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Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches in 6th and 7th Century Ireland

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Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches in 6th and 7th Century Ireland

by

Esther Ward

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

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Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches in 6th and 7th Century Ireland

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Adviser: Alison G. Stewart

In this thesis the author examines the evolution, manufacture, and societal significance of zoomorphic penannular brooches, a type of metal dress fastener used in early medieval Ireland that is often decorated. The brooches examined are dated to the 6th and 7th centuries, during which the Irish underwent a process of religious conversion from Celtic paganism to Christianity, and social rank was paramount. It is in this social context that the brooches are examined. Despite the significance of this time of social change, brooches from this period tend to be overlooked by scholarship in favor of the more ornate metalwork of the 8th and 9th centuries. The author begins by discussing the origin and evolution of the zoomorphic penannular brooch form, and the motifs used to decorate it. This is followed by an explanation of the brooch in early medieval Irish society, based on an examination of early Irish law and literature.

The author took measures to make the field of Medieval Irish metalwork more accessible to scholars outside of Ireland and the UK. The study is presented in a clear manner that is accessible to the outsider, and provides explanatory diagrams and a glossary of terms frequently used in the discipline. In order to amend the lack of high quality images of brooches from this period, the author has provided images of fourteen brooches from the period, 11 of which she handled and photographed at the National Museum of Ireland and the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. The thesis includes a

catalogue of six of these brooches, complete with detailed photos and formal analyses.

By way of her research, the author has made the study of 6th and 7th century zoomorphic penannular brooches more accessible to scholars who are outsiders to the field, with the aim of encouraging research of these items during this fascinating time of religious and cultural transition.

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Introduction

There is something innately alluring about the pre-Christian eras in Ireland. The entire subject seems to be shrouded in mystery. We know so little about their religion and culture, because they left no written documents. What they did leave behind were durable material remnants of their existence, like gigantic megalithic structures during the Neolithic era (Fig. 1), stone circles during the Bronze Age (Fig. 2), and large stones carved with intricately articulated surface decoration during the Iron Age (Fig. 3). As early as the Bronze Age, the people of Ireland also left behind fine, decorated metalwork, like gold lunulae, gold plated ornaments (Fig.4), and large bronze pins, often covered in geometric patterns and motifs. Because the Celtic peoples used an oral culture, rather than a written one, the scholar's greatest link to the Celts is found through archaeology.

This tradition of a high level of metalworking craftsmanship continued into the Iron Age, when Irish design reached what many have considered to be its apotheosis, now referred to as the La Tène style, influenced by the continental Celts, who had been steadily infiltrating Irish shores since 1000 BC. This style, found throughout Europe, was characterized by curvilinear motifs like spirals, interconnected by long, sinuous tendrils, often fanning at their tips to create trumpet forms, and applied to a range of objects, like horse bits, gold torcs (Fig. 5), and large bronze discs.¹ The swelling curves and spirals of the La Tène period were reused and transformed during the medieval period, when these

¹ For a general look at the art of the Neolithic through the late Medieval period in Ireland, see Royal Irish Academy, *Treasures of Ireland: Irish Art 3000 BC-1500 AD*, 1983.

antique forms were applied to new types of objects, like escutcheons, brooches (Fig. 6), and manuscript illuminations.²

The magnificence of these objects that the ancient and medieval Irish left behind inspire us to ask questions about the people who created them—what their social, religious, and political structures looked like. But because the Irish used an oral culture until the late 5th century, when Christianity appeared on the island, it is not until then that we begin to hear their voice. This transition to literacy was, however, slow and mostly religious in nature, consisting predominantly of transcriptions of the gospels and eventually legal tracts. Legal tracts explain quite clearly the expectations of each strata of Irish society, shed light on the various occupations people held, and even give some insight into the type of clothing people were wearing during the early medieval period.³

Myths and sagas are also an important resource to the study of the early medieval Irish—though they are not without problems. The tales, assumed to be pre-Christian in origin, were transcribed by Irish monks who, though they most likely had some respect for the integrity of their own cultural myths, inserted some Christian themes into the literature, and likewise probably censored some of the less Christian subject matter. A second problem is the lateness of their transcription. One of the earliest surviving transcripts of early Irish myth, the *Lebor na huidre* (Book of the Dun Cow), although it is

² For information on the metalwork of the early medieval period, see ‘*The Work of Angels*’ *Masterpieces of Celtic metalwork, 6-9th centuries AD*, ed. Susan Youngs, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). For escutcheons, see Conor Newman’s “Notes on Some Irish Hanging Bowl Escutcheons” *The Journal of Irish Archaeology*, vol. 5, 1989-1990, pp. 45-48. For manuscript illumination, see J.J.G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts 6th to the 9th century* (London: 1978).

³ For a comprehensive look at law during the medieval period, see Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, 2009.

linguistically dated as early as the eighth century, was transcribed around AD 1100. Yet we know that earlier texts containing these early tales, like “The Wooing of Etain” and “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” existed in an eighth century manuscript, the Book of Druimm Snechtai, which has since been lost. Indeed it is likely that more Irish myths were first transcribed around or before the 8th century, but were destroyed, with all other things they found worthless, by Scandinavian raiders (often called Vikings) who raided throughout northwestern Europe from the 8th to 11th centuries, hitting Irish monasteries particularly hard.⁴

My interest lies in this period of transition during the 5th through the 7th century, from pagan, pre-Christian religion, culture, and tradition to those adapted from Christianity. I am fascinated by the way in which the Irish confronted the philosophies and principles of the Christian religion, and how they made it fit into their own culture. Times of religious transition often require the fundamental values of a belief system to be exposed, evaluated, and either maintained or discarded in favor of a newer and better belief or idea. As with many other people groups, Irish culture was integrally intertwined with its pagan religion—holidays, daily customs and taboos, and even the role of its kings and learned classes were, at least in origin, connected to its religion.

I am interested in ascertaining which beliefs, customs, and cultural features the medieval Irish maintained from antiquity, those that they abandoned in favor of Christian beliefs and customs, and also those Christian beliefs that they transformed and perhaps

⁴ Multiple Viking attacks on Irish monasteries are recorded in the Annals of Ulster, and are tabulated and discussed in Colman Etchingham’s *Viking raids on Irish church settlements in the 9th century; a reconsideration of the annals* (Maynooth, 1996), pp. 1-16, 60-61.

renewed with their own cultural mannerisms. These are the questions that sparked my interest in the 6th and 7th centuries, but they certainly cannot be answered through the study of metalwork, if at all, and I do not propose to do so with this thesis.

Questions of belief, custom, and culture can only marginally be ascertained with literary sources from the time, and material culture can only tell us so much. Yet the metalwork of this period certainly shows the amalgamation of pre-Christian and Christian symbolism. Though it is a mere glimpse of the cultural and religious transition that occurred from the 5th through 7th century, metalwork offers a fascinating combination and reimagining of form, symbol, and surface ornamentation. One of the primary objects on which one can view this conversation between the old and new is the zoomorphic penannular brooch, which enjoyed its heyday during the 6th and 7th centuries. It is with these motives that I delve into the evolution of the form of these brooches, and the motifs found on them.

Unfortunately, there are very few scholars who still focus their studies on the subject of Irish metalwork during the 6th and 7th centuries.⁵ Within the last thirty years, there have been three primary scholars: Susan Youngs, long-time curator of medieval art at the British Museum; Conor Newman, Professor of Archaeology at University College Galway, and Howard Kilbride-Jones, an archaeologist and scholar of Iron Age and medieval art in Ireland. For the 8th and 9th centuries, scholarship increases significantly

⁵ The dating of these objects has been a subject of contention over the last century (see Youngs, “Fine Metalwork to AD 650” 1990; Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980; Fowler, “Celtic Metalwork” 1963 gives a good overview of scholarship before 1963, including Raftery, 1941; Smith, 1913; Savory, 1956. In this thesis, the dates proposed by Susan Youngs in *The Work of Angels* (1990) are used, though Kilbride-Jones tends to date these penannular brooches two to three centuries earlier than she.

with archaeologists and art historians like Niamh Whitfield, Ragnall O’Floinn, and Michael Ryan.

Scholarship has most likely been attracted to the 8th and 9th centuries for three reasons: metalwork becomes much more ornate, utilizing filigree and precious metals, metalwork survives in better condition, and contemporary written sources are much more available, as the level of textual scholarship increased on the island. By contrast, the metalwork of the 6th and 7th centuries is simpler in its decoration, made with bronze, and there is very little contemporary literature to aid in our knowledge of it. Indeed, the law tracts regarding social structures and dress do not appear until the 8th century, and the earliest Irish myths date linguistically to the eighth century, at the earliest. Additionally, an overwhelmingly large quantity of 6th and 7th century penannular brooches survive in poor condition, much of their relief and enamel decoration worn away from time and erosion.

Though some erosion on these brooches is possibly due to use, weathering eroded many examples. A large portion of brooches from this period is unprovenanced, and those that have recorded find contexts were found in bogs, rivers, lakes, and other water bodies. It is possible that such brooches were simply lost in transit along or on major water bodies. Yet it is also strongly possible that they were deposited as votive offerings to the gods, of which the Irish had many before their conversion to Christianity. Bogs and bodies of water were thought to be portals to the Otherworld, in which the gods dwelt.

Thus, by depositing a fine, valuable brooch into a water body, one made an offering to a deity.⁶

Although Christianity was brought to Ireland in the 5th century AD, the country was not substantially converted until the 7th century. The conversion was seemingly peaceful, and there are no Irish martyrs to speak of. It is at this time that we would expect to see fewer bog and river deposits, yet brooches dated as late as the 10th century have, like their 6th-7th century counterparts, been found in bog contexts. These too may have been lost in transit, but perhaps it was easier for the medieval Irish to abandon their old gods than it was for them to discard their old ritual habits and traditions.

Research

Research for this thesis began in 2011 at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Yet the most significant portion of this thesis is the result of research that I conducted in Ireland during the summer of 2012, made possible by the Trabold Award, a travel fellowship provided by UNL. With those funds I conducted research for two months at various institutions, including the National Museum of Ireland's Archaeology branch,

⁶ The late 7th century monastic scholar Tírechán wrote in his *Collectanae* (a text dealing with St. Patrick, preserved in the Book of Armagh) "He came to the spring of Findmag which is called Slan, because he was told that the druids honored that spring and sacrificed gifts to it as if it were a god" in Beiler, ed., *Patrician Texts*, p. 152. Classical authors in the first centuries after Christ recorded that the mainland Celts deposited large hoards of treasure as offerings in temples and bodies of water (Diodorus and Strabo). Even stronger evidence is provided by hoard deposits found in water bodies across Ireland, such as the Brighter hoard found in the floodplain of the river Roe in Co. Derry, which consisted of jewelry, a bowl, and a small model boat—all of which were made of gold (Fig. 5). A hoard of bronze trumpets was found in a lake near Eamhain Mhacha, named Loch na Séad (the Lake of the Jewels). Rivers in Ireland almost always have feminine names, and many were named after otherworld women who appear in medieval Irish literature, such as the River Boyne, named after the goddess Boínn, as pointed out in Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland*, The Collins Press, Cork, 1999, p. 64.

Trinity College Dublin's Bailey library, the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, the National Library of Ireland, visited locations of significance to the early medieval world, and attended the Irish Conference of Medievalists at University College Dublin. All of these experiences contributed significantly to the development of my thesis on decorated Irish penannular brooches in the 6th and 7th centuries.

At the National Museum, I was under the supervision of Dr. Andy Halpin, Assistant Keeper of Antiquities at the Museum, who provided brooches from the collection for me to view, as well as guidance with my research. There, I was allowed to view, handle, and photograph ten penannular brooches from the 6th-7th century. With Dr. Halpin's guidance, I was introduced to eight brooches I had previously never seen, some of which I believe have never been photographed for a published work. I was able to take many photos of each brooch, including close up details and the back of each brooch.

During my travels around Ireland I was able to visit numerous locations of significance to the study of medieval Irish art history. These included some monastic settlements that were founded around the sixth century, such as Clonmacnoise in Co. Offaly, Glendalough in Co. Wicklow, Monasterboice in Co. Louth, and Skellig Michael in Co. Kerry. All these locations included high crosses—large crosses sculpted from stone that display some of the earliest examples of medieval Irish art and iconography. One such cross, Muiredach's cross at Monasterboice, shows one of Ireland's earliest images of men wearing penannular brooches (Fig. 7). I was also able to visit medieval ringforts (Fig. 8)—settlement enclosures designed to defend its inhabitants, and stone

circles (Fig. 2)—locations of religious significance to the people of pre-Christian Ireland.⁷

Finally, with my last week in Ireland, I attended the Irish Conference of Medievalists at University College Dublin. There, I heard papers presented by many scholars in the field. A person of note who attended was Niamh Whitfield, one of the chief scholars on early Irish brooches, with whom I had been in frequent contact over the spring of 2012 regarding the topic of my thesis. After meeting at the conference, Niamh was generous enough to spend an entire afternoon with me walking around the National Museum, and discussing early medieval metalworking techniques like enameling, two-piece casting, and millefiori. She also instructed me on the various visual motifs and forms used during the Irish Iron Age that were reused during the Early Medieval period, like the trumpet scroll and ornithomorphic forms. Together, we looked at images of each of the brooches I had handled from the collection, and discussed the motifs, techniques, and zoomorphic forms used thereon. Niamh gave me a great deal of advice regarding my thesis, and continues to send me articles and references that help my work. All of the mistakes contained in this thesis, however, are my own, and not Niamh's.

Aims

My aim with *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches in 6th and 7th Century Ireland* is twofold. First, I wish to emphasize a period of Irish art that writers tend to ignore in favor of the more highly decorated art of the 8th-12th centuries. In addition, I would like to

⁷ Many of the sites I visited had ancient significance and use, which in some cases carried into the early medieval period, like Beltany Stone Circle in Raphoe, Co. Donegal, Carrowmore Megalithic cemetery and Knocknarea in Co. Sligo, the Hill of Tara, Newgrange, and Knowth in Co. Meath.

make the study of early Irish metalwork accessible to college level educators and students who have no background in medieval Irish art. Many publications that discuss brooches from this period feature only small, black and white photos or drawings. Published photos of 6-7th century brooches are few, and low quality. By providing high quality color photos, I endeavor to make the study of 6th and 7th century brooches more feasible for scholars who cannot travel abroad to see them firsthand. This thesis will be uploaded to the Digital Commons, where the images will be accessible to scholars who wish to examine them. It is my hope that this document will encourage professors of art history to include, whatever the extent, Irish metalwork into the early medieval or “Migration” era of their Art History 101 and Medieval Art curricula.

My thesis is divided into six sections. I begin with an introduction, followed by the body of the text in two chapters, a conclusion, catalogue, and glossary. Chapter one narrows the focus of the thesis to the visual appearance of the penannular brooch. I begin by analyzing the penannular brooch form—how it originated, and how it changed over time. I then discuss particular motifs found on brooches from the 6th-7th centuries. I conclude the chapter by analyzing what meanings, if any, these motifs may have had to the people of early medieval Ireland.

Chapter two, entitled Metalwork in the Early Medieval Period: Manufacture and Status, explains how decorated brooches were manufactured in the 6th-7th centuries, and how they functioned as items of social status in early Irish society. With this, I explain early Irish social structures, as well as the status of the metalworker in society. I conclude the chapter by explaining the possible ways in which brooches were worn by men, women, and clerics. A catalogue follows of 6th-7th century penannular brooches that I

consider to be particularly instructional or well crafted examples from the period. This catalogue includes high quality images of penannular brooches, accompanied by identifying information, formal analyses, and any important information that may exist pertaining to each brooch.

Following my conclusion, I include a glossary of terms used in the study of early Irish art. Inspiration for this glossary arose from my own struggle to become familiar with such terms, as I have found no central work that clearly compiles them. This glossary will include terms used to explain metalworking techniques like “punching” or “enameling,” as well as those that describe early Irish motifs, such as “saltire,” “c-scroll,” and “lentoid.” It is my hope that this glossary will make the study of early Irish metalwork more accessible to those whose only option is self-education about early Irish art.

With the compilation of these resources, I hope to make the study of early medieval Irish metalwork understandable and accessible to those who do not have the opportunity to attend lectures on the subject, which is true for most universities in the US. As I began my research for this thesis, I was daunted by how much I did not know, and how indecipherable many of the texts on the subject were to a beginner. I was privileged to be offered full funding to travel to Ireland, where I had access to the primary sources—the brooches themselves—and to the vast collection of books and articles on the subject held at Trinity College Dublin and the library of the Royal Irish Academy. Of equal, if not higher value, was the guidance of those I met while researching at those institutions, like Niamh Whitfield, without whose guidance my understanding of metalwork from this period would be far more rudimentary. It is my wish that this thesis helps bridge the gap

for those who wish to study the subject, but do not have the privilege of a university that specializes in the field (as very few do).



Fig. 1: Neolithic Passage Tombs at Knowth, Co. Meath, 2,500 BC.



Fig. 2: Beltany Stone Circle, Raphoe, Co. Donegal,



Fig. 3: Iron Age carved stone, from Turoe, Co. Galway, H. 119 cm. 1 c. BC. Image source: Lucas, *Treasures of Ireland*, pg. 44.



Fig. 4: Gold plated lead pendant, Bog of Allen, H. 6.5 cm, c. 800 BC, NMI. Image source: Lucas, *Treasures of Ireland*, pg. 24.



Fig. 5: Gold Collar (Torc), Brough, Co. Derry, D. 18.2 cm, 1st-5th cent. AD, NMI.
Image courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland.



Fig. 6: Bronze Zoomorphic Penannular Brooch, 6-7th c., Unprovenanced, NMI W. 368,
D. 7.5 cm, Pin L. 12 cm.

