

III.

THE CAIRNMUIR GOLD TERMINAL: A PARALLEL, AND A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION OF ITS USE. BY JOHN D. COWEN, M.A., F.S.A.

For the enigmatic object in gold with chased Celtic ornament, from Cairnmuir, Peeblesshire, now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (FE 46, fig. 1), several uses have been suggested. But in

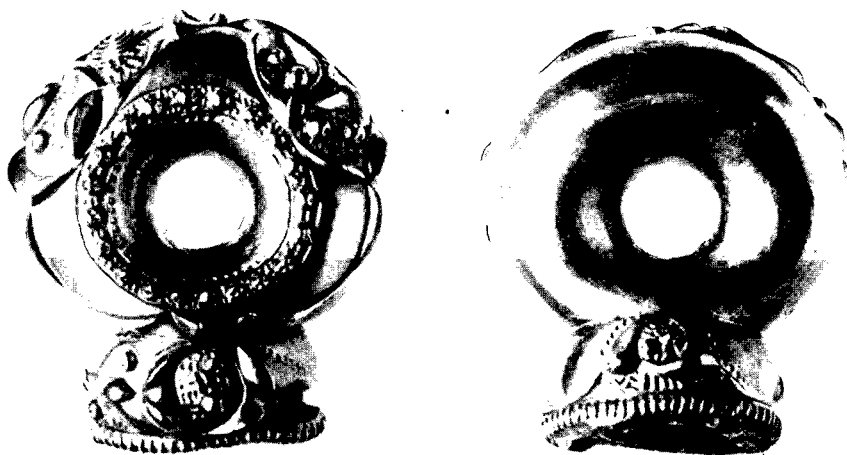


Fig. 1. Gold Object from Cairnmuir, Peeblesshire: front and back. (†.)

the total absence of comparative material such suggestions can rank no higher than guesses, and, so far as I am aware, for the quite distinctive form of this notable piece no one has yet succeeded in bringing forward a parallel. In British archæology it stands unique. It is the object of this note to illustrate a find from foreign soil which does offer a marked similarity of form, and which may afford an explanation of its original purpose.

The features in the Cairnmuir ornament to which attention may be specially drawn are its loop-form with circular outline, set on a substantial hollow cupped base; the small central hole with markedly smooth, funnel-like entrance; the emphasis on the junction between

this funnel and the outer surface of the loop; and, by contrast with the smooth surface of this inner face, the broken appearance and heavily ornamented character of the outer surface.

Now in the National Museum of Antiquities of France, St Germain-en-Laye, there is preserved a find remarkable for more reasons than those that are relevant in this place. It is little known, and has not, I believe, been published. Its provenance is, unfortunately, not well recorded,

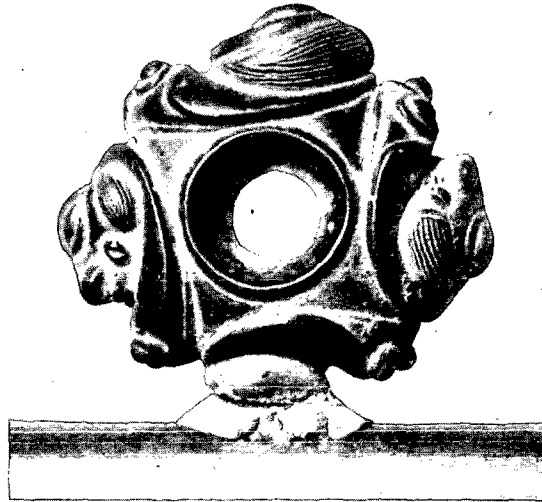


Fig. 2. Bronze Terret from France. (c. †.)

for it is said simply to have come "from the Champagne." Such a locality is on general grounds probable enough, though it is clear that for the inspiration of the fantastic designs on the component pieces we must look rather to the central Rhenish area. Both in conception and in execution this ornamentation is at home in the *milieu* of the rich material culture and bizarre artistic tradition of the Celts who, in the period of La Tène I., were responsible for the burials of Rodenbach, Waldalgesheim, and Weisskirchen.

Our concern, however, here is not with artistic, but with more practical considerations. The Champagne find consisted of the four following pieces:—An object of uncertain use, probably connected with the harnessing of a chariot;¹ a small detached fragment in the form of a human

¹ It is reminiscent of the enamelled linch-pin from Nanterre (Déchelette, *Manuel*, vol. ii. part 3, fig. 502, 7), and still more of the somewhat similar object from the chariot-burial of Leval-Trahegnies, Hainault (De Loë, *Belgique Ancienne*, vol. ii. fig. 108, 6 and 7).

head; and two *terrets*, whose resemblance to our Cairnmuir ornament is surely too striking to be accidental (figs. 2 and 3).¹ Here again we have the loop-form on a base; the smooth central hole sharply demarcated from the remainder of the surface; the broken outline and heavy ornamentation of the exterior face. Here surely there is a connection, if not directly in point of style, yet plainly at all events as to purpose.

