

## Finds from Urquhart Castle in the National Museum, Edinburgh

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Urquhart Castle is situated on a promontory on the N side of Loch Ness, guarding the entrance into Glen Urquhart, a fertile alcove which has yielded artefacts from as early as the Bronze Age and two ring cairns of the Clava type. The site's tactical importance may have invited the construction of a timber-laced fort. Quantities of vitrified stone are recorded from the early excavations by the Ministry of Works, but apparently no relics 'of any of the prehistoric ages turned up'.

The strategic importance of the site commanding the upper part of the Great Glen was recognized early, for it is said that William the Lion had a royal fort at Urquhart. The lordship of Urquhart changed hands some few times before being held by the Comyns, lords of Badenoch shortly before the Wars of Independence. It fell to Edward I twice on campaigns which brought him to Elgin, but was twice recaptured, and granted by Bruce to Sir Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray. It was one of the five castles to hold out against Edward III in 1335. In 1346 the barony and castle reverted to the crown, guarded by royal constables until seized by the rebel Earl of Ross a century later. The lordship of Urquhart was granted to John Grant in 1509. The castle was thereafter in the possession of the Lairds of Grant and kept in repair, although seized by a band of MacDonalds in 1545 and Covenanters in 1644. Garrisoned by Whigs in the Revolution of 1689 some of the buildings were blown up when it was evacuated two years later. In 1708 the Laird of Grant successfully stopped the local inhabitants from despoiling the castle of its lead and woodwork, but it was then left to the mercy of the elements until 1912 when the ruins were handed over to the Ancient Monuments Department. Excavation and repair began immediately, but were interrupted by the war. They were resumed in 1919 and completed in 1922. For a fuller history see the HMSO guidebook, Simpson (1930; 1951) and MacKay (1893).

The results of the Ministry's work were published by Simpson. The finds, however, were relegated to no more than a list of objects, whose location on the site is recorded laconically in the National Museum's register. The incomplete nature of surviving site records has made it difficult if not impossible to pinpoint where they were found. In any case the stratigraphy was recorded simply as the number of feet below ground level, at which they were found. In their long sojourn in the museum a number of the nicer pieces have been published separately in various books. MacDonald and Laing (1977) published some sketches of the Urquhart metalwork in their index as comparative material for their 14th-century metalwork from Lochmaben Castle, Dumfriesshire. Laing noted that there were relatively few collections of medieval ironwork from Scotland, the largest being Urquhart, Lochmaben, and Caerlaverock Castle (publication

\* c/o National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh

forthcoming), and two small groups from Kirkcudbright Castle (Dunning *et al* 1958) and Luce Sands (Jope *et al* 1959). To this list can be added Threave Castle (Good & Tabraham 1981) and the massive collection from Perth (forthcoming). For comparative collections in England see Biddle (1963), Mynard (1969), Jarrett (1970) and Platt, Coleman-Smith *et al* (1975).

Dating the collection is difficult and the absence of stratification is most unfortunate. Historical record of occupation extends from the 13th to the 17th century each of which is represented by some of the datable artefacts: brass ewer, brooches, spurs, arrowheads and coins. Six coins were found, pennies of John Balliol, Edward I and Robert II, placks of James V and VI, and a turner of Charles I. Two bronze pins perhaps point to earlier occupation, being possibly of a late Dark Age date. This might be confirmed by the more recent discovery of a penannular brooch terminal at the castle, now in the Inverness museum published in Small *et al* (1973). Other finds preserved in the Inverness museum include sherds of medieval pottery. Two gunstones 4 and 5 inches (102, 127 mm) in diameter and 14 larger stone shots about 250–300 mm in diameter are still at the castle.

The finds from Urquhart Castle were given on loan to the National Museum in 1923. In 1955 they were gifted by the Countess of Seafield. The HY numbers with each object are the museum's registration numbers. Laing (MacDonald & Laing 1977) gave the redundant loan numbers.

### *Iron*

The ironwork from Urquhart Castle is very varied and as Laing noted the quantity is perhaps surprising in view of the medieval reports of shortages of iron in Scotland. Horsegear, tools, domestic implements, and weapons are all represented. The most interesting, perhaps are the numerous arrowheads.

- 1 Rowel spur. *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (hereinafter *LMMC*) type ff terminals with a hook strap end still attached to one terminal. The small rowel was originally of eight points. Early 15th century L. 150 100 mm. HY 72.
- 2 Rowel spur. *LMMC* type ff terminals, one of which is broken and perhaps mended with thin wire. Originally a six point rowel. Late 14th century. L. 130 75 mm. HY 73.
- 3–6 Swivel-rings. Some form of horse gear, probably tether. The hole of no 4 shows signs of wear. L. 127, 95, 95, 110 mm. HY 74, 76, 77, 75.
- 7 Horseshoe nail. Flat rectangular head of Biddle's Seacourt type 3ii. (Biddle 1963, 176–7). L. 39 mm. HY 80.
- 8–9 Horseshoes. Nailholes not countersunk and hence the plain outline; not fullered; plain calkins. These two are similar to the 14th-century horse-shoes found at Lochmaben Castle. L. 114, 119 mm. HY 78, 79.
- 10 Lump of corroded arrowheads. Some 140 arrowheads all apparently of the same type as no 13, an early barbed arrowhead. The barbed arrowhead, although confined to the chase in the later Middle Ages, was in its earlier stages probably used also as a military weapon. They were found at Dyserth Castle, Flint, a purely military site occupied between the years 1241 and 1263. All the surviving single examples are socketed and represent a wide variety of types and dates but are mostly of military design. L. 149 mm. HY 34.
- 11 Arrowhead. *LMMC* type 15. A later evolved hunting arrowhead with long barbs. L. 80 mm. HY 35.
- 12 Arrowhead. *LMMC* type 16. Barbed hunting arrowhead. L. 78 mm. HY 36.
- 13 Arrowhead. *LMMC* type 13. Early barbed arrowhead, see no 10. L. 58 mm. HY 39.
- 14 Arrowhead. Laing (MacDonald & Laing 1967, 154) suggests it is a crossbow bolt, late medieval. L. 37 mm. HY 37.
- 15 Arrowhead. *LMMC* type 1, leaf-shaped blade, early medieval. L. 50 mm. HY 40.
- 16–17 Arrowheads. *LMMC* type 3. No 17 is of this early form with marked shoulders but also is centrally ridged. No 16 has the more common plain section, but may in fact have been barbed like no 13. L. 59, 46 mm. HY 38, 41.
- 18–21 Arrowheads. *LMMC* type 7. These 13 arrowheads were developed for military use, as an answer

