

III.

AN ACCOUNT OF A FIND OF ORNAMENTS OF THE VIKING TIME FROM VALTOS, UIG, IN THE ISLAND OF LEWIS. BY D. J. MACLEOD, INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. WITH A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECTS BY W. J. GIBSON, OF THE NICHOLSON INSTITUTE, STORNOWAY; AND A NOTE UPON THE FIND BY JAMES CURLE, F.S.A. SCOT.

Mr MacLeod communicated his discovery in the following report forwarded to our Fellow, Mr George Macdonald, C.B., to whom we are indebted for bringing it to the notice of the Society:—

On the 26th of April 1915 I inspected Valtos School, and during the course of the visit the headmaster, Mr Roderick Morrison, drew my attention to certain articles of brass and bronze which some of the school children had unearthed from a small sand mound in the neighbourhood during the current week.

Mr Morrison had thoughtfully collected and retained the articles for identification. They consist of the following:—

1. Two large, hollow, embossed brass brooches, evidently of early Scandinavian type.
2. One large circular bronze ornament, cast in one piece, with artistic Celtic designs; also broken pieces of bronze which fit into the back.
3. One Celtic penannular brooch of bronze (or silvered bronze), with portion of tongue.

4. Bronze buckle, ornamented with Celtic design work.
5. Portion of bronze chain, with links of simple but interesting pattern.
6. One bead of amber.

Along with the articles and in close juxtaposition to them were found the roof of a skull and other human bones. These were again buried.

During the afternoon I paid a visit with a teacher to the place where the bones and articles were discovered. We proceeded for about 150 yards due west of the school, along green hummocky ground, until we came upon a patch of very dry sandy soil in which potatoes are usually raised by the crofter to whom it belongs.

On account of the regular cultivation of this particular area, the soil has gradually become very loose and the sand is easily blown away by the wind. On this account the cultivated area has gradually sunk below the level of the surface of the surrounding ground, so causing to be formed an enclosing face of sandy earth, varying in perpendicular height from a few inches to 3 feet. In the northern and higher portion of the enclosing face of sand a bone was noticed sticking out by one of the boys during the play hour, and further investigation yielded the above articles. They lay with the skull and bones at a depth of 18 inches to 2 feet beneath the original surface.

During my visit to the place I found lying about what was evidently an old rusted iron knife about 12 inches long, with portion of a hollow iron handle and broken blade. There were also amorphous pieces of iron pierced with small square holes, lined with what appeared to be thin plates of bronze.

It may be of interest to mention that in fairly close proximity to the grave, and in a beautiful green sward close by the edge of the sea, is a mound locally known in Gaelic as "An Caisteal" ("The Castle"), but old men of eighty or ninety whom I conversed with, and who have lived in the neighbourhood all their lives, remember it only as it now is—a slight green hummock. The outline of the structure cannot now be traced on the surface, and there is no mention of it on the 1-inch or 6-inch O.S. maps. There is a well of excellent water called "Tobar a Chaisteil" ("The Castle Well") close by. A special portion of the large sandy beach goes by the name of "Traigh Bhorgaidh." "Traigh" is the ordinary Gaelic word for "beach," and "Bhorgaidh" is the genitive of the Gaelic equivalent of the Norse "borg" ("fort"). The phrase therefore means "the beach of the fort." This appears to confirm the surmise that the grave may be that of a Viking,

possibly some Norse warrior who at one time had his abode in "An Caisteal."

The topography, personal names, and language of West Uig, Lewis, all disclose Norse elements to a very marked extent.

