

ROMAN FINDS GROUP

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July 1997

Data Protection Act

Under the terms of the 1984 Data Protection Act, The Roman Finds Group is required to ask its members whether they have any objection to personal data about them being held by the Society on computer. The personal data consists of members' names and addresses used for mailing notices of meetings, and will be released only to archaeological organisations. If members have any objections to personal data about them being held by the RFG, could they please write to the editor

Editorial

As is appropriate for the time of year, this *Newsletter* comes with a tale of distant sunny places. Matt Ponting is the most far-flung of the RFG's members and very kindly responded to an enquiry as to what he was doing in Jerusalem with the article on page 7. The next meeting of the RFG will also have an international aspect as it is being jointly hosted by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and L'Association des Fouilles Archeologiques Nationale (see p. 12).

In the last *Newsletter* I appealed for help with enamelled panelled vessels and had a most generous response. I can recommend the writing of a brief note for the *Newsletter* as a very effective way of acquiring information. As a footnote to the appeal, other people interested in these vessels might like to know that quite serendipitously I came across another enamelled flask that looks very much as if it belongs to the same family. The surprising thing about this one was its context - in a shipwreck of c. AD 175-200 off the Sicilian coast.

Members might like to be reminded of the committee members contact addresses. Angela Wardle (1 Stebbing Farm, Fishers Green, STEVENAGE, Hers. SG1 2JB) deals with all membership matters (subscriptions - due 1st October, changes of address etc.), and Jan Summerfield (CAS, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, PORTSMOUTH PO4 9LD) handles all the other group secretary matters.

The deadline for the next Newsletter will be December 31st, 1997. As ever, all contributions gratefully received, no matter how short. If you feel inspired to write more than 1,000 words, I would be grateful if you could contact me first. Please send all contributions to:-

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A ceramic cult figure from Leicester

Excavations in advance of the redevelopment on St Nicholas Street in west central Leicester in 1969 revealed an aisled building, generally accepted to be a temple. Brief notes on the site were published, but the archive remained largely unstudied though the present author has completed a catalogue of the Roman pottery. The figure which forms the subject of this paper was found in a drain that ran alongside the outside wall of the anteroom or courtyard to the west of the aisled element of the building (Wacher 1995, 359). The context is datable by its pottery component to the Antonine-Severan period, with a *terminus post quem* provided by a sherd of a Central Gaulish mortarium (Dr. 45) which first appeared c. AD 170 or later.

Four joining fragments were recovered, forming the torso of a hollow figure in black pottery, 105mm. high. The fabric is untempered and soapy to touch, not unlike the grog-tempered ware of the 1st century BC - 1st century AD that is widely referred to as 'Belgic'. The use of pottery vessels in such fabrics had largely died out, in Leicester, by the early 2nd century (Pollard 1994). The figure thus stands apart from the pottery traditions of the time of its deposition.

The figure is modelled in the round, perhaps (as Tom Blagg has suggested) by throwing it as a pot first; the diameter would have been in the region of 90-100mm. The pectorals are formed by pressing out the wall. The arm is an appliqué, though the wall is here pressed out also, presumably to facilitate fixing. The 'horns' held in the left hand are also appliqués, as are the nipples which are 50mm apart. The fingers are given definition by cutting away the clay between them. A lost appliqué is implied by an unburnished area across the right abdomen, the remainder of the intended exposed surfaces being burnished. The broken upper edge implies the loss of the head and neck. The following discussion is based upon the opinions kindly expressed about the torso by Dr. Tom Blagg, Dr. Miranda Green, Dr. Martin Henig and Dr. Graham Webster in the late 1980s.

The bare torso, almost certainly of a male, is present, with prominent nipples. The left hand holds one of a pair of horns, probably belonging to a goat: the hand itself is undersized. The upper arm bears a lightly tooled lattice, and both the arm and horns are defined by tooled grooving. A single groove is also present below the elbow, at the lower edge of the fragmentary object. Impressed circles lie above this groove, and outside the arm. A garment, perhaps a pelt cloak, would appear to be represented by the impressed circles and perhaps also by the lattice work. The groove may define the back of the horned creature.

