

## JAAH 2022 No 30 Fischer

### Log book

Svante Fischer, The Late Roman and Early Byzantine Solidi of Scania & the Lund University History Museum

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### Reviewer 1

The Late Roman and Early Byzantine Solidi of Scania and the Lund University History Museum

#### Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History. Review

This article treats the collection of late Roman and Byzantine solidi kept in the coins collection at Lund University History Museum together with coins from Scania kept at SHM, Stockholm. In all 34 coins are treated, some of them are lost. In the article also 54 gold objects, mainly bracteates from Scania from the period are recorded.

The author's first aim is to present the solidi and to discuss how and why they reached Scania. In an important section named Background – Musealization, Decontextualization and Oblivion source critical aspects of the finds are presented. This is a quite interesting chapter as it presents a history of antiquarian treatment of coin finds from the 16<sup>th</sup> c. up till today. The author strongly emphasizes the importance of hoards being kept together and not scattered to several museums and coin collections. The Lund collection also suffered from a serious incident when in 1788 it was chaotically evacuated, which resulted in that a large part was deprived of its context.

The observation that loops might be in a better condition than the solidi or bracteates to which they are attached is interesting, as it tells something of the history of the finds.

Loops. Statistically looped solidi are overrepresented in Scania. The only parallel is Funen.

However, *this is one find, and cannot be regarded as an argument in statistics.*

Weight: *is there an explanation to why the Scanian solidi have a weight below the average?*

On p. 2 is stated "There was a desire to quell potential...." *here some references are needed.*

On p. 3. *Was Kilian Stobæus collection donated or sold?*

There are three solidi hoards, which all are mixed, i.e. with other gold objects. In two of them the solidi are found together with gold bracteates. The solidi are evidently worn, whereas the

gold bracteates are less worn. On page 6 the author claims that the Fjärestad hoard is one of the earliest finds with runic and Latin letters combined. *The heavily worn solidi were apparently in circulation for a long time and cannot be regarded as an indication for dating. The runic text is written in Latin letters, is it possible to replace it with proper runes?*

P. 8 and 11. *The phenomenon of mutilation is an interesting phenomenon which might have been explained*

P.8 About the Gyllerup hoard: "The combination of such solidus types...." *Does that mean that the hoard was imported at one and the same occasion?*

On p. 13 there is a very interesting passage – "By preventing individual actors from having access to minted gold.....". This is a central passage for the author's interpretation of the relation between minted and non-minted gold. *I wish that the author might elaborate this section, with some more discussion and or references. The short mention of "...the important discovery in V...." is not of much help.*

The Conclusion chapter is comprehensive and well written.

The article is completed with a detailed catalogue, two tables, one over solidi and one over other gold objects from Scania and the period. There is also a picture file with 30 pictures. It would of course be fortunate if this also could be included in the article.

My conclusion is that this is an interesting, well researched article, which gives an important contribution to the history of the actual period. In my opinion it should be published.

## Reviewer 2

The article under review is clear, interesting and comprehensive. It has a solid empirical basis, building upon a detailed catalogue of 34 Late Roman and Early Byzantine solidi found in the province of Scania or kept in the LUHM coins collections. The numismatic material investigated here has been partly used in earlier publications, but never has it been described and analyzed so systematically. This systematic approach proves to be fruitful and contributes to a better understanding of the solidus influx to southern Sweden.

The article has a good and logical structure. After a short presentation of the material and of the main goals, it continues with a thorough discussion of the trajectory followed by the 34 investigated solidi since they have been found/recorded, with particular focus on the history of the coin collections in the LUHM. This discussion is absolutely necessary to evaluate the evidential quality of the material and is worth special notice. Some focus is also put on the question centralization/decentralization in Sweden's policy for archaeological finds management. The author is right to emphasize the difficulties faced by the researcher in a decentralized system, but the dark picture depicted could perhaps be nuanced: there has been many positive developments in recent years (increased accessibility thanks to online catalogues, application of common collection management standards, etc).

