

XI

MUSEUM NOTES, 1981*

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1. AN ENAMELLED STUD FROM WEST WHARMLEY. (Figs. 1, 2).

IN 1977 Mr. J. C. Thompson presented to the Museum of Antiquities a bronze disc stud which he had found whilst fieldwalking at West Wharmley in Northumberland (NY 8866).¹ The stud (fig. 1.) is 42 mm in diameter and 1.5 mm thick, and has been cast from a wax model which included the short shank of circular section projecting centrally from the back. The face has a raised design comprising a border with three tendrils curling towards the central circular rib. This roundel and its three semicircular lugs provide four fields which contain red enamel of the usual "glass enamel" type. The raised modelling appears to have been achieved with a spatula and the same tool probably made the serrated marks along the various edges of the moulding. Examination of the spatula and other tool-marks and surface detail was simplified by reference to silicone rubber moulds and an electrotype with oxidized surface made by Peter Shorer.

The disc has a small hole pierced through from front to back in antiquity, and the absence of wear or local damage such as would be caused by nailing or rivetting suggests that, although this object was made as a stud, possibly to decorate harness, it was almost immediately turned into a pendant.

Enamelled disc studs are quite common on Roman sites, but this example is interesting in that it departs from the more usual enamelled motif of concentric circles

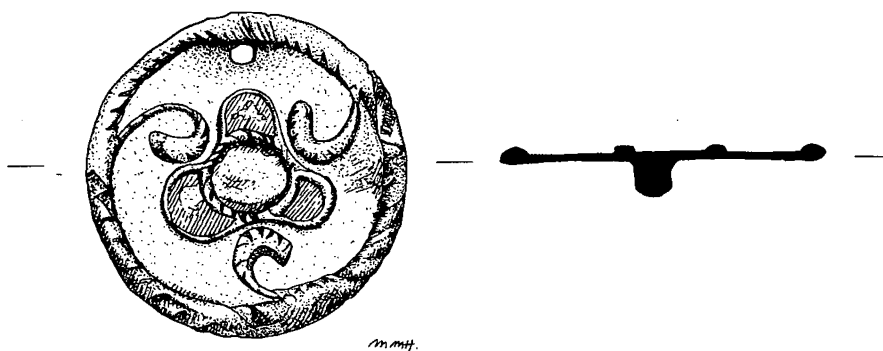


Fig. 1. Enamelled stud from W. Wharmley. See Museum Note 1.

Drawn by Mary M. Hurrell



Fig. 2. Brooch of unknown provenance (1:1). See museum Note 1.

Drawn by Mary M. Hurrell

and tries to copy the Celtic *triskele* design on embossed brooches. These were popular in the north of England. Examples have been found at South Shields, Wallsend, Corbridge, and Chesters.² These brooches have a raised pellet border surrounding a flowing *triskele* pattern which was stamped on a thin silver or tin disc and then fastened to a bronze backing. Dated specimens from other sites in England suggest that these brooches are of the first century A.D., and it would appear that embossed work generally made its exit at the end of that century when it was replaced by cast and enamelled designs.³

A brooch in the Museum of Antiquities (1956.160.A; fig. 2), unfortunately of unknown provenance, can be interpreted as being a late example of the embossed type. Here the pattern, originally intended to represent lotus buds and their accompanying tendrils, has degenerated into a stylized series of berried rosettes, running scrolls, and trails, with the pellet border now a mere zigzag line. In comparing this brooch with the West Wharmley stud one can see that the craftsman has tried to adapt the *triskele* motif to enamelling by simplifying it. The dominant central motif of tendrils has become a circle with three lugs, the running scrolls have reverted to the "hockey-stick" trails of the earlier embossed brooches, whilst the pellet border is now a roughly nicked rib. The same experiment was attempted on a stud from South Shields and a brooch from Dowalton Loch (Wigtownshire),⁴ perhaps more successfully.

The West Wharmley stud is of crude workmanship and looks "home made". The craftsman's attempt at the *triskele* motif has resulted in a stud which has closer affinities with "five-lobed" disc-brooches of the second century as seen at South Shields⁵ or the "grape-vine" decorated stud from Hamshill Ditches (Wiltshire).⁶ The stylistic evidence, therefore, puts the manufacture of this stud into the early second century A.D.

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2. A SCULPTURED DACIAN FALX FROM BIRDOSWALD. (Pl. XI)

THE INSCRIBED stone in question, *R.I.B.* 1914,⁷ was found in 1852 outside the wall



Inscription from Birdoswald. See Museum Note 2.

Photograph: University Library, Newcastle upon Tyne

of the south guard-chamber of the main east gate of Birdoswald fort. It was set up under Modius Julius, governor of Britannia Inferior in A.D.⁸ 219, by the *cohors I Aelia Dacorum* commanded by M. Claudius Menander. This regiment can hardly have been raised before Trajan's Dacian Wars and was a regular unit by c. 130, when it was helping in construction work on the Vallum (*R.I.B.* 1365). Under Hadrian it may have been stationed at Bewcastle⁹ and by A.D. 205–8 it was at Birdoswald building a granary (*R.I.B.* 1909).

The inscription is flanked on the dexter side by a palm branch and on the sinister side by a curved sword. The latter represents a *falx* of the single-handed type, with pommel and guard. This weapon was characteristically carried by Dacians, as depicted in sculpture and coins and occurring amongst small finds. This representation on a stone set up by a *cohors Dacorum* makes the identification almost certain.

