

“Et ego in Arcadia” - A quinquennial ‘Concordia’ from Viggeby, Norrsunda parish, Uppland, Sweden

The recorded Late Roman and Early Byzantine solidus material in Scandinavia is rich and diverse. Much of the material comes from well documented hoards and the various segments of the Scandinavian solidus corpus can be connected to important political events and related specific payments within the Late Roman Empire, as evident from late 5th century hoards in Italy. Still, there are a few solidus finds in the Scandinavian periphery that appear to be more complicated even in relation to corresponding or at least contemporary finds within the Empire.¹ One of the more puzzling finds of Late Roman gold coinage on the Swedish mainland is a solidus struck in the name of the East Roman emperor Arcadius (395–408), see fig 1-2. The coin was discovered in 1909 in Viggeby, Norrsunda parish, Uppland.² It was reported as a single find, near the Rosersberg train station on the railroad connecting Stockholm and Uppsala. The actual find spot appears to be next to the 11th century rune stone U 428, see fig 3.³ The National Board of Antiquities subsequently acquired the coin from the local farmer, a certain G.B. Ljungström, and it was included in the collections of the Royal Coin Cabinet (KMK) and the Swedish History Museum (SHM) in Stockholm.⁴ When Joan M. Fagerlie published her catalogue of solidus finds from Denmark and Sweden more than half a century



Figs 1–2. The Viggeby solidus, SHM/KMK 13774. Fagerlie no. 7:189. RIC IX 70c. Constantinople. AD 387. Diameter: 20 mm. Weight: 4.42 g. Die-axis: six/o clock. Relative wear: good. Photographs by Gabriel Hildebrand. Courtesy of KMK.



Fig 3. The site of discovery, near the 11th century Viking Age rune stone U 428 on the Viggeby homestead. Glass plate photograph by August Fredrik Schagerström, 1919. Courtesy of Upplandsmuseet.

¹ The research was financed by generous grants from the Gunnar Ekström Foundation for Numismatic Research and the Sven Svensson Numismatic Foundation.

² Janse 1922, Bolin 1926, Fagerlie 1967, hoard 7, coin 189, Fischer 2005, 258, Tab. 6, Grp. 6.

³ Klingspor & Lindal 1877, Aschaneus 1925.

⁴ SHM/KMK 13774 (RIC IX 70c).

ago, she chose to exclude all solidi struck prior to the reign of Arcadius.⁵ This was done as a matter of expediency. Fagerlie was in fact quite aware that there were earlier solidi, notably a looped solidus for Theodosius I (379–395) from Bornholm. In her defense, it is true that Fagerlie was right to argue that solidi struck for Arcadius are quite rare in Scandinavia and that the majority are West Roman issues struck in Milan and Ravenna that belong to the early reign of the junior emperor Honorius (393–423). The only recorded find of a proper East Roman issue for Arcadius is indeed the Viggeby solidus. Fagerlie made no major effort to connect the coin to finds outside Scandinavia although it is obvious that it cannot be interpreted in isolation. Such a rare oddity from the barbarian periphery must by all means be matched with comparative material from the European continent and in the Mediterranean.

The obverse image depicts a rosette-diademed, draped, and cuirassed emperor facing right. The obverse legend reads *D N ARCADI-VS P F AVG*, that is, *Dominus noster Arcadius Pius Felix Augustus* (“Our lord Arcadius – pious, happy emperor”). Many Late Roman emperors began to appear on coinage as soon as they were invested in the imperial purple, even at a very young age. The portrait profile of the Viggeby solidus clearly depicts an adolescent Arcadius. The same can be argued for the hieratic style Pentelic marble bust kept in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum (see fig 4).⁶ This suggests that Arcadius was hardly the senior emperor when the coin was struck.

