans; Sadowetz in northern Bulgaria; Szentes in Hungary; North Africa (probably Carthage); Hama in Syria; Dnieper Delta in the Ukraine; Pereschtschepino and Zatschepilovo near Poltawa. These finds and the literature concerning them are discussed in my book *Light Weight Solidi and Byzantine Trade during the Sixth and Seventh Centuries* (New York, 1957).

<sup>5</sup> See particularly Gregory I, *Registrum*, VI, 10 (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica* [hereafter cited as *MGH*], *Epp.*, I, 389), and *ibid.*, III, 33 (*MGH*, *Epp.*, I, 191). Cf. *Nov. Maioriani*, VII, 1, 14 (A.D. 458) (ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul M. Meyer, *Codex Theodosianus* [Berlin, 1905], III, 171). Adrien Blanchet, "Les 'sous Gaulois' du v<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Le Moyen Âge*, 2d ser., XIV (Jan.–Feb. 1910), 45–48, held that this refers to poor alloy in the gold coinage. Maurice Prou, *Les Monnaies mérovingiennes: Catalogue des monnaies françaises de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1892), xvi, and Ernest Babelon, "La Siliquie romaine, le sou et le denier de la loi des Francs Saliens," *Journal des Savants* (Feb. 1901), 120, believed that this refers to a light weight coinage. In any event this shows that the Romans did not accept all gold coinage at full value. See also *Leges Burgundionum, Constitutiones Extravagantes*, XXI, 7 (*MGH, Leges*, Sectio I, II, Pt. 1, 120–21), which shows that the Germanic barbarians as well knew of certain gold coins that were not universally acceptable. Cf. St. Avitus, *Epistolae*, LXXXVII (*MGH, A.A.*, VI, 96). The reference to *Formulae Lindenbrogianae*, lxxxii, which is sometimes mentioned in this connection, can be shown to be spurious on the basis of the best edition of that text in *MGH, Leges*, Sectio V, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Lambrechts, "Le Commerce des 'Syriens' en Gaule du Haut-Empire à l'époque mérovingienne," *L'Antiquité Classique*, VI (Apr. 1937), 35–61, maintained that prior to the *Völkerwanderung* the Gauls themselves carried on the trade in the western Mediterranean. According to Lambrechts numerous oriental merchants entered Gaul in Merovingian times and replaced the native entrepreneurs who had been ruined by the economic difficulties of the third and fourth centuries as well as by the Germanic invasions. Cf. Vasile Pârvan, *Die Nationalität der Kaufleute im römischen Kaiserreiche* (published doctoral dissertation, Breslau, 1909). George I. Brătianu, "Une nouvelle histoire de l'Europe au moyen-âge: La fin du monde antique et le triomphe de l'Orient," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, XVIII (Jan.–Mar. 1939), 252–66, held that the troubles of the third century caused a population decline, particularly in the West, and a consequent shift in the center of economic life eastward. The conquests of Islam, in his view, completed the process, while the anti-Semitism of the Byzantines resulted in a westward migration of Jewish merchants, making possible the Carolingian stabilization at a lower level than had been attained in the earlier period. Henri Pirenne, *Mediaeval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, tr. Frank D. Halsey (Princeton, N. J., 1948), 5, held that by the fourth century the economic supremacy of the East was manifest. Louis Bréhier, "Les colonies d'Orientaux en Occident au commencement du moyen-âge," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XII (No. 1, 1903), 1–39, pointed to the increasing importance of the oriental communities in the West. This was accentuated by the Byzantine reconquest. Before the Germanic invasions the Orientals tended to assimilate into the communities within which they lived, but after the *Völkerwanderung* they were continually noted as a separate entity. See also Paul Scheffer-Boichorst, "Kleinere Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters IV: Zur Geschichte der Svver im Abendlande," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* (66 vols., Innsbruck, 1885), VI, 520–50.

of merchants of eastern origin during the Merovingian period in Gaul is certainly more marked than during the preceding Roman epoch or the following Carolingian age. This is not merely a quantitative but a qualitative point as well. The number of Orientals cannot be estimated other than by the fact that on certain occasions, such as the entrance of Gontran into Orleans, the three separate communities—Syrians, Jews, and Latins—were mentioned individually as though they were all of some size. A list of cities in which the Orientals resided would not in itself be of any importance, but their growing influence is a matter that can easily be traced not only by their frequent assumption of the ecclesiastical posts of the West, such as the see of St. Peter, but even in the constant stream of art motifs and works that are oriental in origin.<sup>7</sup>

