

# SWORD M-SCH-B2735 - P-RICH IRON - IRON AGE - SWITZERLAND

**Artefact name**      Sword M-Sch-B2735

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**Url**                    /artefacts/222/

## ∨ The object



Fig. 1: Iron sword (after Senn Bischofberger 2005, 241),

## ∨ Description and visual observation

**Description of the artefact**      Sword of the middle la Tène type, broken into two parts (Fig. 1). Under a hand lens the surface shows parallel grinding traces from mechanical cleaning.

**Type of artefact**                    Weapon

**Origin**                                Marin-Epagnier, La Tène, Saint-Blaise, Neuchâtel, Switzerland

**Recovering date**                 Water finds, end 19th/beginning 20th cent. AD

**Chronology category**            Iron Age

**chronology tpq**                     B.C. ∨

**chronology taq**                     B.C. ∨

**Chronology comment**            La Tène C, 250 \_ 140 BC

**Burial conditions / environment**    Soil

**Artefact location**                 Museum Schwab, Biel/Bienne, Bern

**Owner**                                Museum Schwab, Biel/Bienne, Bern

**Inv. number**                        M-Sch-B2735

**Recorded conservation data**      Conserved (not recorded, but mechanical cleaning visible)

## ∨ Study area(s)



Fig. 2: Location of sampling area,

✧ Binocular observation and representation of the corrosion structure

Stratigraphic representation: none

✧ MiCorr stratigraphy(ies) – Bi

✧ Sample(s)

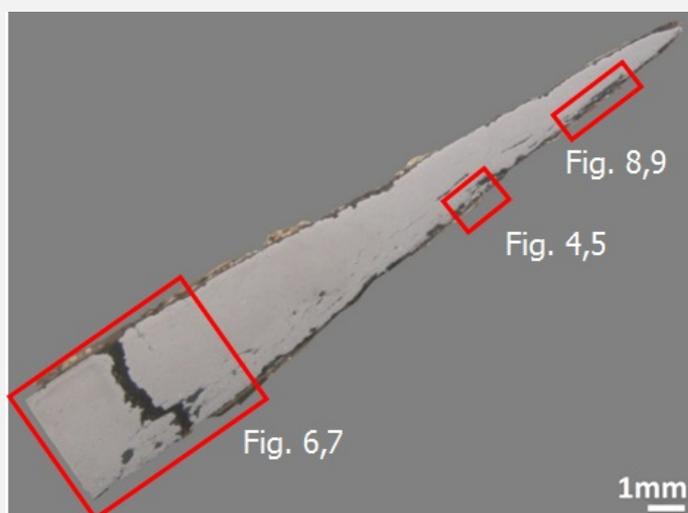


Fig. 3: Micrograph of the cross-section showing the locations of Figures 4 to 9,

Credit HE-Arc CR.

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Description of sample</b>    | The sample includes half of the sword blade. The corrosion layer is thin. |
| <b>Alloy</b>                    | P-rich iron   |
| <b>Technology</b>               | Forged, annealed and cold worked  |
| <b>Lab number of sample</b>     | M-SCH-B2735   |
| <b>Sample location</b>          | Empa (Marianne Senn)  |
| <b>Responsible institution</b>  | Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zürich, Zurich                              |
| <b>Date and aim of sampling</b> | 1969, metallography   |

✧ Analyses and results

**Analyses performed:**  
Metallography (nital etched), Vickers hardness testing, LA-ICP-MS, SEM/EDX.

✧ Non invasive analysis

The remaining metal is a P-rich (0.2 mass%) iron (Table 1) with long parallel slag inclusions (Fig. 4) concentrated on one side of the blade. The slag inclusions are composed of wüstite/FeO dendrites and fayalite/Fe<sub>2</sub>SiO<sub>4</sub> in a glassy matrix (Fig. 5 and Table 2). Their chemical composition is typical for iron produced by the bloomery process (dominated by iron oxides and silica). It is difficult to identify the ore type from the slag composition. Interestingly in one case the slag composition is very specific (alumina and P-rich material). After etching, the metal shows a ferritic structure (Fig. 6). The grain size is variable (between ASTM grain sizes of 4 to 7) and some grains include Neumann bands (Fig. 7). A large crack has developed through the metal section (Figs. 3 and 6). The average hardness of the metal (HV1 185) is quite high for a wrought iron. The level of hardness and Neumann bands are typical for a P-rich iron. Neumann bands are said to develop by cold working and shock deformation. According to Swiss and McDonnell 2003 they form when little cold work is carried out. Distortion (grain deformation) after cold working starts to be apparent in iron after a reduction in thickness of between 30-40%. Since no grain deformation is visible, the present reduction is probably a little less than this range.

