

I.

NOTE ON A TANGED DAGGER OR SPEAR-HEAD FROM CRAWFORD PRIORY, FIFE. BY THE HON. JOHN ABERCROMBY, F.S.A. Scot.

The dagger or spear-head which I now exhibit, and to which I desire to draw your attention, was discovered some twenty years ago on the Crawford Priory estate, about three miles south of Cupar, Fife. There is no record as to when or where it was found, but it is believed both by Montagu, Countess of Glasgow, and by Mr Macleod, the factor, to have been unearthed from the Walton Farm, immediately adjoining the pleasure grounds to the east of the mansion. This farm has probably received its name from a fairly well-preserved, oval-shaped rath with a double line of circumvallation, known locally as the Roman Camp, which lies within the area of the farm.

The blade (fig. 1) is of bronze, measuring $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length, and has lost $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of its point; it is $1\frac{7}{10}$ inches wide at the base of the blade, and is provided with a tang 3 inches long, at the end of which is a rivet-hole and rivet about an inch long. Down the centre of the blade runs a raised flat-sided midrib of nearly angular section, edged by a triple line of very shallow flutings; between them and the edge of the blade run two deeper and wider furrows enclosing a ridge. The central portion of the midrib is ornamented with lines of punched dots which terminate at the shoulder of the tang, where they are also closer together than elsewhere.

In his *Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 181, Dr Joseph Anderson informs us that only one tanged blade of this description is known to have been discovered in Scotland, and that in Ayrshire. The example from Whitehaugh Moss, in Ayrshire, was first described and figured by Mr James Macdonald, F.S.A. Scot., in 1884.¹ From the measurements and description which he gives, as well as from the engraving reproduced in *Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 181, it is evident the Ayrshire and Fife examples resemble each other very closely. Blades of this description

¹ *Archaeological and Historical Collections of Ayr and Wigtown*, vol. iv. p. 53.

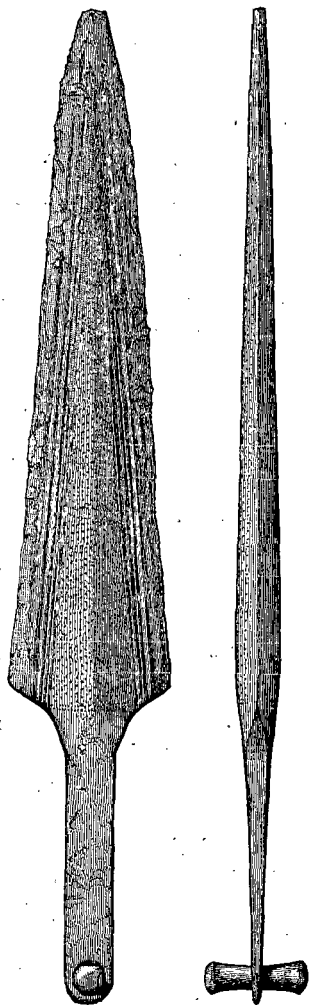


Fig. 1. Tanged Dagger; from Crawford Priory, Fife, 10½ in. long.

are known as the "Arreton Down type," from a place in the Isle of Wight where a hoard that included nine weapons of this variety was found, so far back as 1735. They are described and some of them figured by Mr Franks¹ and by Sir J. Evans.² One of them is described by the former in the following terms: "No. 1. A spear-head or dagger-blade with tang: length 10 inches. The centre ridge is prominent, and is ornamented with rows of engraved dots. On each side of it are four ornamental ribs converging at the point. At the end of the tang, which is flat, is a rivet-hole in which the rivet remains; the latter appears to be about an inch long."³ The general likeness between this and the Fife example is also great, and both are ornamented with punctured dots along the central portion of the midrib. The other specimens differ from No. 1 in points of detail, though all are of the same type, and some have also the same dotted ornamentation. Another very similar blade, though without the dots, was found at Stratford-le-Bow, Essex, and is figured by Sir J. Evans,⁴ who further mentions that a weapon closely resembling it has been found in West Meath. Tanged blades of this rare type have also been brought to light at Plymstock, Devon; at Newberry, Berks; in Burwell

¹ *Archæologia*, vol. xxxvi. pp. 326-331; *Horæ Ferales*, pp. 151-155.

² *Ancient Bronze Instruments of Great Britain*, pp. 257-259.

³ *Archæolog.*, xxxvi. p. 327, pl. xxv. fig. 1.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 258.

Fen and Swaffham Fen, Cambridge ; at Hintlesham and another uncertain locality in Suffolk ; and at Matlock, Derbyshire. So, altogether, it would seem there are but seventeen known examples in England, two in Scotland, and one in Ireland. On the Continent Sir J. Evans knows of one specimen in the Museum of Copenhagen which is said to have been brought from Italy.

