Illerup Swords with Special Patterns

Palmette Patterns

Illustration

Illerup Ådal produced more thant 400 well-preserved swords, some with rather unusual patterns. Some of those are shown here. There are far more swords with "normal" patterns, however. Get the books if you want to see them all. First we look at swords with a "palmette" pattern. **Palmette** is the expression for a motif in decorative art that resembles the fan-shaped leaves of a palm tree. It's roots go back to the ancient Egyptians. We also find it on several pattern-welded Illerup swords and on a few swords from other regions.
One picture tells more than a thousand words:

Drawings of an Illerup sword "SAFG / RNU4" with Palmette pattern on one side; palmette, herringbone and stripes on the other side

What (parts of) the blade look like today (front / back)

Source: Illerup Ådal; Vol. 11, 12. Also for all other pictures in this module if not otherwise noted.

Below is probably the real sword. With luck, you can find it in the Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus; Denmark. You won't see much, however, because the present custom in museum exhibits is to keep things in the dark.

Sword with a palmette pattern

Source: Photographed in the Moesgaard museum, 2015

These pictures, like pretty much all of what follows, are taken from the "official" records of the diggings in Illerup (and elsewhere), a series called "Illerup Ådal". These very scholarly (and very hard to read) books contain drawings of about every sword unearthed in Illerup, some photographs, in-depth descriptions, and long essays about this and that, including the making of pattern welded swords.

- However, the books carefully avoid to mention how the special patterns shown here were made. I do not know it either; what I know (or guess) is given right here.

The pertinent data of the sword shown above are:

- Sword identifier: "SAFG / RNU4"; single find
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers. More about that in the "Sword Types" link
- Descriptions on pp. 142 (11); 167, 202, 213, 224, 232 (12)
- Asymmetric blade. One side with two broad fullers; the other side planar. Three (illegible) stamps. Parts of the hilt were also preserved.

- The side with the four fullers sports 4 stripes with palmettes on the whole length.
  The two fullers on the other side show a palmette pattern and a herringbone pattern; both change to a stripe pattern further down the blade.
  Maybe the smith ran out of palmettes, maybe the customers wanted it this way - we will never know
  With this first example we also encounter a few more puzzles. The sword is asymmetric. Two fullers versus two, different patterns. Why?
  Three stamps to mark the producer? Or what else?

