

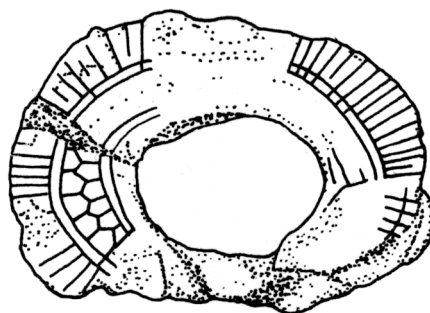
## The dating and significance of the inlaid buckle loop from Yeavinger, Northumberland

Martin G. Welch

Dr. Brian Hope-Taylor's report on his excavations at Yeavinger was published in 1977, but the text had been completed some years before, and there had been very little alteration to it to take account of more recent developments. Reappraisal of the report in the light of more recent excavations, discoveries and research is inevitable and this note seeks to draw attention to a metal artifact whose importance was underestimated by its excavator. Although Hope-Taylor described the iron buckle loop with inlay as 'the only unambiguously Germanic piece of metalwork at Yeavinger', he devoted very little space to its discussion, despite the fact that it had been found stratified in the demolition fills of the Great Enclosure. The demolition followed the first of two destructive fires at the end of phase IIIC. He regarded the buckle loop as following 'Frankish fashion closely', noted that 'it would sit well in a Kentish cemetery', and wrote of its dating that 'while it might find place in the late sixth century it is better located in the first half of the seventh' (Hope-Taylor 1977, 185, 363, n. 119, fig. 88.1). Little in the way of supporting citations was offered for these three assertions, however, for he referred to the classic studies of inlaid metalwork by Holmqvist and Evison (Holmqvist 1951; Evison 1955 and 1958) and quoted three sixth-century buckles from respectively Bifrons, Gilton and Kempston, none of which is of iron or inlaid. In view of the Frankish connection it is surprising that Hope-Taylor apparently had not consulted the continental literature, including the famous report on the Bülach cemetery in Switzerland (Werner 1953).

In fact we can now be much more precise in discussing this artifact. The buckle loop is virtually certain to have been an import from the Frankish kingdoms on the Continent and it can be dated between c. 570–80 and c. 630–40 (Hawkes 1981, 58–9). Imported inlaid iron belt sets of this date are to be found in Kentish cemeteries and are virtually unknown in England outside Kent. Mrs Sonia Hawkes has recently published a discussion of these imports and their influence on the work of Kentish metalsmiths (Hawkes 1981).

The Yeavinger loop has two design elements combined, with an interlocking double row honeycomb pattern enclosed by parallel inlaid strips on the outer section. The honeycomb is often used to decorate the belt plates associated with such buckles and is just one of a range of geometric patterns which can be combined to imitate the effect of all-over cloisonné ornament (Trenteseau 1966, 42, fig. 32). Unfortunately, in the absence of the rest of the Yeavinger belt set, it is impossible to know whether the loop was part of a belt with a round plate or part of a two- or three-piece set with triangular belt plates. Both types can be found with loops decorated in the manner of the Yeavinger piece. For example a round plated buckle with a similar loop occurs in Marktoberdorf Grave 69 and is dated to the late sixth century (Christlein 1966, 20, 60–66, 83–85, 123–4, Taf. 18.7, 71.4 and 123.1) and a triangular plated belt set in Basel-Neuweilerstrasse 18 is dated to the first third of the seventh century (Martin 1976, 173–4, Abb. 42.11–14). Although the parallels cited here are from cemeteries in south Germany and Switzerland, the honeycomb pattern was widely adopted on inlaid metalwork throughout *Francia*. Thus appreciably nearer England in Normandy, a buckle in the Rouen Museum with a round belt plate has a similar loop (Salin 1959, 130, fig. 30) and a corpus of brooches and belt sets from Normandy to be published soon will doubtless illustrate this and a number of other similarly decorated pieces (Lorren 1983). Such belt sets



*The Yeavinger buckle loop, drawn from a radiograph  
(scale 2:1)*

were worn by men in the Frankish kingdoms, often buried with full weapon sets, while in the Kentish graves at Finglesham and Updown near Eastray discussed by Mrs Hawkes, they are again a feature of male dress (Hawkes 1981, 59).

This buckle loop is not the only Frankish import to be found at Yeavinger, for a gold washed copper alloy copy of a Merovingian gold *triens* (Bertoaldus of Huy) probably struck in the 630s or 640s had been discovered stratified in building A3(b) in phase V (Hope-Taylor 1977, 57, 182–3, pl. III). The construction of phase V followed the destruction of the phase IV settlement by fire, the second of the two conflagrations there. Hope-Taylor used the probable date of striking for the coin to provide him with a *terminus post quem* for the occupation of phase V and on that basis suggested that the second fire represents the attested ravagings of Northumbria by Penda and his allies between c. 651 and 655 (Hope-Taylor 1977, 277, 368–9 n. 282–4; Bede *H. E.* III 16, 17 and 24). The early dating of the Continental belt sets now generally accepted was proposed by Rainer Christlein in 1966 and presumably if Hope-Taylor had known that the buckle loop was manufactured by c. 630–40, he would have used this artifact in the same way as the coin to assist him in dating the first conflagration and the subsequent demolition of the Great Enclosure.

It is impossible to demonstrate that the Yeavinger buckle reached Northumbria as part of a complete belt set rather than as a piece of scrap metal, or that it came direct from the Continent rather than via Kent. The probability remains that it was part of a belt set and that Kent was its point of entry to England. Certainly the loop fits well with the historical evidence of Bede for contact between Northumbria and Kent in the reign of Edwin. It may have been Raedwald of the East Angles who put Edwin on to the Northumbrian throne (*H. E.* II. 12), but Edwin married a Kentish and Christian princess Aethelburh (*H. E.* II. 9). She was accompanied by Bishop Paulinus and on Edwin's conversion and baptism both Aethelburh and Paulinus accompanied Edwin to his *villa regia* in Bernicia, *Ad Gefrin* (*H. E.* II. 14). Hope-Taylor identified his settlement at Yeavinger with this royal villa and in the absence of a viable alternative site, it seems probable that he was correct. The buckle loop fits such an aristocratic context and we may imagine that it could have belonged to a male member of Aethelburh's Kentish entourage or to a member of Edwin's own retinue, who had visited Kent on his lord's behalf, though other explanations might be equally valid. It provides additional evidence for believing that Yeavinger IIC was Edwin's royal villa and it provides a *terminus post quem*, which does not contradict Hope-Taylor's attribution of the first conflagration to a ravaging by Penda and Cadwallon

in 632–3 following Edwin's death in battle (*H. E.* II 20; III, 1).

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