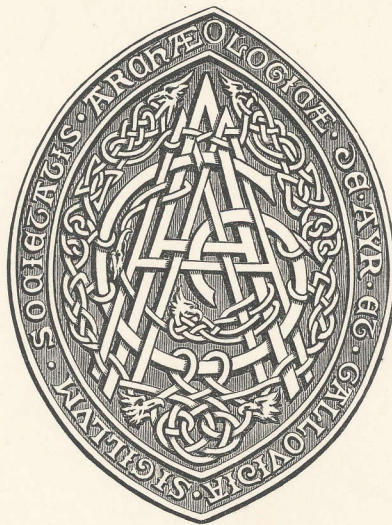


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RELATING TO  
AYRSHIRE & GALLOWAY

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## II.

### A BRONZE SWORD-SHEATH FOUND IN AYRSHIRE.

THE sword-sheath, represented on Plate I. (*a*, *b*, and *c*) may be seen in the College Museum, St. Andrews. I first became aware of its existence in August 1891 when, as one of the local secretaries for the Archæological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, then holding its annual meeting in Edinburgh, I accompanied the members on an excursion to that ancient town. The sword-sheath, along with a number of other antiquarian objects, was exhibited in the lower hall of the College, and it at once attracted my attention as a relic of exceptional importance belonging to the so-called "Late Celtic" period. I had then no time to make inquiries as to its origin or to take a sketch of it, but resolved to do so at some future time. It was not till 25th March 1893, that I found an opportunity of carrying out my intention. By the courtesy of the curator of the museum, I am now enabled to lay before the members of the Ayrshire and Galloway Archæological Association the following notes and sketches of this interesting object.

In the record book of the museum, the sword-sheath is entered as having been presented by Rev. Robert Thomson, but, unfortunately, there is no date assigned to the entry; and the present curator could give no information as to how long it has been in the museum beyond the general statement that it had been there for many years. Attached to it by a string there was a small card with "Mr. David Thomson" written on one side and "Sword-sheath found in draining near Bargany House, Ayrshire," on the other.

The sheath has an elegant form, slightly tapering towards the point,



and measures 24 inches in length by  $1\frac{3}{4}$  in breadth. It is made of two plates of bronze, one of which is sufficiently large to be bent round at the margins, and made to overlap the other. The two plates were then riveted and soldered together. The point is strengthened by a stout heart-shaped tip, from which a marginal moulding runs for several inches on both edges, and from which again transverse bands extend across the body of the sheath.

In point of execution the maker, while strictly adhering to the essential requisites of a substantial and useful weapon, has displayed no small amount of artistic taste by the method and forms in which he has arranged these different details. As will be seen from the sketches the two surfaces are nearly alike, the only differences being that, about 6 inches from the tip, the one (Plate I. *a*) has a curved crossband, half an inch broad, connecting the marginal mouldings, instead of two circular discs in the other (Plate I. *b*); and that the surface plate of the former is plain, while that of the latter shows a slight medial ridge, corresponding to a midrib on the sword. On neither surface is there any trace of a loop for attachment to a sword-belt now to be seen, though, doubtless, some such arrangement must have formerly existed. On careful inspection of the greenish patina which uniformly covers the sheath, certain incised lines may be observed along the inner margin of the side moulding which, at the most expanded part of the heart-shaped tip, run outwards in the form of graceful curves, to the medial line of the margin. The crossband shown in Plate I. *a* has a triangular portion in its middle, and two highly oval-shaped spaces, one at each end, slightly raised in relief.

The upper end of the sheath (Plate I. *c*) presents no ornamentation, but its terminal curve is a noteworthy feature, and finds a parallel in most of the weapons of the late Celtic period both in this country and on the continent.

Although the characteristic linear and spiral ornamentation of late Celtic objects is by no means a prominent feature in this sheath, its structural parts are so arranged as to give it upon the whole an elegant appearance, and it is the style of art thus disclosed that gives to it its special archaeological value.

Only one other scabbard of this style of art has hitherto been found on Scottish ground. This example has for a long time found its proper resting-place in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh, but, like the



former, it has no history beyond the fact that it was found on the Morton-hall estate, at the foot of the Pentland Hills (Fig. 1). It has been described and illustrated by the late Sir Daniel Wilson in his *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (vol. ii. p. 129), and more recently by Dr. Joseph Anderson (*Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 120). It is  $23\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch in width. The cup-shaped expansions at its lower extremity, and the whole front plate of the sheath are one solid casting, but the ornamental band carrying a loop in the middle is attached to its surface by pins. A remarkable peculiarity of this sheath—one which distinguishes it not only from the Ayrshire example, but from all other scabbards of this type known to me, is, that its posterior surface consists of a thin slip of beaten bronze, sliding in grooves formed by the recurved edges of the anterior plate.

