

A CELTIC RELIQUARY

FOUND IN A NORWEGIAN BURIAL-MOUND

BY

TH. PETERSEN

WITH 4 PLATES

DET KGL. NORSKE VIDENSKABERS SELSKABS SKRIFTER. 1907. NO. 8

AKTIETRYKKERIEET I TRONDHJEM
1907

It is a well-known fact that in Norwegian grave-finds especially in the Western and Northern coast districts of the country, antiquities are to be met with, which by the workmanship and style of the ornaments betray their undoubted Celtic origin. They generally consist of articles of highly-gilt bronze decorated in what is called the Irish style, peculiar to the Celtic area of the British Isles and characterized by its trumpet and spiral patterns, interlaced-work and zoomorphic designs, the latter certainly allied to, but not identical with those of the Scandinavian ornamentation. Of such Celtic antiquities a considerable number is already to be seen in the Norwegian museums, and from year to year the number of specimens increases. Most of these objects are mountings, whole or in fragments, some of which, by having a pin placed on the back, have evidently at a later time been transformed into brooches by their new Norwegian owners. A typical series is illustrated in O. Rygh's "Norske Oldsager", figs. 616—637. They are distinguished by great ornamental beauty, and some specimens are equal to the best products of Celtic art in the early centuries of Celtic Christianity. I may thus refer to the bronze bowl found at Jaatten, Jæderen, reproduced from Ab.¹⁾ 1891, fig. 12, by J. Romilly Allen in "The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland", p. LXXVI, fig. 10, and the penannular brooch from Snaasen illustrated in J. Anderson's "Scotland in Early Christian Times (2nd ser.)" fig. 23 from R. 697, together with several of the mountings

¹⁾ Abbreviations:

Ab. = Aarsberetning fra Foreningen til norske Fortidsmindesmerkens Bevaring.

R. = O. Rygh, *Norske Oldsager*. Chra. 1885.

figured by O. Rygh l. c. all bearing witness to the highly developed artistic taste of the Celts and an admirable technical skill hardly surpassed by that of our own times. A Celtic origin must also be attributed to the bronze bowls mentioned by I. Undset in "Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie" 1889, pp. 292 ff., characterized by three enamelled mountings and zoomorphic handles, the upper part of which is like a hook, terminating in a beast's head, which projects inwards over the rim of the bowl. Mountings of the same sort have been found in the British Isles, and two examples from Barlaston, Staffordshire, and Chesterton-on-Foss-way, Warwickshire, are figured and described by J. Romilly Allen in his "Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times", Lond. 1904, pp. 166 f.¹⁾ Other enamelled objects in Norwegian finds may also be of the same origin.²⁾

All these finds of Celtic antiquities must in general be assigned to an early part of the Viking age and afford a significant archæological illustration of the intercourse between the Celtic area of the British Isles and Norway during this period.

Lately a new find of this kind has been dug up in Norway, the most remarkable one, I think, that up to the present is known. It is a Celtic reliquary found in the autumn of 1906 in a large grave-mound at Melhus in the parish of Overhallen, in Namdalen Valley, about 25 kilometres east of the town of Namsos. The shrine forms part of the burial equipment of a grave, the single objects of which have been brought to light at various times by the farmer and sent to the Museum of the Royal Society of Sciences at Trondhjem. An opportunity of examining the remains of the mound by an excavation on the part of the Museum did not present itself until the summer of 1907, when the investigation was undertaken by the author. At this investigation I succeeded in ascertaining the nature of the burial, but of the contents of the grave next to nothing was left, as also naturally might be supposed.

1) See also J. Romilly Allen, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Lond. 1903, pp. LXXV f.

2) I. Undset l. c. p. 308.

As previously mentioned the objects were presented to the Museum at different times, No's 1—9 in the enumeration below being found in 1902, the rest five years later. Though the objects found in 1902 have already been described by Mr. K. Rygh in the Proceedings of the Royal Society for that year, No. 6, pp. 3—6, and the rest will be treated by the same author in the list of additions to the Museum for 1907, I think, however, that a description of the find published in a collected form will be more profitable for archæologists, some of the antiquities being of a peculiar interest. As the objects have been brought to light successively and in a haphazard manner, I have not been able to point out their exact place in the grave. In the following publication of the find I therefore prefer first to describe the antiquities in the same order in which they have been found, as far as I have been able to make it out; then I shall state the results of the excavation undertaken by the Museum.

The find contains the following objects:

1.¹⁾ An iron spear-head with a broad, flat blade showing Damascene work with impressed elliptical figures on the socket (comp. R. 517). The total length is now 33 cm., the socket being a little incomplete; the blade reaching a breadth of 5 cm.

