

A LATE BRONZE AGE PIN FROM BRENTFORD

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SUMMARY

A "wart-headed" copper alloy pin found by the Thames at Brentford (TQ 17745 76655) in 1963 is found to be of the Late Bronze Age (probably Hallstatt B or tenth to eighth century B.C.) and to share affinities with similar pins from North Germany, Denmark and South Sweden. The cultural background of the pin is examined by discussing items from other parts of Europe that show analogies.

The pin is in the London Museum.

The pin (London Museum 64.50) was picked up early one morning in October 1963 by the water's edge at low tide on the north or left bank of the Thames at a spot (TQ 17745 76655) in front of the grounds of Syon House, Brentford. The place is a few hundred feet west of Old England, a location famous for Late Bronze Age, Iron Age and other finds.

The find was made during an underwater survey with aqualung equipment at an especially low tide. The author was present when Mr. George Southall, a member of the group, spotted the pin in dirty gravel by the water's edge and handed it over immediately. An authenticated find of this kind is welcome because so many of the Old England finds in museums are without information about circumstances of discovery.

This copper alloy pin (144 mm or 5.63 in long) has many features in common with Late Bronze Age (or "Hallstatt") pins from the Continent. Keywords that might be used to describe features for a systematic classification would include: *ball-headed, five-warted; biconical; plain, straight shaft of circular cross-section.*

The Continental analogues are first, and closest of all, the German and Danish *Warzenkopfnadeln* and, second, hollow-headed pins with holes instead of warts. The solid pins have a concentrated northern distribution while the hollow ones are generally more southern.

The Danish and German pins which show the closest analogies with the Brentford pin have been most conveniently described by H. C. Broholm.¹ The Danish pins often have bent necks² whilst the German ones tend to be straight-shafted with a round cross-section. One may note a greater variety in the Danish stem-sections which can be flat or square or triangular or rhombic, with frequent scored or punched decoration. The pins with "wart" heads of Brentford type tend to be earlier, being followed by an enlargement and cylindrical development of the warts at the expense of the head³ to create a cruciform effect. Danish scholars have remarked on the variety of the Danish types and have argued that once the type was imported it underwent several local developments.

E. Baudou in his highly systematic account of the Late Bronze Age in northern Europe⁴ lists the *Warzenkopfnadeln* from Denmark, Scania, Schleswig-Holstein and other parts of north Germany. He places them in "Period IV" (tenth and ninth centuries B.C. or Hallstatt B1 and B2) and "Period V" (eighth century or Hallstatt B3).



91

Scale: 1/1

He classifies these pins into two sub-classes: (a) those with bent necks (about 80–110 mm. long) which turn up in mainland Denmark, and the isles of Fünen, Seeland and Bornholm, as well as southern Sweden and Germany (Schleswig-Holstein). Some 32, from Danish graves, are datable, a few being “Period V” as above, and a few “Period IV”, though there are some difficulties in chronology. The grand total is around 149, nine being from Germany and ten from Sweden.

The other sub-class (b) of which the Brentford pin is a representative, are *straight-shafted* and generally longer than (a), being generally 150–170 mm. long. They have been found, besides in Denmark, in Germany on both sides of the Elbe, with a few examples further east, though still west of the Oder. The chronology is not as good as for sub-class (a) since only two dated finds could be noted, one from Holstein and one from Brandenburg. The suggestion is “Period V” though Baudou admits a case could be made for “Period IV”.

The Brentford pin thus can be said to have an origin, either in manufacture or style, which lay in an area between the Waal and the Oder. The matter can be left there but something should be said about the broader background of these pins, thereby revealing the strength as well as the frailties of stylistic trans-regional chronologies. This may be discussed by tentatively considering *hollow* ball-headed pins which have *holes* corresponding to the warts. These pins are found much further south.

The museum at Lausanne has many of these hollow-headed pins. One, from Corcelette⁵ has some of its holes in the head *garnis de perles en verre bleu*.⁶ If the holes represent lost, coloured beads of glass or “enamel” then it is possible to envisage the solid-warted pin from Brentford as a variant or even as an “imitation” produced by a simpler technique.

The Museum für Völkerkunde⁷ at Basel has 17 specimens of such pins which are said to be of the Urnfield or Early Hallstatt period or about 1200–800 B.C., being thus likely to be earlier than the German or Danish wart-headed pins. The Basel examples came from the shores of Swiss lakes;⁸ others come from neighbouring parts of France.

Such hollow pins, made by a *cire-perdue* process rather than by two-piece mould casting, sometimes have concentric groovings round the holes and sometimes the groovings exist without a hole.⁹

While it is suggested that the hollow-headed pins with perforations represent a tradition which is earlier than that of the wart-headed pins, it should be said that both types were components of a European culture which could house not only these pins but also the thistle-headed (or vase-headed) pins and those with biconical heads. A wart-headed pin from such a cultural context was found at Garlstorf (Kreis, Harburg) in North Germany.¹⁰

Perforated pins of this kind have occasionally been found in the early Terremare (IB) cultures of northern Italy. Gösta Sjöflund¹¹ discusses Únětice parallels and warns that analogues could be found at Alishar I in the third millennium B.C.