The natural concomitant of this growing importance of a nonnative element in the life of Western Europe, of course, was the gradual decline of the Gallo-Roman element to a point where it lost its identity in the *mélange* of the rising Germanic barbarians. More properly it may be said that the Germans and the natives fairly rapidly approximated one another culturally and in other ways. The granting of the right of *conubium* among the Visigoths in the sixth century is proof of the rapid Romanization of the Germanic peoples throughout Western Europe. Not only did the Germans adopt Roman culture and forms, but the native elements in the population declined in self-consciousness at the same time, and common ground was reached very quickly after the influx of the barbarians had ceased. This decline, however, did not cause a break in the unity of the Roman Mediterranean, and contacts with the seat of Byzantine culture were many. Internal decline was evident in the late fourth century. The Germanic invasions merely hastened the process so that the economic supremacy of the East became more and more manifest. This internal decline is made somewhat more evident by the fact that in the areas conquered by the barbarians it was not the *solidus* that was the principal coin but the *triens*, which was only one-third of the Byzantine piece. The eventual cessation of coinage in gold in meaningful quantities for exchange is in great measure a result of this continuous decline that accompanied the fragmentation of the political structure, so that no state in Western Europe was strong enough to guarantee currency for its coinage as Rome had done.<sup>8</sup>

The most outstanding feature of the early Middle Ages is this cultural

<sup>7</sup> Louis Bréhier, "Les colonies d'Orientaux." See also O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, Eng., 1911), 87-88, and Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, tr. Bernard Miall (New York, 1939), 129-39.

<sup>8</sup> This was the view of Marc Bloch, "Le problème de l'or au moyen-âge," *Annales d'his-*

and economic decline and the fusion of the Germanic and Roman peoples. Of course this aspect of life in the early medieval period did not proceed at a constant rate, nor was it uniform throughout the West. Conditions north of the Loire reached a much lower point than those found in southern Gaul, where the Germanic penetration was much less real.<sup>9</sup> The Gaul described by Ammianus Marcellinus, however, was quite different from that described by Gregory of Tours. Roman civilization, it has been shown by Pirenne and Alfons Dopsch, did not disappear in one fell stroke, but certainly the decadence of ancient culture was accelerated during the bleaker periods. The Vandal conquest of North Africa must have been one of the events that hastened this process of decline, and during the reign of Geiseric Vandal fleets undoubtedly ravaged the shipping of the Mediterranean with impunity, but this was not a condition of any permanence.<sup>10</sup> The basic economic and cultural unity of the Mediterranean remained, but the supremacy of the East became ever more marked. Feuding and warfare punctuated the lives of western Europeans, but the ubiquitous class of merchants continued to ply their trade so successfully that during the early fifth century the gold solidus seems to have become the standard coin used in southern Scandinavia.

As the pressure of the Germanic tribes increased during the last years of the fourth century and the early years of the fifth, the economic conditions within the Empire declined. This brought about a greater dependence upon the use of gold rather than fiduciary money. At the same time the Germanic peoples became increasingly aware of the monetary value of gold, and this led to a steady increase in its use among them. Silver coinage had fluctuated too much in value as a result of the emperors' financial difficulties in earlier periods. Consequently, the Germanic tribes' marked preference for silver currency, which had been noted by Tacitus, died. They fully realized the usefulness of gold currency during their invasions of the Empire.

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*toire économique et sociale*, V (Jan. 1933), 18-24. See also George I. Brătianu, "La distribution de l'or et les raisons économiques de la division de l'Empire Romain," *Études byzantines d'histoire économique et sociale* (Paris, 1938), 75.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Lambrechts, "Les thèses de Henri Pirenne sur la fin du monde antique et les débuts du moyen-âge," *Byzantion*, XIV (No. 2, 1939), 526 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Norman H. Baynes, "The Decline of Roman Power in Western Europe: Some Modern Explanations," *Journal of Roman Studies*, XXXIII (Pts. 1 and 2, 1943), 29-35. See also Baynes's review of books by Ferdinand Lot, Henri Pirenne, and Michael Rostovtzeff in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, XIX (Pt. 2, 1929), 224-35. As late as 1955 he reprinted that review in his book *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 309-16, contending "that the unity of the Mediterranean world was broken by the pirate fleet of Vandal Carthage and that the shattered unity was never restored." Archibald R. Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean, A.D. 500-1100* (Princeton, N. J., 1951), 18-20, contended that the effect of the Vandal attacks was purely temporary.

