



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

# Archæologia Cantiana.

---

## GOLD TORQUES AND ARMILLÆ DISCOVERED IN KENT.

BY C. ROACH SMITH.

IN the fifth volume of the 'Archæologia Cantiana' appeared an account, by the late Mr. Pretty, of some golden Celtic or British *armillæ* found in the bed of the Medway below Aylesford, and now preserved in the collections of the Kent Archæological Society at Maidstone. Mr. Pretty remarks that previous to this discovery he had "not met with any other articles of a Celtic character found in this county," with the exception of a gold torques found a century since, near Dover, and one of small size found in 1860, near Canterbury. He refers to Roman bronze *armillæ*, which are common enough; but the more ancient personal ornaments in gold he regards as scarce in relation to Kent. We may, however, believe that they have been discovered from time to time, and, for want of that spirit of intelligence which has been fostered at the present day, have passed rapidly to the melting pot,—that old and convenient medium of transformation of works of art in the precious metals, from the images and insignia of royalty and divinity

down to the decorations of the person, and the coins of commerce.

The Kent Archæological Society is now able to lay before its members no less than seven examples of golden armillæ, more recently discovered in the same district (see Plates A and B), and, at the same time, to draw attention to two dug up at Chatham and Gillingham. The plates afford an excellent notion of the peculiarities of these ornaments, such as no written description alone could possibly convey. A fragment of a small variety was found, a few years since, in excavating the land of Mr. Ball at Gillingham. One of unusually massive form, and of uncommon pattern, was dug up, in November 1872, upon Chatham Lines, between the Sally Port and Brompton Barrier, by a party of soldiers throwing up a battery. It weighs no less than 22 oz. 4 dwts. An engraving of it is given in the 'Archæological Journal,' vol. xxx., p. 97, and some notion of it may be conveyed to our readers, by describing it as somewhat like figure 2 in our Plate A, only it is much larger in every respect, and the spiral lines are closer and deeper; its total length is  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches, its diameter varies from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{1}{16}$ ths of an inch, the larger end shewing that it had been broken by its owner; and its form suggests that it may have been of two or three coils. I am indebted to Colonel Gallwey, Commandant of the School of Military Engineering, and to Captain Clayton, R.E., for an inspection of this valuable ornament before it was sent to Her Majesty, who has since presented it to the British Museum. The fragment from Gillingham is in the possession of Mr. Ball.

From the peculiar twisted characters of many of these ornaments, the word *torques* is legitimately used;

Fig. 1.

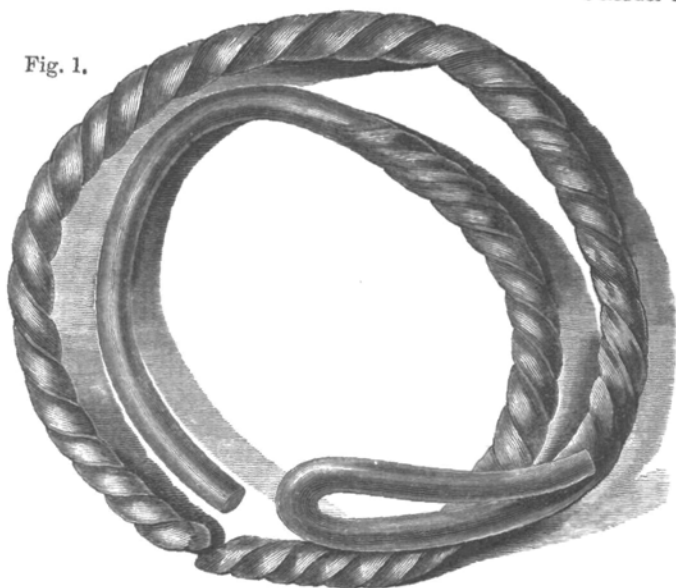
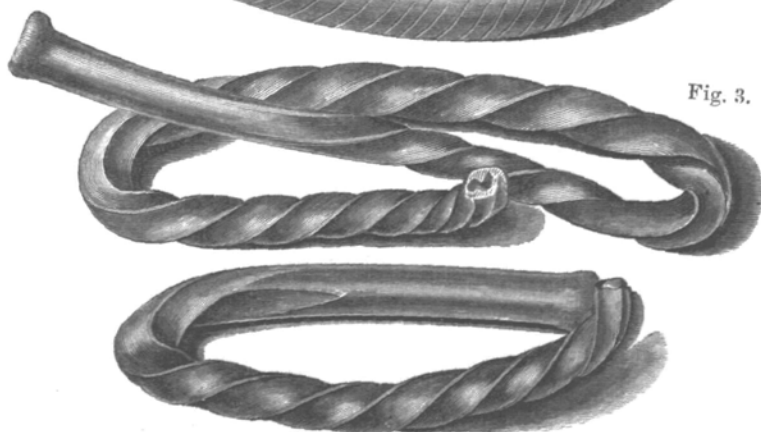


Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



GOLD TORQUES AND ARMILLA, DISCOVERED IN KENT.  
(In the possession of the Kent Archaeological Society.)

but it has been also applied in a wide sense to such as are not twisted, and irrespectively of size and character—whether destined for the neck, the arm, or the waist. Some are so large that they could only have been worn tightly round the loins. Of these the Rev. J. Bathurst Deane has given examples in the ‘Archæologia’ of the Society of Antiquaries of London, vol. xxvii., from a hoard discovered near Quentín in Brittany; but though, for convenience, they are all spoken of as *torques*, they are, as Mr. Deane remarks, “rather of the kind described by Greek writers as *μανικάαι*, a word which they employ when speaking of the collars and bracelets of the Gauls.” One of these collars weighed upwards of 4 lbs., and its intrinsic value was about £209. Several weighed over one pound five ounces, and seemed to have been adjusted to a certain weight, as, indeed, all of them probably were. Some were elegantly worked in patterns common to Celtic ornaments.\*

The torquis is one of the ornaments of ancient art

\* An account of the fate of these golden ornaments may not be uninteresting as a supplement to Mr. Deane’s valuable paper, and I therefore print it here in his own words, from a communication he favoured me with a few years since:—

“I saw the golden articles described in vol. xxvii. of the ‘Archæologia’ at Rennes, in April, 1832, in possession of M. Bohard, a watch-maker of that city, who had purchased them of the discoverer. M. Bohard bought them, in the first instance, in the way of business, for the purpose of making watches out of them. But having been informed by General de Perrhonet and others that they were of great antiquarian value, he very generously offered them to the National Museum at Paris, and to provincial museums at a little more than their value in weight. Unfortunately, however, the French nation had scarcely recovered from the effects of the Revolution of July, 1830, and public functionaries in Paris and elsewhere were afraid to lay out so much

which, perhaps, more than any other, has received copious illustration both from historians and from monuments of various kinds. They are shewn in sculpture of Eastern nations and of the Romans; upon coins, Roman and Gaulish; and, at least in one instance, in tessellated work. I refer to the magnificent pavement discovered at Pompeii, and now in the public museum of Naples, representing the battle of

money (the value of the ornaments being £1000 sterling) in such purchases.

“M. Bohard then requested me to dispose of them in England, adding, with singular liberality, that rather than they should perish and be lost to science, he would sell them to the British Museum, or to any English collector, for the same sum at which he had offered them in Paris. In May I returned to England, and sent M. Bohard’s printed and lithographed circular, descriptive of the ornaments, to the Earl of Aberdeen, as President of the Society of Antiquaries, and to Sir Henry Ellis, the Principal Librarian of the British Museum. I was much disappointed by the replies which I received. Lord Aberdeen said that, not having any private collection of antiquities, he could not purchase them, but would mention the circumstance to Sir Henry Ellis, who might perhaps think them worthy of being bought for the British Museum. Sir Henry Ellis replied to my letters that he did not think the Trustees of the British Museum would be disposed to lay out so much money as these articles would require for their purchase, for in consequence of the vexatious inquiry then going on in the House of Commons into their expenditure, they were very cautious how they spent the money at their disposal. I know not whether the subject was ever mentioned to the Trustees. My impression was, and still is, that neither Lord Aberdeen nor Sir Henry Ellis were at that time aware of the extreme rarity of the types presented by these Gaulish ornaments; and from the reception which my paper in 1836 met with from the Society of Antiquaries and its President, I feel convinced that, had they taken the trouble to make further inquiries on the subject, the British Museum would now have possessed some at least of these *unique* articles.

“Frustrated in my attempt to sell them in England, and being limited in time by M. Bohard, who as a tradesman could not afford to remain

Arbela. In this the torquis, terminating in snakes' heads, appears prominently upon the necks of Darius and some of his chief officers. The Persians are the earliest people with whom this ornament was what may be called national, so far as we are assisted in judging from historical and monumental evidence. The Egyptians do not appear to have fabricated it; and it was not used by the Greeks. With the Gauls and other Celtic nations it was generally worn as a decoration denoting eminence and distinction. As such it appears upon the Gaulish coins, and upon the celebrated statue at Rome representing a wounded German or Gaulish chief, but popularly and incorrectly called "the Dying Gladiator."

