COINS IN CONTEXT I

New perspectives for the interpretation of coin finds


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The social identity of coin hoards: an example of theory and practice in the space between numismatics and archaeology

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1. Introduction

Silver coin hoarding is a distinct feature of the Viking Age in some northern European areas, and these hoards convey much information about coin types and chronologies to numismatists. However, there is still no explanation of the custom itself. I argue that hoards should be considered in terms of social categories or genders as a means to understand the specific reasons behind their deposition. This contribution provides examples of this approach through contextualizing hoards and their contents.

I also propose some theoretical premises regarding the role of numismatics in the space between archaeology, history, economic history and art history. Numismatics as a discipline must develop an explicit research agenda of its own in order to benefit equally from the numismatist's knowledge of a coin's primary context (origin), as well as secondary (use and reuse) and tertiary contexts (deposition). Coins do not belong to one single context; neither the one of primary interest to the historian, nor just that which the archaeologist encounters. A numismatic approach sensitive to all contexts opens a wealth of information in terms of the life biography of objects, social relationships, and the routines and cognitive patterns of the society which produced, used and deposited coins.

2. Coins and contexts

At first, the subject of the current theme, "coins in context", seems straightforward enough: issues of use and stratigraphy. Nevertheless, a "context" can be so much more than the physical context normally of concern to the archaeologist. Therefore, I pursue three main themes intended to refine the notion of coins in context, but also to indicate directions in which these might be used in a productive manner. First of all, I consider some other types of contexts relevant to numismatic research. Secondly, I elaborate on the issue of selection. Finally, a brief case study exemplifies how our understanding of the coin material itself may be altered and deepened by "contextualizing" the material and breaking away from traditional methodologies.

Leaving matters of stratigraphy aside for the moment, let us explore different contexts one ought to consider and concentrate on the different strata or phases in the "life biography" of the coin itself. In the first place there is the primary context, which concerns the minting of coins and their origin. This includes technical data, craftsmanship, workshop organization, minting regulations, intention of iconographic representations, economy and organization of society, implemen-
tation of power, and such other matters which are directly related to the societal context from which the coin originated. In many cases this is where the coin retained its inherent monetary function and meaning. The context of origin is more often discussed by historians, economic historians and numismatists, but less often treated with enthusiasm or deeper inquiry by archaeologists.

The secondary context revolves around issues of use, transfer, reuse and alterations to the coin itself. Here one considers the user's acceptance of the coin, the reception of iconography, logistics of trade, tax collection, sacrifice (e.g. on altars or in wells), bending and punching, perforation, use as jewellery and so on. These are issues which are often addressed by both history and archaeology, and sometimes in other disciplines. In regard to numismatics, a difference can be observed between different areas of research: those conducting research on classical material seem to be generally more interested in questions of how messages are conveyed ("propaganda"), iconography and the like than are the scholars dealing with post-classical material.

The tertiary context is defined here as deposition. This includes coins found in cultural layers, churches, graves, hoards, or deposited intentionally in another manner (under a mast or threshold, for example). The find spots and contexts are frequently of more interest to the archaeologist and are typically examined from an archaeological perspective and method. Numismatists normally withdraw from these considerations as soon as he/she determines dates and delivers them to the archaeologist. Additional contexts may be discerned in the "afterlife" of the coin: re-deposition, use as jewellery, melting or other reuse and memories of it in folklore and mythology or other material objects such as art mimicking its design.

These are contexts of time, place and intention, or to put it differently, contexts of the "historical situation", a phase in the "life biography", or the context of "meaning". Another type of context to consider is the research tradition in which coins are studied. The way the material is approached and conclusions are made is partly decided by the individual and his/her perspective is largely determined by scholarly training and background. What we perceive, what we find of interest and worthy of note, is often a matter of our academic environment and other experiences, inasmuch as what the numismatic material itself suggests.

