

VII

VINDOLANDA—CHESTERHOLM 1969-1972

some important material from the *vicus*

Robin Birley

INTRODUCTION

MUCH work has been carried out at Vindolanda since the last report appeared in these pages (*A.A.*⁴, XLVIII, 1970, pp. 97-157). I reported that a Trust had been given the 15 acre field in which most of the remains lay: since then I have been responsible for large-scale excavation at the site, undertaking a programme which should result in the total examination of the *vicus* which lies in the main to the west of the later forts. Brief resumés of the work have appeared annually in *Britannia*, and further details, including plans and illustrations, can be found in the guide-books to the site, which are re-written each year. It will be some years before the final excavation report can be published, for the *vicus* will require at least five more years of work, but there is already a large volume of important material accumulating. As an interim measure, I offer these pages upon some of the most important finds which deserve a wide audience and may be of interest to others working in the same fields.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavations at Vindolanda have been conducted under the auspices of the Vindolanda Trust, a registered charity administered by seven Trustees. Many individuals and organisations have made substantial contributions through their financial help: although too numerous to name individually I hope they will accept this appreciation of their assistance. Above all I must thank the Trustees of the Sir James Knott Foundation. Throughout the excavations I have benefited from the advice and encouragement of a number of scholars, particularly my father and my brother, John Mann, Richard Wright, Anne Ross, Martin Henig, Judith Turner and George Hodgson, to all of whom I am most grateful. Many hundreds of volunteers have given their labour and skills, none more so than Geoff Hall, my senior site supervisor. My wife has helped me in numerous ways, acting not only as my deputy but also as draughtswoman: the line drawings in this article are hers.

TWO ALTARS TO THE VETERES

1. A rough altar, with its back missing, 21·4 cm high, 13·1 cm wide and 5·4 cm wide (greatest surviving width). The inscription has been roughly cut: *Veteri/bus pos/uit Sen/ilis*—Senilis set this up to the Veteres.

2. A well-dressed altar, with tolerably good lettering. 27·8 cm high, 19·5 cm wide and 16·1 cm thick. The text reads: *Dibus Ve/teribus/pos(uit) Longi/nus*—Longinus set this up to the Gods the Veteres.

Both altars were found upon the flagstones of site LXXVIII, a store-house fronting the road opposite the south-western corner of the late forts. Associated with them was the somewhat comic uninscribed altar (see below 116). Site LXXVIII was a fourth century structure, and the altars probably date to the early years of that century.

The discovery of these altars brings the known dedications to the Veteres (or variants of that name) to 52, with the greatest concentrations at Carvoran (13), Housesteads (6), Vindolanda (5) and Chesters (4). Senilis' altar falls into the normal category of dedications to this deity, being both rough and badly lettered, but that of Longinus is a superior piece of work, and larger than the normal. Much has been written about the Veteres in the past. It seems to be agreed that the dedicators are normally of humble origin, often British and civilian, who never equate the god (or gods) with classical deities. The identity of the Veteres is still in doubt. Haverfield's reservations about "the old gods" (*veteri* being the dative of the Latin adjective *vetus*, "old") still holds good, as do doubts about a Teutonic origin. Anne Ross hazarded the guess that the triads so frequently found in the same area—mother-goddesses and the *genii cucullati*—may represent this deity, an idea which has no proof but is nonetheless attractive. The gross lettering of the altars, referred to by most scholars, is not necessarily a sign that the dedicators were barely literate. These altars are small portable objects, probably inscribed by their owners—and few people without experience are capable of expressing themselves in stone with much success.

