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Keith A. Dowen

AN EARLY MEDIEVAL SWORD IN THE WALLACE COLLECTION

Abstract:

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The article discusses an excavated medieval sword in London's Wallace Collection, which has hitherto received little academic attention. The unusual features of the sword, particularly its pommel and quillon bars, have created confusion over the years particularly with regard to dating. The collated evidence suggests a likely date range of ca. 1150-1250; a time of considerable, sustained developments in armour when plate was increasingly used to supplement mail. As a result the blade of A458 is designed as both a cut and thrust weapon. The sword also exhibits traces of a silver inscription, which though now illegible, has many parallels across Europe.

Key words: armour development, effigies, inscription, pommel, sword

The Wallace Collection in London is widely known in the field of arms and armour studies for being the home of one of the world's finest collections of princely arms and armour. Numbered among these objects are three swords from the early Middle Ages; one of which, A458, is the subject of this study (Fig. 1).

Assembled by the 4th Marquis of Hertford's (1800-1870) illegitimate son Sir Richard Wallace (1818-1890), the collection of European Arms and Armour was largely purchased in Paris either through the dealer Frédéric Spitzer or from the Comte de Nieuwerkerke. Alfred-Émilien O'Hara, Comte de Nieuwerkerke had been Minister of Fine Arts to emperor Napoleon III and Director of the Louvre, but was forced into exile in 1871 after the defeat of France and the formation of the Third Republic. In order to finance his move to Italy, Nieuwerkerke sold his collection to his friend Sir Richard Wallace who was in Paris at the time (Capwell 2011, 13). Among many fine pieces which made their way to Hertford House were a number of early medieval swords, A458 probably being one of them (Mann 1962, 241)[1].

The Sword in Context

Before examining the sword it is worth considering the context in which it was used. The development of weapons and armour are inextricably linked. As smiths developed more effective fighting tools, so armourers came up with improvements in body protection. As armour improved and older weapons made less effective, smiths had to adapt or improve upon existing designs; and so the cycle began again.

Up until the mid-12th c., defensive equipment in Western Europe consisted largely of a mid-thigh or knee length mail shirt, or hauberk, concave kite-shaped shield with rounded top and conical helmets either of one-piece or spangenhelm construction. Mail chausses appear on some of the figures on the Bayeux Tapestry (ca. 1070s), but did not become common until the middle of the 12th c. It is highly unlikely that the mail shirt was worn directly over clothing; instead a padded linen gambeson was worn, or the mail was lined in some way to prevent chafing and reducing bruising when the wearer was struck. Other forms of armour such as quilted linen and leather sometimes reinforced with metal and/or horn were also worn. By the 2nd quarter of the 12th c. various modifications to defensive equipment had taken place. Sculptural evidence from the doorway of the church of San Zeno Maggiore in Verona (dated to ca. 1139); show kite shields with straight rather than rounded tops; presumably because of the

[1] The sword does not appear in Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick's "The Engraved Illustrations of Antient Arms and Armour" of 1830 and therefore it is unlikely A458 was part of his collection which Wallace purchased though Spitzer in Paris.

Fig. 1. Sword from Wallace Collection, A458: a – front view; b – side view. Note the loss of metal due to corrosion along the fuller and the extreme thinness of the pommel (© The Wallace Collection, London).

Ryc. 1. Miecz ze zbiorów Wallace Collection, A458: a – przód; b – bok. Widoczne korozyjne ubytki metalu na zbroczu oraz niewielka grubość głowicy (© The Wallace Collection, London).

improved vision this afforded (Norman 1969, 10). Helmets too were sometimes modified, with the rear part extending downwards to cover the nape of the neck[2].

Throughout the 12th c. mail remained the dominant form of body defence. In England both the 1181 and the 1252 Assizes of Arms of Henry II and Henry III respectively, specified that that those of knightly rank and laymen possessing chattels or rent to the value of 16 marks were to possess a hauberk, helmet, shield and lance. Those worth less were to be equipped with an "aubergel" (mail shirt smaller than a hauberk) or aketon,

[2] As depicted on the ca. 1128 carvings of mounted warriors on the front of Angouleme Cathedral.

Fig. 2. Funerary effigy of a knight in Great Malvern Priory, England. Note the small pick-like weapon at his side (after *Stothard 1876, Pl. 19*).

Ryc. 2. Przedstawienie nagrobne rycerza z kościoła klasztoru benedyktyńskiego Great Malvern w Anglii, trzymającego krótką broń, podobobną do kilofa (wg *Stothard 1876, Pl. 19*).

Fig. 3. Chessman from the Isle of Lewis, ca. 1150-1175. Note the acutely angled blade design for penetrating body armour (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Ryc. 3. Figurka szachowa z wyspy Lewis, ok. 1150-1175. Warto zwrócić uwagę na zwężający się sztych głowni przeznaczony do penetracji pancerza (© Trustees of the British Museum).

a headpiece of iron and a lance (Baker 1993, 106; also Delbrück 1990, 177).

Against the weapons of the time, mail was an effective defence. The English chronicler Orderic Vitalis had noted how many lives had been saved simply by the men wearing mail at the Battle of Brémule in 1119 (Chibnall 1978). We are later informed that to the astonishment of the Saracens, their blows simply glanced off the (mail) armour worn by the Crusaders at Hattin in 1189 (Verbruggen 1997, 63). And yet, between ca. 1150 and ca. 1250, arms and armour went through a period of sustained intense development. It has been suggested by D. Nicolle that by exceeding the penetrative power of the longbow, despite its slower rate of fire, the development of the crossbow was an important if not prime factor in this (Nicolle 1995, 130). Indeed English and French sources are replete with examples of men of noble and royal birth falling victim to the power of the crossbow in the 12th and early 13th c.; not least Richard I of England at Châlus-Chabrol in 1199 (see Strickland 1996). In Poland, as in much of Europe, evidence from seals and archaeological

finds suggests a development of the lance from a simple spear into a more specialised penetrating weapon (Ellehauge 1948, 33; Sarnecki, Nicolle 2008, 23). Indeed, the use of hard body armour may have made the delivery of a strike with a couched lance less injurious to the individual wielding it and of course added an extra layer of defence against it[3]. By the 12th c. evidence suggests the spear-head had evolved from the earlier broad-leaf form to become smaller and more sharply pointed resulting in greater penetration (Edge, Paddock 1988, 46). With weapons able to overcome the protection offered by mail, it was thus necessary to develop more effective forms of body defence.

