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Bracteate Fyn-C 1: A Surprising Encounter with Emperor Marcus Aurelius Carus?

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Bracteate Fyn-C 1, *Ikonographischer Katalog* 58, is of the C-type with head, horse, bird, hand and foot. It is also elaborately furnished with runic texts, divided into four parts: one part under the horse's head, the other three parts along the edge of the bracteate. Two familiar words can be made out: **lapu** and **alu**, but the sequence between these words looks unintelligible; according to Seebold (1995: S.178) "(...) ist die Hauptschrift verschlüsselt". Moltke (1985:109) transliterates: **aaduaaaliia**. Düwel (1985:IK 1, Text p.110) reads **aaduaaaliux**, the last rune showing the lower part while the upper part is "im Bereich der alten Ösenbefestigung". The second-last rune is "eher *u* als *l*, keinesfalls *a*".

The text under the horse's head reads according to Antonsen (1986:328): **horaz**; Moltke reads **houaR**. Düwel: "eine Lesung *r* ist nicht auszuschließen". Antonsen's argumentation for reading an *r* instead of an *u* makes sense: "(...) während der Zweig der dritten Rune unseres Wortes eine eindeutige Krümmung zeigt, wodurch die untere Hälfte des Zweiges dem Hauptstab nähert: *ᛞ* was nur auf eine *r*-Rune schliessen lässt. Eine völlig vergleichbare *r*-Rune findet sich auch auf der Spange von Aquincum in der Reihenfolge **fuᛞarkgw**". On two other bracteates this specific runic graph is found: Hitsum: **groba** and Nebenstedt (I)-B: **iurnR**.

Antonsen comments about **horaz**: "Der Name Horaz ist die genaue germanische Entsprechung des lat. *carus* und ist das männliche Gegenstück zu nhd. Hure." Such a meaning seems peculiar and unlikely on a bracteate with the function of amulet, or, as Antonsen adds: "Was die Mythologen mit diesem Namen anfangen wollen, ist mir unbekannt." But already in 1979¹ Antonsen elaborated in a more favourable way about **horaz**:

With the reading *r*, we have a straightforward name **horaz** = *Horaz* corresponding to Lat. *carus* and undoubtedly a term of endearment, or at least not a pejorative, in spite of the later development of this root to mean "fornicator, prostitute", cf. Go. *hōrs*, Oic. *hōrr*. It is curious that this very reading was proposed by Noreen (1892:258), accepted by Bugge (*NIæR* 1.172) at first, only to be rejected by him (1905:200-6) in favour of **houaz**, which has been accepted by all others since, including Noreen (1923:no.22).

¹ Cf. *The Graphemic System of the Germanic Fuᛞark*. In: *Linguistic Method: Essays in Honour of Herbert Penzl*. Den Haag/Paris/New York, p.295.

In his *Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* (1975:62), Antonsen translates: "Horaz [i.e. beloved]". The third rune looks ambiguous, but I am convinced that it is an *r* and no *u* as it differs from the two other *u*-runes on the bracteate. Besides, this type of *r*-rune with a triangle-form often occurs in runic inscriptions. I propose to proceed with the reading **horaz**,² being linguistically synonymous to Latin *carus*. It appears that *Carus* is the cognomen of a Roman emperor, who died in 283 AD after a reign of only one year. Could it be, that **horaz** on the bracteate refers to this emperor who may have been transferred into the mythological being that figurizes on bracteate Fyn 1? It occurred to me that somehow the corrupt letter-sequence along the edge might add to a solution. This enigmatic part of the runic text is presented by Düwel (1985:IK 1, Text p.110) as **aaduaaliux**. This sequence is generally considered to belong to a tendency to repeat and symmetricalize, shown in these runic vowel- and consonant rows.

As most of the runes are doubled, I think we are dealing here with so-called *Spiegelrunen*.³ These should not be transliterated by twice the same letter, but by just one. The first *Spiegelrune* is clearly an *a*. The next should not be taken as *d*, but as a double *e*-rune. Then follows a single rune *r*, and no *u*: this rune shows similar graphic features to the third rune in **horaz**. The next rune is a *Spiegelrune* *a*, then bind-rune *al*, followed by a double *i* and one single-lined *u*. The last rune is hidden, but I suggest it to be an *s*. We then read the sequence: **aeraalius**. Could it be that actually *Aurelius* is meant? In other words, are we dealing here with the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Carus (282-283)? His patronymic Aurelius might be misread from a coin, or misspelled according to a faulty pronunciation.