2. A pair of scissors of the same shape as R. 442, one blade being broken in the middle, the other nearly complete. The length about 28 cm.

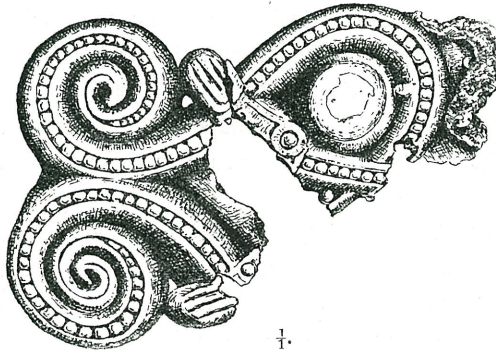
3. A bronze fibula of the type R. 639, the length not less than 24 cm. The specimen is exceptionally well preserved, the plates covering the open spaces and filled with Cloisonné Enamel as well as most of the hoods or bosses placed upon them, being still extant. The sloping surfaces of the bow, and partly also the side surfaces of the brooch are richly ornamented with zoomorphic designs. A detailed description is, however, superfluous, the photographic reproductions indicating the form of the brooch as well as the details of the ornaments. The figures 5—6 show the brooch in reduced size and without the circular

1) In describing No's 1—9, I partially verbatim follow Mr. K. Rygh l. c.

piece originally placed upon the top of the bow, fig. 7 the circular piece, and figs. 8—10 the zoomorphic designs on the sloping surfaces of the bow and the upper terminal face, the latter four figures in actual size. Twisted bronze wires surround the panels on both sides of the bow.

4—5. Two incomplete bowl-shaped brooches of bronze of the early form R. 643 with engraved ornaments. Photographic reproductions of the fragments are given figs. 11—12. The decoration on the upper side consists of an interlaced pattern perhaps of zoomorphic origin; the lines are not toothed as on the type-specimen. As is usually the case with brooches of this early form, the hinge and the catch-plate of the pin have been attached to a metal band placed upon the back and tending to strengthen the thin body of the brooch. This band is here of bronze and not as is usually the case of iron.

6. Two ornamented bronze fragments which seem to be portions of one object as shown in the figure.¹⁾ This object



was originally perhaps a mounting, but considerable remains of iron rust on the back, as after a pin, indicate, however, that we have to do with a brooch, though it is strange to find four brooches in graves dating from this time, the usual number being three, viz. one

fibula and two bowl-shaped brooches, or only two bowl shaped ones. To the back are also fixed small remains of untanned skin. A circular projecting panel on the decorated side is filled with red enamel.

1) With the kind permission of the author reproduced from K. Rygh, Videnskabselskabets Oldsagsamling. Tilvækst i 1902 af Sager ældre end Reformationen. Proceedings of the Roy. Norw. Society of Sciences 1902, No. 6, p. 5.

7. 137 beads, one of which is formed of silver wire, the others being of glass. Some of them are fixed together, the longest ones consisting of as many as seven links. The most varying forms are represented, some of the beads being spherical, others again flattened, barrel-formed and cylindrical. The colours are white, black, green, blue, red and violet in different shades. There are also some of mosaic and a few with inlaid colours in different patterns.

8. An iron implement in the form of a bar, 48 cm. long. Use uncertain.

9. A slate whetstone, 30 cm. long, and fragments of two similar ones.

10. A Celtic reliquary given in actual size figs. 3—4. It is constructed in the shape of a small house with a high ridged roof having hipped ends and is hollowed out of two solid pieces of yew-wood.¹⁾ The walls and roof have been covered with thin plates of bronze without ornaments. On the front these are comparatively well preserved, and here three circular medallions with raised borders are to be seen. Of the round plaques which once filled out the panels only the upper one now remains, this being of silver and decorated with chased Celtic spiral or trumpet designs. Along the corners of the shrine have been fixed tubular curved bronze mountings which served also as a frame-work to keep in position the bronze plates that covered the wood. In both ends of the mounting covering the ridge have been inserted projecting gable-heads, rounded and decorated, of which only one remains.²⁾ To one of the ends is attached a solid bronze mounting to which is hinged a bar terminating in a ring, both decorated on the face with enamel. A similar one has also been placed upon the opposite end, but has now disappeared. To these bars have been attached the ends of a strap for suspending the shrine round the neck of its "hereditary keeper". To the right of the remaining mounting

1) For the determination of the wood I am indebted to Mr. M. Foslie, Keeper of the Botanical Collection of the Museum at Trondhjem.

