

An Early Bronze Age burial at Perio

By John Hadman

Excavations were carried out by the Middle Neolithic Archaeological Group in October 1972 on a prehistoric site close to the deserted mediaeval village of Perio in the parish of Southwick, Northamptonshire. The aerial photographs had indicated to us that the south-eastern end of a large enclosure here was bounded by two wide ditches some 22 metres apart. Each ditch was broken by several gaps or entrances. Pottery from our excavation of the ditches dated them to the Iron Age.

Midway between the ditches an oval pit was discovered which proved to be a dug grave containing a crouched inhumation-burial laid on a compacted gravel surface (fig.14). Accompanying the body was a bronze dagger (fig.15a) which placed the burial in the Early Bronze Age. A sherd of Beaker (fig.15b) was found in the upper filling.

Close examination of aerial photographs showed that a narrow gully midway between and parallel to the wide ditches was broken about 4 metres on either side of the burial pit. Remains of a shallow ditch suggested that there had been a ring-ditch surrounding the grave. If a barrow-mound had existed, no other trace of it remained.

The body had been placed in a crouched position on its left side with the dagger close by the right hand. Stains on the gravel suggested a wooden handle.

The bones of the skeleton were in a highly fragile state and very delicate cleaning procedures had to be employed. A styrene monomer resin was used to harden the bones before they were lifted for examination.

Parallel stains in the clay filling of the grave, together with charcoal fragments, indicated a collapsed wooden cover over the body. Additional evidence for this came from the body itself. The skull, pelvis and rib-cage were flattened and the right upper arm had been separated from the bones of the lower arm.

Apart from the dagger, the only other find accompanying the burial was the leg bones of a sheep.

Dr.D.H.Fulton of Kings Cliffe kindly reported that the body was that of a male in his early thirties, about 1.60 metres tall. The lumbar region of the spine showed signs of advanced arthritis and there was a slight abnormality in one leg. The teeth, although in good condition, were badly worn down.

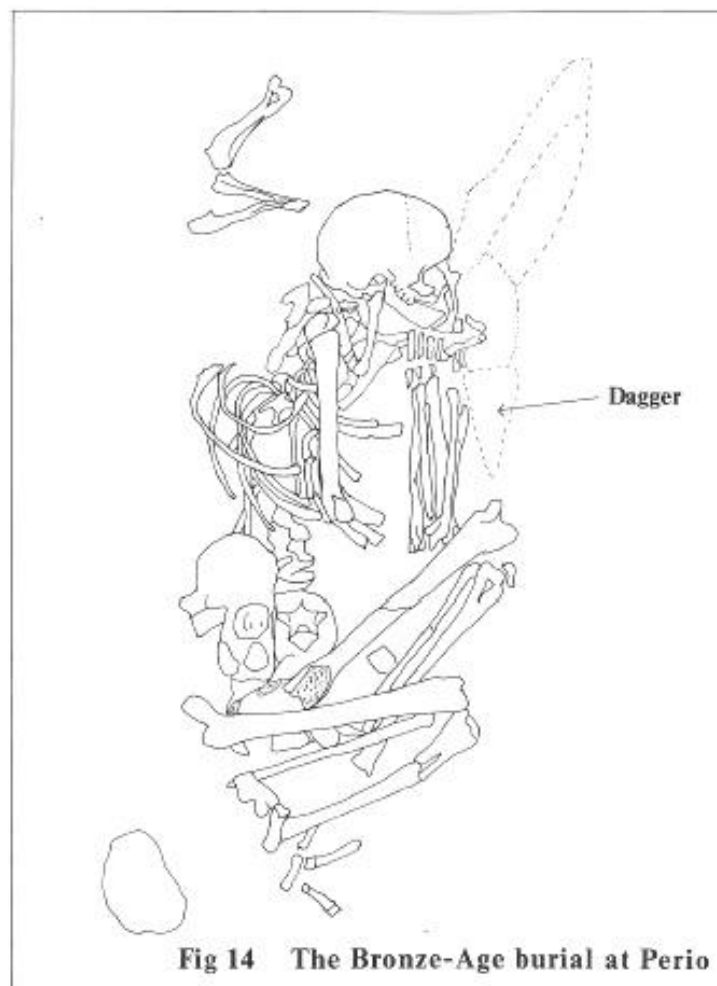


Fig 14 The Bronze-Age burial at Perio

Perio – the finds

By David Coombs

The Beaker

The sherd (fig.15b) is from a beaker in the Southern British tradition in David Clarke's classification, somewhere within the Developed (S2) to Final Southern Beaker groups (S4). The fine red surface fabric, light gritting and use of careful comb impression rather than incision, would marginally favour an attribution within the Developed or Late Southern Beaker groups (S2 or S3). The design motif appears to be well executed floating lozenges within reserved undecorated bands which is characteristic of S2 or S3 Beakers. The beaker may have resembled the ones from Ysgwennant, Denbighshire (Clarke (1970), fig. 895) and Winterbourne Monkton, Wiltshire (Clarke (1970), figs. 897 and 898).

