

REPORT ON THE VOTIVE FINDS FROM THE HARLOW ROMAN TEMPLE

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The iron model swords

The four model swords come from the early Roman / Belgic levels, associated with the pre-Flavian circular shrine and its courtyard.

i) SF 1634: from the courtyard associated with pre-Flavian features, and probably of pre-Flavian date. This is a large miniature sword, 121mm long x 19.5mm maximum blade-width, with a plain, leaf-shaped blade, a broken pommel and a narrow hilt made by beating out the iron at the top of the blade and folding it back on itself each side. The sword is snapped in two across the blade, but this is a modern break. The model was found associated with a lamb's jaw-bone, probably in a ritual deposit.

ii) SF 1931/1932: from the courtyard associated with pre-Flavian features; from within and around squatter occupation of circa 6th c AD date. The model is in two pieces, 71mm and 40mm long respectively, and the leaf-shaped blade is 16mm wide at maximum width. The weapon has a flared, broken pommel and a long narrow grip; it was deliberately snapped in two near the top of the blade, in antiquity.

iii) SF 2016: from the courtyard associated with pre-Flavian features. The model is 99mm long x 14mm (maximum width); it was deliberately snapped in half at mid-blade, in antiquity. This model is the most distinctive typologically, with a thin, waisted blade and triangular pommel. It closely resembles an earlier 1st c AD Mainz type gladius or a Roman military dagger (see below).

iv) SF 2165: from the 1st c. level, under the line of the later Roman temple. This sword-model is unique within the group in that it is encased in a sheet-bronze sheath or scabbard. The shape of the blade cannot be precisely identified without X-ray, but the sheath is parallel-sided until the edges converge to form a pointed tip. The dimensions are 107mm x 12mm (Maximum width). The pommel is lozenge-shaped; the grip has a lenticular outline, and there is possibly some kind of binding wrapped round it.

This collection of four miniature iron swords is of exceptional interest. Models made of iron are not common in British contexts, though a group of iron spears comes from the Romano-Celtic temple at Lamyatt Beacon (Somerset) (Leech 1986, 259-328). The swords form part of a large category of miniature weapons and implements which occur in religious contexts in Iron Age and Roman Britain, Gaul and the Rhineland (Green 1975, 54-70; 1981, 253-269). As far as miniature arms or armour are concerned, shields are not uncommon (Green 1987, 237-41), but swords are quite rare. In Gaul, model swords have been found, for example, at Reims (Marne) and Mouzon (Ardennes), and an iron sword-model at Argentomagus (Indre) dates to the mid 1st c. AD (Fauduet 1983, 97-102). In Britain, a bronze model sword, again of 1st c. AD date, was found with a shield associated with a late Iron Age temple at Frilford (Oxon) (Bradford & Goodchild 1939, 1ff). Other British bronze miniature swords come from Chesters (Northumberland) (Green 1978, 55, pl. 125; 1981, fig. 4b) and from Castor (Cambs), where two are recorded (Green 1975, 64).

The Harlow models are all of iron, and one is in a bronze sheath or scabbard. It is difficult to be precise when dealing with miniature replicas of real weapons, but the typology of the models closely resembles earlier 1st c. AD Roman swords (*gladii*) of Mainz type (Manning & Scott 1985, 148ff;

Ulbert 1969, 97-128). But it is equally possible (Jackson 1990) that the models represent Roman military daggers rather than swords. SF 1931/2 looks particularly dagger-like in its shape and proportions. Roman legionaries carried a gladius, a short, broad-bladed, double-edged weapon 2' long, in a leather or wooden scabbard, high up on the right side of the body. The gladius was essentially for short-range thrusting. The pugio or dagger was carried on the left side: this weapon had a slightly waisted, leaf-shaped blade 9-10" long (Webster 1956; 1969, 130), and would have been used to finish off an enemy.

The presence of model swords at Harlow reflects the occurrence of military equipment which accumulated as offerings in the courtyard outside the late Iron Age /early Roman circular shrine. This ritual behaviour is closely paralleled at Hayling Island (Hants), where a round late Iron Age shrine was inside a courtyard which contained a large quantity of war-gear (Downey, King & Soffe 1980, 289-304). The Hayling material was distinctive in that some of it was deliberately broken; this has happened to two of the miniature weapons at Harlow, which were deliberately snapped in two across the blade. This ritual damage to weapons and other prestige-equipment is reflected at other ritual sites: it occurred at the sacred lake of Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey (Lynch 1970, 249-277); and at the late Iron Age temple within the oppidum at Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise) (Brunaux 1986). Ritual damage of miniature objects is recorded, for instance, at the Woodeaton Romano-Celtic temple (Oxon), where three model bronze spears were deliberately bent in half. This ritual damage was a purposeful act of religious behaviour, performed in order to de-functionalise an object, to remove votive items from the earthly world and render them appropriate as gifts to the supernatural powers (Green 1986, 143; 1992; Grinsell 1961, 475-91). The practice was widespread in antiquity, both in space and time. It occurred in late Neolithic

Britain in the 3rd millennium BC (Wainwright 1989, 130) and in the Greek temple of Hera at Samos in about 800-600 BC (Ferguson 1989, 138).

