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The Character and Cultural Context of the Inis Cáthaig/ Scatterry Island Silver Hoard

Introduction

Silver was the principal medium of exchange throughout the Viking Age. Largely due to the fact that Scandinavian settlement in Ireland adopted a predominantly urban form, combined with the fact that the activity in these centres became increasingly commercial in character, large amounts of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Viking 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, a concentration of wealth which is not equalled elsewhere in the Viking West, or indeed, in some regions of Scandinavia itself. Despite the fact that the Scandinavians founded three towns in Munster, less than twenty per cent of Ireland's recorded Viking Age silver hoards derive from this province, with most of these from counties Cork and Limerick (Fig. 1). Some years ago, the

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author published a consideration of the Viking Age silver and related material from Co. Clare in which only one find, a group of arm-rings provenanced only to the Clare side of the River Shannon, was deemed to be a hoard (Sheehan 2000). Another Clare hoard, comprising a pair of silver brooches from Scatterry Island, the location of the ecclesiastical site of Inis Cáthaig, was not included in this review because, even though it is Viking Age in date, its contents are of Irish workmanship and, therefore, it was considered to represent Irish treasure, just as the celebrated ecclesiastical hoards from Ardagh and Derrynaflan do. For the same reasons this find has been excluded from other previously published considerations of Ireland's Viking Age hoards

