

XIX.—*Note on an Anglo-Saxon Knife, found in Kent, bearing an Inscription.*

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By the kindness of Mr. Edward Lloyd of the Winns, Walthamstow, I am enabled to exhibit a very remarkable Anglo-Saxon knife lately found in excavating for the foundations of a house which he is building at Sittingbourne, Kent.

In general form the knife is of a well-known type, and closely resembles one found in Lad Lane in the city of London, and engraved by Mr. C. Roach Smith in his *Collectanea Antiqua*.^a The total length is $12\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the extreme breadth $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch. The tang for insertion in the handle is $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and there is a shoulder at its junction with the blade both at the back and the edge.

The back of the knife has been inlaid with a central strip of alternate short narrow pieces of silver and brass, on either side of which is a narrow border formed of still smaller lozenge-shaped pieces of the same metals, placed side by side, so as to form a sort of corded pattern alternately white and golden.

On what may be regarded as the principal face of the knife—that which is presented when held in the right hand with the edge towards the holder—the ornamentation is of even more elaborate character, but some larger plates are introduced, some of them engraved with scroll patterns and one with a zoomorphic design. On two of the plates, the first of silver and the second of brass, is engraved the following inscription, + S LEBEREHT M EAXH, showing the name of the owner of the knife. On turning the blade over, that of the maker appears inlaid in silver letters, BIORHTELM ME 7◇ORTE. Above and below this inscription, the bottom of which, unlike that on the other face, is towards the back of the blade, are broad lines composed of alternate pieces of silver and brass inlaid in the iron. The border towards the edge of the blade is on both faces fringed with

^a Vol. ii. pl. lviii. 2.

small triangles of silver. The details of the ornamentation can only be appreciated by an examination of the blade; see Plate XII.

With regard to the inscriptions, it will be observed that, though the maker's name was inlaid in the blade during the process of manufacture, that of the owner appears to have been added by means of the graver at a subsequent time, or when the knife was finished, and in all probability sold.

This engraved inscription presents one or two peculiarities. The form + s, instead of merely the usual cross, appears indeed to be singular. So remarkable is it, that Professor Stephens, of Copenhagen, to whom I sent a transcript of the inscription, was convinced that the letter *ɿ* must originally have intervened between the *s* and the *l*, and that the owner's name was *SILEBEREHT* (Victory-bright). There is, however, a wide space between the *s* and the *l*, and on the silver plate, which is in perfect preservation, there is not the faintest trace of any intervening letter. What the meaning of + s may be is a difficult question. Mr. C. Roach Smith has suggested to me that it may represent *Crucis Signum*, or it might possibly stand for *In Cruce Salus*, or even for *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ*. The name of *LEBEREHT*—the giver of justice—is, perhaps, somewhat German in its commencement, but may well be an Old English name. I cannot, however, at present trace any exact analogue.

The formula *M EAH* is also peculiar, and would certainly appear to be more properly divided as *ME AH*. On Æthred's^a finger-ring, for instance, we find *ÆÐRED MEC AH*. And the brooch of silver found in 1814 near Chatham,^b Kent, and now in the British Museum, exhibits the same formula, *ÆLFGIVV ME AH*, or possibly *ME AN*.

The same form occurs on the Northumbrian^c brooch, only there more completely in Runes, *ÆLCHFRITH MEC AH*. In fact, among all the possessive inscriptions recorded by Stephens the form *EAH* does not occur, nor do I find *ME* elided into *M*. *AH*, on the contrary, is the usual third person singular of the present tense of *Agan*, to own; and this strange division of the letters suggests a possibility that there may have been some blundering in the earlier part of the inscription, and that the real name of the owner may, after all, have been *SIGEBEREHT*.

The inscription inlaid on the other face of the knife + *BIORHTELM ME ʃ◇RTE*

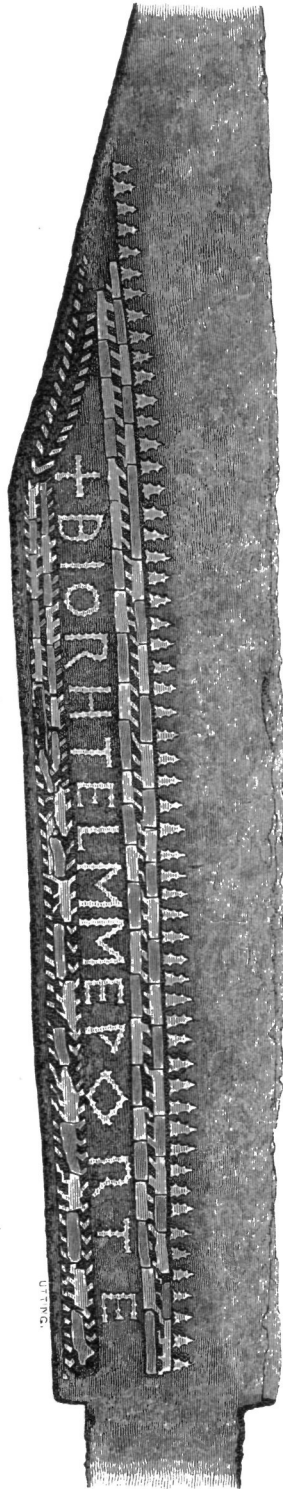
^a Hickes's *Thesaurus*, Pref. viii. pl. vi. Stephens's *Runic Monuments*, p. 463 The original is in the British Museum.

