

A DECORATED BRONZE DAGGER OF ARRETON DOWN TYPE FROM THE THAMES NEAR BOURNE END*

By A. M. APSIMON.

THE dagger which is the subject of this paper was found in the River Thames in November, 1950. It was dredged from 8 feet 6 inches of water, about 400 yards below Bourne End railway bridge. It has been placed with the Thames Conservancy Board Loan Collection at Reading Museum (accession no. 101 : 50). The writer is indebted to the Board and to W. A. Smallcombe Esq., B.Sc., F.M.A., F.I.I.C., Director of Reading Museum, for allowing him facilities to examine and publish this dagger and that described in an addendum to this paper.

The dagger blade is complete except for breaks where two of the rivets have been torn away and for superficial damage caused by the dredge. It is of long ogival form, almost rapier-like, with a stout but broad and rounded midrib (length when complete 9.4 inches = 22.8 cm., width across heel 1.9 inches = 4.8 cm.). Parallel to the curved margin of the blade run two broad grooves, leaving a sharp raised rib between them. These grooves, evidently cast, show that the dagger was made in a two-piece mould. The inner of these two grooves carries four incised lines which run together (leaving about 1/16 inch gap) at the midline about two inches short of the point. Just discernible on the actual specimen are the 'stitch' marks left by the tracer with which these lines were worked.

The triangular heel was fastened to the hilt by three stout squarish-section bronze rivets, of which only one remains. The hilt was presumably of wood or horn as bronze hilts are very rare in Britain. The mark left on the heel by the hilt is straight, with a semicircular opening across the midline. The base of the blade is decorated with hatched triangles or 'vandykes' as shown in the illustrations (see pl. I and IIa). This decoration seems to have been made with the aid of a narrow-ended tracer or punch whose blade was held at an obtuse angle to the surface of the dagger, each blow producing a wedge-shaped impression where the corner of the tool was driven into the surface.

It is hoped that reference to the discoveries mentioned below will serve to give some idea of the date of the weapon and of the factors which appear to have had a bearing on its form and decoration.

FORM

Most like this dagger is a specimen—indeed almost identical—from the Arreton Down hoard¹, while three others from the Moon's Hill

*See, in general, *Annual Report of the Institute of Archaeology*, 1953, p. 37 ff.

¹Franks, A. W., Notes on Bronze Weapons found in the Isle of Wight, *Archaeologia* XXXVI, 326, pl. XXV, 6.

hoard², also in the Isle of Wight, are nearly as close. Less exact parallels may be found among ogival daggers from Wessex Bronze Age graves in Southern England.

Outside England the best resemblances in respect of shape are to be found among Irish ogival daggers. These are normally distinguished by their having a broad rounded heel (occasionally more 'spade'-shaped) with two or four rivets. In particular, we may cite an unlocalised Irish dagger³ which, though lacking the hatched triangle decoration, is remarkably similar in shape to the Bourne End dagger, even agreeing in having three rivets as against the even number more usual in Irish ogival daggers.

Another Irish dagger, though differing from the Bourne End specimen in the form of its heel, may indicate a derivation from Swiss ogival daggers (compare *Raftery* 1951, fig. 134⁴ with the dagger from Broc Grave II, Kt., Freiburg⁵).

The origin of this dagger-form may be seen among East Mediterranean weapons, in particular some from Minoan Crete⁶. In Europe, ogival daggers, dirks, and short swords, are widespread from Northern Italy through Switzerland and the Rhineland to N.W. Germany and Scandinavia. Of all these, the most like the Irish daggers are those from Switzerland. These would appear to have been developed out of the local Early Bronze Age types as a result of the influence of the Minoan-Mycenaean daggers mentioned above⁷. In all cases, these daggers appear in local early tumulus-burials in contrast to the flat graves of the Early Bronze Age.

DECORATION

The hatched-triangles which decorate the heel of the Bourne End dagger are rarely found on English daggers. Among those from Arreton Down and Moon's Hill are examples with a band of incised lines crossing the base of the blade. A stray bronze dagger found at Hungry Bentley in Derbyshire⁸, which is decorated with hatched-triangles, is, though rather shorter and broader in proportion, reasonably close to the Bourne End dagger in general type. A three-

² Sherwin, G. F., A Second Bronze Hoard of Arreton Down type found in the Isle of Wight, *Arch. Journ.* XXII, 199.

³ Coffey, G. *The Bronze Age in Ireland*, 1913, fig. 56, 2.

⁴ Raftery, J. *Prehistoric Ireland*, 1951, p. 141, fig. 134.

⁵ Kraft, G. Die Stellung der Schweiz innerhalb der bronzzeitlichen Kulturgruppen Mitteleuropas, *Anzeiger f. schweiz. Altertumskunde*, XXIX (1), 1927-8, 8, Taf. V, 4.

⁶ Evans, *Palace of Minos*, I, 195.

⁷ Cf. a grave group from Austria (Statzendorf). This provides one of the very few three-riveted ogival daggers from Europe. It has a triangular heel but lacks the rapier-like blade of the Bourne End dagger. An associated bulb-headed pin like that from the celebrated Wessex dagger grave of Camerton (Somerset: *Archaeologia* XLIII, p. 169) suggests that here we may have a clue to the origin of the Wessex Grave variant of the ogival dagger. See *M.A.G.W.*, LXVII, 1937, p. 277, Abb. 1-3.

