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Solidi with Filigreed Tubular Suspension Loops from Udovice in Serbia

By *Ivana Popović*

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Two gold pendants, each consisting of a filigreed tube acting as a suspension loop for two attached solidus coins, were found in 1906 and 1925 at the village of Udovice. This is in Serbia, near Grocka, some 20 km down the Danube from Belgrade. One pendant has solidi of Valentinian III and Severus III, the other yet another solidus of Valentinian III and one possibly struck during the joint rule of Honorius and Constantius III. The pendants belong to a necklace made in the 460s in the Gothic cultural circle. Their closest parallels are a pendant with solidi of Theodosius II from Lübchow in Pomerania and pendants with gold bracteates from Kongsvad å and Stenholts vang on Zealand.

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Two gold pendants, each consisting of a filigreed tube acting as a suspension loop for two attached solidus coins, were found in 1906 and 1925 at the village of Udovice. This is in Serbia, near Grocka, some 20 km down the Danube from Belgrade. The site was once on the road between two legionary camps, *Singidunum* and *Viminacium* (fig. 1). In the absence of any archaeological excavations in Udovice, the find context is unknown. Both pendants were acquired by the National Museum in Belgrade. Unfortunately, one was stolen from the museum's permanent exhibition in 1978. With the aid of the inventory notes, photographs and a plaster cast, however, many of its characteristics can still be determined.

The two pendants are identical (figs. 2–3) and display the same profile, clearly belonging to the same set of jewellery. The tubes have a circular cross-section, length 48 mm, and have moulded openings framed with thick twisted wire. Their entire surface is decorated with thicker and thin-

ner twisted wire, alternating motifs of unbeaded herringbone and straight beaded wire. At the middle of each tube is a biconical cuff consisting of two rings joined by two ribs and decorated with a row of reduced beaded-wire peltae. This cuff divides each tube into two symmetrical parts. At the middle of each half is a slimmer cuff consisting of two parts joined by twisted wire. Each of these side cuffs holds a solidus in a notch on its lower edge. Each solidus is framed with thin twisted wire and each notch with beaded wire.

The 1906 Pendant

A tubular pendant with a solidus of Valentinian III and another one possibly struck during the joint rule of Honorius and Constantius III (fig. 2). Found in 1906, stolen from the National Museum Belgrade in 1978. Length 48 mm, diameter of solidi 22 and 23 mm, weight 24.40 g. The solidi are orientated so that the Emperors'

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Fig. 1. Location of Udovice, east of Belgrade in Serbia.

portraits are approximately right-side-up when the tube is held horizontally.

1. AV. DNPLAVALENTI – NIANVSPFAVC. Emperor's bust facing right, wearing *paludamentum* cloak fastened with circular brooch with pendants; on his head a crown with *pendilia* pendants.

1. RV. VICTORI – AAVCCC. Emperor enthroned. In his right hand a long cross, in his left hand a globe with Victoria above it. Right foot is on a snake with human head. In field: left R, right V. In ex.: COMOB. Solidus rather worn, struck in Ravenna for Valentinian III (425–455; see Cohen 1930, 212, no. 19).

2. AV. DNHONORI – VSPFAVC. Emperor's bust facing right, wearing *paludamentum* cloak fastened with circular brooch with pendants; on his head a crown with *pendilia* pendants.

2. RV. VICTORI – AAVCCC. Emperor stan-

ding, facing right. In his right hand a long *labarum* military standard, in the left a globe with Victoria above it. Left foot is on a captive. In field: left R, right V. In ex.: COMOB. Worn solidus, struck in Ravenna, possibly during the joint rule of Honorius and Constantius III (AD 421; see Cohen 1930, 227, no. 44–45).

Bibl.: Vasić (1906) 1907, p. 208; Garašanin 1951, p. 182, plate XXIV b; Garašanin & Kovačević 1961, plate LXII; Vasić 1992, p. 294; Popović 1993, p. 53–54, plates IV, 11, 11 a; Popović 2001, p. 53–58, 202–204, cat. 67a.

