

Notes and News

A GOLD BRACTEATE FROM KINGSTON BAGPUIZE, OXFORDSHIRE (Pl. IV, A, B)

Gold bracteates are rare finds in any part of England. There are moreover special factors associated with the finding of an example in the spring of 1992 near Kingston Bagpuize in Oxfordshire that make this a particularly important event. The item concerned (Pl. IV, A) was found by a metal-detector, and subsequently conserved at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. At the time of writing the status of this find in relation to the law of Treasure Trove, and therefore its ownership and eventual destination, are unresolved.

This is clearly an example of an A-bracteate: that is, a bracteate carrying a human bust as its central design. No precise counterpart can be cited to this design, which therefore represents a previously unknown bracteate die. The style of the portrait on this piece looks quite crude and degenerate, suggesting that it is a relatively late example of an A-bracteate. The most distinctive feature of the bust is the sharply accentuated triangle below the chin, which is to be interpreted as a motif descended from the gathering of folds of a garment fastened by a shoulder brooch on the busts on the Roman coins and medallions that are the models for A-bracteates. Comparable elements are quite familiar on A-bracteates of Mackeprang's 'West Scandinavian Group',¹ although again not in any identical form.

Of especial interest on the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate is the degenerate Latin inscription around the bust. One can clearly see here the capital letters C, S (horizontally) and N, and a familiar decayed form of Latin lettering in the marks AV. These marks are usually interpreted as representing an original AV (from AVG[VSTVS]) although it is also conceivable that they could derive from a disintegration of the capital N. The Roman coin or medallion models used for early bracteates are commonly of the House of Constantine, and thus the letters represented here are very much what one would predict. One may compare inscriptions such as TANSFAG/... on a bracteate from Broholm on Fyn² or DNCONSNS/DNCONSNOI on a bracteate from Hov, Nord-Trøndelag, Norway,³ both of them examples of Mackeprang's West Scandinavian Group. It is conceivable that the motif  at the end of the inscription to the right of bust could represent a degenerate PF. In the case of the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate there is nothing to suggest that the die-maker understood the lettering that he reproduced in this form.

Next in interest and importance to this pseudo-inscription is the set of wire rims around the edge of the bracteate. Quite unusually, this bracteate has four strands of wire here, all placed on the face of the flan; these are alternatively of beaded wire, round in cross-section, and a twisted ribbon (what Morten Axboe called 'twisted smooth wire'),⁴ oblong in cross-section. Again no precise parallel can be cited, although both the beaded wire and twisted ribbon are found elsewhere, and the occurrence of multiple rims is familiar enough too. It is arresting to note that Axboe's study shows that the occurrence of twisted smooth wire is highly characteristic of bracteates found in N. Germany (principally Saxony and Mecklenburg) although quite well represented all through Jutland too. It appears that the occurrence of multiple rims is more typical of earlier bracteates than of later ones (i.e. on 'Medallion Imitations' and A- and B-bracteates), while twisted round wire and ribbons seem to make a relatively late appearance (mostly on C- and D-bracteates) and consequently only occasionally form part of multiple rim sets. A B-bracteate from Sievern, Niedersachsen, for

instance, has a twisted ribbon combined with a beaded round wire,⁵ and a B-bracteate from Sønder Rind in Viborg amt, Jutland, has a twisted beaded wire rim in between two ordinary beaded rims.⁶ Details such as the exceptional predominance of twisted ribbons on N. German bracteate finds suggests that there may have been at least some N. German bracteate-production independent of Scandinavia.⁷ In general terms, however, ornamental wirework of the appropriate kind seems to have enjoyed a particular minor vogue in S. Scandinavia around the later 5th and early 6th century, as evidenced for instance by examples of filigree work, and the range of wire fragments found in the Høstentorp hoard on Sjælland.⁸

Bracteate chronology is a vexed issue. There are two important relative-chronological fixed points. Firstly, one find (from Åk, Rauma kommune, Møre og Romsdal, Norway)⁹ unambiguously indicates that the Medallion Imitations from which bracteates would seem to have evolved can occur in late Roman-period (i.e. presumably late 4th-century) contexts. Secondly, C-bracteates seem to have emerged alongside the creation of Salin's Style I. A-bracteates appear to have evolved before C-bracteates, and can therefore be dated, vaguely, to some time in the first half of the Migration period onwards; in very broad terms B-bracteates seem to be contemporary with C-bracteates; but A-, B- and C-bracteates also overlap chronologically. There is fortunately no need here to enter into the contentious question of the relative chronology of D-bracteates. The twisted ribbon of the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate, together with its degenerate style, suggest a date after the appearance of B- and C-bracteates, which in absolute terms, following Haseloff's estimated date for the inception of Style I, would mean post-c. A.D. 475.¹⁰ Conversely the occurrence of a multiple wire rim, and the preservation of Latin lettering in the design, are relatively early characteristics. It seems reasonable to date this bracteate approximately to the last quarter of the 5th century.

