XV

NOTES, 2007

1. A ROMAN FOLDING SPOON FROM WALLSEND

David Sherlock

DISCOVERY

Remains of a Roman folding spoon (fig. 1) were found in a gulley in a field system located to the north of the Hadrian's Wall and just west of Wallsend Fort during excavations by Tyne & Wear Museums in 1993 (Griffiths 1993). The bowl and handle were found with pottery which is dated to the second half of the third century A.D. The object is now part of the permanent display at Segedunum Roman Fort Museum (small-find number WS CA520). I am grateful to Tyne & Wear Museums and Alex Croom, curator, for permission to publish it here in advance of publication in volume 2 of the Wallsend excavation report.

DESCRIPTION

The spoon is made of bronze with traces of tinning and a corroded iron rivet which has fixed the bowl of the spoon in its folded position. Bits of the bowl are missing but enough survives to show that originally it was of a purse or fiddle shape. Its maximum dimensions are 42 by 26 mm. The handle which measures 65 mm in length and 5 mm maximum in width is cast in the form of a crouching feline, its forelegs outstretched to hold the L-shaped end of the bowl. Its head has a circular hole for its mouth but the position of the eyes is too corroded to be noted. There is a slight thickening in the handle to denote the position of the animal's hindquarters and beyond it, a moulded tail with trilobed finial. The feline is probably a lion, as on other examples of these spoons (see below). Beyond the tail the handle ends in an asymmetrical lunate shape, one side of which is pierced for a rivet to hinge an implement which would have folded along the side of the handle and there been held in a slight groove between two notches. At right angles to the lunate shape is another projection, which once hinged a second implement, folding out of use into the concave underside of the handle. These implements are most likely to have been the blade of a knife and a spike.

DISCUSSION

Roman folding spoons were classified in 1976 into three types (Sherlock 1976): Type A having a blade on the edge of a plain handle, folding either back up onto the bowl (A.1) or along the side of the handle (A.2); Type C (just one example from France) with a leopard's head handle and blade (missing) which once folded underneath the bowl; and Type B, the commonest type to which the Wallsend spoon belongs. Type B spoons all have fiddle-shaped bowls except for the Richborough example which is leaf-shaped. Numbering the Wallsend spoon as B8 there are seven more examples, which have come to my knowledge since 1976, making the complete list as follows:
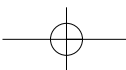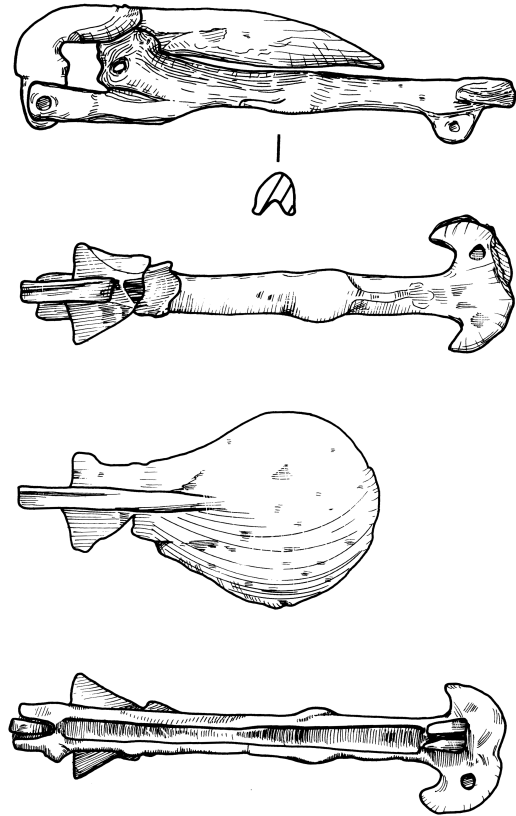
Fig. 1   A Roman folding spoon from Wallsend,
            actual size. © Tyne & Wear Museums.

B1.   From Richborough, Kent
B2.   From a villa near Chepstow, Monmouth
B3.   From Shakenoak villa, Oxon.
B4.   From Traprain Law, East Lothian
B5.   From Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk
B6.   From London
B7.   From Wroxeter, Salop.
B8.   From Wallsend. Published here.
B9.   From Kirkby Thore, Cumbria. A leaf-shaped bowl, its handle missing. Carlisle Museum
         63–1951–40. Unpublished.
B10. From Cambridge. Similar to last. From a shrine in a second-century civilian settlement.
         Alexander and Pullinger 1999, 46, 88, 98, plate xiv, no. 118.
B11. From Chesters Roman Fort, Northumberland. Part of a purse-shaped bowl with L-shaped
         end. Chesters Museum, Hall no. 1066. Unpublished.
B12. From Colchester, Essex. Handle only, in the shape of a crested dolphin. Crummy 1983, 69, fig.
         73, no. 2020.
B13. From Cologne, Germany. A complete example with a purse-shaped bowl dating from the late
         second to the second half of the third century. From a Roman cemetery. This example has an
         iron knife blade which folds into the side of the handle, and its iron spike which folds into the
         hollow underneath. Hellenkemper 1991, 194, fig. 23.
B14. From Ely, Cambs. The most complex example to have been found to date. It once had six
         implements. Like the Wallsend example, the bowl (now missing) would have been hinged
         between the lion's paws and folded up over its head. Beneath the paws are the remains of

another attachment now broken and corroded in a forward position but which must have once folded away under the lion's body. Beyond the lion's rump a spike also folded under its body. The implement on the lion's left is a probe or spike and is complete. The implement on the lion's right is missing but from corrosion evidence it had been iron and was therefore probably a knife blade. On top of the lion and corroded in its folding position is a hooked implement which would have extended as an extension of the lion's tail. Meadows 2003, 36, fig. 23, no. 12.