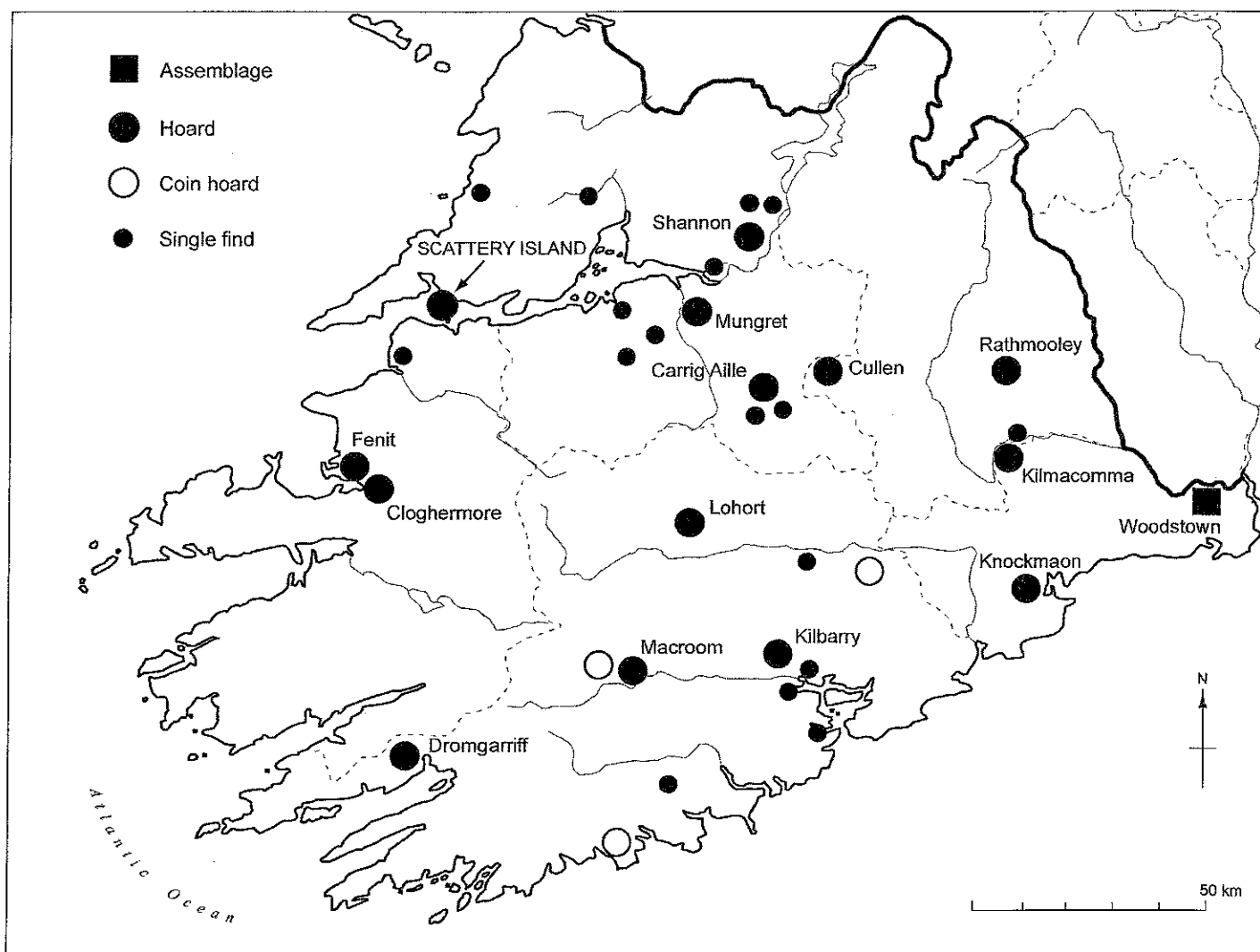


Fig. 1 – Distribution of Viking-Age hoards from Munster.

of Scandinavian-type (Graham-Campbell 1976; Sheehan 1998a). A re-consideration of this position is now due.

Problems inevitably arise in trying to distinguish between hoards buried by the Irish themselves and those concealed by the Scandinavians in Ireland, and this is particularly the case with the small hoard from Scatterry Island. Its composition is unlike most hoards of Scandinavian character from Ireland (as these usually contain ingots and/or ornaments of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian type, and/or hack-silver derived from these object types, with occasionally some coins as well), which may be taken as an indication that it is an Irish hoard. The fact that it was buried on an ecclesiastical site might also, on initial consideration, suggest that it is of Irish rather than Scandinavian character. Indeed, given the known vulnerability of Scatterry to Viking attacks, one might speculate that the brooches had been buried for safety by their Irish owner(s) – and then left unclaimed – for that very reason. On the other hand, in view of the historical and other evidence for the existence of an important Hiberno-Scandinavian presence, and perhaps even settlement, on Scatterry, as well as the presence of two small nicks – a characteristic method for testing silver quality evident in some Scandinavian hoards (including those from Britain and Ireland) – on one of the brooches, it may be considered equally plausible that this find represents a Hiberno-Scandinavian hoard.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to re-consider the Scatterry hoard in the light of its relationship with other Viking Age hoards from Ireland, the political nature of its Shannon estuary find context and the condition of the brooches themselves. It is concluded that this important find, rather than representing Irish treasure, is a Hiberno-Scandinavian hoard.

Viking Age hoards in Ireland

Over one hundred and thirty finds of silver hoards of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian character are on record from Ireland. These are composed of coins or of a combination of ingots, ornaments and hack-silver (the cut-up fragments of ingots or ornaments), with or without coins, and may be divided into three broad categories: coinless hoards, mixed hoards and coin-hoards (Sheehan 1998a, 166-71). Coinless hoards consist exclusively of non-numismatic material and range in composition from complete ornaments and/or ingots to hack-silver, such as the examples from Carraig Aille II, Co. Limerick and Rathmooley, Co. Tipperary, while mixed hoards consist of non-numismatic material combined with coins, such as the example from Mungret, Co. Limerick. A large proportion of both these categories of hoards contain ornaments of specifically Hiberno-Scandinavian type, most of which are products of the silver-working industry centred on Dublin, Ireland's most important Scandinavian settlement. Hiberno-Scandinavian silver-working traditions of lesser significance, however, also developed around other Scandinavian towns in Ireland, such as Cork and Waterford (Sheehan 1998b, 154-56).

