

ART. III.—*The Salta Moss rapier*. By JOHN M. COLES,
Ph.D.

Communicated at Carlisle, July 8th, 1960.

IN the spring of 1957 a bronze rapier was found by Mr Donald Kenney during the ploughing of a field at Edderside, near Maryport. The exact location of the find is not known. The rapier lay about 10 in. from the surface of the ground and was in two pieces when found, as well as lacking the extreme tip of the blade. Mr Kenney has presented the rapier to Tullie House Museum, Carlisle (Accession no. 93 — 1959).¹

In its present form the rapier is 17½ in. long, while the missing point would probably have added another 2 in. to its length (Plate I and fig. 1). The blade now is just over 13 in. long, with the typical straight sides of a rapier, and with double convex section; there are faint traces of bevelled edges. The blade has been bent slightly, possibly during its recovery. The unusual feature of the weapon is its cast hilt; this is 4½ in. long, with a concave base outline and two false rivets just above the hilt-blade junction. There is a roughly oval pommel, and a collar midway along the grip. In section the hilt is double convex with fairly steep sides. The false rivets are not equally spaced, one on each face being slightly nearer the blade than the other. The pommel too is irregular. The weapon has been cast in one piece, unlike some of the leaf-shaped swords of the Late Bronze Age, which have a hilt with or without pommel cast onto a normal sword blade with riveted tang.²

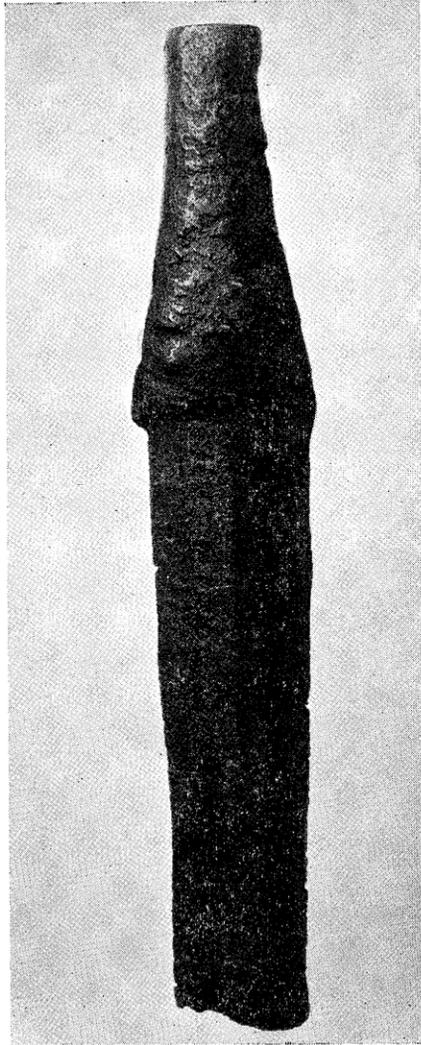
¹ I am indebted to Mr Robert Hogg, B.Sc., F.M.A., Keeper of Archaeology and Geology at Tullie House, for his assistance and for the photograph of this rapier.

² River Cherwell, Oxford; Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements*, 1881, fig. 349. Leadburn, Peebles; National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, DL42.



SALTA MOSS RAPIER
(Tullie House Museum).

facing p. 16.



CUMBERLAND RAPIER
(British Museum).

An object of such unusual form as the Salta Moss rapier would generally be considered as a freak production, an unique and momentary type. Yet of considerable interest is the fact that another rapier of practically the same form, the only duplicate known at present, also has a Cumberland provenance. This second rapier was found before 1870, and is published here for the first time (British Museum 70. 10-13. 1).³ The register at the British Museum states that the object was purchased from Bryce M. Wright of Great Russell Street. It came from the sale of the Crosthwaite Museum at Keswick,⁴ but no other information is known. It does not appear in Miss M. C. Fair's list of swords and daggers from Cumberland and Westmorland.⁵

