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ULLA S. LINDER-WELIN, «GRAFFITI ON ORIENTAL COINS IN SWEDISH VIKING-AGE HOARDS». MEDDELANDEN FRÅN LUNDS UNIVERSITETS HISTORISKA MUSEUM. LUND 1956, PP. 149—171.

The article of Mrs. U. S. Linder-Welin is, as far as I know, the first work dealing with the problem of graffiti appearing on cufic coins of early mediaeval hoards and striving to classify them in a particular and useful manner. In her preface the author states that her work is by no means the result of systematic research, concerning cufic coins and the graffiti characteristic for them, but is rather a sequence of loose and accidental observations gathered during the examination of Arabian coins found in Sweden and Gotland. Those have provided material for her work. No doubt Mrs. Linder-Welin has managed to obtain very interesting results issued from her research in this field. We may expect that her investigations so luckily begun, will be steadily continued and completed by a thorough study of the material coming from regions of Middle, North and East Europe. This will help to solve many problems, whose existence has been discovered by Mrs. Linder-Welin.

The work grasps a far larger sphere than is announced in the title, for the author discusses not only graffiti proper, but many other traces of man's hand, detected on dirhems found in early mediaeval Swedish hoards, such as pecks, jags, nicks and notches on the edge of coins. This could not well be avoided since investigations concerning graffiti, as well as all the above mentioned marks, are in close connection with each other.

The incisions and marks found on coins have been classified according to motives which may have caused their applying, into following groups:

1. Marks resulting from a close examination of the sort of metal,
2. Lines dividing the coins into parts,
3. Marks which have served to add or distribute large sums of money,
4. Owner's marks,

5. Magic emblems,
6. Marks having no definite reason, coming most probably from a disposition to draw.

Discussing in the following pages of her work particular kinds of marks on coins, their special aspect and adhering to the established groups, the author considers the point, whether and to what degree may those marks be distinctive for characterizing hoards discovered in Scandinavian countries. Were it possible to state that some types of graffiti, pecks or other various marks on coins are characteristic for finds of a certain definite territory, this fact would undoubtedly be an important contribution to the research of oriental money circulating in early mediaeval European areas. It would also be helpful to a certain degree for the establishing of motives prompting the application of such or other marks on coins by their timely owners. Data obtained by examination of a large material coming from all parts of Europe, would perhaps allow the drawing of some conclusions of that sort, but I suppose there has till now been no close examination of cufic coins found in Poland and several other countries. Mrs. Linder-Welin states also that coins bearing the marks defined as "pecks" (i.e. "hits of a blunt nail" in Polish numismatic works)<sup>1</sup> are found very often in Sweden. All dirhems, as well as other early mediaeval coins marked with pecks, held by the British Museum, come, according to the author's opinion, from Sweden. She also assumes that making pecks on coins may be typical for the population of the Scandinavian Half-Isle, hence, coins bearing pecks, wherever they were found, would consequently be obliged to arrive there through the intermediary of Scandinavian countries.

May we accept such a theory? In order to have all doubts cleared away we should be obliged to consider what was the aim of those marks and what technics served to their execution? They appear rather often on coins, mostly several on one item, scattered irregularly over its various points. The author's definition "peck" as well as ours "hit", suggest that they were done with a hard tool, having a round, blunt tip, therefore not a knife but rather a chisel or blunt nail. Some of them seem to have been done simply by teeth. Their reason might thus be a test of the kind of silver and the proof researched would then be its hardness or resistance. This is of course a very primitive method of testing silver, similar to notches on the edge of a coin; it was probably largely spread and known to all tradesmen of those distant times. The above mentioned marks are often to be met on dirhems stored in early mediaeval Polish hoards, we know, however, that very few of them came to Poland through Scandinavian countries. In the light of these facts it does not therefore seem probable that these very slightly characteristic

marks, might be a sign of recognition providing information of the coins' origin and the track they may have followed. A definite solution of this problem as well as of many others discussed in this work will be possible only after a close examination of materials coming from other areas.

