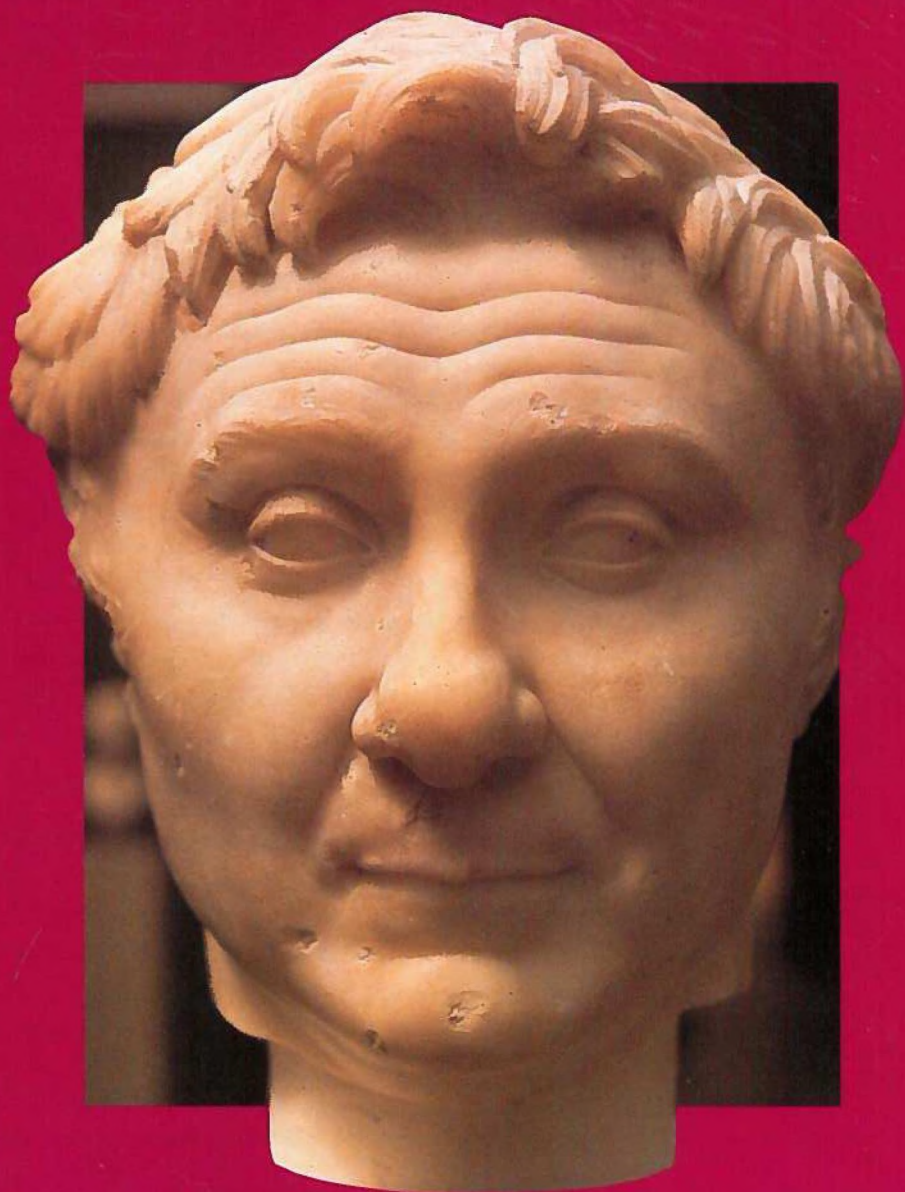


ACTA HYPERBOREA 4



ANCIENT PORTRAITURE

DN ODINN P F AUC?
GERMANIC "IMPERIAL PORTRAITS"
ON SCANDINAVIAN GOLD BRACTEATES

MORTEN AXBOE AND ANNE KROMANN

Even in antiquity, the importance of classical portraiture reached beyond the Mediterranean area. We shall present here a number of examples of how Roman influence was effective in Scandinavia in the Iron Age, more precisely in the 5th century and at the beginning of the 6th century A.D., the period which we call the Migration Period or the Earlier Germanic Iron Age. We shall also try to demonstrate that "Roman influences" were not necessarily simply cases of mechanical copying. The barbarians in Scandinavia knew and understood the Roman prototypes, and they borrowed only those features which fitted with their world and their notions. And they probably had certain precise aims in doing so.

In the following we shall look at how a particular form of amuletic jewellery, the so-called gold bracteates, reflects not only direct influence from Roman portraiture but also the social and political processes in Scandinavia that Roman influence must have contributed to.

Some Roman Influences in Scandinavia

By the beginning of the Migration Period, the Germanic peoples had been neighbours of the Roman Empire for over 400 years. All Scandinavian archaeologists know this, but we usually confine ourselves to the concrete, material influences that are found in the artefactual record. These are influences which appear early, as early as the 1st century A.D., both in utilitarian, daily items such as dress accessories and pottery - items which a good proportion of the population must have used - and in the highly precious imported goods such as glass and bronze vessels.

However, less palpable impulses can also be traced through the find material: changes in agricultural methods, textiles (JØRGENSEN 1986),

games, road construction, weight-systems (FONNESBECH-SANDBERG 1987), and in the social structure as a whole. What we have here is very wide-ranging and long-term cultural influence which goes far beyond the local craftsmen's copying of imported artefacts and which must also have had its impact in a field which is difficult to investigate archaeologically: that is the conceptual and cognitive world of the Scandinavians.

It is always a difficult and dangerous thing to try to imagine the role of individuals in the far past, but Gad Rausing has pointed out one way in which individual families might have been subject to massive Roman influence for generation after generation: through military service for the Romans (RAUSING 1987).

The Roman army was composed of the legions and of various auxiliary units: *numeri* and *auxilii* (WATSON 1969, 13ff.). While down to the 3rd century A.D. the legions could only be made up of men who were born Roman citizens anyone could be included in the auxiliary units, including Germans. The *numeri* were mercenary forces which fought with their own weapons under the leadership of non-Roman officers or chieftains. The *auxilii*, by contrast, had Roman officers and carried Roman equipment. The period of service was twenty to twenty-five years, in the course of which the soldiers got to learn to speak and to read Latin. They were paid in coin and they became familiar with Roman craft and culture. Last but not least, on leaving the army they gained the status of full Roman citizens, a citizenship that was inherited by their offspring.

