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THE יהוה UNSPOKEN WORD

Appears on early coins of Denmark and Sweden

By Howard M. Berlin



Both Denmark and Sweden long have had warm relations with their Jewish communities, especially evident in the cooperation between both nations during World War II in smuggling 7,200 Danish Jews to Sweden.

Few other than avid numismatists are likely aware that some of the early Danish and Swedish coins contain the Tetragrammaton, which is the Hebrew four-letter name of God.

Having long been interested in different aspects of Jewish numismatics, I was aware of these coins and I finally had the opportunity to view many examples bearing the Tetragrammaton. On a recent trip to Europe, I visited both Copenhagen's Nationalmuseet, home to the Royal Collection of Coins and Medals, and Stockholm's National Museum, which houses the Royal Coin Cabinet.

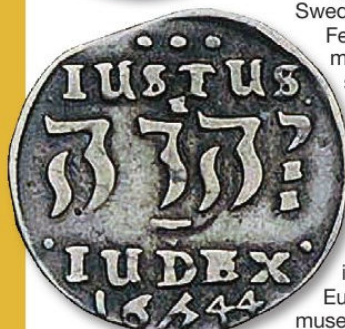


Image courtesy Thomas Heiland Auctions Ltd.

Reverse of silver 4-skilling coin of Christian IV of Denmark, dated 1644, contains the Tetragrammaton with the Latin *iustus iudex*, which together means "The Lord is a righteous judge."

Tetragrammaton

The Greek word "tetragrammaton" means "four letters" and represents the four Hebrew letters, יהוה – yod-heh-vav-heh, as read from right to left.

This four-letter combination appears exactly 5,410 times in the Tanakh, or Old Testament, which

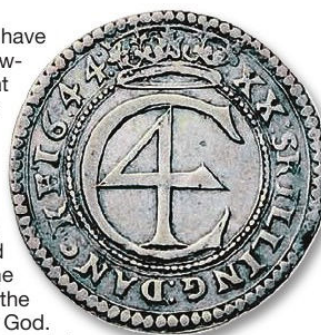


Image courtesy Thomas Heiland Auctions Ltd.

Obverse of 1644 silver 20-skilling piece shows the king's crowned monogram – the number 4 enclosed by the letter C.

makes up the five books of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.

Because ancient Hebrew was written without nikudot (vowel marks), we are not really sure how these ancient words were pronounced. Only the priests of the ancient temple knew God's correct name and pronunciation and they whispered it only on Yom Kippur within the temple's Holy of Holies in the presence of God.

Modern Hebrew does not use vowel marks and its use today is generally confined to prayer books and aids for teaching Hebrew. Because, as in ancient

Image courtesy Thomas Heiland Auctions Ltd.

The Tetragrammaton on all Danish coins contains vowel marks, which can be seen on this 1644 silver 1-mark coin.



יהוה
T

Spelling of Tetragrammaton and the connected forms in the Masoretic Hebrew text shows the vowel points in red.



Christian IV of Denmark



Image courtesy Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles.
Obverse of 1645 gold 1-ducat coin shows Christian IV wearing a crown and holding a scepter and orb as his symbols of power.



Image courtesy Gabriel Hildebrand, the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.
The obverse of a 1599 half daler of Duke Karl (Charles) of Sweden shows the crowned coat of arms between the date while the reverse has the Tetragrammaton within a corona.

times, Jews today never pronounce the four letters of the Tetragrammaton exactly, even when written with vowel marks, the word "adonai," meaning "Lord," is said in its place.

When Christian scribes translated the Torah from the Hebrew Masoretic text during the Middle Ages, they incorrectly translated the Tetragrammaton with the vowel marks as either "Jehovah," not knowing about the prohibition of the pronunciation of these four letters, or as "Yahweh," from its approximate four-letter English transliteration, YHWH.

Very often coin auction catalogers include in their description for those Danish and Swedish coins having the Tetragrammaton the specific mention of Jehovah or Yahweh, further propagating this error.

On June 29, 2008, the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments ruled that the name of either Yahweh or Jehovah "must not be used or pronounced in songs and prayers during Catholic Masses." This ruling now nearly coincides with the traditional Jewish practice.

Christian IV and Denmark's Jews

The most famous of Denmark's early kings was Christian IV, who reigned from 1603 until 1648. He

had a Mint master named Albert Dionis, a Sephardic Jew – one who is a descendent from Spain and Portugal following the 1492 Edict of Expulsion, the Alhambra Decree.

The king wanted Dionis, who was living in Hamburg with a successful import-export business at the time, to head the mint in Glückstadt, a town newly created in 1617 on the Elbe River. Dionis accepted the king's offer and was appointed Mint master in 1619.

On Nov. 22, 1622, and perhaps at the suggestion of Dionis, the king invited Sephardic Jews "of the Portuguese Nation," as they were known, from Amsterdam and Hamburg to come to Denmark.

