LATE ANGLO-SAXON STRAP-ENDS FROM EXCAVATIONS AT IPSWICH

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DISCUSSION

The majority of strap-ends from the Ipswich excavations can be compared with the general 9th-century series, members of which are characterised by their flat convex shafts, a split butt-end, most usually pierced by two rivets for attachment, and a zoomorphic terminal in the form of an animal's head seen from above. Although sub-groups may be defined on morphological grounds, it is in the numerous techniques and styles of decoration- nearly always restricted to the front faces of these artefacts-that the series exhibits most variability, a point clearly demonstrable even in such a small corpus of strap-ends, as the 17 here presented.

?/4801 belongs to a small group of strap-ends characterised by their single-riveted narrow shafts, plain terminals and simple decoration, in this instance consisting of an incised transverse groove or collar with faceting below. Almost all the comparisons for this object come from the series of narrow-shafted strap-ends from Hamwic, which have both plain and spherical terminals (Hinton 1996, groups A & B). Closer in provenance is one of the strap-ends from Brandon, Suffolk (BRD 018 4328), which has a spherical terminal and incised collar. The distribution of this type suggests that beyond Hamwic, where they appear to be a distinctive local fashion (ibid., 102), this type had limited circulation and use. This fact may be related to their fragile design which suggests these objects had some specialised function, perhaps acting as garter tags (ibid., 38).

78/4801 stands alone amongst the Ipswich corpus as a representative of the later tongue-shaped strap-ends which came into fashion under Carolingian influence in the 10th century. These are most commonly decorated with Winchester-style or Anglo-Scandinavian ornament in heavy relief or openwork (See Hinton 1990). The punched ring-and-dot decoration is also a characteristic decorative motif used on strap-ends of this period (Addyman 1965, fig. 11, no. 17; Gurney 1994, 111, fig.3; Keevill 1988, fig. 2, no.3). The enigmatic openwork design is most likely to be anthropomorphic in derivation. Comparison with more representational examples from Brandon, Suffolk (BRD 018 2342, Webster 1991, cat. no. 66 (l)) and Norwich (Margeson & Williams 1995, fig. 24, no. 4), which also exhibit unusual foliate extensions beneath the arms of a naked human figure, suggests this to be a more stylised rendition of a motif exclusive to East Anglian strap-ends. Human representations are featured on two other 10th-century openwork strap-ends both from the west of Britain, one from Winterbourne, near Bristol (Stewart 1987) and the other from Monknash, South Glamorgan (Redknap 1991). These identical finds are decorated by a single human figure, in a similar pose to the East Anglian examples, with upstretched arms, though their legs degenerate into confused interlace.

5/4801 is one of the few examples from Ipswich with recognisable Trewhiddle-style decoration, albeit crudely executed. This can we widely paralleled; Trewhiddle-style decoration is a feature of the de-luxe silver and niello strap-ends found in silver

hoards of the last half of the 9th century, including the Trewhiddle hoard itself (Wilson 1961; Webster 1991). Poorer quality copper-alloy strap-ends decorated with one or more fields of Trewhiddle-style decoration are also fairly common, the single Trewhiddle animal seen in profile on the Ipswich example is best paralleled by those on the strap-ends from Whitby and Cottam in Yorkshire (Haldenby 1990, fig. 4, no. 3; Wilson 1964, cat. nos. 115 & 119) and an example from Middle Harling, Norfolk (Margeson 1995, fig. 41, no. 70). The incised fan-shaped fields emerging beneath the rivets of this example and 84/4601 are imitations of the foliate palmettes which feature on quality strap-ends such as that on the example from Westmeston, Sussex (Graham-Campbell 1988).