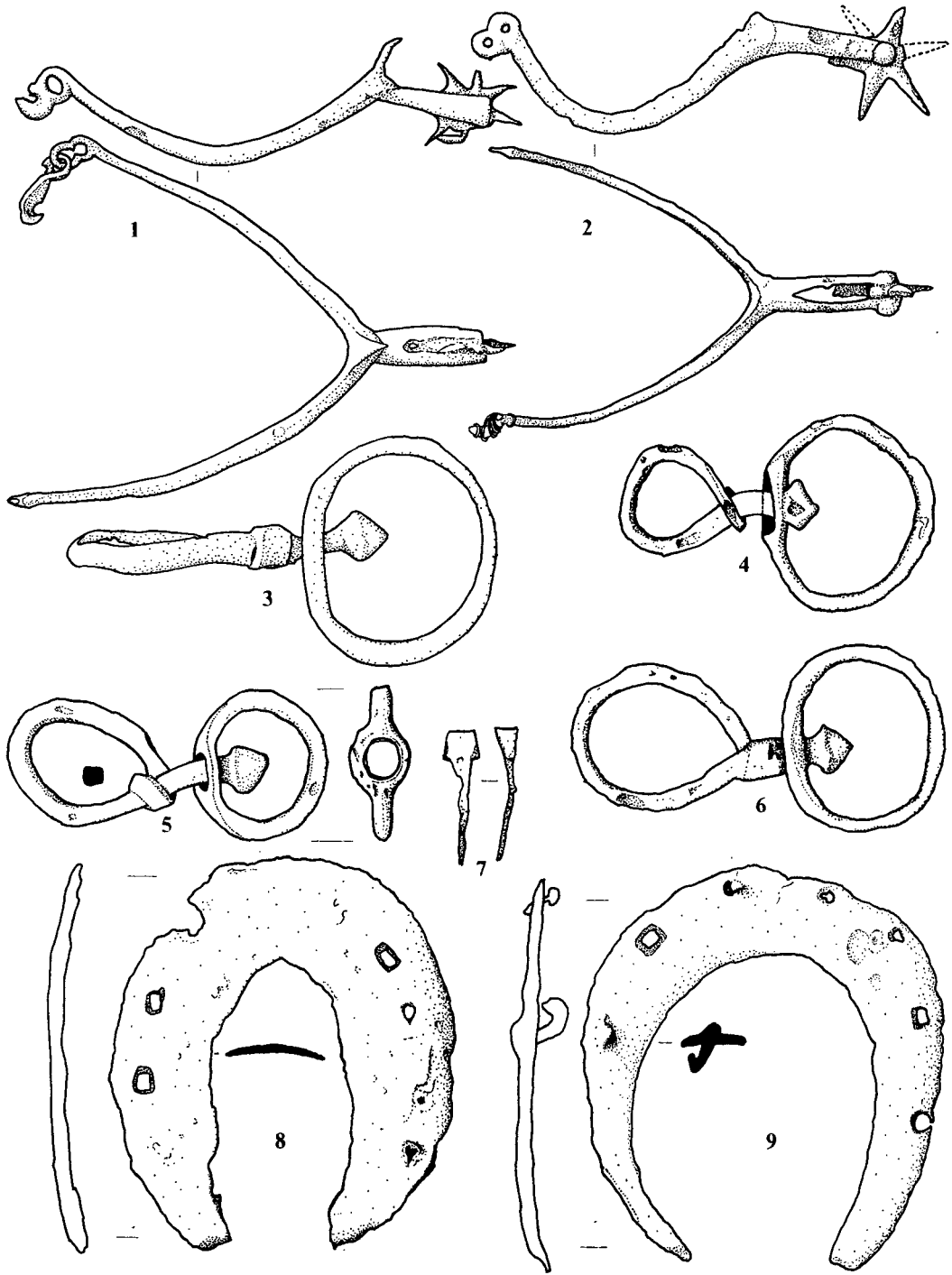


FIG 1 Ironwork (scale 1:2)

