

X

MUSEUM NOTES, 1986*

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1. TWO MEDIEVAL MIRROR BOXES. FIGS. 1, 2

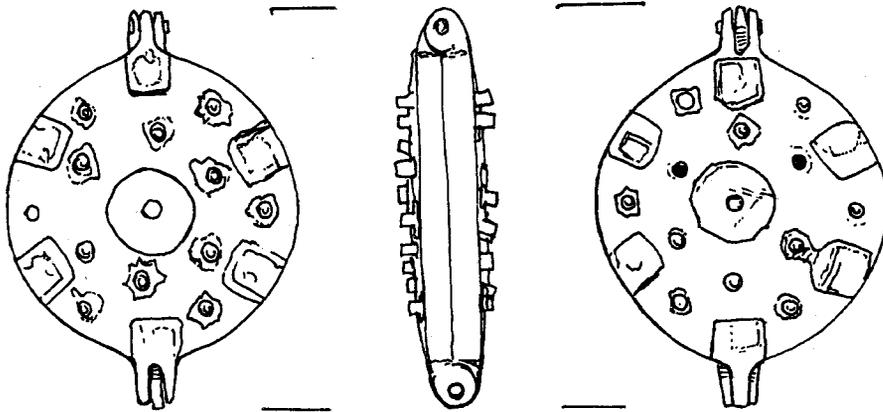


Fig. 1.
Mirror-box, Newton Kyme (N. Yorks.), 1:1. See Museum Note 1.
Drawn by Mary M. Hurrell.

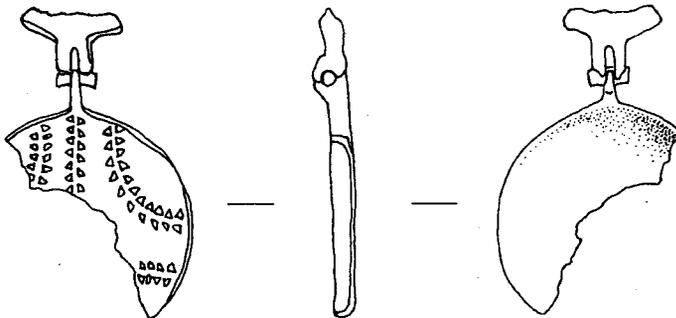


Fig. 2. Mirror-box, Ewart Park (Northd.), 1:1. See Museum Note 1.
Drawn by Elizabeth H. Ward.

A RECENT NOTE in *The Antiquaries Journal* by Justin Bayley, Paul Drury and Brian Spencer,¹ identifying a thirteenth-century cased mirror from Heybridge in Essex, has thrown light on two objects from the north of England which have caused some puzzlement. The first came from Newton Kyme in North Yorkshire and was brought into the Museum of Antiquities for identification by the finder, Mr. J. Grafton, some years ago.² The object consisted of a circular copper-alloy box made up of two identical halves with the hinge and catch projecting from the side. The catch was designed to look exactly like the hinge and was fastened with a pin. The general appearance was of a small powder compact 39 mm in diameter with a total thickness of 13 mm. Both faces had thirteen studs arranged in two concentric circles around a central stud. The studs are all circular in section with a small depression on the top of each and the ends have been hammered on the inside of the box to secure them. The central studs hold discs in place. Traces of adhesive around some of the studs and rough square patches around four on each face suggest that the faces of the box had been covered with leather or some other fine material. The studs were presumably fulfilling a practical as well as decorative function although the adhesive was mostly responsible for holding the material in place.

Inside the box were traces of a whitish grey paste. It was first suggested that these were the remains of a lead seal although the size of the box was unusual for a Roman seal-box. With the evidence of the Heybridge find and the other provenanced parallels it would now appear that this paste was a "cement" for holding a glass mirror in place.

The second piece was found by R. Miket in the ploughsoil at the north-west corner of Blackbird Plantation, Ewart Park, Northumberland (NT 9602 3217) in 1975 and presented to the Society's collection in the Museum of Antiquities in 1984.³ This is incomplete but consists of part of a lid 30 mm in diameter with the hinge and a fragment of the base surviving. Traces of a grey paste survive around the inner edges. The face is decorated with a series of punched triangles arranged in a double row running from between the hinge-loops with double arcs leading from the edge. This decoration is similar to that on the boxes discussed by Bayley, Drury and Spencer, including the complete example from Netherby in Cumbria which was first published by Pennant in 1790⁴ and republished by Bruce in 1867 as a Roman *bullae*.⁵

Bayley, Drury and Spencer have suggested that the similarity of decoration, size, and metallurgical content indicate that these mirror-boxes were the product of the same workshop or craft-community, possibly located in the south-east of England or the Low Countries in the thirteenth century. It is probable that the Ewart Park example is also a product of this workshop. The Newton Kyme example, however, is much larger and has a very different style of decoration. Although there can be no doubt that it too is a mirror-box it would appear to come from a different manufacturing centre, but without parallels it is impossible to deduce whether this centre was in Britain or on the Continent.



