

Wealth and treasure in the West, 4th-7th century

Max Martin

Nowhere, not even in the most communicative of written documents, do we find a more vivid and colourful picture of the true wealth of the late antique and early Middle Ages than in the treasure of the period. From the fourth to the seventh centuries AD many collections of 'treasure', sometimes of substantial proportions, were buried in the ground or hidden in water in the territory of the declining western Roman empire and the barbarian states which succeeded it, as well as in the neighbouring and more remote regions of free Germania. They contained coins of precious metals or silver tableware and utensils or, in some cases, even gold jewellery. It is not uncommon for the finds to include a combination of these objects.

It goes without saying that in these hoards of precious metals – archaeological finds of the very first order – only those parts of bygone wealth which were mobile are to be found; substantial holdings of land or property, as well as certain other valuable possessions, can usually at best only be inferred from written sources,¹ as they leave no trace in the ground. It can be assumed that the owners of such riches, which imply aristocratic table manners, were prosperous landowners and high-ranking military and civilian officials.²

The most concrete information about the wealth of the period is thus handed down to us through treasure, yet this kind of source material is in fact more complex and inconsistent than any other. The regularity with which possessions of precious metal were buried in the ground depends both on the time and the place. The reasons for burying treasure, and the occasion of its successful and for us permanently unknowable recovery, depend on a multitude of factors, all of which demand close scrutiny.³ Certainly a number of deposits of treasure have been thoroughly analysed to date in terms of their contents, and in many cases interpreted historically – one need only think in this context of coin deposits. With the exception of the northern Germanic region,⁴ however, we entirely lack thorough and comprehensive studies of all the finds in larger geographical areas and across longer periods of time. These would enable us to make preliminary comparisons between wider areas and could thereby lead to significant cultural and historical discoveries.

Riches in the form of money, jewellery and other possessions made of precious metals and jewels were not normally buried in the ground; they passed from hand to hand either legally, as inheritance or gift, or illegally, through theft or robbery. Gold and silver jewellery, whether whole or incomplete, was also, like broken silverware, hardly

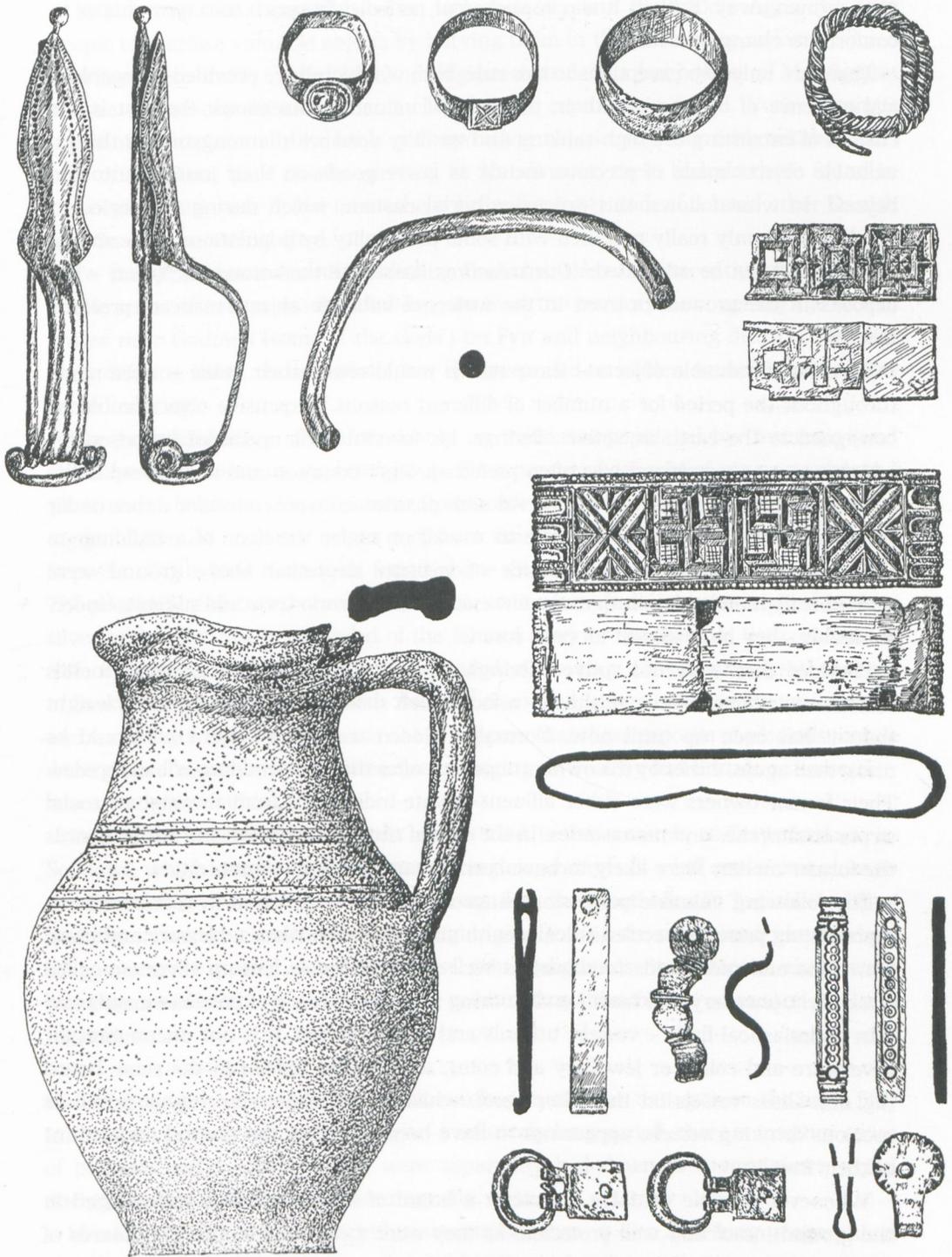


Fig. 20 Silver dress fittings, rings and military equipment, together with sixteen gold and some 500 silver coins (*t.p.*AD 408), buried in a pottery jug. Wiesbaden-Kastel, Germany. (After Schoppa 1962.)

ever thrown away. Rather, it was reworked or periodically recast into new shapes to conform to changes in taste.

There are only two exceptions to this rule, both of which have provided archaeological evidence of bygone wealth in the form of valuable possessions: the first is the custom of entrusting the high-ranking and wealthy dead with, amongst other things, valuable objects made of precious metals as grave goods on their journey into the beyond. In what follows, this expensive burial custom, which during the period in question was only really practised with some prodigality by populations of Germanic descent, will not be addressed.⁵ Our treasures constitute the second exception – the deposits in the ground, or even in the water, of valuable objects made of precious metals.

