

A Viking-age gold arm-ring from the Sound of Jura

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The gold arm-ring that forms the subject of this note was found by skin-divers in 1981, on the sea-bed near Ruadh Sgeir in the Sound of Jura.¹ It is an extremely fine example of a Scandinavian-

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type ring of Viking-age date, characteristic in form, manufacture and ornament, and thus represents an important addition to the corpus of Viking-age gold and silver finds from Scotland (Graham-Campbell 1976).

The ring (pl 46a) is oval in form, measuring 76 mm by 63 mm externally; it is made from two gold rods twisted together that taper slightly towards their ends (from 5 to 4 mm in diameter), which are merged into an elongated plate or band. This flat band of rectangular section expands to its mid-point and has stamped ornament along the length of its outer face (pl 46b); the ornament consists of a central row of large ring-stamps running the length of the expanded middle section, bordered on either side by a row of smaller ring-stamps continuing to the ends of the band as two rows; these are bordered in turn by pairs of punched dots, running in a row along the top and bottom of the band. The ring, which weighs 112.5 gm, was submitted to the Research Laboratory of the National Museum of Antiquities for surface analysis of the gold by X-ray fluorescence (analysis no FO394-6B):

	Gold	Silver	Copper	Iron
Rod	95.3%	3.8%	0.6%	0.3%
Band	95.4%	3.8%	0.5%	0.3%

It must be emphasized that these results were obtained from the surface of the ring without any treatment to allow for surface enrichment, but specific gravity measurements (in chloroform) yielded a specific gravity of 18.56 suggesting a purity of 92% to 94% gold for its bulk (pure gold has a specific gravity of 19.32). The ring is thus made from fairly pure gold; the gold content of a similar arm-ring found in 1978 on the seashore near Goodrington, Devon, was analysed by the British Museum Research Laboratory and reported as being 99% gold, with 1% copper and silver (Graham-Campbell 1980, no 232).

Gold and silver arm-rings made from two or more rods twisted together form a characteristic element in Viking-age hoards found in Scandinavia and are well represented also, both in hoards and as single-finds, in Britain and Ireland, particularly in 10th-century contexts such as the Skail, Orkney, hoard that was deposited c 950. The Jura ring is, however, only the second such gold arm-ring known for certain from Viking-age Scotland, the other being from Shetland (see below),² although there are 21 gold finger-rings recorded from Scotland which include scaled-down versions of such arm-rings (Graham-Campbell 1976; 1982). The Goodrington gold arm-ring referred to above differs from the Jura ring in that it is formed from three rods twisted together, with their ends linked by a faceted rectangular knob, in a similar manner to one of two gold arm-rings found together in the Dublin excavations (Graham-Campbell 1980, no 220); both of the two latter rings are made from two rods twisted together which in the second are hammered together into a linking lozenge-shaped plate with stamped ornament on its outer face. A similar small, but plain, plate forms the link between the rods of the other known gold arm-ring from Scotland, from the Island of Oxna, Shetland (*VA* II, 141-2, fig 65; Graham-Campbell 1980, no 225), but the ring itself is more elaborate being made from four rods plaited together.

The only gold arm-ring from a coin-dated hoard in the British Isles is that from the Ballaquayle (Douglas) hoard of the Isle of Man, deposited c 975. This ring (*VA* IV, fig 17)³ is circular in form, 78 mm in diameter, made from two rods twisted together (with a pair of twisted gold wires laid between them) linked by an expanded plate ornamented with a row of plain opposed-triangle stamps along its outer face. It therefore forms a close parallel for the Jura ring, as does one from the 10th-century (but coinless) hoard found at Vulu, Sør-Trøndelag, Norway, of exactly the same form, 79 mm in diameter, and construction as the Ballaquayle ring, but with more elaborate ring-stamped ornament on its linking plate (Rygh 1885, no 714; Grieg 1929, no 104b,

fig 58; Almgren 1966, 198). The distinctive feature of the arm-ring from the Sound of Jura is, however, the elongation of the linking plate, giving the ring its ovoid form. Such elongated band-like linking plates are hard to parallel at all closely, although that on a gold arm-ring from Hæstad, Vest-Agder, Norway, comes closest (Grieg 1929, no 62a, fig 52).

