

Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift 1981

Nordic Numismatic Journal

*Coinage and Monetary Circulation
in the Baltic Area c. 1350 – c. 1500*

Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad
Nationalmuseet · København

Monetary Circulation in South-Eastern Sweden c. 1350–1500 in the Light of Three Major Church-Finds

By BRITA MALMER

1. General background

In Swedish museums a very rich material is preserved of medieval coins found in Sweden, partly as hoards, partly as cumulative finds. Much of this material is unpublished. To a large extent the coins have been only preliminarily examined or not examined at all. Concerning the chronology of medieval Swedish coingroups there are still a lot of problems. For many groups we still do not know either when or where they were struck. Concerning written sources dealing with coinage, Sweden is poor, especially before the 15th century. Therefore, in most cases it is still impossible to discuss details of medieval Swedish coinage and coinage policy as our German, Polish and even Danish colleagues are able to do. In Sweden we still have to do a great deal of pure basic numismatic research work, first and foremost to create a reliable chronology of our medieval coin groups.

The first coinage in Scandinavia as a whole appeared during the 9th century in the Hedeby area. It was not until the end of the 10th century that the coinage moved northwards. At that time there must have been at least one other mint in *Denmark* (Malmer 1981). From about 1020 onwards there is a continuous Danish coinage to the middle of the 14th century. This picture of an early monetary development in Denmark is enhanced by investigations of the division frequency of hacksilver in finds from the 10th and 11th centuries. The division starts earlier and is more extensive in the central areas of Scania than for instance in Gotland (Hårdh 1976).

Gotland was, from a monetary point of view, an underdeveloped area during the whole of the 11th century. An indigenous monetary development seems to have started during the middle of the 12th century, more than 150 years later than in central Denmark. However, it is not quite certain that the coins in question (Lqt XX–XXII) really were struck in Gotland since a closer investigation has never been made. From the end of the 13th century a new Gotlandic coin type, the W-bracteate, appears. It is

mainly a local currency, very unusual outside of Gotland. Some time during the 14th century the Gotlandic “gote” or “örtug” appears. It is represented in finds from the 1340’s, maybe even from the 1330’s, and would thereby be the Baltic areas’s oldest denomination, higher than 1 penny. But the age of the “gote” is still not completely clear, and – as I have shown in other connections – I do not think that the gote, as Nils Ludvig Rasmusson suggested, could be the prototype of the Lübeck witten (Malmer 1980 B).

In *Sweden* there were two early attempts to start a minting, both times in Sigtuna, once during the 990’s and then again during the 1020’s. Both attempts became mere episodes. First during the end of the 12th century, in the reign of Knut Eriksson, the Swedish minting was resumed. But it was not until the beginning of the 14th century, during the reigns of Birger Magnusson and Magnus Eriksson, that the now remaining Swedish coin material becomes richer and the minting can be followed in more detail.

In *Finland*, according to my opinion, no minting seems to have taken place before the first Åbo-minting, of which we shall hear tomorrow (cf. Talvio 1978).

A study of the background of coinage and monetary circulation in late medieval Sweden accordingly shows the following: Denmark has the oldest and most advanced coinage. Gotland seems to appear as an area with a continuous minting from the middle of the 12th century. In Sweden coinage seems to have a temporary character until the 14th century. In Finland minting seems to have started later than in Sweden.

2. Coinage and monetary circulation in Sweden c. 1350–1500.

A rough outline.

In my book “*Late Medieval Pennies in Sweden*” I tried to present the main lines in the Swedish coinage during the period in question. The new political regime under Albrekt of Mecklenburg (1364–89) seems to have accomplished something of a coin reform. The chaotic coinage during the 1350’s with a penny which finally became almost a copper coin was replaced by a system of pennies with 50% silver. As before, they were struck as bracteates but were technically more advanced than the earlier bracteates. The new pennies show a crowned head, probably a symbol for Stockholm, and crowned A (*62), S and E, probably symbols for Västerås, Söderköping and Kalmar respectively, accordingly two mints in Svealand and two in Götaland. This is one part of the reform. The other part implies the introduction of the “örtug”, the first denomination larger than the penny in the monetary history of Sweden. The “örtug” of Albrekt is a good coin with nearly 90% silver. It was struck in Stockholm (*10), Kalmar and possibly “Silvberget” in Central Sweden.

