

III.

NOTES UPON THREE EARLY IRON AGE BROOCHES FROM THE ISLAND
OF GOTLAND, SWEDEN. BY JAMES CURLE, JUN., W.S., F.S.A. SCOT.
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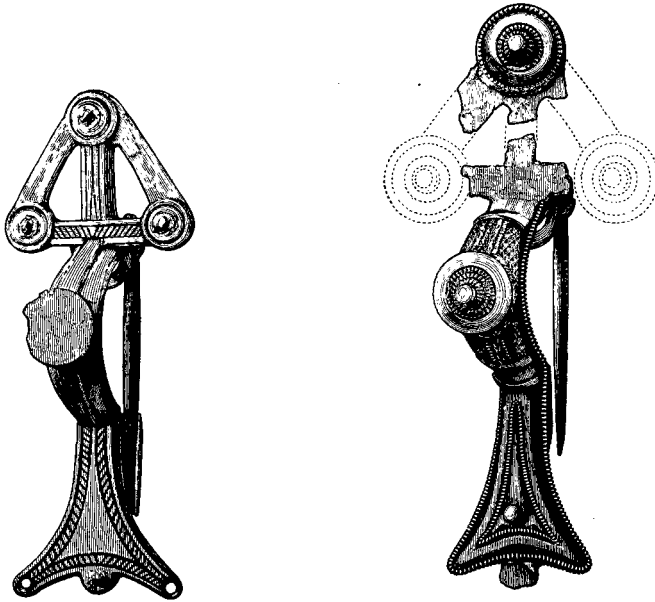
Throughout Europe, with the disappearance of national costume, there are gradually passing away many national forms of personal ornaments—the brooches, the clasps, or the necklaces which before the days of Savings Banks often represented the earnings of many years; and in their place the modern goldsmith displays an immense number of patterns brought together from every source imaginable, patterns which are continually being changed or laid aside as fashion alters. We are apt to forget, as we watch the change, how in earlier times a race would identify itself with a buckle or a brooch form, or a series of ornament patterns, retaining them through the course of many centuries. We are apt to forget how gradual was the process by which a new ornament was evolved from a simpler earlier form, or an old pattern changed and altered by a gradual degradation.

It were an easy matter to illustrate this; but my purpose is rather, with the knowledge of these facts before us, to endeavour to determine the position of three brooches of a somewhat rare type in the long series of ornaments which have come to us from the graves of the Iron Age people of the Island of Gotland.

I purchased in 1892 and 1893 in Wisby the two brooches, figs. 1 and 2. Both were described as having been found at Levide, in Gotland. In neither case did I obtain information as to the objects, if any, found in association with these brooches, which might have helped to definitely fix their position. Both of them, as well as the third specimen,

to which I shall refer later, are practically of the same type, and I do not remember to have seen it in Stockholm, or elsewhere in Swedish collections.

The two brooches from Levide are of bronze, overlaid with thin plates of silver; they belong to the type often described as bow-shaped from its curved stem. They present so many features of resemblance that there can be little doubt that they belong to the same period. The lower end



Figs. 1, 2. Brooches from Levide, Gotland. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

is expanded in the shape of a fish's tail. The upper end of the brooch is fashioned in a peculiar triangular shape; fig. 2 being somewhat imperfect, this feature is not fully shown, but enough remains to prove that it possessed it. The highest part of the bow is ornamented with a circular enlargement. In fig. 1 the lower end is decorated with lines of niello, which has also been employed to ornament the triangular piece of

the upper end. The ends of the base and the apex of this triangle, as also the bow, have been further ornamented with small round projections, now lost, but we may reconstruct these from the ornaments which remain in fig. 2. At the lower end of this brooch a small silver projection, or pin-head, forms the centre of a triangular space, edged with a gilt beaded wire; this is enclosed by a plain band of silver, and the whole brooch is edged with a beaded silver wire. The enlargement of the bow carries a round, button-like ornament of silver, with a gilded centre, edged with a beaded wire; a button-like ornament of similar form, which ornamented the apex of the triangle, is preserved; and doubtless ornaments of a similar kind were placed at the ends of the cross-bar which forms the base.

