

# A NOTE ON A HEAD OF A ROMANO- GAULISH FIGURINE FOUND AT HASSOCKS

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IN the volume of the *Sussex Archaeological Collections* for the year 1925 there is a brief record of the discovery of the head of a small pipe-clay figurine of Roman date, at the Hassocks Sand Pit in 1915(1). The object is now preserved at the Barbican House Museum, Lewes, and through the courtesy of the former curator, and of the curator of the Royal Museum, Canterbury(2), arrangements were made for it to be sent to Canterbury so that the writer of this paper could study it and compare it with a complete figurine of analogous type in the Royal Museum collection(3).

Though the head is slightly larger than that of the Canterbury specimen, the similarity is remarkable. In every respect, namely the hair-style, the poise of the head, and the facial expression, they are almost identical. From this it is clear that the figurine to which the Hassocks head originally belonged was one of a well-known series of Romano-Gaulish figurines which depict a matron seated in a high-backed basket chair, suckling either one or two infants. These were products of an industry which flourished during the second century of our era, in the Allier district of France, where the kilns have been located and the contents examined(4). Tudot, who excavated a site in that region, has published the heads of two figurines which closely resemble the Hassocks example. One indeed may have come from the same mould, and both, judging from the style and treatment, are evidently the work of the same modeller(5).

A strong hint as to who this modeller was, is provided by a group of similar figurines found near the Gallo-Roman sanctuaries situated at Bolards, near Nuits-Saint-Georges, a few miles south-west of Dijon(6). Some

of these bear the name of Pistillus, apparently the same ceramist who worked at Lezoux in the latter half of the second century(7). The stamp, according to Professor Thevenot who has described the objects, is a true stamp from the mould on the back of each figurine before



[Photograph, E. C. Wilson, Canterbury.]

(a)

(b)

HEADS OF PIPE-CLAY FIGURINES

(a) From Hassocks.

(b) From Canterbury.

baking in the kiln. In consequence the name may be regarded as that of the modeller rather than that of the potter. Comparing these products of Pistillus with the unsigned British examples it is clear that most of the latter, if not all, are either copies or are his original work.

Pursuing our investigations one stage farther, we find that in all cases the clay is pure white, a fact which in a letter to the present writer, Professor Lambrechts has observed, is another reason for assigning them to the Avernian, rather than to the Rhineland industry.

Further evidence is forthcoming when we examine the fabric of one of the very few examples of figurines of this class, namely the matron suckling two infants, found in Roman-occupied Germany(8). In this case the clay is yellowish-grey in colour. It is also clear that the figurines of matrons suckling twins are comparatively unknown in that region, a peculiarity which both Lambrechts and the present writer have independently noted. From this evidence it seems fairly established that the British series of such objects, in which the Hassocks head presumably may be placed, were derived from the Avernian and not the Rhenish workshops, and are therefore second century in date.

In Gaul many examples of the suckling matron type of figurine have been found at the sites of temples and religious sanctuaries, in France as well as Belgium(9), where they were evidently deposited as votive offerings. Some, perhaps, were similarly used in Britain, though as yet there is no direct evidence in support of this. When considering the significance of the Hassocks find it is of interest to note that the seemingly isolated German analogous example was found in a cremated burial in a Roman cemetery at Langacker, Karlstein, Bavaria(10). For a figurine of this type to be found in this context is not unusual; several have been recorded in France(11), while in Britain a second example from Canterbury (now complete, but was found to have been broken in antiquity), found many years ago in a burial urn with cremated human remains, shows that the custom was practised in this country(12). When it is recalled that at Hassocks Sand Pit a similar cemetery existed, the inference is clear, for though the precise facts concerning the discovery of this head are admittedly badly recorded, the evidence strongly suggests that it came from a grave in that cemetery(13).

The symbolism of these figurines seems to be as follows. The matron was the Gaulish conception of a Roman goddess, almost certainly Juno Lucina. Her prime function in classical theology was to preside over childbirth, and especially to make the child see the light

of day(14). This goddess, borrowed by the Gauls from the classical pantheon, while retaining her original function, was invested with others in the less restricted field of native Gaulish theology. Thus in time she became identified with the *terre-mère*, the great earth mother, source of all life. In fact she was a fertility goddess, who besides being the protectress of women in childbirth, continued to look after their welfare throughout life to the grave and beyond. There finally she assumed the role of an underworld deity. The multiplicity of roles assigned to this deity is not unusual in Gaulish religion, for, as Lambrechts has demonstrated, many of the deities borrowed from the classical pantheon acquired diverse functions. For example, Minerva, primarily a goddess of war, became a mother goddess(15). The same authority also expresses the opinion that figurines of the type we are discussing, in company with similarly seated matrons carrying various attributes, express the same religious idea as the triads in stone which depict mother goddesses(16). In fact underlying the symbolism of these figurines is the fundamental idea, fertility.