The most primitive and also most frequent marks on coins are, as mentioned above, notches on their edge. They are generally considered tests of the kinds of silver and are thus qualified by Mrs. Linder-Welin. It seems possible however, that some of them belong to the third group, together with the incisions defined as "nicks"<sup>2</sup>. Marking coins for distribution or computation of a large quantity of coins, may have indeed been helpful to the counter. We may also suppose that by disposing coins in rolls, as was found in some hoards discovered in Poland, Russia (and perhaps also in Sweden) a counter-act mark made on the first coin of the roll informed the owner of its contents. The accidental finders of hoards were never able to supply us with such exact data, on account of their ignorance of the problem. Coins bearing marks that may be classified in group 3, should therefore, upon arriving in Europe, or even later, have been part of a bigger treasury owned by rich merchants. Only hoards coming from the areas of URSS might provide material for the solution of this problem, since the largest finds of cufic coins are of Russian origin.

When discussing notches made round the edge of coins, they are considered to be generally applied and not supposed to be a Scandinavian speciality. They are sometimes met on modern coins, e.g. on those circulating in the area of Afghanistan. This fact seems to be worth special investigations dealing with all other marks met on Arabian coins of early mediaeval hoards. A close examination of the coins in question on the areas from which they originate, and verifying whether coins used there today do not present similar marks, would certainly be helpful. We are well aware that Oriental nations are inclined to perpetuate some old habits (especially in such an important domain as trade); thanks to them certain systems of testing silver or other ways of putting marks on coins with certain purposes, may have survived till today.

Not less interesting and very important is the question of settling the sequence of particular marks in time. The author states that incisions determined by her as "nicks"<sup>3</sup> appear in earlier hoards, containing generally coins of Omayyad and Abbasid origin, mostly before 870 A. D. A superficial observation of the material found in Poland confirms that phenomenon. Several later, closely examined Samanid hoards, as well as a very early hoard of Samanid dirhems (from the end of the 9th or the

beginning of the 10th century) found in Klukowicze (Poland) and containing over 1000 whole coins, had no such incisions.

Marks determined as "nicks" are particularly interesting and must be more exactly discussed. In contradiction to "pecks" and "notches" they are done very carefully. Their direction is concentric, they are inclined towards the edge and to each other at various angles. Their length varies also but in general does not reach beyond the second marginal legend of averse and the first marginal legend of reverse. Mrs. Linder-Welin's opinion (which I am ready to support) is, that they are not to be considered as tests of metal, but stressing the fact that they appear in numbers of several and more on one and the same coin, on its averse and reverse, she says "that not even a Swedish Viking could have been so suspicious of a foreign coin"<sup>4</sup>. Although this seems to be a reasonable view, we cannot agree with the last argument, since notches on the edge of coins, generally known to be tests of the quality of silver, appear in a quantity of several or even up to twenty on the same item. The fact that "nicks" are mostly very carefully done, would rather speak against the test supposition. We may imagine that testing of silver coins was roughly and rashly done during trade transactions, and therefore in a hurry, so the merchants could then probably not apply all the care, nor use special tools to engrave marks of a relatively similar breadth and depth. A different reason must therefore be the source of their existence.

The author informs us that some of the nicks were considered to be runes, the examples quoted in her work classify them to be most frequently rune  $\surd$  K. The very simple form of this rune and its frequent appearance imply the idea that the nicks took this form quite accidentally. If the two nicks forming rune  $\surd$  K or some other sign were the only incisions of this type on a given coin, we might consider that Mrs. Linder-Welin's opinion<sup>5</sup> (assuming that ninth century illiterates, acquainted with only one or two runes, engraved just those signs, known to them, on dirhems) has much chance of being the right one. But as those runes are known to appear in a larger context of nicks having no link between them<sup>6</sup>, their accidental doing seems a very probable solution.

There is another idea attached to those marks which seems acceptable. The rune  $\surd$  K might have been a symbol or an abbreviation of some magic spell or religious emblem, and thus could its frequent appearance be explained. The author risks some suggestion of that kind, does not

however elucidate the fact of the rune  $\surd$  K appearing so often<sup>7</sup>. Neither do the context and the appearance of the above quoted signs offer any certainty to that interpretation.

