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THE ANGLO-SAXON PLANE FROM SARRE

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The plane was found in grave 26 of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sarre in 1863 ; it is briefly described and figured in the excavation reports,¹ though its real nature was first recognized by Baldwin Brown.² The plane was on the left side of the body, together with iron keys. A bronze balance and scale-pans and a set of nineteen weights lay at the left foot, and elsewhere was a shield boss, a spearhead, a bronze buckle and a purse mount. The grave-goods indicate the burial of a man in the sixth century.

The plane consists of two parts of different materials.

The *base-plate* is of bronze, 6·05 in. long and 1·3 in. wide. Near each end is a vertical stop to hold the stock or body-piece of the plane. The front stop is cast in one piece with the base-plate, but the rear stop is folded back over the base-plate, hammered tight against it, and then bent up at right-angles. One-third back from the front edge is a rectangular slot, 0·8 by 0·4 in., bevelled along the rear side for the cutting iron.

The *stock* has a cellular structure longitudinally and is denser in the lower part. It is, therefore, bony in nature, and its size suggests that it is too large to be made from a limb bone but was cut from the beam of a large red deer's antler. The stock is 5·15 in. long, 1·2 in. wide and 1·2 in. high. The underneath surface and the ends are carefully made flat and squared, so that the stock fits tightly into the base-plate.

The slot for the cutting iron and its wedge, and for the discharge of shavings in front of the iron, is cut to fit accurately over the slot in the base-plate. It is 2·1 in. long at the top, 0·75 in. wide for the cutting iron, narrowing to 0·6 in. wide in front. The difference in width is hardly sufficient to allow for a shoulder on each side to engage the wedge holding the cutting iron in position. Probably this was done by an iron bar fixed across the slot, but, unfortunately, this part of the stock is broken away on both sides.

The back part of the stock is pierced from side to side by an oval hole, 1·3 in. long and 0·35 in. high, for holding the plane when in use. The hole comfortably takes the end of the thumb on one side and two fingers on the other, enabling the plane to be lightly but firmly held between the finger tips. The back end of the stock is rounded to conform with the end of the hole.

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, VI, 162; VII, pl. XIII.

² *The Arts in Early England*, IV, 415, pl. XCVII, 2 (wrongly assigned to Bifrons).

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The two parts of the plane are fastened together by three iron rivets, one in front of the slot and two behind it. The rivets pass through holes drilled in the stock and are hammered over bronze plates on its top surface. The front plate is square, and those behind the slot are triangular, with the points facing inwards.

The front right corner of the base-plate is rounded and burred on the upper surface, showing that the plane had considerable use before being buried in the grave.

This small and delicately-made plane is clearly a craftsman's tool, intended for squaring or bevelling the edges of small pieces of wood rather than for planing surfaces. The width of the cutting iron would allow for wood up to $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick to be planed. It is, therefore, suggested that the plane was used in finishing strips of wood that were fitted accurately together, such as the sides of work-boxes or caskets,¹ and the staves of buckets.

Examples of ancient planes are exceedingly rare, and according to Flinders Petrie² the plane was a Roman invention. Roman planes are known from Pompeii, Silchester, and the Rhineland, but these are larger than the Sarre plane and were joiner's tools. In fact the Sarre plane appears to be unique for the Anglo-Saxon period. In lightness of make a closer parallel is provided by the wooden plane in the third-century hoard from Vimose, on the island of Fyen, Denmark.³ This is 10 in. long and canoe-shaped, with each end turned inwards in the shape of a bird's head.

Planes closer in construction to the Sarre plane are known from the terps of Friesland, and belong to the late Roman and to the late Frankish periods.⁴ One from Finkum is 6.6 in. long, with a bronze base-plate and a bone stock, and provides a remarkably exact parallel to the Sarre plane. Another plane, from Aalsum, is similar in shape but slightly larger, and is made entirely of wood. These planes, have a hole through the stock as on the Sarre plane. These parallels in Holland suggest that small and delicately-made planes, based on Roman models, were developed in the Teutonic lands at a time when the making of articles from composite strips of wood was particularly in vogue.

The Sarre plane is in the collection of the Kent Archæological Society at Maidstone; grateful thanks are due to the Curator, Mr. L. R. A. Grove, F.S.A., for permission to publish it here.

¹ For the reconstruction of a Frankish casket see *Germania* 31 (1953), 44.

² *Tools and Weapons* (1917), 39.

³ C. Engelhardt, *Vimose Fundet* (1869), p. 29, Fig. 31.

⁴ P. C. J. A. Boeles, *Friesland tot de elfde eeuw* (1951), pp. 202, 535, pls. XXX, 20 and XXXIa, 1.