The imitation solidus of Louis the Pious

Grierson Type VIII, a new die-variant (O2/R2)

Three specimens in NUMIS, and why the die is not Type XIII

Three gold solidi in NUMIS, the find database of De Nederlandsche Bank, are struck from one obverse die and one reverse die. The obverse reads IIIIIIVVDOVUIIIIAVC. The reverse reads OIIIIIIN \|/ IIIIIIIII. The sign \|/ is the taeniae, the shoulder ribbons of the laurel wreath around the cross. Of all Grierson's types, that reverse legend stands closest to Type XIII. The portrait, the lettering and the cross do not. They are the portrait, the lettering and the cross of Type VIII. The coins are assigned here to Type VIII as a new variant, O2/R2.

Type VIII as Grierson defined it

In 1951 Grierson set out the imitations of the gold solidus of Louis the Pious (814-840). His Type VIII is a barbarous coin with a bust to the right and, on the reverse, a cross in a wreath. He read the legends as follows.

Obverse. ↃIIIIINIVVDOVIIIIIAVC. Bust right, barbarous. The front of the wreath has fused with the central V of the legend.

Reverse. \|/IIIIIIIUIOIIIIIIIII. Cross in a wreath.

He knew two specimens, and he took them to be from the same dies. The first is in Vienna, in the Bundessammlung, and weighs 4.59 g. Grierson gives the die-axis as upright on the obverse and with the reverse turned to the left, and this is the coin he illustrates. The second is the piece drawn by P. O. van der Chijs on his plate XII, no. 11, weighing 4.5 g. Van der Chijs (p. 148) had it in the Penningkabinet of Leiden University when he was writing, in 1862. That cabinet passed to the Koninklijk Penningkabinet in The Hague in 1881, but this coin was not in the transfer. Its present whereabouts is unknown. Grierson was satisfied that it is a second specimen of the Vienna dies, and a different coin from the Vienna piece.

The model is the imperial solidus of Louis: a laureate bust with DN HLVDOVVICVS IMP AVG, and a cross in a laurel wreath with MVNVS DIVINVM. The ribbons of that wreath are the taeniae, the shoulder ribbons. On Type VIII both legends have fallen away into strokes. Of the king's name, VVDOV is still there. Of the title, AVC is still there, the last trace of AVG. The feature Grierson singles out on the obverse is the wreath. Its front leaves run into the V in the middle of the legend, so that leaf and letter are one.

Fig. 1. Grierson Type VIII. Fries Museum, 4.41 g, 20.9 mm. Obverse and reverse.



The three coins

NUMIS records the die under four inventory numbers. Two of those numbers are one coin, entered twice, so there are three specimens. All of them are single finds from the northern Netherlands. Each record calls the piece a gold solidus, an imitation made in Friesland. There is no countermark on any of them.

NUMIS 1129861 was found in 2016 at Doniaga (De Friese Meren, Friesland). An earlier state of the record gave the find-spot as Buitenpost (Bûtenpost). The coin weighs 4.43 g and measures 21.5 mm. It is entered as a contemporary imitation in the name of Louis the Pious, and the catalogue field reads Grierson Type XIII with a question mark.

NUMIS 1073727 was found about 2005 at Lutjewijtwerd (Loppersum, Groningen). NUMIS itself leaves the year of finding blank, and the weight is not recorded. The diameter is 22 mm. The coin is pierced, low on the left of the obverse, through the border. NUMIS classes it as Grierson Type XIII, dies O2 and R2, and compares it with Grierson and Blackburn, nos 752-756. That classification is the one the legend suggests. It is discussed below, against the style of the die.

NUMIS 1120769 and NUMIS 1155953 are the same coin. Both records are a single find of 2012 at Westerklief (Noord-Holland), and each entry refers to the other. The weight, 4.37 g, stands only on 1155953, which also carries the Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands number PAN-00082596. Both records give the diameter as 21 mm. Measured, the coin is 22 mm. The two entries do not agree about the type. Number 1120769 has no catalogue reference and is dated (814-840). Number 1155953 is dated about 850-870 and is classed as Grierson Type XIX.