So that Glückstadt could economically compete with Hamburg, the Danish king promised Jews complete religious freedom, and allowed them to own property and to practice their professions. Although this invitation was first restricted only to Sephardic Jews, in the 1680s Ashkenazi Jews – those from the Rhineland and eastern Europe – were also permitted entry to Denmark.

The Danish monetary system from the 16th to the early 19th century consisted of the penning, skilling, mark and ducat. Twelve penning equaled 1 skilling,

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Rare silver 20-skilling pattern is dated 1644.



Image courtesy Howard M. Berlin.



Image courtesy Thomas Heiland Auctions Ltd.
This silver 2-mark coin dates from 1646.





Image courtesy Gabriel Hildebrand, the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.
Silver 1601 1 daler depicts Duke Karl of Sweden above the crowned coat of arms.

Image courtesy Gabriel Hildebrand, the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.
A 1605 2-mark coin of Karl IX of Sweden shows the coat of arms.



Karl IX of Sweden



Image courtesy Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles.

This 1609 silver 6-mark piece of Karl IX of Sweden shows the Tetragrammaton within a corona above a crowned and armored half-figure of the king holding a sword and a shield with the coat of arms of the King of Sweden of the House of Vasa on the obverse.



Image courtesy Westfälische Auktionsgesellschaft.

Obverse of a 1606 silver 20-mark coin of Karl IX of Sweden shows the Tetragrammaton within a corona above a laureate king in armor holding a sword and orb. The reverse shows the Swedish crowned coat of arms, surrounded by 15 small and 14 large coats of arms of the Swedish counties.



Image courtesy HeritageAuctions.com.

Obverse of a 1608 silver 1-mark coin of Karl IX of Sweden shows the Tetragrammaton within a corona above a crowned and armored half-figure of the king holding his scepter and orb. The reverse shows the crowned shield of Sweden, dividing the date, with the Vasa sheaf in the center.

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1 mark equaled 16 skilling and 12 mark equaled 1 ducat.

The first Danish coins bearing the Tetragrammaton were minted in 1644. These coins were 4 skilling, 1 mark, 20 skilling, and 2 mark, all of which were composed of 0.593 fine silver, except the 4-skilling coin, which was made of 0.250 fine silver. In addition, half-, 1- and 2-ducat coins (all composed of 0.979 fine gold) were also minted with the 1644 date. The quarter-ducat coins (also 0.979 fine gold) only bear the 1646 date and were minted in Copenhagen.

However, not all coins were minted in Copenhagen. All 1-mark coins, 1644 through 1647 inclusive, were minted in Christiania, since renamed Oslo, while 1-ducat coins with the 1644, 1645 and 1646 dates were struck at Glückstadt (now in Germany), home of Denmark's first Sephardic Jews who were known as Ulfeldter, or "Hebrews." Mint records show that 1-ducat coins with the 1644, 1645 and 1648 dates were also struck at Copenhagen.

It is not clear why Christian IV chose the Tetragrammaton to be a prominent element on the coins during the last four years of his reign. Perhaps it was due in part

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Image courtesy Gabriel Hildebrand, the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.
This 1606 4-mark coin of Karl IX of Sweden is similar in design to the 1-daler coin issued when he was duke.



Image courtesy Fritz Rudolf Kuenker GmbH & Co. KG.
Obverse of a later (1608) 20-mark coin of Karl IX of Sweden shows the Tetragrammaton within a corona above a crowned king in armor holding a sword and orb.



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to the influence of his Jewish Mint master. Another hypothesis allows the legend that the king considered the Hebrew letters some sort of talisman or good luck symbol that was instrumental in helping him defeat Sweden in the two-year Kalmar War, which ended in 1613.

After his victory, the king ordered that the Tetragrammaton be carved prominently onto various churches and public buildings constructed during his reign. The inscription is still visible on many of these buildings, such as the Round Tower in Copenhagen's Latin Quarter, built in 1637 originally as an observatory.

The coins of Christian IV having the Tetragrammaton were not minted every year between 1644 and 1648 for each denomination, but at least 26 known combinations of dates, denominations, Mints and die varieties are known.

The central design for the obverse for the silver coins is dominated by the king's crowned monogram – the number 4 enclosed by the letter C. For the gold ducats of all denominations, the obverse shows the king wearing a crown and holding a scepter and orb as his symbols of power.

The reverse for all denominations is the same. In the center is the Tetragrammaton with vowel marks. Above and below it is the Latin: *IUSTUS IUDEX*. When combined with the Tetragrammaton, it translates as: "The Lord is a righteous judge."

Coincidentally, this is virtually identical to the equivalent Hebrew phrase, "da'yan ha'emet" ("God... who is a righteous [or true] judge"), which are the

last words of the "rending of the garment" blessing said by the mourner at a Jewish funeral.