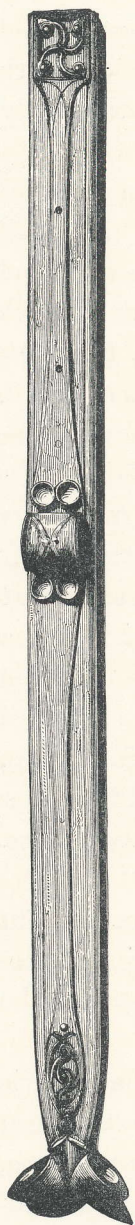


FIG. 1.

Another bronze sheath of this type was found by fishermen in the River Tweed near the village of Carham, and is now in the collection of Canon Greenwell. It is 21 inches long and  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inch broad. "It consists of the front of the sheath with a raised line in the centre, terminating in a triangle and with a solid end; of the back only the lower part remains, the rest having been probably made of leather." (*Archæologia*, vol. xlv. p. 256, and pl. xvi.)

Weapons of this class are, however, more numerous in England. Writing in 1880, Mr. Franks states that to his knowledge the geographical distribution of these swords or their sheaths was as follows: Bed of the Thames 8; Yorkshire 5; Lincolnshire 4; Dorsetshire 2, besides fragments; Hertfordshire, Cumberland, and Lancashire, 1 each. Since then another example has come to light. It was found among the objects recently collected on the site of Hunsbury Hill or Danes Camp, near Northampton, a report of which is published in vol. xviii. pp. 53-61, of the *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers*, and consists of the anterior plate of a bronze scabbard about 30 inches long and 2 inches broad.

It is thus described by Mr. C. H. Read, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries:



"This beautiful specimen is formed of a thin bronze plate on one face, the other face being open, and provided only with transverse ornamented plates; the edge is of the usual character, that is, a rounded recurved plate, the two edges of which clasp the plates forming the face and back of the sheath. The end of the sheath is of thicker metal, and of the usual heart-shaped form which characterises other sheaths of the same period. Towards the lower part, 8 inches from the point, is a pair of ornamental bosses formed of curves and circles, resembling birds' heads. At the back of this part is an engraved plate, with scrolls and circles, and two lower bands, also engraved, which do not correspond with anything on the front. The upper end of the front of the sheath has an elegant pattern of scrolls and circles of the usual late Celtic type, very like the engraved ornaments on the bronze mirror from St. Keverne, in Cornwall (*Archæological Journal*, vol. xxx. p. 267). As a type, it is quite characteristic of late Celtic work, and in no part has it any resemblance to, or connection with, the production of Saxon times, as has been suggested." (*Archæologia*, vol. lii. p. 761 and pl. xxxv.)

Most interesting details regarding the remarkable swords and sheaths of the late Celtic period will be found in *Horæ Ferales*, pp. 172-196, and in *Archæologia*, vol. xlv. pp. 251-266, both written by Mr. Franks, the greatest living authority on the subject.

Prior to the remarkable collection of military accoutrements found on the site of the crannog of Lisnacrogghera, Ireland had furnished but a few fragments of weapons of late Celtic type. Mr. Robert Day (*Royal Historical and Archæological Association of Ireland*, vol. v., fourth series, p. 266) recognised among a hoard of bronze objects found somewhere in county Roscommon, five portions of a bronze scabbard, in which Mr. Wakeman sees a general likeness to those from Lisnacrogghera. They are, however, too fragmentary to be of much value in this inquiry; and, moreover, they were associated with objects of the Bronze Age, such as looped and socketed celts. But there can be no doubt of the nature of two end portions of sheaths, one said to be from county Galway, figured by Mr. Franks in *Horæ Ferales* (pl. xvii. Fig. 4 (a) and (b)).

