

FIG. 1.
NEAR CORBRIDGE ($\frac{5}{8}$).
BLACK GATE MUSEUM.



FIG. 2.
EJSING, WEST JUTLAND ($\frac{1}{4}$).
COPENHAGEN MUSEUM.

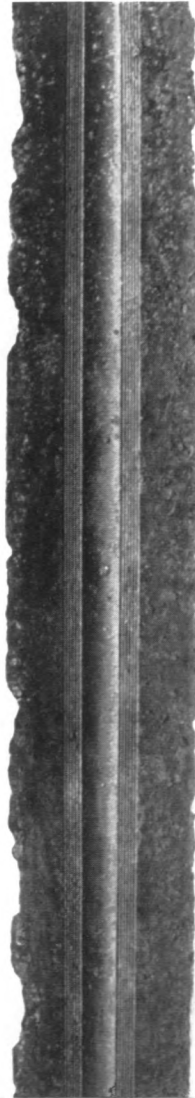


FIG. 3.
DETAIL OF FIG. 2 ($\frac{5}{8}$).

XIII.—FRAGMENTS OF A BRONZE SWORD IN THE BLACK GATE MUSEUM.

By J. D. COWEN, M.A.

In the society's museum are two fragments of a bronze sword of quite exceptional interest. It is unfortunate that their provenance is not better attested. Nevertheless it is claimed that the evidence is sufficient to establish at least a *prima facie* case for a local provenance, and in this belief it seems worth while to draw attention to a discovery which is of more than local interest and has hitherto entirely escaped notice. (Plate XIV, fig. 1.)

The pieces to which attention is invited have recently been recognized as fragments of a sword of uncompromisingly Scandinavian origin, and if the fact of their discovery on this side of the North Sea is accepted, they must take an important position as evidence of continental relations towards the second half of the Bronze Age in northern Britain. The type is a Danish one, of no great rarity, and under Sophus Müller's classification falls within the fifth of the six subdivisions which are to be distinguished in the first half of the Danish Bronze Age.¹ In this type is embodied and is most clearly seen the tendency of the period to a delicacy of treatment and refinement of detail previously unknown to the Scandinavian worker in metal. In Müller period IV the austere handling of the decoration had produced an effect of solid strength; in period V for the first time may be observed a quality of luxuriousness

¹ *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (1909), pp. 88-99. French trans. in *Mém. Soc. Roy. Ant. du Nord* (1908-1913), esp. pp. 106-112.

which by comparison with what preceded it may almost be called effeminate. The period is one of great wealth and variety, both in manner and material, and it remains one of the classic periods for Scandinavian bronzes. The date, according to Müller, of his period IV is the end of the second millennium, of period V the beginning of the first. Our fragments appear, for what the observation is worth, to fall rather towards the beginning than the end of period V, so that a date round about 1000 B.C. will be perhaps as near as we can get on present information.

Through the great kindness of Dr. J. Brøndsted, of the Copenhagen Museum, we are in a position to illustrate the finest example of the type yet found on Danish soil. (Plate XIV, fig. 2.) It was recovered from a barrow in Ejsing parish, in West Jutland, and is now in the national collection at Copenhagen.² Comparison with the Newcastle fragments will make it unnecessary to labour the identity of type. (Plate XIV, fig. 3.) Such an arrangement of midrib and flanking lines is not to be found in any other class of bronze sword, and we may take it as established that the fragments under discussion must have been manufactured somewhere in the South Scandinavian area, probably in Denmark.³

What is less certain is the immediate provenance. The sole evidence for the find is contained in a passage on the page of *Addenda et Corrigenda* to the *Northumberland County History*, vol. X, Corbridge: "The Black Gate Museum at Newcastle contains two fragments of a leaf-shaped sword-blade, found near Corbridge along with pieces of Bronze Age pottery, and presented to the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries by Mr. Joseph Forster. The

² The hilt and upper part of the blade of this sword are illustrated by Sophus Müller, *loc. cit.*, p. 108, fig. 96. So far as the writer is aware no view of the whole sword has previously been published.