This object is also incomplete, having lost its pommel and most of the blade, yet it is unmistakably of the Salta Moss type (Plate II and fig. 1). At present, it is 8 in. long, and in general dimensions probably was originally slightly smaller than the Salta Moss rapier. The blade is now 5 in. in length, and has a lozenge section with a distinct angle at the midrib; no bevelling of the edges is discernible. The hilt again is cast in one piece with the blade, and is slightly more rounded than the Salta Moss hilt. Two very irregular false rivets appear on each face, set more or less in line, and a thin collar appears immediately above these bumps; the surface of the hilt is badly pitted and it is difficult to decide if this collared effect extends for more than the $\frac{1}{8}$ in. at present clearly visible. Presumably the hilt has lost a good proportion of its pommel end, although the slight thickening seen at the present butt may represent the approaching swelling of the actual

³ With acknowledgement to the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish and for the photograph; my thanks are also extended to Mr John Brailsford, Assistant Keeper in the British Museum, for his assistance, and to Dr Joseph Raftery of Dublin, Mr Laurence Flanagan of Belfast, Miss Jean Macdonald of London, Professor C. J. Becker of Copenhagen, and Miss Bridget Wilson of Edinburgh.

⁴ It was described in the sale catalogue of 7 April 1870 as "bronze upper part of sword, cast solid hilt, length 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches" found in Cumberland.

⁵ CW2 xlv 34 ff.

pommel knob. In addition, several small holes can be seen in the centre of both faces, but their function, if intentional, is not clear, unless they are the surviving traces of some sort of hilt plate. The base of the hilt is concave, but not as evenly curved as in the Salta Moss specimen; indeed, one face has two more or less straight lines intersecting to form an obtuse angle, while the other face shows a deeper and less regular concavity.

While no exact parallels for these Cumberland rapiers seem to exist, some objects from Northern Europe as well as Britain are sufficiently close in idea to enable a fairly precise chronological position to be established for the type. The distinctive features of the Cumberland rapiers for comparative purposes are the two (false) rivets and the slightly concave line of the hilt where it meets the blade proper. A number of knives or dirks with single concave or straight hilt bases are reported from Sweden, Denmark and North Germany. The Swedish examples are dated to period II, and include the small sword from the Visingö barrow, Lake Vättern.⁶ Dagger blades with concave outline for organic hilts are also known from the area.⁷ The Danish finds are well documented, and include deeply concave hilt bases on blades from Flynder Sogn and Nordlige Jylland;⁸ these are dated to period II, as is the dagger from Guldhoj which has a base-line only slightly concave, rather like that of the Cumberland rapier.⁹ A tanged blade from Buddinge has a concave hilt plate with three rivets.¹⁰ Some swords of the following period have single concave hilts, and are contemporary with the more elaborate triple concave sword hilts.¹¹

The scimitar from Viby, Kr. Kopenhagen, has a hilt base like that of Salta Moss, and dates well back in

⁶ Montelius, *Swedish Antiquities*, 1922, no. 908; also no. 1002 of Period III.

⁷ Montelius, *op. cit.* no. 897.

⁸ Broholm, *Danmarks Bronzealder* ii, 1944, pl. 13, 1 and pl. 13, 8; also see *Danske Oldsager* iii, 1952, no. 70 — Tirslund, Brorup.

⁹ Broholm, *Danmarks Bronzealder* ii, pl. 14, 7.

¹⁰ Broholm, *op. cit.* i, 1943, 44, grav 183.

¹¹ Broholm, *op. cit.* pl. 25, 1 and 5.

period II.¹² The form survived into period IV in Denmark, and several of the miniature swords have straight hilt bases, including those from Gryderup and Vimose.¹³ In North Germany, comparable objects are also known, as for example the dagger with two-rivet straight-based hilt from Stargordt, Kr. Regenswalde.¹⁴ From Liesbüttel, Kr. Rendsburg, a long rapier with two-rivet butt has traces of a straight-based organic hilt plate,¹⁵ and a concave bronze hilt with three rivets occurs on a short dagger from Herslev, Finderup,¹⁶ distinct from the omega hilted blades of the same Early Bronze Age.