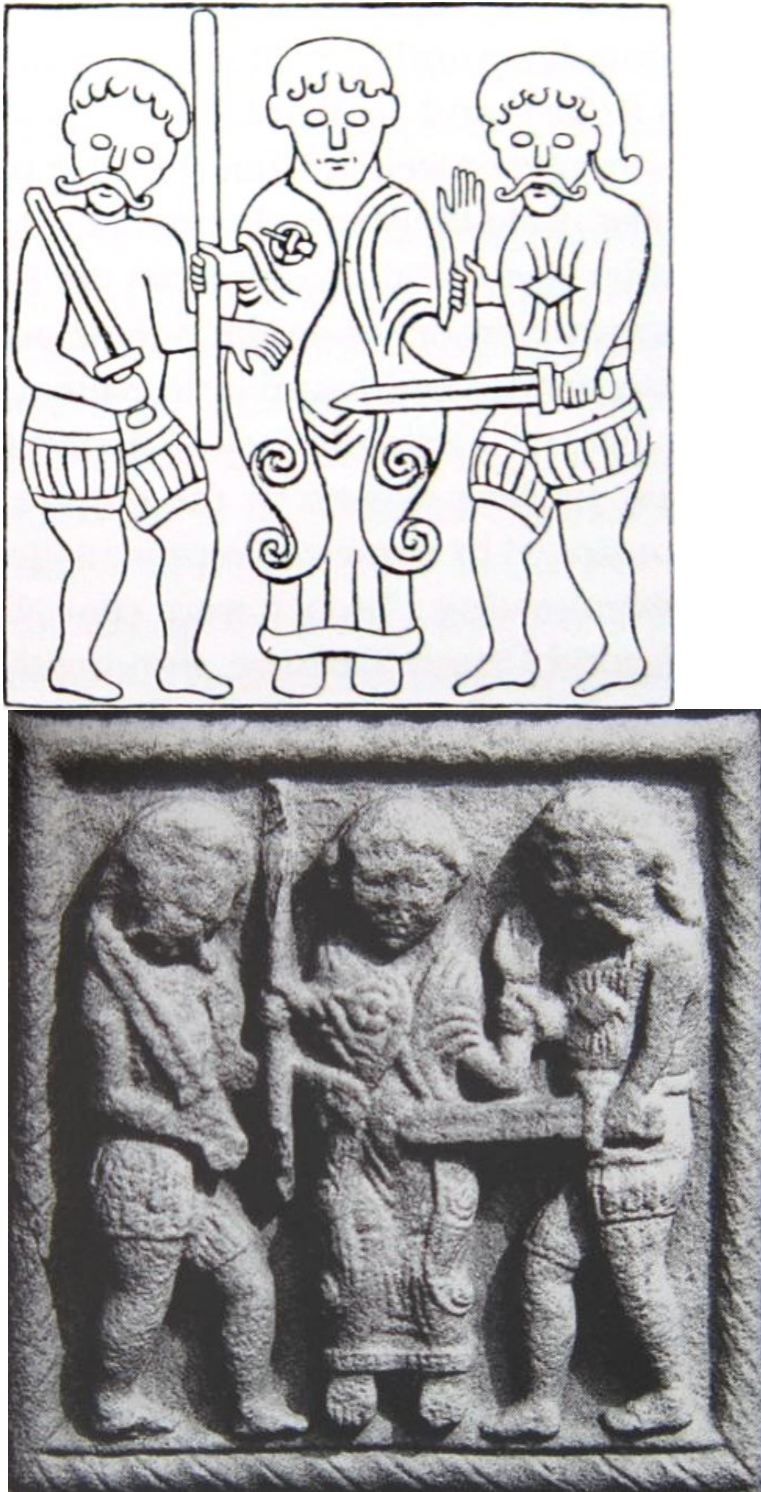


Fig. 7: Muiredach's Cross, *The Arrest of Christ*, 11th century, from Monasterboice, Co. Westmeath. (Above) Drawing by J. Romilly Allen (1894), from Whitfield, *More Thoughts*, 71. (Below) Detail from Harbison, *The Golden Age*, plate 103.



Fig. 8: Leacanabuile Stone Fort (Ringfort), Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry, 9th cent.

Chapter 1: Influences and Originality: Form and Motif

In this chapter I will examine the origin and evolution of the zoomorphic penannular brooch in Ireland, by looking at changes that occurred to its form. Additionally, I will analyze the various motifs and decoration that appear on the terminals of these brooches, inquiring as to any origins or meanings that they have had. By looking primarily at the work of Howard Kilbride-Jones, as well as Conor Newman, Elizabeth Fowler, and Ragnall O’Floinn, I will investigate the variations of the penannular brooch from its birth in the 2nd century AD, until the period of focus: the 6th and 7th centuries. After examining the brooches themselves, I will explain the fashion of the early medieval period, and the sources on dress and fasteners found in early Irish literature.

In early medieval Ireland, a brooch was used to hold together a person’s cloak or dress. A cloak was similar to a woolen blanket, draped around the body, hanging from the shoulders. The two upper ends of the cloak were joined either at the wearer’s chest or shoulder. A brooch secured this joint. During the 6th and 7th centuries, the brooch of choice was the penannular brooch, so-called because there was a small gap in the brooch ring. The brooch, usually made of bronze during this period, consisted of two main parts: a penannular ring, and a long, thick pin, attached to the ring by a barrel-like hoop. The end tips of the brooch ring are called terminals (Fig. 1). The pin was pushed through the two upper ends of the cloak, so that the bottom of the pin lay within the gap in the ring. To secure the brooch, the brooch ring was rotated so that the pin lay over it (Fig. 2 and 3).

The brooches that are the main focus of this thesis were created in the 6-7th centuries AD. In the chronology of Irish penannular brooches, these fall between the

earliest, simpler examples of the 2nd through 5th centuries AD, and the much more ornately decorated brooches of the 8th through 11th centuries. The earlier brooches of the 2nd through 5th centuries tend to have simple brooch rings, with small, undecorated zoomorphic terminals. By the 6th and 7th centuries, the brooch ring becomes more ornate, and the terminals widen for the application of curvilinear decoration and red enamel.

Starting in the 8th century, we begin to see more brooches, such as the “Tara” brooch, that are gilt or made with precious metals, and decorated with fine beaded and twisted wire filigree (Fig. 4). Rather than apply color to the brooches with red enamel, craftsmen began to use semiprecious stones like amber. An Anglo-Saxon influence becomes much more evident in the animal interlace found on these later brooches, replacing the curvilinear Iron Age motifs seen in the 6th and 7th centuries. Additionally, in the 8th century the penannular brooch was phased out by the annular brooch, which bridged the gap between the brooch’s terminals.

Origin and Evolution of the Zoomorphic Penannular Brooch Form

In his 1980 book *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, Howard Kilbride-Jones attempted to categorize the corpus of Irish zoomorphic penannular brooches. Grouping them based on form, rather than motif, he sought to discover a logical, semi-chronological progression and evolution of these brooches. Because many of these brooches have unrecorded or non-datable find circumstances, categorization has always been a challenge. Many were found without the benefit of modern archaeology, during the 19th century. For these reasons, a large number of these brooches cannot be reliably dated, making a chronological categorization difficult to achieve.

Similarly, many brooches have unrecorded find locations, making a geographical categorization difficult. For these reasons, archaeologists have been forced to rely on the few find circumstances that exist, as well as the visual elements that appear on the brooches themselves. Despite the insufficient information on find locations and context, Kilbride-Jones created maps for each category of brooch, showing the known find locations. Before looking closely at his methods of categorization, I will discuss his argument for the origins of the zoomorphic penannular brooch.

According to Kilbride-Jones the zoomorphic form began with the proto-zoomorphic pins of the Votadini,¹ a Celtic tribe inhabiting the lowlands between the Tyne and Clyde rivers, on the eastern coastal region of northern Britain (Fig. 5). The zoomorphic elements found on these pins are confined to a rounded head and a snout, which appear on the heads of finely ribbed pins (Fig. 6). A circular area on the head of the pin was often reserved for the application of enamel. Kilbride-Jones dates these pins to the Roman and Romano-British periods of the first two centuries AD, but others have argued a 4th century date. Many of these pins were found at Traprain Law in East Lothian, the principle fort of the Votadini. By the 2nd century AD the Irish were also making proto-zoomorphic pins of a similar form (Fig. 7).

The Votadini were familiar with the penannular brooch form, which had been in existence in Britain since the third century BC, and in Scandinavia and Iberia by the second century BC.² Yet it was not until the Votadini came across the Brigantian bangle, a penannular bracelet that alternated ribbing with oval forms (a pattern called “bead and

¹ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 5.

² Fowler, “The Origins and Development of the Penannular Brooch”, 160.

reel”), that they began to alter their zoomorphic pins into a round, penannular form.³

But rather than merely maintain the geometric shapes that decorated the terminals of the Brigantian bangle (Fig. 8), the Votadini applied their own proto-zoomorphic forms to the terminals, forms identical to those found on their proto-zoomorphic pins. This hybrid of the Brigantian bangle with the zoomorphic pinhead became the initial form of the zoomorphic penannular brooch in Britain, during the late 1st century AD. Others have also dated the brooches on which Kilbride-Jones bases this date to the 4th century.⁴

According to Kilbride-Jones’ chronology, by the 2nd century AD, the zoomorphic penannular brooch form was adapted in Ireland, where it would remain popular for roughly 1,000 years. Through the centuries, the Irish penannular brooch underwent many changes in size, style, form, and decorative elements. In stark contrast to this, only the initial form of the first and second centuries is found in Britain. Rather, it was the Irish that transformed and mastered the penannular brooch form, creating something all their own.

As stated earlier, Kilbride-Jones sought to discover a logical progression and evolution of these brooches, by categorizing them based on form. By “form,” Kilbride-Jones referred to the “implied shape, arrangement of parts or constituent pieces of a static form.”⁵ Specifically, he looked at the form of the pinhead, the size and shape of the terminals, and, importantly, the size, shape, and placement of the zoomorphic features found on the terminals. These features include the ears, eyes, and snout of the animal (Fig.

³ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 9. Kilbride-Jones shows now picture of the Brigantian bangle, but rather draws one of its terminals (Fig. 8).

⁴ Fowler, “Celtic Metalwork of the fifth and sixth centuries AD”, 103-104.

⁵ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 29.

9). By finding brooches with similarities among these forms, Kilbride-Jones divided the corpus of zoomorphic penannular brooches into four primary categories: Initial Form, A, B, and C. The Initial Form is presented as a precursor from which types A, B, and C evolved. Categories A, B, and C all contain a number of subcategories, equaling nine in total.⁶

The brooches in his Initial Form range from 4.2 to 8.5 cm (1.7 to 3.3 in) in diameter, and are characterized by relatively thin brooch rings with very small, undecorated terminals (Fig. 10). Ribbing exists on many of the brooch rings of this series, though some are not ribbed. The heads of the zoomorphic terminals tend to be oval shaped and are flanked by small, geometric snouts, ears, and eyes. The pinheads are all barrel formed.

In Group A1, the terminals increase in size and their snouts have become broader and more elongated (Fig. 11). Rather than an oval, the heads of Group A brooches have become more triangular. Whereas the eyes of the initial form were often circular, Group A eyes are generally pyramidal. Group A2 brooches also bear these characteristics, but revert to the rounded eyes, and increase the thickness of their brooch rings and pins significantly. No Group A brooches exhibit ribbing on their brooch rings. As in the initial form, the terminals of Group A are still undecorated, but most likely would have been colored with red enamel. Yet these last two rules have been broken by brooch #52 from Ballintore, Co. Kildare, Ireland, whose brooch ring exhibits areas of ribbing,

⁶ I have intentionally left out Kilbride-Jones' Category D, which examines "small brooches" of a pseudo-zoomorphic type, as well as pins that resemble penannular brooches. Rather, I look only at true zoomorphic penannular brooches.

crosshatching, and herringbone motifs.⁷ Overall size did not increase considerably from the Initial Form to Group A, which ranges from 4.2 cm to 6.8 cm (1.6 to 2.7 in).

Kilbride-Jones' Group B is divided into two subcategories, Groups B1 and B2. As a whole, the group is most notably characterized by the introduction of decoration to the terminals (Fig. 12). The motifs employed there range from curvilinear to geometric, and are always set against a reserved background that has been keyed (texturized) to more efficiently receive an enamel ground. Saltires, or St. Andrew's Crosses, have been incised onto the backs of a number of the B1 brooches (Fig. 12.1). Many of the Group B brooches bear the pyramidal eyes of Group A1, though these have become less angular and more rounded into soft triangles, raised at their central axis. Likewise, the pinheads have only slightly changed from Group A's barrel form, adding bands of relief molding and ribbing. Group B2 shows special attention to the decoration of the brooch pin. Also introduced by the Group B brooches are deeply channeled nostrils on the snouts of the zoomorphic terminals, a number of which were filled with enamel. Most of the Group B brooches have relatively thin brooch rings, many of which are ribbed, and range from 4cm to 11.5cm (1.5 in to 4.5 in) in diameter. All of these Group B characteristics are beautifully displayed on a B2 brooch found near Athlone, Co. Westmeath, Ireland, which is held at the National Museum of Ireland (Fig. 13).

Group C is the largest group of true zoomorphic penannular brooches, and contains the most subcategories, totaling five. All C1 brooch rings are ribbed, and raised medial ridges are introduced to the snouts of the terminals (Fig. 14). Additionally, the pinheads of Group C1 are usually decorated with raised bands of almond shaped

⁷ See Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 103.

moldings. An interest in decorating areas along the brooch pin with herringbone, ribbing, and geometric forms is continued in Group C1—though not unanimously. Similarly, the snouts and sides of the terminals (as opposed to the frontal face) are heavily textured with imitation chip carving, running spirals, zigzags, rows of lentoid petals, and other geometric patterns. The same is true for many of the C2 brooches, but only two C3 brooches bear decorative textures in these areas, and none do from C4 or C5.

An excellent example of type C1 is an unprovenanced brooch at the National Museum of Ireland, registration number W. 368, which contains a pattern of diamond shapes, all called the multiple lozenge pattern, on the snouts and sides of its terminals (Fig. 14 and 14.1).⁸ This motif was favored by the Britons, adopted from imported art around the first century AD, during the Roman period, and appears on 6th century Irish objects like the Dowris latchet and the Dooley bone trial piece from Dooley, CO. Donegal.⁹ It is also arguable that, had these diamond-shaped recesses been filled with red enamel, the craftsman has attempted to imitate the garnet cloisonné technique of the Anglo-Saxons, who had invaded nearby England by the mid 5th century.

In Group C2 the eyes are rounded (Fig. 15), but in Group C3 they return to being pyramidal, as in Group A1. C3 pinheads tend to be less imaginative than those of C1, and the ears are triangular. The snouts of C4 brooches usually contain tear-shaped hollows, which are filled with enamel, and all but the earliest examples show a bulbous tip on the snout. C4 eyes are triangular, and the ears are only minimally represented. Kilbride-Jones

⁸ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 21. Here, Kilbride-Jones refers to this pattern as the “multiple lozenge pattern”.

⁹ Ibid.

claimed that all of his C5 brooches were the product of one craftsman.¹⁰ His work differs from the others in Group C for two main reasons: the method used to create them, and the inconsistent appearance of their terminal decoration. C5 brooches were not cast, but rather hammered out terminals were adhered to a brooch ring by soldering them together. For this reason, a portion of C5 brooches are missing one terminal, due to the additional weakness in the joint (Fig. 16). Whereas almost all zoomorphic penannular brooches up to this point have symmetrically decorated terminals, the terminals of C5 brooches vary slightly from their counterpart, inconsistencies that were perhaps overlooked by the craftsman (Fig. 17).

Ragnall O'Floinn corroborates Kilbride-Jones's suggestion that the initial zoomorphic penannular form originated in northeast Britain with the Votadini, based the findings at Traprain Law.¹¹ O'Floinn claims that this initial form was likely used by native inhabitants of Roman Britain, as they have been found in numerous Roman settlement sites.¹² Yet, whereas half of the Irish Class 1 brooches are enameled, only four of the thirty-three British examples are; all of which are from the south of Britain.¹³ Because of this geographic distribution of enameled zoomorphic penannular brooches, O'Floinn proposes that the initial form was transmitted to Ireland via southwest Britain.¹⁴

This of course is a point of departure between Kilbride-Jones and O'Floinn, though perhaps not a strong one. Although Kilbride-Jones felt strongly about the initial origin of the zoomorphic penannular brooch by the Votadini, he claimed no definite

¹⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹¹ O'Floinn, "Patrons and Politics", 2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

answer as to how its form was transmitted to Ireland. He did, however, propose possible modes of transmission, the central argument being that the craftsmen of Traprain Law fled to Ireland in the late 2nd century, after the abandonment of the Antonine wall. Built over the course of AD 142-154 by rule of Roman emperor Antonius Pius, the stone and turf wall stretched westward from the Firth of Forth, reaching coast to coast. The abandonment of the wall in AD 196 opened the floodgates for the invasion of northern tribes, whose destruction would reach as far south as Brigantia (Fig. 5).

Whereas O'Floinn and Kilbride-Jones claim that the initial form of the zoomorphic penannular brooch was first developed in the land of the Votadini, present day southern Scotland, Conor Newman points to a location slightly farther south. Newman argues that it is probable that the penannular brooch was first made zoomorphic in Roman Britain, where it developed alongside the zoomorphic pin (a straight pin, with a zoomorphic head).¹⁵ For him, this notion is confirmed by the discovery of a bronze stylus at the Roman Villa at Bedlam, Yorkshire, which bears a zoomorphic spatulate similar to the terminals of the classic zoomorphic brooch.¹⁶ Yorkshire, a county in northern England, was once a part of the region of the Brigantes, the home of the Brigantian bangle that Kilbride-Jones attributed to the inspiration of the zoomorphic penannular brooch. Like Kilbride-Jones, Newman also uses form as an indicator of developmental stages. He writes that brooches whose terminals are shorter than the circumference of the ring are from the early developmental stage of zoomorphic penannulars.¹⁷

¹⁵ Newman, "The Iron Age to Early Christian Transition", 22, 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

Motif and Terminal Decoration on the Zoomorphic Penannular Brooch

The brooches that are discussed in this paper belong to Elizabeth Fowler's type F.¹⁸ Whereas Kilbride-Jones focused only on the categorization of zoomorphic penannular brooches, Fowler sought to categorize all penannular brooches, many of which were not zoomorphic. The zoomorphic penannular brooch makes up only a very small portion of Fowler's corpus of penannular brooches. Kilbride-Jones criticized Fowler for categorizing her brooches based on decoration, an element which he considers to be "purely ancillary" when dealing with the evolution of the brooch.¹⁹ Kilbride-Jones makes an example of this method's inefficiency by arguing that, by categorizing brooches based on enamel decoration, Fowler's F1 group includes brooches with find locations as far apart as Traprain Law in eastern Scotland and Co. Westmeath in central Ireland.²⁰

In the case of categorization, I agree with Kilbride-Jones that form is the main indicator of a craftsman, workshop and style. The motifs employed on brooch terminals could have entirely been the decision of the commissioner—though there is no textual evidence to support this. Indeed there is no literary evidence to document any transaction of metalwork during the 6-7th century. Additionally, the amount of motifs used is much less varied than the type of brooch form. Many of the motifs used were ancient in origin, and adhered to their conventions—though not without variation. The subtle differences in form, like the length and upturn of the snout, and the pronunciation and shape of the eyes are much more personal decisions, bringing us closer to the craftsman's hand.

¹⁸ Fowler, "The Origins and Development of the Penannular Brooch", 153.