Long contact with the Romans had resulted in this. When they settled in the Empire, of course, the steady process of Romanization gave further impetus to the use of gold. Payments in terms of gold were common in the writing of Gregory of Tours, and the tomb of Childeric at Tournai revealed that this early Frankish king had hoarded a respectable number of gold coins.<sup>11</sup>

The first signs of economic recovery appeared during the reign of Anastasius. His coinage was imitated in some quantity in the West. It occurs in the hoard of Bresin in Germany and in a number of Scandinavian hoards. His coinage and imitations of it also form an important segment of the hoards of Gourdon and Chinon, which were actually buried during the reign of Justin I. But the largest increase in number of Byzantine coins and imitations found in the West occurs for the period from Justinian through Heraclius (610-641). P. C. J. A. Boeles lists 208 coins, mostly gold, found in Frisia. Ninety-five of these are clearly imperial gold or imitations, and better than half are of the above-mentioned period.<sup>12</sup> After Heraclius, the Frankish currency seems to have held sway in Frisia. Since many of the early imitations probably come from Italy, it is clear that a route existed in the early years of the sixth century which brought a steady stream of coinage over the Alps northward. This same situation is noted from a survey of the coins in Austrasia. By far the greatest number are from the period from the reign of Anastasius through that of Heraclius.<sup>13</sup>

One naturally associates this rather startling growth in Byzantine interest in the West with the Persian difficulties which became acute during the reign of Anastasius and continued to afflict the Romans until A.D. 639. During that period war between these two peoples was as much the order of the day as peace. Justinian comprehended fully the immense task facing him. His attempt to reconstruct the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean necessitated the adoption of a defensive attitude toward the Persians. The interest of the Emperor had turned toward the western portions of the old Roman Empire, and his conquests must have stimulated the activities of the oriental merchants in that region. These merchants, however, had

<sup>11</sup> J. J. Chifflet, *Anastasis Childerici I Francorum regis, sive Thesaurus sepulchralis Tornaci Nerviorum effusus et commentario illustrata* (Anvers, 1655), 252. On finds of Roman coins among the free Germans during the Empire, see Sture Bolin, *Fynden av Romerska mynt i det fria Germanien: Studier i romersk och äldre germansk historia* (Lund, 1926).

<sup>12</sup> P. C. J. A. Boeles, *Friesland tot de elfde Eeuw: Zijn vóór- en vroege Geschiednis* (2d ed., The Hague, 1951), Appendix VIII. In addition to one genuine solidus of Anastasius, nine imitations of his coinage, three of which probably came from Italy, are also known to have been found in Frisia.

<sup>13</sup> Joachim Werner, *Münzdatierte austrasische Grabfunde* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1935), 107-33. See also Dirk Jellema, "Frisian Trade in the Dark Ages," *Speculum*, XXX (Jan. 1955), 22.

begun to play a more vital role in the economic life of Western Europe as early as the reign of Anastasius and the beginning of the Persian troubles. The rebuilt Byzantine fleet certainly controlled the entire Mediterranean in the period preceding the death of Heraclius, and, as a direct result, trade in the West became safer than it had been at any time since the Vandals reached Carthage.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that in Procopius' description of the Emperor's actions regarding the two customs houses on the straits on either side of Constantinople, he specifically speaks of merchants traveling between the capital and Italy or Libya.<sup>15</sup> Even the trade of Alexandria, the greatest of all the Mediterranean ports, with Western Europe and particularly with Italy seems to have been more active after the reconquest of the West by the Byzantines. The fact that the communities of merchants in Western Europe were composed primarily of Syrians, Jews, and Greeks, however, must have given Antioch and Constantinople a predominance that Alexandria could not challenge successfully even during the late sixth and early seventh centuries, when trade relations between the patriarch and the pope seem to have reached a peak.<sup>16</sup>

It is pointless to repeat all of the evidence collected by Pirenne and others for the existence of very significant sea trade between the two halves of the Mediterranean. The case is very clear cut for a great expansion of that trade during the sixth and seventh centuries after a period of decline during the preceding epoch.<sup>17</sup> It is, however, necessary to return to the subject of the trade route from Italy by land to the Frisian coast. The route actually never seems to have been entirely closed. Miss Joan Fagerlie, a graduate student at a recent seminar of the American Numismatic Society, has shown that it is most likely that the Byzantine gold found in Scandinavia traveled over this same route. Archaeology provides a certain basis for the use of this trade route in pre-Carolingian times. Theodoric's conquest of Italy and his preeminence among the Germanic kings provided a long period of peaceful relations with the more northerly peoples. The concentration of

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean*, 21 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Procopius, *Anecdota*, XXV, 8 (ed. Haury, III, Pt. 1, 154).

<sup>16</sup> George R. Monks, "The Church of Alexandria and the City's Economic Life in the Sixth Century," *Speculum*, XXVIII (Apr. 1953), 349-62.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Anne Riising, "The Fate of Henri Pirenne's Theses on the Consequence of the Islamic Expansion," *Classica et Mediaevalia*, XIII (May 1952), 87-130. In this article she states: "An extensive Oriental commerce and a general internal prosperity in the Merovingian age has not been proved and hardly rendered probable . . . it is reasonable to assume that the commerce with the Orient was far too small to be a determining factor in Gallic society, and this means that a great part of Pirenne's thesis has collapsed." The existence of these series of light weight solidi would seem to prove that the Byzantines were vitally interested in the western trade and that it was of sufficient dimensions to warrant the particular interest of the imperial government.