The Scatterry find, though it does not contain Hiberno-Scandinavian objects, belongs to the coinless hoard category. This variety of hoard forms the most common type of ninth/tenth century hoard from Ireland, and it may contain ornaments, ingots and/or hack-silver. There are over fifty hoards of this type known, most of which can be dated to between c.850 and c.950. Many of the ornaments they contain are arm-rings made in the Hiberno-Scandinavian tradition, while much of their hack-silver content is also derived from objects of this type. A relatively small amount

of the ornaments and hack-silver found in this type of hoard are imports from Scandinavia, the Baltic and Scandinavian Scotland. The hoard provenanced to the Clare side of the River Shannon, for instance, was composed of arm-rings made in Scandinavian Scotland.

Mixed hoards consist of objects, such as those mentioned above, combined with coins. There are eighteen examples of this type known from Ireland, the vast majority of which were buried during the tenth century, generally after c.940. These hoards are of importance for, in addition to the value they have in dating the ornament-types found in them, they also reveal at what point coins began to be conserved and retained for commercial purposes, which appears to focus on the mid-tenth century. The final category of Viking Age silver hoard is the coin hoard. Just over forty examples of ninth- and tenth-century date are known from Ireland, with rather few on record from the western counties. The types of coins present in these hoards are predominantly Anglo-Saxon, though some Arabic issues are also represented. Most Irish coin hoards are rather small in size, about half of them consisting of thirty coins or less. There can be no doubt that very large amounts of coin were imported from the mid-ninth century onwards but these, however, were generally destined to be melted down for conversion into ingots and ornaments of the type found in the other categories of hoards.

Scatterry Island (*Inis Cáthaig*)

Scatterry, a low island, is situated in the Shannon estuary, near Kilrush, in south-west Clare (Fig. 2). Its location ensues that it controlled maritime access to the upper estuary, and thus to Hiberno-Scandinavian Limerick and onwards to the centre of Ireland, and it was consequently of vital strategic importance during the Viking Age. On the island is the ancient ecclesiastical foundation of St Senán, of Corca Baiscinn, who established it around AD534. On the basis of the number of obits of its churchmen contained in the annalistic sources, Inis Cáthaig was clearly an important ecclesiastical centre. It features a number of important buildings and archaeological features, two of which, the round tower and its adjacent 'cathedral', are clearly of pre-twelfth century date (Ó Carragáin, forthcoming).

While the annalistic sources contain little information concerning the overall ecclesiastical character of Inis Cáth-

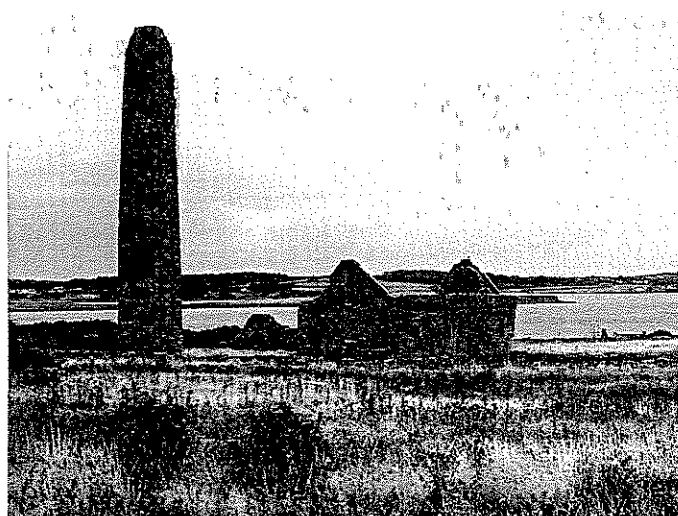


Fig. 2 – The round tower and adjacent church on Scatterry, close to which the hoard was discovered.