If such a Germanic mercenary, then, returned to – let us say – Stevns and had children there, *they* too were therefore Roman citizens, and his sons, in their turn, could join the regular legions and rise through the ranks just as a born Roman could. Rausing draws a comparison with today's Gurkhas in the British army whose fathers and grandfathers often served in the same regiment. An historically known example from the early Roman Period is that of Arminius, the victorious leader at the battle of the Teutoburg forest in A.D. 9. He was a Germanic chieftain but had also served in the Roman army and had not only become a Roman citizen but even a knight. His brother, Flavus, served in the Roman army too. Unlike Arminius, Flavus kept faith with the Romans throughout the conflict, and his son was born

a Roman citizen in Rome (TACITUS, *Ann.*, 2.9 and 11.16; MAXFIELD 1981, 124f.). After the long succession of civil wars and reforms in the Roman Empire in the period around A.D. 300, when the Germanic detachments played an important part in the victory of Constantine the Great, barbarians were given more direct access to high military positions (WAAS 1965).

Perhaps we should, in consequence, also think in terms of farmers from Zealand who could speak and read Latin, who knew what coinage could be used for, who knew the Roman social system and military organization from the inside and who knew the Roman deities and had revered the Emperor as a god. But all the time they would naturally *also* have conformed to the norms of their local agrarian communities: they would, obviously, have become the laughing-stock of the village if they were wandering around in toga and sandals in the middle of the winter. But such hybridization of cultures was well known within the Roman Empire, with its many nationalities, and local deities living on in slightly romanized form such as "Jupiter Tanarus", "Mars Lenus" etc. (these examples from RICHMOND 1963, 192 and 200).

This should not, of course, be taken as the one and only explanation of Roman influence in Scandinavia; rather as a proposition worth considering. It appears that no Scandinavians have been identified amongst the Germans that we know of in Roman service, neither in inscriptions nor in other documentary sources. On the other hand it would seem rather unlikely that one should be able to distinguish a romanized north-Germanic name from the diagnostic local forms that are notoriously present in the Roman frontier provinces (MANN 1983, 26f., 96 and 106).

One can also ask oneself how many would have come home to their barbarian homeland after twenty to twenty-five years romanization, especially if they had got themselves a wife and children during their service, as many soldiers did even though it was against the regulations. But if he did return home, a man in his forties could have lived long enough to father children and to influence the culture of where he lived. This is demonstrated by the age ranges in the Danish cemetery material (SELLEVOLD et al. 1984, 207) and also by the activities of veterans within the Roman Empire (e.g. MANN 1983).

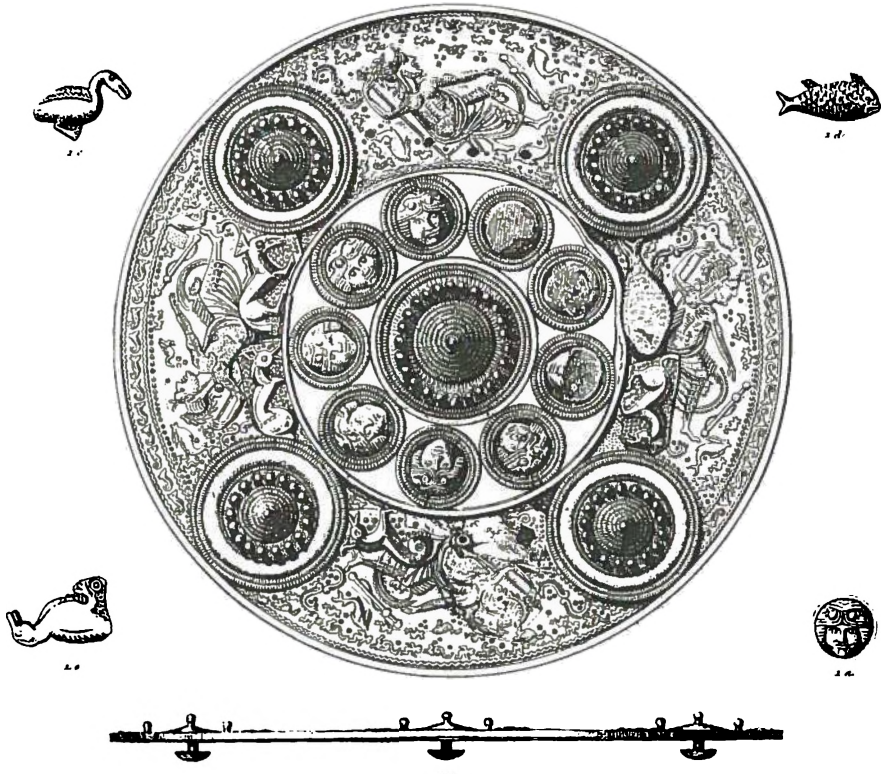


Fig. 1. Phalera disc found at Thorsbjerg Mose, Schleswig-Holstein. The stamped and gilded silver plates of provincial Roman manufacture show a recumbent figure of Mars surrounded by, among other things, geese and dolphins; the central rosette is surrounded by Medusa heads. This is mounted upon a round bronze plate which was riveted on to leather. Two fish, two birds and four animals of Germanic manufacture have been added secondarily. Diameter: 13.1 cm. After ENGELHARDT 1969.

However that may be, it is of course only a very small proportion of the population of Scandinavia who can be suggested to have been such “local Romans”, but such persons may have been – or may have become – important figures in the community.

Such personal connections could, for instance, underlie the finding of the scale of a pine-cone (*Pinus pinea*) and bladdernut seed (*Staphylea pinnata*) in a grave at Blidegn on Funen. The stone pine has its range in the Mediterranean lands, the bladdernut in Central Europe from the Balkans through Bohemia and southern Germany to the south of France (MACKEPRANG 1936).



Fig. 2. A-bracteate, possibly found in Vendsyssel, Jutland. Despite the stylization, the emperor's diadem is visible with the ties at the nape. The runic border is a distorted version of the *futhark*, the runic alphabet, which was probably attributed with magical power. The stamped motif in the centre is surrounded by punched triangles and circles. Diameter: 40.4 mm. AXBOE 1982, no. 66a; *IK* 312,2. Photo Morten Axboe.

