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GEORGE COFFEY

SOME RECENT PREHISTORIC FINDS ACQUIRED BY THE ACADEMY

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,, XXVII. (1908–9
,, XXVIII. (1909–10)
,, XXIX. (1910–11)
,, XXX. (Current Volume)

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IV.

RECENT PREHISTORIC FINDS ACQUIRED BY THE ACADEMY.

By GEORGE COFFEY.

PLATES IV–IX.

Read APRIL 22. Published JULY 2, 1912.

1. AN IMPORTANT FIND OF MOULDS IN CO. ANTRIM.

AN important find of moulds for the casting of bronze weapons was made in December, 1910, by a farmer when ploughing in the townland of Killymeddy, parish of Dinvory, about five miles from Ballymoney, Co. Antrim. The portion of the townland where the find was made is on a ridge that overlooks the valley of the Bann. A little stream, tributary to the Bann, runs along the foot of the field, and to within a few yards of where the moulds were found. The plough struck against what proved to be the moulds, and a mark made by the plough coulter can be seen on the sandstone mould (Plate V, fig. 3). The moulds were obtained by the Academy through the good offices of Mr. S. F. Milligan, M.R.I.A. The find consisted of (1) two complete moulds for looped socketed spear-heads, one measuring $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, the other $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches, both made of chlorite schist; and half of a mould for a looped socketed spear-head made of sandstone, measuring $5\frac{9}{16}$ inches. On the back of the mould for the larger spear-head there is a mould for a dagger or short sword and also for a smaller knife-like implement, while the sides of both have also a mould for a round-pointed object; the other half of this mould is broken above the centre, and there is a piece missing (Plate V, fig. 2). The smaller mould has on each side a mould for a leaf-shaped knife. (2) A mould for one side of a long dagger-blade, or short sword, $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, broken into six pieces, made of sandstone. (3) A large mould of sandstone $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches long for casting one side of a leaf-shaped knife with a midrib; part of the face of this mould has been broken away by the plough coulter. (4) Two halves of a mould for casting a sickle, made of sandstone; the larger half, which is broken into

Fig. 1 ($\frac{1}{2}$).

three pieces, measures 9¾ inches following the curve of the blade, the other half 8¾ inches. (5) Four fragments of moulds of sandstone measuring from 2½ to 4½ inches in length, four other smaller fragments, two sharpening stones, the first 8¼ inches in length (fig. 1, p. 83), the other broken, 3¼ inches in length, and a stone for hammering or smoothing objects 2½ inches long, showing traces of use. The cutting on these broken fragments of moulds is not deep, but they show traces of some blackening caused by use, so perhaps it would not be safe to consider them as unfinished. The sharpening stones and the stone for hammering or polishing complete what was probably the outfit of the founder.

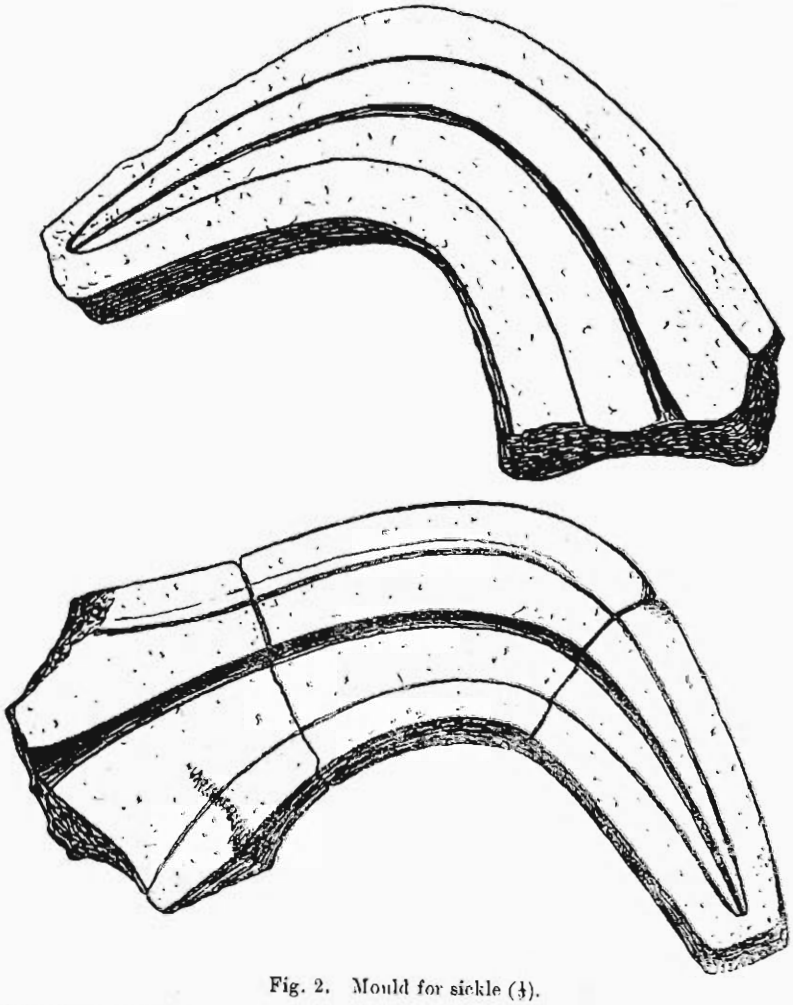


Fig. 2. Mould for sickle (¼).

