Finds Research Group 700 - 1700

DATASHEET 25

WHA'S LIKE US OR JUST THE SAME: SCOTTISH MEDIEVAL SMALL FINDS

ABSTRACTS FROM THE GROUP'S MEETING AT PERTH, 1998: FIRST SELECTION

Fig.1 Medieval Mirror-case depicting Tristan and Iseult, found at Perth in 1921

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INTRODUCTION

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The meeting of the Group to which the following abstracts relate sought to address the nature of Scottish Medieval small finds. Of particular concern was the question of detectable differences and similarities in the material culture across the Anglo-Scottish border, as well as in the wider British context. It was hoped that the audience at Perth, as well as readers of the resulting *Datasheet*, would bring knowledge and experience to bear on these questions.

The meeting arose initially out of the desire of the Group to meet again north of the Scottish border. This appealed greatly to the me, when approached to organise the meeting, presenting as it did the opportunity of airing a subject already contemplated, and given immediacy by the debates surrounding the emergence of a Scottish Parliament.

Initial thoughts in organising the meeting focused on questions of the reflection of ethnicity in the study of small finds. The dangers of too readily equating particular objects with particular people, and the problem of fluidity of ethnicity, have been shown by others, notably Halsall (1995) and Geary (1985). Geary has aptly described the problem of reading too much ethnicity into too few objects (ibid. 48-9):

'No one characteristic be it law, language, custom or birth, can be considered a sufficient index by which to assign ethnicity, nor was it any different for contemporaries. Self perception and the perception of others represented a choice in a variety of somewhat arbitrary characterisations, which could be seen differently by different people. The real ... barriers were between slave and free, free and noble. Within the elite a person or faction could be Burgundian by birth, Roman by language and Frankish by dress. Likewise someone born of a father from Francia and a mother from Alamania could properly be termed a Frank or an Alamanian by different authors considering him from different perspectives. His own perception of himself might change during his lifetime depending on how he viewed his relationship to the Frankish King and his local faction.'

Material culture can address the process of aculturation (where the same objects can readily move in and out of different ethnic groups) and how people used material culture to order their world, to define their position in it and their network of relationships: social, natural and supernatural (Alkemade 1997). The authors of the present abstracts were approached with these thoughts in mind, and their contributions reflect the perceptiveness of their approaches as well as something of the contemporary framework within which data is collected.

I would like to thank contributors for their co-operation and sharing of data, and the small but committed group of delegates for their perceptive questions.

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PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF COPPER ALLOY ARTIFACTS FROM FINLAGGAN

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In the course of eight seasons of excavation at Finlaggan on the island of Islay several copper alloy artefacts were recovered, mostly dating to the 13th to 16th centuries. Some of these pieces are manifestly of local West Highland manufacture, like the pegs for *clarsachs* (harps) and the mounts for a purse. Other items, including buckles, padlocks and fragments of cast bronze ewers and pots, are likely to have been imported to Islay from other parts of Europe.

The National Museums of Scotland have embarked upon a programme of analysing the Finlaggan assemblage by X-ray help to distinguish local from imported objects. The authors are aware that many other factors should be taken into account in interpreting the results, not least that many items are certain to have been re-fashioned out of scrap metal.

The preliminary stage of the study involved a non-destructive analytical survey of the artefacts using X-ray fluorescence (XRF). Semi-quantitative results were obtained which allowed the alloy type to be determined. These represent surface compositions only and are unlikely to correspond to the original artefact composition due to corrosion and alteration during burial. In the next stage of the project, more representative compositions will be obtained by careful abrasion and/or sampling of selected artefacts.

The preliminary results indicate that the assemblage is dominated by the copper-tin alloy bronze, of which a significant percentage contains appreciable quantities of lead. The next most common alloy type was a quaternary alloy of copper, zinc, tin and lead, termed gunmetal. A few artefacts consisted of the copper-zinc alloy brass, with low zinc levels suggesting possible re-working of primary high-zinc brass. In addition, there was a small number of artefacts of pewter (a mixed lead-tin alloy), debased silver and copper.