There are great quantities of Roman weapons in the Danish bog deposits but these of course could have been imported or appropriated as plunder. The same applies to the two Roman decorations, the *phalerae*, which were found in the Thorsbjerg bog, but it is striking that Germanic animal figures have been added to these (WERNER 1941; cf. MAXFIELD 1981, 91ff.). These thus kept an active function after they had left the Roman Empire (*fig. 1*). The Thorsbjerg find also includes, amongst many other things, a Roman helmet (ENGELHARDT 1969, pl. 5:1-2, but now reconstructed somewhat differently in the present exhibition in Schloss Gottorf) and several pieces of garments which Lise Bender Jørgensen has suggested come from the dress of a Roman auxiliary (JØRGENSEN 1986, 146-155; WILD &

JØRGENSEN 1988). To judge by the Germanic artefacts found in this deposit, the brooches in particular, the defeated attackers came from north-western Germany (ILKJÆR & LØNSTRUP 1982).

It is comprehensible that the Germanic peoples should have invented their own script, the runes, as they apparently did in the first century A.D. (MOLTKE 1985, 64). The inventors of the runes must have had a thorough knowledge of writing and of its possible functions, besides which both these and a sufficient number of others must have felt a need to transplant literacy to their homelands. The prerequisites for this could virtually only have been found in the Roman Empire. We even have examples of Scandinavian weapons "signed" in runes in much the same way as Roman weapon-smiths signed their products (STOKLUND 1986).

The Broskov road at Præstø, with its large stones, finely fitted together, looks like a local version of the carefully constructed Roman road systems (JØRGENSEN 1988, 101f.). And the construction of roads and public amenities were indeed amongst the tasks that the legionaries were occupied with in peacetime (WATSON 1969, 143ff.)

Finally, it is remarkable that in certain rich graves both in Scandinavia and elsewhere in *Germania libera* we can find the adoption of the classical idea of placing the Charon's fee in the mouth or the hand of the deceased (GRÄSLUND 1965-66, 168-174; WERNER 1973, 10-15; GORECKI 1975). Remarkably enough, Roman coins were hardly ever used in Scandinavia for this purpose; they were replaced by "local currency" in the form of small pieces of gold or silver. In southern Gotland, indeed, special coin-like bracteates were struck for this purpose (LAMM & AXBOE 1989). In undisturbed inhumation graves these have even been found by the jaw of the deceased. One of the cremations with similar "coins" stands out for being encircled by carefully dressed stones with stonemason's marks (LAMM & AXBOE 1989, Abb. 42-43). Both this feature (which is not entirely unique to Gotland), and the sudden flowering of high-quality dressed-stone monuments on this island, have been taken as the products of Roman influence (NYLÉN & LAMM 1987, 10 and 17f.)

The Gold Bracteates and their Principal Types

And so we come to the gold bracteates (MACKEPRANG 1952; AXBOE 1982; AXBOE 1991; *IK* 1-3). These are round pendants, struck from a



Fig. 3. B-bracteate from Lellinge Kohave, Præstø amt, Zealand. The principal figure is surrounded by a bird and a horse-like animal besides various symbols, including a swastika. The emperor's diadem here has been transformed into two rows of beads in the hair which terminates at the nape with a Germanic bird's head. The meaning of the runic inscription *salusalu* is obscure. Diameter: 27.8 mm. MACKFRANG 1952, Pl. 5:2; *IK* 105. Photo Morten Axboe.

Fig. 4. Highly stylized C-bracteate from Grumpan, Västergötland, with relief reminiscent of chip-carving. The human head has a bird's head at the forehead and "spirit breath" coming from the nose; the two lines between the hair at the nape and the back of the animal may be a final intimation of the neck ties of the diadem. Diameter: 27.9 mm. MACKFRANG 1952, Pl. 7:9; *IK* 64. Photo Morten Axboe.

Fig. 5. D-bracteate from Nørre Hvam, Ringkøbing amt, Jutland, with a drawing to illustrate the stylized animal on which the beaked head is in grey, the neck and body in dark grey, the legs, shoulder and thigh light grey, while a small human foot and a stylized human ear are shown in black. Diameter: 21.9 mm. MACKFRANG 1952, Pl. 16:3; *IK* 469. Photo Morten Axboe; drawing after *IK*.

matrix die like coins, but only stamped on one side so that the design is more or less visible in a negative version on the back. But they were not intended for use as coins: all of them are provided with wire rims and a loop so that they could be worn in a string or chain around the neck. The largest known bracteate is a good 12 cm. in diameter but the diameter is normally about three to four centimetres.

At present about 900 bracteates are known; most are from Scandinavia but there are also a number spread out along the North Sea littoral to England, where finds are quite numerous, and down into northern and central Germany with outliers reaching into Hungary (the most recent distribution map is in HAUCK 1986, 507). The great majority were undoubtedly struck in Scandinavia but we can also demonstrate local production both in England and in central Europe (HINES 1984, 219; AXBOE & HAUCK 1985, 101f.).

Both genuine Roman gold medallions (*fig. 15*) and certain "barbarian" imitations (*fig. 14*) are known in Scandinavia, and these are usually considered to be the precursors of bracteate production. There is, however, a chronological problem, in that the majority of the medallion imitations that are found in graves have to be dated to the 4th century, while the bracteates apparently appear only in the 5th century, and not, in any quantity, early in the 5th century at that. But the medallion imitations are fairly solid pieces, and they can be heavily worn, so it is possible that there may be a connection after all, despite the chronological discrepancy.

The bracteates are usually divided into four principal types, A, B, C and D. Type A (*figs. 2, 6, 8, 12, 18*) is most "Roman" of these. It has a male bust in profile, sometimes with a hand raised, and often bedecked in the emperor's diadem and round shoulder brooch.

The B-bracteates form a somewhat heterogeneous group which has one or more full human figures (*figs. 3, 24, 25*). These figures may bear the diadem but the round imperial brooch is only found on the A-bracteates.

The C-bracteates (*figs. 4, 19, 22*) have a man's head in profile above the back of an animal which also is seen in profile. This is reminiscent to a degree of a rider but is not, in fact, so: usually the man lacks both legs and trunk. There are a few rather individualistic pieces with clear depictions of a rider, which means that despite the small size of the picture it was possible to depict a rider if desired. But

the interpretation of bracteate designs is a very complicated matter altogether which we can only discuss in a very limited way in this article. The C-bracteates form a numerous group: in 1990, 381 examples are known, against 85 A-bracteates and 83 B-bracteates.

There are finally the D-bracteates, another numerous group, with 329 known examples. These have a stylized animal design and thus are of little relevance with regard to portraiture; the only human features that may be found are detached feet or ears (*fig. 5*). We are faced here with the beginning of Germanic animal art, an style which came to dominate art in Scandinavia right down to and through the Viking Age.