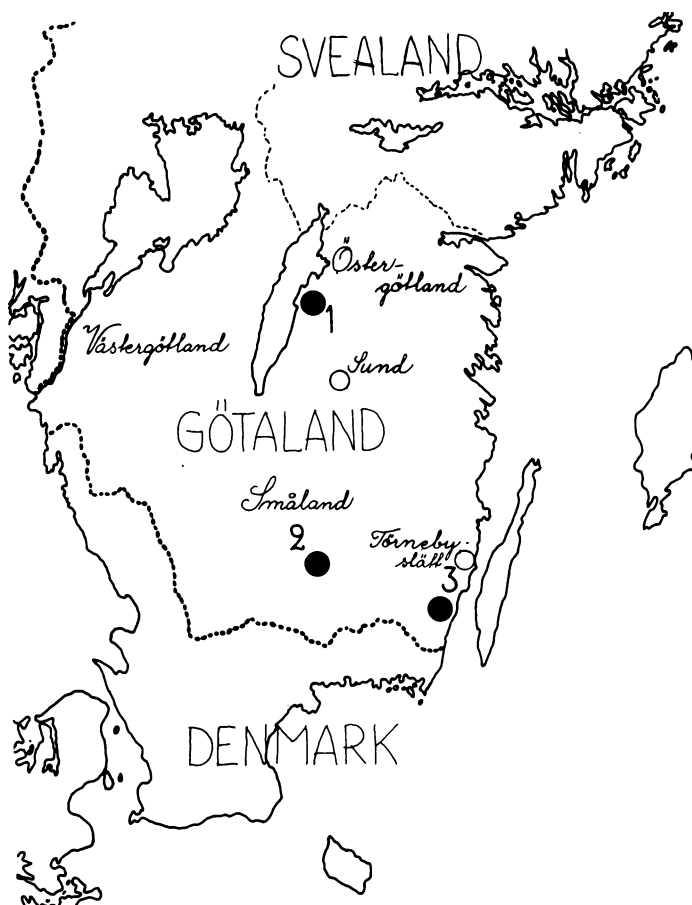


Fig. 1. Part of medieval Sweden. 1 = Alvastra monastery. 2 = Växjö Cathedral. 3 = Hagby round church.

The good pennies of Albrekt are very common in the finds. They still occur in finds from the 1450's. In my opinion, there seems to have been a longer interval in the Swedish production of pennies from the 1380's or 1390's. In the preserved material I have not been able to ascribe a penny to this period. When the pennies occur again, probably in the 1410's, both weight and fineness are reduced. Pennies were struck more or less continuously during the rest of the 15th century but at the end the silver percentage was less than 20% and the weight only 2/3 of the prescribed one. At this stage, at the beginning of the 16th century, the penny had lost its importance. From 1478 a third denomination appeared in the Swedish coinage, a half "örtug" (*11), corresponding to 4 pennies, which more and more replaced the old penny. The "örtug", introduced by Albrekt, was the main denomination during the whole period.

"Late Medieval Pennies in Sweden" mainly deals with chronological problems but is also an attempt to apply a quantitative aspect to the coin mass found in Sweden. Coin production and coin circulation have hitherto mainly been studied with the help of the contents of the hoards. In some respects, cumulative finds, such as church finds, are a better source for the study of coin circulation, especially when there are a lot of similar finds, spread all over the country. For my quantitative study I have used the material from 140 cumulative finds from medieval Sweden, including Åland but not Finland and Gotland.