finds of Ostrogothic silver coins and those of the Exarchate of Ravenna in the middle Rhine region seems to be conclusive proof of a continuous use of that trade route during the pre-Carolingian era.<sup>18</sup>

The route followed must have been one that crossed the Alps in the neighborhood of Lake Constance. Archaeological evidence gathered by Joachim Werner, based on finds of specific articles such as "Coptic" bronze vessels, ornamental gold crosses, and fibulae of a close-cell type, shows a concentration of these items in the region north of Lake Constance along the headwaters of the Danube. The coins seem to have followed a more westerly route. Within the limits of southern and western Germany nineteen siliquae of Justinian struck in Ravenna and forty Ostrogothic siliquae have been found. The evidence provided by these finds as well as the coins struck in the area suggests that the route in question along the Rhine was of greater importance for the area to the east of the river than for the lands to the west of it. If the number of recovered pieces that may possibly have been issued in southern and western Germany can be used as indicative of the whole, the amount of coinage struck in that area during the sixth century must have been very small. Only a very few coins can be attributed to Rhenish mints, and even these are from sites such as Trier, which are located on the Gallic side of the river. In the seventh century, Frankish mints seem to have been in operation at Windisch, Basel, Strassburg, Speyer, Worms, Alsheim, Mainz, Boppard, Andernach, Bonn, Cologne, Zülpich, Julich (?), Trier, and Pfalzel near Trier, all sites on the left bank of the Rhine. Basel, Strassburg, Mainz, and Trier were the outstanding mints while the others only struck coins intermittently. Only occasionally are coins from these Rhenish mints found on the right bank of the river.

In the sixth century, the mass of currency in southern and western Germany on the right bank of the Rhine must have been composed principally of Italic coinage such as Ostrogothic silver and the later silver currency of Justinian. In addition, Ostrogothic and Byzantine gold, which must have crossed the Alps in the same body of commercial transactions that brought the silver, played a significant role. The coinages of the Rhenish and more distant Gallic mints did not occupy a significant position in the sites on the right bank. It can only be concluded that the commercial ties in this area on the right bank were much stronger with Italy than with the Gallic lands.

If anything, the seventh century shows an even more perceptible dis-

<sup>18</sup> Werner, *Münzdatierte austrasische Grabfunde, passim*, is the source for most of what follows regarding the transalpine and Rhenish trade.

inction between the regions to the right and to the left of the Rhine. It is true that since the importation of silver coinage had come to an end, the total number of coins found is much smaller. But the same phenomenon of a commercial connection with Italy rather than the Frankish realm on the left bank is noticeable. The occurrence of Anglo-Saxon sceattas and Frisian trientes in the middle Rhine region, however, marks even further the economic unity of the river valley at the later period. Merovingian coins at the same time are only occasionally found among the Alemanni, Franks, and Thuringians on the right bank and are totally lacking among the Bavarians.

At the extreme continental end of this trade lay Frisia—the area from which the trade about the North Sea radiated.<sup>19</sup> Boeles lists only twenty-six gold coins from Frisia struck before the reign of Anastasius. After that time the expansion in the area's use of gold is easily traced by the great increase in the number of coins of the later period that have been found there. Evidence indicating the importance of the light weight solidi is probably best shown by the fact that of the four coins of Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine listed by Boeles three are of the light weight series.

The finds of twenty-seven coins from Cologne, Mainz, Alsheim, and Worms as well as related currencies that have been made within Frisia easily establish the commercial bonds between that area and the Rhenish regions. In addition there are five coins from the mints on the Moselle and ten from those on the Meuse, including imitations. Thus of the 208 coins listed by Boeles, forty-two pieces come from the trade area formed by these river basins. At the same time it should be noted that a few Frisian and Anglo-Saxon sceattas, probably of a later date, are also found in the Rhineland. It is to be expected, however, that the direction of the currency's flow would be northward in this region. Frisia must be considered one of the more primitive western areas in Merovingian times, and it would therefore import rather than export currency.

Frisia was a vital link in the chain of find spots for the light weight solidi, and the finds are more closely concentrated there than anywhere else. Through the region along the right bank of the Rhine and particularly in Frisia, it was customary to loop or pierce gold coins and to use them for ornaments. This practice is present in a significant number of instances among the light weight solidi; perhaps this is connected in some measure with the fact that since the economy of the area was certainly below that

<sup>19</sup> On Frisia, see Boeles, *Friesland tot de elfde Eeuw*, and Jellema, "Frisian Trade in the Dark Ages," 15-36.

established in Gaul proper, the true value of gold as a monetary metal was not as securely established. Using the coins for the manufacture of ornaments involved a change in the value of the coins. The people residing in this area were not as accustomed to the use of gold as those who lived on formerly Roman lands. In Frisia at least thirty-one of the coins listed by Boeles from the reign of Anastasius and later were of poor alloy. A survey of the coinage from the Austrasian graves shows exactly the same phenomenon. The Germanic peoples who inhabited the region were apparently quite unskilled in determining which coins were of poor gold, for many of the pieces were merely plated copper, and in one instance there was even a core of lead.<sup>20</sup>