MA*

Roman Coin Finds in Denmark as Prototypes for the Bracteates

The typological connection between Roman medallions from the 3rd-4th cent. and Northern gold bracteates is unmistakable, even though the bracteates belong to a much later period. It also seems evident that the A-bracteates were developed from the obverses with military busts, whereas the C-bracteates had the obverses with civil busts as their model.

The prototypes of the so-called "Emperor with raised hand"-bracteates (*fig. 6*) probably derive from the medallion obverses which show the emperor in military dress, holding a globe in his left hand and raising his right hand in greeting. A corner of the imperial cloak, the *paludamentum*, fixed with a round fibula is just visible around the shoulders (*fig. 7*).

The "Emperor with cloak"-bracteates (*fig. 8*) owe their origin to the less elaborate military busts, where the *paludamentum* is hiding the breast plate and the shoulder fibula has a more prominent position (*fig. 9*).

The C-bracteates (*figs. 19 and 22*) have much in common with the civil busts, where the emperor is depicted as a consul. He is wearing an embroidered toga and holds an eagle-tipped sceptre symbolizing the consular power (*fig. 10*). There is no shoulder fibula, since the emperor is depicted without a cloak.



Fig. 6. A-bracteate from Revsgård, Ribe amt, Jutland. The meaning of the runic inscription is obscure. Diameter: 29 mm. Axboe 1982 Nr. 103; IK 145. Photo Morten Axboe.

The pearl diadem, which more or less replaced the laurel wreath on Roman coins in the early 4th cent., is the usual ornament for the bracteate heads (cf. *fig. 6*), but the two branches above the head on the small Fyn bracteate (*fig. 18*) is probably a reminiscence of the old laurel wreath.

There is every probability that the big bird of the C-bracteates is inspired by the eagle-sceptre; and the harness on the animal beneath the man (*figs. 18 and 19*) have a strong likeness to the embroideries of



Fig. 7. Gold medaillon. Constantine I (306-37) l., diademed, draped and cuirassed; r. hand raised, l. hand holding globe. Leningrad. *RIC* p. 616, 101.



Fig. 8. A-bracteate from Broholm, Gudme herred, Funen. The meaning of the runic inscription is obscure. Diameter: 42.6 mm. MACKEPFRANG 1952, Pl. 3:11; *IK* 225.

the emperor's toga (*fig. 10*). The animal itself is puzzling. It might derive from a horseman, which is an often used reverse type on Roman coins (*fig. 11*). If that is the case it seems that the head-and-animal type of the C-bracteates is composed by both obverse and reverse motifs. As a matter of fact such a mixture of two motifs can be seen on the Undley bracteates from Suffolk (*fig. 12*), which is modelled on a 4th cent. bronze coin (*fig. 13*). But Salin-Lindquist's suggestion (MACKEPFRANG 1952, 93) that the animal came to life from the folds of the *paludamentum*, is more likely. The medallion imitation from Godøy supports this view (*fig. 14*).

The obverse types do then seem to have been the main inspiration for the A- and C-bracteates, whereas the B-bracteates clearly originated from some of the reverse types. Thus the Fakse bracteate (*fig. 24*) is a copy of Victory crowning the emperor (*fig. 15*).



Fig. 9. Solidus. Obv. Valens (364-78) r., diademed and draped.

Fig. 10. Antoninian. Obv. Probus (276-82) l., radiate in consular dress with eagle-tipped sceptre.

Fig. 11. Aureus. Marcus Aurelius (161-80). Rev. Emperor r. on horseback.



Fig. 12. A-bracteate from Undley, Lakenheath, Suffolk. The meaning of the runic inscription *gagaga maga medu* or *gægogæ mægæ medu* is much discussed. Diameter: 23 mm. AXBOE 1982 Nr. 307d; *IK* 374. Photo Morten Axboe.

Fig. 13. Bronze coin. Constantine I (306-37). Obv. Roma, Rev. Wolf suckling Romulus and Remus.

As stated above, the prototypes of the bracteates derive from 4th cent. A.D. They cannot have been much later, since there are few points of resemblance between the bracteates and the coins from the 5th-6th cent., which have quite a different style (*fig. 21*).

As appears from the survey (*fig. 17*) a total of about 9000 Roman coins were found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (FAGERLIE 1967, 177ff.; KROMANN 1986, 264f.; LIND 1988, 21ff.; SKAARE 1976, 33-34). About 500 of these were struck in the 3rd-4th cent. - that is 7 gold medals, c. 90 gold coins, c. 320 silver coins and c. 70 bronze coins (WESTERMARK & WISÉHN 1983; KROMANN 1991). That the number is so modest, is hardly surprising since the surviving coins probably are



Fig. 14. Medaillon imitation from Godøy, Giske sn., Borgund pg., Sunnmøre. Reversed CON-STANS-inscription behind the head. Diameter: 32.5 mm. Axboe 1982 Nr. 12a/1; IK 256. Photo Morten Axboe.

Fig. 15. Gold medaillon found in Trunderup, Gudme hd., Funen. Constantius II (337-61). Rev. Emperor I., crowned by Victory, receives surrendering enemy.

little more than a fragment of the original material, most of which was melted down and converted into other objects. But it is remarkable that the material is so unequally distributed. Funen, especially the district of Gudme, has the overwhelming majority of 3rd-4th cent. gold and silver coins, and Norway, Jutland, Zealand and



Fig. 16. Solidus. Theodosius II (408-50). Obv. Helmeted head of emperor. Rev. Constantinople seated l., holding globe.

Main Sweden also have a few pieces to show. However, in Gotland, Øland and Bornholm, which are renowned for their hoards of late solidi (FAGERLIE 1967), coins from this period are totally absent. Such was the pattern of finds, when Mackeprang's corpus was published in 1952, and in spite of the fact that much new material has been added since then, the pattern is by no means altered (KROMANN 1986).

