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THE 1971 AQUILEIA SOLIDUS HOARD AND ITS RELATION TO SCANDINAVIA

Abstract

This is a study of the so-called Aquileia solidus hoard, discovered on February 11, 1971 during an archaeological excavation of the central nexus of the basilica-forum complex of Aquileia. In an early publication by Giovanni Gorini in 1979, two possible interpretations were proposed. First, the nine solidi could have been deposited relatively soon after minting given their slight wear, possibly early in the reign of Valentinian III, c. 425–430. Second, Gorini pointed out that political circumstances could have forced a deposition in conjunction with the sack of Aquileia in 452. This study argues in favor of the second scenario, while stressing that Gorini's observation regarding the slight wear was correct. This suggests that the latest solidi in the hoard were issued very late in the reign of Valentinian III, c. 445–452. This argument further relies on the comparative evidence of die-linked solidi for Valentinian III in hoards mainly from Italy and Scandinavia, demonstrating that the solidi for Valentinian III date to the final part of his reign. The hoard should be interpreted as representative of private rather than military hoarding, given that it has retained issues that have otherwise already disappeared from circulation, and is devoid of types related to military expenditure from the same period.

Keywords

Solidi, Aquileia, Valentinian III, Attila, Honorius, Theodosius II, die-links, Scandinavia, Italy

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the context, chronology and composition of the Aquileia solidus hoard discovered in 1971. This will be done by comparing the nine solidi in the Aquileia hoard to other solidus hoards from Italy (notably the recently published finds from Como and San Mamiliano) and Scandinavia (especially hoards from Bornholm, Småland and Öland that contain die-linked solidi). The Aquileia solidus hoard was found in situ during an archaeological excavation of the central nexus of the basilica-forum complex of Aquileia. In an early publication by Giovanni Gorini in 1979, two possible scenarios were proposed. First, the coins could have been deposited relatively soon after minting given their slight wear. They could thus have been deposited very early in the reign of Valentinian III, c. 425-430. Second, Gorini also pointed out that political circumstances could have forced a deposition in conjunction with the sack of Aquileia in 452. In this paper will be argued in favor of the second scenario, that the hoard belongs to c. 452. This argument rests on the comparative evidence of die-linked solidi for Valentinian III in hoards from Italy and Scandinavia. The four earliest coins date to 408–422. There are no eastern coins after 422 – there is no record of contact with eastern subsidies of 431–434 and 441–447. The last coin from Ravenna dates to c. 430–445. The Rome coins date to c. 450–455. There is thus a hiatus of c. 10-20 years between coins 1-4 and 5-9. The hoard is probably representative of private rather than military hoarding, given that it has retained issues that have otherwise already disappeared from circulation. To sum up, the hoard must have been deposited in 452, and thus provides a snapshot image of what solidus ownership looked like in northern Italy at the time.[1]

THE SCANDINAVIAN NUMISMATIC MATERIAL AND ITS RELATION TO AQUILEIA

By the fourth century AD, the city of Aquileia served as a key hub along the major communication routes leading from Italy and Illyricum towards Barbaricum along the so called "amber route". Precious metal coinage issued by the imperial mint in Aquileia would reach distant Scandinavia but also the outskirts of the Roman Empire in Britain.

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This can be demonstrated by two coins once collected by the founding president of the Swedish Numismatic Society, Baron August Wilhelm Stiernstedt (1812–1880). First, a very rare solidus struck for Constantine II issued in c. 340 was discovered in Ella, Gåsinge Parish in Södermanland. It was acquired by Stiernstedt and donated to the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm in 1848. Second, a siliqua struck for Magnus Maximus in Aquileia in 387–388 belongs to the Stiernstedt Ancient Coin Collection (now kept at the Dolph Briscoe Center at the University of Texas in Austin). The siliqua is die-linked to a specimen in the Hoxne hoard from Suffolk, England. After the execution of Magnus Maximus followed a period of slow decline for Aquileia. The city emerged briefly as an imperial residence in 424–425 when Galla Placida and her son Valentinian III returned in triumph from their exile in Constantinople. Still, Aquileia ceased to issue precious metal coinage after 425 when Valentinian III left for Ravenna. In 452 Attila sacked the town, a blow from which it never recuperated. Nevertheless, the southbound and westbound routes through Aquileia leading into the Po Valley would continue to serve Scandinavian mercenaries operating in northern Italy well into the early sixth century. The strong connection between many Italian solidus hoards and Scandinavian finds has been demonstrated by many scholars since the late 1980's and there is every reason to employ this approach in the case of the Aquileia hoard as well. Given the empirical source value of the numismatic evidence available one should be able to provide a straightforward answer regarding a possible direct Scandinavian connection to the Aquileia hoard.