| Elements              | V | Cr | Mn | P    | Co  | Ni  | Cu  | As  | Ag  |
|-----------------------|---|----|----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Median mg/kg          | < | 5  | 10 | 2200 | 140 | 270 | 500 | 260 | <   |
| Detection limit mg/kg | 1 | 4  | 1  | 50   | 1   | 1   | 1   | 2   | 0.1 |
| RSD %                 | - | 56 | 48 | 10   | 14  | 16  | 37  | 15  | -   |

Table 1: Chemical composition of the metal. Method of analysis: LA-ICP-MS, Lab Analytical Chemistry, Empa (for details see Devos et al. 2000).

| Location                      | MgO | Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> | SiO <sub>2</sub> | P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> | K <sub>2</sub> O | CaO | TiO <sub>2</sub> | MnO | FeO | Total | SiO <sub>2</sub> /Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> |
|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-----|-------|--|
| Wüstite in glass              | 0.7 | 2.1                            | 15               | 2.7                           | <                | 0.6 | <                | <   | 87  | 109   | 7.2  |
| Wüstite and fayalite in glass | <   | 4.8                            | 24               | 0.7                           | 1                | 1.4 | <                | <   | 70  | 103   | 5.0  |
| Wüstite and fayalite in glass | 0.6 | 2.7                            | 23               | 1.8                           | <                | 0.8 | <                | <   | 69  | 98    | 8.4  |
| Fayalite in glass             | <   | 5.6                            | 26               | 2.8                           | 0.8              | 1.4 | <                | <   | 72  | 110   | 4.8  |
| Fayalite phase                | 0.8 | 1.0                            | 31               | 1.2                           | 0.7              | 1.1 | <                | 0.8 | 69  | 106   | 33   |
| Fayalite in glass             | <   | 8.8                            | 24               | 3.2                           | 1.0              | 1.4 | 0.6              | <   | 66  | 106   | 2.8  |

Table 2: Chemical composition of the slag inclusions (mass%) at the tip (pearlite) and the body (ferrite) of the knife. Method of analysis: SEM/EDX, Laboratory of Analytical Chemistry, Empa.

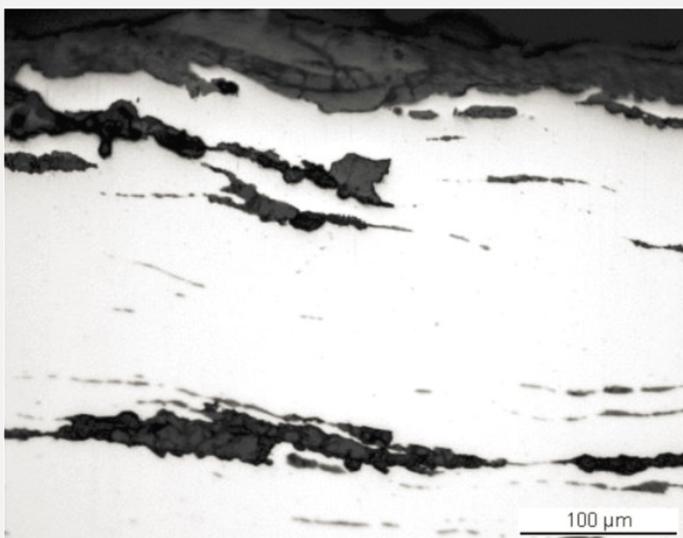


Fig. 4: Micrograph of the metal sample from Fig. 3 (detail, rotated by 225°), unetched, bright field. In white the metal containing elongated slag inclusions (in grey); in black porosity,

Credit HE-Arc CR.

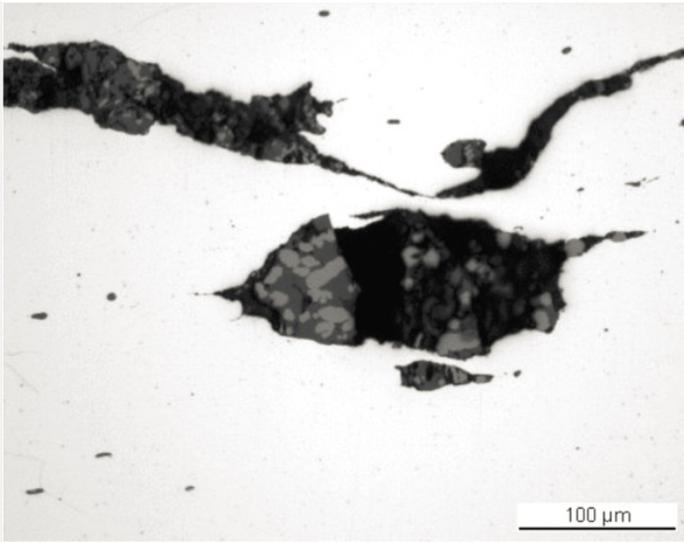


Fig. 5: Micrograph of the metal sample from Fig. 3 (detail), unetched, bright field. Detail with slag inclusions showing a structure with wüstite dendrite (light-grey) and fayalite (dark-grey),

Credit HE-Arc CR.