Deposits of valuable objects – those which would retain their value – were made throughout the period for a number of different reasons.⁶ Expensive objects could be consigned to the earth as votive offerings, i.e. for ritualistic or sacred purposes, for which water or marshland was often preferred. More common and widespread is the category of hidden treasure, whereby valuable possessions were concealed either under the ground or above it, for example in a wall or under the floor of a building, to safeguard them from danger. Hoards of treasure deposited above ground were undoubtedly more common than the few examples known to us would suggest. Understandably, they have almost all been lost.

Provided they were not votive offerings, all surviving deposits of precious metals constitute, to some extent, mishaps – a fact which should be accorded greater weight than it has been up until now. Normally, hidden treasure of this kind would be unearthed again, either by the owners or others, after the transient danger had receded. Their former owners were either affluent private individuals from the highest social strata or churches and monasteries. In the case of ritualistic deposits and votive hoards the former owners were likely to have been pagan sacrificial communities.

The following valuable possessions have repeatedly been found in secular hoards representing private or ecclesiastical wealth and prosperity: silver tableware and utensils, coins and medallions (*multipla*) as well as silver ingots, cut-up silver (so-called *Hacksilber*), jewellery and traditional clothing accessories made of precious metals and – in ecclesiastical finds – vessels, utensils and votive crosses. It is not uncommon for silverware and coins, or jewellery and coins, to be found hidden in the same hoard (fig. 20). Glass vessels on the other hand, which at the time were highly prized as precious drinking vessels, appear not to have been buried in the ground on account of their fragility.

Whenever possible valuable objects in a hoard of hidden treasure were buried in the ground intact and well protected, as they were to be used again. The hoards of cut-up silver – to be found only outside the boundaries of the former Roman empire – constitute an exception to this rule.

In the transitional period between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the only people to sacrifice valuable objects by burying them in the earth or in water as sacred offerings were those in the Germanic regions outside the boundaries of the Roman empire. These objects sometimes included items captured in battle. Votive deposits containing exceptionally valuable gold and silver objects, together with notable offerings of weapons, have chiefly survived in Scandinavia; these include those found in the bogland site near Ejsbøl in southern Jutland (pl. 13) and, of course, other Danish and Swedish sacrificial sites.⁷

To the well-known hoards, including Broholm, there has recently been added a whole series of new precious metal deposits from the territory surrounding the seat of power near Gudme ('Home of the Gods') on Fyn and neighbouring districts.⁸ Despite their differing dates, these deposits can be interpreted as hidden treasure rather than sacred offerings.

The hoards of scrap silver found only on territories populated by Germanic (and Celtic) peoples constitute a special group. They consist of deposits of cut-up or chopped silver vessels and utensils, often with Roman silver coinage, complete or broken silver ingots of Roman or native origin and, from time to time, also jewellery and the like. Deposits of this kind have been found above all in Denmark, Ireland and Scotland.⁹ The peoples of these northern regions appear to have stopped using the original antique silver tableware; one is reminded of the famous story of the 'vase de Soissons' of AD 486, in which a Frankish warrior demanded of his king, Clovis (482-511), that an unbroken silver vessel be divided. As with coins and ingots, silver scrap was valued and traded by weight, which leads one to suppose that these deposits of precious metals were generally secular hidden treasure belonging to wealthy individuals or, in certain cases, to communities.

One of the most famous hoards of this kind is the treasure of Traprain Law in Scotland, which came to light in 1919 during excavations of a hill settlement close to the Firth of Forth, an estuary which flows into the North Sea.¹⁰ Together with a quantity of scrap silver tableware, weighing in total over 20 kg and identified as the remains of around a hundred vessels, in some cases finely tooled, there were some pieces of clothing and four silver coins dating from before or around AD 400 (fig. 21).

Unlike the cut-up silver hoards, which can be identified as dating from the early fifth to the sixth century AD, and thus span a relatively long period, there is another series of precious metal hoards which were apparently laid down in a very short period during the first half of the fifth century (fig. 22).

In addition to this chronological concentration there is also a striking geographical one: first, there is the territory populated by Frankish tribes and situated close to the late antique border of the empire and its outlying districts, and, second, the border

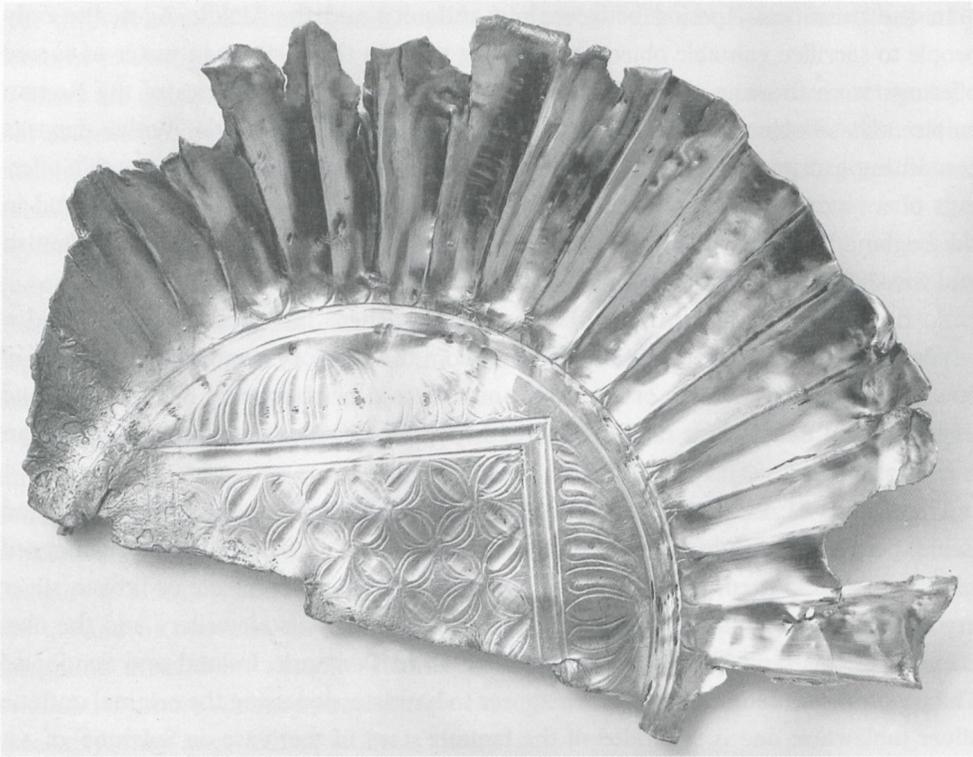


Fig. 21 Cut-up silver bowl from the late Roman hoard at Traprain Law, Borders Scotland; fourth century.

regions to the west of the Lower and Middle Rhine. The contents of this distinctive group of deposits comprise gold and, less frequently, silver coins, as well as (on the right bank of the Rhine) gold jewellery with designs exclusive to the Germanic peoples, in particular neck rings, some of them tightly twisted together before burial, and, less commonly, arm rings. Both of the latter are as a rule decorated with a punched design typical of the first half of the fifth century (pl. 14).

