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In July 2010 an important early Medieval gold bracteate, a first in Leicestershire, was found north of Melton in the parish of Scalford (PAS Ref. LEIC-EDD980). This object was of serious interest as it was the first of at least 1,000 known bracteates to show a figure with a drinking horn (or similar) vessel. The object was the focus of several papers by Dr Charlotte Behr, a bracteate expert, who has written several papers on this object, one of which was published in Transactions in 2011 (Behr 2011a). In November 2014 a second bracteate was found, west of Melton Mowbray, in the parish of Hoby with Rotherby (PAS Ref. LEIC-1E63A8). The finder realised its significance immediately, as it resembled closely the Scalford example which had been found by a fellow member of the Melton and Belvoir Search Society. The item was promptly reported to this writer and sent to the British Museum for examination by Charlotte Behr.

THE HOBY BRECTATE

The bracteate is incomplete and crumpled, but the same imagery as on the Scalford example can be seen clearly – a male figure dressed in Roman attire, drinking from a vessel. It differs slightly in that it has a border comprising several components and an applied wire spiral below the, now missing, loop.

The Hoby example is a highly significant find, which has been confirmed by Behr as a perfect die-link to the Scalford bracteate; it has the rare addition of a beaded double spiral positioned underneath the loop. The spiral, which has been soldered over the border, can be compared with English examples including two from Kent (IK 582 Dover Buckland grave 250 and IK 554 unknown provenance), two from St Giles’s Field, Oxfordshire (IK 323) and Undley, Suffolk (IK 374), and three from the Binham hoard (IK 604,2, 630,1 and 630,3) (2011T657, 2009T657 and 2013T628) (Behr 2010; Behr et al. 2014). The die-linking and stylistic evidence adds weight to Behr’s suggestion that the bracteates were produced locally and not imported from the homelands. The Hoby example contains a design motif which has not been seen on bracteates before. The border is delineated by two solid concentric lines, then a row of wheel-like motifs. The object is completed by a soldered-on, beaded wire edging.

Many bracteates have this style of border, but this example is (so far) unique – a status enjoyed briefly by the Scalford bracteate. The stamp used to form the

wheel-like motif in the border is a new addition to bracteate imagery. They are formed of a central flattened pellet surrounded by a double, solid raised line, divided into rectangular segments by transverse lines. The motif is completed by triangular-shaped motifs forming an outer border.
Bracteates and Their Distribution

Bracteates were a fifth-century development in Southern Scandinavia. Their design echoes pendants which utilised late Roman gold coins and featured stylised images based on coins. It is considered that they represented a form of status symbol using imagery based on Roman emperors, and thereby inheriting the prestige of their wearers. The imagery gradually shifted over time from Roman imperial motifs to ones illustrating Germanic religion and myth. It is hard to establish when this shift occurred. Many Scandinavian examples feature highly stylised animal motifs with ribbon-shaped bodies that echo interlace, or they might represent something figurative which is now lost to modern eyes.

The different classes of bracteate are defined by Märit Gaimster (1992) in the following way:

A-bracteates show the face of a human in profile, modelled on late Roman Imperial medallions. Sometimes accompanied by one or more animals, additional signs and inscriptions.
B-bracteates show one, two, or three human figures in standing, sitting or kneeling positions, often accompanied by animals, signs and inscriptions.
C-bracteates show the head of a man above a quadruped. This has been interpreted as the Germanic god Odin/Woden, frequently accompanied by one or more animals, signs and inscriptions.
D-bracteates show one or more highly stylised animals, rarely accompanied by signs, and never by an inscription.
E-bracteates show an animal triskele under a circular feature.
F-bracteates are a subgroup of the D-bracteates, showing an imaginary animal, sometimes accompanied by another animal, signs or inscriptions.

Around 1,000 examples of fifth- to seventh-century bracteates are known across Early Medieval Europe, the majority coming from Scandinavia, where they may have emerged as a new form of votive item around AD 450. It is believed that the bracteate, and other objects such as gold foils, began to appear as replacement objects for use in ritual deposits replacing weapon hoards, previously the practice in Iron Age Scandinavia. In the central area of distribution the bracteates appear as single votive deposits, or as part of small precious metal hoards. Some of these are buried close to known ‘central places’: this might reflect a significant change in ritual practice at this period, characterised by a change from large communal sacrifices in sites that were used over long periods of time, like weapon deposition, to smaller deposits closer to settlements, and thus possibly under the control of the ‘king’/‘chieftain’ of these newly emerging central places.

