

NOTES ON THE ORNAMENTATION OF THE SILVER BROOCHES FOUND AT SKAILL, ORKNEY, AND NOW IN THE MUSEUM. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

In my paper on the Viking remains of the North of Scotland<sup>1</sup> I described the hoard of silver objects found at Skaill, in the parish of Sandwick, Orkney, in 1858. It consisted of nine large penannular brooches, fourteen twisted neck rings and arm rings, twenty-three solid armlets of penannular form, eleven ingots and bars of silver, and a quantity of fragments of brooches, armlets, &c., which had been chopped up into small pieces. Along with this mass of personal ornaments there were three Anglo-Saxon coins, seven Cufic coins of the Samanian and three of the Abasside caliphs. The latest coin is one of the Abasside series struck at Bagdad in 945 A.D. This gives the period of the deposit as at some time later than the middle of the tenth century.

In that paper I quoted the opinion of Bror Emil Hildebrand, who states that similar hoards of precisely similar objects are found in Sweden, associated also with Anglo-Saxon and Cufic coins, and concludes that "there can be no doubt that these ornaments, ingots, and lumps of silver were brought with the coins from Asia"; he adds also that "this view is confirmed by the fact that somewhat similar ornaments are still worn in some parts of Asia."

Worsaae in his remarks on the Cuerdale hoard, adopts this conclusion and points out that the punched ornamentation made by triangular punches with three small holes arranged in the form of a triangle, which is so common on objects in this and similar hoards, is not a characteristic either of Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon metal work.

The neck-rings in the skail hoard are composed of interplaited or intertwisted wires of different degrees of fineness, usually welded together

<sup>1</sup> Notes on the Relics of the Viking Period of the Northmen in Scotland, illustrated by Specimens in the Museum. Proceedings, vol. x. p. 575.

at the ends, which are sometimes expanded and flattened, and ornamented with triangular punch markings.

Fig. 1 is a neck-ring  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter, composed of three double strands of intertwisted wires, spirally twisted together and intertwisted with a double strand of very fine wires twisted together, which lie in the interstices of the larger plaits, and are so fine that they are scarcely



Fig. 1. Neck Ring of Silver,  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter.

visible in the engraving. The larger wires taper slightly to the extremities, which are welded together, flattened, and impressed with markings of a triangular punch, with a single dot in the field. One end of the neck-ring is fitted with a hook which fits into an eye in the opposite end to fasten it when worn.

Fig. 2 is a neck-ring which, when closed, would be of somewhat greater diameter. It is also composed of a four-ply plait of single wires, each

hammered round, the plait itself being quadrangular in section. The wires are welded into a ball in the centre of the neck-ring, which is ornamented with four double impressions of a triangular punch with



Fig. 2. Neck Ring of Silver.

three dots in the field, arranged in a cruciform figure. The ends of the neck-ring are doubly recurved and terminate in spirals.

Fig. 3 is a neck-ring  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter, composed of two thick wires intertwined with a plait of two very thin wires bordered by a single fine wire on each side. These four fine wires lie in the hollows of the twists

formed by the thicker wires. The ends of the wires are welded together and form a flattened expansion at the ends of the ring, which are provided with hooks to fasten it when worn.



Fig. 3. Neck Ring of Silver,  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter.

The arm-rings are of three varieties:—(1) penannular in form, and rounded or quadrangular in section; (2) formed like the neck-rings of interplaited wires; and (3) formed of a flat thin band with hooks at the end to fasten it when worn.

Fig. 4 is an armlet of the first variety, penannular in form and quadrangular in section, about  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches in its longer and  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches in its shorter diameter, and ornamented with triangular markings, impressed by

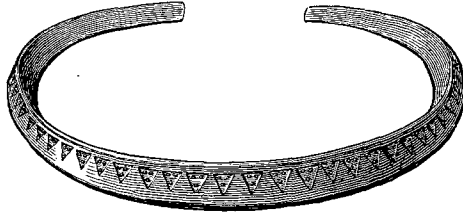


Fig. 4. Armlet of Silver,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter.

a punch with three dots in the field of the triangle. The other armlets are plain, and simply hammered to shape.



Fig. 5. Armlet of Silver,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter.