Grooves on the torso from the right pectoral across the abdomen towards the right hip (and hand?) define an area which is almost straight, tapering towards the chest. Blagg suggested, from the drawing, that this could be a lost appliqué of the shaft of Mercury's *caduceus*, if it were held with the snake-entwined end pointing downwards. Webster contended, on viewing the figure, that

"the missing appliqué object in the right hand is neither the shape of a purse or *caduceus*. A possibility must be the club of Hercules, but the only connection of this saviour hero with a horned animal is the Kerynitian Hind with its golden antlers".

Webster, uniquely, suggests that the arc at the broken bottom edge, to the left of the long grooves and below the chest cleavage, may indicate a lost appliqué phallus. Blagg accepted the present author's suggestion that this arc, formed by pressing a tool into the clay, represents the navel, but Webster felt it was too low on the body for this to be the case.

Blagg doubted that the figure had been modelled to full length, assuming that it was properly proportioned

"and that the goat's horns are correctly identified as such, because that would make the goat a much taller beast than such divine attributes usually are. I would guess that the god was portrayed down to the hips, or perhaps the knees, with the animal by his left hip."

Blagg also accepted, on the evidence of the drawing, the author's suggestion that the figure is shown as if viewed slightly from his left, as indicated by the modelling of the chest and the off-centre navel. He makes the interesting suggestion that there might have been an adjoining figure, viewed correspondingly from the right quarter. Were this the case, Mercury's Gallo-Roman consort Rosmerta would be a prime candidate; they appear together on at least eleven stone carvings from Britain (Green 1976, 31).

There is little doubt that the figure represents a god or a mythological character. Mercury is associated with the goat and, as Blagg pointed out, "the indications of a garment are also appropriate to Mercury, who is usually naked save for a cloak draped around the shoulders". Green has noted that impressed circles are often a convention for portraying beards on face pots. She is fairly certain that here they represent a pelt cloak and that

"this, together with the goat, may mean that we are seeing a local nature god, essentially similar to the god from Le Donon in the Vosges, where a figure with a pelt cloak has a spear and is accompanied by a stag (Hatt 1964, no. 151). Otherwise, the goat could suggest Mercury, though the skin cloak is not something I associate with truly Mediterranean versions of this deity".

Webster thought that the impressed circles ("punch marks") could represent a lion's skin, "but this seems hardly the way to depict the lion skin carried by the hero {Hercules}". He speculates that the figure could represent a local deity, one of a very small number of cult figures in the round in pottery found and identified in Britain, although there is a large body of evidence of religious images on pottery vessels (Webster 1989). Two possible identifications have thus been put forward: the Roman God Mercury, or a local (Celtic) deity. The fusion of the two - an accommodation of imperial and indigenous religions - to produce an image with attributes drawn from both cannot be ruled out. Henig hints at a third element in noting that the accentuated breasts - or at least nipples - recall those of Bacchus.

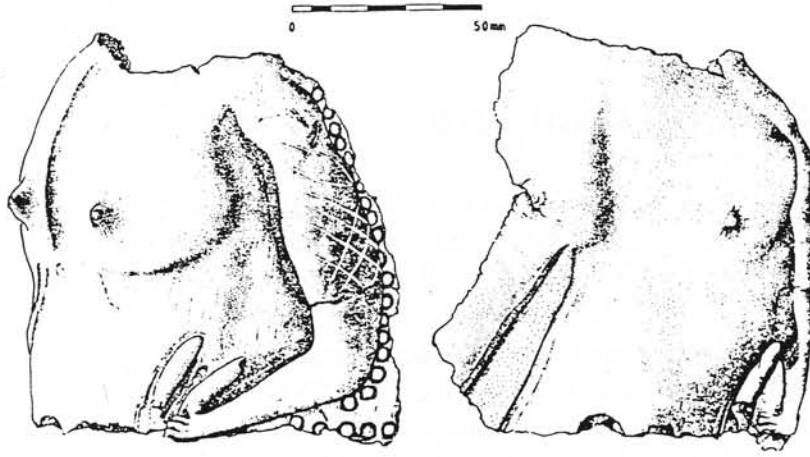


Fig. 1: Pottery cult figure from Leicester (Drawn by Dave Hopkins)

