

An Urn Burial From Glenaree, Co. Limerick.

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During the 1934 excavations at Cush, Co. Limerick, I was told of the discovery, made some months earlier, of an urn burial in the townland of Glenaree, which lies on the eastern side of the mountain known as Slieve Reagh. The discovery was made by a workman, Michael Horgan, while engaged in "earthing" potatoes on the lands of Mr. John Ryan, and, unfortunately, it was not brought to notice until much of the vessel, which had been broken at the time of discovery, was lost. On hearing of the matter, I visited the site in company with Mr. D. F. O'Shaughnessy, of Kilfinane, and Mr. C. C. Cremin, M.A., Kenmare. Mr. Ryan kindly conducted us to the site of the discovery and presented to the National Museum all the available material connected with the find.

The urn had originally rested mouth downwards on a flat stone, the surface of which was about 20 inches under the surface of the ground, and the grave hollowed out to contain the vessel was about 15 inches in diameter. The urn contained a quantity of cremated bones too fragmentary to enable one to say anything regarding the age or sex of the individual cremated. With the bones was a small bronze blade (Plate V., Fig. I.) very much oxidised and the lower end of which is broken off at a rivet-hole. The present length is 81 mm. and the breadth 41 mm.

Blades belonging to the general class to which this example belongs are well known, particularly in Scotland, ⁽¹⁾ though also in Southern England, ⁽²⁾ but the Glenaree blade differs from most of the published examples in not having a tang as is usual with those. One of the Scottish blades ⁽³⁾ approaches it in outline in having the rivet-hole in what is really a broad survival of the tang though its shape is such as to interfere but slightly with the regularity of the oval outline of the blade. One similar blade is known from Ireland; it comes from the Cemetery Cairn excavated in 1932 at Knockast, Co. Westmeath. ⁽⁴⁾ In this example the outline is a long oval, the tang, in so far as it may be so called, being to a very slight extent only a narrowing of the outline.

The Glenaree blade may be regarded as the final stage in the evolutionary process from the tanged blade, that in which the tang is completely suppressed, thus giving us an implement of oval outline with a rivet near the base of the blade affixing it to a handle—possibly—though we cannot be sure of this, in such a manner as to allow it to swing in its fastening in the manner of a modern razor.

All the blades of the general class to which we refer are regarded as being of Late Bronze Age date. None has been found in hoards, but many—indeed most—have been found with cremated burials. One, with a tang, from General Pitt Rivers' excavation at South Lodge Camp was found with a large urn of bucket-type with finger-tip ornament, ⁽⁵⁾ while one from the well-known late Bronze Age cemetery at Magdalen Bridge, ⁽⁶⁾ Midlothian, was found in an urn of type intermediate between the overhanging rim and cordoned variety. The urn in which the Knockast blade was found was also of the cordoned type. (The purpose of this type of bronze blade is not certain. It may have served merely as a knife, but may also be regarded as a razor, though the type usually regarded as a razor is somewhat different, having a notch at the end away from the handle. ⁽⁷⁾)

(1) J. Anderson : *Scotland in Pagan Times : Bronze and Stone Ages*, Lecture I.

(2) Abercromby : *Bronze Age Pottery*, Vol. II., Plate C. IX, 16.

(3) Shanwell. See Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

(4) *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1934), H. O'Neill Hencken and Hallam L. Movius, Jr. : *The Cemetery Cairn of Knockast*. Fig. 5 D.

(5) Abercromby, *op. cit.*, fig. 381.

(6) Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 29. The blade is ornamented with a pattern of lozenge design characteristic of the Scottish examples. As it is broken one cannot say if it was tanged, but this seems more probable.

(7) See J. Evans, *Bronze Implements*, p. 216 ff., where a full list both of types with references is given.

The Glenaree urn is so fragmentary and so little of it remains that, excepting the rim, which can be reconstructed with tolerable certainty, we cannot be sure of the details of the vessel. On the basis of what remains, however, a suggested reconstruction is given in a drawing (Plate V., Fig I.), for which we are indebted to Miss E. Barnes of the National Museum. The ornament on the rim is an irregular series of hatched triangles below three parallel lines encircling the vessel, all being executed by means of impressed cords. The rim bevels inwards and the bevelled surface carries also an ornament of short parallel lines of cord impressions running diagonally. The clay is of poor and very gritty quality, the body of it and the outer surface being dark in colour while the inner surface is brown. Below the pattern the clay is pinched out to form a raised cordon on the surface. The urn is, therefore, to be ascribed to the cordoned type.

We must now consider the date of the burial. Urns such as those from Glenaree are regarded as being of the Late Bronze Age period, which may date between the limits, 1000 and 500 B.C., but the nature of the bronze blade which is, as already pointed out, towards the end of the general series, inclines us to regard the burial as being late. The overlap between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages is particularly marked in the south of Ireland, where we have an important transition period when iron must have been in rather general use for the more common objects of everyday life, but the burial customs and the general social structure must have differed very little from that of Late Bronze Age times. To this period we would ascribe the Glenaree burial and we may regard its actual date as being within the latter half of the last millennium B.C.