Fig. 5 is an armlet of intertwisted wires,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches in its inner diameter,

composed of four double strands of wires, first twisted separately and then the whole of the double twists intertwined spirally. The wires decrease

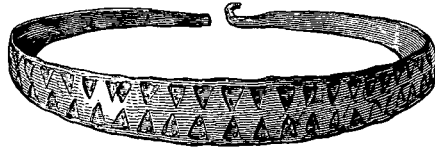


Fig. 6. Armlet of Silver,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter.

in thickness from the middle of the armlet towards the ends where they are welded solid, and terminate in the semblance of two animals' heads.

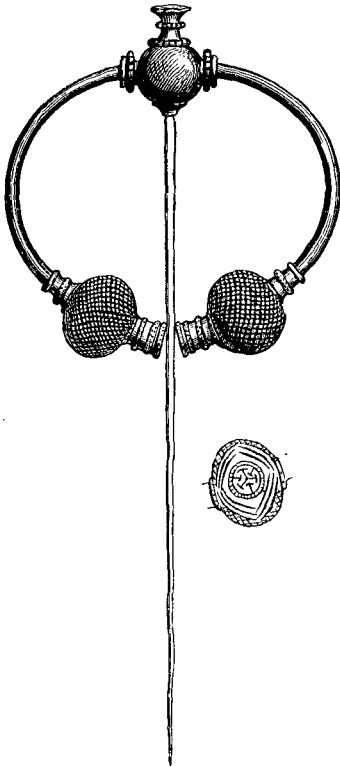


Fig. 7. Silver Brooch,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches diam.

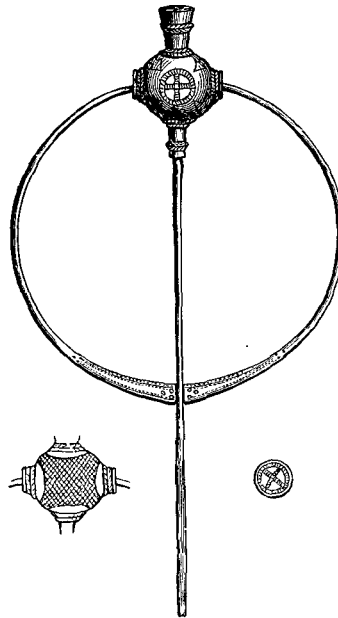


Fig. 8. Silver Brooch, 5 inches diam.

Fig. 6 is an armlet of the third variety, a flat thin band terminating in recurved ends, and ornamented with a double row of impressions made by a triangular punch having two dots in the field of the triangle.

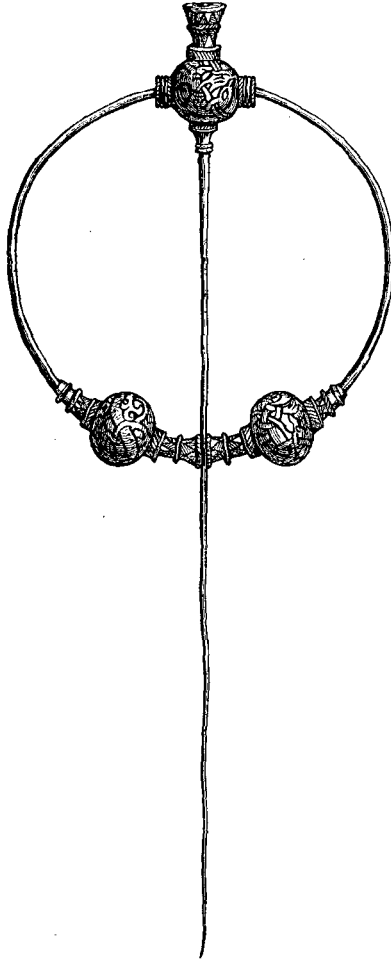


Fig. 9. Silver Brooch, 15 inches long.

The brooches are all of one typical form, penannular, with expanded ends, and furnished with a long and massive pin, moving loosely on the penannular ring. This is the typical Celtic form.

But the brooches in this hoard present a special variety of that typical form which is distinguished by the bulbous form of the expanded ends of the penannular ring, as seen in fig. 7. The same peculiarity is repeated in the heads of the pins. Some of them are destitute of the bulbous expansions. Of this variety fig. 8 furnishes an example. Among those that have these bulbous expansions there are different varieties of ornament. In some instances the bulbs are plain on one side and engraved on the opposite hemisphere. In others the bulbs are covered on one side

with a peculiar prickly-like ornamentation which, together with their

forms, gives them such a suggestive resemblance to thistle-heads; while the reverse hemisphere, as shown in fig. 9, is covered with engraved ornaments, agreeing in some respects with the distinctive features of Celtic ornament but differing in other respects. Similar brooches have been found similarly associated with twisted neck and arm rings, ingots, and Cufic and Anglo-Saxon coins in different parts of Scandinavia, but these brooches in the Skail hoard differ from most of those of the same character which have been found in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, in having their terminal bulbous expansions decorated with engraved ornamentation of a very peculiar character. These engraved designs consist of two varieties, simple interlaced work, and zoomorphic patterns.