Unfortunately no other bracteate-inscription (as far as I know) shows an emperor's cognomen translated into Germanic, written in runes, together with the emperor's patronymic in runes. On the other hand, it is not uncommon to find emperor's names on bracteates, although written in capitalis or capitalis-imitations, mostly concerning CONSTANS. Who knows how many emperors are hidden in ill-cut runes, wrecked capitalis or in a seemingly incoherent blur of signs? For instance, the Geltorf bracteate (IK 255b, Taf.43-44) and Halsskov Overdrev-C, (IK 70, Taf.85-86) show the runic sequence **aug**; a copy of Lat. *aug(ustus)*?

One may object that my interpretation of the runic text on Fyn 1 lacks an equivalent. It is also unusual to have an emperor's patronymic and cognomen written in runes. Stranger still appears the translation of Latin *carus* in Germanic **horaz**. The Germanic text-writer may be expected to have been unaware of the linguistic laws involved. Yet it occurs that he applied them impeccably; this could

² There are four congenial bracteates with runes under the horse's head: Maglemose (III)-C (IK 300), reading **hoz**, possibly short for *Horaz* and Südfünen-C (IK 75), with a runic sequence **luzpa** (as many runes as in **horaz**). The third is *Raum Randers-C*; the runes may be read as **zahorx**? The fourth is *Skonager-C* (IK 163), runic text: **niuwila**.

³ *Spiegelrunen* are found more often: for *w* and *h* on the Illerup silver mounts for a shield-handle 2 and 3; on the Illerup lance-heads 1 and 2 (Stoklund 1985). Further *Spiegelrunen* among which twice *a* on a bracteate: Overhornbæk (II)-A (IK 312,1). Perfect examples are the **alu**-stamps on the Spong Hill urns from East Anglia, 5th c. (Pieper 1985).



Fünen (I)-C (4:1) (aus IK 1, Tafeln, S.69)

only mean that he knew who Carus was and what his cognomen meant: 'dear, beloved'. And one may assume, that in the last part of the third century Lat. *ā* > Gmc. *ō*, as is shown in Lat. *Rōmāni* > Goth. *Rūmōneis* (cf. Antonsen 1975:3f.) and Lat. *c* > Gmc. *ch* > *h*, as is shown in the tribe-names *Chamaves* > *Hamaves*, *Chatti* > *Hatti*? However, it seems inappropriate to use the perfect linguistic fit *horaz*, as this word has a negative connotation in several Germanic dialects, meaning 'whore'. Instead, one may rather expect a translation like Goth. *liufs*, OE *leof*, OHG *liub*, *leub*, *liob*, ON *ljúfr*. The point is, whether the negative connotation of *horaz* already existed in the bracteate-period, several centuries before the OE and OHG attests (Buck 1988: col.1110-1112). Buck gives without any comments in column 1111 Lat. *caritas* for *carus* 'dear' together with OE *hore* and OHG *huora*. His list of equivalents (column 1112) though, has Lat. *carus* next

to OE *leof*, *deore*, OHG *liob*. Obvious there ever was a time when *carus* and *horaz* were synonyms and there is no way of knowing when, unless Antonsen's (and my) interpretation of the runic text on bracteate Fyn-C 1 is accepted.

To read the runic text as *Aurelius Carus* may be imaginative, but is a proposition worth considering. From this point of view, the two other words on the bracteate need explanation: *alu* is supposed to mean 'ale' (Høst Heyerdahl 1981) and *laþu* would mean '(Ein)Ladung, Zitation' (cf. IK 1, Text p.83). OE *laðu* f. 'Einladung' is considered a formula-word used to call supernatural forces which may bring the owner of the bracteate good luck. In its ON form it only occurs on bracteates; sometimes abbreviated: Fyn-C 1 (IK 58), Højstrup-C (IK 83), Gurfiles-C, Skonager-C (IK 163), Schonen-B (IK 149) and Børringe-C (IK 26).

alu in the meaning 'ale' does not seem very satisfying, neither on a bracteate nor on a rune-stone (Elgesem, only one word: *alu*). Antonsen (1984:335) considers Elgesem to be a *Kultstein*. *Alu* may be taken as a cult-word and *ale* was used as a medium to establish a condition of ecstasy in connection with a certain cult. *Alu* would indicate the very condition of ecstasy. *Alu* on amulets (such as bracteates) may have a bearing on *initiation* to the cult. On bracteate Fyn 1 *alu* may therefore refer to the emperor's deification cult. *laþu* in its meaning 'invitation' (to take part in the cult's performance) seems quite suitable in this context.