2) By a mistake, the piece, being found separately, has been photographed with the head pointing downwards instead of upwards.

on the gable, a projecting, hinged bronze plate is to be seen forming the handle of a thin bronze stick which lies horizontally along the front wall and runs into a small loop attached to the cover; on moving this stick out or in the shrine can be opened or shut. The photographic reproductions, to which I refer, will, however, give the best idea of the appearance and construction of this interesting antiquity.

The finder supposed that the reliquary had been enclosed in a larger wooden box, some fragments¹⁾ of which were found quite close to the shrine. An impressed stamp of a medallion on one of the wooden pieces confirms this view.

11. A somewhat large fragment, 25×16 cm., of a whalebone plate like R. 449.²⁾ The upper edge seems to have been incised in a similar manner to that of the type-specimen, and on the face are cut some double ring ornaments.

12. A fragment, 20 cm. long, of a weaver's reed of whalebone.

13. A very short one-edged iron sword with remains of a wooden sheath. The blade has scarcely been more than about 25 cm. long; the width of the hilt about 4 cm. The object might almost be called a long knife.

14. A portion of a two-edged iron sword with relics of a wooden sheath. Of the hilts only the lower one is extant, being straight and about 9 cm. long.

15. An iron axe-head about 18 cm. long and 9 cm. broad over the edge. The specimen is beard-shaped, the expansion of the lower part of the blade towards the edge less developed than in the type R. 559.

16. An exceptionally slender iron shield-boss, 11 cm. high, 9 cm. in diam. over the opening, the border at the base 2 cm. wide. The specimen may be compared with those from Rheinhessen, and Wiltshire, England, (especially the former one but

1) The wood is pronounced by Mr. Foslie to be fir.

2) See K. Rygh in the Proceedings of the Roy. Soc. at Trondhjem 1899, No. 9, pp. 12 ff. and an account by the author in Ab. 1905, pp. 376 ff.

without projection of the pointed end,) illustrated by B. Salin in "Die altgermanische Thierornamentik" figs. 235 and 236.

17. A handle-formed iron implement. Use unknown.

18. A fragment of a spindle-whorl of burnt clay, 3·2 cm. in diam. Its form appears to have been a flat base and the upper side slightly curved. This and No. 19 were found by the author while examining the very fine sand, which had glided down from the grave in the upper part of the mound and had not yet been removed by the farmer.

19. Small fragments of some mostly indeterminable iron objects and bindings, among which a little ring, 3 cm. in diam., made of thin twisted bars and perhaps forming part of a bridle.

20. A number of clinch-nails of different size, most of which were found *in situ* by the author.

As mentioned above the objects just described were found in a large mound situated close to the eastern side of the road from Namsos and about 100 metres north of the farm. On my arrival at the spot only the northern part of the mound was still extant, being as seen in the photographs figs. 1—2 grown over with thick copsewood. Of the southern part only the outskirts could be traced. The mound was found to have measured originally 22 m. in diameter and was constructed wholly of very fine sand. The exact height was difficult to determine, the mound being located on the highest point of a low natural ridge extending north and south parallel with the road and the river below. The distance between the summit and the natural surface of the ground seemed to be 2 m.; measured from the base at the southern end, the height was 2·9 m., and the level of the opposite end lay about 0·4 m. higher. Owing to the sloping nature of the ground the elevation therefore appeared greater viewed from the south side than it did from the north. The mound was rather flat-topped and close to the north of the centre there was a deep circular hollow formed, no doubt, by a treasure-seeker, without, however, touching the grave.

The finder of the objects presented to the Museum had stated

that they were all found in the upper part of the mound, some of them only 3 cm. below the surface. The spear-head was first discovered "some metres" south of the middle, then the other antiquities at the same height and in a straight line inwards to about 1 m. from the centre. The examination undertaken by the author confirms the correctness of this observation. By this was disclosed that a boat had been buried in the upper part of the mound and so near the surface that only the turf and a thin layer of earth covered the gunwale. Of the boat which had been placed in a direction parallel with the river and the road, i. e. north and south, the wood was, of course, quite decayed, and only the iron nails remained. By an exact observation of their place two metres of a boat-end could be traced, and the boat appeared to have been composed of four boards at each side, each board being about two dm. broad; judging from the construction of the remains the total length may have been about 9 m.¹⁾ This boat has thus been a relatively large one, most of the burial vessels discovered in the neighbourhood by regular excavations in the course of the last years as a rule not having a greater length than 6—7 m. Rows of nails belonging to a boat of a corresponding size, 9 m. long, were found in the barrow No. 29 at Stor-Skomo.²⁾ This boat too was situated in the upper part of the mound; a layer of coal, among which were scattered some burnt bones, being discovered at a lower level and partially below the boat itself, seems to show that the boat-grave has been a secondary one, a circumstance, which explains the elevated site of the boat. The same may also possibly have been the case in the Melhus-mound. For in my examination of the remains of this mound I have noticed a layer of dark mould mixed with charcoal³⁾, up to 0·18 m. in thickness, at the bottom and partially just below the boat from

1) A section is seen in the photograph fig. 2. The horizontal distance between the gunwales is here 1·6 m., and the height from the keel to the level of the upper nail-row 0·56 m.

