IX. *Observations on some brass Celts, and other Weapons discovered in Ireland, 1780; by the Rev. Mr. Pegge. In a Letter to the Rev. Michael Lort, D. D. V. P. A. S.*

Read Dec. 20, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

IT is but a very imperfect account I can give you of a late discovery, in the antiquarian way, made in *Ireland*; however it is the best I am able to offer. About the year 1780, two pieces of antiquity were found in a bog in *West-Meath*, unaccompanied with any thing else of note. Lady Sharborne, having been in that kingdom this summer, the pieces I mentioned happily came into her hands, and her Ladyship, on her return to England was so obliging as to make me a present of them.

The drawings of these venerable remains, of the exact size of the originals, were made by the excellent hand of my friend Hayman Rook, Esq. a member of our Society; so that you may depend upon the accuracy of them [a].

[a] See pl. III.

The

The first of them, marked A. is a *Celt*, as this sort of instrument is commonly called, and a very perfect one. It is of brafs, as I suppose the *Celts* in general are, and having a ring, or loop on one side, very nearly resembles N^o 3, in your VIIIth plate, vol. V. of the *Archæologia*, except that on the flat or broad part it has a rib in the middle, to strengthen it as it were on both sides, which does not appear in the type of that in the *Archæologia*; two, however, in Dr. Borlase's *Antiquities of Cornwall* are ribbed like this [b].

The use of these brazen instruments seems at present undetermined, it not being yet ascertained, whether they were destined for military purposes (though I have seen them called *Battle Axes* [c]), or for civil and domestic employments. Even you, Sir, who have so ably and professedly discussed this matter, and taken so much pains with the subject, appear to leave it an undecided point at last [d]. I shall not therefore attempt to resume the consideration of this business after you; but I hope I may venture to embrace this opportunity of making two or three general observations concerning these *Celts*, let the use of them be what it will, premising, however, that the specimen, which gives occasion for the present letter, was found in company with the *spiculum*, or *cuspis*, marked B. in the plate, which with all certainty may be pronounced a military weapon, as it can be nothing else; and that Mr. Adam Wolfey the younger, of Matlock in Derbyshire, has a *Celt*, found near the same place A. D. 1787, at *Blakelaw* in the parish of *Ashover*, with a spear head of flint, a military weapon also.

[b] Dr. Borlase, plate XXIV.

[c] See hereafter.

[d] Dr. Lort, *Archæologia*, vol. V. p. 106, & seq.

It has been remarked above, that the *Celts* were in general of brass, and therefore it was presumed by some gentlemen in Ireland that this in question was older than the invention of iron, and must of consequence be of most remote antiquity. But the position here laid down, 'that this *Celt* is older than the invention of iron,' is with me very questionable; since, though Hesiod and Lucretius, whose words need not be cited to you, do, by express testimony and assertion, corroborate this opinion, and the Arundel marbles state that iron was not invented till 186 years before the Trojan war [e], yet Holy Scripture informs us better, it being there related, that *Tubal Cain* was 'an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron [f]!' There are also other passages of Scripture which tend to evince and confirm the use of iron in the world, in some parts of it at least, before the æra assigned by the marbles. So that it seems to come to this, that in *Greece*, according to Hesiod, brass was known before iron, but that in other regions the case might be different. As to Lucretius, he, we have reason to think, only speaks the sentiments of the learned Greek, his predecessor.

But the consequence which these gentlemen draw from their premises is as infirm and fallacious as the premises themselves, since though brass should be admitted to be known in the world, generally speaking, before iron, it would not follow, that our *Celt* was prior in age to the invention of iron; for please to consider, every region of the globe did not produce iron, either in the ore or in the stone, and that in those places where it was

[e] Dr. Borlase, p. 289, seq. Montfaucon, Antiq. IV. p. 37. It is mentioned accordingly by Homer, Il. Δ. 123, Θ. 15. The *Dabæ* and *Chalybes* were the first inventors. Amm. Marcell. xxii. c. 8.

