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Kerry's Viking-Age Silver: A Legacy of Antiquarians, Collectors and Dealers

JOHN SHEEHAN

Much of the evidence for the Vikings and their activity in Kerry is contained in the historical sources of the period, most notably the annals (Ó Corráin 2009). It is the discipline of archaeology, however, as well as the study of place-names, that expands and refines the historical framework. In some cases it is modern archaeological excavation that has produced new information on the Hiberno-Scandinavians and their activities in Kerry, as has been the case in the remarkable site of Cloghermore Cave, but generally it is a chance archaeological find or the fortuitous survival of a place-name that provides such evidence. In overall terms, however, much of the evidence is somewhat disjointed, being composed of a historical reference here, a place-name element there, or stray archaeological finds elsewhere. In the case of the archaeological finds from Kerry, as elsewhere in Ireland, these often form part of the antiquarians' legacy to archaeology. This legacy, as will be evident from this paper, is not without its faults. In order to reach a fuller understanding of the Viking-age silver hoards and single-finds, therefore, one must research the history of the antiquarians engagement with these finds. This involves studying antiquarian records as well as tracking the artefacts as they transferred from one collection of antiquities to another, often through the sales and auctions of important collectors *via* antiquities dealers. Prior to twentieth-century legislation and the developing role of public museums, much archaeological material from Ireland left the country or disappeared. This is also the case with many of the Viking-age finds, and the purpose of this paper is to consider the Kerry silver material**,** both in terms of the history of the finds as well as their general archaeological context.

The Vikings

The first Viking raids in Ireland took place, according to the historical sources, in 795. Over the following forty years or so many more attacks, sporadic in nature, took place, with the Vikings apparently returning to Scandinavia at the end of each season with their loot and slaves. By the 840s, however, they had begun to build permanent raiding bases or *longphuirt* along the coastal and inland waterways, the most important of which was located at Dublin. A more violent period followed, characterised by large-scale attacks, during which the Vikings may have been attempting to conquer territories for settlement. The Irish kings eventually contained the threat, however, and ninth-century Viking settlement thereafter seems to have been confined to a small number of coastal bases and their immediate hinterlands. Several of these became active as trading centres as well as continuing in their role as raiding bases, and the wealth accumulated in them was sometimes substantial. It was against this background that silver – the principal commodity on which the Scandinavian economies operated – was first introduced into Ireland on a large scale.

From the mid-ninth century onwards the Vikings began to become increasingly integrated into the world of Irish politics. By the early decades of the tenth-century, however, they realised that they could not conquer and settle territories in Ireland in the same manner as they had already achieved in large parts of England and Scotland. Consequently, they seem to have decided to adopt an alternative strategy of colonising Ireland economically. To this end they founded a number of trading towns, including Dublin, Cork**,** Waterford and Limerick. Over time these were to become accepted elements within the framework of local kingdoms that formed the political structure of early medieval Ireland. The towns became prosperous centres and developed important political and economic interests, both within Ireland and abroad. In general terms, by the middle of the tenth century the Vikings in Ireland had been transformed from the raiders and looters of the ninth century. They now mainly lived in towns, engaged in commerce and trade, both national and international, and were becoming increasingly culturally integrated with the Irish. In addition they had become Christian, and later some Scandinavian art-styles began to appear on Irish ecclesiastical objects (see Murray fig. 9 this volume). They had undergone

a cultural transformation from being 'Vikings' to being 'Hiberno-Scandinavians' and, undoubtedly by then, they had as much in common with the Irish as they had with the populations of Norway or Denmark.

There are two significant archaeological sites in Kerry that are of importance, in differing ways, towards refining our understanding of the Vikings and their activities, not just in Kerry, but beyond. These sites, both of which have been excavated, are Cloghermore Cave, near Tralee (Connolly and Coyne 2005**;** see also Connolly this volume), and Beginish Island, in Valentia Harbour (O'Kelly 1956). The cave at Cloghermore, in which a number of Viking burials of late ninth/early tenth century date were excavated, was clearly used by a Hiberno-Scandinavian group. The background and character of the Beginish site has recently been re-interpreted by Sheehan, Stummann Hansen and Ó Corráin (Sheehan *et al* 2001), who argued that it was an enduring Viking base and primarily functioned as a maritime haven or way-station en route from the Hiberno-Scandinavian settlements of Cork and Limerick.

Viking-age silver

Silver was the principal medium of economic exchange throughout the Viking World which, ultimately, stretched from Russia in the east to the North American continent in the west. Though coin usage and minting did develop at different times in different parts of this vast region, generally silver was used as currency in non-numismatic form in a bullion or metal-weight economy, while imported coins were generally valued by weight. Therefore ornaments of various types, as well as ingots, sometimes cut-up into what is termed 'hack-silver', served as a form of bullion currency. Ornaments, such as arm- and neck-rings as well as brooches, also served a dual purpose in that they could also be used as display and status items. But an assortment of hacked-up ornaments and ingots could be just as valuable to a Scandinavian, in commercial terms, as a pristine neck-ring.