What role did imported coins and medals play in Iron Age Scandinavia? Were they generally known? Were they somehow used in daily trade, or were they owned by the upper classes alone? We can give no unambiguous answer except for Norway. The coins found here

| | Nor- way | Jut- land | Funen | Zea- land | Born- holm | Got- land | Øland | Main Swed. | Total |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|--------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------|---------------|-------|
| Denars c.60-230 | c. 10 | c. 500 | c. 280 | c. 500 | c. 1200 | c. 4600 | c. 150 | c. 900 | 7040 |
| Aur-sol c.270-395 | 4 | 3 | c. 80 | 5 | | | | 2 | 96 |
| Medallion. 4th c. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | | | | | 7 |
| Medallion imitation | 8 | 1 | 1 | | | | | 5 | 15 |
| Siliquae 4th c. | 3 | 6 | c. 300 | 9 | | | | | 318 |
| Solidi 5th-6th c. | 1 | c. 10 | c. 15 | 5 | c. 150 | c. 260 | c. 310 | c. 145 | 865 |

Fig. 17. Survey of the Roman coin finds in Scandinavia.

were all locked and pierced, which means that they functioned as ornaments and did almost certainly not circulate as coins. But in Jutland, Funen, Zealand and mainland Sweden, an import of denarii seems to have started in the early 3rd cent., and it is evident that in some places as e.g. Lundeberg in south eastern Funen they occur in connection with foreign trade (THOMSEN 1989; KROMANN 1990). At other sites, however, such as Vorbasse near Ribe, the part played by the coins seems to have been very small indeed, and it is hard to believe in a diffused use of coins. But the vast majority of the Scandinavian denarii was found in Øland, Gotland and Bornholm. The denarii from these areas are very worn, and they seem to have arrived at a late date, after having circulated for a long time somewhere outside the Roman empire. The importation period of these denarii was probably short and due to war rather than to some sort of trade or other regular intercourse. It seems that many of these coins were deposited soon after their arrival, and it is open to doubts if they were used as coins in local trade (KROMANN 1984, 38; LIND 1988, 183-203). A similar part was played by the solidi from the 5th and 6th cent., and even if some of them may have continued their travels from the Baltic islands to the north and west, they can hardly have actually circulated as coins in Scandinavia (KYHLBERG 1983, 41).

Returning to the most obvious bracteate prototypes, i.e. gold coins and medallions from the 3rd and 4th cent., they were probably more or less reserved for the upper classes. Most of them were transformed into jewellery (KROMANN 1986, 269), which was probably the reason why they survived long enough to give inspiration to the bracteates.

But since the prototypes have such an unequal geographical distribution, and since they are so much older than the bracteates, it is unlikely that the idea of making bracteates arose independently in several places. It seems more probable that the production began in one or perhaps a few places, and the area of Gudme, where the bulk of the prototypes have been found, may have been such a place.

The wide distribution of the bracteates themselves supports the theory mentioned above that the concentration of wealth in the Migration period also meant concentrations of power, which made it possible to communicate easily from region to region.

AK

The Prince of the Gods

Both the imperial insignia and other details of Roman coins were taken over to the bracteates and integrated with motifs proper to these pendants.

Both on the medallion imitations and on the A-bracteates the imperial brooch and diadem can be seen, reproduced in varying degrees of detail. A bracteate from the Broholm find in eastern Funen (fig. 18) reproduces the brooches and the diadems clearly, with the central jewels over the forehead especially emphasized, and the inscription is *almost* legible: to the right of the loop is "TANS P F AUC", which could only have been taken from a coin with the legend "DN Constans P(ius) F(elix) Aug(ustus)" - "Our Lord, the pious and blessed Emperor, Constans". This could undoubtedly be evidence of direct copying from a coin that the bracteate-maker had before him, but if that were the case he has deviated from his model by doubling the portrait: we know of no coins of Constans with double bust (HAUCK 1981, 193).



Fig. 18. A-bracteate from the Broholm hoard, eastern Funen. Diameter: 30.1 mm. MACKEPBRANG 1952, Pl. 3:6; *IK* 47,2. After *IK*.

Fig. 19. C-bracteate from an unknown place on Funen. Diameter 25.3 mm. MACKEPBRANG 1952, Pl. 8:18; *IK* 59. Photo Morten Axboe.



Fig. 20. Mosaic from the Archbishop's chapel at Ravenna, laid around A.D. 500. After HAUCK 1987a.

The round imperial brooches occur only on medallion imitations and A-bracteates, but the diadems remain common on B- and C-forms; once again the detail in which they are reproduced varies.



Fig. 21. Reverse of an aureus, issued under Constantine I (306-37). Emperor advancing r., trophy across l. shoulder; to l. and r. captive. Diameter: c. 26 mm. After KROMANN 1989.

A bracteate from Funen (*fig. 19*) is very “classical” in the form of the man’s head and has a distinct diadem with ties at the neck. It does not have the large central jewel but the front is emphasized by an extra line of beads. On a number of other bracteates one sees only a single line or string of beads through the hair, or even just the ties of the strings at the neck (*Figs. 2, 3, 4 and 8*). It is, however, evident that on a considerable number of A-, B- and C-bracteates there was an intention to represent a *ruler*, and that the Roman imperial insignia were used to mark his status. This is not unparalleled: on contemporary, early-Christian pictures Christ can appear in imperial gear (HAUCK 1987a, 173). We have an example in a mosaic (*fig. 20*) which was laid in the archbishop’s chapel in Ravenna around A.D. 500 and thus is exactly contemporary with the bracteates. Christ stands in military dress with a mail corslet and a skirt, with the cross over his shoulder, treading his enemies under foot; quite like the Emperor Constantine I was shown triumphant (*fig. 21*).

On the large C-bracteate from Funen, which represents one of the most beautiful and most detailed stamps known, we again find the diadem given as a string of beads with ties at the nape (*fig. 22*). But here it is combined with an unusually fine, plaited pony-tail. This could be another symbol of lordship; we know, at least, that the



Fig. 22. C-bracteate from an unknown place on Funen. The two runic inscriptions around the edge include, *inter alia*, the “charm words” *lapu* (= *invitation*) and *alu* (? = *ale*) which are also found in several other inscriptions; the remainder of these inscriptions is incomprehensible. Beneath the head of the beast is *houaR* (= *the High One*). Diameter: 37.15 mm. MACKEPRANG 1952, Pl. 6:19; *IK* 58. Photo Morten Axboe.

Merovingian kings wore their hair long as a particular sign of status. This can be detected on King Childeric’s signet ring (*fig. 23*), which was deposited in his grave in A.D. 481/482. The long-haired Merovingian kings are mentioned by Frankish chroniclers, such as Gregory of Tours, and long hair can also be seen on a number of later Merovingian kings’ signets (WALLACE-HADRILL 1962, 156ff. and 246; HAUCK 1987b, 156ff.).