81 cumulative finds in Götaland (i.e. the southern part of medieval Sweden) contain 3448 Swedish medieval coins, to a large extent struck before 1363. In Svealand, Norrland (i.e. the middle and northern part of medieval Sweden) and the island of Åland there are 59 cumulative finds with 1599 Swedish medieval coins, fairly evenly spread over the chronological periods. To the Swedish coins in the finds from Götaland should be added most of the imported mass of coins which inundated Sweden, especially in the 15th century. Most of them came from Gotland (c. 700 specimens, *12), Denmark (c. 1250), Germany (c. 1600) and the Baltic area (c. 100). Except for big towns at the coast, such as Stockholm, foreign coins hardly reached Svealand or Norrland.

Consequently, a much larger number of medieval coins, Swedish and foreign, seems to have been circulating in Götaland than in Svealand, Norrland and Åland. Another difference between Götaland and Svealand is that the Swedish coins, struck both in Götaland and Svealand, move all over Sweden, whereas the foreign coins, as just mentioned, only seldom appear outside Götaland.

3. The find of Alvastra monastery.

Alvastra monastery is the oldest Cistercian monastery in Scandinavia and until the 15th century the richest monastery in Sweden. It was founded from Clairvaux in 1143. It was situated at the foot of a mountain called Omberg, near Lake Vättern in central Götaland, Fig. 1. The medieval "Eriksgrata" – that is to say the road a new king rides after he has been proclaimed king at Mora stones in Uppland – passes through Alvastra. On Visingsö in Lake Vättern lay the castle of Näs, the strongest Swedish fortress of the 13th century (Fritz 1972). A few Swedish miles to the northeast is the cathedral of Linköping, founded at the beginning of the 12th century. To the north, on the other side of Omberg, was the nunnery of Vadstena, founded by Saint Birgitta in the 14th century. With a location like this it is probable that the coins found in the monastery of Alvastra mainly reflect the true monetary circulation in Östergötland during the

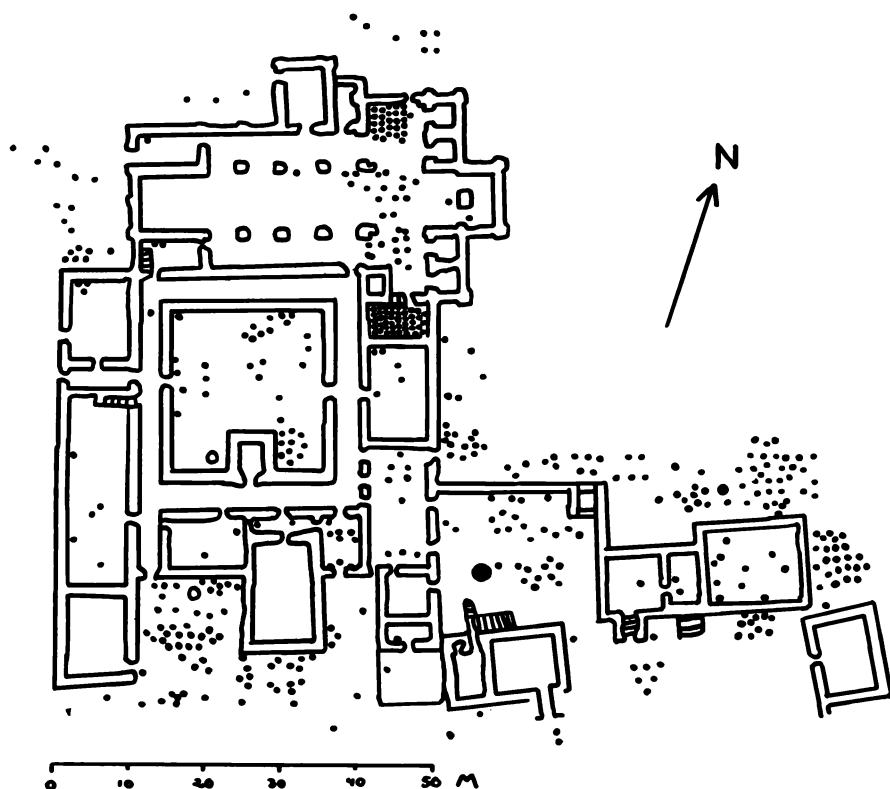


Fig. 2. Coins from the 12th, 13th and 14th century found in Alvastra monastery. The big dot in the outer yard represents a hoard of c. 60 coins struck c. 1290–1318 and published by K. Jonsson, NNA 1975–76.

