

COPPER-ALLOY COMBS FROM BRITAIN AND FRISIA (Fig. 2)

In the Museum of the Literary and Philosophical Society at Whitby, Yorkshire, is a copper-alloy openwork comb.¹ It was found in 1876 in the same part of Whitby as a quantity of other Anglian objects and seems to have formed part of a large deposit of refuse from the royal monastery of *Streoneshalch*.²

The comb is made from a flat cast blank 3 mm in thickness. The teeth have been cut with a saw or file and the rough edges of the blank, including the openwork, filed to a slight bevel. Between three-quarters and seven-eighths of the original comb survives: one of the raised end-pieces seems to have been broken off in antiquity. The surviving length is 123 mm overall and if the comb was originally symmetrical the total length would be between 146 and 148 mm.

On the assumption that this rare piece, unparalleled in the British Isles, was of foreign origin, continental parallels were pursued. Nothing at all close was known from the Frankish or Alemannic *Reihengräbern*³ which had seemed a possible source, but contacts made in 1980 bore fruit in 1985, when another almost identical copper-alloy comb was located in the Friesmuseum in Leeuwarden, Holland.⁴ This comb is complete but for one tooth and though details of the openwork are slightly different from the Whitby comb it is overall strikingly similar. It exhibits the same filing to the teeth and is 146 mm overall and 3.5 mm in thickness, very close to the original dimensions of the other. The findspot was a *terp* site at Aalsum near

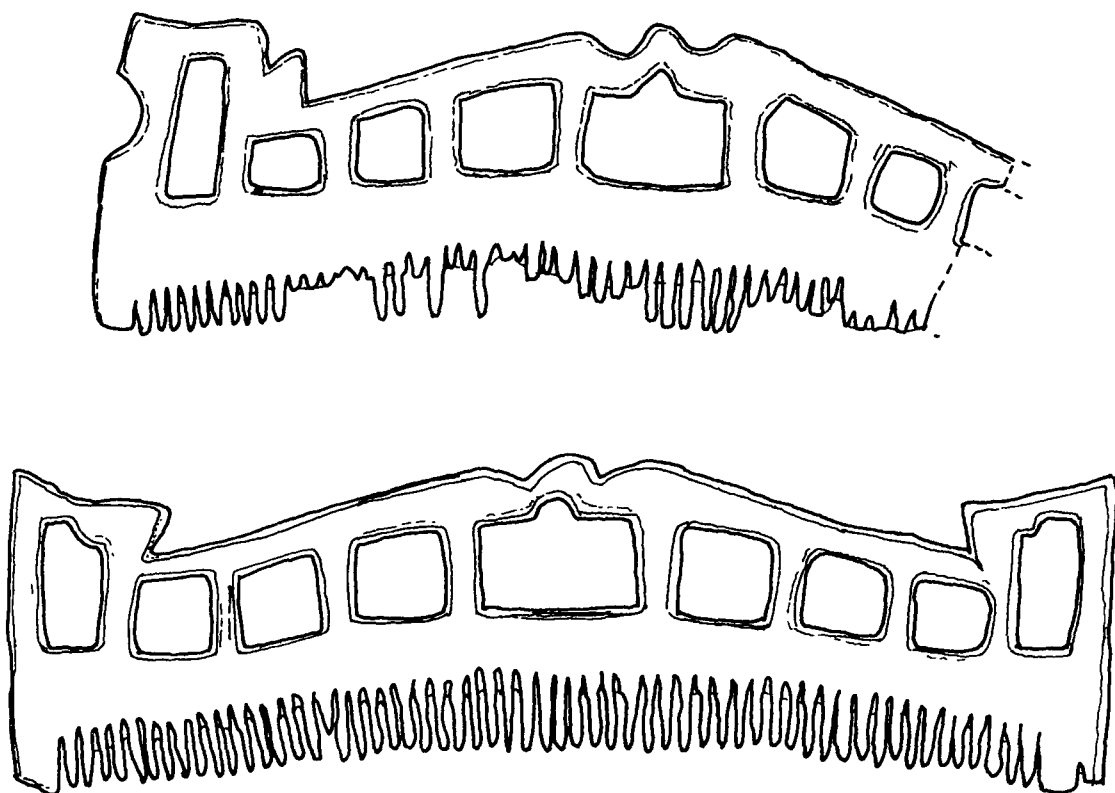


FIG. 2

Above: copper-alloy comb from Whitby. Below: copper-alloy comb from Aalsum. Both at scale 1:1

Dokkum in Friesland; the comb is an old find made during removal of the *terp*, c. 1884–90, and without any stratigraphic or chronological context. The Whitby find includes a number of 7th- and 8th-century objects and a similar date can perhaps be ascribed to the comb, though this too was unstratified.

