

XIV.—MUSEUM NOTES, 1972*

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1. A CARPENTER'S AXE FROM THE COLLEGE VALLEY.

Fig. 1

Early medieval tools are not well represented in the museum collections of our region. The Museum of Antiquities is thus fortunate in the acquisition of a T-shaped iron axe-head (Acc. No. 1972.1) found on the site of a new plantation about 800 m to the north-east of the farm of Southern Knowe in the College valley (NT 894253). Thanks are due to Mr. Robertson of Hethpool both for his speedy reporting of the find and for presenting it to the Museum.

The axe is heavily corroded but traces of the wooden haft still remain in the socket. Its narrow blade, which is slightly curved, is some 20 cm in length and the distance from the cutting edge across the narrow shank to the butt is approximately 18 cm.

This type of axe had a long life in the medieval period, both in Britain and on the continent.¹ Contemporary illustrations show that it was a carpenter's tool rather than a weapon: it appears frequently in late Saxon manuscripts²

* Prepared for the press by D. J. Smith. Grateful acknowledgments are accorded to the contributors.

¹ For representative continental illustrations of this tool see *British Museum Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities* (1923), fig. 109, and S. C. Cockerell, *Old Testament Miniatures* (1969), fol. 2v. For a (?) ceremonial example from Denmark see P. Nørlund, *Trelleborg* (1948), pl. XXXVI and p. 136.

² E.g. I. Gollancz, *The Caedmon Manuscript* (1927), pp. 54, 65, 82 and 87; F. Stenton, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (1957), fig. 25; D. P. Kirby, *The Making of England* (1967), pl. 23.

and, both here and on the Bayeux Tapestry,³ it seems to be used for trimming work. A similar function is indicated by depictions in English manuscripts and sculpture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴ Only Pictish sculpture offers alternative suggestions for the use of these tools: on one slab a man defends himself with an axe against an attacking animal whilst on other stones they are carried by a centaur and bird-headed men.⁵ Yet these illustrations must reflect a very specialised, even eccentric, market and the weight of the British evidence suggests that these were carpenter's tools.

A more precise dating within the medieval period is not easy. In part this is because, though a number of these axes have survived,⁶ few have come from such well dated contexts as those from Late Saxon St. Neots or twelfth-century Winchester.⁷ Wilson has recently reviewed the evidence for the pre-Norman period and concludes that the exaggerated T-shape was a development of the eighth or ninth centuries:⁸ it is certainly present in the two northern hoards from Crayke and Hurbuck which belong to the Late Saxon period.⁹ Ward-Perkins suggested that the type dropped out of use in the fourteenth century¹⁰ and it is probably signifi-

³ F. Stenton, *op. cit.*, pl. 38 and p. 66.

⁴ W. O. Hassall, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (1954), fo. 7 and 7v; W. H. St. John Hope, "The imagery and sculptures of the west front of Wells Cathedral", *Archaeologia* LIX (1904), pl. XXV.

⁵ J. R. Allen and J. Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), figs. 6a, 48a and 311b. These axes need not be local products; see A. C. Thomas, "The interpretation of Pictish symbols", *Arch. J.* CXX (1964), 52.

⁶ R. E. M. Wheeler, *London and the Vikings* (London Museum Catalogues, no. 1, 1927), 24ff; J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Medieval Catalogue* (London Museum Catalogues, no. 7, repr. 1954), 58. For an example from York see D. M. Waterman, "Late Saxon ... finds from York", *Archaeologia* XCVII (1959), fig. 5.

⁷ T. C. Lethbridge and C. F. Tebbutt, "Huts of the Anglo-Saxon Period", *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.* XXXIII (1933), fig. 3; B. Cunliffe, *Winchester Excavations 1949-1960*, I (1964), fig. 54.

⁸ D. M. Wilson, "Anglo-Saxon carpenters' tools", *Studien zur Europäischen Vor- und Frühgeschichte* (ed. M. Claus, 1968), 144-6.

⁹ *Victoria County History of Durham* I (1905), 214; T. Shepherd, "Viking and other relics at Crayke, Yorkshire", *YAJ* XXXIV (1939), 273-81.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* (note 6).

