

A Bronze Hanging Bowl from Castle Tioram

From the Proceedings of Antiquarians of Scotland LXXI (1937), pp206-209.

Author - H.E. Kilbride-Jones, F.S.A.Scot.

Extract by G.C. Barr.

"In England, bronze hanging bowls, or parts of such bowls, have been found on nearly fifty sites. Many have been found in Saxon internments; but there is now little doubt that they were acquired as loot by the Saxons, to whom the art of enamelling was as a closed book. But for the fact that the bowls were actually interred along with the remains of those who had stolen them, it is possible that we might have had to-day very few specimens with which to adorn our museums. Had the bowls remained with their original Celtic owners, they would, in all probability, have been melted down or merely cast out into the open, where decay would have been rapid. It was apparently not a Celtic custom to preserve curiosities of a former age.....Hitherto we only knew of the existence of a single hanging-bowl in Scotland - the much-battered and rather fragmentary remains of a specimen from Tummel Bridge, Perthshire, a bowl which had been buried along with silver penannular brooches of a fifth-century type and perhaps by someone who wished to hide his small hoard from marauders. The presence of this bowl in Perthshire has been ascribed to a raid of the Picts south of the Border. It is therefore very gratifying to be able to record the discovery of yet another hanging-bowl, this time in a locality well removed from the area of Pictish incursions. It was found sometime prior to 1928 in a kitchen-midden at Castle Tioram, in Moidart. During a visit to Fort William last year it was seen by Dr Alex. O. Curle in the West Highland Museum.

The new bowl is in very fragmentary condition: nothing remains apart from the rim and shoulder, and one escutcheon, together with a ring for suspension, fig 1. It has been spun from a single piece of bronze (a difficult process, and achieved by the continued application of heat) and the walls are less than 1mm in thickness. The metal thickens above the shoulder, and the neck is slightly hollow, whilst the rim has been hammered down from above, thereby producing a slight eversion and inversion, giving a width to the top of the rim of nearly 3 mm. The object of producing, or buckling, this T-girder form of rim was for the prevention of sagging, or buckling, which would otherwise have taken place at the points of suspension when the bowl was hung aloft.

The single remaining escutcheon, the obverse of which is slightly convex, has an openwork design of two laterally opposed *palmettes*. The hook has a zoomorphic form, both ears and eyes being clearly indicated. Along the top of the "head" runs a thin, raised moulding which terminates in a small raised oval panel (barely discernable) at the back of the head. Below this, at the junction of hook and escutcheon, are other two small panels; but the decay is such that it is impossible to determine whether or not they bore ornamentation. The ring is encircled on the outside by ladder ornamentation.

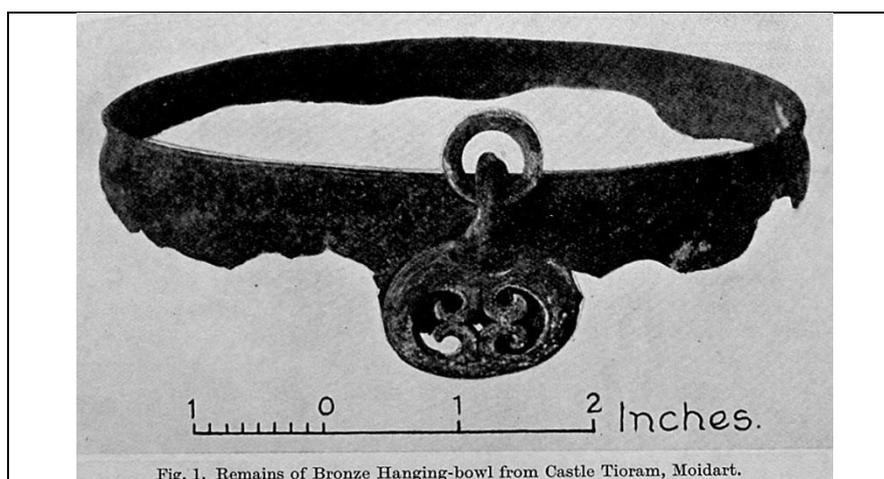


Fig. 1. Remains of Bronze Hanging-bowl from Castle Tioram, Moidart.

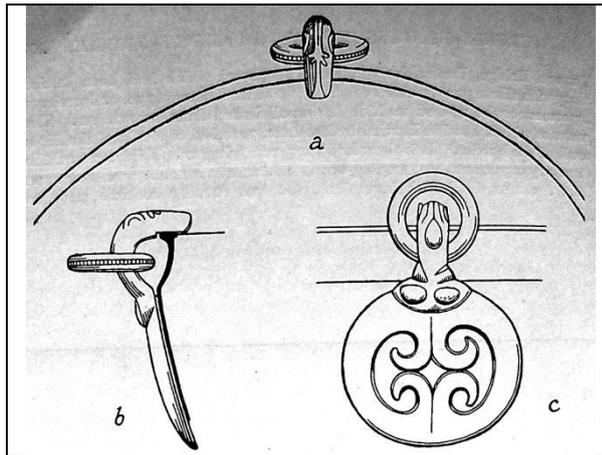


Fig. 2. Castle Tioram Hanging Bowl. a - top elevation; b - side view; c - escutcheon.

There is no indication as to whether the bowl had originally three or four escutcheons; but, in view of its small size, it is probable that there were but three escutcheons. When complete, the bowl must have been more or less hemispherical in shape, and it doubtless possessed a wide kick in the base, which quite possibly bore a print both inside and outside.

.....

Although the type of bowl originated in Britain during the Roman occupation, hanging-bowls were actually known in these islands in La Tène times. So far, there is but one such bowl; it was found at Cerrig-y-Drudion, Denbighshire, and it is an import. It was made probably in the second century B.C. The bowl was provided with four chains and hooks for suspension, so that little special significance can be attached to the quadruple as opposed to the later triple arrangement of the escutcheons."