

## Two Scandinavian brooch-fragments of Viking-age date from the Outer Hebrides

by J A Graham-Campbell

The National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland have recently been presented with a fragment of a gilt-bronze equal-armed brooch of Scandinavian type (pl 28), by Mr John Morrison of Northton, Harris.<sup>1</sup> This fragment was picked up by Mr Morrison, some years before 1967, at NGR NF 9891 on the sand-dunes on the SE side of Chaipaval, Northton, Harris, on the stretch of sands between Traigh na Cleavag and Traigh an Taoibh Thuath.

*Cast bronze fragment* of a brooch, including part of the original outer edge, with a recent central perforation having a jagged edge on the reverse. The front (pl 28a), which has traces of gilding, is decorated with animal ornament except for a plain area adjacent to one end of the shaped outer edge. This plain area surrounds a small perforation which would have served to attach a hemispherical metal boss. The large central perforation has removed the greater part of a similar plain area for another boss. On the reverse (pl 28b) is preserved the partly flattened catch-plate for the pin. Apart from this catch-plate and the outer margin of the brooch, the reverse is covered with a clear positive impression of a fine regular textile. Max. dimensions: 4.3 by 3.6 cm.

The central perforation (diam 0.8 cm) was made with very considerable force, perhaps by a modern bullet. The directness of the perforation suggests that it has been used as a target.

The textile impression is of a remarkable clarity (pl 28c) and is thus a welcome addition to the corpus of such textile evidence from Scotland, as reviewed by Henshall (1952). Its uniform presence over the underside of the brooch indicates that this fabric played an essential function in the manufacture of the clay mould in which the brooch was cast.<sup>2</sup>

Miss Audrey Henshall has kindly contributed the following information. 'The textile pattern is a 2/2 twill herringbone with six threads in each stripe, and displacement between the stripes. There are about 84 warp threads and 64 weft threads per inch. The predominating warp threads have registered clearly, but the weft threads can only be seen occasionally. The direction of spin cannot be made out. A number of Viking-age oval brooches in the Museum have similar textile impressions on the inside surface; all are much coarser than the Northton piece, and none are from a herringbone twill.'

The particular nature of the animal ornament, with its mask-like heads and twisted bodies, and the use of applied bosses (now missing) are features of 9th/10th-century Scandinavian bronze brooches – in particular of the ubiquitous oval, or 'tortoise', brooch. This fragment, however, has a shaped outer edge which is only paralleled by the terminals of certain equal-armed brooches (see Petersen 1928, 81–2, figs 64–5). The ornament of the Harris fragment comes closest to Petersen 1928, fig 64, since its bosses are isolated features in the design and are not linked by bands (cp Petersen 1928, fig 65). Petersen 1928, fig 64, is a single-find from Hals, Tranøy, Troms, first illustrated by Rygh (1885, no. 659) as a type-specimen, and then taken by Petersen (*ibid*) as the type-specimen for his 'Troms type'. Sjøvold (1974, pl 42c) illustrates a further example of this type, also from the north of Norway.

Sjøvold (1974, 208) reviews Petersen's conclusions concerning his 'Troms type' and concludes that stylistic peculiarities, as well as associated finds, date it to the 9th century. It appears to have been a particularly Norwegian type, with a northern distribution. For instance, no examples of the true 'Troms type' have been found in the rich cemetery at Birka, Sweden; indeed only one example of the closely related variety of Petersen 1928, fig 65 (Arbman 1943, Vol I, Taf 77, 5) was found there.

This is the only example of such a brooch so far found in Scotland, or indeed in Great Britain. There is, however, a fragment from Ireland (Shetelig 1954, iii, fig 64) which is more similar than it in detail to Petersen 1928, fig 64.<sup>3</sup> Another brooch fragment from Dublin, which has been identified as part of an oval brooch (Shetelig 1954, vi, fig 83), has ornament closer to that of this type of equal-armed brooch than to that of any oval brooch (cp Petersen 1928, figs 1–57). It should therefore be re-identified as a fragment of an equal-armed brooch, although lacking its original edges. The Harris fragment is thus one of only three examples of this imported Viking-age type of female brooch known from Britain and Ireland.

In December 1975, Mr Coinneach MacLean of Lochboisdale, South Uist, picked up a gilt-bronze brooch-fragment (pl 28d) on Kildonan Machair, South Uist. Mr MacLean informs me that: 'The site is a wind-eroded hollow in the sand-dunes to the S of a standing stone at NGR NF 727286. Surface collection, over the years, has yielded material of predominantly post-Viking-age date, including a silver ring of c 1300. A bronze ringed-pin has also been recovered, and pottery similar to that usually associated with wheel-house structures occurs in one small area.'<sup>4</sup>

*Cast bronze fragment of a brooch, with openwork ornament and traces of gilding (pl 28d).* One edge is intact, with a regularly curving profile, adjacent to which is situated a raised boss with four openings. The reverse is plain. Max dimensions: 2.1 by 1.7 cm.