The temple - accepting the building as such - was originally identified provisionally as a *mithraeum* on the grounds of its physical attributes and also the presence of a stone sculpture of a naked male torso, similar to two from the London Walbrook *mithraeum*. Wachter has questioned this interpretation (1995, 359), and the view has also been advanced that the Walbrook torsos are satyrs, the building itself being a shrine of Bacchus in its final phase (Henig 1984, 108-9, 221-2). Henig has also suggested that the Leicester temple could have been a Bacchic *schola* (*ibid*, 222), at least in later years. This does not help with the identification of the ceramic figure; Mercury is found at the Walbrook and in Gaulish *mithraea*. The high proportion of liquid containers in 2nd century floor levels in the nave as well as in the 3rd century well which lay immediately outside to the south of the building, attest to concerted consumption at the site, which would be in keeping with a Bacchic connection.

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Editorial note. A longer version of this note will appear in *Britannia* XXIX for 1998, and I am grateful to the editor of *Britannia* for allowing members of the RFG to read about this most interesting piece in advance of that publication.

Millefiori gaming counters

Among the glass material from Vindolanda two fragmentary gaming counters were found, made of green glass with opaque yellow tubes, one of which comes from a Period VII (AD 213 + - c. 300) deposit.

British parallels for this piece were few and far between, but so far examples are known from Brandon Camp (Price 1987, 76 Nr. 14 dark blue with white streaks), Carlisle (Caruana 1990, 153 Nr. 360 dark blue with dense grey white swirling pattern - Price and Cottam, forthcoming, 258 Fig. 135, I133 black with op. blue streaks), Usk (Manning *et al* 1995, 129 Nr. 84 opaque green, yellow and red streaks), Fishbourne (Cunliffe 1971, 150 clear, and brown with white streaks) and Colchester (Harden 1947, p. 307 blue and white marbled counter). Most of these come from 1st century deposits and it seemed therefore, that our 3rd century piece from Vindolanda might be residual. But a review of the situation in the Gallic and Germanic provinces, produced some surprises.

As in Britain examples of 1st century date are fairly easy to identify (cf. Velsen (van Lith 1977, 53) and Baden-Aquae/Switzerland (Fünfschilling 1985, 148-150 Pl. 23, 456-458) and Cologne (Fremersdorf 1932, p. 262 fig. 4, 28-29). But here there is a second later group that seems to date to the 3rd and 4th centuries. The foremost find here is a set of millefiori gaming counters from Bonn (Haberey 1961, 329), dated to c. AD 250-275, with further examples come from Berzdorf in the Rhineland (*Bonner Jahrbücher* 159, 1959, 386) and Seltz near Strasbourg (Arveiller-Dulong and Arveiller 1985, 57f. No. 83 from a fourth century grave). Outside the empire they are also known from the princely graves in Nordrup (*ibid*, 58) and Gommern, Sachsen-Anhalt. (Becker *et al* 1996, 46), which are dated to the 3rd centuries.

Millefiori gaming counters are also found in other parts of the Roman Empire and quite a number of museums have them amongst their older collections without firm provenance. (Eisen 1916; Fontaine-Hodiamont 1994). The western material, however, so far seems to suggest two periods of circulation for these counters. One in the 1st century, and a second in the 3rd century. So far no 2nd century examples have come to light, that might have served to link these two. This is becoming to be a familiar picture with millefiori glass, and a lot of the later material has been labelled "residual" in the past. The fact that by the 3rd century there was still enough of these counters in circulation for sets to be buried in Bonn and Nordrup seems to go against this idea.

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Roman Military Metalwork from Masada and Gamla, Israel: the chemistry of soldier and civilian in first century Palestine.