The most interesting portion of the find is perhaps the mould for the sickle (fig. 2). Up to the time of its discovery the only sickles known in Ireland

were those furnished with a socket. No moulds of any description had bee found. In Britain, though the type without the socket has been found, it is rare, and mostly confined to the western counties. On the Continent, the sickles without the socket are the prevailing type, though a few socketed examples have been found in the north-west of France. The Continental sickles divide themselves into three types. The first has a raised button or method of attachment, the second a tang generally furnished with rivets, and the third a curved end. In the Swiss lake-dwellings the flat type of bronze sickle and moulds for casting it have been frequently found, as also the iron type derived from it. The date of this mould has a very important bearing upon the growing of corn in Ireland. Its date is fixed by that of the moulds found with it, as the whole find may be assumed to be of the same period. Looped socketed spear-heads of the type shown by the moulds may be assigned to the fourth period of the Bronze Age as divided by Montelius,[1] and this may be placed at from 1500 to 1000 B.C., or taking it in round numbers at about 1200 B.C.

Spears of the type for the casting of which the moulds were used I have placed before the leaf-shaped type with rivet-holes on each side of the socket. The leaf-shaped spear is associated by form with the leaf-shaped sword; the looped spear with the older types of weapons—the dagger and rapier forms. The record of "finds" is incomplete, but the association of leaf-shaped spears and swords to the exclusion of the looped form is in several instances sufficiently marked to be noted. The evidence of the spear-head moulds further enforces the separation of the two types. Of the known moulds for spear-heads nearly all are of the looped type, and the few for the leaf-shaped type are small and of an indeterminate character. The evidence indicates that with the introduction of the leaf-shaped spear a new method of casting was introduced. These moulds may perhaps be placed towards the end of the period when stone moulds were still in use, and assigned to about 1500 to 1200 B.C.

2. AMBER BEADS FOUND AT COACHFORD, CO. CORK.

The Academy's collection contains a great number of amber beads, many of which appear to be old. Unfortunately the early registers of the Academy's purchases and acquisitions were somewhat loosely kept, and details as to how the objects were found were in many cases not entered. A few years ago I went into the evidence of the finding of amber in Ireland, with a view to determining the age of some of the specimens—whether they belonged to the Bronze Age or were earlier—or whether some might have come from the Mediterranean.

[1] "Archaeologia," vol. lxi, p. 97.

I found it very hard to get any cases in which the evidence was at all clear. The most important case was that of a necklace of fourteen beads which were found with gold beads at Cruttenclough, near Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny. Seven amber beads were found by Conwell in Cairn II., Loughcrew, Co. Meath; these, from associated objects, decorated with late Celtic patterns, can be ascribed to the La Tène period. An amber bead was also found in the Dowth tumulus, but the date of this is uncertain.[1] I have since heard of a number of amber beads having been found in association with a bronze sickle and other Bronze-Age objects in a cave at Whitechurch, Co. Waterford; this find is not yet published.

I was therefore very glad to get a really good case of amber found with associated objects.

The find was made in May, 1907, by two men named Michael Sullivan and William Connell, when making a fence on the land of Mrs. Kate O'Connel, at Mountrivers, Rylane, Coachford, Co. Cork. The objects were buried about a foot from the surface of the ground, and consisted of two bronze celts, two gold fibulae, a bronze fibula, and a number of amber beads; nine beads were stated in the reports of the find to have been obtained, but eleven were recovered. It is alleged that one or two were put in the fire by the finders and that they "blazed up." The objects were handed to Mrs. O'Connel, who kept them until the end of June; she then gave them to her brother, R. Hinchen, who sold one of the gold fibulae and one celt to Mr. Robert Day, M.R.I.A. Mr. Day forwarded these objects to the Academy, and is to be congratulated on his prompt action in the matter. The remainder of the find came into the possession of the Rev. Patrick M'Auliffe, of Clonmoyle, Coachford, and were by him forwarded to the Academy; all the objects of this important find being thus recovered. They are figured one-half the true size. (Plate VI.)

The gold fibulae weighed 3 oz. 4 dwt. 4 grs., and 2 oz. 17 dwt. 20 grs., respectively. The bronze fibula belongs to a type somewhat rare in Ireland, though a few of the same form have been found. The beads appear to be made from Baltic amber, not Italian; though of a rich brown colour, they have not the dark shade of the southern continental variety. They resemble two large beads in the Academy's collection, one of which measures $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, and has a thickness of $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches. It was found at Cashel, near Armagh; the other, of about the same size, was deposited by Trinity College, Dublin.

All these objects may be placed in the Bronze Age. According to

[1] G. Coffey: "Origin of Prehistoric Ornament in Ireland." Journal Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, vol. xxvi., p. 38.

Professor Montelius' recently published "Chronology of the Bronze Age in Great Britain and Ireland,"[1] they belong to the fifth or latest period, and can be dated from the middle of the twelfth to the end of the ninth century B.C. The Coachford celts are well-formed specimens, and this type is placed in the "British Museum Guide to the Bronze Age" at the end of the period of the development of the celt. They may be somewhat later than the date given by Professor Montelius; we may say, however, that they cannot in any event be later than about 500 B.C. The find is therefore of much importance, as it places beyond dispute the fact that many of the amber beads found in Ireland can be placed in the Bronze Age. That this was so had frequently been asserted in the past, but the matter can now be taken as definitely settled.

Amber is very commonly found in Scandinavia in graves belonging to the earlier Stone Age, but in the last portion of this period and during the Bronze Age it is very seldom found, the reason of this being, no doubt, that it was exported to other countries, where it was much prized. The two principal places where amber is found in the north are the west coast of Jutland and the coast of west Prussia. Amber was exported early from both places, and as there is no difference in appearance or chemical composition, it is impossible to determine from which place amber found in another country may have come. As, however, the amber was no doubt exchanged for metals such as gold, bronze, and copper, and as Jutland is far richer in finds of these materials than west Prussia, it is probable that the greatest amount of amber comes from Jutland.[2] This northern amber, or succinit, as it is called, is known from the chemical examination of Herr O. Helm, of Danzig,[3] to contain a large proportion of succinit acid (5 per cent. to 8 per cent.). This is not present, or present only in very small traces, in the amber obtained at the foot of Mount Etna in Sicily. Herr Helm examined several beads from different Italian graves of the Bronze Age, all of which contained succinit acid, and were therefore presumably made from northern amber. The examination of a bead from the shaft graves at Mycenae gave the same result. None of the amber in the Academy's collection has been chemically examined, this being a troublesome process; but from its appearance, and judging by analogy, I think it would be fairly safe to conclude that it is derived from the Baltic.