The practice of offering miniature replicas of tools and weapons to the gods is well-documented: double-axe-models were made as votive gifts by the Minoans of Crete as early as 2000 BC and model vehicles were fashioned for religious purposes in the Near East at about the same time or earlier. In Britain, Early Bronze Age miniature halberds and axes are recorded, but model objects were made and offered in shrines from the Iron Age right through the Romano-British phases. Axes, spears, wheels, shields, swords and many other objects were replicated in miniature and dedicated in temples. Some Swiss axe-models (Forrer 1948) were inscribed with the names of deities - Jupiter, Minerva and the Mother-Goddesses. The custom of making miniature objects for the gods may have been determined by practical factors, such as cost or convenience. But sometimes, meticulous care was taken to make a very exact copy of a functional object: the Harlow sword or dagger with its bronze sheath is a case-in-point. Even if a devotee brought a miniature copy rather than a full-size implement, it had, nonetheless, to be a good copy, carefully executed to be acceptable to the gods. But it is possible also that miniaturisation performed a religious function similar to that of ritual breakage, that of rendering an offering useless for the mundane, earthly world and thus appropriate to the divine (Green 1986, 220-222).

The dedication of sword- or dagger-models at Harlow may imply the presence of a warrior-cult. The full-size military equipment at the site, and the image of a war-god and a stone helmeted head would seem to endorse such a view. But equally, in a pre-Roman Iron Age context, the offering of war-gear may symbolise not war per se but simply prestige-material, appropriate for the knightly class of Celtic society. This argument is put

forward to explain the presence of martial equipment which was deliberately placed in watery contexts during later prehistory (Fitzpatrick 1984, 178-190).

Finally, the association of one of the Harlow models with the jaw-bone of a lamb should not be forgotten. It implies deliberate deposition of the two items together as a religious act, perhaps a symbolic image of sacrifice.

The stone relief of a warrior-god

A small, extremely worn, broken limestone relief appears to represent the upper half of a human figure, with a small round head, thin neck, square shoulders and rectangular torso, the right arm also being discernible. A curved object can just be made out at the figure's left side, possibly a shield. There is a faint suggestion that the figure may be mounted. If the imagery has been correctly identified, then the figure may represent a warrior-god. Simple, rudimentary images of war-deities occur in Britain, as at Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos), and at Margidunum (Notts), where the figure is on horseback (Green 1976, Pls IIc, IIIa),

Bearing in mind other evidence for a military cult at Harlow (reflected in the model weapons, the stone helmeted head and the presence of martial equipment), the image of a war-god would not be out of place at the shrine.

The miniature pewter "chalice"

SF 1178: from within the area enclosed by the late Iron Age penannular ditch. 7.5mm high. This is a perfect miniature pewter vessel, with an outturned rim, flaring bowl-shape and flared base. It is probably of later 1st c. AD date. It is too small to be functional, and must represent a votive model object. Clay miniature vessels are well-documented as shrine-offerings:

occurrences may be cited at Verulamium in south-east Britain (Green 1976, 173) and Alesia in Burgundy (Le Gall 1985). But metal miniature vessels are rarer: at Caistor (Norfolk) was found a curious objects in the form of three tiny conjoined cups (Green 1975, 66); and part of what may be a miniature bronze pot comes from Thistleton (Green 1991).

The votive breast

SF 1979: found in the courtyard associated with pre-Flavian features; but from the pottery-evidence, it could be later, perhaps as late as the 4th c. AD. This is a curious object consisting of a cast bronze roundel 29mm in diameter with, mounted at the centre, a domed bone or ivory disc, 13.5mm in diameter, at the centre of which is a small bronze stud. The object looks like a model of a female breast, the stud representing the nipple, mounted on a bronze plate.

Votive model breasts are not unknown in religious contexts in the Romano-Celtic world. At Bath, a pair of miniature breasts was carved in ivory and cast into the spring of Sulis Minerva (Henig 1984, 151, 153, fig. 74), perhaps in thanksgiving by a young mother after the successful weaning of her child. Models of pairs of breasts, in bronze or silver-sheet, come from the healing sanctuary of Sequana at Fontes Sequanae near Dijon, offered by pilgrims in the hope of a cure, perhaps for milk-deficiency (Deyts 1985; Green 1989, fig. 74). If this find from Harlow is a representation of a breast, then it is curious in being singular rather than a pair. An alternative explanation is that the object represents an eye, the pupil being the central stud, but the proportions are wrong, and eyes are not usually represented completely circular.

