

A new Valsømagle spearhead from Tjust, Småland, Southeast Sweden

In early June of 2011, co-author Goldhahn was contacted by a former student who had discovered that a bronze spearhead was for sale on the Swedish on-line auction site Tradera. The web site informed potential buyers that the spearhead been purchased at an auction in Västervik in Tjust, a town situated in Southeast Sweden. The spearhead (fig. 1) was described as follows:

Bronze Age/bronze spear

Late Bronze Age, with a hole in the socket, rare, possibly cast in Sweden, found by farmers long ago near Västervik, Småland. The tip is worn c. 1 cm, beautiful patina, well preserved but a bit corroded, casting-crack on one of the wings, 12 cm long, 3.5 cm wide, socket 2 cm.

(Our translation)

The auction ended on 8 June 2011 with the spearhead being sold to an anonymous buyer for SEK 1025 plus SEK 24 in postage. This generous person decided to donate the spearhead to the Linneus University's on-going project "Pictures of the Bronze Age along the Baltic coast of Southeast Sweden" (Goldhahn et al. 2012).

Related finds from Tjust

Bronze spearheads are rare in the Västervik-Tjust area (Widholm 1998; Palm 2012; Dahlin 2014). Only four were known before, the new one being the fifth (fig. 2):

1. Ramstad in Gamleby

This incomplete spearhead measures 170 x 31 x 15 mm and should belong to types Kirke Såby or Ullerslev, because of its narrow, elongated shape



Fig. 1. Spearhead from the Västervik area. Length 12 cm. Photo CH.

Fig. 2. Spearheads from the Tjust area. Left to right, spearhead 1-4. After Oldeberg 1974 and FMIS. Scale varies.

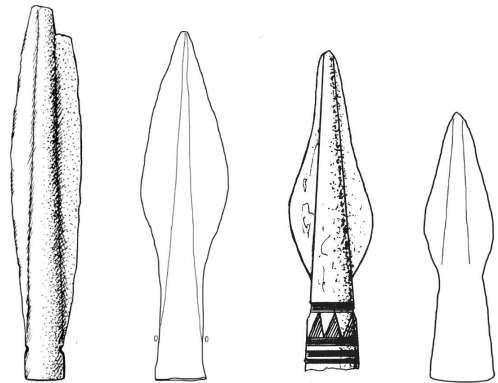




Fig. 3. Possible decoration on the Västervik spearhead (x60). Photo CH.



Fig. 4. The tip of the Västervik spearhead (x60). Photo CH.

and the transition of the edges onto the socket close to the socket mouth, right above the rivet holes. A close parallel is found in a hoard from Fröjk in Denmark (Jacob-Friesen 1967, Pl. 60.8). Both spearhead types as well as the hoard date from Per. II (Jacob-Friesen 1967, p. 141 f; Oldeberg 1974, no 1762). It was found at the farmstead Ramstad in Gamleby parish and incorporated into the collection of a nearby school (Gamleby Folkhögskola) before being given to Kulbacken Museum in Västervik (KUM 4040).

2. Nedre Rumma in Hannäs

This spearhead, which measures 166 x 36 x 26 mm, was found at the farmstead Nedre Rumma in Hannäs parish. The spearhead is in private possession (Raä Hannäs 137:1, see www.fmis.raa.se). It has a simple willow-leaf shape with a conical socket. The acute angle of this cone resembles the sockets of two spearheads in a hoard from Svartarp in Sweden. If this trait can be taken as diagnostic, then Nedra Rumma would date rather late in period VI (Jacob-Friesen 1967, 278 f, Pl. 181.6-7). However, the long transition of the cutting edges into the socket while the blade is still clearly separated from the socket, as well as the placement of the rivets, puts the spear from Nedre Rumma closer to type Ödeshög of Per. I (Horn in press).

3. Lake Storsjön in Västra Ed

This spearhead was found in 1890–91 and sold by

M. Haskel to the National Museum of History in Stockholm in 1891 for SEK 30 (SHM 8864). It originates from an island in Lake Storsjön in Västra Ed parish (Åberg 1923, p. 41; Oldeberg 1974, no 1900). The item, which measures 149 x 37 x 23 mm, is a Valsømagle spearhead from Per. Ib (Vandkilde 1996).

4. Ukna in Ukna

This spearhead from Ukna in Tjust was published by Arthur Nordén in 1925 and has long been thought to date from Per. V. It measures 110 x 25 mm. After an examination of Nordén's illustration (1925, pp. 32, 243, Pl. XI:27) we believe that, on the basis of the blade's elongated, willow-leaf shape the spearhead should be reclassified as type Ödeshög. The socket is shorter than the blade which supports such a classification. However, it is unclear if the spearhead has any rivet holes. A close parallel is found in a hoard from Örebro in Sweden (Jacob-Friesen 1967, Pl. 17.8). This hoard contains a type Virringe axe (Vandkilde 1996, 102 f, fig. 87A). Therefore, the hoard from Örebro may date from Per. Ia (Horn in press). With this background, the spearhead from Ukna would predate the spear from Västervik that is the subject of this note.