In 1851 a hoard of gold was discovered near Velp (Gelderland, Netherlands), which, besides two finger rings, contained no less than seven neck rings, also made of gold. As early as 1715 a large number of gold coins (*solidi*) of the usurper Johannes (AD 423–5), came to light in the same district, as well as splendidly set medallions – three of the emperor Honorius and two of his sister Galla Placidia, the latter struck in 425 (pl. 17). These most recent objects from the latter hoard also allow us to date the Velp hoard of 1851, which stands out from related hoards thanks to its seven neck rings, just as the latter hoard is preeminent on account of its medallions. Remarkably, the large deposit of coins in Dortmund, Germany, found together with three gold neck rings, can also be dated to the beginning of the second quarter of the fifth century on the basis of a number of Frankish silver coins struck around 420–30, although

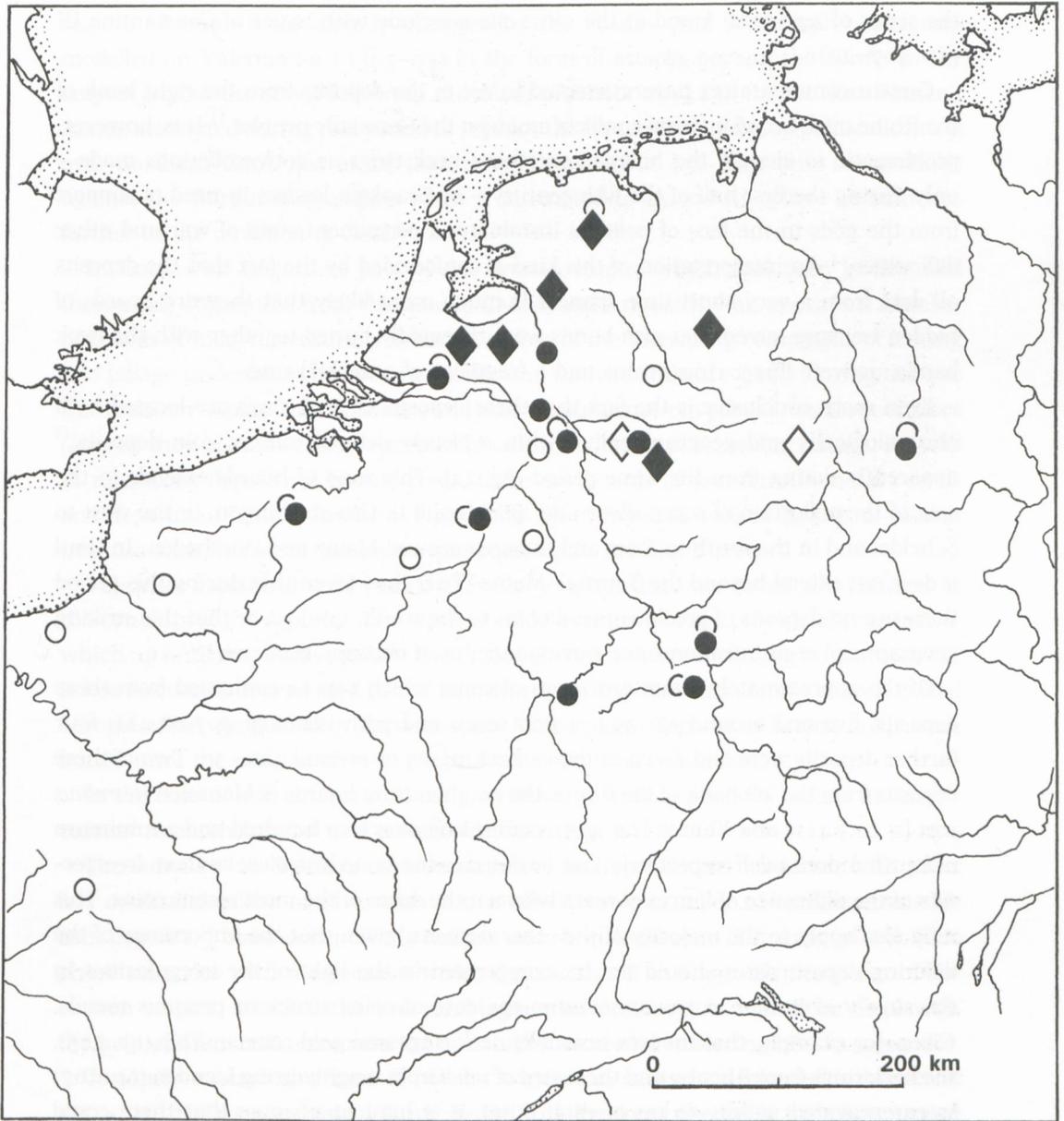


Fig. 22 The distribution of deposits of *solidi* and silver coins, with *t.p.* AD 393–406 ○, with *t.p.* 407/8 or II ◆, and with *t.p.* 425 ●, together with the distribution of hoards from the first half of the fifth century, containing stamped or plain gold neck-rings ◇. (After Bloemers 1969, with additions.)

the series of 440 *solidi* found at the same site conclude with issues of Constantine III (AD 407–II).

Certain commentators have attempted to see in the deposits from the right bank of the Rhine evidence of internal conflicts amongst the Germanic peoples.¹¹ It is, however, problematic to identify the hoards containing neck rings as votive offerings made – only during the first half of the fifth century – by Frankish leaders in need of support from the gods in the face of political instability, a permanent state of war and other difficulties.¹² An interpretation of this kind is confounded by the fact that the deposits all date from a very short time span. It is much more likely that they are hoards of hidden treasure, given that arm bands were repeatedly buried together with the neck bands, as were finger rings, coins and a fragment of a neck(?)–ring.

Even more conclusive is the fact that these deposits of neck-rings are located both chronologically and geographically within a clearly defined zone of coin deposits,¹³ apparently dating from the same period (fig. 22). This zone of hoards extends in the east to the collection of scrap silver and *solidi* found in Grossbodungen, in the west to Schelde, and in the south to Trier and the area around Mainz and Wiesbaden. In Gaul it does not extend beyond the Tournai–Mainz–Trier line, given that during this period there are no deposits of precious metal coins to the south. Could it be that this striking geographical concentration once corresponded to a chronological one?

Of the approximately seventeen series of coins which can be evaluated from these deposits, five end around AD 393–4 and seven end with issues of 407 or 411; four further deposits were laid down at the earliest in 425 or around 420–30. Two of these deposits from the left bank of the Rhine, the neighbouring hoards of Menzelen (*terminus post* [= *t.p.*] 411) and Xanten (*t.p.* 425), comprising over two hundred and a minimum of four hundred *solidi* respectively, can be dated to the same historical context, irrespective of the difference of fourteen years between the dates of the most recent coins. This may also apply to the majority of the other deposits, given that the importance of the differing deposit dates should not be exaggerated in the light of the irregularities in the supply of Roman currency, even in the case of coins struck in precious metals. Given, for example, that the two hoards of neck rings and gold coins in Velp (*t.p.* 425), the neck rings from Rhenen and the hoard of *solidi* from neighbouring Lienden (*t.p.* 407) were excavated within 30 km of each other, it is hard to imagine that there could have been a sequence of different catastrophes separated by only a few years. In the light of these factors, and the high material value of the hoards, there is every reason to believe that there is a single zone of precious metal deposits covering both groups.

