

date be in suburban cemeteries beyond the enclosure.¹⁴ The distinction between the intramural church and the suburban basilica in the cemetery, above the tomb of the martyrs, became blurred in the course of the 5th and 6th centuries, though it still survives in the text of Gildas. Writing about the middle of the 6th century he describes the Church of 4th-century Britain as it arose after the age of the persecutions: "The christians renewed the churches which had been razed to the ground [and] founded, built and brought to completion the basilicas of the holy martyrs, which are displayed on all sides as symbols of victory."¹⁵

The graves in the undercroft could represent the survival of the christian community of Roman Worcester into this age of transition. But the evidence is not unequivocal. No Roman name for Worcester survives, though the incoming Hwicce recognized the site as that of an earlier settlement when they added the suffix *ceaster* to the name. They also found christianity established in the region, if we can rely on the evidence of place-names containing the element *eccles*. Two compound names with this element are recorded in Warwickshire, a third is found near Ross in Herefordshire.¹⁶ Exhall, near Alcester, is close to the Roman town, but Exhall, near Coventry, does not seem to be either associated with a Roman settlement or close to a Roman road. It fits rather the pattern of rural christianity that was arising in the 5th and 6th centuries. The greatest concentration of place-names including the element *eccles* is in the area of Lancashire and W. Yorkshire. This is the region in which the English Church of the 7th century is known to have taken possession of "those consecrated places (*loca sancta*) in various places which the British clergy had deserted, when fleeing from the hostile sword wielded by the warriors of our nation".¹⁷ The same could well be true of the region seized by the Hwicce and the graves at Worcester could represent the existence of one of these 'holy places'.

The evidence of the excavation lends a certain support to the suggestion that the graves are of sub-Roman date. A single post-hole was found near one of the graves. In an early christian, as in any Roman cemetery, built tombs or monuments were a normal feature. In most cases we know that these were of stone. But wood is also employed even for important tombs; it was used, for instance, in the two earliest stages of the *memoria* over the martyr's grave forming the nucleus which grew into the great church of St. Viktor at Xanten.¹⁸ The grave in the undercroft with its trace of a wooden structure may have lain in the small cemetery used by the christian community in the settlement which later became Saxon Worcester.

C. A. RALEGH RADFORD

SO-CALLED 'NEEDLE CASES' (FIG. 53)

A group of objects which are often described as 'needle cases' are not at all well adapted for such a purpose. They are tapering tubes of sheet bronze, closed by a ring at the narrow end, but open at the broad end and without any means of preventing the needles from falling out. Typical examples from Cassington, Oxon.,¹⁹ Barrington, Cambs.,²⁰ and from grave 153 at Wageningen, Holland,²¹ are illustrated in FIG. 53, nos. 5-7. None has ever been found with a needle in it, and most appear to be empty.

¹⁴ *Christianity in Britain* (ed. M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson, Leicester, 1968), 20; *Med. Archaeol.*, xv (1971), 1-8.

¹⁵ Gildas, *de Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, cap. 3 in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Auctores Antiquissimi*, xiii (1898), 28.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* in note 14, 87-92.

¹⁷ Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of St. Wilfrid*, xvii (ed. B. Colgrave, Oxford, 1927), 36-7.

¹⁸ W. Kramer (ed.), *Neue Ausgrabungen in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1958), 380-90. See p. 232 f. below.

¹⁹ Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, acc. no. 1942.155; no associations.

²⁰ Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, acc. no. 1909.298h; no associations.

²¹ W. A. van Es, *Palaeohistoria*, x (1964), 230-1; a woman's grave with two finger rings, buckle and bow brooch, pot, beads, shears and cast bronze rings.