An attempt was made to distinguish 'local' and 'foreign' production groups using curatorial judgement. On this basis it appears that both groups cover the same range of alloy types, with slight differences in the relative proportions, the chief difference being a higher proportion of gunmetal in the 'local' group. Additionally, although the proportion of bronze in each group is similar, the 'local' group has a higher ratio of un-leaded to leaded bronze.

fluorsecence, with the aim of assessing the possibility of detecting differences in the copper alloys that might

Fig. 2 Copper alloy brooch made in the West Highlands and found at Finlaggan

Gunmetal artefacts were probably derived from melting artefacts consisting of a range of zinc-rich and tin-rich copper alloys. The higher proportion of gunmetal in the local assemblage and the generally low zinc levels are consistent with use of scrap metal for the production of new metal artefacts, on site. Only one metalworking crucible has been recognised to date at Finlaggan. XRF analysis of the residues indicate the presence of copper, zinc, tin and lead, suggesting the crucible was used for mixed alloys, and is consistent with the melting of small quantities of scrap metal.

A number of 'foreign' artefacts, particularly cauldron

pieces and feet, consisted of leaded bronze with high levels of antimony. Comparison of these analyses with those from similar material of known provenance may indicate the source of this antimony-rich raw material. Similarly, some 'local' artefacts had high levels of arsenic and comparison with other arsenic-rich material may indicate possible sources.

One brooch consisted of very debased silver with high levels of copper, zinc and tin and may be a re-used billon coin. It is hoped that further analysis and comparison with data on coins of this period may confirm this, and indicate the specific coin type.

The initial stage of the analysis of copper alloys from Finlaggan has provided valuable information about the artefacts and has identified a number of interesting questions for further study.

PILGRIMAGE ARTEFACTS FROM SCOTLAND

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Although pilgrim badges and other pilgrimage artefacts have been found in Scotland, there has been no proper study, and it is likely that many more await discovery in museum collections and by detectorists.

Fig. 3 St Andrews pilgrim badge, found in Perth High Street

The importance attached to these small objects by their owners is not belied by their size. Some could be purchased en route, others were only available at the destination. Brian Spencer has discussed how these objects, the 'eye-catching proof of a completed pilgrimage', served as the credentials of the *bona fide* pilgrim, allowing him to obtain alms, hospitality, exemption from tolls and general protection (Spencer, B 'Pilgrims' Badges', in Biddle, M 1990 *Object and Economy in medieval Winchester. Winchester Studies* 7.ii). Badges took on even greater importance as secondary relics imbued with spiritual powers. Their widespread adoption by cults across Europe from the 12th century onward served to arrest the attrition of shrines by the pious, who, anxious to take home a souvenir, were removing small fragments of the fabric.The badges are rich in meaning, both to their original medieval owners and to present-day students seeking a better understanding of medieval life. They

provide reliable evidence of the movement of people, of real and arduous journeys, while also underlining a tangible devotion to individual saints, within the wider context of popular religion. Pilgrimage persists as a living part of world-wide religious practice, and so these artefacts are especially helpful in illustrating an aspect of medieval life with which we can still connect, providing a rare moment of contact.

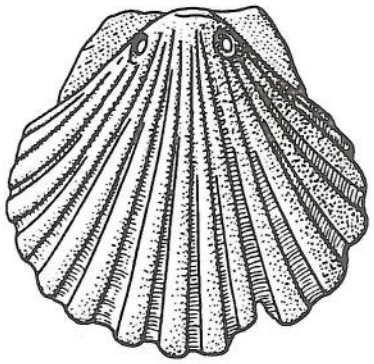

Fig. 4 Scallop shell from Santiago de Compostella, found in Perth High Street

Pilgrimage and the cult of saints was as popular in medieval Scotland as anywhere else in Europe, with major shrines at the heart of important reliquary churches at Tain, Iona, Whithorn, Glasgow, Dunkeld, Dunfermline and St Andrews. Only the last-named shrine has a corpus of identifiable badges, with at least fourteen surviving examples, distributed from St Andrews itself, to Perth (see Fig. 3) and to the English Midlands, the most distant example having been found in Sweden. The greatest concentration comes from in and around London, with six badges from the Billingsgate site alone.