Literary references to the use of plate armour from the late 12th c. and onwards comes from a variety of sources including the early 13th c. Norse "Konungs skuggsjá" ("King's Mirror"/"Speculum Regale Konungs Skuggsja") and Guillaume le Breton's account of the duel between Richard, Count of Poitou (later Richard I of England) and William de Barres. Here each man is described as wearing a metal plate *fera fabricate paterna recocto* beneath their hauberk and aketon (Blair 1979, 37-38). Interestingly, we are informed by le Breton that at the battle of Bouvines in 1214 Gerard de Truie's dagger strike to the breast of Emperor Otto IV was turned by the armour he was wearing (Hutton 1896, 105). In the "Vie de Phillipe Auguste" we are told that the emperor escaped injury by his *armes impénétrables*. This may simply refer to mail worn over an aketon or a coat of double-mail – *haubert doublier'*, which itself would have been an effective and robust defence (ffoulkes 1912, 45)[4]. However in his "La Phillipide" le Breton elaborates by describing les armes de fer; indicating the emperor wore some form of iron defence beneath his hauberk (d'Octave 1841). Indeed the "Konungs skuggsjá" recommends a *breastplate of iron* worn in just this way (*The Kings Mirror* 1917, 219)[5].

Contemporary illustrations and effigies from the mid-13th c. show that the amount of plate armour, not necessarily only of metal, had markedly increased over the previous century. For instance, the effigy of Don Bernaldo Guillen de Entenza (1237) in the Monasterio de Santa Maria in Valencia shows the development of gamboised cuisses for the thighs, poleyns and simple gutter-shaped shin guards. From ca. 1250 further plate additions were made in the form of simple vambraces and gauntlets.

With these numerous developments in armour technology, weapon-smiths needed either to devise new instruments of attack or adapt existing ones. It is noteworthy that precisely during this time we have one of the earliest depictions of a war-hammer or perhaps more accurately a war/military-pick (see Fig. 2). Approximately 500 mm in length with a small pick-like head, the weapon depicted on the effigy of a knight of around 1225 at Great Malvern Priory in England may be a response to the increasing effectiveness of armour which afforded.

The blade of A458 is naturally a highly informative feature of the sword and provides a wealth of material to comment upon. From the form of the blade we can tell that it was designed both for cut and thrust; combining characteristics of earlier Viking period broad cutting blades with later more acutely pointed examples. Late Migration Period and earlier Viking Age swords were designed primarily to deliver slashing or cutting blows; having broad double-edged blades with a slightly rounded point ("svaerd"). However, swords with tapering blades ("maekir") (Oakeshott 1997, 26) had also been developed in order to more effectively thrust through mail and provide for a more manageable and swifter weapon. By the 12th c. most swords were largely both cut-and-thrust weapons, though broad-bladed examples continued to remain popular. Indeed in the 12th/13th c. Norse "Heimskringla" swords are described as hewing weapons along with the axe (*Snorre Sturlson* 1844, 177). In response to the increase in the amount of solid body of armour being worn, the sword of the 13th c. was often lengthened and the blade increased in weight in order to deliver a more powerful blow (Edge, Paddock 1988, 62). Though perhaps exaggerated, a vivid account of the power of the sword is given in the 12th/13th c. "Cantar de Mio Cid": *with his right arm he dealt him such a blow with his sword he chopped him off at the waist, knocking half of him to the ground* (*Cantar*...n.y.) (Fig. 3).

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3 Personal correspondence with Dr Tobias Capwell, Curator of Arms and Armour at the Wallace Collection London. Debate has raged as to when the lance was first used in the couched position but it seems a date ca. 1050-1150 based on excerpts from various chansons de geste is most likely.

4 It is uncertain as to the form double-mail took. It is possible this term referred to a denser weave i.e. six in one or eight in one rather than the usual four in one construction. It may also have referred to an overlapping piece of mail or a second mail coat.

5 Early references to iron body armour may of course not necessarily always refer to large plates. Instead it is possible than some form of lamellar or splinted armour is being referred to as in the examples from the Valsgärde excavation now in the Museum for Nordiska Fornsaker, Uppsala (see Richardson 1997).