If this zone of finds really dates from the beginning of the second quarter of the fifth century, then it can be interpreted in a very different way than has been the case to date. During this period, Aetius (died AD 454), the energetic commander of the western Roman empire, succeeded in driving back the Franks in northern Gaul. Perhaps the Germanic hoards represent Roman retaliatory measures in the northernmost border

regions of Gaul, those already occupied by the Franks, and preventative measures modelled on Valentinian I (365–75) in the form of attacks beyond the border of the empire amidst the chaos following the death of Honorius (423). As the 'last Roman', Aetius attempted during this period to prevent the Franks from gaining political control over northern Gaul, just as he took assertive action in 436 (this time successfully) against the Burgundian empire when it attempted to extend its sphere of influence further in the direction of Gaul.¹⁴

In Gaul – an important part of the Roman empire which had been swiftly and thoroughly romanised from the time of Caesar and Augustus – an enormous number of hoards of hidden treasure was buried in fear of the increasing campaigns of looting and pillage undertaken by both Germanic and native bands of robbers during the late third century. Apart from statuettes and other equipment from private, domestic shrines (*lararia*) they contain almost exclusively valuable objects of a secular nature. As well as numerous deposits of bronze coins, there are hoards of non-ferrous metal vessels and deposits of tools.¹⁵ Deposits of gold and silver coins, as well as hoards of hidden treasure with fine silver tableware and equipment, are much rarer.¹⁶

Valuables continued to be buried after AD 300, but there are significant changes in the contents of the deposits. The wealthy middle stratum of the provincial population, which up until the fourth century had buried plainer treasure including bronze utensils, is less frequently represented in the hoards, suggesting that this section of society had become either decimated or impoverished. More modest deposits of bronze coins were buried until the mid-fourth century and later much more infrequently.

In the case of late antique and early medieval hoards of precious metals in Gaul,¹⁷ current research has led to a remarkable discovery.

The famous silver treasure of Kaiseraugst on the Upper Rhine,¹⁸ together with a few less opulent deposits of silverware and a considerable number of contemporaneous coin deposits,¹⁹ mark out a clearly defined and short-lived zone of hoards (pl. 15). This phase coincides with the years in which Constantius II (AD 337–61), emperor of the eastern empire, attacked the usurper Magnentius (350–53) in his native Gaul with the help of Alamannic mercenaries, and finally succeeded in forcing him to surrender.

Curiously enough this zone of hoards, which can easily be explained in historical terms, is the last one known to us in Gaul dating from the long, turbulent period leading up to the end of the western Roman empire (AD 476). It is a well known tradition that the whole of Gaul became 'a single burning pyre' after the invasion and migration of the Vandals, Suevi and other Germanic peoples (406–7).²⁰ There are barely any archaeological traces of these dramatic events, about which we are informed through written documents; the only exceptions are a small number of deposits of bronze coins which may have been buried during this period.

The absence of a significant number of hoards of precious metals also characterises the reign of the Frankish founding king Clovis I (AD 482–511), although he was not

able to bring either the other small Frankish kingdoms or the Toulouse-based kingdom of the Visigoths under his control without a struggle. The question is whether in Gaul, from c.350 into the sixth century, the indigenous, in some cases rich, senatorial families and the new Frankish upper social stratum had learnt their lesson from what had happened in the past and now secured their valuables in a different way. Were they able to keep the catastrophes at arm's length through payment or by some other means, if indeed these catastrophes really occurred?

From the period after AD 400 two small deposits of silver tableware from Toulouse and Monbadon near Bordeaux are known to us; they were discovered in the nineteenth century and thus, unfortunately, are insufficiently documented. These deposits can be attributed to the first half of the fifth century and may be associated with the events following the settling of Aquitaine by the Visigoths in 418. Moreover, three large silver dishes (*missoria*) from the Rhône valley also cannot be dated to the years, or indeed even the decades, around 400, but rather were buried separately in the course of the fifth and early sixth centuries.

Not until the early sixth century do we encounter once again further sporadic examples of gold coin deposits, first *solidi* and then, increasingly, *tremisses*, with the value of one third of a *solidus*.²¹ In the coin deposit of Gourdon, south-west of Chalon-sur-Saône, two sacred vessels made of gold, a goblet and paten, were buried together with gold coins. Certain sixth-century hoards of coins, such as that at Gourdon, may well go back to the Frankish conquest of the kingdom of the Burgundians (AD 534), while others may have been buried during the course of internal Frankish conflicts.

There are also attested coin deposits from the seventh century, which consist almost entirely of *tremisses* (also known as *trientes*), normally so-called monetary striking, which bear the name of the master of the mint (*monetarius*), and often also the name of the place for which he had struck the coin (pl. 16, fig. 23). Valuable objects are only buried with coins in a few exceptional cases.

It is notable that apart from these early medieval coin deposits there are barely any other contemporary hoards known to us in which silver tableware or jewellery in precious metals are buried. We know from written sources that in the Merovingian kingdom silver tableware was popular in the upper social stratum and in ecclesiastical circles. Moreover, gold jewellery is also known from the graves of wealthy women. Secular hoards of hidden treasure containing anything other than precious metal coins are, however, a rarity between AD 500 and 700, in Gaul as elsewhere.

During the third century, Roman Britain, unlike Gaul, had not thus far had to suffer Germanic invasions. During the fourth century plain vessels of non-ferrous metals or pewter were still being deposited. The notion that these late antique hoards – some more valuable than others – could perhaps be interpreted as ritual deposits has quite rightly been brought into question.²²

