

An unpublished gold finger-ring of Viking-age date from the Isle of Skye, and new light on the 1850 Skye hoard

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In 1979 the City of Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, purchased at auction a gold finger-ring (pl 40b) said to have been found before 1916 on the Isle of Skye (Christie's Sale, 28 Nov 1979, lot 28). I am grateful to Miss Helen Adamson for the invitation to publish this ring and for the information, obtained through Christies from the vendor, that it had originally belonged to a Countess Latour whose farm on Skye had been managed by his cousin's great-uncle who had been presented with it by the Countess on his retirement in 1931.

The Countess Vincent Baillet de Latour was of Austrian birth, the daughter of Baron von Ettingshausen, who was married first in 1881 to Norman Macleod of Macleod, 25th chief of that ilk, who died in 1895. She married subsequently Count Vincent Baillet de Latour; they spent their summers on Skye at Uiginish, near Dunvegan, and after his death, she continued to holiday on Skye until she died in 1943. The Countess developed an interest in archaeology (elected a fellow of the Society in 1915) and directed the excavation of two brochs on Skye, first Dun an Iardhard, near Dunvegan (Macleod 1915), and then (1914–20) Dun Beag, near Struan (Callander 1921). The finds from her excavations, including a plain gold finger-ring found in Dun Beag, were presented by her to the Museum so that there is no reason to suppose that this unpublished

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finger-ring derives from either of her sites. It must be likely, however, that the ring was found in north-west Skye where it would have been brought to her attention because of her known antiquarian interests.

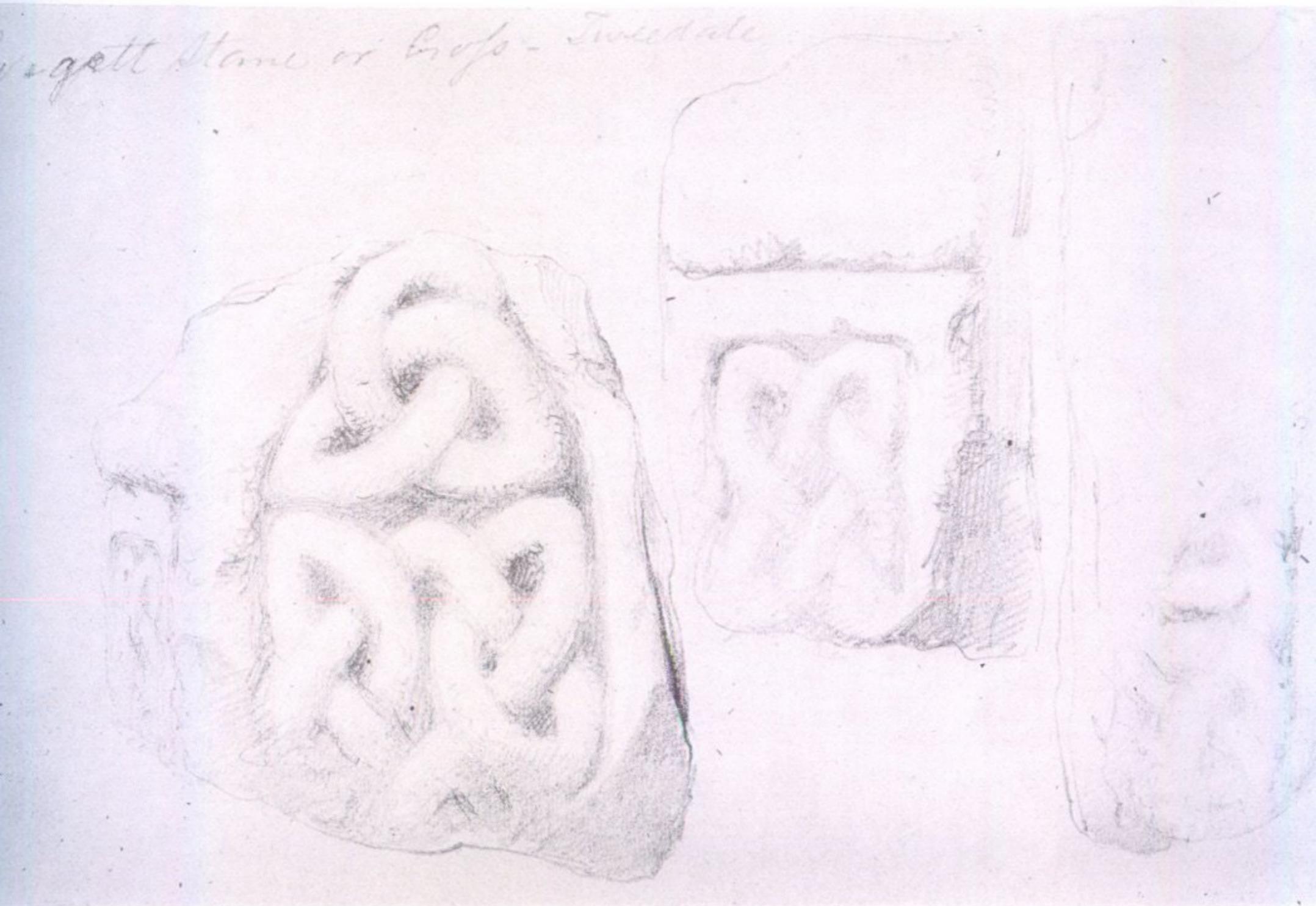
The finger-ring consists of four gold rods twisted together and tapering towards their ends which are linked by a plain lozenge-shaped plate (pl 40b). Its external diameter varies from 25 to 27 mm and its weight is 13.60 gm. It is best paralleled by a gold finger-ring of similar size from Marrister, Whalsey, Shetland (Grieg 1940, 141, fig 64), made from three twisted rods, as is a smaller ring (NMA: FE 21) which forms part of the hoard of gold finger-rings of unknown provenance from the Hebrides (*ibid*, 116, fig 58); the rods are linked by a plate in both these instances, as are the two twisted rods that form a gold finger-ring in the Plan Farm hoard, Bute (Pollexfen & Sim 1884, pl vi,2), and the four rods which constitute the gold finger-ring from the St Ronan's Chapel, Iona, hoard (Curle 1924, 109–10, fig 4), although in the latter instance the rods were first twisted into two pairs which were then twisted together. Both simpler and more complex rings are included in the above-mentioned hoard from the Hebrides, amongst them the elaborately plaited type that is represented by a gold finger-ring from Fladda Chuinn, off Skye (NMA: Cat, 1892, 211; Grieg 1940, fig 58). A hoard of four gold finger-rings from Stenness, Mainland, Orkney (Grieg 1940, 133–4, fig 62; Graham-Campbell 1980, no 238) consists of one plaited, and one twisted ring (three rods without a plate), and two plain penannular bands; this last type is that represented by the gold finger-ring already mentioned as being found on Skye in Dun Beag, Struan (Callander 1921, 123, fig 9,3). These finger-rings are listed in Graham-Campbell 1976 (Appendices B & C), with the others of gold and silver known from Viking-age Scotland; they are all long-lived types and the Skye ring published here is as likely to date from the 12th century as the 10th, given that the Plan Farm, Bute hoard was deposited c 1150 (*ibid*, 123–4) and that the coinless St Ronan's Chapel, Iona hoard must be of similar date (*ibid*). Neither the Hebrides nor the Stenness hoards contained coins to date their deposition.