The 1925 Pendant

A tubular pendant with solidi of Valentinian III and Severus III (fig. 3). Found in 1925, National Museum Belgrade, inv. 556/IV. Length 48 mm, diameter of solidi 22 mm, weight 25.18 g. The



Fig. 2. Gold pendant with solidi found in 1906 at Udovice. Length 48 mm. A: averse. B: reverse. Photograph National Museum, Belgrade.



Fig. 3. Gold pendant with solidi found in 1925 at Udovice. Length 48 mm. A: averse. B: reverse. Photograph N. Borić, National Museum, Belgrade.

solidi are orientated so that the Emperors' portraits are approximately right-side-up when the tube is held horizontally.

1. AV. DNPLAVALENTI – NIANVSPFAVC. Emperor's bust facing right, wearing *paludamentum* cloak fastened with circular brooch with pendants; on his head a crown with *pendilia* pendants.

1. RV. VICTORI – AAVCCC. Emperor enthroned. In his right hand a long cross, in his left hand a globe with Victoria above it. Right foot is on a snake with human head. In field: left R, right V. In ex.: COMOB. It is not clear whether the right-hand field reads V (Ravenna) or M (Roma). Worn solidus struck in Ravenna or Rome for Valentinian III (425–455; see Cohen 1930, 212, no. 19).

2. AV. DNLIBIVSSEV – ERVSPFAVC. Emperor's bust facing right, wearing *paludamentum* cloak fastened with circular brooch with

pendants; on his head a crown with *pendilia* pendants.

2. RV. VICTORI – AAVCCC. Emperor enthroned. In his right hand a long cross, in his left hand a globe with Victoria above it. Right foot is on a snake with human head. In field: left R, right V. In ex.: COMOB. Uncirculated solidus struck in Ravenna for Severus III (461–465; see Cohen 1930, 227, no. 8).

Bibl.: Saria 1925, p. 319; Garašanin 1951, p. 182; Vasić 1992, p. 294; Brenot, Metzger 1992, p. 337, no. 67; Popović 1993, p. 53, plates IV, 10, 10 a; Popović 2001, p. 53–58, 202–204, fig. 9, cat. 67.

Historical Context

The numismatic analysis offers a number of useful insights. Of the four solidi, the youngest is that of Severus III (461–465) which appears to be uncirculated. This indicates that the pendants were made in the 460s. Geographically

speaking, the solidi come from Ravenna and possibly Rome, that is, western mints whose issues are rare in the Serbian part of the Danube region. This may have to do with historically documented events.

After the invasion of the Huns, Roman border defences along the Danube were destroyed in 441. This gap in the border allowed an incursion of Germanic tribes, the Ostrogoths above all, onto the right-hand bank of Danube and into the Balkan hinterland. In 468, Anthemius (who would go on to become first *magister militum* and then Emperor of the West), together with *magister militum illyricum* Marcellinus, led them on a military campaign against Italy, which was at that time mostly controlled by Vandals. When *magister militum* Aspar and Vandal leader Genseric made a separate truce, the Gothic troops appear to have left Italy (Stein 1968, pp. 389–391). At this time, solidi struck in Italy may have been taken back into the Balkans as war booty.

Previous Discussion

Although the Udovice pendants are extraordinary examples of Migration Period goldsmith work, they have not received much attention in Serbian scholarship. Beside notes on their acquisitions by the National Museum in Belgrade (Vasić (1906) 1907, p. 206; Saria 1925, p. 319) they have only been mentioned briefly by Garašanin (1951, p. 182, plate XXIV b) who interpreted them as military decorations, and by Garašanin & Kovačević (1961, plate LXII) who called them *contorniateae*. Vasić (1992, p. 294) published the first detailed numismatic evaluation of the four coins. This allowed Brenot & Metzger (1992, p. 337, no. 67) to include the extant pendant from Udovice in their study of coin jewellery from the western provinces of the Empire.

About the same time, I wrote notes on the pendants and interpreted them as parts of a necklace (Popović 1993, p. 53–54, 58–59, plate IV, 10, 11). In a later work (2001, pp. 202–204, fig. 1.1–3, cat. 67, 67a) I suggested that the solidi pendants were a barbarian interpretation of Roman coin necklaces, which were common from about 250 onward.