Finger-ring, Sewingshields (Northumberland). See Museum Note 2.

Photograph: Audio-Visual Centre, University of Newcastle upon Tyne

2. THE SEWINGSIELDS FINGER-RING. Pl. X

The recent publication of the small finds from Sewingshields Milecastle (No. 35) in this journal⁶ had perforce to be interim as some of the iron objects could not be cleaned and stabilized within the time available for the writing of the report. This unfortunate, and by no means uncommon, state of affairs meant that some objects could not be fully described or identified on the information available. A case in point is the iron finger-ring (No. 37, p. 81). Re-examination of the cleaned ring reveals that it has a narrow hoop of D-shaped section which expands markedly towards the bezel. It may be assigned to Henig's Ring Type III⁷ rather than Type XII as originally thought. This type is generally datable to the second century A.D.

The intaglio, which measures 10 × 8 mm, is oval and made of glass with a light blue upper face on a dark, possibly black, ground. An impression of the god Bacchus can now be seen. In his left hand he holds his thyrsus, although neither cup nor panther are clearly shown on this moulding. A vine, replete with hanging bunches of grapes, arches over the scene from right to left. There is a ground line. The same scene appears on a green glass intaglio from Quinton, Northamptonshire,⁸ and the theme is reasonably common in glyptic art⁹ as in other media, and reflects the wide popularity of Bacchus as a deity concerned with feasting and good cheer as well as salvation.

M. HENIG and L. ALLASON-JONES

3. DECORATIVE MARBLES IN THE MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES

In the collection of the Museum of Antiquities are a number of pieces of worked Roman marble. These are all from Mediterranean sites, gathered by individuals, and were donated to the Society or to the Museum. Unfortunately, for two of the groups there is no record of how they came to be donated.

1. PALATINE HILL, ROME. Acc. 1975.12.

Group of 14 pieces of marble/decorative stone, as well as one fragment each of concrete, coarse pottery and ironstone. Piece compact green stone, cut to rough hexagon. Large triangular piece purple porphyry (actually labelled *rosso antico*), roughly 13 cm length at base, 2.9 cm thick. Fragment of *rosso antico* moulding 6 cm by 2.6 cm, 3 cm in thickness. Mortar adheres to the roughened underside. Fragments of brecciated marble, possibly from Scyros, marked with white, dark pink and dark yellow. Cut roughly square with bevelled edges 3.1 by 3.6 by 3.2 by 3.5 cm, 0.9 cm thick and highly polished. Piece corally breccia, probably *breccia corallina*. Roughly square 5 by 4.6 cm, 0.65 cm thick, highly polished with saw marks on the underside.

Piece, possibly *africano*, about 5 cm square.

Fragment white marble with greyish markings like *pavonazzo*.

Three fragments Lacedaemonian, all broken, 1.3, 0.7 and 0.5 cm thick. All highly polished.

Fragment *africano verde* (?), roughly oblong 12.2 by 6.9 cm, 1.3 cm thick. Greenish grey matrix with white, red, dark green and lighter green inclusions.

Fragment *giallo antico*, rich, warm yellow with red veining, very compact. Piece of beading 10.4 by 4 cm, 2.2 cm thick.

Piece Proconnesian. Purple bands, very crystalline with distinctive marks after polishing. Moulding, 5.3 by 4.4 cm, 2.1 cm thick.

Fragment onyx/alabaster. Probably Egyptian. Signs of burning. Roughly oblong about 8 cm by 5.4 cm.

2. POMPEII. Acc. 1961.1.

Fragment of white marble with head in low relief. The marble is fine-grained and white, weathered to a creamy colour. The head is depicted in profile with a prominent brow and chin and a large nose. A laurel wreath rests on the curly hair. On the back is written in pencil 'Nero?'. Measures 9 by 5.4 cm, 1.5 cm thick.

3. BRITAIN AND LEPICIS MAGNA. Acc. 1956.190.

Pottery and stone fragments.

Large fragment of sculptured marble with acanthus decoration.