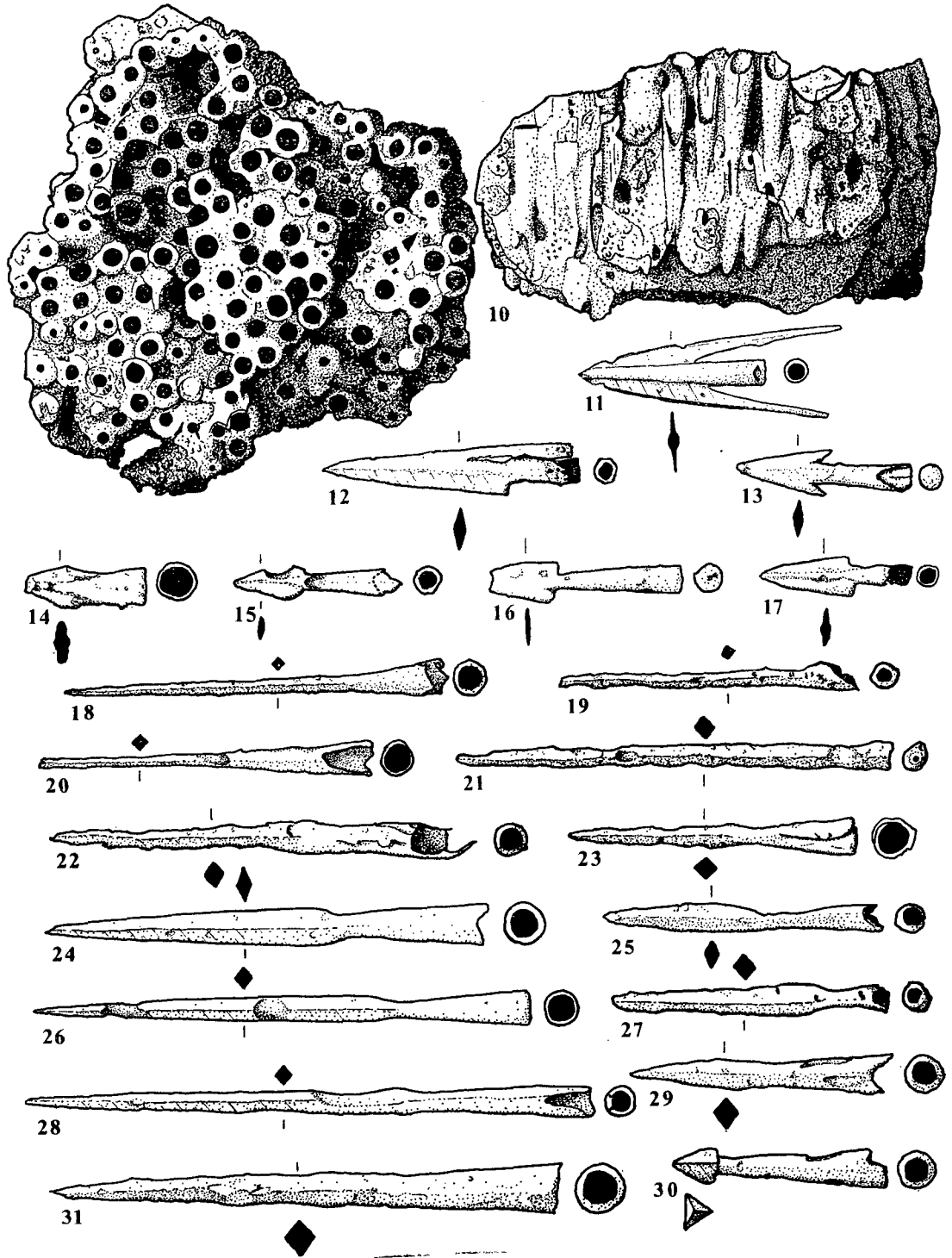


FIG 2 Ironwork (scale 1:2)