D. J. MACLEOD.

Mr MacLeod having acquired the find, presented it to the Nicholson Institute, Stornoway. The detailed description of the objects which follows is by Mr W. J. Gibson, who is in charge of that Institution:—

Pair of single-scaled brass oval brooches of Scandinavian type (fig. 1, Nos. 1 and 2), each 4.25 inches long, 2.55 inches broad, and .9 inch high. Both have been cast from the same mould. The surface is, as usual, divided into sunk panels, in this case eight, decorated in relief with highly conventionalised animal forms. The two top panels are diamond-shaped, and the union of the two contiguous points is formed into a small circular sunk panel which is the centre of the brooch. In the centre of each of these panels is a diamond-shaped boss. The ridge separating the panels has raised edges, and the channel between these is convex in section. Each of the six free points of the diamonds is expanded into a small circular panel similar to that at the centre of the brooch. Each circular panel shows a hole through which passed a copper pin by which was affixed a raised boss of some more easily corroded metal or other destructible material. These have disappeared, but traces of a white metal may be seen on several of the panels. Some of the copper pins are still in position.

The ridges of the two middle panels are continued by "thistle-head" ornaments, partly made up of the round panels, to the margin. The wedge-shaped part of the "thistle-head" is decorated with a key pattern.

Similar "thistle-head" ornaments are placed in the middle of the lower half of the two larger side panels, but the surface of the circular part of these, unlike that of the other seven, is flush.

The edge of the brooch has two mouldings, the outer entire, the inner interrupted by the ends of the "thistle-head" ornaments.

The fastening-pins of the brooches were of iron. The method of attachment is well seen on one of the brooches: the head was secured on a horizontal rivet supported on parallel vertical flanges which form part of the casting; a similar looped-over single projection of the casting confined the point.

On the inner surface of both brooches may be seen the imprint of the texture of the cloth employed in forming the moulds from which they were cast.



Fig. 1. Ornaments of Viking Time from Valtos, Uig, Island of Lewis.

The pattern of these brooches seems identical with that on the Pierowall specimen figured in Mr Curle's paper on "Scandinavian Grave-finds from the Island of Oronsay, and from Reay, Caithness" (*Proceedings*, vol. xlviii. p. 310, fig. 20).

No. 3. Eleven links of a brass chain, probably the connecting chain of the oval brooches. Each link is $\cdot 4 \times \cdot 3$ inch.

No. 4. Circular ornament of bronze of $2\cdot 7$ inches diameter. On a raised centre was carried a central boss, $\cdot 7$ inch diameter, probably hemispherical, of a different metal, now corroded away. This boss was fixed by an iron tang to the base of the cup-like depression, which supported it. The raised centre is surrounded by a feather pattern, bounded inwards by a double-lined border and outwards by a raised moulding. Outside this is an interlaced pattern of three endless cords, each strand divided into two by an incised single line running up the middle. On the feathered and interlaced part of the pattern a graver may have been used.

The interlaced part is surrounded by a low beaded moulding and two raised plain mouldings, followed by a second beaded moulding, and this by a plain one which forms the top of the bevelled edge.

The edge is $\cdot 2$ inch thick, and is decorated with a double incised line forming a bar-chevron border.

The surface of the back is concave.

No. 5. A bronze strap, tapering from a width of $\cdot 5$ inch in the middle to $\cdot 4$ inch at ends.

This strap evidently belongs to No. 4, and has been originally riveted at the ends to its back surface, where one of the copper rivets is still in position. The cross pin or other fastening which has joined the ends has been broken off and is missing.

No. 6. Penannular brooch of bronze of Celtic type, plated.

The head is $1\cdot 4$ inch in diameter, each end showing double hemispherical expansions, the larger $\cdot 4$ inch diameter, decorated with two lateral and one terminal knob.

The pin, of which part remains, is flattened; width $\cdot 15$ inch, thickness $\cdot 1$ inch. Its head is flattened to a width of $\cdot 25$ inch, decorated front and back by two parallel transverse notches, with a longitudinal one connecting these round the loop.

No. 7. Buckle and belt-mounting of bronze, plated.

The buckle is $1\cdot 4 \times \cdot 6$ inch. The tongue is missing; the bar to which it was attached gives indication of considerable wear. The broad part of the buckle is decorated by incised lines, and by two small raised oblong panels which form the sides of the tongue-grooves. These panels have sunk centres.