[1] Archæologia, vol. lxi, p. 97.

[2] Montelius, "Die Chronologie der Ältesten Bonzezeit," pp. 71 and 72.

[3] Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, vol. xxxiii. 1901, p. 400.

3. An Account of Rapiers and Early Swords of the Bronze Age.

Bronze rapiers have often been found in Ireland; there are about forty in the Royal Irish Academy's collection. Some of these are very long. The lower portion of one specimen, which measures at present 13⅞ inches, is stated by Wilde to appear to have belonged to a rapier nearly 40 inches in length. It has two thick rivets at the base of the blade, and the mark of the handle can be clearly discerned. (Plate VII, fig. 1.) The well-known rapier from Lissane, Co. Derry, measures 30¼ inches long, and is the longest complete example which has been found in the British Islands. The average length of the rapiers is much shorter; many of them approach in their outline the Mycenaean thrusting-swords, from which they are derived.

The rapier which I am about to describe is probably the most perfect and best preserved example that has yet been found. It surpasses in the fineness of its ornamentation any I have seen, and approaches in the excellence of its casting to the work of the most skilful founders. It measures 16¾ inches in length, 1⅞ inches across at the base and 1½ inches at the centre. The mid-rib commences nearly an inch from the base of the blade and is carried right up to the point; somewhat flatter at the base, it rises on each side to the height of ⅛ inch. The photograph (Plate VII, fig. 6) and the drawing (Plate VIII, fig. 4) will show its ornamentation and the beauty of the raised lines better than a detailed description. The point and edges of the blade are as perfect and sharp as when they left the hands of the founder. By means of the intersection of the mid-rib, the point on both sides has been fashioned to a marvellous degree of fineness and sharpness. The two bronze rivets at the base of the blade measure about ¾ inch in length, and are over ¼ inch in thickness.

This splendid weapon is a fine example of the excellence and skill attained to by the craftsmen of the Bronze Age, and gives a high idea of the civilization in Ireland at that period. It was obtained by Mr. Thomas Plunkett, M.R.I.A., from the finder, and was discovered in Upper Lough Erne at a depth of 17 feet under water, close to the old castle at Crom. We can therefore say it was found near Enniskillen.

I mentioned above that the longest rapier ever discovered in the British Islands was the celebrated specimen found before 1867 at Lissane, Co. Derry. It has been the good fortune of the Academy to acquire recently this splendid object. (Plate IX, fig 5.) The history of the rapier is shortly as follows:— It was discovered in a bog at Lissane, Co. Derry, on the property of Sir Thomas Staples, Bart. At his death it passed into the possession of his

widow, Lady Staples, who bequeathed it to the Hon. Mrs. Burrell, who left it to her daughter, the Hon. Mrs. Hemiker Heaton, from whom it was purchased by the Academy in 1912. It is figured by Sir William Wilde in the Catalogue of the R. I. A. Collection, p. 442, fig. 314, as the finest bronze rapier ever discovered in Ireland, and he presented, by Lady Staples' permission, a cast of the rapier to the collection.

Wilde's opinion of this rapier is confirmed by Sir John Evans,[1] who reproduced the illustration from the R. I. A. Catalogue. I would, however, go further than this, and describe it as the finest specimen of a rapier I have seen in any museum.

In the illustration of the rapier given by Wilde, and copied by others, two rivets are shown at the base of the blade. The rapier has now only one rivet, and on its purchase I was informed by the owner that, to the best of her knowledge, there never had been more than one. The great length of the rapier must have required much skill and care in the casting. In shows no imperfections or running of the metal in any place. To produce such a weapon in bronze would put a modern founder on his mettle.

The manner of hafting these early swords and daggers is fortunately quite certain, as a few hafted examples have been found. Some were hafted with handles of cast bronze, and a few had handles of horn of the same type as those of bronze, but the hilts for the most part would seem to have been made of horn or some other perishable substance, as they have not been recovered. The curious scolloped mark of the hilt is in many cases quite clear.

Figure 4 of Plate VII represents a bronze dagger which has often been illustrated. All the illustrations show the sides of the hilt as decorated with an ornament of cross-hatched triangles. This ornament on the sides, if it ever existed, which is doubtful, cannot now be traced. Montelius assigns this dagger to his third period, dated from the seventeenth to the end of the fifteenth century B.C.[2] Figure 5, Plate VIII, is a bronze-hilted rapier found in Co. Tipperary, and formerly in the Petrie collection. The hilt and lower portion of the blade are figured after Wilde, by Montelius, who places it in his fourth period, dated at the end of the fifteenth, to the middle of the twelfth century B.C. It is now drawn completely for the first time. It had originally four rivets, of which two remain. We may place it towards the end of the fourth period.

Figure 5, Plate VII, shows a broken weapon of rapier form, found in a bog near Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, in 1901, with a very remarkable hilt made

[1] "Bronze Implements," p. 252, fig. 318. [2] Archæologia, vol. lxi, p. 97.

of horn. This has never been published before, and is the only example I know of a hilt of this material. It is very notable, and the Royal Irish Academy is to be congratulated on having this specimen, which up to the present is unique, in its collection. The form of the hilt is the same as those of cast bronze, and has the same scolloped shape; it is attached to the blade by three bronze rivets. The pommel of the handle, also of horn, is made in a separate piece, and fixed in with a dowel and two pins made of horn.