There are several theories regarding bracteate iconography. Lotte Hedeager has suggested that the imagery, particularly types A, B and C, depict Odin’s journey to the underworld, where it was believed he could contact the ancestors. The bracteate may have been believed to be an instrument for communicating with another world (Hedeager 1999). The pattern of distribution suggests that they most probably had a dual meaning, used both for their religious/mythical properties and as items for prestige display. Bracteates from the north of their distribution area (Southern
Scandinavia and Northern Germany) are found only in hoards, confirming their
function as votive offerings. However, those found in the southern area – Northern
France, Poland, Frisia, England, Central and Southern Germany – are found only in
graves, suggesting a different emphasis in their ritual meaning. This pattern is not
seen in Western Norway and Gotland, which lie on the western and eastern edges
of their distribution area, where bracteates are found in both contexts (Gaimster

ENGLISH BRACETEATES

English bracteates have customarily been thought to come only from graves, but
it has recently been suggested that some of the English examples could be single
votive deposits. The Scalford example was found in complete isolation, whereas the
Hoby example was found in proximity to a scatter of brooch fragments, suggesting
perhaps a cemetery location – this has yet to be confirmed. Given that many are now
found by detector users, along with lack of resources to investigate sites further, it
is hard to confirm the context of some finds. It would appear to be the case that
the bracteates found in England may have been important to an individual for
several reasons – a demonstration of wealth and status, religious affiliation, amuletic
protection, or a link to the continental homelands.

At this time 65 bracteates are known. The majority are gold, but silver and
copper alloy examples have been found; 24 whole and fragmentary examples have
been recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) (see www.finds.org.uk).
The majority of these are D bracteates showing stylised animals. Most are found in
the south east, although their distribution runs up to the Humber. Eastern Kent has
the highest density, with about 30 examples to date. All but one are D bracteates
and all have been found in burials.

There is considerable debate as to where and when the English bracteates were
made. The majority of them are considered to be imports, particularly the A type
which is generally thought to be the earliest. However, a different pattern is seen in
Kent, where all the examples have all been found in cemeteries from female graves.
They form a coherent group in that area and are close to known royal centres. This
proximity to them may have been an attempt to identify the Kentish Kings with
ancestors from Jutland and therefore from the god Woden/Odin (Behr 2010).

It has also been suggested that the ‘Anglian’ type of bracteates (referring to
everything from outside Kent) may have been produced here, although they do show
some parallels with the bracteates from Götland, where, as with the non-Kentish
English examples, they are found in the context of both burials and hoards. This
suggests there was a link between the two regions several generations before the
emergence in the seventh century of rich boat burials on both sides of the North Sea.

The discovery of these two die-linked A-bracteates in Leicestershire suggests that
they were produced locally and that A-bracteates, as is the case with the D types,
could have been utilised to demonstrate the links of local elites to Scandinavia and
the god Woden/Odin.

The evidence for insular production is slight. However, the PAS has recorded
important information in the form of three rare bracteate dies. One for a D-bracteate
comes from Essex (PAS Ref ESS-13B5E6), a C-bracteate die from west of Wymondham, Norfolk (PAS Ref NMS-25CDD3), and a stunning example, possibly re-used as a weight, also from Norfolk (PAS Ref NMS-808582). These dies are important evidence for the manufacture of bracteates in England as they quadruple the number of all known dies. Before 1999, only one example (from Postgården in Jutland) was known (Behr 2010).

EAST MIDLANDS BRACETATES

Although it is only the second bracteate to be found in Leicestershire, this new example from Hoby, albeit incomplete, brings the total in the East Midlands to five. The others are from East Leake (IK 602), Willoughby on the Wolds, Notts (IK 227), and Market Overton, Rutland (IK 123). They were all found in cemetery locations, although the two from north-east Leicestershire have no proven association, and all were found within ten miles of Scalford in a linear distribution running north west–south east of Melton Mowbray (Fig. 2). The new example, from Hoby, was found just to the west of Melton Mowbray, seven miles from Scalford. Behr (2011b) has noted that all these find spots stand in close proximity to Roman roads which, if not being used as highways, may have been boundary markers, a preferred location for burials. It could be argued that they form a loose but coherent grouping.

