

A SHERD OF IPSWICH WARE WITH FACE-MASK DECORATION

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An account has been given elsewhere,¹ of the Anglo-Saxon kilns in the Cox Lane area of Ipswich. Since the excavations then carried out, further development on a site (TM/167446) east of the main Co-operative Society's building has produced pottery of both Ipswich ware and Thetford ware type, and presumably made in the kilns. The material is in the Ipswich Museum. (Registration No. 963-49).

One sherd of Ipswich ware (7th-9th centuries) is of interest as the first, and so far the only fragment of Middle Saxon pottery ever found bearing stamped representations of a human face. Stamped designs are by no means uncommon on Ipswich ware,^{1,2} but have previously been of geometric pattern.

The resemblance of the face to that portrayed on the Sutton Hoo whetstone, and on other pieces of the same period, is so marked as to appear worthy of record, as the accompanying figures will perhaps serve to show. In all the examples illustrated, the basic design is the same, evolved to fit a pointed ovate; variations arise from the need to adapt to the medium, and the individual interpretation of the artist. As will be suggested below, this latter factor may have a bearing on the variations to be noted in the faces on the Sutton Hoo whetstone.

The Scandinavian affinities of the various elements of the Sutton Hoo Treasure have been dealt with very fully by Dr. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford.³ The origins of some of the Anglo-Saxon community settled in the Ipswich area have been noted by R. Rainbird Clarke.⁴ The large square-headed brooches found in the Hadleigh Road cemetery⁵ by Miss Nina Layard indicate an influx of settlers from Jutland, which had been colonised by migrants from Sweden. These people are generally accepted as the founders

¹ N. Smedley and E. Owles, 'Saxon Kilns in Cox Lane, Ipswich, 1961', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. xxix, part 3 (1963), pp. 304-335.

² S. E. West, 'Excavations at Cox Lane, 1958', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. xxix, part 3 (1963), pp. 233-303.

³ R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, 'The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. xxv, part 1 (1949), pp. 43-72.

⁴ R. Rainbird Clarke, *East Anglia* (1960), p. 138.

⁵ Nina Layard, 'An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery in Ipswich', *Archaeologia*, vol. lx (1907), pp. 325-352.

