
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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The Bassingbourn Diana: a comparison with other bronze figurines of Diana found in Britain

Joan P. Alcock

Discussion

Diana was not one of the most popular deities worshipped in Roman Britain and the occasions when she does appear are those where she is depicted in the guise of Artemis where she combined the functions of a woodland deity and a deity of fertility. She also became assimilated with Luna, so much so that representations of a figure adorned with the lunar crescent can be suggested to be either Luna or Diana as on the pediment at Bath (Toynbee 1964: 139).

The main aspect of her worship and her invocations however, appear, to be almost entirely related to her capacity as a goddess of hunting. This is understandable in view of the wildness of the landscape and the enjoyment of both Celt and Roman for the chase. As there does not seem to have been a Celtic female deity entirely associated with hunting the classical concept of the deity would dominate. On the other hand her association with fertility would link her to any of the Celtic female fertility deities. This would account for her worship by the women of the family; a statuette found in the Woodchester Villa, where the head of a bull has an association with Luna, suggests Diana in her capacity as guardian of childbirth (Toynbee 1964: 84).

The four bronze statuettes of Diana found in Britain are all related to the concept of Diana as huntress and their depiction is derived from that of a purely classical design of the 4th century BC. Each of the four is, however, portraying a different interpretation and perhaps the most interesting is the figurine from Bassingbourn. Toynbee regards it as being 'almost certainly a British work, to judge by its clumsy pose and rough style of modelling' (Toynbee 1964: 85) but it is of greater interest than the statement implies. Two similar figures (Hercules and Venus) may have been made in

the same area, so that the possibility of a local British workshop can be suggested in the Cambridge–Ely area. The modeller has also derived his statuette from classical models but seemingly has confused two classical garments a mistake which perhaps might be expected from British or Gaulish craftsmen. The style, especially with regard to the hair and the facial features, is Celtic and somewhat crude in comparison with the Cirencester figurine. Nevertheless, the overall design has a vigour which would have induced a purchaser to believe in the power of this hunter-deity and for him to believe that it would be a suitable offering to present to a shrine or to place in a lararium.

In the 2nd century AD Hadrian promoted the cult of Diana and exploits of Hadrian as hunter, as for example those depicted on the groups of Hadrianic reliefs now decorating the Arch of Constantine, have been interpreted as part of the propaganda cult (Aymard 1951: 523). Coinage of both Hadrian and Antoninus Pius continued this aspect. It is possible therefore that the Bassingbourn figurine can be dated to the 2nd century AD, and that the modeller had taken his inspiration from designs on coins of the reign of Hadrian.

1 Bassingbourn

Location Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

Provenance Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire.

Number RC 23.239

Height 10.1 cm.

Patina Dark green, good condition.

References Heichelheim 1935–7: 59–60, no. IX, plate 3.c; Toynbee 1964: 85; Green 1976: 209; Pitts 1979: 72, plate 19.

Description

The goddess is standing with the weight of the body on the right foot; the left is placed slightly in front. Originally she was placed on a dome-shaped base and was supported by a rod which protrudes from underneath the chiton: the left arm is placed sideways with the forearm raised; it is missing from just below the elbow. The right arm is placed diagonally downwards and is bent at the elbow. A hole is drilled through the hand, which rests on the hip; it is possible that a bow was placed in the hole. The facial features are firmly modelled, the eyes are



Figure 1.
Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire.
Height 10.1 cm.

drilled, the lips thick, the nose well marked and splayed out at the bottom. There is a narrow depression across the face running down the forehead and along the left side of the nose, which may have been done in the casting. The hair is elaborately arranged by being drawn up into two top knots and pulled into a bun at the nape of the neck. This hairstyle is derived from statues such as the Artemis of Versailles where the top knot of hair is held on the top of the

head by a band drawn round the hair to bunch it upwards.

The figure is modelled on one of Praxiteles. Pausanias mentions Artemis Laphria, a work of Menarchomes and Soidas, which Augustus gave to the people of Patriae (Pausanias VII 18.9). This appears to have been a standing figure with the right hand placed on the hip and a bow in the left hand (Imhoof-Blumer & Gardner 1964: pls. vi–x).

The long chiton is held under the breast by a belt, and another belt round the waist allows the garment to be drawn up and pouched over.

The shape of the belt and the shape of the overfold are the same. The heavy folds of the drapery are well-marked at the front but smoothed out behind, though the upper belt and the overfold continue to be clearly marked. This suggests that the main viewing point of the figure was from the front. The arrangement of the garment provides an interesting example of a provincial artist either ignoring or being ignorant of classical practice. Hellenistic sculpture portrayed early representations of a standing Artemis as wearing a peplos, a heavy full garment drawn up at the waist to produce a large overfold.