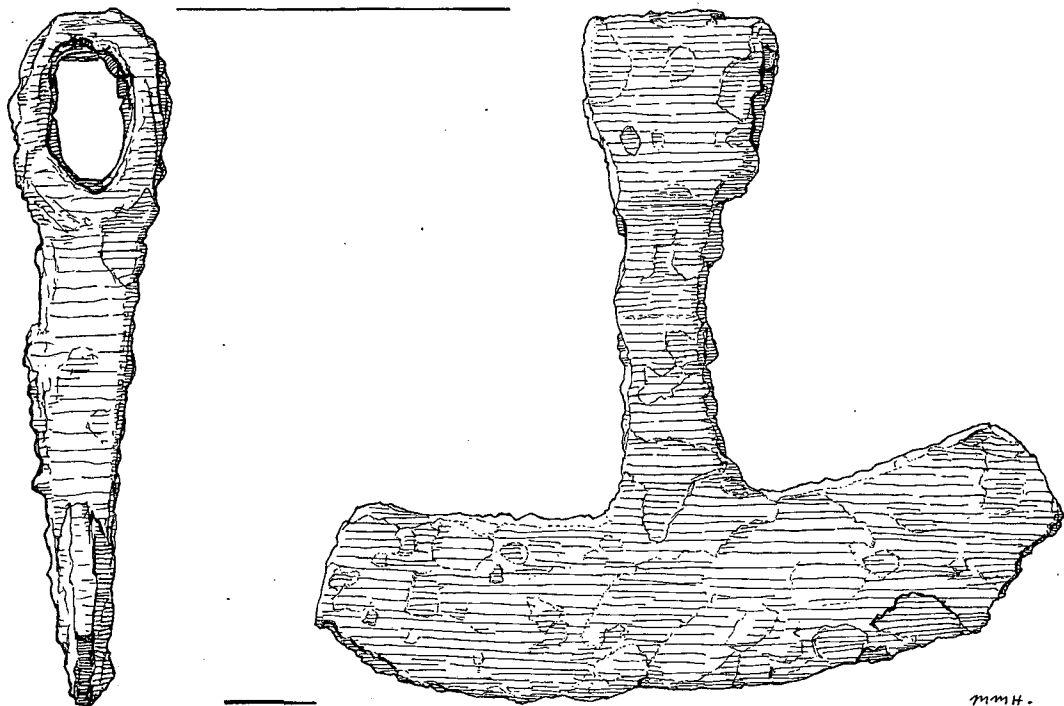


FIG. 1. AXE FROM THE COLLEGE VALLEY. SEE NOTE 1
Drawn by Mary M. Hurrell

cant that it does not appear among the mass of tools shown in the two fifteenth-century manuscripts reproduced by Salzman.¹¹ However, although a date between the eighth and fourteenth centuries is the most likely, it would be dangerous to ignore the possibility of a later persistence of this type of axe in a conservative region.

RICHARD BAILEY

2. NEW STONE AXEHEADS FROM THE KIELDER AREA. Fig. 2

The two ground and polished stone axeheads recorded in this note were found 2 ft 6 in apart at Bells Burn, Kielder (NY 592943), on March 19th, 1970. The site is on the Roxburghshire side of the border. The circumstances of discovery have been briefly noted by Mr. Brian Long elsewhere (Univ. of Newcastle upon Tyne, Arch. Newsbulletin for North'd., Cum'd., and Westm'd., 12 Sept. 1971). The implements were found on the open fell slopes during ploughing for tree planting, half embedded in the heavy clay which underlies 6 in of turf and poor peaty topsoil in this area.

The smaller axe, no. 1 (Fig. 2) was found on the upturned turf, though its impression could still be seen in the clay, while the larger implement, no. 2, was still fast in the clay. Neither axehead has been petrologically examined. The larger example, no. 2 (Fig. 2), has been presented to the Museum of Antiquities (1971.9), and the smaller one remains in the possession of Mr. Long.