(Photo: Tomás Ó Carragáin).

aig, they do link it firmly with the Hiberno-Scandinavians of Limerick in the 970s, suggesting that it had a close relationship with this settlement. The relevant entries relate to specific events that took place in 974 and 977. The Annals of the Four Masters record that in 974, *sub anno* 972 (O'Donovan 1848–51, II, 698–99):

Orgain Inse Cáthaigh do Mhaghnuis, mac Arailt co l-Lagmann-aibh na n-Innsedh imbi, & Iomar ticchearna Gall Luimnigh do brith esti, & sárughadh Senáin imbi. (The plundering of Inis-Cathaigh by Maghnus, son of Aralt, with the Lagmanns of the islands along with him; and Imhar, lord of the foreigners of Luimneach, was carried off from the island, and the violation of Seanan thereby).

This event is also noted in the Annals of Inisfallen, AI 974 (Mac Airt, 1951, 160):

Macc Arailt co m-mórthinól mór timchell h-Erend coro ort Inis Cathaig & co ruc Ímar lais i m-brait esse. (The son of Aralt made a circuit of Ireland with a great company, and plundered Inis Cathaig, and brought Ímar from it into captivity).

Maccus Mac Arailt (Haraldsson) led this attack on Scattery and was aided by the Lagmann, a borrowing from Old Norse *løgmen* meaning 'Law-men', a term which usually has a Hebridean connection when used in the Irish sources (Ó Murchadha 1987). He was a descendent of the notable Viking leader Ívarr, who campaigned on both sides of the Irish Sea in the 860s and whose descendents played a significant role in Dublin and the Hebrides until the twelfth century. Maccus and his brother, Gofraid, were leaders of the Vikings of the Isle of Man and the Hebrides, in which capacity Maccus attended the convention of kings held by King Edgar in Chester in 973. Their father was Haraldr, a king of Limerick who died in 940, and thus they had established links with the rule of this Scandinavian port. Downham has suggested that the reason for the attack on Scattery in 974 may have been that Ímar, then king of Limerick, had excluded Maccus and Gofraid from power and that consequently Maccus had aimed to win control of the settlement (2007, 190). Interestingly, this involved plundering Scattery, implying the existence of a connection between Limerick and Inis Cáthaig. This link is further emphasised by the fact that Ímar, described in the Annals of the Four Masters as 'Lord of the Foreigners of Limerick', had clearly taken refuge on Scattery.

The consequences of Maccus' actions are not recorded, but some accommodation between him and Ímar may have been agreed. However, the Annals of Inisfallen do note that, in the following year, Ímar escaped overseas (AI 975):

Ímar do thelud dar muir & Inis Aubtan do gabail iterum. (Ímar escaped over sea, and Inis Ubdan was captured again).

The result of Ímar's departure was that Inis Ubdan, which may be identified as King's Island in Limerick, was captured, possibly by Irish forces. By 977, however, Ímar clearly had returned to Limerick when, as is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters, *sub anno* 975, he was dealt with by Brian Bóruma (O'Donovan 1848–51, II, 704–05):

Inis Cáthaigh do shárughadh do Bhrian, mac Cinneidigh, for Ghallaibh Luimnigh, im Iomhar cona dhá mhac .i. Amhlaóibh & Duibhcend. Brian caogad bliadhain d'aois an tan-sin. (Inis-Cathaigh was violated by Brian, son of Ceinneidigh, against the foreigners of Luimneach, with Imhar and his two sons, namely, Amhlaeibh and Duibhcenn. Brian was fifty years of age at that time.)

The event was also noted in the Annals of Inisfallen, AI 977 (Mac Airt, 1951, 162):

Ímar, rí Gall, & a da mc. do marbad i n-Inis Cathaig la Brian mc. Cennetich. (Ímar, king of the foreigners, and his two sons, were killed on Inis Cathaig by Brian, son of Cennétig.)

