

2. A LATE BRONZE AGE "RAZOR" FROM ORKNEY.

The bronze blade which is the subject of this note was found some thirty years ago, but has not previously been recorded.¹ It was found in a stone cist in a mound known as Laughton's Knowe in the parish of Holm on the mainland of Orkney (*R.C. Inventory*, No. 368). From the description of this mound in the *Inventory* it is almost certainly of prehistoric date, and it is not unlikely, therefore, that this cist and cremation represents a Late Bronze Age secondary burial inserted into an earlier mound. Within the cist, details of which have not been preserved, was a heap of cremated bones, on the top of which lay the bronze blade incased in the remains of a wooden sheath (Pl. XX, 2).

The blade is double edged and tanged, and measures 3 inches in length by 1.3 inches in width. In addition to this the tang is 1 inch long and .3 inch broad where it joins the blade. The thickness of the blade is approximately 0.1 inch, and it was cast in one piece with the tang.

The instrument is heavily corroded, and its details are therefore obscured, but it is clear that one of the sides is flat, and that the other had a midrib which is now clearly visible only in the lower half of the blade. A slight depression seems to run down each side of the midrib. The standard of the casting is unskilled, much below that usually displayed in the Late Bronze Age. The simple character of the implement stresses the caution with which one can assign any date to it, for such a blade might have been cast at widely different times. But there is a group of blades, generally termed "razors," which are known to have accompanied many Late Bronze Age burials, and it is to this group that our example must belong. In Scotland a date for these from the sixth century B.C. to the end of the first millennium B.C. has been shown.² Closer dating than this is at present impossible, for in such remote places as Orkney, fashions already superseded further south might persist till quite late times.

Culturally these oval razors (Class I) belong to the users of cordoned urns, who frequently included a razor with their cremated burials. During approximately the same period another type of razor with a bifid blade (Class II) seems to have been in use, and this type was imported from the Continent and is never found with burials, though often in hoards. The two classes are therefore culturally distinct, though the shape of one may influence the other in regions where both occur. Both the width of the blade and the slight midrib on our Orkney specimen may have been due to influence of this kind, and in support of this we find that a Class II razor was found at Quoykea Moss, in the parish of St Andrews, Orkney.³ A list, complete to 1936, of other Bronze Age objects which have been found in Orkney will be found in the *Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments Inventory*, vol. i. p. 59.

The two fragments of wooden sheath were found, one on each side of the razor. These were submitted to Mr M. Y. Orr of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, and have been tentatively identified by him to be hazel (*Corylus Avellana*). Though, no doubt, frequently associated with razors, it is very rarely that a sheath has survived in a recognisable form, and the only other examples known from the British Isles came from Priddy, Somerset,⁴ and Armoy, Co. Antrim.⁵ The Priddy sheath was made of wood, and the one from Armoy of leather.

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¹ It has now been presented to the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, by Mr P. Sutherland Graeme.

² *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, vol. xii. (1946), pp. 121 ff.

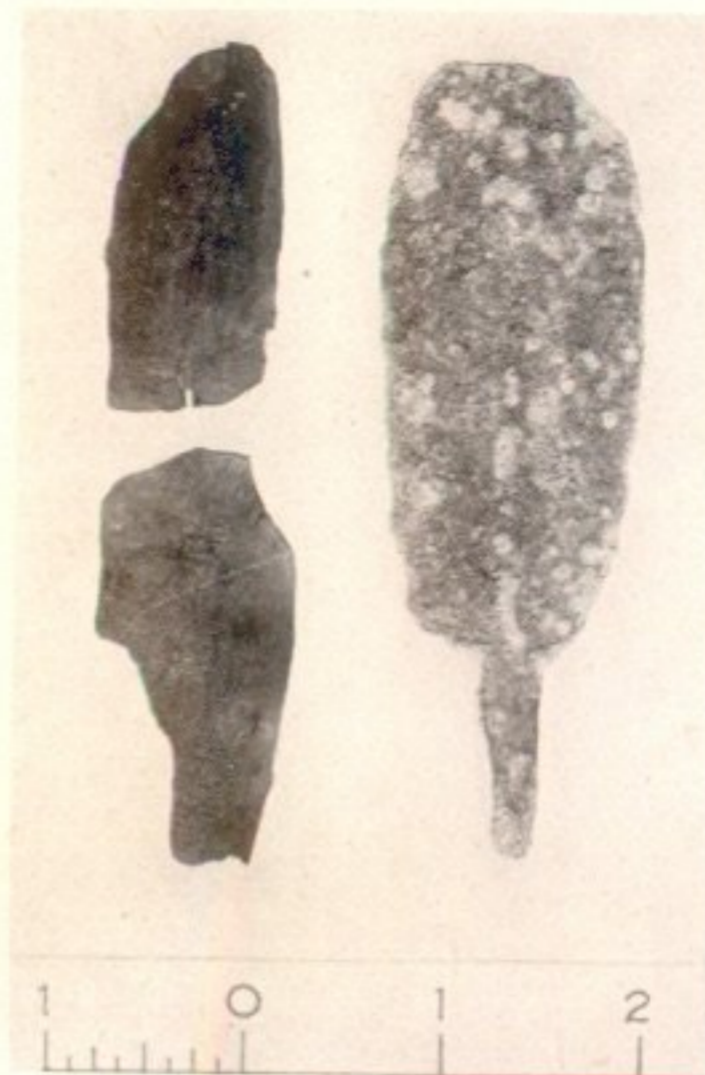
³ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lvi. (1921-22), p. 356.

⁴ *Arch. Journ.*, vol. xvi. (1859), pp. 148-9.

⁵ *P.R.I.A.* (1906-7), p. 123.



1. "Razor" and spearhead cast from the Campbeltown mould.



2. Bronze razor from Orkney with fragments of its wooden case.



3. Window with panels, at South House, Liberton.