The third-century pottery found with the Wallsend spoon broadly agrees with the stylistic date generally given to ordinary spoons with fiddle-shaped bowls (Strong 1966, 177–8) and to the dating evidence (albeit scant) for the other spoons in Type B (Sherlock 1976, 254 and B.9–14 above), but this spoon's handle is unique in its detailed representation of the lion's tail. Otherwise, the fourteen examples are so similar in design as to suggest a single source for their manufacture. It is therefore intriguing that one of them (B13) should have travelled as far as Cologne, but we may note that in a group of seventeen second-century decorated spoons from Roman London one survives from Saalburg Fort and one from Italy (Jones & Sherlock 1996, nos 13, 17).

These Roman so-called folding spoons may more accurately be described as folding eating implements. The bowl and blade have their obvious uses as cutlery; the spike was tradition-ally for extracting meat from crustaceans (Martial, *Epigrams* 14, 121); and another implement might have ended in a small spatula for extracting paste (e.g., *garum*, the Roman fish paste delicacy) from narrow-necked vessels; but uses for the other implements on B14 are unknown. Roman pocket knives, like modern pen knives, with a single folding blade and a handle sometimes in the shape of a hare, also survive (British Museum 1920, fig. 183d). But multi-purpose folding spoons like that from Wallsend are related to three elaborately made late Roman silver examples of folding eating implements, all with six or seven attachments, with, additionally, a sieve and a fork (Sherlock 1988, plate XLIX a and b). They are in several senses the ancestors of today's 'Swiss army knife' and the fact that they folded suggests they were made for travelling as a kind of convenient picnic set, or a modern soldier's knife, fork and spoon that clip together. They cannot be considered as Roman 'army issue' as only some of them have come from military sites. They do however show that the Romans in *Britannia* at any rate were capable of inventing implements of surprising ingenuity.

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2. NODDING SCHOLARS, OR HOW AN OLD TILE-STAMP FROM CARLISLE BECAME A 'NEW' TILE-STAMP FROM CORBRIDGE

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The inclusion of a photograph of a tile-stamp of *legio IX Hispana* amongst a collection of images otherwise exclusively derived from the pre-First World War excavations at Corbridge led the present writer to suggest (Bishop 1995) that it may indicate the presence of that legion at that site. Its occurrence has even been noted in the latest edition of the *Handbook to the Roman Wall* (Bruce 2006, 420).

Unfortunately, subsequent research indicates that this identification may be erroneous and that an almost Hardyesque series of coincidences has led to this state of affairs. First, it is clear that the tile-stamp illustrated was in fact found in Carlisle in 1890 (Haverfield 1892, 199–200, where a cropped version of the photograph — showing just the die — was published, but nevertheless leaving no room for doubt). Francis Haverfield's subsequent involvement with the *Corstopitum* project (Bishop 1994, 5), or possibly even J. P. Gibson's, if he were the photographer, may then have provided the means by which the photograph came to be included with the Corbridge collection. The stamp was subsequently incorporated within both R.P. Wright's catalogue of *legio IX* tile-stamps (Wright 1978, 381, 5(a)) and the updated listing in *RIB* II (Frere and Tomlin 1992, 169, 2462.4 (II)), although neither of these illustrate it, provide a transcription, or mention that it is incomplete. Thus, when the present writer came to check these catalogues upon preparing the original note on this 'new' Corbridge tile-stamp, he failed to make the connection.

So it is that this tile-stamp does not come from Corbridge, but rather from Carlisle, and we must reluctantly discount this piece of 'evidence' for the presence of *legio IX Hispana* at or near Corbridge. *Mea culpa*.

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3. CELTIC PHILOLOGY AND THE RIVER BOWMONT

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The Bowmont is a frontier river. It rises in Roxburghshire/Borders, just north of the water-shed dividing England from Scotland, and flows clockwise in a semi-circle to join College Burn near Kirknewton (NT 9130), Northumberland.