The list below records the findspots of the previously recorded dedications to the Veteres:

Inscriptions from the Wall

Benwell *RIB* 1335, 1336
Chesters *RIB* 1455-1458
Carrawburgh *RIB* 1548, 1549
Housesteads *RIB* 1602-1607
Vindolanda *RIB* 1697-1699—
and the two above
Greatchesters *RIB* 1728-1730
Carvoran *RIB* 1793-1805

Other northern sites

York *RIB* 660
Catterick 727
Old Penrith 925
Netherby, 971, 973
Chester-le-Street 1046-1048
Lanchester 1087, 1088
Ebchester 1103, 1104
Corbridge 1140, 1141



No. 1. Altar to the Veteres



No. 3. Altar to Moguntius



No. 2. Altar to the Veteres



No. 10. Uninscribed altar



Photo: J. Stanley Buck

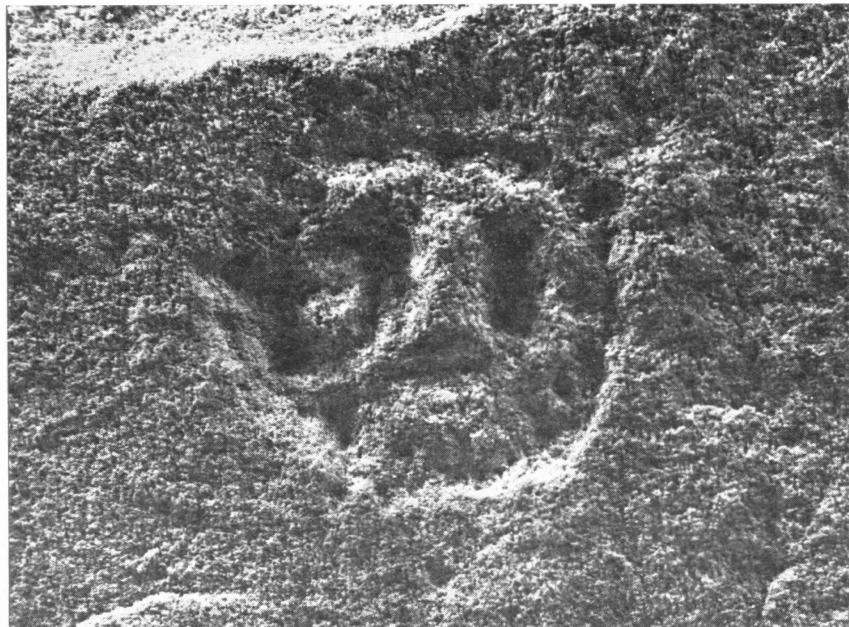
No. 5. Broken and burned stone relief from site XXVII in the *vicus*. The seated God with typical Celtic cap is probably MAPONUS, with representations of SOL (Apollo) and LUNA (Diana) in niches behind him. The military figure on the right is probably the dedicant.



No. 6. Matrona relief



No. 8. Long-nosed God



No. 7. Bearded God



No. 9. Fragmentary relief to the *Genii Cucullati*



No. 12. Pipeclay statuette of Dea Nutrix



No. 11. Pipeclay statuette of Venus



No. 14. Phallus from site XXXI

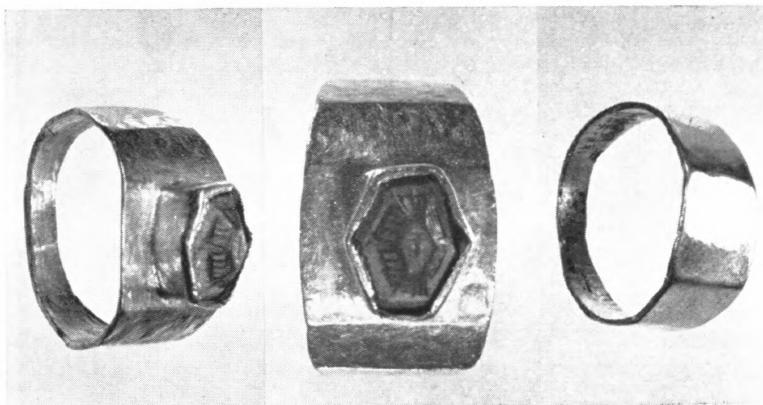


Photo: J. Stanley Buck

Nos. 17 & 18. Gold rings found in 1970. On the left and centre, woman's ring, with cornelian gemstone inscribed ANIMA MEA and with an incised symbol in the centre. Found amongst the floor supports of site XXIV. On the right, another woman's ring, from the bath-house porch.



