

About fifty years ago, a grave-mound situated between the chapel of St. Donan and the shore in the island of Eigg, was levelled by the tenant of the land. No observations of the phenomena of the burial were made, but the objects found were fortunately preserved.¹ The principal object found in this grave-mound was a sword-hilt of bronze (Fig. 36), 7½ inches in length. In its form it resembles the hilt of the Islay sword, but is greatly superior to it in the beauty of its ornamentation and the skill of its workmanship. Indeed, I know no finer or more elaborate piece of art workmanship of the kind, either in this country or in Norway. It is constructed in four pieces—the triangular pommel, the cross-piece under it, the grip, and the guard. Each of these has been cast and worked separately, and they are all united by

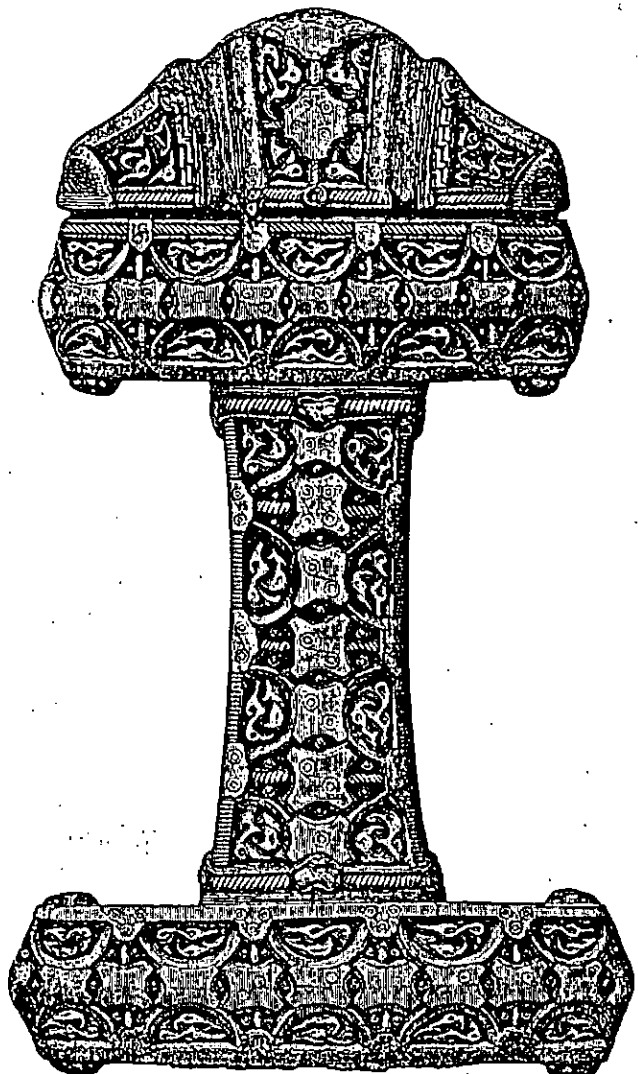


Fig. 36.—Sword-hilt of the Viking time, from a Grave-mound in the island of Eigg (7½ inches in length).

the tang of the blade which passes up through them. The decoration is difficult to describe, but it is not difficult to perceive the harmony, elegance, and fitness of the general design. Each of the four parts is treated with reference to its decoration as a separate whole, but they also combine to give to the entire object a completely harmonious design. The triangular pommel is placed upon a cross-piece answering in character to the cross-piece below the grip, and the grip answers in character to both.

¹ They are now deposited in the Museum; and have been fully described by Professor Norman Macpherson, LL.D., in an elaborate paper, read before the Society, on the Antiquities of Eigg.



Fig. 37.—Side view of Pommel of Sword-hilt.

The ends of the pommel are formed into heads of animals, the zoomorphism more suggested than expressed, and more distinct in the front view of the whole hilt (Fig. 36) than in the side view of the pommel alone: here represented (Fig. 37). The grip and the cross-piece below it are all decorated in the same style, with a beautiful pattern formed of a series of arcaded spaces with quadrangular ornaments between. The patterns chased into the arcaded spaces are apparently zoomorphic in character, and the quadrangular ornaments between them are plates of silver pinned on to the bronze, a circle being incised round every pin head, and each pair of circles connected by a line drawn from the right side of the one to the left side of the other, so as to resemble an S-shaped scroll. The edges of the grip (Fig. 38) are orn



Fig. 38.—Edge of Grip of Sword-hilt.