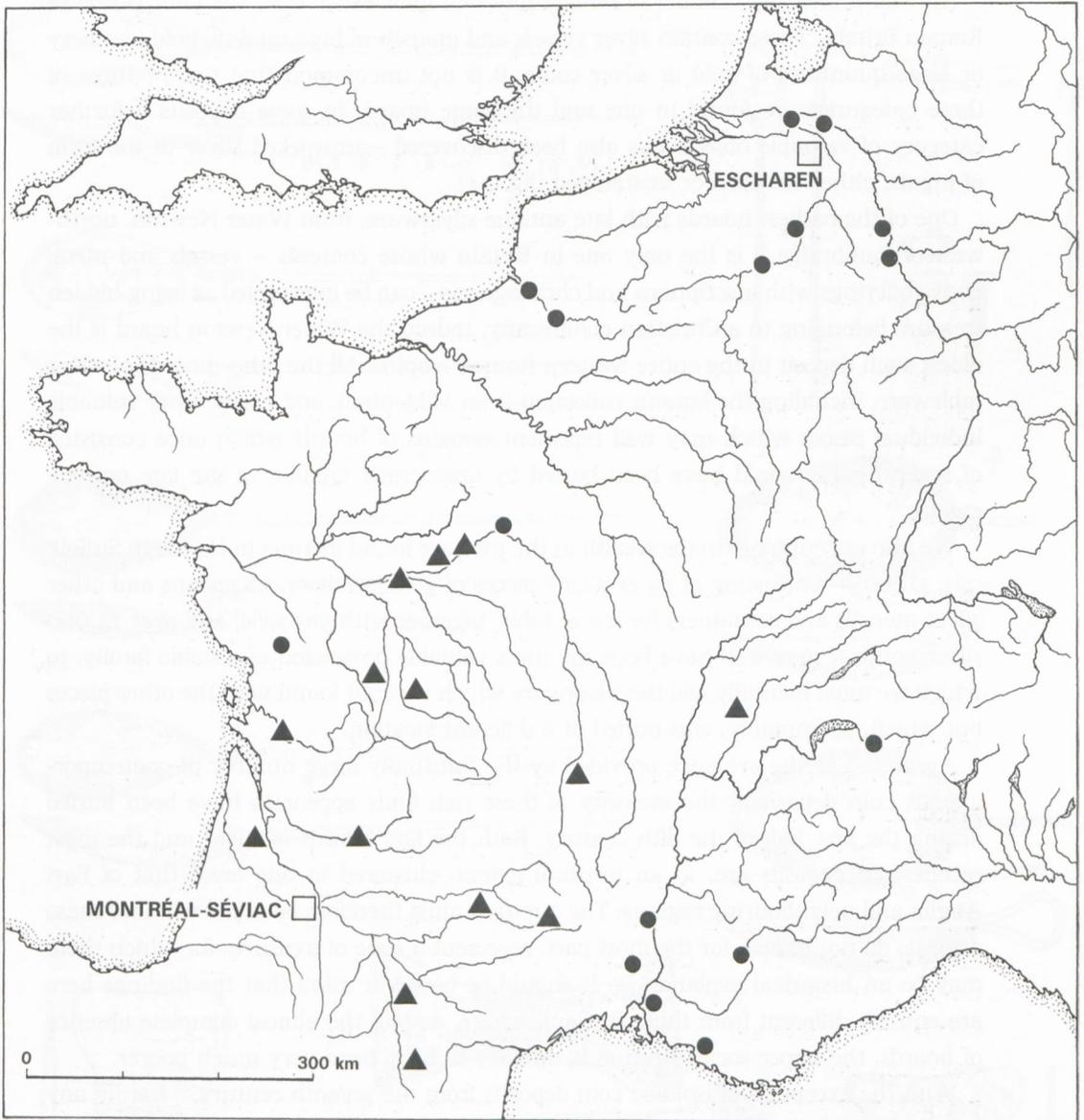


Fig. 23 Distribution of places where the gold coins found in the coin hoards of Montréal-Séviac ▲ and Escharen ● were struck. (After Toulouse and Lafaurie 1959/60.)

An ever increasing number of remarkably rich finds exists from the later period of Roman Britain. These contain silver vessels and utensils of high quality, gold jewellery or large quantities of gold or silver coins; it is not uncommon that two or three of these categories are found in one and the same hoard. In some deposits a further category of valuable objects has also been discovered – unworked silver in the form of ingots, either stamped or unstamped (fig. 24).

One of the earliest hoards with late antique silverware, from Water Newton, north-west of Cambridge,²³ is the only one in Britain whose contents – vessels and metal votive offerings with inscriptions and christograms – can be interpreted as being hidden treasure belonging to a Christian community. Indeed the Water Newton hoard is the oldest such deposit in the entire western Roman empire. All the other hoards of silver tableware, including the famous collection from Mildenhall, and many other valuable individual pieces which may well represent remains of hoards which once consisted of several parts, could have been buried by aristocratic families of the late antique empire.²⁴

We also encounter extreme wealth in the treasure found in 1993 in Hoxne in Suffolk (pls. 31, 60).²⁵ Consisting of 19 exquisite pieces of gold jewellery, 98 spoons and other silver utensils and containers for use at table, together with 565 *solidi* and over 14,000 silver coins, it may well have been the most valuable possession of a noble family, to which we must mentally add the silverware which was not found with the other pieces but which, presumably, was buried at a different location.

According to the evidence provided by the unusually large number of contemporaneous coin deposits,²⁶ the majority of these rich finds appear to have been buried during the first half of the fifth century. Both the late hoards of silver and the most recent coin deposits are, to an unusual extent, clustered in one area, that of East Anglia and neighbouring regions. The question must therefore be asked whether these deposits do not in fact, for the most part, represent a zone of treasures for which there may be an historical explanation. It should be borne in mind that the findings here are entirely different from those in Gaul, where, despite the almost complete absence of hoards, the upper social stratum is unlikely to have been very much poorer.

With the exception of isolated coin deposits from the seventh century,²⁷ hardly any hoards of hidden treasure have come down to us from post-Roman Britain until the practice is renewed during the Viking campaigns of the ninth century.

A large number of the coin deposits buried on the Iberian peninsula, chiefly around AD 400²⁸ and in the years that followed, reflect the restless times following the invasions and settlement by the Suevi, as well as the influence of the Vandals, who settled in southern Spain before moving over to North Africa. On the other hand, hardly any contemporaneous hoards have been found containing silver tableware or jewellery. It is well known that the large Madrid *missorium* of Theodosius, made in the year 388, was found in one of these rare silver hoards, together with two bowls since lost (fig. 11).

