Examination of four Iron Age ferrous hammer heads from Bredon Hill (Hereford and Worcester), England
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Abstract

Four hammerheads, provisionally dated to between the late 4th century BC and the early 1st century AD, were examined by metallography and electron microprobe to determine principally the methods of manufacture and any technological enhancements. Samples, taken near the faces, were found to comprise low/medium carbon steels. Two hammerheads had been quenched and possibly tempered, another was probably quenched and subsequently severely reheated, and the fourth was air-cooled. Carburization in each hammerhead is interpreted as having derived from the bloom (primary carburization). The differences in the heat treatments applied were probably function related. The metallographic results are discussed in the context of other later Iron Age artifacts.

Introduction

The Iron Age hillfort on Bredon Hill (NGR SO958400) was partially excavated during 1935-37 (Hencken 1938). Five hammerheads were recovered (Hencken 1938, 73-4, nos 1-5, fig 6, 1-4), one of which (no 5) no longer survives and may have been lost soon after excavation. These form the largest number of ferrous hammerheads known from any Iron Age site in Britain. The four surviving hammerheads (Fig 1) were examined for metal structure and composition to determine principally the methods of manufacture and any technological enhancements which might correlate with function or chronology.

Hammerheads 1 and 2 are short, stout tools both of which have one heavily burried face. They may have been used for working metals, for striking other tools, or for constructional or other purposes. Hammerheads 3

Fig 1: Hammerheads 1-4, showing location of samples.