

The Mackenzie Collection

by Joanna Close-Brooks and S Maxwell

A large collection of antiquities from the Outer Isles was donated to the National Museum in 1972 by W B Mackenzie, J T Mackenzie and Mrs G M Fleming, the sons and daughter of the late H H Mackenzie, factor of the North Uist estates. Their father had formed the collection in Uist between about 1880 and 1934. Two handwritten lists arrived with the collection, one being a summary list written by Mr H H Mackenzie of antiquities in his house at 37 Buckstone Terrace, Edinburgh, the other a receipt addressed to Mrs McNeil, Newton House, Lochmaddy, for various antiquities loaned to the International Exhibition, Glasgow, 1888. The two lists appear to be complementary, though neither is very explicit. Their evidence suggests that much of the material in the Mackenzie collection is indeed that formerly belonging to Mrs McNeil, loaned by her to the Glasgow Exhibition and listed in the catalogue of that Exhibition, *The Book of the Bishop's Castle*, 1888 (hereinafter referred to as *BBC*). Her antiquities are described on the receipt and in the catalogue in similar terms. They comprised five stone axes, etc (*BBC* 22, nos 12–16; not with the material given to the museum) and seven boxes of assorted objects (*BBC* 28, nos 74–80) of which it seems all or most, including the original glass-lidded boxes, are preserved in the Mackenzie collection, though few individual objects can now be separated from others added by Mackenzie.

Locations for some of Mrs McNeil's objects are given in *BBC*. Most came from the Isle of Bernera which is in the parish of Harris though it lies close to the shore of North Uist, while others came from sites on North Uist itself. Mr Mackenzie's list mentions 'bone needles and pins, parts of bone combs, bone whorls, bone fasteners, bone wilk picks and borers, bronze needles and pins; these were found at Maolbhan in Bernera, Harris; at Boreray Island, Udal near Grenetote, Caolis Newton, Scolpaig, Bealach Ban, and Heisker, all in North Uist.' He also mentions bronze and brass brooches found at Maolbhan, a silver brooch from Boreray, silver rings from Caolis Newton and Pabbay, and sandstone whorls from Udal and Bealach Ban.

A summary account of the collection is given here. The premedieval metalwork, and all the stone and bone artefacts (except a stone axe – AF 1055) have been entered in the museum register under the existing category GT (collections of objects from North Uist) as numbers GT 956 to 1,238. They are identified on figs 1–3 by their museum catalogue numbers, all of which should be prefixed by the letters GT. Identifiable medieval and later objects will be catalogued separately. A representative selection of objects is illustrated, and the notes given here are intended to clarify points which are not explicit in the illustrations.

Metalwork. All the identifiable premedieval bronze objects and one iron pin are illustrated life size on figs 1 and 2. The earliest brooch fragments would seem to be the pin terminals nos