- to the increasing efficiency of armour protection. They have a diamond, or in the case of no 20, square section. L. 117, 91, 102, 133 mm. HY 47, 53, 52, 51.
- 22-29 Arrowheads. *LMMC* types 7-8 and 8. Type 8 is marked by a leaf-shaped blade, eg no 24, but the distinction between 7 and 8 is not always clear eg no 28. No 23's socket was constructed by beating out and rolling over the end. L. 130, 89, 135, 86, 152, 174, 80 mm. HY 46, 54, 45, 48, 44, 49, 55, 50.
- 30 Arrowhead. *LMMC* type 11. Highly developed type of military arrowhead, which is dated 14-15th century by the *LMMC*. L. 66 mm. HY 42.
- 31 Spearhead. Diamond section, no wings, socketed. L. 155 mm. HY 43.
- 32 Dagger blade. Single-edged blade and strip tang with three remaining iron rivets. L. 267 mm. HY 59.
- 33 Knife blade. Single-edged blade and flat strip tang with one remaining rivet hole. L. 86 mm. HY 57.
- 34 Knife blade. Single-edged blade and strip tang with one remaining brass and one remaining iron rivet and five holes and a large 6 mm perforation in the end of the tang. L. 185 mm. HY 58.
- 35-36 Knife blades, like nos 38-39. No 35 has a long tang and heavy triangular section, now concave. No 36 has a copper alloy mounting surviving where the blade meets the tang. L. 151 and 125 mm. HY 56 and 62.
- 37 Knife blade. Wide blade presumably half missing, of very thin section with tang made simply by beating over edge and shoulder of blade. L. 141 mm. HY 63.
- 38-39 Knife blades. Very common medieval form, heavy triangular section, triangular blade and pointed tang. L. 104, 89 mm. HY 60, 61.
- 40 Sword cross-guard. Oakeshott (1964, 113) style I, very common form of straight bar, slightly bent, presumably of relatively constant thickness, but it is very corroded. The gap for blade is 29 mm at its narrowest. Laing (MacDonald & Laing 1977, 20) suggested this was a small pick. L. 180 mm. HY 71.
- 41 Latch? L. 172 mm. HY 90.
- 42-43 Window catches? L. 170, 175 mm. HY 91 a, b.
- 44 End of strap-hinge. L. 54 mm. HY 89.
- 45-47 Spoon-headed augurs or bits. Common woodworking tools. L. 138, 152, 162 mm. HY 65, 64, 66.
- 48-55 Nails. Altogether 36 nails were found. Most have rectangular (almost square) section, of lengths varying from 50 to 155 mm. The heads are usually flat (a few are slightly pyramidal) and roughly square or circular. Laing (MacDonald & Laing 1977, 156) described no 48 (his no 17) as a nail-headed gouge or chisel). L. 105, 77, 55, 138, 117, 155, 122, 50 mm. HY 128, 132, 122, 125, 102, 100, 126, 123.
- 56-57 Clench bolts. Three were found with flat oval heads and slightly rhomboidal roves. Common on many medieval sites and probably not indicative of shipbuilding, but perhaps used in door construction. L. 50, 48 mm. HY 94, 93.
- 58 Hook with looped head. L. 56 mm. HY 95.
- 59-61 Hooks with flattened hook ends resembling small sickles, perhaps pruning knives. No 59 has a small perforation in its blade. These can be paralleled on Medieval sites by one from Threave Castle (Good & Tabraham 1981), and another two from Clough Castle, County Down, Ireland (Waterman 1954, 138). L. 80, 96, 122 mm. HY 99, 98, 97.
- 62 Shoe for wooden spade. The inner edge forms a v-section into which the wooden frame would fit, the depth of which narrows considerably at the bottom. L. 185 mm. HY 84 a and b.
- 63 Barrel Padlock-key. *LMMC* type C bit without the common two projections, the shank is broken. L. 106 mm. HY 89.
- 64 Key. *LMMC* type II, circular bow, hollow shank, the shank and bit are made from a rolled sheet of metal. L. 125 mm. HY 88.
- 65 Door latch. L. 272 mm. HY 87.
- 66-69 Candleholders. The candle grip is made by beating out the end and bending them around. In no 67 there is one and possibly three small perforations in the candle grip. L. 80, 95, 111, 67 mm. HY 67, 69, 68, 70.
- 70-71 Stirrup-shaped buckles, from harness gear. There is lightly incised linear decoration (?) on the shank of no 70. L. 84, 89 mm. HY 86, 85.
- 72 Strap and hook (?) L. 63 mm. HY 96.
- 73-75 Strike-a-lights or buckles. The former identification is preferred by Laing (MacDonald & Laing 1977, 154). There are two other possible examples from Threave Castle (Good & Tabraham 1981). Compare the series of these from Novgorod in Russia (Thompson 1967, 74-5). L. 81, 85, 125 mm. HY 83, 82, 81.

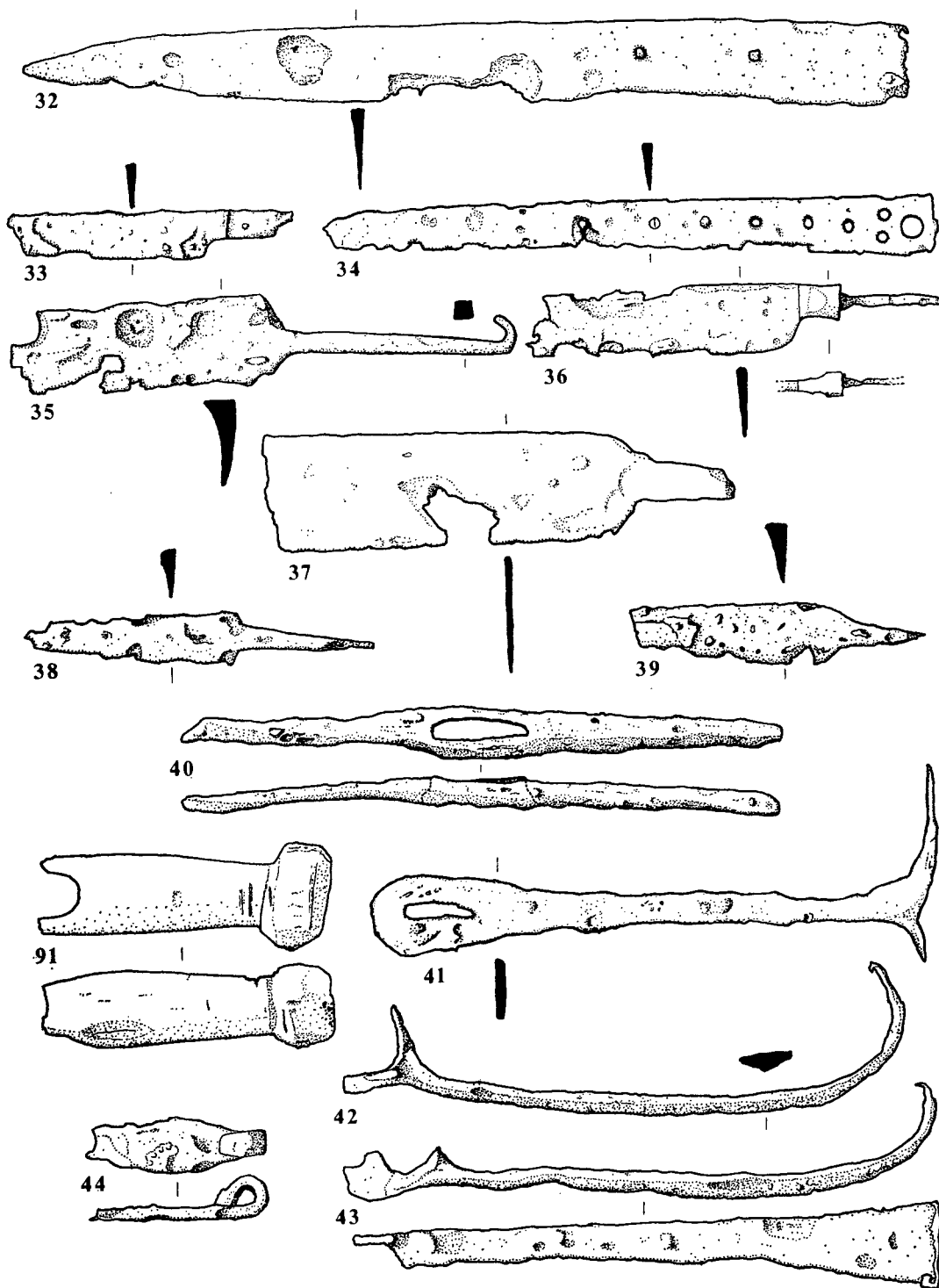


FIG 3 Ironwork (scale 1:2)

