

a Merovingian type, but at the same time employing decorative and metalworking styles in use at that time in England.

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A FRAGMENTARY BRONZE STRAP-END OF THE VIKING PERIOD FROM THE UDAL, NORTH UIST, INVERNESS-SHIRE (PL. XXVI, B-D; FIG. 51)

Recent excavations at Coileagean an Udail (the Udal), North Uist, have concentrated on the Viking and immediately pre-Viking levels of this multi-period site. The present indication, from the considerable area so far investigated, is that 'the culture of the Norse-Hebrideans is not too readily to be distinguished from that of the pre-Norse Celtic Hebrideans except in terms of house structure'.⁹ There are, however, amongst the material recovered from the 9th to 11th-century levels (IXc and X), a few artifacts which are clearly not of native Hebridean origin. Chief amongst these is a coin of Harald Hardrada (c. 1060)¹⁰ from the top of level IXc; attention should also be drawn to a decorated bone comb-case, from the interface of levels IXc and X, with 10th to 11th-century parallels from other Viking sites such as Dublin¹¹ and the settlement at Freswick, Caithness.¹²

An important find in level X in 1972 is a fragment of a decorated *bronze strap-end*, which has certain 9th to 10th-century parallels that raise a number of problems.

This fragment, (PL. XXVI, C, D; FIG. 51), L. 3.25 cm., consists of the damaged remnant of the tip and part of the main body of a strap-end with incised decoration on either side. Both faces of the main body have a single field of ornament between obliquely hatched borders, each face having a different ribbon-interlace pattern. The field, on what is here termed the obverse, contains a simple single-strand interlace pattern, whereas that on the reverse has a more elaborate but less clearly defined knot-pattern which will be discussed at greater length below. The tip expands slightly from the main body before tapering to a rounded point. Its centre is pierced by a circular hole surrounded by two concentric circles which are linked by a number of groups of three transverse lines. A single ring-and-dot is incised at the termination of the hatched border which is also the point of expansion of the tip. This feature, balanced on the missing side of the object, represents the eye of a stylized animal-head, seen from above, of which the nostrils are represented by similar dots, without the accompanying rings, near the tip of the object. The ornament of the tip is similar on both faces.

The fragment is cut and broken in such a way as to indicate that it had become no more than scrap-metal when discarded or lost. Sufficient exists, however, to show that it is part of an object very similar to one from the Viking grave at Cronk Moar, Isle of Man, a burial dated between 850 and 950 by Wilson.¹³ The Cronk Moar example is complete, as is another found at Dunbel, co. Kilkenny:¹⁴ clearly they are both *strap-ends*. The basic similarity between all three of these pieces includes the use of the same symmetrical, single-strand, interlace pattern in at least one of the main fields on each, including the obverse of the Udal example. This close relationship might allow one to deduce that the missing butt-end of the Udal strap-end was similar to that on each of the other two examples. Another significant shared feature is that the tip of the Dunbel strap-end is undoubtedly in the form of a stylized animal-head, seen from above. This

⁹ Iain Crawford *Excavations at Coileagean an Udail: 9th Interim Report*, (Christ's College, Cambridge, 1972), 8.

¹⁰ M. Dolley and K. Skaare, *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad*, VIII (1973), 221-7.

¹¹ Found in Winetavern Street (reg. no. E81:4638) during excavations directed by B. Ó Riordáin for the National Museum of Ireland. I am most grateful to Mr. Ó Riordáin for this and other references.

¹² *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, LXXIII (1938-9), pl. xlvii, 1.

¹³ G. Bersu and D. M. Wilson, *Three Viking Graves in the Isle of Man* (Soc. Med. Archaeol., monograph series, no. 1, 1966), 75-6, 84-7, pl. xvi, B.

¹⁴ *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, LIII (1923), fig. 8.

