

A note on two gold lunulae

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Research for the catalogue of the recent National Museum of Antiquities' exhibition *Symbols of Power At The Time Of Stonehenge* (Clarke *et al* 1985) has prompted some study of the exact provenances of two gold lunulae in the national collections.

These two, catalogued as FE 63 and L 1963.30, are assigned by Joan Taylor (1980, 94–5, NLS 9 & Pr 6) to 'probably Ayrshire or Lanarkshire' and 'Monzie estate, Comrie, Strathearn' respectively. However, these are placed in her Classical group, about which it is said that:

'the major groups are so geographically confined that a lunula from the Classical or Unaccomplished groups if found outside Ireland would immediately be considered an Irish export' (Taylor 1980, 27).

The other three non-Irish Classical lunulae are well-provenanced Cornish finds (Gwithian, Harlyn Bay and St Juliot: *ibid*, Co 5, 7 & 8). When compared with the rather broad locations offered for the 'Scottish' pieces, the question arises as to whether the period of export of FE 63 and L 1963.30 may be considerably later than the Bronze Age.

Is there any evidence to support this? Let me first take FE 63, bought in 1898 from the 'Lanfine Collection' (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 32 (1897–8), 240). It is presumably to be identified with the 'ANCIENT GOLD TORC. 9½ in. diameter, in fine condition', lot 596 in Messrs Dowells' catalogue¹ of the sale of the contents of Lanfine House near Kilmarnock.

A 'Thomas Brown Esq.' of Lanfine House, presumably the father of the late Miss M Brown of 1898, is noted by Daniel Wilson (1863, 462) as possessing another Lanfine sale object acquired by the Museum (FE 64), a gold bracelet with expanded terminals (Taylor 1980, NLS1), but the lunula is not mentioned there. Neither does it appear in John Smith's 1895 book *Prehistoric Man in Ayrshire*, nor in an earlier article, drawn on by Smith (Brown 1878), both of which detail local prehistoric finds kept at Lanfine House. If the lunula had been a local find in the years after the late 1870s, surely Smith would have found space for it? There is also no mention of it in any local newspaper or in the *New Statistical Account*.

The other antiquities in the 1898 sale were 'Fibulae' (lots 597 & 8) and small pieces of Chinese, Japanese, Maori, Egyptian and Classical origin, sold along with more recent ornaments and furniture. No direct connection can be established between Thomas Brown and Ireland, but the sale catalogue does show that he possessed a general collection of antiquities alongside a more local (and published) one.

Gold lunula L 1963.30 was first published by John Coles (1969, 94), when he noted that Joan Taylor had identified a lunula published by Hewat Craw (1929, 176) as coming from 'Perth' with L 1963.30 from the 'Monzie area collection'.²

Other Bronze-Age goldwork from Monzie now in the National Museum comprises a 'cuff-fastener' (L 1963.31: Taylor 1980, Pr 4), an example of 'ring-money' (L 1963.32: Pr 5) and a 'lock-ring' (1963.33 & Pr 3). According to Joan Taylor (1980, 68 & 64), all securely provenanced cuff-fasteners are Irish finds while pieces of ring-money are 'almost totally without association'.

George Eogan, in his study of lock-rings (1969, 119, n 4), considers that as all the parallels to Pr 3 are Irish, not mainland British, with a marked concentration around the lower Shannon, it possibly arrived as a collector's piece in recent times. Given all the above strictures and the wide date-range of L 1963.30–33, he views it as a strong possibility that they are all a modern collection of prehistoric Irish goldwork.

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All the Monzie goldwork was loaned to the National Museum by the then Captain of Dunstaffnage, resident at Dunstaffnage House, Argyll. There appears to be some slight evidence to link at least the lunula with Dunstaffnage, although to a collection kept there rather than the locality.

Taylor reproduces a pre-1920s photograph of L 1963.30 and notes in the caption (to plate 9) that the lunula 'was afterwards damaged by fire while in a private collection'. A fire at Dunstaffnage House in 1940 destroyed Stirling Heads 39 and 40, kept in a collection there (Dunbar 1975, 22). Presumably the goldwork was soon afterwards removed to the family's other residence at Monzie.

In summary, whilst there is insufficient evidence to fully change the Scottish provenances of the lunulae NLS 9 and Pr 6 (as has been done for the gold hoard once thought to have been found at Torloisk on Mull: Eogan 1967), there is enough known to place them in doubt and to restrict the *certain* Irish exports to the three Classical lunulae from Cornwall.

NOTES

- 1 National Library of Scotland, manuscript 7603.171.
- 2 Craw notes that this piece was in the NMAS.

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