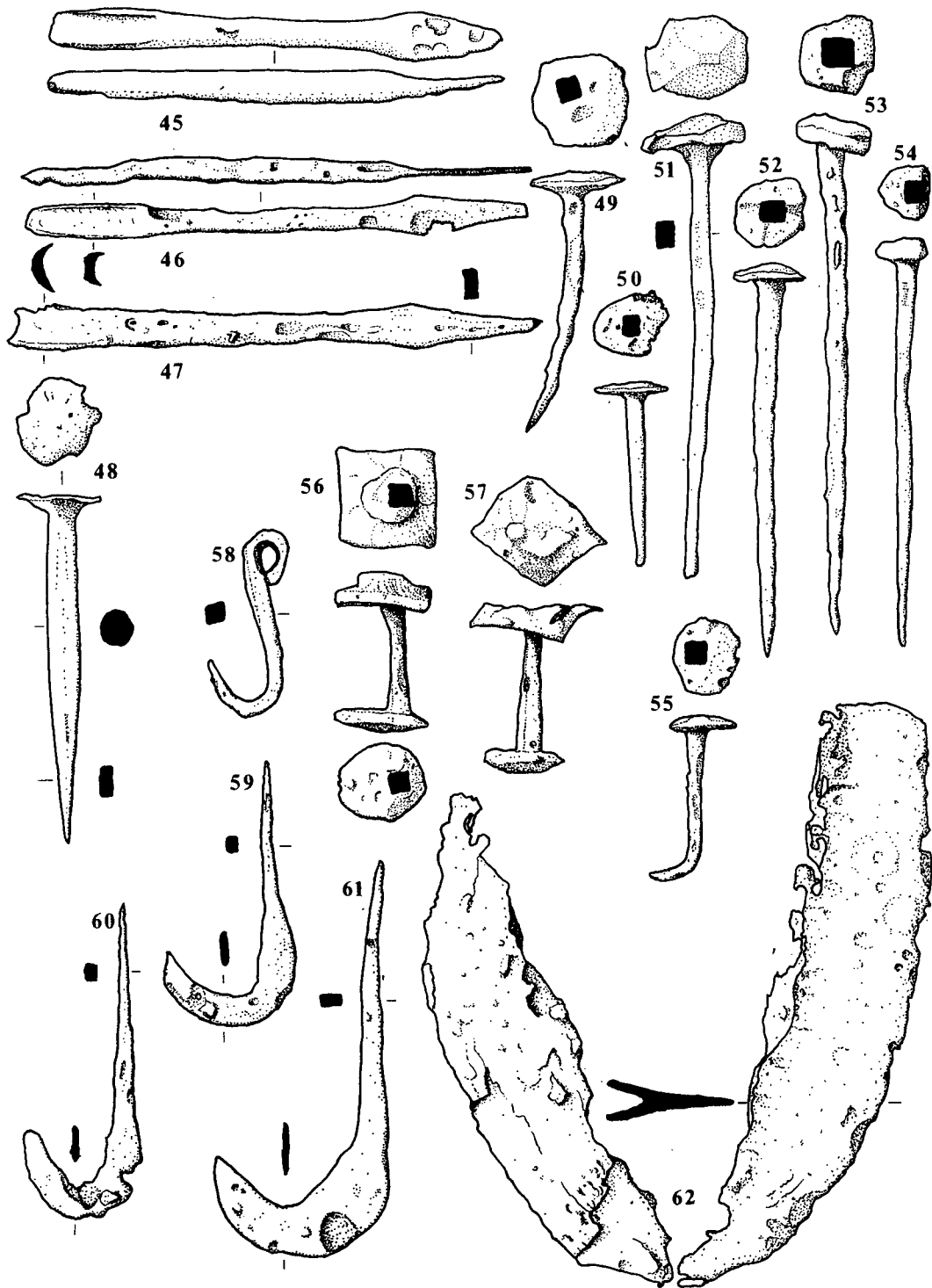


FIG 4 Ironwork (scale 1:2)