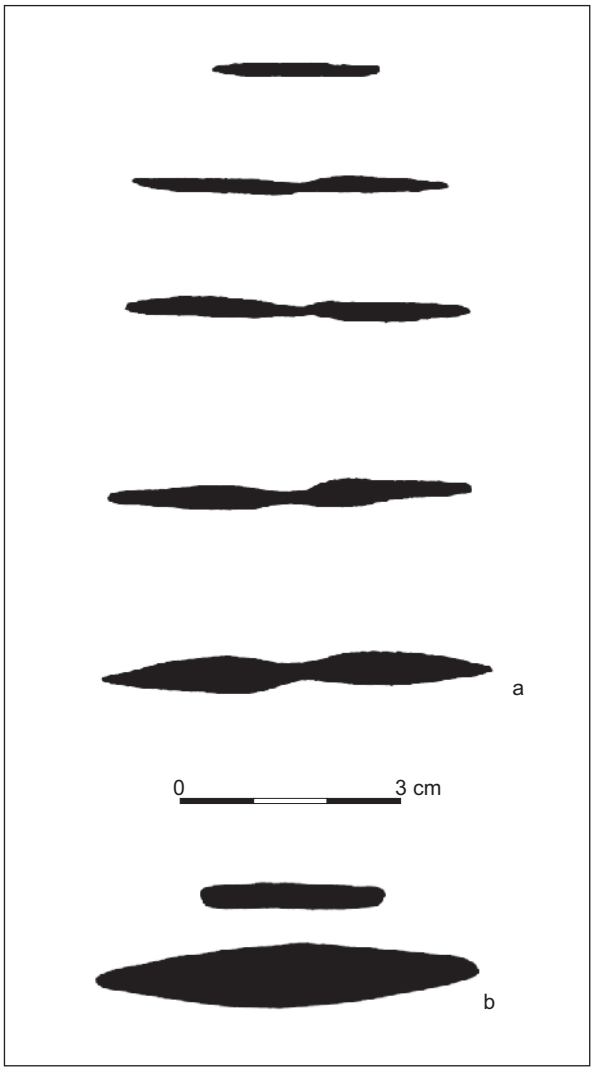

Fig. 4. Sword from Wallace Collection, A458: a – blade section profiles taken at the cross-guard 20 cm, 40 cm, 60 cm and 80 cm; b – section profile of the tang and the pommel. *Drawing by K. A. Dowen*.

Ryc. 4. Miecz ze zbiorów Wallace Collection, A458: a – przekrój głowni w odległosci 20 cm, 40 cm, 60 cm i 80 cm od jelca; b – przekrój rękojeści i głowicy. *Rys. K. A. Dowen*.

Fig. 5. Distinct narrowing of the tang as it enters the pommel is not the result of corrosion but was deliberately made (© The Wallace Collection, London).

Ryc. 5. Wyodrębnione przewężenie trzpienia w miejscu osadzenia głowicy nie jest wynikiem działania korozji – zostało wykonane celowo (© The Wallace Collection, London).

Analysis of the Sword

A458 is one of the few items in the collection in excavated condition, thus its current weight of 1.8 lb or 680 g reflects a loss of material through corrosion. Measuring 850 mm the blade gently tapers to a point from a width of 50 mm at the cross-guard to 27 mm at 800 mm – loss of material to the width of the blade appears minimal. The fuller is not as broad as on earlier Viking period examples, but varies in width from 14 mm at the cross-guard to 9.5 mm at 700 mm (the fuller terminates at 94.5 mm from the tip). More significant corrosion has occurred to the surface of the blade and in areas along the fuller this has resulted in complete loss of material. Corrosion has had least impact near the cross-guard; which is shown clearly in the blade profile (see Fig. 4:a). Blade thickness reduces from 5 mm at the cross-guard to 1.5 mm at the tip. The pommel is of great interest and will be discussed further below. It is notable for being extremely thin, ranging from 1.5 mm at the very edge to approximately 10 mm at the centre (see Fig. 4:b). It is likely that corrosionhas removed a certain amount of material, though it is difficult to tell the extent of this. The grip is oblong in form and measures 86 mm long, 4 mm thick and is 33 mm at the widest point, tapering to 10 mm as it enters the pommel. The distinct shoulder and narrowing as seen in Fig. 5 may be the result of the tang

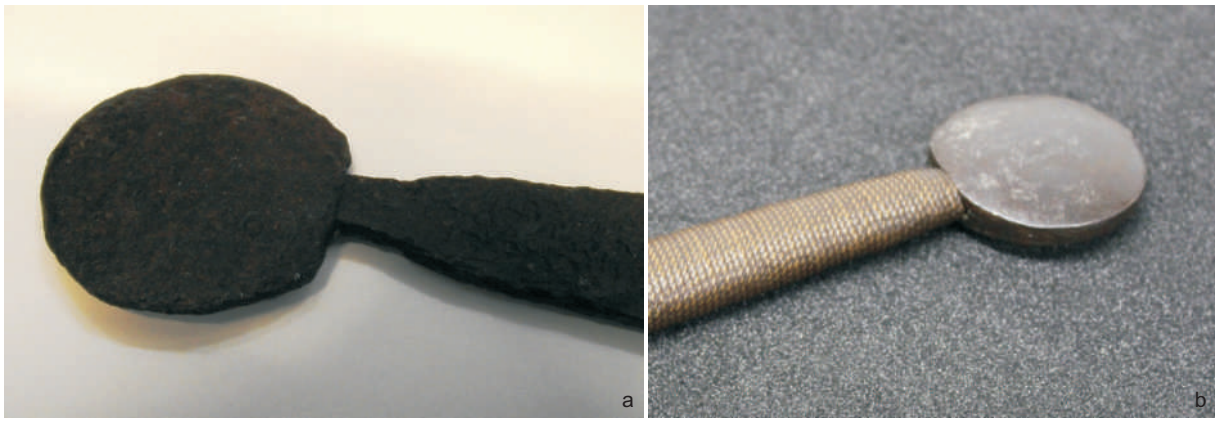

Fig. 6. Pommel of A458 (a) compared to the pommel of the late 14th or early 15th c. sword IX.950 in the Royal Armouries from the arsenal in Alexandria (b). *Photo by K. A. Dowen* (a – with thanks to the Trustees of the Wallace Collection; b – © Royal Armouries).

Ryc. 6. Głowica miecza A458 (a) i głowica miecza IX.950 ze zbiorów Royal Armouries, pochodzącego z arsenału w Aleksandrii, datowanego na koniec XIV lub wczesny XV w. (b). *Fot. K. A. Dowen* (a – dzięki uprzejmości Trustees of the Wallace Collection; b – © Royal Armouries).

being too wide to enter the pommel and requiring modification. The arms of the cross-guard are slightly downturned, that on the left being at a greater angle, probably due to post-deposit damage, and are roughly ellipsoidal in form swelling at the terminals.

Attempts to place the sword into a particular category have proved fruitless as the blade dimensions, even allowing for material loss, do not fit precisely into any of Geibig's Type 1-14 classifications nor Oakeshott's typology. Indeed, the latter simply assigned A458 under "Multiple Miscellaneous", but closest to Type XA (Group 1) in his "Records of the Medieval Sword" (Oakeshott 1991, 225). As L. Marek has noted, *one of the most intricate problems commonly encountered by scholars engaged in early-medieval sword investigation is the correct classification of artifacts* (Marek 2005, 19). It is perhaps worth considering that attempting to define everything by rigid modern classifications obscures the 'organic' nature of arms and armour. Indeed we may be creating a rod for our own back by wrestling with problems of categorisation that are of our own creation. Instead we must consider the differing places of manufacture the innumerable number of smiths and the fact that the men who made these weapons were not working to millimetre perfect blueprints (ibid., 20). As S. Peirce has observed this creates something of a dilemma for modern researchers when faced with dating swords, as the subtle evolution of blade forms rarely provide clear typological "break points" (Peirce 2002, 15).