In addition to the three gold finger-rings now known from Skye, there are three Viking-age silver hoards from the island, of which that found on the beach below the Storr Rock, near Portree, was deposited c 935 (Graham-Campbell 1976, 119). The variety of its 110 coins and the nature of its 23 pieces of hack-silver led Graham-Campbell to conclude (*ibid*) that the Storr Rock hoard 'has a marked Hiberno-Norse aspect and must reflect the close connections between the Norse Settlements of Scotland and Ireland at this period'. The other two hoards have unknown findspots, the first (Skye, no 1) having been discovered before 1781 and the other (no 2) in 1850 (Grieg 1940, 112–13); they both contained one complete example and several fragments of the plain silver penannular rings known as 'ring-money', used by the Norse in Scotland particularly in the period 950–1050 (Graham-Campbell 1976, 125–6). I am much indebted to Mr H Wordon of Edinburgh for drawing my attention to a passage concerning the latter hoard in D Wilson, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1851), 521, which states that 'in the present year, 1850, a large hoard of Anglo-Saxon coins was discovered in the Isle of Skye: upwards of 90 fell into the hands of one individual, and a much greater number were dispersed. By far the greater number are stykas of Eadgar'. As the ring and fragments 'found in a sepulchral mound' in Skye in 1850 were presented to the Museum by Prof Daniel Wilson himself, in 1863 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 5 (1862–4), 127, no 7), there seems little doubt that we are dealing with a single hoard. I am grateful to Prof M. Dolley for discussing this reference with me, which has been missed by all who have written on the Viking-age hoards of Scotland, and for his suggestion that this hoard would most probably have been deposited in the 970s. Skye no 2 thus fits well into the general deposition pattern of the Viking-age coin-hoards from Scotland (Graham-Campbell 1976, fig 2) and provides further confirmation for the general dating of 'ring-money' (*ibid*, table 1).

These three hoards and three single-finds of silver and gold (to which might possibly be added the Hebridean hoard of gold finger-rings) together constitute a notable concentration of such wealth and form a significant amount of the small body of archaeological evidence that is known for the Norse presence in Skye, most recently reviewed in part by Small (1976).

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a 'Pygett Stane or Cross - Tweedale'; drawing by James Drummond, c 1863



b Viking-age gold finger-ring from the Isle of Skye (scale 1:1)

FISHER | Pyket Stane

GRAHAM-CAMPBELL | Skye finger-ring