But a grip from a dagger or rapier found in a barrow at Tarbek, Segeburg, appears to bear the closest continental resemblance to the Cumberland rapiers. This has a straight-line junction of hilt and blade, and two rivets in the expanded portion of the hilt.¹⁷ The shoulders are more abruptly curved than on the Salta Moss rapier, and the hilt is decorated with horizontal grooving; above the shoulders is a third rivet set in the grip proper, yet even with these differences of detail, the basic similarity is striking. Found with this object were a knob-headed pin, a small decorated spearhead, a narrow palstave and a sword handle assigned by Kersten to his period IIA of the nordischer Kreis. The well-known Liesbüttel find (distinct from the rapier from the same location, noted above), also of this early period II, contains a dirk with bronze handle which is distinctly concave at the blade base, and which has four rivets.¹⁸ This, however, lies much closer to the Cumberland rapiers than

¹² *Acta Archaeologica* vii, 1936, 304, fig. p. 305; also see *Nordiske Fortidsminder* I 72, fig. 1 and pl. xv, Langstrup, Zealand, knife.

¹³ Broholm, *Danske Oldsager* iv, 1953, fig. 13, 14; see also Holste, *Die Bronzezeit in Süd- und Westdeutschland*, 1953, taf. 19, Niedermockstadt.

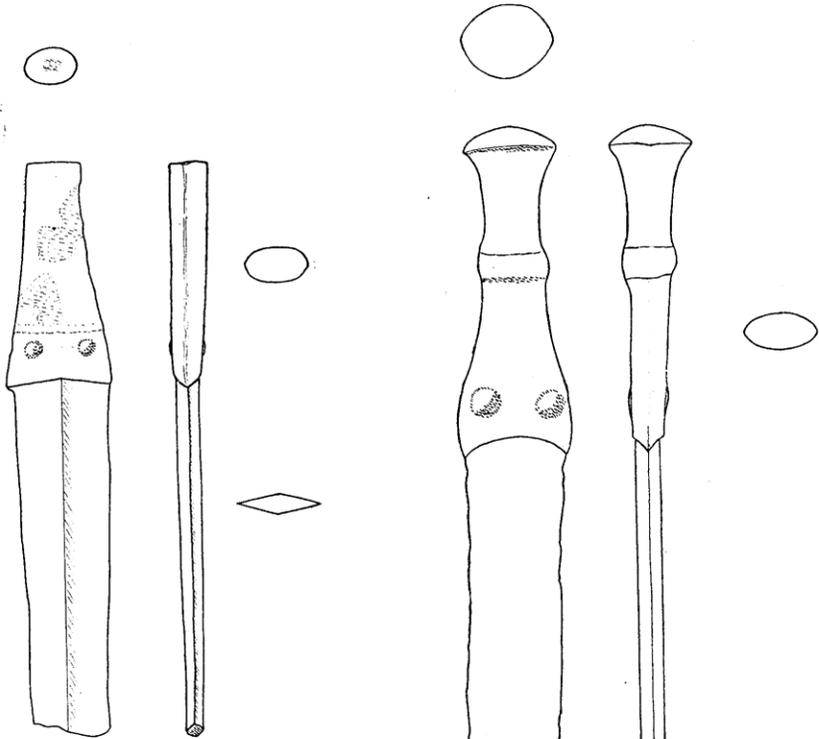
¹⁴ Kersten, *Die Funde der älteren Bronzezeit in Pommern*, 1958, taf. 84, no. 767.

¹⁵ Hachmann, *Die frühe Bronzezeit im westlichen Ostseegebiet . . .*, 1957, taf. 17, 10, no. 197.

¹⁶ Hachmann, *op. cit.* taf. 18, 3, no. 118.

¹⁷ Kersten, *Zur älteren nordischen Bronzezeit*, 1936, taf. xiv, 155, no. 79.

¹⁸ *Mainzer Zeitschrift* xxix, 1934, pl. ix, 1; also J. D. Cowen, *Proc. Preh. Soc.* xiv, 1948, 233.