[f] Genesis iv. 22. Montfaucon esteems iron to be as old as the world, IV. p. 37.

found,

found, it might yet be scarce; so that the new metal, after discovery, might not be immediately brought into common and general use, but brass might continue to be employed for every purpose, long after iron was partially and imperfectly known [g]. All then that can be inferred and allowed is, that the Irish *Celts*, of which we shall find hereafter several have been discovered, are only older than the introduction of iron *there*, and when that was no one can pretend to say [h]; wherefore the result is, that though their *Celts* are undoubtedly ancient, yet they may not rise so high in antiquity as some at first have rashly concluded, but that it might require some time for the islanders to gain experience of the superior excellence of iron in point of hardness and duration, before they would entirely lay aside and abandon a metal so long in use, and so much more plentiful, as we will suppose brass in this case to be, though so much more feeble and less efficient.

2dly. It seems to be agreed among the learned and judicious, that the ancients, who made such common use of this soft metal, and we may say, for all purposes, had a method of tempering and hardening their brass [i], so as to make it more serviceable by carrying a sharper and more lasting edge. This, Sir, is a most reasonable supposition; and I have hardly a doubt but we could do the same at present, were we to attempt it, and had the like occasion and necessity for doing it that they had. I therefore shall not scruple to assume, that the *Celts* were in

[g] Dr. Borlase, p. 290. Gov. Pownall, *Archæologia*, III. p. 536. Montfaucon, l. c.

[h] Quære, when iron was first known in England?

[i] Montfaucon, l. c. Mr. Hearne, Letter to Mr. Thoresby, in Leland's *Itin.* l. p. 135—138. Dr. Lort, l. c. p. 108. Gov. Pownall, l. c. p. 355.

some manner improved and hardened by the very useful invention of the respective people that used them.

3dly. The *Celts*, of which there a great variety, as may be seen in your plates, are not of *Roman* but of *Celtic* extraction, from whence, as reasonably may be presumed, the name, whoever first imposed it, was taken [*k*]. Mr. Lethieullier, though particularly attentive to this object, found but few specimens of this instrument in the *Italian* cabinets when he was in that country, and their virtuosi, he observed, looked upon those that appeared there as *transalpine* antiquities [*l*]. It is certain that they are not seen on the Trajan or Antonine pillar [*m*], nor do Vegetius and the rest of the Roman writers on the art military speak of, or describe any offensive weapons of the kind. And therefore, when any have been found in undoubted Roman stations, and accompanied even with Roman coins, &c. [*n*] we are obliged to suppose, either that they came thither by chance as the spoils of some *British* or *Celtic* enemy, or that they were the arms, or tools, of barbarian auxiliaries [*o*].

In regard now, on the other hand, to the *Celtæ*, whom, I presume, we may also call *Gauls* and *Britons*, the *Celts* ‘ have been
‘ found in great numbers, as you inform us, in various parts of
‘ this island [*p*] (of *Britain*) and figured and described by various
‘ authors;’ and this under our present consideration was dug up
in *Ireland*, where, as seems to be allowed on all hands, the

[*k*] But see a different etymon, from *cælare*, to engrave, in Dr. Borlase, p. 283, which, however, I do not approve.

[*l*] Dr. Borlase, p. 282.

[*m*] Idem, *ibid*.

[*n*] Idem, p. 281.

[*o*] Idem, p. 283.

[*p*] See also Dr. Borlase, *l. c.*

Romans

Romans never were settled [*q*], and where, as in *Tipperary* [*r*], and *Leitrim* [*s*], to say nothing of the Isle of *Man* [*t*], many implements of the kind have at times been found. It seems then, that one may safely pronounce the *Celts* to have been either domestic tools, or warlike instruments, call them which you please, of the *Britons*, *Ibernians*, *Celtæ*, or *Gauls*. Sir James Ware terms that found in the county of *Leitrim* a *military ax*; but the piece before us has nothing of the nature of an ax, for were you to put a helve or handle to it, by means of the two grooves and the loop, you perhaps might make a working tool of it, but nothing like an ax; and the same may be said of all *Celts* of this form. However, the same learned author informs us, ‘that the Irish horsemen were attended by servants on foot, commonly called *Daltini*, armed only with darts or javelins, to which thongs of leather were fastened wherewith to draw them back after they were cast.’ And afterwards, describing the *Kerns*, a species of the Irish military, ‘These, he says, fought with darts or javelins to which a thong was fastened, swords, and knives or keys.’ If my specimen of the *Celt* be a military weapon, it was probably one of these darts or javelins, the loop on the side being in appearance intended to receive such a thong as Sir James speaks of.