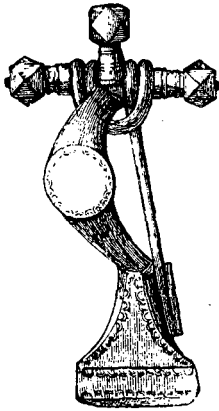


Fig. 3. Brooch from Gotland. (†.)

Both brooches are of a somewhat complex form. We may safely infer that they have been evolved from a simpler type, and that they have had as their ancestor a brooch of which the fundamental parts were a simple curved stem and a cross-bar, terminated with two knobs of bronze, which was attached at right angles to one end. Round this bar the wire was wound which formed the pin. Such a brooch existed in Gotland. Fig. 3 represents a Gotlandic brooch¹ which appears to occupy a position midway between this older, simpler form and the type represented by the Levide brooches. It possesses, in common with them, an expansion of the lower end. It shows the same circular enlargement of the bow. The end of the stem has been prolonged at right angles to the cross-bar, and in one specimen of the same type, in my collection, this prolongation is of equal length with either of the cross-arms. All three are terminated by small bronze knobs cut in facets. Now, if we add two pieces of metal so as to join the end of the stem with the cross-bar, we practically arrive at the type of the Levide brooches. The object of the

¹ Hildebrand, *Industrial Arts of Scandinavia*, p. 22, fig. 10.

cross-bar, as I have already indicated, was to give a fastening to the pin, which was formed of a piece of wire, one end of which was wound round the bar, thus forming a spring. In fig. 3 it is employed in this way. The knobs at the end were originally designed to keep the bar in its place. On comparing figs. 3 and 1 we find that the cross-bar in the latter is merely an ornament; and that the terminal knobs having ceased to be a necessary part of its construction, their place is taken by circular ornaments. From this transition from an useful to an ornamental function we may infer that the Levide brooches are of a later type than fig. 3, and it is highly probable that they are directly developed from it. This evolution of the upper part of a fibula is by no means uncommon, and we may trace it in Central Europe as well as in the North. Not infrequently the upper part becomes a semicircular plate, from which, in the earlier examples, the terminal knobs of the stem and cross-bar still project; gradually these terminal projections disappear; and as the decorative skill of the metal-worker increases, this semicircular plate becomes rectangular, so as to afford wider scope for ornamental treatment. This latter phase of development is very marked in the later Gotlandic forms of the Teutonic bow-shaped fibula.

The type of brooch represented by fig. 3 is of frequent occurrence in Gotland; it belongs to the Early Iron Age, and to the period when the direct influence of Roman culture was still felt in Scandinavia.

The resemblance between this brooch and figs. 1 and 2 is so close that I do not suppose any long period elapsed between them; and this probability is further strengthened by the fact that the method of decoration which we see on the brooches, especially on fig. 2, is in itself characteristic of the period of Roman influence. At this period the distinct characteristics of Gotlandic art had not as yet asserted themselves, but rather there existed a close relation between the ornament patterns of the island and those of Denmark or the Scandinavian mainland.¹

It is in the Danish graves, as might be expected, that we find the greatest number of objects bearing the stamp of Roman culture, and it is among the ornaments taken from these graves that we find the method of decoration of the Levide brooches.