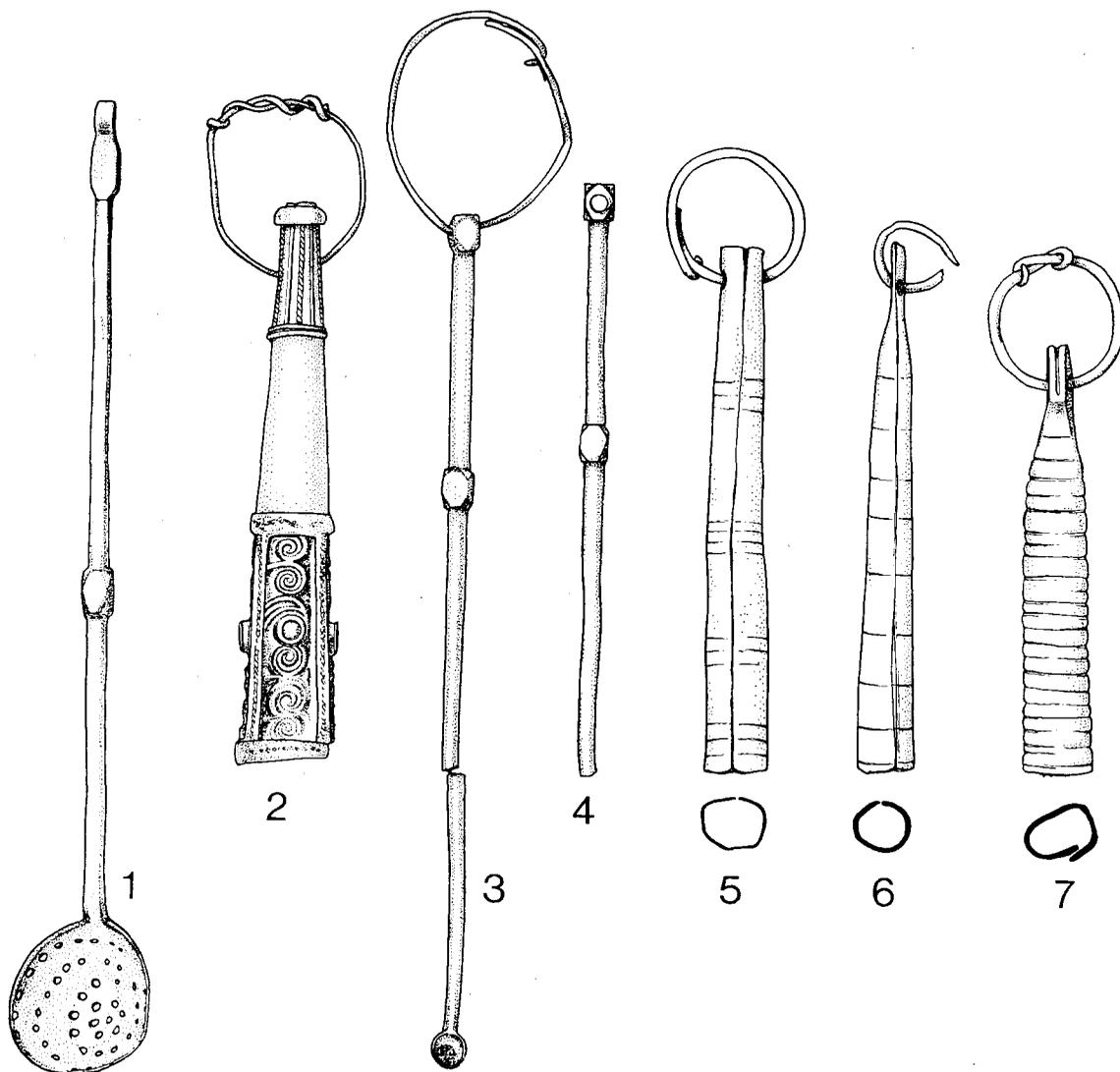


FIG. 53

'NEEDLE CASES' OR COSMETIC BRUSHES (pp. 151 ff.). Sc. 1:1

1-4. Objects from a grave at Bacsovdas, Yugoslavia; 5. 'Needle case' from Cassington, Oxon.; 6. 'Needle case' from Barrington, Cambs.; 7. 'Needle case' from grave 153, Wageningen, Holland

Tubular bronze needle cases are known from the Viking period,²² and are identified with certainty by the needles found inside them. But in all cases the tubes are closed by a bung at one or both ends, and when carried they are suspended, not at the end, but at the middle so that they hang horizontally. A similar sort of object from grave 222 at

²² See the numerous examples illustrated by H. Arbman, *Birka, I, Die Gräber* (Stockholm, 1943), pls. 167-9.