¹⁹ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 3, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

Though motif may be only ancillary for the purposes of chronological categorization, it certainly has worth elsewhere. Many of the motifs employed on the terminals of penannular brooches enable us to see what symbols and designs were deemed useful, beautiful, or meaningful to the nobles who wore them—or alternatively, which motifs were deemed to be most marketable to the craftsmen who made them. They show us what cultures they looked to for artistic conventions.

Whether the topic of motif is ancillary or essential, it is certainly futile to ignore it altogether. After looking next at some of the primary motifs employed by 6-7th century craftsmen on the terminals of zoomorphic penannular brooches, I will examine any possible origins and meanings. Some of the most common motifs found in the brooches studied in this paper are the triskele, pelta, Maltese cross, curved-sided triangle, and variations thereon. Though millefiori is certainly not a type of motif, it is included in this section, as a form of terminal decoration that may communicate a certain idea.

The term triskele originally translates from the Greek *triskelos* as ‘three leg’, and has been applied to triplets of various forms, centrally joined. However, conventionally the Irish triskele motif consists of three spirals that have been joined centrally, in most cases. This motif has occurred in Irish art since the Neolithic period, and can be seen on megaliths such as the curbstone at the entrance of Newgrange, as well as standing stones in the inner chamber of the tomb (Fig. 18). The motif was also used during the Celtic Iron Age and seems to have enjoyed a revival in the early Christian period. It is then, during 6th-7th centuries that the triskele motif began to be applied to the terminals of penannular brooches, latchet fasteners, and escutcheons. The triskele features prominently on three of the finest brooches in this paper’s catalogue: the unprovenanced

NMI W.368 (Fig. 14), Kilbride-Jones #67 found near Athlone, Co. Westmeath (Fig.13), and a brooch held at the Walters Art Museum, Accession # 54.2341 (Fig. 19).

The Maltese cross appears on five penannular brooches from the 6-7th centuries two of which appear in this thesis (NMI 5505.W358, and a small brooch not included by Kilbride-Jones (Fig. 20)). Almost certainly, these cross motifs were Christian, whether their wearer was or not. This assumption is supported by the peculiar form of this Maltese cross, which bears a triangular stem. Stemmed Maltese crosses appear on a number of Irish stone crosses and early Irish texts, like the *Cathach* (Fig. 21). Thus, the cross found on this brooch is Christian in origin. However, the reason for the use of such a motif is debatable. One could easily argue that the wearer was a church official or a clergyman. Similarly, the wearer could have been a lay official, who, by wearing this Christian symbol, proclaimed the power of the Christian God, or at least his institution, and claimed the legal rights that belonged to members of the clergy. Certainly, by the 7th century Christianity had become the favored religion of the Irish people, and the sign of the cross would have been recognizable to many.

A number of brooches from the 6th and 7th centuries contain millefiori studs in their terminals, which are often set against an enamel background. Sometimes the studs are organized into a specific shape or motif, but on many brooches they merely appear to float, evenly spaced, on the terminal.²¹ Each stud is round, and composed of flecks of colored glass which often create a checkerboard or marigold motif. In some cases, these studs were set into small, round bezels, in order to secure their positions, or perhaps to

²¹ Whitfield, “The Balinderry Brooch”, not yet paginated. Niamh Whitfield has pointed out that the millefiori studs on the brooch found at Balinderry Crannog are arranged into the shape of a cross (Fig. 22).

provide a divider between the stud and the surrounding enamel (Fig. 23). It is likely that these glass studs were meant to emulate precious gems, using a less expensive, more available material.

In his unpublished 2010 lecture “Symbolism on Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches”, presented at The Sixth International Insular Art Conference, Conor Newman proposed that millefiori studs found on the terminals of zoomorphic brooches may represent dragon stones.²² His reasoning for doing so was inspired by the myths of their procurement. The earliest Latin source on dragon stones comes from Pliny the Elder, the Roman natural philosopher, in the first century AD. In book XXXVII, sec. lvii.158 of his *Natural History* on gems, Pliny wrote that dragon stones were procured from the brain of a dragon, by cutting its head off while it lay sleeping.²³ With this, Newman proposed that the millefiori studs, which lay in the “head” of the zoomorphic terminal, might represent dragon-stones.

It is clear that the myth of the dragon-stone had reached Ireland by the early medieval period. This is substantiated by Niamh Whitfield’s 2012 study on dragon stones in early medieval Irish literature, entitled “Dragon Stones: the fabulous gems”. Whitfield points out that dragon-stones are mentioned in multiple early medieval Irish myths and sagas. For instance, in *Fled Bricrend* (Bricriu’s Feast), the handsome hero Cú Chulainn becomes even more beautiful by having eight red dragon-gems set into each of his eyes

²² Newman and Burke, “Symbolism on Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches.” I must thank Niamh Whitfield for bringing Newman’s idea about millefiori to my attention, which was presented at the Sixth International Insular Art Conference in York, 20th July, 2011. Niamh was present for the presentation of this paper, but I was not.

²³ Whitfield, “Dragon-Stones”, 79-80. Whitfield drew from Eicholz, D. E. *Pliny: Natural History with an English translation*, vol. X. (London/Cambridge, Mass: William Heinemann/Harvard University Press, 1962), book XXXVII, sec. lvii.158.

(*och n-gemma deirg draconai for lár o da imlisen*).²⁴ Again, the stones are mentioned in the early Irish text *In Tenga Bithnua* (the Ever-New Tongue), which is believed to be the Irish translation of a lost Latin *Apocalypse of Philip*.²⁵ In the remaining tenth century translation, the author mentions *lia Istien* (the Stone of Istien), which was procured from the brains of a dragon.²⁶ Certainly, the Irish were familiar with the myth of the dragon-stone.

A motif that appears on a number of zoomorphic penannular brooches is the pelta, also called the palmette. The pelta is Roman in origin, and was adopted by the Celts in antiquity. In origin, its name means “shield shaped”, and is characterized by a rounded, crescent shaped cap, which erupts from a thin stalk. Derivatives of this form include the mushroom coil, in which the outer edges of the cap are coiled under in a spiral, and the double pelta (also called double palmette), in which two peltae are joined together symmetrically by their stalks. The form appears in double on a brooch found near Old Castle of Carbury, Co. Kildare, on which the outer edges of the cap have been punched (Fig. 24). Here, the motif seems to take on the shape of a hammer head.

An interesting and mysterious motif occurs on a number of brooches from Kilbride-Jones’s C3 and C4 groups, composed of a circle, contained in coupled scrolls that create a cupped form, which project from a triangular stand (Figs. 25). Kilbride-Jones explains this motif as a degenerate form of the stylized palmette, adapted by Celtic craftsmen during the Iron Age on items like the Cork horns. He writes, referring to the

²⁴ Ibid. 79. Here, Whitfield is referencing sec. 51.17-18 of *Fled Bricrend*.

²⁵ Ibid., 80.

²⁶ Ibid.

terminal decoration of his brooch numbers 55, 101, 115, 117, 119, 93, 116, 120, 118

and 127, as follows:

The stylized palmette is about as simple a motif as it could be possible to devise—the ultimate in degeneration. It was permitted degradation, too; for finally it was allowed to break up into uneven circles and other meaningless meanders, have completely lost all significance for those practicing a most degenerate art style.²⁷

The palmette is frequently flanked by ornithomorphic figures, often in the form of lobes that have been punched at the end, indicating the eye of the bird. This can be seen on late Iron Age items of various types, like the Oldcroft pin and the Monasterevin Disc (Fig. 26).

Of particular interest is an unprovenanced brooch (NMI 1000:2822) (Fig. 27) that bears a strikingly similar motif to the Monasterevin Disc. While it is most likely that the motif that appears on this brooch's terminals is merely a copy of the pre-Christian motif, it also bears a striking resemblance to contemporary symbolic constructions of the Eucharist found on various items throughout mainland Europe.²⁸ The motif on the brooch terminal is composed of a triangular pedestal, from which projects two symmetrical abstracted bird heads, punched at the eyes, whose heads meet at the center, creating a cup shape with their elongated bodies. Their beaks point downward, pecking at a circular form, the center of which contains a lentoid.

I propose the possibility that this is an early, abstracted rendition of Eucharistic symbolic constructions that were being used in mainland Europe during the 6th and 7th centuries. One such continental instance of this image is found on a 5th-6th century

²⁷ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 26.

²⁸ For more on this symbolic construction of the Eucharist in early medieval Europe, see Catherine Karkov's, "The Chalice and Cross in Insular Art" in Spearman, ed. *Age of Migrating Ideas*, pp. 237-244.

gravestone from Vienne, on which is etched a chalice on a triangular pedestal, above which hovers a round host (Fig. 27). The chalice is flanked by two birds that stand symmetrically facing the chalice, perhaps poised to take a drink. Have the Irish adapted this contemporary image into the abstracted forms found on the terminals of NMI 1000:2822? Rather than show the host hovering above the chalice, restricted terminal space has compelled the artist to place the host within it.

The motif on the terminals of NMI 1000:2822 resemble the Monasterevin Disk so closely, that it seems likely that they both are participating in pre-Christian imagery. Yet, alternatively, it is possible that the craftsman, familiar both with the motif found on the Monasterevin Disk and the Eucharistic symbols found across mainland Europe, decided to adapt the two into one new motif. Perhaps the artist, wanting to communicate a then common symbolic construct of the Eucharist, drew from the visual vocabulary of his own country, to communicate a concept from the new Christian religion. Ragnall Ó Floinn has presented the possibility that similar motifs found on Kilbride-Jones' Group C4 represent the flabellum, a fan used during the Christian liturgical service.²⁹ This is also a plausible explanation of the motif, since the flabellum appears throughout the imagery of Book of Kells, an Irish manuscript of an 8th or 9th century date.

Similar motifs of stemmed palmettes occur on various other brooches, like a small brooch from Bough, Rathvilley, Co. Carlow, which has an extremely similar brooch form to a brooch from Co. Westmeath, whose terminals bear Maltese crosses—very possibly produced at the same workshop, if not by the same hand (Fig. 28). It seems very plausible that a craftsman who produced brooches with Maltese crosses, willingly depicted a

²⁹ Ó Floinn, “Penannular Brooch” in Youngs, *The Work of Angels*, 32.

symbol of equal weight and importance in the Christian religion; that of the Holy Communion. Or perhaps, as Kilbride-Jones suggests, these are simply degenerate, stylized palmettes—bad copies of a Roman motif. Though I tend to disagree.

The meaning of the motifs found on early Irish metalwork is inherently mysterious, and almost always based on speculation. Indeed, much is veiled about the people of early medieval Ireland, because there was no written culture in Ireland until its slow development during the 5-7th centuries (apart from Ogham markings).³⁰ Nonetheless, ignoring the possibility of meaning would be futile. To me, it seems highly unlikely that all brooch terminals were decorated with meaningless motifs, merely placed there for aesthetic purposes.

Most Irish zoomorphic penannular brooches feature terminals that are symmetrical, both in form and decorative designs. The terminals on all these brooches bear animal-like elements—including a snout, a brow usually with eyes, and, in most cases, ears. Between the ears and brow is usually a triangular area, indicating the head, reserved for enamel and/or a decorative motif. To archaeologist Michael Ryan, these symmetrically arranged beasts are not merely an aesthetic invention, but rather have an apotropaic function, to protect the wearer and ward off evil spirits, or a devotional function, related to the worship of a deity.³¹

³⁰ Ogham is a late antique Irish and British rune-like script consisting of twenty characters, based on the Latin alphabet. Parallel strokes are drawn on either side of a continuous line, each amount of strokes denoting a certain letter. Ogham script was used sparingly, and almost always to denote a standing stone as a place marker, often giving credit to the person who erected it. See Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1991).

³¹ Ryan, “Links Between Anglo-Saxon and Irish Early Medieval Art”, 119.

Similar arguments for the use of apotropaic forms on early medieval Irish metalwork have been made by archaeologist Miranda Green. She argued that the spoked wheel might have been used as a talismanic form on brooches and various other objects in Roman Britain, bringing luck to the wearer, because the wheel was connected to the veneration of the Romano-Celtic Sky-God.³² Archaeologists Conor Newman and Fiona Gavin cite Green's idea when discussing the punched saltire on the verso of the Londesborough pin, though they never concretely ascribe to her idea (Fig. 29).³³ Similar saltires appear on the verso of a number of Irish zoomorphic penannular brooches, including Kilbride-Jones numbers 54 (River Greese) (Fig. 12.1), 55 (Irish, Unprovenanced), 56 (Irish, Unprovenanced), and on the verso of the pinhead on brooch 57 (Ford of Toome, Lough Neagh).

The location of these saltires seems significant. They have not been placed in locations that would have been visible while the item was worn. Rather, the saltire's presence on the brooch would have been known only by the wearer, and thus perhaps was related to personal devotion to a deity. Alternatively, it may have been significant for the wearer to have the saltire closest to his or her body, on the side of the brooch that actually came in contact with the wearer. Various other Irish zoomorphic penannular brooches bear markings on their backs, varying from 'N' shapes (Kilbride-Jones #'s 93, 94, 95, 106, 107 unprovenanced, 105 Co. Westmeath, 110 and 111 Co. Limerick), 'zig-zags' (#'s 101 Co. Fermanagh, and 109 unprovenanced), to punched concentric circles (# 74 Co. Cavan), X's and transverse lines (# 116), and marigold motifs (# 132). Number 74 is of

³² Green, "Model Objects from Military Areas of Roman Britain", 255.

³³ Newman and Gavin "Notes on Insular Silver in the Military Style", 7.

particular interest, as the verso of its left terminal bears two concentric circles, which have been crossed with lines of dots, executed with a hollow punch. This circular form could easily be considered a four-spoked wheel, or solar disc, which was frequently used as the sunburst pattern on disc brooches from the regions of present-day northern England and southern Scotland during the 1st and 2nd centuries (Fig. 30).

The 8th century was a time of considerable change in decorative techniques on Irish metalwork. Contact and exchange of artistic ideas took place between Irish and Anglo-Saxon craftsmen, introducing Germanic decoration to Irish forms. As Irish monks established and joined monasteries in England and Scotland at places like Iona, their modes of decoration fused with those of the new inhabitants of England: the Anglo-Saxons. From the 5th to 7th century, England underwent extreme social, economic, and political change. Having been part of the Roman Empire since 43 CE, by 410 Britain was no longer under Roman rule, and in many ways returned to the socio-political structure of pre-Roman Britain, but that land would soon after be taken by two invading Germanic tribes from northern Germany: the Anglo-Saxons. Though there is evidence of early Anglo-Saxon attempts at British invasion, it was not until the 6th century that their place in Britain was substantially cemented. By 500 CE they were in possession of the fertile southeast of the country, and their power continued to spread.³⁴ The discovery of a workshop at the royal stronghold of Dunadd in Scottish Dál Riada attests to the creation of Irish metalwork on the British mainland.³⁵ During this time, the extremely detailed

³⁴ For more on Anglo-Saxon culture see Webster, Leslie ed. *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600-900*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

³⁵ Dál Riada was an Irish kingdom that encompassed parts of Northeastern Ireland and most of the western coast of Scotland during the late 6th and early 7th century.

animal interlace of Anglo-Saxon metalwork fused with the spirals and scrolls of the Irish La Tène period, making an entirely new and magnificent form of decorated metalwork. Discussion of Anglo-Saxon art is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.³⁶

Most evidence of metalworking workshops has been found at secular sites, such as the 6th century workshops at Dooey, Co. Donegal, and Ballinderry Crannog 2, Co. Offaly.³⁷ Yet there is growing evidence for workshops at ecclesiastical centers like Armagh, Nendrum, Downpatrick, Movilla, and Clonmacnoise.³⁸ Founded in the 6th century by St. Ciarán, Clonmacnoise lies in the central county of Offaly, and was an important monastic settlement throughout the medieval period. Much of Clonmacnoise's importance was due to its geographical location, where the medieval borders of the powerful kingdoms of Munster, Connacht, and the Southern Uí Néill met.³⁹ At Clonmacnoise, archaeologists found clay moulds and crucibles for the manufacture of fine metalwork, as well as bone motif pieces, most likely used for the practice and reference of medieval metalworkers.⁴⁰ These items were found at levels datable to the 7th and 8th centuries.⁴¹

³⁶ For more on the relationship between Anglo-Saxon and Irish art see Lloyd Laing's *Later Celtic Art in Britain and Ireland*, (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications Ltd., 1997).

³⁷ Ryan, "Links Between Anglo-Saxon and Irish Early Medieval Art", 118.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ó Floinn, "Clonmacnoise: Art and Patronage in the Early Medieval Period", 251.

⁴⁰ "New Graveyard at Clonmacnoise", Excavations.ie. accessed November 28, 2012, <http://www.excavations.ie/Pages/Details.php?Year=&County=Offaly&id=3140>

⁴¹ Ó Floinn, "Clonmacnoise: Art and Patronage in the Early Medieval Period", 251.

Evidence of metalworking has also been found at royal sites, such as the 7-10th century royal crannog of Lagore, Co. Meath, occupied by a branch of the Uí Neill.⁴²

Crannogs are a kind of artificial island built onto a body of water, onto which a home is built. An association with crannogs and ecclesiastical centers most likely implies a strong tie between metalworkers and people of high status. Yet many craftsmen were mobile, and travelled to royal or wealthy sites to perform their arts.⁴³

The zoomorphic penannular brooch was born through the influences of multiple insular cultures. Furthermore, it was transformed and perfected by the Irish, to whom the penannular brooch migrated from its birthplace in southern Scotland. Over the course of its existence, the zoomorphic penannular brooch underwent many changes in form and was used to display various motifs and ideas. The patterns and motifs applied to these brooches drew their heritage from the Irish Iron Age, as well as the Celtic Iron Age that occurred on the European mainland. Techniques used to decorate these brooches, like millefiori, originate in places as far away as the Mediterranean, and were transmitted through various people groups before reaching Ireland. These brooches are beautiful and instructive to the modern historian of medieval Ireland, as material survivors from an age of social, cultural, and religious change.

⁴² For more on this subject see Hencken, "Lagore Crannog: an Irish royal residence of the seventh to tenth centuries AD" *RIA Proc.* 53 C, 1950, pp. 1–247.

⁴³ Ryan, "Links Between Anglo-Saxon and Irish Early Medieval Art", 118.