This, Sir, is all that needs be said, and perhaps more than needs, on the figure A; so I proceed to that marked B, an object of a very singular kind, novel in appearance, and well deserving the attention of the curious. However, it is not

[*q*] Col. Vallancey, *Gram.* p. 2, Camden, col. 1315, and others.

[*r*] Dr. Lort, l. c.

[*s*] Sir James Ware, p. 161. edit. Harris.

[*t*] Idem, p. 217. It seems they were often found in this island.

an easy matter, in my apprehension, to decypher it, or to give its proper name, and it is with the utmost diffidence that I attempt it. It is of brass, as might be expected, since Sir James Ware writes, ‘As to the military arms of the more ancient Irish, it is past controversy that they were made of *brass*, and so were those of the ancient Greeks, Germans, and Britons [*u*].’ It is six inches long, and weighs at this time near three ounces, much too heavy to be thought the head of an arrow. It must therefore have been a weapon (for a military weapon undoubtedly it is) for casting or darting by the hand. This intention seems further evident from the nature of the socket, or the round hollow part, at the bottom, which being but $\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch in diameter at its orifice, was incapable of receiving a shaft of much substance or strength, for pushing. A shaft, however, it certainly had; witness the existence of this socket, and the two holes opposite to each other at the distance of half an inch from the said orifice, and apparently designed for a rivet to connect and fasten the two members or parts of the instrument together. The length of its quondam shaft it is now impossible to discover; for though we should suppose, for once, the Roman *Pilum* and this Ibernian weapon to have been of the same kind, (and some indeed have termed it a *Pilum*) yet this imagination will not assist us, since the length of the Roman *Pilum* is far from being exactly ascertained, some of the ancients making it near two cubits long in the shaft, and the point 9 inches [*x*], and others 5 feet 6 inches [*y*]. I shall say no more of a matter so uncertain.

[*u*] Antiq. of Ireland, p. 161.

[*x*] Polybius, in Montfaucon, IV. p. 40.

[*y*] Vegetius, II. c. 15.

The socket, or round hollow part, is outwardly less than of its length, and the rest, to the point, is quadrangular, to cut and penetrate the more easily. And it is for the same intention, I presume, that two of the edges, opposite to each other, have ribs a little raised, as is expressed in the drawing. This is a remarkable circumstance, as is also the quadrangular form itself; Vegetius observing, that the Roman *Pilum*, to compare it again with that, was only triangular [z], which indeed must have been a better shape for the purpose than this. Appian, however, in one place gives it a quadrangular form [a]. But whatever advantage our instrument might derive from its figure, it never could perforate a cuirass of almost any kind, the point is so blunt, and to all appearance never was much sharper. It could only serve against an unarmed foe, whether thrown or kept in hand. But in this respect our weapon differs very materially from the *Pilum*, the *Acies* or *Spiculum* of which was purposely made so slender and acute as to break in striking the enemy, that so he could not make any use of the dart by throwing it back upon his assailant [b].

It has been noted above, that the Romans never established themselves in Ireland, if ever they invaded it; consequently, that it must appear unreasonable to expect to find any of their weapons there. This *Cuspis* indeed has been called a *Pilum*; but besides the prepossession against that idea just now mentioned, quære, whether the *Pila*, after Julius Cæsar's time, were

[z] Idem, l. c. 20. II. c. 15.

[a] Appianus de Bello Gallico. p. 1191. edit. Tollij.

[b] See Horace ii. f. i. 14. and the Commentators Dacier and Baxter: also Polybius in Montfaucon, IV. p. 40, and Stewechius ad Vegetium, p. 42.

always made of iron [c]; and further, whether their heads did not always resemble those of their spears, from which they could only be distinguished by the shortness of their shafts. This is assuredly the case of those darts which are esteemed to be *Pila* in Montfaucon [d].