The light weight solidi, however, are found at the furthest extremity of this trade route, in England. Of course, commercial connections between England and the Continent were quite strong during this period. A type of fibula that may be distinguished from others is found in England and Frisia as well as near Cologne and Worms. The so-called "Coptic" bronzes extend over the entire route from Italy down the Rhine. Other objects such as a clamped saucer from the lower Rhine are also found in Kent, and Anglo-Saxon type belt plates occur along the Rhine. Pottery, glassware, and cruciform brooches serve to indicate the strength of this trade. The bond between the Continent and Britain actually appears to have been strengthened during the period of the Anglo-Saxon invasions, and a common cultural pattern is easily seen in Frisia and England. Because many authors have sufficiently detailed British contacts with the Continent in the early Middle Ages, it is pointless to repeat the material.

The character of the trade along the Rhine Valley was influenced by the more primitive condition of the peoples on the right bank through whose territory this trade passed. These people used gold and engaged in

<sup>20</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II, 42 (MGH, *Scriptores rerum merovingicarum*, I, 105), tells us that Clovis bribed the *leudes* of Ragnachar with counterfeit currency of gilded copper (*aereum deauratum*). The fraud was only discovered sometime later after the damage had been done. On another occasion Gregory notes that the Saxons paid many thousand pieces of gold to King Guntram for the privilege of crossing the Rhine. Having crossed the river, they entered Auvergne in the springtime, and there they produced, instead of gold, stamped bars of bronze (*regulas aeris incisas pro auro*). People who saw these bars did not doubt that they were tested and proven gold because of the fine color that had been given to the metal by some clever process. Many persons were tricked by this device, gave their good money for the bronze, and were reduced to poverty. *Ibid.*, IV, 42 (MGH, *Scriptores rerum merovingicarum*, I, 177). Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, I, 2, 4 (ed. Jacob Haury [Leipzig, 1905-13], III, Pt. 2, 17-18), tells us that the bronze equestrian statue of Justinian which stood in the Augusteum at Constantinople was softer in color than pure gold and not much less in value than an equivalent weight of silver. Cf. Theodor Mommsen, *Histoire de la monnaie romaine*, tr. Duc de Blacas (4 vols., Paris, 1865-75), III, 47, note 1, for another interpretation of this passage. The Dortmund hoard is an example of one containing some coins of poor alloy. Kurt L. Regling, *Der Dortmunder Fund römischer Goldmünzen* (Dortmund, 1908), 20.

monetary transactions, but coins were utilized as ornaments to a greater degree here than elsewhere. Finds of Ostrogothic and Byzantine silver coins show that the inhabitants retained the use of silver currency in an active sense while it was lost throughout most of the Roman world. Their knowledge of gold as a currency medium was limited; a great many pieces of poor quality, plated or heavily alloyed, were in circulation.

Into this trade the Byzantine light weight solidi were introduced. Originally they seem to have been struck in Constantinople and sent to Italy from whence they passed over the Alps and down the Rhine. This move was part of the Byzantine design to increase profits from the western trade. Because of the Persian difficulties beginning in the early sixth century, an increasing number of the traders of Constantinople turned westward.<sup>21</sup> One can see a marked growth in the activities of the oriental traders in the West as early as the reign of Anastasius. The colonies of eastern merchants, who were resident in Western Europe and who jealously preserved their identity after the settlement of the Germanic barbarians, made this expansion easier in the more Romanized parts of Europe. During Justinian's reign this activity increased even more sharply, since it was aided and abetted by the victories of Byzantine arms. Negotiations with the Himyarites to the south of the Persian Empire and the Turkic peoples to the north during the reign of Justinian could not have compensated for the severe setback received by the eastern trade of the Byzantines as a result of the Persian wars.<sup>22</sup> The importance of trade as a factor in Justinian's defensive wars against the Sassanians can be noted by simply reading Procopius' account of the events. Under these stresses the imperial government sought to cultivate trade in the West through all available channels. Procopius, who served in Italy on the staff of Belisarius, as a direct result of his connections with the military men, must have been aware of what was transpiring there even after he left. Therefore it is in his writings that the striking of light weight solidi is mentioned.

