

Pictish Symbol Stone at Wester Balblair, Beauly, Inverness-shire

by A. D. Cameron

The stone was discovered in May 1969 by Mr Peter Boa, 'Strathnaver', Wester Balblair, while digging a new garden. This is crossed by the line of the old road, which is marked on the Ordnance Survey maps, and is some 30 yds. above the edge of the raised beach (N.G.R. NH 511453). The stone was lying 2 ft. down with its face upwards and had obviously been used as bottoming in the road. Although it now has a creamy-fawn appearance, due probably to burial underground, it is a slab of deep-red sandstone, similar to the local building stone.

The length on the left-hand side is greater than on the right, 2 ft. 4 in. compared with 1 ft. 9½ in.; its width is 1 ft. 6 in. for most of its height, tapering gradually towards the top; and the thickness is 4½ in. The stone has been roughly shaped at the back, the long sides being bevelled towards the back, the bevels being 5¾ in. and 5¼ in. wide. There are markings only on the front face, none of them on the bottom 13 in. of the stone.

A simple, clear, incised crescent and V-rod symbol occupies the centre of the face and is surmounted by three joined upright oval shapes, two of which are not quite complete (fig. 1). The central oval seems to have been slightly longer than the complete one to the left of it. Romilly Allen's lists show the three-ovals symbol occurs on stones in Caithness, and in the Covesea cave in Moray.³ The right leg of the V-rod ends in a leaf-shaped arrowhead; the top of the left leg could be a stylised representation of the flight feathers of an arrow. There is no decoration on the crescent, which is unusual. The grooves are broad and about ⅛ in. deep.

Mr Boa has kindly agreed that the stone be placed under local guardianship and it is now in Beauly Priory. I am grateful for the help of Mr Edward Meldrum of Inverness, who made a rubbing and drawing of the stone.

¹ *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* XLIII (1908-9), 170.

² *OSA*, xviii, 599.

³ Allen, J. Romilly, *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), 63.