But if we consider the bracteates, with their more or less comprehensible runic inscriptions with amuletic words, with the swastika and other apparently magic symbols, it is not probable that it is an earthly lord that is portrayed. A clue may be found in the runic inscription under the animal’s head on the large C-bracteate from Funen (*fig. 22*): it reads *houaR*, “the high one”. This could be the signature of the runemaster (MÜLLER 1988, 126f., 140f. and 155f.), but it is also one of the names that is used for Odinn in the Viking Age:



Fig. 23. Impression of a signet ring from the grave of the Frankish king Childeric at Tournai, Belgium. After WALLACE-HADRILL 1962.

it is found, for instance, in *Hávamál*, “The Words of the High One”. One could indeed have it both ways, for Odinn was certainly *inter alia* the lord of the runes and of magic.

Here we reach the heart of the problem: what is the purpose of the bracteate designs? Who do they represent? This is a large and problematic topic on which Professor Karl Hauck in Münster has worked for many years now. In what follows I shall repeatedly build upon results which he and other researchers in his bracteate project have come up with. The most up-to-date report on the *status quo* of research is Hauck 1992, in where place-name research and other disciplines also have a part to play. It should, however, also be noted that

there are still differing opinions on the subject of Hauck's results amongst Scandinavian prehistorians.

According to Hauck it is Odinn who plays a quite dominant role on the bracteates. On the A-bracteates he is shown in his role as the prince of the gods while some of the B-bracteates show him in the course of various acts of magic.

On some of the more detailed C-bracteates – on the large bracteate from Funen (*fig. 22*), for instance – we can see more than just a man's head above an animal that looks more or less like a horse. If one looks closely, there is also a human hand on the neck of the beast and a human foot near one of its forelegs. Hauck explains this on the strength of later medieval charms that are preserved in both pagan and Christian versions. Their function is to cure a lame horse, and a man has to “draw his hand along its flank, whisper in its ear and tread upon its right foot” – “leg to leg, joint to joint, as it was was it best” (free translation from HAUCK 1983, 519 and 522). The C-bracteates thus function by demonstrating the healing power of Odinn that was still called upon in these later charms. Hauck has also pointed out more evidence for it being Odinn who, as the prince of the gods, is virtually the only figure to appear on the bracteates (HAUCK & HOOPS 1973; HAUCK 1988, 22-31).

In the Viking Period, however, Odinn was certainly not the only god of the Scandinavians and he can hardly have been so in the Migration Period either. This is, in fact, also demonstrated by the bracteates where several figures can appear together, especially in a small group of B-bracteates unique in their design of three persons together (MACKEPFRANG 1952, Pl.6:11-16). The largest and most attractive member of this group is the large bracteate from the Gudme II hoard (AXBOE 1985), but an important detail is found only on one of the pieces: a bracteate that was found near Fakse (*fig. 24*). This is a broken feather- or branch-like object one end of which is lodged in the breast of the figure in the middle. This is so peculiar a detail that it must justify associating this picture to the myth surviving in Norse literature which includes a matching detail. Hauck, consequently, interprets this bracteate design as a representation of the death of Baldr. Baldr stands in the centre, with the mistletoe in his trunk, while Odinn can be seen to the right, identified by his spear, and Loki stands to the left, in woman's clothing. It was in this tale that Loki



Fig. 24. B-bracteate from Fakse, Zealand. Diameter: 26.7 mm. MACKPRANG 1952, Pl. 6:11; *IK* 51,1. Photo Morten Axboe.

Fig. 25. B-bracteate, found near Trollhättan, Västergötland. Diameter: 28 mm. MACKPRANG 1952, Pl. 5:22; *IK* 190. Photo Morten Axboe.

dressed up as *Tøk*, who would “weep dry tears over Baldr’s pyre” and thus prevented him from coming back to life. But at the same time this *Dreigötter-Brakteat* is an independent Scandinavian rendering of a Roman motif (*fig. 15*): the winged Victory, with a palm leaf in one hand, who crowns the victorious Emperor (in the centre) while he nobly pardons his enemies.

In a similar way, it is only reasonable to interpret the bracteate from Trollhättan (*fig. 25*) from the later tale of Tyr, who lost his hand in the mouth of Fenrisulfr. For although we should not use the Eddaic poems and the other sources for late Scandinavian paganism as a checklist for the bracteate designs, a continuity in religious motifs must be presumed.

A Changing Society

If the bracteate designs centre on the prince of the gods this must have something to say about the society and the people who pro-

duced and used the bracteates. In the first case, they were evidently familiar with the concept of a ruler, and with the symbolic language which the Roman Empire used to praise *its* divine sovereign, for the Roman coins were a medium of deliberate imperial propaganda (HANNESTAD 1986; KROMANN 1989). It was the concept of the divine emperor that was the basic ideological foundation of the Roman state.

On the other hand, there is no reason why anybody up in the north, in Scandinavia, should act as propagandists for the imperial power; they must have had their own reasons for using his portrait. Both the principal motif in itself and the details that were selected for copying must have been comprehensible, and must have been used in a context that was so important that gold was used as the material for its representation. And the massive emphasis on Odinn in his role as lord is so striking that it virtually must have some mundane cause. If we look upon this as the projection of political ideals into the religious sphere, the establishment of a divine lord could be connected to the attempt by worldly princes to establish their power here in Scandinavia. For Man does indeed have an inclination to create his gods in his own image.

We really know nothing for certain of political history in Scandinavia before the Viking Period. When the historical sources begin to flow we find, on the whole, the three kingdoms that we know from the Middle Ages, but it is unclear when they were formed. In the case of Norway, according to Snorri Sturluson, this took place at the battle of Hafrsfjord in the late 9th century. In Denmark, Harold Bluetooth has often been credited with this on the basis of the inscription "he won for himself all of Denmark and Norway" on the large Jelling stone of the second half of the tenth century, but he cannot have been the first to have done this.

In the years around A.D. 800 we know, from the annals of the Frankish kingdom, that the Danish King Godfred and his successors were opponents whom Charlemagne had to take very seriously indeed, and it appears that their kingdom at this time may have included both Scania and the Oslofjord region (ALBRECHTSEN 1976, 11-26). From as early as c. 520 we hear of Chlochilaich, the king of the Danes, being killed during a raid on northern Gaul (GREGORY OF TOURS, *The History of the Franks*, III:3). This man is presumably identical with the

Hygelac who is named in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. But we have no idea whether in the fifth century the Danes lived primarily in what is now Denmark; indeed we are right in the middle of the Migration Period; and to illustrate the uncertainty of our knowledge and the variability of tradition, *Beowulf* has Hygelac as king of the Geatas, who presumably were living in Central Sweden. We also do not know what power and authority a “king” really had (cf. NÄSMAN 1988, 126f. and 131-136).