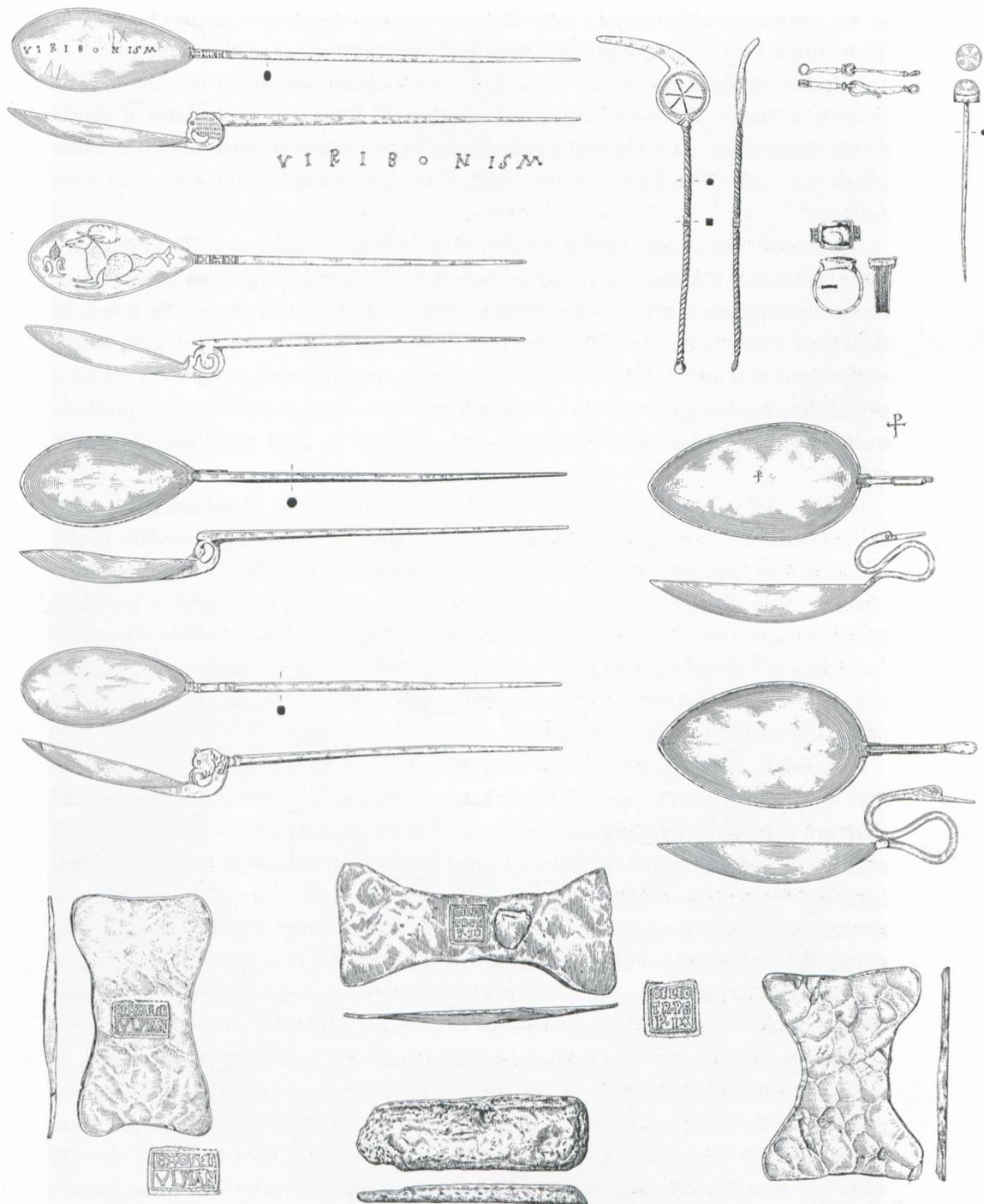


Fig. 24 Six (out of twelve) spoons, four ingots, toilet equipment and hair-pins in silver, together with a finger-ring and chain clasp in gold from the Canterbury, England, hoard; about AD 400. (After Johns and Potter 1985).

In the settlement of La Alcudia near Elche, a number of valuable pieces of jewellery were buried around 400, together with three gold coins and a small gold ingot.²⁹

Only two kinds of hoard can be dated to the Visigothic period of the late fifth to seventh centuries. There are, first, a few coin hoards,³⁰ the deposition dates of which do not suggest any clear chronological correlation, with the exception of two or three which may have been hidden in the wake of the Arab invasions and conquests after AD 711.

The second, and smaller, group consists of three finds of hidden treasure containing sacred objects.³¹ The famous votive crowns of the Visigothic kings and a number of extremely valuable votive crosses originate from the richest of them, the hoard of Guarrazar near Toledo (pl. 18);³² the other two hoards also contained gold votive crosses, but of a much simpler design. To date no secular hoards from the Visigothic period have been found in which, besides money, rich families may have buried precious metal objects such as silver tableware and jewellery to keep them out of harm's way.

In Italy very few hoards of hidden treasure were buried in the period before AD 400. On the other hand, there are a remarkably large number dating from the fifth to the end of the seventh centuries. The earliest deposits, which are again a function of the unstable times at the beginning of the fifth century, include the hoard of jewellery from the Piazza della Consolazione in Rome,³³ as well as the substantial hidden treasure consisting of valuable silver tableware discovered in 1797 at the foot of the Esquiline Hill, which included silver caskets for cosmetics and clothing as well as silver ornaments and elements from a state carriage (fig. 25).³⁴

In Upper Italy, a number of early coin deposits were buried between AD 400 and 500 which often also contained pieces of jewellery. As well as Mediterranean gold jewellery consisting of necklaces, finger rings and earrings set with stones (of the kind customarily found in other deposits) a pair of bow brooches belonging to a traditional costume worn by Ostrogothic women has come down to us from the hoard of hidden treasure in Reggio Emilia, dating from the late fifth century. Together with a gold Germanic neck ring found in the small hoard of Carpignano near Pavia,³⁵ these brooches reveal that among those burying valuable objects in Upper Italy at the time there must have been a number of people of Germanic origin.

In the period after AD 500 secular deposits of hidden treasure are outnumbered, as on the Iberian peninsula, by hoards in which vessels and utensils with a sacred provenance and function were buried; these include patens, chalices, spoons and wine sieves.³⁶ In the treasure of Galognano, which was buried 2.5 km from the church, there are vessels which according to their inscriptions were donated by the faithful (fig. 26). These Italian 'church treasures' were also buried to protect them against looters, who may have included Alamannic or Longobardic warriors.

As regards secular hidden treasure in the period after AD 500, we know only of



Fig. 25 Silver *patera* with Venus and cupids, and Adonis with a hunting dog. Esquiline hoard, Rome, Italy, fourth century.



Fig. 26 Silver chalices, patens and spoons from the hoard at Galognano, near Poggibonsi, Italy; sixth century. After von Hessen *et al.*, 1977.

isolated hoards of vessels, utensils or jewellery, such as the one found at Isola Rizza near Verona,³⁷ and a large number of deposits of gold coins.³⁸

We would be expecting too much of the archaeological discoveries that have come down to us if we were to attempt to draw definitive conclusions solely on the basis of these finds as to the wealth and status of the upper strata of society caught up in the upheavals of the antique world. For too long now, archaeology has tended to rely exclusively on concrete findings for its conclusions, and has too infrequently posed the follow-up questions: why have these discoveries rather than others come down to us? Which valuable objects, such as coins, may well have once existed but not come down to us due to a lack of deposits? When was this the case and for what reason? The category of hidden treasure, a particularly erratic and unevenly preserved group of finds, has not to date been sufficiently questioned in this way.