The connection of three years earlier between Scandinavian Limerick and Scattery Island recurs in these 997 entries. The fact that it was not just once, but twice, that Ímar had based himself on Scattery in periods of crisis suggests that the link that existed between Scandinavian Limerick and Inis Cáthaig may have been a sustained one, rather than one which merely covered the years of the mid-970s. Indeed, it may well be that the link began during the opening decades of the tenth century, or perhaps even during Limerick's ninth-century *longphort* phase. It is interesting to note that the Life of Senán and related material, though not, of course, historical texts, also make reference to Inis Cáthaig within the understood context of it being part of the Scandinavian kingdom of Limerick, attention to which has recently been drawn by Ó Corráin (in Sheehan et al 2001, 112–13). The Life, for instance, records a prophecy that Inis Cáthaig would become be a sanctuary for Foreigners and Irish (*Bid dín attaigh do Gallaib & do Gædealaib*) (Stokes 1890, 66). A poem, perhaps of the fourteenth century but based on much earlier materials, has Inghéan Bhaoth, the female saint of Killinaboy, telling a rather misogynistic Senán that the Vikings (*Uiginnigh*) will plunder his island and will settle there, that there will be 'fair blonde women flaunting their cloaks' and there will be sex and marriage there for the duration of the reign of three kings. In addition, she tells that kings will reside regularly on the island to the west of the stream called Ness (Grosjean 1934, 80–81). For the author of this poem it is clear that there had been an important Scandinavian settlement on Inis Cáthaig and that the island was regarded as part of the Scandinavian kingdom of Limerick.

This link between Inis Cáthaig and Scandinavian Limerick is also evidenced in the toponym 'Scattery'. In the Life of St Senán the name of the island is said to derive from Cathach, a monster or sea-serpent that dwelled around it until Senán's arrival (Stokes 1890, 56, 66–67). The true etymology of its name, however, is less dramatic, meaning 'Island of Cathach', where *cathach* is either an adjective, 'bellicose, given to battle', used as a personal name, or is a hypocoristic form of an Old-Irish compound name with the element *cath-*, such as Cathassach, Cathgal and Cathgus (Ó Corráin in Sheehan et al 2001, 112). The form Scattery does not occur before the seventeenth century, while the form 'Iniskattery', a combination of *Inis Cáthaig* and the forerunner of Scattery, is first found in the Down Survey of c.1660. Evidently, this form lived on in Scandinavian Limerick, and passed from there into English. It has been suggested by Ó Cíobháin that the *-s* of *Inis* got attached to *cathaig*, that *-ar* is a common element in the genitive of Old-Norse names and that the termination *-y* represents Old Norse *-øy* (island) (1971, 113–25). However, Ó Corráin has proposed that this is really an intercultural rendering, suggesting that the Hiberno-Scandinavians realised *Inis Cathaig* in part-translation, part-assimilation, to Old Norse: *inis* was correctly rendered as *-øy*; but *cath-*, with preposed *s-*, was understood as Old-Norse *skattr* (genitive in composition *skattar*), meaning tribute or treasure (in Sheehan et al 2001, 112). To the Scandinavians, it seems, Scattery meant the island where tribute was collected from elsewhere, or the island subject-

ed to tribute, or the island of treasure. Whether one follows Ó Cíobháin's or Ó Corráin's interpretation, it is clear that Scattery is the Anglicized version of a Hiberno-Norse place-name.

Therefore, it is evident from the annalistic references, the tradition enshrined in other medieval sources, and the place-name evidence, individually and collectively, that the Scandinavians of Limerick played a great deal more than just an occasional or passing role in Inis Cáthaig/Scattery Island. It seems likely that there was a sustained relationship between the two, at least during the tenth century, and there may well have been an enduring Scandinavian presence there, as had apparently been prophesied by Inghean Bhaoth.