Two other A-bracteates have been found in England: at Undley in Suffolk, and St Giles's Field in Oxford.¹¹ The former of these, which has a remarkable runic inscription, is another much debated item, particularly with regard to its possible place of manufacture, but it has nothing of significance in common with the Kingston Bagpuize piece. Up until now, the St Giles's Field bracteate (Pl. IV, B) has been a very suspiciously isolated find, to the extent that one could reasonably doubt that its given provenance represented an authentic Anglo-Saxon find context.¹² If, however, the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate represents genuine Anglo-Saxon deposition in the vicinity of where it was found — which one may reasonably believe — then the St Giles's Field find becomes much more plausible too. Very broadly, the St Giles's Field and Kingston Bagpuize bracteates seem to stand at about the same stage in the artistic development of A-bracteates. The St Giles's Field bracteate too has no exact counterparts, but it does have a substantial range of parallels on points of detail in Denmark and Jutland, N. Germany and Frisia. It seems most likely that both the Kingston Bagpuize and the St Giles's Field bracteates were imported into England. They could certainly have come originally from the S. Scandinavian 'home' of the earlier gold bracteates — in particular, from Jutland — but a N. German origin is also a real possibility.

As imports, they would not necessarily have been brought directly to the Upper Thames region from their original source. Southern Scandinavian material influence, for instance, was demonstrably operative over a wide swathe of SE. England, from East Anglia to Surrey, around the turn of the 5th century. It is quite conceivable that these bracteates were passed on to the Upper Thames region from Kent, where several other gold bracteates have been found, most of them, apparently, S. Scandinavian exports, though these do not as yet include any A-bracteates.¹³ Saxon material influence on early Anglo-Saxon England too was practically ubiquitous¹⁴ and gold bracteates were clearly in regular use in Continental Saxon culture. These bracteates could therefore have been brought to the predominantly Saxon Upper Thames area from the Saxon homelands.

Such questions of the origins of the items lead directly to deeper questions concerning their function: i.e. why they should have come to the Upper Thames region, and why they were deposited where they were. In this case neither of these questions can be answered in

more than a speculative way. Irrespective of iconographic and religious meanings that have been proposed for bracteates, gold bracteates were a medium for consuming gold: i.e. for distributing, displaying and depositing the most precious metal the Germanic peoples used. We cannot be certain what constraints and controls there were on the circulation of gold in later Migration-period northern Germanic communities — including the Anglo-Saxon settlements — in a period which I have argued was a transitional phase of quite intense competition for social positions and concomitantly a relatively free situation in respect of prestigious artefact production and distribution.¹⁵ Suggestions that bracteates were distributed through a regular, political gift-exchange system¹⁶ are credible but quite hypothetical and unsubstantiated; perhaps indeed ultimately unverifiable. Even if the original modes of diffusion were originally regular and uniform in such a way, regional variations in the modes of deposition of bracteates should distort our recovery of their geographical patterning.

There are four predictable forms the deposition of the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate may have taken: as a grave good; as a ritual hoard (i.e. a sacrificial, votive deposit); as a hidden treasure hoard; as a casual loss. The bracteate comes with no positive evidence in favour of any of these possibilities; there is, however, some suggestive circumstantial evidence which is worth reviewing so that certain possibilities may be assessed, in particular, perhaps, should future finds be made in more favourable circumstances. Casual loss is always a possibility where other diagnostic features are absent, although precious items like gold bracteates can reasonably be supposed to be less likely to have been casually lost and unrecovered than cheaper pieces. The hiding of bracteates in treasure hoards has recently been argued for in Scandinavia — for instance in association with the Gudme II finds¹⁷ — but the association of bracteates with settlement sites, which is one of the arguments in favour of this interpretation, remains very rarely observed, so that it is still unproven that this practice was ever common. Deposition of bracteates as grave goods is found in Norway and England, but not in the rest of Scandinavia or N. Germany. This is the only attested mode, indeed apparently the normal mode, of bracteate deposition in England; but it can be attested only for Kent and Anglian England, not the Upper Thames region. No sign of a cemetery has been recorded in the vicinity of where the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate was found. The St Giles's Field bracteate was found in the 17th century. Details of the circumstances in which it was found are not surprisingly vague and of uncertain authority. Again, however, there are no good grounds for positing a grave find as matters stand.¹⁸

Ritual hoarding of bracteates is attested in all of Scandinavia, in Schleswig-Holstein and Saxony, but not in England. Bracteates may be sacrificially deposited singly or in hoards of groups of bracteates or with other precious, mostly gold objects.¹⁹ Diagnostic of the ritual hoard is the terrain in which the deposition is made: sacrificial offering seems the most plausible explanation of depositions in places where recovery of the items would be difficult, if not, in practical terms, impossible, such as in water. Many bracteate finds have come from peat or marl, or by rivers, lakes or the sea. The Kingston Bagpuize bracteate was reportedly found 6.3 m from the present edge of a ditched stream; the farmer on whose land the bracteate was found suggested, apparently on his own initiative, that the bracteate could have been in soil dredged from the stream in ditch-clearing.²⁰ These circumstances tempt speculation that Kingston Bagpuize may represent a sacrificial deposit, but as the find spot is also at the foot of a fairly substantial hill slope it is possible that the object could have been washed or otherwise brought down from a place of deposition higher up.

