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## Viking-Era Ring Unearthed in Northern Ireland

By [Barbara Maranzani](#)

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This week, a court in Northern Ireland announced its ruling that the 2012 discovery of a metal bracelet was in fact a rare artifact—a Viking arm ring from the 10th century.



David Taylor holds the 10th century Viking arm ring he discovered last year. (Credit: Getty Images)

The artifact was discovered in April 2012 while David Taylor and his brother-in-law Andrew Coulter were removing stones from a field on Coulter's farm in the village of Kircubbin in Northern Ireland's Country Down. After spotting the dirt-encrusted object lying on one of the rocks, Taylor pocketed it, mistakenly thinking it might be a piece of machinery of some value. His wife, however, wasn't convinced and suggested he simply throw it in the garbage. Instead, Taylor contacted a local museum, which informed that he hadn't found a piece of machinery, but something much more significant.

For the Vikings, arm rings such as the one discovered by Dave Taylor were not merely ornamental. They were often used to cement bonds of loyalty between a lord and his warriors in a society where men lived and died by their honor. They were often bestowed upon young adult males to symbolize their coming of age. In addition, some groups used the rings—which were made of precious metals—as a form of, easily transportable (and protectable) currency, in a time before coins or paper money.

Earlier this year, an inquest was convened in Belfast Coroners Court, which holds jurisdiction over the discovery under the United Kingdom's antiquity laws. At the inquest, experts testified that the ring was 90 percent silver (but also included traces of copper and gold) and likely dated to between 950 and 1100 A.D. They also told the court that the arm ring didn't originate in Ireland but in Scotland, most likely in the Orkney Islands or Shetland, which were under Viking control at that time.

Almost as rare as the ring itself is the fact that it was the only Viking artifact discovered at the Kircubbin site. Items such as these have almost always been found as part of a larger pile of treasures, such as a 1998 find of Viking jewelry and silver pieces valued at more than \$1 million or the discovery of the Silverdale Hoard in 2011, a collection of over 200 pieces believed to be one of the largest Viking treasure troves ever found in the

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United Kingdom. That coupled with its likely Scottish origins led experts to speculate that the ring may have passed from Scottish or Viking control to Irish hands through trade, theft or as a spoil of war. The location of Andrew Coulter's farm near the remains of a medieval church provided additional clues about the ring's possible history. In an era with little in the way of home protection technology, it was common practice to bury valuables near sacred, and presumably secure, lands such as those owned by churches.

The ring has been sent to the UK's Treasure Valuation Committee, comprised of antiquity experts from the British Museum and elsewhere, for further study. In addition to learning more about the ring's history, the committee hopes to determine its monetary value. If Taylor chooses to sell the ring, (with Northern Ireland's Ulster Museum a likely destination) he will be legally required to split any proceeds with his brother-in-law, on whose land it was discovered.

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