It has been recognised for some time that finds of certain classes of Roman fibulae are strongly associated with military sites in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. In particular, the Aucissa type of fibula is a type especially well known from first century military sites (de la Bédoyère 1989, 121). Furthermore, the work of Justine Bayley and Paul Craddock has demonstrated how these military fibulae are predominantly made of brass in the UK, and that, from the first century onwards, Roman military non-ferrous metalwork in Europe is generally found to be made of brass rather than bronze or copper (Jenkins 1985, Bayley 1990, Craddock and Jackson 1995 and Craddock, forthcoming). Brass was also used as a coinage alloy for the highest value base-metal coins (*sestertius* and *dupondius*) and, taken in conjunction with its use almost exclusively for military equipment, has led to the suggestion that the alloy was somehow under state control, probably by the army (Bayley 1990, 21).

The situation in the Near East is considerably less clear, primarily due to the almost total absence of scientific methods applied to archaeological material. This paper is based on the results of a recently completed programme of analysis (by atomic emission inductively coupled plasma spectrometry) conducted by the author, of 129 pieces of Roman military equipment from the excavations of Masada (Aviram *et al* 1988) and Gamla (unpublished, but forthcoming!). Both sites were besieged and then destroyed by the Roman military in single episodes and never seriously re-occupied. Furthermore, these events were dramatically recorded in the Jewish War, a history written by a captured Jewish General, Flavius Josephus (Williamson. 1981). Thus we have material which was deposited within a very short space of time, in battle conditions (i.e. not discarded because it was no longer wanted) and which we can attribute to a specific event for which we have a very precise date (March or April of 74 A.D. for Masada and October 67 A.D. for Gamla). Furthermore, Josephus also supplies details about the military units involved, so we know that at Masada it was the *Legio X Fretensis*, with some auxiliary units, whilst at Gamla it was a combination of the *Legio X Fretensis*, *Legio XV Apollinaris* and *Legio V Macedonica*.

The results of the analyses show exactly the same preponderance of brass amongst the military fittings from both these Near Eastern sites and, furthermore, the same fashion for the Aucissa fibulae is also observed. Out of the eighteen Roman fibulae from Masada, fifteen are Aucissa types, as are all four of the Roman fibulae from Gamla. The alloy is also identical, with all the Roman fibulae from Masada and Gamla being made of brass of very similar composition to the British examples analysed by Bayley (see Table 1). This suggests very similar alloying and workshop practice.

	Sample size	Zinc %	Tin %	Lead %
British sites	16	19.54 +/- 2.54	1.72 +/- 1.83	0.15 +/- 0.18
Masada + Gamla	19	20.35 +/- 3.21	1.01 +/- 1.37	0.85 +/- 0.70

Table 1: Comparison of the main alloying metals present in Aucissa fibulae from Britain and Israel (means and standard deviations). (British data after Bayley, 1990).

Furthermore, in the Western provinces, brass was made using the zinc ore smithsonite, which is rarely found in the Near East (Craddock 1995). This is a carbonate ore which allowed the Romans in the West to use a simple alloying process which resulted in some of the impurities in the zinc ore (mainly iron and manganese) being transferred to the brass along with the zinc. In the Near East the predominant zinc ore is sphalerite, a sulphide ore, which requires a far more complex process resulting in a brass with only the low levels of iron and negligible manganese which are found in the copper (Carradice and Cowell 1987, Craddock 1995). Because of this it has been possible to suggest that all the military brasses (including the fibulae) from both sites were made of Western brass.

This discovery might not be so remarkable until we investigate the movements of the legions involved. In particular, the *Legio X Fretensis* was one of the permanent garrison legions (since at least AD 6) of Syria which was moved to Judea during the revolt (and ended up garrisoning Jerusalem). Why should a Syrian legion not only favour the distinctly Western Aucissa fibula, but also apparently import them alongside all the other brass fittings from Lorica rosettes and fasteners to horse harness phalerae and helmet cheek piece decorations?