Its name has been problematic. The most recent discussion seems that of Ekwall. He gave the forms *Bolbenda* of *c*. 1050, *Bolbent* of 1293, and *Boubent* of *c*. 1540 from Leland, who wrote, 'Ther is a litle broke cawlyd Boubent cumminge owt of Scotland rennithe into Glyn', i.e., the river Glen, a tributary of the Till. Ekwall took the second element as English 'bend'. The first, with the *o* of English 'low', he called obscure.[1]

However, the Bowmont passes Mindrum (NY 8432), explained as a Cumbric toponym meaning 'mountain ridge' (cf. Welsh *mynydd* and *trum*).[2] The Glen, mentioned by Bede and in *Historia Brittonum* (locating an Arthurian battle there), also has a Celtic name, from a form giving Welsh *glân* 'clean, pure' (nothing to do with Welsh *glyn* 'glen').[3] So Celtic philology will perhaps help with the Bowmont, a tributary of the Glen. We may thus relate it to *Blaen-Bolo* in a Strata Marcella charter of about 1200, where *Blaen* is 'upland, heights' and *Bolo* is an obso-lete hydronym, used of a stream flowing into the Banw in the western part of Garthbeibio (SH 9414), a parish on the Powys-Gwynedd border. Although *Bolo* might derive from a personal name, it more probably relates to *bol* 'belly; cavity', but also 'swelling, bulge', as at Rhos-y-bol (SH 4288) 'moorland of the hollow' in Anglesey, or Bolgoed (ST 0479) 'wood of a swelling hill', a farm in the Vale of Glamorgan.[4] The classic place for the Welsh element *bol* is the twelfth-century *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, by an author with a unique feeling for the land-scape of both Gwynedd and Dyfed. This narrator explained Talybolion in north-west Anglesey as *tal ebolion* 'payment of foals' (in compensation to an Irish king), though modern scholars translate it more prosaically as 'end of the ridges' or 'end of the deep cavities' (*y bolion*).[5]

Welsh *bol* allows an explanation for the Bowmont. For most of its course it flows through a narrow valley, a 'deep cavity' overlooked by high hills, in contrast to the wider and sunnier valleys of Glen and Till. The river of a *bol* or 'cavity' would thus well describe it, with English *bend* apparently being added to an original Cumbric form. That was perhaps because College Burn, which runs through a still narrower valley, was also called the river of the *bol*. The Bowmont might thus have been called the river of the 'bend' since its course is curving, in contrast to that of College Burn, which is unusually straight.

Yet there is a problem. Welsh *bol* originally contained *g*, as shown by Gaulish *bulga* 'leather bag'. This survives in the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff with *Bolg-ros* or Bellimoor (SO 3940) near Hereford (the English form being a calque). If *g* was still written as late as the twelfth century, why is there no trace of it for the Bowmont? British *g* here had become a spirant (like the *g* of German *lage*) by lenition in the later fifth century, apparently remaining through the entire Old Welsh period.[6] We should thus expect it in a toponym **Bolg-* borrowed by Old English in the late sixth century. Its non-appearance in *Bolbenda* is presumably due to the loss of a consonant in an Old English compound form.[7] It will not be due to any develop-ment in late British.

Let us repeat this point to make it clear to non-Celticists. If the first element of *Bowmont* were borrowed from Cumbric **bolga* 'leather bag' (where the asterisk indicates a recon-structed form not actually surviving in writing, and *g* represents a spirant, as in German *lage*),

then we have to explain why this *g* does not appear in early attestations of *Bowmont*. The likely explanation is because of sound-changes in Old English, where the loss of such a consonant is known in compound words. It would not be due to any change in Celtic. That allows us to see the first element of *Bowmont* as going back to a borrowing by English in the sixth century, when the Bernicians settled in the area.

If, then, the first element of *Bowmont* is a Brittonic term meaning 'deep cavity' (Welsh *bol*), we see more sharply a pre-English aspect of early Northumbria. Entering the Glen only a mile from Yeavering, the Bowmont would indicate the survival of Britons immediately by a centre of Northumbrian royal power. If the Bowmont has a part-Celtic name, it will tend to support Brian Hope-Taylor's opinion that Yeavering was, in origin, a British settlement.[8] This tallies neatly with the etymology of *Yeavering* itself (which Bede gives as *Ad Gefrin*) from the Cumbric equivalent of Welsh *geifr* 'goats' plus *bryn* 'hill', taken as the Celtic name of the *oppidum* on Yeavering Bell, a form then applied to the Anglo-Saxon royal complex at Old Yeavering.[9]

NOTES

[1] *The itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535–1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (London, 1906–10), v, 66; Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1960), 56.

[2] Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000), 323.

[3] Nikolai Tolstoy, 'Nennius, Chapter Fifty-Six', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 19 (1960–2), 118–62.

[4] R. J. Thomas, *Enwau Anfonydd a Nentydd Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1938), 217–8.

[5] *Branwen Uerch Lyr*, ed. D. S. Thomson (Dublin, 1961), 27.

[6] K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 468–9.

[7] Cf. Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), 186, 188.

[8] Brian Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London, 1977), cited in J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People': A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), 74–5; C. O'Brien, 'The Early Medieval Shires of Yeavering, Breamish, and Bamburgh', *AA⁵*, 30 (2002), 53–73; *Yeavering: People, Power, and Place*, eds. Paul Frodsham and Colm O'Brien (Stroud, 2005). The writer thanks Professor R. N. Bailey for supplying the last two references.

[9] Coates and Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places*, 323; *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, ed. V. E. Watts (Cambridge, 2004), 710.