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The coins of Søren Norby in Finnish finds

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Søren Norby was a Danish privateer and admiral, who held Gotland as his fief from 1517 to 1525. His career, which came to an end outside the walls of Florence in 1530, also has numismatic interest, for he issued coins in Visby. According to Georg Galster, whose words echo those of Peter Hauberg,¹ they “were intended, among other things, as pay for the comparatively large forces which he had to maintain in defence of the island (...)”.² Undoubtedly Norby needed much cash for his military enterprises outside Gotland too.

He seems to have visited Finland for the first time in 1504 in the retinue of Svante Nilsson, the newly elected regent of Sweden. In 1507 and 1508, Norby’s fleet harried the coasts of Finland. His role in Finnish history is, however, mainly connected with the years 1522-23 when he conquered Finland and brought it back under Danish Union rule. As a reward, he was enfeoffed with the whole of western Finland. His coins in Finnish finds belong to this short period preceding the final dissolution of the Kalmar Union.

The coins

The first mention of coins issued by Søren Norby dates from the end of April 1523. Minting came to an end in Visby probably in the spring of 1525, but it continued for a short time in Landskrona in Scania and Ronneby in Blekinge.³

The coins minted in Visby were shillings and hvids. They all bear the name SEVERIN NORBI and his coat-of-arms on the obverse. On the reverse the shillings have either the traditional lamb emblem of Gotland with the words AGNE DEI MISERERE MEI or the Danish coat-of-arms and the inscription MO[neta] NO[va] WISBICEN[sis]. The latter type of shillings is also dated, either 1524 or 1525. The hvids belong all to the undated type with the lamb. According to Hauberg the undated coins were “without doubt” struck in 1523, and this view has been shared by later writers.⁴

All the seventeen coins in the Finnish finds are shillings of the undated type with the lamb. Three varieties of this type are known. Those of the coins that can be attributed exactly belong with

1 Hauberg 1891, 49.

2 Galster 1972, 118.

3 Hauberg 1891, 49-50, 67-68; Rasmusson 1961, 91-94; Lagerqvist 1970, 155, 158-160; Galster 1972, 37.

4 Hauberg 1891, 49; Rasmusson 1961, 94; Lagerqvist 1970, 155; Galster 1972, 37.



Fig. 1. Søren Norby's shilling from Kuusisto castle ruin. Variety with "L" in the obv. legend.

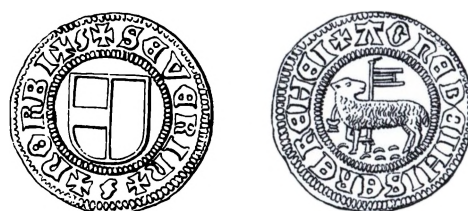


Fig. 2. Søren Norby's shilling (Hauberg 1891, p. 67). Variety with "S" in the obv. legend.

two exceptions to the variety that has the letter L between two crosses in the obverse inscription: +SEVERIN+L+NORBI+S (Fig. 1). On two coins the legend is +SEVERIN+)(+NORBI+S. The inscription with ")((" continued to be used on the coins of 1524 and 1525, and so it may well be later than the variety with "L".

There are also shillings with the letter S between the two crosses (Fig. 2), but this variety is not represented in the Finnish find material.

The finds

Fourteen of the coins come from a single find place, the ruins of the Kuusisto (in Swedish, Kustö) bishop's castle in what is now the town of Kaarina (S:t Karins) near Turku (Åbo). There is one coin from the Perniö (Björnå) church, some 70 km southeast of Turku, and one from Turku itself. All these find places are situated on the southwest coast of Finland. The only find from the interior comes from Häme (Tavastehus) castle (See map).

All the coins belong to the National Museum of Finland. Unfortunately most of them are so dark and corroded that a photographic presentation of all of them would have been impracticable.

Kuusisto bishop's castle

Shillings with "L" in the obverse legend: 11 coins, weighing 2.75 – 2.72 – 2.71 – 2.38 – 2.37 – 2.28 – 2.25 – 1.96 – 1.92 – 1.90 and 1.45 g (the last coin corroded).

Shillings with ")((" in the obverse legend: 2 coins, weighing 2.59 and 2.35 g.

Unattributed fragment (0.37 g)

With the exception of the fragment, the coins listed above were acquired in the late nineteenth century and there is no detailed information of their

find spots.⁵ Some (most?) of the coins may have been found together.

Perniö church

One shilling found in 1963, with "L" in the obverse legend. Weight 2.05 g.⁶

Turku

One shilling found in 1901 in earth removed from Iso Hämeenkatu street (no. 17). The coin cannot be located at present and its weight is unrecorded, but it belongs to the type with the lamb.⁷

Häme castle

One shilling found in 1973, with "L" in the obverse legend. Weight 1.61 g (corroded).⁸