If the Eastern legions were as self sufficient as their comrades in the West, we should see the use of locally produced brass or even a continuation of the age old tin-bronze tradition. Furthermore, the *Legio X Fretensis* could not have picked up its brass supplies whilst posted on a Western frontier, as could be argued for the XV and the V, being a permanent Syrian legion. The legion was made up, as far as we can tell, from local Syrians (Cotton and Geiger 1989), and had been stationed at Cyrrhus and later Raphanea, both Syrian cities (Wheeler 1996). The answer must lie in the nature of the Roman army in the East.

Pollard (1996) uses the example of Dura Europos to make a case for the Roman army as a 'total institution' in the East, cut off from the surrounding civilian population despite being ethnically and culturally a part of it, 'Institutional identity can supplant ethnic identity and maintain separation of individuals of common origin.' (Pollard 1996. 217).

This separation can be seen as politically desirable and was actively encouraged by the State through the encouragement of military cults.

(Mithras, Jupiter, Dolichenus) (Pollard 1996, 223). Pollard also argues that the lack of evidence for economic interaction between soldiers and civilians in Dura indicate the separation of the two ethnically identical groups, an argument which appears to find support in the work presented here. The fact that the most basic non-ferrous alloy used in the manufacture of military material was imported from the West and not procured from local civilian sources surely indicates a profound economic separation between the Roman military machine and the local population.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Guy Stiebel for his enthusiasm for the project and for his help in gaining the necessary permissions, The Gamla Excavation Project and Danny Syon for his help and encouragement with the Gamla material and the Geological Survey of Israel for access to analytical equipment. The project was conducted as a Lady Davis Post-doctoral Fellowship at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

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Conference Reports

New Approaches to the Art of Roman Britain

On 1st March, Ian Ferris organised a day school held at the University of Birmingham. He assembled a group of established and lesser known speakers, selected from field archaeological units, museums and university departments, to discuss portable art, mosaics and architectural decoration, and the ideology and imagery of Romano-British sculpture.

The first three papers covered portable art. Lesley Bevan from the University of Birmingham Field Archaeology Unit spoke on the context and status of some recently-discovered decorated metal work from the Midlands. Jean Bagnall Smith brought us up-to-date on research she was undertaking on votives from Romano-British temple sites at Woodeaton, Oxfordshire and Great Walsingham Norfolk.

Catherine Johns gave a résumé of the main forms of jewellery from Roman Britain. She prefaced her overview of developments in forms and styles with the cautionary note that personal adornment is fashioned in many materials, especially organic materials. The survival rates are thus variable and so the whole picture is not available to us.

David Neal began the session on architectural art. He used both Stephen Cosh's and his own paintings of mosaics from Roman Britain to illustrate his talk. Prior to 1993, some 1,000 mosaics had been recorded. From their combined researches, some 2,000 are now known and form the basis of the forthcoming corpus (in four volumes) they have been working on. Dr Neal cautioned against using the term 'school' to describe the work of groups of mosaicists - his work has recognised that more workmen are involved than previously thought.

Dr Sarah Scott, from the University of Leicester, gave us a more theoretical approach to viewing Roman art. She considered how artistic patterns develop, what guides artistic production and how is art meaningful and in what context. Mosaics from the Cotswold area formed the framework for her observations on studying art in its physical and social context, its production and use, and as elements in a wider cultural interaction.

Ian Ferris presented an interesting paper that examined the representation of barbarians on the distance slabs placed along the Antonine Wall. With comparisons from both home and abroad, Ian demonstrated that the imagery reflected socio-political trends and the over-riding need for the Romans to 'control' the barbarian world.

Female representation in Romano-British Art was the subject of Renée Rogers paper. The imagery and the ideology behind it made for fascinating listening and the links to the previous paper were very clear. It

was no surprise to the enlightened members of the audience to hear that women were portrayed as subordinate creatures of society, outsiders and representatives of chaos whereas men were superior, the rational upholders of social order!

The architectural sculptures of south-east Britain were reviewed by Dr Tom Blagg. This examined the monumental and funerary stonework from London, and compared the material with that from other places in the south-east, such as Verulamium, Springhead and Canterbury.