The Romans, however, had a missile weapon called a *Verutum*, mentioned by Cæsar [e], Livy [f], Vegetius [g], and many other ancient authors, and thus described by Montfaucon: ‘The *Verutum* also was a kind of dart, which Polybius makes to be three cubits long; it was four square, and very much of the shape of a spit, from whence it borrowed its name, *Veru* being the Latin word for a spit [h].’ This, you observe, Sir, had no barbs, and supposing our *Cuspis* once had a shaft of the same length it would accord perfectly with it. But still one cannot esteem the weapon in question to be a Roman *Verutum*, for the reasons above given, and because the Gauls, or Celtæ, used the *Verutum* as well as the Romans. This appears from that memorable story related by Julius Cæsar concerning the two valiant centurions, competitors for fame, Pultio and Varenus. The former, he says, was embarrassed by a *Gaulish Verutum* sticking in his belt, (the Greek Version terms it ξυσός) so that he could not readily draw his sword, but was relieved and saved by his rival Varenus, who afterwards was rescued,

[c] Compare Vegetius, l. c. 20. II. c. 15. Appian. de Bello Gall. l. c.

[d] Montfaucon, p. 13, 14, 15.

[e] Cæsar de Bello Gallico V. c. 36.

[f] Livy, X. 29.

[g] Vegetius, III. c. 14.

[h] Montf. IV. p. 41.

in his turn, from imminent danger by Pulsio [*i*]. I am of opinion, Sir, but it is only my opinion, that at last one may venture to call our warlike instrument a *Celtic Verutum*, as being used both in Gaul and in Ireland, and perhaps the only one of the kind hitherto discovered; but of this, you London gentlemen, who have better opportunities of viewing the remains of antiquity, and of consulting books, than I in this sequestered place can pretend to, are the best judges. The *Celtæ* came into these western parts from the N. E. quarter of the globe, and there we find, what is very remarkable in the case, a people called *Mosche* in the army of Xerxes, who used, according to Herodotus, just such a weapon as ours, viz. short shafts with long heads [*k*].

The learned begin now to think, that the *Romans* had a *Celtic* original [*l*], the same with our *I'ernians*, and therefore no wonder, the *Verutum*, with small differences and variations, should be a weapon common to both nations without copying one another. And thus, Sir, though the *Romans* might, after some years, think proper to abandon the *Celt*, a *Celtic* weapon, once but very anciently used by them, and none of these are ever now found in *Italy*, yet the *Verutum*, another *Celtic* weapon, might be retained by them; consequently, and upon this state of the case, the *Verutum*, an instrument well known to and used by the *Romans*, might be found in *West Meath*, though the *Romans* were never there.

[*i*] Cæsar, l. c.

[*k*] Herodotus, Polymn. c. 77.

[*l*] Col. Vallancey, Introd. to Irish Gram. passim. Pezron l. c. 19. il c. 1. Pelloutier l. c. 10.

This

This address, Dear Sir, from an old acquaintance, and one indebted to you for many acts of friendship and regard, will not prove disagreeable, I hope, to *you*, who are running the same course of literature as myself.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient

Humble servant,

S A M U E L P E G G E.

P. S. After this letter was written, Mr. Rooke, whom I had the pleasure of mentioning above, signified to me that he had a *Cuspis* of the spear kind in his possession, found in the forest of Shirewood about the year 1777, and favoured me also with a drawing of it marked *C* in the plate. This, if it can be admitted that the Romans used brass for their *Pila* after Julius Cæsar's time, one would judge to be a Roman *Pilum*, from the sharpness of its point [*m*], the loops for a thong to draw it back, and the smallness of its orifice at the bottom, capable only of receiving a very slender shaft. But the most astonishing thing of this sort is the spear-head marked *D*, the property of Philip Gell of Hopton, Esq. in Derbyshire, by whose free permission Mr. Rooke has here represented it. It was found in a ground belonging to Mr. Gell at Middleton, a hamlet in the parish of Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, the beginning of May last, by a labourer, in opening a tumulus, or barrow, composed of

[*m*] This is somewhat obtuse in the drawing, the extremity having been broken off, and perhaps at the time it was thrown.

lime

lime stone, the stone of the country. It lay on the natural ground, about the middle of the barrow, on the right hand of a skeleton which was pretty perfect. A spear head undoubtedly it is, for the three rivets, which are now loose, and turn round in their respective holes, were certainly intended to fasten it to its shaft; and the largeness of the orifice at the bottom, does as indubitably justify us, in denominating it a true and proper spear; but whether it be a Roman or Celtic, that is, British, remain, must be left in suspense; to the latter, however, one would incline to give it, on account of its rudeness, and the singularity of the rivets.

X. *Some*