For full three centuries before the Christian era, the torquis or armilla appears upon the Gaulish coins as an emblem of power and pre-eminence equivalent to the laurel crown of the Greeks and Romans. It may, at the same time, be looked upon as indicative of mental inferiority; for although the working of the gold into ornaments so varied and not inelegant

long without his money, I wrote to him in June, and reluctantly exposed the poverty or the niggardness of our National Institution. I heard no more of the fate of these precious relics until the year 1834, when I again visited Rennes, and saw M. Bohard. He then informed me that having waited several months in the hope of being able to sell them, he had been at last compelled by necessity to melt them down, and some of the watches at that time in his window had been made out of them!

"I never saw any drawings which exactly represented Torques or Manacs or any ornaments exactly like those discovered at St. Quentin. I believe them to have been *unique*, and the more grievous is the reflection that by the small outlay of £100 or £200, one or two of the most curious of them might have been at this moment in the British Museum.

"*'Hæc olim meminisse pigebit.'*"

presumes mechanical skill and knowledge of metallurgy, no doubt the result of ages of experience, the nations who had this peculiar ability could notwithstanding only be considered as half civilized: they were unable correctly to sculpture the human form, and, in short, were without a literature. The earlier Gaulish coins shew that, so far as preparing the metal went, the artists were equal to the Greek, but they could go no further,—they had no power to understand the beauty of form or the use of letters. They could only copy very rudely the elegant designs which they found upon Greek coins. The enormous quantity of ancient gold ornaments of the class under consideration which has come down to our time must be looked upon as totally distinct in origin from Greek and Roman works of art; and, whether Eastern or Celtic, as indicative of barbarous or half-civilized peoples who, without cultivation of the higher reasoning faculties and the comforts and refinements of life, delight in gaudy show, in “barbaric pearl and gold.”

For centuries before the Christian era, down to a late period of the Roman empire, the torques is continually mentioned by historians as tribute, as a trophy, or as a military reward in connection with Gauls, Britons, and Germans, and it is often shewn in monumental records of victories; but it does not appear, so far as I have been able to ascertain, upon any of the Dacians in the celebrated column of Trajan, from which it may be inferred that it was not a national ornament.

It was, as is well known, the emblem or badge of the Manlia family, assumed, it may be, from the incident related by Livy of the capture by T. Manlius Torquatus of the gold torques worn by the Gaul



whom he conquered in single combat, and from which he took his cognomen. On some of the coins of this family the torques appears as a conspicuous emblem : with two armillæ it occupies the reverse of a small brass medal with IO IO TRIVMPH(e) and a laurel branch on the obverse, probably struck in the reign of Domitian on the occasion of a victory over the Germans. Valerius Maximus states that L. Sicinius Dentatus in his triumphal processions had borne before him, with numerous mural and civic crowns and ornaments, one hundred and eighty-three torques and one hundred and sixty armillæ,\* the accumulation of his personal achievements. Here, as in many other cases, the torques and the armilla are mentioned separately as distinct from each other; the one being for the neck or waist, the other for the arm. Enormous quantities of gold torques were taken in the wars with the Gauls, anterior to the conquest of their country by Julius Cæsar. Livy states that no less than 1470 formed part of the spoils carried in the triumph of P. Cornelius Scipio Nassica.†

In monumental inscriptions torques, armillæ, and phaleræ are often mentioned together as distinctions conferred for military services. L. Gavius Silvanus, an officer of the eighth legion, had them given him, together with a crown of gold, by the Emperor Claudius, for his good conduct in the British war;‡ and in others they are recorded combined as rewards bestowed by Trajan for the Dacian war.§

Perhaps the most interesting example in sculpture of these two ornaments is that discovered at Zanten and now preserved in the public museum of Bonn.

\* Lib. iii. cap. xi. sec. 26.

‡ Orelli 3568.

† Dec. iv. lib. iv. cap. xl.

§ Grutor 365. 4.—Fabretti, p. 399.