Though worn, 84/4601 also retains elements of Trewhiddle-style decoration, though in a highly conventionalised form, to date only recognised on strap-ends. This consists of a symmetrical design of two small confronted beasts, with punched eyes surrounded, top and bottom, by a herringbone pattern. This has many parallels, including published examples from Andover, Hampshire (Hinton 1977), Stevenson Sands, Ayrshire (Callander 1932-3, fig. 5, no. 3) and Wharram Percy, Yorkshire (Goodall 1987, fig. 191, no. 9).

89/4601 belongs to a large and widely distributed group of strap-ends decorated with incised geometric ornament. In common with members of this group it has a characteristic tapering outline and highly stylised zoomorphic terminal. The depiction of eyes with conjoining arcs is a motif also employed on strap-ends from Great Wakering, Essex (Wilson 1964), and London (Smith 1923, fig.22), though the closest parallel in overall design comes from Cottam in the Yorkshire Wolds (Haldenby 1992, fig. 3, no. 6).

Incised decoration is also evident on 436/5203, though this time taking the form of a simple lattice design. Numerous parallels also exist for this decoration, appearing on published strap-ends from Hod Hill, Dorset (Keen 1986, fig. 2.2), Holton-le-Clay, Lincolnshire (Sills 1982, fig. 11D) and Ramsbury, Wiltshire (Evison 1980, fig. 20, no. 2). An excavated example from St Neots, Cambridgeshire (Addyman 1973, fig. 18, no. 8), shares a similarly shaped zoomorphic terminal with rows of lunate incisions for ears, though on this strap-end additional incisions also frame the lattice design.

Though much corroded, an X-ray reveals 89/3201 to be an example of a distinctive group of 9th-century strap-ends decorated with silver-wire scrollwork and niello settings. To date, in excess of 60 of these strap-ends have so far been identified, with a distribution centred on Norfolk and Suffolk (Thomas 1996, forthcoming). Published examples come from Thetford, Norfolk (Goodall 1993, fig. 117, no. 23), Cambridge (Lethbridge 1937), Brandon (Webster 1991, cat. no. 66 (m)) and Felixstowe, Suffolk (Kendrick 1934-6, fig. 5). The Ipswich strap-end, with its arrangement of two longitudinal panels of niello inlaid with 'S'-shaped scrolls of silver-wire, represents the most common manifestation of the type. The provision of an additional field of inlaid decoration on the zoomorphic terminal is also consistent with the group, featuring on the closely related strap-end from Brandon.

Without scientific analysis it is impossible to establish whether any of the other poorly preserved strap-ends from Ipswich would have been similarly inlaid with niello or

enamel decoration. Such would not be surprising in light of the recognition of an ever increasing number of 9th-century enamelled strap-ends, through both new discoveries (Keen 1986, 196; Mills 1993, 83) and scientific analysis of old finds (Stapleton et. al., 1995, 387). Remains of corroded inlays survive on 26/4701, 510/3104 and within the large rectangular ears of the terminal fragment 9/8804. A panel of inlaid decoration also survives on the terminal of 1548/3104, which also retains a glass-eye inset, a feature seen elsewhere on strap-ends from Hertfordshire (Webster 1991, cat. no. 194) and Bulwick, Northamptonshire (Dallas 1975).

The distinctive terminal, plain split-end and interlace decoration of 38/5003 mark this example out from the general series of 9th-century strap-end. The closest comparisons come from strap-ends distributed in the Danelaw and other areas of Viking contact. A strap-end fragment from Fishergate, York, has similar rounded ears set to the side of the terminal and interlace decoration executed in relief (Rogers 1993, 5319). A close parallel also comes from Aggersborg, Denmark (Roesdahl 1981, fig. 13), with a panel of interlace within raised borders, a plain split-end and a similarly disposed terminal. An upper fragment from Meols in Cheshire again incorporates a plain split-end with panels of interlace on both faces (Griffiths 1991, 286). Further comparisons for the Meols object are provided by other strap-ends and buckles from the Irish-Sea region, including Dublin (ibid. 99), which adds support for the Ipswich strap-end being an Anglo-Scandinavian product of the late 9th or 10th century.