2) Ab. 1905, 362 f. The distance between the Melhus-mound and the boat-graves at Stor-Skomo is not greater than about 2 km.

3) Mr. Foslie has pronounced a sample to be birch.

about 8 m. south of the centre with a breadth and length of up to 2 m. In this layer two small pieces of burnt bones were found. It is not impossible that we have here to do with a separate grave. Still the question is difficult to decide, the bone-ends being quite indeterminable and the layer containing no remains of grave-goods. I am inclined to think that the coals and bone-pieces in this case are only remains from the funeral meal. The earth below the layer showing no traces of the action of fire, the coals must have been collected from another place and then scattered over a part of the natural surface of the ground before the building of the mound.

In the remaining part of the boat nothing was found but a great boulder. This stone may probably have served as an anchor, and in that case the boat-end in question may have been the prow.

The mound seems, however, to have contained a second grave, which must in this case be of later date than the unburnt boat-grave. Immediately above the boat-end and close below the turf there was a layer of charcoal, up to 0.5 dm. in thickness and mingled with small pieces of burnt bones and some burnt nails and rivets, at the time of the examination covering an area of about 6 m.², the southern edge being broken off as seen in the photograph. One metre west of the boat the layer was adjacent to a stone flooring, 1.5 × 0.8 m., consisting of boulders and small flags, all being sooty and showing traces of having been exposed to the action of fire. Above and between the stones were found many pieces of coal and two burnt clinch-nails, and the earth beneath was quite scorched. This stone flooring must evidently have been a fire-place. Close to the exterior edge of the pavement and at the same level were found some small pieces of burnt bones mingled with coal. It thus seems that we have here to do with the remains of a second boat which has once been burnt and probably on the very summit of the mound.

We may thus briefly summarize the results of the examination undertaken on the spot. A boat has been buried in the mound. From the information given by the farmer, the reliability

of which is beyond doubt, it is moreover evident that all the antiquities found have been deposited in this boat. The objects showing no traces of the action of fire, and no burnt bones having been found in the boat, it must also be assumed that we have to do with unburnt burial. The features of this grave thus closely correspond with the series of unburnt boat-graves which systematic excavations during the last years have brought to light in this district, most of which may be attributed to an early stage of the Viking age, some of them, perhaps, even to the preceding period.

On revising the list of the antiquities enumerated above, it is evident that we have here to deal with a double-grave, some of the objects exclusively belonging to the equipment of a man, others again to that of a woman. To the first must be attributed the two swords, the axe-head, the shield-boss and probably also the spear-head and the whet-stone, while the woman has been equipped with the brooches, the beads, the scissors, the spindle-whorl and weaver's reed and undoubtedly also the whalebone plate and the reliquary.¹⁾ Two persons have thus evidently been buried in this boat, a man and a woman; from the rich furniture of the latter it may also be concluded that she was the man's legitimate wife. Has this woman voluntarily accompanied her husband in death? Some passages in the old Northern literature, taken together with archæological observations²⁾, seem to show that this custom was not unknown in Scandinavia during the Pagan times. The matter is, however, very difficult to prove archæologically and quite impossible, when the corpses, as is here the case, are deposited unburnt and the skeletons entirely decayed; from the grave-articles there can naturally be deduced only an approximate date for the burial, and we must always take into account the possibility of the grave being opened on the

1) Comp. the shrine mentioned p. 15 below.

2) K. Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, Berlin 1856, p. 477. O. Almgren, *Vikingatidens grafskick i verkligheten och i den fornordiska litteraturen*, p. 323 f. H. Schetelig, *Ship burials* (repr. fr. the *Saga Book of the Viking Club*, Jan. 1906), pp. 34 f.

death of the remaining partner of the marriage in order to receive his or her body. With regard to this grave both the equipment of the woman and that of the man indicate an early part of the Viking age, and do not disprove the possibility of the two persons having been buried at the same time; but still nothing can be positively proved on this subject, as far as I am able to see.