It is largely due to the fact that Viking settlement in Ireland adopted a predominantly urban form, combined with the fact that the activities of the Hiberno-Scandinavians became increasingly commercial in character, that very large amounts of Viking-age silver have been found in this country. In fact, well in excess of one hundred hoards of ninth- and tenth- century date are known from Ireland, representing a concentration of wealth that is not equalled elsewhere outside of Scandinavia during this period. However, despite the fact that the Hiberno-Scandinavians founded three towns in Munster, less than twenty per cent of Ireland's recorded Viking silver hoards derive from this province (**Figure 1**). There are only sixteen silver hoards containing non-numismatic material on record from Munster, those from: Kilbarry, Lohort and Macroom, Co. Cork; Fenit and Cloghermore, Co. Kerry; Carraig Aille II and Mungret, Co. Limerick; Rathmooley and Cullen, Co. Tipperary; Kilmacomma and Knockmaon, Co. Waterford; Scattery Island, Co. Clare, and four hoards with county provenances only, two from Cork and one each from Limerick and Clare (see Sheehan 1998, 162-63, where selected references are cited). In addition, there is a small number of single-finds as well as an assemblage of Viking silver from the recently discovered Scandinavian *longphort* at Woodstown, Co. Waterford.

Most of these Munster hoards have been found in counties Cork and Limerick, probably reflecting to an extent the presence of the Viking towns there. Kerry, being at a remove from the Viking urban centres and their cultural and economic hinterlands, is not particularly rich in the silver that drove the Hiberno-Scandinavian economy, with only two hoards and one apparent single-find on record from the county. Taken together, however, these form a group of interesting finds that throw light on aspects of the nature and extent of Hiberno-Scandinavian involvement in Kerry. The hoards are those from Cloghermore and Fenit, while the single-find is provenanced only to 'near Ballybunion'. In addition, a Viking-age silver arm-ring, previously published as being from Tralee (*Day Catalogue* 66. no. 457; Graham-Campbell 1976, 72), may now be expunged from the record and identified as the 'near Ballybunion' find.

The Cloghermore hoard

The hoard from Cloghermore Cave has recently been fully published (Sheehan 2005) and is further considered by Michael Connolly in this volume. Consequently it is dealt with in only a summary manner here. It consists of six items, comprising two ingots and four large fragments of arm-rings (**Figure 2**). The ingots, small oblong bars of silver, are of some interest representing as they do a simple means of storing bullion in late ninth and tenth century Ireland. The arm-ring fragments