During the reign of Justin II, Antioch and its environs included at least one source of these light weight solidi; the Syrian hoard shows conclusively that the mint of Antioch issued this type of coin. These new light weight

<sup>21</sup> Procopius, *Anecdota*, XXV, 13-26 (ed. Haury, III, Pt. 1, 155-57), and Robert S. Lopez, "Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire," *Speculum*, XX (Jan. 1945), 16. Cf. Knud Hannestad, "Les relations de Byzance avec la Transcaucasie et l'Asie Centrale aux 5<sup>e</sup> et 6<sup>e</sup> siècles," *Byzantion*, XXV-XXVII (No. 2, 1955-57), 446.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. John B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian* (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565) (2 vols., London, 1931), II, 330 ff. and Alexander A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, tr. Mrs. S. Ragozin (2 vols., Madison, Wis., 1928-29), I, 199-200. See also Hannestad, "Les relations de Byzance," 421-56.

solidi were apparently used in the extensive trade with the cities of southern France. The evidence that light weight gold was introduced into the main body of western trade along the valley of the Rhone in the reign of Justin II is well attested. It is quite true that there have been no finds of authentic Byzantine light weight solidi made within the area of Gaul about the Rhone, but a series of so-called pseudoimperial gold coins of western manufacture which utilized approximately the same weight standard is known.<sup>23</sup> These new coins bore marks of value indicating that they were clearly derived from the authentic Byzantine light weight series in so far as the weight standard was concerned. The solidi were worth twenty-one siliquae and the trientes seven. That, of course, is the most essential feature of the relationship between these new Gallic pieces and the light weight Byzantine solidi.

Other aspects of the history of the pseudoimperial coins point to the same close relationship with the Byzantine solidi. They reflect the same tendency to move northward that was so noticeable in the case of the Byzantine solidi from the Rhine region. The north was less highly developed than the south. A goodly number of the hundred or so specimens of the pseudoimperial coins have been found in Britain and other northern areas. Thus some have been recovered in the hoard from Saare, in Kent near Reculver, and in the hoard from Nietap. They also occurred in the Sutton-Hoo ship burial, in the Wieuwerd hoard, and in the Bilgaard and Hichtum terps in Frisia. This would seem to be another instance of the attraction of the more Germanic, and consequently less highly developed areas, for light weight gold currency.

Pseudoimperial gold was issued regularly at Marseilles, Arles, Uzès, and Viviers and intermittently at Venasque, Die, Valence, Vienne, and possibly Gap. All of these cities, of course, are located in the Rhone Valley, a major artery of trade from the Mediterranean littoral into the interior. From the seaports along the coast, goods were moved up the Rhone into the heart of Gaul; the network of other rivers throughout the country afforded relatively easy communications with the rest of the land.

It seems most likely that this pseudoimperial currency of Gaul was first issued during the last years of the reign of Justin II. S. E. Rigold suggests that it was begun about the year A.D. 574. The great period for the striking of these Gallic coins was in the reign of Maurice Tiberius. By 616, however, the last traces of the independence of the cities in southern Gaul had been

<sup>23</sup> A definitive study of these pseudoimperial gold coins has appeared: S. E. Rigold, "An Imperial Coinage in Southern Gaul in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *Numismatic Chronicle*, ser. 6, XIV (London, 1954), 93-133.

eradicated, and the pseudoimperial series was replaced by one of royal origin which bore the royal effigy but emanated from the same area.

Historically, the series of pseudoimperial coins reflects the political influence of the Byzantines in the cities of the Rhone Valley. The relationship between the various Frankish rulers such as Sigibert, Childebert, and Chilperic and the Byzantine emperors was never as close as during the years from about 584 to 594. Subsidy payments for Frankish aid against the Lombards were regularly made, and as late as A.D. 601, when Callinicus, the third Exarch of Ravenna, renewed the struggle against the Lombards, contacts with the Franks were necessary. By 606, however, a truce with the Lombards marked the end of the Byzantines' effort to carry on offensive action against the Germanic barbarians. The decline of Byzantine influence was a concomitant of the enlargement of the realm of Chlotar II, who succeeded Chilperic as an independent sovereign in Neustria. In 613 Chlotar had seized all of Gaul as his own, and it was not long before he imposed his savage rule in the Rhone Valley as surely as elsewhere in Gaul. Thus there is a connection in time between the decline of the Byzantine rulers' efforts against the Lombards, the striking of the pseudoimperial series in southern Gaul, and the rise of Chlotar II's realm.

It can be said without fear of dispute that the Roman experiment with the use of light weight gold currency was a complete success in the field of external trade. For a considerable period of time the secondary trade artery along which most of these coins are found remained somewhat backward as compared with the more Romanized sections of Europe. Its attraction of the pseudoimperial pieces is indicative of this backwardness. This, however, is only a subsidiary aspect. Gold coinage of lighter weight made it possible to use less of the precious metal which the Byzantines treasured so closely to carry on their western trade. The adoption of the triens as the common gold piece rather than the much more precious solidus demonstrates the tendency in early medieval Western Europe toward the use of lighter and smaller gold coins. Economic decline gave gold coins a much greater purchasing power, and as a result the lighter coins could perform the economic functions that had required full weight solidi during earlier periods. Even after the peoples of the West fully recognized the change that the Byzantines had introduced into the gold coinage used in external trade, these advantages remained. It must not be forgotten that the lighter weight gold standard was quickly adopted by the cities of the southern Gallic region, and from there it spread throughout the Frankish realm and the rest of the European successor states. As long as the Byzantines had an

active interest in the western trade, the adoption of this lighter standard made it possible for them to use a smaller amount of gold for their transactions. At the same time it brought the gold coinage that they were using in this trade into direct alignment with the prevailing trend of monetary policy among the peoples of the West, including the Franks, Suevi, and Visigoths, who adopted the lighter standard.