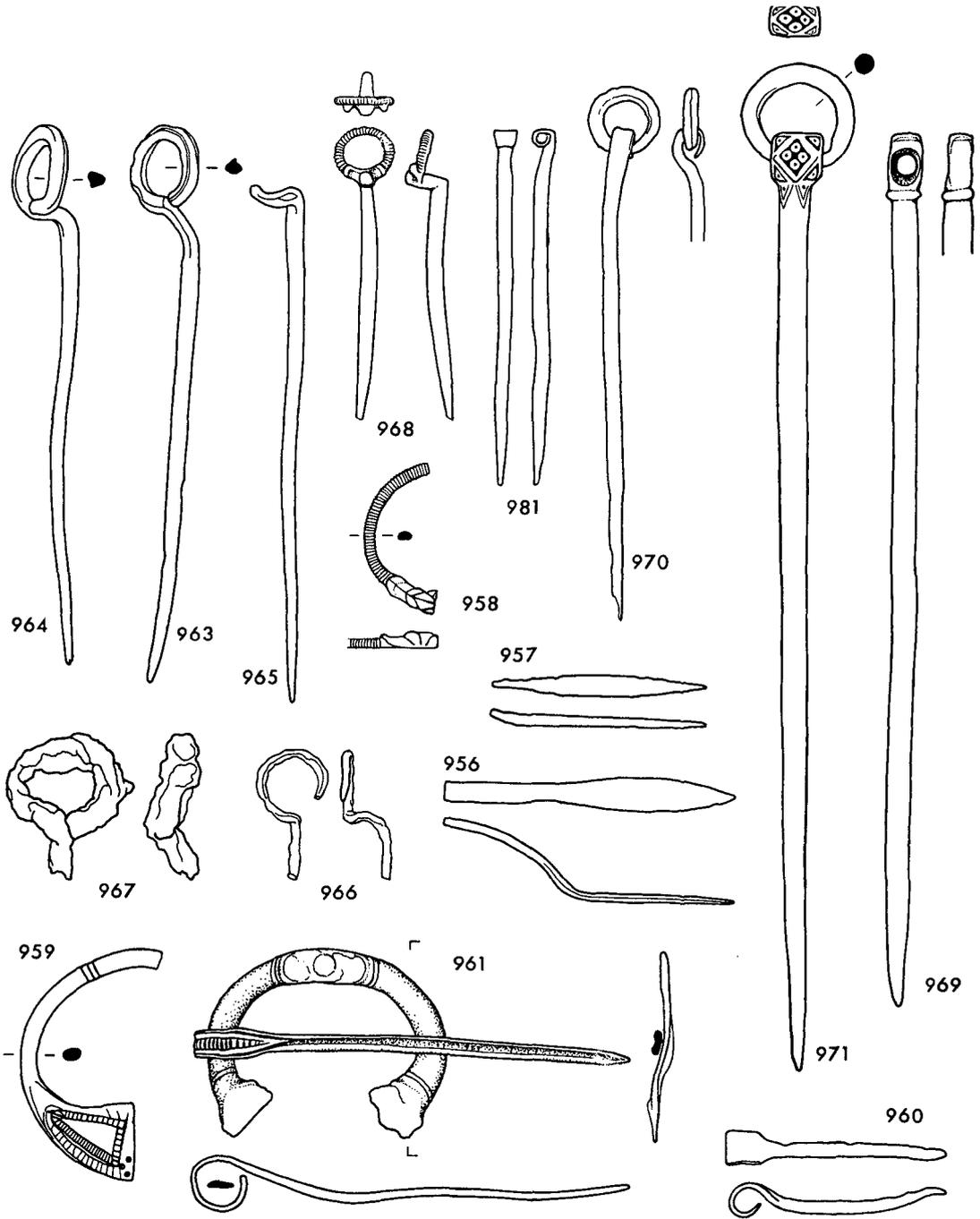


FIG 1 Mackenzie Collection, bronze objects and iron object GT 967 (1 : 1)