mented with three sunk panels of interlaced work alternating with four plain panels. The upper side of the guard (Fig. 39) has two ornaments of similar character, each consisting of four loops round a pellet, the bands composing the loops crossing each other in the centre of the figure. There is nothing that is distinctively Celtic in the style of the interlaced work. Indeed, there is so little of it, that it would be difficult, from this specimen alone, to form any opinion as to the relations of interlaced ornament to the system of decoration characteristic of the Viking period. I have already stated that the mere presence of interlaced work is not a feature which can be relied on as a certain indication either of the Celtic or the Scandinavian character of the

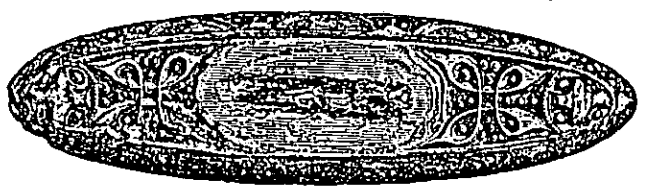


Fig. 39.—Upper side of Guard of Sword-hilt.

ornament of which it forms a part. In consequence of the close intercourse which subsisted between the areas of the two distinctive schools of art during the Viking time, the influence of the one upon the other is traceable in such transitional styles as that of the Manx crosses and the decoration of the Skail brooches to be hereafter described. And the Celtic manner, with a Scandinavian spirit, is distinctly discernible in the decoration of a sword-hilt (Fig. 40) found in a grave-mound of the Viking time at Ultuna, in Sweden.¹

¹ The tumulus contained the remains, still distinctly recognisable, of a ship in which a warrior had been entombed along with his arms and two horses. The iron nails which fastened the planks together were still visible in their places. The vessel appeared to be a galley of no great size, carrying a single mast. Alongside of the body, which was unburnt, was found a sword, the blade of iron, and the splendid hilt of gilt bronze decorated with interlaced patterns of extreme beauty and elegance. Remains of the wooden sheath and its

countings were also found. A helmet of iron was also found, having a great ridge of bronze, containing zinc as an ingredient—the only helmet of the pagan period in Sweden hitherto known. There were also found a magnificent umbo or boss of a shield, in iron plated with bronze, and adorned with patterns of interlaced work, the handle of the shield, nineteen arrow-heads, the bits of two bridles, a pair of shears, all in iron; thirty-six table-men and hreo dico, in bone. Besides these there was an iron gridiron and aettle of thin iron plates riveted together, with a swinging handle, as also bones of swine and geese, probably the remains of the funeral feast.—*Laue de Prehistorique*, par Oscar Montelius, Stockholm, Paris, and Leipzig, 1864, p. 114.

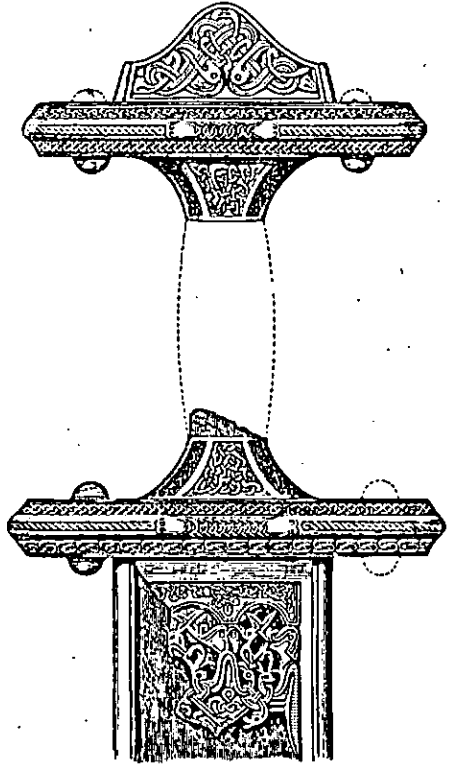


Fig. 40.—Sword-hilt found in a Grave-mound at Ultuna, Sweden.

In the grave-mound at Eigg there were found, along with the sword-hilt, a buckle or fastener of a belt of bronze or brass (Fig. 41), attached to a thin plate of the same metal, and a solid lump of metal apparently of a similar alloy, 2½ inches

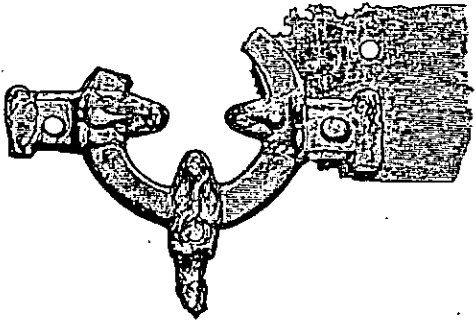


Fig. 41.—Buckle of Bronze (actual size), from a Grave-mound in the island of Eigg.

in length, which appears to have been one of the feet of a large three-footed pot.