Middle Ages. It is not a question of any backward area with only a few links with the outside world.

The excavations of the monastery of Alvastra took place between 1921–1957 and brought to light about 1250 medieval coins of which 1236 have been preliminarily classified (Malmer 1980, Find 167). In most cases the finding place of each coin is known, which is rather unusual. In the *Numismatiska Institutionen* in Stockholm the find locations of the coins have been plotted on a number of maps of the monastery area. This has never been done before – as the material from Alvastra, both the coins and the other find categories, has not yet been published.

The oldest coins from Alvastra are from the middle of the 12th century, which corresponds exactly with the founding of the monastery. The 12th and 13th century coins have a characteristic distribution. They are con-

centrated in the sacristy and in the church's northeastern part. The 14th century coins show about the same distribution, Fig. 2. During the period 1400–1470, certain changes appear: few coins inside the church, a lot of coins in the chapter hall, but in the sacristy there are relatively fewer coins than earlier. During the period 1470–1520, which is also the last period in which the monastery was in use, these tendencies gained strength. There were almost no coins inside the church and sacristy; instead the coins are concentrated in the chapter hall, the outer yard and guest houses, Fig. 3.

4. The find of Växjö Cathedral.

St. Sigfrid was an English missionary, active in Sweden and especially in Varend in Småland during the earlier part of the 11th century. Varend was a culturally isolated district in southern Småland which, during the Middle Ages, formed its own diocese. It was the smallest diocese in Sweden with a cathedral in Växjö, consecrated to St. Sigfrid, Fig. 1.

In 1957–58 an archaeological excavation took place inside the church in connection with restoration. During the excavation 1123 coins were found, of which 2 were from the 11th century. 861 medieval coins can be classified more precisely (Malmer 1980, Find 168). The excavation was undertaken in squares which follow the vaults in the church. Unfortunately, the connection between the excavation squares and the coins has been lost. There is no possibility of studying the differences in the distribution of coins during various periods, as in Alvastra. On the other hand it is known how many coins have been found in total, both from the Middle Ages and modern times, in the separate squares. Most of the coins have been found in the choir and in the centre of the church, Fig. 4.

As a finding place, Växjö is more isolated than Alvastra, with large woodland areas to the east and south, a circumstance which ought to have had importance for the character of the coin circulation in relation to both the other finds.

5. The find from Hagby Round Church.

The third church is Hagby Round Church in southeastern Småland, Fig. 1, built during the end of the 12th century as a combined defence construction and church. The church of Hagby is much smaller in size than the two other churches. When the church was restored in 1965 an extensive archaeological excavation took place. No less than 940 coins were found. 578 medieval coins could be classified more closely (Malmer 1980, Find 41). Many of the medieval coins were found together in graves but infor-

