Korta meddelanden

A spectacular sword pommel from Gamla Ingla, Uppland

By Ny Björn Gustafsson

We live in a world of ever-increasing access to digitized museum collections, where photographs of artefacts are passed on both fast and wide via various social media platforms. In the following, some light will be cast on a spectacular find of which pictures has circulated for several years, without many details: A stray sword pommel from Sweden, with possible ties to the British Isles.

In November 1943, three fragments of a runestone were found when a fireplace was torn down in Gamla Ingla in Skogs-Tibble parish, some 20 kilometres west of modern Uppsala. The fragments fitted together, and the original stone had been carved on both sides. It was recorded as U 886 (Wessén & Jansson 1951, p. 587). Gamla Ingla ('Old Ingla') is the remnants of an original hamlet dispersed in the late 19th century through agricultural land reforms. In its immediate vicinity are two other runestones – U 884 and 885. Several Iron-age burial cairns are also to be found close by and during a small excavation in 2021, a hearth was exposed south of runestone U 885 and subsequently radiocarbon dated to the Vendel Period (590–640 CE; Frölund 2022, p. 67).

But these are not the only objects of antiquarian interest from Gamla Ingla, it is also the find site of a most spectacular Viking-period sword pommel.

The artefact

Today, the pommel is cared for by Upplandsmuseet (Uppsala County Museum, inventory no. UM20271). It was brought to the museum in June 1946 and a short note state that it had been found during demolition of a house some two years earlier, in a layer of redeposited soil under a floor. Nothing connects it to the U 886-fragments, but it must be seen as likely that they came from the same building.

The pommel (fig. 1) is cast from copper alloy and quite large, 75 mm long, 45 mm high and 30 mm wide. It weighs 102 g and is partly broken along the base. What sets it aside, besides its size, is its general design. It is cast in a genuine Ringerike style with advanced openwork details. The ornamentation dates it firmly to the first part of the 11th century CE and mainly consists of a central Fleur-de-Lys and five interjoined spiralling scrolls – two large, mirrored on each side of the centre and three along the base. All this can be seen in great detail through Luciano Pezzoli's conceptual reconstruction (fig. 2).

The middle- and top element of the Fleur-de-Lys is somewhat deformed and features a hole, 9x4 mm, for the sword's tang. The pommel's under- and inside reveal several interesting traits, such as two cast pins which once matched holes in an upper hilt fitting. Like other contemporary, hollow copper-alloy objects, it was cast via the lost wax method (*À cire perdue*) over an inner clay core (cf. Gustafsson 2016). In figure 3, one of two inner bridges can be seen. These connects and supports the tips of the large, openwork scrolls, but were also instrumental in the casting. They helped to stabilize the wax model during the creation of the mould and held the core in place. Later, when the wax had been melted out, they allowed the metal to flow more easily out to the outermost parts of the openwork scrolls. The inner surface has been left untraced and minute pieces of vitrified clay from the core cling to angles and corners.

Fig. 1. The pommel from Gamla Ingla. Photo: Olle Norling, Upplandsmuseet (CC BY-NC-ND).

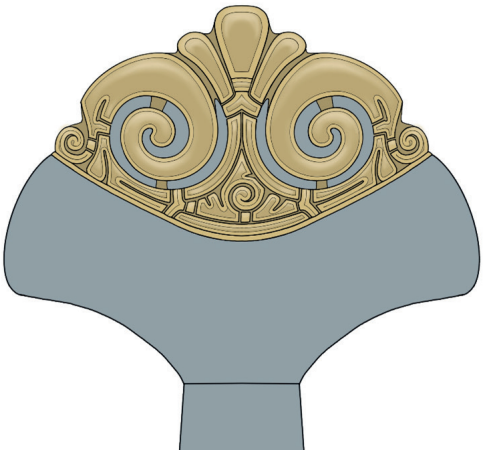

Fig. 2. Conceptual reconstruction of the pommel. Illustration: Luciano Pezzoli/Children of Ash ©.

The outer surface is worn and affected by corrosion, but faint traces of crosshatching, e.g., on the larger scrolls, might indicate that they were originally fitted with soldered-on ornaments, possibly of contrasting silver sheet. Along the lower base, there are hook-like protrusions, one in the middle of each face. These probably served to secure an intermediate ornamental cord which covered the joint between the pommel and the upper hilt fitting.