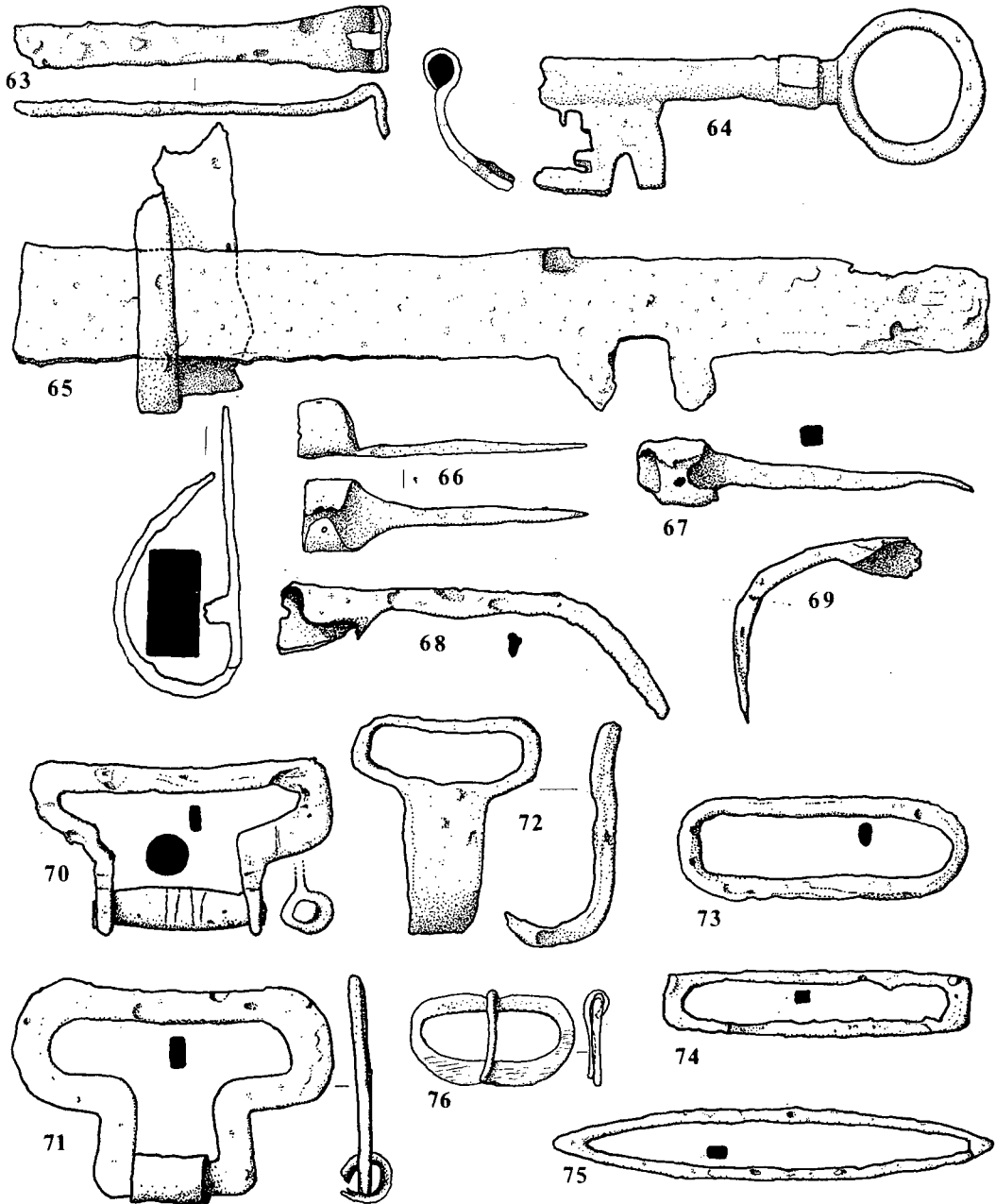


FIG 5 Ironwork (scale 1:2)

*Copper Alloy*

- 76 Kidney/oval shaped buckle. There are slight linear scratches on the shank. The pin is a simple wire with looped over head. L. 46 mm. HY 17.
- 77 Pendant. Cross with lozenge-shaped perforation in the centre. The arms terminate in trefoils with a circular perforation in the centre of each, through one of which is a swivel attachment to take the now missing chain. L. 38 mm. HY 12.



