

The Queen's Gift*

A Coin-like Pendant and a Gold Hoard from Hjarnø in a Comparative Perspectives

by Helle W. Horsnæs & Mads Ravn

The figurative motifs of the *solidus* imitation are consistent with the Late Roman gold coin types in use from the second quarter of the 5th century AD onwards. They were used also by the first Byzantine emperors as well as by the kings of the successor kingdoms in western Europe, who minted in the name of the eastern emperors well into the 6th century AD. The conservatism of the images on the coins makes it extremely difficult to date them unless the obverse legend is preserved. Fortunately the partly preserved obverse legend DNIVI[...]OSPFAVG identifies the prototype for the imitation as a coin struck in the name of western Roman emperor Julius Nepos (474–475/480 AD). Victory on the reverse is holding a long, jeweled cross, and there is a star in the right field. The legend reads VICTOR [...]AVCCCA, but it is strangely cut off along the rim. The legend in the exergue is hardly legible, but the visible remains are consistent with the ordinary CONOB or COMOB legend. The 'coin' was first mounted in a rim consisting of a twisted gold wire soldered onto the edge. After that a very elaborate gold loop with a high central rib and raised edges decorated with beaded wire was attached over the head of the emperor. The total weight of the pendant is 5.6 g. A simple specific gravity test revealed that the pendant had a density of 18 g/cm³ versus 19.3 g/cm³ for pure gold. This means that the gold is alloyed—probably with silver, in which case the alloy would consist of approx. 85 % pure gold and 15 % silver.¹ Close inspection of the pendant shows



Fig. 1: Coin pendant from Hjarnø.



Fig. 2: *Solidus*, Julius Nepos RIC type 3249 (this specimen), without archaeological provenance, formerly in Het Koninklijk Penningkabinet, Leiden.



Fig. 3: Coin bracteate from Kinbjerg, The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, inv. no. RP 1141.1. W. 1.592g.

* Our sincere thanks to: P. Beliën, Conservator Nationale Numismatische Collectie, De Nederlandsche Bank, Amsterdam for the photos of the type specimen of RIC 3249 and permission to publish them as figure 2; and to M. Højlund Rasmussen, Konserveringscenter Vejle, for his valuable help and discussion of the possible production method.

¹ Cleaning and analysis undertaken by M. Højlund Rasmussen, conservator, M.Sc., Konserveringscenter Vejle.



Fig. 4: Sites mentioned in the text.

that both the obverse and the reverse surface of the coin imitation is uneven, and it has none of the characteristic radial patterns normally seen on struck coins. The inevitable conclusion is that the imitation must have been cast in a mould probably hubbed from a struck coin or coin imitation.

In this case the closest parallel for the coin imitation in the Hjørnø pendant is the Roman *solidus* of Julius Nepos type RIC 3249 dated to 475–477 AD. It is the only type to combine the star in the right field of the reverse with the legend ending with a final ‘A’. Kent only knew one specimen (fig. 2). He regarded it to be

an Imperial issue, but it belonged to a group of types that he did not assign to a specific mint.²

Neither the obverse, nor the reverse of the Hjørnø piece are die-identical to the type specimen for RIC 3249. Indeed, the spelling error in the obverse inscription DNIVI... instead of DNIVL... on the obverse is not listed among legend variations in RIC vol. X, and although the horseman motif decorating the emperor’s shield is often rendered quite schematically even on Imperial issues, on the Hjørnø specimen it is

² Kent 1994.



Fig. 6: *Solidus* imitation from Midskov, Funen. The Royal Coll. of Coins and Medals, inv. no. FP 1166. W. 4.23g.

