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The Udovice Solidus Pendants

Late-5th Century Evidence of South Scandinavian Mercenaries in the Balkans

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This paper summarizes a number of observations about the possible origin, manufacture, weight, and hoarding of two gold filigree pendants found at Udovice in Serbia. It is argued that they were made in South Scandinavia after 465. They were then transported to the Continent in the period 475–500. Their final deposit at Udovice is likely to have coincided with conflicts along the Danube between the Byzantine Empire, the Gepids, Herules and Ostrogoths.

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The Udovice solidus pendants arguably constitute some of the most exciting archaeological material brought to attention in recent years. They are welcome additions to the incomplete jigsaw puzzle that is the Scandinavian Migration Period. For the first time ever, scholars may transcend the dichotomy between solidus coinage found in Scandinavia and written sources from the Continent. Some 40 years ago, Joan M. Fagerlie very correctly asserted that:

»...the solidi have been explained in the light of what we know from literature, rather than the reverse. But the literary sources cannot, by themselves, explain the solidi for us. There are several passages referring to barbaric tribes passing this way or that, of migrations to the land of Thule, and there are references to trade, tribute payments and

to barbarians in the imperial services, but none of these can be associated with the solidi in Scandinavia without some outside evidence« (Fagerlie 1967, p. 99).

Now this problem belongs to the past. A number of facts together force the conclusion that the Udovice pendants are of a late 5th-century South Scandinavian origin. At the invitation of *Fornvännen's* editors, as my view of the matter differs from that presented by Ivana Popović (2008), I have summarized my observations on the pendants. I will discuss them below in a framework of seven main points.

Scandinavian Parallels to the Pendants

First, the layout and execution of the filigree work of the Udovice pendants is very close to that of the Stenholts Vang (IK 179) find from

Fornvännen 103 (2008)

Zealand rather than the finds from Fakse or Körlin (Öberg 1944; Mackeprang 1952; Axboe 1982; Hauck 1985; Lamm 1991). An important difference, however, is that the Udovice solidi are separated from their tubular loops by an angular filigree rim, which is not present in the case of the Stenholts Vang bracteates. This could perhaps be an indication that earlier bracteates or solidi have been removed from the Udovice pendants and replaced, after which a new, improved fastening device had to be installed. In any case, there is a fairly certain *terminus post quem* for the current state of the pendants.

The Udovice pendants belong to a long Scandinavian tradition of gold filigree work. It began already in the 2nd century with contacts to the Gothic Wielbark culture in current northern Poland, and indirectly, to the Black Sea Region (Andersson 1993; 1995; Kokowski 2001). As to the other filigree work in the collections of the Belgrade Museum (Popovič 2001), it appears to be of two categories. It is either of inferior artistic quality to the Udovice finds or from highly skilled but stylistically unrelated Byzantine workshops.

The Scandinavian gold filigree tradition arguably culminated with the 5th century gold collars of Ålleberg, Färjestaden and Möne (Lamm 1991; 1998). By contrast, there is no such filigree work in rich Central and Southeast European graves of the mid- to late 5th century such as Apahida I and Blučina, or in the hoards of Pietroasa and Szilágysomlyó (Horedt 1970; Eggers 1999; Martin 1999; Koch 2003; Oanta-Marghitu 2004). Instead, these latter arguably Gepid, Herul or Ostrogothic contexts show a closer contact to the workshops of the Imperial court in Constantinople. This is not surprising. It shows that a member of the barbaric kleptocracy's highest echelons within close range of the Empire was, when convenient, willing to make every effort to become a high Roman functionary, be it a *comes*, *magister militum* or *patricius*. Thus, they would prefer to wear the attributes of power that came with such titles.

Looped and Filigreed Solidi

Second, the reconfiguration of 5th century solidi as looped pendants with filigree rims appears

predominantly in South Scandinavian regions, notably Bornholm, Funen, Jutland, Zealand, Scania and Västergötland, with a northern outpost in Skön parish, Medelpad (fig. 1; Janse 1922; Bolin 1926; Fagerlie 1967; Horsnæs 2001; 2002; Axboe 2004). One must also mention the Lübchow find from nearby Pomerania in Poland, which has been attributed to a Scandinavian implantation (Duczko 2001, pp. 195–198). The more opulent loops and pendants are clearly connected to the Scandinavian bracteate production.