For this reason it becomes necessary to examine the evidence on which is determined the character of the two Champagne pieces as *terrets*. Apart from the general appearance of the find, which seems of itself to suggest the remains of a set of harness, and which in this respect so closely agrees with the character of other such finds on Celtic territory, there is the conformation of the looped objects themselves, from which it is not a long step to the developed *terrets* of later times. We have, further, the characteristic formation of the attachment, the runner between two large covering flanges (more particularly marked in fig. 3), which had a long life on foreign soil,² and appears at times in our own country.³ Finally, it may be observed that in these two pieces, so like in general form, yet not a pair, we seem to have the elements of a full set of Celtic harness to the making of which, as Mr Leeds has shown,⁴ went *terrets* of two distinct sizes.

The Rhenish material suggests that the Champagne find is of the



Fig. 3. Bronze Terret from France. (c. †.)

¹ I am much indebted to the authorities of the Museum of St Germain-en-Laye, and in particular to Dr Françoise Henry, for supplying me with photographs of these objects. It is, perhaps, as well to observe that for purposes of photography the two *terrets* have been mounted on lumps of plasticine.

² See, for example, *Préhistoire*, II. p. 107, fig. 22, 3; but the type is very common.

³ An excellent example is in Ilkley Museum, from the Roman site there. The same style of attachment is also found on occasion on objects other than *terrets*, e.g. on an ornament from Brough (British Museum).

⁴ *Celtic Ornament*, pp. 121-2.

period of La Tène I., though a late phase of the period may be suspected. This is borne out by the very close resemblance between the treatment of the ornament on one of the terrets (fig. 3), and the bracelet from Bavaria illustrated by Déchelette,¹ and picked out by him as characteristic for La Tène II. So that perhaps, after all, full La Tène II. is the correct dating. But in either case, if the two pieces in question be accepted as terrets (and the authorities in whose charge they are do so accept them), we are in the presence of the earliest terrets hitherto recognised north of the Alps.

Is, then, the Cairnmuir ornament a Celtic terret? In such a claim, to be sure, there are at first sight certain difficulties, but on a closer examination, and in view of what we now know, some of these must disappear, while none remains insuperable. The obvious objection that the hole is too small to take the reins no longer holds good. We may, if we care, point out that it was only necessary to pass one rein through each terret, not two as is sometimes supposed,² and that the careful construction of the hole, with its polished sides, would to some extent compensate for the small size of the hole itself. But arguments like this are unnecessary in face of the Champagne examples which prove that, as a fact, the Celtic peoples quite certainly did use terrets with holes smaller than one would to-day have believed practicable, and smaller even than that in the Cairnmuir piece.

Another objection might be found in the fact that the attachment at the base of the object can no longer be seen. But on any view of its purpose we cannot avoid the inference that some such means of attachment must have existed once, and have now perished. The recessed runner is a familiar feature of later terrets in this country, where it seems to have been the counterpart of the form with a flange on each side already mentioned as characteristic of the continental development. Attention may also be drawn to the form of the attachment in certain unusual pieces from Stanwick, one of which is illustrated in the *British Museum Guide, Early Iron Age*, fig. 157. These are, in general form, linch-pins, not terrets, but their peculiarity consists in their having a small terret-like termination to one end of the pin, the junction between pin and "terret" showing a humped formation, circular on plan, very similar to what we see in the Cairnmuir example. The latter is, of course, too large ever to have been the terminal of a linch-pin, and the Stanwick

¹ *Op. cit.*, fig. 442, 5; and pl. xi, 7.

² A convincing demonstration of this point is to be found in Lindenschmit's *Alterthümer*, vol. i. part 2, pl. v. Nos. 1 and 2, where are figured portions of two sets of harness with the terrets still attached to them *in pairs*. These objects were found in Italy, and are in the Museum at Wiesbaden. I am indebted to Dr J. G. Callander for drawing my attention to this interesting reference.

pieces are in point rather as illustrating the existence on terret-like objects of a form of attachment which it is difficult to parallel at all, and which has not yet been pointed out on any of the recognised forms of terret.

Perhaps the most serious difficulty arises from the material and construction of the piece. By contrast with the extremely heavy solid bronze castings of the Champagne find here we have a hollow object, of no very substantial character, formed of a metal at once precious and unpractical. And it is a question whether it could ever have stood the strain of use. More than one explanation is, however, possible. In the first place the construction of this ornament, as inspection shows, is anything but flimsy. It is not worked in gold foil or plate, but is a casting to which the finish has been applied, first with the hammer, and then with the graver. And though the finish of the interior shows that it can never have had a filling, nevertheless there is a considerable thickness of metal, and from this, supported by the tubular construction, one obtains an impression of no mean strength. It may be that here we have part of a harness designed for use on ceremonial occasions, when violence of action was not contemplated, and the maximum of display was an obvious advantage. With such an idea the quality of the material fits remarkably well. On the other hand it may never have been intended for practical use at all. In that case we may think of it as possibly part of a harness dedicated by way of offering to some deity, or maybe one intended for the personal use of a god, that is, in a ritual sense, and on no mortal horse.

If this line of argument be accepted we may claim to have explained a piece, the use and character of which have long been a standing puzzle, and at the same time to have established the Cairnmuir gold ornament as typologically, if not in point of date, the earliest of all terrets known from British soil. Since on present views the character of the ornament precludes a high dating, we may perhaps explain the persistence of this early form in the light of the ritual possibilities suggested above as a part of the conservatism inseparable from religious practice.

If, on the other hand, the suggestion now put forward is not acceptable, this striking resemblance between objects in themselves of such outstanding interest seems at least relevant to future discussion, and worthy to go on record.