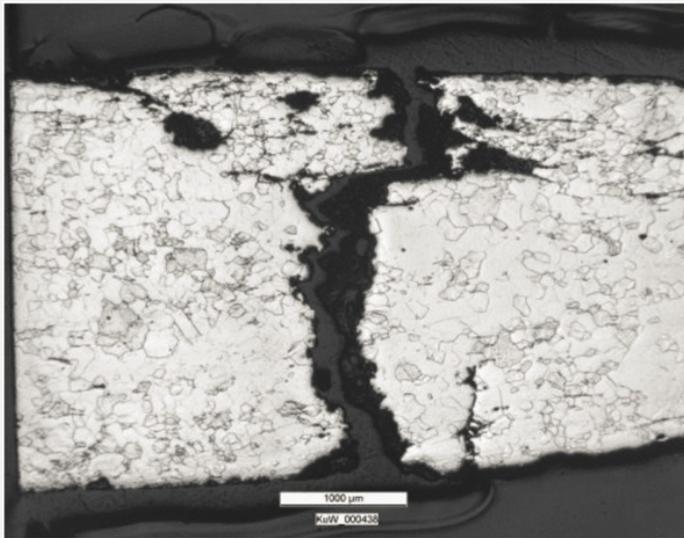


Fig. 6: Micrograph of the metal sample from Fig. 3 (reversed picture, rotated by 225°, detail), etched, bright field. Metal with a large pre-existing crack and ferritic, recrystallized structure. Grains have different sizes,

Credit HE-Arc CR.

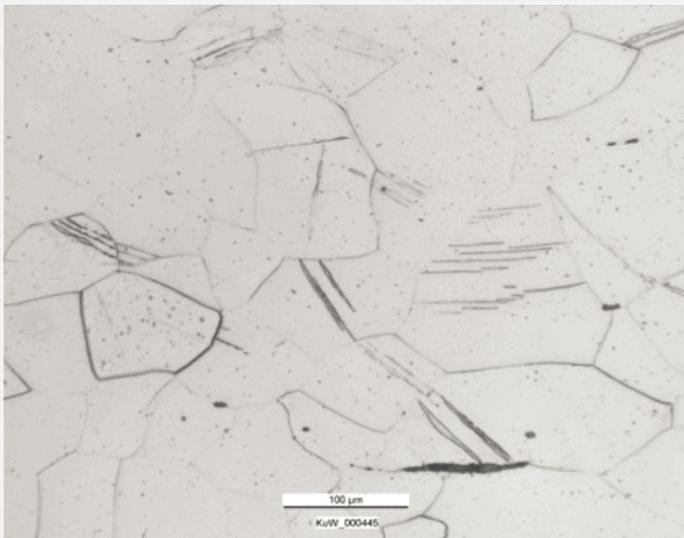


Fig. 7: Micrograph (detail of Fig. 6), etched, bright field. Ferrite grains including Neumann bands formed after cold working in a P-rich iron,

Credit HE-Arc CR.

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Microstructure</b>       | Recrystallized grains, Newman bands, ghost structure |
| <b>First metal element</b>  | Fe   |
| <b>Other metal elements</b> |  |

The remaining metal, including the large crack, is covered by a thin, fissured corrosion crust (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 9). The corrosion crust is thicker on the side containing the long slag inclusions (Fig. 3). In bright field and in the BSD-mode of the SEM image only light and dark-grey areas can be distinguished (Figs. 4 and 9). Under polarised light the corrosion products appear yellow-orange near the metal surface and then become successively dark-red and black. The outer layer is orange-yellow, as is the inner one (Fig. 8). There is a correlation between the level of grey in SEM/BSD-mode, the colours under polarised light, and the chemical composition of the corrosion layer (Table 3, Figs. 8 and 9). The lighter the grey of the SEM/BSD-mode, or the colours (light-brown and red) under polarised light, the richer the area is in Fe and the more depleted it is in O. Surprisingly the inner corrosion layer is contaminated with Si, Al and O.

| Elements                                    | O  | Si  | Fe | Total |
|---|----|-----|----|-------|
| Light or dark-red corrosion products (CP3i) | 25 | 1.6 | 67 | 94    |
| Light or dark-red corrosion products (CP3i) | 32 | <   | 74 | 108   |
| Dark or dark-red corrosion products (CP2i)  | 41 | <   | 67 | 109   |

Table 3: Chemical composition (mass %) of the corrosion layer (from Fig. 8). Method of analysis: SEM/EDX, Laboratory of Analytical Chemistry, Empa.

