



FIG. 63

MEDIEVAL OBJECTS FROM VICTORIA CAVE, SETTLE, YORKSHIRE (p. 211 ff.).

Sc. $\frac{3}{4}$

A RUNE-STONE FROM VICTORIA CAVE, SETTLE, YORKSHIRE (PL. XXXII; FIG. 63)

While the extensive prehistoric and Romano-British occupation-debris from Victoria Cave is well known,²⁸ the fact that, as at some other caves,²⁹ sporadic occupation continued into the medieval period seems to have gone unnoticed. Late Saxon or early medieval occupation of Victoria Cave is marked by at least three objects (PL. XXXII, A; FIG. 63): a small disc-headed silver pin engraved with a quadripartite design—one

²⁸ The bulk of this material now forms part of the private collection of Mr. Thomas Lord, of Castle Hill, Settle, by whose kind permission the present objects are published.

²⁹ Material from near-by Attermire Cave in the same collection includes later Saxon and medieval bronze belt-fittings, and a coin-sequence covering the 8th and 9th centuries. No doubt such scant remains are often those of the kind of religious recluse who throughout this period 'drawn hem to disert and drye much peyne'; at Cratcliff Cave (Derbys.) the early medieval wall-crucifixion was probably the work of such a recluse (cf. R. M. Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London, 1914), pp. 32-48).

part of a suite—of a kind normally ascribed to the 9th century, but which probably had a long history;³⁰ a double-cut bone comb of familiar late Saxon or Viking type; and a fragmentary rune-stone.

This last is worth attention, since it adds one more to the small number of known inscriptions in Scandinavian runes from the area of Norse settlement in NW. England—all of them from the later 11th or 12th centuries, and all from conventional ecclesiastical contexts at Bridekirk, Carlisle, and Dearham (Cumb.) and Conishead and Pennington (Lancs.).³¹

The Settle stone (PL. XXXII, A) is a thin slab of calcareous mudstone of a kind common near Victoria Cave. In 1937 the fragment was brought to light from behind the Victoria Cave display cabinet, where it was found together with original manuscript accounts of the excavation. It is almost certainly that referred to in the daily journal of Joseph Jackson, who supervised the excavation on behalf of the Settle Cave Exploration Committee:

‘Saturday, April 23rd, 1870. Three men at work all day at the Cave found a flat stone (slate) with grooves scored upon it in various directions, under datum line 12 inches deep in cave earth.’

Microscopic examination of mud remaining in surface irregularities shows it to be a wash of cave earth mineralogically identical with samples taken from Victoria Cave. The trimmed straight edge on the right is one side of the slab. But as it is only some 8 by 9 cm. with broken edges on three sides, the slab is clearly incomplete. There is no indication of its original size or of the length of the original inscription, nor can we say whether the line-end represents a word-end or division. The group *-mr*, however, is a characteristic terminal phoneme of many Old Norse substantives, adjectives and personal names.

Although brief and carelessly carved, it is clear that the futhork used is not Anglo-Saxon but corresponds with that form which, deriving ultimately from the earlier Norse ‘Jær-type’, was used, although with considerable variation of usage in detail, for most Viking inscriptions in insular contexts. Curiously, however, the inscription finds its most exact parallel, not among any of the rune-stones from Lancashire and Cumberland (admittedly a small group) nor among the more extensive series of largely 10th-century inscribed stones from the Isle of Man, but in the series of inscriptions at Maeshowe, Orkney, and in particular on stone XI, now in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh,³² where exactly the same form of runes occurs in the same word—the name Óframr—in the sentence *reist runar þær oframr sihurþarsonr*, ‘Óframr Sigurdson cut these runes’. Only five fragments of the inscription survive, lightly scratched on thin pieces of a laminated siliceous siltstone.³³ PL. XXXII, B, shows the fragments superimposed on an enlargement from Farrer’s engraving.³⁴ The stone bearing

³⁰ Cf. R. Cramp, ‘An Anglo-Saxon pin from Birdoswald’, *Trans. Cumb. and Westm. Antiq. and Archaeol. Soc.*, n.s. LXIV (1964), 90–3. The Lord collection contains a further unpublished example from Great Close (West Riding, Yorks.) which should be added to Miss Cramp’s list.

³¹ Bibliographical details are available in H. Marquardt, *Bibliographie der Runeninschriften nach Fundorten*, I, *Die Runeninschriften der Britischen Inseln* (Göttingen, 1961). The Settle inscription was mentioned briefly by A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, VII (English Place-Name Soc., xxxvi, 1958–9), 62, note 3. For this reference and other advice I am indebted to Dr. R. I. Page.