The reverse image depicts the female personification of Constantinople seated on a throne, her head facing right while holding a scepter in her right hand and a shield in her left hand. Inside the shield, there is the legend *VOT V MVLX* in four separate rows, that is, *Votis V (=quinquennialibus) Multis X (=decennialibus)* which translates as “Vows for the Fifth Reign Anniversary

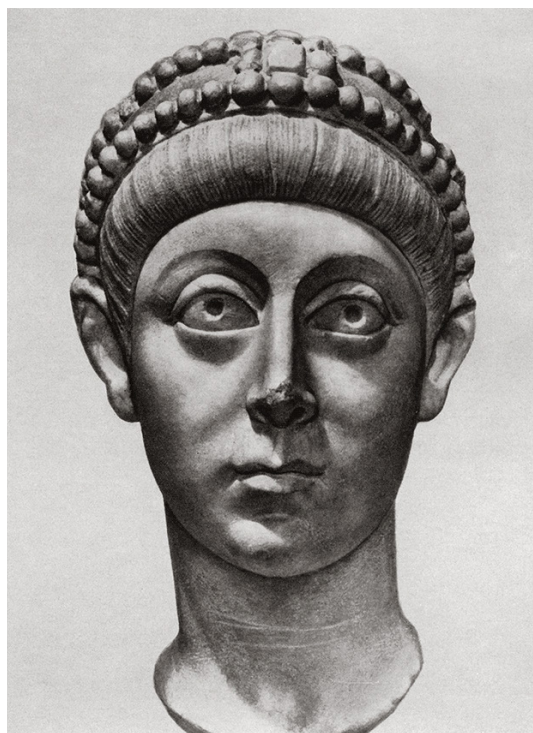


Fig 4. Pentelic marble bust of Arcadius, discovered in 1949 near Forum Tauri, currently kept in the National Museum of Istanbul. Unknown artist.

and More for the Upcoming Tenth Anniversary”. The reverse legend reads *CONCORDIA AVGGG*, that is, *Concordia augustorum* (“harmony of the emperors”). This is followed by the Greek letter Δ (delta = 4), which identifies the coin as having been struck in the fourth officina of an imperial mint. The total number of members in the imperial college during the Valentinian and Theodosian dynasties was duly explained on the reverse of the coins by adding a capital G at the end of the acronym AVG for each member. In the case of the Viggeby solidus, there are three G’s. This means that the imperial college consisted of three members at the time. These were presumably the senior emperor Theodosius I, his oldest son Arcadius, and the junior western emperor Valentinian II (375–392). The imperial college would not have included the usurper Magnus Maximus (383–388) after 387 when Magnus Maximus broke the truce within the quadruple imperial college and invaded Italy. The later junior emperor Honorius was only proclaimed Augustus in 393, following the mysterious death of Valentinian II in Vienne the year before. This suggests that the coin was struck in c. 387. Finally, the legend *CONOB* in the

⁵ Fagerlie 1967, 103. She also excluded all finds of siliquae from her study. But a discovery in 2011 of a siliqua in Örja, Scania, Sweden complicates matters (Aspeborg 2012). It was struck in Milan in the name of Arcadius during the early reign of Honorius in c. 395–402 (RIC X 1227b). This separates it from the many previous finds concentrated around Gudme, Funen, Denmark. These mainly date to the late reign of Constantius II (337–361). One may thus have to reconsider our current understanding of the Scandinavian siliqua material, in order to publish the latter in a coherent edition.

⁶ Firatli 1951.

reverse exergue shows that the Viggeby solidus was made of pure gold, *obryzum*, and struck in Constantinople.