The bronze/brass priest's headdress

SF 1881: found in the courtyard associated with pre-Flavian features, but possibly as late as 4th c. AD. The find consists of a chain made up of elliptical copper-alloy and brass links. When found, small fragments of leather were discovered adhering to the metal. The chain is in two pieces, one of 17 links (125mm long); the other of 22 links (147mm long), branching at the end into two separate strands.

Given the religious context, it is likely that the chain represents part of an item of priestly regalia, a chain headdress, probably mounted on a leather cap. Such headdresses are known elsewhere in eastern Britain, for example at Stony Stratford (Bucks) (British Museum 1964, 62; Green 1976, 179); and Cavenham (Suffolk), both from hoards of crowns and headdresses. The Cavenham chain had five bronze discs joined by eight metal chains formed of S-shaped links, again probably mounted on a leather backing (Layard 1925, 258-65). Most recently, three chain headdresses

have been discovered at the Romano-Celtic temple of Wanborough in Surrey (Surrey Archaeological Society 1988, 14-16). These consisted of elliptical-linked chains forming headdresses worn over leather caps, surmounted by, in two cases, cast bronze wheel-models, and in the other by a solid bronze roundel. The Harlow headdress must have been the property of a member of temple-clergy, who donned his ceremonial headgear at times of sacrifice, officiation at ceremonies and festivals.

The gold and bronze leaves/feathers

i) SF 1929 Gold leaf: 2nd c. AD or earlier (based on the pottery evidence). Found in courtyard associated with pre-Flavian features. The object is a sheet-gold leaf, with stepped edges and a vertical groove up the centre. It is bent two-thirds of the way along its length (perhaps, though not certainly

deliberately in antiquity); stretched flat, the leaf measures c. 47mm in length.

ii) SF 927 Bronze leaf/feather Unstratified, from 1960s backfill. Found within the area enclosed by the late Iron Age penannular ditch. The object is a thin sheet-bronze triangular sheet of leaf or feather form, decorated in repoussé with three vertical groves joined by close-set ribbing, set aslant, in imitation of featyher-strands or leaf-veins. The feather is 37mm long, but is folded over onto its front surface on one corner, and back on itself at the base.

Both these objects belong to a well-known group of votive metal leaves or feathers which come from religious contexts, both in Britain and in many of the Roman provinces, particularly in the North and West. The gold leaf is a rare find, though it has a parallel in an example from Stonea, Cambs (Potter 1981, 101-104, fig. 10, 1, pl. VIb). But the great majority of these votives were made of silver or bronze. The Harlow leaves are uninscribed and devoid of iconography, but others may bear dedications to divinities or are decorated with figural imagery. Examples may be cited in the caches of ritual material at Barkway (Herts) and Stony Stratford (Bucks) (British Museum 1964, 62-64, fig. 31; Toynbee 1978, fig. 6); and early Christian silver feathers of 4th c. AD date come from Water Newton (Cambs) (Painter 1977).

Plain votive feathers/leaves occur on many Romano-British temple-sites: several have been found at Uley (Glos) (Ellison 1977 40; 1980, 305-326); others occur at Lamyatt Beacon (Leech 1986, no. 24, fig. 36); Lydney (Glos) (Wheeler & Wheeler 1932, 90, no. 137, pl. 29); Woodeaton (Oxon) (Kirk 1949, fig. 9, no. 4); Godmanchester (Cambs) (Wright & Hassall 1973, 325); and Thistleton (Leics) (Green 1991) At Cavenham Heath, a plain bronze feather was found in association with a group of bronze priests' headdresses and crowns (Layard 1925, 261, fig. 4).

Metal leaves or feathers appear to have been offered as gifts to the gods as part of the vow-making process, in return for a service rendered by the god to his suppliant. Such objects were probably displayed on shelves or piled onto altars and offering-plates within the shrine. A picture in the Notitia Dignitatum (Overbeck 1973, fig. on p. 57) depicts leaf-plaques on a shelf or leaning against a wall, along with bags, dishes and coffers full of money.

It is possible to speculate as to why this particular leaf or feather shape was chosen as a form of gift. It has been suggested (Toynbee 1978) that these objects in fact represented palm-leaves and therefore victory. But equally possibly, the feather-form may reflect the imagery of birds, who were often depicted in iconography to represent the freed soul flying away from the body to heaven after death. My own view is that the plaques represent leaves, and are therefore perhaps evocative of tree-symbolism, whereby life, death and resurrection are portrayed as an allegory of the 'death' of deciduous trees in winter and their 'rebirth' with new leaves in the spring.

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