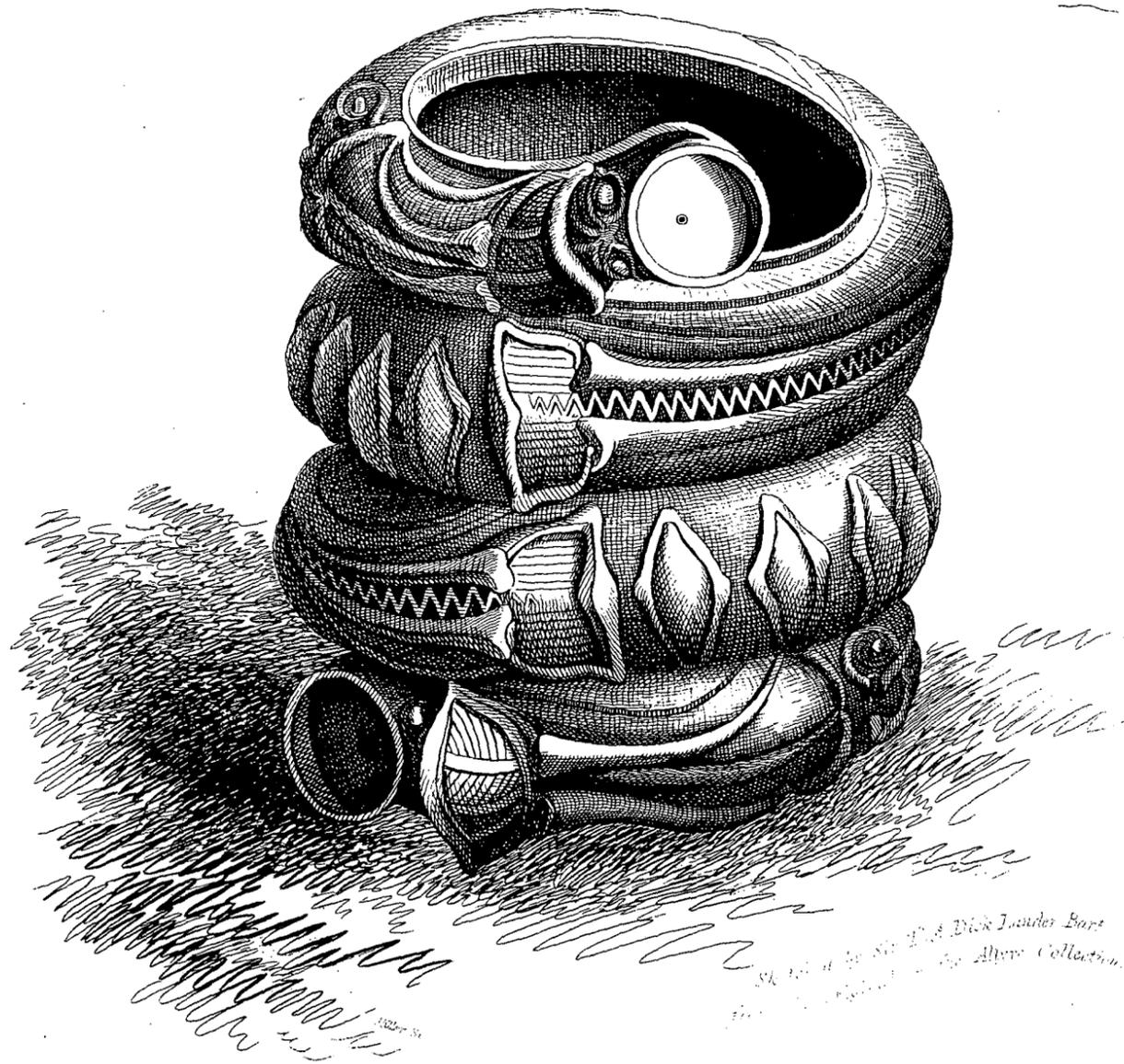


Curious Bronze Relic found near the Estuary of the River Findhorn.



ART. XIII.—*Description of a remarkable Bronze Relic found near the estuary of the river Findhorn, in the possession of Lady Cumming of Altyre. With a Drawing (See Plate VI.)*

BY SIR THOMAS DICK LAUDER, BART.

Read 12th March 1827.

