

Kort meddelande

Östergötland's First Gold Foil Figure Die Found at Sättuna in Kaga Parish.

At aristocratic manor sites of the Vendel Period in Scandinavia, minuscule gold foil figures are found, *guldgubbar* (Lamm 2004 w. refs; Watt 2004 w. refs). They are embossed with images of men and women; usually singly, sometimes pairwise, embracing and kissing. When found *in situ*, they are often associated with the posts carrying the roof of the mead hall, venue of cultic feasts and political summits. (For a particularly fine example from Uppåkra in Scania, where the building appears to have been a temple rather than a mead hall, see Larsson 2004; 2007.) The images have been interpreted as gods or heroes, the embracing pairs as mythical divine ancestors of royal lineages, perhaps the god Freyr and his chaos-giant wife Gerd (Steinsland 1991). The latest major additions to the literature on this artefact category are Mannering 2006 and Back Danielsson 2007.

Gold foil figures are exceptionally light-weight, replacing the more massive bracteate pendants when the Byzantine gold coin supply was cut off at the shift to the Vendel Period c. AD 540. So light are they that they do not trigger a metal detector. What does trigger a detector is the bronze die on which the figures were embossed. Twelve such dies found at seven sites in southernmost Scandinavia have until recently been known to scholarship. A thirteenth was found on 9 April 2007 at Sättuna in Kaga parish, Östergötland, by metal detectorist Niklas Krantz of the Gothenburg Historical Society. The Society's metal-detector group collaborates with myself and the Östergötland County Museum on research into the political geography of Östergötland c. AD 400–1000. So far, we have surveyed thirteen sites of which Sättuna has yielded the strongest evidence for a central status.

The Die

The Sättuna die belongs to a fairly rare type depicting a single woman seen in profile (Watt 1999, fig. 3). Looking at the die, she is facing right, chin held high. The woman's eye is large and round, her mouth open as if she were singing or speaking loudly. Unusually, an ear is depicted. Her hair forms a large knot at the back of her head and then cascades down her back. Her right hand is held close to her chest, thumb and fingers orientated upward in a gesture suggestive of public performance, her elbow at her waist. She is wearing a long obliquely cross-hatched dress, a shawl over her shoulders, a featureless belt at her waist, and an over-sized disc-on-bow brooch under the side of her jaw. Her pointed shoes, visible under the hem of the dress, are placed off-centre to the right, leaving space to the left for a rectangular feature adorned with three circles. This suggests that the woman is sitting on a low stool (as pointed out by Mats Wessling). The figure is edged by a beaded rim forming a straight lower edge and an arch over the woman's head, leaving the top corners blank.

The die measures 29.0 by 15.0 by 2.9 mm, a rectangular piece of cast copper alloy. The back side is pitted and worn and shows no sign of any decoration. From an art-technical viewpoint, it resembles a line drawing rather than a piece of sculpture: the relief is shallow with little plasticity and none of the chip-carved effect seen in many other dies. This technique is also seen on a few foil figures found on Bornholm (Watt 2004, p. 193). Says Gert Franzén (e-mail 16 April 2007, my translation):

“The Sättuna die is highly unusual and differs sharply from those found e.g. on Bornholm and at Uppåkra. The Danish ones have usually been made through cutting work with a graver



Fig. 2. Drawing by the author.

Fig. 1. A Vendel Period gold-foil figure die found in April 2007 at Sättuna in Kaga parish, Östergötland. 29.0 by 15.0 mm. Photo by the author.

(Sw. *stickel*). This one has been made by plastic chasing (Sw. *drivning*) with a punch, in a manner reminiscent of foil-figure manufacture with *repoussé* technique. [...] The interior of the die is matrix-like and the profile depth of any foil figure made on it will be less than usual. An almost flat image with accentuated contours is produced.”