Photo: J. Stanley Buck

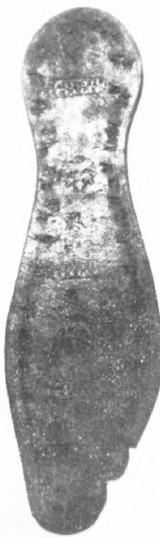
No. 19. Gold ring, with cameo representing Medusa. Found in 1970, in the post AD 367 level in room XV, *mansio*. The ring was probably very old when lost.



No. 20. Jet betrothal medallion, picturing (left) a couple kissing and (right) clasped hands. Found in the narrow alleyway between the *mansio* and site XXX, in a level deposited circa AD 300.



No. 22. The Bronze Military Standard. This rare object had been buried in a back room of the Corridor House.



No. 21. The sole of the leather slipper



No. 24. Bronze statuette of a scholar



No. 25. Silver ring



No. 23. Bronze cockerel

*The south*Thistleton, Rutland (*JRS* lii 192)*Unknown findspots**RIB* 2068*RIB* 2069

REFERENCES

Haverfield 1918 *AA* 2 XV 22-43 (where 12 of the altars are drawn).

Eric Birley *Roman Britain and the Roman Army* 74f.

Anne Ross *Pagan Celtic Britain* 372f.

3. ALTAR TO MOGUNTIS

Dimensions: 16 cm high, 10·8 cm wide, 10·6 cm thick.

Found on the roadway outside site V, in loose rubble.

Inscription: *Deo . Mo/gunti et/Genio lo/ci / Lupul (us)/(v)sm*

To the God Moguntis and the Genius of the Place. Lupulus willingly fulfilled his vow.

Moguntis—sometimes called Mountis or Mogonitus—is less frequently attested, with two inscriptions at Old Penrith (*RIB* 921, 922), two at Risingham (*RIB* 1225 and 1226), one at High Rochester (*RIB* 1269), and one at Netherby. (*RIB* 971). In the latter dedication he is identified with the Veteres—“deo Mogont(i) Vitire san.”, and he is clearly a North British deity similar to the Veteres.

4. DEO MAPONO—crescent-shaped silver plaque

Dimensions: 72 mm wide, 20 mm high and 1 mm thick.

Findspot: lying on the small side-road leading from the main road, opposite the *mansio*, to the bath-house. Unstratified.

Inscription: *DEO MAPONO*—To the God Maponus.

This is the sixth dedication to this deity, who is portrayed for the first time conclusively in the uninscribed relief below. Three inscriptions have been found at Corbridge, where they have been assigned to the second half of the second century by E. Birley: the dedicators are all officers of the Sixth Legion (*RIB* 1120, 1121, 1122). A centurion of the same legion dedicated an altar to the god at Ribchester between A.D. 238 and 244 (*RIB* 583), and four Germans appear as his votaries on an altar from Brampton (*RIB* 2063), which E. Birley dates on style to the first half of the third century. The four altars set up by Sixth Legion officers all equate Maponus with Apollo, whom I. A. Richmond identified with Apollo the harpist, rather than Apollo the hunter, and sculptures on two of the altars also portray Diana the huntress. In the sculpture below,

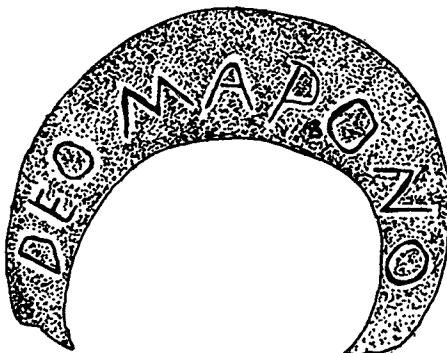


Fig. 1

No. 4. Silver plaque

Apollo and Diana appear in niches behind the god. The *locus Maponi* of the Ravenna Cosmography suggests a cult centre, perhaps at Lochmaben in Annandale, but the god is not necessarily confined to north Britain. Unlike other popular Celtic deities, Maponus was able to attract senior army officers.