The silver hoard

In light of the above evidence it seems appropriate to return to the silver hoard from Scattery, comprising a pair of Irish brooches. These were found together on the island in 1836, and were subsequently illustrated by Lady Henrietta Chatterton in her *Rambles in the South of Ireland during the year 1838* (1839, vol. 2, 214-5; Fig. 3), an illustration later reworked and published by T.J. Westropp (1893, 281). Chatterton noted the brooches 'were dug up not long ago among the ruins on that island', and that they were 'of solid silver, beautifully worked, and are now in the possession of the Rev. J. Mochler of Fermoy'. This individual is without doubt to be identified as the Rev. James Mockler, of Rockville, Fermoy, Co. Cork, who was a numismatist and collector of antiquities. His collection, which was sold by auction following his death by Sotheby's of London, in 1848, included coins, medals, stone and bronze axe-heads, silver and gold finger-rings and the two silver brooches from Scattery (Cahill 2006, 257, fn.16). Mockler's main interest appears to have been coins and, accordingly, it would not be surprising if he had been at least an acquaintance of Richard Sainthill, the noted Cork numismatist. There certainly seems to have been some connection between these two, for the Scattery brooches were exhibited by Sainthill to the Cuverian Society, a celebrated committee of the Royal Cork Institution, in 1840.

It is almost certain that, at the London sale of Mockler's collection in June 1848, the Scattery brooches were acquir-

ed by Thomas Crofton Croker, the Cork-born antiquarian, for he certainly owned them by August of that year when he attended the British Archaeological Association's annual meeting, in Worcester. At a soirée for the association, hosted by Lord and Lady Albert Conyngham, a large number of antiquities and works of art was exhibited, including a collection presented by Crofton Croker. Forming part of this were 'two silver buckles of Danish manufacture, from Inniscattery, an island at the mouth of the Shannon' (JBAA iv (1848-49), 316), and it seems that he was showing off his recent purchase. Croker died in 1854, and in December of that year his extensive collections were auctioned, in London, by Puttick & Simpson. It is not known who acquired the Scattery brooches (or even that they were still in Croker's possession at the time of his death), but they next surface in 1872, when they were acquired by the British Museum at Sotheby's sale of the Purnell Collection. By this time, however, their association with Scattery appears to have been forgotten about, and they were registered in the museum as unprovenanced finds. As a consequence, though they were occasionally referred to in publications (e.g., Smith 1914, 1923; Mahr 1941; Raftery 1941), they were neither recognized as being the Scattery brooches nor even as finds that had any association with each other. They had spent almost a century in the British Museum before they were re-provenanced to Scattery by a youthful James Graham-Campbell, who recognized them as the ones which had been illustrated by Lady Chatterton in 1839 (1972, 117).

As stated above, Sainthill exhibited the Scattery brooches in Cork in 1840. He noted that they had been 'dug up by a peasant, in his potato garden, near the ruins of St. Senan's Abbey at Inniscattery' (1844, 229). Presumably this means the brooches were found near the Abbey church, also known as the 'cathedral', rather than one of the other churches on the island. A small number of dwelling houses are marked a short distance to the north-north-east of this church on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map, while another group, formerly known as 'The Street', is shown near the pier beside the late medieval church of Teampall na Marbh. It may well be that the potato garden mentioned by Sainthill as the find-spot of the hoard was located close to these dwellings.

The brooches, which are registered in the British Museum as BM 72, 5-20, 14 and BM 72, 5-20,15, may be described as follows:-