On one of the larger brooches there is a circle of interlaced work (fig. 10) on the reverse of the bulbs, which on the obverse are covered



Fig. 10. Actual size.



Fig. 11. Actual size.

with the characteristic prickly ornament. A similar circle (fig. 11) occurs on the head of the pin of another brooch. The collar of the first-mentioned brooch is surrounded by a band of interlaced work (fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Actual size.

The character of this interlaced work so closely resembles the Celtic style, that it may be said with certainty to be more Celtic than Scandinavian in character. In point of fact the precise patterns may be seen on several of the sculptured monuments of Scotland.



On the other hand the zoomorphic work appears to be more Scandinavian than Celtic in character and closely resembles the style and treatment of the designs on the Manx crosses. (See figs. 13 to 18.)

It consists of animal forms which are treated in a freer manner than is usual in Celtic work. Their bodies are outlined with the double line so



Fig. 13. Ornament from bulb of Brooch (actual size).

characteristic of Celtic work, although they are occasionally covered with indications of scales (as in fig. 14), a feature rarely found in the pure Celtic style, but common on the Manx monuments. The eye is not the characteristic eye of the Celtic conventionalised beast which is forwardly rounded

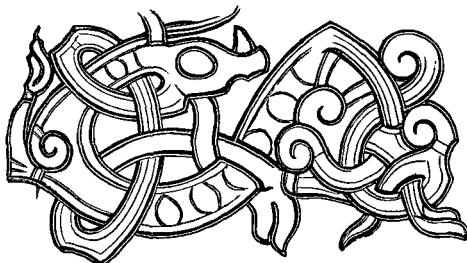


Fig. 14. Ornament on bulb of Brooch, shown as fig. 9 (actual size).

and backwardly pointed; neither is it the eye which is characteristic of the Scandinavian conventionalised beast, forwardly pointed and backwardly rounded. The patterns produced by the interlacement of the body and limbs of the beast with its tail and crest, are less regular and geometrically symmetrical than is usual in Celtic work, and there is a

tendency in the convolutions to break off in scroll-like terminations which is conspicuous in Scandinavian work but absent in all the pure Celtic varieties of ornament. In one case (fig. 15) the figure of which the pattern is composed is more bird-like than beast-like.

Thus, although the zoomorphic ornament of these brooches consists of



Fig. 15. On the Pinhead of Brooch, shown as fig. 9 (actual size).

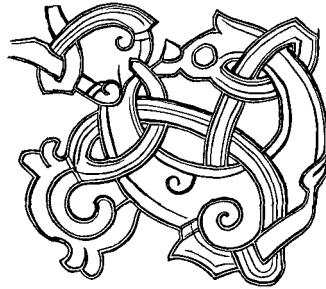


Fig. 16. On one of the bulbs of Brooch, shown as fig. 9 (actual size).

animals intertwined in the manner common on Celtic metal work, the details and the style appear to me to be more Scandinavian than Celtic; and treatment of the designs is more closely paralleled by that of the

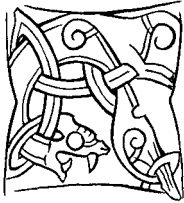


Fig. 17. On one of the bulbs (actual size).



Fig. 18. On one of the bulbs (actual size).

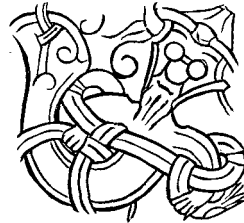


Fig. 19. On the head of the pin (actual size).

designs on the Manx crosses than by any metal-work or stone-work of purely Celtic character.

But the most singular of the features of this ornamentation is the

occurrence along with such designs as (figs. 17 and 18) on one of the brooches, of a quasi-human figure (fig. 19), which takes the place of the conventional beast usually worked up into a pattern of interlacements.