The coinage of pseudoimperial gold in southern Gaul ceased during the reign of Heraclius, and at the same time the influence of the imperial government in Gaul declined sharply. It was precisely at this instant that the pressure of the Persians reached its zenith. Coinage of light weight solidi at Antioch had come to an end before the reign of Phocas. During Heraclius' reign Antioch was actually seized for a short time by the Persians; Damascus, Jerusalem, and even Egypt were temporarily held by them. Coevally the Avars launched an assault against Constantinople, and Heraclius pondered the wisdom of flight to Africa. Fortunately the Avar attacks were a purely temporary phenomenon, and trade in the Balkans was not seriously hampered. The hoards and finds from the Balkans show that the Byzantine emphasis on trade there continued through the reign of Constantine IV Pogonatus. Trade with the East, however, must have been seriously affected by the Persian wars that punctuated the reigns of Phocas and Heraclius during the first quarter of the seventh century. The Byzantine victory at the Battle of Nineveh, which was followed by the death of Chosroes and a series of dynastic convulsions within Persia, exhausted the Persians and made it possible for the Byzantines to conclude a very favorable peace.

During the reigns of Phocas and Heraclius, as the Frankish realm was expanding under Chlotar II and Byzantine influence waned in Gaul, the number of light weight solidi issued by the Byzantine government appears to have increased. The subsidiary trade route along the Rhine was probably used to a greater degree than in the reigns just preceding that of Phocas. Certainly the majority of Byzantine coins found in the sites along this route were struck in the reign of Heraclius. Thus it seems obvious that while Byzantine influence in southern Gaul was paramount there was no need to exert great efforts along this subsidiary route, but when the Frankish kings had complete control and the Persian difficulties were pressing, the imperial government attempted to extend its activities along the Rhine.

It is possible that the forces necessitating increased Byzantine activity in the West along a subsidiary route also created the need for an expansion of trade in southern Russia. Certainly the reigns of Constans II and Constantine IV Pogonatus witnessed the use of these coins in the Ukraine, as is

shown by the hoards. The movements of the Bulgars were probably the factor that terminated Byzantine efforts to use light weight solidi in southern Russia. A new power in the form of the Khazar state was being erected in southern Russia, and the Byzantines dealt with the Khazars on different terms.

The Pirenne thesis laid stress upon an extensive oriental commerce in the Merovingian age. This picture of intense Mediterranean trade has been questioned.<sup>24</sup> A careful examination of the light weight solidi has shown that not only is there excellent evidence that this trade was important enough to merit consideration and action by the imperial government, but that its nature was quite different from what Pirenne and later scholars have envisioned. Virtually all historians agree that the Germanic invasions did not mark a turning point in the economic history of Europe though they may well have accelerated the decline and disintegration of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, as soon as the first waves of these invaders had settled down in the new successor states, the Byzantine merchants revived western trade. A large portion of the evidence cited to support the persistence of the Roman pattern of Mediterranean trade after the *Völkerwanderung* actually reflects this revival of commerce in the sixth and seventh centuries after the decline in the fifth.<sup>25</sup> The causal nexus for this commercial renaissance is to be found in the increasing Persian pressures along the eastern frontier which began in the reign of Anastasius and continued through that of Heraclius. The Persian difficulties, which we know affected the eastern silk trade, were coeval with the growth of western commerce. Expansion of trade with Western Europe was possible because there were colonies of oriental merchants in Gaul and Italy who jealously guarded and preserved their identity apart from the common populace and maintained their connections with the Byzantine Empire. It is even probable that the number of such oriental merchants in the West increased with the relative growth of their prosperity as the native mercantile class was eliminated. The rise of these communities in the late fifth and early sixth centuries and their disappearance after the reign of Chlotar II in the early seventh century when the independence of the cities of southern Gaul was extinguished are obviously connected with the expansion of Mediterranean trade. In Gaul the resident oriental merchants were responsible for the largest part of the overseas trade.

<sup>24</sup> See footnote seventeen.

<sup>25</sup> None of the discussions surrounding the effects of the Germanic invasions have taken particular note of the economic decline of the fifth century and the remarkable recovery in the sixth and seventh centuries. H. St. L. B. Moss, "The Economic Consequences of the Barbarian Invasions," *Economic History Review*, VII (May 1937), 209-16, reviews most of the important work done on this problem.