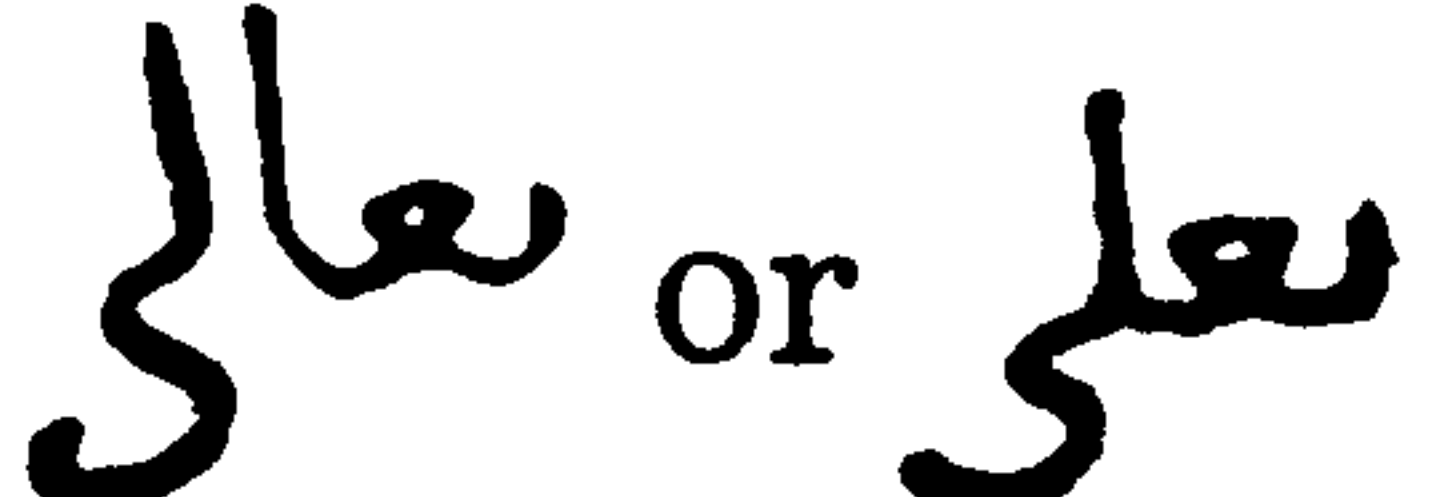
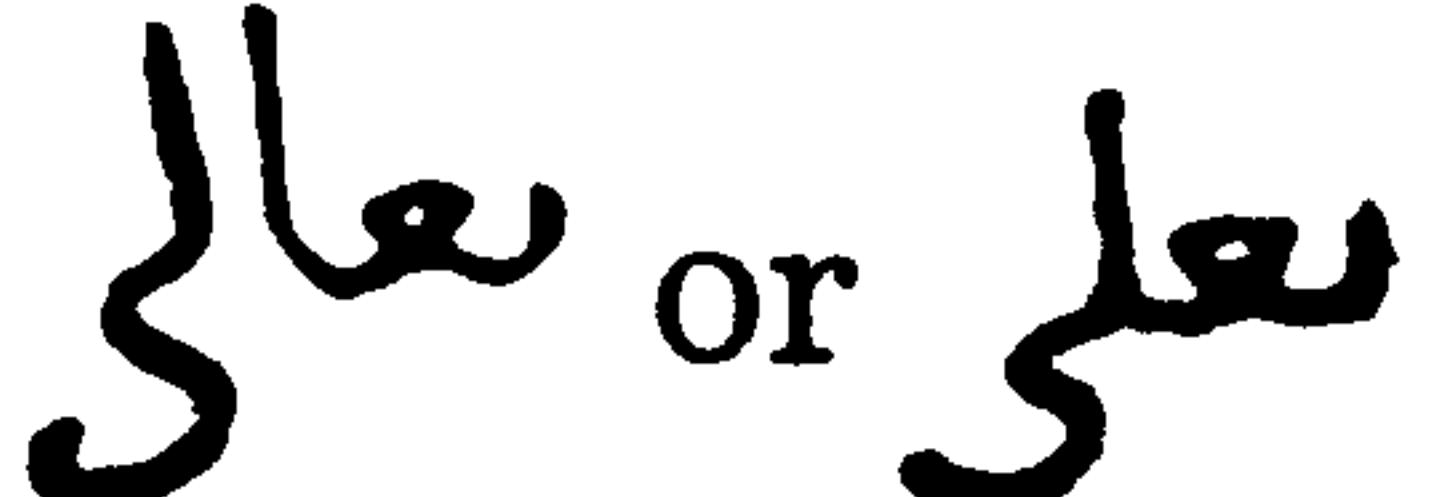
The author mentions a group of nicks discussed before by L. Lindquist and considered by him to be runes<sup>8</sup>. We find these nicks on a fragment of dirhem drawn in Mrs. Linder-Welin's paper. Similar to "runes"  $\surd$  K mentioned above, these nicks qualified by Lindquist to be a rune inscription are accompanied by loose nicks, four on the mentioned fragment, and probably numerous on the whole coin. The "rune inscription" is very indistinct on the inserted picture, but the presence of many loose nicks accompanying the inscription calls for a deeper reflection and suggests the following possibility: the coins may have been marked with nicks already in the East, or on their way. The scars confronted by a Scandinavian knowing the rune alphabet may have suggested the idea of joining them and making them more like runes. This would explain the presence of "runes" and a number of nicks not linked to each other on the same coin. None of the coins I had the occasion to examine did present marks resembling runes (although I met a quantity of nicks), I was therefore not able to settle whether particular lines forming a rune letter are made in various ways. As far as may be judged by the drawing, I am inclined to suppose that we may detect some such differences of execution in cuts belonging to the group mentioned by Lindquist. The stating of such diversities at least in a few cases, would reinforce my suggestion of cuts being added to existing nicks in order to make them resemble runes. These marks so very like runes may also, however, be quite accidental.