The pommel is one of the most interesting features of A458 and deserves some attention. As noted above, the pommel is very thin and lenticular in cross-section – closest to Oakeshott Type G. It used to be widely assumed that disc pommels did not appear on swords until the 13th c, though Hoffmeyer did highlight their prevalence in southern Europe in the 10th to 13th c. (Hoffmeyer 1963, 5-6). Doubtless this contributed, together with the form of blade and the cross-guard (see

Fig. 7. Mid 14th c. disc sword pommel from the church of San Francesco, Pescia, Toscany.

Ryc. 7. Dyskoidalna głowica miecza z pochodzącego z połowy XIV w. przedstawienia w kościele św. Franciszka, Pescia, Toskania.

below) to the dating of the sword by successive curators at the Wallace Collection to the early 14th c. Such flat pommels are often a feature of Italian swords and the Royal Armouries in Leeds houses one such example from the arsenal at Alexandria. Sword IX.950, most likely Italian and dating to the early 15th c., has a flat disc pommel slightly thicker than A458; being 14 mm, but otherwise virtually identical (see Fig. 6:a-b). Other earlier Italian examples can be found in a range of art forms from manuscripts to sculpture. In the church of San Francesco in Pescia, Tuscany, is a martial tomb of a nanber if the Obizzi family dating to ca. 1360 (see Fig. 7) with a sword very similar to IX.950 with what appears to be a flat disc pommel. Other examples abound and include the tomb of Jacopo dei Presbiteri, ca.1382, in the church of San Francesco in Pisa. If we turn our attention to Spain, disc pommels continued in use until the late 14th c. (Oakeshott 1960, 225). Indeed their very simplicity contributed to their longevity (Seitz 1965, 147). Earlier disc pommels may be found on British Museum ML. 4035, dated to the 13th c. (see Fig. 8).

However, in the late 1940s and 1950 Dr Jorma Leppäaho of Helsinki University excavated a number of graves which have traditionally been dated to the late Viking Period (ca. 1050-1150) in southern Finland which unearthed a number of swords with disc-form pommels[6]. A number of the Finnish sword pommels exhibit bevelled edges and raised central hubs whereas others, like A458, are completely plain (Leppäaho 1964). Though we cannot state with as much confidence as Peirce that the findings provide undisputed physical proof of this style of pommel dating back to the 11th c., we do have other lines of evidence (Peirce 2002, 10). Indeed, an examination of manuscript illustrations, such as those contained in the Spanish "Biblia Sancti Petri Rodensis" ("Roda Bible") in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, depict swords with what appear to be disc-pommels dating to ca. 1050-1100. Another much earlier manuscript, dating to the 10th c. in the Royal Library of Belgium (KBR Ms. 10066-77 Miscellany), depicts a typical Viking era sword (folio 116v) with a disc pommel and what is possibly a chamfered edge – Oakeshott Type H. Generally though the collated evidence suggests that this form became more common in Europe from the mid-12th c. onwards (Aleksić 2007, 45).

In attempting to find an origin for the disc-pommel, we must turn away from Europe and instead focus our attention on the Byzantine world. Though artistic depictions of battle scenes did not reach the same level of popularity as they did in the rest of Europe, the plethora of warrior saints and Biblical characters demonstrate the widespread use of disc pommels on Byzantine swords (spathia/ σπαθία). Examples are numerous but include the depiction of Goliath in the "Menologion of Basil II" ca. 1000 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice, and the 11th c. "Smyrna Octateuch" ("Cod. Gr.746") in the Vatican Library. With the Byzantine Empire extending into modern-day Greece and the Balkans it is it is unsurprising that disc pommels became a common feature of Mediterranean and south European swords (Aleksić 2007, 44; see also Hoffmeyer 1963, 12). It is not until after the First Crusade that these pommels become more common in central and Western Europe (Aleksić 2007, 10; see also Seitz 1965, 145); pointing to their introduction by Crusaders exposed to Byzantine influences. Their appearance in Scandinavia probably reflects the extensive trading links to the Byzantine world and the presence of Angles, Danes, Germans and Norsemen in the elite Varangian Guard (Τάγμα των Βαράγγων) from the 10th c. and of course men returning from the Crusades.

The closest example to A458 which also displays a lobe-like rather than purely circular form is the ca. 1170-1180 sword of Saint Galgano Guidotti in the chapel named after him at Monteseipi in the province of Siena. Known as "The Sword in the Stone" ("La Spada nella Roccia")[7], only hilt and upper portion of the blade (width 43 mm) protrudes from the block of travertine into which the saint is said to have thrust his sword (Boccia, Coelho 1975, 324)[8]. The pommel is notably thicker and may therefore give an indication of the original appearance of that on A458. The blade profile is very similar and the only notable differences are the straight cross-guard, the slightly broader fuller which continues part-way up the tang and the absence of a shoulder near the pommel. As part of his Group III swords Hoffmeyer dates such pommels from the 1150s onwards. Interestingly he also notes that such pommels can be as thin as 1.5 mm; the same as A458 and hence one reason for his inclusion of the Wallace sword within this group (Hoffmeyer 1954, 43).

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6 It is important to bear in mind that Leppäaho died before completing his work and thus was not able to provide specific dates for the burials. The findings may in fact post-date the Viking period as 'older style' weapons remained in use for a considerable period of time.

