

ART. VI.—*A bronze incense container in the form of Bacchus from Carlisle.* By JANET WEBSTER.

Read at Carlisle, March 31st, 1973.

THE object under discussion was recovered from the River Eden at Carlisle.¹ It comprises the hollow cast bust of an effeminate, partly clad youth; the top of the head is cut away to leave a round hole with a sunken flange; at the top centre back of this hole are two small projecting rings, separated by a groove, part of the hinge by which a lid was secured. At the sides of the head, adjacent to the opening, are two large rings which must have supported a handle. The base of the object is now open, but a slight flange of bronze projecting inwards from the back suggests that it was originally closed. The object is now 4.4 in. (11 cms.) in height and 3.7 in. (9.4 cms.) wide at its base.

The bust is delicately modelled. The hair is arranged in a two-tier fringe of clustered locks over the brow, and gently frames the face with waving locks drawn back over the sides of the head; the back hair is worked in long waves and falls low on the neck. The face is sensitively worked with large, wistful eyes, a straight slender nose and a delicate rosebud mouth. At the base of each of the handle-rings is a leaf-like moulding worked with waved indented lines to blend with the treatment of the hair; the tip of each leaf-moulding projects slightly. Draperies hang from a fastening on the left shoulder, and, although they

¹ Carlisle Museum Collection, Acc. No. 6-09.3. The bust was exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1878, cf. *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, 2nd Series, vii (1876-8), 356. I am most grateful to Mr Robert Hogg and to the administrative committee of Carlisle Museum, Tullie House, for permission to publish this piece. I should like to thank Prof. J. M. C. Toynbee for reading the draft and making valuable comments, and my husband P. V. Webster for his considerable help. I should like to thank Mrs G. Booth for producing prints on which Plates I and II are based.

appear to cross the bust at the back, they hang almost vertically down in front. The draperies probably represent a goatskin with stylised hooves, one at the fastening on the left shoulder, and one hanging down the front of the garment.

The identity of the figure and the function of the object are suggested by comparison with a very similar though larger object found in a Roman grave at Esch, Netherlands, in 1952.² The treatment of the face and hair of the Netherlands example is very similar to that of the Carlisle bust, although the face is somewhat more naturalistic than the idealised face of the Carlisle piece. The Netherlands figure has been identified as Bacchus; he wears a goatskin over his left shoulder, with two goat's legs hanging down in front. Like the Carlisle piece, the Netherlands bust originally had a hinged lid on the top of the head, flanked by two rings for suspension; half of the handle, which was originally inserted into these rings, remains; it has a swan's head terminal and is covered by an elongated acanthus leaf on top. The bottom of the bust is closed and flat and the whole is supported by a small pedestal sunk into the centre of the base. It seems reasonable to assume that the Carlisle bust was originally finished off in the same way. The Netherlands bust is defined as an incense container.

The Bacchus-bust was clearly a popular form for the incense container in the Western Empire. From Spain, four Bacchus-bust incense containers are illustrated by A. García y Bellido;³ two⁴ follow the naturalism of the Netherlands piece, while the other two⁵ are inferior stylised versions of the Carlisle

² A. N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, W. J. T. Peters & W. A. van Es: *Roman Bronze Statuettes from the Netherlands. II. Statuettes found South of the Limes*, Groningen 1969, 30-35, no. 14.

³ A. García y Bellido, *Esculturas Romanas de España y Portugal*, Madrid 1949, Nos. 485, 486, 488 & 489 bis.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos. 486 & 489 bis.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Nos. 485 & 488.

Bacchus; the pedestal support of A. García y Bellido's No. 485 is notable and perhaps suggests that many, if not all, incense containers were finished off with this type of base construction; the handle arrangement of his No. 488 is interesting; his Nos. 485 and 488 appear to be clad in goatskins. A fifth incense container illustrated from Spain⁶ is closely related to the group, but is probably to be interpreted as a satyr.

From Germany two similar busts are illustrated by H. Menzel;⁷ both are crude versions of the general Carlisle/Netherlands type; both lack rings for suspension on the sides of the head, and one⁸ has been filled with lead to serve as a steelyard weight.

From Austria, five incense-containers are illustrated by Fleischer,⁹ and their function and derivation from Alexandrian originals discussed.¹⁰ Although Fleischer's Nos. 181 and 182 are described as satyrs, the general treatment of the face and hair in each case and the top-knot of hair drawn into a bow over the brow of his No. 181 confirm that they are in fact depictions of Bacchus. The Egyptian affinities of the three other incense containers from Austria are stressed in the text, but the influence of the Bacchus-bust type can also be observed in each of these three pieces, particularly in the treatment of the hair.

Despite the relative wealth of the comparative material, the source of manufacture of the Carlisle piece is no clearer. The Netherlands and Carlisle pieces are comparable in form, artistic style and technical competence, but the differences between them indicate that their moulds were not derived from the same

⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 487.

⁷ H. Menzel, *Die Römischen Bronzen aus Deutschland. II. Trier*, Mainz 1966, Nos. 169 & 170.

⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 170. Compare also another similar container, filled with lead to serve as a steelyard weight, in the British Museum (B.M. No. 1934, 12-10.1).

⁹ R. Fleischer, *Die Römischen Bronzen aus Österreich*, Mainz 1967, Nos. 181, 182, 206, 207 & 208.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.



PLATE I.—Front and side views.



PLATE II.—Rear view.

model, although they could perhaps be derived from the same workshop. The Spanish and German pieces are in the same style as the Carlisle/Netherlands busts, but represent cruder, probably local, manufactures; the two sophisticated Austrian pieces represent different Bacchus styles and the three cruder pieces again probably represent local workmanship.

A number of the incense containers discussed here have been found in funerary contexts;¹¹ the choice of a Bacchus-bust incense container would perhaps seem a particularly appropriate offering to leave with the dead in view of Bacchus' role as a provider of bliss in the afterlife.

Bacchus was clearly a popular subject for the manufacture of incense containers in the Roman World. Several different styles of Bacchus were used for modelling incense containers, but the style of the Bacchus portrayed in the Carlisle and Netherlands busts stands out as a distinctive type, not only inspiring localised imitations but even influencing incense-container busts of other forms.

¹¹ From the Netherlands: Zadoks-Josephus Jitta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-35, No. 14; from Spain: A. García y Bellido, *op. cit.*, Nos. 485 & 489 bis.; from Austria: R. Fleischer, *op. cit.*, Nos. 182 & 208.