

XI

MUSEUM NOTES, 1977*

Peter Shorer and Elizabeth Coatsworth

1. AN UNUSUAL DRAGONESQUE BROOCH FROM SOUTH SHIELDS (pls. XV–XVII)

IN THE collections at the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne, there is a “Dragonesque” brooch of bronze of unusual form which was discovered at South Shields and is attributed to the late second century A.D.¹

The usual Dragonesque brooch is of cast bronze, S-shaped, decorated with cast-in three-dimensional shapes, and with recesses to contain enamel, resulting in a Celtic-style dragonlike head at either end of a body.² The pin for attachment to the clothing is of stout wire, bent to form a loop around the neck of one “head”, then passing underneath the body and fastening by bending over the neck of the opposite head.

The Dragonesque brooch from South Shields differs from the usual in the following details.

The method of construction is not cast to form the shape but wrought to resemble a “double-swan” of reversed “S” design. The dimensions are: length overall 46 mm × width 28 mm, body width 20 mm × thickness 1 mm, neck width 3 mm × thickness 2 mm.

The central area is a body with a swan’s wing on either side, reversed so that each terminates in a delicately formed swan’s neck, head, and beak. Signs of hammering are visible on the underside of the body and wings. The dendritic structure is unlike that produced in a solely cast structure. It may have been cast to a general form and then shaped by hammering, which would also cause the metal to become harder and stiffer.

An equally important difference from the usual type is in the manner of decoration. Instead of having cast-in three-dimensional shapes and enamel this has a series of rivets varying in size and form according to their position in the design. Along the centre-line of the body are six round-headed rivets which penetrate to the underside where they are visible as neatly-burred ends flush with the body-surface. The metal has been caused to compress into square shapes of slightly larger area around three adjacent rivets. There are two rivets, one at the end of either opposed wing adjacent

* Prepared for the press by Dr. D. J. Smith, with warmest thanks to the contributors.

¹ Accession no. 1929.119.

² W. Bulmer, “Dragonesque brooches and their

development”, *Ant.J.* XVIII (1938), 146–53; cf. R. W. de F. Feachem, “Dragonesque fibulae”, *ibid.* XXXI (1951), 32–44.

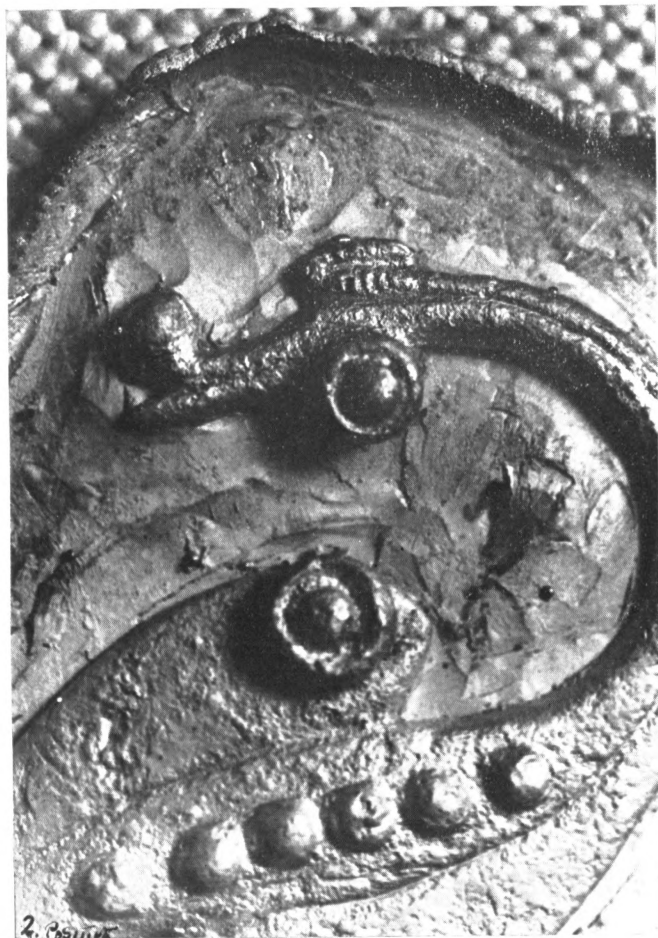


a. Electrotype, obverse, positive (x2)



b. Electrotype, reverse, positive (x2)

THE SOUTH SHIELDS DRAGONESQUE BROOCH See note 1 (*Photographs: Peter H. T. Shorer*)



a. Electrotype, obverse, positive (detail, x3)



b. Silicone rubber mould, obverse, negative (detail, x3)

THE SOUTH SHIELDS DRAGONESQUE BROOCH See note 1 (*Photographs: Peter H. T. Shorer*)



a. Electrotype, reverse, positive (detail, x3)



b. Silicone rubber mould, reverse, negative (detail, x3)

THE SOUTH SHIELDS DRAGONESQUE BROOCH See note 1 (*Photographs: Peter H. T. Shorer*)

to the body. Each has a ring of metal encircling the rivet-head. This appears to be of wire-section but no joins are visible. If not wire it would need to be a washer with a section of approximately 2 mm inside and 5 mm outside diameters and 2 mm thickness. The top surface of the washers appears to be recessed in countersunk fashion, forming an attractive decorative feature. It is unlikely that the concentric groove formed by this washer/rivet complex contained inlay or filling.