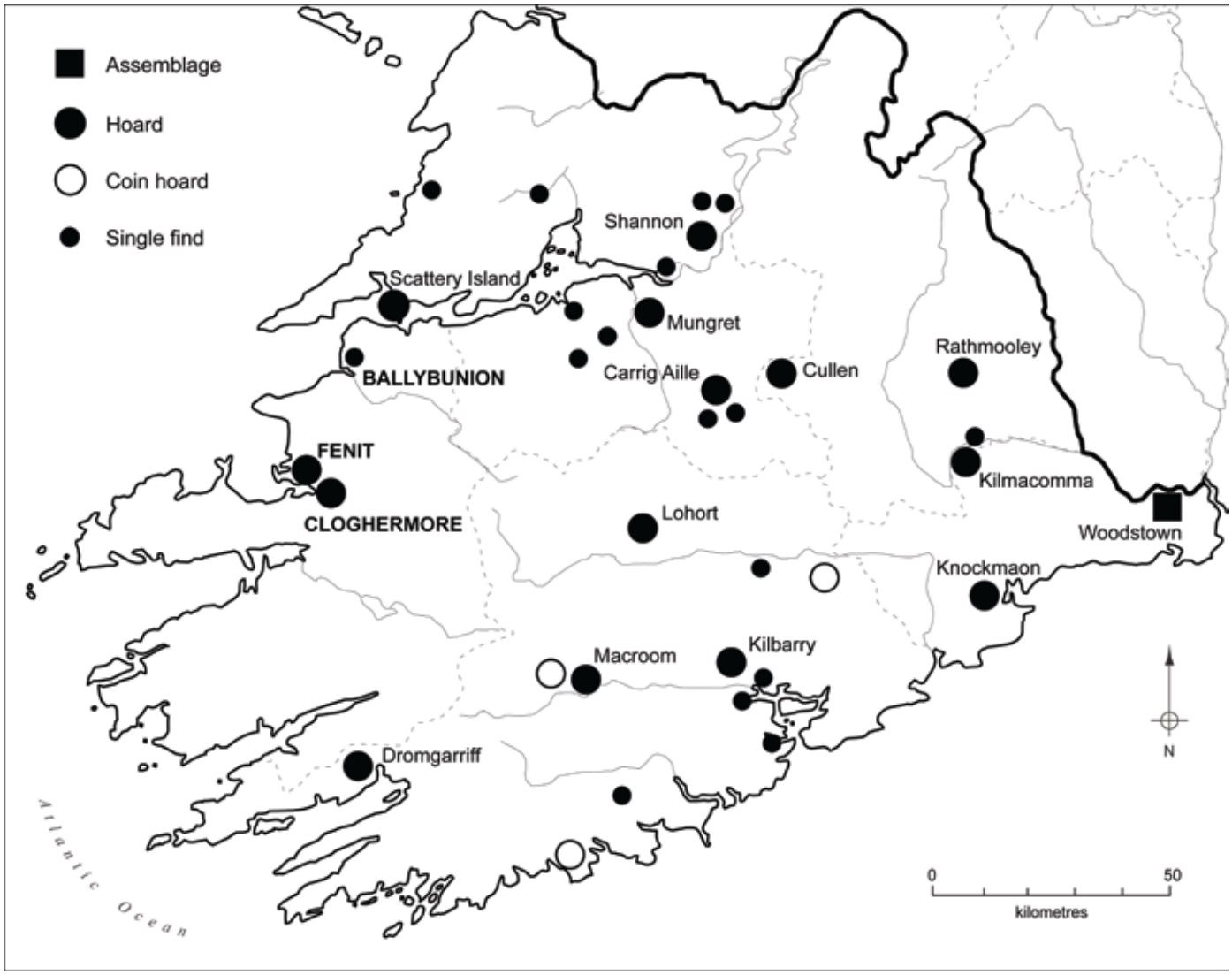


Figure 1: Distribution of Viking-Age hoards from Munster.



Figure 2: The Viking-age hoard from Cloghermore Cave, Co. Kerry (Photo: Tomás Tyner, Audio-Visual Services, University College Cork).

are classic examples of Hiberno-Scandinavian broad-band arm-rings. The nature of a metal-weight economy sometimes necessitated the reduction of ornaments to hack-silver, and examples of broad-band arm-rings reduced to this form occur in many hoards in Ireland. Silver arm-rings were by far the most common products of Ireland's Hiberno-Scandinavian silver-working tradition, which was at its height between *c*.850 and *c*.950, but the most important of these in numerical terms is the broad-band type, which occur in twenty-nine hoards from Ireland. These rings are also known from Britain and Norway, including a spectacular new find from Huxley, Cheshire, which contains twenty examples (Sheehan 2009). The occurrence of broad-band arm-rings alongside coins in a number of hoards from Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia indicates that the majority of these rings were produced during the fifty-year period between *c*.880 and *c*.930. They appear to have been primarily manufactured for the storage and circulation of silver as a form of currency in Ireland's metal-weight economy, though it is very likely that they also served as status objects. The distributional evidence from Ireland suggests that these types of arm-rings were manufactured there, most probably in Hiberno-Scandinavian Dublin.

Given that it has no coin content, the date of the Cloghermore hoard may only be approximated from the evidence of the deposition dates of other related hoards. Taking the proposed date-ranges for broad-band arm-rings and for ingots together, a date for the assembly and deposition of the Cloghermore hoard within the period between *c*.880 and *c*.940 seems likely, though it is seems more probable that the deposition of the hoard lies within the latter part of this range, possibly *c*.910-940.

In its broad Munster context, the Cloghermore hoard shares most in common, structurally, functionally, chronologically and culturally, with the finds from Carraig Aille II, Co. Limerick, and an unlocalised Co. Cork hoard, known as Cork no. 2. It seems possible that the three hoards ultimately relate to and derive from Dublin and its economic sphere of influence, rather than from the Munster Hiberno-Scandinavian urban settlements. The importance of the Cloghermore hoard, in terms of its proposed connections with the broadly contemporary Carraig Aille II and Cork no.2 finds, is that, unlike them, it derives from a well-excavated and culturally defined archaeological context. The cave at Cloghermore has produced a significant quantity of Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian material, such as, for example, some of its glass beads and ringed pins. It seems obvious, on present evidence, that the range of material culture represented here probably derived from or through Dublin, and the character and contents of the silver hoard support this hypothesis. As such, the Cloghermore hoard, as well as the Carraig Aille II and Co. Cork no. 2 finds, serve as a reminder of the economic primacy of Dublin in Viking-age Ireland.

The find context of the Cloghermore hoard, a cave, is unusual. The only other cave from Ireland from which a Viking-age non-numismatic silver hoard has been recorded is Dunmore, Co. Kilkenny, where, as was the case at Cloghermore, quantities of human bones were also present. Interestingly, a second hoard has quite recently been found at this cave (Bornholdt Collins 2010). It should also be noted that a gold broad-band arm-ring was found during excavations in a cave at Edenvale, near Ennis, Co. Clare, in the early twentieth century, and, interestingly, its form of concealment was quite similar to that used in Cloghermore, it having been placed in a recess of the cave's main chamber, lying between small stones and covered by a slab (Scharff et al 1906, 67-9). Therefore, even though it only constitutes a single-find, it shares with the hoards from Cloghermore and Dunmore the vital characteristic of concealment and should be considered alongside them. It is tempting to associate the deposition of a Viking-age silver hoard in a cave with ritual activity, especially when there are also quantities of human bones present. However, despite this prospect, Viking-age silver hoards are only very rarely found in demonstrably ritual contexts (Graham-Campbell & Sheehan 2009, 88-90), and there is no absolutely clear example of the ritual deposition of a hoard in a cave, either in Ireland or elsewhere in the Viking world. It seems more likely that the Cloghermore hoard is a standard economic deposit, deliberately concealed with the intention of recovery.

