

## X

Note, 1998

### A decorated samian bowl from the Plaza site at Tynemouth

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IN a case displaying miscellaneous classical antiquities in the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, there is a complete decorated samian bowl of the second century A.D. bearing a label which states that it was found at Tynemouth (Accession Number C1950:74). According to the museum records it was loaned by J. O. Kirkley, Esq., of 8, Glencairn Park Road, Cheltenham, on 26th June, 1941. It is described as follows: "One Roman Bowl of Samian ware found in 1876, while excavating for the foundations of Tynemouth Aquarium. The Bowl, with two human skeletons, was in a bed of drifted sand about 14 ft. from the surface, and upwards of 30 ft. from the present high water mark, and it dates about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. The emblems on it seem to represent the Vine and the Leopard, both sacred to Bacchus, and the Wolf emblematical of Rome." A subsequent letter to J. O. Kirkley from the Librarian and Curator, dated 13th May, 1950, records with thanks the conversion of the loan into a gift to the Art Gallery and Museum.

The "Tynemouth Aquarium" is the Aquarium and Winter Gardens, which Tomlinson (1888, 53) states was built in 1877–8. After many changes of ownership and use, this prominent landmark, known in later years as the Plaza, was demolished in 1996. In the *Shields Daily News* for 22nd March, 1877 is the following paragraph: "Skeleton Found at Tynemouth. While some workmen were engaged in excavating at the Tynemouth Aquarium works, yesterday they found the skeleton of a human being". There is no other contemporary or later published account of discoveries on the Plaza site, but the brief account in the *Shields Daily News* supports the documentation of the bowl at Cheltenham.

Perhaps the bowl and two skeletons were an earlier find during preliminary building work in the previous year; alternatively, the newspaper reference might have been an inaccurate account of the discovery recorded by Kirkley, who was mistaken about its date.

There are several Roman finds from Tynemouth Priory and Castle, and in 1963 the late George Jobey excavated two circular houses which might have been associated with a settlement established in the pre-Roman Iron Age and continuing into the Roman period (Jobey 1967, 35–40). Roman pottery found on the site of the houses is of later second-century date (*ibid.*, 68–70, fig. 7, nos. 4–10). Two Roman inscribed stones found in the eighteenth century were probably brought from the Roman fort at Wallsend for reuse as building material. Other Roman objects are listed by Jobey (*ibid.*, 40–1). The only subsequent find is of two sherds of Roman pottery dating to the second half of the second century or first half of the third century A.D., from the excavation of medieval and later deposits at East Street (Hart 1997, 97, 105).

Manufacture of the samian bowl can be dated to c.A.D.130–160, although it may have been buried at a much later date. Romanised burials in Britain during the first and second centuries A.D. were generally made in the form of cremations, although the practice of inhumation began to be adopted from the mid-second century A.D. (Philpott 1991, 57–8). However, the pre-Roman practice of inhumation persisted throughout the Roman period in native areas; this was certainly the case in Northumberland (Tait and Jobey 1971). Much more remarkable is the use of a decorated samian bowl to accompany the inhumations at Tynemouth. Plain samian ware is common in