These features show that the coin belongs to a 'Concordia' series of coins struck by Theodosius I in Constantinople in the late 380's.⁷ This 'Concordia' series has been described and classified through studies of preserved specimens in various museum collections in Britain, the European continent and the important hoard of Sidi-Bou-Saïd, Tunisia (tpq 388). Much of the rationale behind the 'Concordia' issues must have been an attempt by Theodosius I to solve the pressing problem of dynastic legitimacy while displaying an image of apparent unity and cohesion in a very divided imperial college. The legitimate senior emperor Gratian had been murdered in 383 by Magnus Maximus who was a cousin of Theodosius I. This caused Theodosius I to become de facto senior emperor. He was able to negotiate a truce. Magnus Maximus was recognized as a member of an expanded quadruple imperial college, ruling over Britain, Gaul, Spain and Africa from Trier while Valentinian II, the younger brother of Gratian, had to content himself with ruling Italy from Milan. For a while, there were reverse coin legends with as many as four G's in a row. When Magnus Maximus eventually broke the truce and invaded Italy, the fourth G disappeared from dies in the eastern imperial mints controlled by Theodosius I. He had no choice but to integrate the fugitive Valentinian II into his family, which he did in 387 by marrying the latter's sister Galla. Theodosius I soon defeated his troublesome cousin. Magnus Maximus was executed despite pleading for mercy. His son Flavius Victor was supposedly strangled in Trier by the Frankish general Arbogastes.⁸

The classification of the Viggeby coin above reveals that Fagerlie made an unfortunate mistake. Fagerlie's catalogue begins with a coin issued many years earlier than several properly recorded coin finds that she deliberately excluded



Figs 5–6. The TO Solidus. RIC IX 70c. Diameter: 20 mm. Weight: 4.4 g. Die-axis: six'o clock. Relative wear: good. Photographs by Harald Nilsson, Courtesy of TO.

from her corpus. Beginning a catalogue with coins struck with the image of Arcadius means that one must also include those struck under his father Theodosius I from 383 onwards, as they share the same reverse types. A revised edition of the Late Roman solidi in Scandinavia must therefore include all 4th century solidi including new finds that have been recorded after 1967. In addition, it should also include unprovenanced coins kept in Scandinavian collections.⁹ In preparation for such a revised edition, my 2016–2018 inventory of solidi kept in coin collections in Scandinavia was executed in three stages. Step by step, it became apparent that the Viggeby solidus was highly unusual outside the descriptive numismatic literature.

In the first stage of the inventory, I was fortunate to discover one more quinquennial 'Concordia' solidus struck for Arcadius almost right away. It is currently kept in the coin collection of Timmermansorden (TO), a masonic lodge in Stockholm (see figs 5–6).¹⁰ The solidus was struck

⁷ Pearce et al 1933, Grierson & Mays 1992, Kent 1993, pl. 1 n. 21. It should be noted that an unprovenanced 'Concordia' coin in the name of Theodosius I was displayed in the permanent exhibition of the KMK in the years 1971–2017.

⁸ Theodosius I spared the life of Magnus Maximus' wife and daughter. The daughter may have married Ennodius and thus possibly became part of the imperial pedigree for the later short-lived emperors Petronius Maximus (455) and Anicius Olybrius (472–473).

⁹ There have been two new discoveries of solidi for Theodosius I in Scandinavia since 1967. The first, struck in Milan c. 379–383 (RIC IX 7d) was discovered in a mixed precious metal hoard in a building in Fraugde Kærby, Funen. It had been used some time as a pendant but was deactivated as its loop had been broken off (Runge 2009). The second find was an issue struck in Milan in 394, KMK dnr 711–1508–2004 (RIC IX 35a). This is the earliest coin of some 17 solidi in the Stora Brunneby hoard (tpq 451) from eastern Öland, Sweden (Fischer et al 2011).

¹⁰ I am much indebted to Harald Nilsson, the current custodian of the TO coin collection for access to the vault, new photographs, and a helpful account for the collection. The TO was founded in 1761. Most of the coin collection was donated by the royal chamberlain Axel Roos af Hjelmsäter, an affluent 19th century noble landowner from Västergötland. The coins are likely to have a Swedish origin.