The fact that neither sacred nor ritual deposits of precious metal objects or scrap silver were commonly buried in the soil of the western provinces of the Roman empire, and the fact that this practice did not escalate, demonstrates, on the one hand, the endurance of antique ideas and, on the other, the assimilation of the recently settled Germanic peoples and communities. It is open to question, however, whether certain

objects recovered from underwater sites in Burgundy, comprising helmets, weapons and bowls made of non-precious metals, were not in fact fluvial sacrifices.³⁹

Accordingly, wealth is archaeologically manifested primarily in precious metal objects and coins buried by private individuals or churches to safeguard them against danger. A single deposit of precious metal may well be the consequence of an isolated, individual action, the motivation for which is unlikely ever to come to light. More meaningful in this context are geographical and chronological concentrations of deposits. The occasion behind a clearly defined zone of hoards of this kind is not likely to be a series of discrete individual actions, but rather processes of paramount importance, which in certain circumstances we can interpret historically with the help of written evidence.⁴⁰

Objects of precious metal retain their value, and those placed in safekeeping to escape danger would, as mentioned above, wherever possible be retrieved. Each hoard which was not recovered, and which has therefore come down to us, thus represents a genuine misfortune for its former owner, a catastrophe which, in many cases, he may well not himself have survived.

The famous late Roman silver treasure of Kaiseraugst provides us with an instructive example. Given that there are no known chronological or geographical counterparts to this valuable hoard of silver, the most recent object of which dates from the year AD 350, the supposition that the deposit was the result of a decisive, isolated incident suggests itself. However, three more modest deposits of copper coins were buried in the same fortress at the same time, obviously in the face of the same extreme danger. As a result we are presented with a set of hoards which can be dated very precisely to the years 351 or 352 and which can be explained in terms of the historically verifiable Alamannic invasions of the period. Comparable deposits of copper coins and contemporaneous strata of devastation have also been found in other areas of northern Switzerland and the Alsace, which clearly implies that this is not simply a local zone of hoards, but also a regional one.

The example of Kaiseraugst also illustrates another point: despite protection as unassailable as humanly possible – in a secure fortress – an unusually valuable set of possessions was buried, which, together with the distinctly more modest coin hoards, was never to be recovered. This is surprising given that the eminent former owner of the silver tableware must undoubtedly have had much better opportunities open to him at the time to recover his riches and, indeed, to protect them in the first place. For this reason we may surmise that the fortress was stormed and burned down, and that there was an abrupt discontinuity in the composition of its predominantly military inhabitants.

A single, unrecovered hoard can to some extent be seen as evidence of a sporadic or local discontinuity of ownership. On the other hand, geographical and chronological concentrations of hoards do not simply amount to several sporadic discontinuities, but

may instead represent a widespread, or indeed complete, discontinuity in the owners concerned, or even of the entire social stratum to which they belonged. It must always be borne in mind that an unknown number of hoards may have immediately been expropriated by new owners, with the result that there may well have been a considerably greater number of discontinuities than we are able to ascertain today. At any rate there could not have been fewer.

Moving from banal explanations to more complicated ones, it is possible to formulate the following hypotheses regarding precious metal treasure remaining in the ground against the wishes of its former owners. In general, it can be stated that the more valuable the hoard of precious metal objects, the richer and more powerful the former owner is likely to have been. The higher his social standing within the ruling social stratum, the more likely it is that he would have been able to protect himself against low or medium level danger; certainly he would have been better protected than men of humbler means. In addition, members of the influential upper social stratum would have had a considerable number of contacts at their disposal and been informed more swiftly of new developments than the rest of the population. Someone who possessed great wealth was thus able to protect himself both sooner and more thoroughly than others, and it is possible that he was consequently also less frequently forced to bury his possessions.

From what has been said above it is possible to conclude, conversely, that the richer the hoard, the greater and more all-embracing the danger which precipitated the deposit. In the case of a widespread zone of hoards, and thus a widespread danger, the following should be borne in mind. A wealthy upper stratum of society will not expose itself and its assets to extreme danger over a number of years, let alone decades, but rather will respond with recourse to its extensive connections and varied opportunities for self-defence. Thus even in the case of precious metal deposits constituting a true zone one should not think in terms of a period of years separating them, but rather at most a few months. It is highly unlikely in the case of a region with a number of precious metal deposits proven archaeologically to be roughly contemporary – spanning perhaps ten years – that the deposits were buried at a rate of, for example, one a year. If during a particular period a high social stratum in one geographical area was unable to recover a large number of valuable hoards, it should be assumed that a major discontinuity rapidly overtook this stratum, enveloping its closest members and servants. Causes could include either wars or a powerful social revolution, which can lead to a swift replacement of one upper stratum of society by another.

It is undoubtedly the case that an impressive number of late antique and early medieval deposits of precious metals has come down to us. They prove that the transformation of the Roman world which was taking place at the time certainly also led to far-reaching changes amongst the wealthy upper social stratum in the western Roman empire. It

is remarkable, however, how unevenly spread the hoards are, both chronologically and geographically, despite the fact that we can assume that overall there are comparable conditions of preservation across the board. There is nothing in Gaul, for example, which corresponds to the striking zone of hoards in Britain, which itself needs to be dated more specifically within the early part of the fifth century. Just as in the late fourth century, so also the events of AD 406, when the Vandals and other peoples apparently descended on the whole of Gaul, did not lead to an increase in the number of precious metal deposits.

In the Mediterranean countries it was above all the first half of the fifth century which appears to have been dominated by vigorous upheavals amongst the ranks of both the old and new wealthy upper social stratum. The frequency of hoards suggests that these upheavals lasted longer in Italy than on the Iberian peninsula. On the Iberian peninsula itself, ecclesiastical possessions, such as those found at Guarrazar, may well have been hidden from the advancing Arabs. Strangely enough, however, there is an almost complete absence of corresponding private deposits of valuables, not only around AD 700 but also earlier. This is also the case in Italy. On the other hand, hoards of coins are represented, which leads to the conclusion that this category of hoard, indicating a willingness to bury money, should be evaluated differently from the hiding of valuable silver tableware or jewellery.

It is clearly not coincidental that from the point of view of hoard discoveries the most marked discontinuities and upheavals should have occurred in the northernmost frontier regions of the Roman empire, in Britain and in the Lower Rhineland. Possessions also passed from hand to hand in other areas in which the newly arrived Germanic upper social stratum had to contend – not always peacefully – with the native population. The amalgamation and integration of these new, Germanic upper social strata and the installation of their political rule was, however, not as violent or tumultuous as was the case in the eastern part of Britain.

In the case of the Visigoths in Aquitaine (from AD 418), the Burgundians on the Rhône (from 443) and the Ostrogoths in Italy (after 489–90) we encounter peoples comprising a fair number of individuals born within the frontiers of the Roman empire who were more completely assimilated than their parents. And finally it should be emphasised that – in Gaul especially – the new Germanic and older native upper social stratum had learnt their lesson from the first violent confrontations and that, consequently, during a second phase, the redistribution of wealth occurred through the payment of ransoms, the assignment of property and, in the end, through the levying of taxes; former looters had become partners.