SALTA MOSS — right
 CUMBERLAND — above



jmc

do most of the North European swords and daggers with their triple concave or lunate hilt bases.¹⁹ Its associations include a British basal-looped spearhead, whose occurrence in the North is evidence of contact between Britain and Northern Europe at this time.

Closer to north-west England there are a number of objects from both England and Ireland which appear to be related to the Cumberland rapiers. One is illustrated by Evans, from Belleek, Co. Fermanagh;²⁰ this has two bronze rivets and provision for others in the very slightly concave hilt line, and the knobbed effect at the end of the hollow handle is like that on the Salta Moss rapier, although less exaggerated. Another Irish blade, this a dagger, has an openwork handle including two false rivets and slightly concave base.²¹ The false rivets and concave base are also seen on the Arreton Down socketed spearhead²² which is closely matched by the Sporupland, Jutland, spearhead, found with a Northern grip-tongue sword and chape of Broholm period II.²³ The Omagh, Co. Tyrone, moulds for similar spearheads should also be noted here.²⁴ Other Irish relations are suggested by the horn handle on the rapier from Galbally, Co. Tyrone;²⁵ this was originally attached by four rivets, but the outline of the hilt and its concave base are close in form to that of the Salta Moss rapier. Probably the most important comparable object from Ireland is the rapier from Shower, Co. Tipperary;²⁶ this too has a one-piece horn handle, slit to receive the blade butt, but the concave shoulder line and the two rivets point to a similar origin for this

¹⁹ E.g. Broholm, *Danske Oldsager* iii, 1952, fig. 23.

²⁰ Evans, *op. cit.*, 1881, fig. 292.

²¹ Vallancey, *Collectanea*, 1784, vol. iv, pl. xi, fig. 4; also in Evans, *op. cit.*, 1881, fig. 293.

²² *Later Prehistoric Antiquities . . .*, 1953, fig. 10, 3.

²³ Forssander, *Der Ostskandinavische Norden während der ältesten Metallzeit Europas*, 1936, 222; Broholm, *Danmarks Bronzealder* i, 1942, 93, grav 806.

²⁴ *J.R.S. Ant. Ireland* xxxvii, 1907, 181 ff.

²⁵ Evans, *op. cit.*, 1881, fig. 319.

²⁶ *N.M. Ireland* 1934: 5604.

organic attachment and for the metal-hilted Cumberland rapiers.²⁷

In general, however, the simple concave base-line occurs on British and Irish dirks and rapiers alongside triple concave lines, so this feature alone cannot be employed as a limiting date for the Cumberland rapiers. The dirks and rapiers from Battersea, Harlech, Moville, Co. Donegal and Co. Antrim,²⁸ all with two rivets, are more or less contemporary with triple-arched or omega hilted weapons such as those from Sandford Oxford, Newcastle, Mortlake, Drumcoltran and River Erne.²⁹ A number of dirks and rapiers of slightly later date (typologically) have simple concave butt-bases; this includes the weapons from the Thames at Wandsworth and Hammersmith, Maentwrog, Lisburn,³⁰ an example from the hoard at Wallington, and one from the reputed hoard at Callander, Perthshire.³¹ However, the most valuable comparison for the Salta Moss and Cumberland rapiers occurs in the Blackrock, Sussex, hoard.³² In this hoard there is a cast hollow hilt for a dirk blade with slightly concave mouth and two rivets; the butt is formed by the expansion of the grip with provision for an oval-headed pommel pin. The more rounded shoulders and the decoration, as on the Tarbek handle, show a greater sophistication, yet the tradition and basic form remain in the Salta Moss and Cumberland rapiers.

The Blackrock hoard has recently been discussed by

²⁷ These are unconnected with the West European hollow metal-hilted swords with triple concave base outline; Holste, *Germania* xxvi, 1942, 4 ff., abb. 2, of which about five examples are known from Britain and Ireland, e.g. Evans, *op. cit.*, 188r, figs. 290 and 291; Coffey, *The Bronze Age in Ireland*, 1913, fig. 60.