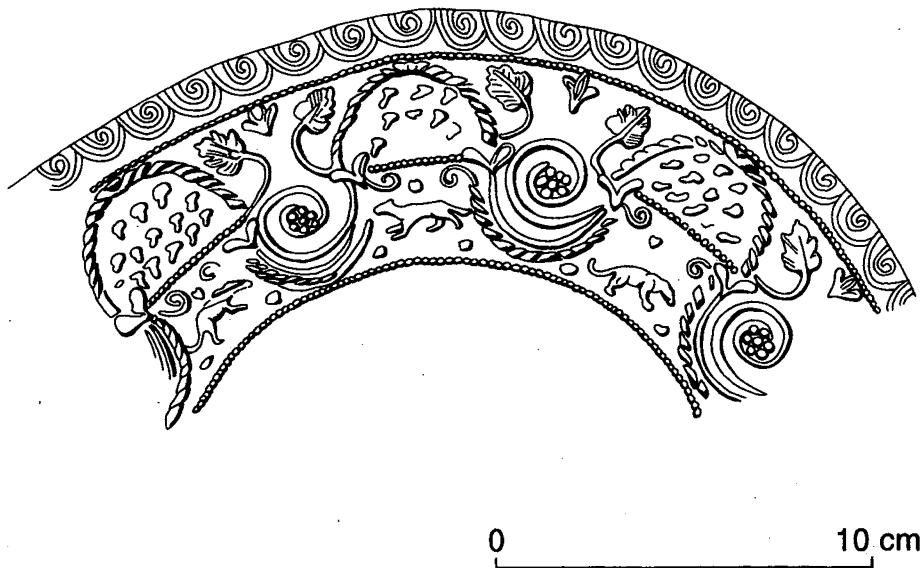


Fig. 1 *Decoration on a samian form 37 bowl from Tynemouth. Scale 1:2.*

Romanised burials, but decorated ware is very rare. A brief search of publications of the major cemeteries in Roman Britain located only one decorated bowl, a form 29 dated c.A.D. 50–65 found in a cremation at Baldock, Hertfordshire (Stead and Rigby 1986, 67, fig. 28, no. 8). By contrast, plain samian bowls and dishes are common finds in cremation cemeteries. Only one of the native burials of the Iron Age and Romano-British periods in northern Britain listed by Tait and Jobey (1971, 66–9) contained pottery, although many of the remainder produced objects of iron and copper alloy, and even glass vessels. The association of the Tynemouth bowl with burials is thus doubly remarkable.

The bowl is complete apart from a small chip missing from the rim. The base shows signs of wear, but there is little abrasion elsewhere. Miss Brenda Dickinson has kindly contributed the following note on the bowl:

“Form 37, East Gaulish: an almost complete bowl with a winding scroll using corded festoons, rather haphazardly joined together by bifid motifs. The main interest of this bowl lies in its motifs, several of which were used at both La Madeleine and Heiligenberg. The ovolo is replaced by a frieze of spirals, a device used at La Madeleine (Ricken 1934, Taf. IX, 1), but always, apparently, with the spirals winding in the opposite direction. At Heiligenberg, straight wreaths of spirals winding anti-clockwise, as here, are known (cf. Forrer 1911, Taf. XXVII), but there they do not act as ovolo replacements. The following details are common to both potteries: festoon (Ricken, Taf. II, 10 = Forrer, Taf. XXVIII, 12, 14); seven-beaded rosette (Ricken, Taf. VII, 1 = Forrer, Taf. XXVII, 5) and leaf-tips (Ricken, Taf. VII, 36 = Forrer, Taf. XXVII, 16). The first two occur at Heiligenberg on stamped bowls of Ianus I, and the last on a bowl in his style. The other details belonging to La Madeleine are the panther to left (0.1554), on bowls from Saalburg (Ricken, Taf. X, 10, 14, 23) and the trifid motif

(ibid., Taf. VII, 10), on a bowl from Langenhain (Simon and Köhler 1992, Taf. 75, 27). Those used at Heiligenberg, on bowls in the style of Ianus, are the bifid motif (Ricken and Fischer 1963, P142), the leaf (ibid., P84?) and the lion (ibid., T46). On balance, the bowl is perhaps more likely to have been made at Heiligenberg by Ianus, though the beads bordering the main zone of decoration are not the type which he normally used. Equally, they are not exactly the same as any in the La Madeleine range. However, whatever the bowl's origin, a Hadrianic-Antonine date is not in doubt, since the motifs used at La Madeleine are found on bowls from the Saalburg Erdkastell, which, on the evidence of the samian potters' stamps, went out of use c. A.D.139 (Harley 1970, 30) and decorated bowls of Ianus made at Rheinzabern occur in one of the earliest finds groups there, c. A.D.140–150 (Rau 1977, 64). c. A.D.130–160."

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Neil Holbrook of the Cotswold Archaeological Trust for drawing the bowl to my attention and to Dr Steven Blake, Keeper of Collections, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, for allowing me to photograph and take graphite rubbings of the decoration. Ray Walker kindly searched newspaper files for mention of the discovery. The bowl was drawn by Roger Oram.

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