NOTES

- 1 Claude, 1973.
- 2 Painter, 1993.
- 3 Reece, 1988.
- 4 Geisslinger, 1967.
- 5 See the contribution by Alain Dierkens and Patrick Périn in this volume.
- 6 Geisslinger, 1984.
- 7 Hagberg, 1984; Headeager, 1991.
- 8 Nielsen *et al.*, 1994.
- 9 Johns and Potter, 1983; Munksgaard, 1987.
- 10 Curle, 1923.
- 11 Bolin, 1929; Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, 1976.
- 12 Heidinga, 1990.
- 13 Van der Vin, 1988; Kent, 1994.
- 14 Ewig, 1988.
- 15 Künzl, 1993.
- 16 *Trésors d'orfèvrerie* (exh. cat., Paris).
- 17 Baratte, 1993.
- 18 Cahn and Kaufmann-Heinimann, 1984.
- 19 Wigg, 1991.
- 20 Whittaker, 1995.
- 21 Grierson and Blackburn, 1986.
- 22 Johns, 1994.
- 23 Painter, 1977.
- 24 Painter, 1993.
- 25 Johns and Bland, 1993.
- 26 Archer, 1979.
- 27 Grierson and Blackburn, 1986.
- 28 Bost *et al.*, 1992.
- 29 Ramos Fernandez, 1975.
- 30 Barral i Altet, 1978.
- 31 Hübener, 1975.
- 32 Caillet, 1985.
- 33 Ross, 1965, vol. 2.
- 34 Shelton, 1981.
- 35 Degani 1959; *Milano* (exh. cat., Milan).
- 36 Hauser, 1992.
- 37 Von Hessen, 1968.
- 38 Ercolani Cocchi, 1992; Gorini, 1992.
- 39 Pauli, 1983; Schulze, 1984.
- 40 Reece, 1988.

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Plate 13 (*Right*)
Three silver-gilt belt
buckles from a votive
hoard deposited in wetland
at Ejsbol, Jutland,
Denmark; fifth century.





Plate 14 (*Opposite, above*)
 Gold neck-rings and an arm ring found with 22 *solidi*, from a hoard at Beilen, Drenthe, Netherlands; c. AD 400.

Plate 15 (*Opposite, below*)
 The so-called Ariadne dish, silver and niello, from the Kaiseraugst, Switzerland, silver hoard; deposited AD 350–1.

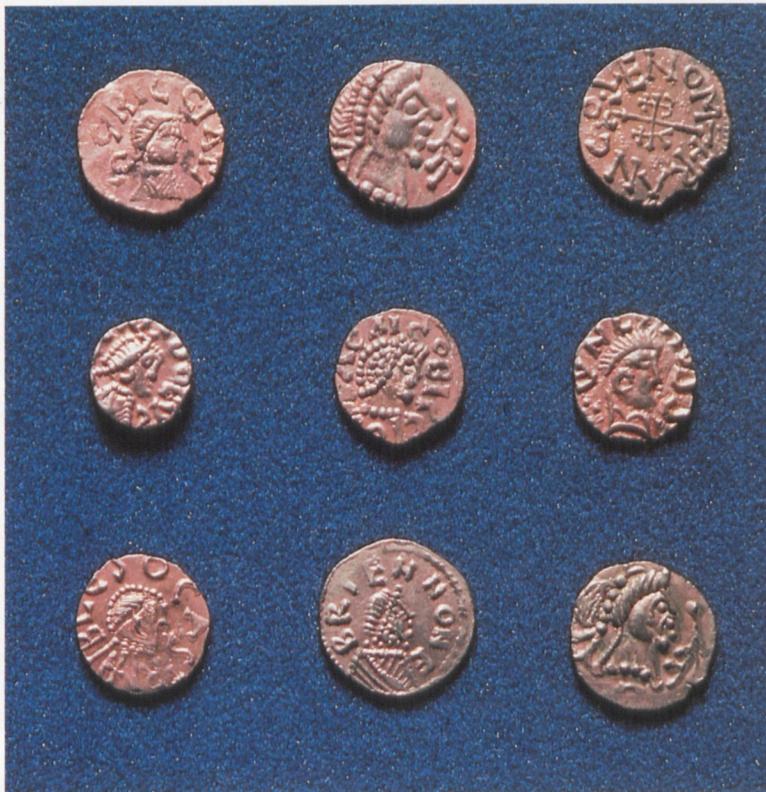


Plate 16 *Tremisses* with mint-names from around AD 600 and after, from the coin hoard of Montréal-Séviac, Gers, France.



Plate 17 Obverse and reverse of one of two gold medallions set with *multipla* of Galla Placidia from the first Velp hoard, Gelderland, Netherlands; c. AD 450.



Plate 18 (*Left*)

Votive crown with hanging cross and pendants, some of them forming the latinised name of the Visigothic king Recceswinth (r.653-672). The golden crown is also embellished with garnets, sapphires, pearls and other semi-precious stones. From the hoard of votive crowns and crosses found at Guarrazar near Toledo, Spain. This magnificent symbol of Christian kingship combines Germanic and Byzantine techniques and motifs in a powerfully transformational image.

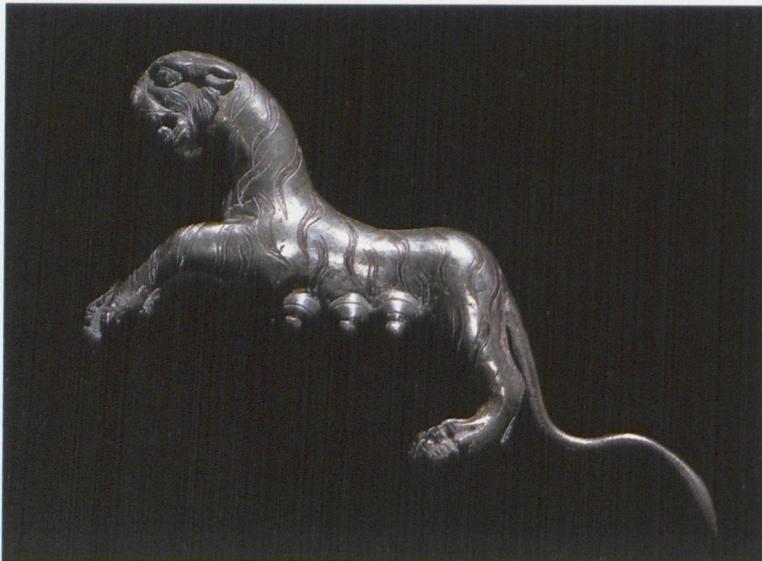


Plate 31
Silver gilt and niello
tigris from the Hoxne
hoard, Suffolk,
England; early fifth
century. A late
antique leaping
animal of this kind
must have played a
part in establishing
the model for this
form of the evangelist
symbol (c.f. pl.32).



Plate 60 (Right)
Roman gold and
silver coins from
the Hoxne hoard,
deposited in the
early fifth century.
(*Heirs of Rome*,
cat. 5a.)