The belt-mounting is plated and formed by folding, an oblong notch having been cut in the folding to take the head of the tongue. The back is plain; the front decorated with an incised pattern showing two interlaced spirals, the interlaced band being divided lengthwise by a line of dots along the middle. The background is cross-hatched in triangles. There seem to have been holes at each of the outer corners (the back shows one of these) by which the mounting was fastened to the leather or woven fabric of the belt.

No. 8. A fusiform bead of amber, slightly imperfect; originally 1 inch long, $\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{3}{8}$ inch thick, perforated longitudinally by a drilled hole $\frac{1}{15}$ inch in diameter.

Lastly, remains of an iron implement, possibly a knife and portions of a socketed spearhead, found on the sand near the grave.

W. J. GIBSON.

The group of objects thus described belongs to one of those rare finds in which Scandinavian and Celtic influences are mingled. The oval brooches (fig. 1, Nos. 1 and 2) were probably made in Norway or Sweden. They belong to the single-scaled variety, which was certainly one of the earliest types of such brooches to reach our shores. In the paper to which Mr Gibson refers, I have termed it the Pierowall type, from the site of the Viking cemetery at Pierowall in Orkney, where a pair of these brooches was found with a Celtic penannular brooch, another example of the association of Scandinavian and Celtic relics. Altogether the Pierowall graves produced three pairs of single-scaled brooches; it is probable that all of them were of the same pattern. In my former paper I mentioned a pair of the same type from Newton, Islay, and a single example from Unst, Shetland. With these we can now associate the Valtos brooches, and I may add five pairs found in Ireland. Four of these come from the very fine collection of Viking relics found at Island-Bridge and Kilmainham near Dublin, now in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy there, and one pair found at Ballyholme, County Down. The brass chain was very possibly used for connecting the two brooches together.

In addition to the oval brooches, we have the remarkable circular ornament (No. 4). Mr Gibson describes it as being at the back smoothed to an accurate concave. The bronze band (fig. 1, No. 5) appears to have been fixed to the back, secured at either end by rivets, one of which is still in position. There does not appear to be any trace of a pin or other fastening which would enable us to identify the object as a brooch. It is quite common among the ornaments in a Scandinavian grave to find a pair of brooches identical

in design associated with a third entirely different in pattern, which was doubtless worn between them. We have an example of this in the trefoil-shaped brooch found at Clibberswick, Shetland, with oval brooches. The absence of any pin, however, indicates that the object in question was not intended for use as a brooch. The bronze band at the back suggests that it was so placed to allow of the disc being put upon a strap, and that it was probably used as a belt mounting. Its general character impresses one as Celtic. The decoration of looped cords is to be seen on much of the Celtic metal-work of the time. We have an admirable example of this treatment on the penannular brooch from Pierowall already referred to. The ornament which surrounds the central boss, probably originally of amber, though more irregular in execution, recalls the treatment of the terminals of the silver penannular brooch from Croy, Inverness-shire—a purely Celtic ornament which was found in association with coins of Coenwulf, King of Mercia, 785-818 A.D. Lastly, while the object cannot be identified from its form as belonging to any well-known group of Celtic personal ornaments, and though, no doubt, it is somewhat coarser in execution, it presents in form and treatment a close analogy to the circular medallions to be seen on such Celtic work as the Lough Erne Shrine and the Monymusk Reliquary.

On the other hand, in endeavouring to trace the provenance of an object which, as far as I know, is unique among our Scottish finds, it is well to keep in view that somewhat similar interlaced work occurs in a good many finds in Norway. In some of these it occurs on ornaments clearly imported from Ireland, but it is also to be seen occasionally on purely Scandinavian forms.