It seems that the finding of the Kingston Bagpuize bracteate has solved one problem by authenticating the St Giles's Field bracteate find. Other than that, however, it opens up many more possibilities, concerning the organization and expression of wealth and power in the Upper Thames region in the late 5th/early 6th centuries, and the region's external contacts in England and perhaps overseas, that must now be considered in future research into this region.

NOTES

- ¹ M. B. Mackeprang, *De Nordiske Goldbrakteater*, Jysk Arkaeologisk Selskabs Skrifter II (1952), 26–31, pls. 3–4.
² K. Hauck *et al.*, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit. Ikonographischer Katalog* (Münstersche Mittelalterschriften 24, 3 vols., 1985 ff), no. 47, 2.
³ *Ibid.*, no. 282.
⁴ M. Axboe, 'The Scandinavian gold bracteates', *Acta Archaeologica* 52 (1981), 1–87, esp. 38–41.
⁵ *Ibid.*, Pl. XI, 325a.
⁶ Hauck *et al.*, *op. cit.* in note 2, no. 341.
⁷ J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period* (Oxford, British Archaeol. Reports, Brit. Ser. 124, 1984), 202–03.
⁸ Mackeprang, *op. cit.* in note 1, Pl. 23.16–19; O. Voss, 'The Høstentorp Silver Hoard and its Period', *Acta Archaeologica* (1954), 25, 202 and Fig. 19.
⁹ Mackeprang, *op. cit.* in note 1, 1.10.
¹⁰ G. Haseloff, 'Salin's Style I', *Medieval Archaeol.* 18 (1974), 1–17; *id.* *Die Germanische Tierornamentik der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1981).
¹¹ J. Hines and B. Odenstedt, 'The Undley Bracteate and its runic inscription', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 6 (1987), 73–94.
¹² Hines, *op. cit.* in note 7, 209–10.
¹³ S. C. Hawkes and M. Pollard, 'The gold bracteates from sixth-century Anglo-Saxon graves in Kent, in the light of a new find from Finglesham'; *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 15 (1981), 316–70.
¹⁴ Hines, *op. cit.* in note 7; *id.* 'Philology, Archaeology and the *adventus Saxonum vel Anglorum*', in A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400–600: Language and History* (Heidelberg, 1990), 17–36.
¹⁵ J. Hines, *A New Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Great Square-Headed Brooches* (London, Society of Antiquaries Research Rep., forthcoming).
¹⁶ L. Hedeager, 'Kingdoms, ethnicity and material culture: Denmark in a European perspective', in M. O. H. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo* (Woodbridge, 1992), 279–300, esp. 289 ff. and refs.
¹⁷ J. Hines, 'Ritual hoarding in Migration-period Scandinavia: a review of recent interpretation', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 55 (1989), 193–205.
¹⁸ E. T. Leeds, 'Anglo-Saxon remains', *Victoria County History for Oxfordshire*, 1, 346–72, esp. 355–56.
¹⁹ Hines, *op. cit.* in note 17.
²⁰ Unpublished report by the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit.

TWO VIKING-AGE SILVER INGOTS FROM DITCHINGHAM AND HINDRINGHAM, NORFOLK: THE FIRST EAST ANGLIAN INGOT FINDS (Figs. 1, 2)

The first stray find of a Viking-Age ingot to be recorded in England was discovered at Easingwold, Yorkshire in 1989.¹ Following the publication of this two further isolated finds of ingots were recognized from Norfolk.

One was found in January 1989 with the aid of a metal detector at Hindringham, c. 10 km NE. of Fakenham (Norfolk SMR no. 25071), on a site which has yielded prolific evidence, in metalwork and pottery, of mid and late Saxon occupation.² The finder, Mr P. West, offered it for identification by the Norfolk Museums Service, but it was unrecognized. After the Ditchingham ingot described below had been given some publicity at the Norwich Detector Club, Mr West resubmitted the Hindringham piece, which was then identified as of Viking-Age origin.

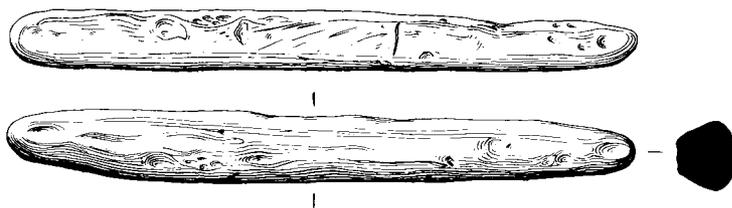


FIG. 1

The Hindringham ingot. Scale 1:1