Two other grave-mounds in the same neighbourhood were excavated in 1875 by Professor Macpherson, and I had the opportunity of seeing them subsequently. The ground-plans and sections of them which are here given (Fig. 42), were made by Mr. Arthur Joass. The largest mound was about 40 feet in diameter and from 6 to 7 feet in height, with a circular depression in the centre. In an enclosure roughly formed of stones in the centre of the mound and on the original level of the surface, there were found traces of an interment, with grave-goods, of the usual Viking character. They consisted of an iron sword in the sheath, similar to that found in the Islay grave, an iron axe-head, a spear-head

(5)



Fig. 42.—Ground-plan and Sections of Grave-mounds in Eigg.

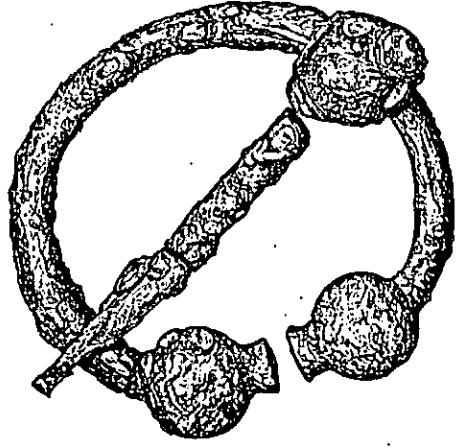
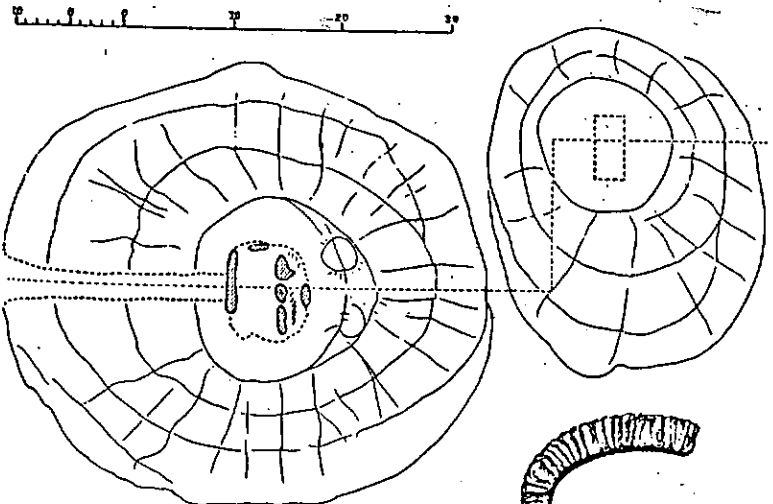


Fig. 43.—Brooch of Bronze, silvered, from Grave-mound in Eigg (2½ inches diameter).



Fig. 44.—Belt-Clasp (actual size).

of iron, a penannular brooch of bronze plated with silver and ending in knobs of the shape of thistle heads (Fig. 43), an agrafe or belt-clasp of bronze or brass, ornamented with a

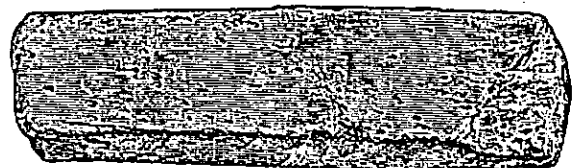


Fig. 45.—Whetstone (actual size).

scroll-like pattern in relief (Fig. 44); a small whetstone (Fig. 45), and several portions of dress consisting of cloth of three different varieties of texture (Fig. 46), one of which is trimmed with fur.

The smaller grave-mound, a few yards distant, contained the fragments of an iron sword, a whetstone, a plain penannular brooch with knobbed ends, of a slightly flattened form, in bronze or brass, and some beads of amber and jet.

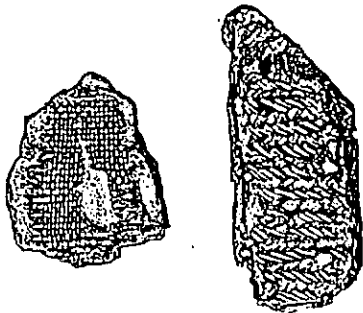


Fig. 46.—Specimens of Cloth found in the Grave-mound.