They are both shewn upon the statue of M. Cælius, who perished in Germany with Varro and the three legions in the time of Augustus. This officer is represented as crowned with the civic crown, wearing round his neck the torques; upon his breast are massive ornamented armillæ, and plain broad armlets upon the wrists: five phaleræ complete his decorations.\* The armillæ upon this figure may be compared with two in gold figured in the 'Numismatic Chronicle,' N.S., vol. iv., Pl. v., to which some early Gaulish coins found with them give an approximate date. They were found at Frasnès, near Tournay, and are copied from photographs sent me by M. Renier Chalon, who gave an account of the discovery in the 'Revue de la Numismatique Belge.' They may be considered as belonging to a much later style of art than our Kentish examples, and probably somewhat anterior to such as appear on the monument of M. Cælius. Intercourse with the Romans tended materially to influence Celtic art, which gradually lost much of its original characteristics, without ever attaining the elegance of the Roman and Greek works which served as models or patterns. In the Mayence Museum is an almost equally interesting monument of a family group, in which a Roman lady, a widow, appears in a rich costume with a torques, armillæ, fibulæ, and rings. The ends of the torques, which is upon her neck round a kind of frill to a close fitting gown, are globular. This monument is probably two centuries later than that of the cenotaph of the Roman officer in the Bonn Museum.†

\* An engraving of this interesting sculpture, prepared from a sketch I made at Bonn, will be found on p. 141, vol. ii. of my 'Collectanea Antiqua.'

† It will be found in the same volume, Pl. xxx.

Of armillæ of a later period, which must be called Roman, but which are probably of provincial manufacture, and not free from Celtic peculiarities, are a pair in silver once in possession of my friend the late Mr. E. Pretty, and engraved on p. 353, vol. ii., of the 'Journal of the British Archæological Association.' They are flat, and terminate in snakes' heads, the other part being ornamented with not inelegant patterns. Here, again, coins assist us to date. With the armillæ were twenty Roman coins in silver and thirty-five in large brass. Those of Antoninus Pius, Faustina, and Verus were the latest; and, being in the finest condition, not having suffered by circulation, indicate the time of deposit. They were found at Castlethorpe, in Buckinghamshire, enclosed in a small urn.

Torques and armillæ are also found in bronze. There are six in this metal in Mr. Durden's valuable museum of local antiquities at Blandford in Dorset. They were found at Tarrant Monkton in draining a water meadow, lying about 18 inches below the surface, surrounded by a few flint stones. They are all composed of twisted wire about the size round of a tobacco pipe, tapering smaller towards the loop at each end; are from six to seven inches in diameter across the circle, and weigh from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  oz. to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  oz. each. The half of a similar torques, but of larger size, was found three years ago at Haselbury in the same county. With this, Mr. Durden states, were two armillæ composed of a single coil of bronze slightly overlapping at each end.\*

\* It is impossible to refer to Mr. Durden's Museum of British, Roman, and Saxon remains, discovered chiefly in the vicinity of Blandford, without remarking that such collections are of national importance, and should be preserved intact in one of the chief towns of the

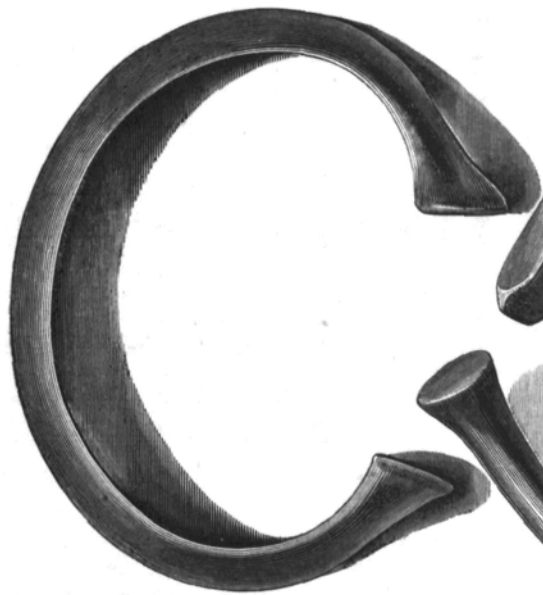
Torques, and armillæ, constituted part of the personal ornaments of regal and noble Saxon families, and they are not unfrequently mentioned, and described by weight, in wills and bequests. Leof Æthelwold, Aldorman, leaves to King Eadred four torques; two of a hundred and twenty mancuses, and two of eighty. Byrhtic, and Ælfswith his wife, assign by will (made at Meopham) one torque of eighty mancuses of gold, one of thirty mancuses, one neck-torque (*sweor beah*) of forty mancuses, and one neck-torque of eighty mancuses. The word which Mr. Thorpe\* translates *torques* is *beag* or *beah*, which, in a Latin translation of the latter will referred to, is rendered *armilla*, (*armillam auream quæ habebat octoginta mancas auri*). In another will, four torques, of two hundred mancuses of gold, are mentioned. The weight and value of these ornaments shew that they were both torques and armillæ, probably antique.