REFERENCES

- I. A. Richmond "Romans in Redesdale" *NCH* XV 1940 p. 97.
"Roman legionaries at Corbridge, their supply base, temples and religious cults," *AA* 4 xxi 1943 207-210.
- "The Sarmatae, Bremetennacum veteranorum and the regio Bremetennacensis" *JRS* XXXV 1945 18f. and 27f.
- Eric Birley in *Trans Dumfriesshire and Galloway Nat. Hist. and Antiq. Soc.* 3rd series XXXI 1954 39-42.
- C. A. Ralegh Radford, in the same volume, pp. 35-38.
- Anne Ross *Pagan Celtic Britain* (Routledge 1967) esp. pp. 368-370.

5. MAPONUS RELIEF

Dimensions: height 27 cm width 21·2 cm thickness 5·6 cm.

Findspot: the southern end of site XXVII, a strip-house, amongst rubble on the last floor level—and alongside the "Matrona (?)" relief.

The stone has been burnt, and although complete it is broken into four pieces.

The relief portrays a god standing in the centre, wearing a conical cap, with the typical features associated with Celtic deities. In the crook of his left arm he cradles a circular object: his right arm is extended above an altar. On his left side stands a soldier, with cuirass, shield and spear, and behind his

shoulders, in small niches, two busts portray Apollo and Diana. The god is clearly Celtic, and the association with Apollo and Diana leaves little doubt that it was intended as a representation of Maponus. For comments about this god and references, see above.

6. MATRONA (?) RELIEF

Dimensions: 27 cm high, current width 16 cm (probably once 22 cm).

Findspot: the southern end of site XXVII, a *vicus* strip-house near the bath-house.

The relief is broken into three fragments and burnt. A close inspection of the worn face reveals a goddess sitting upright in a high-backed chair, carrying an object in her right hand—it is very indistinct, but resembles an old-fashioned broom, which she grips near the base of the handle. The nose is damaged, but the hair-style is clear. Although the relief is incomplete, there would seem to be no room for another figure on the stone, and the deity is definitely not one of a triad. The stone was found alongside the Maponus relief (see above p. 114), and in this context it may represent Matrona, mother of Maponus and an important deity in her own right. For comments about her, see Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*.

7. BEARDED GOD

Dimensions of the stone: 28.5 cm wide and 13 cm high. Height of the sculpture 5 cm.

Findspot: carved on a building stone *in situ* on the inside of the eastern wall of the corridor-house, in the north-eastern room, on the second course above the latest floor-level.

This crude but effective little face, punched onto the stone with a pointed chisel, presumably served a religious function in a household with strong Celtic sympathies.

8. LONG-NOSED GOD (?)

Dimensions of the stone: 27.5 cm high, 18.5 cm wide at the top, 7.5 cm wide at bottom. Height of the portrait 15 cm.

Findspot: Found on a loose stone, once the key of an arch, in rubble overlying a late fourth century structure above site XXIX, near the West Gate of the Diocletianic fort.

The punched relief portrays a long-nosed male, facing left, wearing a conical leather cap, with a suspicion of an ornamental thong suspended from the back.

Beneath the figure there is an eye. There is no certain explanation of this stone. The face may be a caricature, for the nose is unusually prominent, but the presence of the evil eye beneath, presumably to ward off spirits, suggests that it may have had religious significance.

9. GENII CUCULLATI

Size: 14·1 cm high, 10·3 cm max. surviving width, 5 cm thick.

Findspot: Unstratified at the south end of site XXXIX.