From the order in which the single objects are found it may be concluded that the woman has been placed near the middle of the boat, with the face looking towards the north (the prow?), and the man a little nearer the remaining boat-end. The spear-head has originally been attached to a long shaft, and that may have been the cause, why this object was first found, lying more towards the south and apart from the other articles belonging to the furniture of the man.

In this comparatively rich and in several respects very important grave-find, the reliquary naturally forms the most remarkable part, and it may therefore be of interest to compare this example with the other ones of its kind which are known still to exist.

As far as I have been able to find, only four reliquaries belonging to the same type¹⁾ as that from Melhus, characterized by having the shape of a small house with ridged roof and hipped ends²⁾, have up to the present been known. The most remarkable example is doubtless the shrine preserved at Monymusk House, Aberdeenshire. It has often been mentioned in the English archæological literature, in greatest detail by Dr. J. Anderson in his "Scotland in Early Christian Times", (first series), pp. 247 ff.; another description with illustration is later given by the same author in J. Romilly Allen, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Lond. 1903, p. LXXIX. This reliquary consists of an

1) Respecting the different types of reliquaries I refer to the description given by the late Mr. J. Romilly Allen in his excellent work "Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times", Lond. 1904, p. 210.

2) With regard to the origin of the form which recalls the ancient Celtic oratories or the representation of the Temple of Jerusalem in the Book of Kells (fig. 91) see J. Anderson, "Scotland in Early Christian Times", (first series), p. 246.

inner wooden box of the same form and size as the Melhus-shrine. The walls and roof are covered with thin plates of silver enclosed in a frame-work of curved bronze mountings. On the front the plates are decorated with a pattern of interlaced zoomorphic designs in the later Irish style. Here we also see the three raised medallions placed as on the Melhus-shrine. The ornamentation is somewhat different, these being decorated with a pattern of interlaced-work surrounding a jewelled centre. Besides there are three square panels decorated in the same manner, two on each side of the upper medallion and the third between the two lower ones. From the ends of the ridge are projecting gable-heads of the same form as on the Melhus shrine, decorated, however, in a style corresponding with that of the medallions and square panels. At the ends it has hinged enamelled bars of bronze for the insertion of the ends of a strap.

As the Monymusk reliquary has been preserved from time immemorial at Monymusk it may be regarded as a Scottish ecclesiastical relic. The two following ones, however, were found in Ireland. Of these the best preserved was found in 1891 in Lough Erne between Enniskillen and Belleek and is at present in a private collection. It is described and illustrated by J. Romilly Allen, *Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times*, pp. 210 f. The shrine consists of an inner box of yew-wood of the same form as the Melhus-shrine. Thin bronze plates without ornaments cover walls and roof. On each side there are three circular medallions decorated with a jewelled centre and a pattern of interlaced-work filling the space round it. Curved bronze mountings cover the corners; a metal band decorated with an interlaced pattern conceals the joint between the eaves of the roof and the sides. Horizontally upon the ridge is a solid bronze bar placed on edge, terminating in projecting gable-heads like those on the shrines mentioned above. Appliances for the insertion of a strap are hinged to the ends.

Somewhat more decayed is another shrine found in the Shannon and now preserved in the Museum at Edinburgh. It too consists of a box of wood of the same shape as the preceding ones, covered with bronze plates without ornaments. Instead of

the circular medallions there have been three square panels decorated with interlaced-work. The shrine is described and illustrated by J. Anderson, Scotland in *Early Christian Times*, (first series), p. 246.

Only the three shrines just described, belonging to this particular group of reliquaries, are at present known in the British Isles. The fourth one is preserved in the Copenhagen Museum, being according to the old catalogues of the Museum carried there from Norway.¹⁾ The shrine has a form and size similar to the preceding ones, the roof, however, being somewhat less hipped.²⁾ The covering bronze plates are on the face decorated with engraved interlaced patterns in the Celtic style. On the same side we see the three circular medallions, the space within the raised borders being filled with Celtic spiral designs recalling very much those on the Melhus-shrine. On the other side there are square panels with settings for glass and precious stones. The joints are partly covered with mountings, these, however, not being tubular, but flat and lying close to the wood. The projecting gable-heads have also a somewhat different form. A Runic inscription scratched on the bottom reads "Ranvaig owns this casket".³⁾ In the shrine are lying some scraps of silk-stuff and a couple of relics provided with labels of parchment reading: *De sta Lucia, de ligno crucis*. The date of the handwriting is rather indeterminable, probably the 14th century.⁴⁾ The history of this shrine seems thus in its broad features to have been as follows: Agreeing closely with those

1) J. J. A. Worsaae, *Nordiske Oldsager i det kgl. Museum i Kjøbenhavn*, Kbh. 1859, fig. 524. G. Stephens, *The old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England*, Vol. I, 476. I. Undset, *Norske Oldsager i fremmede Museer*, Kra. 1878, p. 63. J. Anderson, *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, (first series), p. 248.