Contexts related to time and place seem simple enough, but time and space are also examples of "research contexts", as becomes clear when handling matters of chronology and taxonomy. Chronologies are essential for any discussion on the societal or ideological context of objects (synchronous) or about processes of change and causal connections between objects (diachronic). Through chronology one creates a room or "space in time", on which further analyses and interpretations can be based and from which they can depart. The first step in chronological work is the process of classification, which involves the process of analysis, systemisation and verbalisation. We try to create order and find the order there once was, but is there an order to reveal or to invent? With regard to cultural material, in my view, there is no such thing as a natural order. Instead, the categories we use are mere constructs – of a scholar's personal and subjective definitions and understanding of ontology – though certainly there may be a
primary context logic, which may be understood and verbalised to varying degrees. The words, categories and names chosen ultimately affect the way objects are subsequently understood. The processes of classification, taxonomy and establishment of a chronology, are consequently dependent, therefore, on the intelligence, logic and language of the researcher.

These short reflections on various contexts should serve as a reminder that even in the contextual situation most frequently encountered by the archaeologists, i.e. stratigraphy and dating, coins are more than chronological markers. They are highly complex objects and are not often appreciated as such. By contrast, coin hoarding is one area where the context often complicates matters beyond the understanding of the numismatist.

Hoards are often used by the numismatist to relate contents to each other in space and time: what is in a hoard is considered to be relatively and reliably synchronous. This applies, of course, only for the time of deposition. It is well known that the objects in a hoard may represent a considerable span of time and that jewellery, in particular, may have been used and passed down for many generations. On the other hand, coins are normally considered to be the most "reliable" objects, though many examples show clusters of material from different eras within hoards (e.g. ten Roman or Viking Age coins in a hoard of 2,500 medieval coins), varying degrees of wear, etc. More interesting is the evident selection of coins that has taken place, complicating the conclusions one may draw from a hoard. What the hoard does show is that certain coins were at that place at that time. It does not show the proportions of coin types outside of the hoard, what else was there or what was used outside the hoard.

A critical archaeological discussion concerns grave goods which accompanied the dead in the burial. To what extent does this material reflect the situation of the living? Were the objects chosen because they were representative of the deceased's social or civil status, age or occupation? Or was it considered a proper way to honour the dead, reflecting the desires of the living family, or for other reasons we cannot determine? In short, do the things in a grave actually say anything at all about the previous life of the dead person interred in it? The parallel to be made with coin hoards is that we try to draw conclusions about the normal life of coins from a very specific burial context. When we see, for example, that a very rare group of coins is overrepresented among those perforated or transformed into jewellery, it is a clear indication that coins, like other "grave goods", were selected for the occasion.

One example of such a selective process is the Byzantine silver coins imported into Scandinavia during the Viking Age. In Sweden, 28% of the Byzantine coins found in graves and hoards were perforated, compared with (roughly contemporary) only 2% of German, 4% of English and 4-8% of Islamic coins, although the other coins greatly outnumbered the Byzantine1. Why is this the case?

Is it a matter of time, fashion, or the motif of the coin, or something about the social context? We cannot answer this at present, but we should keep these things in mind attempting to reconstruct coin circulation, trade routes, etc. What is found reflects not only what there once was, but also what was chosen for a specific purpose and context. The same holds true for all contexts: what coins were brought to church, which ones were used in sacred rites, which ones composed larger payments, and which ones were common in marketplace? Every context implies a certain selection. Therefore, one must note what is present, but also what is not, and pay attention to how, where, in what, and with what else coins are found.

3. The social identity of hoards – a case study

3.1 Hoards as women, dead or alive

In Scandinavian (Old Norse) mythology and sagas, there is a close connection between women and treasures. In the sagas, women and treasures alike are hidden within enclosures or within or on mounds and hills; they are guarded by dragons or snakes and are meant to be found and retrieved by heroic male dragon-slayers. It has also been suggested that women were the owners of hoards, it being their dowry or the silver collected by a suitor to buy her from her guardian. Thus, relationships between women and silver hoards may be supposed from several points of view. In myth, the "ideal" treasure is of gold, but what is found in reality is typically silver: coins, rods, jewellery, and pieces. An increasingly intimate connection between women, metal and hoarding is apparent in Scandinavia by the end of the Scandinavian Bronze Age (1700-500 BC). Arrhenius suggests that women collected silver and were responsible for keeping it and passing it on to the next generation: "The fact that treasures to such a high degree came to be personal property of women may perhaps provide us with a natural explanation of why so many were eventually left in the ground. Women were in general at high risk in childbirth, which makes it not so surprising that many of them passed away without having been able to distribute their treasures further. Silver hoards, in this interpretation, basically equate "dead women". In mythology, women and treasures (hoards) are not dead, but rather they are protected within walls and by

4 K. Kristiansen, Ideology and material Culture: an archaeological perspective. In: M. Spriggs (ed.), Marxist perspectives in archaeology. New directions in Archeology (Cambridge 1984) 72-100. See in particular Figure 12.
5 Arrhenius (note 3), 95.
dragons; however, they are often in some kind of sleep or impotent condition and must be "liberated" in order to be of use or to take some form of action\(^6\).