The most detailed account of the finding of two hollow-headed pins, with perforations in the head, is that dealing with a hoard found in 1949 in Gelderland Province in the Netherlands.¹² The pins were associated with a spearhead which G. Elzinga dates to the end of the Bronze Age, around 750–650 B.C. One of the hollow heads is globular while the other is biconical and not dissimilar to the Brentford one in silhouette. It is to be noted that, despite similarities shared with Swiss and French examples, there are quantitative and qualitative differences. It is also clear that the Dutch examples required the skill that goes with the *cire-perdue* process, whereas the Brentford pin could have been cast solid without elaborate techniques. It is important to note that the Gelderland pin could well be later than the Brentford one.

One should mention in passing a generally much earlier type of ball-head pin with a thin transverse hole running from near the top to near the junction of the ball with the stem. A variant has a horizontal or near-horizontal perforation and heads may be biconical rather than globular. They have been found in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Germany, France and Switzerland. Though they are nearer to the beginning of the Bronze Age than that of the Iron Age, they do continue well into the Hallstatt period. One was found at Tinsdahl in Holstein, territory of the wart-headed pin. Such examples are brought forward to show how diffused in time and distance a simple ornament type can be. Dating is difficult but they can be of the early Hallstatt period, i.e. the Late Bronze Age (c. 1000–750 B.C.).¹³

To summarise: pins with some sort of spherical head are known from throughout the Bronze Age of Europe. Their function can only occasionally be hinted at. The Brentford pin was inadequate and dangerous for holding a wool cloak together. Many pins of this kind could have been used for fixing coils or knots in hair. Only with some later pins, such as the plain ball-head pins of c. 600–400 B.C. (or Hallstatt D) from the area between the headwaters of the Danube and the Rhine, can definite correlation be found with female burials.¹⁴

The earliest “species” of the ball-head pin “genus”¹⁵ we can consider here is a solid plain head with or without transverse piercing. They range from Romania to the Midi and can be found in north Germany. They are a feature of the Únětice culture or contemporary cultures (c. 1900–1500 B.C.) or even earlier if recalibrations of some C14 datings are accepted. The transverse-hole type persisted, e.g. in Romania, to the end of the Bronze Age.

Next in time and overlapping in place and chronology with the transverse-hole type as well as the wart-head type is the “species” with a hollow head and holes instead of warts. These are mainly found in Switzerland and France, though specimens have been found in the Netherlands.

Finally, there is the wart-headed pin, a “species” that overlaps mainly in time with the hollow-headed pins but is generally a little later. Such pins are mainly from northern Germany, the Brentford pin being an outlier of this species or type.

It should be recalled that some bronze finds of approximately the same date were excavated at Brentford by R. E. M. Wheeler¹⁶ and it has been subsequently suggested that Old England was like an “Alpine Lake Village”. But a direct connection with Switzerland is discounted by most scholars and it is more appropriate to see the presence of a single wart-headed pin as an unremarkable example of the considerable relations across the North Sea that occurred in the Bronze Age. J. J. Butler has fully documented this.¹⁷

NOTES

- ¹ H. C. Broholm, *Danmarks Bronzealder*, Vol. 4: *Danmarks Kultur i den Yngre Bronzealder* (Copenhagen 1949), p. 49, and Plate 9, Figs. 1-4. Broholm gives fuller pictorial details and associations in the third vol. of his *Danmarks Bronzealder . . . Samlede Fund fra den Yngre Bronzealder* (Copenhagen 1946); 4th period, pp. 10, 21, 23, 45, 57; 5th period, pp. 88, 89, 97.
- ² The obtuse angle in the neck of the stem tends with time to become a right angle. Cf. Hugo Hoffman, *Die Gräber der jüngeren Bronzezeit in Holstein being Vor- und frühgeschichtliche Untersuchungen aus dem Museum vorgeschichtlicher Altertümer in Kiel* (Neue Folge) 2 (Neumünster 1938) e.g. Tafel II, No. 580, Tafel X, No. 665, and text pp. 4, 98. He notes that the angled pins from Holstein are "Montelius IV" (tenth-ninth century B.C.) in date and the straight ones "Montelius V" (eighth century B.C.).
- ³ As noted by Hoffman (see Note 2).
- ⁴ Evert Baudou, *Die regionale und chronologische Einteilung der jüngeren Bronzezeit im Nordischen Kreis being Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis: Studies in North-European Archaeology I* (Stockholm etc., 1960) pp. 77-78, 260-262, plate XVI, map 38.
- ⁵ No. 15352.
- ⁶ Adrien Colomb & Berthold van Muyden, *Musée cantonal Vaudois / Antiquités lacustres . . .* (Lausanne, 1896) plate XXII and p. 16.
- ⁷ All inventories under 1/2/12/08. For a more recently documented site see J. Speck, "Die spätbronzezeitliche Siedlung Zug- 'Sumf', Ergebnisse der Sommergrabung 1952" *Ur-Schweiz-La Suisse Primitive . . .* XVII, 3/4 (Basel, Dec. 1953) pp. 51-67, esp. Fig. 38 on p. 57.
- ⁸ e.g. Aimé Bocquet, *Catalogue des collections préhistoriques et protohistoriques* (Musée Dauphinois, Grenoble, 1969, text, and 1970, plates), Nos. 974, 982 (Plate 61). They are posited as Hallstatt A-B or Dechêlette Bronze IV.
- ⁹ See also F. Audouze and J.-C. Courtois, *Les Epingles du Sud-Est de la France . . . being Prähistorische Bronzefunde Abt. XIII, Band I* (Munich, 1970) pp. 33-34. These pins are Group M of these authors.
- ¹⁰ Cf. E. Sprockhoff, *Jungbronzezeitliche Hortfunde der Südzzone des nordischen Kreises* (Periode V) Bänder I and II, being *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum zu Mainz Katalog 16* (Mainz, 1950) I, pp. 227 and II, p. 131 and plate 19. His Kat. No 12 for period IV (1937) also furnishes other parallels, Cf. H. H. Jacob-Friesen in *Einführung in Niedersachsens Urgeschichte*, pt. 2 *Bronzezeit* (Hildesheim, 1963), pp. 326, 328 and Fig. 312.
- ¹¹ Gösta Säfvald, *Le Terremare delle provincie di Modena, Reggio Emilia, Parma, Piacenza*, being *Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom . . . VII* (Lund and Leipzig, 1939) pp. 177-180 and plate 58, Nos. 11 and 12; 61, Nos. 14, 15, 16.
- ¹² G. Elzinga, "Een bronsdepot op de Veluwe in de gemeente Heerde, Gelderland", *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, Jaargang 8 (Amersfoort, 1957-58) pp. 11-25.
- ¹³ For French examples with horizontal holes see H. Rolland, "Grottes sépulcrales des Alpilles à Saint-Rémy de Provence" *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française* XXX (Paris, 1933), pp. 368-369 and pl. III (p. 369), Fig. 1, a ring of wire goes through the perforation, as well as his "Quelques vases de Hallstatt I à Saint-Rémy de Provence", *Gallia* 4 (1946), pp. 316-320 and Fig. 1, No. 6. To this may be added G. Bailloud's "Note sur une épingle d'argent de la Lozère" *Bull. de la Soc. Préhist. Fr.* for Oct. 1956, LIII, fasc. 3 (Paris 1957), pp. 568, 570, 571 which has a distribution map; and for German occurrences, R. Hachmann, *Die frühe Bronzezeit im westlichen Ostseegebiet und ihre mittel- und südosteuropäischen Beziehungen . . .*, being *Beihfte zum Atlas der Urgeschichte im Auftrage des Direktors des Hamburgischen Museums . . . Heft 6* (Hamburg, 1957), Tables 55, 56 and pp. 212, 224, 227. V. G. Childe in *The Danube in Prehistory* (Clarendon, Oxf. 1928), Plate IX, No. A4 and p. 230, note 2, says that Unětice pins with almost vertically perforated heads are imitated in Danish passage-graves and that later specimens have hollow decorated heads. Cf. J. Schráníl, *Studie o vzniku kultury bronzové v Čechách* (Prague 1921), pp. 41, 45 for claims that the type is indigenous.
- The Romanian example with a near-horizontal perforation is from Baleni and can be anywhere between 800 and 500 B.C. See I. T. Dragomir "Le dépôt de l'âge de bronze tardif de Baleni", *Card R18e of Inventaria Archaeologica Romaniae*, Fasc. 4 (1967).
- ¹⁴ G. Mansfeld, "Späthallstattzeitliche Kleinfunde von Indelhausen (Kr. Münsingen)", *Fundberichte aus Schwaben*, New Series 19 (Stuttgart 1971), pp. 89-117.
- ¹⁵ This is a classification based on observed similarity, with no necessary implication of ancestry.
- ¹⁶ R. E. M. Wheeler, "Old England, Brentford", *Antiquity*, vol. III (1929), pp. 20-32 and plates I-V.
- ¹⁷ J. J. Butler, *Bronze Age connections across the North Sea . . . being Palaeohistoria*, vol. IX (Groningen, 1963) *passim*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have had the privilege of discussion or correspondence with several persons who must be exempted from complicity in any error of interpretation on my part: Colin Burgess (Newcastle); J. J. Butler (Groningen); Mary D. Crafter (Cambridge); G. Elzinga (Leeuwarden); Christopher F. C. Hawkes (Oxford); Marion Itten (Zurich); Jean Macdonald (Museum of London); Etienne Rynne (Dublin); Elisabeth Schmid (Basel).

Mr. George Manchester drew the pin. The University of Keele helped with small travel grants for the examination of parallels.

The Editors are extremely grateful to the Trustees of the London Museum for a grant towards the cost of publishing this article.