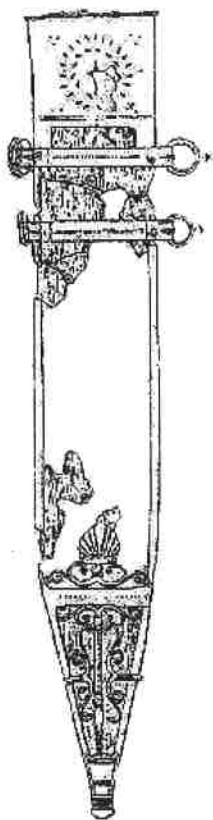


A SIMPLE SCABBARD FOR A MAINZ GLADIUS

By David Hare

During further research into Pompeii sword scabbards, it was found that a transition had probably occurred (see previous article in *Exercitus* 2005) from the styles of scabbards used for the slightly earlier Mainz pattern of sword to the later Pompeii pattern that replaced it over a period of time.



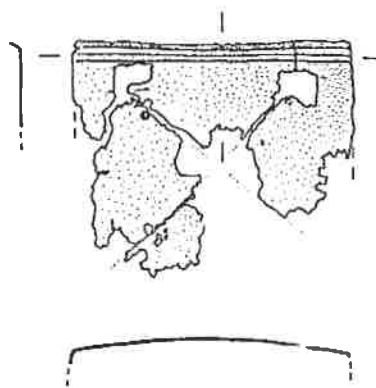
The Porto-Novo Scabbard

Most scabbards for Mainz pattern swords are one of two types; A guttered frame (with two cross hangers for the suspension rings) with a series of decorated (embossed or engraved) plates fitted on the front, with a two piece wooden lining for the blade behind (the Fulham being a good example). Or the same frame with a tinned or silvered plate inserted down it's whole length, with components of decorative openwork fitted to the mouth area and the chape area, and also sometimes around the hangers.

Pompeii sword scabbards are generally characterised by their separate top “lockets” and chapes with applied palmette decoration fixed to the leather covered wood lining for the blade.

Some years ago work to find a “simple” Pompeii scabbard revolved around the pieces found at Long Windsor, and it's possible direct parallel from Valkenberg (and another from Vindonissa). The problem with this was that the fittings were 75mm wide, too wide for any known Pompeii blade, where no more than 60mm is needed to wrap the scabbard around the blade.

What sort of scabbard did they come from?



The Long Windsor Top Fitting

The answer came from Corsica (illustrated in *Exercitus* Spring 2005), a scabbard with a metal frame, wide enough and shaped clearly for a blade of the Mainz pattern.

The fitting at the top clearly came from the same group as the Valkenberg and Vindonissa pieces, and was 75mm wide as they also are. The scabbard also has a palmette similar to any found on Pompeii scabbards, and a scrolled decoration covering the chape, mirroring the scrolled ends of the palmette above. This chape decoration is very similar to a chape of one of the Pompeii scabbards found at Pompeii itself, which also has the piece wrapping itself around the back of the chape.

A reconstruction was needed, as I thought the ESG clearly needed some simpler Mainz scabbards, of a type possibly in use by II Augusta as it moved around the south of England. The evidence

needed to pull this together needed a little faith.

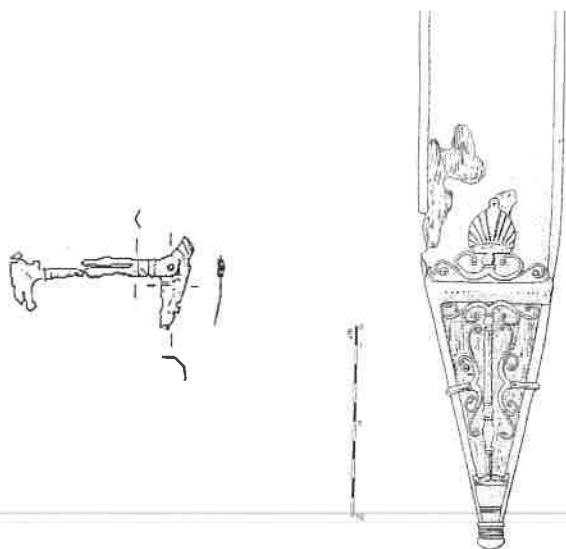
We know that II Augusta had been based in the Rhineland for some years before 43AD, and due to a lack of action prior to the invasion of Britain, probably had a lot of older equipment (M C Bishop pers. com. 2004). A gladius blade of Mainz pattern was found at Chichester, the Long Windsor pieces of scabbard are from Dorset, areas where II Aug. were active. The Valkenberg piece is from an auxiliary fort possibly under influence of a legion with older equipment.

It was decided to fit the fittings from Corsica with the Chichester blade, but also make a second scabbard with the Valkenberg fitting to see how the Long Windsor parallel fits.

It is worth looking back at the Long Windsor pieces again, as the drawings of the remains of the chape have similarities to Corsica scabbard. The cross piece at the top of the chape in both cases seem to in one piece with the left hand guttering or soldered on, with a rendering of the palmette decoration seen on the top corners of a chape belonging to a Pompeii scabbard. On the right hand side the cross-piece is riveted to the guttering, with a palmette that wraps over the guttering at the side.