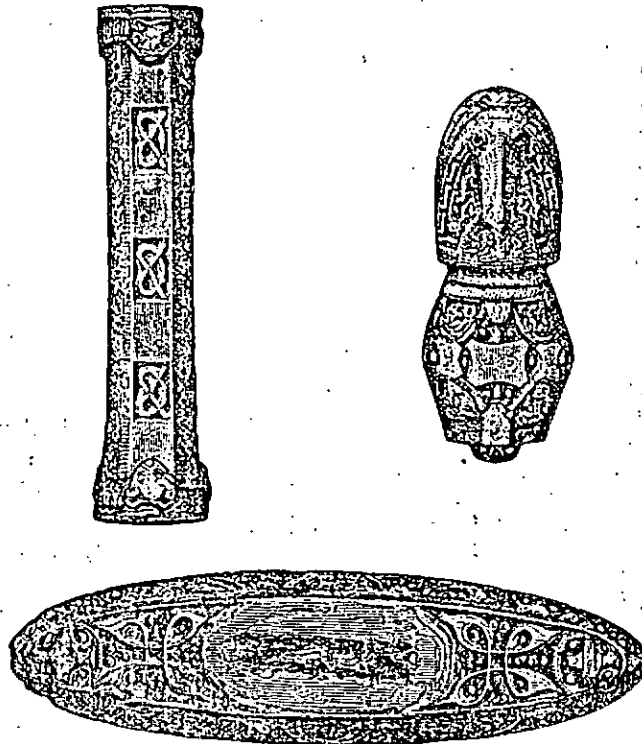
(1.) By Professor NORMAN MACPHERSON, LL.D.

A Collection of Antiquities found in the Island of Eigg:—viz., Sword Hilt of bronze or brass, partly plated and inlaid with silver, and finely decorated with interlaced work and ornaments in relief. Massive Foot of a Pot, in bronze or brass. Portions of a Sword Belt, with clasp of bronze or brass. Parts of the Blades of a Sword and Dagger, Whetstone, and portion of Leather Belt, with its Clasp. Portion of Woollen Dress, trimmed with Fur. Penanular Brooch, with thistle-headed Knobs of bronze or brass, plated with silver. Circular Brooch of brass. Small polished Stone Celt and Arrow-head of Flint. Oaken Stem and Sternpost of a Boat. (See the subsequent Communication by Professor Macpherson for a description and figures of these objects.)

(1)

With regard to the articles exhibited to the meeting.

1. The sword handle figured on Plate XXX. was, as far back as I remember, in my father's possession in Aberdeen. Recent inquiries, made through the Rev. J. Sinclair, the parish minister, regarding the finding of it, have elicited the information from a blind old man of very retentive memory, Donald Ban Mackay, that "it was discovered by his brother, Allan Mackay, when levelling a hillock a little below the division fence in the field called Dail Sithean, that is, the field of the tumulus or of the fairies, for the Highlanders called all mounds Sithean, the abode of the Daoine Sith. The spot is well known, half way between the chapel and the rocks to the east. A fine stone for sharpening was beside it. It seems two pieces of the blade were for some years in the possession