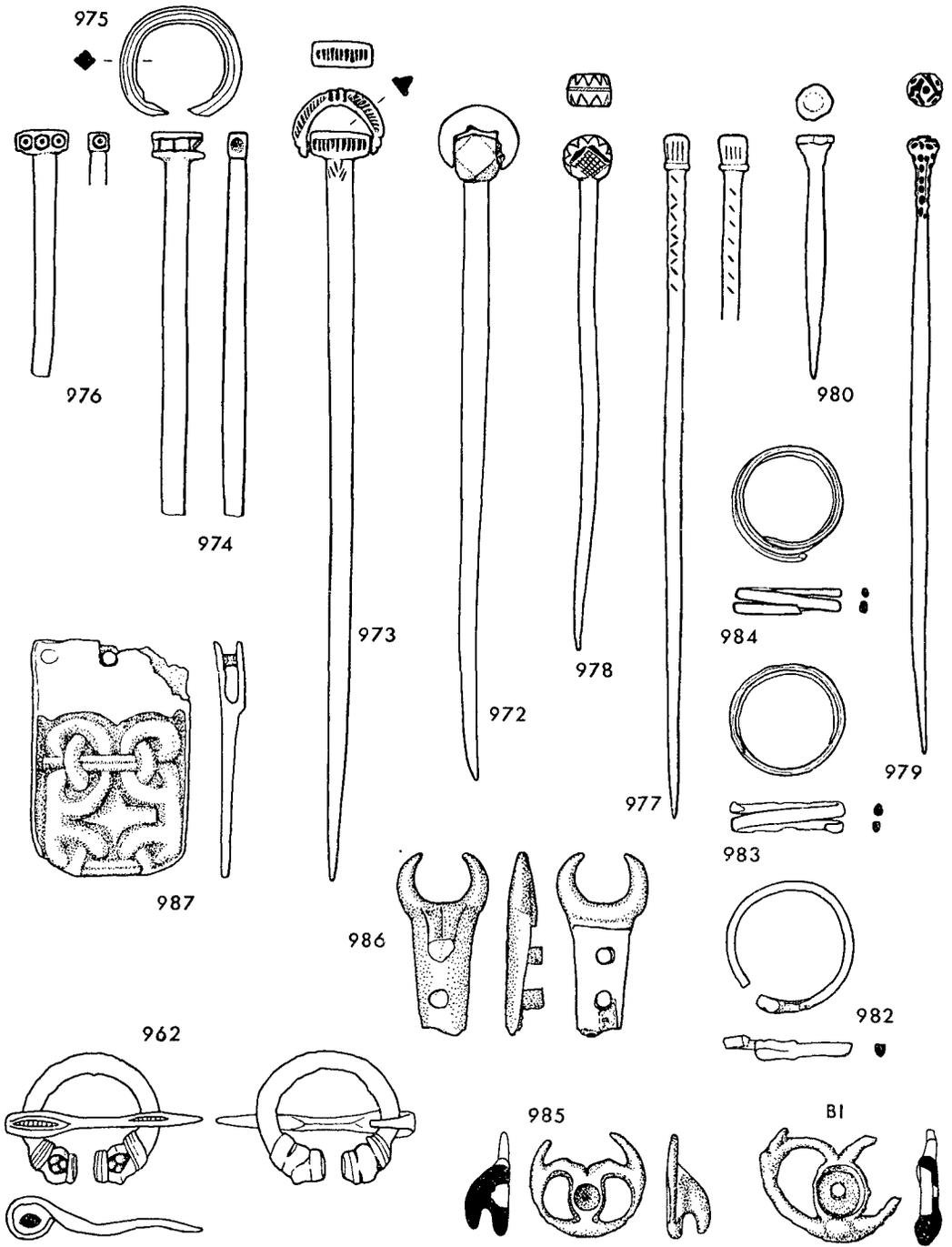


FIG 2 962-985, Mackenzie Collection; BI, Culbin Sands. All bronze (1 : 1)

956-7, which belong to penannular brooches of an early form with arched pin, found for instance at Newstead (Curle 1911, pl 88, no. 7). Of the later brooches, 959 was tinned on the upper surface of the flat terminal. Part of the decoration was faintly incised on this tinned surface, and where it has worn off, as within the deeply scored triangle, the decoration is also lost. The pin 960 might belong to this brooch. The brooch 961 has considerable corrosion, possibly traces of solder for lost settings, on the broken terminals and the centre of the hoop; it was probably tinned all over, but the tinning now survives only under the corrosion. The small class G brooch, 962, is tinned all over, save for the pin.

All the pins are bronze except one, the remains of an iron projecting-ring-headed pin, 967. All pin shafts are round in section unless otherwise shown. The ibex-headed pin, 968, is only the second known from Scotland, the other being from Covesea (Stevenson 1955, 289, fig B, 11). The pin 978 with solid, polyhedral head has thin twisted silver wires inlaid between incised zigzags across the top. The miscellaneous objects include a strap terminal with interlace decoration, 987, that appears to have been cut down in antiquity (Graham-Campbell 1973, 130), a horned terminal, 986, for which no parallel has been found, and a curious stud with a hook at the back, 985. A close parallel to the last object from the Culbin Sands collection in the museum is illustrated on fig 2, B1. Both objects may originally have had a complete outer ring, but are now worn. There are also two domed lead spindle whorls, 20 mm diameter (not illustrated). The projecting ring-headed pins and two spiral rings from this collection have been discussed by Clarke (1972).

Stone (not illustrated). A small axe of Antrim porcellanite, AF 1055, and a carefully shaped and bevelled oval stone, 998, found together in a box, would seem to be the 'stone small axe' and 'polishing stone' listed by Mr Mackenzie as found on Boreray. Other stone objects are various spindle whorls, 999-1012, including six of steatite and others of a shelly conglomerate, and three stone beads, 1013-1015, two of steatite.

Glass (not illustrated). The beads, 989-996, comprise a few simple types, including three yellow ring beads, and a spindle whorl of turquoise glass. Mr Mackenzie noted that beads were found at Caolis Newton, and Dun Torquil at Newton.

Jet (not illustrated). A small fragment of a jet armlet, originally D-shaped, 997.

Pottery (not illustrated). One spindle-whorl made from a pot-sherd, 1018.

Bone. A selection of the very numerous bone objects are illustrated on fig 3 and pls 21b and 22.

Two combs survive more or less intact (pl 22b). The larger complete comb, 1019, is very probably that mentioned in the Glasgow Exhibition Catalogue (*BBC*, 28) 'The larger comb was found in a stone cist on the island of Barra'; and may have come from an otherwise unrecorded Viking grave. (For other Viking finds from Barra, see Shetelig 1940, 72, 168.) One end has been restored; the surviving length is 195 mm, the restored length 220 mm. A smaller double-sided comb, 1030, is 61 mm long. There are also various fragments from single or double sided composite combs, many with simple decoration, usually dot-in-circle motifs.