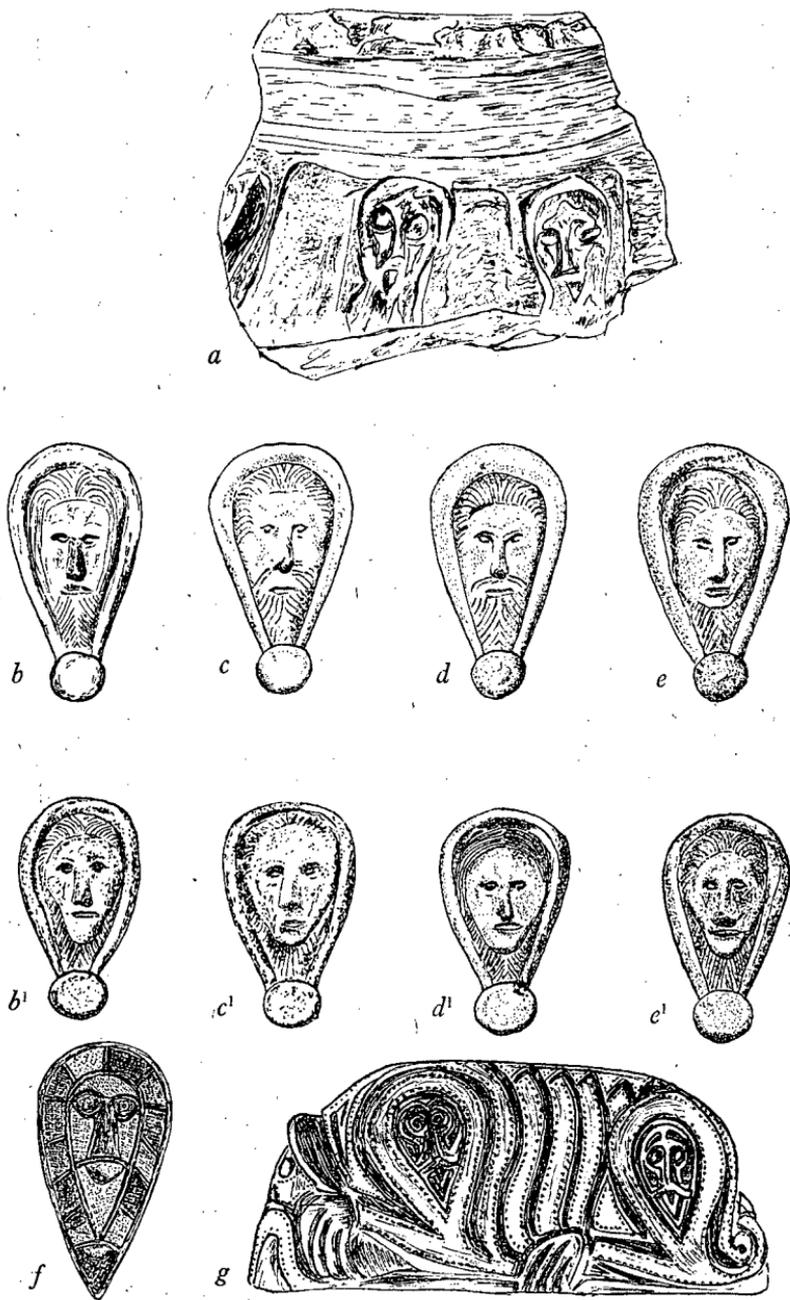


FIG. 12.—*a*, Sherd of Ipswich ware from Carr Street, Ipswich ($\frac{1}{2}$); *b*—*e* and *b*¹—*e*¹, Masks from the Sutton Hoo whetstone ($\frac{1}{2}$); *f*, Mask from leg of bird-mount on Sutton Hoo shield ($\frac{1}{2}$); *g*, Sword pommel from Kirmukarvu, Finland ($\frac{1}{4}$).

of the dynasty which had its seat at Rendlesham, and its burial-place at Sutton Hoo. Their successors in Middle Saxon times must have been responsible for the establishment of the pottery-making industry which produced Ipswich ware and later Thetford ware in the vicinity of what are now Cox Lane and Carr Street. Four sherds of Ipswich ware were found in the barrows at Sutton Hoo excavated by Basil Brown in 1938.

A further Scandinavian link was revealed by the discovery at Kirmukarmu, Vesilahti, Finland, of a sword pommel in gilt-bronze, now in the Finnish National Museum at Helsinki, bearing representations of a face similar to those here described, and of fragments of dragon mounts from Pukkila, Isokyrö, Finland, closely comparable with the corresponding parts of the dragon on the Sutton Hoo shield.⁶

The face-mask, in general terms, represents a man with features somewhat elongated to fit the available space within the pointed ovate chosen as a surround; the manner in which this is carried out varies according to the material.

In the case of the Ipswich ware sherd (Fig. 12 *a*), the cheeks are hollowed almost to the point of emaciation, the nose is long, the beard short and sharply pointed. The surround is splayed out at the base, almost giving the effect of a cowl, and is in contrast to that of the whetstone figures, where it terminates neatly in a round boss. The eyes are large and round, resembling those of the bird on the shield mount, rather than the eyes of the masks on the whetstone.

The whetstone figures are of considerable interest, and in order to demonstrate the variations, all have been figured here. Although in its undamaged state the terminals were no doubt of the same pattern, the grid surrounding the orb supporting a cup, it is simpler for the sake of clarity to regard the less mutilated end as the top, and it does in fact seem to show more competent workmanship. The face itself is of more normal proportions than that on the pottery, and the stone has lent itself to a more naturalistic reproduction of the features, elongation being limited for the most part to the beard. Fig. 12 *b, c, d* show a distinguished, almost noble face, with hair and beard parted in the middle. In *b*, however, the hair is combed down the sides of the face until it meets the beard, whereas in *c* and *d* it is drawn back. In these, also, the moustache is more clearly delineated.

In *e* there is a marked change. Not only is the upper lip clean-shaven, but so is the chin, the beard growing behind the chin line. The strokes representing the beard are cruder, straightly oblique and not waved outwards as in the first three. This technique is used

⁶ Aarni Erä-Esko, 'Sutton Hoo and Finland', *Speculum*, vol. xxviii, No. 3 (1953) pp. 514-515.

in all four faces round the basal end of the whetstone, but in d^1 the hair is again combed down the sides of the face as in b .

It would seem almost as though b , c , and d had been executed by a master-hand, the remainder being turned over to a less skilled assistant. The workmanship is less accomplished; the coarser finish cannot be attributed merely to the greater degree of damage suffered by this end of the stone. This is evident from the treatment of the beard alone.

The shield-mount (Fig. 12 f) presents a different problem, the inlaid decoration imposing stricter limitations on the artist, with a consequently greater degree of simplification. Length is accentuated in the nose and beard; the eyes are round. The moustache is merely indicated by the straight oblique lines of the cell margins.

The sword-pommel (Fig. 12 g) from Kirmukarmu might well, as is suggested by Erä-Esko's comparison, have been copied from a cloisonné mount such as that on the bird's hip. Here again are the circular eyes, the long straight nose, the sharply-pointed beard. The triangular gouging of the cheeks follows nearly the form of the cheek cells of the bird-mount; the moustache, though more emphatically stated by a double line is, as has been said earlier, comparable in its straightness of line. If, as has been stated, the shield is of Swedish origin, the patterns both of the face and the dragon may have been common throughout Scandinavia.

In spite of the variations in the rendering of the face on the different facets of the whetstone, it seems likely that it represented the same person, an individual either human or divine, of some significance. It may conceivably portray Woden, from whom the Kings, including those of East Anglia, claim descent.

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Mr. J. G. Hurst, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Public Building and Works, has examined the Ipswich ware sherd and confirmed its unique quality.