

### III.

#### SOME PREHISTORIC RELICS FROM LEWIS.

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In the School Museum of the Nicolson Institute, Stornoway, are preserved certain prehistoric relics found in Lewis, which it seems desirable to have recorded. Through the kindness of Mr John Macrae, Rector of the Nicolson Institute, these are now exhibited.

1. Carved stone ball of six knobs found on a croft at Laxdale, Parish of Stornoway. This extends the record of the distribution of these objects to the Outer Isles. Diameter = 2.9 inches, weight = 18 oz.; material, hornblende gneiss of a kind occurring both locally and on the mainland.

2. Tanged and barbed arrow-head (fig. 1, No. 1) found at Carishader, Parish of Uig. Length = 1.2 inch, breadth = 0.7 inch, thickness = 0.3 inch; material, translucent quartz, such as occurs locally.

3. Bronze pin with ornamental head (fig. 1, No. 2) from Reef Sands, Parish of Uig. Length over all = 3.1 inches, tapering in thickness from a little over 0.1 inch at middle to the point and at the neck to 0.1 inch. Head circular, flattened; diameter = 0.3 inch, thickness = 0.15 inch; decorated on each flat face with two small punch marks, diverging at angle of 45°; neck ornamented with beaded collar. Several similar pins are in the National Museum collection.

4. Small oblong plaque of jet (fig. 1, No. 3) from Reef Sands, Parish of Uig. This was found by Mr Malcolm Buchanan in April 1924 among human bones which were temporarily exposed in the Reef Sands on right of road and about 7 feet below top of bank. He reported that among the bones were two skulls, and on top of them in the sand three slabs of stone. He covered up the bones with sand. It was rumoured in the district that a "cràggan" had formerly been found near the spot. The plaque is oblong, with ends slightly incurved; length = 1.7 inch, breadth = 1.05 inch, thickness = 0.3 inch, thinning to 0.2 inch at edges. One hole

for a suspending string, about  $\frac{1}{12}$  inch in diameter, is bored longitudinally, close to, and parallel with, one of the long sides. One corner of the oblong had been broken off, and (seemingly with the intention of

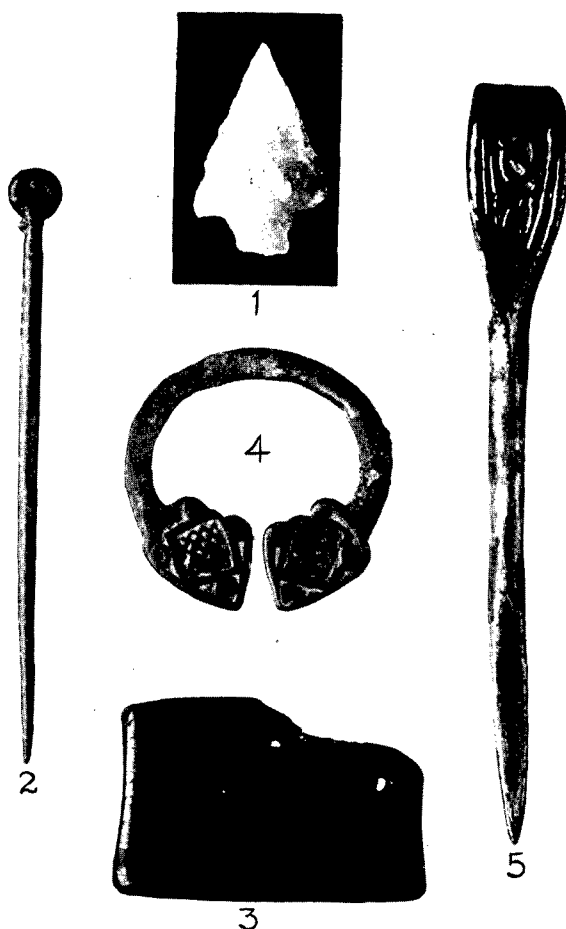


Fig. 1. Prehistoric Relics from Lewis. (†.)

mending it) two small holes, about  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch in diameter, have been drilled through the plate at right angles to the surface, near to, and parallel with, the broken edge. As to the purpose of the ornament, the shape of the plaque and the nature of the perforation for suspension

show that it is not a spacer of a necklace but may possibly have been worn as a single pendant. I have not been able to find a parallel.

5. Portion of penannular brooch in brass or bronze (fig. 1, No. 4) found in 1919 by Mr C. B. Macleod about 10 feet below present surface, in a kitchen-midden on beach near Aignish Church, Eye Peninsula. Outer diameter of penannular ring = 1.4 inch; ring 0.15 inch broad and 0.1 inch thick, with expanded ends 0.5 inch by 0.4 inch, each having lozenge-shaped sunk panel touched on outside by four small spirals from the moulding, each panel filled with interlaced ornament. The casting has been done in an open mould, the workmanship is of moderate quality, and the design debased through copying. The kitchen-midden is exposed on the beach, and has been partly removed by the sea. It occupies a restricted area, and has blown sand above and below. The thickness of the occupational deposit is about 3 feet, and the succession from above downwards is as follows: About 6 inches mainly of whelk-shells; layer of dark earth, with fragments of coarse pottery and fish-bones; layer with limpet and mussel-shells and bones; layer in which the shells are less numerous but containing some large fish-bones. One small stone pestle or pounder was found.