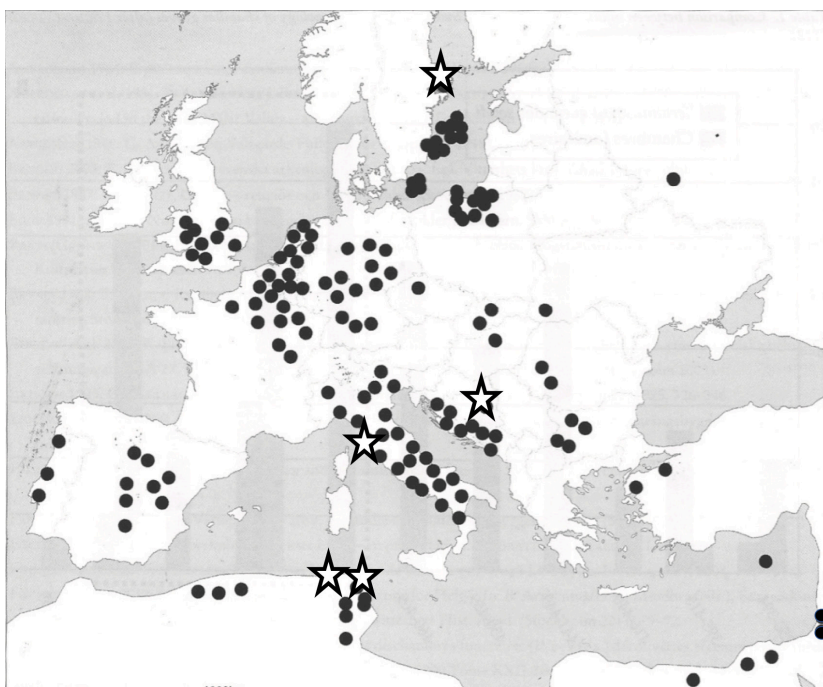


Fig 7. Distribution map of solidus hoards.
Hoards containing quinquennial issues for Arcadius marked with stars.

in officina H and is in fair condition. Nevertheless, it has an assay mark on the rim, showing that someone must have been uncertain as to the gold content. This unexpected discovery in a private collection may perhaps be an unreported find from somewhere in Scandinavia as it would have been quite difficult for a modern period collector to acquire such a coin elsewhere. Much to my surprise, it does not appear in the inventory of coins published by TO in 1910.¹¹ It may have been added to the collection during the course of the 20th century.

The second stage consisted of a regional survey of all solidi dating to second half of the 4th century in Scandinavia. It showed that most are single finds or unprovenanced specimens in collections with the exception of one solidus hoard in Gudme with a tpq 351, the final issues being in the name of the usurper Magnentius (350–353).¹² The solidus finds from Norway are typically grave finds with the exception of a solidus for Valens in the Viking Age Hoen hoard.¹³ There are currently no certain

finds of solidi in the name of Magnus Maximus and Valentinian II from Scandinavia, although two solidi of Magnus Maximus were donated to the National Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark already in 1816.¹⁴

The third and final stage involved a supra-regional survey of all recorded solidus finds in Britain, the European continent and the Mediterranean. It revealed that these contain many earlier coins from the second half of the 4th century.¹⁵ Of all hoards from the period 388–400 (see fig. 7), there is no doubt that the most important hoard is that from Gamzigrad, Serbia, discovered in 1991 c. 1 km away from Galerius' castle Felix Romuliana. The hoard has a composition with the highest ratio of quinquennial 'Concordia' coins struck for Arcadius, some 32 out of a total of 99 solidi, weighing a total of 440.55g.¹⁶ The first coin is struck for Gratian in 377 and the final coin is an issue for Valentinian II struck in

¹¹ Lilienberg 1910.

¹² FP 3638.2.

¹³ Horn Fuglesang & Wilson 2006.

¹⁴ RP 1112.1 (RIC IX 1), and RP 1113.1 (RIC IX Trier 77).

¹⁵ Hobbs 2006, Fischer & López Sánchez 2016.

