

III.

NOTICE OF TWO FLANGED PALSTAVES OF BRONZE FROM CRAIG-A-BHODAICH, FARR, SUTHERLAND. BY THE REV. ANGUS MACKAY, M.A., CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT., WESTERDALE MANSE, CAITHNESS.

The two bronze palstaves (fig. 1) now to be described were found by Mr Patrick Mackay, mason, Swordly, at the north-west foot of Craig-a-Bhodaich, Farr, Sutherland, while repairing the dyke which encloses the hill pasture of the parish minister in 1906. The spot where the implements were discovered is about 140 yards above the confluence of the Crask streamlet with the Burn of Farr, and near the base of a rock about 7 yards from the east bank of said burn. The place has all the appearance of having been a rock-shelter or lean-to, for the rock, which is about 12 feet in height, overhangs a little, and would be very suitable for a lean-to house.

The palstaves lay side by side on a small shelf near the base of the rock, as if placed there by the hands of the ancient craftsmen, the soil afterwards covering the tiny ledge over, and so protecting them. They lay so closely together as to preclude the possibility of their having handles attached to them when deposited there, and the marks of casting on either side of them are so very pronounced that it looks as if they had been little used. It may well be that they were cast under this sheltering rock close by the Burn of Farr, for one side of a stone mould for casting bronze spear-heads was found in the neighbourhood not long ago, and is described by me in the *Proceedings*, 8th January 1906. The finding of the mould indicates that they probably did cast bronze implements locally, and that they had a trading connection with the

South in these early times, for the metals which go to form bronze are not found in the North, so far as I am aware.

The largest of the two palstaves (fig. 1) measures $6\frac{7}{8}$ inches in length by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in greatest breadth across the cutting face, tapering

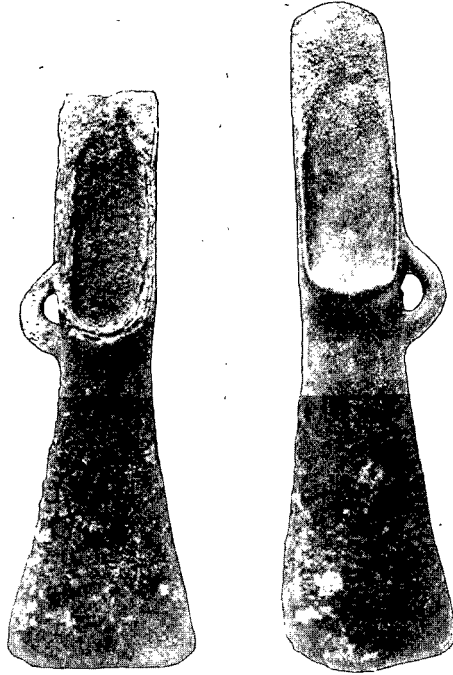


Fig. 1. Two Bronze Palstaves or Flanged Axes found in Farr, Sutherland. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

upwards to 1 inch in breadth at the base of the recess between the flanges. These project for $\frac{1}{2}$ inch at the base of the recess, which is 3 inches from the butt, and taper into the flat at about an inch below the butt. The middle part between the two recesses on either side is thus 3 inches in length, and rather less than 1 inch in breadth between the flanges, and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness. This part was

inserted between the split halves of the angularly branched end of the handle which fitted into the recesses between the flanges, and were firmly bound round with thongs to resist side pressure in the use of the instrument. Below the base of the recess there is a strongly rounded thickening on the broad face of the palstave, which extends downwards like a tapering midrib for $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches till it merges into the flat of the blade. A strong loop $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in thickness, with an opening nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in length and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in width, is placed on one side of the instrument, almost in the middle of its length, the centre of the loop being opposite the base of the recess between the flanges. The ridge formed in the casting along the line of junction between the two halves of the mould is visible on both edges of the palstave, and the bronze, though much corroded, is of a rather deep coppery colour.

The second palstave, which is obviously not from the same mould as the first, is 6 inches in length by $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches across the cutting edge, the interspace between the flanges in the upper part is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide, and the stop-ridge is rounded. The blade in the lower part is thinner and more widely spread than in the first palstave, and the conical swelling in the middle has two depressions in its upper part immediately under the stop-ridge. Both palstaves have been acquired for the National Museum through the good offices of Mr James Macdonald, W.S., F.S.A. Scot.

It may be told in this connection that the mason who found the bronzes at Craig-a-Bhodaich has been fortunate enough to alight upon other bronze implements at different times within the parish of Farr. About twelve years ago he found a very fine bronze spear-head in the soil beneath a prostrate stone, one of a circle, at Craggan Soiller, to the south of Farr township; and a few years earlier still he came upon two bronze axes in a peat moss, on the hill above the point where the Kirtomy road branches off from the main highway. The bronze spear-head and the two bronze axes are preserved in the museum of Dunrobin Castle.