³ It is a pleasure to acknowledge the writer's obligations to Dr. Brøndsted not only for the photograph here reproduced, but for confirmation of the Danish origin of the piece, and for its precise classification under Müller's system. In a recent letter Dr. Brøndsted recognizes the fragments as native to Denmark, and accepts them as such without qualification.

fragments are coated with green patina and are respectively three and three and a quarter inches long. They belong to a sword-blade having a maximum breadth of one and three-quarter inches, with a slightly rounded midrib having parallel lines on either side, and date from the end of the Bronze Age." As a formal description of the fragments this may be accepted as accurate, except that so far from being pieces of a leaf-shaped blade, they are undoubtedly from a sword-blade with straight sides; and that, by a slip, the measurements given as three and three and a quarter inches, should read four and four and a quarter inches.

For this statement no authority is quoted, and no other reference to the fragments, either printed or in manuscript, is known to the writer. Prolonged search has failed to bring to light the original memorandum from which the passage was written up;⁴ indeed it appears very probably to have been destroyed.

In the circumstances we can only subject our sole item of evidence to such examination as we are able to bring to bear. In the first place, it is a bare statement of fact, for which, after considerable efforts, no support can be produced. Further, it has proved impossible to trace the time at which, and the circumstances under which, these objects were given to the society. On the contrary, on the one occasion when a Mr. Joseph Forster did present a piece of Bronze Age pottery from Corbridge, no mention is made either of a sword or of bronze fragments of any kind. So far, then, as the museum registers and donation lists go, they are without a provenance. Granted that, there is just the further possibility that they may have come direct from Denmark to the Black Gate collection in modern times; this collection has more than once been the recipient of gifts of Danish material.

⁴ In this connection the writer gratefully acknowledges the assistance he received from Miss M. Hope Dodds, the present editor of the *County History*, and from Dr. H. H. E. Craster, who edited the Corbridge volume. The note quoted above was actually written by Mr. Parker Brewis, and to him the writer is particularly indebted for an extensive search among his MS. collections.

Against these arguments may be urged the undoubted presence, record or no record, of the fragments in the Black Gate. It is known that at one period the books of the society were very imperfectly kept, and these are by no means the only objects whose appearance in the collection is unrecorded and unexplained. Again, the Danish gifts are well authenticated, and their contents at all events reasonably described; they consisted of two small collections respectively of stone implements and of fragments of pottery, and in no case is there mention of any metal fragments, such as would surely have been made had so unusual an item formed part of the gift.

So that in so far as the museum records are concerned it may fairly be said that we are left with no reason either to accept or reject any suggestion of a local provenance. We are faced, then, with the statement in the *County History*; and as to this it is impossible not to believe that so unequivocal and circumstantial a statement, specifically inserted into a list of Addenda, can only have been based on evidence equally circumstantial. That we cannot actually put our finger on that evidence is the weakness of our case, for we can form no judgment of its reliability. There is, however, one source as yet unmentioned; it is not only a possible source, but in view of what has been said above it seems to be the *only* possible one. Mr. Brewis had full access to the papers of canon Greenwell, and it is his own suggestion that his statement was based on a manuscript note he had found in that quarter. The suggestion fits in well with the appearance of the passage in the Addenda, as an afterthought. It is the only reasonable explanation of the facts, and at no single point does it conflict with our evidence. If this view is the correct one, and to the writer it appears more than probable, the information preserved in the note in the *County History* may be relied on absolutely. The passage of time serves only to increase Greenwell's reputation for accuracy.

It appears, then, that we may accept for these Scandinavian fragments the provenance here propounded,

subject always to a certain reservation in the cause of absolutely unqualified certainty.