This fragment forms part of one end of the upper shell of a two-piece oval brooch, like Rygh 1885, nos 652 and 654, although neither of these type-specimens has the small transverse bars above the boss which are a feature of the South Uist fragment. These are present on a number of other examples of this type from Norway, as illustrated by Petersen (1928, figs 51a, b and e). Oval brooches like Rygh nos 652/654 are to be dated to the 9th–10th centuries (Petersen 1928, 64–7).

The discovery of this Viking-age Scandinavian brooch-fragment on Kildonan Machair raises the possibility that there was continuity of settlement on this site during the prehistoric and medieval periods. It is probable, however, that the occupation-levels of this sand-dune site have been re-deposited.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

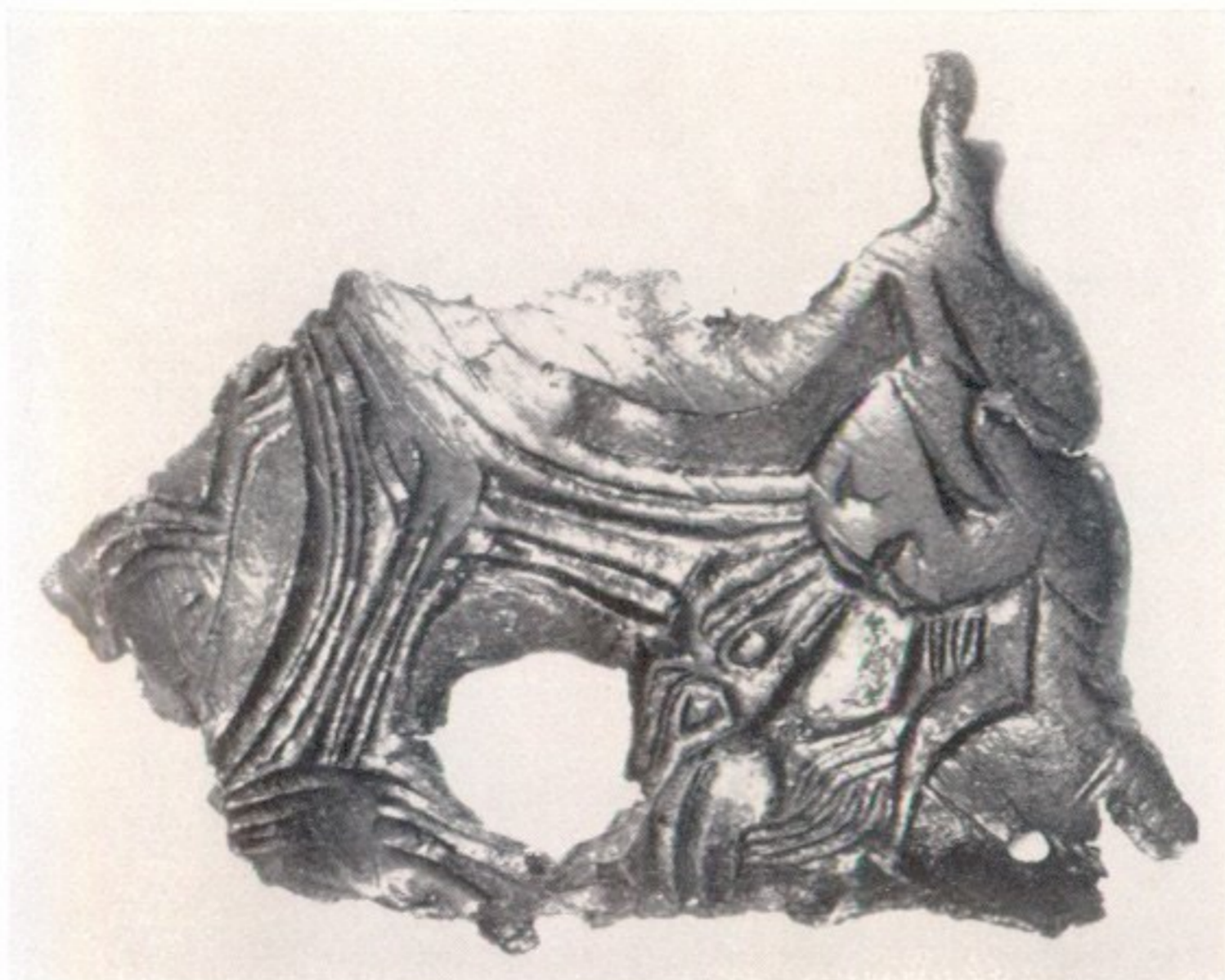
- 1 NMAS unregistered; see p 230 no. 27. I am most grateful to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland for the invitation to publish this fragment, and to Mr Stevenson and Dr Close-Brooks for their assistance with its study.
- 2 Earlier discussion of the use of fabric in mould manufacture includes Zachrisson 1960, and Bunker and Ternbach 1970, but see now Arrhenius 1973 and 1975.
- 3 I am most grateful to Mr Michael Ryan for the information that a drawing in the National Museum of Ireland suggests that this brooch is from the Kilmainham (Dublin) cemetery.
- 4 This material has been placed in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, as will be this new fragment (NMA cat nos GS 200–13; Loan 1976, 13–26). I am grateful to Mr MacLean for permission to publish his find, and to Miss Cap Sease for the photograph.
- 5 Information from Mr Iain Crawford.

