

SHORTER CONTRIBUTION

A STIRRUP-STRAP MOUNT FROM LITTLE GLEMHAM, SUFFOLK: A POSSIBLE IMPORT

by *David Williams*

This note draws attention to an unusual stirrup-strap mount (Fig. 150) found recently at Little Glemham by Peter Bradley while using a metal detector. Stirrup-strap mounts, together with their accompanying iron loops, were fixed at the junction of stirrup and stirrup leather and, as well as being decorative, they seem to have provided a measure of protection against the loss of the stirrup in the event of the breaking, through wear, of the stirrup leather. They appear to date from the mid-11th century through, perhaps, to the early 12th century, and are found scattered widely across England as well as the near Continent, particularly Denmark. Two main classes of mount have been distinguished, Classes A and B (Williams 1997). Class B mounts, into which this object falls, are generally rectangular or trapezoidal in shape, and have openwork decoration which is often zoomorphic.

A large part of the left hand side of the Little Glemham mount has broken away but it is clear that the mount was once of pentagonal form. There were originally three rivet holes on the upper side, in only the central one of which, a dome-headed rivet of iron, survives. The flange was originally pierced by two rivet holes, of which one survives and contains the remains of an iron rivet. The openwork design is symmetrical and each side shows a long-tailed quadruped, arranged awkwardly, so that each appears to be standing on its tail with its feet on the sides of the frame. The head of each beast looks backwards over its shoulders and from the mouth of each issue foliate-like shapes, which are perhaps intended to represent fire. There may be surviving indications of an eye on the head of the left hand beast.

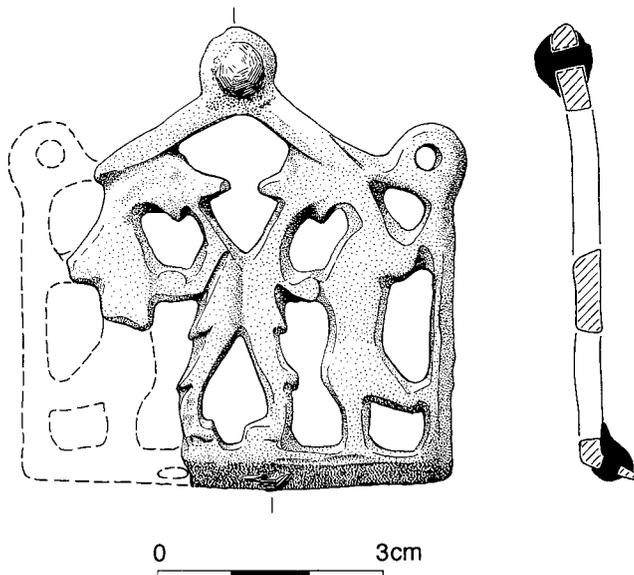


FIG. 150 – A stirrup-strap mount from Little Glemham, Suffolk. Scale 1:1.

The pentagonal form of this mount is unusual but can be found on a number of mounts of both main Classes. The decoration cannot, however, be paralleled, even distantly, among the large corpus of published English material in which zoomorphic decoration is largely confined to facing animal heads or addorsed snake-like creatures of late Viking inspiration. An openwork mount with unusual decoration, from the beach at Dunwich, also in Suffolk, is the only other English mount with a vague similarity but this is hardly a close parallel. A continental origin was suggested for that mount (Williams 1997, Fig. 61, no. 481). The closest published parallel for the Little Glemham object is a mount of similar purpose from Schouwen in the Netherlands which depicts a symmetrical pair of facing quadrupeds within an ornate pentagonal frame (Roes 1958). The intriguing stirrup-strap mount from Little Glemham is sufficiently unusual therefore for it to be suggested that it may be an import from the near Continent.

I am grateful to John Newman for drawing this find to my attention and for allowing me to record it. The mount has been returned to its finder.

References

- Roes, A., 1958. 'A Strap-End in the Yorkshire Museum and its Continental Counterparts', *Antiq. J.*, 38, 94–96.
 Williams, D., 1997. *Late Saxon Stirrup-Strap Mounts, a Classification and Catalogue*. C.B.A. Res. Rep. 111, London.