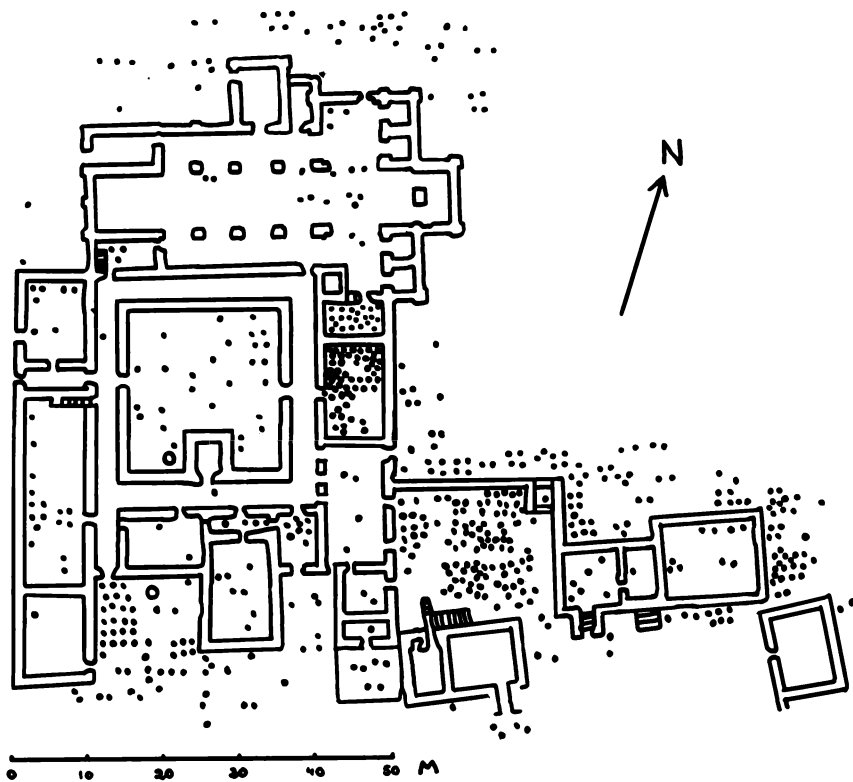


Fig. 3. Coins from c. 1400–1520 found in Alvastra monastery.

mation about the find combinations has more or less been lost. Consequently it is impossible to make a distribution chart of the coin finds in Hagby Round Church, Fig. 5.

Hagby is centrally situated near the coast in one of Sweden's richest farmlands.

6. Monetary circulation in South-Eastern Sweden in light of the finds from Alvastra, Våxjö and Hagby.

All the finds are unpublished. Except in the case of the coins from Hagby, which have recently been arranged by Monica Golabiewski, the classifications are rather preliminary, mostly done by N. L. Rasmusson and L. O. Lagerqvist in the 1950's.

The geographical distribution of the coins is shown in Table 1. Only a little more than half of the coins are Swedish; the other part consists

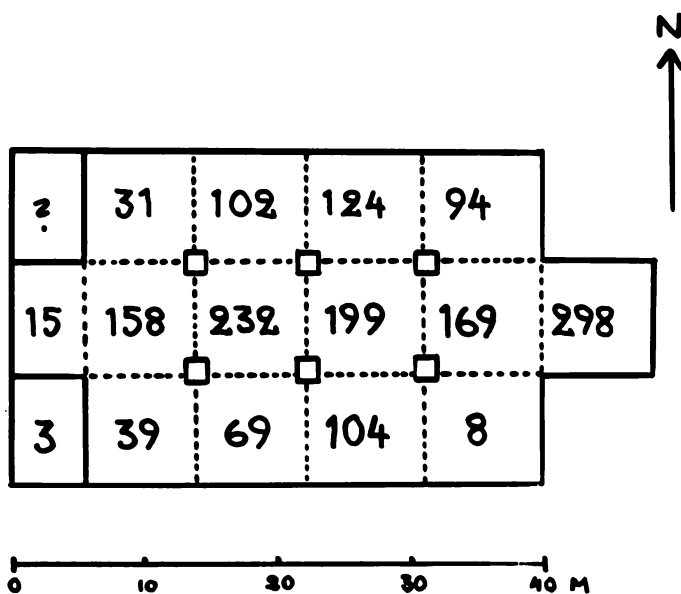


Fig. 4. Ground plan of the Väjö cathedral. The figures represent the total number of coins found in each square.