Parallels

The central motif does occur elsewhere in late Viking-period art, e.g., on the lower frame of the lost Cammin casket (Goldschmidt 1918, No 192L, Taf. LXV111). The pommel from Gamla Ingla is, as far as it has been able to establish from literature and accessible museum catalogues, without parallels in Sweden. Neither is it included in Signe Horn-Fuglesang's corpus over the Ringerike style (1980). However, there are other extant Nordic swords with pommels featuring somewhat related, opposing large scrolls. One of these is an unprovenanced sword in Moesgaard museum, Denmark (Inventory no AM0224; Fuglesang 1980, p. 42 & plate 112D). It is quite damaged, but from the preserved ornaments two opposing scrolls can be distinguished. A second sword with opposing scrolls

Fig. 3. Inside view of the pommel from Gamla Ingla. Photo: Olle Norling, Upplandsmuseet (CC BY-NC-ND).

on the pommel was found recently in Grave 8 at Langeid in Setesdal, Norway (Wenn 2016, p. 50). Additionally, the Langeid sword features single scrolls on the cross-guard, as does the Moesgård sword – on the haft fittings. None of these two swords are fitted with cast pommels though, and they belong to a distinctively different type than the Gamla Ingla pommel. Its hitherto closest parallels are instead to be

found in England, also as loose pommels. Like a growing number of other artefacts, these have been recovered through public metal detecting. According to the legislation in England, finders are normally allowed to keep finds not deemed as "Treasure". This brings that some scientifically important artefacts from England will not enter public collections. Thankfully though, a great many of these are "kept" accessible via the British Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru's "Portable Antiquities Scheme – PAS". They register finds recovered by the public and reported to their network of Finds Liaison Officers (Leahy & Lewis 2018, p. 6).

One of the pommels, PAS-id LEIC-9158C3 (fig. 4a), was recovered in March 2009 at Ravenstone, Leicestershire, while another, PAS-id LIN-9468E7 (fig. 4b), was found in Tilney All Saints, Norfolk, in January 2012. A third pommel, allegedly found near Brigg, Lincolnshire, in 2004 was unfortunately not registered with the PAS. Evidently, the three English pommels are very similar to each other. They all feature paired scrolls on each side of a domed middle, creating a crude Fleur-de-Lys design. The scroll ornaments on the Brigg pommel appears not to be openwork, otherwise it is almost identical to the pommel from Tilney All Saints. Alas, as it has not been examined by the PAS, its authenticity cannot be fully ascertained; it is only known from a single photograph in an on-line listing of lots up for auction in September 2014 (LotSearch). The Ravenstone pommel was donated to the Charnwood Museum in Loughborough by its finder (inventory no. 2750588), but the current whereabouts of the Tilney All Saints and Brigg pommels are unknown.

Fig. 4a. Pommel from Ravenstone, Leicestershire, PAS-id LEIC-9158C3. Photo: Wendy Scott/Leicestershire County Council (CC BY-SA).

Fig. 4b. Pommel from Tilney All Saints, Norfolk, PAS-id LIN-9468E7. Photo: Adam Daubney/Lincolnshire County Council (CC BY-SA).

Conclusion

The closest stylistic parallels to the Gamla Ingla pommel are thus to be found in England. The developed Ringerike style dates it to the first half of the 11th century CE, a period of dynamic interaction between Denmark, but also other parts of the Norse cultural sphere, and the British Isles. Even though the Ringerike style is named after a Norwegian district, objects adorned in it are common in many areas of Britain and Ireland (cf. Kershaw 2011). It is therefore hard to establish if the pommel was produced within modern day Sweden or somewhere in the west. However, it should be noted that another sword fitting in an elaborate Ringerike style, a sub-hilt mount, was recovered in the 1950's at the royal Anglo-Saxon manor in Old Windsor, Berkshire (Hilberg 2022, pp. 170–173). Such mounts occur in several distinct types, but a second and somewhat less elaborate hilt mount, also in Ringerike style, was recovered at Haithabu in 1936 (Jankhun 1936, Taf. IIb; Geibig 1989, Taf. 7:2). They both feature central Fleur-de-Lys motifs.

All in all, it is evident that the Gamla Ingla pommel must have been fitted to a sword of

elaborate design, intended for a high-ranking person, possibly with westward connections. Via the runestones, several of Ingla's early inhabitants are known by name. Thus, U 884 was made by Holmgeir and Sigrid to commemorate a certain Vig, Holmgeir's father (Wessén & Jansson 1951, pp. 583–586) while U 885 commemorates a Sigvat (Wessén & Jansson 1951, pp. 586–587). His stone was erected by his three sons, Vig, Sigsten and Karl. The first son might be identical with the Vig on U 884 even though the spelling differs (UikR on U 885 and Uih on U 884). The name Sigvat, Sighvatr and versions thereof, is known from 14 runestones, 10 in Uppland (Peterson 2007, p. 191). It also occurs throughout the Norse cultural sphere, both in Iceland and – according to the Doomsday Book – in 11th-century England. There, the name Sighvatr appears in connection to one or possibly two landowners at Boothby in Lincolnshire, more or less halfway in between the find sites of the two PAS-registered pommels (Open Domesday). The fragmentary Ingla stone, U 886, does not include any name of a person. All the stones have ornaments carved in the Urnes-style and can thus be considered as younger than the pommel, and even if the Sigvat of U 885 lived during the middle of the 11th century CE, it might already have been antiquated by that time.

As the pommel was found in redeposited soil it is not possible to speculate further concerning its original context, it could have been part of a grave's inventory or some kind of other deposition. Lastly, it should be noted that to date, no matching finds have been reported from the area of Gamla Ingla.

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