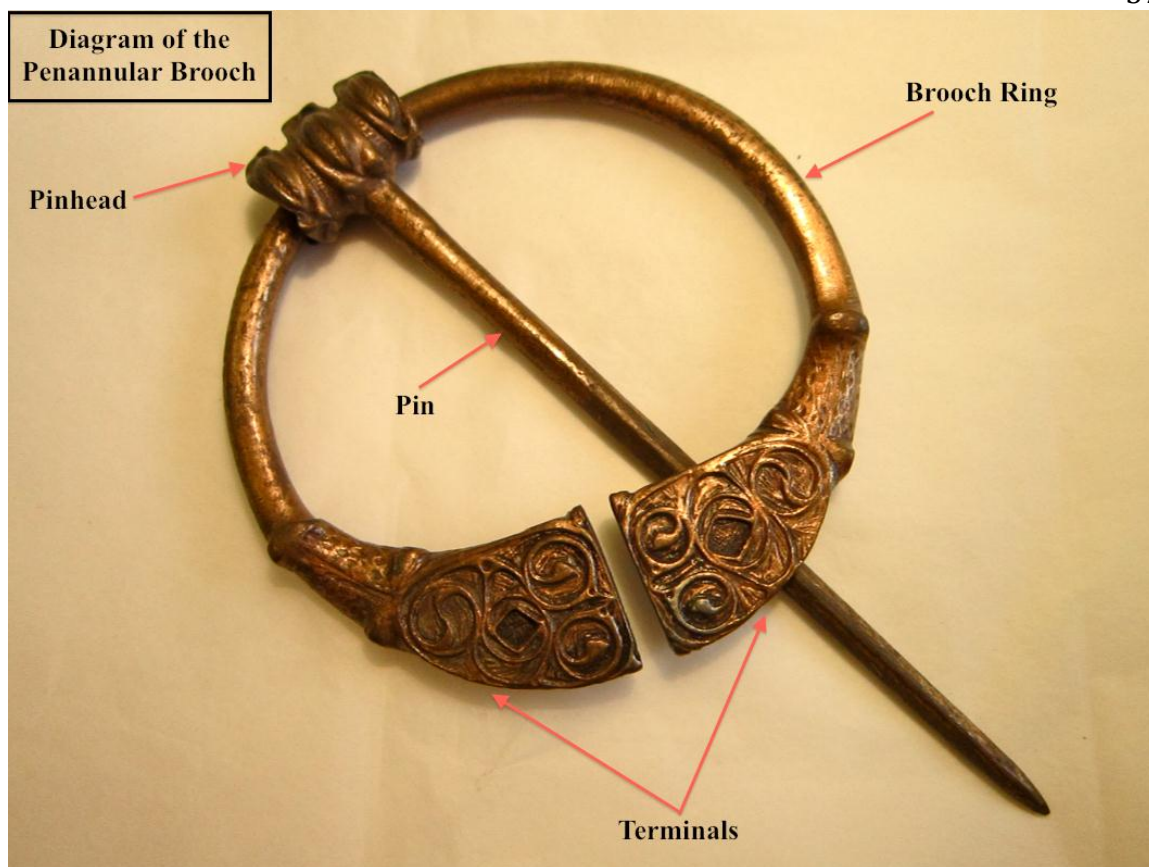


Fig. 1: Diagram of the Penannular Brooch, created by author.



Fig. 2: How to fasten a penannular brooch. This image was taken at the Ulster Museum, Belfast, where museum-goers can try fastening the brooch themselves. The cord hanging over the right shoulder should be ignored, as it is only an anti-theft device.

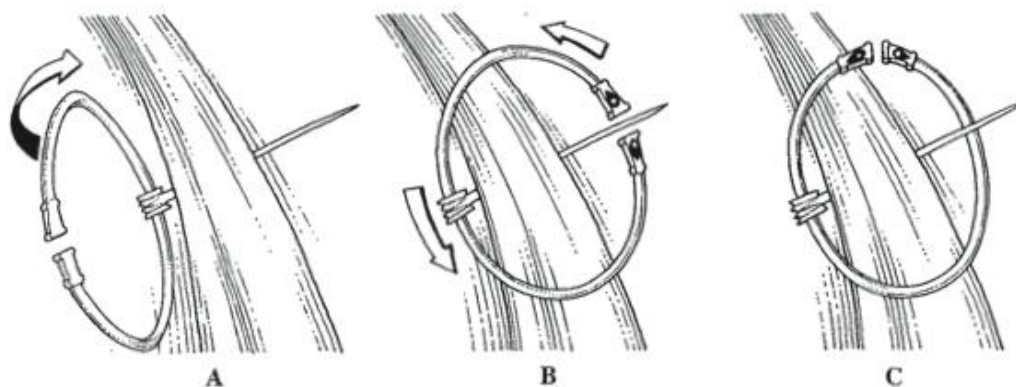


Fig. 3: Three steps in the fastening of a penannular brooch (drawing: Nick Griffiths).
Image source: Whitfield, *Lost and Found II*, 266.



Fig. 4: The “Tara” Brooch, from Bettystown, Co. Meath, early 8th c., NMI. Image from
Youngs, “Enamelling in Early Medieval Ireland”, p. 43.



Fig. 5: Map of Britain in Late Antiquity, showing the Votadini.

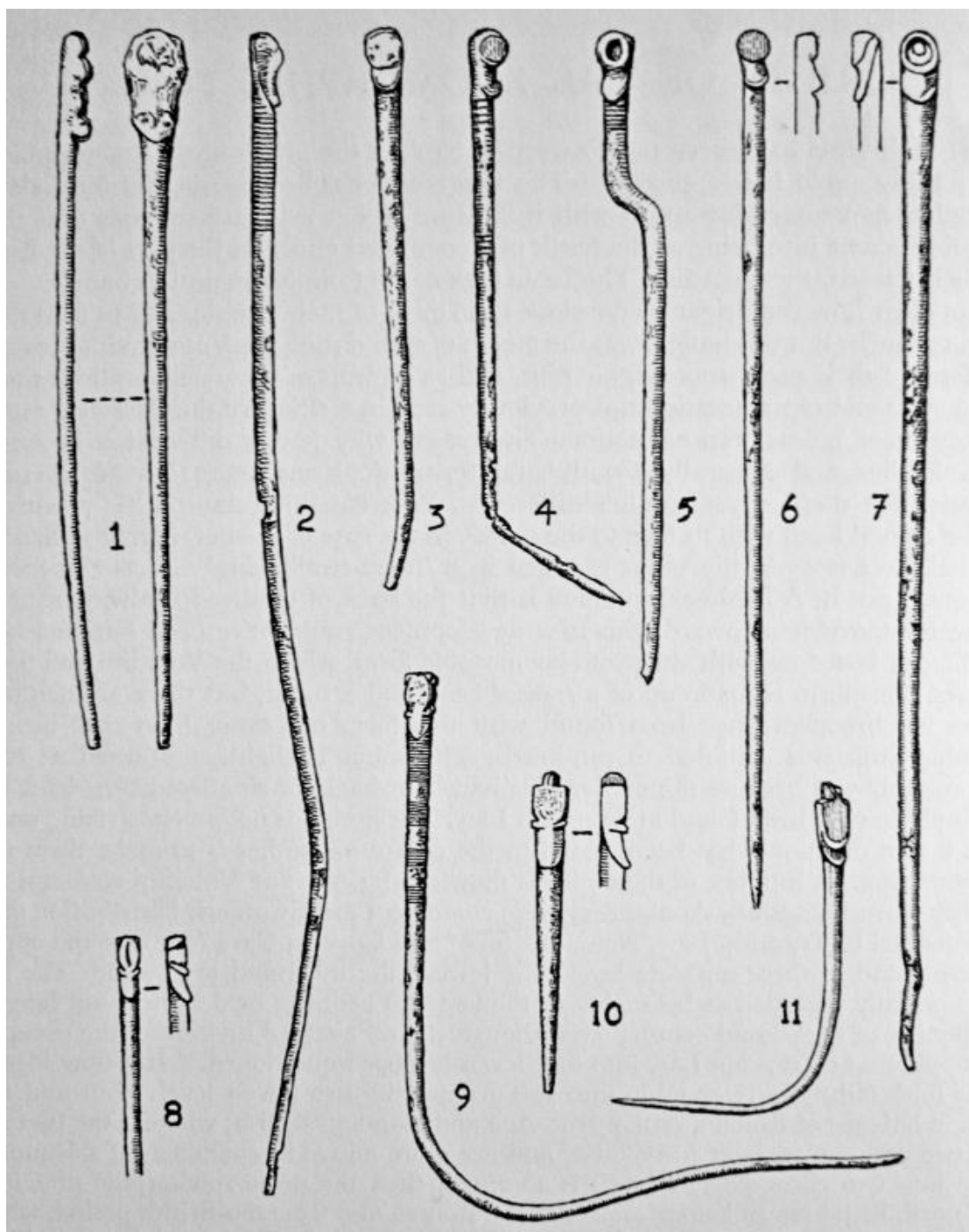


Fig. 6: Traprain Law, East Lothian: 1-7, proto-zoomorphic pins; 8-11 zoomorphic pins. Drawing from Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980, pg. 6.

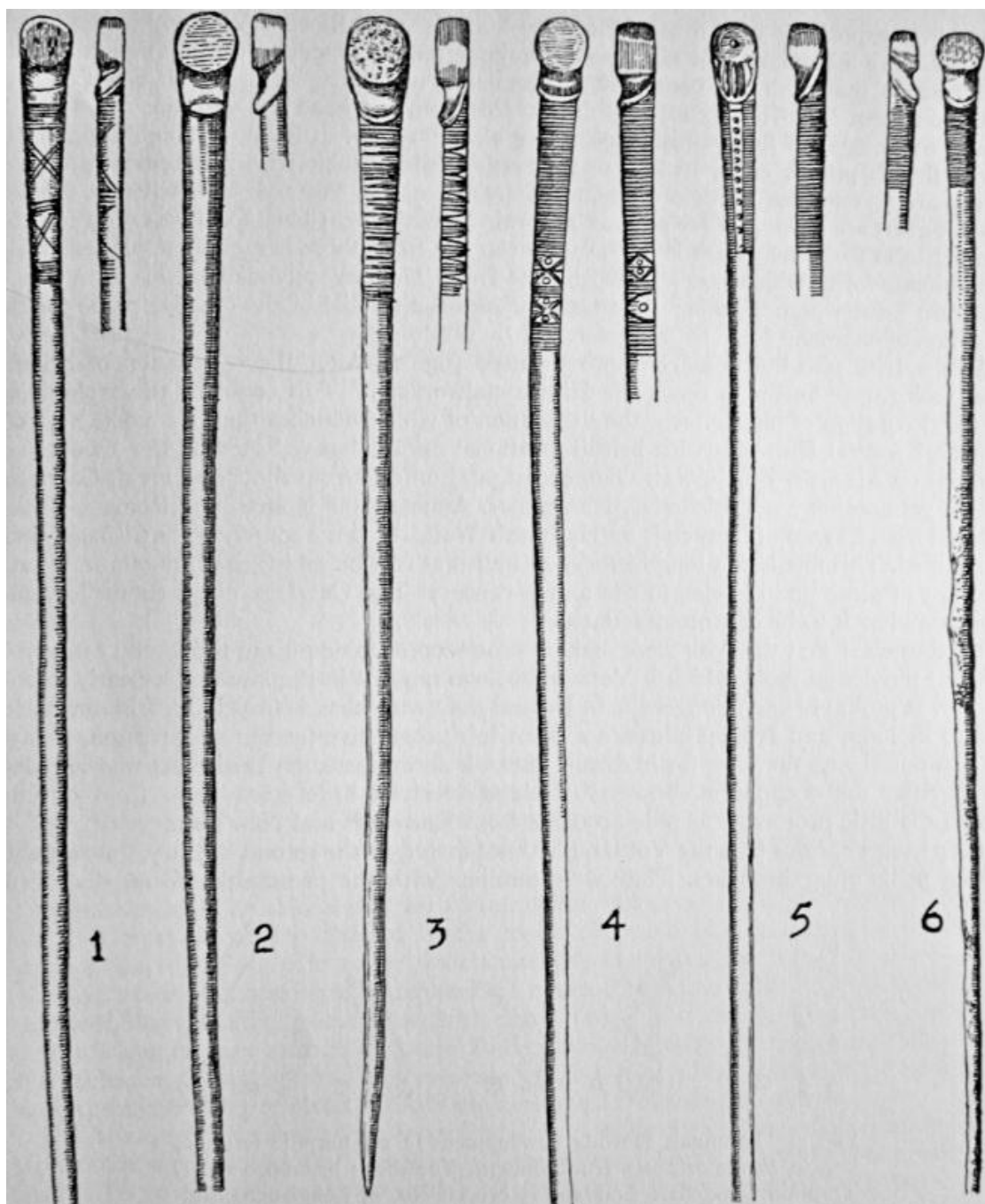


Fig. 7: Irish proto-zoomorphic pins. Drawing from Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980, pg. 7.



Fig. 8: Terminal of a Brigantian bangle or bracelet, from *Isurium Brigantum* (Aldborough), Yorkshire.

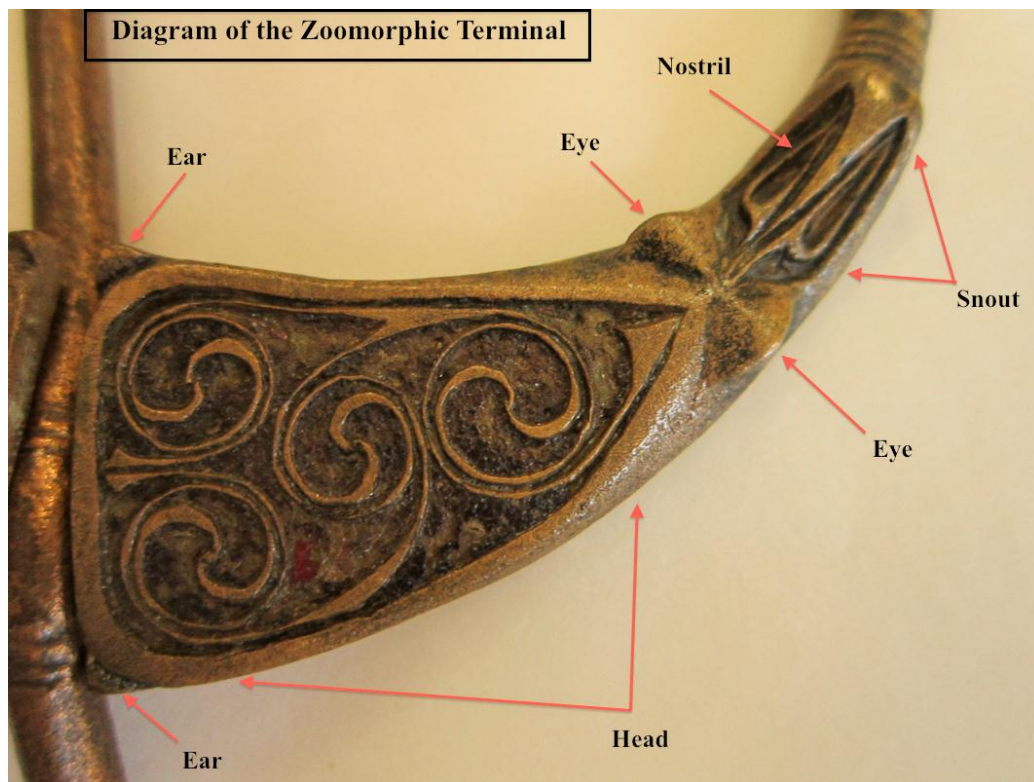


Fig. 9: Diagram showing the zoomorphic parts of a brooch terminal, created by author.

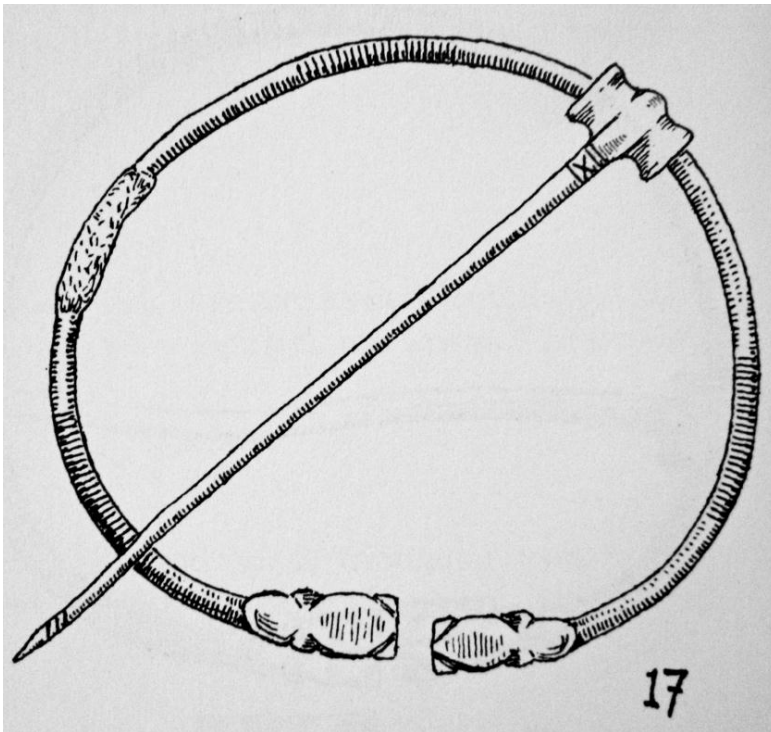


Fig. 10: Initial Form Brooch, Kilbride-Jones #17, Drawing from Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980.

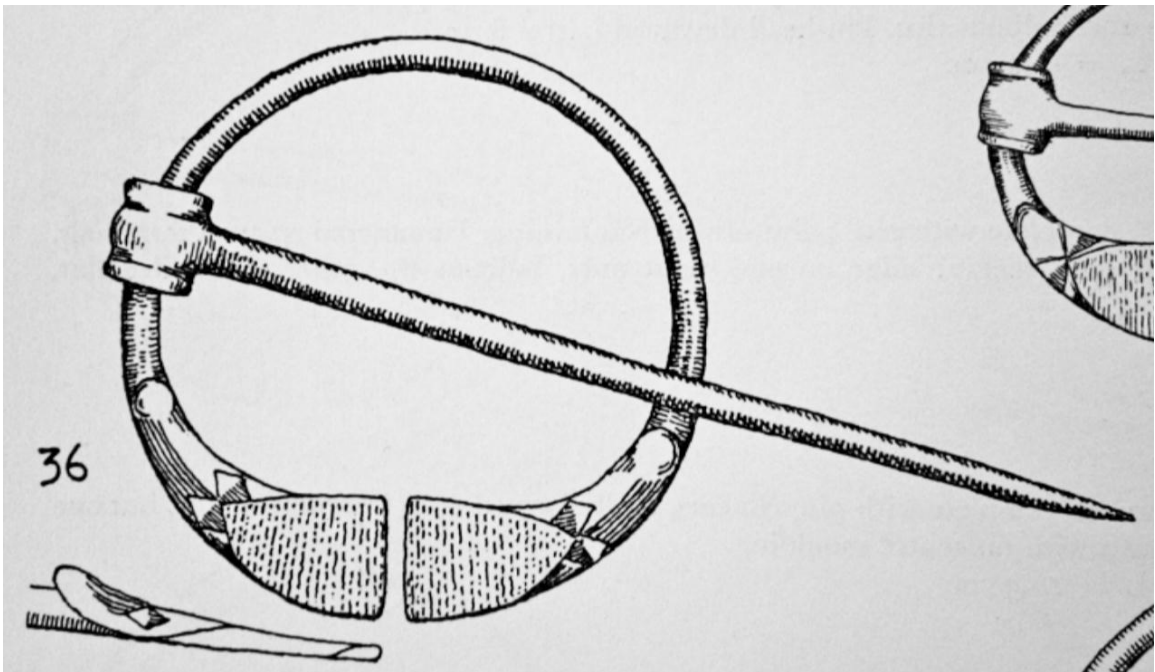


Fig. 11: A1 Brooch, Kilbride-Jones #36, Drawing from Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980.