This type of reconfiguration differs from the late 4th-century Germanic trend of looped multipla, extending from the Szilágysomlyó hoard in Transylvania, which has been attributed to the Gepid court by Kiss (2001, p. 233), to the female grave of Vestre Hauge in Norway (Andersson 1995, pp. 42–48; Bursche 2001, pp. 84, fig.1; Dahlin Hauken 2005, p. 129, Pl. 11). This early trend was inspired by the highly artistic hexagonal fittings for multipla and solidi of the Constantine dynasty made in Byzantine workshops, but should not be confused with the Byzantine school. An important point of the 4th-century Germanic reconfiguration of multipla and solidi was the conscious addition of weight (Andersson 1995; Dembski 1999). An extreme case is a Germanic multiplum imitation from Szilágysomlyó that weighs, with loop and rim, all of 417 grams, that is, approximately 93 times the weight of a solidus.

Metrology

Third, the pendants from Udovice weigh 25.18 g and 24.4 g, respectively. This is well below the uncia of 27.1–26.55 g (Herschend 1983, p. 50). Together, they weigh 49.58 g, that is, approximately eleven solidi at a weight of 4.5 g. However, Herschend (1983, p. 62, fig. 7; 1991) has shown that Gresham's law was in full effect at the time among the Germanic kleptocracy. As the 5th century progressed, people tried to hold on to the heaviest coins from the 430s and 440s. Thus, the further away one gets in time and space from the distribution center, the less the average weight of a hoarded solidus. The average weight in the Szikáncs hoard (*tpq* 443) from Hungary with 1439 solidi is 4.483 g. The Bina hoard from



Fig. 1. Distribution of opulent bracteate loops in Scandinavia. After Axboe 1982.

Slovakia with 108 solidi (deposition date c. 450–455 according to Kyhlberg 1986, p. 57, tab. 42) had an average coin weight of 4.463 g. By the time one reaches Öland with the hoards of Åby with 79 solidi (*tpq* 475) and Björnhovda with 36 solidi (*tpq* 476), the weight is down to 4.421405063 g and 4.413444444 g.

The intended weight of the pendants should thus follow the *libra*, nominally c. 327.45 g, but more often c. 322.3 g. Herschend's 1980 study of unminted gold from Öland revealed a median weight unit of 6.213 g, roughly 6/27 of an *uncia*.

The two pendants together make up 7.9800418 such units, 48/27 or 16/9 of an *uncia*. This alignment to a peripheral debased weight system suggests that the pendants were manufactured at a considerable distance from Constantinople.

Solidi Types and their Scandinavian Parallels

Fourth, the four Udovice solidi themselves are worthy of attention. They are all of Western origin, struck in Ravenna and Rome c. 415–465. Thus, their internal composition differs from other 5th-century solidus hoards found in former Yugo-



Fig. 2. Distribution of solidi struck for Libius Severus and found on Öland. After Herschend 1980.

slavia, the Carpathian Basin, the Danube estuary and the Tatra Mountains, which have chiefly been attributed to the Hunnic tributes (Mirnik 1981; Herschend 1983; Kyhlberg 1986; Ciobanu 1999; Kiss 2001, pp. 235–240; Bóna 2002). The latter hoards contain an overwhelming proportion of solidi struck for Theodosius II in 430–439, the IMP VOT XXX type, and 441–443, the earliest IMP XXXXII COS XVII types (Kent 1992). There were subsequent forgeries of the latter type in Pannonia (Biró-Sey 1992). The worn issue of Honorius (395–423) at Udovice and the two of Valentinian III (425–455) are fairly common ones. They have been included in the Hunnic tributes, as evident from the Bina hoard in Slovakia (Kent 1994). But this is where the similarities end.

It should be emphasized that the last Udovice solidus was struck in Ravenna for the relatively anonymous western emperor Libius Severus, a Lucanian nobleman in the hands of Ricimer, the Germanic *magister utriusque militiae*. Libius Severus was officially installed as emperor on 19 November 461. Although one source dates his death to 15 August 465, the last law in his name was enacted 25 September 465. Leo I in Constantinople never recognized Libius Severus as a legitimate co-emperor. Ricimer went to great lengths in appeasing Leo I, issuing coinage in his name while using the same dies for the Libius Severus issues. Fagerlie (1967) lists seven such coins from Scandinavia.

While solidi struck for Libius Severus are relatively rare on the continent, they are not as infrequent in certain parts of Scandinavia. Some 40 finds are known (Herschend 1980, fig. 33; Östergren 1981, p. 63). Of these, 26 are from Öland (fig. 2). Out of the total of 18 die-identities for Libius Severus in Scandinavia, there are 15 on Öland (Fagerlie 1967, s. 127). Björnhovda is unquestionably the central Scandinavian hoard whence many other issues of Libius Severus are likely to have emanated, considering that it has three die-identical coins, of which one (Fagerlie no. 121) has an external relationship to two other hoards on Öland (Fagerlie nos 122–123), and two (Fagerlie nos 126–127) have an internal relationship and an external relation-

ships to two other hoards on Öland (Fagerlie nos 124–125). As to the possible relationship of this solidus hoard to the gold filigree pendants, it should be duly noted that the Färjestaden gold collar was found only some 1.9 km from the Björnhovda hoard, that is, a mere 15–20 minute walk.