The distinctive zoomorphic decoration of 0001/4601 can be best paralleled by the animals on one of the silver strap-end pairs from the Lilla Howe hoard, North Yorkshire (Watkin & Mann, 1981, fig. 4, pl. xiv; Webster 1991, cat. no. 249 a & b). These have the same large heads and powerful bodies, with horizontal 'ribbing' as the Ipswich beast. The incidence of openwork decoration on 9th-century strap-ends is very rare indeed, notable examples being an unprovenanced example in the British Museum decorated with symmetrical Trewhiddle-style foliate ornament[1] and an unusual variant from York (Wilson 1964, cat. no. 135). In both its large size and use of openwork decoration the Ipswich strap-end should be placed towards the end of the 9th-century series, foreshadowing the coming popularity of this decorative technique during the 10th century on tongue-shaped strap-ends (see 78/4801).

CATALOGUE

1) Cu-alloy strap-end, unfinished? L. 40.8mm, W.10.5mm, Th. 2.1mm. There is a breakage across right-hand rivet hole. The left-hand iron rivet survives in situ.
The main body is decorated with scalloped edges, each scallop provided with a crescentic incision. These enclose an undecorated panel which is most likely unfinished. The zoomorphic terminal is well-formed with large circular ears pierced by lunate incisions. Eyes are suggested by faceting behind the squared-off snout. 442/3104, 0281 Late Medieval.

2) Cu-alloy strap-end with corroded inlay. L. 46.4mm, W. 11mm, Th. 2.1mm. Rivets missing.

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[1] British Museum acc. no. 1990, 7-6, 5

The decoration is very worn but originally there would have been a fan-shaped field beneath the rivet holes and also two lentoid or elliptical fields within the main expanded surface of the strap-end. Two subsidiary triangular fields may have been inserted in the recesses to the top and bottom of the larger fields. Within each are the remains of a corroded substance, possibly enamel?. The hare-like terminal has large swept-back ears provided with both lunate and vertical incisions, bulging lentoid eyes and a pointed snout.
510/3104, 0385 early Late Saxon/l. 9th century

3) Cu-alloy strap-end with enamel/niello setting and blue glass inset. L. 55.5mm, W. 13mm, Th. 2.9mm. Badly corroded and broken in two, medially.
The poor condition of the strap-end prevents a detailed description, the recognition of the decoration was aided by an X-ray. Originally the main sub-rectangular panel was enclosed within beaded borders. It contained a regular interlace design, though it is not possible to distinguish a zoomorphic element. This design may have been inlaid with precious metal? The round-snouted zoomorphic terminal has large oval ears with lunate incisions. The brow is decorated with a kite-shaped field of greyish inlay, incised with at least 3 inverted 'V's. Two punched eyes are placed to the side of the animal's head, the left-hand retains a blue glass inset.
1548/3104, 2520 early medieval 11/12th century

4) Cu-alloy strap-end. L. 36.6mm, W. 11.9mm, Th. 2.2mm. Badly corroded with rivets missing.
The poor condition of this artefact prevents a detailed description. The main body is sub-rectangular in outline, any original decoration is now obscured by corrosion. The zoomorphic terminal has small rounded ears with lunate incisions and a squared-off snout.
17/3201, 0081 early medieval 11/12th century

5) Cu-alloy strap-end with remains of an iron hook on the reverse. L. 32.3mm, W. 13.1mm, Th. 2.3mm. Badly corroded.
An X-ray reveals that the decoration originally consisted of a main sub-rectangular panel of decoration framed by plain borders. This was occupied by an intricate engraved interlace design. The terminal is too worn to ascribe features apart from a squared-off snout. An iron hook, with a detached terminal fragment is secured to the reverse of the terminal, it is not possible to discern whether this is a secondary feature, or conceived for some specialised purpose. The only parallel for this is provided by a cu-alloy strap-end from Hainford, Norfolk[2], although on this example the hook is cast in one with the strap-end body.
18/3201, 0067 early medieval 11/12th century