THE curious antique, of which a sketch is annexed, was found, three or four years ago, by a man who was shooting among the sand hills of Culbin, on the western side of the estuary of the river Findhorn. These hills owed their origin to the prevailing winds from the W. S. W. which, in process of time, brought clouds of sand from the sandy country lying to the westward of the town of Nairn, and heaped it up there, to the destruction of a valuable estate. Some of these hills are a hundred feet in perpendicular height; but the material composing them being an extremely comminuted granitic sand, is so loose and light that, except in a dead calm, it is in eternal motion, so that parts of the original soil are often laid entirely bare. Though flints are not included in the mineralogical list of this country, yet there is one small spot among the sand hills where flinty fragments are often picked up; and as elf-bolts, or flint arrow-heads, have been not unfrequently found on this spot, it is, with some show of probability, supposed that a manufactory of those rude aboriginal weapons may have once existed there. The man above alluded to having accidentally lost his gun flint, went to the spot in question to look for a flint to replace it; and in searching about he discovered the antique which is the subject of this communication. Some time afterwards he carried it to a shopkeeper in Forres, to whom

he sold it for half-a-crown; and Lady Cumming of Altyre, who purchased it from the shopkeeper at a much higher price, and in whose possession it now is, has been so kind as to permit me to take the accompanying sketch of it. I have only to regret that her Ladyship's indisposition at the present moment, by preventing her from sketching it herself, compels me to send my own rude draft of the antique, instead of the much more delicate and highly finished drawing which her superior talent would have enabled her to produce.

The antique stands $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, and is $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and its diameter *within* is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Its weight, in air, is 2 pounds $9\frac{1}{2}$ ounces avoirdupois. It is of bronze; but the metal is of the very finest and richest Corinthian sort. I had not by me the implements necessary for ascertaining its specific gravity with *scrupulous nicety*; but I did so with all the accuracy I could command, and the result was, that I found it to be about $9\frac{1}{2}$, water being as 1. Now, as zinc is only 7.190, and copper 7.78, and their compound metal, brass or bronze, is set down in the tables at about $8\frac{1}{3}$, whilst gold is nearly about $19\frac{1}{3}$, it follows that a very large proportion of gold must enter into the composition of the antique. My calculations would give about 14 ounces 5 drachms of gold. Perhaps this may be more than the truth; but there cannot be a doubt that a very considerable quantity of the precious metal exists in it.

The workmanship of this curious relic is most beautiful, the taste exquisite, and the detail is executed with the greatest delicacy. It is formed like a coiled-up snake, having rather more than three complete convolutions lying spirally on each other. The spirals, though very close, are yet so far separated from each other, as every where to admit of the insertion of the edge of a thin sheet of paper, except at one place, near one extremity of the coil, where about an inch and a half of the head seems to have been broken off, and again joined so perfectly as not to

be visible from without, except on a very close inspection; but on looking at it within, the joining appears where the application of a ruder soldering of brass, used in repairing the fracture, has at the same time been the means of uniting the upper convolution to that beneath it. I must remark, however, that it was in this condition when first discovered. The whole coil is hollowed out on the inner side, a wide fosse running round the interior of the spiral from the one extremity to the other. This will be observed by looking at the sketch, where a view is obtained into the upper part of the interior. The whole seems to have been formed at length, and then twisted up into the coil; and this circumstance of itself speaks for the excessive fineness of the metal.

The snake seems to have been the model for the construction of this very interesting antique; but it has not been servilely and awkwardly copied, as one might expect a workman in an infant state of society would have done. The snake's form has been employed only in assisting the tasteful invention of the artist, as we see the tile, the basket, and the acanthus, in the Corinthian capital, or the various objects used in the detail of Grecian sculpture. The serpents' heads at the two extremities are only to be recognized from the carving of the hoods, the faces, and the eyes, in which last are inserted prominent eye-balls of a deep blue enamel or glass. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches from each extremity, there are somewhat similar indications of snakes' heads, with eyes also filled with similar globules of the same blue glass. On the outer side of each extremity there is a perfect circle of nearly an inch in diameter, surrounding and enclosing a flat hollow space of about a sixth part of an inch in depth, having a deeper and minute hole in the centre of each; and from the appearance of the metal there, I have not the least doubt that the circular cavity was filled with some gem, or artificial stone, perhaps of the same nature as those now forming the eyes.

This antique has all the characters of being a druidical relic, especially from the sacred serpent being introduced into it. The very small diameter of the interior forbids the possibility of its having been a bracelet; and from its form, which renders it incapable of being placed on a table so as to stand without inclining to one side, it could not have been employed, as might have otherwise been fancied, as a prop or support to some of the sacred appendages of the druidical altar. I am indebted to the joint work of Dr Meyrick and Charles Hamilton Smith, Esquire, for the only clue to my explanation of it, which I find in the sixth plate of that splendid and learned book, where we have depicted the costume of the druids, taken from a bas-relief found at Autun. On the left shoulder of the figure crowned with oak leaves, we see the robe fastened, by having its folds gathered together, and drawn through an ornament of precisely similar form to that of the antique which is the subject of this communication. That in the plate, indeed, appears to be somewhat smaller than the antique found among the sand hills of Culbin; but this is not to be wondered at, when we consider the probably rude and ill defined copy from which the plate was taken.

As far as I am able to discover, the antique is in itself perfectly unique; but of this, as well as of the interest its discovery is calculated to excite, the learned body of Scottish Antiquaries will be the best judges.

THO. DICK LAUDER.

P. S. Since I have been engaged in drawing the antique, it has occurred to me that some of the ornaments have reference to the form of the misletoe.

Relugas, 31st January 1827.