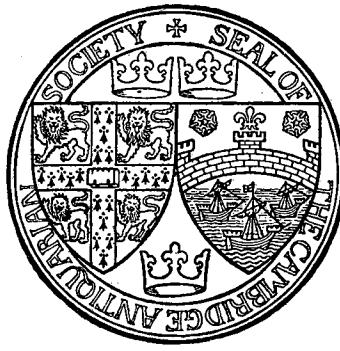


PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUMES LVI & LVII
JANUARY 1962 TO DECEMBER 1963

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A FLAT AXE FROM CHATTERIS FEN, CAMBS

JOHN M. COLES

IN the 1820's a small flat axe, presumably of bronze, was found during drainage operations in Chatteris Fen, Cambs. The axe was presented at a later date by Mr C. V. Armitage to the City of Lincoln Museums, and has recently been given to the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge,¹ through the offices of Mr F. T. Baker, F.S.A., of the City and County Museum, Lincoln.

The axe (Fig. 1a) is 10·4 cm. long with a maximum width across the blade of 4·4 cm. Midway down the length of the axe there are outward expansions of the sides to present a shouldered outline; at this point the axe is 2·9 cm. across and 0·7 cm. thick, and here are located two small holes, probably cast with the axe and drilled out afterwards. They are countersunk from one face only, and are irregular and sloping. The faces of the axe are corroded and damaged and lie very slightly below the level of the hammered sides of the axe. There is no trace of any incipient stopridge. The sides of the axe are plain, and the profile is a slender pointed oval. On the faces there remain traces of decoration, vertical punched strokes arranged in irregular rows as a 'rain' pattern, more marked now on the lower part of the axe, but visible on the upper part as well where the axe is less well preserved. There are two features about the Chatteris axe that help to establish its position in the Bronze Age. These features are: (1) the form and decoration, (2) the perforated shoulders.

The axe belongs to Megaw and Hardy's Type I of decorated British-Irish axes, a type without definite flanges or stopridge.² The expanded cutting-edge, the rounded butt, the slender pointed oval profile are all characteristic of this type; the very slight hammered flanges are also present on many Type I axes. The simple 'rain' pattern visible on the faces of the Chatteris axe belongs to Megaw and Hardy's group 2 decoration, where the ornamentation consists of simple all-over patterns of one motif only. Many Type I axes have this group 2 decoration.³ The map⁴ shows that axes such as these, and other decorated Early Bronze Age axes, are widespread in their distribution, with a large proportion from north and eastern Ireland. On the whole, this concentration outweighs the scatter in England-Scotland; from East

¹ Register 63. 177.

² B. R. S. Megaw and E. M. Hardy, 'British Decorated Axes and their Diffusion during the Earlier Part of the Bronze Age', *P.P.S.* iv (1938), pp. 272ff., figs. 1 and 2.

³ *Ibid.* figs. 2a and 12c.

⁴ Based on Megaw and Hardy, *op. cit.* fig. 7, and J. J. Butler, 'A Bronze Age Concentration at Bargeroosterveld', *Palaeohistoria*, VIII (1960), pp. 101ff., fig. 55, with amendments. This map includes both flat and low-flanged decorated axes.

Anglia we have only three axes comparable to the Chatteris example, one from Quy, Cambs, one from Eriswell, Suffolk, and a Norfolk find.¹ As Megaw and Hardy pointed out, a number of these decorated axes, and other more developed Early Bronze Age forms, were traded to the continent, to Southern Scandinavia and Central Germany, and several others are now known from the Netherlands.² It has been suggested that perhaps these Irish-type decorated axes were made on the

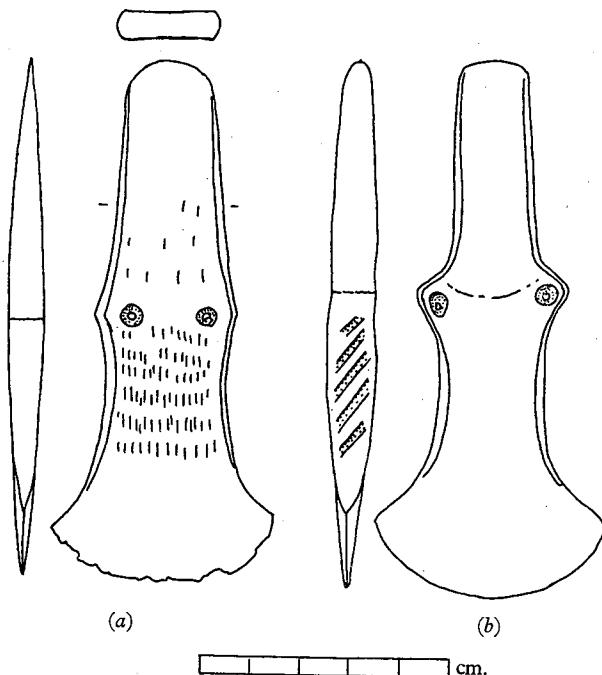


Fig. 1. (a) Chatteris, Cambs, (b) Co. Westmeath.