Miscellaneous objects include two spindle whorls made from the head of a femur, 1043-4, and one made from an ivory tooth or tusk, 1045, various rectangular bone or antler plates with rivet holes, and occasionally bone rivets surviving, 1046-1055, a bone handle, 1056 which is a close parallel to one from the Broch of Burrian (GB 278, *supra* p 78, fig 9) and various other bone, cetacean bone and antler objects and fragments, their purpose often unclear, but some paralleled in the Erskine Beveridge collection of objects from North Uist.

Pointed implements made from split pieces of long bone, sometimes retaining part of the articulation, should probably be classed as awls; various examples are catalogued as 1086-1106.

One example, 1100, has a blunted chisel-shaped end. Bone bodkins or needles with straight or pointed end above the eye, 1123–1153, many broken, and fish gorges, 1154–1162, are well represented (pl 22a).

There are some sixty bone and antler pins, 1163–1232, and another forty broken points of pins, 1233–1285. The better preserved examples with shaped heads are shown on fig 3 and pl 21b. Many of the unillustrated pins are badly weathered, but several have simple forms of knob head.

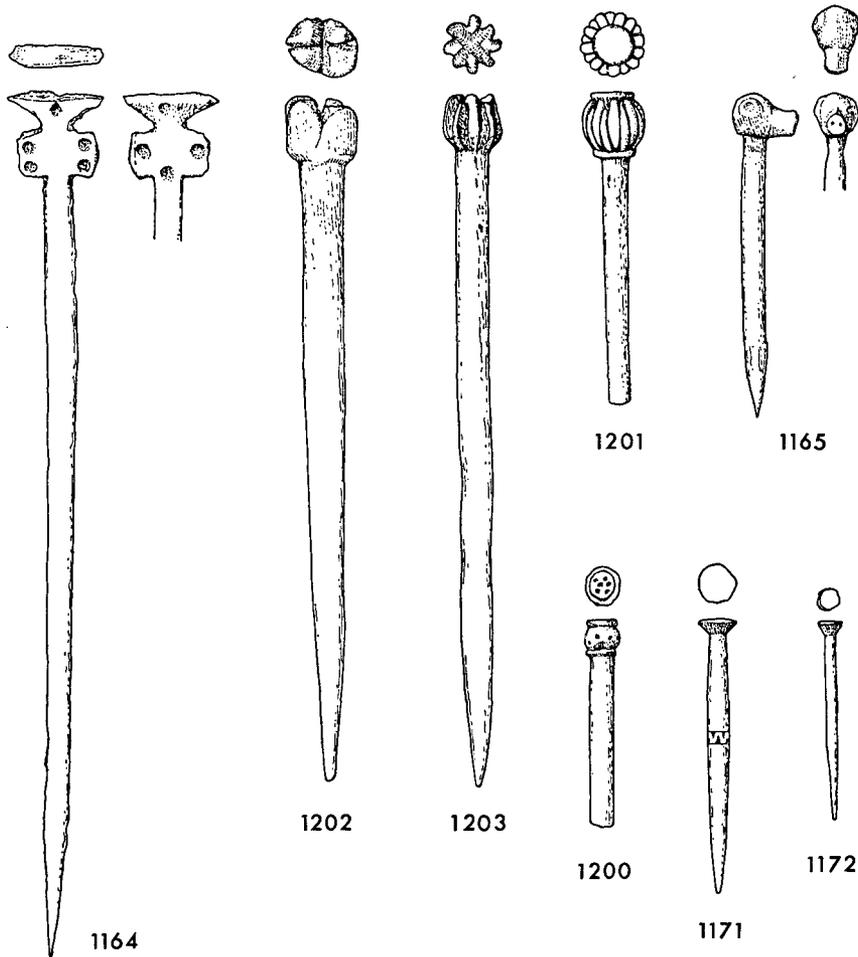


FIG 3 Mackenzie Collection, bone pins (1 : 1)

There are also half a dozen plain stout pins made of antler. One or two of the bone pins may be modern.