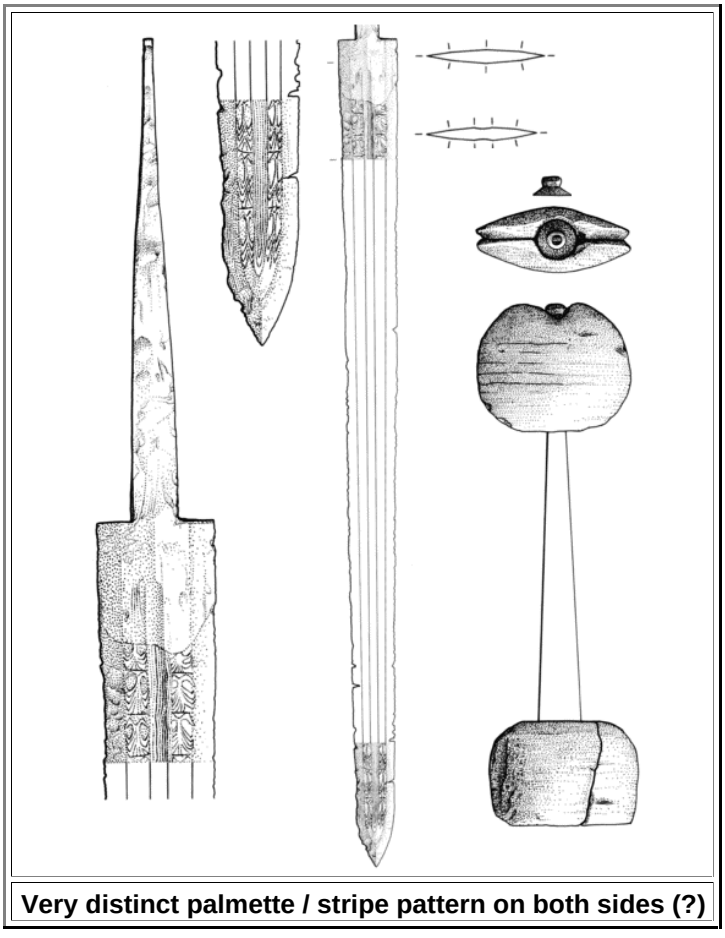
Science Module

Sword Types

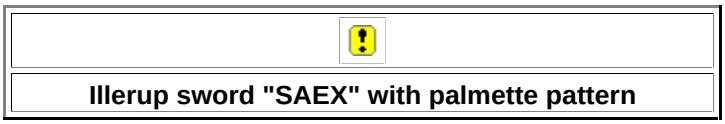
Good questions but the main question is: How are palmettes made? I have given this a lot of thought and I spend a lot of time searching for an explanation in the literature - without a positive result. Finally I remembered my own advice: "Listen to the smiths", or even better, ask them. I asked **Patrick Bárt** how to make palmettes and his reply was short. "I's a kind of mosaic damast". At first I didn't understand what he menat but somewhat later I got it. The result can be found in this module.
Let's look at a few more "palmettes"

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "SAEX"; From findings concentration 41/93
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers
- Description on pp. 50 (11); 35, 164, 201, 223, 233 (12)
- A stripe pattern in the one central fuller; palmette patterns left and right on both sides (?). The sword is very well preserved with hilt parts.



Very distinct palmette / stripe pattern on both sides (?)



Illerup sword "SAEX" with palmette pattern

- Note that the tang consists of a separate piece of iron / steel that has been welded to the blade. It is not, in other words, a continuation of one or two of the rods that make the blade as seen in other blades: This is seen quite often. There are several swords with this construction where the tang was welded to the blade

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

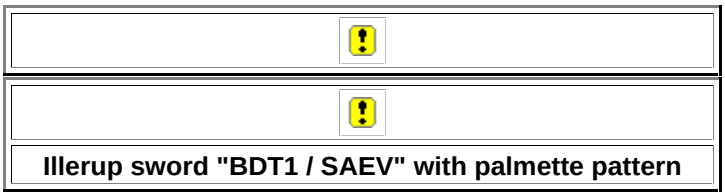
- Sword identifier: "AVK"; Single find
- Type: Vimose-Illerup
- Description on pp. 115 (11); 113 (12)
- Three palmette pattern stripes on one side; the other side has two palmettes and one "Winkelmuster" (herringbone).

Illerup sword "AVK" with palmette pattern

- Not the deep cuts close to the tang, including one right next to the tang (arrow). This cuts could not have been suffered in a fight (wrong direction; down the blade!) but must signify a ritual "killing", probably with an axe.

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

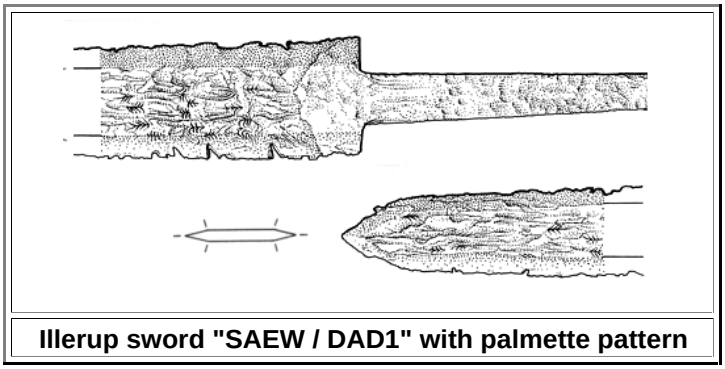
- Sword identifier: "BDT1 / SAEV"; Single find; fragment
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers
- Descriptions on pp. 117 (11); 163, 201, 213, 235 (12)
- Only one side has 4 very clear stripes of palmette pattern, separated by narrow stripes. The other one is plain. There is a "factory" stamp reading AEQVVSF



Illerup sword "BDT1 / SAEV" with palmette pattern

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "SAEW / DAD1"; Single find
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers
- Descriptions on pp. 131 (11); 164, 233 (12)
- No fullers, indistinct palmette pattern on both sides (?). Quite similar to "SAEX" above



Illerup sword "SAEW / DAD1" with palmette pattern

Chevron Pattern

Another "mysterious" pattern occasionally found is the chevron pattern. It is mysterious because once more it is not clear how it was made. In the descriptions of the blades it is always states that the chevrons are filled with a palmette pattern but it is no clear how that was determined.