Still, the last Udovice solidus is not a perfect match to any Scandinavian example. Rather, a glance at the tenth volume of the Roman Imperial Coinage (Kent 1994) reveals that the Udovice issue is of the rare RIC 2718 type (Kent 1994, Pl. 61), sporting the interrupted obverse legend SEV – ERVS, in contrast to the much more common SE – VERVS. Only three RIC 2718 solidi are known from Scandinavia (Fagerlie nos 141, 143, 145). Two are from Öland: one from Gettlinge in Södra Möckleby parish (SHM 2777) and another from Stora Hult in Algutsrum parish (SHM 23508), some 4.5 km from Björnhovda.

The third Scandinavian specimen, from the Soldatergård hoard on Bornholm, is known by description only (Breitenstein 1944). It should be stressed that the last of the Udovice solidi shows considerable signs of wear on both obverse and reverse. On the obverse, one may note the partially effaced beading on the diadem, a cut to the eye, and a long gash descending from the ear down the cheek, which may be an assay mark. The reverse is more evenly worn, suggesting that it has been exposed to an even smooth surface, e.g. a wearer's shirt.

By contrast, most Scandinavian issues for Libius Severus are of the RIC 2704, 2705 and 2720 types struck in Rome and Milan. Some of these are in much better condition, having been hoarded instantly at their arrival in Scandinavia. Some of the western RIC 2529 coins found in Scandinavia that were struck for Leo I have die-identical obverses with the RIC 2719 type struck for Libius Severus. One of these coins is from the Björnhovda hoard (Fagerlie no. 537). The other has been found at Sylten on Bornholm (Fagerlie no 536), some 500 meters from where a combined bracteates – solidi – filigree pendants hoard was found at Fuglsang/Sorte Muld in 2001 (Watt 2000, p. 81; Horsnæs 2001; 2002). The Sorte Muld pendants are five bracteates and six

solidi struck for Valentinian III (425–455). Four are die-identical issues of the RIC 2036 type struck in Ravenna. They have a reverse legend VOT X MVLV XX, i.e., they date from 435. Fagerlie lists one example of this type from Skogsby in Torslunda parish on Öland (SHM 17911). This is c. 3.6 km from Björnhovda and 5.4 km from Färjestaden.

There are also two combined bracteate/solidus gold hoards with coins struck for Libius Severus on Öland, namely those of Bostorp in Norra Möckleby parish and Frösslunda in Stenåsa parish (Herschend 1980, App. I; Axboe 2004, pp. 321–323). The Bostorp hoard (KLM 23575, 25382) consists of six solidi with a total weight of 26.7 g (that is a debased *uncia*, just slightly below 6/72 of the *libra*), three C-bracteates (IK 221–223) weighing 52.73 g (slightly below 12/72 of the *libra*), and a necklace weighing 153.45 g (well above 34/72 of the *libra*), giving the hoard a total weight of 232.88 g, or 52/72 *libra*. Kyhlberg (1986, pp. 67–68, tab. 44) dates its deposition to 467–486. The Frösslunda hoard (SHM 12202, 12262, 12933, 22753), by contrast, is more in line with one of the Udovice pendants. Together, five solidi (*tpq* 474) and a C-bracteate (IK 248) weigh 24.883 g, that is, 24/27 of an *uncia*.

Find Context

Fifth, there is no reason to believe that the Udovice pendants come from a grave: filigree pendants are extremely rare as grave goods. Besides a handful of multipla, solidi and bracteates mainly from Norway, there is a tiny zoomorphic ornament in Gamla Uppsala from a gold collar, which may perhaps be considered a grave gift in the shape of a *pars pro toto* (Lindqvist 1936). It seems more likely that the find from Udovice is a hoard, very much like those from Southern Scandinavia or the Carpathian Basin. Moreover, it is not certain that the two pendants pertain to the female gender. It is quite possible that such a rare object carried some sort of male executive power or prestige with it. The pendants may together have been interpreted as a sign of Germanic military status, albeit of a lower and more peripheral rank than the objects found in the rich graves and hoards commonly attributed to

Gepid and Ostrogothic princes, such as the gold *Kolben* armlets of Apahida I (230.2 g) and Blučina (226.7 g), that have been interpreted as *stirps regia* (Werner 1980; Kyhlberg 1986, p. 69, 120–121).