³² Accession no. 1B 259. It is not clear when this came to the museum, but in all probability it was acquired early, through the offices of James Farrer (cf. *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, V (1862–3), 9, and XIV (1879–80), 4). It seems to have been taken from Maeshowe sometime between 1861 and 1865 (cf. E. Charlton, ‘The Orkney runes’, *Archaeol. Aeliana*, n.s. VI (1865), 134).

³³ Identified from samples kindly supplied by Mr. N. Robertson. For this and other geological advice I am indebted to Dr. G. D. Nicholls.

³⁴ J. Farrer, *Notice of Runic Inscriptions discovered during Recent Excavations in the Orkneys* (Edinburgh, 1862), pp. 30–1, pl. ix (11). Cf. Bruce Dickins, ‘Fragments of Maeshowe XI in the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities’, *Proc. Orkney Antiq. Soc.*, II (1924), 59–60.

the cross that preceded *ræist* remains *in situ* at Maeshowe. The inscription might be transliterated thus:³⁵

+
 + ræistrunarþæs +
 +
 + oframrsihurþarsonr +
 +

In fact, of the name, all but parts of the last characters are missing, and we are therefore dependent on Farrer's engraving and an independent drawing made by George Petrie.³⁶

Both Settle and Maeshowe stones open the name with a bind-rune of \mathfrak{A} and \mathfrak{V} . At Maeshowe, as in the more northerly inscriptions in general, \mathfrak{A} invariably has the value *ó*. It is used thus too in inscriptions from Carlisle and Conishead. In the Manx series this form occurs only once—in the distinctive futhork used on Maughold IV,³⁷ where it must be ascribed the earlier Old Norse value, the nasalized \mathfrak{A} . (This might simply represent a reversal of the usual Manx form \mathfrak{B} , an inversion not in this instance being confusable with the usual Manx b-rune.) The most striking link, however, occurs in the fourth character of the Settle stone, the *maðr*-rune, the exact form of which, with the doubled right-hand stroke, otherwise occurs only on Maeshowe XI, and is almost certainly to be regarded as idiosyncratic to this rune-master.³⁸ The Settle form seems to be identical in so small a detail as the careless manner in which the left-hand stroke crosses the upright. Although the uppermost part of the characters is missing, it is *a priori* unlikely that this sequence should be interpreted as a bind-rune of *a* and *l* followed by *f*³⁹ or by the kind of 'slashed' g-rune found in some Swedish contexts.⁴⁰ In only one epigraphic detail, i.e. in the form used to denote the vowel *a*, do the two inscriptions apparently differ. The Maeshowe inscriptions, the great majority of the Manx ones, and the Bridekirk and Carlisle stones all seem to use the older Norse form \mathfrak{A} , whereas the Settle stone, in common with the unusual Maughold IV and Michael III inscriptions, the Pennington tympanum and other mainland inscriptions like that on the Harrogate 'hog-back',⁴¹ seems to employ the Common Danish 'crossed' form \mathfrak{A} . In Maeshowe usage such a practice would court confusion with the *æ*-rune, and probably, therefore, as in the case of the *maðr*-rune, this crossing of the upright on the Settle stone should be dismissed as erroneous.

However, even allowing for such a possible discrepancy, it is clearly remarkable that such an unusual name, written in so singular a manner, should occur twice in different parts of the country. The Settle stone has not been extensively cleaned and so rewards close physical study. Microscopic examination shows that the grooves of the inscription are filled with powdered mudstone and cut *across* surface irregularities containing cave-earth wash without themselves containing any. Both the trimmed and fractured edges contain cave-earth. Supposing that the inscription was not conceived as a fragment, these facts would be commensurate with a piece of stone having been taken up from the floor of the cave, casually inscribed—no doubt with a sharp edge of

³⁵ Characters now completely visible are represented by bold-faced type, those only partially visible by Roman type, and those now missing by italics. This reading differs from that given by Dickens, *loc. cit.* in note 34, both in the disposition of the fragments and in the extent of runes recognized.

³⁶ Society of Antiquaries of Scotland MS. iv, f. 6. Neither Petrie nor Farrer provide exact copies of the originals, but both are clearly important in this instance. The manner in which they were arrived at is described by J. M. Mitchell, *Mesehowe* (Edinburgh, 1863), pp. vii-viii.

³⁷ P. M. C. Kermode, 'The Hedin cross, Maughold, Isle of Man', *Saga Book*, ix (1925), 333-42.

³⁸ But cf. inscription XVIII: M. Olsen, *Tre orkneske runeindskrifter: Maeshowe XXII, XVIII og XVI* (Christiania, 1903), p. 26.