If we look at archaeological finds from Scandinavia we can trace how the centre of gravity of the distribution of finds of imported goods and gold shifts through the course of the Iron Age. In the Early Roman Iron Age there is a clustering of finds on Lolland, including, amongst others, the rich graves at Hoby and Juellinge (HANSEN 1987, Karte 16). In the Later Roman Iron Age the centre of gravity shifts to eastern Zealand, to Stevns in particular (HANSEN 1987, Karte 25). Here we have the extraordinary rich princely grave at Himlingøje, and Ulla Lund Hansen has shown how in this area a great part of the importation of Roman luxury goods to Scandinavia was controlled: the finest and most singular articles went no further into Scandinavia than to eastern Zealand while the more run-of-the-mill goods could be redistributed to other regions (HANSEN 1987, 220ff.; HANSEN 1988).

In the Earlier Germanic Iron Age there are relatively few imported glass or bronze vessels, but this is, by contrast, the most opulent period in Danish antiquity as far as gold is concerned. In both respects the area around Gudme in south-eastern Funen is absolutely pre-eminent (HANSEN 1988; FONNESBECH-SANDBERG 1987). Here we find the gold hoard from Broholm, with more than four kilograms of gold, and several more gold and silver hoards, including the bracteate hoard Gudme II (AXBOE 1985). The status of the Gudme region apparently reaches its zenith in the Migration Period, but its pre-eminence can also be traced before and after this period according to the evidence of the excavations at the present-day village of Gudme, in the cemetery of Møllegårdsmarken and at the possible “port-of-trade” at Lundeborg (THRANE 1987; THRANE in HAUCK 1992; PETERSEN 1988; THOMSEN 1989). In the course of time, a good quantity of imported items has been found at Gudme (*fig. 26*), coming from widely dispersed parts of Europe.

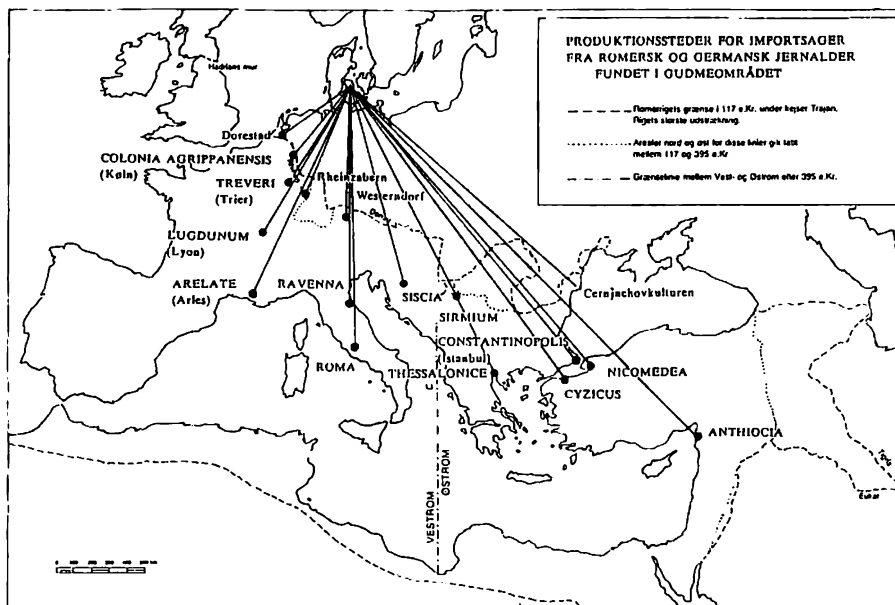


Fig. 26. Map of the sources of coins, glass and terra sigillata found in the Gudme area. After PETERSEN 1988.

Such a concentration of wealth was very probably accompanied by a matching power and, possibly, religious influence too: *Gudme* means “the home of the gods”. And in several ways there seem to be changes in Germanic social structure in the course of the Roman Iron Age; certainly, *inter alia*, with their roots in the influence of the neighbouring Roman Empire and in the turmoil of the Migration Period.

An important factor in the development of the Germanic chiefdoms and kingdoms was, apparently, the growth of the retinue system (see, for instance, HEDEAGER 1987, 132f. and HEDEAGER 1988, 249ff.). We have to assume that kinship had great significance for the individual Iron-age person: the family was what one belonged to, and in times of need one could find help and support from one’s kindred. But during the Early Iron Age a class of professional soldiers seems to have emerged, associated with a chieftain in a relationship of personal loyalty without being related to him - like Hrólfr Kraki and his warriors whom we know of from the sagas. A warrior class system of

this kind must have needed to distinguish itself in some way from the world around it and to maintain an order of rank within itself.

The Roman army already had a well-developed system of badges of rank and distinction (MAXFIELD 1981). And in the course of the Later Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period it appears that the Germanic folk create their own such decorations, probably also in association with the emergence of the known Germanic kingdoms: the Goths, the Franks, and so on. From the 6th and 7th centuries one can note the ring-swords, which the German archaeologist Heiko Steuer believes were distributed to the selected warriors of the prince, to a form of retinue; the ornamented helmets that are found in rich graves of the same period may have played a similar role (*fig. 27*) (STEUER 1987). In Denmark we know of four loose sword-hilt rings of gold, all of them from the Gudme area, where a couple of simpler, bronze examples have also been found (THRANE in HAUCK 1992; one is illustrated in THRANE 1987, Fig. 7:511).

In the Later Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period it is the armrings which are interpreted as marks of status. Joachim Werner regards the so-called snake's-head rings as badges of the retainer while the so-called *Kolben* armrings (penannular armrings with thickened terminals) were restricted to members of a royal family (WERNER 1980; HAUCK 1985). I am doubtful as to whether the difference in rank between different ring-types can be interpreted so precisely (STEUER 1982, 247ff.), but in any event there is a *Kolben* arming in Childeric's grave, where it was deposited together with a gold onion-head brooch. This is a Roman status symbol (STEUER 1982, 245ff.) and thus one example of how the Roman and the Germanic could be combined, just as Childeric's signet ring - which undoubtedly is a Roman feature - displays his Frankish royal symbol, his long hair. In Denmark we find both ring-types in the Himlingøje graves and the Thorsbjerg bog finds, and there are two *Kolben* armrings in the gold hoard of Broholm (Catalogue: KYHLBERG 1986, 118-121).

