

ΛΑΒΡΥΣ

Studies presented to Pontus Hellström

Edited by

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and
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Abstract

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This volume contains studies on Classical Antiquity presented to Professor Pontus Hellström on his 75th birthday in January 2014. The 41 papers cover subjects ranging from the Etruscans and Rome in the west, to Greece, the landscape of Karia, and to the Sanctuary of Zeus at Labraunda. Many papers deal with new discoveries at Labraunda, but sites in the surrounding area, such as Alabanda, Iasos, and Halikarnassos are well represented, as well as Ephesos and Smyrna. Many architectural studies are included, and these examine both Labraundan buildings and topics such as masonry, Vitruvius, the Erechtheion, stoas, watermills, and Lelegian houses. Other papers deal with ancient coins, ancient music, Greek meatballs, and Karian theories on the origin of ancient Greece.

Keywords: Pontus Hellström, Labraunda, Karia, Ancient Turkey, sanctuary, Ancient Greece, Hellenistic, Roman, Hekatomnid, archaeological excavations

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Tracking solidi—from Thessalonica to Hjärpestad¹

by

Svante Fischer

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the background of a small group of relatively rare 5th-century solidus types struck in Thessalonica for the East Roman Emperor Leo I (AD 457–474) that have been found in Scandinavia. Besides being listed and briefly discussed by Fagerlie in 1967, no concentrated attempt has ever been made to identify their specific background.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to compare the Scandinavian finds of coins to similar specimens found in Continental solidus hoards, and subsequently to determine if there is a possible 5th-century connection that can be demonstrated between Scandinavia and the Continent by means of these solidus types. This, in turn, could help elucidate the background of the collapse of the Roman state's finances and the fall of the West Roman Empire in AD 476.

Introduction

During the first two-thirds of the 5th century AD, the East Roman Empire usually only employed two mints in its production of solidus coinage.² Such a mint was known as *sacra moneta*, to distinguish it from the *moneta publica* where regular coinage was struck. This can be compared to the half-dozen solidus mints operative in the eastern half of the Roman Empire in the late 4th century, and the continuation of the *moneta publica* in these cities.³

The reduction of the financial distribution network was part of the general centralization process characteristic of the subsequent Byzantine Empire, where state finances were subject to increasing monopolization by the court of Constantinople. The primary East Roman mint, usually known in coin legends as CONOB, was securely located behind the walls

¹ The research for this paper was financed by a 2012 grant from the Swedish Society for Ancient Monuments (Svenska Fornminnesföreningen). Thanks are due to Richard W. Burgess for discussing the question of the distribution of 5th-century solidi with me, and to Lennart Lind for reading a draft of this paper.

² Grierson & Mays 1992; Kent 1994.

³ The only exception to this norm is the very limited solidus coinage of the usurper Leontius in Antioch from the short-lived ANTOB mint during a period of four months in AD 484. Only three types, RIC X 1101–1103, are known to have come from this mint. Out of the total four known coins, two are die-identical specimens of RIC X 1101, one is in the Saltholm hoard on the island of Bornholm, and the other is in Abritus, Bulgaria (Fagerlie 1967; Kent 1994, 316).

of the palace grounds of Constantinople, with ten different *officinae*, labelled from Alpha to Iota.

The other mint, known in contemporary coin legends as TESOB from AD 391 to AD 451, and later as THSOB until AD 474, was located in Thessalonica. The latter mint had a much less frequent output of solidi. It would seem that the striking of solidus coinage in this secondary institution became increasingly related to the investiture of new emperors in their first consulships into the early reign of Leo I in AD 457–466. It is quite possible that some of the East Roman emperors may have felt compelled to travel to the city in order to strike and distribute inaugural coinage there at the time of the festivities surrounding their first consulships.

There are other features, however, that suggest that the two solidus mints of Constantinople and Thessalonica may have operated in different ways, and the bureaucratic control over the entire solidus supply may have been subject to change, especially given the very high output of solidi of the *Gloria orvis terrar* type for Theodosius II, which was struck to finance the Western Emperor Valentinian III during his stay in the city in AD 424.⁴

A further observation is that the iconography of the engravers from the Thessalonica mint was old fashioned, or perhaps even deliberately retrograded for many years towards the mid- 5th century. Were it not for the consular dates in the coin legends, one would be inclined to offer an earlier date for much of the Thessalonica coinage, especially during the later reign of Theodosius II, where the elongated three-quarter profile in the old cuirass, so typical of his early coinage in Constantinople, is retained in Thessalonica.

