

## DATASHEET 30

### Prick Spurs 700-1700

by

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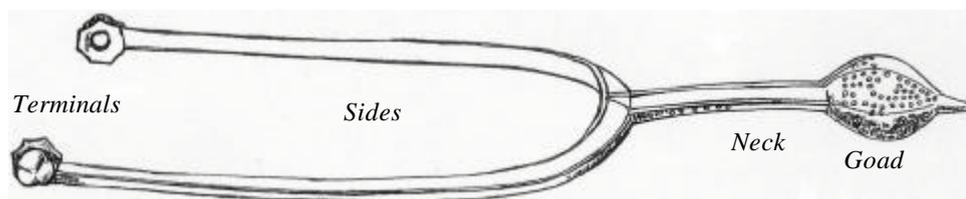
*Candlespur, Reece Lane, Acrise, Folkestone, Kent CT18 8LW*

By AD 700 the use of spurs was well-established in Europe while further east the whip continued to be the preferred riding aid. Their early use in Britain is shown by finds from Roman sites (Shortt 1959, 61-76). Spurs were made from iron or copper alloy; the former were often tinned to protect them from rust and enhance their appearance. As they developed, their importance as a fashion accessory denoting the status of horsemen increased and they were often decorated, silvered and gilded. By the Middle Ages gilded spurs were used in the ceremonies of knighthood and had become symbolic of that rank. A rare spur made of gold with Borre-style decoration, dating from the 10th century, was excavated at Verne Kloster in Østfold, Norway (National Museum of Antiquities, Oslo; Wilson & Klindt-Jensen 1966, 89 & pl. XXIX a-c). Chaucer described the Wife of Bath as wearing ‘..on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe’ (Skeat 1895, 424-5). Women would have worn similar spurs to men but only when it was essential for riding because they would

have been inconvenient with long skirts, which also concealed them, precluding any fashionable interest.

#### **Terminology** (*Figure 1*)

Spurs with a single goad point were simply called *spurs* before the appearance of the rowel spurs in the thirteenth century. The term *prick spurs* has been in use since at least as early as 1688 (Holme 1688, II 325/1) and possibly derives from the earlier use of ‘pricking’ to describe fast riding. *Spurs* and *buckles* are medieval terms; *leathers* for the straps of spurs was used in the 16th century (for full details and references for terminology see Ellis 1995a, 126-7). The spur-makers of Walsall in Staffordshire call the projection which carries the goad the *neck* of the spur (Plot 1686, 376-7, para 79), unlike American spurriers who call it the ‘shank’. Modern Walsall spur-makers refer to the spur *sides* which flank the wearer’s foot. These have *terminals* at their front ends for the *attachments for the leathers*.



*Figure 1: Terminology*

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### Development 700-1700

Spur sides were horizontally straight from 700 until the late 11th century (1-11), and many continued to be straight but shorter during the 12th century (12-14), when sides which curved strongly under the ankle became increasingly popular. The earliest spurs had very severe goads (1-4) which, by the 10th century, began to be replaced by milder goads with broad bases to their points (5 onwards). At first leathers were most often attached by rivets although terminal types varied and the disappearance of rivet terminals was to coincide with the invention of the rowel. After rowels appeared in the early 13th century the use of prick spurs declined, so that by the first quarter of the 14th century they were quite rare except for areas under the influence of the Moors who continued to use them until modern times (25-26).

The illustrations in Figure 5 (21-28) show some later prick spurs and these can generally be identified by their similarity in everything but their goads to the contemporary rowel spurs.

The illustrations and catalogue notes are a very general survey of spur development. They are not drawn precisely to scale and the overall length measurement (O.L.) given is taken forward along the neck to a point midway between the terminals.

### Catalogue

1) Gilt copper alloy spur, Carolingian, 8th century. O.L. 131 mm. The terminals are pierced with vertical slots for the leathers; other similar spurs had deeper terminals to which the leathers were riveted.

Buckles and fittings were usually decorated en suite.

Private collection.

2) Iron spur, Carolingian, 8th-9th century. O.L. 168 mm. Triangular section sides, round neck and goad. The damaged terminals originally had two rows of rivets to hold the leathers.

Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, Berlin, inv. no. 95.3-Zeughaus.