In the remaining parts of Denmark, gold coins and imitations from the 5th–6th centuries AD are found more rarely. Ten years ago it was possible to list 19 coins,⁷ to which should be added an almost similar number of pseudo-Imperial issues in the name of Roman emperors and some more or less rude imitations.⁸ One of them, from Midskov, Funen (see fig. 4), is identified by the obverse legend as a Nepos imitation (DNIVLIVS NEPVSIVC), while the reverse imitates the *Salus rei publicae* types (reverse legend SALVS REIP B?ICAE) with a cross and RV between two seated emperors, probably Anthemius and Leo I, struck in Ravenna (fig. 6).⁹

In addition to the *solidus* from Hjarnø we can today add seven new finds of Late Roman/Early Byzantine and pseudo-Imperial gold coins from the 5th and 6th centuries to the list of finds from Denmark.¹⁰ This is a high number of new finds within a relatively short period, and they are all due to extensive metal detecting. A *solidus* struck during the reign of Valentinian III recently appeared in Lundeborg, normally considered to be a port-of-trade connected to Gudme, and the central place at Gudme itself has produced a *triens* struck in Milan in the name of Julius Nepos. A very small fragment of a *solidus* depicting only the ear of the profile portrait was part of the hack silver hoard dated to the late 5th century AD found in 2009 at Høgsbrogård near Ribe.¹¹ A gold hoard found in the central place at Lejre included a hitherto unknown Justinian I *solidus* type, probably struck in the Gallic

area.¹² A *triens* struck for Justinian I appeared during recent detector surveying of a new site at Hagebrogård between Viborg and Holstebro in northern Jutland, and so far it seems to be the only Iron Age object recovered from that particular site. The Hagebrogård coin is a *triens*, as was the Nepos coin from Gudme. The two Late Roman/Early Byzantine *trientes* are remarkable as this denomination was previously only attested in one specimen from Denmark.¹³ A looped *solidus* struck for Theodosius II was also an isolated find. It was found on the small island Tunø in the Kattegat, between the east coast of Jutland and the island Samsø. Finally, a *solidus* has appeared at Fæsted as part of the largest known Viking Age gold hoard from Denmark.¹⁴

This brief summary indicates the common find pattern for Late Roman and Early Medieval gold coins in Denmark: there are a number of finds that are isolated in the sense that no other archaeological material from the same period have so far been identified at the find spot and in the same context. In some cases, this may reflect source critical factors, such as the fact that the coin was discovered many years ago, and neither archaeological investigations nor metal detecting was undertaken on the find spot then. The Late Roman coins from Gudme reveal that single finds may be made in very particular and find-rich sites. Many of the gold coins from the 5th and 6th centuries AD however derive from precious metal hoards, often mixed with Nordic gold bracteates and other jewelry. Both hoards and single finds may be interpreted in line with other single finds of gold objects as intentional depositions, for example in connection with important borders, crossroads or wetlands.

Coin Imitations and Coin Bracteates from Northwestern Europe

It is significant that some of the pseudo-Imperial *solidi* from Denmark have been found in the same hoards as the regular issues, for example in the three large hoards from Funen: in the Elsehoved hoard two of eight coins are from western, non-Imperial mints (see fig. 4). In the Rynkebygård hoard one of five coins is an imitation, and in the large Broholm hoard there is one regular *solidus* and one imitative issue.¹⁵ While coins from the Constantinople mint plays an important role among finds from Denmark as a whole, there is a markedly

7 Horsnæs 2009. The Danish material is compared with other finds from northern Europe in Nicolay 2014, tab. 8.1.

8 Horsnæs 2010, in particular 152–157.

9 For example Anthemius RIC 2877 from Ravenna mint. Breitenstein 1943, 17–18, no. XXVII; Fagerlie 1967, find 192, cat. 183 Horsnæs 2009, 256 no. 6. The Royal Coll. of Coins and Medals, inv. no. FP 1166.

10 Nielsen 2019 presents a list of Roman gold coins found in 2008–2018, including Roman gold coins and imitations thereof from the 1st to the 4th century AD and finds from Bornholm.

11 Feveile 2011.

12 Horsnæs 2012.

13 Horsnæs 2010, 156 with further references.

14 The hoard was presented in Ejstrud, Schaadt & Grundvad 2017 before the coin was found.

15 Horsnæs 2009, nos. 12–14.



Fig. 7: Coin imitation from Strangegården, The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, inv. no. FP 1733. W. 6.01g.