I figure a number of daggers and rapiers in the Academy's collection. Some of these are decorated with incised or raised lines. Several of the figures on Plate VII show a striking similarity to the rapier I am describing. They display the same flattening of the mid-rib at the base; the arrangement of the ornamental lines is very similar, and the workmanship of all is very good. The connexion between the types of dagger-blade and the early Italian daggers is confirmed by the series of small hatched triangles which have been found at the base of two Irish examples, and which are a common feature on the Italian daggers. I have noticed this point in my recent book.[1] These daggers belong to an early phase of the Bronze Age, the long rapiers being assigned to a somewhat later period, but it is hard to go further, as the Irish finds are few, and there was probably some overlapping of the different types. The whole subject of the direct early connexion of Ireland with the continent is very important from an historical point of view, and we see that the civilization of Ireland in the Bronze Age was much higher than has commonly been assumed, and was spread generally over the country.

The rapiers belong to the middle and later portion of the Bronze Age. In France, where this type is common, it is classed by M. Déchelette in his Series B., type 2, as "sword with trapezoidile base," and he describes the type as follows:—

This form is widely spread in the British Islands and the north of France, whence it was introduced into South Germany and the region of the middle Rhine. The blade, which narrows considerably from the handle, is sometimes exceedingly slender and very thin. An exceptionally long example found in Ireland measures 30¼ inches in length, and only ⅝ inch in breadth at the centre. The first swords of type 1, Series B (swords with a round base), which surpass in length the triangular daggers, appear at the end of the Age of Bronze II (1900–1600 B.C.). Those of type II belong to the Age of Bronze III (1600–1300 B.C.). They have been found in the depot of Anzy-le-Duc, Saone et Loire, and in burials of the same period, for example, in the tumulus of Staadorf, Haut Palatinat, a burial of the Age of Bronze III (1600–1300 B.C.).[2]

Dr. Montelius, in his "Chronology of the British Bronze Age," places the

[1] "New Grange and other Incised Tumuli in Ireland," p. 115.

[2] Manuel d'Archéologie, vol. ii, p. 208.

rapiers in his Period IV, which he dates at from the end of the fifteenth to the middle of the twelfth century B.C., so that his dating of these objects almost agrees with that of M. Déchelette, and this period practically coincides with the date I have chosen for the erection of the principal tumuli at New Grange and Loughcrew, i.e., some time before 1200 B.C., as given in my recent book, "New Grange and other Incised Tumuli in Ireland."

It is now well recognized that the development of the Aegean-Mycenaean swords went on lines parallel to those of western Europe. We find first that long rapiers or thrusting weapons, which go back to the Cypriote dagger with the curved or hook-shaped tang appear, and later come the swords with cutting edges. We cannot doubt that some of the western rapiers or daggers were derived from the Mycenaean types, which were then lengthening into swords. See on this point M. Déchelette, "Manuel d'Archéologie," vol. ii, p. 214. A direct bond is otherwise established between the Mycenaean types and those of the West by the bronze swords found in Sicily with pottery dated as Minoan Recent III. These Sicilian rapiers, which appear to be local imitations of Mycenaean types, are found in tombs belonging to the period immediately following that of the Mycenaean rapiers.

It is interesting to note that the rapier was the parent of a rare type of spear-head that is almost confined to Ireland. There are six examples in the Academy's collection, and one in that of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. In England only two have been found, one at York, and one in the Thames at Taplow. This type was evolved by adding a socket to the rapier-blade, and attaching a pair of loops a short way down the socket. One example found at Taplow on the Thames has a pair of gold studs at the base of the blade, which are no doubt derived from the rivets at the base of the rapier.

4. Recent Find from the Neighbourhood of Lough Erne.

Recently the Academy was fortunate enough to obtain a very fine bronze spear-head and two bronze leaf-shaped swords found at Tempo, Co. Fermanagh, through the agency of Mr. Thomas Plunkett, M.R.I.A. The spear-head, which measures 15⅛ inches, is in a very fine state of preservation, and belongs to a rare form (fig. 3, p. 92). The loops are formed by the extension of the small ribs on each side of the mid-rib, which are turned at right angles to the socket; there are also rivet-holes. It is almost identical with the spear-head figured by Evans,[2] which was found at Knockans,

[1] "Archæologia," vol. lxi, p. 97.

[2] "Bronze Implements," p. 331, fig. 41.

Co. Antrim, and is now in Canon Greenwell's collection. The present spear-head is the first complete specimen of this type that has been obtained for the collection, and, as far as I am aware, this, with the one in the Greenwell collection mentioned above, another slightly longer in the Belfast Museum, and an imperfect specimen at present measuring 12 inches long in the Academy's collection, are the only examples of this type known.

The two leaf-shaped swords are both in an excellent state. (Plate IX, figs. 3 & 4.) They belong to the same type, with notches below the hilt, and are both of the same period. The casting of the handle of one of them appears to have been imperfect, and to have been afterwards repaired. It has six rivet-holes on the handle-plate, but had formerly eight, of which two are now stopped up. It measures 24¼ inches in length, and the blade at its widest part measures 1¾ inches. The other sword is the same length, but heavier, and is slightly wider at the broadest portion of the blade. It has four rivet-holes but had originally seven, three of which are now stopped up. The handle-plates end in the usual fish-tail shape. Swords of this type, with notches below the hilt, are placed by Montelius in his fifth period of the Bronze Age, dated from the middle of the twelfth to the end of the ninth century B.C. This date is perhaps somewhat too early, and their use may have lasted on into the Heroic period.