The Fenit hoard

Unfortunately, practically nothing is on record concerning the find context of the important hoard from Fenit. Discovered shortly before 1880, this consists of a neck-ring and a plain arm-ring (**Figures 3-4**). The latter object, now lost, may be identified as a broad-band arm-ring of the same type, though plain, as those represented in hack-silver form in the Cloghermore hoard. The neck-ring is formed of three tapered rods, twisted together. At one terminal one of the rods is

extended and bent to form a loop, while the other terminal takes the form of a solid, dome-shaped knob.

The hoard first came to public notice at a meeting of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland that took place in Cork in October 1880, when Alderman Robert Day, a well-known Cork collector of antiquities, exhibited the artefacts. He gave the following account (Day 1882, 346-7):

> I am also enabled, by the courtesy of their lady owner, to exhibit a silver armlet and bracelet which have quite recently been dug up in the county Kerry. I regret that I cannot *now* give the detailed particulars of their finding. The bracelet is a plain, heavy, flattened penannular band of silver, which was probably worn as such. Similar objects have been found from time to time in the country, and were at one time supposed to have passed current as ring money. *Vide* papers read before the Royal Irish Academy in May and June 1836, by Sir William Betham, where exactly similar objects are figured. The longer of the two is of twisted silver, and may have been worn as an armilla or necklet; it tapers from the points where it is brought together, and secured with a silver loop, and swells out to its fullest proportions in the centre. This is an extremely fine example of its kind.

Although Day noted that he could not then report on the hoard's find circumstances he, unfortunately, is not known to have ever done so. Consequently, we know nothing about the precise find-spot or the circumstances that led to the discovery of this important find. He did, however, acquire the find and over thirty years later it appears, provenanced to Fenit, in the sale of his collection in London (*Day Auction Catalogue* 1913, 66, pl. xix). At this auction the hoard was purchased by William Permain, a London-based international dealer in art and antiquities. He appears to have split the hoard, and an arm-ring which almost certainly may be identified as the one from Fenit later surfaces in Sotheby's catalogue of an anonymous collection that was auctioned on December 6th 1920 (lot 194). The entry appears as:

> A PENNAULAR ARMLET, IN SILVER, 2 ¾ *in. broad;* of massive flat rectangular section, and of rough oval shape; the ends taper and are squared; the edges slightly beaten up; from *Ireland. An extremely rare object*.

The present location of this object is unknown.

The Fenit neck-ring initially made its way to America when William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951), the wealthy newspaper magnate, acquired it for his renowned private collection of European art and antiquities. It seems possible that Permain, the dealer who purchased the hoard in London in 1913, was acting as a buyer for Hearst. He certainly served in this capacity later on when, for instance, he acquired Canova's *Venus Italica* for him (Caruso and Hahn 1993, 828). (This remarkable statue, incidentally, had for almost a century prior to this formed part of the private collection of the Petty-Fitzmaurices, of Kerry's Lansdowne Estate, having been obtained by them from Napoleon's brother, Lucien). It appears certain that Hearst acquired the Fenit neck-ring during or shortly after 1913. This was during the early stages of a period, lasting for several decades, when he assembled one of the largest and most impressive private collections ever brought together. Its high points included classical vases, medieval armour, Limoges enamels, Georgian silver and medieval and later tapestries, and it has been claimed that Hearst single-handedly accounted for some twenty-five per cent of the world's art-market during this time.



Figure 3: Robert Day's drawing of the Fenit hoard (Reproduced by permission of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland ©).



Figure 4: The neck-ring from the Fenit hoard (© Walters Art Gallery).



Figure 5: The neck-ring from the Hunt collection (© The Hunt Museum).

Hearst's business empire was threatened with bankruptcy in 1938 and consequently it undertook a court-mandated reorganization. Many of its assets were liquidated, and Hearst was forced to sell off a great deal of his private collection. At the various auctions that followed many of his pieces were acquired by prestige galleries and museums such as the Louvre, Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. During this period the Fenit neck-ring was acquired by the Walters Art Gallery, Maryland, having been purchased at a New York sale of the Hearst collection in 1941 by a group of philanthropists who presented it to the museum as a gift (Garside 1980, no. 413), where it remains on permanent display.

The Fenit neck-ring is unusual in form in that, in addition to its terminal hook-fastening, it features a dome-shaped knob terminal. While the former feature occurs on many Viking-age neck-rings, the latter one is certainly very unusual. Among the few known occurrences of this general type of arrangement, for instance, is the neck-ring from Mönsterås, Småland, Sweden, which has a globular terminal (Hårdh 1996, 46, fig.5). The closest known parallels for the dome-shaped terminal on the Fenit neck-ring, however, from anywhere in the Viking world, are found on a neck-ring in the Hunt Museum, Limerick (Sheehan 2002, 113), where both terminals are of this form (**Figure 5**). However, the history of the early ownership of this find, prior to its acquisition by John Hunt (1900-76), suggests a possibility that these terminals may actually be modern additions to this Viking-age ring. For this reason, given the rare and unusual nature of the terminal-types they share in common, it is necessary to consider the Hunt Museum neck-ring within the context of the potential light it may throw, or otherwise, on the authenticity of the Fenit ring. If one of these neck-rings can be demonstrated to be of dubious form or background, then the other may come under serious scrutiny.

