Storr Rock, Skye, Viking Silver Hoard

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In 1891 a collection of coins and fragments of silver objects and ingots (hacksilver) was found on the shore near the Storr Rock on Skye (MHG5265). It is a typical mixed Viking silver hoard such as found throughout the areas of Scandinavian activity.

Of the 111 coins, most are complete, and included 19 dirhams minted in the Arabic empire. Two had been pierced, so had functioned as jewellery as well. Such coins reached Scandinavia via Russia and the Baltic, and were much prized due to their high silver content. There were also 91 Anglo-Saxon coins including coins minted by Plegmund, Archbision of Canterbury (890-914) and Athelstand (924-939). Taken together the coins indicate that the hoard was deposited c. 935-940.

The hacksilver collection is interesting in many ways. It includes a fragment from a type of ring manufactured in the Baltic (Permian ring), from brooches manufactured in Scandinavia and Ireland, and brooch and arming fragments found in other hoards from the British Isles, particularly on both sides of the Irish Sea. The Permian ring fragment is the only one known from Scotland, although fragments have also been found in one Irish and two English Viking hoards.

Most of the silver is heavily nicked, small cuts made as silver passed hands to check for purity. This was common practice in the Viking world which had a metal weight economy, where all metal was valued by its weight. As a result, the ingot was valued as much as other objects. Balances have been found in Viking graves, including some from Scotland, but none from the Highlands.

These items are unlikely to have been assembled in Skye, but more likely different parcels changed hands, accumulating and then dispersing over the years. The coins in particular, show that the silver had been circulating for some time. The Arabic coins included coins minted by Ismai’il bin Ahmad (r. 892-907), Ahmad bin Isma’il (r. 907-914), and Nasr II bin Ahmad (r. 914-943). The presence of the Permian ring and Arabic coins suggests at least part of the parcel derived from the Baltic.

This Viking hoard is only one of at least four from Skye. It provides evidence of Viking activity in the mid 10th century, though whether a passing traveller or a settler is not known. It shows the links the Scandinavians in the Highlands had to a wider trading network which the Scandinavian settlers in Scotland would have participated in.

Further information:

Graham-Campbell, James 1995 *The Viking-Age gold and silver of Scotland (AD 850-1100)*, National Museums of Scotland: Edinburgh.

‘Silver dirhams from the Storr Rock Viking Hoard’ on National Museums of Scotland website [www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/storr-rock-viking-hoard/](http://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/storr-rock-viking-hoard/) (accessed September 2020)

Image: request from NMS