7 Also see Chodyński (2014) for a recent analysis.

8 Whatever the story of its origin, there is little doubt that the sword itself is genuine.

Fig. 8. Sword held in the British Museum with flat disc pommel. Investigation has shown the fuller contains an inscription but unfortunately is now illegible (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Ryc. 8. Miecz z płaską kolistą głowicą przechowywany w zbiorach British Museum. Badania wykazały, iż na zbroczu znajdowała się, dziś nieczytelna, inskrypcja (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Though certainly not as common as the well-known "Brasil-nut" form and its offshoots, the carved capitals of the Basilica of Notre-Dame du Port in Clermond-Ferrand in the Auvergne, dating to the early 12th c., show that both pommel forms existed side by side. Although it is difficult to discern certain details, the remarkable martial

Fig. 9. The Type XII sword from Korsødegården excavated in 1880, collection of Kulturhistorisk museum, University of Oslo. Though the hilt and pommel differ from A458, the blade shares many similar characteristics.

Ryc. 9. Miecz typu XII z Korsødegården, odkryty w 1880 r., zbiory Kulturhistorisk museum, Uniwersytet w Oslo. Zarówno głowica, jak i rękojeść odmienna od okazu A458, głownia wykazuje jednak wiele podobieństw.

12th c. wall paintings at Hornslet Church in East Jutland Denmark, appear to show warriors also wielding swords with both disc and Brasil-nut pommels. It was not until the end of the 13th c. that the disc, or the more developed "wheel" pommel had become the most popular type (Oakeshott 1951, 55).

The cross-guard of A458 has caused a certain degree of confusion and debate. This form first appears to date to the 13th c. and later; for which there are dozens of examples in museums across the world. However, as Oakeshott has amply demonstrated, traditional assumptions often need re-examining: *In the past hundred years or so it has been assumed (and too often written) that the cross of a medieval sword provides a clear and reliable indication of date* (Oakeshott 1997, 112). Whilst it is true that between the 4th and 11th c. cross-guards exhibited little variety in form, from the early 12th c. such an array of styles came into use that providing a specific place of origin or date based on stylistic criteria is extremely difficult to achieve (Oakeshott 1960, 203-204). Indeed, Hoffmeyer has suggested that hilts are subject to more variation in design than blades; being less likely to be mass produced (Hoffmeyer 1963, 5). Though this assertion may be open to question, we must bear in mind that we have evidence from later periods demonstrating the involvement of numerous craftsmen in the construction of a sword. Indeed, we only need think of late Roman and Byzantine fabricae to find early evidence of specialist workshops. We should therefore in no way assume that the smith who made the blade, also made the hilt[9].

Early medieval evidence of curved cross-guards in manuscript illustrations is plentiful and it is worth noting a few examples. Returning again to the "Rhoda Bible", not only do a number of the swords depicted have disc pommels, but they also have curved cross-guards; some with swollen terminals. The "Navarre Picture Bible", now in the Bibliothèque d'Amiens Métropole, dating to ca. 1197 depicts numerous swords with short curved cross-guards in conjunction with disc pommels. Though these could be found on earlier Viking swords, the artist seems to have emphasised not only their thinness, but also swellings at the terminals. Swords with both disc-pommels and curved cross-guards appear again in the ca. 1175 Morgan Miniatures of the Life of Christ.

As already stated, attempts to define the blade by any of the well-known typologies have proved fruitless; the closest it comes to any in Oakeshott's typology would be Type Xa or Type XI and Geibig's Type 6. Overall though the form of A458 does fit in well with Oakeshott's Type X criteria, *a broad flat blade of medium length (average 31") with a fuller running the entire length and fading out an inch or so from the point* (Oakeshott 1997, 28)[10]. Like the disc pommel, Type Xa and XI blades appear to be most common from the 12th to early 13th c. (Aleksić 2007, 81-82).

The blade is very similar in style to the Korsoygaden (Korsødegården) sword, excavated in 1880, now in the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo (see Fig. 9). Although a Type XII according to Oakeshott (based on the length of the fuller), the sword has been dated to the 1st half of the 12th c. and exhibits a similar blade profile, blade length (around 35"), blade width (around 2¼") but somewhat shorter fuller to A458. Though the cross-guard displays a greater curvature, the profile is of a similar form and has slightly swollen terminals (Oakeshott 1991, 76-77). Another sword, illustrated by Seitz in his Other Type Xa/XI parallels may be found across Europe such as the 12th c. swords in the Military History Museum, Budapest (Inv. No. 52.84) and the Regional Museum Jagodina, Serbia (found in Staro Lanište) (Aleksić 2007, Pl. 3 and 6). Another, from Yverdon Switzerland, now housed in the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum (LM 10116) was dated fairly ambiguously to 1000+ by Oakeshott (Oakeshott 1991, 49), but again has a blade profile more usually associated with a much later date. The width of the fuller may be compared to the Type XI Fornham sword held in Moyses Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk which is thought to be a relic of a battle fought locally in 1171, though there is some question over its exact dating (see below)[11].

The most interesting feature of the sword is undoubtedly the traces of silver inscription running part way down the fuller of the blade (Fig. 10-11). Unfortunately most of the silver has been lost and only the incised lines remain. Beginning at 783 mm from the cross, the first inlaid element measures around 5 mm high and 3.5 mm wide and appears to be in the form of a cross (with the left-hand arm missing). Approximately 6 mm from this there is a short horizontal which angels into a downward

9 With thanks to Bob Woosnam-Savage for his thoughts on these issues.

10 The distinguishing feature of Type Xa being a narrower fuller, but not as narrow as a Type XI; though Oakeshott admits the distinction is very fine (Oakeshott 1991, 36).

11 For two other examples of disc pommel swords from the Castel Sant'Angelo Rome and Nationalmuseet Finland, dating to ca. 1100-1250, see Seitz (1965, 145-146).