The author describes also rune inscriptions on coins appearing not near the edge but in the middle of some of them<sup>9</sup>. These seem to be done with a technique different to that of nicks. We remember one of the author's suppositions that nicks may have served the purpose of counting or distributing large sums of money<sup>10</sup>. There is also an interesting hypothesis attributing the role of counters at games<sup>11</sup> to coins marked with those signs.


The appearance of nicks only to a certain<sup>12</sup> limit of time, thus connected no doubt with their real destination, is also a curious problem for scientists. What reason may have determined a complete cessation of marking coins in that way? Independent of whether they are to be considered runes, tests of silver or signs helping to count money, this continues to be an actual and interesting question. The author's conclusion that the nicks may have been done or completed in after-time by Scandinavians, is much weakened by the fact of two discoveries of

big and homogen hoards of dirhems in the Eastern part of Poland, containing coins marked with nicks and buried directly on tracks connecting Poland with the East<sup>13</sup>.


In the following pages of her work the author discusses two graffiti on the dirhems known to her from the Swedish area and coming

undoubtedly from the East. In one case it is the inscription  or 

read by the author: "May He be exalted", or "His Glory", or "His Name" etc. Mrs. Linder-Welin proposes also other possible translations

for instance: . The second of her graffiti has the following form


. Here the author puts forth two possible lectures:  or

, the first may be read: "my part (or portion)" and the second "my coin (or cash)". The second version suggest also the name "Sahl" or nisba engraved directly on the coin.


Further we find the description of graffiti of a different type than those described above. Some of them are a distinct cross, a Thor's hammer, an arrow etc., others are very indistinct and may hardly, or with plenty of good will, be considered a boat or some kind of animal. Mrs. Linder-Welin stresses the necessity of using a magnifying glass and special light for a close examination of graffiti; these will be helpful to prove that lines forming those figures differ greatly from marks that may have accidentally injured the coins. We find, however, also groups of lines very difficult to discern and judge whether they are meant to be some legible sign or only traces that may have been injures of the coin's surface. Such an investigation calls for much care and prudence. It is still more difficult to determine whether the drawing was really meant to represent what we suppose we are able to detect from it, or is it only the result of an accidental crossing of lines. Some of the coins are covered all over with lines, part of them strong — others hardly visible, running and crossing in various directions, hence arises the possibility of figures formed by accident (triangles, crosses, arrows etc.). A typical example of such a case is the dirhem discovered in Drohiczyn<sup>14</sup>, on which we see on the reverse (above to the Kalimah) a very distinct five-ray star, formed by the meeting of long, crossing, apparently aimless lines. Although the figure is very clear, I should hesitate to ascertain that it has been executed with premeditation.