OTHER FINDS OF SOLIDI IN AQUILEIA

The sizeable numismatic material from Aquileia has recently been surveyed by Andrea Stella in two important works. In total, Stella lists some 8,000 Roman and Late Roman find coins from the city. There have been three other separate finds of solidi from Aquileia. The only other hoard find consists of three solidi for Valentinian I and Valens from the TROB. mint in Trier which operated c. 367–375, and a tremissis for Valentinian I from Thessalonica. The hoard probably dates to the late 370's but could perhaps be associated with political unrest in northern Italy following the death of Gratian in 383 and the subsequent brief residency of Magnus Maximus in Aquileia in 387–388. By the same token, it is clear from the Gravisca hoard in Tuscany that solidus coinage of the early Valentinians from Trier mints could be hoarded well into the early fifth century in Italy. Second, there is a find of a solidus for Arcadius from Milan of a very common type, RIC X 1205. Third, there is rare issue from Ravenna for Licinia Eudoxia struck in 437. It is die-linked to a specimen in the Como hoard. There seems to be no direct correlation between the main Aquileia hoard and these other solidus finds around the city, nor can these finds be explicitly related to hoards in Scandinavia.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE AQUILEIA HOARD

There have been two previous publications of the hoard with plates. When these are added together and compared to other publications the following data can be presented, see table 1:

Ruler	Gorini 1979, n.	Stella 2020, n.	Mint	RIC X	Weight	Chronology	Inv nr	Condition
Honorius	1	18 (2b)/1	RV	1326	4,5	408–423	IG 74585	Worn, assay mark on reverse
Honorius	2	18 (2b)/2	RV	1328	4,4	408–423	IG 74587	Worn
Theodosius II	3	–	CONOB, Iota	8	?	408–420	?	Worn
Theodosius II	4	18 (2b)/4	CONOB, Gamma	202	4,46	421	IG 74586	Worn
Valentinian III	5	18 (2b)/6	RM	2014	4,48	440–455	IG 74588	Fine
Valentinian III	6	18 (2b)/8	RM	2014	4,47	440–455	IG 74584	Crack in obverse die
Valentinian III	7	18 (2b)/7	RM	2014	4,44	440–455	IG 74581	Crack in obverse die
Valentinian III	8	18 (2b)/5	RM	2014	4,41	440–455	IG 74582	Fine
Valentinian III	9	18 (2b)/9	RV	2018	4,44	430–445	IG 74583	Fair

TABLE 1 - The nine solidi of the Aquileia hoard.

Table one shows the number of die-links currently known. According to Thordeman's law, the number of coins in a hoard always reflects the total output and the circulation pattern of all represented coin types in the hoard. This is true to a point in the case of the Aquileia hoard. After the inventory in table 1, we can begin a more detailed comparison with other hoards in terms of quantitative representation. First, it becomes apparent that much coinage typical of military payments and East Roman subsidies is simply absent in the Aquileia hoard. What is missing? The solidi in the Stora Brunneby hoard from Öland (tpq 451) and the Bina hoard from Slovakia (deposited c. 445) are very good examples of what should have been in the hoard had it been explicitly connected to payments of barbarian mercenaries. In particular,

CONCLUSION

It seems most likely that the Aquileia hoard was somehow related to important church functionaries and/or urban magistrates in the Aquileia rather than the Late Roman military state apparatus. It seems very probable that the sudden incursion of the Huns forced the hoard into the ground. There have been various but unconvincing attempts to connect the Hunnic invasions to the solidus import to Scandinavia. Rather, the opposite seems more likely. Scandinavians have received solidi in return for military service not because of the Huns, but rather because the Huns were no longer around when most of the Scandinavian mercenary retinues were able to operate inside Italy. The comparative analysis of die-links and connections to other hoards reveals no direct relation between the Italo-Scandinavian cluster of related hoards mainly deposited in the period 472–490 and the much earlier Aquileia hoard. On the contrary, the Aquileia hoard integrates itself on a wider, lower spectrum in a preceding time span in the circulation hierarchy of fifth

century solidus hoards. The die-links mainly connect the youngest coins in the Aquileia hoard to some of the older coins in the more important Italian and Scandinavian hoards. In short, the Aquileia hoard consists of solidus types that were available to the local elite in northern Italy in the late 440's, at least a decade or two before larger contingents of Scandinavian mercenaries began to operate in Italy.