This small and fragmentary relief portrays one of the hooded and cloaked deities known as the *genii cucullati*. The top of his head is lost, and only one leg of his neighbour remains. The stone is burnt and weathered, and the detail is not clear, but the deity appears to be clutching his cloak around his waist.

Toynbee describes the *genii cucullati* as being godlets of healing, fertility and after-life, and points to the wide distribution of the thirteen previously recorded sculptures—three from the region of the Wall, eight from Gloucestershire, one from Wiltshire and one from London. (J. C. M. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain* p. 156 no. 76.)

The well known Housesteads sculpture was also found in a *vicus*, in a small domestic shrine with a small hoard of denarii ranging in date from A.D. 220-229. (AA4 xi 1934 pp. 190-1, pl. 27 fig. 2.)

10. UNINSCRIBED ALTAR

Size: 25·3 cm high, 14·1 cm wide and 8·3 cm thick.

Findspot: *Vicus* store-building, site LXXVIII (along with the two altars to the Veteres).

The left hand side of the altar's face has been worn by the sharpening of knives. There are two circles on the top of the stone, similar to those on the face. The face of the altar is not inscribed, but there is a faint impression of a small inverted phallus on the small carved altar in the centre. These carvings may have been intended to represent the head of a god, with hair, eyes, nose, mouth and beard, but if one accepts the horizontal and vertical lines at top and bottom as purely ornamental, the remaining circles and small altar take on a phallic look.

There appear to be no parallels for this strange altar, but its association with the two dedications to the Veteres (see above) may be significant.

11. VENUS STATUETTE

Dimensions: height 11 cm.

Findspot: stratified in a late third century floor-level in site XXX, perhaps at that date serving as married quarters for soldiers' families.

Venus statuettes are frequently found on Romano-British sites, although not so often in the north, and several less complete examples have been found in the Vindolanda *vicus*. Professor Jocelyn Toynbee has pointed out that such objects are essentially civilian, and that for all their connections with the poorer strata of the provincial populations they are purely classical, derived from Graeco-Roman renderings of Venus and Aphrodite (*Art in Roman Britain*, p. 187). They would be found in small household shrines or even carried on the person, and their influence over the after-life, fertility and health would be sought.

12. DEA NUTRIX

Dimensions: height 10 cm.

Findspot: unstratified in the narrow alleyway between sites LXXII and LXXVII.

Dea Nutrix statuettes are much less common in Britain, and this appears to be the first example to be found north of Chester. For details of other such statuettes, see Toynbee's comments (*Art in Roman Britain*, p. 187 and illustrations figs. 173 and 175), where she points out that the majority are found in the south-east of Britain. The goddess is sometimes portrayed with one child in her lap, suckling (as in this case), but more often she holds two babies. Here she sits formally in a high-backed wicker chair, holding the baby to her right breast. The piece was probably imported from the Allier district of France.

PHALLIC SYMBOLS

Three phallic symbols have been found since 1969 in the *vicus*, two carved on building stones and one on a flagstone: a fourth example was first spotted by Mr. Thomas Pattinson on Barcombe overlooking the site, carved on the living rock on the small quarry-face at the south end of the hill. The four symbols vary considerably both in their dimensions and in their portrayal of the male sexual organ. Little work has been done on these symbols so far, but for comments in general see Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (Routledge Columbia) 1967, where she draws attention both to their obvious associations with fertility and to their connection with various Celtic deities.

13. Barcombe quarry (note: there are two quarry faces on the southern summit of the hill, facing west. The more southern of the two has been re-worked in modern times, but the other is a Roman quarry. On its face there are various carvings, largely indistinct, together with wedge holes.

The phallus is at the northern end of the rock).

Dimensions: overall length of phallus 50 cm.