Historical background and comments

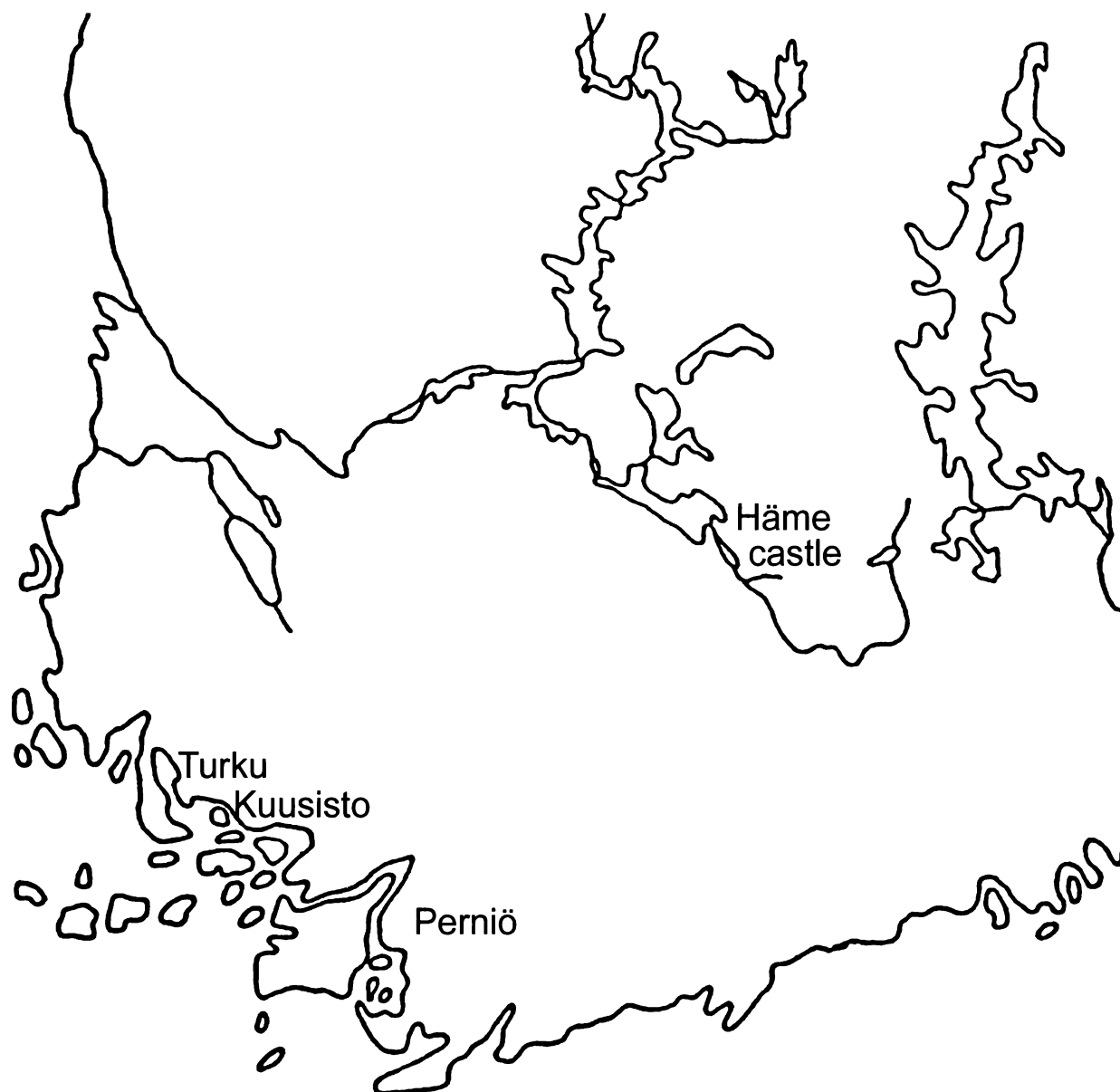
In 1521, Sweden was breaking away from the Kalmar Union. In Finland opposition to Danish rule was led by Arvid Kurck, the last catholic bishop of Turku, who had his residence in Kuusisto castle. After the arrival of Norby and his troops in Finland in May 1522 Kurck fled the country but on his way to Sweden he perished in a shipwreck. The new situation did not, however, last more than a year, for in 1523 it was the turn for a Swedish army to land

5 The first coins from the castle ruin were acquired in 1883, and there have been continuous excavations in recent years. The inventory numbers of the coins in the Coin Cabinet are 422:2-10, "find 144", 22/1893 (3 coins) and 89020:50.

6 Coin Cabinet 63047:189.

7 National Museum 4034; annotation by Pekka Sarvas.

8 Coin Cabinet 77058:78.



the find places

in Finland. The Danish garrisons in the Turku and Kuusisto castles capitulated in August 1523, Häme castle fell soon thereafter, and on 10 October the last Danish stronghold in Finland, Viipuri (Viborg, now Russian Vyborg) castle in Karelia, came under Swedish rule.⁹

It is hardly conceivable that Søren Norby's coins could have reached Finland only after the Danish forces had left the country. Most of them have, after all, been found in Kuusisto castle which was the base

of Norby's fleet in Finland.¹⁰ The finds from Kuusisto castle also include many other Danish coins, but none of them can be dated later than 1523.¹¹ This is a strong indication that the undated coins presented in this paper were struck before August 1523.

⁹ Pohjolan-Pirhonen 1960, 4-11; Törnblom 1992, 409-412; Suvanto 2006, 125-128.

¹⁰ Törnblom 1992, 111.

¹¹ Taavitsainen 1979, 13-14, 38-41, 67-68.

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