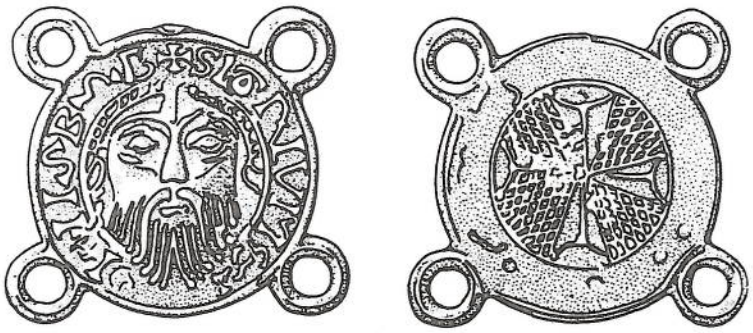

Fig. 5 Circular pilgrim badge from Perth

Most of these badges are small, rectangular plaques of cast pewter or copper alloy, depicting the saint on a saltire cross, and with a stitching ring at each corner for attachment to clothing. One example from excavations in Perth is dated to the second half of the 13th century. One half of a stone mould for casting this type of badge was found near the pilgrims' church and hospital by the harbour at North Berwick, East Lothian, the embarkation point of pilgrims across the Forth by the Earl's Ferry. The possible fragment of a St Andrews badge mould was found at Kinross on the route from Perth. By the 15th century a more elaborate and attractive openwork form of badge was also being manufactured, one example of which has been found near St Andrews Castle, and another near Leicester.

St Ninian at Whithorn was an even more ancient and long-lived shrine. Although there is no definite evidence of a surviving badge, there is documentary evidence of the sale and display of these souvenirs,

which would have been manufactured in great numbers. One possible candidate is the cast pewter badge in the form of a plaque with three figures, one mitred and identified by the letter 'N', found along the pilgrimage route near Dumfries. A number of monastic houses provided hospitality for pilgrims on the roads to Whithorn, including Dundrennan Abbey where another badge mound fragment has been found. This was a superior example, of Continental lithographic limestone, engraved with six surviving small, circular images, of mainly secular but obscure imagery. Melrose Abbey in the Borders contained a shrine of the 12th-century abbot St Waltheof; this may have developed alongside a shrine of St Cuthbert, who entered religion nearby. The unusual circular badge depicts a mason's hammer (*mel*) along with a Cistercian rose (*ros*), pictorially indicating the place-name.

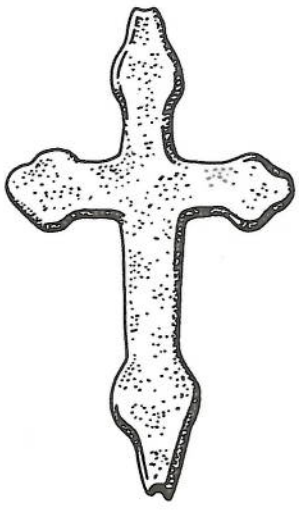

Fig. 6 Crucifix reliquary from the River Tay near Newburg

The only other badge identifiable with an actual Scottish shrine is an openwork badge showing the Assumption of the Virgin, dated by Spencer to the later 15th century and found at Fast Castle, Berwickshire (personal communication). Possibly this badge originated at the famous Marian shrine and holy well at Whitekirk, East Lothian.

A second group of pilgrimage artefacts is the significant body of finds illustrating the pilgrimages of Scots abroad. Excavations in the medieval burgh of Perth have produced two lead *ampullae* used to carry home holy water from the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury. Perth has also produced an *ampulla*, dated to the mid 13th century, obtained at the shrine of Walsingham in Norfolk. Also from Perth comes a badge of St John the Baptist obtained at the popular shrine of Amiens in northern France. Numerous safe-conducts were issued by the English crown to enable Scots to travel to this shrine. One of the most famous medieval pilgrimages, to Santiago de Compostella in north-west Spain, is also illustrated by finds from Perth (Fig. 4). Two badges of natural scallop shell, of 12th or 13th-century date, have been found in excavations, pierced for suspension at the neck or attachment to clothes. These shells could only be obtained within the Basilica at Santiago; anyone who sold or obtained them elsewhere was liable to excommunication. These scallops were highly prized, and a number are known to have been buried with their owners in different parts of Europe. A striking example of this practice was found in excavations at the monastery on the May Island at the mouth of the Firth of Forth, where a man in his twenties had been buried with a scallop shell in

his mouth. From the 14th century, natural shells were supplemented by shell badges in other materials; the only pewter badge from the shrine at Santiago so far to be found in Scotland came to light near St Monans in Fife. Analysis of a jet rosary bead found at Elcho Nunnery near Perth demonstrated that its source was Spanish, probably near Santiago, indicating that other sacred and secular artefacts were also brought back by returning pilgrims.