3) Iron spur, 8th-9th century from Dorestad, Netherlands, an area then roughly Saxon within the Carolingian empire. O.L. 141 mm. In excavated condition, the end of one side has rusted away; the remaining terminal had a double row of three rivets to attach the leather. British Museum, MME 1869, 4-5.84. A spur of similar type from York differs in that its one surviving terminal is formed by extending the flattened end of the spur side and curling it back to form a simple horizontal slot (Ottaway 1992, 699 & 701, no. 3836).

4) A typical Scandinavian Viking spur; iron, decorated with applied silver and copper. Middle Viking period 10th century. O.L. 213 mm. One of a pair from rich grave no. 2 at Nørre Longelse Mølle, Longelse, Langeland, Denmark. Langelands Museum C. 489. Contemporary spurs from Britain usually had shorter necks. (Drawn from photo plate 291 a & b in Graham-Campbell 1980, 82).

5) Iron spur excavated from a 10th-century grubenhaus fill at Rhuddlan, Clwyd, Wales. O.L. 107 mm. (Ellis 1994, 14, 187-8, 211, no. 136, fig. 17:7).

6) Iron spur with a simple pattern of incised lines on the upper surfaces of its triangular sides. 10th century, provenance unknown. Damaged with incomplete goad, the O.L. is now 150 mm. Royal Armouries, Leeds, VI-416. The surviving combined buckle-terminal is restored in the drawing with reference to a very similar spur from York Coppergate excavations (Hall 1984, 111-112, fig. 134; Ottaway 1992, 698-703, fig. 304, no. 3826, where spurs with buckle terminals are fully discussed).