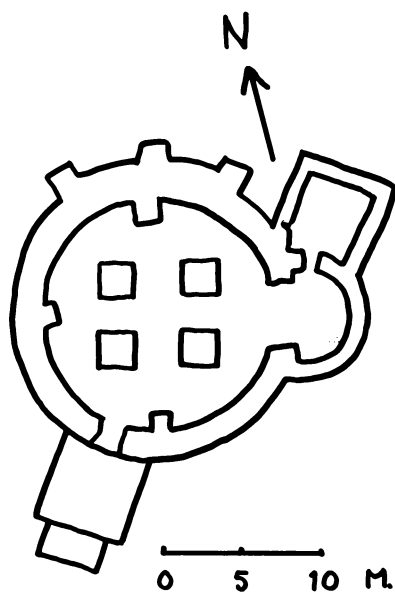


Fig. 5. Ground plan of Hagby round church.

Table 1. Medieval coins in the finds from Alvastra (1), Våxjö (2) and Hagby (3).

	1 ¹		2		3	
Sweden	641	52	479	55	320	55
Gotland	117	9	118	14	55	10
Norway	7	0.5	4	0.5	1	<0.5
Denmark	222	18	118	14	46	8
Germany	231	19	126	15	133	23
Balticum etc.	11	1	15	1.5	23	4
England	5	0.5	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	1	<0.5	1	<0.5	—	—
France	1	<0.5	—	—	—	—
	1236	100.0	861	100.0	578	100.0

¹ Differences in relation to Malmer-Wiséhn 1982, Find 157 I–IV, are due to a new classification made by Brita Malmer 1982. This is also true of Tables 2–5.

mainly of German, Danish, and Gotlandic coins. On the whole, the distribution of the coins of the three finds is very much alike, but there are some interesting differences; for instance there are fewer Danish and more German and Baltic coins in Hagby, Find no. 3 on the map, which is situated near the east coast of southern Götaland.

Table 2 shows the chronological distribution of the *Swedish* coins. The Swedish coins mainly belong to the period before the influx of foreign coins in the 15th century. In Alvastra 80% of the Swedish coins were struck before 1389, in Våxjö 93%, in Hagby 86%. In all three finds there is an increase of Swedish coins from c. 1470 onwards. This is a general tendency, probably connected with the economical growth of Central Sweden and the forthcoming break of the political union with Denmark.

Table 3 shows a detail of Table 2, namely the distribution of Swedish bracteates with radiate ring, struck in the 1350's. In this group there are E- (*61), L- and S-bracteates (Lqt XXVIII:A), as well as bracteates with a crown (Lqt XXVIII:B) or two crowns (Lqt XXIX). L probably means the mint of Lödöse in western Götaland and S the mint of Söderköping in eastern Götaland (Malmer 1980, pp. 30 ff and Plate 27). E-bracteates (*61) have been connected with the mint of Kalmar because the "örtug" struck by Albrekt of Mecklenburg in Kalmar, just north of Hagby, has a crowned E on the obverse (Malmer 1980, cf. Hemmingsson 1979). Table 3 shows a very strong concentration of E-bracteates for the find of Hagby near Kalmar with 78 E-bracteates and only 1 L-bracteate and 5 S-bracteates. This is a strong indication of Kalmar as the mint of E-bracteates.

Table 2. Swedish medieval coins in the finds from Alvastra (1), Våxjö (2) and Hagby (3).

		1167– c.1225	c.1225– 1275	c.1275– 1318	1319–63 earlier	1319–63 later	1364–89	1389– c.1410	c.1410– 1440	c.1440– 1470	c.1470– 1500	c.1500– 1520	unclassi- fied
1	örtug	–	–	–	–	–	3	–	3	2	1	–	–
	1/2 örtug	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	16	10	–
	penny	2	2	82	128	120	111	–	15	32	33	3	15
	1/2 penny	7	19	37	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2	örtug	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	1/2 örtug	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	1	–
	penny	–	–	95	128	85	72	–	6	6	14	–	1
	1/2 penny	1	43	22	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3	örtug	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	1	–	–
	1/2 örtug	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	1	–
	penny	–	–	20	19	132	72	–	9	10	22	–	–
	1/2 penny	1	19	8	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	unclassified	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Number of specimens		11	83	265	275	337	258	–	34	50	95	15	17

Table 3. Swedish bracteates from the 1350's in the finds from Alvastra (1), Våxjö (2) and Hagby (3).