Anders Andréén (1991:250ff.) points out that as bracteates are modelled after Roman coins and medallions, also the inscriptions might follow Roman patterns. "From the functions of the prototype: the iconographic attachment to the cult of the ruler (...), is it possible to understand the bracteates as a "political medium". Because of their frequency in bracteate-inscriptions, especially the words *alu*, *laukaR* and *laþu* are considered.

The origin of the three words could be the common formula found on coins and medallions *dominus noster, pius NN* (name of emperor), *felix augustus*, which means "our lord, the pious NN, a fortunate emperor". The formula contains the three central terms, *dominus*, *pius* and *felix*, which interestingly may be paralleled with the significance of *laþu*, *laukaR* and *alu* (...).

Interesting is, that most of the 22 bracteates containing these words are found within the boundaries of the power-centres of the day: Sjælland, Fyn and Jylland (cf. fig.7 in Andréén). These are also the regions where rich graves were furnished with Roman grave-goods: bronze and silver vessels, *Zwiebelknopffibeln*, golden arm-rings: *armillae* and *torques*, *Ringknaufschwerter*, Charon's-coins (Steuer 1982). One may discuss the different meanings of the Roman and ON formula-words, but Andréén may be right about their function as formulaic words, indicating a ruler's cult. This may fit quite well in my interpretation of the bracteate Fyn-C 1 text.

On the bracteate the whole image of the 'emperor' is germanized; the head does not resemble Carus' bold head with a beard, as seen on his coins. Another problem is the time-gap, as M. Aurelius Carus lived towards the end of the third century and this bracteate is supposed to date from the fifth or sixth century. But if

he was really famous and if he was idolised he may have lived long in the mind of his admirers. The oldest types of bracteates present a natural-looking image of the head of a Roman emperor; later on the image becomes more and more germanized. Seebold (1992) gives a survey of the development from Roman medaillons to German bracteates through different stages, adding several Germanic motives with an indigenous mythological connotation. One of his sub-divisions is the bracteate-type-C with horse, head, bird, hand and foot. Fyn-C 1 is the most archaic in this series, showing a figurine stretching one hand over the head of his horse (Seebold 1992: 282, 306). Evidently the archetype to these C-bracteates showed an emperor holding out two hands: one stretching out in an *ave-gestus*, the other holds the globe of the earth.

Seebold (1992:304) suggests that the bracteates in fact symbolise the ideal Germanic king, transformed from the Roman emperor. The C-bracteates show the king as the only person who can understand and interpret the language of the birds, the whinnying of horses and the meaning of the runes. Moltke (1985:109) describes the picture thus:

Amazing how much the goldsmith has made of the erect, self-centred equestrian statue of His Imperial Majesty! An elegant, expressionist picture - of a Germanic divinity? A distinguished - a noble - face dominating the space, surmounted by an immense head- (or hair-) adornment ending in a massive plait. The body itself clearly had no interest for the Germanic artist - what little of the human trunk he retains is hidden behind a horse - not a realistic horse but a "Germanic" horse (...). A bird of prey with a hooked beak flies in front of the god's (?) face. But dismiss Odin - he comes later and has two birds for companions.

According to Karl Hauck (in numerous publications on the bracteates' iconography) it is Odin who plays a dominant role on the bracteates. When Seebold is right in his interpretation of the central meaning of the bracteates in showing a perfect Germanic king, emanated from the image of Roman emperors, the symbolism may very well suit Odin, being the ruler or king of the realm of the gods. According to Seebold (1992:305f.) bracteates were developed directly from the Roman emperor-image and therefore still showing an earthly ruler. However, the transfiguration from ideal king to divine being is only a short step. Besides, Roman emperors were considered divine beings, at least in Carus' time.

The question arises whether a Roman emperor may be acceptable as source of inspiration to the creation of a Germanic warrior-god? After all, Odin is considered an alien god with an intriguing personality, associated with runes, poetry, death, magic; sinistre and dark, but also sublime, majestic, indeed *august*. He comes in many disguises, his army consists of undead warriors, he rides high up in the sky on a mighty horse, he has great knowledge of things uncommon. He is a magician and has great power; if ever comparable with somebody on earth, only a Roman Emperor would do. One may wonder, whether the deification of the ideal Germanic king gave rise to the birth of Odin, whose evolution is shown in the development of the bracteates.

