

Some Notes on Shepherds' Staves

By L. F. SALZMAN

IT is probable that most people if asked to draw a picture of a medieval shepherd might be rather hazy about details of his costume, but would have no hesitation in equipping him with the typical shepherd's crook, associated with Dresden shepherdesses and found in most Folk Museums. I have examined many scores of representations of shepherds in illuminated manuscripts, paintings, and carvings and have so far found only three, or possibly four, English and one French instances of such crooks before about 1475: to these instances I shall return later.

Shepherds were not common subjects for classical artists, and the few examples that I have found seem to carry nothing more functional than a plain stick. In Christian art they occur frequently in scenes of the Nativity either greeted by the angel in the fields or in adoration at the crib; David, and more rarely Abel, are portrayed as shepherds; and there are occasional pastoral scenes. Two books which contain a number of relevant illustrations are *Les Noël's de France* by Maurice Vloberg (Grenoble, 1934), and *Noël! Noël!* by Henri Ghéon (Flammarion, 1935).

In Byzantine art, and generally before about 1200, the shepherd carries either a plain long staff or a club. Examples of the plain staff may be seen in a Reichenau MS. of the beginning of the eleventh century (Boeckler, *Deutsche Buchmalerei Vorgotischer Zeit*, pl. 36), and in a French MS. slightly later in that century (Vloberg, p. 181). In the well-known group of shepherds on the porch of Chartres Cathedral (c. 1200) the shepherd playing on the pipes carries a twisted club. An earlier twelfth-century German MS. shows a shepherd with a club (Boeckler, pl. 57) and a contemporary German ivory carving in the Victoria and Albert Museum (*V. & A. Christmas Picture Book*, 4) has three shepherds, each with a club, presumably more for

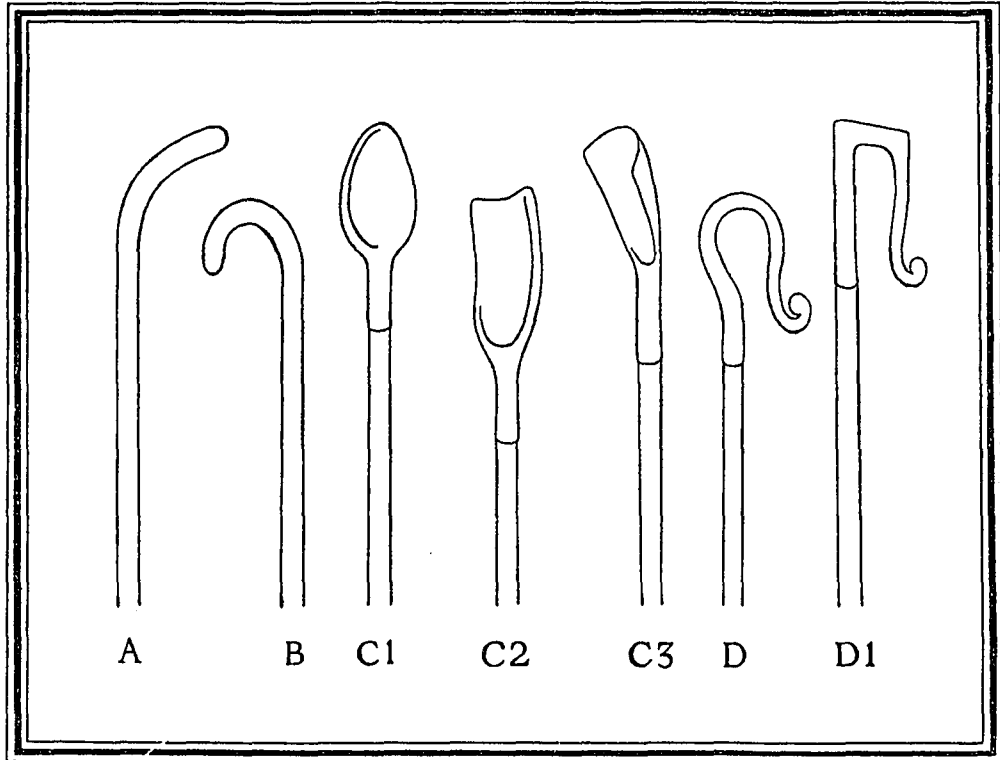
defence than for control of the sheep. The *Hortus Deliciarum* of Herrad von Landsberg, c. 1175, has an interesting variation, the thinner upper end of the club being curved into a sort of embryo crook (pl. 23, 24); this is too small to be functional as a crook and is possibly for attachment to the belt.