¹ Hildebrand, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

The characteristics of the ornamentation of this period are the overlaying of surfaces with plates of gold and silver, the decoration of these plates with lines of beaded wire and small rosettes, or larger button-like ornaments, of which the centre is formed by a projecting pin-head of silver, surrounded by a band of metal with vertical flutings. In the Torsberg find we see this particular method of ornamentation employed on a shield-plate, in association with heads and figures which display a classic origin.¹ Still more markedly do we see it in the large fibulae in the form of a svastica found at Nordrup² or Varpelev,³ in Zeeland, in association with glass vessels of Greek or Roman origin, or at Sanderumgaard,⁴ in Fyen. The Nordrup fibula has had seventeen of these button-like ornaments, the Varpelev fibula had twenty-one, that of Sanderumgaard has had twenty-nine, though many of them have been lost. These brooches may be considered as being the products of the northern art of the 4th century. One of them was found in a grave at Nyrup,⁵ in the north-west of Zeeland, with two gold solidi of the years 308-350 A.D., while in Norway a specimen was found at Aak Gryten, in Romsdal,⁶ with a barbaric imitation of a gold coin of Magnentius 350-353 A.D. In Sweden the same fibula is found in Skane,⁷ and the same button-like decoration occurs in a large fibula found in Wester Gotland,⁸ associated with a glass cup, usually an indication of the Roman period. It is this button-like decoration that we have in fig. 2; and when we find it associated with the same silver plating and beaded wire ornamentation as that employed in the svastica-shaped fibulae, I think it may be assumed that both belong to the same period.

Having thus in a measure fixed the period of these brooches, let us pass to the third (fig. 4). I purchased this specimen in 1893 from a dealer in Stockholm who informed me that it had been found in Gotland. It is entirely of silver. The type is the same as those already described, only that the circular enlargement of the stem is wanting, and

¹ Mestorf, *Vorgeschichtliche Alterthümer aus Schleswig-Holstein*. Fig. 672.

² Petersen, *Nordiske Fortidsminder*, I. Hefte, pl. ii. fig. 1.

³ *Memoires des Antiquaires du Nord*, 1872-77.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Nordiske Fortidsminder*, I. Hefte, p. 17.

⁶ O. Rygh, *Norske Oldsager*, fig. 238.

⁷ Montelius, *Antiquités Suédoises*, fig. 333.

⁸ *Ibid.*, fig. 320.

the lower end of the brooch has been rounded off somewhat differently. There are not wanting signs, however, that it belongs to a rather later stage of development than figs. 1 and 2; the cross-bar has departed more from its primitive form. The two arms are no longer extended at right angles to the stem, and it is to be observed that the prolongation of the stem, which in fig. 1 bisects the triangle, has become in fig. 4 the ornamental centre-piece of what is really a four-sided figure. The beaded lines have disappeared, and the button-like ornaments are cut out of the solid metal. In the lower part of the stem, and continued over the curve, we have, instead of the beaded lines or niello decorations, an ornament which is derived from plants, and probably is a degraded representation of the leaves or tendrils of the acanthus or vine.

This ornament is characteristic of the early Northern type of bow-shaped brooches, which belong to the epoch of the great Teutonic migrations: indeed, it is scarcely to be found in Scandinavia associated with any other class of ornaments. These bow-shaped brooches which display this method of ornamentation are not found in the Danish graves with the svastica-shaped brooches; they belong to a rather later period. Professor Montelius, in a recent chronological study of the Northern antiquities prior to the coming of Christianity,¹ has grouped together some of the most characteristic specimens of these brooches, and assigned them to the 5th century. The six specimens which he illustrates are all of them more highly developed than fig. 3, and I should feel inclined to attribute it to the earlier part of the 5th century. The brooches, figs. 1, 2, and 4, thus appear to me to exhibit the transition which must have

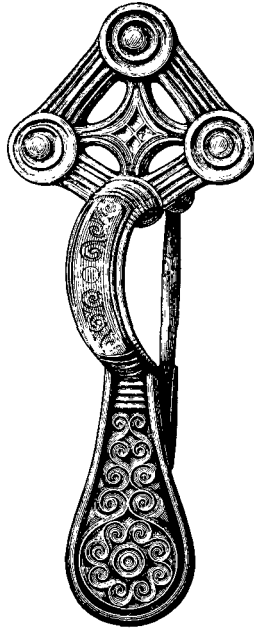


Fig. 4. Brooch from Gotland.