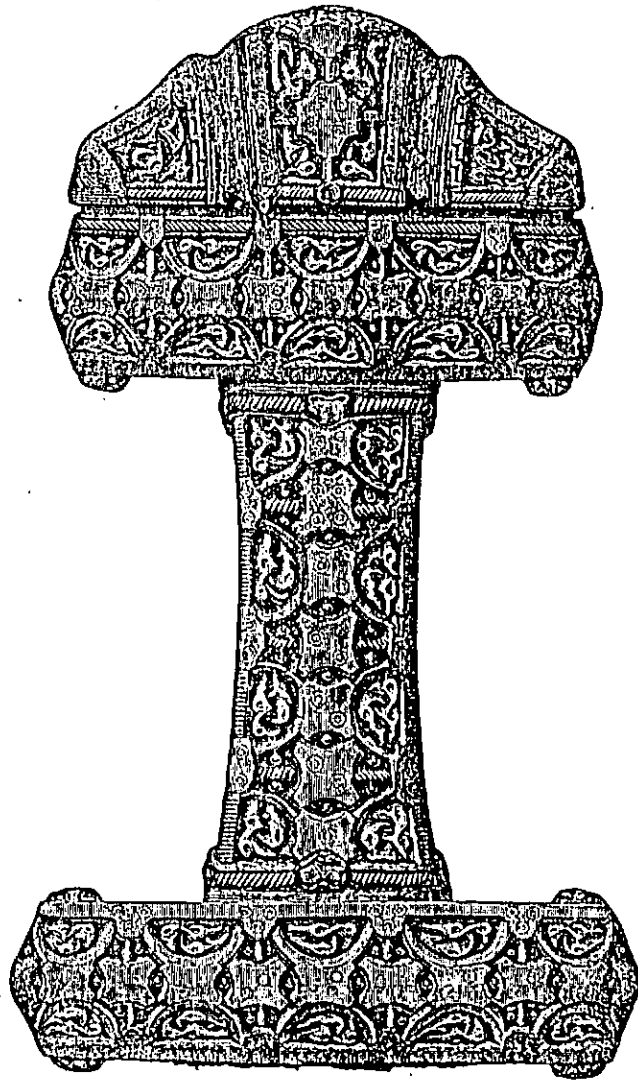


Figs. 3, 4, and 5. Ornamentation of Guard, edge of Grip, and Pommel of the Sword-hilt.

of Allan and others. Donald's wife remembers that the discovery took place about forty-eight years ago."

There were also found along with the sword (a) a few thin plates of bronze, (b) part of a buckle (fig. 6) attached to one of these plates, and probably connected with a sword belt, (c) a triangular piece of metal

(1)



SWORD-HILT OF THE VIKING TIME, FOUND IN THE ISLAND OF EGG.
(7½ inches in length.)

PLATE 30

(fig. 7), as to which Mr Anderson has made the irresistible suggestion that it must have been one of the feet of a large bronze vessel.

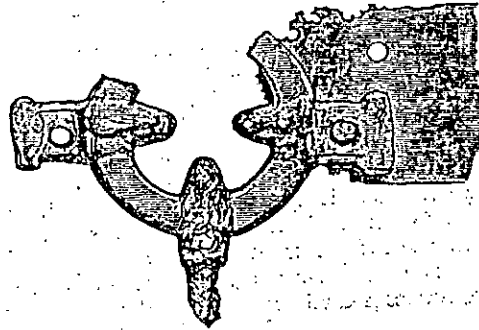


Fig. 6. Buckle or Fastener of Belt attached to a thin Plate of Bronze (actual size).

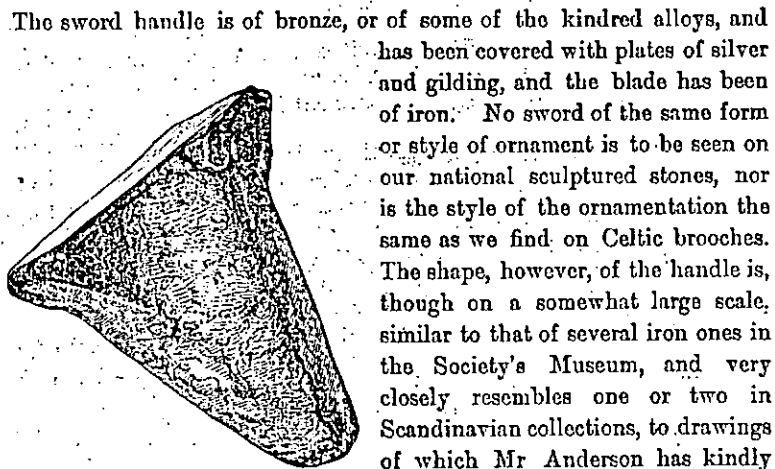


Fig. 7. Foot of large Tripod Vessel of Cast Bronze ($2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length).

The sword handle is of bronze, or of some of the kindred alloys, and has been covered with plates of silver and gilding, and the blade has been of iron. No sword of the same form or style of ornament is to be seen on our national sculptured stones, nor is the style of the ornamentation the same as we find on Celtic brooches. The shape, however, of the handle is, though on a somewhat large scale, similar to that of several iron ones in the Society's Museum, and very closely resembles one or two in Scandinavian collections, to drawings of which Mr Anderson has kindly directed my attention, more particularly one in the Bergen Museum, found with an axe and hammer of iron in a cairn at Halsenö, another found in Romsdal, and a third found in Hedemarken, and now in the Christiania Museum. All of these were found, like this one, in grave-mounds, and the last-mentioned—which has been photographed—bears so very close a resemblance to it both in form and in the manner of distributing the ornaments in alternating panels, that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they belong to the same school of Scandinavian art, although the one now before the Society seems the more elaborately adorned. The accidental removal of the surface of one panel discloses that all the smoother ones are plates of silver, fastened with from two to four rivets, round which circles have been engraved and connected with each other so as to form a sort of S-shaped ornament.

(1)