Some features of the pins, such as the hipped stems (there are two more broken examples) and the ornamental band on the stem of 1171, were discussed by Stevenson (1955). Comparisons for the simpler forms of knobbed head can be found in pins from the Broch of Burrian and from Norse levels at Jarlshof (Hamilton 1956, 126, fig 59, 1, 2). The small pin with outward facing animal head, 1165 (fig 3) is closer in feeling to the delicate double-headed pin from Burrian

(GB 141, *supra* p 71, fig 6) than to the large pins from Jarlshof with heads in line with the stem (Hamilton 1956, 125, fig 58). Of other pins on fig 3, no. 1164 may be compared to examples from Jarlshof (Hamilton 1956, fig 69, and another cross-headed pin with dots on the arms, apparently unpublished) while the dots on the top of the head of the small pin 1200 compare with three Jarlshof pins shown on the same figure. The pin 1201 with decorative head is similar to two pins from Lagore Crannog (Hencken 1951, 193, fig 105, nos 221, A). (J C-B)

MEDIEVAL AND LATER OBJECTS

Brooches

A silver ring brooch (diam. 22 mm, pl 23a no. 3) lacking its pin has a debased black letter 'inscription', leaves and an animal crowded on its small surface which has niello inlay; it is probably of sixteenth-century date and has a leafy decoration engraved on the reverse. A larger silver brooch (diam 85-88 mm, pl 23a no. 2) has a plain surface with four small silver bosses, their fillings missing; slightly dishd, it is unusual in a Scottish context and may be of eighteenth-century Scandinavian origin. There are also bronze or brass flat ring brooches, mostly lacking their pins and with their decoration rubbed; four have the chevron patterns often found on Scottish late-medieval to seventeenth-century brooches; one has an unusual 'block'-headed pin and is probably eighteenth-century in date. One of the brooches illustrated (diam 49 mm, pl 23a no. 1) has a simple dotted interlace pattern and is also probably of eighteenth-century date. The small brass ring 'brooch' (diam 24 mm, pl 23a no. 5), which is round in cross-section, is probably a medieval dress buckle, as is also a smaller ring 'brooch'. One detached bronze pin has a cross-bar near the head, as found on medieval silver brooches, while the heads of two others have the barrel-profile of sixteenth-seventeenth-century brooch pins. At the other end of the scale, a copper (?) brooch, without a pin appears to have been formed by cutting out the centre of a coin, which has not been identified—the pin would presumably have been wrapped round the ring, for there is not a fixed place on the ring for it.

Other items

There are two bean charms, one mounted in plain silver bands (pl 23a no. 4) and a charm made by mounting a Bronze-Age barbed-and-tanged, honey-coloured flint arrowhead in gold. There is a pair of thin bronze sleeve links, and among the buttons, one bronze one has '1st COMPY : NORTH·UIST·VOL^s' round a thistle and was made by 'I. Nutting, King St. Covent Garden'; there are three large, *c* 1800 buttons, other smaller buttons and links and a bronze buckle of late medieval or seventeenth-century date. Two crude, heavy silver finger rings may be of Scandinavian peasant origin; a gold memorial ring with a large, pointed-oval, bezel is dated '1784'. A variety of bronze and copper rings, needles, pins, cut and shaped patches, and a fragment of a bronze skillet handle complete the gift, objects which will mean more some day when studied with similar items in collections from the Culbin Sands and elsewhere. (SM)