Fig. 8: Coin bracteate, without archaeological provenance, formerly in Leipziger State Library, acquired by The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals in 1853, inv. no. KP 176.31. W. 1.91g.

higher percentage of coins from the western Empire and pseudo-Roman mint as well as imitations from western Denmark than from Bornholm. The majority of these coins must have come to Denmark via the same, western, route from the early 5th century AD onwards.¹⁶ The prominence of the Constantinople mint in the material is probably *not* due to an eastern influx route via the Baltic area but should rather be explained by the probably large output of this mint, which also circulated freely in the western Empire.¹⁷

The closest parallels for both the coin imitation from Hjørnø and the coin bracteate from Kinbjerg can be found in the southern North Sea area, where a number of small 'kingdoms' formed in the transitional period between Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. The closest parallel for the unusual coin bracteate from Kinbjerg was found in Achlum (NL). It may derive from the Achlum Hoard that contained four or five Nordic D-bracteates and perhaps an A or C-bracteate, but the find circumstances of both the hoard and of the coin bracteate are badly recorded.¹⁸ The coin bracteate from Achlum is clearly based on a *solidus* with the same obverse motif as the Kinbjerg specimen, but as this motif was in use on coins well into the 6th century AD it is of little value for exact dating. The garbled legend on the Achlum coin bracteate is unclear, but the interpretation as a legend of emperor Anastasius (491–518 AD) seems justified.

Other more distantly related coin bracteates based on Late Roman *solidi* with a profile portrait have been found in Frisia. One was found at Arum (Witmarsum) in 1864. The portrait is very stylized and the legend reduced to lines. The coin bracteate was set in a broad frame consisting of one ordinary beaded rim and four concentric large beaded rims, and it was mounted

as a coin brooch. It is usually dated to the 5th–6th centuries,¹⁹ but a later date should not be excluded as the fibula mount is very similar to Viking Age coin brooches.

Another one-sided coin imitation from the Witmarsum area is more in line with the Late Roman coin types. The imitation is known to have been found before 1964, but the exact provenance is unknown. It is based on a prototype from Valentinian I (375–392). The imitation weighs 3.26 g and has a completely flat reverse.²⁰ In these aspects it is more easily comparable with the one-sided *solidus* imitation from Strangegården (fig. 7).²¹

A coin bracteate found in 1955 during the excavation of a settlement area in Erin, Nordrhein-Westfalen (IK no. 240) is a closer parallel to the Kinbjerg bracteate. It shows the profile portrait of the emperor to the right with details pointing towards prototypes in the coinage of the middle or third quarter of the 4th century AD. The nonsense inscription might imitate the short inscription referring to Valens (DN VALENS PFAVG). The 'letter' forms are closely comparable to some of the typologically earliest Nordic bracteates, notably the large bracteate from Senoren (IK 354). The coin bracteate has faint remains of a loop, but no traces of a rim.

A coin bracteate without archaeological provenance acquired by The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals from the Leipziger State Library coin auction in August 1853 is very similar to the Erin specimen.²² It was then identified as an Italian medieval bracteate, but there can be no doubt that it belongs in the Iron Age. The motif consists of a pearl-diademed emperor in profile to the right similar to 4th century AD coins, and also in this case the garbled legend may imitate the

¹⁶ Contra Nicolay 2014, who believes that the major influx of gold to the Frisian area in the 5th century AD came via the eastern route to Scandinavia and thence onwards to Frisia.

¹⁷ Cf. for example Fischer & Sanchez 2016, tab. 3.

¹⁸ Nicolay 2014, 74–76.

¹⁹ Boeles 1951, pl. XLI: 8; van der Vin 1992, no. 12.1, pl. I.

²⁰ Boersma 1964; van der Vin 1992, no. 239.

²¹ Breitenstein 1946, no. 34 and fig. 9; Horsnæs 2010. The Royal Coll. of Coins and Medals inv. no. FP 1733.