2) This reliquary seems thus to represent a transition from the older, strongly hipped-roofed group to the younger which is characterized by vertical gables. Of the still existing specimens belonging to the older group it might therefore be taken to be the youngest one.

3) The runes belong to the peculiar group found in the Isle of Man, the Norwegian district Jæderen, Östergötland and Gotland. My friend Mr. Magnus Olsen has informed me that the inscription can hardly be older than A.D. 950.

4) According to the kind information of Dr. M. Mackeprang, Copenhagen.

known in the British Isles and being decorated in the peculiar Celtic style it must naturally originate in one of the Celtic parts of the British Isles. From the fact that it has been in the possession of a Norwegian woman, it may further be concluded that in the Viking age and probably in a later part of this period it has been carried to Norway as a Viking's spoil. After the introduction of Christianity into this country, the shrine, the destination of which has not been forgotten, is then transferred to a church and provided with new relics. In one of the centuries immediately after the Reformation it has then been sent to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities at Copenhagen¹⁾, and from here it was in the year 1845 transferred to the National Museum.

To these four can now be added a fifth, the newly-found shrine at Melhus. It agrees very closely with the others of the same group in the exterior form and partly also in the size, only in the details of the decoration we find some differences, due to the fact that the shrines cannot all be of the same age, and a difference in age must naturally find expression in the style and kind of decoration. Thus there is so striking a correspondence with regard to the construction and size of the Melhus-shrine compared with that preserved at Monymusk House, that I should be inclined to suggest some connection between them, the former possibly having been derived from Scotland; but the decorations show clearly, in my opinion, that the Monymusk-shrine must be of a later date. It lies outside the limits of this account to enter into a comparison of the relative ages of the different shrines, this being a matter for Celtic archæologists. I will, however, venture the opinion that the Melhus-shrine may be the oldest in this class of reliquaries. This may be concluded from the circumstance that

¹⁾ It is not possible exactly to determine, at what time this has taken place. With certainty the shrine cannot be traced back farther than to the inventory of 1737. I should, however, think that it is the same shrine, which is mentioned by O. J a c o b æ u s, *Museum Regium*, Havn. 1696, p. 63: "Cistae variae ex cupro inaurato pro reliquiis Sanctorum olim asservandis usitatae. *Harum una ex Norvagia allata est.*" Comp. I. U n d s e t l. c. p. 65.

the other shrines are decorated with interlaced work, and in the case of the Monymusk shrine also with zoomorphic designs, *motifs* belonging to later stages of the Celtic ornamentation, the period of Christian art from about A. D. 650. The Melhus-shrine on the contrary is quite destitute of these ornaments, but on the remaining circular medallion we see the old native Celtic spiral and trumpet pattern, the exterior surfaces of the shrine being beyond this quite undecorated. The simpleness of its construction and ancient character of the decoration give the shrine a stamp of antiquity, and if the total absence of later ornament *motifs* is not quite accidental, there should perhaps be good reason for assigning it a date not later than about A. D. 650.¹⁾

From a Norwegian archæological point of view, however, it would be of more interest to know, what time this shrine of Celtic origin was carried to Norway and then deposited in the burial-mound. It is a matter of course that this must have taken place after the beginning of the Viking age; for a reliquary cannot have been an object of peaceful trade, but must have been taken by men with sword in hand.

The archæological chronology of the Viking age is still very uncertain, detailed researches of the antiquities belonging to this period not yet being made. The form and ornamentation of the brooches show, however, that the find with certainty must be referred to an early stage of this period. The youngest of these brooches is doubtless the large and richly decorated fibula illustrated figs. 5—6, and a determination of the age of this object will also give us the earliest date which can be assigned to the grave.