Sweden's Jews

Like Denmark, Sweden also developed a close relationship with the Jews, but at a later period. And like many areas throughout Europe, there were also dark periods in its treatment of Jews.

From 1718 to 1772 during what was termed the "Age of Liberty," decrees were issued against Jews and no Jews were allowed in Sweden.

It was not until 1774 that the first Jew, Aaron Isaac, was allowed into the country. In 1878 the Swedish Parliament granted Swedish Jews full civil rights. Despite the granting of these civil liberties, Swedish law, like the laws of Netherlands, today prohibits ritual slaughter of animals for food. Thus, halal meat for Muslims and kosher meat for Jews must be imported from Denmark.

Sweden's first gold coin

The first appearance of the Tetragrammaton on a Swedish coin was in 1568, some 76 years before those of Denmark. It appeared on Sweden's first gold coin, the *ungyersk gyllen* ("Hungarian gold").

At a gold content of more than 23 karats (24 karats is pure), this was to be a version of the Dutch guilder and only 5,032 coins were struck. The obverse has the laureate image of Eric XIV, who ruled from 1560 to 1568. The reverse has the Tetragrammaton with vowel marks, which is the first word in Hebrew from Eric's Latin motto: "Deus dat cui vult" – "God gives to whom He wills." The motto alludes to the fact that Eric was Sweden's first hereditary king and that he received his succession from God and not by election at the Stones of Mora as did the Swedish kings before him.

Besides Eric XIV, other coins having the Tetragrammaton were struck during the reigns of three other monarchs: Karl IX (Anglicized to Charles) with known dates from 1599 to 1603 as duke, and as king from 1604 to 1611; Gustav II Adolph, perhaps the greatest of all Swedish kings, known as the "Lion of the North," from 1615 to 1626; and John, Duke of Östergötland, from 1613 to 1626. Like his older brother Eric XIV, Karl's Latin royal motto also included a reference to Jehovah: "Jehovah solatium meum" – "In God I Trust."

During this period, the Swedish monetary system was composed of the *öre*, mark (equal to 8 *öre*), daler (a forerunner to the U.S. dollar and equal to 32 *öre*) and the riksdaler (equal to 96 *öre*).



Eric XIV of Sweden



Image courtesy Gabriel Hildebrand, the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.
Sweden's first gold coin, the *ungyersk gyllen*, minted in 1568, depicts laureate face of Eric XIV on the obverse and the Tetragrammaton on the reverse.



Gustav II of Sweden

More than 66 known combinations of dates, denominations, Mints, die varieties and rulers with the Tetragrammaton are known, including: half and 2 öre; half, 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 mark; half and 1 daler; and the riksdaler. While most coins were minted in Stockholm, others were minted at Goteborg, Vadstena and Soderköping.

Gold klippes

Of the Swedish coins, two of the more unusual are those gold coins that are square in shape, called "klippes," as they were literally clipped from a sheet of gold to save time. Two that are both composed of 0.870 fine gold and that have the Tetragrammaton are the rare 1612 5-mark piece of Karl IX and the 1626 10-mark coin of Gustav II Adolph.

Collecting these coins can prove quite a challenge. Many of the silver coins are readily available in low grades while the gold coins are often harder, if not more expensive, to acquire in most grades. However, some like the klippes are exceedingly rare and are usually only found in museum collections such as the national ones in Copenhagen and Stockholm.

Other occurrences

Although I have focused only on the early coins of Denmark and Sweden, further hunting reveals that the Tetragrammaton also appears on 17th century medallion double show talers of Holland.

In addition, German cities and states such as Erfurt, Nuremberg, Hesse-Cassel, and Saxony during the 17th century also struck ducats and talers bearing the Tetragrammaton. ■



Image courtesy Gabriel Hildebrand, the Royal Coin Cabinet, Stockholm.
This is an example of the rare gold 10-mark klippe of Gustav II Adolph of Sweden, dated 1626.

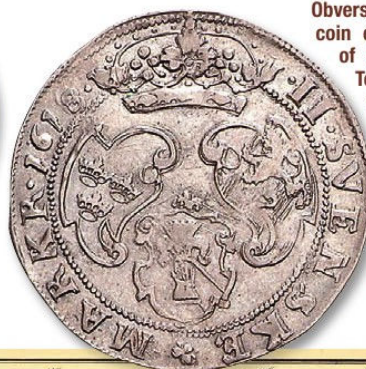


Image courtesy Westfälische Auktionsgesellschaft.

Obverse of a 1618 2-mark coin of Gustav II Adolph of Sweden shows the Tetragrammaton on the obverse within a corona above a crowned and armored half-figure of the king holding a scepter and orb. The reverse shows a crown above coat of arms.



Image courtesy of the University Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

Map shows the boundaries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway at the time of Gustav Vasa in 1520.