Coin	Hoard or Auction	Reference	Country	Ruler	Mint	Obverse die	Reverse die	RIC X
Aquileia 1	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Honorius	Ravenna	1	1	1326
RIC X 1326 plate coin	Münzhandlung Basel 4 March 1935.	Kent 1994, Stella 2020	?	Honorius	Ravenna	1	8	1326
Aquileia 2	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Honorius	Ravenna	2	2	1328
S M 235	San Mamiliano	Arslan, Turchetti 2015	Italy	Honorius	Ravenna	2	9	1328
Aquileia 5	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	3	3	2014
Aquileia 6	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	4	4	2014
Aquileia 7	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	4	5	2014
Aquileia 8	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	5	6	2014
Aquileia 9	Aquileia	Gorini 1979, Stella 2020	Italy	Valentinian III	Ravenna	7	10	2018
Como 329	Como	Facchinetti 2022	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	4	5	2014
Como 350	Como	Facchinetti 2022	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	3	3	2014
Como 353	Como	Facchinetti 2022	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	4	5	2014
F 48	F 18 Hässelstad	Fagerlie 1967	Sweden	Valentinian III	Rome	4	5	2014
F 51	F 205 Dalshøj	Fagerlie 1967	Denmark	Valentinian III	Rome	4	5	2014
Noli 4	Noli	Arslan 2007	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	4	5	2014
S M 322	San Mamiliano	Arslan, Turchetti 2015	Italy	Valentinian III	Rome	6	7	2014
Stenåsa 3.2, n.1	Stenåsa 3.2	KMK dnr 711-1509-2004	Sweden	Valentinian III	Rome	3	3	2014
Witow 4	Witow	Bodzek 2009	Poland	Valentinian III	Rome	3	3	2014
Övetorp SHM 32444	F 40 Övetorp	Fagerlie 1967	Sweden	Valentinian III	Rome	6	4	2014

TABLE 2 - The die-links of the Western solidi in the Aquileia hoard.

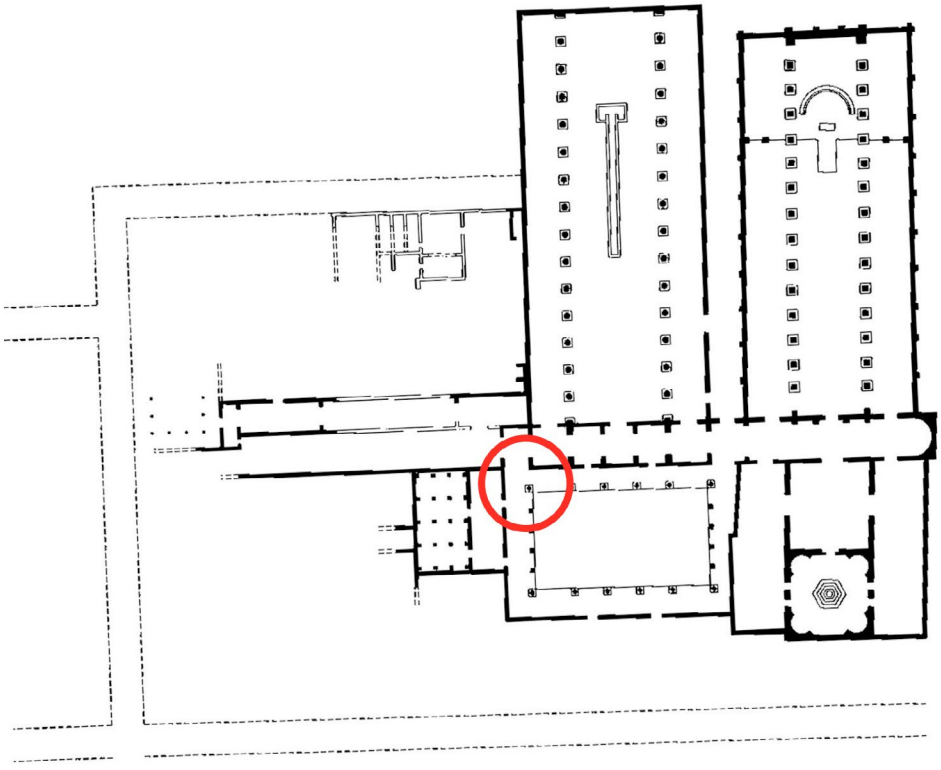

FIG 1 - The Site. After Stella (2020).