¹ *Svenska Fornminnesföreningens Tidskrift*, vol. viii. p. 148.

taken place about the end of the 4th century, from the method of ornamentation based upon the imitation of filigree work characteristic of the ornaments from Torsberg, Varpelev, and other Danish cemeteries,¹ to the ornament derived in a measure from classical designs, which, under the influence of the Teutonic migrations, found its way into the North.

How this plant ornament came to the North is in itself an interesting problem. As I have already indicated, it appears in Scandinavia only in connection with a single group of early brooches which are attributed to the 5th century. In all the specimens illustrated in which it occurs we note this point of similarity—the twining tendrils never break into leaves or flowers. I think we may infer from this that the Northern metal-worker did not seek, in using it, to reproduce any form of plant with which he was familiar, but rather that he had borrowed it from some foreign source, and copied it in ignorance of its signification. There can be little doubt that it came from the South. It is characteristic of the phase of art of the Teutonic migrations; and, in association with the bow-shaped fibula, we may trace it across Europe, from the Crimea to Hungary, through Southern and Western Germany to Scandinavia, or across France to England. Only we must note this difference, that whereas in the North the fibula is associated with a plant ornament in a state of degradation, we find it in the South side by side with ornaments bearing graceful representations of leaf and tendril.

This association doubtless resulted from the mingling of the traditions of the Byzantine or the Roman art with the arts of the barbarians, and it is at those points where the barbarian tribes must have come in contact with the higher civilisation that we find it best exemplified.

One of these points is the Crimea. When Dr Macpherson published his *Antiquities of Kertch* in 1857, the importance of accurate records of excavation was not so widely recognised as it is now, and we may search his pages in vain for any exact statement of the association of the various objects which he figures. He makes it, however, sufficiently plain that in the so-called Varangian tombs, rock-cut chambers, in themselves indicating an advanced civilisation, he found side by side this bow-shaped fibula, typical ornament of the barbarians, with delicate

¹ S. Müller, *Die Thier-Ornamentik im Norden*, p. 20.

vessels of glass, the forms of which are no less typical of Southern manufacture. And here we find figured among the personal ornaments a little buckle of bronze, now in the British Museum, which is ornamented with a well-executed leaf design.

In Hungary we meet with the same mingling of the two cultures: designs characteristic of the Kourgan finds of Southern Russia are mingled with patterns which display a classical origin; the bow-shaped fibula is found side by side with belt-clasps, ornamented with vine or acanthus patterns. Not only do we find these designs carefully and gracefully executed, but beside them we find the degraded forms of the ornament, as we see it in fig. 4.

From the cemeteries of Kesthely in Hungary we have some admirable examples of belt-clasps and belt-mountings ornamented in this way with rich foliage patterns, or the strange griffin-like animals which form a connecting link with the Russian Kourgan finds.¹ Fig. 5² represents a belt-mounting from Kesthely, showing a well-executed leaf design. Beside it let us place a buckle found in 1882 at Szilagy-Somlyo³ near Grosswardein in Hungary (fig. 6). Comparing these, there can be no doubt that the origin of the two patterns is practically the same; but while in fig. 5 the leaves are comparatively well designed, in fig. 6 we have an unsuccessful attempt to reproduce them; the design has degenerated, and instead of leaves we have meaningless spirals, approaching to those with which the Gotland metal-worker has decorated his fibula. In fig. 7⁴ we have another belt-mounting from Kesthely, showing a degraded leaf pattern, much as we have it in fig. 4.