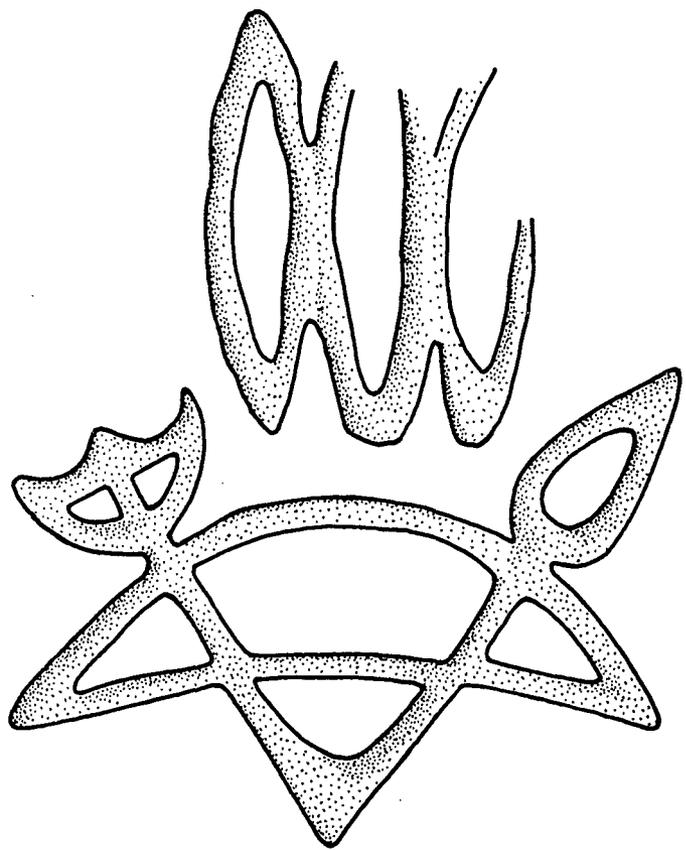
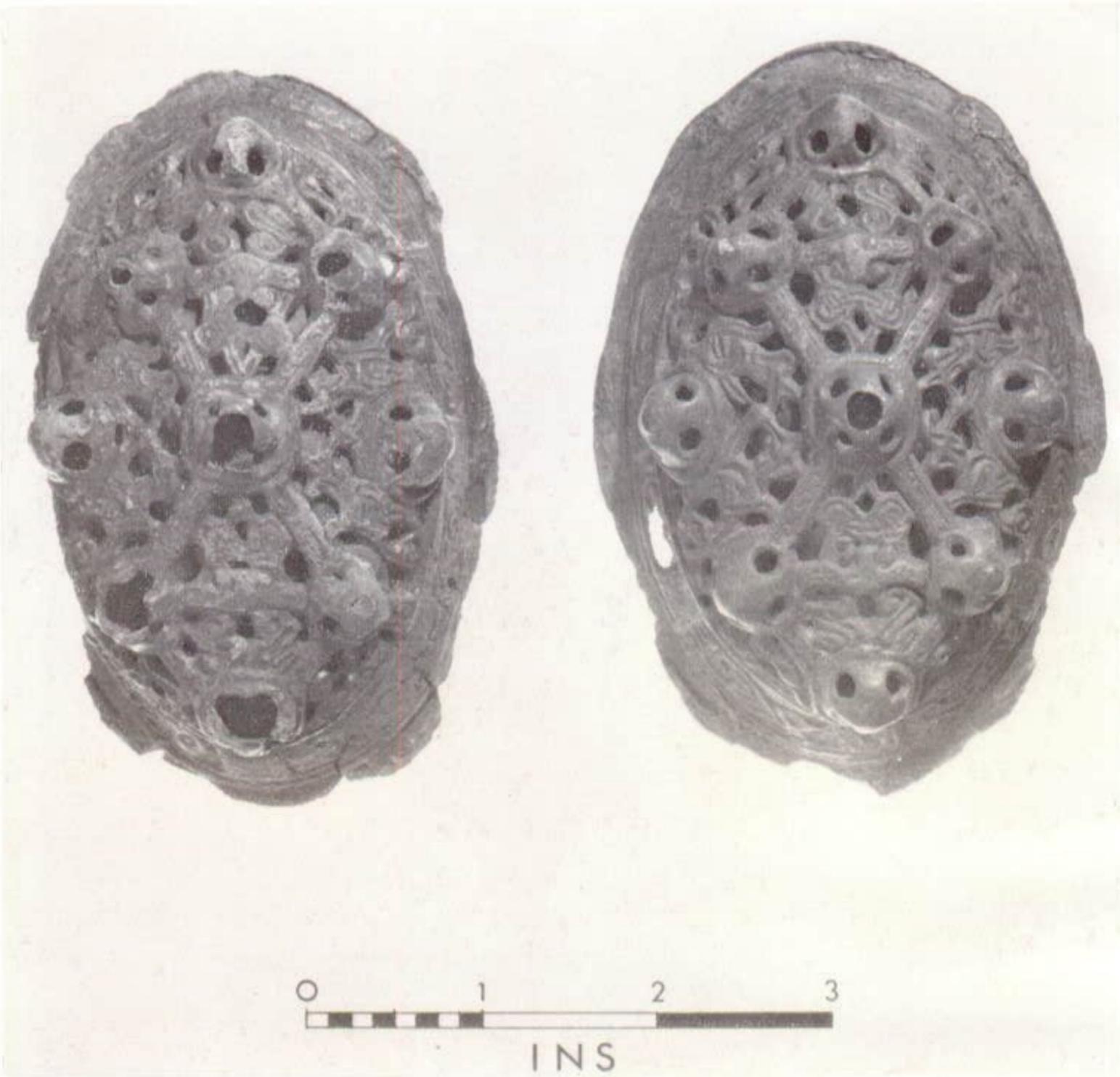