Fig 2a-2b - Solidus from Övetorp, Algutsrum Parish, Öland, Sweden. SHM 32344. Photograph by Gabriel Hildebrand, courtesy of the SHM, Stockholm.

Fig 3a-3b - Honorius. RIC X 1328. San Mamiliano, coin no. 253. Reproduced with the kind permission of E.A. Arslan.

Fig 4a-4b - Solidus F 48, SHM 12457. Hässelstad, Lofta Parish, Småland, Sweden. Photograph by Gabriel Hildebrand, courtesy of the SHM, Stockholm.

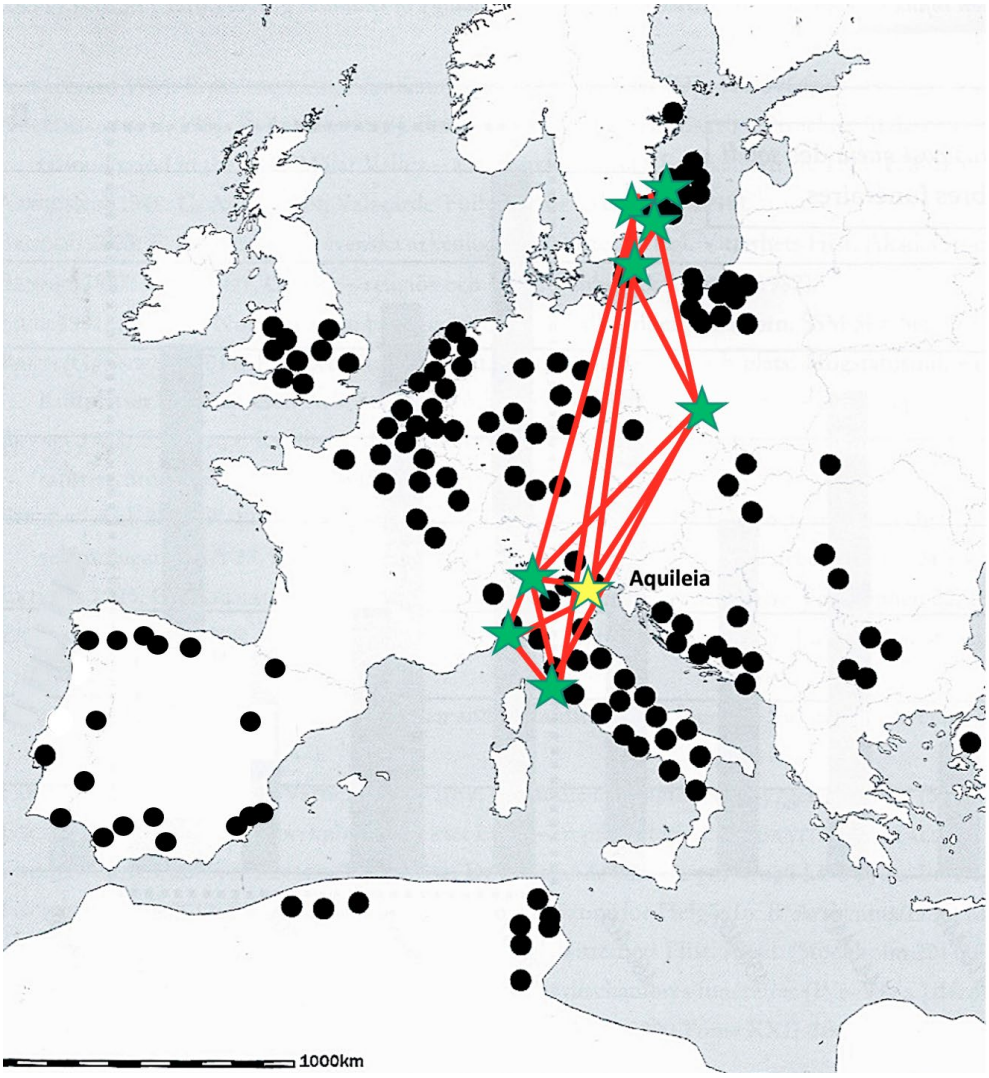

FIG 5 - Die-link map. Illustration by the author.

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