It is also striking how many hoards contain similar sets of jewellery. Brooches, rings, pins, earrings, bracelets, and so on are recurrent. They vary over time, depending on the temporal context of the hoard, but within a certain period of time (which from a numismatic perspective means "related to certain coins") one will often find a very similar sort of jewellery in hoards. They appear to be "fixed sets", compared, for example, to grave goods or tool sets. Working with 12th – 13th century coins from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea,\(^7\) I have encountered several such fixed combinations of coins, jewellery and other objects. I suggest they represent different social identities or genders, and I use one of these groups to illustrate this line of thought. In these hoards, the matter of selection is important and so is the close context of the coins. The contents in terms of numbers, types and combinations of objects, and the micro-context of those coins were all apparently carefully selected.

3.2 Some 12th century silver hoards

The oldest Gotlandic coins (minted c. 1140-1220), which were the impetus for this study, are small and thin (c. 11-13 mm \(\varnothing\); c. 0.14 – 0.24 g.), but normally have high silver content (\(\approx 96\%\) Ag) (fig. 1). They are not found in great numbers.

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\(6\) Myrberg (note 2).

outside of hoards, but there they may be found together by the thousands. Some hoards contain objects other than coins and others do not (table 1). The empirical basis for this case study is a total of 60 hoards with a total of 76,336 coins. All coins are not of the medieval Gotlandic type, but all hoards included some such coins and many of the hoards contained only these exclusively. The hoards were recorded with the counts of coins, the container, other material and the type of context discussed in documents pertinent to their discovery. Table 1 shows some results from the first part of the study. A few find contexts were recurrent: field (what was a cultivated field at the time of recovery of the hoard – which does not mean it was so when the hoard was deposited, but should reflect similar circumstances of the soil, location, etc.), boulder/cairn (in or under a large stone or a cairn), settlement (including medieval farmsteads), castle (castles and ring-forts, a context probably connected with a certain use and group of people, perhaps also gender), and church (including the main church building and also the cemetery; in some cases the hoards were mortared into the walls or foundation of a church or were buried in graves). Unknown/other refers to cases where insufficient information was available. Container includes cauldrons, urns, cloth, wooden boxes and horns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>without objects (36 hoards)</th>
<th>in container</th>
<th>cultivated field</th>
<th>boulder/ cairn</th>
<th>&quot;settlement&quot;</th>
<th>castle/ ringfort</th>
<th>church</th>
<th>unknown/other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with objects (24 hoards)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>46 %</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all (60 hoards)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>container (16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The table shows the number of hoards that were found with or without objects and/or container, and in which contexts the hoards were found. In the bottom row the contexts of hoards in a container are specified.

From the table it can be concluded that the find context is connected with the content of the hoard. Of the hoards, 40 % included jewellery while 60 % did not. Those containing jewellery were more frequently found in some type of container (cloth, box, horn) (46 % of the hoards with jewellery, as compared with 14 % of the hoards without). In other words, 69 % of the containers were found housing a hoard encompassing jewellery. Hoards with containers were also more frequently recovered in (what was at the time of recovery) cultivated fields (38 % of the hoards with containers), as were the hoards including jewellery (42 % of the hoards with jewellery, to be compared with 11 % of the hoards without). Even after
considering possible external factors that may cause deviation, e.g. different conditions of preservation, the container not being mentioned by the finder, etc., the connection between the inclusion of jewellery and the presence of a container and find spot in field is clear. We may consider the number of containers in the study to be an underrepresentation of the original number deposited, but there is no reason why specific contents should change the rates of preservation to any significant degree. Hoards with containers were also found in ecclesiastical contexts (25 %), but here hoards with and without jewellery are equal in numbers. Typically, rather small hoards (\( \leq 100 \) coins) are found in churches, as they are in the context of a fortress/settlement, while at least 54 % of the largest hoards (\( \geq 1000 \) coins) were deposited in what was a cultivated field at the time of recovery\(^8\).