This does not conclusively prove what the Long Windsor fragments are, but I think it is enough to

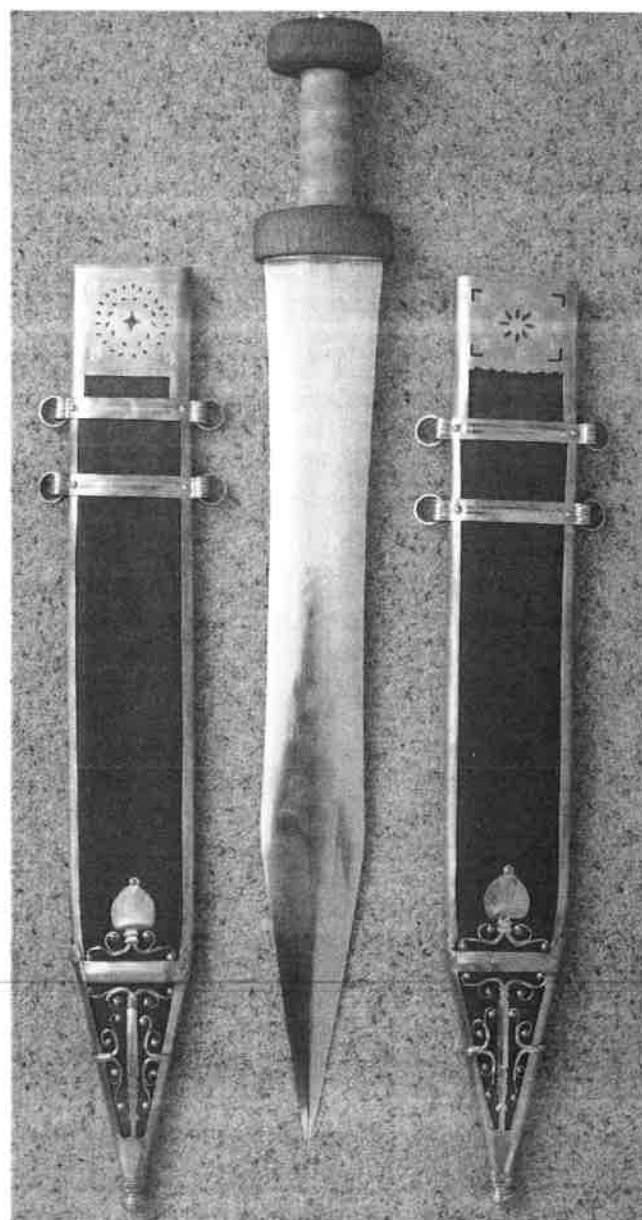
obtain forged blades for new swords. These were duly ordered in July 2005, but did not turn up until August 2007! All of the brass work of the scabbard frame and decoration was tinned, and the palmette work on the chape was riveted to the front of the leather covered wood liner prior to the rear liner being fitted inside the frame. The top fitting was then added to the top of the frame and secured. The blades have oak guards and pommels, but due to the great difficulty in obtaining suitable bones to make the grips due to the recent problems in British agriculture, I had to use beech to make the grips.



Comparison: Left, the Long Windsor chape fragment. Right, the Porto-Novo chape. The way the cross-piece is made is similar

suggest that they may parallel more with the Corsica scabbard than a Pompeii type of scabbard.

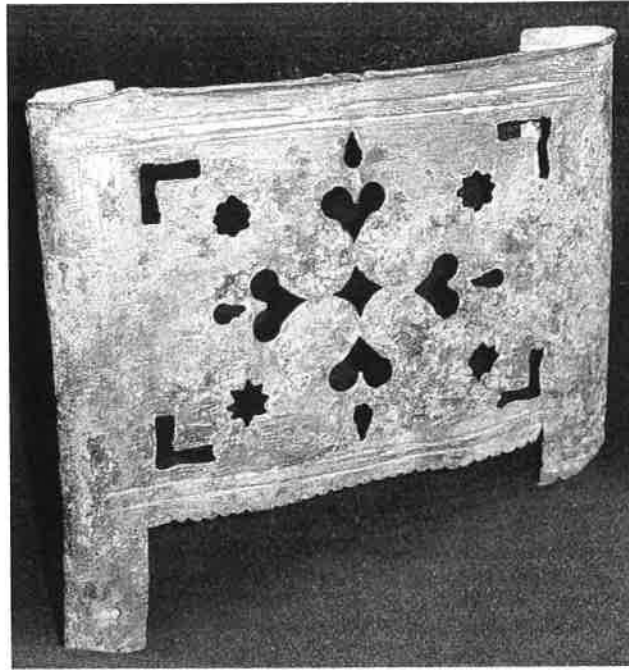
The two reconstructions were made using normal ESG methods and formers. However, although the author can manufacture sword blades using the grinding/filing method, it is current policy to



The reconstructed scabbards with the gladius blade based on the Chichester find. The scabbard on the right has fitting from Valkenburg. Left scabbard is based on the Porto-Novo example

Completed, the two scabbards are similar, and I am sure that all the similar fittings from Long Windsor, Valkenberg, Vindonissa can be grouped with the Corsica example.

Nothing is so clear cut when researching Roman weaponry. Much of this was formulated in 2004, and further evidence from Pompeii itself will provide the subject matter for a future article.



Another example of a top fitting for the type of scabbard described in this article. Find location unknown to the author.

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