The day was brought to a conclusion with an overview of Roman art and cultural change in Roman Britain by Dr Martin Henig. He reviewed art forms from each century of occupation noting for instance the early examples of Romanisation of native styles, that Roman military art is not 'high' art and that at the end of Roman Britain changes in artwork were achieved without the influence of army or barbarians and were an evolutionary development.

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RFG June meeting

There was an attendance of around 25 for the Saturday morning lectures organised by Roy Friendship-Taylor at Verulamium Museum. Simon West and Sarah Adamson spoke, respectively, on current excavations just outside the museum (which is being extended to cater for more school parties) and the finds made in the process. The site is in the centre of Verulamium and includes a corner of the basilica, the crossroads of Watling Street (here 15 feet thick) and another road, and the corner of a town house in Insula XVIII. Amongst other things the excavation revealed the scale of drains and water supply systems serving the basilica, the latter including lead sheet patches for wooden pipes, and confirmed that it had an extended frontage. Finds included a complete hipposandal from the road, painted plaster, quarter round *opus signinum* mouldings and a copper alloy lid with a sprung mechanism on the back. These and other finds including a fountain fragment were on show.

Simon Holmes being unable to attend and give his paper on seal boxes, Hilary Cool then concluded the morning by outlining her research into finds of 4th century fusiform glass unguent bottles. These rare, sometimes very long, tubular containers with expanded midribs might have contained wine and seem both to be associated with unusual and high status burial and (unlike most glass forms) to be common to the whole empire. Continental finds associated with votives specifically linked to Sabazius

and objects with more general mystery religion connections strongly suggest that the unguent bottles were burial-ritual items used by rich believers in an afterlife.

After pub lunches (archaeologists in pubs? surely not!) there was the opportunity both to look round the museum and for a guided tour of the visible remains of the Roman town, which rounded off an enjoyable meeting.

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Notes and News

Winter Meeting of the RFG

This will be held on Monday 24th November in Canterbury, and will be hosted by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust in association with l'Association des Fouilles Archeologiques Nationale. The theme for the day will be *Very Late Roman* and it will be concerned largely with late fourth and fifth century finds from East Kent and the Pas de Calais. Highlights include a review of the finds from the Stour Street Burial Group, lead pendants and other finds from Ickham, Germanic objects in Roman contexts and a discussion of contemporary material in north-west France. A lunchtime tour of the new Roman museum in Canterbury will also be included, alongside a display of recent discoveries.

A full programme will be circulated nearer the date, and further information can be obtained from the organiser Ian Riddler at the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, 9a Broad Street, CANTERBURY CT1 2LU (tel. 01227 462 062).

Treasure Act

The new treasure act comes into force on 24th September, 1997. The text is available on the internet at the following address:-

<http://britac3.britac.ac.uk/cba/detecting/>

Putting the Record Straight: finds on the SMR

The IFA Finds Group will be holding a conference on this theme at Jewry Wall Museum, Leicester on Monday 13th October, 1997. The cost will be £3 to IFA finds group members and £5 to non-members. For details contact Richard Pollard, Leicestershire Museums, Arts & Records Service, County Hall, Leicester Road, Glenfield, LEICESTER LE3 8RA. Tel 0116 265 6793. Fax 0116 265 6788.

Quern Study Group

This group has now resumed activities and widened its research interests with the aim of providing a forum for discussion on a variety of stone artefacts from all periods. Hones, whetstones, tiles and miscellaneous artefacts as well as querns and millstones will now be included. A newsletter will be published later this summer (copy deadline July 18th), and the group also aims to hold a meeting at the end of January.

Membership costs £5 p.a.. Contact Ruth Saunders, Dept. of Archaeology, Reading University, Whiteknights, PO Box 218, READING RG6 6AA

Britannia the maritime links

The Association for Roman Archaeology are holding a conference on this theme at the Museum of London on 4th and 5th October 1997. The conference fee is £39. Details from the Director ARA, 27 Broadway, Rodbourne, Cheney, SWINDON, Wiltshire SN2 3BN (Tel 01793 534 008)