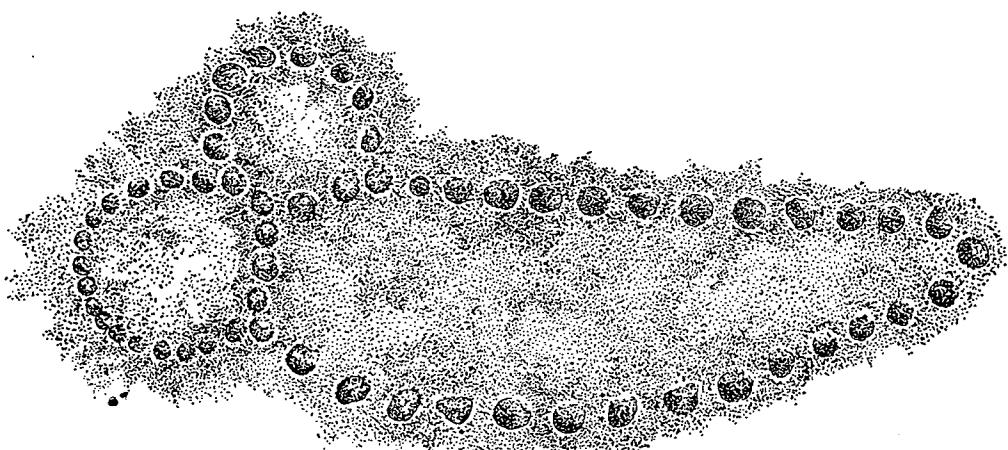


Fig. 2

No. 13. Phallus in Barcombe quarry

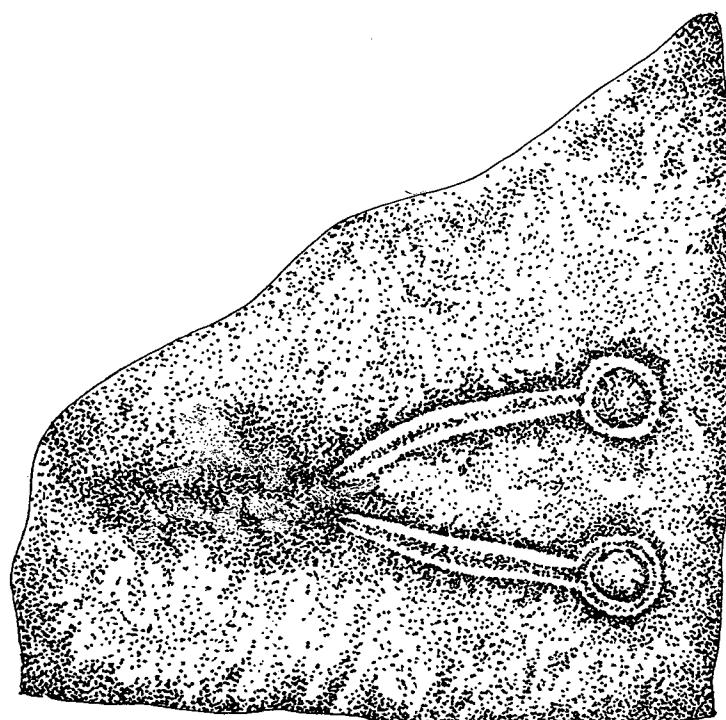


Fig. 3

No. 15. Phallus from site LXXIV

14. Site XXXI, a roadway, was littered with building debris from the adjoining structures. One stone carried a deeply cut phallus, which would have been viewed as horizontal.

Dimensions of the stone: 21 cm by 14 cm.

Overall length of the phallus: 14·2 cm.

15. Site LXXIV, one of three store buildings lining the road opposite the west wall of the Diocletianic fort, near its south-western corner, was paved with heavy flagstones. In the western half of the building one flagstone was carved lightly with a phallus.

Dimensions of the stone (approx.) 48·5 cm by 38 cm.

Overall length of the phallus: 23 cm.

16. The *mansio*, site IX, had been reconstructed in the fourth century, and the eastern half then served as a house. One of its fallen building stones was carved with a phallus.