Parallels

The Udovice pendants are similar to medallions mounted on analogous tubular loops in the Szilágysomlyó hoard from Transylvania. In 2001, I left the possibility open that they may once have hung on a wire connecting the ends of an open neck-ring. The Szilágysomlyó hoard, whose deposition is dated to 400–450, contained 14 gold medallions, the latest struck for Gratian (367–383). They were fixed on variously decorated tubular loops, and of the tubes that carried two medallions of Valens, each had three circular cuffs for fastening them (Seipel 1999, pp. 117–118, Abb. 6, 163, Kat. nr. F12). The manner of construction, the culture-historical context and the time of deposition suggest close parallels between the finds from Szilágysomlyó and Udovice.

As J.P. Lamm has kindly pointed out to me, certain gold jewellery from the Baltic region sheds additional light on the Udovice pendants. At Lübchow in the Kolberg-Körlin district of Pomerania (currently in Poland) a gold pendant with a tubular loop and three solidi has been found. The coins were struck for Theodosius II (408–450) in Constantinople and Thessaloniki (La Baume 1963, p. 21, Abb. 1,2). The find probably also contained other gold jewellery, including bracteates, and coins. The latest of these associated coins is a solidus of Leo I (457–474). On this basis, and in spite of some dilemmas, La Baume (1963, p. 22–24) dated the Lübchow find to 450–500. The Lübchow pendant's tubular loop is grooved, and between the five cuffs it is wrapped with thin filigree wire. The coins are fixed to the first, third and fifth cuff. The way in which the solidi are mounted here is slightly different from the one at Udovice, where the coins are mounted in filigree wire rings suspended from the cuffs on the tube.

The Udovice fastening method appears on similar pendants from two sites on Zealand in Denmark, Kongsvad å and Stenholts vang, where the tubes carry Scandinavian gold bracteates instead of solidi. The Kongsvad å pendant (fig. 4) has three bracteates. The three pendants from Stenholts vang have two bracteates each (fig. 5), fastened to the tubes with filigree wire rings, while there is a thick cuff decorated with filigree



Fig. 4. Gold pendant with bracteates found at Kongsvad å on Zealand. Photograph National Museum, Copenhagen.



Fig. 5. Gold pendant with bracteates found at Stenholts vang on Zealand. Photograph National Museum, Copenhagen.

peltae at the middle of the tube (*Goldbrakteaten* 1985, pp. 180–181, no. 101; 308–309, no. 179; Taf. 128, 233; Jørgensen & Vang Petersen 1998, pp. 240, 243). The design of these tubes and the way the bracteates are fastened to them is entirely analogous to the Udovice pendants. Indeed, the ring-shaped filigree-wire edge-trim of Scandinavian bracteates in general is often identical to what we see at Udovice.

In addition to the pieces mentioned above, similar tubular loops are known from many sites in Sweden and Denmark (Lamm 1991/3, p. 156, Abb. 3; 1998, p. 338, Abb. 56). In 2001 a metal detectorist at Fuglsang/Sorte Muld on Bornholm

found what appear to be parts of a complete gold-pendant necklace, folded into part of a Roman silver dinner plate (Axboe 2002). The necklace consists of six solidi of Valentinian III made into pendants, five bracteates and two filigree cross pendants, all separated on the string by ten filigree tubes of the same kind as at Udovice, only smaller, and two spheroid beads (fig. 6; bornholmsmuseum.dk/arkeologi/solv-tar.htm). Some single Scandinavian gold bracteates, such as those from Gerete and Eskatorp in Sweden (Arrhenius 1988, p. 466, kat. 15, 16, Taf. 78/XI, 15; 79/XI, 16) also have tubular loops. The magnificent gold filigree collars from Älle-



Fig. 6. Selected pieces from a gold hoard found folded into a Roman silver plate at Sorte Muld on Bornholm. A: tubular spacer bead. B: solidus coin with simple loop. C: spheroid spacer bead. All shown at slightly different scales. Photographs John Lee, National Museum, Copenhagen.

berg, Färjestaden and Möne, and also gold bracelets and parts of necklaces found in Denmark, are made of row upon row of similar filigreed tubes.