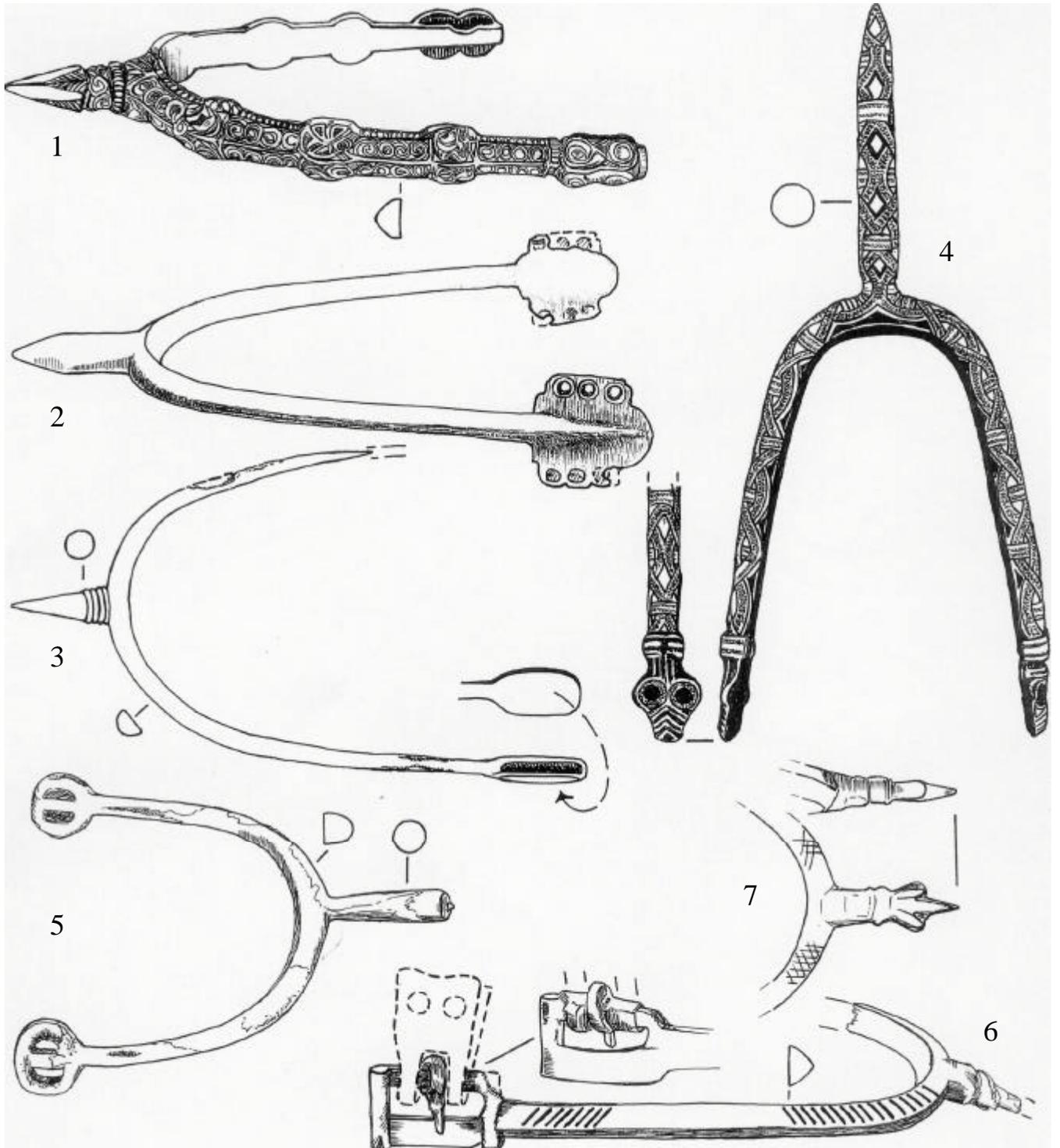


Figure 2: Catalogue Nos 1 to 7 (not to scale: see catalogue for measurements)

7) Neck and heart-shaped goad of an iron spur, 10th century, from Thetford, Norfolk. This spur has triangular section sides, incised line decoration and its one remaining terminal has a buckle pin on it. O.L. 140 mm. Its similarity to No. 6 and others in this group suggests a likely goad type for that damaged spur. (Ellis 1984, 101-102, fig. 140, no. 269).

8) Iron spur with surface traces of tin, circa 1000. Found in the bank of the By (or Box) Brook adjacent to a ford, Slaughterford, Wiltshire. O.L. 194 mm. Most of the neck is formed as a faceted cylinder supporting a tiny goad. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, no. 1955-896. (Passmore 1937, 76 & pl. XXVIII. On tinning: Jope 1956, 35-42). For similar spurs from London see Ward Perkins 1940, 98, fig. 29, nos 1 & 2, also Ellis 1995a, 130-1, fig. 90, no. 316. Another from the Cherwell deposit, Oxon, Ashmolean Museum no. 1886.1232 is almost certainly Anglo-Viking (Blair & Crawford 1997, 135-43, fig. 1).

Ball-and-spike and lozenge-shaped goads appeared at the beginning of the 11th century. Finds from the closely datable French site of Charavines in the Lac de Paladru, occupied 1003-1035, include both forms on slender spurs with straight sides (Colardelle & Verdel 1993, 57). Musée Dauphinois. These have rivet terminals, as has

9) one of a pair of gilded iron spurs with gold and silver dot decoration. Early 11th century, from Devon and probably from a burial in the church of St Andrew at Chardstock near Lyme Regis (Pulman 1875, 567). O.L. 168 mm. (Lacy c. 1905, 27-8, pl. 10. Dufty 1968, pl. CLX). Royal Armouries, Leeds, VI-373-4.

10) Spurs of Rudolph of Swabia on his tomb slab in Merseburg Cathedral, N. Germany c. 1080, comparable with

11) a tinned iron spur from the Roach Smith collection of mainly London finds, British Museum 56 7.1 2518. O.L. 149 mm. Four rivets held its leathers between the inner surface of each terminal and a small inner plate. Datable to the late 11th century by its

similarity to (10) and also to another spur from the initial occupation layer c. 1067 at Winchester Castle (Ellis 1990a, 1037, 1039-40, no. 3862, fig. 331 and pl. LXIV).

12) Another tinned iron spur, excavated from a c. 1080-1100 context at York Minster (Ellis 1995b, 486-8, no. 41, fig. 171). O.L. 95 mm. Its terminals are pierced with vertical slots for a single leather encircling the foot.

13) Spurred foot of a mounted knight depicted on a German tapestry c. 1180 from Baldishol Church, Hedmark, Norway. Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo. Comparable with

14) a tinned iron spur in excavated condition, the shaded area restored. O.L. 105 mm. The minimal neck and large goad are typical of the second half of the 12th century. Private collection. For similar London finds with rivets surviving in their terminals see Ward Perkins 1940, 102, fig. 31, nos 1 & 2.