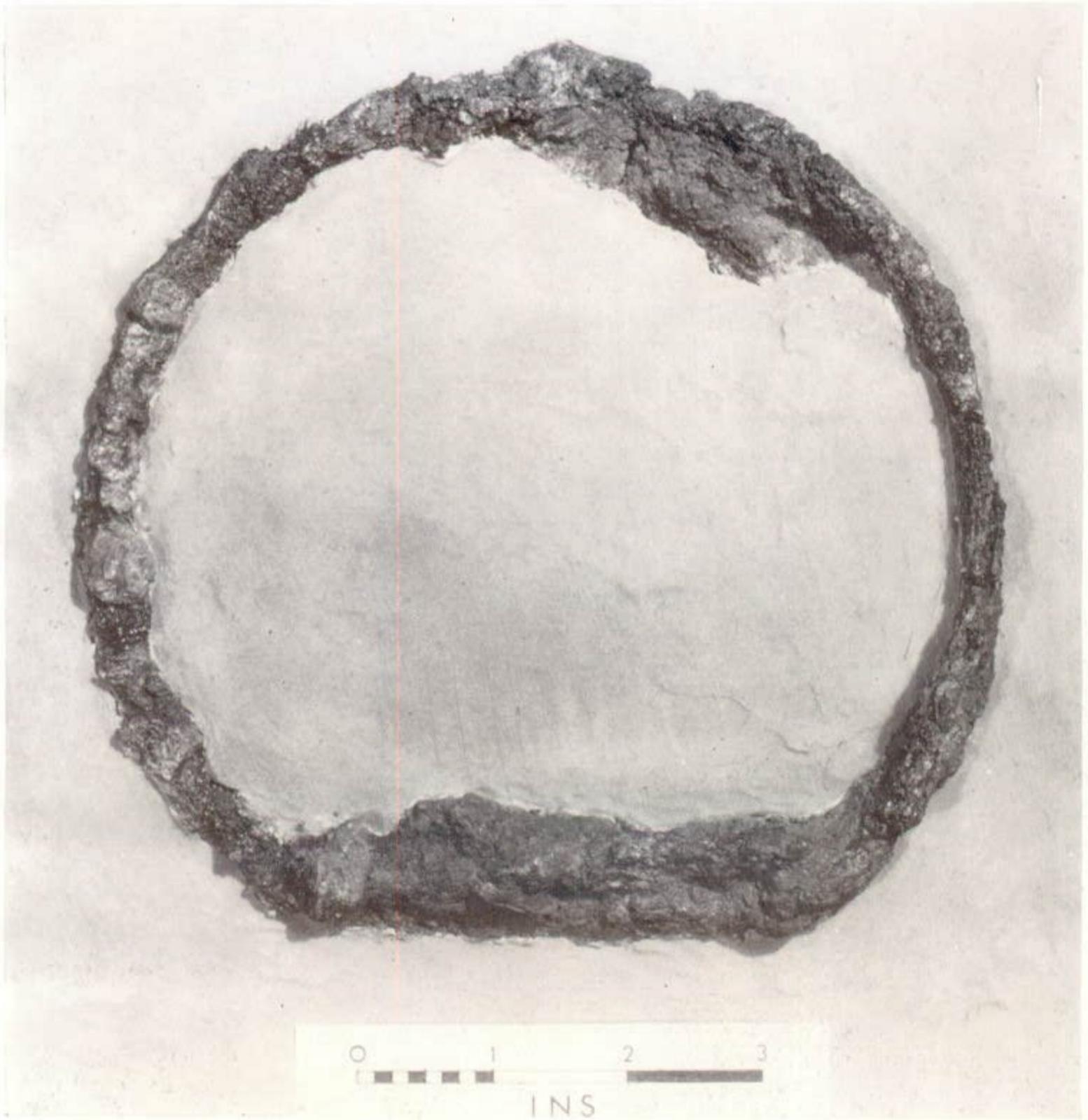


FIG. 1.



Pair of tortoise brooches



a Necklet



b Iron sickle