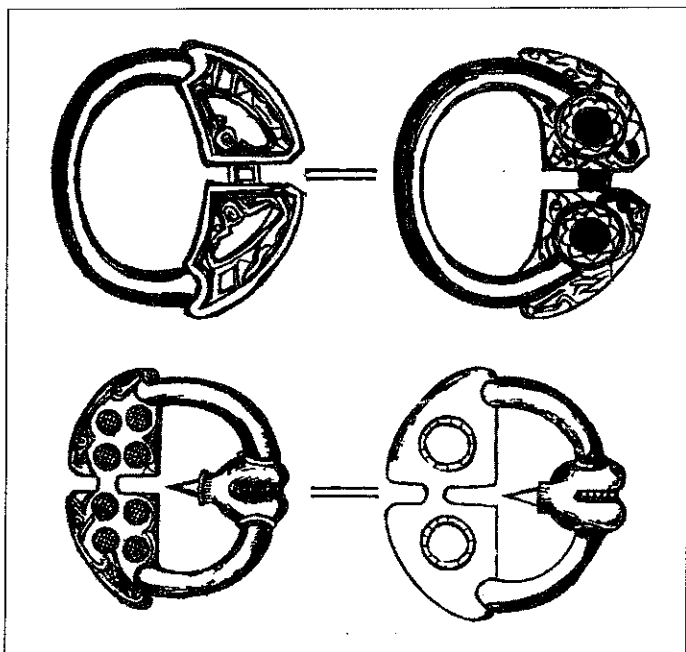


Fig. 3 – Lady Chatterton's 1839 illustration of the Scattery Island hoard.

No. 1 (Fig. 4a). Silver brooch of pseudo-penannular type, with traces of gilding surviving on both sides, the pin of which is missing. The hoop, plain and of oval cross-section, has sub-triangular terminals which are linked by a bar featuring two parallel zones of obliquely hatched ornament. Occupying the central part of each terminal is a raised circular compartment, now empty, framed by a scalloped collar, while the upper and lower margins have stylized ornamentation with some zoomorphic elements. The reverse of each terminal features a stylised ornithomorphic figure engraved on a gilt background. Diameter 4.7 cm; weight 19.09 gm. (BM 72, 5-20, 14).

No. 2 (Fig. 4b). Silver brooch, of pseudo-penannular type, the pin-shaft of which is missing. The hoop, plain and of almost circular cross-section, has sub-triangular terminals which are linked by a simple bridging-bar. Each terminal features four raised circular bosses, with brambled tops, and has a stylized animal, with oval eyes and gaping jaws, on the lower margin. The reverse of each terminal features a pair of concentric circles. The pin-head is barrel-shaped and has a conical projection or tenon for the attachment of the pin-shaft. There are two nicks on the brooch's hoop. Diameter 4.0 cm; weight 27.56 gm. (BM 72, 5-20, 15).



Fig. 4 – The Scattery Island hoard:
 a) brooch No. 1 (BM 72, 5-20, 14);
 b) brooch No. 2 (BM 72, 5-20, 15).

Graham-Campbell suggested that the Scattery brooches date to 'the period of the middle to late ninth century' (1972, 121), a date range supported by Youngs (1989, 102-03). Scandinavian activity in Ireland resulted in significant quantities of silver becoming available to Irish craftsmen for the first time, particularly from c. 850 onwards, and this led to the development of novel Irish types of objects, such as various types of brooches.

Discussion

Even though the Scattery hoard is Viking Age in date, its contents are clearly of Irish workmanship and it, therefore, may represent an Irish rather than a Scandinavian treasure. Problems inevitably arise in trying to identify the nature and cultural background of individual hoards, and this is particularly the case with the find from Scattery Island. In terms of its composition it is unlike most hoards of Scandinavian character from Ireland, as these usually contain ingots and/or ornaments of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian type, and/or hack-silver derived from these object types, with occasionally some coins as well. The lack of any material of Scandinavian character in the find may be taken as an indicator that it is an Irish

hoard, as might the fact that it was buried on an ecclesiastical site. On the other hand, in view of the annalistic and other evidence for the existence of a Scandinavian settlement on Scattery, as outlined above, this could well be a Scandinavian find. In addition, there are differences between the specific find contexts of Irish brooches and Scandinavian-type hoards. The Irish brooches are usually found as single-finds, rather than within hoards, while hoards form the characteristic context of the Scandinavian material. There are some instances of Irish brooches entering the Hiberno-Scandinavian pool of silver and occurring as hoard components in hack-silver form, but these are remarkably few in number.