Fig. 12: B1 Brooch, Found in River Greese, Co. Kildare, NMI 1945:312, Kilbride-Jones #54, D. 5.8 cm (2.3 in), Pin L. 7.4 cm (2.9 in).



Fig. 12.1: Verso of B1 Brooch, Found in River Greese, Co. Kildare, NMI 1945:312, Kilbride-Jones #54, D. 5.8 cm (2.3 in), Pin L. 7.4 cm (2.9 in). This detail shows the saltire (St. Andrew's Cross) on the back of each terminal.



Fig. 13: B2 Brooch, found in the river Shannon near Athlone, Co. Westmeath, 6-7th c., Kilbride-Jones #67, D. 8.9 cm (3.5 in), Pin L. 16.3 cm (6.4 in).



Fig. 14: C1 Brooch, 6-7th c., Unprovenanced, Kilbride-Jones #73, NMI W. 368, D. 7.5 cm, Pin L. 12 cm. The brooch ring is ribbed, though this has worn away significantly, and can only be faintly detected upon close examination.



Fig 14.1: Detail of Imitation Chip Carving of C1 Brooch, 6-7th c., Unprovenanced, Kilbride-Jones #73, NMI W. 368, D. 7.5 cm, Pin L. 12 cm.



Fig. 15: C2 Brooch, bronze penannular brooch, Castledermot, Co. Kildare, Early 7th c., NMI 1945:311.

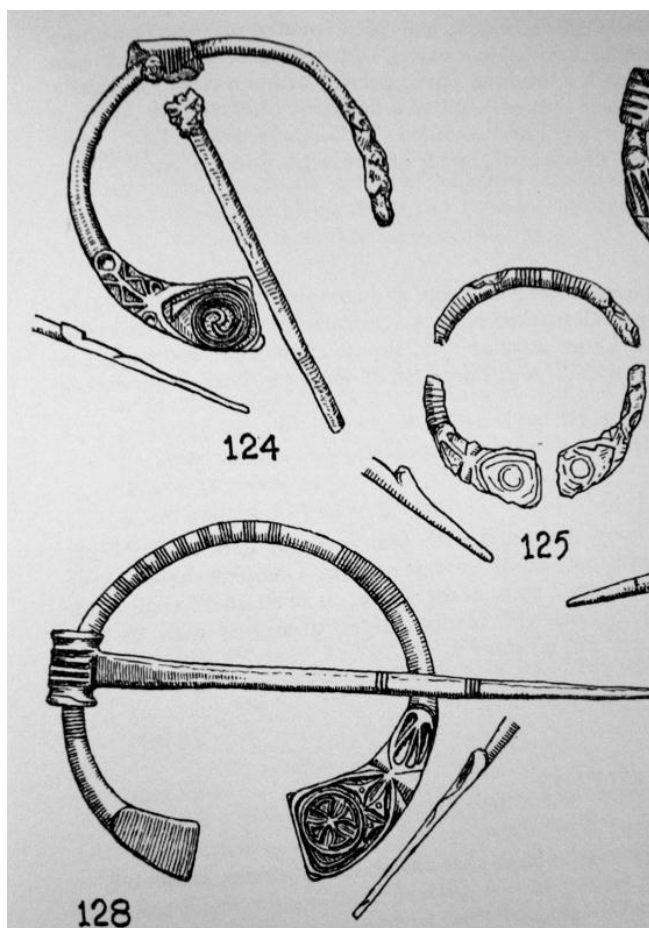


Fig. 16: C5 Brooches with missing terminals. Drawing from Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980.

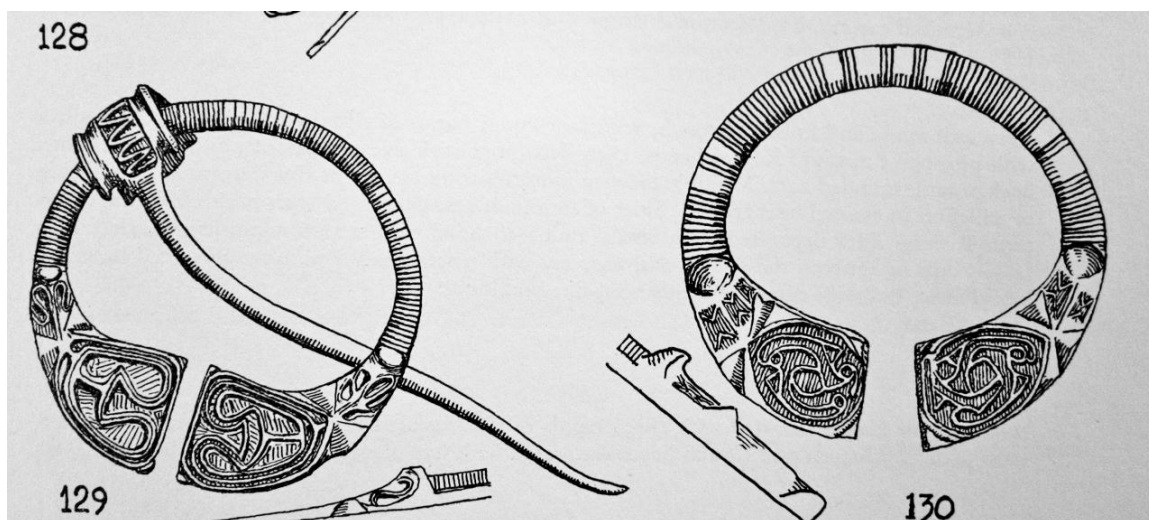


Fig. 17: C5 Brooches with asymmetrical terminals. Drawing from Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 1980.



Fig. 18: Curbstone at Newgrange, Co. Meath, Ireland, 3,200 BC. Triskele carved into the left side of the stone, at the entrance to the dromos, leading to the inner tomb.



Fig. 19: Penannular Brooch, Irish, 6-7th c, bronze with traces of gilt, Unprovenanced, Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, Accession # 54.2341, D. 6.5, L.12.5, H. 1.2 cm.



Fig. 20: Bronze Penannular Brooch, NMI, 6-7th century.

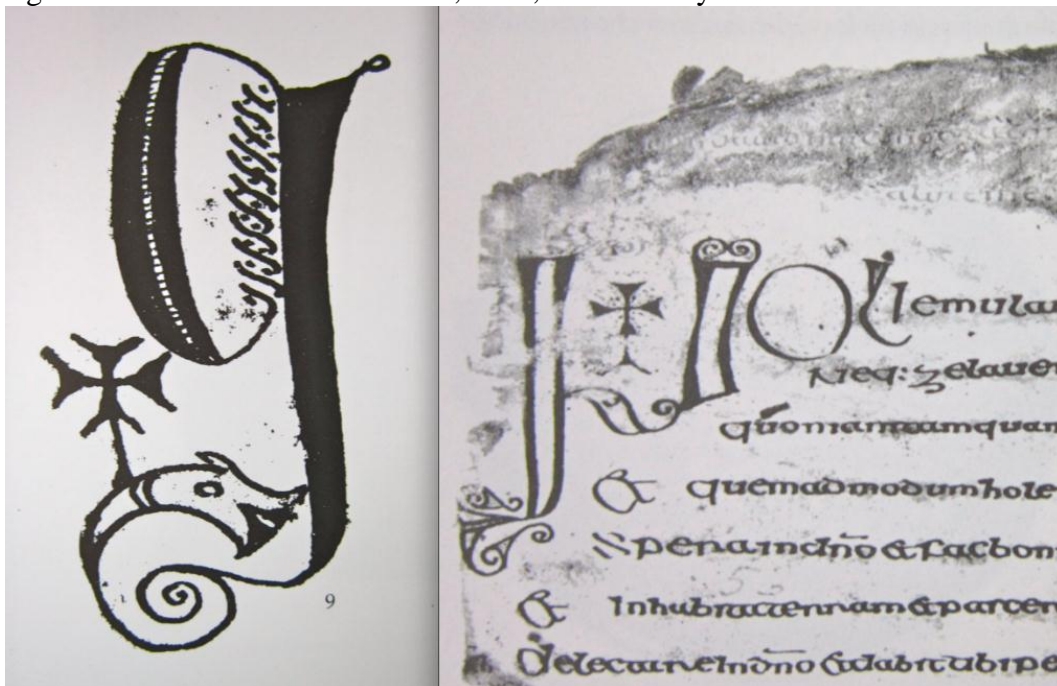


Fig. 21: Manuscripts with stemmed Maltese crosses. (Left) (Right) Detail of Folio 6a of the *Cathach*. Image Source: Harbison, *The Golden Age*, plate 9, and p. 29.



Fig. 22: Detail of millefiori. Bronze penannular brooch from crannog no. 2, at Ballinderry, Co Offaly, late 6th - early 7th century, NMI.



Fig. 23: Detail of bezels for millefiori studs, bronze penannular brooch, Castledermot, Co. Kildare, Early 7th c., NMI 1945:311.



Fig. 24: Bronze Penannular Brooch, found near Old Carbury Castle, co. Kildare, Kilbride-Jones #108 (Group C3), NMI R1930, D. 6.2 cm, Pin L. 11.5.

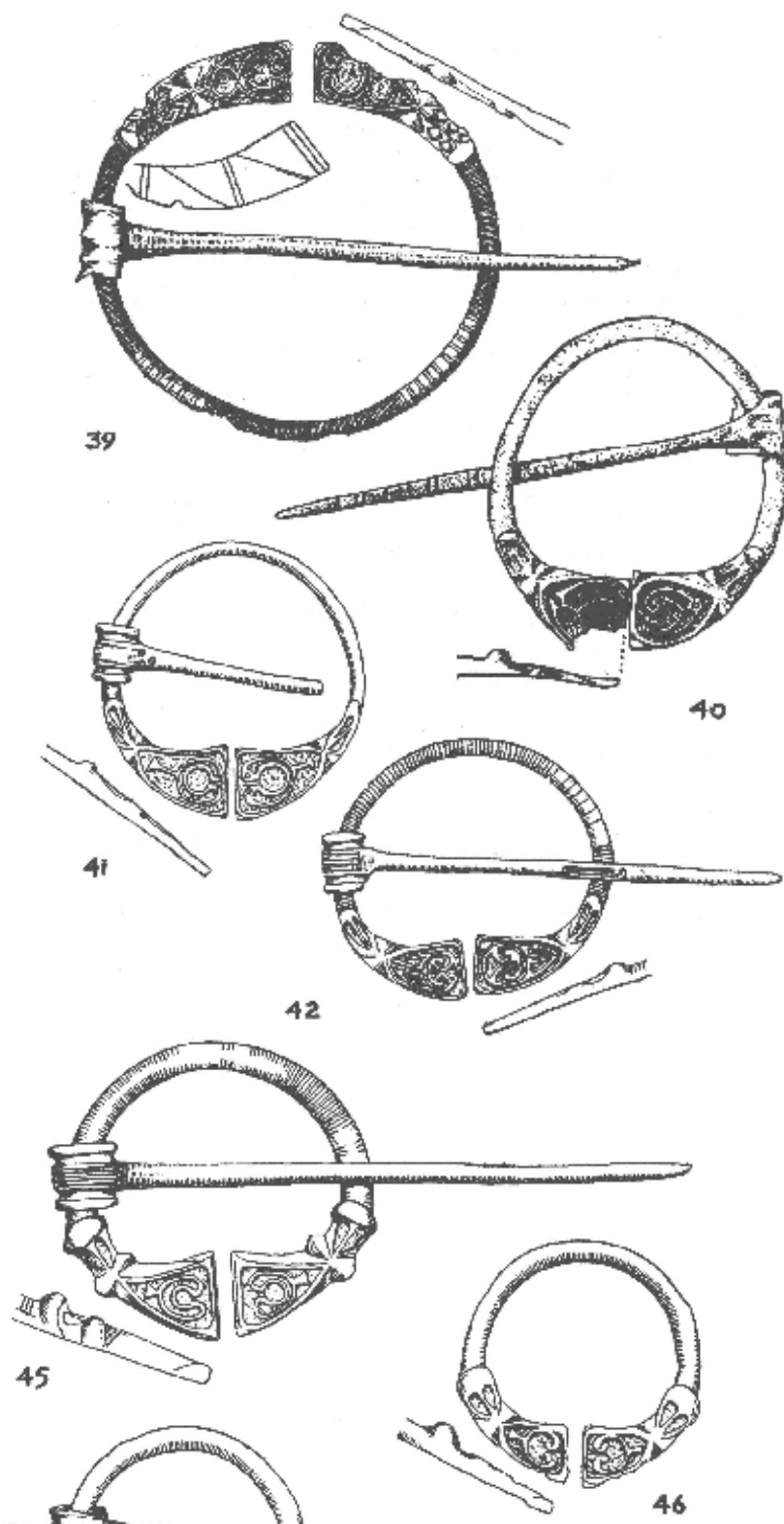


Fig. 25: Brooches with palmette derivatives on their terminals, from Kilbride-Jones "The Evolution of Penannular Brooches with Zoomorphic Terminals", 1935-37, pp. 422 and 425.



Fig. 26: Bronze Disc, Monasterevin, Co. Kildare, 2nd century AD.



Fig. 27: (Left) Terminal of Bronze Zoomorphic Brooch, NMI 1000:2822. (Right) Two birds flank a chalice on the Epitaph of Veneriosa, 5-6th cent., Musee de Saint-Andre-le-Bas, Vienne.

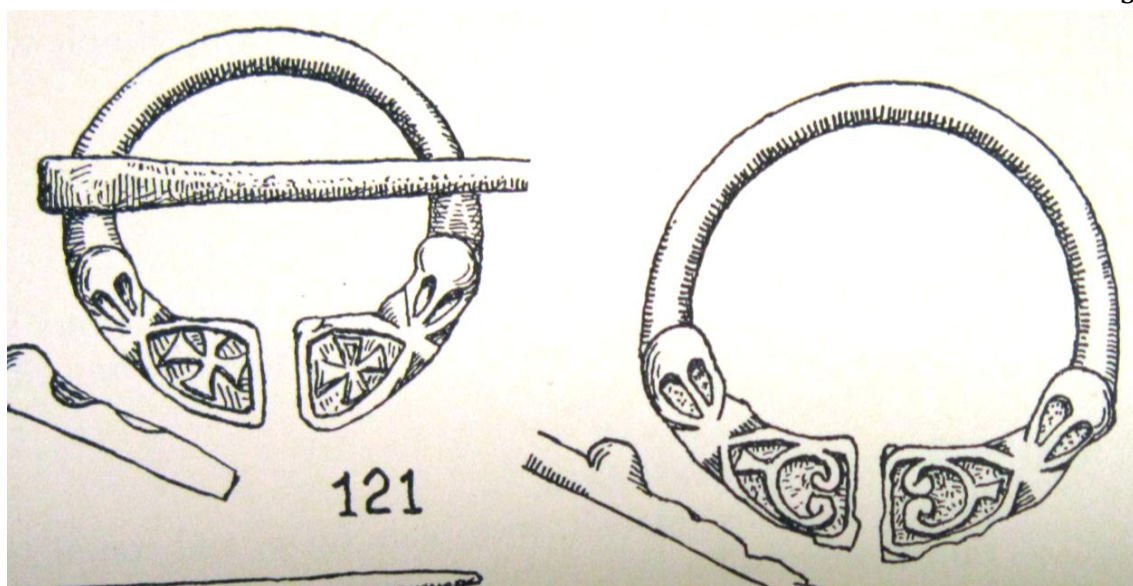


Fig. 28: (Left) Bronze Penannular Brooch, Co. Westmeath, Kilbride-Jones # 121, D. 3.8 cm. (Right) Bronze Penannular Brooch, Bough, Rathvilley, Co. Carlow, Kilbride-Jones # 122, D. 4.3 cm. Both at NMI.



Fig. 29: Head of the Londesborough Pin. Image from Newman and Gavin "Notes on Insular Silver in the Military Style", p. 6.