Typology and distribution

During the onset of my research on the 5th-century solidus coinage five years ago, I gathered approximately 23,000 solidi from various hoards in a database, LEO.⁵ There were c. 7300 individual coins recorded. Of these, 5988 could be attributed to distinct mints, see *Table 1* below. This compilation shows that the total output of the Thessalonica mint was quite marginal over the years. Its rather sporadic activity must therefore have been caused by specific needs, or short periods when bullion was relatively abundant in the imperial treasury.

⁴ Kent 1994, 37.

⁵ Fischer 2011.

Table 1. Gold Coinage Recorded in LEO with Certain Mint Marks, AD 317–565.

City	Solidi	Percentage
Constantinople	3300	55.4
Milan	804	13
Rome	683	11
Ravenna	425	7
Trier	360	6
Thessalonica	94	1.6
Antioch	92	1.5
Lyon	89	1.4
Arles	71	1.1
Sirmium	70	1.1
Total	5988	100

Moreover, the solidi struck in the name of Leo I in Thessalonica are easy to recognize due to their distinct legends and iconography (*Fig. 1a-b*). This allows researchers to track their distribution patterns in solidus hoards throughout the Late Roman world and the periphery of Barbaricum. There are some clearly visible variations in the mint legends and the iconography of the mint during the reign of Leo I. This permits a further typological subdivision that, in turn, has enabled the author to follow up on specific coins as possible leads into the overall assessment of the Scandinavian material and its relationship to Continental hoards. Above all, the last consular solidus types for Leo I proved to be highly unusual and hence might have had a peculiar distribution pattern.



Fig. 1a–b. A specimen of RIC X 618 from the Hjärpestad hoard. Courtesy of SHM.

In total, there were no more than twenty different coins of the types RIC X 616–623 in my early version of LEO in 2010. This means that these Thessalonica types were very rare, and the finds were hard to connect together. Ten were found in Scandinavia.⁶ It should be noted that two

⁶ Fagerlie 1967, 50f.

belong to the same hoard in Hjärpestad, Löt parish, in the Skedemosse region on Öland, and another two were in the hoard from Ramsätra, Köping parish.⁷ The fact that four out of ten coins found in Scandinavia are found in two hoards located eight kilometres from each other, that is, a stroll on foot for an hour and a half, is an unlikely coincidence.⁸

There is also the unique case of a looped consular solidus RIC X 623 on Gotland, a region where looped bracteates and regular solidi are abundant, but where this represents a unicum (the specimen is, in fact, the plate coin of the RIC X catalogue).⁹ Another consular specimen was found in the Childeric grave in Tournai.¹⁰ These very unusual appearances made these particular solidi stand out, and there is still no obvious satisfactory answer as to how they ended up in such peculiar circumstances. More source material is needed because the coins from Thessalonica in Scandinavia are indicative of a much larger problem—that of our very limited understanding of Late Roman state finances.

It is clear that the Late Roman state apparatus always spent far more solidi than it could regain from taxes or tributes. Similarly, new sources of gold ore were always needed. The 5th century has been described as a period of gold haemorrhage, where the Roman state apparatus was drained of its financial resources to effectively sustain Late Roman society. The problem is to show where all the money went, and how. One theory is that of an unofficial distribution network, where barbarian warlords¹¹ and Roman potentates could have skimmed off the state resources and bribe or pay tributes to other players whenever necessary.

In contrast, a more general theory of “unofficial cash flow”, that is, a large export of solidi without explicit state involvement, would suggest a rather free circulation of East Roman coinage that was possibly dictated by a functioning market economy between the Roman Empire and Barbaricum, as argued by Metcalf.¹² Such a market accompanied by very substantial coin circulation would break up die-identical chains into random patterns, like, say, the coinage of Honorius in hoards deposited in the 440s and 450s.

This suggestion, however, is indeed contradicted by the evidence of the solidus hoards themselves (and these are truly random finds and thus representative samples). Indeed, if the Eastern coinage that shows up in solidus hoards in the former Western Empire and Barbaricum is to be considered unofficial, and no proper East Roman state funding was entering the imperial coffers in the West Roman Empire, how does one explain the die-identical chains of Eastern coins in mixed Western and barbarian hoards?