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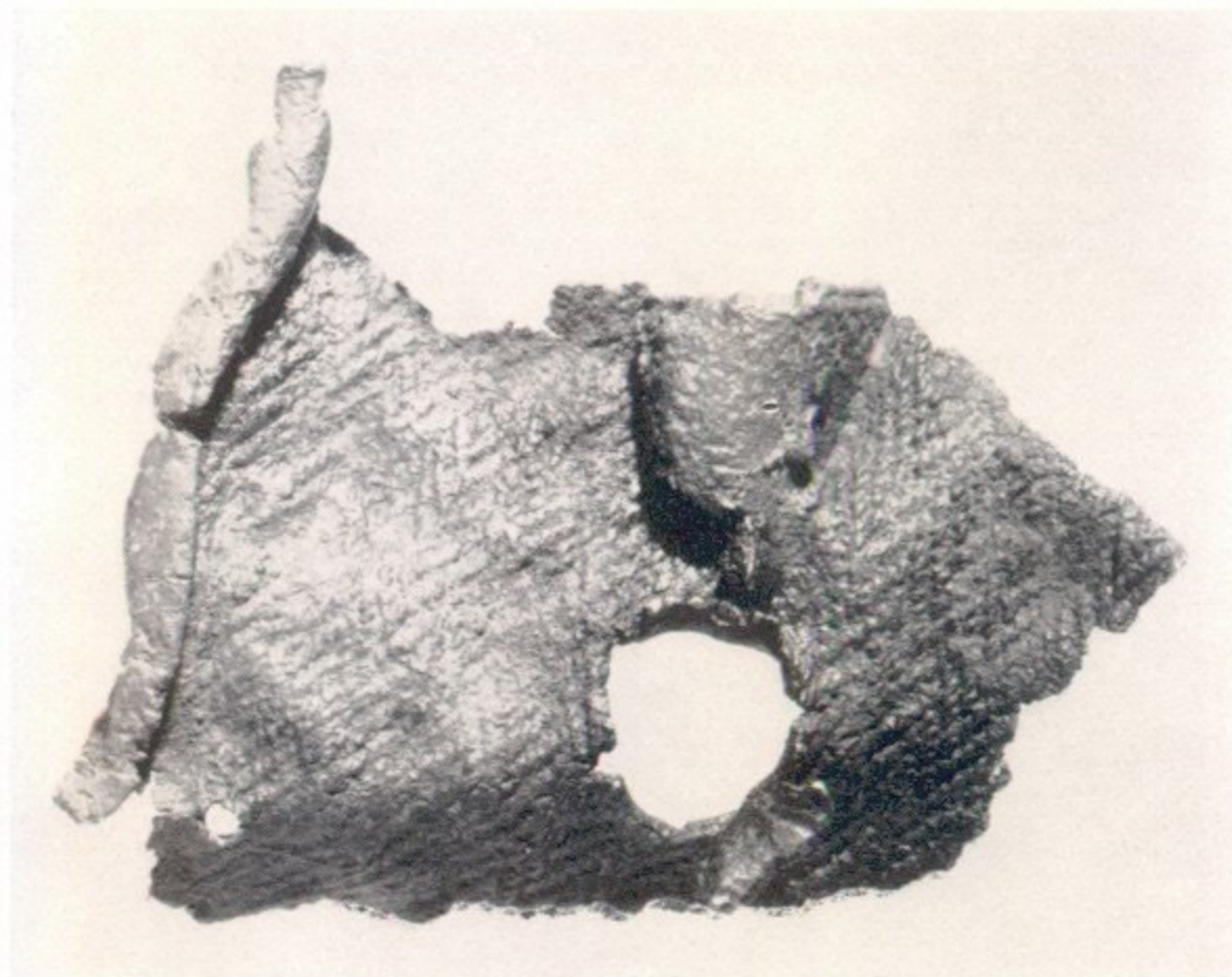




a Bronze brooch-fragment from Harris (2:1)



c Detail of textile impression on reverse of Harris fragment (5:1)



b Reverse of Harris fragment (2:1)



d Bronze brooch-fragment from S Uist (2:1; photo Miss C Sease)