Greyish white marble weathered to honey colour.

Piece *rosso antico* moulding 4.6 cm in depth and 6.5 cm in length.

4. CYRENAICA. Acc. 1980.7.

Stone and architectural fragments including some baked brick and terracotta.

Piece of sculpted marble depicting drapery. Very crystalline white marble probably from Thasos.

Large piece of cornice in white marble, 16 by 7 by 4.5 cm. Very crystalline, fine/medium grained marble, weathering to honey colour. Pentelic?

Piece moulding in white marble, 8.9 cm long. Probably Pentelic.

Piece *cipollino* 8.5 by 6 cm, 1.6 cm thick.

Part of an inscription. White marble, probably Pentelic, 18.5 cm long, 2.3 cm thick.

5. ABU MENA, EGYPT. Acc. 1985.4.

Small collection of glass, pottery and *tesserae*.

Three pieces of purple porphyry, one fragmentary, two shaped pieces like crescents, 0.5 cm thick.

One piece Lacedaemonian squared off with a drafted margin.

Small fragment *giallo antico*, pinky yellow, 0.4 cm thick. Crescent-shaped.

Fragment *verde antico*, cube/triangle. 1.3 cm thick.

One large and four small fragments grey/white banded marble. Large fragment 2.4 cm thick, small oblong 0.7 cm thick. Possibly Greek Island marble, possibly Proconnesian.

The Palatine collection was acquired by the Museum of Antiquities in 1975, but

there is no record of the donor. Much marble was employed for the Imperial Palaces on the Palatine Hill, some of which is still in evidence. The marble in this group was picked up from all over the Palatine. Thus the collection is only useful in so far as it indicates the presence of these particular marbles. These fragments were part of either wall or floor decorations. Generally speaking the thinner examples would be better suited to wall veneer and *opus sectile*. All these marbles have been recorded in excavation and published,¹⁰ but two warrant further comment. The piece of *rosso antico* moulding is a good example of this use. *Rosso* was never used for large objects and was most usually employed in *opus sectile*. It was quarried at Cape Taenarium in the Peloponnese and its use for beading and mouldings is very common in wall decoration, for example in the Eumachia building at Pompeii.¹¹ Its high period of use was the earlier Empire, and though it was used elsewhere it was mostly exported to Rome. The piece of Proconnesian is interesting because this marble, from the Island of Marmara near Istanbul,¹² is not found in Rome in the same quantities as in the Eastern Mediterranean where it had a monopoly, especially for architectural purposes. This particular piece was probably part of a floor.

The marble head relief from Pompeii is probably a fake. The head itself fits too neatly into the available space on the piece of marble, and the carving looks more Victorian than Roman. The actual piece of marble is probably ancient and reworked for the tourist market in recent times. If it is an ancient piece of marble it is most likely to be either from Carrara in Italy or from Mt. Pentelikon in Greece; the latter supplied Rome and the Naples area with white marble until the opening of the Carrara quarries in the late 1st century B.C./early 1st century A.D.

The 'Britain and Lepcis Magna' group is labelled as being from 'Prof. Mainds, Art School'. It may be assumed that the marble is from Lepcis Magna. The white marble fragment could possibly be Pentelic. This was used for sculpture and architecture in Lepcis, for example the bases for the *cipollino* columns in the Severan Forum. It is definitely not Proconnesian, the other white marble in major use in Lepcis Magna in the Roman period.¹³ The piece of *rosso antico* moulding is significant, because it is a rare example of its use outside Italy. It was used in Athens, and it has been noted by the writer at Palmyra in the Baths of Diocletian where it was used for beading, and has also been recorded in Britain at Colchester.¹⁴ If this piece in the collection did in fact come from Lepcis then it can be concluded that this type of stone was also reaching North Africa. Unfortunately the date of its use cannot be closely ascertained, but it was presumably in the earlier Empire.

Generally speaking Cyrenaica was a backwater as far as architecture and building was concerned. However, a certain amount of marble was imported. The bulk of the surviving white marble is Pentelic, and coloured marble was also imported from Greece. Much of this was re-used in later Christian buildings, for example the *cipollino* columns of the East and West Churches of Apollonia. Thus the *cipollino* in the group is not unusual.

The small collection from Abu Mena is particularly interesting. All the pieces are surface finds made by Dr. Miller, a member of the Society of Antiquaries, while he was in Egypt during the Second World War. Thus while one can be dated or

associated with any particular phase of the site their presence is significant. Abu Mena is situated about 40 miles to the south of Alexandria and was, as the name suggests, the site of a shrine to St. Menas. The first identifiable structure on the site is mid-4th century A.D. in date; the first stone church and crypt was completed soon after A.D. 375. The complex was at its greatest extent in the 5th to 8th century.