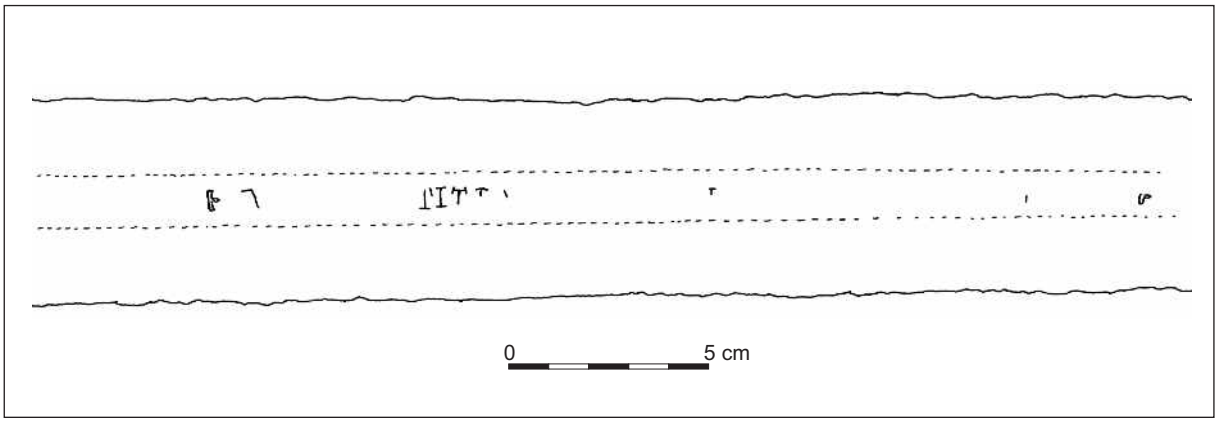

Fig. 10. Scale drawing of the blade of A458 and the positions of the incised lines relative to the fuller. The hilt of the sword is to the left. *Drawing by K. A. Dowen*.

Ryc. 10. Rysunek fragmentu głowni miecza A458 z umiejscowieniem inskrypcji (rękojeść znajduje się z lewej strony). *Rys. K. A. Dowen*.

diagonal measuring some 5 mm in length. The next section, which consists of a group of incised lines, is separated by some 40 mm from those just described. These lines are tightly arranged in a space of around 28 mm in length, the longest verticals measure some 5 mm, with the longest horizontals being roughly 3.5 mm. As can be seen from the pictures, these lines take on the appearance of letters and are not simply a series of scratches.

Other deliberately incised lines can be found further along the blade and seem to terminate with what may be the traces of another cross (see Fig. 10) some 973 mm from the first. Although the sword was conserved at the Wallace Collection in 1992 and some of the inscription was discovered, it has only been during the preparation of this article that more of the inscription has come to light with the aid of a Brunel stereomicroscope (see Fig. 11:b and 12).

Though inscriptions on blades are not rare, the use of silver as opposed to iron did not become common until the beginning of the 13th c., though of course there are exceptions. Comparisons with clearer blade inscriptions have enabled the identification of the letter 'N', as can be seen in Fig. 13. Sadly no other letters can be clearly discerned, thus we are left to speculate as to what was once there. What is clear, however, is that the inscription is of some length and it is not simply a single word such as the smith's name, though if dating to the 13th c. the inscription may be of shortened and abbreviated form (Oakeshott 1960, 216). No further traces of silver were found on the other sides of the "crosses" thus it may be suggested that these begin and end the inscription

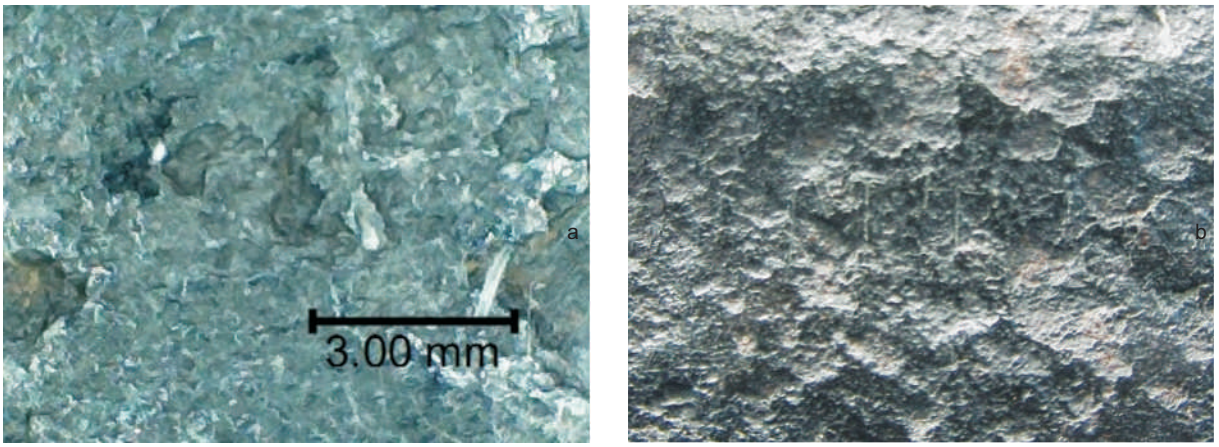

Fig. 11. Sword from Wallace Collection, A458: a – traces of a silver cross (?) found at 783 mm from the hilt-end of the sword; b – group of incised lines with minute traces of silver inlay (a-b – *photo by K. A. Dowen*; a – with using Brunel stereomicroscope x 20 magnification; a-b – with thanks to the Trustees of the Wallace Collection).

Ryc. 11. Miecz ze zbiorów Wallace Collection, A458: a – resztki srebrnego krzyża (?) odkryte w odległości 783 mm od zakończenia rękojeści miecza; b – grupa linii ze śladami srebrnej inkrustacji (a-b – *fot. K. A. Dowen*; a – przy uzyciu stereomikroskopu Brunela w powiekszeniu x 20; a-b – dzięki uprzejmości Trustees of the Wallace Collection).