The jewellery included in the hoards with 12th century medieval Gotlandic coins mainly came from Gotland, Scandinavia and Estonia. These pieces reflect stronger ties to their area of origin than the coins; jewellery is normally found in hoards closer to their area of origin and is rather worn. Jewellery, as a rule, is included in Viking Age hoards, but those hoards are generally not deposited during the 11th century. Medieval hoards appearing in the 12th century contain very little jewellery and Hacksilber and contain only domestic coins almost exclusively. According to the chronology I have worked out for the Gotlandic coins, the coins found in hoards with jewellery were mainly of types minted between c. 1190 and 1210\(^9\). Accordingly, these hoards appear to be the resumption at a later date of an older custom. The "other coins" in the hoards are Medieval Scandinavian, German and English coins, and in a few cases, Viking Age coins\(^10\). In an attempt to part with the traditional approach to coin hoards, I focus not on the coins, but on one particular type of brooch which is found in several of the hoards (fig. 2). Table 1 clearly indicates that the hoards in question were subject to careful selection and composition of numbers of coins, contexts, containers and jewellery and, therefore, I find this approach better for understanding the meaning of these hoards.

### 3.3 Pendant brooches

Pendant brooches are a recurrent feature in silver hoards with Gotlandic coins from the turn of the 13th century and well into it, together with other jewellery such as finger rings, earrings, large disc brooches with filigree, silver chains and glass beads. I chose this particular group of objects as a starting point for the study because they are easily recognizable, and because they are found in two typical and distinct contexts: in hoards and in female graves (table 2). There are, as always, also a few "unknown" and "stray" finds, most of which one may suspect belonged to either one or the other of these contexts, but which could not be classified

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8 Myrberg (note 7), Chapter 5, study 6B.
9 Ibid., Chapter 6.
10 Ibid., Chapter 5, study 6A.
Fig. 2: Pendant brooch found in 1739, in a hoard of more than 4,000 coins, discovered while digging a ditch (Sweden, Västergötland, Kockhem; SHM inventory number 102). Scale 1:1. After Nordman 1924, fig. 10 (note 11).

precisely. 42 pendant brooches are included in the case study, derived from 26 find complexes. The pendant brooches were treated thoroughly in 1924 by Finnish archaeologist C.A. Nordman11, in a study of the Karelian Late Iron Age (including the 13th century). His study is rather old by now, but the catalogue12 and discussion of objects remain valid. Nordman concluded that the pendant brooches were most probably of Gotlandic origin and come in few iconographically distinct types, the oldest (end of the 12th century) with a lion or dragon (fig. 2), later ones (after 1200) with floral ornamentation (fig. 3) or with representations of Christ, angels and saints (fig. 4)13. The brooches are undoubtedly feminine jewellery, and were found in female graves in Finland (table 2). One of the brooches (from Tukkala) is inscribed "BOTVI IYIAIUK" [Botvi owns me] in runes; "Botvi" is a typical Gotlandic female name. Nordman was convinced that the brooches were of Gotlandic origin, and suggested that the Tukkala brooch may even have belonged to a Gotlandic woman (perhaps married in Finland; personal connections around the Baltic Sea were close)14.

The brooches themselves are made of silver, sometimes inlaid with niello or gold, and vary in size between c. 4.5 to c. 8.5 cm ø. They have a pin on the back for attaching the brooch to cloth and a loop attached to the edge of the brooch, below the design. Inserted in the loop is a ring, from which a thin chain hung (fig. 2). What was on the end of the chains is unknown. The brooches were worn as single pieces, and sometimes as a middle brooch between two commonly used oval brooches worn in pairs by the shoulders. In one of the Finnish graves, the chain of the pendant brooch appears to have been attached to

