Costume in the Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Saltwood, Kent

Part 3 Weaving batten and Bibliography

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A summary of the site can be found at
http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/greylit/details.cfm?id=11334
doi: 10.5284/1008823
Specialist reports on other artefacts can be found at
http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/ctrl/sfsspr/downloads.cfm?volume=research&CFID=54264&CFTOKEN=88E00B02
Weaving batten

An iron weaving batten, or sword-beater, ON 2048, was recovered from Western cemetery grave C3762. To judge from the position of teeth, beads and buckle in relation to the batten, it must have lain, point down, to the right of the woman’s waist. The batten is 523mm long, of which 100 mm is the pointed tang for the handle and 15 mm the incomplete remains of a tongue-like projection at the tip. The tang has remains of the wooden handle. The blade is heavily corroded but Brian Gilmour has identified it as of composite construction and made from a cut-down sword (Gilmour this volume).

These battens were used to beat up the weft when weaving on the warp-weighted loom. The sword-shaped form with tang handle and an extension on the tip is typical of East Kent, where there have been 12 similar finds, and another from Chessell Down, Isle of Wight, belongs in the same group (reviewed in Walton Rogers forthcoming). There are also five examples from graves in the East Midlands and East Anglia and a sixth from the settlement at West Stow, Suffolk. This distribution continues into the Continent, where a related form of beater has been found mostly North and East of the Rhine (ibid.). These sword-shaped beaters contrast with the spear-shaped form with socketed handle of northern England, which has its closest links with Norwegian beaters (Walton Rogers 1998, 292-4).

Fig.23: Grave C3762 with the weaving batten marked in red.

The Saltwood batten comes from a particularly well furnished burial (Fig.23) and the other Kent battens also come from graves of women with jewellery and accessories indicative of rank.
Battens made of wood would also have been in use, but it is probable that the owner of the iron batten was a senior member of the household who was responsible for overseeing cloth production (Chadwick 1969, 21; Walton Rogers forthcoming).

Sword-beaters first appeared in graves in the early-mid 6th century. There is a steady lengthening of the blade from 376 mm in the earliest from Buckland I G20, which has recently been re-dated to the early part of Buckland Phase 2, 510/30-550/60 (Brugmann forthcoming); to 765 mm in the Final Phase bed burial at Edix Hill G18 (Malim and Hines 1998, 52, 219, 234, 282-7). The Saltwood example, which before breakage of the tip was probably 530-540 mm long, fits the Phase 3 date provided by the Kentish disc brooch and the late variant of Costume Style IV.
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