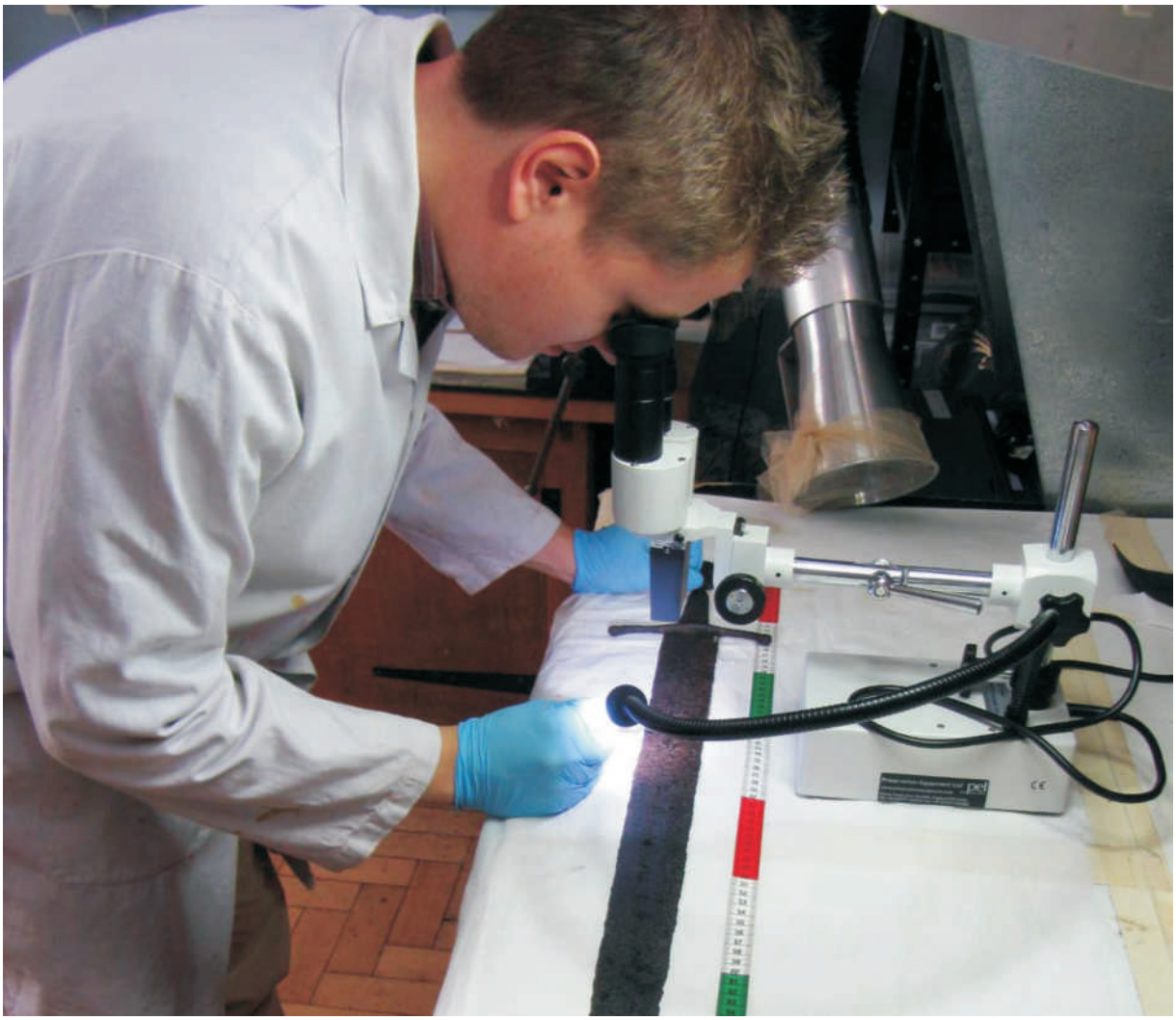

Fig. 12. The author examining A458 in the conservation workshop of the Wallace Collection.

Ryc. 12. Autor w trakcie badań miecza A458 w pracowni konserwatorskiej Wallace Collection.

and are not used to separate words as in some examples. As to what the inscription was it is impossible to tell, though we have a few possibilities. Firstly, that the inscription was a palindrome, that is an arrangement of letters which read the same backwards as forwards as in "RACE CAR". However, the inscription appears too long for this. Secondly, that the inscription, at least to us, is an incomprehensible arrangement of letters with a repeating letter interspersed throughout as in the 12th-13th c. sword in the National Museum in Copenhagen, NEDEHEREMEDENI. In this inlaid silver example crosses were also found on the blade (Wegeli 1905, 264). Thirdly, we have a legible religious inscription or invocation, examples include +INNOMINEDOMINI+, +BENEDICTUSDEUSMEUS+ or the very apt +BENE(DI)CT(US) (DOM)INUSDEUSMEUS…../ +ADPRELIVOZCTDIGITOSMEOS….VID (from *Benedictus Dominus Meus Deus qui docet manus meas ad praelium et digitos meos ad bellum*) found on a Type XI sword from Paczków (Głosek 1984, 160; Geibig 1991, 130). The style

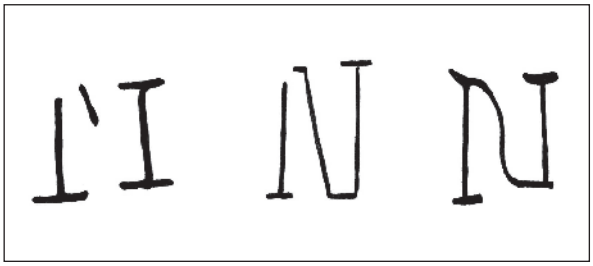

Fig. 13. Comparison of the incised lines on A458 (left) with other known examples from Liuksiala (center) and Berlin (right). *Drawing by K. A. Dowen* (after *Leppäaho 1964, 61, Pl. 28* and *Głosek 1984, Pl. X*).