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "AMY"; Single find; fragment
- Type: Vimose-Illerup
- Descriptions on pp. 113 (11); 111 (12)
- 8-sided cross-section, no fullers. Tang broken off, plenty of damage from fights. There is a clear chevron pattern filled with palmettes on both sides (?)

Illerup sword "AMY" with chevron pattern

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "BIL"; Single find.
- Type: Vimose-Illerup
- Descriptions on pp. 119 (11); 116, 208 (12)
- Chevron pattern filled with palmettes on both sides (?). Damage from use. Two stamps with names on either side. One reads "IRINIANVS"

Illerup sword "BIL" with chevron pattern

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "IUB1 / SAMK"; Single find.
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers
- Descriptions on pp. 142 (1); 175, 203, 220, 232 (12)
- Chevron pattern filled with palmettes on both sides and on the whole length. The tang was broken and fixed with two rivets. Traces of incrustations and inscription; partially destroyed by a repair.

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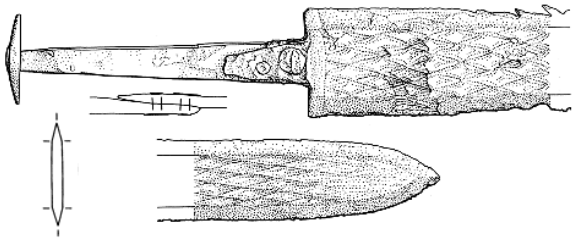
Illerup sword "IUB1 / SAMK" with chevron pattern

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "SAFB"; Single find.
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers
- Descriptions on pp. 213 (11); 165, 201 (12). The sword was apparently forgotten in Vol. 11; it is only mentioned in the context of sword types.
- Chevron pattern on both sides(?), Broken tang; repaired with rivets, ritually killed.



Illerup sword "SAFB" with chevron pattern

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "SAVK / KADC". From findings concentration 57/90
- Type: Vimose-Illerup
- Descriptions on pp. 62 (11); 49, 191, 205, 233 (12)
- Chevron pattern filled with palmettes all over. Two stamps.

Illerup sword "SAVK / KADC" with chevron pattern

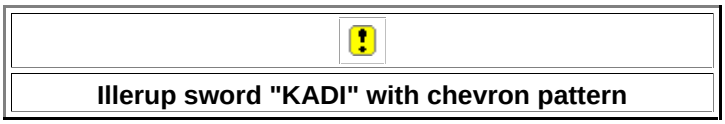
Here is probably the real sword. With luck, you can find it in the Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus; Denmark. You won't see much, however, because the present custom in museum exhibits is to keep things in the dark.

Illerup Adal sword with a (palmette filled) chevron pattern

Source: Photographed in the Moesgaard museum, 2015

The pertinent data of the sword shown below are:

- Sword identifier: "KADI". From findings concentration 59/47
- Type: Woerden-Bjaers
- Descriptions on pp. 64 (11); 53, 141, 210, 219 (12)
- Asymmetric cross-section, incrustations on both sides (laurel wreath; Victoria). One stamp. Patterns only on the side with the two fullers. Chevron pattern filled with palmettes in parts of the length in the fuller; the other fuller has a herringbone pattern. Change to a stripe pattern (obtained by folding the rods) in both fullers farther down the blade.

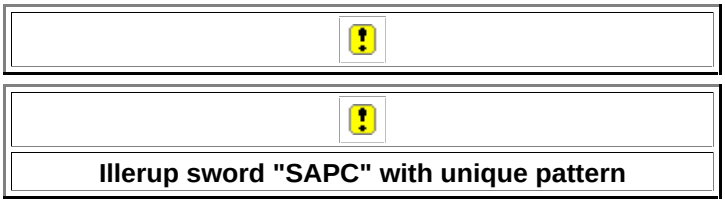


Illerup sword "KADI" with chevron pattern

Mosaic Patterns

One Illerup sword sports a very special pattern. It seems to be unique so far, although it is possible that some of the more corroded swords with unrecognizable patterns might have had it too.
The pertinent data of this sword are:

- Sword identifier: "SAPC"; From findings concentration 59/47
- Type: Vimose-Illerup
- Descriptions on p. 64 (11); p. 51, 185. 203, 216, 233 (12)
- Broken tang. One stamp, battle damage. There are two stripes with a rather unique mosaic or rose pattern on both sides.



Illerup sword "SAPC" with unique pattern

The Illerup Ådal books do not mention the pattern at all. Did it puzzle the experts? It certainly puzzles me. Here is how it was probably made.