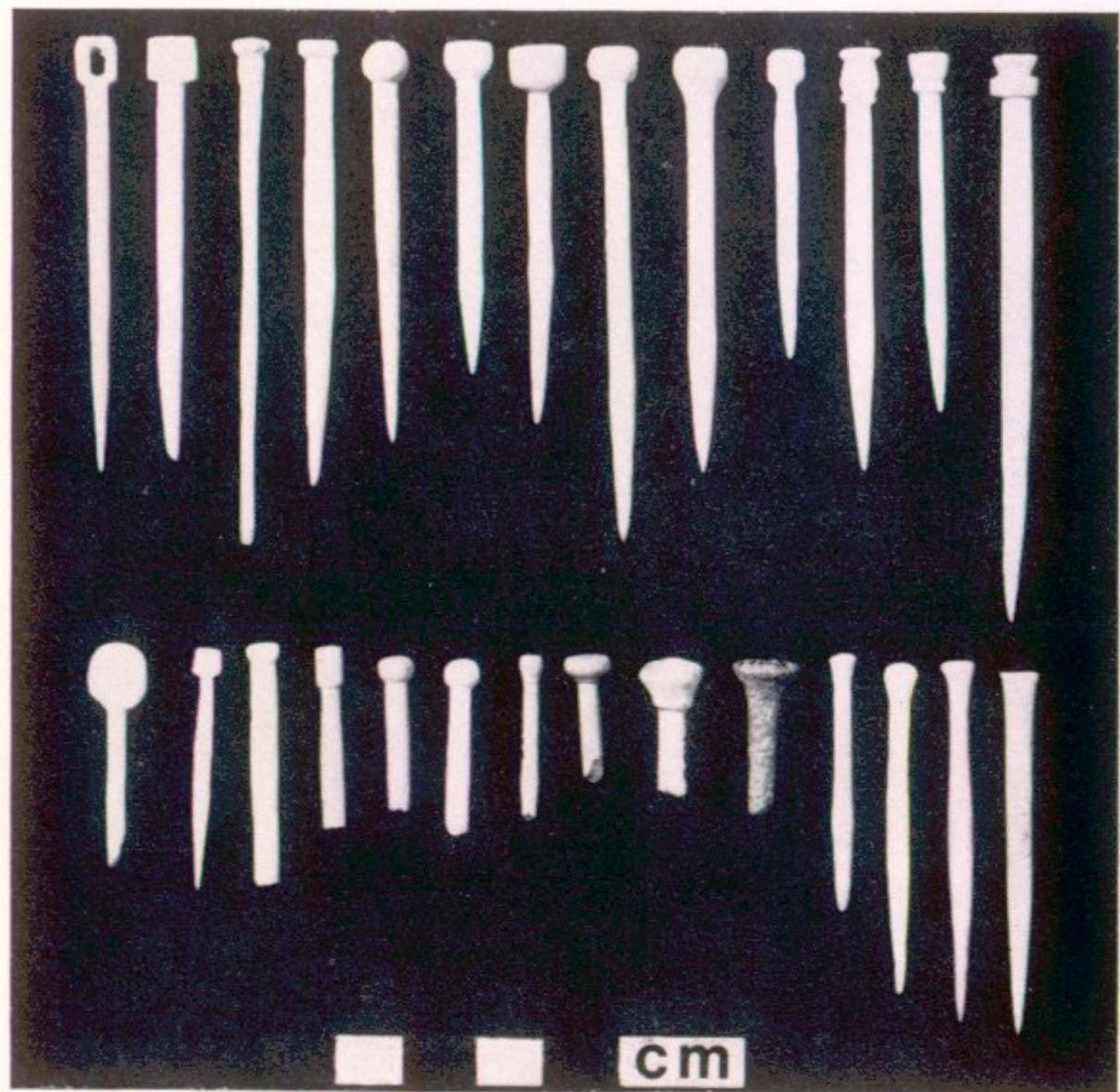
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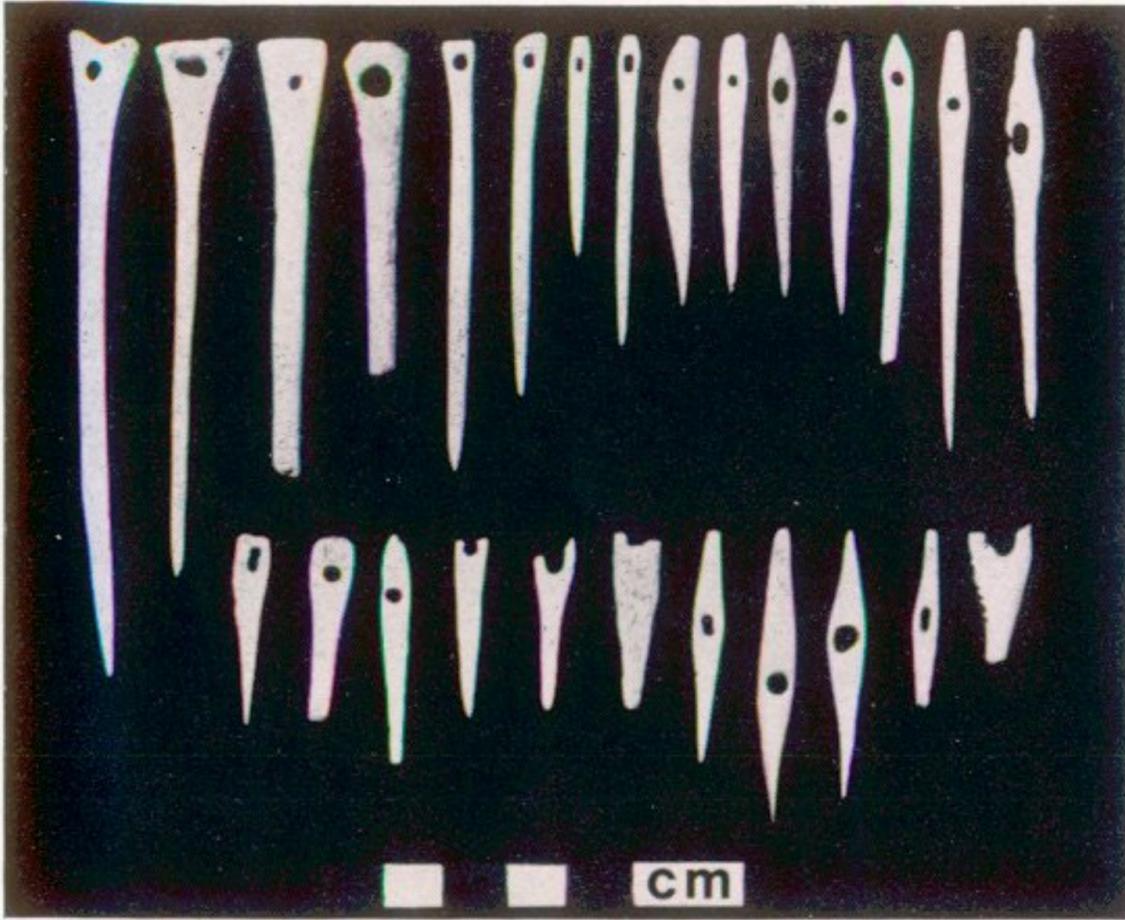