¹⁶ Jovanovic & Lalovic 1993, coins 75–99. Of these, 14 (86–99) belong to series closely related to the Viggeby solidus.



Figs 8–9. SHM/KMK 6772. (RIC IX 16b). Valens (AD 364–378). Nicomedia. AD 367–375. Obverse: D N VALENS PF AVG, emperor pearl-diademed, draped bust left, wearing imperial mantle, holding mappa and scepter. Reverse: VOTA PV-BLICA, two emperors, nimbate, seated facing, each holding mappa and short sceptre; the emperor on left raising his mappa. Mintmark: SM to left and right of two captives, MN (ligate) between them. Diameter: c. 20 mm. Weight: 4.44 g. Die-axis: six o' clock. Die-link: uncertain. Relative wear: good, cut on the rim. Photographs by Gabriel Hildebrand. Courtesy of SHM.



Figs 10–11. SHM/KMK 4626 (RIC IX 5d). Gratian (378–383). Milan. Obverse: D N GRATIANVS P F AVG, emperor pearl-diademed, draped bust right, wearing imperial mantle, Reverse: VICTORIA AVGGG, two emperors, nimbate, seated facing, holding globe, above them Victory, between them palm branch. Mintmark: COM. Diameter: c. 20 mm. Weight: 4.39 g. Die-axis: six o' clock. Die-link: uncertain. Relative wear: worn, punch in the lower rim of the obverse. Photographs by Gabriel Hildebrand. Courtesy of KMK.

488, leaving little doubt as to the chronology. By contrast, the world's largest solidus hoard from Chemtou, Tunisia (tpq 423) contains only one specimen from officina Z, out of 1,648 solidi, despite the presence of long die-linked chains of both earlier and contemporary issues from the same period.¹⁷ The Sidi-bou-Saïd hoard also only contained one specimen. While the relationship between the various 'Concordia' issues, including those commemorating the quinquennalia is not clear, much can be inferred in favor of Kent's 1993 interpretation. The composition of the Gamzigrad hoard suggests that some issues of the coin type may have been employed in payments related to a late 4th century military campaign against the Goths on the Balkans. But the supra-regional survey of solidus hoards could indicate that the find from Viggeby and the unprovenanced coin the TO collection may tentatively indicate some form of early Scandinavian involvement in payments to barbarians in the late 4th century on the Balkans, presumably during the Gothic wars. Given the composition of continental and Mediterranean hoards, these payments could also have included the more frequent issues struck for earlier members of the Valentinian imperial college, notably Valentinian I (364–375), Valens (364–378) and Gratian (368–383). Such solidi are indeed known from Sweden, albeit poorly published. In particular, one must mention three coins. First, there is the pierced and worn

"Gotlandic Pendant" struck for Valentinian I, now kept in the British Museum (BM). Sadly, this very important find was acquired illegally on Gotland and spirited out of Sweden by James Curle.¹⁸ Second, there is the solidus for Valens from the early Migration Period cremation grave in Kvitsle, Njurunda parish, Medelpad which is in very fine condition, and which dates the construction of the funerary monument to after 368, see figs 8–9.¹⁹

¹⁸ James Curle of Melrose (1862–1944) was a British collector who traveled to Gotland on at least two occasions in 1895–96 and 1901–1902 in order to acquire and decontextualize antiquities, armed with substantial sums of money and a self-serving interpretation of Swedish law. Some twelve solidi are known to have been in Curle's possession after his plunder on Gotland. Curle's Gotlandic collection was acquired by the BM in 1921, but its importance was only discovered by Swedish antiquarians in 1928, who started to ask questions as to how it had been assembled and taken out of the country. Curle was clearly embarrassed by this unwanted attention and tried to deflect the repeated inquiries, as he put it himself in 1936 in a letter to Richard Steffen (1862–1948), the Gotland County archivist: "I hope all this long account of my 'plundering' won't weary you. I suppose if I hadn't bought the things they might have drifted away and been lost sight of but I always intended that they would eventually go to the British Museum where they are available for comparative study" (Kidd and Thunmark-Nylen 1990). Only four of the twelve solidi can be identified in the BM today.

