



GOLDEN ORNAMENTS
FOUND AT CAIRNMUIR

W. Perry Sculp.

XIV.—Letter from JOHN LAWSON of Cairnmuir, Esq., to SIR WALTER SCOTT, BARONET, describing some Golden Ornaments found in March 1806, near the house of New Cairnmuir, Peebleshire.

[Read 2d June 1828.]

SIR,

Edinburgh, December 7th, 1807.

As you expressed a desire to have some account of the Golden Ornaments found at Cairnmuir, I shall with pleasure communicate all the particulars which I know concerning them.

These curiosities were found in the month of March 1806, upon the side of the *Shaw Hill*, near the house of New Cairnmuir, parish of Kirkurd, Peebleshire, by a herd boy, who, going early in the morning to his sheep, observed something glitter in the sun upon the ground. On his scraping with his foot, the whole treasure was discovered lying not an inch below the surface of the ground, consisting of the ornament marked No. 1; two collars exactly similar, marked No. 2; two halves of a broken collar, marked No. 3; and upwards of 40 of the heads or coins, marked No. 4.¹ No. 1 you have already seen; I need not therefore attempt any description of it, nor hazard any conjecture as to its use, only observing, that almost every one who has seen it supposes it to have been some religious ornament. The two collars, No. 2, were exactly alike, and were composed of two thick golden wires twisted together, and terminating in a loop at each end. They were quite pliable, and could be stretched out or bent to any shape. I presume little doubt can be entertained of their being ornaments for the neck, but to what age or nation they belonged is a conjecture which has puzzled all the Antiquaries who have seen them. One gentleman who saw them imagined them to be Roman; and mentioned the family of the *Manlii Torquati*, who were privileged to wear such ornaments, in support of his opinion. This idea, however, I conceive, is rather far-fetched. They were undoubtedly of an ancient date, from the uncommon fineness of the gold; but I should rather suppose them to have been British than Roman, from the rude-

¹ See Plate X.

ness of the workmanship. No. 3 was a third collar, broken when found, but quite different from the former, being of gold of an inferior quality, and also being quite of one solid piece, which was fluted or twisted. The ends of it were beat out flat, and had no loop or opening in them. Whether it was a neck ornament also is more doubtful, for when entire it was perfectly stiff and could not be bent, and I fancy must have been broken in some attempt to open it out. If it was a neck ornament, it certainly never was meant to be taken off after having once been put on. I have never had any probable account of its use. Of the coins or beads, No. 4, you have also seen specimens. Their use is very uncertain, and their quality as gold far inferior to the other articles.

The weight of No. 1 is 4 oz. 5 dwt., its value as bullion	L.9	11	0
Each of the collars, No. 2, 8 oz. 12 dwt., value L.28. 2s.	-	56	4
Broken collar, No. 3, 8 oz. 10 dwt.	-	22	10
The coins or beads, No. 4, were of unequal size and value; at an average, however, they were worth at least 10s. 6d. each, and reckoning 40 of them at that price,	-	21	0

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Sir George Montgomery of Macbiehill is possessed of one of the collars, No. 2; what became of the other, and of No. 3, I am ignorant,—I believe the boy disposed of them to some of the goldsmiths here. No. 1 and a few of No. 4 are in my possession, as you know.

The most unaccountable part of this discovery is how so many articles, apparently of different ages and purposes, should have been found all together, and in such a spot as that where they were lying. The place where they were found is in a sort of hollow upon the side of the Shaw Hill, a wild bleak muir, and the ground mossy and covered with heath. There is no tradition of any battles having been fought in that neighbourhood, nor are there any remains of any religious houses in that part of the country. The only religious house at Peebles I ever heard of, of ancient date, was the monastery of the Holy Cross, belonging to the Red Friars, built by Alexander III. in 1257. Peebles is distant 10 miles from Cairnmuir. At Biggar, however, 7 miles from Cairnmuir, there was a collegiate church built by Malcolm Lord Fleming, in the year 1545, and also another at Carnwath, 10 miles from Cairnmuir, built by Somerville of Carnwath, ancestor of the Lords Somerville, in the year 1424. My authority for these is my ancestor Spottiswoode.

Along the tops of many of the hills in the neighbourhood there runs a chain of small *circular* forts or encampments, evidently British, and one of them is within a quarter of a mile from the spot where these articles were found. If the articles were religious, perhaps they might have been part of the plunder of some religious house at the Reformation, and either lost or hid upon the Shaw. They had probably been contained in a bag or box, which had rotted in the ground; and, by the wearing away of the surface, had, when found, been so little covered by the soil as they were. I forgot to mention, that in the parish of Lyne, 5 miles from Cairnmuir, are the remains of a very complete *square* encampment, generally believed to be Roman, from its size; it would contain, I suppose, one legion. This, Sir, is all I have to mention to you at present concerning these articles; and if from this loose account you can form any opinion concerning their age or use, I should esteem it a singular favour if you would communicate it to me.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

There can be little doubt that No. 2 and 3 are specimens of the ancient British Torques or Golden Wreath, an ornament for the head, worn by persons of distinction, and called in the Welsh language the *Eudorchawg*. Mr Turner, in his "Vindication of the Ancient British Poems," appended to the third volume of the History of the Anglo-Saxons, says,

"Another part of the British costume which the Bards notice, is the wearing the golden Torques. *Llywarch* mentions it thus:

' Four and twenty sons I have had,
Wearing the golden wreath, leaders of armies ;'

and *Aneurin* states, that in the battle of Catterath there were three hundred and sixty-three who had the golden Torques."²

"Gibson, in his additions to Camden's *Britannia*, p. 658, edit. 1695, describes one found near the Castle of Harlech, in Merionethshire, thus: 'It is a wreathed bar of gold, or perhaps three or four rods jointly twisted, about four feet long, flexible, but naturally bending only one way, in the form of a hat-band. It is hooked at both ends. It is of a round form, about an inch in circumference, and weighs eight ounces.'"³

To this may be added, that two wreaths of a similar description, but found in Ireland, are figured in Volume V. of the *Vetusta Monumenta*, published by the Society of Antiquaries, London.

² *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 5th edition, vol. iii. p. 621.

³ *Ibid.* p. 622.