²² Katalog des Münzkabinetts der Stadtbibliothek zu Leipzig, 1853, 254, no. 5233; inv. no. KP 176.31.



Fig. 9: Hjørnø. The find spot close to the sea, and on dry land. A small excavation going slowly through the topsoil with the help of volunteer detectorists more than doubled the number of finds made by previous three detector surveys over the top soil.

short legend of Valens (fig. 8). There are small traces of a loop above the head of the emperor, but no trace of a rim or other mounting.

These examples are few, and the list does not claim to be comprehensive, but it demonstrates that very unusual coin imitations have parallels in Northwestern Europe. Yet, we may not have to look outside the borders of modern Denmark to find other coin bracteates. Several of the Nordic A-bracteates are so close imitations of the Roman prototype that the distinction between a coin imitation and Nordic bracteate is a matter of scholarly tradition. Most of the A-bracteates imitate the profile portrait of the emperor, but four small and die-identical A-bracteates with runic inscriptions from the Gummersmark/Magleose Hoard found in Sealand uniquely merge two imperial portrait types in an eclectic creation (IK no. 299). The pearl-diademed profile portrait seen on Imperial coins from the advanced 4th century AD onwards has been combined with the facing portrait of the emperor carrying a spear and a shield, decorated with a horseman seen from the second quarter of the 5th century AD, the prototype of the Kinbjerg and Hjørnø specimens. Apart from the runic inscription,

also the position of the spear and the depiction of a torque(?) hanging as a pendant on the breast of the figure on these bracteates are rather unusual.

Cast coin imitations have not previously been discussed in a Danish context, but again a small number of cast imitations point towards Northwestern Europe. Those are three so-called Runic coins, two from Harlingen and Schweindorf in Germany, and one unprovenanced specimen in the British Museum, and two cast *solidus* imitations one from the Wieuwerd Hoard (deposited c. 630–640) the other an unprovenanced specimen in Uppsala.²³

The Gold Hoard from Hjørnø

The coin imitation is part of a gold hoard found on the small island Hjørnø situated at the mouth of Horsens Fjord in eastern Jutland (fig. 9). The first finds from Hjørnø were made during metal detector surveying of a field by amateur archaeologists.

²³ Nicolay 2014, 243; Berghaus & Schneider 1967, cat. 1–5.



Fig. 10: Distribution of finds from the Hjarnø Hoard.

Following the finds, an archaeological investigation of the site was undertaken in 2018, and post-excavation detecting continues. All finds were documented using GPS coordinates, revealing that the material was spread over almost 2000 m² (fig. 10). It was not possible to locate the original deposition of the hoard, but the excavation proved that the material was deposited close to the sea, but on dry land, and in an area without any traces of occupation.

The excavation combined with repeated detector surveying has brought to light a total of 63 objects (fig. 11). They include small circular pendants in openwork gold wire, sometimes filled in with pretzel-shaped motives, larger circular pendants with a snake-like motif reminiscent of D-bracteates, division beads, a button decorated with garnets(?),²⁴ a gold ring, hack silver buckle and remains of silver embellishment of a tunic.²⁵ The majority of these objects are types that are normally found in connection with jewelry hoards.²⁶ The coin pendant shows that the deposition of the hoard must postdate Julius Nepos' reign (474–480 AD), but the coin imitation may have been produced some time later and was in use

for a long period before deposition. To narrow down the possible deposition date we have to look at other elements of the hoard.

Several of the types from the hoard are closely comparable to finds in other gold hoards from Denmark. A recently found example is the hoard from Kirkemosegård, stylistically dated in the early 6th century AD, which also contained a number of the small circular pendants.²⁷ Also a hoard from Hvorslev consisting of one B- and four D-bracteates that had two circular pendants similar to some of the pendants at Hjarnø, suggesting that it could have been made by the same goldsmith.²⁸

The larger pendants from Hjarnø seem to have no exact parallels from Denmark (fig. 12). They present an intricate openwork decoration of snake-like figures that create a visual effect closely comparable to the pattern seen on the Nordic D-bracteates. The snakes on the pendants are decorated with triple lines of gold filigree. The pendants can be inserted into a small group similar of pendants with a very wide distribution pattern in St. Nicolas at Wade (GB), Teig and Søndre Dingstad (N) and Gross Lüben (D). The group was dated on stylistic grounds to the late first half/mid-6th century AD.²⁹

Parallels for the individual elements of the large pendants are more easily found. The interlace snake

²⁴ Identified by M. Axboe as a sword button.