Two badges found in Scotland indicate pilgrimage to Rome. Both have the standard image of the twinned apostles Peter and Paul. One was found at Whithorn, the other at Finlaggan, Islay, the capital of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles; both are probably of 14th century date. Another foreign saint popular with the Scots was St Giles, whose shrine at St Giles-du-Gard in the south of France had benefited from being on one of the main routes to Santiago. A badge from this shrine, dating to the 13th or 14th century, was found at Whithorn. (Until recently this was believed to be a badge of St Ninian himself, and was published incorrectly as such by this author.)

The badges discussed in this paper are illustrated together for the first time in: Peter Yeoman, *Pilgrimage in Medieval Scotland*, forthcoming (Batsford).

13TH-CENTURY SEALS AND MATRICES: TAYSIDE AND THE WIDER WORLD

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For Fig. 7, see page 11 The Chapter seal of Dunkeld (reverse): mid 1290s

13th-century ecclesiastical seals from Tayside show links with England and continental Europe. The town of Kings Lynn copied the seal of Inchaffray Abbey. Families from Lynn had settled in Perth by the end of the 12th century and Scots traded through the English port. Inchaffray in turn had based the reverse of their seal of that of the chapter of Bergen cathedral.

In the 1290s the cathedral chapters of Dunkeld and St Hallvard in Oslo acquired handsome new seals clearly by the same artist and quite unlike contemporary Scottish or Norwegian work. The style suggests Paris, where the bishop of Dunkeld and Audun Hugleiksson, representing the king of Norway, both signed treaties with France against the English in October 1295.

See Glenn,V *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* Vol 5 (1999) for an expanded version of the paper delivered at Perth.

SCOTTISH AND ENGLISH VIKINGS – CAN WE SEE ANY DIFFERENCE?

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Traditionally we have considered the Vikings in the British Isles as a homogenous group – no respecters of persons or property and certainly not restricted by the current border between the political units of England and Scotland. In England we can define the Danelaw, a historical and political entity defined by specific place name types and cultural attributes, towns and manufacturing activities. Deep in the Danelaw these elements are clearer than on the northern fringes, where Norwegian and Hiberno-Norse aspects can be distinguished. Further north still, in Scotland, the Norwegian influence dominated the cultural landscape. In the Late Norse period, parts of northern Scotland were politically linked for centuries with the Norwegian homeland.

Can we see any differences between Vikings in the North and the South? In England in the Viking period, there were towns with developed hinterland economies such as York. They had a strong trading base, manufacturing activities, and monetary economies. This was not the situation in Scotland (although it must be remembered that much of the comparable material is slightly later in date than in England). The settlement evidence is all rural rather than urban - no Viking towns in Scotland – with the wealth base in the north and west probably being dictated by the powerful Norwegian earls and their associates. Commodities can be identified as having been traded around the Irish Sea (for example from Whithorn), or brought in from Norway (like combs and steatite), or traded from Shetland (steatite). Other goods were traded and used extensively, but are often under-represented in the archaeological record (fish, cereals, birds' eggs, leather goods and a few ceramics). An exchange system has been distinguished in the north, using silver ring money as a unit of currency. Even stated as simply as this, the differences are striking, but the reasons are not obvious.

These differences may be related to different origins within Scandinavia, the contrast perhaps between the familiarity of nucleated settlements and small towns as found in Denmark, versus the isolated settlements of Norway. But this is too simplistic and almost certainly inaccurate. The local conditions of the British Isles were no doubt formative, as well as the attitudes of the local population. However, a consideration of how we identify ethnic groups in this era is also important. Is it safe to identify the ethnic origin of an individual on the basis of artefacts anyway – were the Irish brooches found at Westness and Balnakeil the property of Irish people or of family members of travellers to Ireland, or raiders...the family group from Scar, Orkney has a number of North Norwegian links in the assemblage, so was that *their* point of origin or perhaps their forebears' home? Did these people speak with an

Orcadian accent or perhaps a Norwegian one? The strong Norwegian political influence in Northern Scotland may well have ensured that long after the original settlement had taken place, new settlers may well have been born there and spoke Norwegian dialects as their first language.

Fig 7 The Chapter seal of Dunkeld (reverse): mid 1290s