(a) *The smaller axehead* (Fig. 2, 1)

In most respects this example is of a fairly common form, the sides tapering gently to a rounded butt, the cross section being a flattened, pointed oval in shape. The sharp edge of

¹¹ L. G. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1450* (1952), pls. 13 and 19.

the blade is continued along the sides and round the butt, a line broken only by a small pointed oval facet at the end of the butt. The faces retain the lines of quite marked grinding facets, which have not been completely obliterated in the final finishing work. The face illustrated is a discoloured buff-cream colour, which extends into the numerous irregularities which scar the axe. It is smoother and more polished

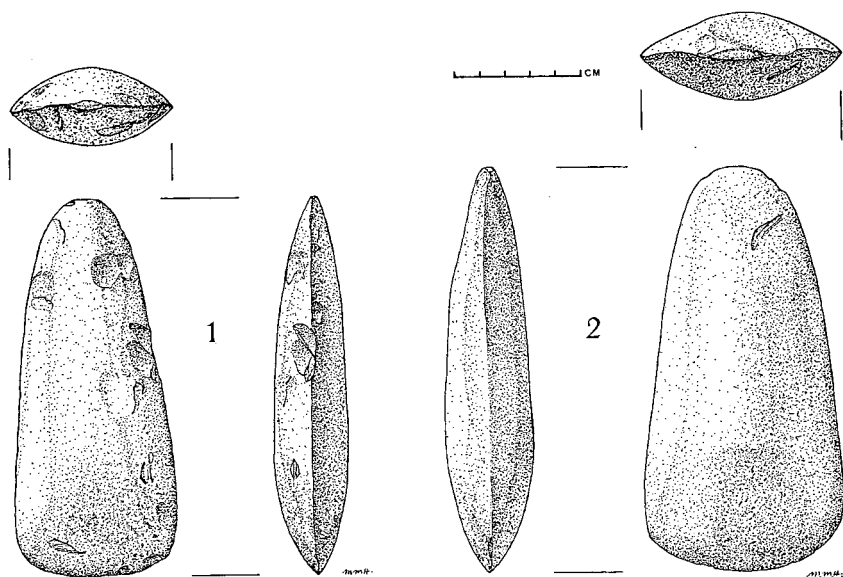


FIG. 2. AXEHEADS FROM THE KIELDER AREA. SEE NOTE 2
Drawn by Mary M. Hurrell

than the other face, which is of a much paler cream colour and, though still smooth, is covered with fine striations.

One or two irregularities suggest recent damage, and these reveal a dark grey, fine-grained rock underneath the creamy surface patina. The length of this specimen is 149 mm, it measures 60 mm across the cutting edge, and has a maximum thickness of 29 mm.

(b) *The larger axehead* (Fig. 2, 2)

This is of a broader, rather heavier form than the smaller example, but in its general character resembles the latter closely. It has a similar pointed oval section and, more important, has the same distinctive sharp edge continuing from the blade along the sides and round the butt, where it is broken by a small, pointed oval facet. It differs from the smaller axehead in that the sharp edge is blunted for a length of 50-60 mm along both sides, just where the hand fits when the implement is held. It is generally smoother than the smaller axehead, but is of a similar dirty buff-cream colour, with dark grey, fine-grained rock showing in recent surface scars. Traces of grinding facets are much fainter than in the case of the smaller implement. Its length is 161 mm, it measures 76 mm across the cutting edge, and has a maximum thickness of 35 mm.

These axeheads surely constitute a pair, showing the same surface colour and treatment, and general form, notably the continuous sharp edge broken by a tiny butt facet. They provide an important addition to the scanty finds of ground and polished stone implements known from North Tynedale.

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3. THE AESICA AMULET AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE. Pl. XXIII, 1

Magical amulets occupy a special place in glyptic studies in that their primary purpose was not ornamental, nor were they designed as seals. The intaglio form can be misleading because although, as in the case of the gem under discussion, intagli might be set in rings and used as orthodox signets, their primary purpose was "to defeat the evil demons and

dynameis. The amulets may present an evil force like Hecate, chained and made subject to the wearer: they are more likely to present the good god militant, ready to drive away the forces which hurt men."¹²

The idea of signet-rings and gemstones having certain magical properties was not unknown in the West. Special properties were assigned to particular materials by both Greeks and Romans.¹³ Furthermore the choice of subjects for signets was not made at random; deities protected their devotees, and both Medusa-masks and *combinations* had an apotropaic significance.¹⁴ Magical or "gnostic" amulets are different from these and are specifically the product of Egyptian and Levantine speculation about the Universe. They introduce us to concepts alien to the Western mind, and when they are found in the Latin-speaking provinces of the Empire they may be taken to imply the presence of Egyptians, Syrians, Jews or other orientals in the neighbourhood.¹⁵

¹² E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* II (New York, 1953), 248.