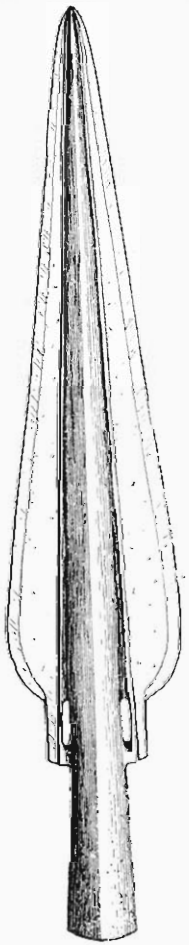


Fig. 3.

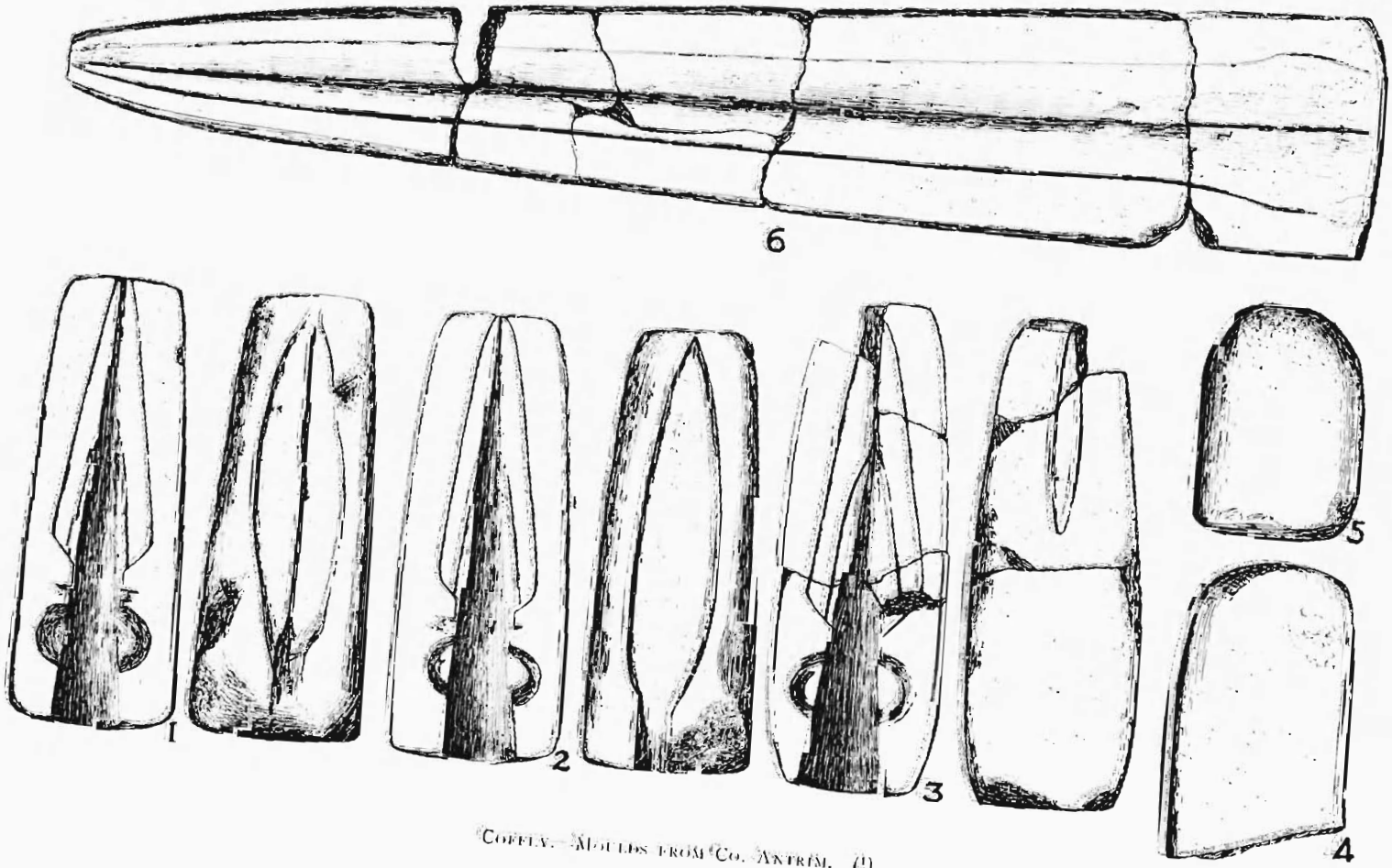
5. Find from Belturbet, Co. Cavan.

Another important find of two leaf-shaped bronze spear-heads was made by Miss Rose McConnell at a place called the Ford near Belturbet, Co. Cavan. These spear-heads were found together, and were probably the arms of a single chief or warrior.