⁷ Recorded precious metals find from Hjärpestad include: SHM 9458, 9987, 18286, 18620, 18621, 18983, 19578. Recorded finds from the Ramsätra hoard include: SHM 1983, 4402, 6616, 887, 11879, 15048, 17497, 22450.

⁸ A similar situation is found in the very important Åby hoard, which contains two even more atypical specimens struck in Thessalonica for Marcian in AD 451–457 (see Fagerlie 1967; Herschend 1978).

⁹ See Kent 1994.

¹⁰ Chiflet 1655; Fischer & Lind, forthcoming.

¹¹ See MacGeorge 2002.

¹² Metcalf 1995.

Given the composition of the hoards in West Roman territory and Barbaricum, and their die-links, it is much easier to argue for continuous East Roman subsidies to the Western Empire (even if they were illegal bribes to power-brokers like Aetius or Ricimer and their ilk), than to argue for widespread circulation emanating from trade. This is because another piece of evidence would have to replace the hoards for that theory to have empirical precedence.

The most important recent addition to our knowledge of the distribution pattern is the recent discovery of the San Mamiliano di Sovana hoard.¹³ This hoard of 498 solidi was buried in c. AD 477. It contains many separate groups of solidus types and retains sequences of die-identities that should have been broken up had there been substantial coin circulation. The simplest explanation for the San Mamiliano di Sovana hoard and its network of die-links with Scandinavia is that most East Roman solidi came directly to Italy and were distributed to Barbaricum from there.

Moreover, a recent article by Budaj and Prohászka has summarized the presence of Leo's Thessalonica coin types in Central Europe and the Balkans.¹⁴ This small, yet important, catalogue shows that the coins can be tracked within a territory often considered to be under Herul and Gepid control in the years AD 460–480 and into the 6th century.¹⁵ A problem that remains, though, is that there is no obvious connection in this region between: (a) grave goods, (b) coin hoards, and (c) the purported ethnicity of various military affinities recorded in the few historical sources. This triangulation hence remains highly conjectural, as it is based on the assumption that material culture in the shape of burial goods equals markers of ethnicity and rank, above all the idea that the few elite graves are Herulian and the mass of less significant graves are Gepid.

The solidus hoards in Scandinavia are usually made up of both East Roman and West Roman issues, and the total horizon ranging from TAQ to TPQ often extends up to 60–70 years, typically from the early reign of Honorius (c. AD 402) to the large series struck for Leo I (RIC X 605 and 630, struck c. AD 462–466 and 471–473, respectively). Kyhlberg first suggested that the coin hoards found in Scandinavia had already been assembled in Italy.¹⁶ My research confirms this by showing that die-identities of both East Roman and West Roman coinage appear in several hoards from Belgium, Italy and Scandinavia.

Indeed, the only certain reciprocal evidence of coins first reaching Scandinavia and then going back to the Continent have been demonetized and transformed into status symbols: the Udovice solidus pendant showing Italian money going first to Scandinavia and then subsequently to the Balkans.¹⁷ The youngest coin is a West Roman issue, RIC X 2718 struck in AD 462 in the name of Libius Severus, and was fitted onto a south Scandinavian piece of gold filigree jewellery that somehow ended

¹³ Arcangeli *et al.* 2012.

¹⁴ Budaj & Prohászka 2012.

¹⁵ Tejral 2012; Ivanišević & Kazanski 2010.

¹⁶ Kyhlberg 1986.

¹⁷ Fischer 2008.

up being buried at the old Roman frontier town of Singidunum in the Balkans. Since finds of the coinage of Libius Severus are extremely rare in the Balkans, the path of a Scandinavian retinue from Italy to the Balkans via Scandinavia after AD 462 is likely. One may therefore return to the research on the Hjärpestad hoard itself. Its composition must be presented and compared to other hoards that include RIC X 616–623.

Besides a substantial number of finger rings and gold bars, (weighing some 144.688 g), the Hjärpestad hoard includes a number of different solidus types (*Table 2*). The hoard looks commonplace in the Ölandic corpus of solidus finds, just as this combination of solidi would be perfectly normal in Italy, judging from the San Mamiliano hoard.¹⁸ There is, however, not a single hoard in all of Central Europe or the Balkans that even remotely resembles this composition.