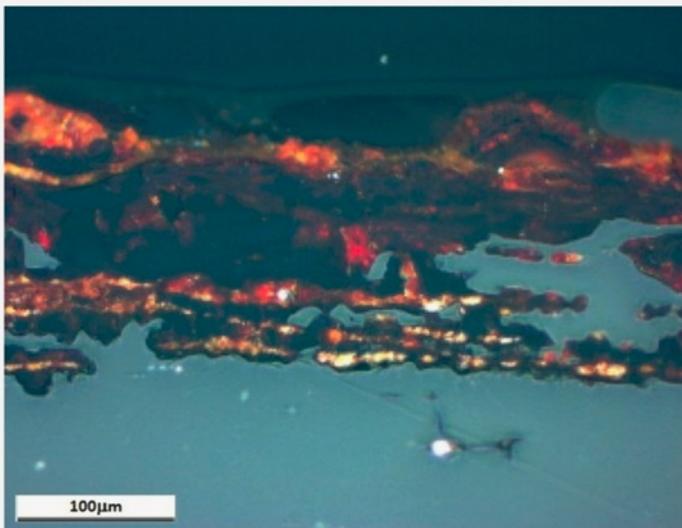


Fig. 8: Micrograph showing the metal - corrosion crust interface from Fig. 3 (inverted picture, rotated by 135°, detail), unetched, polarised light. The metal appears in blue and the corrosion changes from yellow-orange to dark-red and black,

Credit HE-Arc CR.

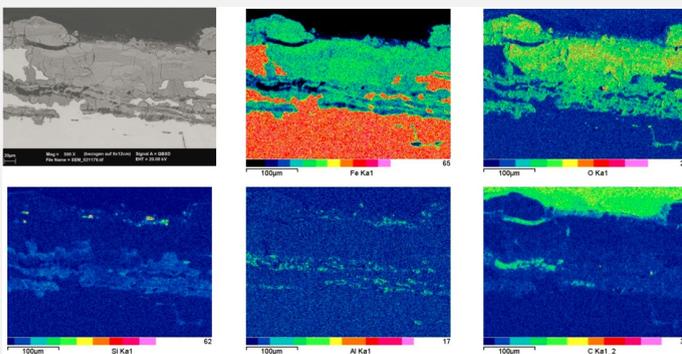


Fig. 9: SEM image, BSD-mode, and elemental chemical distribution of the selected area from Fig. 8. Method of examination: SEM/EDX, Laboratory of Analytical Chemistry, Empa.,

Credit HE-Arc CR.

Corrosion form Uniform - transgranular

Corrosion type ?

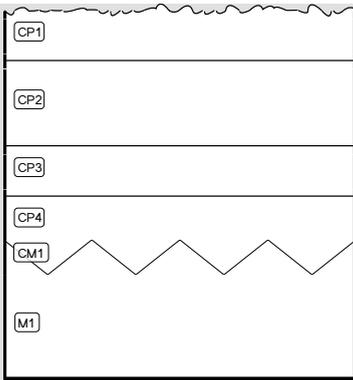


Fig. 4: Stratigraphic representation of the object in cross-section using the MiCorr application. This representation can be compared to Fig. 9.

✎ Synthesis of the binocular / cross-section examination of the corrosion structure

Corrected stratigraphic representation: none

✎ Conclusion

The sword blade is made of a hard, P-rich iron. It displays poor workmanship compared to other Celtic swords. The metal was first hot worked followed by a final cold working. The corrosion layer, typical of terrestrial context, has been partially removed by the conservation treatment. The possible use of air abrasive cleaning with glass beads and aluminium oxide, or the use of abrading tools, could explain the enrichment in Si and Al of the surface.

✎ References

*References on object and sample*

**References object**

1. Senn Bischofberger, M. (2005) Das Schmiedehandwerk im nordalpinen Raum von der Eisenzeit bis ins frühe Mittelalter. Internationale Archäologie, Naturwissenschaft und Technologie Bd. 5, (Rahden/Westf.), 30.

**References sample**

2. Senn Bischofberger, M. (2005) Das Schmiedehandwerk im nordalpinen Raum von der Eisenzeit bis ins frühe Mittelalter. Internationale Archäologie, Naturwissenschaft und Technologie Bd. 5, (Rahden/Westf.), 240-242.

*References on analytic methods and interpretation*

3. Swiss, A. J. and McDonnell, J.G. (2003) Evidence and interpretation of cold working in ferritic iron. International Conference, Archaeometallurgy in Europe 2003, Proceedings, vol. 1, Milan, 209-217.