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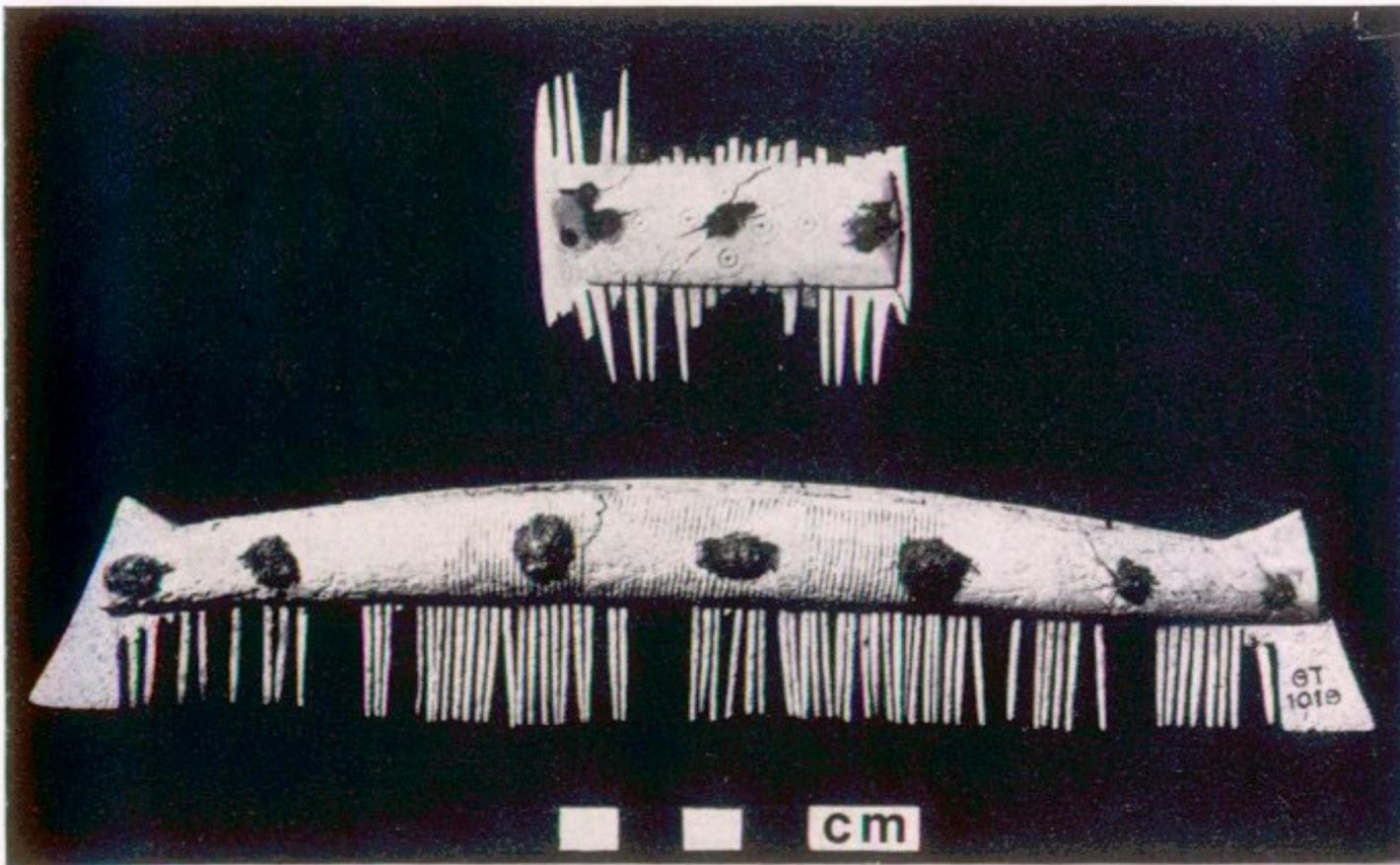


b Mackenzie Collection, bone pins (about 2:3)