There is no unequivocal record concerning how, or from whom, John Hunt acquired the Viking-age neck-ring for his collections. In the early 1970s, however, he spoke to James Graham-Campbell about the matter. Graham-Campbell, then an assistant lecturer in the Department of Archaeology, University College Dublin, was in the process of compiling information on Viking-age silver from Ireland and visited Hunt in his home, by invitation, to view relevant material from his collections. Regarding the neck-ring with the dome-shaped terminals, Hunt stated that it had been found in Ireland and that it derived from the collection of the Rt. Rev. Monsignor James O'Laverty (1828-1906), of Holywood, Co. Down. Whatever about the veracity of the former claim, concerning the provenance of the object, the latter one cannot presently be substantiated and no such ring is listed in the catalogue of the sale of the O'Laverty Collection, which was held in Belfast in 1906.

It is possible to elucidate the background of the Hunt Museum neck-ring, to some extent, by using information retained in the archives of the Hunt Museum itself, namely an album of photographs, compiled *c*.1920, of the J.H. Ball Collection that was housed in Hertfordshire County Museum, St Alban's, along with a copy of a document entitled *Catalogue of the John Ball Collection of Antiquities now on loan to The Herefordshire County Museum St. Albans*, retained in the National Museum of Ireland. Mary Cahill (2005) has recently published an important study of this individual, John Henry Ball (1883-1938). He was in the employ of the Marquess of Londonderry for a time, possibly as a chauffeur, served as a Royal Naval Air Service officer during the First World War, and subsequently went on to become a very successful arms dealer. He amassed a very large private collection, including fine and decorative arts, furniture, armour, ceramics and archaeological material, much of which was on loan to the St Alban's museum. It is known that he was occasionally somewhat dubious in his dealings with antiquities, and that he was not adverse to 'improving' or even forging archaeological material. Cahill's paper fully explores his involvement, for instance, in the production of a collection of fake gold ornaments of purported Irish provenance, including the so-called Strangford Lough hoard.

The St Alban's Ball Collection album includes a photograph of two silver neck-rings. One is undoubtedly the neck-ring now in the Hunt Museum, complete with its very distinctive terminals, and is captioned 'Viking neck torque of plaited silver wire'; the second ring, which is also distinctive in form, is captioned 'Neck torque of silver. Early Iron Age. Valladolid, Spain'. The Viking-age neck-ring is also included in the aforementioned *Catalogue of the John Ball Collection*, where the full entry reads 'Viking neck Torque of plaited silver wire. 1 ◊ section bracelet. 1 earring all silver'. What may be deduced from this information is that the Hunt Collection neck-ring was found sometime before *c*.1920, by which time it formed part of the Ball Collection. The association of the ring with Ball, given the very unusual form of its terminals, is important given his demonstrable propensity to forge and alter archaeological objects. It seems possible that the dome-shaped knob terminals were additions designed by Ball, perhaps to 'improve' an incomplete object. While there is little doubt that the Hunt Museum neck-ring is a genuine Viking-age object, some doubt might be cast on the authenticity of its terminals. The potential relevance of this object to the Fenit neck-ring, of course, is that the best parallels for the latter's dome-shaped terminal are found on the former.

Prior to considering the issue raised above – the authenticity of the terminals of the Fenit and Hunt Museum neck-rings – the question of how and when John Hunt acquired the Ball neck-ring should be addressed as it is also of relevance in connection with the next find of Viking-age silver from Kerry to be considered in this paper, that from 'near Ballybunion'. Ball died in 1938, and some of his collection in St Alban's was dispersed in 1939. The remainder was auctioned in London at Sotheby's, in 1949, and at Christies, in 1956. The Viking-age neck-ring does not feature in the catalogues of either these sales, so it appears reasonable to assume that it was included in the apparently more casual dispersal of objects from the museum in St Albans in 1939. This group of objects included antiquities from Ireland and the identity of the sole purchaser was recorded, perhaps not surprisingly, as John Hunt (MacGregor 1987, 14).

During the following year, 1940, Hunt offered a high proportion, if not most, of his newly acquired material from the ex. Ball Collection for sale to the National Museum of Ireland. Much of the material had Ulster provenances, suggesting that it had been acquired by Ball during the period when he worked for the Marquess of Londonderry, whose seat was at Mount Stewart, Co. Down. A list of the material

for sale, now referred to as the 'Ball/Hunt inventory', was compiled in the National Museum during 1940 and this has recently been published by Cahill (2005, 103-108). Interestingly, the silver neck-ring is not included on the list, suggesting that Hunt had decided to retain it for his personal collection. In any event, the National Museum's efforts to purchase this collection were unsuccessful and the material was returned to Hunt in 1948.