- 78 Pin. Frustrum-headed pin, trapeze in face with rectangular horizontal section rising above an abacus. Two deep incisions on each side of the head gives an appearance reminiscent of Laing's 'astragaloid-headed' pin. Plain frustrum-headed pins are found perhaps exclusively in Scotland and are tentatively dated by Laing (1975, 328-9), 8-9th century. L. 93 mm. HY 19.
- 79 Pin, with pentagonal head in side section with incised x. The front top facet is decorated with four linear incisions. The decoration is identical to a specimen from Perth in the National Museum (FC 139) and Laing's example of a crutch-headed pin from Orkney. Laing (1975, 331) gives these crutch-headed pins a 10-14th century date, but the shape is not quite identical. L. 101 mm. HY 18.
- 80 Handle from 3-legged skillet? The end once joined to the skillet still has the original smooth finish of the rim. L. 115 mm. HY 11.
- 81 Ring. Circular sectioned shank and 'bezel' with circular perforation, probably originally with a swivel attachment. D. 25 mm. HY 13.
- 82 Ring brooch of octagonal external shape, each side being concave, and roughly circular shape. The pin is flat with a 'barrel' shaped head which is split to allow its insertion into the hinge. Four flat panels are decorated on each side, the reverse of which is very slightly ridged with lightly incised oblique lines. The front panels are at the four compass points and bear an M and maltese cross in the panel split by the hinge and VM, MV, and VMV in the other three, each with a background of incised lines. The back four panels bear a 'foliaceous' design. Callander (1924, 183) puts this brooch in his type II category although it deviates somewhat from the silver type II brooches dated to the 14th century by association with coins, for its internal outline is less distinctly octagonal, and the external sides are concave. The front panels no longer bear the 'Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews' formula, but nevertheless many silver type II brooches show advanced signs of confusion in the inscription. This brooch still bears a cross in the first panel, common to most 'talismanic' brooches. Callander dates this to the 14th century, although the 15th century is quite possible. L. 59 mm. HY 14.
- 83 Ring brooch of hexagonal shape with concave sides, which are planoconvex in section. Reminiscent of the previous type II brooch. The oblique incised lines reflect the black lettering of earlier brooches, now filling the whole surface, front and back. The pin is simply beaten sheet metal and the head is a simple loop. Callander (1924, 183) dates this to the 15th century but again a century later is possible. Both brooches are pictured in Callander (1924, fig 6, 5 & 6). L. 39 mm. HY 15.
- 84 Hinged lock catch from a chest. The perforated square attachment, riveted to the hasp, went into the lock. Part of the hinge pin has broken away and is lodged in the hinged end of the hasp. L. 88 mm HY 7.
- 85 Piece of copper alloy mounting from the rim of a vessel with circular perforations alternating with 'black letter' i's, in imitation of an inscription. 16th century. L. 58 mm. HY 9.
- 86 Rectangular plate, perforated at either end with a small hole. L. 58 mm. HY 10.
- 87 Small hasp, small perforation under the now broken hinge. L. 29 mm. HY 8.
- 88 Ewer. The body is pear-shaped, made up of six flat strips of which the two sides are considerably wider than the remaining four. The foot and base are similarly hexagonal and have been cast as one with the body. A thin slit in the neck allows the water to enter the spout, which characteristically ends in a zoomorphic head, sometimes considered a dog's. This spout is relatively short compared to most ewer spouts which usually join very low on the body. The now missing lid would have been low, dome-shaped and stepped up from the ewer rim. There is a small hole in the neck. Brass ewers were once common tableware in Europe. Filled with water they were used to wash one's hands over a flat bottomed bowl, in which the ewer often stood awaiting use. From paintings they are securely dated to the 15-16th centuries and we can see that various shapes and forms were contemporaneous. This ewer is seemingly identical to one in the Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam (Theuerkauff-Liederwald 1975, pl 8), although its base is said to be octagonal not hexagonal. It still has its lid which has a maker's mark with a crown in which is the name 'Jehan', as yet unidentified. Interestingly enough Theuerkauff-Liederwald claims that there is a mistake in the design which can easily lead to the spout being knocked off, for an identical spout (now in the National Museum) has been found at Bothwell Castle, Lanarkshire (illustrated in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 93 (1960-1), pl XVI, fig 1). Theuerkauff-Liederwald knew of no other examples of this ewer but thought that it showed more characteristics of the 15th century. L. 216 mm. HY 5.

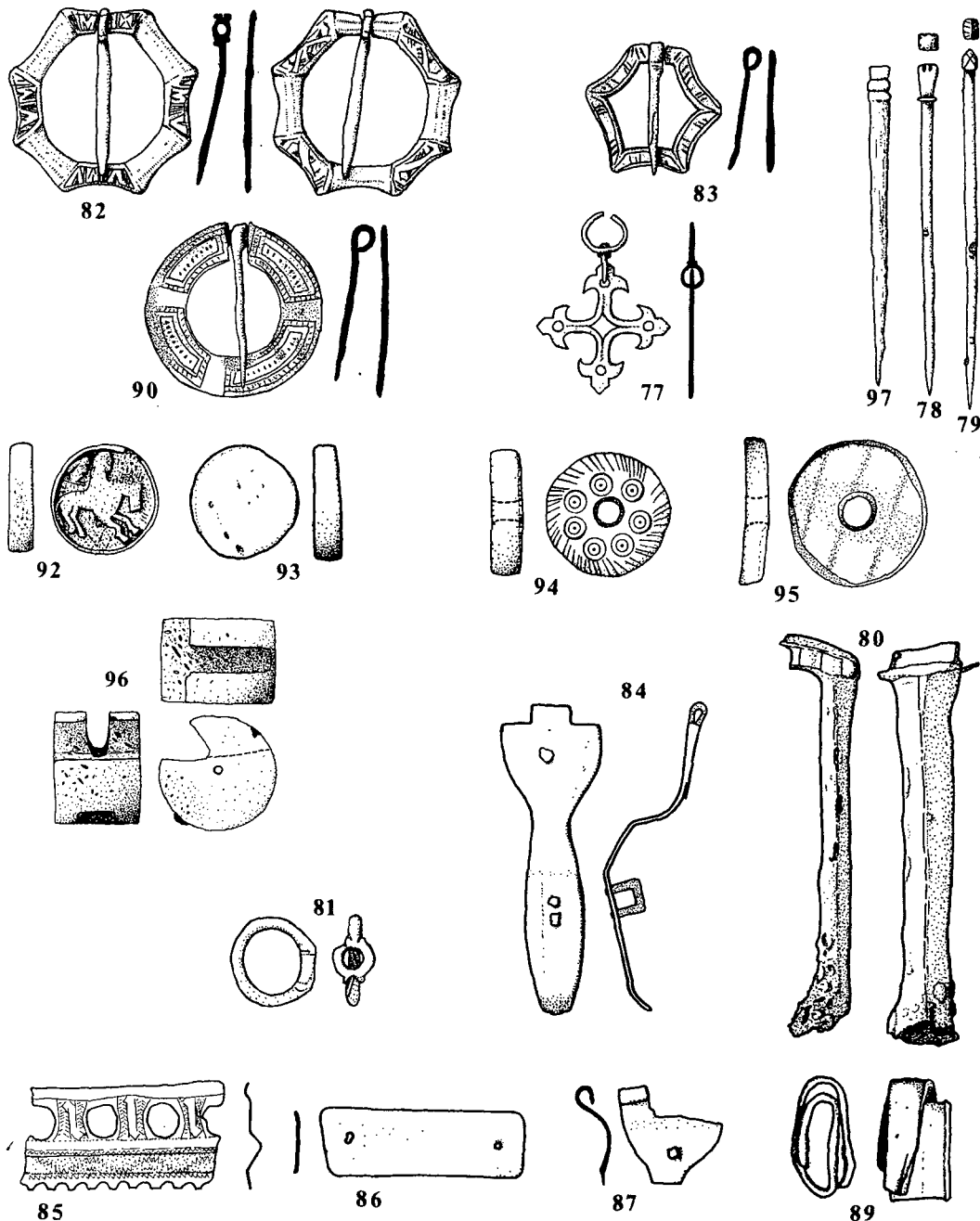


FIG 6 Copper alloy, pottery and bone objects (scale 1:2)

*Miscellaneous*

- 89 Strip of lead, coiled up. Extended length 140 mm. HY 24.
- 90 Handle and pommel of solid deerhorn carved to form a roughly square pommel and circular sectioned handle which is broken through a large circular perforation approximately 15 mm in Diameter. L. 87 mm. HY 23.

