

Two Roman phallic pendants from Surrey

The two copper-alloy pendants discussed below (fig 1) are both metal-detector finds recovered from Surrey sites during 1994.¹ They are apparently the first such pendants to be recorded from the county, although it is believed that further similar pendants and rings bearing phallic motifs have been found along the Hog's Back, the source of no 1 (John Boas, David Graham, pers comm).

Description

1 Crescent-shaped pendant with a loop for suspension and an erect phallus protruding from the front. The loop and phallus are not sited centrally on the crescent. The pendant is cast in one piece, and is only roughly finished on the back. The maximum width is 29mm, height 34mm and depth 29mm. The only decoration is on the phallus itself: the details of the glans are defined by simple incised lines, and two further lines are present on the shaft. The suspension loop is large for the size of the pendant, suggesting that it may have hung from a relatively heavy item such as a harness fitting. Found west of Puttenham on the south slope of the Hog's Back.

2 Pendant comprising male genitals with a suspension ring sited between two small wings at the base of the shaft; part of a larger loop survives in the ring. Overall length 33mm. Cast in one piece, with the details formed in the casting. When hung from a piece of thread, the phallus points downwards at an angle of approximately 45°. Found in Priory Park, Reigate.

Discussion

The pendants are of types well known from both military and civilian sites in Britain and on the Continent (Green 1978, 34-5), and the wings of no 2 were a common attribute on phallic

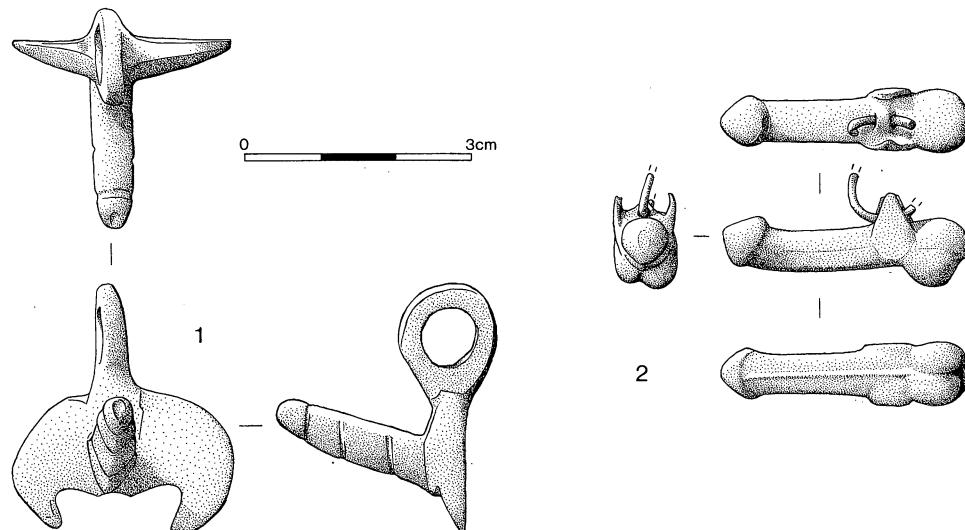


Fig 1 Roman phallic pendants from the Puttenham area (no 1) and Reigate (no 2) (1:1). Drawn by David Williams

representations. Such pendants could have been suspended from a variety of items, including belts, straps, harness fittings or simple chains. The phallus was a widespread charm in the Roman world, affording good luck and protection from such evils as witchcraft (Johns 1982, 62-75; Jashemski 1979, 188-9), and its superstitious connotations were definitely Roman rather than native British. It was not necessarily an obscene or specifically erotic symbol, as is attested by the presence of phallic amulets in graves (eg Crummy 1983, fig 54, no 1804) and by very small rings with phallic motifs which were probably given to children for their protection (Johns 1982, 63; Henig 1984, 186).

No close dating is possible for these unstratified examples. The two pendants, though not uncommon finds for Roman Britain, are of interest as evidence for popular Roman culture and superstition in Surrey.²

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Catherine Johns for her comments on the pendants, and for reading the text in draft. We are also grateful to David Williams, for drawing the objects, and to John Boas.

NOTES

- 1 No 1 has now been acquired by Guildford Museum (Acc No RB 3974); no 2 is at present (January 1995) on loan to Guildford Museum for study (ref TRB 3827). We would like to thank David Williams for bringing no 2 to our attention.
- 2 An example of a different type of phallic pendant, a roundel cut from antler and carrying a phallus carved in relief, has been found at Staines (Greep 1994, no 188, and pl 4, b).

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