The fibula belongs to a group of brooches which are in several respects very interesting. Referring the reader to the important contributions illustrating the origin and development of this brooch-family given by the Swedish archæologists,²⁾ I shall only mention

1) J. Romilly Allen, *Celtic Art in Pagan and Christian Times*, pp. 164 ff

2) B. Salin, *Die altgermanische Thierornamentik*, Stockh. 1904, pp. 64—68 and K. Stjerna, *Bidrag till Bornholms befolkningshistoria under jernalderen* (*Antikv. tidskrift för Sverige* del 18, nr. 1), pp. 161 ff. *Comp. I. Undset* in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 1889, p. 313. The

that the type chronologically embraces rather a long space of time. The older forms, a specimen of which found at Stor-Skomo is figured Ab. 1905, p. 368 (reproduced by G. Gustafson in "Norges Oldtid" fig. 391), seem to appear already in the period before the Viking age; they are successively increasing in size, till they become at last so large that they must have been quite unpractical in use. At this stage of development they disappear in Norway rather suddenly, leaving no traces. Judging from the style of decoration and the fact that, with only one exception¹⁾, they are not found together with bowl-formed brooches younger than R. 647²⁾ and 648, the disappearance must have taken place in the course of the first half of the 9th century, probably as early as the beginning of the century. With regard to the Melhus-brooch figured here in a somewhat reduced size it will easily be seen that we have to do with a specimen in the last stage of development. The fibula has reached a maximum size (the longest specimen hitherto found, as far as I know of), while of the birds'-heads, rudimentary remains of which are still seen at the foot of the Vikestad-brooch R. 638, there are no traces here. The size and exterior form seem thus to refer the brooch to the time about A. D. 800. The style of the decoration indicates, however, that the making of the brooch may be dated rather before than after this point of time, the zoomorphic designs showing the characteristics of the style prevailing during the latter half of the 8th century.³⁾ It is also a significant

Melhus-brooch has the characteristics of the so-called mainland type embracing nearly all the Norwegian specimens, as far as they can be determined. Of the Gothlandic type with the end of the bow terminating in a single round disc there is only one specimen preserved in the Museum at Trondhjem, a small brooch from Stangerholt, Ytterøen, found together with the bronze mounting reproduced by Dr. Salin l. c. fig. 582. This brooch represents an early stage of development and is the only one of this type hitherto found in Norway.

- 1) Fragment of a large specimen from Fonnaas, Rendalen, found together with two bowl-formed brooches of the type R. 656. Ab. 1877, p. 14, No. 77.
- 2) The type specimen R. 639 from Orre, Klep, greatly resembling the Melhus-brooch, was found together with two brooches = R. 647.
- 3) Dr. Salin's Teutonic style III, according to the researches of this author prevailing during the 8th century and extending into the 9th. The deco-

fact that the fibula is found in association with two bowl-shaped brooches of the early form R. 643, the making of which must be attributed to the 8th century and certainly before that of the large fibula.¹⁾ I cannot therefore be far mistaken, if I refer the large fibula to the middle of the latter half of the 8th century, viz. about A. D. 775. It is, however, another question at what time the objects were deposited in the grave. This can naturally only be a matter of conjecture. As will be shown below, historical reasons, however, make it probable that the burial has not taken place before A. D. 800. On the other hand the early nature of the equipment points to a period not far removed. The burial should therefore most likely be attributed to the first part of the 9th century.

The year 793 A. D. is generally regarded as the beginning of the Viking age, in that year the church and cloister on the Isle of Lindisfarne in Northumberland, according to an Anglo-Saxon chronicle,²⁾ being ravaged by heathens. Later researches³⁾, however, have made it probable that even before this time intercourse between Scandinavia and the British Isles had begun, this certainly not always of a peaceable nature. Thus Irish annals record raids undertaken as early as the beginning of the 7th century on the coast of Ireland and the Hebrides by pagans, who may be assumed to have been Scandinavians from the Shetland Isles, where Northern men must early have settled. In the time between these raids and the plundering of the church on Lindisfarne no doubt smaller predatory excursions not mentioned in any annalistic record may have taken place.⁴⁾ Some of the Celtic antiquities found in Norway may thus have been carried to this country before A. D.

ration of the Melhus brooch belongs to the middle of this style-period. B. Salin, *Die altgermanische Thierornamenrik*, pp. 270 ff., 350. Comp. especially p. 281.

1) *Comp. Ab.* 1905, 367 f.

2) *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Thorpe, A. D. 793.

3) Cf. Alex. Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordboernes og særlig Nordmændenes ydre Kultur, Levesæt og Samfundsforhold i Vikingetiden*, Chra. 1905, pp. 8, 11 f., 307 ff., and the literature cited by this author.

4) See Alex. Bugge *l. c.* p. 8.