	1	2	3
Lqt XXVIII:A			
E	26	42	78
L	16	10	1
S	21	4	5
fragments with unclassified letter	15	6	36
Lqt XXVIII:B			
crown	21	12	8
Lqt XXIX			
2 crowns	21	11	4
Number of specimens			
	120	85	132

Table 4. Danish medieval coins in the finds from Alvastra (1), Våxjö (2) and Hagby (3).

	1		2		3	
12th century	1	}	—	—	—	—
13th century	1		9	8	1	2
14th century	1		16	14	—	—
Erik of Pomerania 1396–1439						
Sterling	16	7	19	16	4	9
Crown bracteate	51	23	23	19	13	28
Copper sterling	14	6	9	8	—	—
Leopard bracteate	13	7	3	2	2	5
Gros	2	1	3	2	—	—
Christopher of Bavaria 1440–48	— ¹	—	3	2	—	—
The Privy Council 1448	1	<1	1	1	1	2
Christiern I 1448–81						
Hvid	26	12	10	9	7	15
Hans 1481–1513						
Hvid	31	14	15	13	6	13
Christiern II 1513–23						
Hvid	1	<1	—	—	—	—
Klippling 1518–22	61	27	7	6	12	26
Unclassified	3	1	—	—	—	—
	222	100	118	100	46	100

¹ According to Malmer 1980, p. 200, the find of Alvastra contains 25 coins struck for Christopher and none for Christiern I which is wrong. Cf. Malmer-Wisén 1982.

The distribution of *Danish* coins is shown on Table 4. In broad outline the distribution is very much alike, especially in Alvastra and Hagby. One difference is that the find of Våxjö contains considerably more Danish coins from the 13th and 14th century and fewer Danish coins from the beginning of the 16th century. In the 15th century crown bracteates of Erik of Pomerania, (*58), “hvids” of Christiern I (*6) and Hans (*7) are most frequent in all three finds.

The *German* coins in the finds mainly belong to the 15th century. Table 5 shows the distribution as regards denominations. Obviously Alvastra is the richest find with 2 gold coins, 21 wittens and only 3¼ wittens. Våxjö and Hagby have no gold coins and many ¼ wittens.

Table 5. German medieval coins in the finds of Alvastra (1), Våxjö (2) and Hagby (3).

	1		2		3 ¹	
Goldgulden	2 ²	1	—	—	—	—
Witten	21 ³	9	6 ⁴	5	4 ⁵	3
1/4 Witten	3 ⁶	1	14 ⁷	11	17 ⁸	13
Mecklenburgian bracteates with a bull's head	168	73	87	69	76	57
Other groups, mainly bracteates	37	16	19	15	36 ⁹	27
	231	100	126	100	133	100

¹ Differences in relation to Malmer 1980, p. 174, are due to a new classification made by Monica Golabiewski 1980.

² Nürnberg 1486–95; German Empire, Nördlingen, 1440–93.

³ Anklam, Greifswald, Rostock, Stralsund, Wismar, Wolgast.

⁴ Anklam, Greifswald, Güstrow, Stettin, Stralsund.

⁵ Friedland, Stettin, Wolgast, unclassified.

⁶ Güstrow, Parchim, Teterow.

⁷ Güstrow, Hamburg, Lübeck, Parchim, Wismar, Teterow.

⁸ Flensburg, Güstrow, Lübeck, Oldesloe, Parchim, Wismar.

⁹ Vierchen: Stettin 1. Vinkenaugen: Colberg 1, Demmin 1, Garz 1, Stettin 2, unclassified 1. Bracteates: Anklam 1, Demmin 1, Holstein 1, Lübeck 9, Lüneburg 1, Rostock 6, Salzwedel 1, Stralsund 8, Anhalt Zerbst 1.