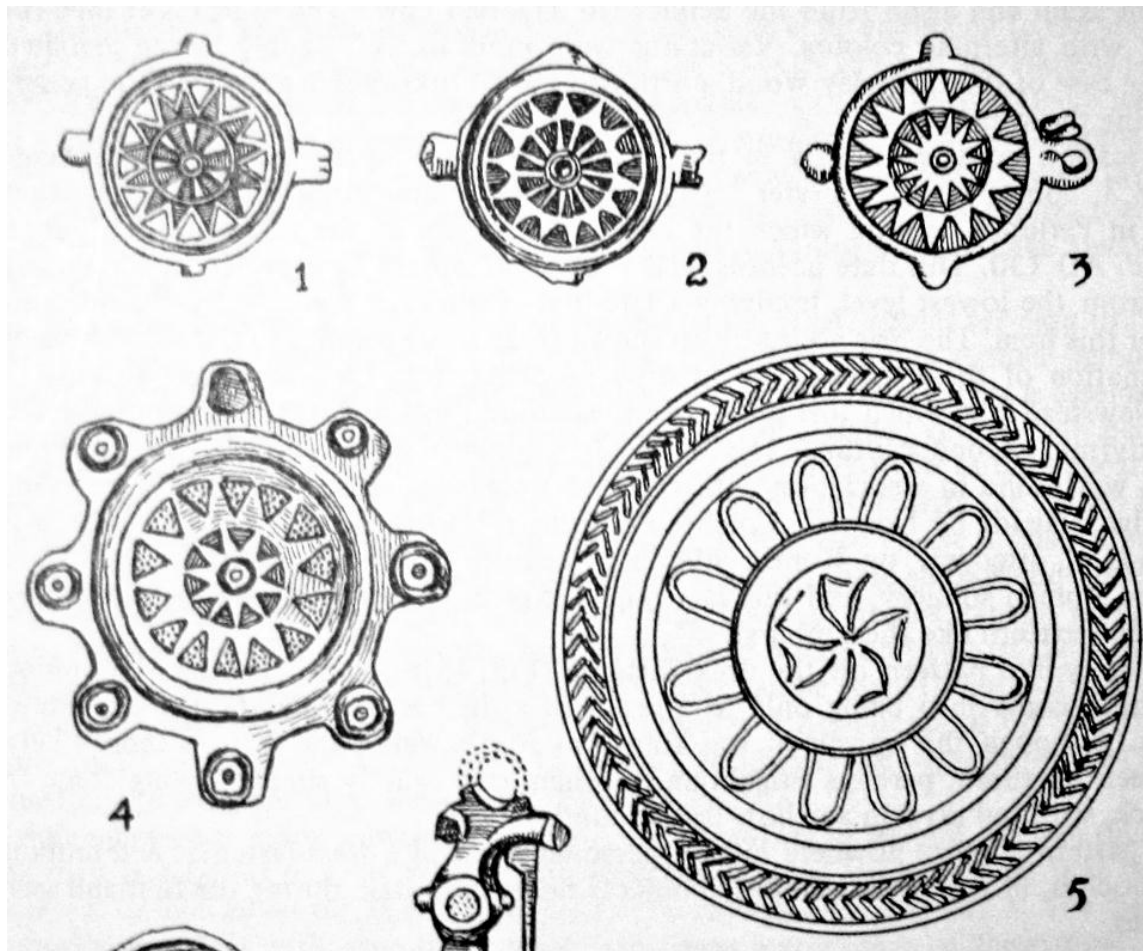


Fig. 30: Umbonate enameled disc brooches with sunburst patterns. 1. From Traprain Law. 2. From Nor'nour, Isles of Scilly. 3. From Alchester. 4. Disc-Brooch, enameled, Hilderly Wood, Malton, N.R. Yorkshire. 5. Decorative detail from Bowl, Snailwell, Cambs. Image source: Kilbride-Jones, *Celtic Craftsmanship in Bronze*, 61.

Ch. 2: Decorated Metalwork in the Early Medieval Period:

Manufacture and Status

The decorated metalwork of early medieval Ireland, examples of which were discussed in chapter 1, was closely associated with high social status. By wearing these items, the wearer was distinguishing his or herself as a member of the nobility. Not only were these brooches, pins, and latchets worn by the aristocracy, they were created by craftsmen of high social standing. The art of metalworking was one of high regard, worthy of a high honor price. As the Irish people began to embrace Christianity in the 5th century, the officials of the Christian church began to wear these symbols of high social status. In a fiercely class-conscious society, decorated metalwork was a tool used to mark one's class, a legal entitlement to aristocrats, and a highly regarded craft to the Irish of the 6-7th century.

Workshops and Methods of Production

The majority of decorated metalwork from the 6-7th centuries was made of a copper alloy. Other non-ferrous metals, such as lead, tin, silver and gold were also used, though much less frequently. The copper alloy used was usually in the form of bronze or “gunmetal,” an alloy consisting mostly of copper, with varying amounts of tin and zinc.¹ These small amounts of zinc were added to the alloy to improve its casting qualities.²

The metals required for the production of copper alloy were most likely Irish and British in origin. Evidence of mining in Ireland, for instance at Ross Island on Lough

¹ O'Sullivan, *Early Medieval Dwellings*, 116.

² Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, 90.

Lein in Killarney, Co. Kerry, dates back as far as 2500 BC. There, copper, iron, and possibly lead and silver were mined. Archaeological evidence confirms that Ross Island was mined during the early Christian period, indicated by small furnaces that have been dated to 700 AD. Additionally, a 9th century Welsh monk named Nennius described the metals found at Lough Lein as tin, lead, iron, and copper.³ It is also quite possible that the tin used to make bronze was imported to Ireland from Cornwall.⁴

Several steps were required in the creation of a cast metal object. Far before the object was cast, the artist developed preliminary designs. These designs were usually engraved onto slate, bone, or antler as seen on the “trial” or “motif” pieces of the period, so called because these items were used for the trial of a motif. An excellent example of a trial piece was found at Dooley, Co. Donegal, and demonstrates multiple motifs that would have been used in the early medieval period (Fig. 1). Many of the designs of the period employ complex geometric and curvilinear forms, for which compasses appear to have been used extensively to create them.⁵

After the preliminary design was prepared, a model of the object to be made was sculpted from wax, wood or lead,⁶ then the preparation of the clay mould began. Two balls of prepared clay were flattened on a flat surface. The wood, wax or lead model was pressed into the flat surface of one of the clay slabs, and left to dry for several hours.⁷ The

³ O’Brien, *Ross Island*, 16. O’Brien quotes Nennius, writing “There is a lake called Lough Lein. Four circles around it. In the first circle, it is surrounded by tin, in the second by lead, in the third by iron and in the fourth by copper...”

⁴ Whitfield, personal communication.

⁵ Craddock, “Metalworking Techniques,” 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 171. See also Kilbride-Jones *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 12. Kilbride-Jones mentions only wood and lead as materials used to make a model or ‘pattern’.

⁷ *Ibid.*

other clay slab was pressed onto the alternate side of the wax, wood or lead model, and the model was removed from the clay.⁸ A funnel-shaped entry for the molten metal was carved into the clay, and the two sides of the mould were keyed together to make one form. The wax, wood, or lead model was then removed from the mould, and the clay mould was fired in a hot kiln, completing the creation of the mould.

Next, the metal intended to be cast was placed into a crucible, and held with long tongs over a hot furnace. In order to make molten bronze, a copper cake was melted at a heat of 1981.4 degrees Fahrenheit, stirred with a green branch, and tin was added to the mix.⁹ This molten bronze was poured into the prepared mould, and allowed to cool into its hardened form. The cast object was released by separating the two halves of the mould. It is likely that the initial casting bore imperfections like rags, and other irregularities on its surface.

After the object was cast, much was done to refine and decorate its surface. Any rags would have been removed by files, and the surface of each object was most likely buffed, as many of these cast objects, such as the Castledermot brooch, have smooth surfaces (Fig. 2).¹⁰ To create deep channels in the metal, chisels with sharp, angular edges were used, whereas light channels of straight or curved lines were made with a round-edged chisel-like tool, called a chaser.¹¹ Areas of a metal object could be widened and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 12. Kilbride-Jones notes that stirring the molten copper with a green branch causes the release of methane and other gasses, which helps to refine the copper.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

flattened by hammering its surface on an anvil.¹² Imitation chip carving was used on some items from this period, as can be seen on the terminals of unprovenanced brooch NMI W.368 (Fig. 3). In this process, small diamond-shaped facets were chipped away from the surface of the wax, wood, or lead model, creating a consistent pattern on its surface. When the model was cast into metal form, these chipped away areas cause a glinting effect on the surface of the metal. The pattern that appears on NMI W.368 is also referred to as the multi-lozenge pattern, and occurs on many British dragonesque brooches from around the 2nd century. The pattern is therefore, most likely referenced from Brittonic examples.

Enamel was frequently applied to brooches to add color. The enamel used in Ireland during the earliest part of the Middle Ages was almost always a bright, opaque red. This red enamel was composed of glass that had been colored by dendritic cuprite, a dark red mineral consisting of cuprous oxide.¹³ During the 6 and 7th century, this enamel was applied to decorated metalwork using the *champlevé* technique, in which enamel was applied to a recessed area. *Champlevé* enamel usually appears as a background to a raised decorative area, with the red of the enamel contrasting with the bronze sheen of the metal and highlighting the detailed areas of the brooch (Fig. 4).

Early medieval Irish craftsmen used two different methods of applying *champlevé* enamel. In the first method, enamel was applied by heating the enamel to its melting point, flooding the recessed field and fusing the enamel to the metal ground.¹⁴ This method results in a smooth, hardened surface. In the second method, the enamel was

¹² One such anvil was found at Garannes, Co. Cork, Ireland.

¹³ Youngs, "Enameling," 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

heated to a lower temperature, causing it to have a putty-like consistency, whereby the enamel could be manually pushed into the recessed areas.¹⁵ In these cases, the surface of the enamel can have more of a voluminous, uneven appearance.

Round studs of millefiori glass are sometimes found on the terminals of early Christian brooches. These multicolored studs were made by fusing together elongated rods of colored glass, then cutting the fused rod, revealing flecks of each colored rod (Fig. 5). Glass for millefiori was sometimes imported from the Mediterranean. Some brooches were also tinned, a process in which the brooch was dipped in molten tin, and covered in a thin layer of the metal, that gave it a silvery appearance (Fig. 6). This tinned surface wears away through use and age, often leaving only patches of tin.

Social Status and Metalwork

Topographically and socially, Ireland was divided into many tribal territories, each ruled by a king. Both the territory and the people it contained were known as a *túath* (plural *túatha*), often referred to as petty kingdoms, which could have contained people from multiple clans. Early Irish society seems to have been built on two major structures: the clan (*cenél*) and the kin-group (*fine*). Within both groups, individuals were held accountable for each other's actions; the kin-group was expected to see that fines were paid if a member broke the law. The clan as a whole worked to produce enough excess to provide for its warrior aristocracy.¹⁶ This warrior aristocracy, as described in early Irish literature such as the epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (Cattle Raid of Cooley) and much of the Ulster Cycle, raided the cattle of other clans and fought battles. Using the system of

¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶ Laing, *The Archaeology of Celtic Britain and Ireland*, 16.

clientship, lords gave clients set amounts of cattle in return for goods produced on the farm.

Irish society during the 6th and 7th centuries was fiercely class-conscious. Each person had an honor-price, a price that must be paid by the offender if the individual was killed, or if the honor of a person was illegally offended or damaged. The highest honor-price belonged to the kings and poets (*fili*) who, during these two centuries, were above the law.¹⁷ There were many kings in Ireland at any given time during the early medieval era: one for each *tuath*, territory, and province. Below the king were various ranks of nobility, freemen who could own and inherit land, and professionals or *áes dána* (literally ‘men of arts’).

The *áes dána* included experts in law, genealogy, and history as well as poets, druids and skilled smiths, who could demand honor prices second only to the king and some nobility.¹⁸ Various ranks of poets existed, the highest of which commanded an honor price equal to a king of a territory, and were expected to be proficient in genealogies of the men of Ireland, and have the ability to understand verse without deliberation.¹⁹ Experts of law included judges who presided over the pleading of a case, judges of unintentional crimes, and judges of exemption. Druids, according to the Ancient Laws, were those who performed divination. Metalworkers and carpenters were, thus, in the same class as lawyers, doctors, and druids. They were *daer-nemed*, and men of the arts.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁹ *Ancient Laws, Uraicecht Becc*, 57. The title *Uraicecht Becc* translates to “small primer”, and is a legal text dealing with social status. It is a *nemed* text, meaning “privileged ones”.

Honor prices were paid in *cumals*, a single unit of which was equal to seven cows, as well as other goods. For instance, a king was worth seven cumals, or forty-nine cows. No money system was established in early Ireland, but rather a system of tribute and bartering of goods. Before writing was introduced by Christian missionaries in the 5th century, the early Irish had no written language, except for the sporadic use of Ogham, a rune-like script used to denote important locations, usually found on standing stones. For this reason, oaths and agreements were made verbally. Oaths could only be retracted within 24 hours of the agreement; thereafter they were breakable only at the cost of an honor price.

The lowest of all honor prices belonged to the unfree men. However, these men were not necessarily slaves. Four types of people were considered to be unfree: the *fuidir*, *bothach*, *senchleithe*, and true slaves. The *fuidir* was a farmer who was dependent on a lord, and could not enter into any legal contract without the aid of his lord.²⁰ A person or family who was *bothach* lived in an unenclosed home, not surrounded by a ringfort or any other enclosure, and thus separate from the free farmers.²¹ If a person or family remained *fuidir* or *bothach* for three generations, they became *senchleithe*, a social position similar to the medieval serf. The *senchleithe* were bound to the land, and thus possessions of the land's owner.²² Yet while even the *senchleithe* were natives of Ireland, and thus had some legal rights, a true slave had no legal rights, and was usually a prisoner of war or a foreigner captured in the slave trade, as St. Patrick had been in his youth.²³

²⁰ Boyle, "Lest the Lowliest Be Forgotten," 87.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

The rank of a woman was, according to legal tracts, dependant on that of the man in charge of her. This was her father, if she was unmarried, her husband if she was, her son if she was widowed, and her kin group if she had no male guardian.²⁴ Without the authorization of her male guardian, a woman could not make a sale, purchase, contract, or transaction.²⁵ She could not make an oath or own family land on her own. A woman was raised by her parents as a child, but before her teenage years she may have been sent to be fostered by a set of foster-parents—a practice used for both girls and boys. During her fosterage, if she was noble-born, a young girl would have been trained in the arts of sewing, spinning, and other household duties expected of a noble woman.²⁶ Girls of lower status, however, were put into service at a noble household.²⁷

The roles and rights of a woman in early Ireland were tightly confined according to legal tracts, but so were those of all who lived in early Ireland. Equality, let alone gender equality, was a foreign notion to the people of early medieval Ireland. Yet the women who appear in 7-8th century Irish literature play roles that are much more varied than those set out in legal tracts. These women range from passive sex items to dutiful wives, not so dutiful wives, mothers, economic partners, holy women, prophetesses, coy and intelligent coquets, and warrior queens. Indeed, the very existence of laws restricting women from independent land ownership, business transactions, and marriage decisions implies that there were women who broke them, and men who helped.²⁸

²⁴ Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, 68-79.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bitel, *Land of Women*, 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

Metalworkers were distinguished into three categories in the Ancient Laws of Ireland: iron smiths, those who worked with gold, and those who worked with brass. Someone who was reputed to be a master of his art as an ironsmith, goldsmith, or brass smith had equal freedom with the *aire desa*, the lowest rank of nobility.²⁹ Several metalworking workshops appear on royal sites, such as the workshops at Dunadd in Scottish Dal Riada and Garranes in Co. Cork, Ireland, believed to be a major royal seat.³⁰ Metalworking workshops may have been located at royal strongholds simply to ensure the security of the precious metals with which the smiths worked, and the valuable items they crafted. Wealthier settlements included well-fortified strongholds, and were thus a logical location for the defense of precious possessions.

Nonetheless, the social roles were important to the smooth running of a community. Class, rank, and honor-price were central to social roles within one's *tuath*. Social class determined the amount of tribute due to an individual, and the level of repercussions due to their clan if he or she was murdered or unlawfully offended. Consciousness of one's own class was ingrained into the minds of the early Irish people from their youth. The fosterage system, in which many aristocratic youths were raised, reinforced these social strata, and prepared them for their future responsibilities as an adult.

Because class was so important to the early Irish, it was important to outwardly show one's rank through dress. This was evident even in the Ancient Laws of Ireland, which delegated certain clothing to certain classes and occupations. In an effort to

²⁹ *Ancient Laws, Uraicecht Becc*, 115.

³⁰ Laing, *Celtic Britain and Ireland: Art and Society*, 98.

improve inter-tribal relations, aristocratic youths were sent to be fostered by nearby clans. While in fosterage, class-consciousness and social division were reinforced. Children of different social standing were, by law, dressed in different colors of clothing to demark social difference. With regards to fosterage, the Ancient Laws of Ireland states that “Blay-colored (unbleached), and yellow, and black, and white are to be worn by the sons of inferior grades; red, and green, and brown clothes by the sons of chieftains; purple and blue clothes by the sons of kings.”³¹ Another version states “Satin and scarlet are for the son of the king of Erin, and silver on his scabbards, and brass rings upon his hurling sticks, and tin upon the scabbards of the sons of chieftains of lower ranks, and brass rings upon their hurling sticks.”³² As this last expert states, status was not only marked by clothing, but also by grades of metal.

It seems clear that, as with the color of clothing, a hierarchy was also assigned to metals. Silver was assigned to the sons of kings, and tin to the sons of chiefs. The Ancient Laws of the *Senchus Mor* continue to establish this hierarchy of metals further in the text, saying “And brooches of gold, having crystal inserted in them, with the sons of the king of Erin, and the king of a province, and brooches of silver with the sons of a territory, or a great territory; or the son of each king is to have a similar brooch, as to material; but that the ornamentation of all these should appear in that brooch.”³³ Thus, gold was assigned to the highest men of rank, followed by silver. Though bronze is the primary material used for brooches found from this period, is not mentioned in this tract of the *Senchus Mor*. If

³¹ *Ancient Laws, Senchus Mor*, 147.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 147, 149.

this law was followed, the brooches studied in chapter one were likely worn by those who ranked lower than a King of a territory.

Ornamentation on brooches is mentioned rather unclearly in the last statement made in this section of the *Senchus Mor*. The 19th century translator of this section of the text, Dr. O'Donovan, wrote in a gloss "this brooch was carved or ornamented according to the rank of each king, but the ornaments which distinguished these brooches from each other are now unknown", "It is probable that the brooches of the different ranks were distinguished by the nature of the inlaying or the variety of the carving."³⁴ Yet, it seems, that this is merely the opinion of this late translator, and has not been concretely substantiated by archaeological studies.

The kind of clothing worn by the people of early medieval Ireland is not certain. Depictions of figures clothed in contemporary garb did not begin to appear until the 10th and 11th centuries, when they were carved onto high crosses. This leaves a 500-year gap from our period of concern. However, similar carvings appear as early as the 8th century in Scotland, such as those found on the Hilton of Cadboll Stone, where a noble woman is shown riding side-saddle with a large brooch worn centrally on her breast, its round terminals facing downward (Fig. 7). In an attempt to form a picture of early Irish clothing, various scholars have looked toward contemporary fashions in mainland Europe, as well as contemporary literary sources.

One venue of fashion exchange was Roman Britain, with which the Irish seem to have had much contact. The Irish likely adopted wearing a tunic under a cloak, or Irish *brat*, from the officials of Roman Britain, as did the Germanic peoples within the Roman

³⁴ Ibid., 148.

Empire.³⁵ The Byzantine emperor and his senior officials similarly secured their cloaks with a brooch as part of their official uniform (Fig. 8).³⁶ In the 3rd and 4th centuries AD the Romans began to use decoration on brooches to distinguish rank, whereas brooches had previously been simple, functional objects.³⁷ A similar use of brooches is found about 400 years later in one of Ireland's earliest written law tracts: the *Senchus Mor*.

