

IV.

ETRUSCAN GOLD JEWELLERY IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES OF SCOTLAND. BY MISS MARY A. JOHNSTONE, B.Sc., F.L.S.

The Etruscan gold ornaments in this museum are illustrative, in form and in decorative technique, of the work of the Etruscan goldsmith in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.

Sufficient material has been found to constitute a series of the types of ear-ring fashionable in Etruria in successive centuries.

The characteristic form (*a baule*) of the sixth century—not very like an ear-ring—was a cylindrical box having a transverse slit left in the side, this crossed by a suspension wire, which in turn was concealed from front view by an upstanding, hinged plate of gold. The whole was sometimes lined with sheet gold.

In the fifth century, fashion changed to a more ring-like form (*ad anello*). The “ring” was varied with much taste and ingenuity, very often broken at one point to introduce ornament, a lion’s head or a dolphin’s being favourites; the closure was effected by means of a thin wire loop. Another type belonging to the century was a large disc patterned with granulation and gold wire.

In the early fourth century, one form was faced by a decorated oval plate, behind which was the ring proper. During the late fourth and the third century, ear-rings became more and more elaborate, less artistic, often garish; they might carry chains with droplets, strings, or bunches of pendants; they were often of great size. The largest and flimsiest were probably of funeral import.

The contents of seventh-century graves in Vetulonia, Cære and Præneste prove that the Etruscan goldsmith attained pre-eminence in that century—marvellous for the microscopic delicacy and accuracy of his technique and for his exquisite taste in designs, implying an inheritance of training and the possession of very fine implements, as well as a rare mastery of processes some of which have not since been re-discovered in their perfection. We see great fertility in ideas in the patterns evolved, some native Etruscan, some modified borrowings from Oriental sources.

Three methods of ornamenting a surface were in common use.

(a) The application of minute grains or globules of gold was practised, either to express outlines or to block in masses; this was the unique "granulation" (*a granulazione*), or, when the particles were excessively small, dust of gold (*a pulviscolo*). Very elegant examples of granulation were produced up till the last decades of the sixth century; it was still favoured in the fifth, but became less and less used and less refined in quality. This technique was not restricted to Etruria, being used throughout the Eastern Mediterranean—of excellent merit in Rhodes and in Lydia.

(b) The method of manipulating fine gold wire, either applied to a background of sheet gold, or as open, lace-like work, was more peculiarly Etruscan than the granulation, and may have originated in the ancestral home of the people. The seventh century produced the finest of it; in the sixth, it was still most beautiful, and often used in conjunction with granulation. It was neglected in the late fifth and the fourth, revived in coarsely inferior fashion in the third. It was the forerunner of the filigree which became the vogue in Genoa in Renaissance times.

(c) Very good repoussé work, charming in detail and of astonishing exactitude in microscopic detail, was associated with the other two forms of decoration in the seventh and sixth centuries—making for great variety of treatment. There is found an infinity of subjects stamped on sheet gold, and quaint miniatures of animals (*e.g.* ducks and lions) fashioned in the round, their beauty revealed in its perfection only under magnification.

The ear-rings and pendant preserved in this museum illustrate very well all three of these types of the Etruscan goldsmith's art (fig. 1).

PAIR OF GOLD EAR-RINGS.

Nos. FF 30-33. 575-475 B.C.

Found in Pompeii. From the collection of General Ramsay.

This pair of cylindrical ear-rings is rather larger than most of this type, and is characterised by the boldness of the designs and the accuracy of the execution.

The front panel (21 mm. × 20 mm.) is divided into nine compartments, which are enclosed in edgings of double-looped gold strip, the tops of the folds forming the free surface. Each one of the central and corner compartments contains a large boss resting in a cup, the rim

of which is just visible. The boss is covered with infinitely minute particles of gold. In each of the other rectangles is a floral rosette, its leaves fitting into the angles; bounded by the leaves is a dainty cup, fluted, sometimes indented at the top, a sphere at its centre, covered with the finest granulation.

The back panel is plain by contrast, being merely crossed by several bands of cable-work, with a border of tongue design in wire.

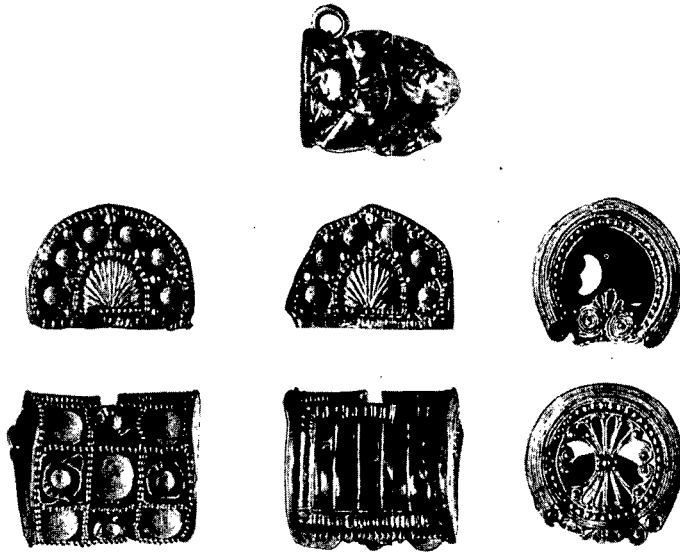


Fig. 1. Etruscan Pendant and Pair of Ear-rings, front and end views, of Gold. (+.)

Both ends are heavily ornamented with striking designs in ribbon gold, forming rows of fine cables, leaves, and volutes, combined with globules. There is no granulation.

The hinged flaps (detached, the pins missing) are semicircular in form. Edged by a plain band, the border is of the looped ribbon-work used in the front panel. Within this is a circle of beautiful, fluted cups having central bosses coated with dust-like granules—like miniature pateræ. A smaller semicircle of the pleated strip-work separates the row of cups from a fan-shaped cluster of grooved ornament. The whole scheme is very handsome.

PENDANT.

No. FF 34. Sixth to Fifth Centuries B.C.

From front to back, 21 mm.

Found in Pompeii. From the collection of General Ramsay.

This pendant, of embossed sheet gold, is in the style of the lion's head often found as part of circular ear-rings of the fifth century. At the top is fixed a double loop for suspension. It may have belonged to an ear-ring or to a necklace.

The microscopic detail of the work is extraordinarily delicate, showing not only the main features such as mane, eyes, nostrils, mouth with protruding tongue, but fine points like eyelids and eyelashes, characters of teeth, spots above the eyes, even the papillæ on the tongue!