It would be unwise to assert that all these leaf patterns, which are characteristic of the epoch of the Teutonic migrations, had their origin in Hungary or the Crimea; the same process of copying and the degradation of a pattern can no doubt be traced further West, but I think it is probable that from Hungary the leaf patterns first found their way into the North. Dr Lipp, from the evidence of the coins found at

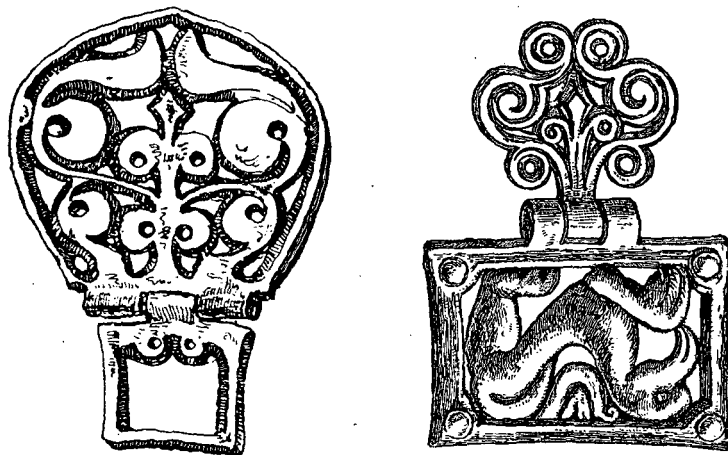
¹ Lipp, *Die Gräberfelder von Kesthely*, Buda Pesth, 1885.

² Lipp, *op. cit.*, fig. 69.

³ Hampel, *Der Goldfund von Nagy-Szent-Miklos*, p. 175, fig. 118.

⁴ Lipp, *op. cit.*, fig. 187.

Kesthely, attributes the cemeteries there to the latter half of the 4th century. Now, we know from the evidence of coins and the close



Figs. 5 and 6. Buckle from Kesthely, and belt-mounting from Szilagy-Somlyo.

similarity of objects found in both countries that at this period Southern products were finding their way through Hungary into Denmark, and doubtless into Scandinavia. Dr Hildebrand, in his *Arkeologiska*

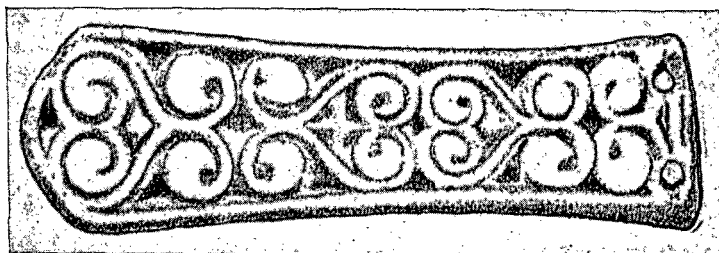


Fig. 7. Belt-mounting from Kesthely.

paralleler, has described some interesting finds which afford proof of this. It will be sufficient to cite one of these.¹ In 1797 there was

¹ *Månadsblad*, 1872, p. 118.

found at this very Szilagy-Somlyo, from whence comes the buckle, fig. 6, a chain of golden wire, from which there hung a number of miniature golden charms—a sword, a shield, an axe, a plough-share, and a vine-leaf; also a ball of rock topaz mounted in gold, and ornamented with two lions drinking from a circular vessel. Together with the find were twelve large gold medallions struck for the Emperors Maximinian, Constantius II., Valens, Gratian, and Valentinian, covering thus the period from 290–380 A.D.

In 1865 a find of coins and ornaments was made at Bangstrup, in Fyen: in all forty-seven gold pieces were recovered: the earliest was coined for the Emperor Trajan, the latest for Constantius II., thus embracing a period from 249–351 A.D.; and with the coins there was discovered a little golden vine-leaf, with its ring for suspension, and a small golden plate, also fitted with a loop, upon which we have again the same design of the two lions drinking from a cup: the execution is ruder than the mounting of the Szilagy-Somlyo topaz, but the common origin of both designs is unmistakable.