Parallels

Single women seen in profile is a foil-figure motif known exclusively from Denmark and Scania. According to Margrethe Watt (e-mail 19 April 2007), none of the currently known gold foil figures has been made with the Sättuna die. The closest known parallel to its motif is a foil figure from Sylten on Bornholm (Klindt-Jensen 1957, fig. 134; Watt 1999, fig. 3:13), a site located a few hundred meters from the famous Sorte Muld where over 2500 figures have been found.

One of two dies from Neble on Zealand (Watt 1999, fig. 3:4; NMK C30884) shows a woman with a similar cross-hatched hem on her dress, but the upper half of this die is not preserved.

Foil-figure dies have most likely been used at all sites where several foil-figures are found. The concentration of currently known dies to southern Scandinavia is thus due more to the recent activities of metal detectorists than to any Vendel Period situation. Nevertheless, it may be noted that the Sättuna die is currently the northernmost die-find known to scholarship. Several more northerly sites in Sweden and Norway have yielded foil figures.

[As an aside, let me take this opportunity to mention an observation I have made regarding another foil-figure die, the one found at Järrestad in Scania (Söderberg 2005, p. 91, fig. 17). The Järrestad die has a funny elongated shape,

almost spoon-like, measuring about 7 by 1 cm, with the relief of the die located at one end. The die's outline shape clearly mimics a strap-end of the kind adorning ostentatious Early Vendel Period horse gear (e.g. VZG 232–266, 1047–1049). The Järrestad artisan appears to have moulded a strap end out of wax, leaving out any holes for the fastening rivets, and then executed a foil-figure die on the wax mount's fastening plate, depicting the hugging couple motif. This is interesting for two reasons: a) it anchors a type of foil-figure chronologically in the male burial sequence, b) it suggests a conceptual link between foil-figure imagery and aristocratic warrior ideology.]

The Site

Scanty written sources point out Kaga parish as a power base of the 12th-century Sverker royal dynasty. The area is not, however, rich in archaeological finds or sites. Scholars have nevertheless repeatedly (e.g. Nerman 1956) pointed Sättuna out as a potential central place in the mid-1st Millennium because of its *-tuna* name, its great barrow (diameter 35–40 m, height 5.5 m, construction date unknown) and its topographical location. The site is on a rise at the southwest shore of Lake Roxen, a prehistoric hub of water-borne traffic where the navigable rivers of Motala ström, Svartån, Stångån and others converge. Linköping, episcopal seat since about AD 1100 and currently Sweden's fifth-largest city, is only kilometres away.

Including the April 2007 fieldwork, we have done a total of 72 person-hours of metal detecting at Sättuna. Finds relevant to the foil-figure die are as follows. The Migration Period: a fragment of a cruciform brooch and half a large equal-armed copper-alloy relief brooch decorated in Style I. The Early Vendel Period: half a punch-ornamented strap-end, five small equal-armed brooches (one of which is unfinished, the pin hinge not yet perforated and the pin-catch unbent). The Vendel/Viking Period shift: half an equal-armed brooch in Style E. The Viking Period: a small spheroid weight and an Oriental-style palmetto belt mount. Undated metal-working indications: a small hammered copper-alloy bar and sundry molten lumps.

The nearest find-spots for gold foil figures are at Ströja/Brahekyrkan on Visingsö in Lake Vättern (Jansson 2003; 2006) and Bodaviken/Svintuna on the Bråviken bay (Olsén 1981). Both are communicative sites closely associated with the much later Medieval kings of Sweden, and one has a *-tuna* name. Neither, however, has yielded other evidence of any unusual status in the Vendel Period.

The foil-figure die, the relief brooch and the metalworking evidence mark Sättuna as Östergötland's first identified mid-1st Millennium central place. The absence so far of any precious-metal finds suggest that the site is not on the top level with Gudme, Uppåkra and Sorte Muld. Tentatively, I would suggest that what we have found is Östergötland's equivalent of Slöinge (Lundqvist 2000). With a geophysical survey at Sättuna planned for the autumn of 2007, I hope to be able to offer more data in the future to support such deliberations.

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