Spurs with curved sides first appeared in the 12th century. The surviving original side of (14) above has the merest suggestion of a tendency to curve but

15) the sides of an iron spur from Goltho Manor plunge smoothly into deep curves under the wearer's ankle. It was excavated from a sealed context 1080-1150. O.L. 122 mm. (Ellis 1987, no. 166, fig. 160). This illustration includes a plan as well as a side view to demonstrate that, when only one view of a spur is photographed or drawn, the more informative side view should nearly always be used.

16) Iron spur, its outer surfaces overlaid with a thick plating of copper alloy giving it a 'golden' colour, probably for a knight. Incised line decoration. 13th century. O.L. 128 mm. Facombe Netherton manorial site excavations, Hants. (Ellis 1990b, II, 421-2, fig. 9:10, no. 571). British Museum.

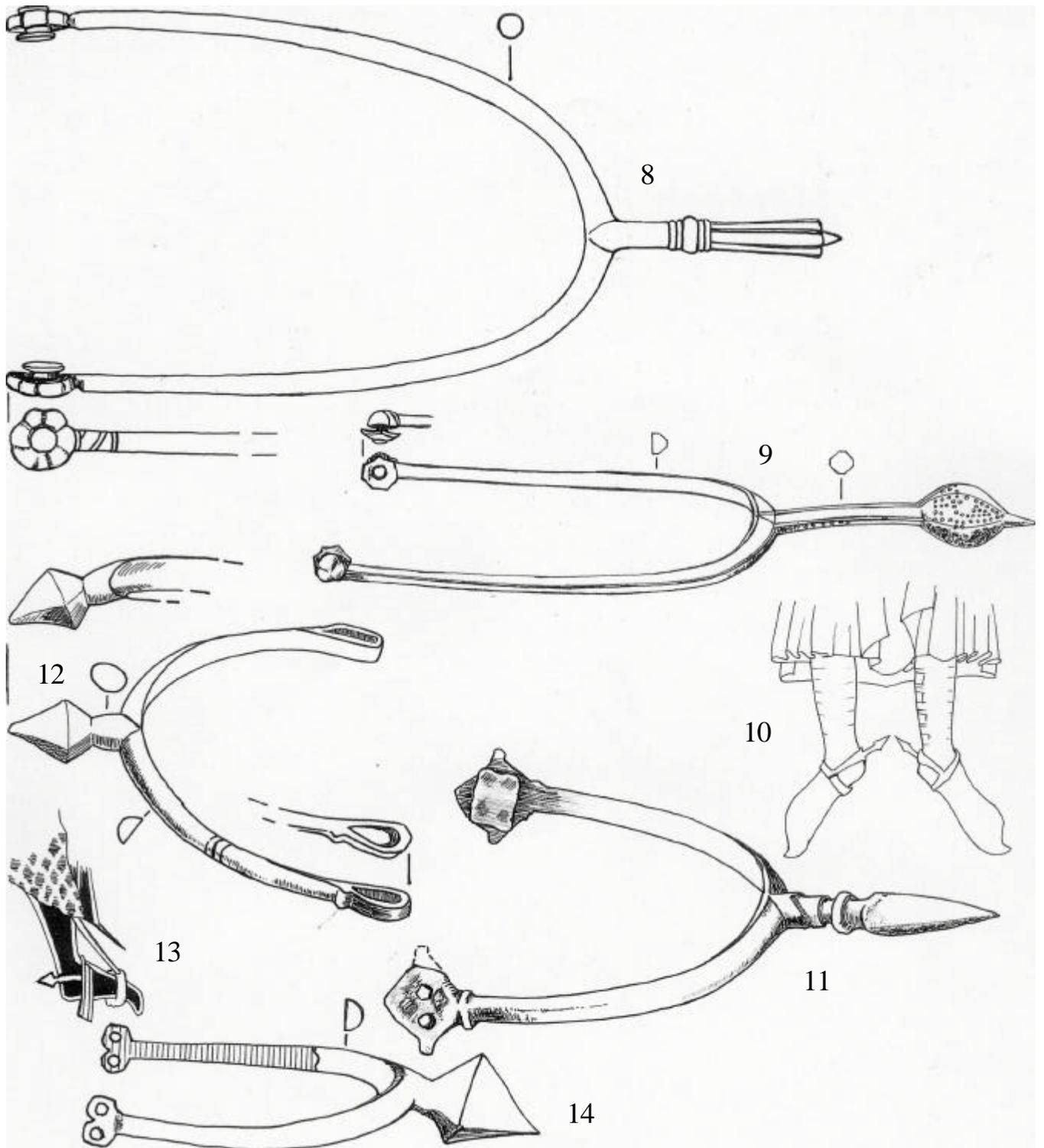
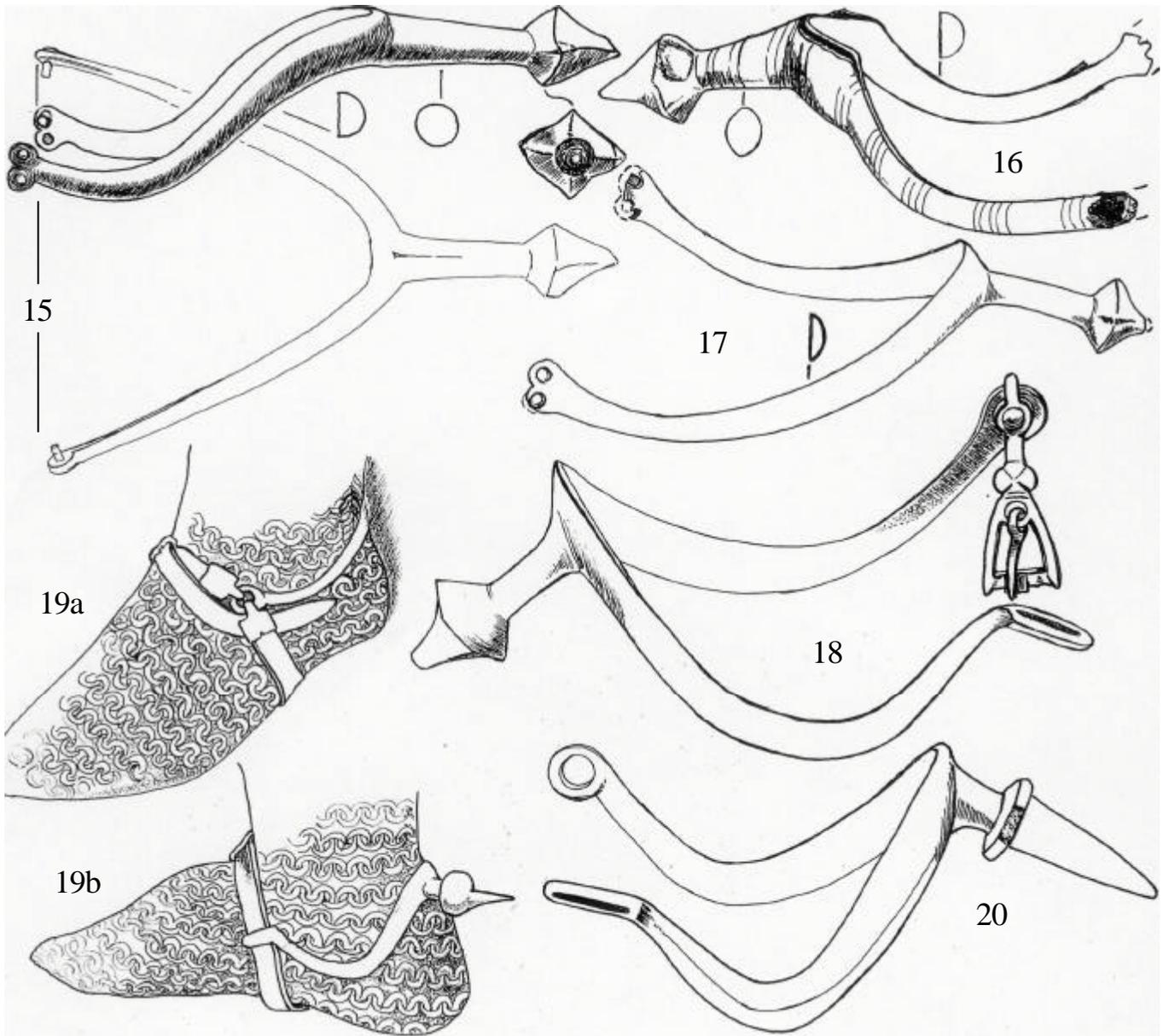


Figure 3: Catalogue Nos 8 to 14 (not to scale)



*Figure 4: Catalogue Nos 15 to 20 (not to scale)*

17) Iron spur with traces of non-ferrous plating, 12th-13th century. O.L. 126 mm. Damaged heart-shaped terminals with three surviving rivets. Small find no. 129 from a disturbed context, 1980 excavation led by R. Cramp at the Hirsell, Coldstream, Scotland.