The people of Roman Britain and Ireland seem to have worn their brooches differently. The 7th or 8th century Irish law tract *Bretha Egid* (translates to Judgments of Inadvertence) required that men wear brooches towards their shoulder, and women at the center of their breast—whereas both genders of Romans wore brooches at the shoulder.³⁸ Indeed, Ragnall O'Floinn goes so far as to propose that the early form of Irish brooches (Kilbride-Jones A-B1) was probably primarily worn by women.³⁹ By contrast, Anglo-Saxon women wore one brooch on either shoulder.⁴⁰

Despite the regulations put forth in *Bretha Egid*, early Irish literature describes men wearing brooches on both the shoulder and on the breast. One literary source that sheds light on society in early medieval Ireland is the epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. Though its earliest remaining copy is dated to the 12th century, the language of the *Táin* has been dated as early as the eighth century, and is believed to be part of an even older oral tradition. The Irish, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, used no writing system (with the

³⁵ Whitfield, "More Thoughts on the Wearing of Brooches", 70.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 71.

³⁸ Ibid., 72.

³⁹ O'Floinn, "Patrons and Politics", 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

infrequent exception of Ogham script), but had an oral tradition that trained select people in their communities to memorize histories, geologies, law, myth, and other wisdom.

The stories laid out in early Irish literature like the *Táin*, as well as the mythological and Ulster cycles, seem to reflect a Celtic Iron Age society. They focus on the battles and exploits of the warrior nobility and their various heroes, like Cu Chulaind, Conchubur, and many others. Frequently, the tales revolve around the tensions between the people of Connacht, the western province of Ireland, whose political center lay at Cruachan Aí, and the inhabitants of Ulster, the northern province of Ireland, whose political center lay at Emain Macha. Within many of these tales, there are lengthy descriptions of important characters' appearances, making early Irish literature one of our greatest resources on the topic of medieval clothing and fashion in Ireland.⁴¹

One such episode occurs in the *Táin*, when the Connachtman Mac Roth has returned from the hill at Slemain Midi, from whose heights he can view the encroaching enemy forces, the *Ulaid* (men of Ulster). Upon returning to Medb and Ailill, queen and king of Connacht, Mac Roth describes the appearance of each war band's leader, totaling twenty descriptions of each man's dress and physical attributes. The typical clothing description from Mac Roth includes a tunic, cloak, and brooch or pin.⁴² Of the tunics, he describes many variations: some that fall as low as the wearer's knees, some with sleeves,

⁴¹ For more on early Irish literature, see Gantz, Jeffrey. *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1981). Niamh Whitfield gives an excellent look at dress fasteners in early Irish literature in "Dress and Accessories in the Early Irish Tale 'The Wooing of Becfhola,'" *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 2 (2006), pp.1-34.

⁴² *The Táin*, trans. Thomas Kinsella, 225-234. All twenty of Mac Roth's descriptions of the Ulster men appear on these pages.

some with fine embroidery, purple pleated tunics, some with borders, many white hooded tunics, red embroidered braided tunics, and various other colors. Woolen, fringed, and speckled cloaks of green, dark grey, purple, yellow, brown, black, and fine red appear on Mac Roth's list.

Of particular interest to this paper, Mac Roth also describes the cloak fasteners worn by the Ulstermen. He describes brooches of red-gold, gold, and bright silver, as well as other types of cloak fasteners, like a leaf shaped pin, silver or gold pin, disk of tin or silver, iron spike,⁴³ and five chains of gold.⁴⁴ Gold and silver brooches certainly have not been found from the 6th and 7th centuries, and this section is possibly more representative of later medieval fashions. Alternatively, the author may just have been imagining up finer variations of real objects, turning the bronze brooches of his time into golden brooches in the story. Silver pins and disk shaped brooches, however, are most definitely found in Ireland during the 6th and 7th centuries (Fig. 9 and 10).

This passage in the *Táin* clearly demonstrates the articles of clothing that were likely worn by the warrior nobility of early medieval Ireland. It seems that the typical ensemble was composed of a hooded tunic, roughly knee length, which was covered by a cloak, and fastened by a brooch or type of pin. All of these had varying degrees of decoration. Yet the author, in a way, complicates the issue of brooch and pin placement. Some Ulstermen are described as wearing a brooch or pin on the shoulder—as is prescribed in early Irish law in the *Bretha Egid*, as stated above. Yet some of the men

⁴³ Ibid., 231. The spike fastener may be mere myth, used to communicate the gruffness of this particular man, who is described as “a terrible hero with harsh looks: big bellied, big nosed, thick-lipped, his hair tough...he wore a rough woven tunic and a dark cloak.”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 230. These chains were not necessarily cloak fasteners, because this man fastened his cloak with a brooch.

described by Mac Roth wore a brooch or pin on the breast,⁴⁵ and others wore one pin on each shoulder.⁴⁶

Wearing fine metalwork was not confined to the lay aristocracy, but could also be worn by people of ecclesial status. The success of the Christians in Ireland was partly due to the preexistence of a powerful intellectual class that was highly respected by society. The kings, druids, and bards all possessed both intellectual and sacral features. By the 7th century clerics usually came from the aristocratic class, and were related to the local nobility.⁴⁷ Law tracts dating from the eighth century grant to the bishop the same honor price as a king, *fili* (poet), and *brithem* (judge), and established the bishop's domain as the basic political unit, the *tuath*.⁴⁸ Accounts of the early clerics also demonstrate that they inherited some of the qualities formerly assigned to the druids, like prophetic and visionary powers, and were regarded as the intellectual elite.⁴⁹ The druids had practiced miracles, prophecy, and preached the existence of another world, all of which easily corresponded with Christian teachings.⁵⁰

Medieval Irish social structure was such that if the nobility converted to Christianity, the members of their *tuath* were likely to follow suit. A man could not give away land to someone outside of his kin, so monasteries were given, leased, or sold to the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 226, 229-230, 234.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁷ Hughes, *Celtic Monasticism*, 6.

⁴⁸ Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, 60.

⁴⁹ Hughes, *Celtic Monasticism*, 6.

⁵⁰ For more on the relationship between the teachings of the Druids and St. Patrick, see John Carey's "St. Patrick, the Druids, and the End of the World", *History of Religions*, Vol. 36, 1996, pp. 42-53.

Church by the entire clan, some of whom would carry out monastic roles.⁵¹ Thus, some monasteries were family foundations, maintaining the prosperity of the *tuath* by performing spiritual duties for the laity, such as baptism, preaching, burials, and mass. Even the aristocratic practice of fosterage became absorbed into the Christian church. Aristocratic boys were sent by their parents to be fostered in monasteries and received formal education at monastic schools.⁵² Christian motifs, like the Maltese cross, are found on a small number of brooches from the 6-7th century, perhaps attesting to the high rank of clergy during this period.

In conclusion, fine metalworking was a sophisticated and highly esteemed craft in medieval Irish society. It was integrally bound to the stratification of social classes, and was central to the outward display of social rank through dress. By looking at early Irish law, as well as literary and archaeological evidence, it has become clear that both the production and wearing of finely decorated metalwork was associated with the upper classes. In the Catalogue, I will present ten examples of 6-7th century brooches, allowing the reader to become familiar with the range of forms and motifs found within the corpus. Additionally, detailed images make clear the high level of craftsmanship realized by early Irish metalworkers.

⁵¹ Hughes, *Celtic Monasticism*, 6.

⁵² Ibid.



Fig. 1: Bone and antler motif pieces, Dooey, Co. Donegal (left) and Christchurch Place, Dublin (right). These items are sometimes called “trial pieces”.



Fig. 2: Bronze Penannular Brooch, Castledermot Co. Kildare, Ireland, early 7th century. The smooth areas of the brooch seem to have been buffed to a shine.



Fig. 3: Bronze Penannular Brooch, Unprovenanced, Ireland, 6-7th century. The multi-lozenge pattern, or possibly imitation chip carving can be seen on the sides and snout of each terminal.



Fig. 4: Bronze Penannular Brooch, 7th century, Arthurstown, Co. Meath, Ireland. The terminals of this brooch contain red enamel.



Fig. 5: Bronze Penannular Brooch, Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland, NMI 1876:99, approx. 3 in diameter. Though the enamel has worn away from the terminals, four millefiori studs still remain, bearing yellow, blue, and red colored glass.



Fig. 6: Bronze penannular brooch from crannog no. 2, at Ballinderry, Co Offaly, late 6th-early 7th century, NMI. Niamh Whitfield has pointed out that the Balinderry Crannog brooch was originally tinned, in Whitfield, “The Balinderry Brooch”, in the forthcoming R. Moss (ed.) *Art and Architecture of Ireland*. (2014), not yet paginated.



Fig. 7: Detail from the Hilton of Cadboll Stone, 8th cent., Scotland. Image source: Frontispiece of Spearman, *The Age of Migrating Ideas*.

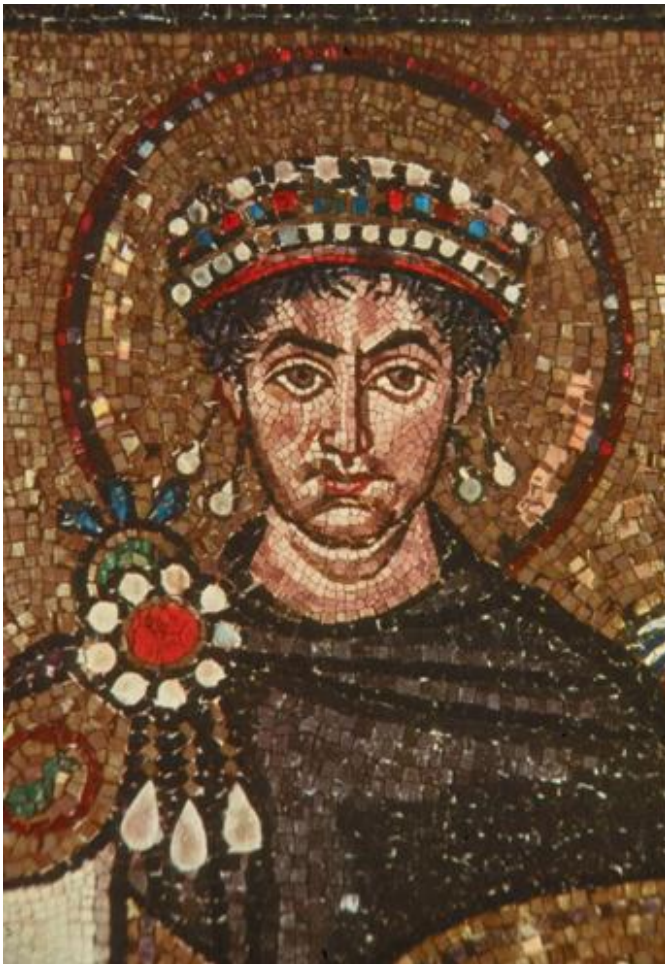


Fig. 8: Detail of Emperor Justinian, Mosaic of Justinian and his Attendants, mid 6th century, Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy.



Fig. 9: Bronze disc brooch, Lagore, Co. Meath, 6th cent.



Fig. 10: Handpin, Castletown Kilpatrick, Co. Meath. Found in 1848. Copper Alloy with heavy silver plating, late 6th-early 7th c., L. 14.1 cm, head dia. 1.7 cm, NMI. P.634.

Conclusion

The zoomorphic penannular brooches of medieval Ireland are evidence of a highly skilled population of craftsmen in Ireland. By the 6th and 7th centuries these brooches had evolved from a thin, highly abstracted form to an enlarged surface to be decorated. Over the centuries following the 6th and 7th centuries, the amount of time, skill, and ornamentation applied to brooches increased, and the craftsman and patron developed a hunger for extremely ornate surface decoration, as with the “Tara” brooch from the early 8th century (Fig 1). Access to precious metals meant a more malleable medium to be formed into an intricate display of motif and design, and a more pure, bright metal surface. These extremely ornate, highly accomplished brooches of the 8th and 9th centuries are works worthy of the highest admiration, and should be a source of national pride to the Irish people.

But this should not be cause to ignore the centuries of innovation, originality, and inventiveness that led to their creation. Watching the progression of the zoomorphic penannular brooch form over time allows us to see into the decision making process of these early medieval metalworkers, as they determined which forms worked best for their own purposes. Craftsmen made conscious decisions to communicate the zoomorphic form in ways they felt were more effective or beautiful. Over time, the zoomorphic form transformed from a small, relatively two-dimensional conglomeration of geometric forms, into a larger, softer, more elongated form whose various facial forms projected from the surface of the terminal.

The new, widened terminal of Kilbride-Jones' groups B and C was a monumental opportunity for the craftsman, enabling him to expand his picture plane. The head of the animal was expanded into a large, curved-sided triangle, creating a blank canvas for the artist to fill with finely rendered motifs, like triskele and c-curves. The rendering of the snout increased in sophistication—its subtle features became more pronounced and softened in their graceful undulations from one end of the terminal to the other. Patterns began to appear on the snout, like the multiple lozenge pattern on the outer sides of the terminals on NMI W. 368 (Fig. 2) and the herringbone motif on the outer side of the Castledermot brooch and NMI 1000:1904 (Figs. 3 and 4).

Not only are these brooches valuable as documents of the evolution of the zoomorphic form in Ireland, but also as art objects within themselves. While the more ornate brooches of the 8th and 9th centuries may appeal to those with a love of extensive surface decoration, simplicity of color and form found among Kilbride-Jones groups B and C appeal in a different way. By containing the chief motif within the frame of the zoomorphic head, the viewer is enabled to focus on whichever image the artist or patron has chosen to represent. A background of bright red enamel highlights the motif, creating a contrast between the color and luster of each material. This motif of focus is the head of the beast, from which projects a snout that swallows the ring of the brooch. Such an arrangement of forms, and the narrative that it implies, is fascinating within itself.

Does the location of the motif, within the head of the beast, imply something about the motif itself? Does the motif within the beast's head represent something about the beast? I believe that the symbol placed on the head of the beast may denote what the beast represents, or the source of its ferocious power. A Maltese cross on the head of a

beast may indicate the power of Christ. Perhaps the zoomorphic terminals with millefiori represent a beast whose power is derived from dragon stones. The symbols of the Eucharist on NMI 1000:2822 may represent a beast whose power is derived from the mysteries of Christ's body and blood, as taken in the Eucharist. The meaning of the triskel remains a mystery, but its presence on places of pre-Christian religious significance, and its appearance on countless items of wealth, point toward a significant meaning, rather than mere popularity as a form of decoration. Is it possible that the pelta motif found on so many terminals represented the protective power of the shield—the form from which the pelta motif was originally derived?

Furthermore, I think that these brooches may have been meant to be apotropaic devices, invoking the protective power of the force symbolized on the terminal space. As mentioned previously, St. Andrews crosses were inscribed into the backs of a number of brooches and pins from this period, possibly to a talismanic end. By placing symbols of power within the head of the ferocious beast, the wearer may have been invoking the power of that force as an apotropaic means of protection from various forms of evil. During this early Christian period of the 6th and 7th centuries, the power of the sign of the cross, as well as the Eucharist, would have been well understood.

Alternately, the motifs found on the terminals of these brooches may have been arbitrarily chosen, based on fashion, and the whim of the craftsman or patron. No written document can be procured to prove either supposition, yet it seems necessary to propose the possibility of each. Kilbride-Jones quite strongly and clearly claimed that the motifs found on the terminals of zoomorphic penannular brooches were meaningless, and

referred to many of them as bad copies of Roman motifs. I believe that this is unlikely, although I do not deny its possibility.

In order to answer the questions I have raised about the possible meaning behind the form and decoration on these brooches, future work should look into the nature of the zoomorphic terminal, looking at questions such as: Does the zoomorph represent a serpent, dragon, or hound—or both? How does the dragon motif appear in early Irish literature and art? How does the hound appear in early Irish literature and art? Additionally, future work should examine the possibility of apotropaic or votive functions of the motifs used to decorate brooch terminals. What objects and symbols were considered to be apotropaic? Further work on the symbolic possibilities on early metalwork should look to work that has been done on insular manuscripts as a guide.¹

Future work would widen my catalogue to include more zoomorphic brooches from this period, and perhaps make them digitally accessible to scholars. Not many brooches of this type have been photographed for public use, nor have many images of these brooches been uploaded to a website for scholarly use, as the Metropolitan and British Museums have endeavored to do within the last few years.

The zoomorphic penannular brooches of 6th and 7th century Ireland shed light on a time, culture, and people about which we know very little. The motifs displayed on these brooches are visual documents of a time when Christian and pre-Christian beliefs were converging. Maltese crosses are seen within the same century as ones displaying pre-

¹ For more on illuminated manuscripts see Meehan, B. *The Book of Durrow: a medieval masterpiece* (Dublin: 1996); Alexander, J.J.G. *Insular manuscripts 6th to the 9th century* (London: 1978); Henderson, G. *From Durrow to Kells, Insular manuscripts 650-800* (London: 1987).

Christian La-Tène motifs. These brooches are evidence of a skilled population of craftsmen, whose product was in demand among the nobility. Although the zoomorphic penannular form was invented in Britain, it was re-imagined, evolved, and perfected in Ireland, making it an exclusively insular invention and art form. As a symbol of social status, mentioned frequently in early Irish literature and in early Irish law tracts, the zoomorphic penannular brooch provides an excellent channel into the social structures of early medieval Ireland. Not only are these brooches important for their aesthetic value, but also for their cultural significance as windows through which to see the people of the early Christian period.



Fig. 1: The "Tara" Brooch, from Bettystown, Co. Meath, early 8th c., NMI. Image from Youngs, "Enamelling in Early Medieval Ireland", p. 43.



Fig. 2: Detail of multi-lozenge pattern, 6-7th c., Irish, unprovenanced, NMI W. 368, D. 7.5 cm, Pin L. 12 cm.



Fig. 3: Detail of herringbone motif, Bronze Penannular Brooch, Castledermot, Co. Kildare, Early 7th c., NMI 1945:311.



Fig. 4: Detail of herringbone motif, Bronze Penannular Brooch, Irish, unprovenanced, 6-7th c., NMI 1000:1904.

Catalogue of Select Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches from the 6th and 7th Centuries

The following catalogue includes high quality images of six Irish zoomorphic penannular brooches. All of them were closely viewed and handled by the author, five at the National Museum of Ireland's Archaeology branch in Dublin, Ireland, and one at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, MD. These six brooches were chosen from thirteen that I handled, from the selection of roughly 110 zoomorphic brooches that are held at the National Museum of Ireland.¹ I have three reasons for choosing the brooches that I did: some were chosen in order to present a wide array of the types of zoomorphic terminal forms from this period, others were chosen because I found them to be particularly well crafted, and above all I tried to select brooches that have not been frequently published. Most of these brooches were chosen because they meet all of these criteria.