¹³ E.g. Pliny, *N.H.* XXXVII, 124 (amethysts which prevent drunkenness); *ibid.*, 139-42 (agate: various properties, according to appearance). Cf. C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Michigan, 1950), 3. It is observable that amongst Roman gemstones certain materials are preferred for particular subjects (for example, chalcedony for Jupiter-Zeus, bloodstone for Sol-Helios, red jasper for *combinations*).

¹⁴ On choice of subjects, M. Henig, "The veneration of Heroes in the Roman Army", *Britannia* I (1970), 249-65; A. Blanchet, "Recherches sur les 'grylles', à propos d'une pierre gravée", *Revue des Études Anciennes* XXIII (1921), 43-51; ed. Stöhlin, "Paedagogium", *Die Griechische-Christlichen Schriftsteller* (Leipzig, 1905), 111, cap. ix, 59, 2; also cf. C. W. King, *Antique Gems and Rings* (London, 1872), 329-30 (Clement of Alexandria's advice to Christians on devices to put on signet rings); Bonner, *op. cit.*, 5-6.

¹⁵ G. Sena Chiesa, *Gemme del Museo Nazionale di Aquileia* (Aquila, 1966), 418-9; she believes that even those found at Aquileia, which had a well established gem-cutting industry, were imported from the East. G. Grimm, *Die Zeugnisse Ägyptischer Religion und Kunstelemente im Römischen Deutschland* (Leiden, 1969), 19-20, no. 10, pl. lxxii (Trier). G. C. Boon, *Roman Silchester* (London, 1957), 126-7 (Silchester). R. P. Wright, "A Graeco-Roman Amulet from a Romano-British site at Welwyn, Herts.", *Antiq. Journ.* XLIV (1964), 143-6 and pl. xlii. Also note gold lamellae, *RIB* 436 (Segontium), *RIB* 706 (York), *Britannia* I (1970), 305, no. 1 (Woodeaton). Grimm, *op. cit.*, 129-31, no. 13 (Krefeld-Gellep), 172-3, no. 67 (Cologne), 219, no. 134 (Lauingen). Also others of silver, e.g. *ibid.*, 212-3, no. 128 (Badenweiler).

The Aesica amulet is a bloodstone (heliotrope).¹⁶ It is oval in shape, and has a flat upper surface, 12 × 9 mm, and a bevelled edge (lower surface 15 × 12 mm). The gem is c. 2.5 mm thick, and is set in a silver ring of a well-known third-century type.¹⁷ The upper surface shows a figure with a cock's head, legs composed of two serpents, and the body of a Roman soldier in a cuirass and tunic. In his left hand is a round shield and in his right a whip. He is depicted frontally but faces left. There is no inscription by which the anguipede may be identified, but analogous gems bear the legend "Iao" in Greek characters.¹⁸ This word, the name of the Hebrew God, may have been inscribed on the reverse of the stone which is, of course, hidden by the ring; such was the case of the bloodstone from Silchester which also shows the anguipede on its obverse.¹⁹ Names such as Adonai, Sabaoth, Elohim, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and, above all, Abrasax (Abraxas), also of a predominantly Jewish character, occur on gems which depict the anguipede, but "Iao" is seldom excluded.²⁰ Goodenough is surely right that this was the name of the figure.²¹

Confusion has been caused in the past by the fact that "Abraxas" had a place in the Gnostic system of Basilides as the ruler of the 365, i.e. heavens.²² However, "in view of the complexity of the system ... it can hardly be said that this ruler of the 365 heavens occupies a dominating position

¹⁶ *PSAN* 2 VI (1895), 241, no. v, calls it a green jasper; however, flecks of red are apparent. Pliny, *N.H.* XXXVII, 165, writes "*causa nominis, quoniam delecta in vas aquae fulgorem solis accidentem repercussu sanguineo mutat ...*"

¹⁷ Cf. R. E. M. Wheeler, *Lydney Park* (Society of Antiquaries, 1932), 82 and fig. 16, nos. 53-5.

