

A new Anglo Saxon runic inscription from Barkston, Lincolnshire

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It will not come as a surprise to readers to say that many archaeological finds have a significance that their initial appearance belies. This is certainly the case for this slightly misshapen object, discovered by a metal detector user at Barkston in 2011.

The object is silver, but traces of gilding survive. Its form is similar to a pair of tweezers, but both arms are bent, and one arm damaged so that its original length and terminal are unknown. The surviving arm flares at the terminal. A copper rivet sits at the point where the arms meet. Despite its superficial similarity to a pair of tweezers, of which many of Anglo Saxon date have been found in Lincolnshire and are usually not so noteworthy, the object may have a greater significance, as revealed by the runic inscription that runs along the outer edge of the arms.

Although lightly incised, and with some parts lost due to damage, Professor John Hines at Cardiff University has been able to decipher the inscription, which reads:

Side A: + þecbløetsigubilwitfæddæ Side B: ondwerccagehwelchefænondecla

Professor Hines has observed that the text is remarkably close to a passage of three lines of verse in the Old English poem 'Azarias', which translates as 'Let the glories of the created world and everything made, the heavens and the angels, and the pure water, [and all the power of creation upon Earth], bless Thee, kind Father'. The form of the runes and the language used has led to a suggestion that the inscription dates to between c.AD725 and c.AD825.

Such an ecclesiastical reference raises questions over the interpretation of the object as something as utilitarian as a pair of tweezers, and it might perhaps instead be a pair of candle snuffers or page turners for a book. Whatever the exact function, the discovery of a new runic inscription, always a rare find in archaeology, is significant, and new research will undoubtedly be carried out on this item in the coming years.

The Collection would like to express its thanks to the Friends of Lincoln Museums and Art Gallery for their generous contribution to the purchase of this important find.

Acknowledgements

The contents of this paper have drawn research from the Coroner's report for this treasure item, produced by the British Museum.

