

The "Pastiche" Scam.

Debunking Bronze Swords with an Iron Core

Science

As we know very well, the Luristanis around 1930 produced some much needed income by unearthing thousands of remarkable bronze objects plus a 100 or so iron mask swords from the graves of their ancestors. Less well known is that local yokels all over "Western Asia", in particulate in what is now Northern Iran, did the same thing. From today's point of view (see below) they must have unearthed a lot of bi-metal swords with only the bronze hilt left because the iron blade was completely corroded. The iron tang inside the hilt was protected and still intact, though. They also found a lot of bronze blades with no good hilt ("Vollgriffschwerter" or [Naue I type](#)).

Those incomplete bronze objects did not look so hot and did not fetch a good prize. So an idea was born: Let's combine the two parts to a good-looking all-bronze sword albeit with an iron core in the hilt.

- Drill a shallow hole into the hilt, taking out some iron, insert the bronze blade (after making it fit to the hilt) and solder it in. Smooth the joint over a bit and cover the afflicted region with green patina that looks like the patina of the rest. You can easily produce a bunch of nice-looking bronze swords like the ones shown below:



Formerly highly esteemed bronze swords are now faked "pastes"

Source: Hisashi NOJIMA, Yui ARIMATSU, Masahiro FUJII, Susumu MURATA, Hakuhiro ICHIKAWA, Shohei FUJII, Naoto MORIMOTO Bronze-Hilted Iron Swords from Western Asia at the Department of Archaeology, Hiroshima University, 2020, Accessible in the Net

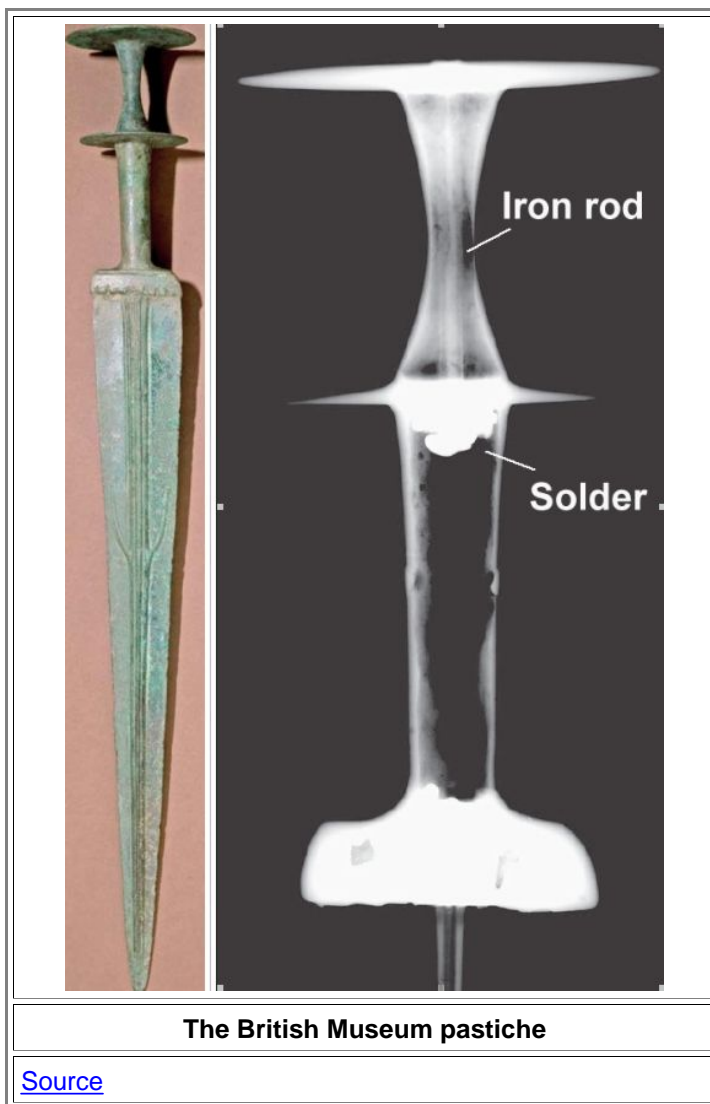
These swords were actually bought by Japanese archaeologists at the market in Teheran; assuming that they were "honest" bronze swords. Research later showed that they had some iron in their hilts. You don't need sophisticated methods for this, having a magnet stick to the hilt gives a rather clear hint.

- The scientists, instead of noticing that they fell for a scam, proposed theories about, e.g., ritual uses of bronze swords with an iron core in the hilt, etc. Finally the paper cited above appeared and described these swords as the "pastiche" that they are. A **pastiche**, as Wikipedia knows, is a work of visual art, literature, theatre, or music that imitates the style or character of the work of one or more other artists. Unlike parody, pastiche celebrates, rather than mocks, the work it imitates. The swords above imitate real old bronze swords and celebrate them, in a fashion.

▶ To an amateur like me it is inconceivable how serious scientists (who shall remain unnamed here) fell for "bronze swords with an iron core" around the year 2000. There is no conceivable practical reason why one should produce such a thing, so it was (routinely) assumed that they served for some "ceremonial use".

To an amateur like me it is refreshing, however, to see that serious archaeologists obviously don't read the relevant literature and that the referees of the respective articles did not catch on either. I can state this because there were at least one publication before the year 2000 that pointed out that pastiches existed in the museum of the authors and how one could find that out. It appeared in 1969 from the Penn State Museum¹). Another one was published in 2010 by the British Museum²)

Here is a picture from the [British Museum paper](#). It shows the iron rod and the solder that connects parts of a bronze hilt plus bronze blade to the hilt of the original bi-metal sword



- It is of fleeting interest that the pastiche producers chose to construct a [double-disc pommel sword](#). Why? I don't know. Maybe because the hilt actually was from a double-disc pommel sword with an iron blade?

▶ I have no more to say at present (Oct. 21). That's a pity because there is much more to bi-metal swords; I just don't know it (yet). Maybe because I haven't done enough literature research or simply because a lot is still unknown, waiting for future research.

1) [Gayle Wever](#): A Persian puzzle. A bronze sword from Teheran
Penn State Museum "Expedition"
Fall 1969, p.25

2) [Simpson and La Niece](#): New light on old swords from Iran
British Museum Technical Research Bulletin (4) (p.95-101)
Archetype Publications, London, 2010