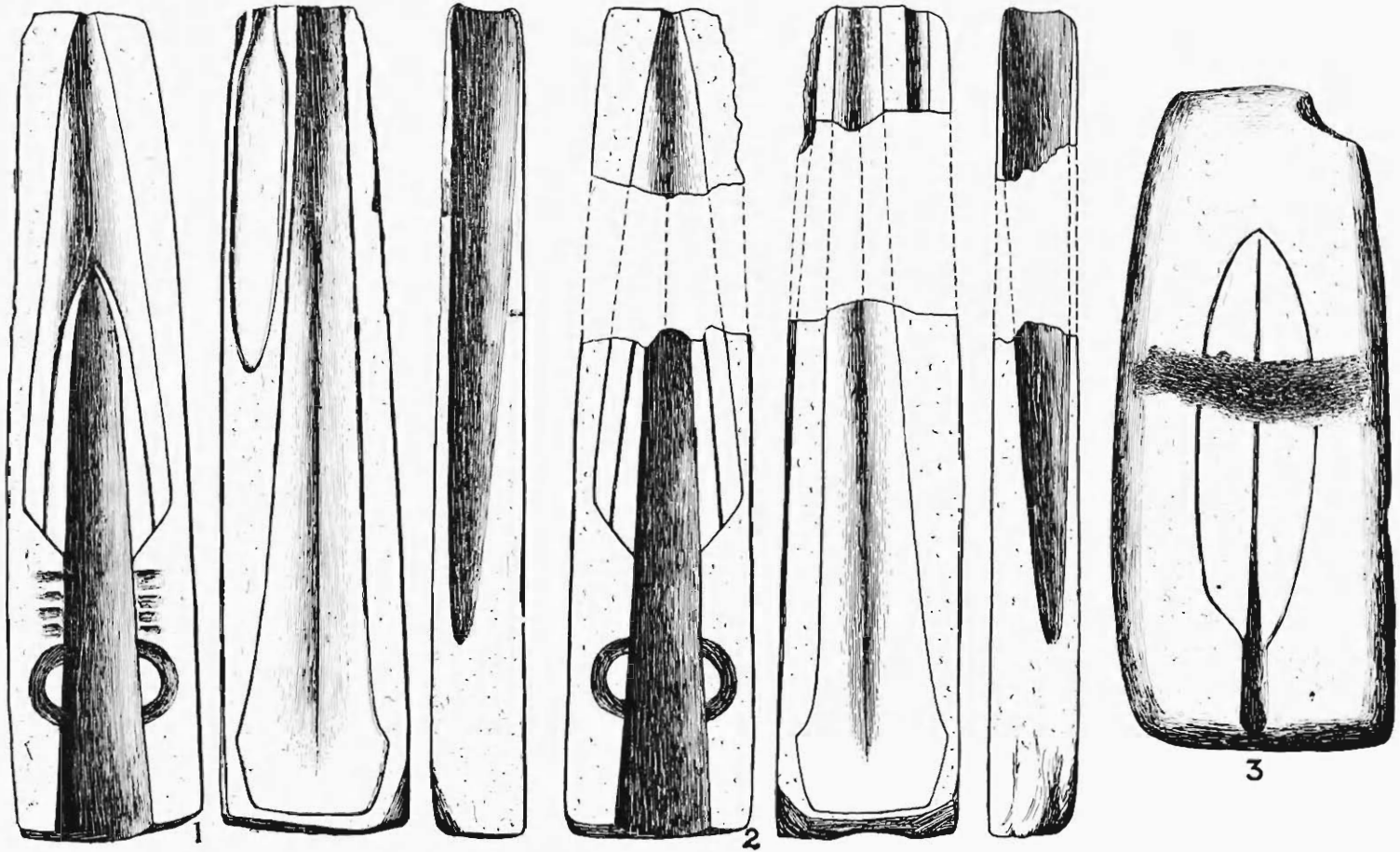
Both spear-heads are in a good state of preservation, but were unfortunately much cleaned by the finder before being sent to the Museum. The longest is 21 inches in length, and the blade is 2½ inches at its broadest part. (Plate IX, fig. 2.) It has a rivet-hole on each side 1¼ inches from the base of the socket, and is the longest spear-head of this type in the collection. The smaller is 12⅞ inches long, and the blade is 2½ inches broad at its widest part. (Plate IX, fig. 1.) The rivet-holes are ⅞ inch from the base of the socket. They belong to the same type as the spear-head from

the North of Ireland figured in Evans's "Bronze Implements," fig. 384, p. 316, also the one from Lough Gur, figured in my paper on "The Classification of Spear-heads of the Bronze Age found in Ireland," Proc. R. I. A., vol. iii., T.S., fig. 19, p. 496. In this paper I dealt fully with this type of spear-head, and in summing up the evidence as regards its age, showed that in finds the association of the leaf-shaped spear with objects of the Bronze Age, such as cauldrons, leaf-shaped swords, horns, crotals, &c., was well marked.

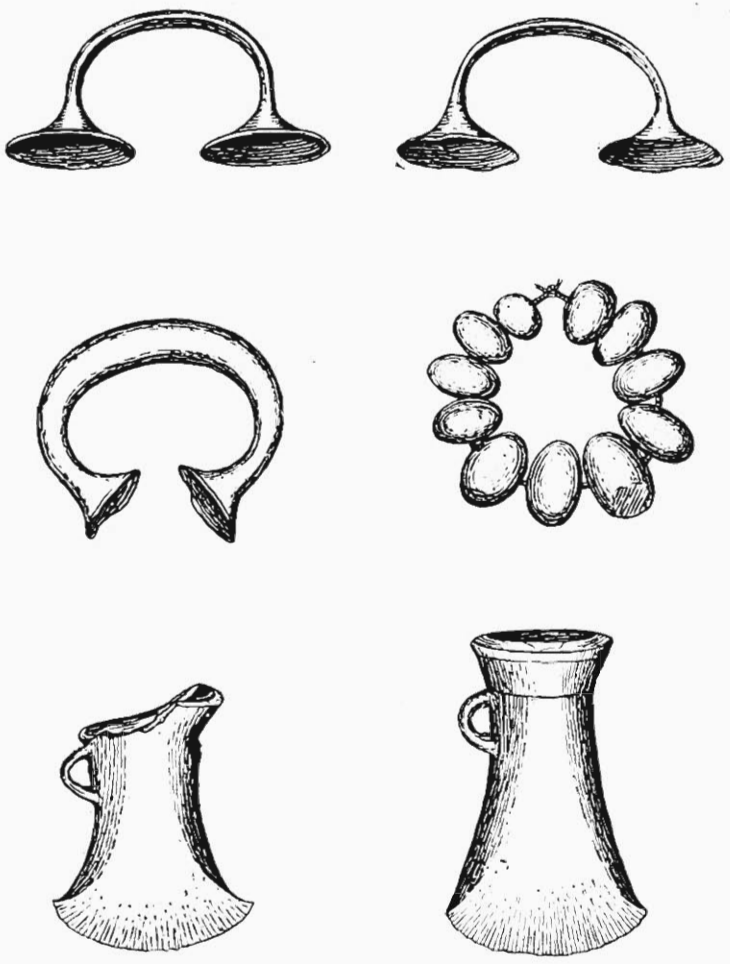
Professor Montelius, in his chronology of the British Bronze Age, places this type of spear-head in his fifth period, dated at from the middle of the twelfth to the end of the ninth century B.C., but this is perhaps somewhat too early, and I should prefer to leave it at somewhere before 700 B.C.