6) Cu-alloy strap-end with niello and silver-wire scrollwork decoration. L. 42.2mm, W. 13.6mm, Th. 2.3mm. Badly corroded with right-hand top corner broken away and upper third of front-plate missing at split-end.
A description is aided by an X-ray. A single rivet hole survives at the left-hand side of the split-end. Beneath the front-plate breakage there are the remains of two rectangular longitudinal panels of niello inlaid with silver-wire. In the left-hand panel

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[2] Norwich Castle Museum acc. no. 201.987(2)

the wire survives as three single scrolls, the lower two divided by a smaller horseshoe-shaped filler motif. The more complete right-hand panel has remains of two 'S'-scrolls, one above the other, although half of the upper scroll is missing. Three similarly shaped filler motifs flank the larger scrolls. The terminal is well-executed, with large rounded ears pierced by double lunate incisions. The moulded eyes, set to the side of the animal's head, are lentoid in outline and have punched pupils. The snout is slightly protruding and square in outline. An additional panel of inlaid ornament survives on the brow and nose, this contains a single 'S' spiral flanked by smaller 'U'-shaped motifs.
89/3201,

7) Cu-alloy openwork strap-end with attached back-plate. L. 41.9mm, W. 19.5mm, Th. 2.3mm. Rivets and terminal missing.
A deeply incised arc mimics the upper contour of the openwork panel of decoration below. This is framed within plain borders and consists of a single animal, viewed from the side, with its head turned backwards. The head of the animal has a large lentoid eye and open mouth with a curled lower lip, out of which issues a large tongue curled upwards to touch the right-hand frame. The body is elongate and provided with five lateral incisions, a foreleg reaches downwards to touch a possible tail. The backplate of the split end is secured by means of two iron rivets which pierce the openwork design through the head and neck of the animal.
0001/4601, unstratified

8) Cu-alloy strap-end with zoomorphic decoration. L. 37.2mm, W. 18.2mm, Th. 1.9mm. Worn with rivets missing.
Below the rivet holes is a crudely rendered incised palmette formed by an inverted 'V' resting within the curve of a semicircle. The main rectangular panel of ornament is heavily worn and consists of a symmetrical arrangement of two confronted Trewhiddle-style beasts with punched eyes, whose extremities degenerate into controlled geometric interlace giving a chevron effect at the top and bottom of the panel. The zoomorphic terminal has two square ears with lunate incisions above a brow defined by a raised lateral ridge. The nose is square and eyes are suggested by slight faceting at the side of the head.
84/4601, 0491 mid Late Saxon, 10th century

9) Cu-alloy strap-end with incised geometric decoration. L. 42.7mm, W. 14.4mm, Th. 1.4mm. Rivets missing.
Decoration is contained within an incised border which follows the convex outline of the
main face, at the split-end it forms two arcs beneath the rivet holes with a projecting cusp which joins a bifurcated upper edge. Within the border is a design of incised lines and arcs. The terminal tapers to a pointed nose and is decorated with two confronted rows of touching arcs enclosing smaller lozenges. The tip of the snout is defined by a incised lateral line.
89/4601, 0499 early medieval, 11/12th century

10) Cu-alloy and niello strap-end. L. 31.2mm, W. 9.3mm, Th. 2.8mm. Good condition.

