

4. AN IRON OBJECT FROM DUNADD.

Among the iron objects recovered from the fort of Dunadd in Argyllshire during the 1929 excavations is a small socketed implement with three short teeth, measuring only $1\frac{9}{16}$ by $\frac{11}{32}$ in.² The excavator, the late Mr Hewat Craw, drew attention to certain continental parallels, but since he wrote, a number of further examples of the same type of tool have been published, and the evidence is worth while reviewing afresh.

Known examples seem to fall into two groups, dating respectively from the Roman period and from the post-Roman Dark Ages. Gallo-Roman examples are, for instance, recorded from Vertault³ and from the Vieille-Cité, Haute-Marne,⁴ and another probably in a Gallo-Roman context at Moulins.⁵ These are all simple small iron implements, as is that from the Roman fort of the Saalburg.⁶

The second group is more interesting, and more significant in the Dunadd context. Five sites in Ireland have produced such tools, four of them being excavations which permitted of the dating of the site to the Dark Ages. At Carraig Aille Fort I, Co. Limerick, the occupation ran from the late 7th to the 10th century A.D.;⁷ the Lagore Crannog, Co. Meath, has a similar range of

¹ *P.P.S.*, xvii (1951), 35-36, "The Colonisation of Scotland in the Second Millennium B.C.," by Sir Lindsay Scott.

² *P.S.A.S.*, LXIV (1929-30), 117; fig. 5, no. 7.

³ *Revue des Musées*, XIX (1929), 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xviii (1928), 139.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii (1928), 81: apparently from a pottery.

⁶ Jacobi, *Römerkas. v. Saalb.*, I, 453, fig. 71, 8.

⁷ *P.R.I.A.*, LI (C) (1949), 98.

date; ¹ Cahercommaun Fort in Co. Clare was of the early 9th century A.D.; ² and Ballinderry Crannog I in Co. Westmeath was of the late 10th century A.D. ³ The remaining site, Dunbell Rath in Co. Kilkenny, has produced objects of the same general character as the dated sites, and must belong to the same period. ⁴

This Dark Ages group has good parallels on the European continent. A comparable series, in bronze and more elaborately made than the Irish group, and sometimes decorated, has recently been published from the Frisian region of Holland, where they are attributed to the 8th to 9th centuries A.D. ⁵ A similar specimen with decoration comes from the Moselle near Metz, ⁶ and three elaborate examples with zoomorphic sockets and leaf-ornament came from a collection formed by a resident of Macon. ⁷

The use of these objects is unknown. It has been suggested that the Gallo-Roman specimens were used for scratching parallel straight or wavy lines on pots or tiles, and in the case of the Frisian examples a use as a form of weaving-comb has been suggested, but without much confidence.

The Irish parallels for the Dunadd tool immediately imply Scotie or Dalriadic contexts, especially in view of the presence in the Argyllshire site of other metal types found on the Irish Dark Ages sites quoted above. Dunadd belongs typologically to a Dark Ages group of "nuclear" forts, as Stevenson has pointed out, ⁸ and documentary evidence of a siege in A.D. 683 and a capture by the Picts in A.D. 736 confirms this. The curious little pronged tool discussed above is another piece of confirmatory evidence for an occupation within the 8th century A.D. or later.

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