¹⁸ Grimm, *op. cit.*, 19-20, no. 10; Bonner, *op. cit.*, 134 and nos. 162-4, 166-9, 173, 175-6; A. Delatte and P. Derchain, *Les Intailles Magiques Gréco-Egyptiennes* (Paris, 1964), nos. 3-9, 11-15, 18, 20-22, 24-25, 27-30, 32.

¹⁹ Boon, *op. cit.*, 126-7.

²⁰ Bonner, *op. cit.*, nos. 162-3, 166-7, 169; Delatte and Derchain, *op. cit.*, nos. 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29, 33; Goodenough, *op. cit.*, 246-7, figs. 1079-80, 251, figs. 1090-91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 250-1. Bonner, *op. cit.*, 134-5, holds that "Iao" was merely a word of power like "Abraxas".

²² Cf. C. W. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains* (2nd ed., London, 1887), 245-79.

in it, and later writers, such as Jerome and the author of the little treatise *Adversus omnes haereses* ascribed to Tertullian, are scarcely within their rights when they call 'Abraxas' the highest god, or the all-powerful god, in the system of Basilides."²³ In fact the word "Abraxas" has an isopsephic significance, in that the letters of which it is composed can be read as numerals which add up, in this case, to 365, the number of the days which compose the solar year.²⁴

The solar nature of the image seems to be beyond question. Cocks are birds of light, and according to Pausanias they were sacred to the sun.²⁵ The central part of the figure is derived from representations of Helios-Sol, who invariably holds a whip.²⁶ The serpentine legs remind us of Chnoubis,²⁷ a serpent with a leonine head surrounded by rays, of the Egyptian Uraeus, and of the snake mentioned in a passage of Macrobius: Asklepios is "the healing power (like the snake) from the substance of the sun coming down to the souls and bodies of mortals ... the serpent with its acutely piercing and vigilant eye imitates the nature of this star".²⁸ The choice of heliotrope as the vehicle of the type is also important. Goodenough sees "no reason for doubting that the anguipede itself, since it was chiefly identified with Iao, was made primarily by and for Jews, and was tremendously popular with them", in Roman times.²⁹ The

²³ Bonner, *op. cit.*, 133.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 134. Goodenough, *op. cit.*, 250-1, states that the Hebrew word for such a term was a *gematria*.

²⁵ *Paus.*, 5, 25, 9; cf. Bonner, *op. cit.*, 127.

²⁶ J. Curle, *A Roman Frontier Post and its People: the Fort of Newstead* (Glasgow, 1911), 333 and pl. lxxxvii, fig. 35, for Sol wearing a tunic on a gem from Newstead.

²⁷ A magical amulet depicting Chnoubis set in a third-century lead ring has recently been found in a grave at Constanta: *Pontica* IV (1971), 303-9. I owe this reference to Dr. D. J. Smith.

²⁸ Goodenough, *op. cit.*, 247; Macrobius, *Sat.* I, xx, 1-5.

²⁹ Goodenough, *op. cit.*, 250. However he goes on to say, p. 251, "if the anguipede may be taken to be presumably Jewish in origin, one cannot, merely on that account, suppose that every amulet on which it appears is probably Jewish, any more than it can be assumed that the Helios in the synagogues of Beth Alpha and Naaran indicates that these buildings were constructed by and for Greeks ..."

Aesica amulet may well have been worn by a Jew. Certainly Iao is not the traditionally aniconic Deity associated with Rabbinic Judaism, and if "Gnosis" is taken as secret knowledge, he could even be termed "Gnostic". However, in the world of late Antiquity, the desire for weapons with which to combat malignant forces affected both Jew and Gentile. "The Jew wanted immediate use and benefit of the power of his God, and these amulets represented that power, made it accessible."³⁰ If we accept the Jewish attribution here and at Silchester some light is thrown on the origins of Christianity in Britain, for in the first instance this will have spread through the Jewish diaspora.³¹