It has seemed advisable to examine the question of provenance in some detail, since the case under discussion is the only example of the kind known to the writer. For several other similar specimens a local origin has been claimed, but in each case the claims can be proved to be unfounded. It may, therefore, be useful briefly to review the position of these other examples.

In the British Museum are the remains, very much broken, of what has been a fine sword of this type. It was formerly in the Brent collection, and is labelled "Possibly from Kent." The Brent collection did not, however, consist solely of local material, but contained a considerable number of foreign pieces. No presumption of local origin, therefore, arises, and the presence of a Scandinavian sword in this quarter cannot be accepted as evidence of an English provenance.⁵

In the Yorkshire Museum, York; there is a specimen of a sword of this character. It came to the museum with the Kendall collection, and, though unlabelled, it was for that reason at one time thought to be a local find, Kendall being a local collector working the Pickering district. Examination of Kendall's methods, however, proved that he was in the habit of exchanging "duplicates" with collectors on the other side of the North Sea, and the presumption collapsed.⁶

And finally, it is not very long since the late Dr. Walther Bremer recognized in the Dublin Museum certain fragments of Scandinavian bronzes, including a sword (though not of this kind), a palstave, and a sword-pommel. They are noticed in Bremer's paper "Ireland's Place in Prehistoric and Early Historic Europe,"⁷ where they are quoted as constituting evidence of a cultural backwash upon

⁵ The writer is indebted to Mr. R. L. Jessup for confirmation of this point.

⁶ *Ex inf.* Mr. Parker Brewis.

⁷ A posthumous English translation of his essay *Die Stellung Irlands in der Vor- und Frühgeschichte Europas*, 1926.

Irish shores, proving the superior strength of continental influences during the latter half of the Bronze Age. In Dr. Macalister's foreword (*ibid.*, p. 3) attention is further drawn to the fact of Bremer's discovery, and the addition of a "new chapter" to Irish prehistory is claimed. To the great kindness of Dr. A. Mahr, of the Dublin Museum, the writer owes not only photographs of the pieces in question but also copies of the relative entries in the museum register, from which it appears that in no case is there any suggestion of a recorded provenance. It will not, surely, be maintained that bare presence in such an institution as a national museum, even an Irish one, implies an origin in the country where the museum may happen to be situated. Bremer's general position, Dr. Macalister's "new chapter" may be, in themselves, unexceptionable; it is not on evidence like this that their validity will be proved.

Before leaving this topic of the evidence for relations with the opposite coast of the North Sea at an early period we cannot refrain from again mentioning the fragments of Danish pottery of the Passage-Grave period found at Seaton Carew near West Hartlepool, often quoted in this connection, and recently republished in this journal.⁸ These, too, are in the Black Gate; and so is a perforated axe-hammer from the Wear at Sunderland claimed by Montelius as an import from Scandinavia,⁹ though in view of the common occurrence of the type in Britain in what would appear to be a vernacular setting,¹⁰ it is difficult to accept the statement without further explanation. For another local stone axe in our collection a Scandinavian origin has more than once been suggested, and though no precise parallel has yet been brought forward the idea is echoed in the latest and most authoritative publication of the piece.¹¹ Of relations with our

⁸ Prof. V. G. Childe, *Arch. Ael.* (1932), 4, IX, 84 (with full bibliography).

⁹ *Archiv für Anthropologie*, XIX, 17.

¹⁰ Cf. *Archæologia*, LXXV, 77 seqq.

¹¹ Mr. Parker Brewis, *Northumberland County History*, XIII, pp. 15-16.

neighbours overseas in this direction from a very early period there is no lack of evidence, and additions to it are continually being made.¹² So that there is nothing inherently improbable in the discovery of a Danish sword blade in the neighbourhood of Corbridge, and every fresh discovery of Scandinavian material in this country goes to support the attribution here advanced.

¹² See especially Mr. Reginald A. Smith in *Pro. Prehistoric Society of East Anglia*, 1918-19, vol. III, part I, pp. 14 *seqq.*