Since Mrs. Linder-Welin's article offers in many cases only drawings of the discovered graffiti, it is difficult to be certain as to the degree of their distinctness on coins and to state in what context of other incisions do they appear. We may surely add that every drawing is the result of some suggestion and most often offers an idea previously conceived. The use of drawing is certainly indispensable, since a camera would not be able to perceive the subtleness of some of the marks. The description of every drawing should, however, give clear indications determining the situation of the graffiti in relation to inscriptions on the coin, telling if they cross each other or if the graffiti are placed on a surface of a coin free from inscriptions, or with inscriptions damaged.

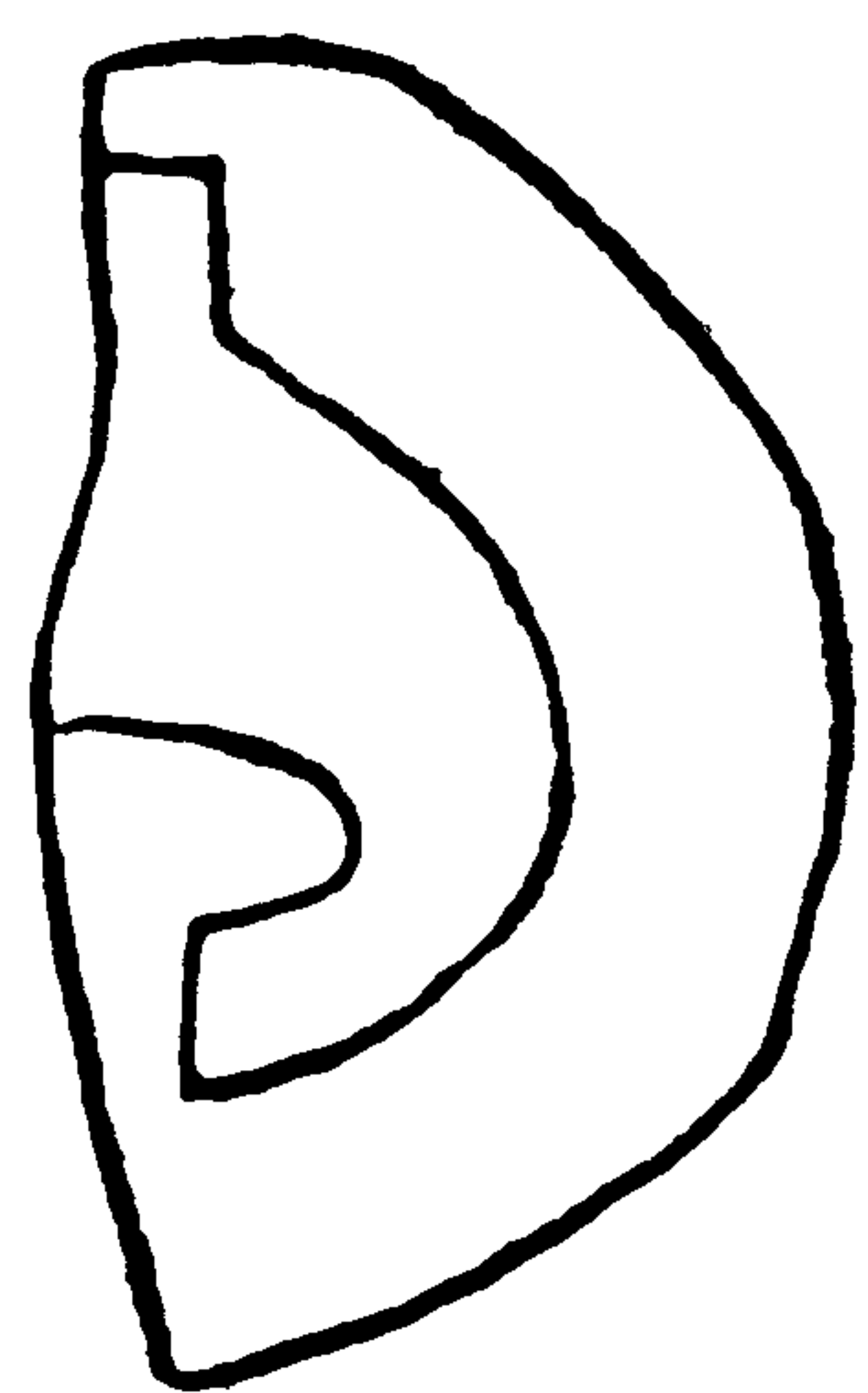
The observation of a number of coins leads to a conclusion that many thin or thick incisions appear often on free spaces between the verses of šahāda. This might easily be a proof of the purposeness of their appearance, since the individual who drew them apparently searched a free space to make his aim clear, sometimes, however the incisions are crossed or broken by one of the legend's letters and beyond this