The formless club developed into the type (A) which I call the 'hockey-stick', which is the commonest variety between 1200 and 1400. The earliest definite example of this which I know is in two scenes from the life of David in an English MS. of c. 1150 (*Bibliographica*, iv, pl. 1). David is similarly equipped in a series of scenes (pl. 161-76) in *Old Testament Illustrations* (Roxburghe Club) from a MS. of c. 1250 in the Pierpont Morgan Collection, and again in a MS. of c. 1295 (Couderc, *MSS. du Moyen Age*, pl. 34). Other thirteenth-century examples occur in one of the windows of Chartres Cathedral and in the mural painting at Cocking Church, Sussex (Johnstone, *Creative Art in Britain*, 87). My use of the term 'hockey-stick' is justified by a remarkable illustration (pl. 7) in *Queen Mary's Psalter*, of c. 1300. Here Cain and Abel are both shown, unscripturally, as herds; each carries a stick of this type and Abel is holding up a ball, while the accompanying inscription says that they play in their leisure with their 'crosses' and balls (*De crozces et de pelotes se entre iuent a festes*). Another miniature in the same MS. (pl. 162) shows the shepherds of the Nativity with a variant of the type, shortened so as more to resemble a golf club (cf. Ghéon, 17 and 24). This type occurs also in an early fifteenth-century French MS. in the Bodleian (Douce 102; reproduced as a Christmas card). On the other hand the type is occasionally developed into the open crook (B) resembling the handle of a walking-stick. This is not common, but there is one example in the

Antiphoner of Beaupré, c. 1290 (100 MSS. of Henry Yates Thompson, vi., 21), and another in a MS. of the late fifteenth century in the British Museum (Egerton MS. 2045, fol. 82).

The hockey-stick type continued into the early fifteenth century (e.g. G. H. de Loo, *Heures de Milan*, pl. 6), and is even found in an

Amiens (Vloberg, p. 38). This type is shown in a German marble carving of 1638 (*V. & A. A Second Christmas Picture Book*, pl. 9) and as late as 1701 in an illustration to Hoogstraten's *Phaedrus* (Amsterdam). From about 1425 the straight scoop holds the field. It would be tedious to list examples, but reference may be made to the Nativity scene



eighteenth-century ivory carving of a shepherd from Goa (Portuguese) in the Victoria and Albert Museum. But from about 1325 almost every shepherd is shown carrying the *houlette*—there appears to be no English word for it. This is a long straight staff with an iron spud at one end, which may take the shape of a spoon (C1), a straight scoop (C2), or a scoop set at an angle (C3). The three shapes were contemporary and merged into one another. On the whole the earliest examples tend to the spoon (e.g. Stettler, *Swiss Stained Glass*, pl. vi: c. 1360), which often has much the appearance of a spear—as in the sixteenth-century choir stalls at

in the Grimani Breviary (c. 1480) and two in Winkler, *Die Flämische Buchmalerei* (pl. 51 and 75). The angle-spud occurs as early as c. 1340 in the Hours of Jeanne, Queen of Navarre (100 MSS. of Henry Yates Thompson, i, 20) and is found down to the sixteenth century, a good example being in the lovely Nativity at Autun (Joan Evans, *Art in Mediaeval France*, pl. 100). This last, seen in profile, suggests a golf 'iron'; and indeed the shepherds are shown in a fifteenth-century MS. as playing a primitive type of golf with their *houlettes* (Vloberg, p. 135).

The purpose of these spuds long puzzled me, and I could only assume that they were

for digging up roots that were either good or bad for the sheep. But on referring the matter to my friend Herr Koppold of Munich, he told me that he had not seen the shepherd's crook in use in Bavaria, but that the shepherd walks behind his flock and, if a sheep begins to stray, he digs up a divot with his spud and throws it outside the sheep to drive it back to the flock. This is borne out by Littré's *Dictionnaire*: "HOULETTE—Bâton que porte le berger, et au bout duquel est une plaque de fer en forme de gouttière, qui sert pour lancer des mottes de terre aux moutons qui s'écartent et de la sorte les faire revenir." Herr Koppold also called my attention to a passage in Pepys's Diary, where he records how in July 1667 he met a shepherd on Epsom Down "and I tried to cast stones with his horne crooke."

The Epsom shepherd's crook would have been of the type shown in the illustrations to "The Shepherd's Calendar" of 1579 (reproduced in Green's *Hist. of the English People*, pp. 849-54). This retained the spud at one end but had at the other end the fully developed 'leg-crook' (D). This type of double-purpose staff is very prominent in a series of French Books of Hours printed about 1498 (*Bibliographica*, XII, 462-8): it also appears in a contemporary tapestry (Elek, *French Tapestry*, pl. 26). A variant with a crook of rectangular design (D1) is found on some Tournai tapestries of pastoral scenes in the South Kensington Museum (one reproduced in *Masterpieces in the V. & A.*, pl. 95; cf. Elek, pl. 53).

