

5. THE KAMES BROOCH

THE unique and lovely Kames Brooch is an outstanding addition to the medieval antiquities in the Museum, and the Trustees are greatly indebted to the Pilgrim Trust, to the Treasury for a special grant, and to a contribution from the Society's Special Purchases Fund, for assistance in acquiring it as recorded on p. 315.

Gold brooches of the period are rare anywhere, and this brooch has additional interest for us because it may have been made in Scotland about A.D. 1300 and been handed down as a family heirloom ever since. The enlarged illustration, Pl. LIX: 1, shows clearly the vigour of the chain of six beasts cast in relief and chased. Each grips the one in front with left forepaw and teeth, and curls its tail round the neck of the one behind. The eye-sockets have been drilled deep and are inset with tiny balls, seven of which remain; accidental chips in their yellowish-brown surface show them, under magnification, to be really blue glass. Circular punch marks emphasise the line of the backbones. A little extra glitter has been given to the outer edge of the brooch and to the collar of the pin by beading with the same tool. Further scrutiny shows that the writer was wrong in describing the beasts as grasping the rear paws of the one in front¹: there is no trace of rear claws and joints, so they must be two-legged winged dragons, or wyverns, and it is their wings, slightly spread, which are being gripped and bitten. The long tail comes from between the wings.

On the back is an elaborate talismanic inscription, shown full size on Pl. LIX: 3. (The brooch is only 1.65 in., or 2.75 cm., across). The Lombardic letters, in two concentric lines, are reserved against a roughly tooled background, which looks like a keying for opaque enamel or more probably a softer inlay like niello. They read (maltese cross) IHESVSXNAZARENVSXCRUCIFIXV SXREX IVDEORM[sic]XIASPERXXMELXX PCHIORXA and engraved on the pin ATROPA. The first line is a fuller version of one of the more usual inscriptions, generally but not invariably in sunk letters, which J. G. Callander showed were common on the relatively simple silver ring-brooches in Scotland, and to be dated to the thirteenth-fourteenth century by their association with Edwardian coin hoards.² There is not enough published information from England to show whether Scotland was particularly rich in such brooches. The London Museum's *Medieval Catalogue* says, however, that they are 'not uncommon' elsewhere, and Dr Evans illustrates two in the British Museum.³

It is certainly noteworthy that though Callander recorded only two other gold talismanic brooches from Scotland, the Kames Brooch's curious combination of the names of two of the Wise Men with that of one of the Fates occurs on one of them. This small brooch, one in. across, was found in Islay and is also in the Museum (Pl. LIX: 4 and 5). In detail the letters are rather different and the tooling perhaps careless,⁴ but the inscription is similarly reserved. It reads on one side IESVS XNAZARENVS RX and on the other IASPER X MELCHITRΞATROP.

A possibly significant connection may also be suggested between the winged dragons on the brooch and the (wingless) two-legged dragons that are engraved on the central silver-gilt 'print' of the Bannatyne, or Bute, Mazer. In an important paper in the *Proceedings*,⁵

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXI (1946-7), 197 with Pl. XXIV. See also LVIII (1923-4), 170; *Palace of History* (Glasgow Exhibition 1911), I, 138; Evans, Joan, *A History of Jewellery 1100-1870* (1953), 58, and Pl. 11. Dr Evans, in a letter, notes that the brooch is quite removed from the courtly fashions and Parisian styles which were then tending to affect Western European jewellery.

² *P.S.A.S.*, LVIII (1923-4), 160-78.

³ *LM Medieval Catalogue* (1940), 274; Evans cit., Pl. 6.

