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A Vendel Period gold and garnet cloisonné quatrefoil from Fröjel, Gotland

Harbour emporia and early landing sites is a perennial theme in Gotlandic archaeology. This is hardly surprising, given the island's approximately 800 km of coastline. Through unceasing interdisciplinary work our knowledge of landing sites has increased considerably over time (e.g. Munthe 1948; Hansson 1967; Lundström 1969; 1971; Olsson 1985; Carlsson 1987; 1999c). According to the latest published estimate some 60 possible sites, both larger and smaller, have been identified (Carlsson 2011, p. 22).

In the later Viking Period there seems to have been a tendency to focus trade and exchange to a smaller number of more developed sites. Three of these, Fröjel, Västergarn and Visby, are on the island's west coast. In several respects they complement each other, especially from an interpretative point of view as they seem to represent three different outcomes of the same basic concept. All three appear to have developed in the course of the early-to-mid 11th century, but while Visby grew into an outright town, the other two did not. Västergarn appears to have remained a local port of trade but the harbour settlement at Fröjel was completely abandoned, probably by AD 1200. Thereafter the site did not see much more than agricultural use and thus presumably kept certain traits which have been obscured, built over or entirely lost at the other two sites. For this reason, the Fröjel settlement has seen repeated excavations over the past 30 years, excavations which have been crucial for an updated understanding of the period on Gotland (e.g. Carlsson 1999a; 1999b; Dahlström et al. 2002; Dahlström 2003; 2005).

The Fröjel excavations unearthed a wealth of objects. Many of these reflect the site's position in period networks of trade and exchange – slags, casting moulds and other debris from craft production as well as silver and trade weights. However, the understanding of the site is complicated

by the fact that part of the settlement was built over an earlier cemetery. Thus, later ploughing has mixed settlement finds with objects from damaged graves deeper down.

Although all of the finds from Fröjel are important to some extent for the general interpretation of the site, certain pieces attract more attention than others. One of these highly interesting objects was recovered in 2001. It is a fragmented piece of gold and garnet cloisonné jewellery (fig. 1). Judging from its current state, somewhat more than one half of its original front face remain, including two stones. Without laboratory examination it is impossible to determine whether these are garnets or red glass, and such analyses are beyond the scope of this short presentation. The rear face is incomplete and must originally, judging from two surviving rivet shanks, have been covered by a back plate which is now missing.

The excavation report refers to the object as part of a Vendel Period sword pommel (find no. 25359; Dahlström 2003, p. 61). A closer look at the fragment shows that this cannot be correct. Instead, it is possible to reconstruct it as a part of a quatrefoil ornament with a second inner quatrefoil, skewed 45 degrees in relation to the outer frame. The fragmentary state of the piece makes it impossible to determine exactly what kind of object it originally was; the quatrefoil shape is represented in several types of cloisonné objects such as brooches, pendants and rings.

Based on the surviving parts, the Fröjel piece must originally have measured about 22 mm from point to point across the middle quatrefoil. As far as I am aware, there is no corresponding object from Gotland. But in 2015 a well preserved quatrefoil cloisonné pendant was found at Gamla Uppsala in Uppland (Ljungkvist et al. 2017). It measures 16 mm across the middle but has no central quatrefoil. Another quatrefoil piece was found at Dover in England in 1972. It is a golden ring



Fig. 1. Front and back of the Fröjel fragment (find no. 25359).

adorned with a cloisonné quatrefoil in which the garnet has been further adorned with a central circle of gold (DOVRM1991.10; Philp 1973, p. 10).

The Fröjel fragment represents a high level of craftsmanship. Due to its damaged state and as it was found singly in mixed deposits, it is hard to determine its original use and depositional context. It is possible that the quatrefoil was originally part of the inventory of a destroyed grave in or close to the local cemetery, but it may also have been deliberately deposited or brought in as raw material intended for reuse in the workshops of the later harbour settlement. Technical analysis will most probably reveal more information, but meanwhile the presence of the fragment itself serves both to elaborate our understanding of the site and to underline its importance.

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