Marcus Aurelius Carus was one of the soldier-emperors of the third century. He made a splendid career in the Army and became *praefectus praetorio* (in 276) of his predecessor Probus. He was acclaimed Emperor by his soldiers (by the army of Raetia and Noricum) while Probus was still reigning. The unfortunate Probus was subsequently lynched in 282. Probus thought highly of his officer; he wrote a letter to the Senate in Rome recommending to have an equestrian statue erected for Carus. Carus died under mysterious circumstances after a reign of less than a year: it is said he was "laid down by a well-aimed stroke of lightning" while on a military campaign against the Persians in Mesopotamia. This campaign had brought him as far as Ctesiphon, which he captured, and also Seleucia, and Coche, according to Zonaras and Eutropius. The importance of his successes - aided by the strife between Bahram II, the Persian king and his brother Hormizd - is shown by the fact that all Mesopotamia was under Roman sway at the accession of Diocletian. After his deification he bore the title of "Persicus Maximus". His striking and peculiar death is claimed to be a decree of Fate that no Roman Emperor may advance beyond Ctesiphon: Carus was struck by lightning because he desired to pass beyond the bounds which Fate had set up. He even was warned by an oracle. The effect of death-by-lightning must have had the impact of a divine punishment, performed by the sky-god c.q. god of thunder himself: *Jupiter*. Surely the cause of his death impressed the Germanic imagination.

The bald top of Carus' head soon became familiar to his subjects even in Gaul; so also did his claims to adoration as "God and Lord"; a development in imperial ritual that had brought scorn and detestation to earlier rulers, like the high priest and emperor Elagabal, who brought the very object of his adoration into Rome, a black conic meteorite, together with the extravagant cult of the Invincible Sun God from Emesa, Syria. Since Aurelian (270-275) the cult of the Sun *Deus Sol Invictus* became a State Cult. M. Aurelius Carus placed facing heads of Sol and himself on coins with the text *Deo et Domino Caro Augusto*. The ancient Italian cult of the sun god in Rome was patronised by the *gens Aurelia*, so this cult had become, so to speak, the house-cult of the *gens* to which Carus belonged.

Carus was what is called a *fellow-Danubian* of the school of Claudius and Aurelianus. For a very long time already there were serious skirmishes along the river Danube with Goths, Juthungi, Vandals and Alamanni. Carus' predecessor Probus had fought against Alamanni and Franks, who crossed the Rhine and cut deep into Gaul, conquering large areas during the reign of emperor M. Claudius Tacitus, who was at that time far away in Asia Minor. Probus forced the Barbarians to withdraw behind the Rhine-border and he even succeeded in founding new *castra* on the rightbank of the Rhine. Probus marched against the Vandals on the lower Danube (278), made a quick pass into Asia Minor (279) and came back to Gaul to meet his death by treason in 282.

From these events one may conclude that at least the southern Germanic tribes knew one or two things about the Roman Emperors. How came this knowledge to the bracteate-manufacturers in the north? Morten Axboe (1991:271ff.) sketches a lively portrait of Germanic soldiers, who, after a service of twenty or more years

came back to their homelands as *Roman citizens*, "which was the status they gained by serving in the Roman army". This status was hereditary, so "their sons were Roman citizens too, and could in their turn join the regular legions and rise through the ranks just as a born Roman could". (...) "By the beginning of the Migration Period, the Germanic peoples had been neighbours of the Roman Empire for over 400 years". Some inhabitants of the Danish Isles as likely as not spoke and read Latin, knew of the Roman social and political system, knew the Roman deities and had revered the Emperor as a god.

These facts are stunning, when considering Roman influences on Germanic culture.⁴ That contacts were abundant between Scandinavia and the Roman Empire is shown in many archeological finds. Of particular relevance on the subject of bracteate Fyn-C 1, is the gold-hoard from Brangstrup on Fyn, where among other golden objects 51 coins have been found: 28 aureii, 20 solidi and three imitations (Henriksen 1992:55). The coins date from the period between Emperor Trajanus Decius (248-251) and Constantinus the Great (306-337). Three aureii are from Carus.

As a conclusion can be said, that it is not impossible that a bracteate was manufactured inspired on the Roman emperor Carus, bearing his patronymic and his cognomen, as he may be well-known and revered on Fyn. Both his outlook and names were germanized - to fit in the bracteates' iconography. After all, the Germanic culture was strong enough to develop her own standards: the best proof is that not the Roman alphabet was adopted, but instead a Germanic writing-system was developed: the runes.

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⁴ This consideration may be supported by a theory brought forward at the sixth Meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists in Oxford 1st-7th August 1993. William Filmer-Sankey of the Oxford Archaeological Trust gave a paper under the title: "The 'Roman Emperor' in the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial", in which he proposed that the East-Anglian King Redwald's burial was modelled after the way contemporaneous Byzantine Emperors were buried.

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