

A medieval crescent-shaped dagger-pommel from Fortingall, Perthshire by David H Caldwell

Through the kindness of Mr A McAuley, the museum has acquired an interesting late 14th-century bronze dagger-pommel, found in a garden at Fortingall in Perthshire (NGR NN 738471). It is shaped like a crescent with incurving tips (one broken off) and swollen belly through which passes an asymmetrical hole for the tang of the dagger hilt. It has been cast hollow. Both faces are cut with centrally placed heater-shaped shields with leafy foliage decoration on either side, and two further shields are placed on each outer face of the horns. The shields are all divided paly of seven except for one which is bendy of nine, and it is apparent that this scheme of decoration has been meant to take a *champlevé* enamel finish. There are still traces of red enamel in the shields on both faces. It is 32.5 mm wide, 12.5 mm thick, and 27 mm high (fig 1, A).

Daggers with crescent-shaped pommels seem to have been made in W Europe from the 13th to the 15th century, though the exact dating of many is very difficult. A knife with backed blade from Bulle in Switzerland has been dated to the 13th century (Wegeli 1948, 276, fig 251) and another from London to the second half of that century (Oakeshott 1960, fig 122). The former has a pommel of strip iron, U-shaped with the terminals ending in little rings, and it seems likely that those pommels which are formed of strips of metal (normally iron?), rather than cast with a more solid form, are earlier in date. Two quillon daggers from London, thought to be of mid 14th-century date (Laking 1922, vol 3, figs 734, 735; *London Mus Med Cat* 1940, pl VI, A 1946;

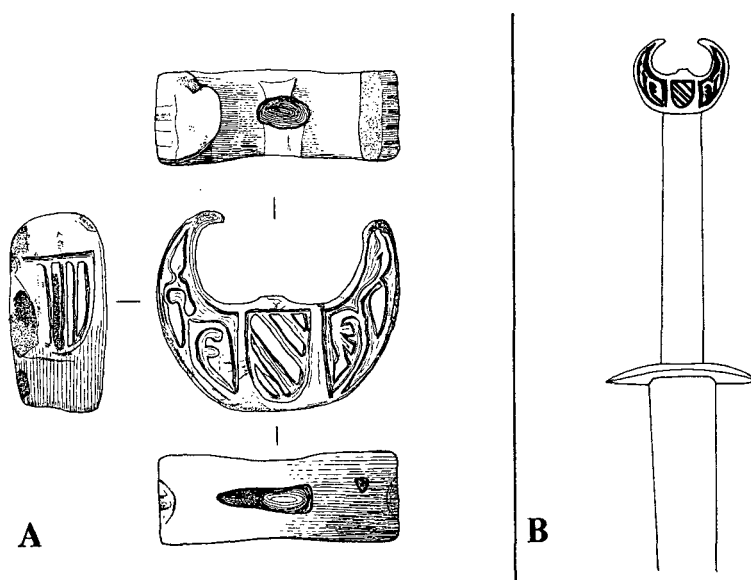


FIG 1 A, Fortingall dagger-pommel (scale 1 : 1); B, possible reconstruction of dagger with quillons

Guildhall Mus Cat 1908, pl LXXXVII, 1) are also examples of this earlier type. Their pommels, as the quillons, are gently curved bars with the ends curled up and down respectively.

A later group of crescent-shaped pommels, to which the Fortingall one belongs, are more solid in form and more definitely crescent shaped. Two transitional examples (in type but not necessarily in date) might be noted: a quillon dagger with backed blade in the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zürich (Peterson 1968, pl 23), and a quillon dagger illustrated by Laking and thought by him to be probably north Italian (Laking 1922, vol 3, fig 736). The dagger at Zürich is dated by Peterson to the late 14th or early 15th century and the other to the early 15th century. A quillon-less bronze-hilted dagger, probably Venetian and c 1400 (Laking 1922, vol 3, fig 737) has a thickened and decorated crescent pommel approximating quite closely in shape to the one from Fortingall, as also a quillon dagger in the Berlin Zeughaus with a frilly bronze crescent (Closs and Post 1939, 163, abb 4). It is dated to the late 14th century. An even closer parallel, however, is a bronze pommel dated to c 1400, found in Italy and decorated with coats-of-arms. In it the horns of the crescent are joined to give the pommel a continuous oval outline (Laking 1922, vol 3, fig 738).

The type of decoration on the Fortingall pommel is the same as that appearing on other small bronze enamelled objects made in large quantities in the 14th century, especially at Limoges in France. Similar coats-of-arms with simple geometric designs – obviously purely decorative and not intended to relate to any person or family – occur as the basic element of decoration on a series of 14th-century pricket candlesticks of which one was found at Bothwell Castle in Lanarkshire (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 93 (1959–60), pl XVI, 4, now in the National Museum – HX 506), and there are others from St Mary Bishophill Senior Church, York (RCHME 1972, pl 24a), now in York Museum, and in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (accession no. 4913–1901). It seems most likely that the Fortingall pommel is a late 14th-century product of Limoges or some other continental centre working in a similar tradition. Its asymmetrical tang-hole suggests that it was mounted with a backed blade and it would probably have been fitted with short straight pointed quillons like those on the daggers in the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich and the Berlin Zeughaus (fig 1, B).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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