The new spearhead from Västervik

The new find from the Västervik area measures about 120 x 35 x 20 mm. It can be classified as type Valsømagle. This is based on the concave



Fig. 5. Grinding striations on the Västervik spearhead (x150). Photo CH.

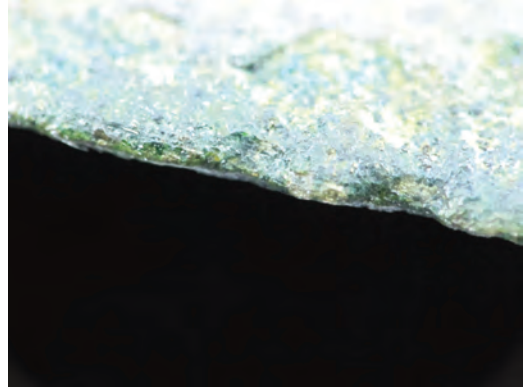


Fig. 6. Damage on the Västervik spearhead's blade edges (x60). Photo CH.

shape of the cutting edge in the upper half of the blade. Lower down the curvature of the cutting edge is soft and rounded, a trait never seen in type Bagterp spearheads. A close parallel is known in a hoard from Haga on Gotland (Jacob-Friesen 1967, Pl. 29.3).

One of the microscope photos of the spearhead shows two triangular features (fig. 3). One is distinct, the other less so. If these two features are not due to taphonomic processes (or occurred post-discovery), they may represent decoration. Unfortunately, they do not help date the piece. Although triangular decoration is known from the Late Neolithic, it is also seen during the Early Bronze Age Fårdrup horizon, and still survives on late Valsømagle spearheads such as the famous one from Falköping in Sweden (Jacob-Friesen 1967, Pl. 28.1). However, it is possible that shorter, squatter forms date somewhat earlier than the longer, more slender spearheads from Falköping, or in the eponymous hoards from Valsømagle in Denmark (Jacob-Friesen 1967, Pl. 27). If so, then the spearhead from Västervik in Tjust could be an early member of the Valsømagle horizon (Horn in press).

Use-wear analysis has showed that the spearhead may have been used multiple times and been subject to considerable transformational repairs. The following description uses terminology from Horn 2013. Most obviously, the tip seems to have been re-worked during the lifetime of the spearhead (figs 1, 4). The mid-rib in the tip section is

flattened, possibly due to hammering. Study of other Scandinavian Early Bronze Age spearheads has shown that many have broken or otherwise damaged tips (Horn 2013). Broken-off tips of spearheads have been found in burials (Goldhahn 1999) or even stuck in the skeleton of the deceased (Vandkilde 2000), indicating violence and combat as the cause of death (Goldhahn 2009). The transformation of the tip of the Västervik spear to its rounded current form may be due to such damage and subsequent repair, which may have involved hammering.

Traces of other transformation processes can also be seen. Under patina and some soil residue the spearhead has grinding striations that could be observed microscopically (fig. 5). Of course, it is difficult to assess when this grinding or polishing occurred. Some could have been applied immediately after casting. However, some may be due to repair. From the use wear, we can glean a rich history of several fights the spearhead has been used in. After the tip was repaired the spearhead was used in fighting again, leading to a considerable blunting of the tip. This also displaced material.

More damage can be seen along the blade's edges. One seems to be more affected by corrosion. Damage to a spearhead may increase dissolving corrosion (Horn 2013). However, to avoid a circular argument, we must be able to see some use wear in another part of a spearhead. Such use wear can in fact be seen on the upper and lower

thirds of the other edge (fig. 6). This damage may have been dents. However, they could perhaps initially have been sharper notches. Repair processes may have caused their smoother form. Similar damage, possibly in combination with an increased presence of corrosive agents in the microclimate of the soil, may have caused this side to dissolve more.

All this shows that the spearhead was most likely used multiple times in heavy combat. Furthermore, whomever the spearhead belonged to also took care of the weapon, removing damage and re-sharpening it. The spearhead must have had considerable value, because even after heavy damage incurred at the tip it was not thrown away, re-cast or sacrificed immediately, but instead carefully hammered and transformed into its now rounded shape. Afterwards, it was used in combat at least once more as renewed flattening of the tip shows.

A sad ending

There is always a thrill when new finds of this kind emerge, and the importance of the described spearhead for our understanding of the Bronze Age in northern Europe demands no explanation in these pages. The mentioned project's and LNU's intention was to analyse and publish information relating to this new spearhead, and then donate it to Västervik Museum at Kulbacken. However, the mighty Norn had other plans. Sometime between December 2014 and mid-February 2015, when Goldhahn was a visiting fellow at the School of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian National University, somebody broke in and stole the spearhead together with all the documentation assembled by the project. Luckily, Horn had kept photos taken during his examination of the spearhead. All available information about it has now been sent to the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm. The theft has been reported to the police, which decided not to start an investigation. Perhaps one day the object will resurface and another chapter in its history can be written.

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