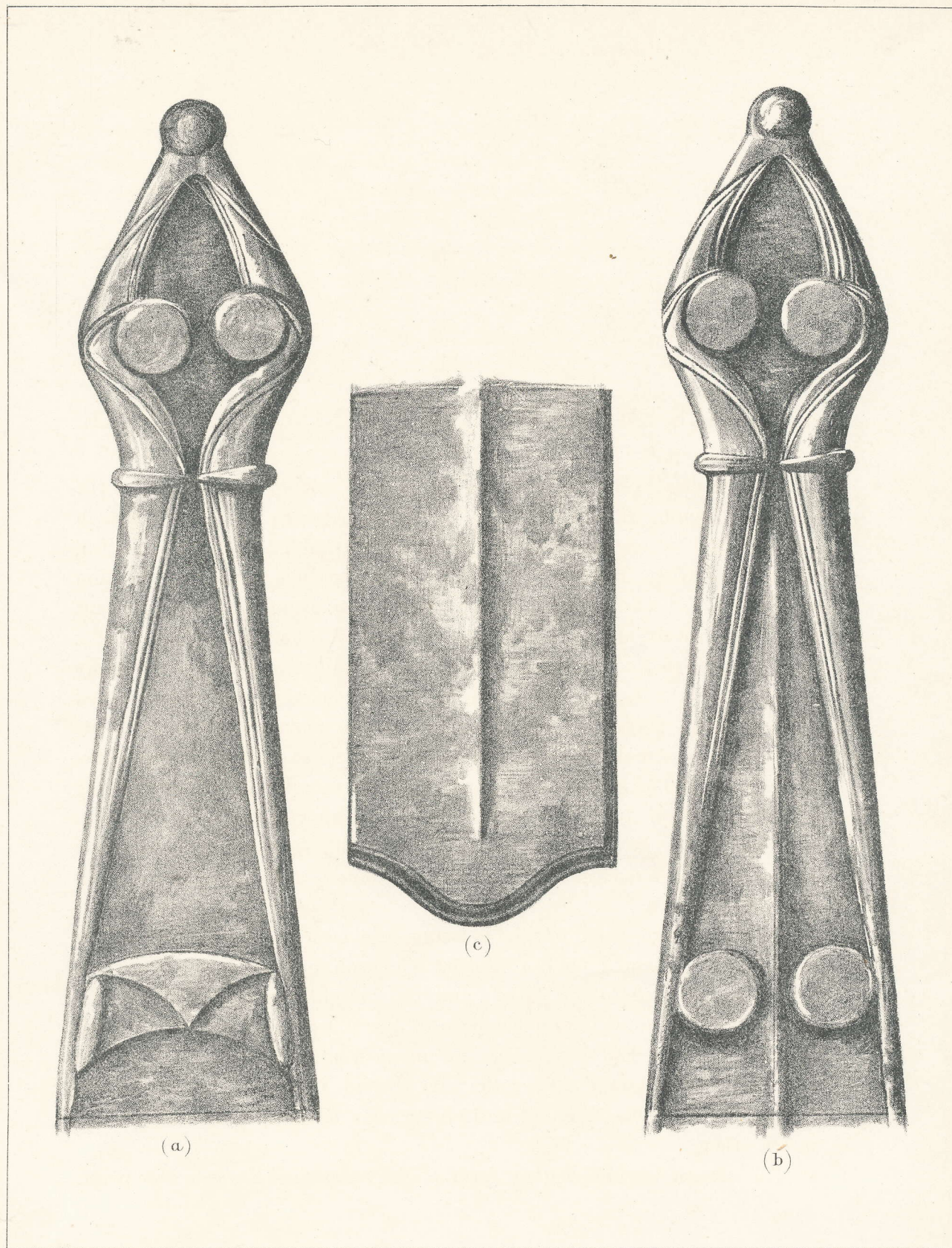
Up to the present time Lisnacrogghera crannog or bog has yielded four sheaths, together with some fragments of the tip-mountings of one or two more. As all these, as well as the other objects found at Lisnacrogghera, are fully described and illustrated in my work on the *Lake-Dwellings of*



*Europe*, it is unnecessary to recapitulate the details here. Their typical connection with antiquities known as Gaulish and La Tène types is also fully discussed in the same work. It would be impossible to enter here on a general description of the numerous other objects of the late Celtic period which have been collected from time to time during the last thirty years since Mr. Franks first directed attention to this highly differentiated group, but those who may be specially interested in the subject will find important and perhaps controversial materials in the works already referred to, as well as in two recent articles, viz. "On a Late Celtic Urnfield at Aylesford, Kent," (*Archæologia*, 1890), and "The Discovery of an Ancient Lake-Village in Somersetshire," (*Times*, 24th Oct. 1892). For additional illustrations of the bronze sheaths, I would refer my readers to *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. iii. pl. xvi., and vol. iv. pl. xxxiii.; *Proceedings of Archaeological Institute*, York, volume (1846), pl. v.; and *Catalogue of Antiquities in Alnwick Castle*. A perusal of these references will readily enable any one to become acquainted with all that has hitherto been published on late Celtic remains in Britain.

ROBERT MUNRO, M.D.





BRONZE SWORD-SHEATH.