³⁹ *-alfr* is common enough as a personal name element but would make only poor sense in the total context of the Maeshowe XI inscription.

⁴⁰ Cf. H. Arntz, *Handbuch der Runenkunde* (2 ed., Halle/Saale, 1944), pp. 110-11.

⁴¹ W. J. Kaye, 'An inscription in Scandinavian runes found near Harrogate', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. London*, 2 ser., xix (1902-3), 55.

the same material—and soon dropped again. Any wash that might then have gathered in the grooves of the inscription would have been less compact because of the thickness of powdered mudstone beneath, and might well have disappeared at the first cursory cleaning of the surface. There seems no good reason, therefore, to suspect the face value of Jackson's statement. But analysis cannot show the date at which this deposition took place.

Coincidentally, James Farrer, who had discovered the Maeshowe runes in 1861, was a resident at Ingleton, near Settle, and had interested himself in excavations in other Craven caves (most notably Dowkergate and Foxholes) at about this time. Inevitably therefore one is led to speculate whether the stone might have been introduced into Victoria Cave in relatively recent times. The similarity, not only of the form of the runes used and the extent to which they are complete, but also of the kind of slab on which they are cut, makes it not inconceivable that the Settle piece represents the results of an attempt to restore the fragmentary Maeshowe inscription. But this seems unlikely; it would not replace just those parts that are missing. It does not simply break off but finishes on a straight edge at the end of a lexically meaningful unit with no attempt to begin what should have been the next word; and yet the doubled right-hand stroke of the *maðr*-runes is present on both stones. There are significant discrepancies in detail between the Settle stone and both Farrer's engraving and Petrie's drawing of Maeshowe XI. On the Settle stone the runes are cut more deeply and on a rather smaller scale.

A further possibility remains. Runes have been, of course, notoriously vulnerable to scholarly hoaxes, and it is always possible that, like the Barnspike and Hazel Gill Crag inscriptions from Cumberland,⁴² the Settle inscription is a forgery. The interpretation of the Maeshowe runes had been the subject of controversy during the 1860s and the Settle inscription might have been intended to support some particular philological faction, although it is difficult to imagine quite what this was. The Barnspike and Hazel Gill Crag inscriptions are both very lengthy, and claim to contain historical substance. The Settle stone would be a vastly more sophisticated forgery than either of these, and it would be curious if the scholarly man who took such pains to copy the *maðr*-runes so exactly should have bungled the *ár*-runes. This solution then seems equally improbable.

With this caveat in mind we might take the evidence at its face value. In all probability the Settle and Maeshowe XI inscriptions were made by one hand—that of that Óframr Sigurdson who wrote his name on the wall of the robbed prehistoric burial-mound in the Orkneys. But whether he was one of Rognvald's *Iorsalafarar* or one of Hakon's treasure-hunting comrades is uncertain. The Maeshowe inscriptions do not necessarily all belong to one date. Different groups of the inscriptions are usually ascribed to various visits to the monument in the middle of the 12th century. But the layout of inscription XI, powdered with seven crosses, differs from the remainder in various ways, and it may possibly belong, like the zoomorphic designs, to the very beginning of the 12th century.⁴³ The name Óframr is a singular one.⁴⁴ Presumably it originated as an adjectival nickname meaning something like 'modest, bashful' or, if divided *of-ramr*, 'too strong, powerful'. While probably not unique in the large Norse-speaking population of northern England,⁴⁵ it seems to be recorded only once elsewhere, as the name of a Lindsey landowner, partially dispossessed at the time of the Domesday inquest of 1086.⁴⁶ But biographical speculation, although tempting, is unlikely to prove fruitful.

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⁴² Cf. the report by C. Ferguson, *ibid.*, xviii (1899–1901), 88–91.

⁴³ Cf. Haakon Shetelig cited in Roy. Comm. Anc. Hist. Mon. (Scotland), *Twelfth Report*, II, *Inventory of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1946), p. 313.

⁴⁴ It is not mentioned by E. Björkman, *Nordische Personennamen in England in alt- und frühmittel-englischer Zeit* (Halle, 1910), or by A. Janzén, *Personnaene* (Nordisk Kultur, VII, Stockholm, 1947).

⁴⁵ Cf. E. Ekwall, 'How long did the Scandinavian language survive in Britain?' in *Grammatical Miscellany offered to Otto Jespersen* (London, 1930), p. 23 f.

⁴⁶ *Domesday Book* (Record Office, London, 1783), I, pp. 367, 371, *et passim*. The name occurs some dozen times, written Ófram, Offran or Offrā, but O. v. Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book* (Uppsala, 1937), p. 339, considers it a scribal error for OE. Osfram.