The relative age in Britain of these tanged daggers or spear-heads can be approximately ascertained, as in two instances they formed part of a hoard. The Plymstock example was associated with sixteen flanged axes, one straight chisel, and three daggers of an early type. In the Arreton Down hoard were also unearthed four flanged axes, two daggers, and a socketed weapon, ornamented with two bosses or imitation rivets near the head of the socket, which both Mr Franks and Sir J. Evans believe might be either a dagger or a spear- or lance-head, and will not pronounce definitely upon the subject. A peculiarity attaching to one of the tanged blades, which both these learned archæologists prefer to consider spear-heads, must not be omitted. The base of the blade rests in a loose bronze ferrule decorated with a double row of perpendicularly arranged bosses to simulate rivets, and the ferrule does not reach down as far as the rivet at the lower end of the tang. The raised ridges or ribs which border the upper rim of the ferrule project beyond the edge of the blade, and would therefore offer some slight resistance to further penetration if the weapon were used as a lance or spear. From the above indications it may be inferred that tanged daggers or spear-heads of this particular type belong to a period subsequent to that of the flat axe and flat dagger-blade, which are sometimes found together, as at Butterwick, York,¹ or separately, like the similar dagger from Collessie,² Fife ; but prior to the introduction of the palstave or, at any rate, of the socketed axe.

But what was the real function of these weapons ? Were they spear-heads, as such learned archæologists as Mr Franks and Sir J. Evans, on the one hand, with some hesitation believe ; or, from being more allied to dagger- and halbert-blades, as Dr J. Anderson considers, were they used

¹ Evans, *op. cit.*, fig. 2, 279.

² *Catal. of Nat. Mus. of Ant. Scot.*, pp. 186.

as such? There is a good deal to be said on both sides. Knowing, as we do, that the socket is a matter of development, and therefore requires time for its accomplishment, it seems hardly credible that during the perhaps long interval between the introduction of bronze into Britain and the development of the socketed spear-head no metal lance-heads were in use. For the spear is undoubtedly one of the earliest of human inventions and has been found among all savage peoples, even among those like the Tasmanians and Australian Blacks, who are ignorant of the use of the bow and arrow, who use their stone axes by simply holding them in their hands, and who are destitute of the rudest pottery. Yet on further consideration it seems to me almost certain that such was the case; that the early inhabitants of Britain employed spear-heads that were not of bronze for a considerable time after they had become acquainted with the art of metallurgy. But that interval of time need not have been excessive. It is seldom that anything new is invented or that two people widely separated hit upon the same idea; improvements in metallurgy made in one area are constantly transmitted to another, but they are rarely separately discovered. Now it is quite possible that before the introduction of bronze at all into Britain the socketed spear had already been developed and was in use, though in a region far removed from her misty shores. Sir J. Evans, with all due reserve and the natural dislike of an archæologist to precise dates in prehistoric matters, would place the beginning of the Bronze Period in Britain some 1200 or 1400 years B.C. Assuming for the moment that this is approximately correct, we know that an early variety of the socketed spear was used in Egypt as far back as the eighteenth century B.C. Mr Budge¹ describes and figures a socketed bronze spear-head from Egypt, though he believes it is probably of Mesopotamian origin, bearing a royal cartouche which fixes its date at about 1750 B.C. It is an early form, for the socket has not been cast in one piece, but is composed of a sheet of bronze. "burnt on" to the head of the spear. From his archæological experience gained in Egypt, Mr Flinders Petrie² would place between 1200 and 1100 B.C. the date of the six graves, lying within the walls of Mycenæ, that were

¹ *Archæologia*, vol. liii. pp. 83-86, pl. i. fig. 3.

² *Journ. of Hellen. Studies*, vol. xii. pp. 199-205, 1891.

excavated by Schliemann. This indefatigable treasure-seeker, while searching the second grave, brought to light a long bronze socketed spear of slender form, with a loop on one side near the mouth of the socket.¹ Here, then, we find in one corner of Europe, in the twelfth century B.C., a socketed lance cast in one piece; and it is more than probable this type had been developed and perfected some centuries earlier. For according to Mr Petrie the flourishing period of prehellenic art falls between 1500 and 1400 B.C., and the great period of Mycenæ from about 1300 to 1100 B.C. During these four centuries it is evident there was constant intercourse and interchange of ideas between Egypt and Greece, for prehellenic art is saturated with ideas and *motifs*, either inspired by, or directly copied from, originals seen in the Nile valley. If in the eighteenth century B.C. the socket of a lance was merely "burnt on," we may be sure that in another century the Egyptian artificer in metal would have contrived to effect his purpose in a single casting. So by the sixteenth century it is quite probable that the socketed spear was used at certain points in the south-east of Europe when the west was still in a stone period, or at most was making experiments in casting flat axes.

