

The Trier Mint 822–840

by

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The first volume of Raymond Weiller's work *Die Münzen von Trier* represents a valuable contribution to Carolingian numismatics, containing as it does a near-exhaustive list of the surviving specimens of the various ninth-century coinage types minted in Trier¹. Weiller has since published another, additional type, which was discovered together with two other Carolingian coins during excavations at the abbey of Echternach². One of the other two coins from Echternach is of particular interest. It is a denier of the very common anonymous type issued by Louis the Pious between 822 and 840, bearing the legend **XPISTIANA RELIGIO** around a temple on the reverse and **HLVDOVVICV-SIMP** around a pelleted cross on the obverse. This type was a notable omission from Weiller's corpus, presumably on the grounds that it was not clear which, if any, coins of this type were products of the Trier mint. As I hope to show in this short article, however, a not insignificant number of Louis' *Christiana religio* issues, including the specimen found at Echternach, can be attributed to Trier with a considerable degree of confidence.

The *Christiana religio* type is, as has already been indicated, a particularly important one. It was struck on a large scale throughout the Frankish Empire between 822 and 840, making it the most common of all Carolingian coinages³. Until recently, scholars have expressed little optimism about the possibility of identifying the products of individual ateliers, but the detailed study of the large hoards found at Roermond and Pilligerheck, containing over two thousand *Christiana religio* issues between them, now offers an excellent opportunity to push ahead with the tasks of categorisation and attribution⁴. This entails first determining stylistic groups of coins and then, where possible, recognizing parallels between these and preceding or succeeding coinages, notably the mint-signed temple types minted by Charles the Bald, Lothar I and Pippin II of Aquitaine from 840. In the case of the Trier mint, there are observable stylistic links both with the coinage struck locally by Louis the Pious between 818 and 822, bearing the mint-name **TREVERIS** in two lines on the reverse, and with the Trier temple type coined by Lothar I from 840⁵.

The first and most obvious feature of the Trier group of Louis' *Christiana religio* issues is the absence of pellets in the angles of the obverse cross, in contrast to the standard form of the coinage. This is directly paralleled on Lothar's mint-signed coins from Trier, again unlike the remainder of Lothar's temple types. Nevertheless, it is not only the lack of

¹ R. Weiller, *Die Münzen von Trier* 1,1. Publ. Ges. Rheinische Geschichtskunde 30 (1988).

² Ders., *Trois monnaies carolingiennes trouvées dans la cave de l'ancienne abbaye d'Echternach*. Bull. Soc. franc. num. 44, 1989, 659 ff.

³ See further my article on Money and Coinage under Louis the Pious in *Francia* 17/1, 1990, 23 ff.

⁴ Roermond: H. E. van Gelder, *De Karolingische muntvondst Roermond*. Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde 72, 1985, 13 ff. Pilligerheck: summary in J. Lafaurie, *Numismatique romaine et médiévale*. Ann. école pratique des hautes études, IV^e section 1969-1970, 323 ff. Some coins were illustrated in the catalogues of Karl Kress sale 140, 7 August 1967, nos. 151–328, and Kölner Münzkabinett sale 41, 7 April 1986, nos. 553–562, 564–576, 578, 580, 582.

⁵ Add to Weiller (as n. 1) 274: 16. Leiden, Fund Roermond 1968. a1/a2; 17. Leiden, Fund Roermond 1968. a12/a2.

pellets which categorises the group, for there are other stylistic features which must also be present if a particular coin is to be attributed to Trier. The appearance of the temple is important: on the Trier group it is generally squarish, with a 90° roof angle; it is regular in appearance, but engraved with crude, solid lines. The lettering is also chunky and not particularly neat, with peculiar winged **As** and **Vs** on some coins, where the intersection of the letter has dart-like projections which can almost give the appearance of an **X**. This feature is likewise found on Lothar's mint-signed coinage from Trier. Furthermore, although some of the *Christiana religio* issues in the Trier group found at Pilligerheck have rather different, wild and sprawling inscriptions, these are also matched on Louis' earlier two-line type from Trier, suggesting incidentally that the former were among the first *Christiana religio* coins to be minted after the change of type⁶.