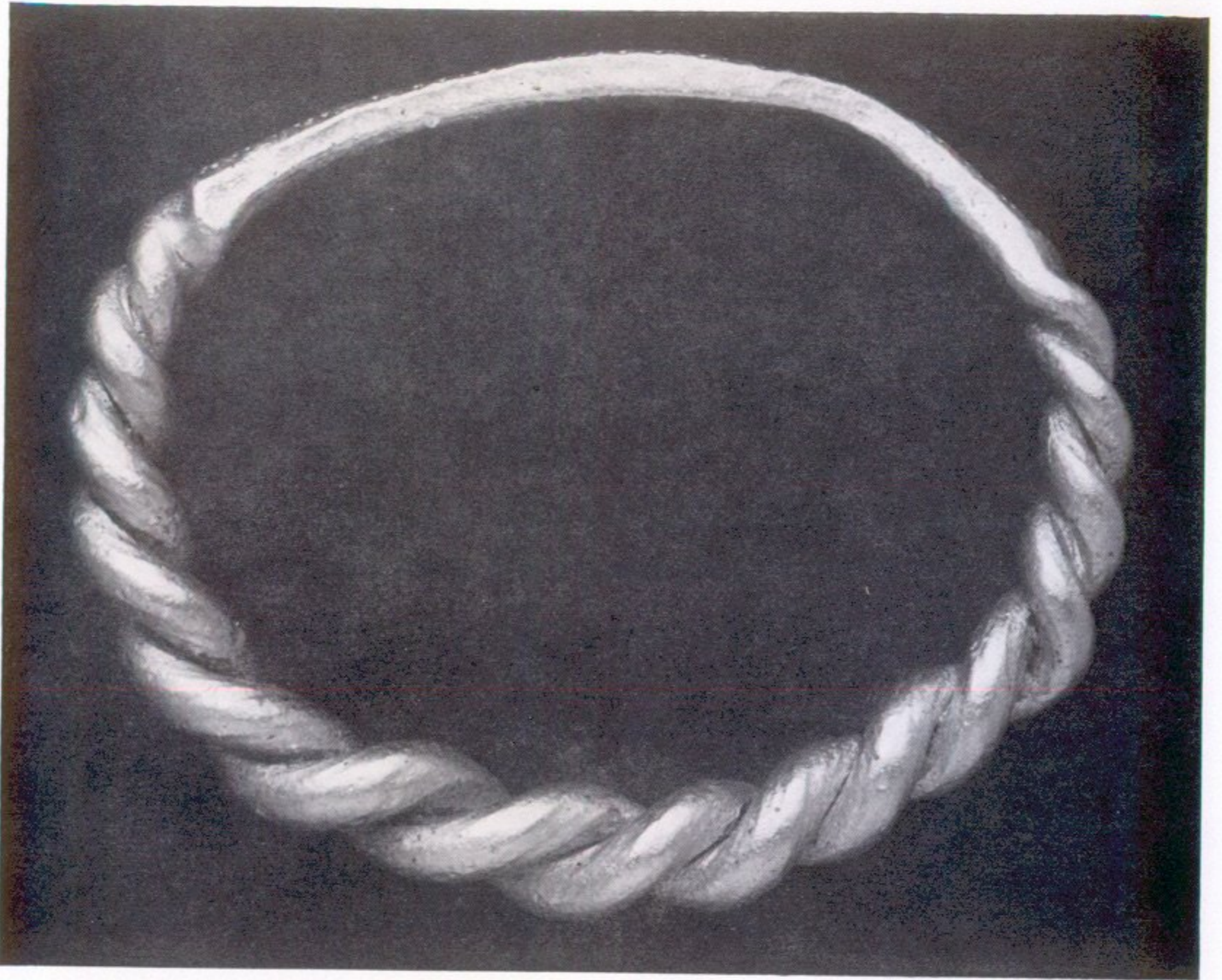
The newly-discovered gold arm-ring from the Sound of Jura is thus an extremely fine and somewhat unusual variant of a well-known type of arm-ring and should most probably be dated to the 10th century. Even if the largest concentration of Viking-age silver and gold finds in Scotland is located in the Northern Isles,⁴ there is nevertheless a significant scatter of hoards and single-finds from the Hebrides to which the gold arm-ring from the Sound of Jura makes a notable addition. This Hebridean wealth, in part at any rate, reflects involvement, whether through trade, toll or piracy, in the Dublin-oriented trade of the western Viking world that developed during the tenth century (cp the Isle of Man: Graham-Campbell 1983).