²⁸ B.M. WG1700, Ashmolean 1927/2357, N.M. Ireland 1880:29, Belfast 483-1937 respectively.

²⁹ B.M. WG1253, WG1682, WG1704, N.M. Edinburgh DJ30, N.M. Ireland 1897:168 respectively.

³⁰ London Museum A2013, O1304, B.M. 68. 8-5. 17, Belfast 183-1913A respectively.

³¹ N.M. Edinburgh DQ323; there is no evidence to sustain the view that these objects, two rapiers, an asymmetrically looped and leaf-bladed spear-head and a typologically late socketed axe, were found together.

³² C. M. Piggott, *Proc. Preh. Soc.* xv, 1949, 107 ff.; *Inv. Arch.* GB47.

M. A. Smith³³ and dated by its objects of North German inspiration to periods III and IV of the Northern Bronze Age. Its British forms are consistent with a date of *circa* 1,100 B.C., falling technologically within the Middle Bronze Age.³⁴ The chronological horizon for the Salta Moss and Cumberland rapiers thus seems to be limited to this final Middle Bronze Age phase in Britain.

Across the Solway, the Glentrool hoard provides further evidence of industry and imports of this period, prior to the arrival of the full Late Bronze Age industry.³⁵ The hoard contains, *inter alia*, a side-looped pin duplicated in North Germany,³⁶ and a basal-looped spearhead of the type which was traded from Britain to Northern Europe; one appears in the Liesbüttel find mentioned above. Two side-looped pins of the Glentrool type have been found in Ireland,³⁷ showing that the area around the Irish Sea must have been a collecting region for objects of North German derivation. Also entering here are the British representatives of the Hademarschen type socketed axe of North Germany, dated to periods III or IV.³⁸ The main distribution of these in Britain lies in the Somerset region,³⁹ but the Solway area has yielded two of the type,⁴⁰ and the Bishopsland, Co. Clare, hoard also contains one of these.⁴¹

Glentrool is also related to the Somerset hoards and thereby to Northern European contacts by its twisted bronze torc,⁴² and by its tanged knife which is duplicated

³³ M. A. Smith, *Proc. Preh. Soc.* xxv, 1959, 159 ff.

³⁴ M. A. Smith and A. E. Blin-Stoyle, *Proc. Preh. Soc.* xxv, 1959, 188 ff.

³⁵ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scotland* lv, 1920-21, 13, 29-37.

³⁶ Janssen, *Die Verbreitung der Bronzenadeln mit seitlicher Ose*. *Præhist. Zeitschrift* xxvi, 1935, 208, abb 5 and 7.

³⁷ British Museum 91, 4-20, 5; Ashmolean Museum 1927/2853.

³⁸ Sprockhoff, *Niedersachsens Bedeutung für die Bronzezeit Westeuropas*. Bericht. R-G Kommission xxxi, 1941, taf 59, 3, map 113.

³⁹ Hodges, *Studies in the Late Bronze Age in Ireland*. *Ulster Journal of Arch.* xix, 1956, 32.

⁴⁰ Annan, Dumfries, N.M.A. Edinburgh DE80: Temple Sowerby Westmorland, Carlisle Museum 235, somewhat atypical.

⁴¹ O'Riordain, *Proc. Preh. Soc.* xii, 1946, pl. xiii, 12.

⁴² Kersten, *op. cit.*, 1936, 36 ff., Form 2.

in the Monkswood, Somerset, hoard.⁴³ The Glentool and Bishopsland hoards, and the other finds noted, show the existence during the final phase of the Middle Bronze Age of a distinct area centred around the Irish Sea which received imports and ideas, some direct from Northern Europe and some via Somerset. While the Salta Moss and Cumberland rapiers appear to be local, possibly Irish, productions, their ultimate inspiration lies in Northern Europe, and they must be dated to the centuries around 1,100 B.C.

⁴³ *Archaeologia* lxxi, 1921, 138. pl. xi, 3.