11 C.A. Nordman, Karelska järnåldersstudier [Karelian Iron Age studies]. Finska fornnminnesföreningens tidskrift 34 (Helsinki 1924).
12 Ibid., 6-14.
13 Ibid., 56-69.
14 Ibid., 66-68.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Find spot</th>
<th>Nos</th>
<th>Categ.</th>
<th>Find context</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Gotl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EE, Saaremaa, Taggamois</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>grave with cairn</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE, Saaremaa, Piila</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>21?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Kekomäki</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave of 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Kekomäki</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave of 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Kekomäki</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave of 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Kulhamäki</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Leppesennäki</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Linnasaari</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G?H?</td>
<td>burnt, grave goods under stone</td>
<td>2 dirh.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Suotniemi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>burnt, bone, urn?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Karelen, Tontinmäki</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Savolax, Tuukkala</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>S (G)</td>
<td>probably from the gravefield</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Savolax, Tuukkala</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Savolax, Tuukkala</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL, Savolax, Tuukkala</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>unburnt grave</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI, Tavastland, Harakkamäki</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>H?</td>
<td>together in a slope (late IA gravefield?)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Gotland, Suderbys</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Gotland, Sproge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>by the churchyard</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Skåne, Kristianstad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>unknown (0) (0)</td>
<td>(0) (0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Småland, Badeboda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>under cairn</td>
<td>1 bys. 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Småland, Tingby</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>horn in field</td>
<td>3882 3768</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Småland, Torp</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>under cairn</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Södermanland, Rickelsta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>in the earth</td>
<td>(0) (0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Västergötland, Kockhem</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>ditch in field</td>
<td>c. 4000</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Oland, Alvidsjö</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>under cairn</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, Oland, Hallnäs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>H?</td>
<td>under cairn</td>
<td>(0) (0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE, unknown place</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>(0) (0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Finds of pendant brooches from 12th-13th centuries (all types). The table shows the finding place, how many brooches were found in each place (or hoard), the type of find (G=grave, H= hoard, S=stray find), the finding context, the number of coins found with the brooch/es, and how many of those coins were of the Gotlandic coins from the 12th-13th centuries. Numbers within brackets indicate that no information about coins was obtained, X that coins were included but the exact number is not known. The table is based on the catalogue in Nordman 1924, with my additions concerning the coins.
Fig. 3: Pendant brooch of the "floral-ornamented" type. This brooch was found with one more pendant brooch, and several other objects including a gilded brooch and a gilded crown or diadem. The hoard also included a perforated and gilded copy of a Byzantine silver coin (the original minted for Basileos II and Konstantin VIII, 976-1025) with fragments of a medieval bracteate attached to the surface, perhaps as a result of burning. The hoard was discovered in a cairn by some children in 1887 (Sweden, Småland, Badeboda; SHM inventory number 8285). Also visible in this picture is the animal head (dragon) shape of the loop, biting the edge of the brooch as is common on the types without lion iconography. Scale 1:1. After. H. Hildebrand, Sveriges Medeltid I, bok II [Sweden's Middle Ages I, book II] (Stockholm, 1894), figure 221.
Fig. 4: Pendant brooch of the "ring-cross" type, probably showing the crucifixion of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the shape of birds. This brooch was found with two more pendant brooches, four finger rings, two earrings and ten Gotlandic coins in a cairn removed from a field in 1905 (Sweden, Småland, Torp; Jönköpings Länsmuseum, Kalmar, Sweden (JLM) inventory number 8706). Scale 1:2. After Nordman 1924, fig. 32 (note 11).

one of the oval brooches. While the pendant brooches in Finland were found almost entirely in graves (sometimes in multiple graves, see table 2), they were found primarily in hoards in Sweden. Finnish graves contain no coins of any kind, and it is thus only in the hoards that Gotland coins are present. In Estonia, two discoveries containing the brooches have been made, one in a grave (without coins) and one in a hoard (with coins).

In a few hoards of Gotlandic coins, there is a similar type of object included: a round silver piece with a lion or dragon and loops on the edge (fig. 5). They differ from the pendant brooches in that they have no pin on the back and that the loops are each side of the silver disc. A thick silver chain was attached to the disc through animal heads ("dragons") biting the loops. Actually, these "medallions" were parts (locks) of chains for silver crucifixes, and they, as well, are found in two contexts: hoards and male graves. They are not investigated further here, but it should be noted that in all the multiple Finnish graves (table 2), all females (adults and juveniles) had pendant brooches and all males wore crucifixes. Like the pendant brooches, these relic crosses or crucifixes are supposedly of Gotlandic origin.