NOTES

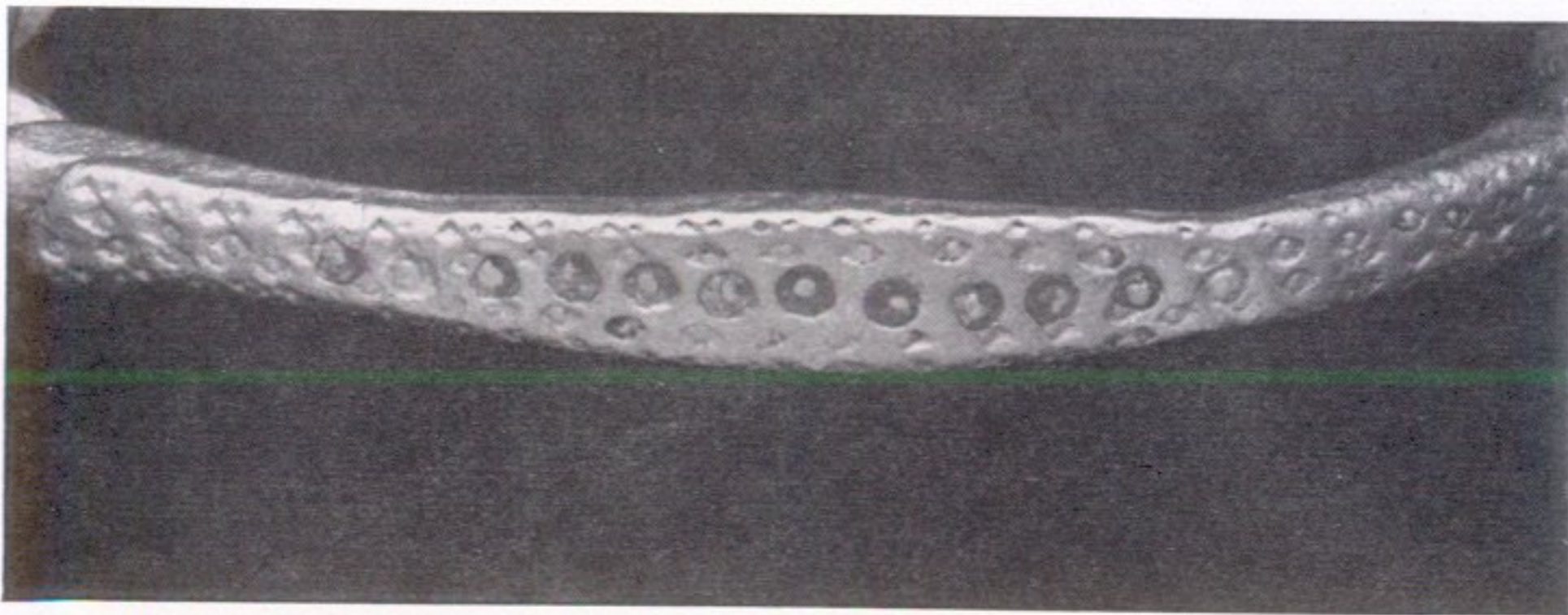
- 1 Acquired by the National Museum in 1982 (reg no FE 103) to whom I owe the invitation to publish this note. I am grateful to Mr T Cowie who assisted me with its preparation and to the Research Laboratory who kindly made their analyses available for publication.
- 2 The Parkhill, Lindores, Fife, hoard (deposited c 1025) is said to have contained 'some gold chains and bracelets', but these are lost and their form is unknown (Graham-Campbell 1976, 122, 128, 130).
- 3 This ring is wrongly described in VA IV, 51, as being 'closed by a spiral knot' (see Graham-Campbell 1983, 74, fig 8).
- 4 These form the subject of a PhD thesis under preparation by Miss Olwyn Owen for the University of Durham.

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a Viking-age gold arm-ring from the Sound of Jura (scale 1:1)



b Detail of stamped ornament on the Jura arm-ring (scale 2:1)