On the spiral frieze of Trajan's Column several Dacians are shown using *falces* with one hand, notably in Cichorius Scenes LXVII, LXXII, XCV–XCVI, CXLV and CLI.¹⁰ The *melée* around Roman defence-works in Scenes XCV–XCVI includes no fewer than seven in action. These *falces* have either a long handle, as in Scene LXII, or a shorter handle with a long curving blade and guard approximating to the

Birdoswald example. Corroborative representations are seen on the Adamklissi *congeries armorum* frieze¹¹ and on a *denarius* of Trajan¹²; both examples have guard and pommel. One actual *falx*, 55 cm long, has been found at Káloz in Rumania.¹³ Another, from Grăditea Muncelului, is 68 cm with a tapering tang.¹⁴

The double-handed *falx* was much longer. An example from Rupea (Cohalme) in Transylvania is 90 cm long, with a metal haft for just over half its length.¹⁵ The latter would have had a wooden sheathing, balancing the wicked curved blade which gives the weapon its name. The Adamklissi metopes depict these *falces* in use against Roman *legionarii* equipped with *ocreae* and *manicae* to protect their limbs. According to Arrian the Greek *kopis*, a single-handed sword not unlike the one-handed *falx*, was capable of shearing off a man's arm and shoulder with one blow.¹⁶ In the Metopes all the Dacians have *falces*, their Germanic allies being equipped with shields and javelins. Vulpe used this contrast with the depictions of Dacians on Trajan's Column to argue for an invasion of Moesia Inferior by Sarmatae, Buri and Eastern Dacians, unattested in the literary sources.¹⁷ The pedestal of the Column may, however, depict a large *falx* to the left of the doorway.¹⁸ In its double-handed form the *falx* often occurs when Dacian spoils are depicted. Four Trajanic coin issues show the curving blade¹⁹ and Scene LXXVIII on the Column may include them. A *ferculum* relief in the Museo delle Terme, Rome,²⁰ and an unpublished relief in the Split Archaeological Museum, Yugoslavia, both have a *falx* with other weapons. The identification of the *falx* with the Sarmatian double-handed swords of Tacitus²¹ is not unreasonable.

The small *falx* on the Birdoswald stone is repeated on *R.I.B.* 1909, though there the palm branch and sword are transposed. In this example the handle is badly worn but the curve of the blade shows clearly.²² The Birdoswald *falces* may indicate a unique regimental badge or the carrying of *falces*, instead of *spathae*, by the Dacian *auxiliarii*. A jealously guarded regimental tradition such as is suggested would have a close modern parallel in the Gurkha soldiers with their *kukris*. A tentative comparison might be made with the ethnic dress of the Chester 'Sarmatian';²³ and, according to Hyginus,²⁴ irregular Dacian units were used in the later second century. The use of *falces* therefore bears consideration. It is certainly unusual for an auxiliary *cohors* to depict a regimental weapon or badge in sculpture.

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NOTES

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¹ Accn. No. 1977.4. Kindly drawn by Miss M. M. Hurrell.

² South Shields: Arbeia Roman Fort Museum, 1975.1. Wallsend: recent excavations by C. M. Daniels (ref. WAL 273, WAL 1287). Corstopitum Museum: *AA*³ V (1909), p. 406, fig. 22. Chesters: E. A. W. Budge, *A Catalogue of the Roman Antiquities in the Museum at Chesters* (1903), p. 328, no. 1275.

³ Personal comment from Mr. H. Kilbride-Jones.

⁴ South Shields: Museum of Antiquities, 1956.128.69.A; M. MacGregor, *Early Celtic Art in North Britain* (1976), no. 41. Dowalton Loch: National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, HU62; MacGregor, *op. cit.*, no. 253.

⁵ Museum of Antiquities, 1929.119.2 For published examples see *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain* (British Museum, 1922), pp. 51-62, fig. 73d.

- ⁶ Gussage and District Museum, Dorset.
⁷ Museum of Antiquities, 1855.7.
⁸ A. R. Birley, "The Roman Governors of Britain", *Epigraphische Studien* 4 (1967), p. 88.
⁹ D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall* (1976), p. 250.
¹⁰ Numbering used by C. Cichorius, *Die Reliefs der Traianssäule* (Berlin, 1896, 1900).
¹¹ F. B. Florescu, *Monumentul de la Adamklissi Trôpaeum Traiani* (Budapest, 1st ed., 1959), fig. 85, C-D.
¹² *R.I.C.* II, p. 258, 216.
¹³ R. Vulpe, "Les Bures alliés de Décébale dans la première Guerre Dacique de Trajan", *Studii Classice* V (1963), p. 240.
¹⁴ *The Dacians*: Catalogue of the Billingham Art Gallery Exhibition, 1980, p. 80, no. 252.
¹⁵ V. Pârvan, *Getica : O protoistorie a Daciei* (Budapest, 1926), p. 507, fig. 342.
¹⁶ Arrian, I, 15, 8.
¹⁷ Vulpe, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
¹⁸ K. Lehmann-Hartleben, *Die Traianssäule* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1926), Abb. I.
¹⁹ *R.I.C.* II, p. 250, 96; L. Rossi, *Trajan's Column and the Dacian Wars* (1971), figs. 15-17.
²⁰ L. Vogel, *The Column of Antoninus Pius* (Harvard, 1973), pl. 51.
²¹ Tacitus, *Hist.*, I, 79.
²² I. A. Richmond and E. B. Birley, "Excavations on Hadrian's Wall in the Birdoswald-Pike Hill Sector, 1929: Part II, The Inscriptions", *T.C.W.A.A.S.* XXX (1930), p. 199, pl. IX.
²³ R. P. Wright and I. A. Richmond, *Catalogue of the Roman Inscribed and Sculptured Stones in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester* (1955), pl. XXXIV, 137.
²⁴ Hyginus, 30.