The brooches that I viewed at the National Museum in Dublin were initially selected by myself, which I chose by looking at the drawings of H. E. Kilbride-Jones. Yet many of the brooches that I viewed were suggested to me by Andy Halpin, Assistant Keeper of Antiquities at the National Museum. In the future I hope to expand this catalogue to include a greater variety of brooches from this period, demonstrating the many motifs and techniques that exist, and above all making them available for primary research to those for whom travelling to Ireland is not an option.

¹ In a personal communication with the author, Andy Halpin, Assistant Keeper of Antiquities at the National Museum, estimated that there are about 100-120 zoomorphic brooches at the National Museum, and anywhere from 60-100 at other museums. NMI is still in the process of completing its inventory, and does not yet have an exact count of these brooches. Kilbride-Jones (1980) lists 160 zoomorphic brooches from NMI, other museums, and private possession, but this almost certainly does not contain the full corpus.

Each brooch has been photographed at a high resolution with a digital camera, and is accompanied by detail photos and a formal analysis, describing its color, brooch ring, terminals, brooch pin, and any additional observations that may pertain to the brooch. Each brooch has been labeled with its find location, registration number, number and group assigned by H. E. Kilbride-Jones, and dimensions. Much of the dimension information comes from Kilbride-Jones' *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches* (1980), and find location information comes from the National Museum. Images of seven other brooches appear throughout the chapters of this thesis. Though these brooches do not appear in this catalogue, I encourage the reader to examine them as well.



1. Bronze Penannular Brooch, River Greese, Co. Kildare, NMI 1945:312, Kilbride-Jones #54 (Group B1), D. 5.8 cm, Pin L. 7.4 cm (D 2.3 in, Pin L. 2.9 in).

Color:

This small, lightweight brooch has a grayish bronze color. Kilbride-Jones claims there is an enamel background within the terminals, but I saw no evidence of this—save for a slight orangey rust color in the deepest recesses of the terminal decoration.

Brooch Ring:

The brooch ring has a grainy appearance, probably due to its age, and it is cracking vertically like a ring of weathered wood. Alternating bands of ribbing have been applied to the areas nearest the terminals, as well as the area at the top center of the brooch ring. An indented ring runs along the back of the brooch, moving vertically from terminal to terminal.

Terminals:

The terminals are zoomorphic, with a rounded triangle of a snout. This snout joins to a lentoid head by way of two teardrop shaped eyes. The animal head terminates with a pair of rounded, recessed ears. Within the lentoid head, two concave-sided triangles have been joined, each punched at its center. It is likely that these recessed areas would have been filled with red enamel. The emphasis of these terminals is on sculpted form, rather than two-dimensional surface decoration, as on most of the brooches in this catalogue. The verso of the terminals is also decorated, each bearing a saltire, each flanked by a double band. The ribbing on the recto of the brooch ring, however, does not extend to the verso of the brooch.



Brooch-pin:

The brooch-pin curves slightly upward at its mid-point, and curves again in a more pronounced way where it meets the brooch ring. The pin was cast with this curvature so that it conforms to the brooch ring when fastened. The pinhead is decorated on its recto and verso with three raised ribs. The pinhead is only loose enough to move .5 inch in distance.



2. Penannular Brooch, copper alloy, 6-7th cent., Kilbride-Jones #67 (Group B2), found in the river Shannon near Athlone, Co. Westmeath, D. 8.5 cm, Pin L. 16.3 cm (D. 3.5 in, Pin L. 6.4 in).

Color:

The brooch has a bronze color that has grayed slightly. The terminals still bear small patches of red enamel. Patches of faint green oxidation appear within the recessed areas of the terminals.

Brooch Ring:

The brooch ring has been somewhat distorted and is slightly pointed at the top center (assuming the terminals are the “bottom” of the brooch). The front of the entire brooch ring has been incised with ribs. These ribs end halfway down the side of the

brooch where there is a recessed line. This recessed line stretches along the entirety of the brooch ring and is probably a result of the casting process.



The Terminals:

The terminals of the Athlone brooch are flattened, triangular forms, much thinner than the brooch ring. The terminals are zoomorphic, and have traditionally been described as beasts swallowing the brooch ring. Here, the beast's snout swallows the brooch ring and bears markedly pronounced, pointed nostrils. These nostrils protrude from two diamond shaped eyes that project from the surface in relief. At the highest point of these diamond-like forms slits are clearly visible on the inner side of the terminal and appear faintly on the outer side. These slits may represent the opening or pupil of the eye. Ears have been marked out at the inner corners of each terminal.

The focal point of each terminal is a highly decorated, triangular head. The terminals are symmetrical and bear curvilinear motifs, reminiscent of the Ultimate La Tene style of the Celtic Iron Age with its abstract, curvilinear designs. At first glance, the



central motif of each terminal is a triskel, with an additional spiral extending outward. Yet the three inner spirals are, uncharacteristically, not joined at one central axis—perhaps excluding them from being labeled as triskele. The spirals have no central axis, but are interconnected by c-scroll extensions of their tails. At its center, each spiral interlocks with a counter-spiral, creating a complex sense of movement. These spirals are organized into two pairs per terminal, one pair is placed vertically, the other horizontally, connected by an elegant, flowing line. These raised spirals bear faint hatch-marks, when viewed under magnification.

Around the raised, curvilinear motifs, the background is recessed and has been keyed or textured by scraping away at the metal, to receive an enamel ground. Traces of red enamel remain within these areas as small specks and patches. The recessed areas around the animal's nostrils may have received an enamel ground, as these have also been keyed.

Brooch Pin:

The brooch pin is completely intact and is still quite pointed at the end. The pinhead is textured with thirteen raised ribs of varied sizes. At the joint where the pinhead



meets the pin there are two parallel Z shapes, which Kilbride-Jones omits in his drawing.²

The pin has also been decorated in two sections ribbed with three lines, both of which occur where the pin meets the terminals.

Additional Observations:

The Athlone brooch was dredged from the bottom of the River Shannon along with an almost identical brooch, which is now in the possession of the Ulster Museum. Kilbride-Jones seems to confuse these brother-brooches and has mixed up their brooch-

² Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 109.

pin decorations in his drawings, especially the Z shaped lines where the pin-head meets the brooch ring.



3. Bronze Zoomorphic Penannular Brooch, 6-7th c., unprovenanced, Kilbride-Jones #73 (Group C1), NMI W. 368.

Color:

NMI W. 368 has a reddish tint to its bronze color with a patch of a silver color on the lower left of the left terminal. Its coppery-bronze color is beautiful, glossy and slightly golden.

Brooch Ring:

The brooch ring is intact. At first glance, the surface of the rings seems to be smooth and glossy, but upon closer examination faint ribbing is detectable and extends across the entire brooch ring. Perhaps these ribs have worn away over time.



Terminals:

The terminals on NMI W.368 are zoomorphic, containing an upturned snout and raised eyes, which protrude from an ovoid, triangular head that contains abstract curvilinear motifs. The snout is bisected vertically by an incised line or medial ridge, and is textured with lozenge shaped stippling or multiple lozenge pattern, which continues along the sides of the terminals. At the center of each head are small, diamond-shaped recesses that have been keyed probably to receive champlevé enamel. The background behind the curvilinear designs has also been recessed and keyed to receive enamel, but no remains of enamel are visible on the terminals.

The design concept of NMI W.368's terminals is similar, but certainly not identical to that of the Athlone Brooch, and consists of four interconnected spirals. Whereas all four of the Athlone Brooch's spirals contain counter spirals, only one spiral on the outer edge of each terminal on NMI W.368 contains a counter spiral. As in the Athlone brooch, the two spirals on the innermost edge of the terminals join at a central tip, which points toward the gap between the terminals. Ears have been marked out at the inner corners of each terminal. The terminals are hollow, reducing the weight of the brooch as well as the amount of metal necessary for manufacture.



Brooch Pin:

Three vertical lentoid shapes appear on the head of the brooch pin. Each lentoid has been incised by a recessed medial line, and is set on a raised band. Each medial recess, as well as the recesses between each band, has been hatched with parallel, diagonal lines. The back of the pinhead also bears three vertical lentoids set against raised bands, but does not exhibit hatched medial lines or any texture. V-shaped texturing appears on the bottom third of the brooch pin, but has worn away considerably and is most detectable under close examination and magnification.



4. Penannular Brooch, Irish, bronze with traces of gilt, 6-7th c, unprovenanced, Kilbride-Jones # 72 (Group C1), Walters Art Gallery 54.2341, 12.5 x 6.5 x 1.2 cm. Photo courtesy of the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, MD, USA.

Color:

The color of this brooch is bronze that has grayed significantly, to a dark gray bronze. Traces of gilt appear throughout the surface of the brooch.

Brooch Ring:

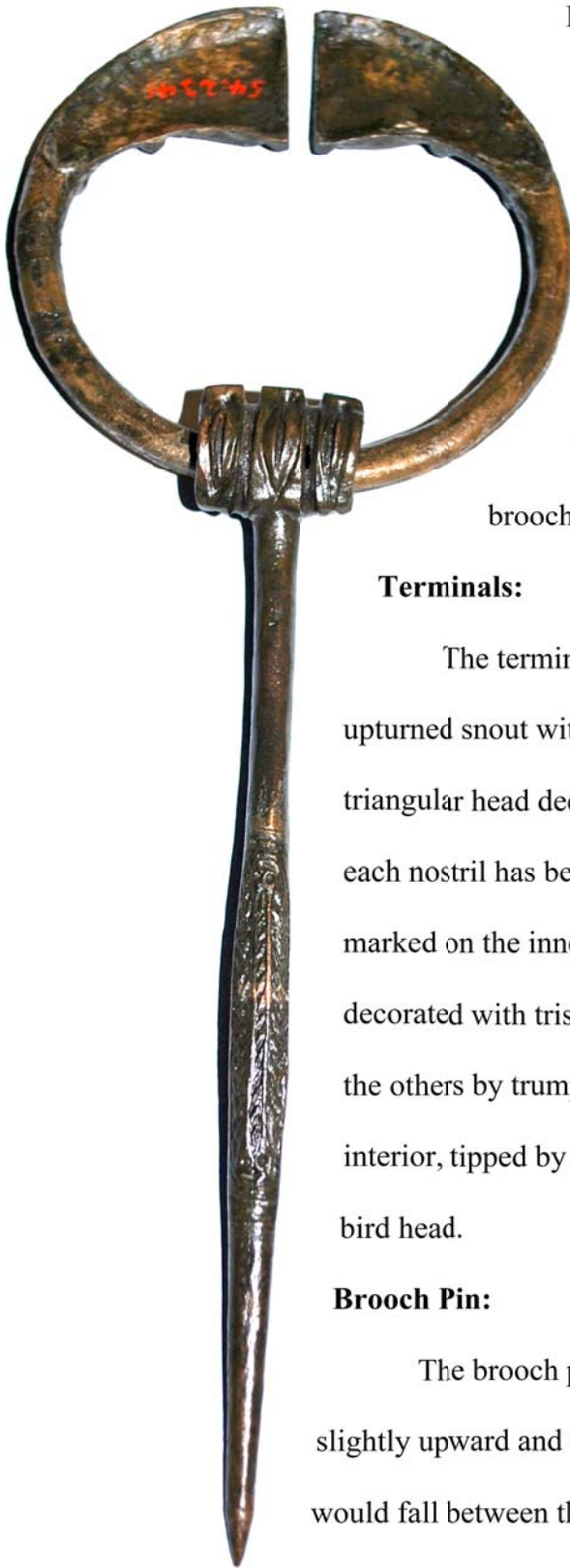
Ribbing covers the entire brooch ring, alternating sections with wide spacing and sections with close spacing. The brooch ring's width increases as it reaches the terminals. A casting ring is visible around the outer edge of the brooch, ending at the snout of each terminal.

Terminals:

The terminals are zoomorphic and consist of an upturned snout with pronounced nostrils, raised eyes, and triangular head decorated with curvilinear motifs. The top of each nostril has been punched. Ears have been clearly marked on the inner corners of each terminal. The heads are decorated with triskel motifs with each spiral connected to the others by trumpet scrolls. Each spiral terminates at its interior, tipped by a punched comma, possibly indicating a bird head.

Brooch Pin:

The brooch pin is in very good condition. It curves slightly upward and widens about halfway down, where the pin would fall between the terminals. This area has been decorated



with an oblong area of herringbone motif that is separated into three vertical bands.

The upper and lower edges of this area have been punched twice and are bordered by several bands of ribbing. The pinhead is decorated on both sides by three wide, raised bands, each of which encases an ovoid form, which is surrounded by a recessed border.



5. Bronze Penannular Brooch, Irish, 6-7th cent., unprovenanced, Kilbride-Jones #109 (Group C3), NMI 1000:1904

Color:

The bronze has turned a very dark, brownish gray. Traces of red enamel are visible on the terminals.

Brooch Ring:

The majority of the brooch ring is ribbed with the exception of a small space at the top center. Three successive unribbed triangles appear above the snouts, one pointing toward the bottom of the next, contrasting in texture with the ribbed ring. The ribbing does not extend to the back of the brooch, but terminates halfway down the side of the

brooch ring where there is a recessed line that stretches along the entirety of the brooch ring, and is probably a result of the casting process.



Terminals:

The terminals consist of triangular heads, from which extend large snouts that are particularly upturned at the tip. Ears are marked at the inner corners, and the sides of the head are decorated with a herringbone motif in low relief. The eyes are pyramidal, and rounded at their points. In comparison to the previously discussed brooches, the forms that appear on the terminals of NMI 1000:1904 vary more in their levels of relief, creating an interesting push-pull effect, and a higher contrast of light and dark.

Additionally, the patterns that decorate the sides of the terminals are particularly well executed, creating an interesting surface texture. Herringbone appears on the ears, which project from the surface in an abnormally high level of relief. This push-pull effect is also visible on the snout of the animal, which has been molded with deeply recessed nostrils, and flares dramatically at the upturned tip.



Each head contains an abstract, curvilinear motif, consisting of three arms that radiate counter-clockwise from a central circle. From here, each arm stretches out toward one of the corners of the triangular head, where its tip curves under to create a small circle. From here, the arm sends out another extension line, continuing the counter-clockwise motion, and connection itself to the next main arm. As a whole, the motif creates a sense of motion, implying a counter-clockwise rotation. Within the central circle a square has been marked out, perhaps emulating a square-cut gem, placed at the center of the motif. Kilbride-Jones claims that this is a square of millefiori, and includes a drawing of its checkerboard pattern, though I only detected the hint of these very small, finely arranged millefiori remains under magnification.³ The recesses around this motif have been keyed for the reception of a red enamel ground, traces of which remain. Enamel was likely applied to the recesses behind the relief patterns on the sides of the

³ Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, 128-9.

terminals, as well as those on the snout and ears. The backs of the terminals are incised with zigzag lines.

Brooch Pin:

The brooch pin is in good condition and curves upward where it falls over the brooch ring, where it has been decorated with a zigzag line in relief that is framed in a long, thin, recessed oval. Enamel was likely applied to this recess. The pinhead is large, loose, and barrel shaped, and consists of raised borders and a central molding with a raised almond shape at its center. This motif is repeated on the back of the pinhead.





6. Bronze Penannular Brooch, Irish, 6-7th century, bronze, No Locality, Kilbride-Jones # (Group), NMI 5505.W358

Color:

This brooch is a deep gray color, with green areas of oxidation. However, there is a 1/4in wide area of grayish bronze at the top center of the brooch ring where the pinhead rests on the brooch ring. The gray color indicates perhaps an exposed area of the brooch's original color. Traces of red enamel appear on the terminals, the bottom half of the brooch pin, areas of the pinhead, and a patch at the top center of the brooch ring. Though brooches of this type tend to have enamel only in specific recessed areas, patches of red enamel appear on areas throughout this brooch.

Brooch Ring:

Upon close examination, ribbing on the brooch ring is visible and seems to have worn over time. The front of the entire brooch ring has been incised with ribs,



ending at the terminals. These ribs terminate halfway down the side of the brooch where there is a recessed line that stretches along the entirety of the brooch ring, probably a result of the casting process. A deeper incised line appears at the top center of the brooch ring.

Terminals:

The terminals are zoomorphic: ears are marked at the inner corners and raised, rounded eyes and an upturned snout lie between the head and brooch ring. The ears, placed on either side of the terminals, are slightly raised from the initial surface and have been hatched with vertical lines. The snout has been decorated with a herringbone motif on either side. The head contains an ovoid recess that frames a Maltese cross. The background behind each Maltese cross has been recessed and keyed for the reception of a red enamel ground, traces of which remain.

Brooch Pin:

The brooch pin seems to be undecorated, and is rough in texture, perhaps due to corrosion. Yet under high lighting, the bottom half of the brooch pin appears to be red, presenting the possibility that it had originally been decorated with red enamel. The front of the pinhead has been decorated with six incised lines that are contained in a rectangular frame.

Glossary of Terms Used to Describe Early Irish Metalwork

Adorsed: Placed back to back. In heraldry, this term is applied to any two animals placed back to back: opposed to affronté.

Annular: ring shaped.

Chased: engraved with a sharp object, like a graver or a burin. This is seen in Roman British silverwork, like the Londesborough pin.

C-Scroll: a line that is shaped like the letter “C”, and has spirals at either end, called scrolls.



Elliptical: oval, egg shaped.

Enamel: A technique in which opaque glass is heated into a softened state then pressed into prepared metal fields or cells, and allowed to cool and harden.

Escutcheon: a mount, often used to cover the hinges on hanging bowls.



Interstice: An intervening space, especially a small or narrow one.

Lentoid: Pointed oval, almond-shaped.



Lozenge: horizontally oriented diamond shapes.

Marigold: a motif consisting of six lentoid petals that protrude from one central point.



Mushroom Coils: see peltae.

Ornothomorphic: resembling a bird. In early medieval Irish art, this often refers to a highly abstracted bird form, indicated by a pointed beak and a circular eye.



Ovoid: egg shaped, with one end more pointed than the other.

Pelta: An ancient semi-circular shield shape that commonly features in Roman mosaics. A pelta was a crescent-shaped wicker shield commonly used in the ancient world before the 3rd century BC. It seems however that the shield used in Greece had its origins in Thrace and central Europe. In Irish art the tips of peltae are often curled, and are sometimes referred to as ‘mushroom coils’, and palmettes.



Penannular: A circle with a small gap in it.

Punched: This term is a method of decorating surfaces with a pointed tool, usually creating a small indented dot.

Saltire: An “X” shape, also known as Saint Andrew’s Cross. It is found on the flag of Scotland and St. Patrick’s flag. St. Andrew is said to have been martyred on such a cross.



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