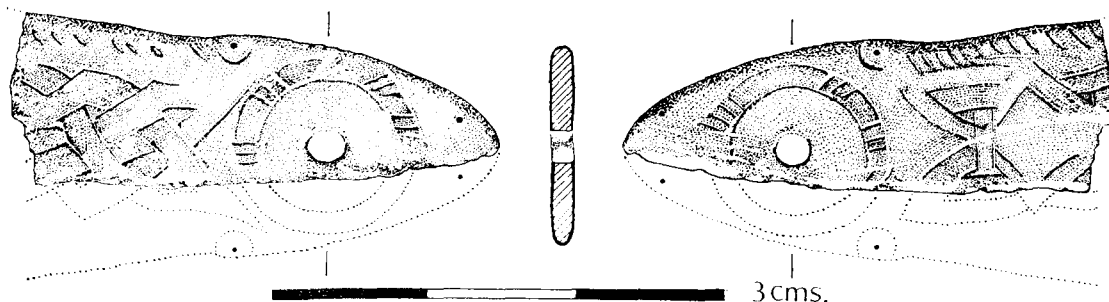


FIG. 51
THE UDAL, N. UIST
Bronze strap-end (pp. 128 ff.)

may also be true of the corroded Cronk Moar example and is clearly so, in an even more stylized form, on the Udal specimen. This particular feature is one that is common on 9th-century Anglo-Saxon strap-ends which also have one central rectangular field of ornament on the body.¹⁵ But apart from such general similarities in the layout of the ornament, these three strap-ends (and another, unpublished, example from the recent excavations at High Street, Dublin¹⁶) differ significantly from the stereotyped Anglo-Saxon series. One point of interest is that, unlike the one-sided Anglo-Saxon variety, they are decorated on both faces. Of greater importance is the presence of the circular perforation towards the tip of each of them—again a feature without parallel in the Anglo-Saxon sequence. They do not appear to derive these distinctive features from contemporary Norse strap-ends, such as those from the Gokstad ship-burial.¹⁷ These vary in form, have a tendency to over-all decoration, with a plain reverse, and lack the distinctive circular perforations. The possibility of Norse influence on the ornament on the reverse of the Udal strap-end will, however, have to be considered further below. In fact, the ornament of these four strap-ends is compatible with what is perhaps suggested by their distribution—that they are of Celtic origin. Strap-ends do not appear to have been a normal feature of Celtic dress at this time, either in Scotland or in Ireland, so that it would seem that a foreign type of artifact, in this case a 9th-century Anglo-Saxon strap-end, was adapted for what could have been some slightly different function.¹⁸ On the present evidence, particularly since three of the examples are from 9th or 10th-century Viking contexts, it would be impossible to state exactly where in the Celtic area this development took place. Suffice it to say that 9th-century Anglo-Saxon strap-ends are known from a number of Scottish sites¹⁹ and have recently turned up in the Dublin city excavations.²⁰

Wilson appears reasonably confident that these strap-ends had a specialized function and he identifies them as book-clasps.²¹ He suggests that 'the hole in the terminal is functional in that it engages with a peg in the edge of the board of a book-binding'. In evidence, he cites the pegs on the Anglo-Saxon book-binding from Fulda, and the Anglo-Carolingian clasp on a book-binding from Enger in Germany. Unfortunately there is no proof of their use in such a manner in an insular Celtic context. The discovery of

¹⁵ For a discussion of Anglo-Saxon strap-ends see D. M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork, 700-1100*, in the *British Museum* (London, 1964), 62-3.

¹⁶ Information from Mr. Ó Riordáin.

¹⁷ D. M. Wilson and O. Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London, 1966), pl. xxx, *a* and *d*.

¹⁸ Cf. a parallel 9th-century development in Norway, *ibid.*, 90.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.* in note 15, 99-116.

²⁰ Information from Mr. Ó Riordáin.