Alternatively, the device would certainly have had an appeal to a Mithraist, who was not too strict in his attitude to religious iconography. Bonner, indeed, illustrates an amulet showing on the obverse the famous tauroctony, and, on the reverse, the anguipede.³² Another stone which depicts Iao has the word "Mithras" engraved on the reverse.³³ The possible connection of the stone with the Mithraic cult was suggested (in passing and without any substantiation) in the original publication of the hoard.³⁴ In Persian belief, the cock was the creature of Ohrmazd, who "heralds the new-born light and awakening life".³⁵ The snake appears to have been regarded as a beneficent power, connected with the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

³¹ Jews are attested in Cologne by a rescript of December 11th, A.D. 321, addressed to the decurions of that city. This permits Jews to be drafted on to the municipal council; cf. Theod. Code, 16, 8, 3. For Jewish gold glass, Goodenough, *op. cit.*, 112 and fig. 975 (Menorah); F. Neuburg, *Ancient Glass* (London, 1962), 93=F. Fremersdorf, *Die Denkmäler des Römischen Köln VIII* (Cologne, 1967), 203-7, pl. cclxxv-cxciii (Old Testament scenes); W. H. C. Frend, "The Christianization of Roman Britain", 46-7, in M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson, *Christianity in Britain 300-700* (Leicester, 1968), cites Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae* 10 (31, 20-21) for Aaron, a Christian martyr from Caerleon (the name is, of course, hebraic).

³² Bonner, *op. cit.*, 264, no. 68.

³³ Goodenough, *op. cit.*, 250 and fig. 1088.

³⁴ *PSAN* 2 VI (1895), 244. Note a silver tessera from Verulamium, "which combines Mithra's name with that of the Persian supreme deity and of the Egyptian sun-god, P-Re"; Bonner, *op. cit.*, 39, and R. E. M. Wheeler, *Verulamium* (Society of Antiquaries, 1936), 221-2 and pl. LXVIA.

³⁵ L. A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden, 1968), 36.

element of fire.³⁶ It must be emphasised that Iao is *not* Mithraic, but a simple soldier might well have found it hard to distinguish between Lion-headed Kronos and some other partially zoomorphic power.³⁷

Naturally, there are other possibilities. To what cult did the owner of the villa at Brading on the Isle of Wight belong? Here we see a mosaic showing a man with a cock's head, a house, a ladder and two griffins. It does not seem that this pavement and the others which were laid at the same time are either Jewish or Mithraic.³⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible that there was some sort of connection between the cock-headed man and the solar anguipede.

MARTIN HENIG

4. EARLY POTTERY FROM DUNSTANBURGH CASTLE. Fig. 3

Some years ago, when the material from the excavations carried out in 1930 at Dunstanburgh Castle³⁹ was given to the Society, one noted that the native pottery was missing from the collection. At that time the Society's museums were in process of reorganisation, and a more optimistic view that this pottery had merely become divorced from the main body of the material could therefore not be substantiated. I am indebted to Miss Barbara Harbottle for the ultimate resolution.

Seventeen sherds form a separate entry (1956.12) in the Register of Accessions of the Museum of Antiquities and include that most interesting item, "a sherd of native pottery with finger-impressions", mentioned but not illustrated in the first report. As could be anticipated, the fact that this

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 348-53, pl. vii, no. 103, pl. xi, no. 316, pl. xii, no. 326, and pl. xvi, no. 665. The amulet depicted by Delatte and Derchain, *op. cit.*, no. 35, indeed shows Iao with a lion's head. Note also *ibid.*, no. 36 (head of a dog), nos. 37-8 (head of an ass).

³⁸ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain* (2nd ed., London, 1963), 202, no. 197, pl. 231.

³⁹ *A.A.*, XIII (1936), 279ff.