The first verifiable re-surfacing of the Hunt Museum neck-ring following *c*.1920, when it had been photographed in St Albans, is when the two ex. Ball Collection silver neck-rings are depicted in a British Museum photograph, dated 1950. The accompanying note reads:

> Said to have been found in N. Ireland. Brought in by Mr Hewett, dealer, for export. Licence not recommended. Should therefore still be in England.

Mr Hewett may be identified as Kenneth John Hewett, a well-known London-based dealer in ethographic art and antiquities who dealt with museums in Britain and the United States throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Neither his provenancing of the rings to 'N. Ireland', nor the implied suggestion that together they formed a hoard, have any verifiable authority given that it is known, on the basis of the caption to the *c*.1920 photograph, that one of the neck-rings is of Spanish provenance. However, it is possible that Hewett's north of Ireland provenance for the Viking-age neck-ring is genuine given that it derived from the Ball Collection within which a very high proportion of the Irish material, as inventoried in the National Museum in 1940, is of Ulster provenance.

In 1951, having failed to obtain a licence to export the ex. Ball Collection neck-rings, Hewett offered the Viking-age ring for sale to the British Museum, stating that it derived from the O'Laverty Collection. Even though Hewett's purported association between this ring and the O'Laverty Collection is unverifiable, as has been pointed out above on the basis that it does not feature in O'Laverty's 1906 sale catalogue, it is presumably possible that some of O'Laverty's items were disposed of during his lifetime and, therefore, would not have featured in this sale. This possibility, along with the Ulster background of much of the Irish material in the Ball Collection, might indicate that the find-location of the Hunt Museum neck-ring was indeed in the north of Ireland.

It is interesting to note that the same alleged O'Laverty link with the neck-ring was offered to Graham-Campbell by John Hunt over twenty years later. It is known that there was a business connection between Hunt and Hewett (Cahill 2005, 98, fn.51), with Hewett supplying antiquities to Hunt, and it seems probable that in his 1950-51 dealings with the British Museum he was acting on Hunt's behalf. If so, Hewett's purported O'Laverty link presumably originated with Hunt, but it is not known from where he got it. The British Museum, in any case, did not acquire the objects and the Viking-age neck-ring appears to have returned to Hunt's collection in Ireland. It was certainly there in the early 1970s, when it was examined by Graham-Campbell, and it now forms part of the collections in the Hunt Museum (Sheehan 2002, 113). The ultimate fate of the Spanish neck-ring, which is of no obvious relevance to this paper, is unknown. Perhaps Hewett found a buyer for it.

The potential relevance of the Hunt Museum neck-ring to the Fenit neck-ring is that the best parallels for the latter's very unusual dome-shaped terminal are found on the former. Is it possible that both rings were 'improved' by the same hand in order to increase their value to collectors? This seems unlikely, however, on a number of grounds. Firstly, the Kerry find was exhibited in Cork in 1880, shortly after its discovery, complete with the dome-shaped terminal (see **Figure 3**). Given the time factor involved, it seems there would have been little opportunity available to perform an alteration to the object. Secondly, there is nothing on record to suggest that there was any connection between Robert Day, who is associated with the Fenit object, and J.H. Ball, either in relation to this matter or any other. Thirdly, the Fenit hoard was exhibited in Cork three years before J.H. Ball was actually born, making impossible any connection between Ball and the Fenit neck-ring terminal. It must be concluded, therefore, that there is no connection between these two finds and that, consequently, the potentially dubious background of the Hunt Museum neck-ring cannot be taken as an indication that there is anything questionable about the form of the Fenit neck-ring.

There is a thirty years gap between the initial publication of the Fenit neck-ring and the first recorded existence of what ultimately became the Hunt Museum neck-ring (in the St Albans photograph). If the terminals of the Hunt Museum

ring are fake additions, designed by Ball, it is perfectly conceivable that he found inspiration for their form in Robert Day's published illustration of the Fenit neck-ring (Day 1882, fig.4). Indeed, he may also have viewed the Fenit ring in 1913 at Sotheby's sale of the Day Collection, though it has not been established that he was at this auction (Cahill 2005, 69). The best way to finally resolve the issue is to subject both the Fenit and the Hunt Museum neck-rings to XRF-analyses, a project which the author hopes to initiate shortly (subject to the co-operation of the Hunt Museum and the Walters Art Gallery). If the terminals of either of the neck-rings are fake additions this would become evident, as the metallurgical composition of the silver used to manufacture them would be different from the composition of the Viking-age rods that form the hoops of the rings. If the silver compositions of the hoops and terminals are the same the implication would be that the rings, in their entirety, are of Viking-age date. The author expects this would be the case in the instance of the Fenit neck-ring, and it is not inconceivable that the Hunt Museum neck-ring would also prove to be a genuine Viking-age object.