²¹ *Op. cit.* in note 13, 76, and refs. *ad loc.*

three of these strap-ends in Viking contexts does not assist in resolving this problem of their use, although mounts and clasps taken from such insular objects as book-bindings were often reused by the Vikings, as is possibly the case with the Cronk Moar example, or simply treated as scrap, like that from the Udal. It remains correct, however, to describe them as strap-ends, whether or not they were used on books, since even in their hypothetical role as book-clasps they would have been attached to the ends of short straps, such as are provided for in the relevant Fulda book-mounts.

Wilson concludes his argument concerning the use of the Cronk Moar example by expressing the opinion that 'it is conceivable, but unlikely' that it might have functioned originally as a strap-end of the ordinary kind, although there would then be little point in its having the pierced terminal. These strap-ends should, however, be compared with such pieces as the bronze bridle-mounts from the Viking graves at Balladoole, Isle of Man, and Kiloran Bay, Colonsay.²² These approximate in form to the strap-ends and have similar panels of interlace ornament; this connexion is emphasized by the fact that one of the Kiloran Bay mounts terminates in a stylized animal-head seen from above. These bronze mounts, made in the Celtic area, would seem therefore to be quite closely related to the bronze strap-ends of similar origin. The mounts have circular perforations for the rivets which attached them to the leather bridles. The rivets are disguised and converted into ornamental features by the use of dome-headed bosses which are surrounded by patterns made up of concentric circles. This use of bosses as an ornamental device on the mounts suggests that the perforations of the strap-ends may have been for the attachment of double-sided dome-headed bosses. Such double-sided bosses, surrounded by patterns of incised concentric circles, are a feature of the terminals of a number of silver penannular brooches from Ireland which are to be dated within the period 850 to 950.²³ But, since these hypothetical bosses are absent from all four extant strap-ends, this theory must remain as unproven as that which suggests that they are book-clasps.

It remains to discuss the knot-pattern on the reverse of the Udal strap-end (FIG. 51). Although somewhat muddled in execution, it gives every appearance of having been derived from a pair of knots, set side by side, in the Scandinavian Borre style.²⁴ In such an arrangement one of the most characteristic features of the ornament is the presence of a central hollow-sided lozenge. The true nature of the Udal ornament will be better appreciated if we examine another strap-end from North Uist (PL. XXVI, B) which has recently been given to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.²⁵ This strap-end is clearly of Scandinavian origin; it is tongue-shaped, with a plain reverse and over-all decoration on the obverse, in classic Borre style. It gives the impression of having been cut down from its original or intended size, because its ornament consists of only one and a half adjacent knots. This ornament is clearly and competently executed in low relief, with the hollow-sided lozenge feature being particularly evident. The most reasonable explanation for the ornament on the reverse face of the Udal strap-end must be that it was based on a Borre-style prototype of this nature, without full comprehension of the details on the part of the native craftsman.

This derived Borre-style ornament on the Udal strap-end introduces new dating evidence for the group as a whole. In discussing the date of the Cronk Moar burial, which he places within the century 850 to 950, Wilson suggests that there is a 'general likelihood' that such insular pieces as the strap-end belong to the 9th century.²⁶ He is more definite that the Balladoole and Kiloran Bay mounts, cited above as parallels for the

²² *Ibid.*, pls. v-vii.

²³ E.g. Brit. Mus., 88, 7-19, 103; Nat. Mus. Dub., R.87; Nat. Mus. Dub., w.32; Nat. Mus. Antiq. Scot., FD 1. All these brooches are single finds without exact provenances. See Olav Sverre Johansen, *Acta Archaeologica*, forthcoming.

²⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 17, pl. xxvii, f and h.

²⁵ Reg. no. GR 987, H. H. Mackenzie collection, without exact provenance. I am most grateful to the National Museum for permission to illustrate and discuss this object in advance of their own publication.