In the three finds of Alvastra, Våxjö and Hagby there are 117, 118 and 55 *Gotlandic* coins, respectively. Most of them are “gotes” from the 15th century (71, 91 and 80%, respectively) (*12). There are also early *Gotlandic* coins, c. 1140–1270, Lqt XX–XXII (25, 6 and 4% respectively) and a few “hvids” from the period c. 1450–1520 (3, 3 and 11% respectively).

Furthermore there were a few coins struck in eastern Germany, Poland or the area of the Baltic states, i.e. the Teutonic Order, the archbishop of Dorpat and others. The eastern distribution of the *Baltic* coins is obvious: Alvastra 11 specimens, Våxjö 15 and Hagby, the smallest find but situated on the east coast, 23 specimens.

Furthermore, the find of Alvastra contains 7 *Norwegian* coins, 5 *English* (4 sterlings from the 13th century and 1 nobel, struck in Calais 1363–69), 1 *French* (14th cent.) and 1 *Dutch* (13th cent.). The find of Våxjö contains 4 *Norwegian* and 1 *Dutch*; the find of Hagby 1 *Norwegian* coin, cf. Table 1.

In general, the composition of the coin mass seems naturally to be dependent on the geographical location of the finding place: there are

more Danish coins in western than in eastern Sweden and there are more Gotlandic and Baltic coins in eastern than in western Sweden (Malmer 1980, pp. 150–53, map 21–24). But inside smaller areas, as for instance Småland (Växjö and Hagby) and Östergötland (Alvastra), there is a factor which counteracts the possibilities of separating the foreign coin flows and detecting differences in the composition of the cumulative finds, namely the continuous mixing of different coin sorts once they have gone into circulation. Thus, the main result of this investigation so far is that the three finds are astonishingly alike, in spite of their different geographical locations. The conclusion is that the mixing of different coin groups during their circulation in south eastern Sweden was very thorough before the coins were lost or offered in the churches. In other words, coins were frequently used by common people as well. The trouble is that we have no indication of time. This thorough mixing of coins: was it a question of years, decades or centuries?

Unfortunately there are only a few hoards available for comparative studies of the question of mixing. Regarding this question there are two interesting hoards, one from Sund in Östergötland, not far from Alvastra (Malmer 1980, Find 123) and another from Törnebyslätt near Kalmar (Malmer 1980, Find 70:III), Fig. 1. They have the same t.p.q., c. 1420. Sund has 85% *Gotlandic* coins and Törnebyslätt 79% *Danish* coins. Obviously no mixing has taken place between those two hoards. From this far too small material we can only get the general impression that the foreign content of some of the hoards had been imported more or less directly, without longer circulation inside Sweden.

Special abbreviations and literature

- Andersson, I., 1967. Hagby fästningskyrka. *Fornvännen* 1967, pp. 22–36.
 Fritz, B., 1972. *Hus, land och län. Förvaltningen i Sverige 1250–1434. I.* (Stockholm).
 Hemmingsson, B., 1979. Svenska bokstavsbrakteater från senmedeltiden. *Myntkontakt* 1979:3, pp. 56–58.
 Hårdh, B., 1976. *Wikingerzeitliche Depotfunde aus Süd-Schweden. Probleme und Analysen* (Lund).
 Lagerqvist, L., *Svenska mynt under vikingatid och medeltid*, Stockholm 1970.
 Malmer, B., 1980 A. *Den senmedeltida penningen i Sverige/Late medieval pennies in Sweden* (Stockholm).
 Malmer, B., 1980 B. Hur gammal är goten? *NNUM* 1980:7, pp. 153–4.
 Malmer, B., 1981. Om Danmarks näst äldsta myntfynd och depåfyndet från Igelösa kyrkogård. *NNUM* 1981:4, pp. 62–67.
 Malmer, B. & Wiséhn, I., 1982. *Sveriges Mynthistoria. Landskapsinventeringen 1. Myntfynd från Östergötland*.
 Talvio, T., 1978. Coin Imitations as Jewelry in Eleventh Century Finland. *Finskt Museum* 1978, pp. 26–38.