As yet not a scrap of evidence has been forthcoming which even suggests the existence of a British industry for the manufacture of these figurines in Roman times. From their comparative rarity it is plain that the British market was not flooded with them as it was by the products of the closely allied *terra sigillata* industry. It suggests that their use as religious symbols was restricted to a small section of the Romano-British community. Therefore, in the light of our present knowledge, it is safer to assume that the type discussed in this paper did not enter Britain through the normal trading channels, but was brought over by womenfolk of Gaulish immigrants, who remained faithful to the religious cults of their original homeland. If this is the correct interpretation of the evidence, then in Britain, the cult of the suckling goddess was not indigenous, but a foreign importation.

There is a possibility that the cult of the suckling

goddess may have gained popularity or fresh impetus from the official cult of *Fecunditas Augusta* at Rome. This reached its peak in the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, that is, at the time when the clay figurines of the goddess seem to have been made. The deity personified the fecundity of the Empresses who were represented on their coins as nursing mothers under the title of *Fecunditas*; cf. Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, III and IV, Faustina I, Faustina II, Crispina, Lucilla, and Julia Domna.

From the foregoing evidence it may be said with some degree of confidence that the Hassocks head once belonged to a figurine of a goddess of that type, produced in the region of the Allier, from an original mould or a copy by Pistillus or his school of modellers in the second century of our era. The evidence provided by this most interesting object, though not so decisive as one would wish, as it was a chance find, is of importance when taken in conjunction with similar evidence from other parts of Britain. As such it sheds some light on the Romano-British religious cult of the mother-goddess as influenced by the Gaulish mainland.

Finally, it is of interest that a figurine of the same or an allied type, is represented by a single small fragment, in Sussex, though at the time it was published it was not recognized as such because of its seemingly indeterminate nature. However, the part which has survived is the base of the side of the basket-chair in which mother-goddesses of this type are usually seated. This object came from the site of the Roman bath at Highdown Hill, and from its association with a domestic building it would appear to have belonged to a household shrine(17).

### *Bibliography and Notes*

1. *S.A.C.* LXVI, 'Additions to the Museum', p. xlii.
2. Mr. Edward Pyddoke and Mr. Frank Higenbottam, to whom the writer is indebted, and hereby records his grateful thanks.
3. *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xvii, p. 34, fig. (Royal Museum, Canterbury, Inventory No. 931).

4. E. Tudot, *Collection de figurines en argile . . .* (Paris, 1860), pls. 25, 26, and 27 ('déesses de la maternité').

5. E. Tudot, op. cit., pl. 29. As most certainly did an identical head found many years ago at Rawreth, Essex, which matches in measurement the one from Hassocks (now in British Museum, C. Roach-Smith Collection, No. 56, 7-1, 5108).

6. E. Thévenot, 'La Station Antique des Bolards à Nuits-Saint-Georges (Côte-d'Or)', in *Gallia* (1949), tome VII, fasc. 1, pp. 199 ff.

7. E. Thévenot, 'Le Culte des déesses-mères à la Station gallo-romaine des Bolards', in *Revue archéologique de l'Est de la France* (1951), tome II, pp. 12 ff. Cf. E. Tudot, op. cit., pl. 30 A; Felix Oswald, *An Index of Potter's Stamps on Terra Sigillata*, and *C.I.L.* XIII. 10015, 84.

8. *Altertümer unserer heidnischen Vorzeit*, tome v, p. 373, No. 1202, pl. 65 (Schumacker).

9. S. J. De Laet, *Cultureel Jaarboek van de Provincie Oostvlanderen* (1950), pp. 269-314.

10. *Alt. uns. heidn. Vorzeit*, v, grave 328.

11. A. Blanchet, 'Étude sur les figurines en terre-cuite de la Gaule romaine', in *Mémoires de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 6<sup>e</sup> sér. X (1901), Supplément, 189 ff.

12. *Arch. Cant.* xvii, p. 34 (Royal Museum, Canterbury, Inventory No. 933).

13. *S.A.C.* LXVI. 34-61.

14. Virgil, *The Eclogues*, IV: 'Smile on the baby's birth, immaculate Lucina. . .'

15. Pierre Lambrechts, *Contributions à l'étude des divinités celtiques* (Bruges, 1942), 171.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

17. G. P. Burstow and A. E. Wilson, 'A Roman Bath at Highdown Hill, Sussex', in *S.A.C.* LXXX, fig. XV, No. 4, p. 87.

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