Occasionally an artist would add a second belt just above the waist.

As this garment was intended to reach the ground it was unsuitable for active movement and Diana Venetrix would wear the less cumbersome chiton, a more simple garment made of two pieces of cloth sewn together with an opening in the centre of the upper edge for the head and two openings at the uppermost ends of the side edges for the arms. A Roman addition to this costume was to place a second chiton or tunic with short sleeves beneath the first. This can be seen on the figure of Artemis in the Vatican Museums (Lippoid 1936: 188–9, no. 584, taf. 51). The creator of the Bassingbourn figurine has confused the two garments giving the goddess a peplos with short sleeves held by a belt placed under the breasts.

Parallels

This, together with the powerful appearance of the figure, suggests Celtic workmanship. There is no parallel to this figure amongst published bronze figurines. Only one, from Cologne, displays the goddess wearing a peplos and this is cast in a more classical fashion (Menzel 1986, no 81, taf 45). Diana wearing a long garment ('draped') appears on coins of Hadrian's reign (e.g. Mattingley 1923–40: III, 282, no 334, plate 53.6; Robertson 1962–82: II, 94, no 127, plate 21). The position of the left

arm is paralleled by figurines in the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston where the arm was raised to hold a torch (Comstock and Vermule 1971, nos 157–158). The facial features recall those of bronze figurines found in the same area e.g. a Venus found at Ely and a Hercules from Sutton near Ely (Heichelheim 1935–37, 52, 61) and suggest the presence of a local workshop.

2 Cirencester

Location Corinium Museum, Cirencester.

Provenance Cirencester, Leauses Garden, Gloucestershire. Found together with a statuette of Mercury

Number B 595.

Height 5.6 cm.

Patina Dark green. Some corrosion in the folds of the drapery.

References Buckman & Newmarch 1850: 109; 1860: 110, figures 41–2; Toynbee 1964: 85; Reinach 1924, v: 134, no. 4 – shown here with left foot missing.

Description

The goddess is stepping forward on to the right foot, the left is placed behind, so that the weight has just been transferred from the rear to the front foot. The left arm is extended obliquely forward; the missing left hand probably held a bow. The right arm is raised upward diagonally; the forearm bends down to allow the fingers to withdraw an arrow from a quiver on the back. The fingers are separately modelled.

The head is turned to the left with the face strongly modelled; the features are good. Eyes are indicated by depressions; the mouth is a slit, the nose is wedge-shaped.

The hair is drawn back from the forehead and lies in waves which conform to the shape of the head. The front hair is gathered into a kind of double-bow on the top of the head. She is wearing a chiton which ends at the knee; it is draped over both shoulders leaving the neck bare. The right knee is thrust forward pushing the drapery which falls to one side. The long quiver, with a rounded base, lies at an angle against the back of the body. It has been cast as one with the figure. On the feet are small hunting boots reaching to halfway up the calf.

Discussion

Artemis, depicted as a standing figure in the act of putting on a heavy mantle, was first created by Praxiteles for the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia on the Acropolis (Bieber 1961: 21; Picard IV 1963: 248, figure 5). Pausanias noted (I, 23 7) that the sculptor created it on his

return from Asia about 356 BC. He also commented (I 40 2) that in the ancient sanctuary at Megara there was a statue of Artemis surnamed 'saviour' created by Strongylion. Coins from Megara show her running, wearing a shortened chiton and holding a torch (Richter 1950: figure 643).

A statue of Artemis at Antikyra, according to Pausanias, reveals the goddess holding a torch in her right hand, and with a quiver hanging from her shoulder; by her side sits a dog. This design also appears on coins (Imhoof-Blumer & Gardner 1964: plate γ xvii) and the stance may have been adapted from the earlier statues of Artemis or from Amazon poses of the 5th century BC. A further development from the



Figure 2.
Cirencester, Gloucestershire.
Height 5.6 cm.

Praxitelean original is seen in the Artemis from Gabii, now in the Louvre (Rizzio 1932–5: Tav. xciv) where the goddess wears a wide chiton over which she arranges a diplax (a somewhat similar garment to a peplos but with a broad overfold). These statues are static but the pose of the Artemis of Versailles, now in the Louvre, a work ascribed to the 4th century BC sculptor, Leochares, a younger contemporary of Lysippus, gives the suggestion of the goddess running forward whilst taking an arrow from the quiver on her back. This design, known as

Diana Venetrix, was popular in Rome under the Republic. Pliny (*Natural History*: XXXVI IV 24) remarks that a statue of Diana by the younger Kephisodotus stood in the temple of Juno within the Porticus Octaviae (Platner & Ashby 1929: 427) and Sestieri (1940–1) suggests that this statue was the prototype which was copied.