^b Arch. Journ. xii. 202. Stephens *op. cit.* p. 586.

^c Stephens *op. cit.* p. 386.



$\frac{1}{2}$ linear.



Full size.

is of more ordinary form and closely corresponds with the Runic inscription on the Northumbrian brooch already cited, on which the maker's name appears in addition to that of the owner, under the form GUDRID MEC WORHT. Another instance of the same kind is afforded by the inscription on the sundial on the wall of Kirkdale Church near Kirkby Moorside,^a Yorkshire, which concludes
 ʝ HATFARD ME ʝROHT ʝ BRAND PŔS.

On the font at Bridekirk^b the first of the two rhyming lines inscribed on one of the faces in mixed Runes is

+ RIKARTH HE ME IWROKTE.

The same form of MEH ʝO occurs on the shaft of a cross found at Alnmouth,^c Northumberland, and now in the Museum at Alnwick Castle.

It seems needless to cite instances of the inscriptions which, like those on Alfred's jewel,^d and on a silver ring^e now in my own collection, record that they were wrought by order of the owner. I may, however, mention the sword found at Gilton,^f near Ash, with a Runic inscription on the hilt, and the large knife or sword found in the Thames,^g and now in the British Museum, as offering some analogies with the knife from Sittingbourne.

On the former, however, the inscription is merely engraved or scored, and has not as yet been deciphered. That on the latter comprises the whole Futhorc or Runic alphabet, to which is appended the name of the maker or owner BEAGNOTH, and consists of letters formed of gold and silver wire twisted together and inlaid in the blade. Though thus resembling the Sittingbourne knife in character, it is no doubt of earlier date; but I am inclined to think that it can hardly belong to so early a period as that somewhat hesitatingly suggested by Professor Stephens, viz. about A.D. 400-500.

It is hard to assign an approximate date for such objects, but, if we were to accept the forms of the letters as our guide, the lozenge-shaped \diamond , the ʝ and Σ would give nearly the same date for the Sittingbourne knife as for the Kirkdale sundial, which is known to date from about A.D. 1050 to 1060. Looking, however, at the distance between Kent and Northumberland, and the probably different

^a Camden's Britannia (Gough) iii. 330. Arch. v. 188. Stephens, *op. cit.* 985.

^b Archæol. ii. 131; xiv. 113; xix. 379; xxviii. 347. Arch. Æliana, 1856, p. 182. Stephens, *op. cit.* 491.

^c Stephens, *op. cit.* 461. Arch. x. 472.

^d Hicke's Thesaurus, i. 142. Arch. ii. 73. Akerman's Arch. Index, pl. xix.

^e Arch. Assoc. Journ. vi. 153. Stephens, *op. cit.* 463.

^f Akerman's Pag. Sax. p. 48. Stephens, *op. cit.* 370. Haigh, Conquest of Britain, 51.

^g Stephens, *op. cit.* 361. Haigh, *op. cit.* 46.

character of the population in Saxon times, a comparison between the letters on the coins of the south of England and those on the knife would seem to afford a safer criterion.

Taking the \mathfrak{A} , \diamond , and \mathfrak{P} as presenting peculiar forms, we find them of precisely the same character on coins of Offa, of Mercia (A.D. 757-796), and on those of Jaenberht and Æthilheard, Archbishops of Canterbury, struck during his reign. The Σ \sqcap \mathfrak{E} and \mathfrak{M} resemble, however, more closely the forms which occur on the coins of somewhat later date, such as those of Archbishop Plegmund, A.D. 891 to 923.

On the whole I am disposed to consider that the knife may, with some degree of probability, be assigned to the ninth century.

If the owner's name is after all to be read as SILEBEREHT it is worthy of notice that we find on one of the coins ^a of Cuthred, who reigned over Kent from 798 to 805, the name of the moneyer appearing as SILEBERHT.

^a Ruding, vol. i. p. 116, pl. iii. 1.