Two more rivets, in form and construction similar to the latter, but smaller, are situated in the head-area on the inside curve from the body. The head itself is shaped and the rivet positioned to produce an "eye" effect. This eye is opposite a chased decoration which represents a "comb". This is formed from a length of metal, from the beak area, which has been folded back alongside the head to increase the width, and the likeness.

At the extremity of either head is a beak formed by a split in the metal. At the end of the outer side, the same side as the comb, is an excess of metal, possibly formed as an extension of the beak, coiled to form a ring. Through this ring is a round-headed rivet with the head protruding above the front surface and the pin neatly finished flush to the under surface.

The upper surface of the brooch has two chased lines to delineate the proportions of the design and each continues from the junction of either body/wing along the tapering section forming the neck to the separation of the comb from the beak. Chasing also produces the appearance of the comb.

The reversed "S" form is its third difference from the usual Dragon esque type to which this brooch, stylistically, belongs.

The Celtic influence creates an illusion of elegant simplicity and the delicacy of a swan. It also creates the detail of the head in such a manner that it appears correct in principle, and then becomes up-side-down as the detail is taken into account. It has an appearance of mobility.

This antiquity has been referred to as a brooch, but there are no means for attaching a pin and no indication of other methods of attachment or use. All penetrating rivets are hammer-finished and there are no empty holes. There is no sign of wear-marks as on the usual bent-wire pin, though a pin must be assumed to be the method of attachment.

These observations are the result of handling the original and of making and studying silicone rubber moulds and electrotpe copies which provide detail not easily visible on the original.

Further examination, and analysis, and comparison with similar decoration where possible, are suggested.

PETER H. T. SHORER, F.I.I.C.

2. THE CRUCIFIXION ON THE ALNMOUTH CROSS (pl. XVIII)

The cross from Alnmouth, which was found in July 1789 "near the ruins of the



THE ALNMOUTH CROSS See note 2
(*Photograph: University Library, Newcastle upon Tyne*)

old church, commonly called Woden's church"³ is now in the University Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne (no. 1958.8.N), on permanent loan from the Duke of Northumberland. For many years it formed part of the collection at Alnwick Castle. It is in two pieces which, cemented together, measure *c.* 89 cm in height, *c.* 44.1 decreasing to 36.2 cm in width and *c.* 19 decreasing to 15.5 cm in depth. It is incomplete as is clear from the Crucifixion face, where part of another figure panel can be seen at the top, while the panel with the Crucifixion is also incomplete at the bottom. In addition some of the surviving panels are wholly or partly defaced. Three faces are decorated with panels of interlace and fret ornament, separated on the sides by plain panels. The stone has a lengthy bibliography, but most previous discussion has centred on the inscriptions which appear on both broad faces and one narrow face, though that on the border above the Crucifixion is illegible.⁴ A tenth-century date has been assigned to the cross by most writers in this century, on the basis of the inscriptions and the interlace patterns.⁵

The Crucifixion has never been seriously analysed since Haigh⁶ and Stephens⁷ in the last century considered it supported an eighth-century date for the cross. Collingwood only remarks that Christ is not draped in a long garment "as in previous stones", but does not otherwise discuss it.⁸ Clearly, it would be of interest to discover whether the Crucifixion is of an early type, which might imply regional conservatism or even the possibility of a somewhat earlier date for the cross, or whether it has any features which support the tenth-century dating.

The scene shows Christ, nimbed, His body straight and head erect, His arms extended rigidly, raised high on a tall cross with a decorated shaft. His feet rest, side by side, on a *suppedaneum*. On either side by His head are symbols of the sun and moon. It is very difficult now to say which, as the surrounding circle is no longer complete on either side and the centres have been defaced: however, the remains do suggest that they were originally personified as faces. Beneath each arm of the cross are two figures, one above the other. The upper pair have been much damaged by the breaking of the stone, and are consequently somewhat enigmatic. Their short tunics suggest male figures. The feet of the one on Christ's left are turned away from the cross, those of the figure on His right turn towards it. Nineteenth-century commentators usually describe them as the two thieves,⁹ and this is certainly possible, since the break in the stone would have effectively destroyed all traces of their crosses. The repentant thief is shown in a number of miniature and ivory representations on Christ's right and turned towards the cross, while the unrepentant thief is

³ J. Brand, "Appendix", 17 June 1790, *Archaeologia* X (1792), 472.

⁴ See E. Okasha, *A Hand-list of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (1971), 47-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47-8; W. G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (1927), 101; T. D. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art* (1949), 57-8, places it among his "late figured crosses".

⁶ D. H. Haigh, "The Saxon Cross at Bewcastle", *AA*² I (1857), 173-4.