¹⁹ SHM/KMK 6772 (RIC IX 16b). The solidus was found in 1881 by the workers Elias Zetterberg and

¹⁷ Baldus & Khanussi 2014, coin 1642.

Finally, there is the worn issue for Gratian from Högby, Dödevi parish, Öland, see figs 10-11.²⁰ There are also several other unprovenanced late 4th century solidi in the coin cabinets of Uppsala University (UUM) and Lund University Museum of History (LUMH) that may perhaps one day be attributed to proper archaeological contexts.²¹ At this point, however, a certain connection between the finds of late 4th century solidi in Sweden and the Gothic wars of Theodosius I only remains plausible but very difficult to demonstrate. In particular, it is known that much Roman gold was transferred to Barbaricum in the shape of gold bars during the late 4th century, as demonstrated by a cluster of finds of stamped Roman gold ingots.²² For now, we must accept the fact that only fragments of the late 4th century import of precious metals to Scandinavia have survived as concrete numismatic evidence as in the case of the Viggeby solidus.

Nils Hedlund during an excavation executed at the order of the merchant A.P. Hedberg from Sundsvall. The coin is 98% gold. The context is described as one of several cairns in a cemetery (see SHM 13447 excavated in 1889-90 and SHM 15746 excavated in 1916). The cairn contained a cremation grave, with the coin on top of burnt bones inside a Vestland cauldron (Dahlin Hauken 2005). Other finds included bear claws (presumably from a fur), melted glass fragments and a gold finger ring weighing 1.77 g, 80% gold. The latter was missing from the SHM already in 1933. For a survey of rich burials and finds of solidi and barbarous imitations in Medelpad, see Enqvist 1937.

²⁰ SHM/KMK 4626 (RIC IX 5d). Herschend 1978 suggested a relationship between the solidus and the important Dödevi C-bracteate SHM 5714 (IK 45). I am inclined to argue against this view. It seems more likely that the worn solidus for Gratian has no relation to the fine gold bracteate or the late 5th century solidi discovered in different fields that lie far apart within the same real estate.

²¹ I am indebted to Ragnar Hedlund, UUM, and Gitte Ingvardson, LUMH, for their assistance and new photographs of this material.

²² Hobbs 2006. A case in point is the Brasov hoard from Romania, currently in the BM (R1894.1207.1). It includes a gold bar weighing 476 g., presumably produced in Sirmium.

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Svensk sammanfattning

Artikeln behandlar ett ovanligt fynd av en solidus präglad för kejsar Arcadius (395–408) i Viggeby i Norrsunda socken, Uppland, SHM/KMK 13774 (RIC IX 70c). En jämförande studie av myntet och skatter som innehåller mynt av samma typ visar att myntet är slaget på hösten år 387 under Theodosius' I regeringstid 379–395. Dateringen visar att Joan M. Fagerlie gjorde sig skyldig till ett misstag när hon 1967 uteslöt ett betydande antal solidi som bevisligen var yngre än Viggebymyntet. Jämförelsen med kontinenten och medelhavsområdet, särskilt Gamzigradskatten funnen 1991 i Serbien, visar att skatter från denna tid också innehöll äldre solidi av typer som återfunnits i Skandinavien. En viktig slutsats är att en ny reviderad katalog över senromerska solidi funna i Skandinavien bör omfatta samtliga solidi från 300-talet. Till sist förefaller det utifrån Gamzigradskattens sammansättning som om mynttypen skulle kunna kopplas till utbetalningar på Balkan under kriget mot goterna i slutet på 300-talet. Under denna tid betalades dock mycket guld ut i form av tackor varför det är svårt att helt säkert knyta de få skandinaviska myntfynden från 300-talet till enskilda politiska händelser.