²⁵ Inventory of finds by Ch. Lindblom; cf. also Lindblom & Balsgaard Juul 2019. All elements of the hoard have not yet been cleaned and studied. This article should therefore only be seen as a preliminary presentation of the find.

²⁶ For a recent distribution map, cf. Hølund Nielsen 2015, fig. 3.

²⁷ Clemmesen 2014.

²⁸ Discovered 2017, unpublished.

²⁹ Behr 2010, cat. 6 with references.



Fig. 11 (above): A selection of finds from the Hjarnø Hoard.

Fig. 12 (right): One of the large pendants from the Hjarnø Hoard.



pattern is for example rather common on high status objects such as scabbard mounts (examples from Hov and Væth in Denmark) and fibulas, and a number of parallels can be found also on other object types in northwestern Europe throughout the 6th century AD, e.g. on an exquisite Kentish round gold pendant found in Cornjum (NL). Here the snake-like figures made in triple lines of gold filigree are set on a flat background that fill in the four quadrants of a cross made of garnets. A date around 600 AD is suggested for this and similar pendants.³⁰

The Hjarnø pendants are inserted into a double beaded rim with elaborate loops, and on the loops are pretzel-like ornaments made in double line filigree, very similar to the ornament used in the center of the small circular pendants and repeated on division beads from the hoard. The pretzel ornament is also employed

as decoration in other elaborate loops, such as the one on the large Nordic bracteate from the Gudme II hoard (IK 51,3), and this small pattern is repeatedly used on gold objects from northwestern Europe.³¹

Three Late Roman *solidi* found in Denmark are fitted with elaborate loops of the same shape as the Hjarnø loops. The coin pendants were found on three different occasions on two different sites, Jordrup and Ejstrup, both in the hinterland of Kolding in eastern Jutland, and thus not far from Hjarnø. The different coin types again underline how coins from different production areas were used together: one derives from the Constantinople mint (Leo 2 & Zeno struck 474 AD), one from Rome mint (Libius Severus 461–465) and the last is a pseudo-Roman imitation of a Libius Severus coin ascribed to the Gallic Empire. However, the close similarity of the loops connects the

³⁰ Nicolay 2014, 83 and fig. 4: 23.

³¹ Nicolay 2014.

three coins that form an ensemble that must have been reworked in the same workshop.³² The decoration on the coin loops consist of minute interlaced snake-like creatures and thus compares better with the central motive of the Hjarnø pendants than with their loops.

These examples demonstrate how different elements of the hoard link up to a larger pattern of both regional and superregional exchange, and outside modern Denmark the material from the late 5th and 6th centuries AD the southern North Sea area ('Frisia') in particular offers rich parallels for the Hjarnø Hoard.³³

An Interpretation of the Hjarnø Find

J. Nicolay discusses the cultural interaction and sharing of common Norse beliefs in the North Sea region in the 5th and 6th centuries AD, as visible in the use of a common symbolic language and the extensive use of the same archaeological 'types' produced in several places along the North Sea coast: in northwest Germany, the Netherlands and southeast England. It is well-known that objects were exchanged within a large area around the North Sea coast, and patterns and motives were reused and adapted by local workshops. Along with the objects there was certainly also an exchange of ideas and religious practices, such as the deposition of valuables as gifts to the gods. J. Nicolay termed it 'The northern tradition of gold hoarding'.³⁴

Classifying the Hjarnø hoard according to the principles suggested by J. Nicolay it is a typical example of a religious deposition of an exquisite female *parure* ('Scandinavian stereotypical hoard'). A standard element of these hoards is a necklace. It can be made of various types of pendants, and it is important to note that coin pendants, Nordic bracteates and other types of pendants are interchangeable in these hoards. They clearly have the same function. The pendants are often found with smaller beads, and they are normally regarded as having been alternating division beads. In many cases the necklace is accompanied with a large elaborate brooch decorated with gold filigree and/or garnet cloisonné,³⁵ but in this case there is a small gold brooch only.