The same dies

The Lutjewijtwerd coin and the Westerklief coin are from the same obverse die and the same reverse die. The bust faces right. The head is large and flat, the face is reduced to a few strokes, and the wreath is a fan of long leaves that run out into the ring of letters. Across the shoulder the drapery is a bundle of curved lines. On the reverse a cross stands in a wreath, with a beaded inner border, and the legend runs in upright strokes around it.

The coin from Doniaga is heavily worn, and the face of the bust has been rubbed almost smooth. What remains matches the other two: the fall of the drapery, the leaves of the wreath where they meet the legend, the groups of upright letters, and the cross in its wreath. It is the third specimen of the same pair of dies. The second NUMIS number of the Westerklief coin does not make a fourth.

Fig. 2. NUMIS 1073727, Lutjewijtwerd (Loppersum, Groningen), found about 2005, 22 mm, pierced. Obverse, with the legend IIIIIIVVDOVUIIIIAVC marked.



Fig. 3. The same coin, both sides, from the photographs on the NUMIS page. Obverse and reverse. The reverse image in NUMIS is small.



Fig. 4. NUMIS 1129861, Doniaga (De Friese Meren, Friesland). Found 2016. 4.43 g, 21.5 mm. Same dies. The bust is heavily worn.



Fig. 5. The Westerklief coin, Noord-Holland, found in 2012. 4.37 g, 22 mm. Listed twice, as NUMIS 1120769 and NUMIS 1155953. Same dies. Obverse and reverse.



The legends of the new die

The Lutjewijtwerd coin is the specimen on which the obverse legend can be followed the whole way round. It reads IIIIIIVVDOVUIIIIAVC. The hole lies in the lower left of the obverse, in the border, and it does not remove the letters on which the reading depends. So far as wear and the photographs allow the other two coins to be read, they carry the same legend.

The reverse legend of the same die reads OIIIIIIIN \|/ IIIIIIIII. On the original solidus the cross is in the middle and a laurel wreath frames it, and \|/ is the taeniae of that wreath, the ribbons at the shoulders.

Set beside Grierson's obverse of Type VIII, the two obverse legends are the same sort of text.

Type VIII obverse ↃIIIINIVVDOVIIIIIAVC
O2/R2 obverse IIIIIIVVDOVUIIIIAVC

Both keep VVDOV, which is what is left of HLVDOVVICVS, and both end AVC, which is what is left of AVG. On the Vienna die the letters after DOV are a row of I's, and the front of the wreath has fused with the central V. That is the feature Grierson uses to describe Type VIII. On the new die the V and the U are cut as two letters, so that the name reads DOVU, and the wreath does not swallow the V. The opening differs as well. Type VIII begins with a reversed C, and the new die begins with a row of I's.

The obverse would, by itself, sit happily beside Type VIII. The reverse does not point the same way. It points to Type XIII.

Type XIII

Grierson's Type XIII is a bust to the right, which he describes as clearly related to the preceding types, and a cross in a wreath. His printed legends are these.

Obverse. IIIIIIVVDOVᔓIIIIAVC. The sign between DOV and IIII is an S lying on its side. Bust right, clearly related to the preceding types.

Reverse, as Grierson printed it. \|/IIIIIIIIIOIVIIIIII. Cross in a wreath.

He lists three specimens, and he takes them all to be from the same dies. The first is in Leeuwarden, in the Friesch Museum, inventory 1022, weighing 4.49 g, probably found about 1886 at Aalsum near Dokkum in Friesland. Grierson cites the illustrations in Boeles, plate XLIX.16, and in Boeles's Trouvailles, p. 51 and plate i.63. The second was in a private collection in Leeuwarden, 4.15 g and pierced, probably a local find, mentioned by Boeles at p. 541. The third is the coin drawn by Gariel, plate XIV.16, then in the hands of Rollin and Feuardent, and now of unknown whereabouts.