793, and consequently that year cannot be used as a general starting point for fixing the date of graves containing such objects. As to the reliquary, however, there is no reason to suppose that it was carried off and brought to Norway in this early time. The raids undertaken as early as the first part of the 7th century belong to a period too remote from the date of the burial, for the shrine with any degree of probability to be derived from these expeditions. Nor is it probable that the shrine was carried away in the interval before A. D. 793; for it is quite unlikely that a foray, in which a reliquary with its contents (an object at that time certainly of high ecclesiastical and national value) formed part of the booty, should not have been recorded in any annal or chronicle! Not till the year A. D. 793 have we reliable historical records of incursions on the coasts of the British Isles by Norwegian Vikings. But in this and the following years we read of the plundering of a great number of British monasteries and churches, the relics and ecclesiastical ornaments being a special object for the rapacity of the pagans.¹⁾ I think it, therefore, not unlikely — perhaps I dare say probable — that the Melhus-reliquary was carried off and brought to Norway just on one of these first Viking expeditions. That this at all events has not taken place later than the beginning of the 9th century appears clearly from the early date of the grave.

The find at Melhus has an historical significance as a direct evidence that also Vikings from Namdalen Valley took part in the first Viking expeditions to the Celtic lands in the West. There is now much which points to the fact that at the beginning of the Viking age the district of Namdalen occupied a prominent position among the northern districts of Norway. By systematic excavations there has been discovered during the last years a number of graves dating from this period, several of them being of great interest (Björnes, Fuglem, Skomo, Vold, Melhus). Burial of unburnt bodies has been the prevailing custom and in most cases the body has been placed in a boat — in a few cases in a

1) G. Storm, *Kritiske Bidrag til Vikingetidens Historie*. I. Kra. 1878, pp. 10 ff.

coffin of stone or wood. The equipment of the women's graves is characterized by bowl shaped brooches of the oldest type (as R. 640 and 643), fibulas, numerous beads (in the older graves of mosaic; in the younger the single-coloured beads predominate), whalebone plates, a weaver's reed, spindle-whorls etc. The men's graves contain the usual set of weapons. The archæological material is, however, still small, and the finds and observations too isolated to enable us at present to draw any very definite conclusions.

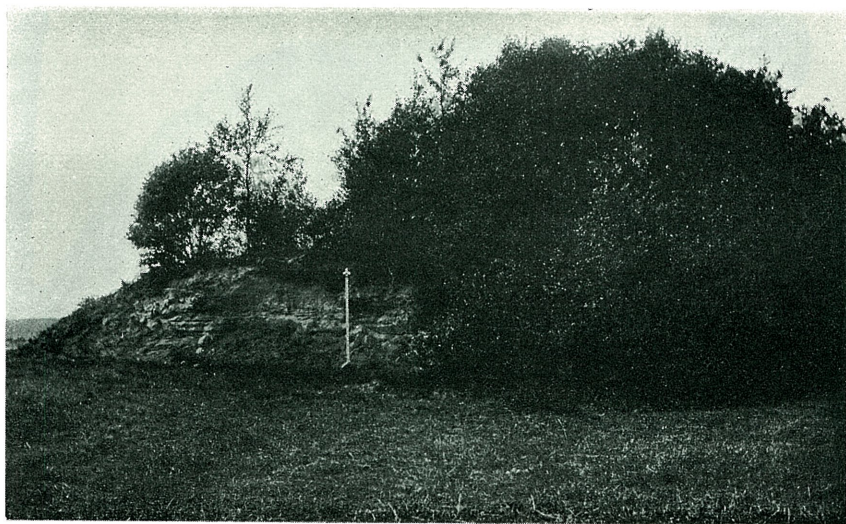


Fig. 1. The mound before the excavation, viewed from south.



Fig. 2. X marks the site of the boat-end.



Fig. 3. †.

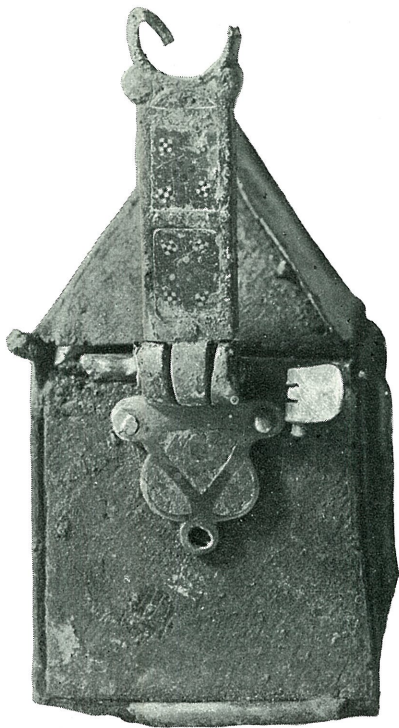


Fig. 4. †.



Fig. 5.

24 cm. long.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7. †.



Fig. 8. †.



Fig. 9. †.



Fig. 10. †.



Fig. 11. †.



Fig. 12. †.