Opinions have differed about the exact time when this body of gold-tube jewellery was produced, with dates suggested from c. 300 until shortly after 600 (Lamm 1998, p. 339–400). Evidently, however, it all belongs to the same cultural circle. The finds discussed offer evidence to place this group of material in a chronological and culture-historical context.

Contacts North and South-East

Prehistoric Scandinavia was exposed to cultural influences from the Black Sea region at least from the Bronze Age onward. Connections between the two regions became particularly intense during the reign of Theodoric the Great (451–526). Among the objects that bear witness to this are numerous Scandinavian finds of Gothic-Byzantine style metalwork and faceted glass drinking cups (Arrhenius 1988, pp. 441–447, Abb. 3–4). Material culture in Scandinavia c. 450–550 developed in close contact with the Gothic cultural circle, which, in its turn, was to a great extent shaped through its adoption and transformation of the Roman heritage. The tubular

pendant loops with solidi are a fine example of these complex connections and relations. They are a barbarian interpretation of Roman coin necklaces, which were, particularly from about 250 onward, common mainly in the eastern parts of the Empire.

Most finds of these coin necklaces have been made in Egypt (Popović 2001, p. 203). In these jewellery sets (e.g. Yerolouanu 1999, Cat. 2,3,7), the tubes separate the coin pendants, which hang from multiple gold chains. In the Szilágysomlyó hoard, which belongs to a Germanic cultural milieu of the early 5th century, we find medallions fixed to tubular filigree loops. This idea is further developed on the somewhat later solidi jewellery from Udovice and Lübchow.

Judging from the coins used – solidi of Theodosius II, Honorius & Constantius III, Valentinian III and Severus III – such pendants were made during a brief period in the second half of the 5th century. The solidi of Theodosius II on the Lübchow pendant are from eastern mints, Constantinople and Thessaloniki, which hints at the innovation centre behind the idea. The Udovice solidi are western issues from Ravenna and perhaps Rome. This is in all probability a consequence of military expeditions during that tumultuous period. At Lübchow, beside the soli-

di pendant, were found gold bracteates; and six bracteates are in the same hoard from Sorte Muld as the coin necklace with solidi of Valentinian III. Thus, necklaces with solidi and with bracteates are coeval. The Sorte Muld necklace also shows that at the same time as tubular loops were made, solidi were also fitted with small loops and hung on necklaces *separated* by small filigreed tubes.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from these finds is that bracteates and solidi were fitted with tubular loops about the same time, though the bracteate version may have survived somewhat longer. The bracteates with tubular loops in all probability represent a Scandinavian adaptation of a Continental concept, this being the final descendant of the Roman coin necklace custom from 250–300. The Swedish gold filigree collars and associated material demonstrate another direction in which the tubular jewellery developed. This work possibly found its inspiration in impressive Gothic necklaces like that from Pietroassa (Odobescu 1889–1900; Goldhelm 1994, p. 232, Kat. 98:4).

As for the solidi with tubular loops, it seems likely that they belong to the Ostrogothic cultural circle, and that they were the property of the elite, though no coeval Gothic filigree work is known. Is it possible that during the second half of the 5th century this jewellery was made according to the taste of Goths in Constantinople itself? Or in some center on the Black Sea coast, or in local workshops that kept contact with such centres, nurturing the traditions of Roman-Byzantine goldsmith work?

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Summary

Two gold pendants, each consisting of a filigreed tube acting as a suspension loop for two attached solidus coins, were found in 1906 and 1925 at the village of Udovice. This is in Serbia, near Grocka, some 20 km down the Danube from Belgrade.

The tubes have a circular cross-section, length 48 mm, and have moulded openings framed with thick twisted wire. Their entire surface is decorated with thicker and thinner twisted wire, alternating motifs of unbeaded herringbone and straight beaded wire. At the middle of each tube is a biconical cuff consisting of two rings joined by two ribs and decorated with a row of reduced beaded-wire peltae. This cuff divides each tube into two symmetrical parts. At the middle of each half is a thinner cuff consisting of two parts joined by twisted wire. Each of these side cuffs holds a solidus in a notch on its lower edge. Each solidus is framed with thin twisted wire and each notch with beaded wire.

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