Neck-rings occur throughout the Viking World, though they are a particular feature of Scandinavia itself from where several hundred examples are on record (Hårdh 1996, 41-83). They are found both in hoards and as single-finds. It is likely that they served as status symbols in Scandinavian society though, like the silver arm-rings discussed above in relation to the Cloghermore Cave hoard, they could also be reduced to hack-silver for commercial convenience when occasion demanded. They were manufactured throughout the period of the Viking Age, though the majority of examples appear to date to the tenth century. A number of Viking-age neck-rings are known from outside of Scandinavia, though there are only a few examples on record from Ireland. One of these was found at Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare, another is provenanced to Athlone, Co. Westmeath, while a third forms part of an unlocalised hoard from Co. Galway. The latter is of simple form, and may well be of Hiberno-Scandinavian manufacture, while the Athlone and Miltown Malbay examples share certain characteristics with neck-rings from Norway and, on the balance of probability, seem likely to be tenth-century imports.

It is difficult to propose a hypothesis which explains the occurrence of the Fenit hoard on the coastline of Kerry, on the north side of Tralee Bay. There is no historical record of any Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian presence or settlement in this area. Archaeological evidence from elsewhere, however, demonstrates a Viking presence along Ireland's Atlantic coastline at various places and times. It is, therefore, quite possible that the Fenit hoard may represent Viking activity in this area. It is equally plausible, however, as has been suggested in the consideration of many hoards from elsewhere in Ireland, that the Fenit find represents Irish ownership of Viking-age silver.

The 'near Ballybunion' find

Robert Day, who was involved in the early history of the Fenit hoard, was also associated with the only recorded example of a single-find of Viking-age silver from Co. Kerry, an example of a fairly unusual type of arm-ring found at an unrecorded location near Ballybunion. The evidence for this find is contained in the minutes of a meeting of the Cork Cuverian Society, a celebrated committee of the Royal Cork Institution (*Cuvierian Society Minutes,* 11th October 1864):

> Mr R. Day Jun. exhibited a silver armlet undecorated but joined at either end by a succession of spiral ornaments, found last year near Ballybunion, Co. Kerry.

Research by Dr Joan Rockley has indicated that this is very likely to be the ring, weighing 1oz. 3 dwt (*c*.36 gm), which is known to have been purchased by Day from Hilliards, the Tralee jewellers, in July 1864, the transaction being recorded in Day's account books. A drawing of the ring is included in an album containing a collection of images from the Day Collection, now retained in the archives of the Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland (**Figure 6a**). This is captioned: 'Silver Armlet found near Ballybunion C°. Kerry. July 1864. Wt. 1oz 3 dwt. D.', with the final letter presumably representing the initial of Day's surname.

The Ballybunion arm-ring remained in Day's possession for the rest of his life and features in the auction catalogue of the sale of his collection at Sotheby's of London in 1913 (*Day Auction Catalogue* 1913, 66, lot 457, pl. xvii), where it is described as:

> A large armlet of silver, *about 3 5/8 in. long*; the hoop of quadrangular section and diminishing in thickness

towards the ends, where it is drawn out into thin circular wire which originally formed a sort of hook-and-eye fastening; near *Tralee, Co. Kerry; very rare*.

The 'near Tralee' provenance assigned to the ring here was clearly an error, as the illustration of the object published in the auction catalogue (**Figure 6b**) demonstrates that this is the same ring as that which features in the earlier Day album, where its find-spot was noted as being 'near Ballybunion'. In addition, the description of the Ballybunion ring exhibited to the Cuvierian Society in Cork in 1864 is fully in accordance with the 1913 description of the 'Tralee' ring. It seems likely that this confusion of provenance resulted from the fact that the Ballybunion ring was purchased by Day in Tralee, as is recorded in his account books, and that therefore he came to associate it with that town.





Figure 6a: Drawing of the Ballybunion rod arm-ring (from Day album, Irish Antiquities Division, National Museum of Ireland); 6b: photograph of the arm-ring from Sotheby's Day auction catalogue (1913).

At the Sotheby's 1913 auction the Ballybunion arm-ring was purchased by W.T. Ready, a well known London dealer. While it is not known exactly who, or how many collectors, subsequently acquired the ring, it was definitely obtained at some stage by J.H. Ball, the collector already noted above in relation to the Hunt Museum neck-ring. This is evident because it appears in the National Museum of Ireland's inventory of the ex. Ball Collection material that was offered for sale to the museum by John Hunt in 1940 (Cahill 2005, 105). The entry appears as: 'No. 206. Bracelet. Silver. Kerry. nr. Tralee', and this almost certainly is to be equated with the '1 ◊ section bracelet' included in the *Catalogue of the John Ball Collection of Antiquities now on loan to The Herefordshire County Museum St. Albans*, where the '◊' symbol refers to the lozenge-shaped cross-section of the ring. In the event, the National Museum's efforts to purchase this collection were unsuccessful and the material was returned to Hunt in 1948. However, the photographic record of the collection made in the museum in 1940 includes an image of this arm-ring, numbered 206, with 'Day Sale 457' written on the back. From the photograph it is clear that this is the Ballybunion arm-ring, and that its terminals had been modified and tidied up since it was photographed for the catalogue of Day's 1913 auction. This work is likely to have been the handiwork of Ball who had a reputation, as noted above, for 'improving' archaeological objects.