15 Ibid., 15.
17 Nordman (note 11), 6-7.
Fig. 5: Silver chain and lock with dragon/lion. Hoard from Estonia (Harjumaa, Kumna; Ajaloomuseum, Tallinn, Estonia (AM) inventory number 18136:32-51). The hoard was found under or close to some big boulders, which were removed from a field in 1965-68. It was deposited in a ceramic vessel and included other jewellery as well as 20 coins, of which 7 were of the early Gotlandic type. Not to scale. After Tõnisson 1970 (note 16).

The brooches, the coins and the crucifix chains are all from Gotland, but are they found there? No, not in this period. Gotlandic coins were frequently hoarded on the island during the preceding period, but from c. 1190, only a few coins of the late types minted up to that time were included in hoards while the rest consisted of Gotlandic coins of older types. At this time the habit of hoarding seems to disappear entirely on Gotland. Instead, we find coins hoarded in adjacent regions, particularly in Öland and Saaremaa (other large islands in the Baltic Sea; Gotland's closest neighbours) and in mainland Sweden, Estonia and Latvia. There are a few examples of pendant brooches and relic cross parts on the island, one of which is said to have been found "by the churchyard" (table 2) and all are defined as stray finds. Perhaps they all came from graves, but this can not be verified.

The iconography of the pendant brooches should be considered entirely in a Christian context. The lion (one example represented in fig. 2) is a way of representing Christ in Romanesque art, the period in question. The floral ornaments (palmettes and trees) of the slightly later types of brooches are also common in Christian medieval art and may be compared with both Byzantine and Gothic ornamentation (see the example in fig. 3). Finally, the figurative types with Christ on the cross, saints, angels, etc., are undoubtedly Christian (see example in fig. 4). The 12th and 13th centuries were periods when Christianity entered the Baltic Sea region in a new way. In eastern areas, there were missions and crusades and in the western parts, which had been officially Christian for a hundred years or more, consolidation and organisation of church administration took place. The crusades embroiled much of the region, whether "senders" or "receivers" of this
forceful Christian message. The crusader ideology was high fashion among the Christian elite of northern Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries, and a number of crusades were launched in several directions, both north and south. For the Baltic and Finn peoples in the eastern Baltic, these were hard times, since they were among those who were to be "Christened" (and, not surprisingly, made parts of other kingdoms). The crusades were particularly intensive at about the time when pendant brooches were used and buried, the last decades of the 12th century into the middle of the 13th century. Still, the very existence of pendant brooches and crucifixes in Finland in c. 1190-1220 proves that Christianity was not unknown in that region at the time. There were people with a firm Christian identity which they expressed in jewellery and dress ornaments. Perhaps this was of vital importance to them during an ongoing process of "conversion", or perhaps it was what caused their death – some of the Finnish graves are mass graves containing males, women and children who, apparently, were buried at the same time.

3.4 Hoards as female, Christian graves

The pendant brooches, then, may be connected with female gender and with a Christian identity. It is likely that a woman wearing such a brooch would also be of a certain social distinction, judging from the other jewellery in the graves and hoards and from the association with males wearing relic crosses, which are among the most costly silver objects produced at the time, particularly of those made for personal use. How the brooches were worn may never be determined, but we know they were part of the burial dress of some women on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea during a period when Christianity was a developing feature of that society. On the western side of the Baltic Sea, the brooches are not found in graves but in hoards and then, in most cases (five of seven verified), with coins. The find contexts of those seven hoards are: four in or under a cairn, two in a field, and one "in the earth", which should perhaps be interpreted as in a field, but neither the specific circumstances nor the other objects are known. Although the sample is small, there are some further commonalities: the two hoards found "in a field" were also the ones including the largest number of coins (c. 4,000 and 3,882, respectively), while the four found "in or under cairn" contained a considerably lower amounts of coins (1, 10, 940 and no known coins, respectively). It is also worth mentioning the Estonian finds, where one brooch was found in a grave (without coins), and the other in a hoard (detailed circumstances unknown to the author) with a few (21?) coins (table 2). The hoard including parts of a crucifix chain (mentioned above) was also found near or under a large boulder and with 20 coins (fig. 5).