Curiously enough, the leg-crook, although so rarely illustrated before about 1500, was known much earlier in England. On two misericords, the carved brackets under stall seats, one in Gloucester Cathedral and the other in the chapel of Winchester College, a shepherd is shown carrying such a crook; both are of the second half of the fourteenth century. Also dating from about 1350 is the probably English MS. (Egerton MS. 1894) reproduced by M. James, *Illustrations of Genesis* (Roxburghe Club), in which is shown (pl. 13) a shepherd standing beside his hut—

a movable hut on wheels—and holding such a crook. To about the same date belongs a possible fourth English example. This is a Nativity from the series of paintings formerly in St Stephen's Chapel at Westminster. In this one of the shepherds has a similar crook; unfortunately the picture is only known from a copy and one cannot be quite certain that it is accurate; it is noteworthy that another of the shepherds has the hockey-stick type. So far as France is concerned, the only early example that I have found is in a MS. of c. 1410—the *Livre de Marveilles*, illustrating the voyages of Marco Polo and other eastern travellers. Here (vol. I, pl. 53) King Dor is shown guarding the herds—sheep, swine, and cattle—of Prester John and holding a staff with the fully developed crook, and without a spud. In the same MS. a view, theoretically in Persia, shows a shepherd with a spoon-staff (vol. II, pl. 198), which is also carried by one in a Nativity scene (pl. 243).

At present I have failed to find any example of the leg-crook east of the Rhine. In each of the Academy Summer Exhibitions of Dutch and of Flemish Art there were five or six shepherd pictures, but in none was there a crook. Even in the Van Dyck portrait of Lord George Stuart, where the catalogue described him as "in Arcadian costume, holding a crook," what he holds is the straight *houlette*. In Italy at all periods, so far as I can ascertain, shepherds always carry a simple straight staff: a very good example is the Lombard wood carving, sixteenth century, of the Nativity in *V. & A. Second Christmas Book*, pl. 14. The only definite instance of even an *houlette* that I have found in an alleged Italian painting is in one "attributed to Tibaldi" (c. 1550) in the Ashmolean Museum (no. 431).

Of documentary evidence I have none. Although I have read a great many medieval and later farming accounts and inventories, I have never met a reference to the shepherd's staff or crook; nor do writers such as Walter of Henley mention it. It is a subject which appears to have attracted no attention; but I

hope that these notes which I have put together may induce some one to go more fully into it.

There remains the relation between the shepherd's functional staff and the 'pastoral

staff' used by prelates of the Church. But if I started to stray in that direction the editor of the AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW would justifiably cast a divot, or half-brick, to turn me back to the flock.

Letters to the Editor

ARTHUR YOUNG

SIR,—Can any of your readers help me find the manuscript of Arthur Young's Autobiography?

Yours faithfully,

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SHOOTING ON HILL PASTURES

SIR,—Your correspondent, Sir Hugh Rhys-Rankin, has to some extent put the cart before the horse. In Scotland, the fallacy has long been upheld (and still is) that the interests of shooting ousted the sheep and with them many humans, leading to another bout of the well-known 'clearances'. In fact the slump in the sheep (and cattle) prices was already reducing the sheepflocks and causing some of the shepherds to emigrate, or to return to their Border homeland where the ideal conditions have always made sheep-rearing a more economical proposition than in the Highlands. (Incidentally, it is a fact not mentioned, so far as I know, by any Scottish agrarian historian that there has never been an indigenous tradition of shepherding in the Highlands of Scotland, according to the standards developed by the Border shepherds.) When the slump came these skilled men gradually left. Doubtless they were glad to do so, for the Highlanders did not like them; in many areas their coming had been a symbol of an earlier 'clearance'. The sheep that remained were left to the Highlanders' primitive methods of shepherding, based upon the ancient tending of a small number of mixed stock constantly

under the eye of some member of the community. This state of affairs is directly responsible for the appallingly low quality of sheep and shepherds today in the less favoured areas of the Western Highlands and Hebrides. To return to the main point, however; the sheep were already going out at the time when a new class, suitably armed to perform in an ancient and respectable sport, were appearing in large numbers upon the scene. In many cases the opportunity was grasped to convert land that was no longer profitable into 'moor' or 'forest'. The conversion gave rise to further, though local and minor, social upheavals, which in turn gave rise, among those not able to see the whole thing in historical perspective, to the belief that shooting drove the sheep off the hill. The main point that I wish to make is that the change was inevitable. The conditions were ripe inasmuch as the firearms and the people to use them were both being 'made' in large numbers, and the modern scientific methods of sheep husbandry, which might yet have enabled the hill-sheep to hold its own in the face of some opposition, had not been developed. There are other reasons which cannot be gone into here; only in recent years, when social and legislative changes have become potent factors, could the outcome be different. The cause, therefore, of the drop in sheep numbers "since 1870" was not the shooting interests alone, but a coincidence of factors arising from the social and economic changes of the time.

Yours, etc.,

R. A. KENNEDY