18) Spur for the left foot. Its form is typical of 13th-century prick spurs and, apart from its goad, also of the contemporary earliest rowel spurs. Buckles were worn on the outer side of the foot. A single spur leather was attached below the buckle, passed under the foot, up through the slot on the inner terminal, across the wearer's instep towards the buckle as Fig. 4.19. (Drawn from a photograph in Erbostoser 1978, 84 where it is captioned 'St Mark's Cathedral, Venice', but searches of the Cathedral Treasury and museum, the Palazzo Ducale and the Museo Correr have failed to locate it.)

19) Feet of an early 14th-century monumental effigy in Harrington Church, Lincolnshire, probably of Sir John Harrington. (a) outer side of left foot with the buckle having its own short leather, (b) inner side of right foot showing the encircling spur leather passing through a slot terminal.

20) Copper alloy spur for the right foot, mid 13th to early 14th century. O.L. 125 mm. Provenance unknown. Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna, Italy, inv. no. 231 (Boccia 1991, 101, cat. no. 187).

By the 14th century prick spurs were becoming uncommon and rowel spurs predominated in western Europe, except in areas influenced by the horsemanship of the Moors who used prick spurs into modern times. Thus in Spain and Portugal prick spurs continued to flourish and develop alongside spurs with rowels. The later prick spurs can usually be dated by their similarity of form to contemporary rowel spurs.

21) Limestone sculpture of a mounted man in armour, 14th century. From Oliveira do Hospital, now in the Museu Machado de

Castro, Coimbra, Portugal (Royal Academy of Arts 1955-56, no. 21).

22) A heavy iron spur, O.L. 120 mm. The high, flanged area behind the wearer's heel decorated with incised lines and the triangular lobed form of the attachment for the leather are features shared with rowel spurs of the second half of the 15th century which is probably its date. Provenance unknown. Royal Armouries, Leeds, VI-465.

23) Long spur, gilt copper alloy. Datable by its similarity of form to mid 15th-century rowel spurs. O.L. 190 mm. Drawn separately are its buckle which is attached to the spur for wear on a right foot, also one of the hook attachments for its leathers. Provenance unknown. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, No. W 1083.

24) Spur worn with armour by Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga of Sabbioneta. Portrait statue by a Venetian woodcarver c. 1587. The Duke had earlier served Phillip II in Spain. Palazzo Ducale Sabbioneta, Italy.

25) One of a pair of 'Barbary' spurs, Morocco, N. Africa. Iron with traces of gilding. O.L. 253 mm. Both sides were originally straight. Typical of spurs worn by the Moors from the 16th century until modern times, this pair were in the Tradescant collection in the second half of the 17th century (Ellis 1983, 140-4, no. 18, fig. 23), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The vertical loop above the rider's heel held an extra leather supporting the weight of the neck as worn by

26) Mohammed Ohadu, the Moroccan Ambassador to King Charles I, in his equestrian portrait by Godfrey Kneller dated 1684 (Ellis 1983, 144, fig. 25). Chiswick House, London.