In writing up the Whitby finds I suggested that the comb might have been used ceremonially in the monastery,⁵ but in the absence of an avowedly religious context for the Frisian comb it would perhaps be safer to assume a lay and functional purpose for it.

To be certain, which, if either, was the import more findspots would be needed, but it would be unwise to presume that the British find was necessarily Frisian in origin, for there are a number of (pagan) Anglian items which show a similar use of openwork, such as girdle-hangers, though these do not survive into the suggested period of the combs. Keys with openwork handles are somewhat closer in date, though Wilson⁶ notes that these are not amenable to close dating or typology. Bone combs do not offer much help either — no doubt the differing technology gave rise to different forms.⁷ However it is interesting to note some attempt at openwork on bone combs from Frisian *terp* mounds, which may perhaps serve to show the type of ornament favoured there, and perhaps even to confirm the origin of the copper-alloy combs.⁸

At all events there is clear historical evidence for close contacts between Northumbrian monks and Frisia in the late 7th and early 8th century under Wilfrid, Willibrord and Boniface.⁹ Links in cultural material are therefore not surprising.

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NOTES

¹ *Yorkshire Archaeol. J.*, 29 (1927–29), 350; *Antiq. J.*, xi (1929), 158–59; H. P. Kendall, *History of the Abbey of Whitby* (Whitby, 1932), 11, and pl. opp. 20; H. B. Browne, *The Story of Whitby Museum* (Whitby, 1949), 34.

² A. J. White, 'Finds from the Anglian Monastery at Whitby', *Yorkshire Archaeol. J.*, 56 (1984), 33–40: the findspot was in Black Horse Yard, Church Street, Whitby. For finds from excavations in the 1920s see C. Peers and C. A. Raleigh Radford, 'The Saxon Monastery of Whitby', *Archaeologia*, 89 (1943), 27–88.

³ Information from Dr Heiko Steuer, Historische Museen, Cologne.

⁴ By Dr W. Tempel, District Archaeologist for Rotenburg, to whom I am most grateful for supplying information and photographs. The comb has the inventory number FM 33–360. I should also like to record my thanks to Dr R. Kramer of the Friesmuseum for further details of the find.

⁵ Cf. P. Lasko, 'The Comb', 336–55 in C. F. Battiscombe, *The Relics of St Cuthbert* (Oxford, 1956). Of course this comb is of unusual size.

⁶ D. M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700–1100 in the British Museum: Catalogue of Antiquities of the Later Saxon Period Volume I* (London, 1964), 57, 147, 148, 153, 201, 203.

⁷ A. MacGregor, 'Barred Combs of Frisian Type in England', *Medieval Archaeol.*, xix (1975), 195–98; A. MacGregor, *Bone Antler Ivory and Horn: the Technology of Skeletal Materials Since the Roman Period* (London, 1985), 73–98.

⁸ A. Roes, *Bone and Antler Objects from the Frisian Terp-Mounds* (Haarlem, 1963), pl. XXIII, 2 (Province of Groningen), and also to a lesser degree, pl. XXIV, 5, pl. XXV, 1, 3, 5, 7, and pl. XXVI, 1–7.

⁹ F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1971), 165–71.

A VIKING-AGE BELL FROM FRESWICK LINKS, CAITHNESS (Fig. 3)

Work at Freswick Links, on the E. coast of Caithness, has been undertaken by Durham University since 1979. This note appears in advance of the publication of the final report on that work¹ because of the particular significance of this Viking-Age bell and its wider parallels.

Cast copper-alloy bell with hexagonal body, now slightly mis-shapen, and expanded suspension loop, of flattened metal, with circular perforation, small moulding around the neck. The body has a fluted lower edge and is decorated by ring-and-dot motifs, three on each of the six faces, forming two rows. The clapper is lacking and was originally affixed by an iron loop, the stub of which now remains. (Fig. 3).

Height: 34 mm; Diameter of mouth: 29 mm max; 15 mm min.

Site reference: FL82 UN, RF no. 2053.