Kingston, Kent,²³ is the only Anglo-Saxon piece justifying the name of needle case. It is cylindrical, and apparently open-ended, though Faussett refers to the remains of "a small piece of linen cloth which had served to keep the head or lid the tighter on". The tube contained two bronze needles. Neither this Anglo-Saxon piece, nor any of the Viking varieties bear any relation to the tapering tubes of the 5th and 6th centuries.

Another suggestion put forward by Professor Werner²⁴ is that the tapering tubes are amulets, similar to the bone pendants of pyramidal form which occur in migration period graves from S. Russia westwards to Wallingford; but the difference between the two makes this suggestion unconvincing. The bone pendants are worn as earrings, or as definite pendants along with beads and other objects, and frequently two or more occur in the same grave; they are normally solid, pyramidal and decorated with ring and dot ornament. The tapering tubes are hollow and round, and normally encircled with inscribed lines; invariably they are found singly in graves.

Although unconvincing, Werner's suggestion does draw attention to what must be the most exotic of these tapering tubes, an example from a grave at Bacsordas (Karavukovo) in N. Yugoslavia.²⁵ This example (FIG. 53, no. 2) is silver, with niello and gilded *kerbschnitt* decoration surrounding settings for stones—yet its size and functional characteristics show that it is the same object as the plainer bronze pieces. The bronze examples are found in women's graves in England and sparsely in western Europe, but they are not normally found in association with other objects, or in a position which gives a clue to their function. The Bacsordas find does seem to provide this clue. The grave, a woman's grave, contained a buckle, a pair of earrings, a coin, and the items in FIG. 53, nos. 1-4, a spoon with pierced bowl, the tapering tube, an earscoop, and another, broken piece. Although the find was not seen *in situ*, and the grave positions were not recorded, there seems every reason to believe that the tapering tube was associated with the other items. Apart from the general similarity of the pieces, the positions of the breaks in the shafts of two of the pieces, coinciding as they do with the end of the tapering tube, suggest that all these three pieces were lying close together in the grave.

Supposing then that all four of these pieces were found together—were perhaps joined together on one larger ring—what clue does this give to the function of the tapering tubes? The earscoop is a toilet article and the broken piece looks as though it is too. The spoon with pierced bowl is also a toilet article in the context of this grave. In Kentish or in Merovingian contexts spoons with pierced bowls seem to be amuletic, but in Ostrogothic and E. Germanic contexts they occur regularly strung together with other toilet items, as at Tortona²⁶ and Acquasanta, Italy,²⁷ and at Kerch, S. Russia.²⁸ The implication is that the tapering tubes must also be a part of some sort of toilet article—but, what sort? There already seems to be a more than ample range of tweezers, earscoops, toothpicks, and other articles to satisfy the most complicated of needs.

Faced with this question when writing museum labels a few years ago I suggested that the tapering tubes could have held bundles of hairs or bristles, to make brushes, and that these brushes could have been used for putting on make-up, rouge, eye-shadow, or something similar. The suggestion provoked some amused comment from my colleagues, who remained unconvinced, and eventually I removed the objects and their

²³ C. Roach Smith (ed.), *Inventorium Sepulchrale* (London, 1856), 81, pl. 13, 9-10. 'Workboxes' or 'threadboxes', often found in 7th-century graves, have never been recorded with pins inside them, despite the statements of R. A. Smith and G. Baldwin Brown. They frequently contain scraps of textile and other organic material, and their function seems likely to have been amuletic.

²⁴ J. Werner, 'Herkuleskeule und Donar Amulett', *Jahrbuch des Röm.-Germ. Zentralmuseums Mainz*, xi (1964), 176-97.

²⁵ D. Csallány, *Archäologische Denkmäler der Gepiden im Mitteldonaubecken* (Budapest, 1961), 230, Taf. 274.

²⁶ V. Bierbrauer, *Bollettino della Società Pavese di Storia Patria*, xxii-xxiii (1973), 7-8, Taf. 4, 4.