Cosmopolitan Kleptocracy

Sixth, as for a possible explanation to the Udovice find, it fits well with the cosmopolitan nature of what I have called the barbaric kleptocracy (Fischer 2005, p. 15). It has already been noted that the South Scandinavians of the Migration Period were capable of organizing a number of simultaneous mercenary expeditions to the continent. As Kyhlberg (1986, p. 72) put it: »This could mean that, c. A.D. 460 to about the fall of the Roman empire, the population of Öland had personal connections with the political and military events on the Continent, perhaps as a result of the regular provision of troops.» A case in point is the combined evidence from the two hoards of Björnhovda and Åby on Öland, which derive from two different campaigns c. 462–465, the former to the west, the latter to the east (Herschend 1980). The eastern coinage struck for Leo I (457–474) of the Åby hoard is of two types, RIC 605 and RIC 630. The RIC 605 type, has been dated to c. 462–466 (Kent 1994). Åby has five internal die-identities of this type in fine and very fine condition (Fagerlie nos 378, 420, 441–443). This type of coinage in Åby probably derives from substantial tributes paid to the Valamirian Ostrogoths in the mid-460s by two Byzantine *magistri militum*, the Galatian Procopius Anthemius and the Alan Flavius Ardabur Aspar. Their later careers would be turbulent: Anthemius ruled as western emperor 467–472, but was murdered by Ricimer. Aspar fared no better, murdered by Leo I in 471. By contrast, it appears that at least some lower-ranking South Scandinavian mercenaries were more fortunate. The RIC 630 type was struck for Leo I in 471–473. The Åby hoard has three internal die-identities of this type, of which two have an obverse-reverse die-identity (Fagerlie nos 408–410).

The Åby hoard was finally augmented with new western coinage, a solidus struck for Romulus Augustus in 476, following the payment of the Scirian Odoacer, leader of the Herules in

Ravenna. Meanwhile, the Björnhovda hoard was augmented with a solidus struck for the eastern usurper Basiliscus (475–477). This relatively minor addition to the Björnhovda hoard suggests that its owners may not have played a role in the western payment of 476, though they clearly did during the 462–465 western expedition. A possible scenario is that the principal contributors to the Björnhovda hoard stayed behind on the continent.

The Udovice pendants were most likely manufactured in South Scandinavia shortly after a western expedition in 462–465, when the Libius Severus solidus was fitted to one of the pendants. Together, the two pendants must subsequently have been exposed to wear for a considerable time after 465. They were in all likelihood brought to the continent during yet another eastern mercenary expedition in the last quarter of the 5th century, that is, during the reign of Zeno the Isaurian (476–491) or Anastasius (491–518).

Occasion for the Deposition at Udovice

Seventh, the deposition event of the Udovice pendants could tentatively coincide with one of many wars in the area as related by the 6th-century chroniclers Procopius and Marcellinus *comes*. The Ostrogoths captured Singidunum in the 470s, only to be expelled in c. 488 by the Gepids, who then made Sirmium their capital. The Ostrogoths returned in force in 504 during the reign of Theoderic the Great, conquering Illyricum and much of the lower Danube valley. Singidunum reverted to Byzantine control in 512 under the truce between Theoderic and Anastasius.

In 513, Anastasius is reported to have settled Herules along the lower Danube to keep a watchful eye on the neighboring Gepids and Ostrogoths. As Marcellinus *comes* put it:

»Gens Erulorum in terras atque civitates Romanorum jussu Anastasii Caesaris introducta.»

(Marcellinus, ed. Mommsen 1894).

(Anastasius Caesar introduced the Herul affi-

nity to abandoned Roman lands and settlements).

The presence of Ostrogoths, Gepids and Herules around Udovice more or less closes the case of the hoard's origin as far as I am concerned, given the account of Procopius of Caesarea in *De bello Gothico* II, 15 (Lotter 2003, pp. 130–131) of Herul royalty travelling back to Scandinavia as late as in 509.

Conclusion

The seven points above all lend support to an interpretation of the Udovice pendants as important testimony to the extensive range of sociopolitical mobility within the late-5th century Germanic kleptocracy and its material culture. Together with the finds of three die-identical runic C-bracteates (IK 182, 1–3) from Debrecen and Szatmár in Hungary, the Udovice pendants show that the mid-level military leaders among the Germanic successors of the Roman Empire had no qualms in bringing objects pertaining to *translatio imperii* (Fischer 2005, p. 13) all the way from peripheral Scandinavia down to the Carpathian Basin and even across the Danube. But once they climbed further up in the military hierarchy, Germanic mercenaries were quick to shed the clearest signs of their peripheral origins in favor of more Roman symbols of power. In his account of the Vandal wars, Procopius of Caesarea claims that when the comes Belisarius attacked the Vandal kingdom, four hundred Herules from Thrace under the command of Faras were with him. As to their attire, a glance at the famous mosaics of San Vitale is perhaps in order. Justinian's bodyguards are indeed wearing gold necklaces, but now of a more Byzantine character.

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