Dimensions of the stone: 45 cm by 24 cm.

Overall length of the phallus 12·5 cm.

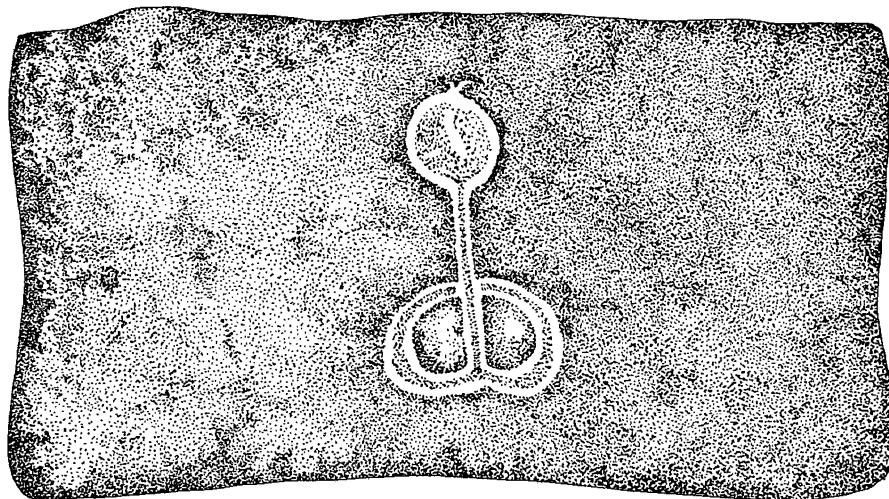


Fig. 4

No. 16. Phallus from the *mansio*

GOLD RING (1)

17. Small gold ring, with hoop 16 mm wide by 14 mm high, and with a hexagonal bezel 8 mm wide by 5 mm high, set with a burnt red cornelian stone. The text cut round the side of the gem, reads AN/IM/Λ/ME/Λ,

Anima Mea, "My life" or "My darling". Incised in the centre of the gemstone there is a figure or symbol, too worn to make identification possible. The ring was found in the southern part of the corridor in the corridor-house, to the south of the military bath-house, below the fourth century floor level. It was initially thought to have Christian significance, but without the confirmation of a Christian symbol in the centre such an explanation cannot be supported. The hoop is so small that the ring must have belonged to a woman or child.

GOLD RING (2)

18. Plain hoop, identical in shape and size (16 mm by 14 mm) with that of the *Anima Mea* ring, and probably from the same workshop. Found in the lobby outside the south wall of the military bath-house's changing-room, embedded in a fourth century floor-level. Lacking the rather unattractive hexagonal bezel of the *Anima Mea* ring, this piece is both simple and effective.

GOLD RING (3)

19. 23 mm wide, 19 mm high, with raised bezel 4 mm high enclosing a bluish-white onyx cameo, depicting Medusa, facing half left, with a stylised wreath of snakes around her face. Found in the *mansio*, in a fourth century floor-level above the filled in remains of the latrine block. Both ring and cameo are well worn, suggesting that the piece was something of an heirloom when lost in the fourth century.

20. JET BETROTHAL MEDALLION

Height 32 mm, width 30 mm. Max. thickness 4 mm, min. thickness 2 mm. The medallion is made from Whitby jet, and it has a lug at the top perforated for suspension.

There are hair-line cracks on the reverse.

The *obverse* features a couple, apparently kissing. The woman's hairstyle suggests a date towards the end of the third century. The *reverse* features clasped hands.

The medallion was found in the narrow alleyway to the east of the *mansio*, in the rubble packing which resulted from the demolition of the building at the end of the third century.

This piece is almost certainly the product of the workshops which made the seven Gorgon pendants and portrait medallions found at York (RCHM

Eburacum 1962 p. 142 and plate 68), together with several examples found on the continent. Toynbee (*Art in Roman Britain* pp. 184-185) pointed out that it is unlikely that these portraits were taken from life, but that they were stock pieces, chosen for their general suitability to given purchasers or recipients. Unlike the York examples, the Vindolanda medallion is carved on both faces, and it is definitely jet and not shale.