It is not known what Hunt did with the Ballybunion arm-ring following its return to him in 1948. In 1968, however, Dr Kurt Ticher, an expert on early modern silver who also occasionally dealt in antiquities, sent a number of photographs to William Seaby, Director of the Ulster Museum, one of which featured 'a silver Viking armlet of square section and said to have come from Tralee'. Subsequently Seaby sent a letter to John Hunt enquiring if he still had this ring, among other objects, and if they were for sale. Hunt's reply, which did not address Seaby's question, included an attached document which contained the following information:

> A silver bracelet formed from a tapering bar of diamond section, thickest at the centre, the ends recurved and twisted round each other. … The silver bracelet said to have been found at Tralee.

The full texts of the Seaby/Hunt correspondence is transcribed by Cahill (2005, 78-9).

The Ballybunion arm-ring was not seen by Graham-Campbell when he inspected the Hunt Collection in the early 1970s and its present whereabouts are unknown. It may be that it was amongst a number of antiquities stolen from Hunt *c*.1953, one of which subsequently turned up in New York, though, if so, it seems unlikely that he could have described the ring in so detailed a manner in his 1968 correspondence with Seaby.

On the basis of the illustrations of the Ballybunion arm-ring (**Figures 6a,b**) it may be identified as an example of a Scandinavian rod arm-ring. Arm-rings of this type are formed of a single rod, usually of circular or lozenge-shaped cross-section, and are most commonly of annular form; the terminals are normally wound simply around the opposite side, although in some cases they are intertwined to form a spiral-knot. Unlike the broad-band arm-rings discussed above, rod arm-rings are normally plain and undecorated. Some examples occur in gold, such as the spectacular example in the Hoen hoard, from Norway, though examples in silver are of far more common occurrence. They are regular features of the Viking-age hoards of Scandinavia, but are of much less frequent occurrence in the western Viking world. The overall hoard evidence indicates that they originated in ninth-century Scandinavia, even if they did not come into widespread use before the mid-tenth century. It seems likely that arm-rings of this type found in Britain and Ireland derive from Scandinavia, perhaps specifically from Norway.

There is an example of a rod arm-ring in the Cuerdale hoard, from Lancashire, and also in the hoard from near Deptford, London, finds which are coin-dated to *c*.905-10 and *c*.935 respectively. There is also an example in the Skaill hoard, from Orkney, which was deposited *c*.960-80. The presence of the rod arm-ring in the Cuerdale find is of importance in that it demonstrates the currency of the type in the west during the late ninth/early tenth century. Given that much of the non-numismatic element of this very large hoard is of Hiberno-Scandinavian origin and that, for this reason, most of it appears almost certainly to have been assembled in Ireland, it is likely that the Cuerdale rod arm-ring originated there. From Ireland, apart from the Ballybunion example, rod arm-rings are on record from three hoards, those from Garron Point, Co. Antrim, Macroom, Co. Cork, and Rathmooley, Co. Tipperary. In addition, a small lead alloy example was found during the excavation of Hiberno-Scandinavian Dublin, at Winetavern Street. In summary, the Viking-age rod arm-ring from near Ballybunion is probably of Scandinavian origin and dates to the later ninth or first half of the tenth century.

Conclusions

The study of Viking-age silver from Kerry, as other regions of Ireland, is of interest in a number of respects. The most important of these, of course, is the archaeological information that is yielded concerning the activities and impact of the Hiberno-Scandinavians. However, the study is also important in terms of the light it throws on the poor appreciation and understanding that the antiquarians, collectors and dealers of the past had regarding the overall importance of archaeological artefacts. Clearly, they often saw their value purely in terms of the objects themselves, as display items that could be bought and sold, assembled and dispersed, altered and adjusted, without any need to adequately describe and record them for posterity. Practically no efforts were made to investigate or even note the precise find-locations and associations of the objects, and they were often recorded, if at all, in a rather cursory manner. Likewise, there was little recognition of the rights that the people of a region, or even of the nation, had towards maintaining and understanding their own heritage. It is, of course, unfair to judge past practises by the standards of the present. Encouragement for the future, however, can be taken from the fact that the only find of Viking-age silver from Kerry that remains in Ireland, available for public appreciation in Kerry County Museum, is its most recent find, the Cloghermore hoard.

The range of Viking-age silver artefact-types represented among the hoards and single-finds from Kerry is of some interest, with both Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian types present. The arm-rings in the Fenit and Cloghermore hoards are typical Hiberno-Scandinavian types, probably made in Dublin, while the ring from near Ballybunion is more likely to be of Scandinavian origin, perhaps from Norway. The cultural background of the Fenit neck-ring is less certain, and it is not presently possible to assign it to either the Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian silver-working traditions. It is not unusual to find both Scandinavian and Hiberno-Scandinavian silver objects within the same region,

and it should be remembered that their value was determined by their bullion weight, not their cultural background.

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