The find also contained elements not commonly met with in the jewelry hoards. A garnet decorated button was identified as a sword button³⁶ and would normally be regarded as a stranger in a female ensemble. Belt

fittings are also normally related to the male sphere, yet it should be remembered that a belt was a necessary part of the female dress, and belt fittings have been found in high status female burials.³⁷ The male elements of the hoard make it possible that there could have been a second deposition. As the find was spread out due to recent ploughing, and we did not find the actual deposit hole this is impossible to ascertain, as long as we cannot assess the chronology of the finds more accurately.

Gold hoards disappear from the archaeological record in Denmark during the 6th century AD, and it has been argued that much gold was deposited in connection with the 'Year without summer' in 536 AD caused by a violent volcanic eruption.³⁸ We cannot date the Hjarnø hoard with certainty as an entity to 536 AD, as several elements, notably the large pendants, seem to have their closest parallels in slightly later material. However, a slightly later deposition need not exclude a relationship to a volcanic event, as one may assume that the event would have been remembered for several generations after.³⁹

In a social classification the Hjarnø finds belong to objects affiliated with 'regional leaders and their retinue', and J. Nicolay suggests that this type of hoard may be interpreted as surrogate burials in a period where changing burial customs necessitated a reframing of religious practices previously performed in connection with the funeral.⁴⁰ His arguments are based on the similarity of the elements of the female hoards with the finds from aristocratic inhumation burials in the southern part of his research area. In his hypothesis regional kingdoms were situated as pearls on a string along the southern North Sea coast around 500 AD, and they gradually developed into larger entities, kingdoms, and confederations during the following centuries. The golden objects play an important role in this development embodying power and kingship. By owning, exchanging, and distributing gold, power could be claimed and maintained.

Summary

The coin pendant presented here is an important part of the recently found gold hoard from Hjarnø. It can be inserted into the group of Late Roman coins and coin imitations already known from Denmark and their contexts, and it provided an unexpected link to the unique coin bracteate found at Kinbjerg 350 years ago. The link between the two objects underlines the

³² Horsnæs 2010, 91. NM inv. nos. C 9536, 19/09 and 19695.

³³ Nicolay 2014, with excellent photos of a large number of the finds.

³⁴ Nicolay 2014, chap. 11.3.

³⁵ This is for example the case at Kirkemosegård & Clemmesen 2014 with references.

³⁶ M. Axboe, pers.inf.

³⁷ Nicolay 2014, 279, tav. 10.2.

³⁸ Axboe 2001.

³⁹ Gräslund & Price 2012.

⁴⁰ Nicolay 2014, 314.

functional affinities and the sometimes-fluid boundaries between gold coins, coin imitations, and bracteates in non-Roman and post-Roman Europe.

Both the coin pendant and other elements of the Hjarnø hoard can be compared to related objects in other hoards in Denmark as well as in a broader part of northwestern Europe, where we also find the nearest parallels for the coin bracteate from Kinbjerg.

The recent finds from Hjarnø, as well as other gold finds from Jutland, tap into the story of connectivity on elite level between the ‘North Sea Kings’ in the late 5th and 6th centuries AD. The final deposition of the hoard must be interpreted as a religious act, connecting the human world with the supernatural. The find has given us a glimpse into the world of human interaction, where raw materials, objects and decorative patterns were exchanged, re-used and copied, and the ongoing analysis of the individual elements of the hoard—their prototypes, parallels and derivatives—will no doubt provide us with more information about social structure, rituals and their meaning.

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