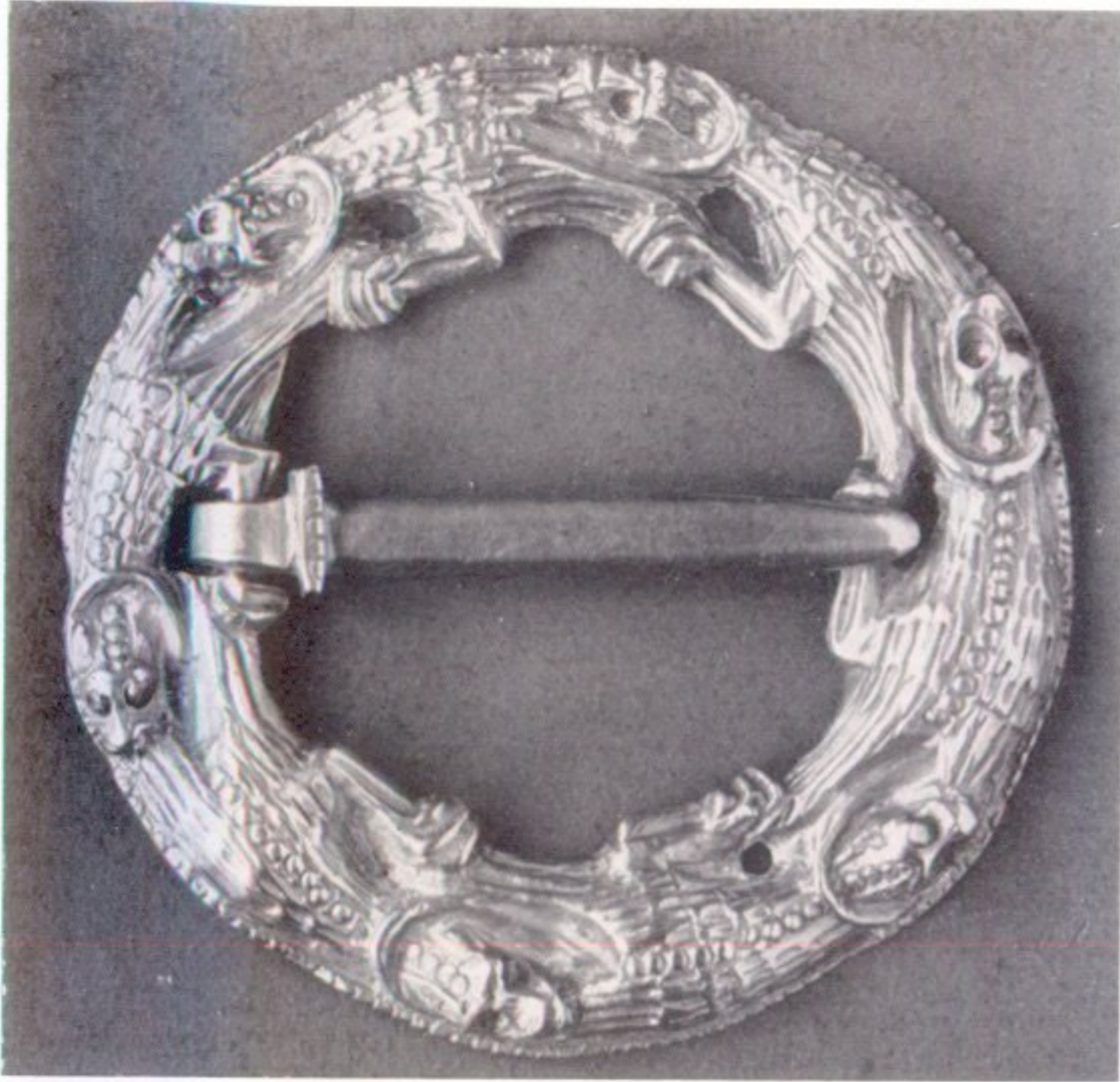
⁴ Opposite the attachment of the pin the chasing is partly interrupted on each side, and there are cracks as if the brooch had been held in a vice at that point. Where not chased there are suggestions that the letters had been roughly marked out in the casting.

⁵ *P.S.A.S.*, LXV (1930-1), 217-51.

J. H. Stevenson identified the persons represented by the enamelled shields on the print, and deduced that it was made for some occasion at Rothesay Castle between 1314 and 1318. Despite the clumsy method of inserting the translucent enamels, noted by W. Brook in an accompanying appendix, the engraved and other decoration on the print is such that stronger reasons would be required to disprove the contemporary and local character of the whole. Cinquefoils in particular are prominent on the shields and are featured in the engraving. The two-legged dragons alternate with them round the print. The central lion, cast separately in the round, has glass eyes, but these are red and it has no other feature in common with the dragons on the brooch.

Now the Kames Brooch was for long kept in the same black-japanned box as the Mazer. For both were inherited by the MacGregors of MacGregor, through marriage in the latter part of the eighteenth century with the heiress of Macleod of Bernera, from the Bannatynes of Kames in Bute who were the successors of the FitzGilberts whose heraldic charges were cinquefoils. Just as the print of the Mazer, and perhaps its wooden bowl embellished with sixteenth-century mounts engraved with Bannatyne names, evidently came down as an heirloom from the early fourteenth century, so there is every likelihood that the brooch did also; and that there were then in Scotland craftsmen capable of designing and making both.

R. B. K. STEVENSON



Above, the Kames Brooch, enlarged to show detail.
Below, the Kames Brooch and the Islay Brooch, actual size



STEVENSON: THE KAMES BROOCH.