All the pieces of marble were for some kind of *sectile* work. The banded white marble is either Proconnesian or Greek Island marble. Proconnesian is probably more likely as it had a virtual monopoly in the market for sarcophagi in Egypt, and the transport of marble from the same quarry for other purposes is inherently likely.¹⁵ Egypt itself exported several important luxury building stones, including purple porphyry. The quarries are situated at Djebel Dokhan in the Eastern Desert,¹⁶ and large quantities were exported to Rome where it came to symbolize imperial power and dignity. Little has been recorded in Egypt itself, mainly due to the lack of work carried out on Roman sites. Indeed the use of marble in Roman Egypt has hardly been touched upon. These shaped pieces, therefore, are an important indication of the stone's use within Egypt. *Giallo antico* is found in large quantities in Rome and on other Italian sites, as well as on major coastal sites of Asia Minor; it is rare in the Levant and has not been recorded, to the writer's knowledge, in Cyrenaica or Egypt. Thus despite the small size of this sample, its presence is significant. In such discussion it must be remembered that the fate of a lot of the ancient marble was to be burned down in lime-kilns or to be stripped away and re-used elsewhere, and subsequently lost.

The piece of Lacedaemonian marble, in fact a green porphyry, is significant in a similar way, though like purple porphyry it was more likely to be re-used in later periods because it could not be burned in lime-kilns. Lacedaemonian, quarried 20 km south of Sparta, was difficult to extract in large pieces, so its most common use was in *opus sectile*. This particular piece looks as though it may have been set into a framework, perhaps in the decoration of a table-top. In this capacity it may have been re-used from an original floor or wall decoration. The distribution of Lacedaemonian is slightly curious—mostly Rome and Naples area, one example in Gaul, one in Germany, three instances from Britain, one from Spain and one from North Africa. Three instances are recorded in Asia Minor and two from the Levant.¹⁷ The presence of Lacedaemonia has not, until now, been recorded in Egypt.

Verde antico was quarried near Larissa in Thessaly from the reign of Hadrian and became particularly favoured in the later Roman and early Byzantine period, especially in Constantinople.¹⁸ The piece in this collection is the first to be recorded in the whole of North Africa and could easily date from the large 5th-century church built at Abu Mena.

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*Prepared for the press by Dr. D. J. Smith, with warmest thanks to the contributors.

NOTES

¹ *The Antiquaries Journal* LXIV (1984), 339–402.

² Mr. Grafton retained the box and I am most grateful to him for allowing publication.

³ Accession Number 1984.9.A.

⁴ Pennant, T., *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1790), 84, Pl. VII.

⁵ Bruce, J. C., *The Roman Wall* (1867, Newcastle edition), 344.

⁶ *AA⁵* XII (1984), 1–147.

⁷ Henig, M., *A Corpus of Engraved Gems from British Sites* (1978).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 298–9, No. App. 100.

⁹ Zwierlein-Diehl, E., *Die Antiken Gemmen des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien II* (1973).

¹⁰ M. E. Blake, *Ancient Roman Construction in Italy from the Prehistoric period to Augustus* (1947), 50–60.

¹¹ J. B. Ward-Perkins, 'Tripolitania and the Marble Trade', *JRS* XLI (1951), 98.

¹² For the quarries in general, N. Asgari, 'Roman and Early Byzantine Marble Quarries

of Proconnesos', *Proceedings Xth International Congress of Classical Archaeology* (1973), 467–480.

¹³ For example, the Severan Temple in the Forum, J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture* (1981), 386.

¹⁴ The Palmyra material is at present being prepared for publication by the writer; for the Colchester material, P. Crummy, *Colchester Archaeological Report 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough* (1984).

¹⁵ For sarcophagi, J. B. Ward-Perkins, 'Nicomedia and the Marble Trade', *PBSR* XXXV (1980), 41–48.

¹⁶ D. Meredith, 'The Roman Remains in the Eastern Desert of Egypt', pt. I, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 38 (1952), 94–111.

¹⁷ These form part of a study being prepared for publication by the writer.

¹⁸ For the quarries, J. Papageorgakis, 'Die Antiken Marmorbrüche von Thessalien', *Praktika tes Akademias Athenon* XXXVIII (1963), 563–572.