The bifurcated upper edge of the split-end is pierced by two circular copper-alloy rivets. Beneath is a stylised engraved fan-shaped field composed of two inverted 'V's touching the inner curve of a semicircle. The main panel of engraved decoration is framed within lightly incised borders. It contains a single backward-glancing Trewhiddle-style animal with a punched eye, tail lappet and splayed toes, inlaid with (now corroded) niello. The zoomorphic terminal has large oval ears pierced by lunate incisions, a triangular brow, faceted eyes and a squared-off snout.
5/4801, 0004 19th century

11) Leaf-shaped cu-alloy strap-end with single rivet hole. L. 39.5mm, W. 13.4mm, Th. 1.4mm. Severely corroded with front-plate of split-end missing.
A single rivet hole pierces the remaining back-plate centrally. Corrosion prevents any further comment on decoration, however it is likely that it was originally plain. There is very little shaping of the terminal which tapers to a point.
283/4801, 1571 Middle Saxon, 8th-early 9th century

12) Cu-alloy tongue-shaped strap-end with cast openwork decoration. L. 55.4mm, W. 24.2mm, Th. 2.4mm.
A thickened split-end, pierced by two small copper-alloy rivets is reserved from the main body of the strap-end. This region is decorated with an irregular arrangement of seven punched ring-and-dots. The main body consists of a slightly raised border enclosing an abstract openwork anthropomorphic figure, standing en face with outstretched arms. Two expanded 'wing-like' lobes, decorated with lateral incisions project from beneath the arms of the figure to touch the frame.
78/4801, 0783 Mid Late Saxon, 10th century

13) Cu-alloy strap-end with interlace decoration. L. 53mm, W. 14.3mm, Th. 1.5mm. Upper edge of split-end damaged and back-plate now missing.
A small rivet hole pierces the front-plate, it is possible the extant rivet is secondary as it is placed to one side and there is a suggestion of a larger hole partially preserved in a central position at the damaged upper edge. The decoration is executed in low relief and consists of a raised border enclosing a regular two-strand interlace pattern. The zoomorphic terminal has moulded ears with circular recesses designed to be viewed from the side. The brow and rounded nose are defined by a lateral step, the former is provided with two drilled eyes.
38/5003, 0858 Early Late Saxon, Late 9th century

14) Cu-alloy strap-end with incised decoration. L. 41.5mm, W. 9.1mm, Th. 1.7mm. Damaged with a diagonal breakage across front-plate of split-end, and rivets missing.
The upper edge of the split-end is bifurcated, below each lobe is a chamfered rivet hole. On the main face of the strap-end, an incised rectangular border encloses a crudely-incised lattice pattern. The stylised zoomorphic terminal has four pairs of lunate incisions for ears, moulded lentoid eyes and a pointed snout, both of which are badly worn.
436/5203, 0463 Middle Saxon, 8th-Early 9th century

15) Cu-alloy strap-end. L. 61.6mm, W. 16.6mm, Th. 3.3mm. Heavily corroded with a lateral breakage above terminal and front-plate of split-end missing.
Condition prevents a detailed description of the features. Originally the main design would have been arranged in two longitudinal panels of decoration of unknown technique and design, possibly inlaid settings. The terminal has large oval ears with lunate incisions, lentoid eyes placed to the side of the head and a pointed snout.
26/5701, 0234 Mid Late Saxon, 10th century

16) Strap-end terminal fragment. L. 33.8mm, W. 14mm, Th. 1.7mm.
A small surviving section of the main panel allows comment on the original decoration. The main panel would have been sub-rectangular in outline with an incised border. It has been deeply recessed to receive a setting or inlay. The terminal has two large rectangular ears, both of which are deeply recessed and contain the remains of a white substance, possibly enamel. Crudely incised chevrons decorate the brow, further incised lines define the lentoid outline of the eyes. The snout is pointed.
9/8804, Late Medieval

17) Cu-alloy strap-end with single rivet in situ. L.36.1mm, W. 3.9mm, Th.1.7mm.
Broken in several places with upper section of back-plate at split-end missing.
Both the split-end and main body expand slightly from a waist which segregates the two. Decoration is restricted to the incised lateral waist, beneath which, are two small semi-circular facets. Two pairs of diagonal incisions are made on the sides of the strap-end immediately behind the facets.
?/4801, 2804 Late Medieval, Residual

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