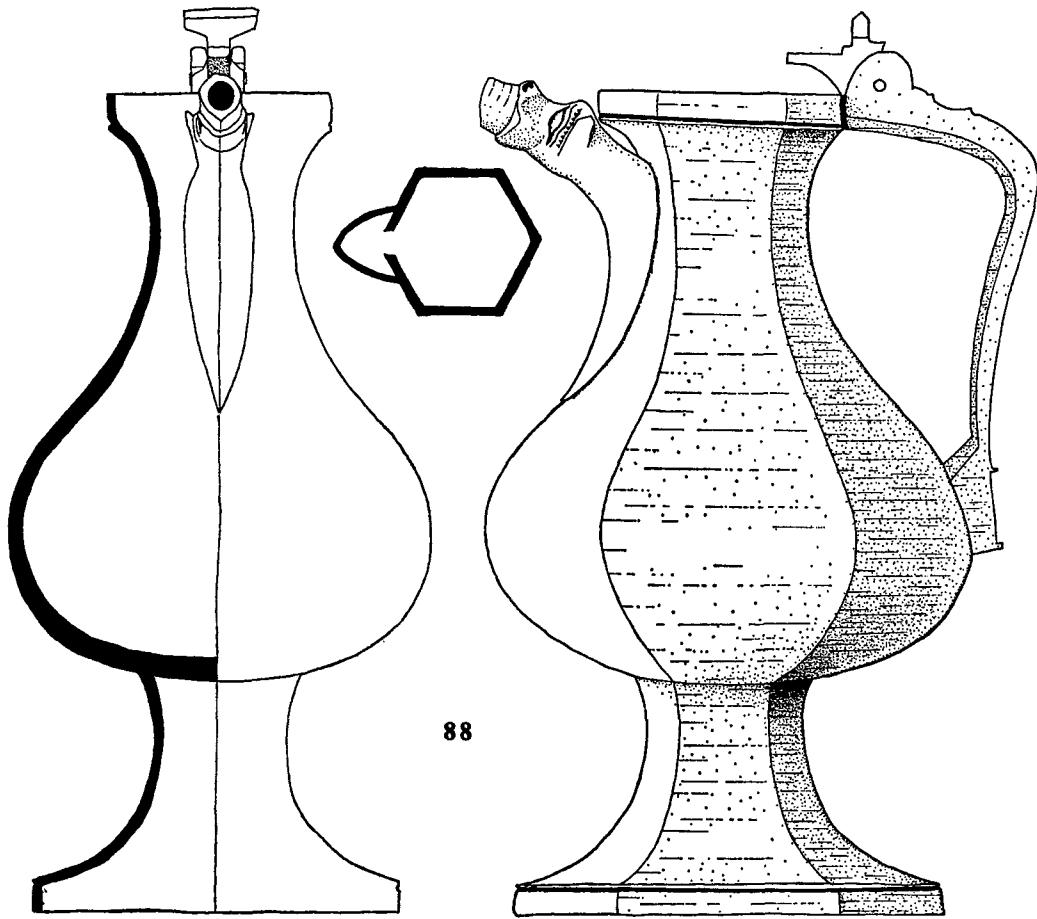


FIG 7 Ewer (scale 1:2).

- 91 Bone pin with three roughly carved mouldings on its head. L. 89 mm. HY 20.
- 92 Bone playing piece. Horseman in relief, but poor in detail, eg the horseman's legs are missing. The poor quality of the bone obscures his face and the horse's head and neck. There remains some incised hatching below the horse and an unintelligible figure behind the rider's back (vaguely resembling a rabbit?). The piece appears in Goldschmidt (1926, fig 281), where it is dated 11–12th century, but in its rough condition any date based on artistic style must be speculative. D. 31 mm. HY 22.
- 93 Circular disc of reduced grey pottery, presumably used as a playing piece. D. 33 mm. HY 137.
- 94 Bone playing piece decorated on both sides with seven 'dot and double-circle' ornament and incised oblique lines around the edge. D. 35 mm. HY 140.
- 95 Pottery spindle whorl with a yellow glaze and applied brown stripe. The fabric is red. D. 40 mm. HY 139. Not illustrated is a red sandstone whorl with incised linear decoration. D. 50 mm. HY 138.
- 96 Crossbow nut, made from a section of antler and probably turned on a lathe. For fuller descriptions see MacGregor (1976) and Credland (1980) where it is described as medieval or early post-medieval. The nut would have sat in a recess in the top of the crossbow stock, secured by strands of catgut through the perforation. The two projections would have pointed away from the front of the crossbow and would have held the string while the bolt's notch would have been fitted to the string between the two projections. The nut would have been held stationary by the sear of the trigger engaging a metal wedge projecting from underneath the nut. Now all that remains of the wedge is a small amount of corroded iron. D. 32 mm. HY 21.

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