K88

This gold pommel cap displays three-strand bands of beaded wires laid out to form interlace motifs on all four panels (shoulders and sides). Each panel is edged by a border composed of a broader outer beaded wire inside which lies a finer beaded wire, Figure 2b. No plain wires have been used on this artefact. As in the case of K21, the filigree decoration has been soldered onto a flat backing plate.

Most wires are heavily worn, which does not allow accurate observation of the original shape of the beads and therefore makes identification of the beading tool more difficult. Yet, from what has been said previously in the case of all other artefacts, it seems that a grooved ‘beading file’ was used. Evidence for this includes the presence of a medial seam on most wires, the asymmetrical shape of some beads (Figure 2c right, finer wire), the regular spacing and lack of gaps and the rounded shape of beads when still preserved. The bead diameter varies between ca. 0.6 mm and 0.75 mm for broader wires, with up to ca. 0.95 mm and 1.05 mm in diameter for the broadest wires on the edge of the base of the pommel (Figure 2c), and between ca. 0.2 mm and 0.3 mm for finer wires. The distance between beads varies between ca. 0.33 mm and 0.37 mm for broader wires and between ca. 0.18 mm and 0.2 mm for finer wires. The broad and fine beaded wires used as borders and edges also show distances in these ranges, indicating the use of a grooved swage with one single gauge for all broad wires and one single gauge for all finer wires.

Stress cracks can clearly be seen on the very broad wire with short bead spacing (Figure 2c right) and on various areas of the base sheet. This cracking is due to the heavy deformation caused to the metal and is typical of silver-rich gold alloys⁶ (Meeks 2011).

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⁶ The sub-surface analysis of various components of K88 including beaded wires, the cap and the base sheet have shown that the silver concentration ranges from 34 to 39 wt% in the alloy (Blakelock 2014: 58).
Figure 2b. SEM BSE images of sword pommel K88 showing the interlace decoration made of three-strand bands of beaded wires and the panel borders composed of one broad wire and one fine wire (fields of view ca. 15 mm).

Figure 2c. Photomicrograph (left: field of view ca. 9 mm) and SEM BSE image (right: field of view ca. 2.5 mm) of sword pommel K88 showing the angular and tightly beaded broader wire edging the base of the pommel.