

A Late Iron Age Decorated Object from Cosgrove

by

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A copper alloy artefact was found at SP 796 419 by a metal detector user, G Allan, just after ploughing in the winter of 1983/4. The area of the find is at the south east end of the field in which the Cosgrove villa is situated and about 100 m beyond those villa buildings so far identified. The finder passed it to R J Williams, Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit, who brought it to the author's attention and arranged for its deposition in Northampton Museum. The present note is a simple description; no analytical work has been carried out.

The upper part of the object consists of a semicircular plate 34 mm across with enamel decoration. This swells through an abrupt, almost rightangle, chamfer from 3.5 mm to 6.5 mm thick, to form a stub of truncated trian-

gular form and profile decorated with incised lines. The overall length is 36 mm. A loop on the undecorated side has an oval opening 8 mm by 5 mm, under which a slight depression runs up from the base.

The decoration on the plate has three components, all roughened to take enamel. There is a small central circle, in which red enamel still survives. Roughly concentric to this is a narrow circular line, which expands at the top to form a trilateral area for enamelling; the upper side of this area is formed by the arc of the narrow circle, the lower by two concave lines, both arcs of similar diameter. The largest area once enamelled runs around the edge of the plate above the other decoration; its outer side is formed by an arc concentric with the

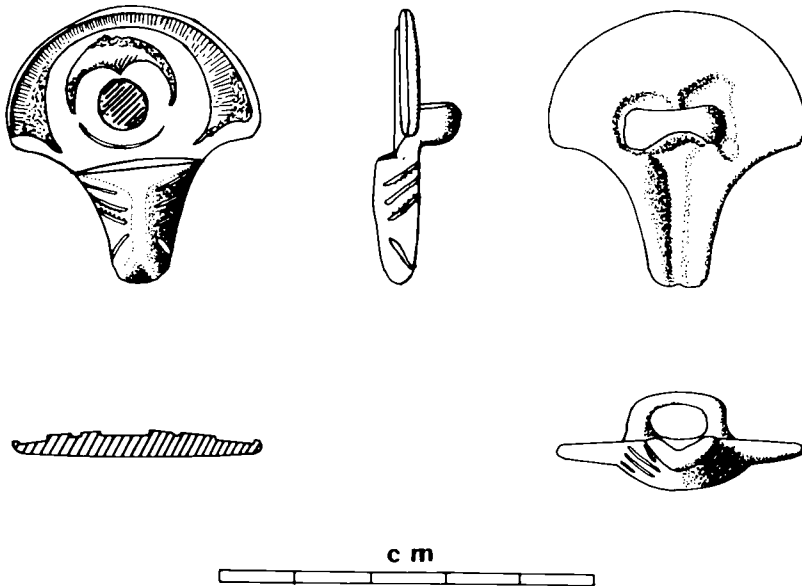


Fig 1 The Iron Age Decorated Object from Cosgrove. 1/1.

plate, the inner by an arc of smaller diameter; the result is a band which expands evenly as the plate widens.

No close parallel for the artefact has been identified, although the general curvilinear form of the decoration and the method of enamelling places it firmly within the Late Iron Age. Three possible uses for the object have been suggested. Professor M Jope has compared its shape to that of the head of the King's Langley lynch-pin (Fox 1958, PL 52) and suggested that it was a decorated bronze terminal for an iron pin. The general similarity to the head of the King's Langley pin is marked, but that pin, and lynch-pins in general, are all at least twice the size. The loop at the back of the Cosgrove object would only take a pin 7 mm in diameter, much too insubstantial for a lynch-pin. The second possible interpretation is as a variety of looped stud (MacGregor 1976, 134 and FIG 8). No published looped studs are very similar to the Cosgrove example but all have a loop at the back of a variously shaped and decorated plate, the smaller versions being comparable in size to Cosgrove. There is no detailed explanation as to how exactly these studs were used, beyond acting as a variety of dress-fastening. The size of the Cosgrove piece is compatible with a dress fitting and the decorated side, particularly the basal stub, seems to have been much handled. A third suggestion is that the object may have been a decorative mount from the rim of a bucket or similar vessel. No close analogies are illustrated by MacGregor (1976) and undoubtedly the study of Iron Age metalwork is hampered by the lack of a comprehensive compendium for Southern Britain to match MacGregor's work for the North. The Cosgrove loop could have fitted over a projection on a bucket rim. Its overall impression is that of a very debased anthropomorphic head. Compared to the heads on the Aylesford bucket (Brailsford 1975, 86-7) the semicircular plate could be seen as a simplified version of the helmet and the stub below with its incisions as a 'face'. The wear or handling on the Cosgrove piece would be quite consistent with its use as a mount. It is not possible to make a definite identification on the basis of published data. Small artefacts in particular have been little studied compared to the major works of Celtic

art and far too little attention has been paid to the identification of function as opposed to the analysis of artistic forms.

It is relevant to include the object here because of the scatter of pottery of mid-first century AD date recovered from the villa excavations. Although there were no identifiable features, it reinforces the evidence for activity of very late Iron Age date in the area, the focus of which remains to be located.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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