

Scabbards of the Dark Ages- Type 3c

'Distributor Ring' Three Strap Sling

By R. Scott

The Distributor Ring- Three Strap Sling is simply a variant on the Three Strap Slings system in which the three straps are joined together with a special fitting. In this case the fitting is a ring and three tags. This system is well documented in contemporary manuscripts and there are many archaeological finds to support this type of suspension. The system seems to have been used by the Vikings from the late C9th. onwards.

During the time of the Vikings, straps connected to a Distributor ring are found with three main uses. To connect the reins to a horses bridle, as a decorative feature on a waist belt from which to hang a pouch, as a slinging system fitted to a scabbard. It is likely that all these developed from pre-Viking horse tack.

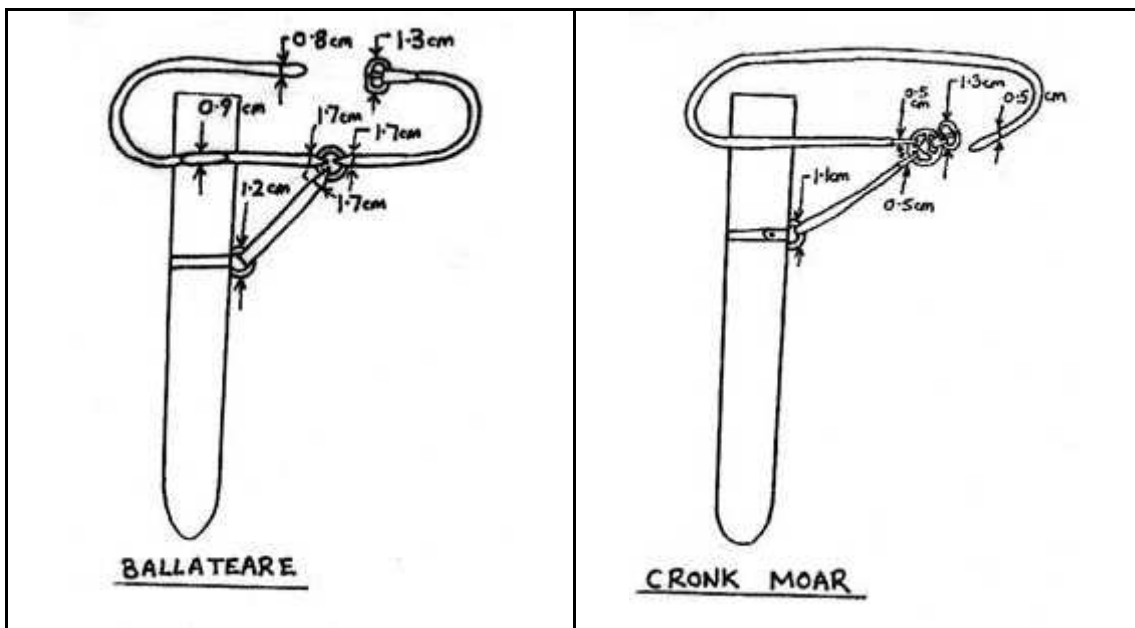
This system is well attested to in the archaeological record, though illustrative evidence is lacking. The Vikings rarely illustrated such items, and the subjects in contemporary Saxon or Carolingian manuscripts are likely to be sporting the trefoil variant.

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| <p>The diagram shows a scabbard with a distributor ring. A leading strap with a buckle is attached to the upper fixing plate. A split strap is attached to the distributor ring, which also connects to a trailing strap. A lower fixing method is shown at the bottom of the scabbard.</p> | <p>This diagram shows a scabbard with a distributor ring. The straps are joined to the ring in a different configuration than the first diagram, illustrating a 'flawed reconstruction'.</p> |
| <p>Three Strap Sling 3c Nomenclature- 'Distributor Ring' Three Strap Variant</p> | <p>Joining the Dots- differently. Taking the same information and creating a Sling which ignores pictorial and reconstructive evidence. Bersu and Wilson's Flawed Reconstruction.</p> |

There are several archaeological finds which support this sling arrangement. The best known examples come from the C10th. Hiberno-Norse grave finds in the Isle of Man. They were reconstructed by the

Archaeologists Bersu and Wilson with total disregard to the Carolingian manuscripts illustrations in section 3b; as well as ignoring the evidence in the Byzantine, French and German manuscripts and the Winchester Frieze in section 3a. Their reconstruction when replicated was found to Tilt so far forward the scabbard hung horizontally, there was even a danger the sword would come out. Also having the straps all on the trailing edge meant the scabbard would flap around when the owner ran into battle. A totally unsatisfactory arrangement! Indeed other than for slinging sabres, there is no contemporary evidence in finds or illustrations for the Bursu/Wilson reconstruction!

If we reconstruct the Scabbard along the lines of the rest of the manuscript evidence in sections 3a & b, a system emerges that works very well. A problem with the Solid strap and Trefoil variants is that all the strapping is very rigid. It is okay for parade wear, but running around in battle causes the straps to buckle at all junctions. By using a ring system, all the straps can rotate around the ring independently of each other providing a much more flexible and user friendly system. It is not surprising therefore that this system was widely adopted by the Vikings.



Reconstructions of the Ballateare and Cronk Moar scabbards from the Isle of Man. Showing the various strap widths at various junctions on the scabbards.

From the archaeological finds it is possible to reconstruct how the sling arrangement was fitted to the scabbard. The Leading strap was fitted to the Ballatere scabbard by a simple and undecorated copper alloy plate. This was attached to the scabbard by a rivet at each end. This fixture was

missing from the Cronk Moar scabbard. The Split strap was fitted to the scabbard by means of a thin copper alloy band, again undecorated, which looped around the scabbard and enclosed a simple 'D' ring. Simple tags attached the various straps to the distributor ring, The Ballateare had a plain and simple affair, however the Cronk Moar was much more decorated and included the setting of a white quartz cabochon in the centre of the ring. The Ballateare Leading and Trailing straps terminated in a buckle and strap end that came to rest, one would suspect, roughly at the centre of the chest. However, the Cronk Moar system seems to have fitted the buckle directly onto the Distributor ring, roughly on the left thigh. However another variant is possible, the Leading and trailing straps could have ended in a fastener on the chest as in the Ballateare example, but the buckle on the Distributor ring could then have fed the Split strap. A buckle here would mean that the angle of forward tilt is adjustable. However reconstructions have shown that whilst this feature is initially useful, once the optimum angle is set, there is rarely any need to adjust it.