Read from the coin illustrated below, the reverse legend of Type XIII is OIIIIIIIII \|/ IIIIIIIII, the \|/ again the taeniae. Grierson's printed reverse and this reading are not the same string of letters. The reading used here is the one taken from the coin.

Fig. 6. Grierson Type XIII. Obverse and reverse.



The two reverses, set side by side, are as close as two blundered legends of this series can be.

Type XIII reverse OIIIIIIIII \|/ IIIIIIII
O2/R2 reverse OIIIIIIN \|/ IIIIIIII

Both begin with O and a run of I's, both break at the taeniae, and both end with IIIIIIII. The new die has N where Type XIII carries the run of I's on. The obverses are close in the same way. Type XIII has IIIIIIVVDOV, then an S lying on its side, then IIIIAVC. The new die has IIIIIIVVDOVUIIIIAVC. Both keep VVDOV as distinct letters, and both end AVC. On this evidence the new die could be taken for a variety of Type XIII. That is how NUMIS entered the Lutjewijtwerd coin, as Type XIII, dies O2 and R2.

The style is another matter. On Type XIII the letters are thick, and they are set wide apart. The cross is thick, with heavy arms. The portrait is cut in a different style from the portrait of Type VIII and from the portrait of the new die: another face, another wreath, another fall of the drapery. Type VIII and the new die belong together in all three of these things. The strokes of the legend are thinner and stand closer. The cross is lighter. The bust is the same kind of bust. A classification by the legend alone would put the new die with Type XIII. A classification by the coins puts it with Type VIII.

Attribution: Type VIII, variant O2/R2

The new pair is therefore a second obverse and a second reverse of Type VIII. Grierson's specimens (a) and (b) are the first die-pair. He does not number the dies. The pair published here is called O2/R2. Those are the die numbers NUMIS had already given the Lutjewijtwerd coin, there attached to Type XIII. The numbers are kept, and they are moved, with the coin, to Type VIII. The move rests on the portrait, the weight of the letters and the weight of the cross, against a legend which, taken by itself, is closest to Type XIII.

The same die has been given three classifications in NUMIS: Type XIII, dies O2 and R2, for the Lutjewijtwerd coin; Type XIII with a query, for the coin from Doniaga; and Type XIX, for one of the two records of the Westerklief coin, the other record having no type at all. Grierson and Blackburn 752-756, which NUMIS cites as a comparison for the Lutjewijtwerd coin, is the general run of these imitations, and it is not a die identification.

The Leiden coin of Van der Chijs is not among these three. Grierson regarded it as another strike from the Vienna dies of Type VIII, and already in 1951 he could not say where it was.

The NUMIS pieces are single finds of about 2005, of 2012 and of 2016, and the Lutjewijtwerd coin has been pierced.

Finds and date

The die is known from three find-spots: Doniaga (De Friese Meren, Friesland), Lutjewijtwerd (Loppersum, Groningen), and Westerklief (Noord-Holland). All three lie on the northern coast, which is the region of the Frisian imitation solidi. NUMIS gives Friesland as the place of production on every record of the die, and describes the coins as contemporary imitations made by the Frisians after the Carolingian empire, in the name of Louis the Pious.

Fig. 7. The three find-spots, numbered as in the catalogue. 1 Doniaga (De Friese Meren, Friesland). 2 Lutjewijtwerd (Loppersum, Groningen). 3 Westerklief (Noord-Holland). Base map: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community.



The dates in the database are of two kinds. The bracket (814-840) is the reign of the king whose solidus was copied. It is the date of the prototype. The record 1155953 is dated about 850-870, and the remarks on the other records cite Simon Coupland for the striking of these imitation solidi between about 840 and about 880. That is the date followed here for the striking. The Lutjewijtwerd coin was found about 2005. The two recorded weights, 4.43 g and 4.37 g, stand with Grierson's 4.59 g and 4.5 g for Type VIII, and with his 4.49 g and 4.15 g for Type XIII, on the standard of the full solidus. The piercing of the Lutjewijtwerd coin was made after the coin was struck. Gold solidi of this series were often holed. One of Grierson's Type XIII specimens, the private coin in Leeuwarden, is pierced as well.