Ryc. 13. Porównanie liter na mieczu A458 (po lewej) z innymi znanymi przykładami: z Liuksaly (w środku) i Berlina (po prawej). *Rys. K. A. Dowen* (wg *Leppäaho 1964, 61, Pl. 28* i *Głosek 1984, Pl. X*).

of lettering on Fornham sword (SESBENEDICTAS and INNOMINEDOMINI) is similar to A458 and has been dated by E. Oakeshott to around the early 12th c. based on Leppäaho's findings (Oakeshott 1991, 62). However, another sword in the Märkisches Museum Berlin (also known as the Brandenburg Provincial Museum) dating to the 14th c. also has similar lettering (Wegeli 1905, 265). M. Głosek does include a number of examples of inscription dating to the 13th c. which would not contradict a dating of the Wallace sword to the late 12th or early to mid-13th c.; based on the blade and pommel (see Głosek 1984). Unfortunately, with so little of the inscription remaining on our sword it is almost impossible to date the script with any accuracy. It should be noted though that many handwriting styles continued in use of a long time and could be periodically revived. Undoubtedly more dedicated research on the subject is needed.

Conclusion

Investigation into sword A458 has been far from straightforward and undoubtedly there are many more avenues left to explore. It has proven impossible to provide a tight date-range as the sword exhibits features which remained in use for some considerable time. Particularly problematic has been the dating of the pommel; as we have seen the disc-form was popular over many centuries. Though manuscript and sculptural evidence has shown this form of pommel can be dated back to at least to the 10th c., Leppäaho's excavations, if indeed they do date to the late Viking period, would therefore have provided physical evidence of their use from the 11th c. The disc-pommel appears to have been most common during the later 12th and 13th c. and this together with the style of cross-guard and cut and thrust form of the blade suggests a likely date of ca. 1150-1250 for the sword. It is of course possible that future investigation may narrow down this date range[12].

A458 has provided a fascinating insight into the developing nature of arms, armour and warfare during the 12th and 13th c. During this period mail was being increasingly supplemented with other materials designed to offer greater protection against hand-held and missile weapons. As a result older broad bladed swords, designed primarily for cutting, were not always sufficient to the task. Armour had not yet developed to the point where rigid acutely pointed blades were required, instead the sword needed to function as both a cut and thrust weapon; perfectly exemplified in A458.

It is unfortunate that so little of the silver inscription has survived, but with further study it may be possible to piece together more clues. This investigation in no way claims to be exhaustive, instead it is hoped that the material presented here will stimulate further research from across Europe into this style of sword.

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Keith A. Dowen
Assistant Curator of European Armour at the Royal Armouries

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12 Seitz (1965, 149) dated the sword to ca. 1175-1250.

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Keith A. Dowen

WCZESNOŚREDNIOWIECZNY MIECZ ZE ZBIORÓW WALLACE COLLECTION

Streszczenie

Kolekcja broni i uzbrojenia w londyńskim Wallace Collection jest w większości schedą po Sir Ryszardzie Wallace, nieślubnym synu czwartego markiza Hetford, żyjącym w XIX stuleciu. Oprócz wspaniałych przykładów broni książęcej przechowuje się tutaj kilka wydobytych z ziemi wczesnośredniowiecznych mieczy, z których jeden – opatrzony numerem inwentarzowym A458 – jest przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu.

Kształt głowni miecza A458 wskazuje, że był on używany zarówno do pchnięć, jak i cięć. Nawiązuje tym samym do szerokich głowni mieczy z wczesnego okresu wikińskiego oraz późniejszych okazów z głowniami silniej zwężającymi się ku sztychowi. Mierząca 850 mm długości głownia łagodnie zwęża się od 50 mm przy jelcu aż do 27 mm w punkcie na długości 800 mm. Zbrocze nie jest tak szerokie jak w przypadku okazów z okresu wikińskiego, ale mierzy od 9,5 do 14 mm. Głowica jest niezwykle interesująca, gdyż jest ekstremalnie cienka – pośrodku ma tylko 10 mm grubości. Wynika to z działania korozji, która zniszczyła nieco jej powierzchnie, chociaż trudno powiedzieć, w jakim dokładnie stopniu. Wyraźne schodkowe zwężenie rękojeści w miejscu nałożenia głowicy może wynikać z faktu, iż pierwotna sztaba rękojeści była zbyt szeroka i musiała zostać zmodyfikowana.

Próby umieszczenia miecza w znanych klasyfikacjach typologicznych nastręczają znacznych trudności, ale wydaje się, że głownia najbliższa jest typowi XA wg E. Oakeshotta. Głowica należy do typu G wg tego autora i pojawiać się ma dopiero w XIII w. Analiza przedstawień w manuskryptach wykazała jednak, że takie twierdzenie jest błędne, a miniatury z „KBR Ms. 10066-77 Miscellany" przechowywanego w belgijskiej Bibliotece Królewskiej pozwalają cofnąć datę pojawienia się podobnych głowic aż do X w. Dopiero jednak badania wykopaliskowe prowadzone w południowej Finlandii w l. 40. i 50. XX w. przez Dr J. Leppäaho z Uniwersytetu w Helsinkach udowodniły XI-wieczną chronologię oryginalnych zabytków. Najbliższą analogią do okazu A458, oprócz zabytków opublikowanych przez Leppäaho, jest tzw. „Miecz w Kamieniu" ('La Spada nella Roccia') z kaplicy San Galgano w Monteseipi, datowany na okres ok. 1170-1180. Wśród innych egzemplarzy z analogicznymi ostrzami wspomnieć należy pochodzący z początków XII w. miecz z Korsødegården, przechowywany w Oslo oraz datowany na późny XII w. zabytek z Fornham ze zbiorów Moyses Hall Museum Bury St Edmunds. Kombinacja tych elementów oraz kształt jelca sugerują, że miecz powinien być datowany na okres pomiędzy 1150 a 1250 r.

Najbardziej interesującym elementem analizowanego miecza są niewątpliwie ślady srebrnej inkrustacji widocznej na głowni miecza w pobliżu jelca. Badania z użyciem stereomikroskopu wykazały prawdopodobne ślady znaków krzyży poprzedzających i kończących inskrypcję. Jakkolwiek jej fragmentaryczność jest duża, może być porównana z lepiej zachowanymi przykładami. Na podstawie długości napisu możemy założyć, że inskrypcja na mieczu A458 może mieć charakter religijny, np. +BENEDICTUSDEUSMEUS+ lub +INNOMINEDOMINI+.

Tłumaczył Piotr N. Kotowicz