If we now turn our attention to the results of archæological research in the northern, the western, and west central parts of Europe, we find every reason to believe that the socketed spear was not developed in those areas, but was originally imported at a full-blown stage. Montelius finds it fully developed in the first age of bronze in Scandinavia. M. E. Chantre,² in treating of the lances used during the Bronze epochs in France, only mentions the socketed kind. In the atlas, however, that accompanies his great work, he figures a tanged bronze blade with three facets, found at the station of Châtillon, Bourget, which he describes as a lance-head. But it is the same as that figured in his *Lake Dwellings of Europe* (fig. 20, No. 5), by Dr Munro, who is uncertain whether to term it a lance-head or a dagger. In summing up the results of his labours over so large and diversified an area as that included under the above heading, our learned Secretary (*op. cit.*, p. 516) assures us that lance-heads were from the earliest

¹ Schuchhardt, *Schliemann's Ausgrabungen*, fig. 206.

² *Age du Bronze*, vol. i. p. 144, &c.

times made with sockets. So, too, in Britain all the undoubted spear- or lance-heads mentioned by Sir J. Evans in his well-known work are provided with a socket forming an integral portion of the head. The obvious inference is that throughout these areas the type had been developed elsewhere, and the socketed spear- or lance-head was originally an importation from without; for there are no intermediate forms leading up to it, analogous to the transition from the flat to the flanged axe, from this to the palstave, from the palstave to the socketed axe, though it is true the home of this development was not in Britain. But there is a difference between Britain and the other areas of Europe above mentioned. In Britain there existed a decided interval between the first appearance of bronze and of the first spear with a socket. In England these weapons have been found twice with a flat axe, seventeen times with palstaves, and still oftener with socketed axes, though it must be observed that on both occasions the flat axe was associated with socketed axes, as was also sometimes the case with regard to the palstaves, though not always. In Scotland they have been found on several occasions with socketed axes and socketed chisels, as well as with leaf-bladed swords, but not with earlier weapons, which points to the probability—for the evidence is inconclusive—that they were known earlier in South than in North Britain. We may therefore infer that the type had found its way to England before the introduction of the socketed axe, and that it was synchronous with the palstave, if not before. It seems to have been brought into Britain subsequent to the Arreton Down type of blade, though not long after. At any rate, if we assume the Arreton Down weapons to be spear-heads and not daggers or knife-daggers, we do not bridge over any considerable space of time between the first introduction of bronze into Britain and the first importation of a socketed spear. The *à priori* difficulty of having to imagine a protracted period of non-metallic spear-heads, though other weapons of metal were in common use, although it still remains, is lessened; for we see that not only the socketed spear came in at a fairly early period, but that there was a possibility of its having been imported even earlier, though it cannot actually be proved. Sir J. Evans estimates at four or five centuries the space of time between the

first importation of bronze and the apparition of spears with sockets, a period which I suggest may reasonably be curtailed.

It is now time to regard two of the Arreton Down weapons (Evans, *op. cit.*, figs. 324, 328) a little more closely. As I mentioned above, the ferrule of one of them is decorated with two perpendicular rows of bosses to simulate rivets, and the socket of the other has also a pair of imitation rivets below the upper rim of the socket. As the hafts of daggers are both fastened and ornamented with rivets, as in the fine example from Brimilstone, Wilts (Evans, fig. 287), while this is not the case with lance-heads, it seems better to consider these weapons as knife-daggers, and not spear-heads. Again, in both, the upper rim of the ferrule and of the socket projects beyond the line of the blade, an arrangement unsuitable for a lance, as it tends to check farther penetration, though perfectly applicable to a dagger or knife-hilt, as it is but a guard in embryo. If the tanged blade with a ferrule is a dagger or knife, it is more than probable the eight other tanged blades from the same hoard, and those of the same type found elsewhere in Great Britain, served a similar function. For a narrow blade a tang is the simplest and doubtless very early means for attaching a haft. A silver tanged knife was unearthed from the ruins of the second city at Hissarlik, where flat axes of nearly pure copper were also found.¹ Though their blades are of a different type from those under consideration, tanged daggers and knives of the Bronze Age are common in France and the Continent. Taking everything into consideration, I have therefore no hesitation in believing the example from Fife is a dagger-knife of an early type, and was imported there from the South.

¹ Schuchhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 77.