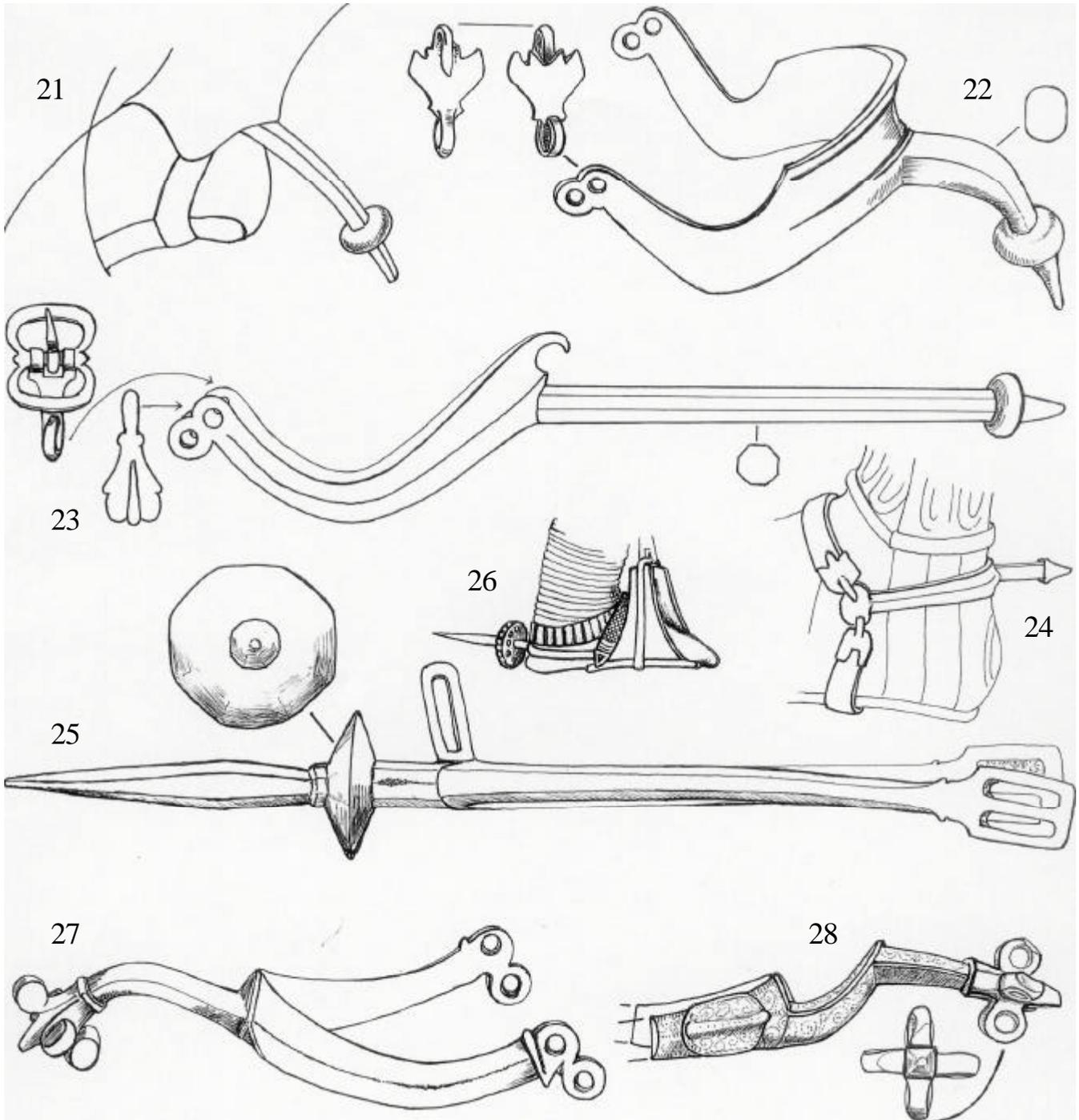


Figure 5: Catalogue Nos 21 to 28 (not to scale)

27) and 28) The fashionable importance of spurs peaked in the 17th century and included a temporary revival of prick spurs, known as 'Scotch spurs' in England. Unlike medieval prick spurs they combine gently curved sides with strongly curved or bent necks and are similar to 17th-century rowel spurs in all features except their goads. (27) and (28) are copper alloy, provenance unknown. (27) has slight traces of punched decoration, O.L. 117 mm. British Museum, MME 36,9-1,52. The fragment (28) has a delicately punched scroll

pattern with gilding traces, O.L. incomplete 87 mm. Two ring loops of the goad have been worn down by use on a right foot spurring the horse with the side of the goad rather than the point. Private collection. A spur of this type is worn by William Style of Langley, Beckenham, Kent in his portrait dated 1636, Tate Gallery, London (10.2.1 Cat. British School T.2308). Similar finds include one from Marston St Lawrence, Northampton Museum no. D 46/52.

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