⁷ G. Stephens, *Handbook of the Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (London, Edinburgh, Copenhagen, 1884), 256.

⁸ Collingwood, *op. cit.*, 62.

⁹ They are so identified by Haigh and Stephens in the works cited, and also by E. Bateson (ed.), *History of Northumberland II* (1895), 489-90.

on His left and turned away.¹⁰ There are, however, two other possibilities: first that the figures are a duplication of the soldier theme, and secondly that they are a misunderstanding of the symbolic figures Ecclesia and Synagogue who, though always represented as long-robed females have otherwise as their chief characteristic that one faces the cross, while the other, Synagogue, stands on Christ's left and faces away from Him. This possibility will be considered again in relation to the layout of the scene.

The other pair beneath the cross are the spear-bearer on Christ's right, his body half turned to the cross, his head tilted back and turned to the spectator and his spear raised to Christ's side, and the sponge- or cup-bearer on Christ's left, much more defaced, but clearly a companion figure.

A number of features make this representation different from other examples in Northumbria, whether early or late. One is the tall cross, with its shaft decorated below the *suppedaneum*, on which Christ stands high above the subsidiary figures. This feature can only be paralleled in pre-Conquest sculpture by the tenth-century panel from Romsey in Hampshire.¹¹ Secondly, there is the layout, with four figures below the cross arms, one above the head of the other. Again, the Romsey panel is the only pre-Conquest parallel. More than two figures beneath the cross is in itself a rarity in Anglo-Saxon sculpture: apart from Romsey there are only three examples, one at Sandbach in Cheshire, one at Newent in Gloucestershire, and possibly one, and that laid out in a very different fashion, at St. Andrew Auckland, Co. Durham. Of these three, only that at Sandbach has any other features in common with the Alnmouth Crucifixion. The spear-bearer and the sponge-bearer are a frequent motif in Northumbrian crucifixion scenes, but they are not all of one type: e.g. the grotesque figures on a shaft from Aycliffe, Co. Durham,¹² must have had a different model, and the representation of one of these figures on a fragment from Bothal, Northumberland, is different again.¹³

The inescapable conclusion is that the iconography in the Alnmouth crucifixion is not a regional type. Neither is the positioning of the Crucifixion on the shaft a sure indication of date: it certainly appears earlier there than on the cross-head, as for example, at Hexham in Northumberland and St. Andrew Auckland in Co. Durham, but it is also found on the shaft long after the cross-head type had appeared, at e.g. Aycliffe, Co. Durham, and on an otherwise very differently organized cross at Gosforth, Cumberland.

It was suggested more than forty years ago by Reil that the spear- and the sponge-bearer figures from Alnmouth are of the type found in the Metz school of ivory carving.¹⁴ When this suggestion is followed up, a number of interesting comparisons

¹⁰ This feature is found, for example, in the Egbert Gospels, Trier Codex 24 fol. 83v. There was certainly such a tradition, but in many cases both the crucified thieves are shown with heads turned towards the cross.

¹¹ Kendrick, *op. cit.*, pl. XI, fig. 3. The shaft of the cross here is worn but traces of carved decoration survive on it.

¹² Collingwood, *op. cit.*, fig. 97.

¹³ E. Coatsworth, "Two representations of the Crucifixion on late pre-Conquest carved stones from Bothal, Northumberland", *AA¹* I (1973), 234-6, pl. XXXII.

¹⁴ F. Reil, *Christus am Kreuz* (Leipzig, 1930), 113, footnote.

emerge. Features of the Metz type of crucifixion are not limited to the stance of these two figures. A large proportion of those ascribed to this school have all of the following distinguishing characteristics: a vertical layout with the four figures immediately below the cross-arms set out one above the other, the upper two being most commonly Ecclesia and Synagogue and the lower the spear- and sponge-bearers. Secondly, the latter pair are placed low, by or below the feet of Christ, are half turned, and have bearded, thrown-back heads. The spear and cane are held up vertically between them and the cross-shaft, instead of passing diagonally across their bodies, as is more usual. The personified sun and moon are present in all instances of this vertical layout, though of course this feature is equally characteristic of other schools. Finally the shaft of the cross below the *suppedaneum* is always elaborated, usually with a snake wound about it (? here transformed into interlaced), and in one instance is actually supported on a decorated pillar.¹⁵ The Metz ivories are, of course, with their additional scenes and symbolic figures, and their finer quality of carving, incomparably richer. Nevertheless, the number of similarities seems sufficiently large to warrant at least the suggestion that a model of the Metz type lies behind the Alnmouth carving, though in the case of the figures beneath the cross-arms it may have been not very well understood. None of the Metz ivories of this type is earlier than the late ninth century and this would confirm the tenth-century dating of the cross.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH

¹⁵ In the Städtisches Museum, Metz. See Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Karolingischen und Sächsischen Kaiser VII–XI Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1914), pl.

XXXII, no. 78. For other examples of the Metz type of crucifixion, see *ibid.*, nos. 83, 85, 86, 88, 89, 115.