Certain other features which characterize the Trier group but which are not paralleled on mint-signed issues are the placing of crosses on either side of the temple, a circle beneath it (only one example known), or the addition of pellets in the legends, usually between the **L** and the **V** of *Hludovicus* or in the **IANA** of *Christiana*. On many coins the legends are also debased, with the reverse reading **RELIGO** or even **RIICO**, and the obverse beginning **MIVD** instead of **HLVD**. As Weiller's plates show clearly, the mint-signed Trier issues of both Louis and Lothar I reveal a similar lack of skill on the part of the local moneyers.

These stylistic parallels would by themselves be sufficient to permit a tentative attribution to Trier, and this was indeed suggested by van Gelder as long ago as 1965, even though he never subsequently repeated the idea⁷. Further support for the hypothesis is provided by the presence of an unusually large number of *Christiana religio* issues of the Trier group in the hoard found at Pilligerheck (Kr. Mayen) in 1956. This important hoard of some two thousand coins has not yet been published, although M. Jean Lafaurie has reproduced a summary of its contents and undertaken an impressive amount of preliminary research. His manuscript is now with the bulk of the deposit in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier, where I was able to study it⁸. The museum also holds photographs and casts of the other important parcel of coins from the hoard, which was bought from the Münchner Münzhandlung Karl Kress by the Württembergisches Landesmuseum in Stuttgart. The hoard contains over 1400 *Christiana religio* issues of Louis the Pious, of which seventy-six are of the group which has here been attributed to Trier⁹. This figure may not seem remarkably large, but its significance emerges when it is compared with the numbers of coins of the Trier group found in other hoards. Sixteen were present at Roermond (out of 724 *Christiana religio* issues), five at Emmen (of 219)¹⁰, at least three apiece at Zelzate (of at least 270)¹¹ and Wagenborgen (of at least fifty-six)¹², two at Oudwoude (of twenty-eight)¹³, and one at Ide (of sixty-two)¹⁴. This disproportionately

⁶ Weiller (as n. 1) 25,9; compare Kress sale 140, nos. 161, 169.

⁷ Van Gelder, Le trésor carolingien d'Ide. *Revue num.* 1965, 248.

⁸ I am indebted to M. Lafaurie for allowing me to study his manuscript, to the museum staff for their assistance, and to St. John's College, Cambridge for financing the trip.

⁹ One of the coins without pellets on the obverse is stylistically dissimilar.

¹⁰ R. Serrure, Notice sur deux trouvailles de monnaies carlovingiennes, faites dans la province de Drenthe (Pays-Bas) II: trésor d'Emmen. *Bull. mensuel de num. et d'arch.* 2, 1882-1883, 185.

¹¹ P. Naster, Trouvaille de monnaies carlovingiennes à Zelzate (1949). *Revue belge de num.* 1950, 215.

¹² Koninklijk Penningkabinet, Leiden.

¹³ S. Wigersma, Muntvondst te Oudwoude. *De vrije Fries* 20, 1903, 71; 73.

¹⁴ Van Gelder (as n. 7) 247.

large number at Pilligerheck can plausibly be explained by the fact that the find-spot lies only 70 km from Trier, which is in fact the nearest Carolingian mint.

From these figures, as indeed from those of Weiller, it is evident that Trier was not a particularly large or significant mint in contemporary terms. Even in a local hoard such as the one from Pilligerheck, its products accounted for only some 5% of Louis' *Christiana religio* issues and 3.5% of Lothar's mint-signed coins. Nonetheless, a die-study of the *Christiana religio* issues found at Pilligerheck permits at least an estimate of the number of dies in operation. Using the Good estimator¹⁵, the fact that the seventy-six coins were struck on sixty-six obverse dies suggests that some 320 dies were used during the eighteen years in which the type was in production (the figures are identical for the reverse dies). If we allow that some 10 000 coins could be struck from each die before it was replaced, which is a conservative estimate, then the Trier mint could have produced some 3.2 million coins of the *Christiana religio* type between 822 and 840.

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¹⁵ W. Esty, Estimation of the size of a coinage: a survey and comparison of method. *Num. Chron.* 146, 1986, 208 f.