The presence of two small nicks on one of the Scattery brooches (no. 2; Fig. 5), a previously unnoted aspect of the find, represents an important cultural characteristic. The practice of nicking and pecking silver objects, bullion as well as coins, is a feature of some Viking-age silver hoards in Britain and Ireland, as well as in Scandinavia, and was presumably carried out to test and check silver purity and quality (Graham-Campbell 1995, 33). It is not a feature of silver artefacts of Irish type, apart from a few examples that appear to have been deposited in Scandinavian-type hoards. The presence of nicking on a Viking-age silver object, therefore, indicates that this object formed part of the circulation of silver within the Scandinavian bullion economy. The presence of this important feature in the Scattery hoard, therefore, is a clear indicator that this find had at least passed through Scandinavian hands, if it had not been buried by those same hands.

While many Viking-age hoards from Ireland have no detailed recorded information concerning their find-contexts, it is nonetheless clear that the majority of those that do have some information actually derive from settlement contexts. Often these settlements are of Irish type. In Munster, the hoards from Carraig Aille II, Co. Limerick, Rathmooley, Co. Tipperary, and Kilmacomma, Co. Waterford, were found concealed in ringforts, while the Mungret find, from Co. Limerick, like the Scattery Island hoard, derives from an ecclesiastical site. Elsewhere in the country, where crannógs are of more common occurrence, hoards are also found in these contexts. This suggests that these hoards were in Irish ownership when they were



Fig. 5 – Scattery Island brooch No. 2, with nicks indicated.

buried, especially when they are from areas that remained in Irish control for all or most of the Viking Age. In the Munster context, for instance, this would appear to be the case of the hoards from the ringforts at Rathmooley and Kilmacomma. The Carraig Aille II hoard, also from a ringfort, is less definite in this regard as there are other finds of general Scandinavian character known from this site, as well as a reference in the *Annals of Inisfallen* to a Viking base at Lough Gur, where Carraig Aille is situated, in 926 (Ó Floinn 1998, 150). In overall terms, however, it appears that most Viking-age silver hoards from Ireland were in native ownership when they were buried. The means by which the Irish acquired this wealth are not fully understood, but it is likely that trade, tribute and gift-exchange were involved in this process (Sheehan 1998a, 173-6). Some of the wealth represented by the hoards from Ireland, however, must have been owned by Hiberno-Scandinavians. It may safely be assumed, for instance, that at least some of the hoards from the immediate vicinity of Dublin, and from the hinterlands of Hiberno-Scandinavian towns elsewhere, represent local wealth. In the case of Munster, Bradley has drawn attention to historical and other evidence for the existence and extent of Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement in the rural hinterlands of Limerick, Cork and Waterford (1988, 62-65). Hoards from these areas include those from Kilbarry and Mungret, from near Cork and Limerick respectively, and the late tenth-century find from Knockmaon, near Dungarvan, which derives from an area known to have been controlled by the Hiberno-Scandinavians of Waterford.

Clearly, both the geographical and the cultural contexts of the find-spot of a hoard must be examined when attempting to ascribe ownership to it. In the case of the geographical context of the Scatterry Island hoard, it derives from an area not far removed from the hinterland settlements of Scandinavian Limerick. Therefore, there are arguments to be made for a Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian context for the hoard purely on geographical grounds. In the case of the cultural context of its findspot, there is no simple equation with an ecclesiastical site to be made. On the contrary, a significant amount of the tenth-century historical/cultural context of Scatterry Island is Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian. In fact, in overall terms - archaeological, historical and toponomic - the evidence appears to point towards the hoard being in Hiberno-Scandinavian ownership when it was buried. Although the brooches are of Irish workmanship, the find should be regarded as a Scandinavian-type hoard on the grounds that it is more likely to represent Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian loot rather than Irish treasure. The nicks on brooch no. 2 are of central relevance in this regard, as is the literary and historical evidence for a Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement on Scatterry and the island's links with the nearby Hiberno-Scandinavian town at Limerick.

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