IMAGES

The newly discovered Hoby bracteate belongs to an exclusive set of unique bracteates from England, along with the Market Overton example (Fig. 1). This gives us two unique examples from a set of five. The Market Overton example, which was found in a grave context during excavation, is a unique F-bracteate (a
sub-group of the D type). It is the only example which depicts just a bird above the usual quadruped, where customarily there is a male head. The bird may have been one of Woden/Odin’s ravens, with the more commonly found human head being that of the god Woden/Odin. As noted above, Hedeager is of the opinion that types A to C show imagery relating to Norse mythology. Many show depictions of Woden/Odin (C types), which Hedeager argues replaced the imagery of Roman emperors on A types. These were used, she argues, by Scandinavian warrior elites as a way of propagating the ‘new’ Norse mythology, with the image of the god on a quadruped illustrating the ‘soul journey’. The B types depict classic Norse religious imagery such as Tyr loosing his hand, Balder’s death and Sigurd the dragon slayer (Hedeager 2011, 207–9).

The Leicestershire A bracteates have been given an earlier date (AD 450–600) than the others, as they show the transformation from Roman iconography to the more obviously Germanic depictions on later types. With these examples the link to Germanic imagery is in the form of a drinking horn/glass vessel, which has added a significant new type to the bracteate corpus.

This depiction shows the importance of the drinking ritual in early medieval art. Although Scandinavian artefacts are known for portraying drinking scenes, especially the 100 gold foils and five patrices from house 2 at Uppåkra, Sweden (Behr, 2011b), no other depictions of drinking inscribed on early Anglo-Saxon material have been found in England. It has been argued that there is a written link to drinking throughout the bracteate range. The later types of bracteates (types B, C and F), which hold runic inscriptions, use words which could relate to alcohol. Because of the intricacies of the various Runic formula types, alternative possibilities have to be considered. Two examples from Binham, Norfolk have a four-letter inscription which unfortunately is in bad condition, but which may read ‘wet’. A reference perhaps to liquid or possibly drink. However, it might be wita ‘to know’, or even the Norse vattra ‘to witness’. Alu ‘ale’ occurs several times. German language scholars, however, consider alu means ‘good fortune’. Medu ‘mead’ appears on a bracteate from Undley, Suffolk. We know that the ritual sharing of a drink was important in early Medieval society and the purpose of the imagery on the bracteates must have been to celebrate this (Behr et al. 2014).

**MELTON AS A PUTATIVE CENTRAL PLACE**

The majority of the 65 or so bracteates from England have been found to the south and east of the country, with the majority being in East Anglia, where they are found in either rich cemeteries or as hoards clustered around possibly significant places. The most fascinating non-cemetery grouping is to be found around the village of Binham, Norfolk. It is generally accepted that the presence of these objects point to high status, royal centres and central places, yet Behr has dismissed this suggestion for Melton (Behr et al. 2014). The East Midlands group, although slight, must surely be considered to echo the meaning and distribution of those found further south. It is a plausible suggestion that the East Midlands group centres on Melton, particularly with the two linked examples coming from its immediate area. Focused metal-detecting in the area is revealing important single finds, some of which...
are imported goods contemporary with the bracteates: objects such as a Frisian
scabbard mount found north of Stonesby (LEIC-7F2E18) and a high-status gilded
shield apex mount from Hoby with Rotherby (LEIC-194735). This was found close
to the bracteate, an indication perhaps of a cemetery. There are also slightly later,
but still significant finds, from the area, the most notable of which must be the
recently found seventh-century gilded silver mount from Dalby (LEIC-15A132,
X.A5.2013) Recently, detectorists have identified a probable cemetery a few miles
west of Melton, finds from which include a gilded and garnet-set sword pyramid
(LEIC-4BD061) and buckle (LEIC-86FB45) dating to the sixth or seventh century.
Melton is one of several areas of the county that is detected intensively which may
account for the higher quantity of recovered objects, but it is only the Melton area
which is producing significant numbers of early medieval objects, amongst which
are imports of a much higher status than other artefacts found in Leicestershire for
this period. This writer is of the opinion that there is significant evidence to suggest
that Melton may have been an important central place. (This is examined further in
Bourne and Scott, Transactions 89 (2016), forthcoming.)

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