Table 2. Solidi from Hjärpestad

Emperor	TAQ	TPQ	Mint	RIC X type
Honorius	402	406	Ravenna	1287
Theodosius II	408	420	Constantinople	202
Theodosius II	430	434	Constantinople	257
Theodosius II	441	443	Constantinople	312
Theodosius II	441	443	Constantinople	322
Marcian	451	456	Constantinople	510
Majorian	457	461	Milan	2639
Leo I	457	462	Thessalonica	616
Leo I	457	462	Thessalonica	618
Leo I	462	466	Constantinople	605
Anthemius	467	468	Rome	2824
Julius Nepos*	474	475	Milan	3235
Romulus Augustus*	476	476	Milan	3415

*The two youngest coins were found in the same field several decades before the other finds, and need not belong to the larger, mixed hoard where the exact location is known.¹⁹

Table 3. Solidi from Ramsätra

Emperor	TAQ	TPQ	Mint	RIC X type
Theodosius II	424	425	Constantinople	234
Marcian	451	456	Constantinople	510
Majorian	457	461	Milan	2639
Leo I	457	462	Thessalonica	618
Leo I	457	462	Thessalonica	619
Leo I	462	466	Constantinople	605
Libius Severus	461	465	Rome	2704
Julius Nepos	474	475	Rome	3246

¹⁸ Arcangeli *et al.* 2012.

¹⁹ See Herschend 1978,175.

Conclusion—a new approach

No definite answers were provided by the addition of the new contexts from Central Europe and the Balkans to the LEO database, in regard to the distribution pattern of the solidi of Thessalonica. The distribution of Eastern solidi in the Western Empire and Barbaricum remains a very thorny issue that is unlikely to be resolved by means of a study of the written sources. Rather, future analysis of the distribution pattern of East Roman solidi belongs to the new realms of agent-network theory and digital agent-based modelling. Still, from this discussion, one may conclude that there are three possible routes from Thessalonica in order for the coins to end up in Scandinavia. In accordance with Ockham's razor, the most likely route is the one that can provide an explanation which covers the distribution pattern for the entire corpus of solidi struck for Leo I in Thessalonica.

Table 4. Possible Distribution Routes

Route 1	Thessalonica > Italy > Barbaricum (e.g. Pannonia > Tatras > Pomerania > Öland)
Route 2	Thessalonica > Balkans > Barbaricum
Route 3	Thessalonica > Balkans > Barbaricum > Italy

Much would suggest that the first route is the simplest and most likely, bringing the coins together with others as one entity that had already seen some internal circulation in the Roman Empire prior to arriving in Scandinavia from Italy. The second route finds support from the finds listed by Mirnik, Ciolek, Depeyrot, Prohászka, and Budaj & Prohászka,²⁰ but one still has to explain the presence of the same types of coin in Italy and Belgium, while being unable to account for hoards that have the same kind of general composition in Scandinavia, Belgium, and Italy.

The third route would be one favoured by those who do not wish to argue in favour of official East Roman subsidies to the West Roman Emperor in Italy in the period AD 410–467. For this hypothesis to hold true, however, it would mean that solidus hoards paid by the Eastern Empire to their barbarian frontier troops were subsequently brought *en bloc* by those very same barbarian warriors into Italy, then mixed with many very different West Roman issues still linked by dies, and buried in Italy. While this is not impossible, one must hasten to add that for hoards in Belgium, Italy, and Scandinavia to be linked in this way by East Roman issues, it would mean extensive long-distance travel by the hoard owners themselves rather than by individual coins circulating on a market.

The reasoning behind the third route is very complicated, as the argument would be solely based on written sources and iconography, and one would not be able to employ the full range of the solidus hoards as evidence. We know very little about the late 5th-century barbarian warlords and their travels. A possible way of resolving this issue is to

²⁰ Mirnik 1981; Ciolek 2007, 2009; Depeyrot 2009a-c; Prohászka 2010; Budaj & Prohászka 2012.

combine routes one and two, dividing the flow of solidi from the Thessalonica mint into two: one being the barbarian Balkan route, and the other being the West Roman Italian route.

* * *

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