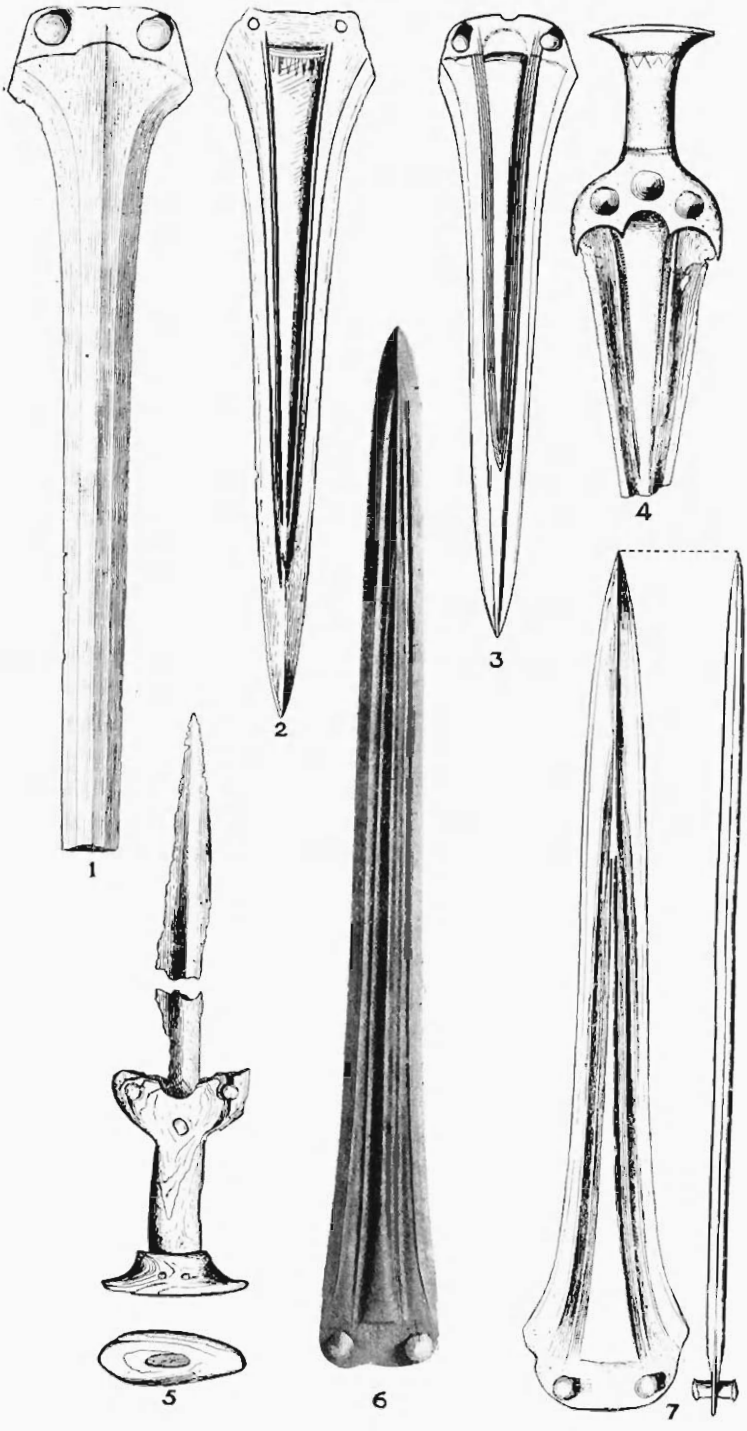
Coffey.—Moulds from Co. Antrim. ($\frac{1}{2}$)