It is worth mentioning that armrings (*armillae*) found a place amongst the Roman military decorations, amongst other things in the form of open rings with thickened or animal-head terminals (MAXFIELD 1981, 86-90). Werner, indeed, sees the *armillae* as direct prototypes for the Germanic snake's-head rings (WERNER 1980, 24ff.). It seems that none of the Scandinavian snake's-head rings show signs

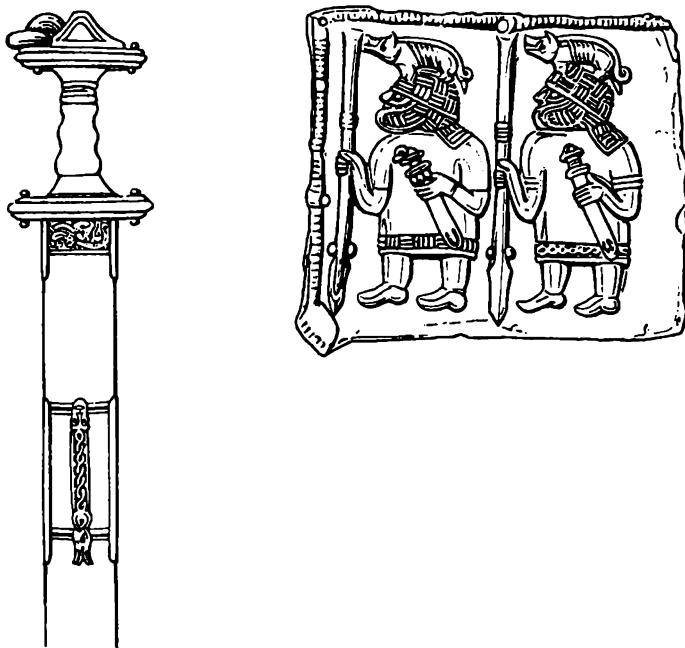


Fig. 27. To the left: the upper part of a ring-sword from grave 7 at Valsgårde, Uppland. This name is given because of the ring with an attachment loop which can be seen in the upper left-hand corner of the hilt. The ring may be loose, or, as here, cast in one with the loop and therefore with no utilitarian function. To the right: a bronze die from Toroslunda on Öland which shows two warriors with swords and magnificent helmets; the leading warrior has a ring-hilted sword. The patric die was intended for the stamping of foils for the decoration of similar display helmets; it measures 50 x 57.5 mm. After SEIFER 1987.

of wear or any other evidence of use, not even those found in graves. This could well mean that they were not used as ordinary dress jewellery; were the surviving examples produced especially for burial or sacrifice, or were they only worn/displayed on very particular occasions, just as Roman soldiers only wore their decorations in parades and such like?

Politics and Religion

The multifarious and deep influences exercised upon the Germanic communities in Scandinavia and central Europe in the first four centuries A.D. must have resulted from continuous contact with the Roman Empire which in certain cases must have been quite intensive.

This is not just a matter of some relatively short periods such as when usurpers in Gaul had an acute and particular need for mercenaries, even though such episodes can leave their mark on finds from free Germania (e.g. WERNER 1973). But if the Germans were not already subject to continuous Roman influence such special engagements could hardly have resulted in fundamental changes in society; in such a case even the most precious imported Roman showpieces would have had no value beyond that of curiosities.

The bracteates clearly belong in an upper-class milieu, with the elite who clearly sought to appropriate and demonstrate power and influence. To wear, to give away and to sacrifice gold were important elements in the creation of prestige in a state of competition such as the elite of the Migration Period found themselves in (HINES 1989; cf. HEDEAGER 1990, 39-86). I take it for granted that the bracteates had a magical, amuletic function – through the power of the pictures, the runic inscriptions and the symbols that are found on them – together with their value as jewellery. This means that an interpretation of their motifs will contribute to the understanding of the religious ideology of the bracteates' users.

But in the Scandinavian Migration Period too, religion and political power must have been irretrievably interwoven – in general terms, just as they were in the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages – and as far as I can see, the bracteates are capable of illustrating political notions *as well as* religious ones, essentially through the recurrent use of symbols of lordship. Several Germanic royal dynasties later claimed that they had divine ancestors – as a rule, in fact, Odinn himself – which can properly be interpreted as an element in the legitimization of the dynasty, and as a parallel of a sort to the later ages' "king by the grace of God". When the Frankish King Clovis converted to Christianity in 496 he was praised for his renunciation of the divine status of his pagan ancestors (STAUBACH 1983, 29f. with further references). In the case of England, Bede notes that many kings reckoned their descent from Woden (BEDA VENERABILIS, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* I.15; cf. LOYN 1962, 230). According to Snorri, Skjold, the founder of the royal Danish Skjoldung dynasty, was the son of Odinn, and Earl Hakon also reckoned his descent from a son of Odinn. The kings of Uppsala, by contrast, drew their lineage from Yngvi/Freyr, i.e. from one of the Vanir (*Ynglinga Saga*, Ch. 5-10).

The bracteates show how far the Scandinavians had the assurance to appropriate and exploit the Roman influences to their own ends. With the insignia of the Roman emperor, Odinn was elevated as the prince of the gods at the expense of the other deities, and this must have made a particular sense for those in power in this world at a time when a kingship of the Danes may have been in the process of formation. Odinn, the Prince of the Gods, could indeed have been held forward as a model for worldly imitation.

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Summary

Roman influence in Scandinavia was not just a matter of barbarian craftsmen simply imitating foreign objects or taste. Through almost 500 years of neighbourhood with the Romans the Germanic peoples acquired not only a number of Roman objects, but also a knowledge of many aspects of Roman civilization; possibly partly through (hereditary?) service in the Roman army. Not only their material culture was affected, but their society and way of living as a whole.

The Scandinavian gold bracteates of the Migration Period adopt important details from the pictorial language used by the Romans to praise the divine emperor: i.a. the diadem with a central jewel and the round imperial brooch. The motif of Victory crowning the emperor was also taken over by the bracteate makers. The sources can be traced to Roman coins and medallions, but motifs and details are used and integrated within a Germanic context of magic and mythology, apparently praising Odinn as the lord of magic with powers of healing and elevating him as prince of the gods. The conscious use of details testifies not only to a knowledge of their meaning, but also to a political situation in Scandinavia with powerful lords struggling to establish themselves, perhaps as kings of an early Denmark, and propagating Odinn at the expense of the other gods as a divine model and legitimation to worldly ambitions.

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