²⁷ G. Annibaldi, J. Werner, *Germania*, xli (1963), Abb. 3; there is also (Taf. 41, 1) a tapering tube of gold foil from Acquasanta which seems more like the objects considered here than the 'golden knifegrips' [J. Werner in *Provincialia (Festschrift für R. Laur Belart, Basel, 1968)*, 654], amongst which it is very much the odd man out.

²⁸ A. Roes, *Rev. archéol. de l'est et du centre-est*, ix (1958), fig. 20.

labels from display. Now I think I can replace them, for I have discovered that just such a brush, found at Oostrum, Holland, was displayed in the exhibition *Frisians, Franks and Saxons* at the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, in 1959.²⁹ The brush is made up of a tapering tube of sheet bronze, which appears to be in every respect the same as the examples illustrated in FIG. 53, nos. 5-7, and projecting from the broad, open end of the tube is a bunch of black hairs which still survives in position. The brush—perhaps ‘cosmetic brush’ would be a suitable term—was threaded on a ring with an earscoop.

There seems no reason to suppose that all these tapering tubes were not also once filled with bristles. In most soil conditions these have disintegrated, and left the tubes apparently empty as we find them. It remains only to urge future excavators to treat the contents of their tubes with care. Perhaps we shall be able to find out what sort of hair was used and how stiff the brush would have been, and to guess for what it might have been used.³⁰

DAVID BROWN

A SWORD OF THE VIKING PERIOD FROM THE R. LEA AT HERTFORD³¹ (PL. XXX, B; FIG. 54)

An early Viking period sword was found, sometime during the first quarter of this century, by Mr. B. J. Gripper of Hertford, at the bottom of his garden opposite Mac-Mullens' Brewery.³² It came to light when the R. Lea was being dredged, in an area that was then subject to flooding.³³ No other objects seem to have been recovered from there subsequently.

Description

An iron sword with blade, tang and pommel complete (PL. XXX, B). The length overall is 89 cm. The tapering blade measures 75.1 cm. with a fuller on each face. Below the guard is an area prepared for an inscription, the letters of which decrease in height from 2.8 cm. to 2.00 cm. and are made of twisted billets of metal. Some of the letters are now virtually impossible to discern, but the inscription seems to read: *LEVT[ER] FECIT* (FIG. 54).

The other face of the blade has a similar panel decorated with what appears to be a central lozenge and two terminal triangles (FIG. 54). X-ray photography carried out at St. Albans Museum has shown that the blade is not pattern-welded.

The guard is straight and flat, 13.2 cm. long, and rounded off at either end. Like the pommel it does not appear to have been decorated. The pommel itself is a flat semicircle of metal. The end of the tang is beaten out slightly over the pommel to secure it and, beneath, there is a gap between the tang and its slit in the pommel, indicating a space for the grip which would probably have been of leather or wood.

The sword is now somewhat pitted. It has at some time been cleaned chemically, since there is no corrosion. The blade is slightly bent in two places with a crack running from edge to fuller, some two-thirds of the way down.

²⁹ Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, exhibition catalogue, *Van Friezen, Franken en Saksen* (1959), item 135b.

³⁰ I have not attempted a complete list of ‘cosmetic brushes’, but several additional bronze examples are given by J. Werner, *op. cit.* in note 24, and S. C. Hawkes, *Med. Archaeol.*, II (1958), 36. W. Veck, *Die Alamannen in Württemberg* (Berlin, 1931), 259, Taf. 31, 2, from Gultlingen, looks like another gold example.

³¹ I should like to record my gratitude to Mrs. L. E. Webster, Dept. of Medieval and Later Antiquities at the British Museum; Professor D. M. Wilson, Dept. of Scandinavian Studies, University College, London, for answering my questions about the inscription; Miss V. I. Evison, Birkbeck College, London, for help with the typology.

³² N.G.R. TL 32551280.

³³ O.S. 6 in. map, 2 ed., 1899, Hertfordshire. Mr. Gripper died in 1924. As the map shows the river in an undredged state it may be assumed that the sword was found between 1900 and 1924. The sword is now owned by Mr. Gripper's great-nephew, who has generously allowed it to be examined at Verulamium Museum, St. Albans, through the kind offices of Mr. A. G. Davies, curator of Hertford Museum, where it is now on loan.