The Artemis of Versailles wears what is often described as a short chiton. The garment is, however, a long chiton which is held in place by two belts, one placed under the breast, the other round the waist. The latter allows the garment to be pulled up into an overfold so that it will not impede a running motion. The lower folds appear to stream out backwards, a gesture reminiscent of the garments worn by Victoria and by the Lares. The arrangement became popular in the Roman period.

On the Versailles statue the hair is arranged in a bun held on the nape of the neck. A statue of Artemis now in the Vatican Museum (Bieber 1977: figure 260) has the hair arranged in two 'bows' on the top of the head. This elaborate hairstyle displays the so-called rococo tendencies of Hellenistic art which continued into the Roman period.

Parallels

There are many parallels to this design mainly from Gaul (e.g. Boucher 1973: nos. 31, 33–4) and the Rhineland (e.g. Menzel 1966: no. 63) but also extending across the Empire (Popovic *et al.* 1969: no. 100). It would seem this particular concept of Diana as huntress was more popular in other parts of the Empire than in Britain.

3 Wroxeter

Location Rowley's House Museum, Shrewsbury.

Provenance Wroxeter, Shropshire.

Number A 300.

Height 8.1 cm.

Patina Dark green; well preserved.

References *Archaeological Journal* xix (1862):

81; *Gentleman's Magazine* (April 1862): 401;

Wright 1872: 320; Green 1976: 164; *Victoria*

County History: Shropshire 1 (1908): 254.

Description

The figure is stepping forward so that the weight of the body would be placed on the left leg; the foot is turned diagonally outwards. The right leg has been broken off but the angle of the remaining upper joint shows that it would

have been placed behind. The left arm extends diagonally outwards; the hand is formed into a slit and could have held a bow. The right arm is held out horizontal to the body with the forearm placed obliquely backwards behind the head. The hand is in the act of taking an arrow out of the quiver. The head is turned slightly to the left; the facial features are formalized, the nose is smooth and the pupils of the eyes have been drilled. The hair is brought into a roll round the head and is framed by a diadem; waves fall on either side of a central parting at the back. The hairstyle is carefully modelled. The diadem is a common attribute of the goddess (e.g. as in the



Figure 3.
Wroxeter, Shropshire.
Height 8.1 cm.

Versailles Artemis) and sometimes has a crescent moon placed on the front (e.g. the Artemis in the Capitoline Museum) (Jones 1912: 328, no. 24, 182). The figure wears a chiton which is tied by two bands, one under the breast and one round the waist. The garment is caught up by the latter to form an overfold; the lower part is pushed to one side by the left leg, so that the goddess is caught in the act of striding forward.

Parallels

There is no direct parallel to this figure amongst the bronze figurines already published but the style recalls the Gallo-Belgica tradition.

4 Exeter

Location Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.

Provenance Unknown.

Number Montague collection 5/ 1946.736. The figurines came into the museum's possession in 1946 together with several other bronze figurines and there is no record of where they were found.

Height 6 cm.

Patina Dark brown, some corrosion in the folds of the garment at the back.

References Unpublished.



Figure 4.

No provenance (Exeter).

Height 6 cm.

Description

The goddess is stepping forward on to the right foot; the left foot is placed behind and sideways

so that the foot is slightly turned outwards. The left leg is bent at the knee. The left arm is held diagonally outwards but is missing below the elbow. The right arm is extended forwards and is bent at the elbow; the hand seems to hold what appears to be the remains of a bow. The head is turned slightly to the right. The facial features are not well-formed; the mouth is barely indicated, the eyes protrude and the nose is wedge-shaped.

The hairstyle is formed in an elaborate coiffure being drawn into a roll round the head with a central parting down the back. The roll is carried into the nape of the neck and drawn into a bun by means of five horizontal rolls.

The goddess wears a chiton caught up in one overfold at the waist so that the top part forms a pouched effect. It is draped over both shoulders leaving the neck bare. The folds of the garment are clearly marked. There is a quiver behind the right shoulder held by a strap which crosses over the right shoulder and under the left arm.

Parallels

The parallels are similar to those relating to the Cirencester figurine. Diana Venetrix seems to have been worshipped most commonly in the eastern area of Gaul and the Rhineland (Kruger 1917), where her depiction occurs more frequently in stone. This particular figure may have been brought into Britain either during the Roman period or as a collector's item.

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