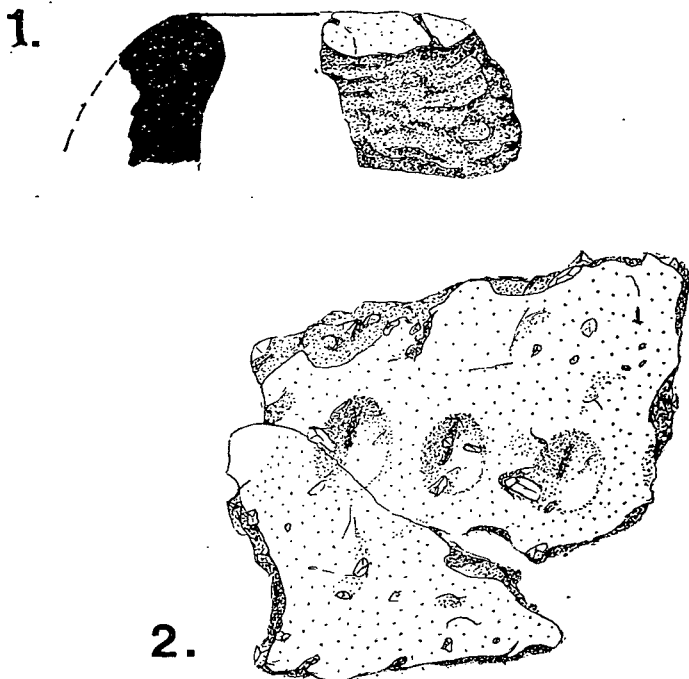


FIG. 3. POTTERY FROM DUNSTANBURGH (1:1). SEE NOTE 4
Drawn by T. G. Newman

sherd was earlier than the Roman material from the site had not escaped the vigilance of Professor Gordon Childe⁴⁰ and subsequently it appeared as "Hallstatt" in the limpid yet impelling prose of Dr. Douglas Simpson.⁴¹ At the time this was indeed the only sherd of this nature recorded from the county and, at best, one of a few possibilities north of sites such as Scarborough in Yorkshire.

The total collection as it now stands represents at most five vessels and includes only one rim sherd. Presumably the majority of these came from the hearth in Area I on the east side of the site (some are marked T1 or T2, i.e. almost

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁴¹ *A.A.*⁴, XXVII (1949), 1ff.



Fig. 1. The Aesica Amulet. see note 3.
Photo: C. M. Daniels.



Fig. 2. Intaglio from Corstopitum.

certainly Trenches 1 and 2). The rim fragment, which is unmarked and not mentioned in the original report, is apparently incurving and diminishing slightly in width from a thicker walled vessel to a rounded rim (Fig. 3, no. 1). Such forms clearly have a long life hereabouts. By analogy with a sherd from the palisades at Huckhoe it could be as early as the fifth or sixth century B.C. (radiocarbon date 510 ± 40 B.C.)⁴² but similar rims have also been found in much later contexts in the area. The finger-impressed body sherd (Fig. 3, no. 2), together with another plain wall fragment presumably from the same vessel, are both some 12 mm thick and have buff/red surfaces and dark grey cores containing grits measuring up to 4 mm. They are marked T13 and, as the original report indicates, must have come from one of the later trenches in Area 3, put in around the high terrace on the west side of the site running between the Lilburn Tower and the inner bailey and marked off by "a broad curving bank running north and south" which at first sight looked like a "Roman earth-work". Sections through this bank showed it to consist of "loose stones and earth, ill compacted, without kerbing or ditch".

Finger-impressed pottery of any form in the area is still a rarity and the nearest parallels in wall decoration would be from Burradon, Northumberland.⁴³ But more southerly analogies might suggest a date at least as early as the sixth century B.C.⁴⁴ Be that as it may, this sherd in itself is almost sufficient to indicate the possibilities of structural evidence in the form of palisades, ramparts, or both, yet to be found at Dustanburgh in contexts much earlier than the Romano-British settlement which other finds imply. And, though later medieval defences can obscure, as on the equally prominent bastion at Tynemouth,⁴⁵ they may also by the very nature of common requirements suggest a possible line

⁴² *A.A.*⁴, XLVI (1968), 293ff.

⁴³ *A.A.*⁴, XLVIII (1970), 75, fig. 8.

⁴⁴ E.g. T. C. M. Brewster, *Excavations at Staple Howe* (1963); I. H. Longworth in "Round Barrows on Ampleforth Moor", *Y.A.J.*, 1970, 283ff.

⁴⁵ *A.A.*⁴, XLV (1967), 40.

for earlier protecting or defensive works. If this were to be the case at Dunstanburgh then a site of some nine or ten acres might result—a magnitude which is seldom achieved in these parts by pre-Roman fortified settlements. Moreover, such an early sequence leading through to a non-defensive Romano-British settlement would be one which is easily paralleled on many a site in the Tyne-Forth province.

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