

Fragments of a Roman Cavalry Cheek-piece from the Fort at Newstead

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A great many fragments of metal found in such sites as Roman forts frequently remain unidentified, either as the remains of a damaged but otherwise complete object or as a small piece of a very much larger object. It is therefore essential for collections of unidentified frag-



FIG 2 — Cavalry helmet cheek-piece from the Waal at Nijmegen (†). (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden)

ments to be periodically examined in case recent research can shed new light on the purpose of one or more pieces.

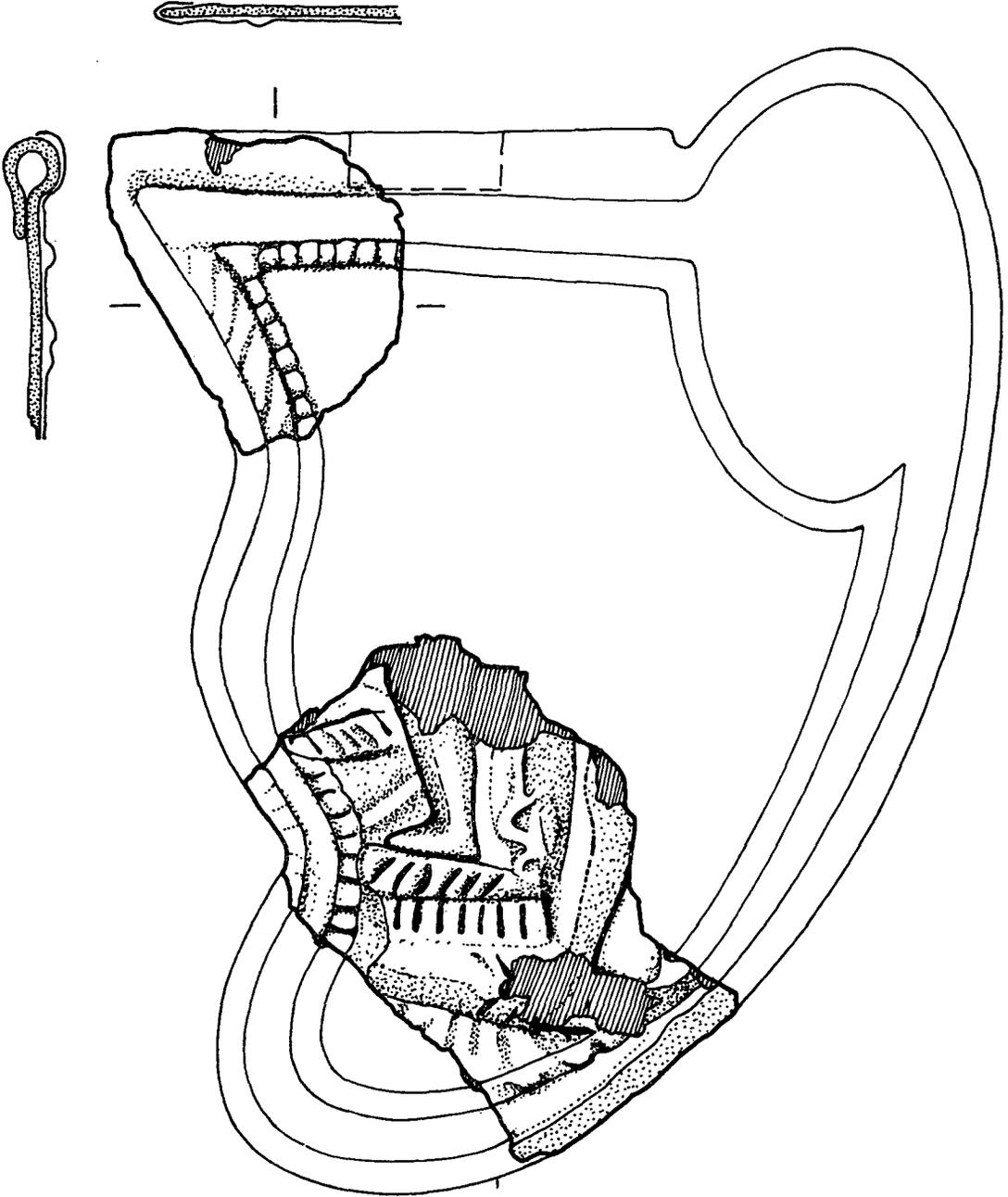


FIG 3 Fragments of a cavalry helmet cheek-piece from Newstead ($\frac{1}{2}$)

In May of 1972 two such fragments (FRA 1003) displayed under the heading of 'Civilian Bronzes' from Newstead in the Roman Gallery of the Museum of Antiquities of Scotland were recognised as portions of a cavalry helmet cheek-piece. The cheek-piece was of a type fitted to a parade helmet which may have been an alternative to the better known *cassis* with a complete mask of which three specimens or parts thereof were found in the fort at Newstead.¹

The fragments consist of the upper forward corner with the remains of part of the hinge tube and a larger piece spanning the lower half from the cutaway on a level with the wearer's mouth and the jaw-line at the rear edge (fig 3). They are formed of an iron back plate, bent over at one end to form the hinge tube, and covered with a sheet of embossed bronze, the bronze being folded round the edges of the iron to hold it in position. Both pieces indicate their position by the remains of the rims which edged the plate and an inner raised and cabled border. Inside this cabled frame was embossed a figure in low relief, the legs of which remain on the larger fragment where steps of ledges are indicated, the right leg being bent and the foot rested upon the lower of these. There is also some suggestion of a cloak or robe hanging between the legs.

The cheek-pieces of this class can be counted upon the fingers of two hands and four, including the pieces under discussion, are from British sites. All of these could have been backed with a stronger plate of iron. An example at Corbridge (*Corstopitum*),² embossed with a female bust, was found in the silt of the pre-Hadrianic ditch, and one of the most beautiful specimens, now in the Newark Museum, came from Brough, Nottinghamshire (*Crococalana*).³ The last was embossed with a chubby child-like *Dioscurus* holding his horse. An example from the river Waal near Nijmegen, now in the Museum van Oudheden at Leiden, is perhaps the nearest in style and finish to the Newstead fragments (see fig 2).

As with all identified Roman cavalry helmets, the cheek-pieces have an extension for the front of the ear which on this type is embossed with a naturalistic representation of that human appendage, and the inner frame of the cheek-piece is made to cut round this as it would on normal legionary cheek-pieces.

A cavalry parade helmet from the necropolis of Tel Oum Hauran, Syria, now in the Damascus Museum,⁴ dated to the second century, carries cheek-pieces of this pattern and later, less artistic examples, such as the one in the Tullie House Museum, Carlisle and another from Mainz in the Mannheim Museum, were probably attached to third-century helmets like that from Guisborough, Yorkshire, in the British Museum.⁵

NOTES

1. Curle, James, *A Roman Frontier Post and its People*, Glasgow, 1911, 166-74, pls xxvi-xxx.
2. Richmond, I A, and Gillam, J P, 'Further Exploration of the Antonine Fort at Corbridge', *Archaeol Aeliana*, xxx, 4th Ser (1952), 263-4, no. 21.
3. Webster, Graham, and Dudley, Donald R, *The Roman Conquest of Britain*, London, 1965, 119, pl 31.
4. Catalogue: Deuxième Exposition des Découvertes Archéologiques des Années 1954-5, Ajour séi par Le Directeur Général des Antiquités de Syrie au Musée National de Damas, 30-4, casque B.
5. British Museum, *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, London, 1964, 67, pl xxvi, 3.