Jet objects are not uncommon in the *vicus*: beads, hairpins, rings, bracelets of several kinds and even buttons have been found in some quantity, and if this is the pattern in other *vici* it suggests that the Yorkshire jet industry was a major concern in the third and fourth centuries at any rate.

21. LEATHER SLIPPER

Length 13 cm, max. width 6·9 cm.

Found in the pre-Hadrianic deposit to the south of *vicus* site LXXVI, just inside in the south rampart of the early forts.

There are very substantial deposits of leather at Vindolanda: the ditches of the later forts, in the small sections sampled so far, have been found to contain numerous examples of footwear and scraps, whilst the pre-Hadrianic deposits, lying below the water-table, contain even larger deposits. Some sixty boots, shoes, sandals and slippers, many of them obviously the property of women and children, are currently being treated by the North of England Museum Service and Manchester University (the latter through the kindness of Professor Barri Jones).

The lady's slipper (photographs plate XX), was found in the pre-Hadrianic deposit, along with thirty other articles of footwear, the majority of which were fragmentary boots (but including five small sandals, the property of women or children). It could be argued that they originated from the Commanding Officer's Residence, but there is no reason to doubt the presence of women and children in a *vicus* of first century date. One of the child's shoes had a small rosette pattern stamped on the inside of the sole, but the only other stamped item was this lady's slipper, an article of superior design and manufacture.

The sole is stamped three times with a die, reading:

L-AEB/THALES T F, (Lucius Aebutius Thales, son of Titus).

Between these dies there are decorative stamps, of an oak-leaf and perhaps a sheaf of corn. The sole is made up from four layers of leather, stuck fast with a brown glue. The slipper may be of foreign manufacture: no other examples of this die are known.

BRONZES

22. MILITARY STANDARD

Size: a. sleeve 6·8 cm high, aperture at base 3·5 cm internally.
 b. horse 6·4 cm high, 6·4 cm wide.

Findspot: buried beneath the earliest floor of the north-eastern room of the corridor house.

At the foot of the sleeve a projecting bar survives, but its companion has been broken off. A *vexillum* or flag would have been hung from these bars. Above the sleeve a sturdy little horse, bridled but not saddled, stands with a foreleg resting upon the head of a snake.

There is little doubt that this bronze is a military standard, once mounted upon a pole with fork-like prong at the base, as portrayed in the representation of a standard-bearer from Carrawburgh (now in the entrance lobby to Chesters Museum). The horse was not the symbol of the Fourth Cohort of Gauls, but this standard may have belonged to one of its *turmae*, unless it belonged to the second century garrison (about which nothing is known at the moment). Its burial beneath the lowest floor in the north-eastern room of the corridor house suggests a third century date for its concealment, but the reason for such a hiding place is impossible to conjecture.

23. COCKEREL

Size: 2·5 cm high, 3·25 cm wide.

Findspot: outside the eastern wall of room 111, *mansio*, unstratified.

Although very small, this is a notable bronze and one of the few objects of purely ornamental value from the site. With a few simple touches the artist has produced a most realistic cockerel.

24. A SCHOLAR

Size: 5·1 cm high.

Findspot: among rubble and clay packing in the raised cooking hearth in the centre of the western range of the married quarters block (site XXXII).

The thoughtful-looking bald-headed man wears a *pallium*, the distinctive robe of the scholar (as Dr. John Wild pointed out to me). Mr. George Learmonth, who treated the bronze, reported that the eyes had been inlaid with tin or silver, and that an iron spike once supported the base.

25. SILVER RING

22 mm wide, 19 mm high, and inscribed on the flat upper face MER.
 Found outside the south-western corner of the bath-house, upon flagstones.
 The inscription perhaps refers to Mercury.