Catalogue

Grierson Type VIII, variant O2/R2. Gold. Contemporary Frisian imitation of the solidus of Louis the Pious, struck about 840-880.

Obverse. IIIIIIVVDOVUIIIIAVC. Bust right, barbarous, in the manner of Type VIII. The wreath is a fan of long leaves running into the legend. V and U after DO are separate letters. The letters are thin and closely set, as on Type VIII, and the portrait is of that style.

Reverse. OIIIIIIN \|/ IIIIIIIII. Cross in a wreath, lighter than the cross of Type XIII.

No.	NUMIS	Find-spot	Found	Weight	Diam.	Entered in NUMIS as
1	1129861	Doniaga (De Friese Meren, Friesland). Find-spot formerly given as Buitenpost (Bûtenpost).	2016	4.43 g	21.5 mm	Type XIII (?)
2	1073727	Lutjewijtwerd (Loppersum, Groningen). Pierced. Weight not recorded. NUMIS leaves the year blank.	c. 2005	not recorded	22 mm	Type XIII, dies O2, R2; cf. Grierson and Blackburn 752-756
3	1120769 = 1155953	Westerklief (Noord-Holland). One coin, two records. PAN-00082596 on 1155953.	2012	4.37 g	22 mm (21 mm in NUMIS)	1120769: no type. 1155953: Type XIX, dated c. 850-870

All three are Type VIII, dies O2/R2, on the classification proposed here.

For comparison, Grierson Type XIII, the legends as used above. Obverse IIIIIIVVDOVᔕ IIIIAVC, the sign after DOV being an S lying on its side. Reverse, from the coin, OIIIIIIIII \|/ IIIIIIIII. Letters thick and widely spaced. Cross thick. Portrait of a different style from Type VIII and from O2/R2.

References

Coupland, S. 2016. 'Recent finds of imitation gold solidi in the Netherlands', Numismatic Chronicle 176, pp. 261-269. Cited in the NUMIS remarks for the date of the imitations, about 840 to about 880.

Grierson, P. 1951. 'The gold solidus of Louis the Pious and its imitations', Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde 38. Type VIII, with the Vienna specimen (a), 4.59 g, and the Van der Chijs specimen (b), 4.5 g. Type XIII, with the Leeuwarden specimen (a), Friesch Museum inv. 1022, 4.49 g, the private Leeuwarden specimen (b), 4.15 g, pierced, and the Gariel specimen (c).

Grierson, P. and Blackburn, M. 1986. Medieval European Coinage, with a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, I. The Early Middle Ages (5th-10th centuries) (Cambridge), nos 752-756. Cited by NUMIS, as a comparison, for the Lutjewijtwerd coin.

Van der Chijs, P. O. De munten der Nederlanden, van de vroegste tijden tot aan de Pacificatie van Gend (Haarlem), pl. XII.11 and p. 148. The second specimen of Grierson's Type VIII dies, then in Leiden, and since lost from view.

Boeles and Gariel are cited here only as Grierson cites them for Type XIII: Boeles, pl. XLIX.16, and his Trouvailles, p. 51 and pl. i.63, and p. 541; Gariel, pl. XIV.16.

NUMIS, De Nederlandsche Bank, De Nieuwe Schatkamer.
1129861. https://www.denieuweschatkamer.nl/en/money-collection/found-coins-reporting-and-cleaning/numis/numis-detailpagina/1129861
1073727. https://www.denieuweschatkamer.nl/en/money-collection/found-coins-reporting-and-cleaning/numis/numis-detailpagina/1073727
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Fig. 1 is a coin in the Fries Museum, 4.41 g, 20.9 mm. Fig. 6 is Type XIII. The find-coins are the NUMIS photographs, copyright De Nederlandsche Bank. On Fig. 2 the obverse legend is marked on a photograph of NUMIS 1073727. Fig. 3 uses the obverse and reverse from that NUMIS page. Fig. 7 is the find-spot map, on a base map © OpenStreetMap contributors.