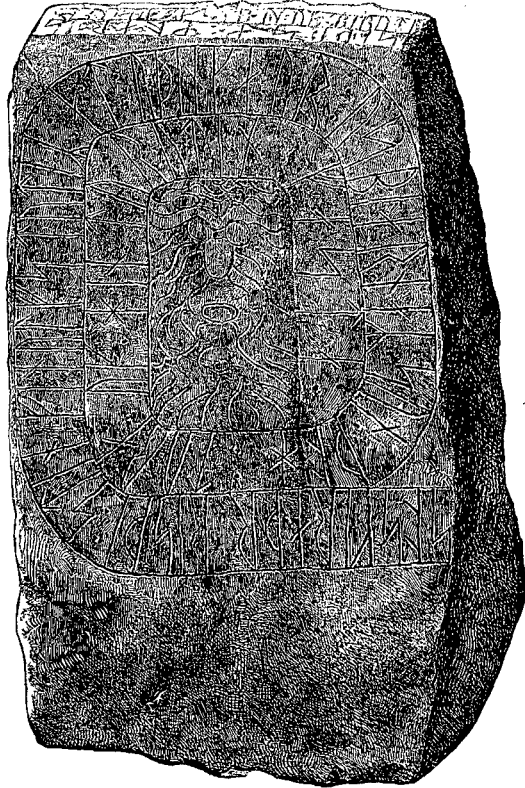


Fig. 20. Runic Monument at Skjern, North Jutland, with Thor's Face  
(5 feet high).

The treatment of the figure is peculiar. It presents a bearded face which is curiously triangular, with a nose made by a simple curved line and the eyes connected by double lines across the upper part of the nose so as to give the face a curiously spectacled look.

This is the typical character of the bearded face which appears on the Scandinavian monuments of the heathen time, and which Professor Stephens has recognized as the portrait of the god Thor, represented as the protector of the dead.<sup>1</sup> Thor's head alone appears on the monuments, as on the stone at Skjern, in North Jutland (fig. 20), which is considered to be of the ninth century, and on that at Aby, in Södermanland, Sweden (fig. 21); on the amulets called Thor's Hammers, as in fig. 22; and on a Thor's hammer of silver found in Skane in Sweden. No full length portrait of the divinity is known in Scandinavia. But no one comparing these representations of the bearded face with the curvilinear nose

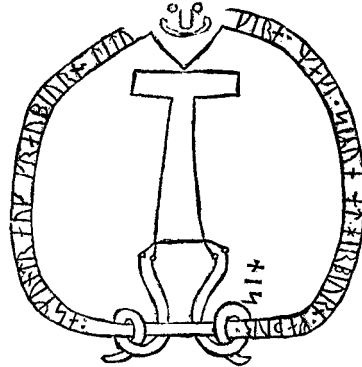


Fig. 21. Runic Monument at Aby, with representation of Thor's Head and Hammer.

and spectacle-like eyes on the monuments with the face of this figure on the Skail brooch can fail to see its striking resemblance to the head of Thor.

The same spectacled eyes and nose appear on the inlaying of the axe from the Mammen How, which also bears (fig. 23) a series of zoomorphic designs in the Scandinavian style closely resembling the zoomorphic designs on these brooches.

It follows therefore that the art of these engraved designs on the Skail brooches has some features which are more Celtic than Scandinavian and other features which are exclusively Scandinavian in character. It is therefore a mixed art belonging to a mixed population, and having close affinities with the mixed art of the Scandinavian colonists on Celtic soil.

The soil in which the hoard was found is within the Celtic area, but at the time which the date of the coins assigns as the period of the deposit

<sup>1</sup> See the interesting notices of these curious sculptures in Professor Stephens work entitled "Thunor the Thunderer," folio, Copenhagen and London, 1878, from which the illustrations figs. 20, 21, and 22 are taken.

of the hoard, it was possessed by a Scandinavian colony composed of a mixed population. The inference is that the character of the art agrees with the natural presumption that the deposit consists of objects made and used by the people possessing the soil in which it was found, a presumption only to be set aside by such distinct evidence of foreign origin as is presented in the case of the Cufic coins. The form of the brooches is not Scandinavian. It has the Celtic typical feature of being penannular.



Fig. 22. Thor's Hammer in silver, from Skane, Sweden (actual size).



Fig. 23. Axe-head inlaid with silver, from the Mammen How, Denmark.

It has been only once found in a sepulchral deposit, viz. in the island of Eigg, which, in common with the rest of the Hebrides, was also occupied by the same mixed population.