⁸ Childs, V. G. A Bronze Dagger from Hungry Bentley in Derbyshire, *J. Derbysh. Arch. & N.S. Soc.*, new series XV, 29.

riveted dagger from Woodnook, Wakefield, Yorkshire⁹ (with a round heel like that from Snowhill, Gloucester¹⁰) has a blade not unlike the Bourne End specimen although the resemblance to the Irish ogival daggers is more pronounced. The Woodnook dagger is decorated with three rows of hatched-triangles (set slightly concave towards the point) whose arrangement and execution suggest that they are something of an after-thought. Another ogival dagger from Suffolk¹¹, with a faint midrib and broadly bevelled edges, has a heel decorated on both sides with vandyking and incised bands.

A small square-tanged dagger from Helsington¹² Peat Moss, Westmorland, is decorated with coarse vandykes and a band of cross-hatching that have Irish affinities. Finally, a dagger from the Thames at Richmond¹³ has similar decoration, but in form is quite unlike the dagger under discussion.

Several Irish ogival daggers of the variety already mentioned are decorated in the same manner, though normally in a bolder style¹⁴. Stray specimens of this type also occur in Scotland¹⁵ and in Yorkshire¹⁶. As decoration of this kind is also found very commonly on Irish axes and spearheads, we may conclude that the Bourne End dagger shows Irish influence in both shape and decoration.

Hatched-triangles are admittedly quite common on the daggers and halberds of the Central European Early Bronze Age. These are all very unlike the dagger under discussion. This fact, coupled with the relative scarcity in England—as compared with Ireland—of similarly decorated daggers, and the complete absence of this form of decoration on Wessex daggers of the earlier or *Bush Barrow* type, makes it unlikely that the Bourne End dagger can have been influenced *directly* by the decoration of the continental types just cited.

DATING

Both the Arretton Down type of dagger and the European ogival daggers appear at about the same typological stage, associated with similarly developed types of flanged axe and the first socketed spearheads. These belong to the transition phase between Early and Middle Bronze Ages in Central Europe (Reinecke A2/B1). If the dating of *circa* 1450 B.C. for the beginning of the full Middle Bronze

⁹ Newall, F. *Barrow 85 Amesbury, Wilts. Arch. Mag.* XLV, 448 (list no. 57).

¹⁰ Greenwell, W. Recent Researches in Barrows, *Archaeologia* LII, 70.

¹¹ From Undley, Lakenheath. *Evans Coll.*, Ashm. Mus. (no. 1927-2347, Prigg Coll.) length, 121 mm.

¹² Evans, J. *Ancient Bronze Implements*, 1881, p. 246.

¹³ *B.M. Guide to the Antiquities of the Bronze Age*, 2nd ed. 1930, p. 30, fig. 9.

¹⁴ (a) Coffey, G. *op. cit.* fig. 56. (b) *Do.*, *New Grange*, 1912, fig. 95.

(c) Wilde, W. R. *Catalogue of Museum of Royal Academy of Ireland*, Dublin 1857-62, fig. 324, no. 62; figs. 344, 347. (d) Evans, J. *op. cit.* p. 246, figs. 308, 310.

¹⁵ Anderson, J. *Scotland in Pagan Times, the Bronze and Iron Ages*, 1886, p. 176, fig. 179.

¹⁶ Elgee, F. *Early Man in N.E. Yorks.*, 1930, Pl. X, fig. 7.

Age (Reinecke B2) supplied by the celebrated amber spacer-beads from Kakovatos (Elis, Peloponnese)¹⁷ is accepted, then it seems to follow that the first appearance of the socketed spearhead in Central Europe cannot be later than the beginning of the 15th century B.C. For the same reasons the life of the developed type of Unetiče flanged axe with pointed butt should come to an end about then. As these axes appear to be the prototypes of those in the Arreton Down group of hoards, and as the Arreton Down type of spearhead appears to be influenced by the early Central European spearheads, the earliest of the Arreton Down hoards can hardly be much later than the beginning of the 15th century B.C.

Our attempt to date this group of hoards—and with them the Bourne End dagger—leads us then to the earlier part of the 15th century B.C. In a wider sense we may see this dagger as the product of a flourishing insular bronze industry, whose smiths were mainly either of Irish training or extraction, and whose customers demanded daggers with the latest continental fashion in blade form, combined with a style of hafting familiar from its first introduction on the daggers of their 'Beaker' ancestors perhaps two centuries previously.

I am indebted to Mr. T. L. Gwatkin of Reading Museum for the drawings of the Bourne End dagger; to Professor Childe and Mr. Leslie Alcock of the National Museum of Wales for information and photographs in respect of the Woodnook dagger; and to Miss L. F. Chitty for additional information about the Helsington and Lakenheath daggers. My thanks are also due to my friend Mr. George C. Boon of Reading Museum for the photographs and other help.

ADDENDUM: NOTE ON A BONE DAGGER FROM THE THAMES NEAR STAINES.

The dagger described below was dredged from the Thames at Fishing Temple Point between Staines and Laleham in October, 1954. It has now been placed with the Thames Conservancy Board's Collection in Reading Museum (accession no. 62 : 54). The condition of this object, which is made from a long bone is a strong argument in favour of its being of ancient date. The bone has assumed the dark colouration characteristic of the material when it has been in the river for a very prolonged period, and there is also a small area of calcareous accretion near the pommel, which would militate against a very recent origin. The surfaces of the specimen exhibit scorings and scratches which are consistent with the use of flint tools in manufacture, there being nowhere any indication of a metal instrument having been applied.

Thus reassured we may proceed to enquire what metal prototype—for there obviously was one—the maker had in mind. The shape and proportions of the blade (5.75 inches long, 1.75 wide at heel) and hilt (3.75 inches long) correspond very well to those of

¹⁷ Von Merhart, G. *Germania* XXIV, 1940, p. 99.

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