Considering the conceptual connections between silver hoards and (dead or sleeping) women, and the connection between the pendant brooches and female

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19 Nordman (note 11), catalogue numbers 3, 5-6, perhaps also nr 4.
graves, I propose that the hoards treated in the case study should be considered representative of female graves. There is also a hint of a pattern: hoards found in a "field" context are large in number of coins, while the hoards found in or under cairns are lesser. Other hoarding contexts known for Gotlandic coins, such as the above mentioned castles, churches, etc. (table 1), are not known at all regarding the combination with pendant brooches. As was shown in table 1, the selection and composition of hoards to be deposited in certain contexts apparently also regarded the number of coins. The cases in the present study serve as means for proposing that even the number of coins was intentionally related to depositional context. I suggest that the coins in these hoards represent the body of the deceased, and that increasing the number of coins was a way of "adding body" to those hoards and marking them on the "inside". Hoards with fewer coins were marked out as "graves" through a cairn or boulder on the "outside".

It is difficult to speculate as to why these "graves" were created. A suggestion might be that they were substitutes for "real" graves, perhaps when the person was missing. When there are several pendant brooches in a hoard, they are normally of varied types. They may have belonged to or represented different persons, perhaps the variations reflect changing fashions during the individual's life, or maybe they represent different stages in life. These are only suggestions for interpretation, but the connection to females and Christianity is clear in a time when Christianity itself was undergoing important changes in the area and, consequently, burial customs. Few objects entered medieval Christian graves, and the hoards, therefore, may have represented what a woman could no longer place in her grave, as was prescribed by old custom. The solution may have been to bury the objects outside of the churchyard and clarify their meaning with coins and cairns.

4. Hoarded coins in context

Many of the hoards recovered in Scandinavia were found over the past centuries, in particular in the 19th century when new fields were cultivated, many wet areas were ditched, and new ploughing machinery was introduced. The hoards recovered at that time were poorly recorded in terms of modern standards, but there are enough instances in which detailed information is available to allow at least some investigation of hoard composition and find circumstances. The evidence from such studies indicates that most hoards were probably composed in a deliberate way and were not simply randomly gathered valuables. The patterns of find context highlight this interpretation. For middle Sweden in the Viking Age, a spatial connection between silver hoards, rune stones and estate boundaries has been proposed to provide a broad example of contextual interpretation20. Here, I have dealt more with the detailed context of the find in an attempt to understand

20 T. Zachrisson, Gård, gräns, gravfält: sammanhang kring ädelmetalldepåer och runstenar från vikingatid och tidig medeltid i Uppland och Gästrikland [Farm, boundary, cemetery: connections between precious metal deposits and rune stones from the Viking Age and early Middle Ages in Uppland and Gästrikland] (Stockholm 1998).
what those hoards actually represented. It should be stressed that the study is only
dealing with a few out of several possible lines of interpretation and that many
types of investigations may be made on the same material. There are also several
other contents in the hoards which could, and should, be subject to the same type
of investigation. It may be that they represent other phenomena, or that they
express the same phenomenon but other "genders". The case study above is
intended as a starting point for discussion, not as the ultimate or unequivocal
answer.

The most important aim of this is to remind one that hoards do not reflect one
single phenomenon and should not be used for only one type of interpretation or
means. Hoards must be differentiated and examined for the many individual events
which led up to their deposition. Additionally, the whole hoard should be treated,
not the jewellery or the coins alone, as is often the case. So, what does the case
study actually tell us about the coins? Not much about their chronology, but we did
explore the question of why coins were hoarded, what they represented in that
specific context, addressed Scandinavian mentality in the medieval period, the
conception of hoards and coins, and the motivation of hoarding events. Above all,
some general points are made clear:

- coins in a hoard may be chronologically relevant but also carefully selected
- coin hoards must be differentiated and investigated in several types of contexts
- coins must be treated with the other components of the hoard
- coins may represent something else than "riches" or "pocket money"
- coin studies need not necessarily focus on the primary context to tell us
something useful about the coins

Hoards as well as other coin finds ought to be treated in their complex physical
context in order to improve our understanding of coins, hoards and contexts alike –
or at least to help us formulate new questions. One should consider selection and
hoarding context to determine what led to hoarding events. These additional
considerations should not to be regarded as complications, but as openings to new
insight. Material culture is not always "straightforward", but that does not mean it
is incomprehensible.