Due to the position of the beaker sherd in the grave filling there can be no question of an association between the burial and the beaker. Although chronologically such an association would be possible, as round-heeled three-riveted daggers are also known from an S2 association at Aldro (Clarke (1970), fig. 888) and with an S3 beaker at East Kennet (Clarke (1970), fig. 948), the position of the sherd might suggest old occupation debris or a disturbed burial that had become incorporated in the grave filling. Daggers with three rivets have also been found with S4 beakers at Linlathen, Angus (Clarke (1970), fig. 1018), and Methilhill, Fife (fig. 1016) and with Finger Pinched beakers at Eynsham, Oxford (fig. 1038) and Pentraeth, Anglesey (fig. 908) as well as with a number of post-beaker period burials.

Clarke illustrates five beakers from Fengate of his S2 tradition (figs. 855-859) and one of his S3 tradition (fig. 937). Recent excavations at the Padholme Road site, Fengate, have produced sherds of S2 or S3 beakers as well as sherds of S4 (Final Southern Beaker tradition). The presence of timber remains in the grave might suggest that originally the body had been buried in either a coffin or a timber-lined grave. For a discussion of such burials the reader is referred to Ashbee (1960) and Elgee (1949).

The Dagger

At present the dagger (fig.15a) is 135mm. long and the maximum width across the heel is 67 mm. The dagger is best described as a round-heeled dagger with three rivets, with an ogival blade. The edges of the rivet holes have been torn, but it is clear that they were once holes, and not rivet notches. The three rivets are present, and when found were in position. As

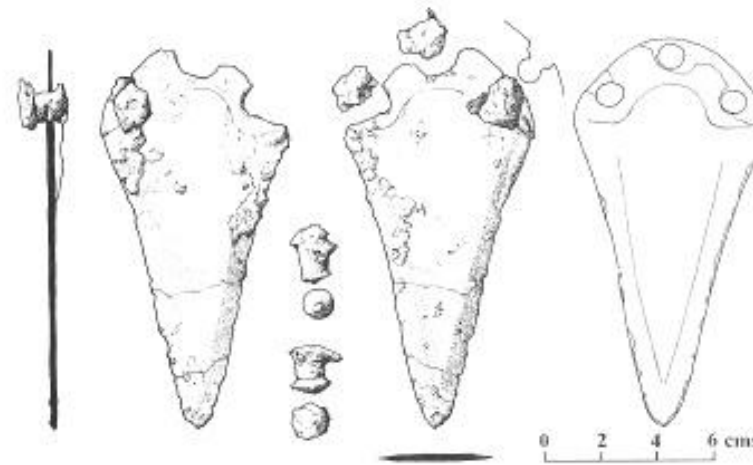


Fig 15 (a) The dagger from Perio



Fig 15 (b) The Beaker potsherd from Perio

the broken fragments from around the rivet holes were not found it might suggest that the blade was rehafted before burial. Sharpening along the edges can be clearly seen and the original hilt-line was clearly discernible on the surface of the heel. The hilt-line was omega-shaped with rounded corners. The section of the blade is flat with no trace of a midrib.

The dagger falls into a well known class of daggers which were current during the Beaker period and Early Bronze Age in the British Isles and Europe. Three-riveted round-heeled daggers associated with beakers are referred to above. Similar daggers belong to the Corkey type of Harbison (1969), (figs.14-40) in Ireland, some of which have ogival blades, others triangular forms. Piggott (1963) illustrates a number of similar daggers from the British Isles (fig.17, i, 11, v) as well as the European ones (fig. 18), and Henshall (1968) illustrates daggers from Scotland which are of the same general type.

A date within the sixteenth century B.C. would perhaps best fit the dagger, but this must be regarded as only a very rough date.

I would like to thank Dr. D.L.Clarke for kindly supplying notes on the Beaker sherd, and my wife Jenny for drawing the dagger and the sherd.

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