6. Pin of penannular brooch of bronze (fig. 1, No. 5) found at Valtos, Parish of Uig, near the spot from which came the Viking Relics exhibited to the Society in Session 1915-16 and described in the *Proceedings* for that year. There is little doubt that it belonged to that set of ornaments. Total length of pin including loop = 3.9 inches. Stem, 0.2 inch thick, is flattened out above to a breadth of 0.5 inch, with a thickness of 0.05 inch, and bent backward to form loop, which has an interior diameter of 0.5 inch clear. This broad portion tapers, and thickens, gradually into the stem. Back part of loop narrows to 0.15 inch where bent back against stem. Broad part of front of loop is ornamented with an elongated triangular panel sunk within marginal mouldings and containing an interlaced pattern, debased in the casting by frequent copying. Pointed end of stem for 1.2 inch of its length flattened—front, back, and sides. The pin is of an unusually stout pattern. The ring of the brooch to which it belonged may have been of 2 inches to 2½ inches in diameter.

7. Axe-hammer of "cushion" type found in 1904 by Mr George Macleod at Knock, on top of a gravel bed under 5 feet of peat. The implement is of adze form, with the haft-hole at right angles to the blade. Total length = 5.15 inches, breadth at middle = 1.65 inch, tapering slightly towards the sub-rounded ends, one of which is slightly narrower (1.4 inch at ½ inch from end) than the other (1.55 inch at same distance). The haft-hole, which is nearer the narrower end by ¾ inch, has parallel sides and is 0.7 inch in diameter; the drilling is technically perfect.

Thickness in the middle = 1.25 inch, tapering gradually to the rounded sides. The section at the middle is a roundish oval; towards the ends it flattens. The convexity is less on one face than the other, giving a ventral and a dorsal aspect. The entire surface is finely polished. The craftsmanship and finish are of the highest quality. The beauty of the stone selected, and the ingenuity shown in cutting it in the direction that gives the finest effect to the banded markings, are noteworthy.

Two points of general interest may be commented on: (1) Though the number of specimens on record in the British Isles of this "cushion" form is small (I have been able to trace only about two dozen) the type is very definite. Its features are the pillow shape, a difference of convexity in the two faces, the parallel-sided haft-hole at right angles to the blade and placed somewhat nearer the narrower end, the bladed ends with rounded instead of cutting edges, the over-all polish, the selection of stone of a decorative quality (usually greenish, but in several cases black-and-white banded), and the fine craftsmanship and beautiful finish. It was long ago pointed out that a number of the axe-hammers of the Bronze Age show no indications of use either as tools or as weapons, and were probably intended for some ceremonial or ritual purpose. This has been recently emphasised by several archæologists.<sup>1</sup> The present Lewis specimen is further evidence for this view: it has never been used either as axe or as hammer; indeed, the shaping of the ends would make it useless as either. Where did this rare "cushion" type originate? Of 14 Scottish specimens, 2 were found in Shetland, 4 in Orkney, 2 in Lewis; that is, 8 in all from the northern islands. The remaining 6 range from Caithness by the east of Scotland to the Lothians. Half a dozen English specimens come from the Thames or its neighbourhood. It is not safe to generalise from such a small number of specimens, but, for what they are worth, the figures seem to suggest that the type has spread from the north southwards. If this be so, we have here another small indication of the originality of the northern islesmen in the prehistoric periods, a feature which has impressed various investigators.<sup>2</sup> Evidence of this individuality is apparent in a wide range of northern antiquities. It gave a characteristic touch even to types of implements and pottery, and to customs, *e.g.* of burial, that reached them from outside. Instances that they had methods of their

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* Dr J. Graham Callander, "A Stone Axe-hammer from Perthshire," *Proceedings*, vol. lx. p. 258; Ludovic M'L. Mann, "Axe-hammer Heads," *Proceedings*, vol. lvii. p. 102; Reginald A. Smith, "Specimens from the Layton Collection in Brentford Public Library," *Archæologia*, vol. lxi., in which the "cushion" type and its range are discussed; and "The Perforated Axe-hammers of Britain," *Archæologia*, vol. lxxv.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* Dr J. Graham Callander, "Certain Prehistoric Relics from Orkney," *Proceedings*, vol. lxx. p. 78, and *The Bronze Age Pottery of Orkney and Shetland*, vol. lxxvii. p. 352; J. M. Corrie, "Certain Prehistoric Relics from Shetland," *Proceedings*, vol. lxxvi. p. 75.

own of dealing with their material readily suggest themselves—the uniqueness of the chambered mounds of Midhowe and Maeshowe, some of the special features at Jarlshof and Skara, the ground-plan of the Standing Stones of Callanish, the island brochs and their subsidiary structures, the neolithic pottery of Unstan, and the Northmaven knives to be referred to later. Other points suggested by this form of axe can only be left as questions. Were these implements the ceremonial mace-heads of secular authority? Or were they the sacred symbols of some religious cult? In either case what determined the form? Is its prototype a workman's adze? Or is it derived from the peasant's modest hoe, suitable symbol to emerge with honour among a people whose interests were presumably agricultural?

(2) The second point of general interest has been suggested by the material of which this specimen is made. Dr T. M. Finlay identifies this as a type of rhyolite, passing into quartz porphyry, which occurs in Northmaven, Shetland, and, as far as the British Isles are concerned, is peculiar to that district. The uniqueness of the material suggests an inquiry as to the nature of the implements made from it and the extent to which they may have drifted southwards. The so-called "flensing knives" of Shetland are found, with very few exceptions, to be of this rock. Dr Finlay points out that the banded nature of the material lent itself readily to the making of thin plates susceptible of a high polish and a sharp edge. Other implements fashioned from the Northmaven rock are adze-shaped, with a spreading blade. Of the same material also are two of the perforated "cushion" axes under discussion, one of these the Lewis specimen, the other found as far afield as Fife. When one remembers, too, the movement of the island steatite in the form of cups and urns, this southward drift of objects from Shetland seems worthy of further investigation.