The author then undertakes an in-depth analysis of the 34 solidi included in the paper: chronology, origin, context of discovery, die-links, imitation, reuse and weight. The main patterns of the Scanian material are clearly defined, such the high proportion of reuse as jewellery. These patterns are continuously compared with those known from other areas, especially Öland and Gotland. All

the comparisons are informative, but more space could be given to Zealand and Bornholm, which are much closer geographically. In addition, the analysis part comprises a section dealing with the Scanian finds of unminted gold and gold bracteates. The intention here is to enlarge the evidence base and to propose a more comprehensive approach to gold finds. The patterns emerging from this study of the proportion solidi/unminted gold in Scania and in other regions are particularly thought stimulating and provide significant support for the author's conclusions.

The last part of the article is devoted to interpreting the material. The author offers a fresh view on two traditional questions: how the solidi were imported to Scania and how these Roman imports were used by the local elite. The main propositions are well grounded in numismatic data, with complementary evidence from various archaeological sources. Some degree of conjecture can be found in the last two paragraphs of the text, but this concerns general ideas on how the Scanian elite landscape was organized. The limitations of the evidence available become more apparent here (especially the limited number of well-documented solidi finds).

Beside the general reflections expressed above, some more specific comments can be made:

- I think there is a misunderstanding of what Jonsson writes regarding the number of solidi found in Scania. Jonsson provides two figures, one corresponding to the number of solidi from Scanian hoards (33) and one corresponding to total number of solidi in the province ( $48 = 33$  from hoards + 15 single finds). The figures are particularly high because the Gyllerup hoard is interpreted as containing 24 solidi in Jonsson's article.
- The short passage dealing with gold composition could be improved by adding some references, for instance the metal analyses of bracteates made by Birgit Arrhenius.
- When it comes to commercial relations with the Roman world, it is probably worth quoting Jordanes and his description of Scandza.
- A distribution map would be useful to sustain the idea that solidus deposition in Scania was a 'coastal phenomenon'.
- The descriptions in the catalogue are exhaustive, except in the case of the coins reused as pendants, where complementary information on the loops and rims could be relevant.

In summary, the article is most suitable for publication in JAAH. It is based on a deep knowledge of the solidi imported to Scandinavia and has an interesting approach combining the evidence from well-documented finds with that of decontextualized museum collections. The catalogue is of outstanding quality, following the highest numismatic standards and with almost every item illustrated. The author's conclusions will add new dimensions to the lively debate on the presence and use/reuse of Roman imports in Scandinavia.

## Author's comments

I am very grateful for the helpful questions, comments and suggestions offered by the two peer-reviewers. I have tried to implement all their suggestions. The questions asked by the first reviewer have been resolved by clarifying the passages in question, notably on how the Stobæus collection was acquired by the LUHM. In regard to the suggestions of the second peer-reviewer, there is now a reference to the passage on fur trade in the third book of Jordanes' *Getica*. In addition, I have sought to include references to the comparative material from Bornholm when it comes to the distribution of solidi issued for Honorius and Valentinian III. Unfortunately, the relatively minor material from Zealand with only a dozen solidi does not allow for comparative analysis, as is also the case with neighboring Blekinge with only ten solidi. The suggestion of a

further in-depth discussion of gold alloy analysis of gold bracteates has been expanded with further references to the analytical research of Birgit Arrhenius at the Stockholm Research Laboratory in the 1970's in relation to the IK gold bracteate project, but I have also added that of W A Oddy of the British Museum in the 1980's in relation to the Helgö project. The catalogue has been expanded with longer entries describing the loops and rims of the looped solidi. Finally, the new distribution map of Scania (fig 27) shows the diverging distribution patterns of solidi, gold bracteates, unminted gold and cavalry equipment in the various parishes. The deliberate use of a parish map rather than a settlement map reflects the need to conform to antiquarian tradition of the SHM, where there are many instances where the only precise location offered for gold finds is to be found on the parish level.