letter we can see their continuation, e.g.:  <sup>15</sup>. This would prove that lines were planned on the flan before striking the coin.

We may also suppose that when several accidental incisions (flaws) began to form part of a figure, as for example in the case of the above mentioned star, somebody might feel provoked to accomplish the drawing with a few clever strokes.

Drawing No. 31 in Mrs. Linder-Welin's work , considered by her as a sign of ownership or magic emblem, seems to me to be rather the result of an accidental crossing of lines.

Drawing No. 32 shows a very curious figure engraved on one of the coins. The author wonders whether it is not an oriental motive, which might be the case but the drawing (or rather its part visible on the fragment found) did remind a lunula, having the form of a crescent, with hook for suspension. The lunula-ornaments used to be very much spread in those times. The author mentions that in the 10th century hoards found in Sweden contain not only dirhems but also unstruck blank flans, destined for the make of ornaments. She does not, however, tell us if the mentioned graffiti was drawn just on such a flan or on a minted coin. We may suppose that this figure represents a lunula in the first phase of its production.



At the end of her work Mrs. Linder-Welin makes a list of the hoards from which originate the coins described. Research concerning graffiti is rather a beginning enterprise, we may, however imagine that later research workers who will make efforts to construct a synthesis of the problem, will consider such lists joined to every paper, as extremely useful. Also the detailed informations about the places where the coins with graffiti happen to be stored (if not yet published) would be of great help. It may be hoped that Mrs. Linder-Welin's work will give impulse to new efforts towards the elucidation of problems very difficult to solve till now on account of a lack of material.

I also hope that my research in the field of graffiti appearing on cufic coins found in Poland<sup>16</sup>, will supply new material connected with this interesting problem.

Mrs. Linder-Welin's work discussed in these pages, is a very precious contribution to numismatics and archaeology of Northern, Western and Middle Europe of the early mediaeval period.

Anna Kmietowicz

#### N O T E S

<sup>1</sup> The author's definition "peck", as well as ours "hit" does not suggest exactly how it was done.

<sup>2</sup> To be compared further, p.

<sup>3</sup> "Nicks" are irregular incisions on the surface not on the edge of coins.

<sup>4</sup> U. S. Linder-Welin, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 153, fig. 4, 5, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 154—155, fig. 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 154—155, fig. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159—160, fig. 17, 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Hoards found in Czechów (A. Czapkiewicz, T. Lewicki, S. Nosek, M. Czapkiewicz, *Skarb dirhemów arabskich z Czechowa* [Hoard of Arabic Dirhems from Czechow], Warszawa—Wrocław 1957) and Drohiczyn.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above note 12.

<sup>15</sup> The letters protrude about 1/2 mm above the flan's surface.

<sup>16</sup> The materials mentioned come from only a few hoards found in Poland.