

A COIN OF OFFA FOUND IN A VIKING-AGE
BURIAL AT VOSS, NORWAY.

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DURING my excavations at *Voss* in the summer of 1908, undertaken for the Bergen Museum, I discovered in an interment a coin struck for Offa, King of Mercia, 757-796, which is, so far as I have been able to ascertain, the earliest Anglo-Saxon coin found in Scandinavia.

The coin was found in the excavation of a tumulus, 30 m. in diameter and about 3 m. in height, situated on the sloping side of a hill. It was built of sand and gravel over a heap of stones which covered the burial itself. The grave was a rectangular depression cut down into the original surface of the soil, 2.70 m. long, 1 m. broad, and .45 m. deep. It contained considerable remains of wooden planks and some birch-bark, indicating how the depression, now open and filled with gravel, had originally been covered and protected by timber. On the bottom of the grave was noticed a layer of a kind of brown and black earth, certainly produced by the decomposition of organic substances, and in this layer were found the very scanty remains of a human skeleton placed on its side, lying east and west, but with the head towards the east end of the grave.

All the antiquities found were embedded in the same layer. One hundred and eighteen beads of glass, amber, cornelian, and rock crystal were scattered from the neck and down towards where the girdle would be; these must have formed a fine necklace. At the centre of the breast three large bronze brooches were discovered. At the position of the girdle lay a small iron knife with the wooden handle

still preserved, and a needle-case of bronze; a little further down the body were two bracelets, one of silver and the other of bronze. A sickle, a spit, and an iron ring were found close to the skeleton. The western end of the grave was occupied by the remains of a wooden box with iron mountings, containing a number of implements for woman's work, such as for spinning, weaving, etc.

From the articles found in the grave there is no doubt that the interment was that of a woman, though the scanty remains of the skeleton did not themselves admit of any conclusion on this point.

The position of the coin in the grave was somewhat puzzling. It was found beneath the skull on the same level as the middle of the face. My first thought was to explain it as a sort of ear-ring; but only the single coin was found in this position, while we should expect to find a pair if it had been an ear-ring. I therefore think that it must have been attached to the upper part of the necklace, a few beads of which were situated as high as to be level with the site of the chin, and as the body had evidently rested on its left side the necklace may have been moved out of its natural position when the body was placed in the grave, and fallen still further forward as the remains gradually became disintegrated.



SILVER PENNY OF OFFA FOUND IN NORWAY.

The coin seems to be absolutely identical with the silver penny illustrated in the *Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum, Anglo-Saxon Series*, Vol. I, Plate VII, No. 13, text p. 32, namely, *obverse* + OFFA REX in two lines across the field; above, the initial M, for Mercia: *reverse* OSMOD, as the moneyer's name, across the field; above and below, ornaments. It, however, appears certain that the coin was regarded merely as a curiosity or charm at the time when it was attached to the necklace. By means of a blunt punch a depression had been made in the centre of the obverse, producing a corresponding

boss on the other side; and the coin had been perforated with a hole originally just filling the interior space of the D in the moneyer's name, OSMOD; but the upper edge of the hole had been somewhat worn by use. Apparently the reverse has been regarded as the front side when the coin was converted into an ornament, and, as proved by the position of the perforation, when hung as a pendant it must have shown the inscription vertically and reading upwards; not at all a natural position if the inscription or design were meant to be intelligible.

The obverse, with Offa's name, is certainly better placed, but here the depression makes the reading very difficult. I should think that the person who made the coin into a pendant was not familiar with either the king's name or the type of money. Moreover the coin was very old at the time when it was deposited in the grave at Voss. Two of the bronze brooches found in the grave were of the well-known oval type, shaped somewhat like a tortoise-shell, and may be dated with approximate accuracy. They belong to the later Viking period, and must have been made in Norway about two hundred years later than the time when the coin was struck for King Offa in England. Nothing in the grave or suggested by the relics found in it contradicts this conclusion.

It is very unlikely that the coin could have been brought to Norway in Offa's time or even during the century following his reign, for there exists no other evidence of an importation of English coins into Scandinavia during the eighth and ninth centuries, nor is it probable that such coins were current in England as late as towards the close of the tenth century when this tumulus would be made. The Norwegian hoards of silver date from the second half of the tenth century, and do not contain a specimen of so early a date as the time of Offa. I am inclined to suggest that the most natural explanation of the appearance of Offa's coin in a Norwegian grave of the late tenth century, would be that it was found in the earth in England, perhaps at the beginning of the tenth century, and passed then as a curiosity into the hands of some Norwegian, who brought it with him on his return to his own country. This suggestion is supported by an

examination of the state of preservation of the coin. It is not much worn except on the surface of the boss, and the device is still quite distinct and clear ; which would hardly have been the case if the coin had been in constant use during some two hundred years.

A detailed description of all the antiquities discovered during the excavation will be published in *Bergens Museums Aarbog*, 1909, the catalogue-number of the find being 6228.



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THE GOLD MANCUS OF OFFA, KING OF MERCIA, FIGURE 1,
AND COINS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE SUBJECT.