I have stated that the armillæ found at Chatham and Gillingham were broken in ancient times. The larger specimen is also notched deeply, as if to facilitate a further division. These facts are, to a certain extent, evidence of these ornaments having been used in commerce, in weighty transactions, as a monetary medium. Their value was no doubt well understood; and, being carried upon the person, their safety was ensured. The smaller gold ornaments of the Celts, of which such a remarkable variety has been found in Ireland, may also be considered under this point of

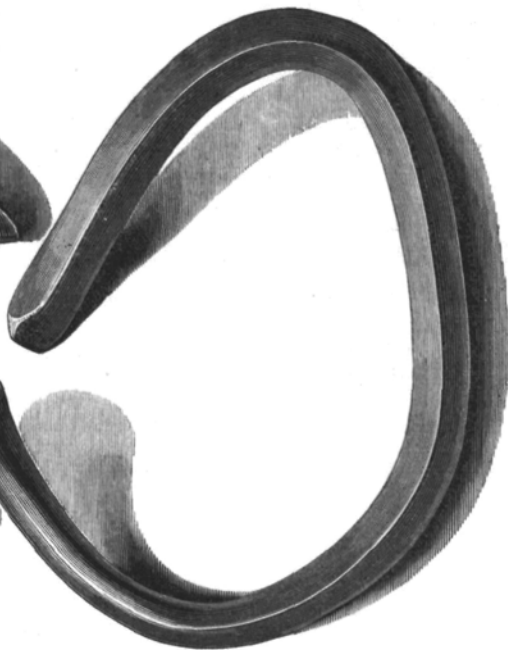
county. The same observation may be applied to the numerous British urns collected by Mr. Charles Warne, author of 'Ancient Dorset,' just published, a work which enhances the value of collections such as these.

\* 'Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici,' p. 500, *et seq.*

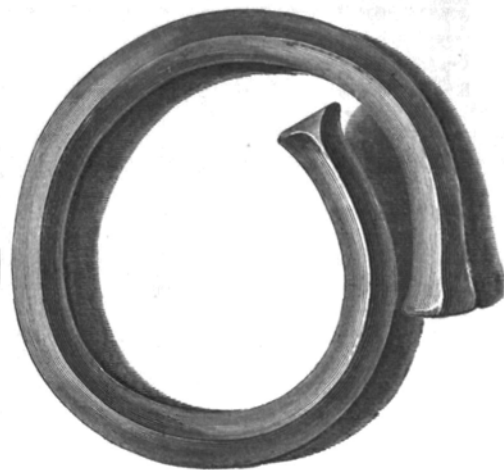
No. 1.



No. 2.



No. 3.



GOLD ARMILLÆ, DISCOVERED IN KENT.  
(In the possession of the Kent Archaeological Society.)

view. It does not, however, tend much to lessen their mental inferiority to the Greeks and Romans, whose coinages, adapted so fully for all classes, are among the most striking proofs of their great intellectual excellence.

For all who may be induced to make researches on the subject of this communication, I cannot do better than to refer them to Dr. Birch's well-illustrated Papers in volumes ii. and iii. of the 'Archæological Journal;' to the 'Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy;' to Dr. Wilde's 'Catalogue of the Antiquities of the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy;' and to Mr. Crofton Croker's account of Gold Plates and other ornaments in gold, including torques and armillæ, printed in the third volume of the 'Collectanea Antiqua.'

---

#### PLATES A AND B.

##### A.

- Fig. 1, which with Figure 3 may strictly be called a Torques; weight 4 oz. 17 dwts. 19 grs.; its total length is 16 inches.  
 Fig. 2. Weight 5 oz. 17 dwts. 12 gr.; length  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in.; girth  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in.  
 Fig. 3. Weight 5 oz. 1 dwt. 8 grs.; total length 15 inches.

##### PLATE B.

- Fig. 1. There are two of this type. One weighs 4 oz. 4 dwts. 16 gr.; is  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches in extreme length;  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch in girth;  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide in centre.  
 Fig. 2. Weight 2 oz. 16 dwts. 17 gr.; length 8 inches; girth  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch.  
 Fig. 3. Weight 4 oz. 0 dwt. 8 grs.; length 8 inches; girth  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch.