



# *The Archaeological Journal*

## Book Reviews



**THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE SPEARHEADS OF BRITAIN.** By Richard Davis, with a contribution by Jeremy P. Northover. Pp. xi and 337, Illus 138. Franz Steiner Verlag (Prähistorische Bronzefunde, Abteilung V, Band 5), 2012. Price: Euro 98.00. ISBN 978 351510 350 3.

Spearheads are among the most splendid objects of the British Bronze Age, yet they have been relatively neglected and this is the first detailed study for more than a hundred years. The book presents a corpus of the earlier spearhead types covering most of the British Isles from west Cornwall to Shetland, including the Isle of Man. The title is slightly misleading, however, since the contents are arranged in typological rather than chronological groups, so that a few looped spearheads dating to the Ewart Park phase of the Late Bronze Age are included, while unlooped spearheads of the Middle Bronze Age Penard phase are not.

The introduction covers the history of research, the chronological framework (including a few radiocarbon dates), sources, terminology, the history and development of the earlier spearheads in Britain based on the author's classification, as well as function and other unresolved issues. Davis proposes that Middle Bronze Age spearheads were the principal weapon in a combination with rapiers, with the blade edges used for cutting and the tip for thrusting (pp. 22–25). There are significant new data about recovery of spearheads. An important feature of the corpus is that it includes around seventy finds from England and Wales recorded under the Portable Antiquities Scheme within the past fifteen years (pp. 9–10). These new finds begin to alter the traditional distribution of spearheads. Apart from indicating that many objects are still in the ground, the contexts accessible to metal-detectors, essentially ploughed fields, are distinct from the contexts of dredging, quarrying and drainage that produced many earlier finds.

The substance of the book is a catalogue of just over a thousand examples, organized in typological sequence with each spearhead drawn by the publishers in standard format: there are no photographs. The geographic location of each find is provided; local government units are those current in 1998 and an innovation for the series is the inclusion of grid references. Davis arranges the material into groups, sub-divided into types with some variants. The first group (tanged) has triangular blades and long tangs, the blades derived from daggers of the later Early Bronze Age. Group 2 has short sockets, with either a hole or a loop on each side for attachment to the wooden shaft (early socketed), and probably originated in Ireland. Group 3 is characterized by a relatively broad trapezoidal blade bearing a rib on each wing and a longer looped socket extending into the blade to form a midrib (ribbed kite blade), while group 4 lacks blade ribs and has narrower blades (plain kite blade); both kite-bladed groups are predominantly Irish. A

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 171 for 2014.

relatively broad blade with curved outline characterizes group 5 (wide blade). Both groups 4 and 5 retain looped sockets; the latter was probably developed in Britain. Group 6 (developed side-looped) is the most common, comprising almost half the total corpus, and has mainly flame-shaped blades with loops on the socket. Group 7 is much smaller and more miscellaneous, with single or asymmetrical loops or with long blades (special side-looped) and includes Irish imports. Groups 8 and 9, comprising nearly three hundred examples, have loops at the junction of socket and blade (incorporated or projecting basal-looped). The former is equally common in Britain and Ireland, the latter predominantly British though very rare in Scotland. Finally, group 10 has a perforation in the lower blade on each side of the socket (protected-loop). Once sockets and loops were adopted, the overall design of British spearheads remained relatively consistent over several centuries.

The Late Bronze Age basal-looped spearheads mentioned above, moulds and a few exotic or fake spearheads, conclude the corpus. It is notable that only one reliable import from the Continent is included, but side-looped and basal-looped spearheads were also made and used in northern France and Belgium. There is an appendix on metallurgy by Peter Northover and a list of associated finds. This book should be considered together with a complementary volume on the later spearheads that is in active preparation. It should be the basic work of reference on the subject for many years.

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