To Celtic influence also I should ascribe the small penannular brooch or pin (No. 6). Its bulbous ends with raised points were probably animal heads at an earlier stage of its development, with projecting snouts and staring eyes, just as we may see them on a brooch such as Mr Coffey has illustrated in his *Guide to the Celtic Antiquities in the Dublin Museum*—one of a group dated as not later than about 700 A.D. But although the type may derive its ancestry from Ireland, it is quite possible that it was fashioned by some metal-worker of the Western Isles; for the excavation of the Mote of Mark, Kirkcudbrightshire, has furnished us with the moulds from which a native craftsman produced a variety of ornaments rich in interlaced work, and among them simple penannular-headed pins or brooches with lozenge-shaped terminals, not very far removed from this Valtos pin.

I have already mentioned the find from Island-Bridge and Kil-

mainhain near Dublin. This constitutes one of the most interesting groups of Scandinavian antiquities in Britain; for not only does it contain the oval-shaped brooches referred to, but a magnificent series of swords, with other weapons of the Viking age, a number of tools, and the characteristic sets of scales, with their weights, which indicate that some of the Northern people who lay buried there had come as traders. Among the objects gathered together from these sites, unfortunately in a somewhat haphazard fashion, I would particularly note a bronze buckle,¹ coated with white metal about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. The portion of the buckle into which the strap was inserted formed a rectangular panel, now in part destroyed, about $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches \times $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch, which is filled with a key pattern. The buckle

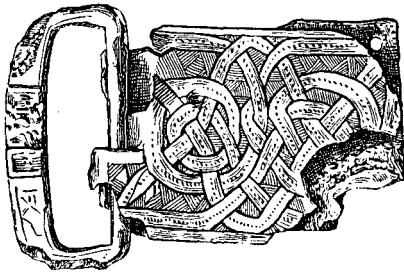


Fig. 2. Plated Buckle and Belt-mounting of Bronze, from Valtos, Uig.

stands out among the Island-Bridge finds as an object of Irish design, entirely distinct in character from the imported Scandinavian relics. Its key pattern is to be found in several of our early manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells, or the Lindisfarne Gospels, while on the stone monuments we have it exactly reproduced on one of the panels of an early cross shaft from St Andrews. The small buckle in the Valtos find (fig. 1, No. 7, and fig. 2) bears no characteristic trace of Scandinavian origin:

on the other hand, its double interlaced knot-work is typical of the Celtic manuscripts of the best period, and is to be seen in the border of one of the pages of the Book of Durrow.

The other objects of the find—a single fusiform bead of amber (fig. 1, No. 8), and the remains of an iron knife and socketed spearhead—do not call for any special comment. It is unfortunate that in none of the Scottish—nor, I believe, Irish—finds does the Pierowall type of Viking brooch occur with coins to enable us to date it; but we know that in Scandinavia it is held to belong to the beginning of the ninth century. We must remember, however, that such ornaments were often placed in the grave after they had seen a good deal of service. We recently had before us an example from Reay, Caithness, of one of these brooches with its worn edge patched with silver; and from a personal examination of one of the Valtos brooches, No. 2, which

¹ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xxviii., Section C, No. 5, "Scandinavian Objects found at Island-Bridge and Kilmainham," by George Coffey and E. C. R. Armstrong, p. 121, fig. 22.

Mr Gibson has been good enough to send me for inspection, I have no doubt that it had been in use for a considerable time; the break in the margin, which is clearly shown in the illustration, is probably the result of the movement of the metal chain, and the whole edge is polished through wear.

The end of the eighth century saw the first attacks of the Vikings on the coast of England. By the beginning of the ninth century they had harried Iona and made their presence felt in Ireland. As the century went on the numbers coming westward increased rapidly. By the middle of the century they were widely settled in Caithness, the Orkneys, and the Hebrides; and where, as at Valtos, at Pierowall, or at Oronsay, we find a Scandinavian grave in which typical brooches from the North are associated with Celtic ornaments, we may hazard the conclusion that it belongs not to the first period of piratical onslaught but rather to the beginning of more settled colonisation. In the whole circumstances, I should feel inclined to date the Valtos burial as not earlier than the middle of the ninth century.