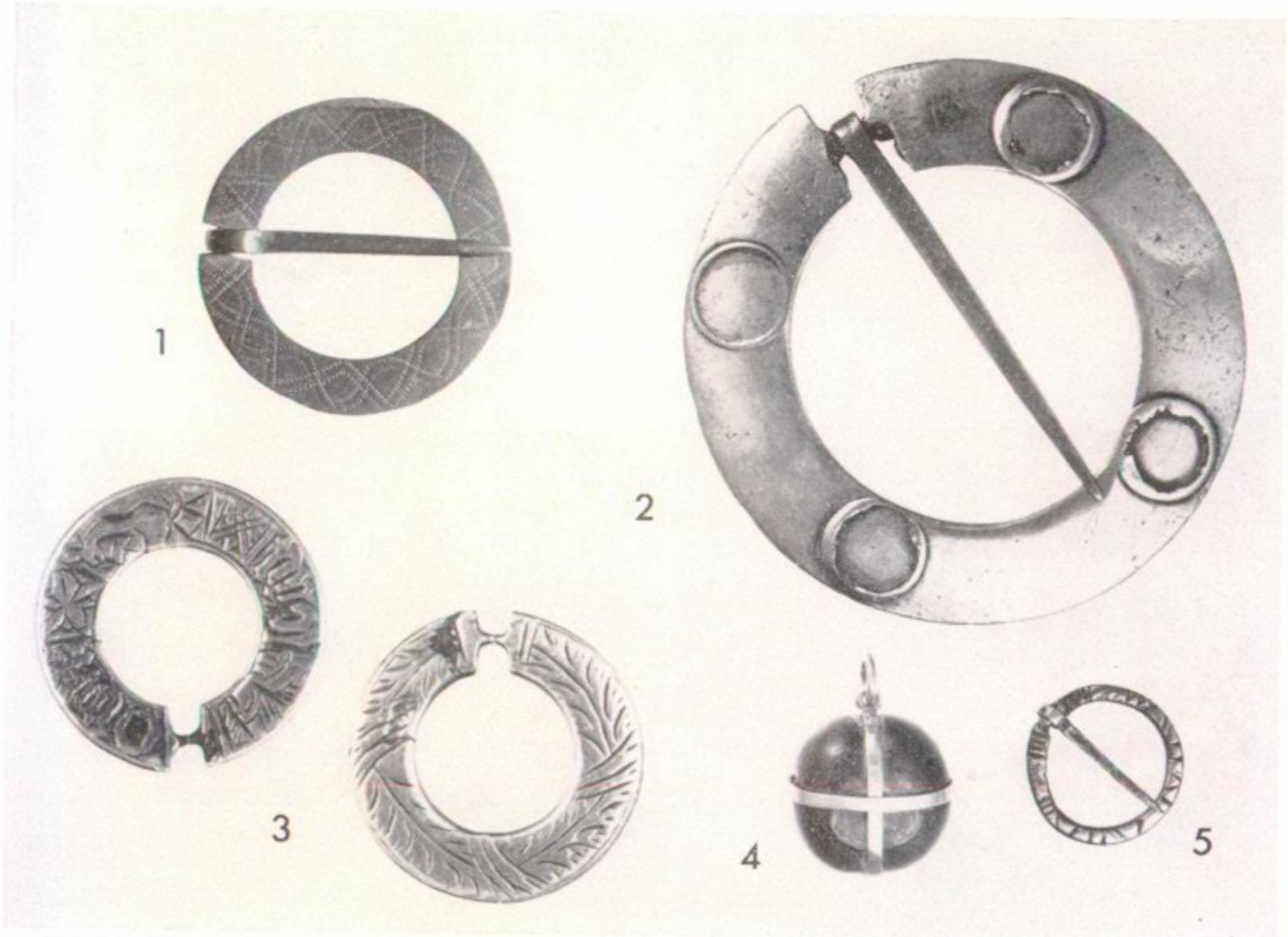
Mackenzie Collection | Buckstone cist | CLOSE-BROOKS
CLOSE-BROOKS and MAXWELL



a Mackenzie Collection, bone needles and fish gorges (1:2)



b Mackenzie Collection, bone combs (1:2)



a Mackenzie Collection, medieval brooches and bean charm (2:3)



b Northwaterbridge, cross-slab (1:8)



c Northwaterbridge, carved stone (1:6)