²⁶ *Op. cit.* in note 13, 85-7.

strap-ends, cannot be dated much later than the middle of the 9th century on the basis of their ornamental technique. Bearing in mind also the derivation of these strap-ends from the 9th-century Anglo-Saxon variety, it is evident that the Celtic group is of 9th-century origin. The duration of the Borre style is seen by Wilson as being of the general period of 840 to 980.²⁷ On these grounds, it seems clear that the Udal strap-end is to be dated within the century 850 to 950, with the likelihood that it cannot be much later than *c.* 900. The admixture of Celtic, Norse and Anglo-Saxon features displayed by this piece does not assist, at this period, in the exact location of its place of manufacture, since the requisite artistic environment existed throughout the west, from the Hebrides to Ireland and the Isle of Man.

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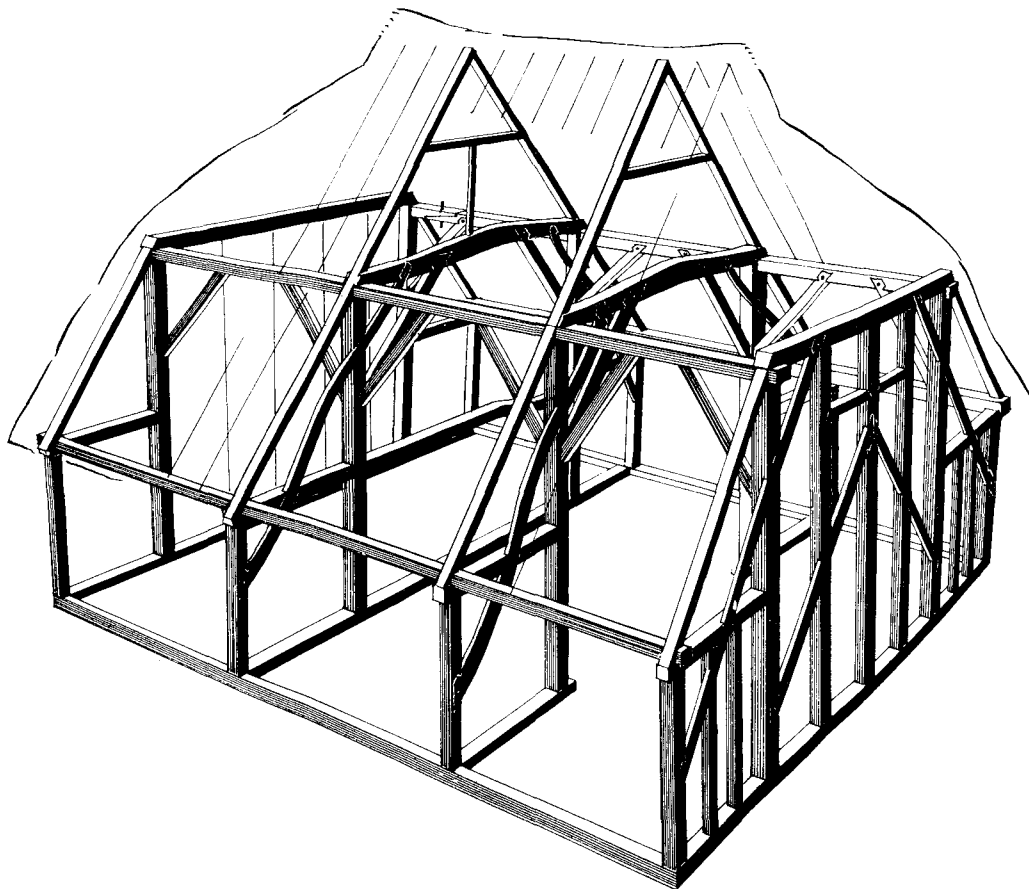


FIG. 52

AISLED HALL CALLED SONGERS, CAGE LANE, BOXTED, ESSEX (p. 131 f.)

SONGERS, CAGE LANE, BOXTED, ESSEX (TM 333007; FIG. 52)

Whatever may be expected or deduced from excavations (and there is little corroborative evidence from deserted medieval villages), the small building at Boxted,

²⁷ P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London, 1970), 287.