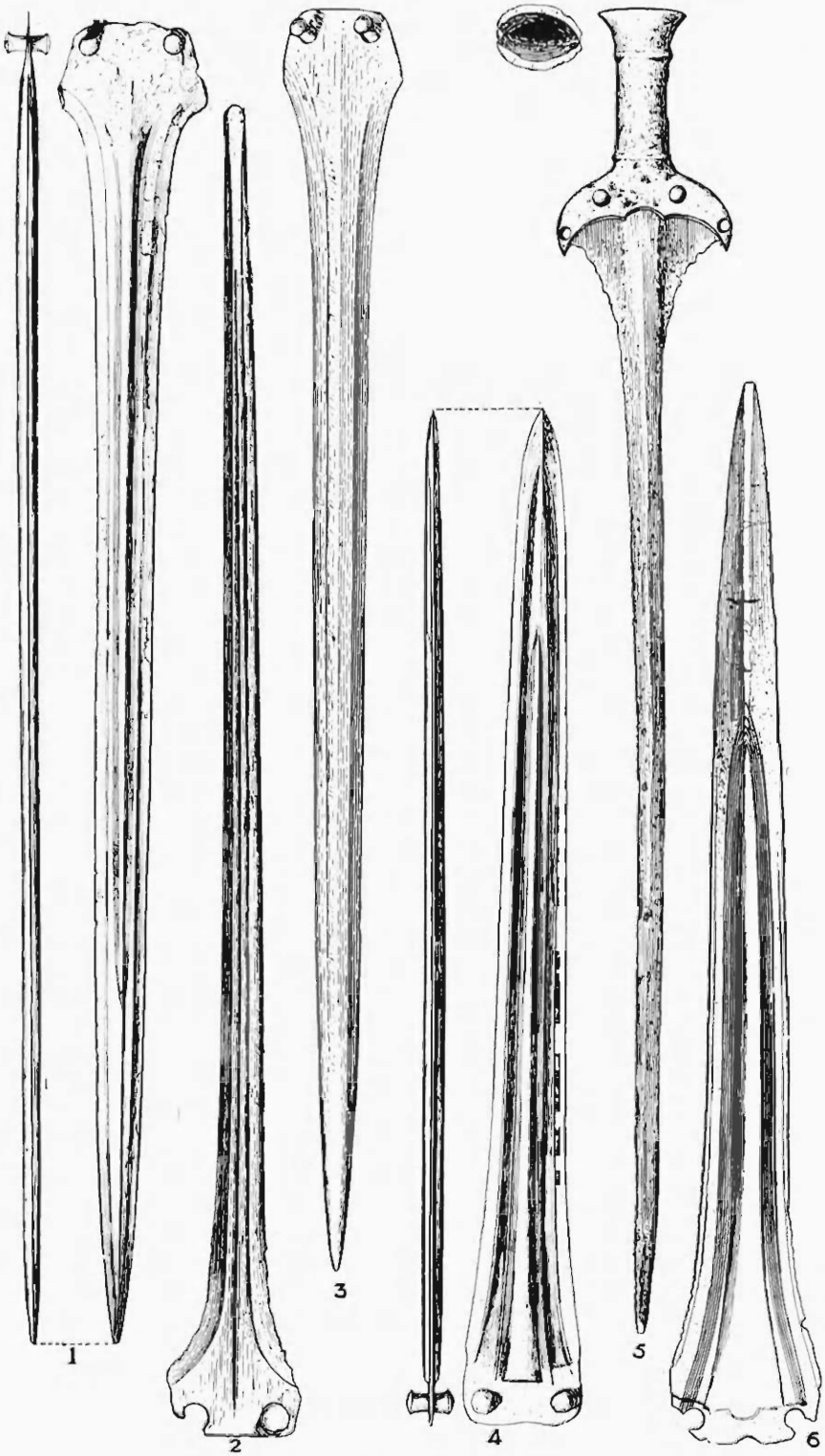
COFFEY.—MOULDS FROM CO. ANTRIM. ($\frac{1}{2}$)



COFFEY.—AMBER BEADS AND OTHER OBJECTS FROM COACHFORD, CO. CORK. (½)



Coffey.—Bronze Rapiers. (1/3)



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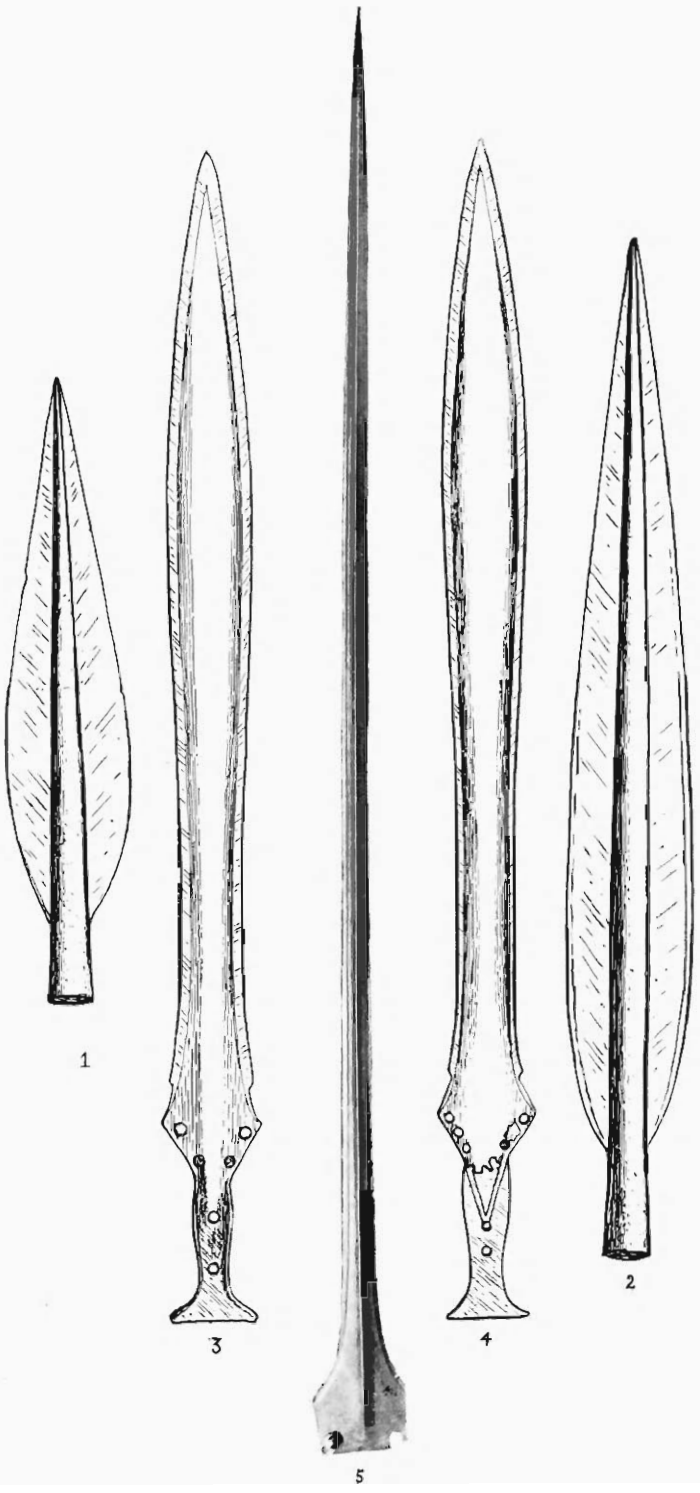

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