continent by Irish smiths; the Wageningen hoard in Holland contains Irish axe and halberd, a dagger and metalworkers' material, and may represent the equipment of an Irish smith.³ The map then shows a possible trade route from the British Isles to the Netherlands and Central Germany; the Scandinavian finds may have arrived by a different route. O'Riordain's map of Irish-type halberds shows the same spread.⁴ Butler has commented upon the fact that analyses show the Irish axes to be made of true Bronze, with from 9 to 14 per cent tin, while local continental copies were still being made of copper. The date of this trade, in Central German terms, seems to lie in or around the seventeenth century B.C. in developed Unetice and late Reinecke A1

¹ University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology; Ashmolean Museum; British Museum 66, 6-27, 10 respectively.

² P. J. R. Modderman and J. J. Butler, 'A Decorated Low-flanged Axe and a Stone Axe from Haren (North-Brabant); with a Note on the Maas-Rhine Group of Irish Early Bronze Age Exports', *Bericht van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, IX (1959), pp. 284 ff.

³ *Antiquity and Survival*, II, nos. 5-6, 127.

⁴ S. P. O'Riordain, 'The Halberd in Bronze Age Europe', *Archaeologia*, LXXXVI (1937), pp. 195 ff.

contexts, the date suggested for the German Dieskau and Swedish Pile hoards, partly on the basis of sixteenth-century Shaft Grave correlations for Reinecke A 2.

The shoulders on the Chatteris axe are a feature not previously encountered on Irish-type decorated axes. In a low-flanged form comparable but larger axes, without



Fig. 2. Decorated flat and low-flanged axes.

decoration, are a feature of the South German Early Bronze Age whence they were exported to Schleswig-Holstein and south Jutland, Kersten's Zone 2 of the Nor-discher Kreis, to form one of the components of the Sögel group in that area.¹ This trade and local production came at a perhaps slightly later date than the main group of Irish decorated axes in the north, but some influence for a shouldered axe could of course have been transmitted back to the British Isles where the Chatteris axe

¹ E.g. R. Hachmann, *Die frühe Bronzezeit im westlichen Ostseegebiet und ihre mittel- und südosteuropäischen Beziehungen* (1957).

was made. However, it seems more likely that the inspiration for the Chatteris axe comes from another group with both Irish and continental connections, best illustrated in the Ulstrup, Jutland, find.¹ Two flat axes were found here, one a normal Irish-type decorated axe, the other with loops midway along the sides and with more elaborate double chevron ornament executed in shallow punched dots. This presumably is also of Irish workmanship, as comparable although less elaborate decoration occurs on the Knockaun, Co. Waterford, axe.² A similar style and technique is known on other Irish and Danish axes. The Ulstrup axe is close in general form to the Chatteris find, although it is larger. The loops curve out from the very slight hammered sides to make distinct shoulders, more marked than those on the Chatteris axe. Another axe, probably from north-eastern Ireland, also belongs to this small group. It is flat, with involved punched dot and rain pattern, and has side loops like the Ulstrup axe.³ Butler has noted several other finds of looped axes, which are not as close to the Chatteris axe as Ulstrup and the north-east Ireland axes. However, an unpublished axe from County Westmeath, at present in the National Museum of Ireland,⁴ is remarkably close to the Chatteris find (Fig. 1 b), with hammered flanges, wide blade and accentuated and perforated shoulders. The flanges are decorated with oblique grooves, a feature of other Irish decorated flat and low-flanged axes.⁵

The Chatteris axe then is best considered as a member of the small group of decorated axes with loops or perforations, belonging to the Irish Early Bronze Age. The Ulstrup axes and an unlooped one in the Gallemose hoard⁶ show Jutland as a market for trade in Irish Type I decorated axes. Associations at Gallemose include Pile-type axes and a number of penannular rings which have analogues in Unětice hoards of a developed Early Bronze Age nature. The Dieskau hoard of central Germany, belonging to this phase, also has a decorated Irish axe. The Chatteris Fen axe, on the basis of this dating, should therefore belong within the British Early Bronze Age contemporary with the Wessex culture of southern England, but of Irish manufacture.

¹ J. Butler, 'Irske Bronzeokser fra Ulstrup', *Kuml* (1955), pp. 36 ff.

² *Ibid.* fig. 3.

³ *Ibid.* fig. 4; J. Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements* (1881), fig. 107; also see fig. 106 for a decorated and looped 'chisel'.

⁴ Register 1944: 197. I am grateful to Mr Etienne Rynne for telling me of this find and for a drawing on which Fig. 1 b is based.

⁵ It is more likely that the loops or perforations on these axes were intended as decoration rather than as an aid to hafting, as the holes on the Chatteris axe are too close to the centre of the axe to be functional. Perhaps related to these flat axes is a group of decorated low-flanged axes with a slight shouldered effect at the sides; these may represent the tradition of the loops or shoulders on a typologically later form of axe (Evans, *op. cit.* figs. 68, 97).

⁶ Hachman, *op. cit.* Tafel 4.

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