If we shift our view momentarily from the question of the quantity of the trade to its character, we must also revise Pirenne's thesis. Pirenne laid great stress upon Byzantine exports to the West and upon the supposed four great disappearances: papyrus, spice, gold, and textiles. Robert Lopez has shown that the connection between changes in the trade in these articles and the advance of Islam is not quite as close as Pirenne had proposed.<sup>26</sup> In addition, though the evidence is by no means definitive, it would seem that the Byzantines had an unfavorable balance of trade with Western Europe during the very early Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon of a net loss of precious gold coinage from the Roman Empire to the underdeveloped lands surrounding it can easily be demonstrated in much earlier times with respect to the free Germans.<sup>28</sup> Western Europe in the sixth and seventh centuries was at a low economic and cultural level, without the taste and desire for exotic and refined luxury items and products of industry in great quantities, but with an excess of raw materials available for export. Perhaps the most valuable of these exports from the West was human—slaves. Evidence of slave trading in Western Europe is quite extensive, and more important still is the fact that their movement was from the northern frontier districts to the seaports on the Mediterranean for transshipment overseas. The slaves themselves were recruited from all Central and Western European races, primarily as a result of the persistent warfare of that period. Charles Verlinden has collected all the evidence relating to slavery in the Frankish state.<sup>29</sup> It seems clear that after the reign of Dagobert, who was a contemporary of Heraclius, the sources of the slave trade diminished appreciably. Dagobert was the last of the Merovingian rulers who displayed any energy along the frontiers of his kingdom to increase its size. Without successful campaigns against other peoples of the West, the sole sources of new slaves were the natural increase of those already enslaved or the additional few who might suffer reduction to servitude for offenses against the law or who might sell themselves. Thus, as Verlinden points out, the slave trade must have declined sharply before the mid-seventh century. If the price

<sup>26</sup> Robert S. Lopez, "Mohammed and Charlemagne: A Revision," *Speculum*, XVIII (Jan. 1943), 14-38.

<sup>27</sup> This suggestion was made by Robert S. Lopez, "East and West in the Early Middle Ages: Economic Relations," *Relazioni del X Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche* (6 vols., Florence, 1955), III, 129-37. Cf. Steven Runciman, "Byzantine Trade and Industry," *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. H. Clapham and Eileen Power (2 vols., Cambridge, Eng., 1941-52), II, 86-118, for a diametrically opposed view.

<sup>28</sup> See Bolin, *Fynden av Romerska mynt, passim*, and Arnold Luschin von Ebengreuth, "Der Denar der Lex Salica," *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, Phil.-hist. Klasse, CLXIII (Vienna, 1910), Abh. 4, 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale* (Bruges, 1955), I, 639-702.

for individual slaves was as high as twelve or fifteen solidi and the trade was very brisk, both of which seem likely from a study of the texts, this would account fully for the vast quantities of Byzantine gold found in the West prior to A.D. 650 and its virtually complete absence in the following years.

There is one further factor to be taken into account. The effects of the Islamic conquests on the Byzantine Empire were not treated by Pirenne as causative factors save for the exclusion of the Byzantine fleets from the western Mediterranean. In effect, this is to deny any importance to the economic history of Byzantium as an element in the story. Quite the reverse, however, appears to be the case. The Moslem conquests and migrations had cut the Byzantines off from the supplies of gold ore, and only by the most rigid controls was Byzantine currency maintained after the mid-seventh century.<sup>30</sup> Byzantine trade had to readjust itself to the new conditions, which required that trading in the West be favorably balanced. Steps in this direction must have been taken as early as the last years of Heraclius. Thus by A.D. 650, over fifty years before the completion of the Moslem conquest of the Mediterranean, events in Gaul and a changed Byzantine trade policy resulting from the loss of direct contact with the sources of gold had effected the sharp reduction in trade that Pirenne attributed to the closing of the western Mediterranean by Moslem pirates. There can be no doubt that the concerted effort at building up the trade of Byzantium with the West, which began in the closing years of the fifth century and which is reflected in the issuance of the light weight solidi, was over by the reign of Constantine IV Pogonatus. It was indeed declining sharply as early as Heraclius' reign. Of course it did not cease abruptly and completely, and some articles necessary for maintaining the prestige of the chancelleries of the western monarchs or the Church continued to be imported, but the fact that Byzantine hoards and coins no longer occur with any frequency cannot be denied.<sup>31</sup> Byzantine policy, as has been recognized by all Byzantine historians, was different in the eighth and ninth centuries from what it had been in the period from Justinian through Constantine IV Pogonatus.

<sup>30</sup> Runciman, "Byzantine Trade and Industry," 91-92.

<sup>31</sup> Lopez, "Mohammed and Charlemagne," 14-38.