

## Roman Speculum,

FOUND AT CAISTER NEAR NORWICH.

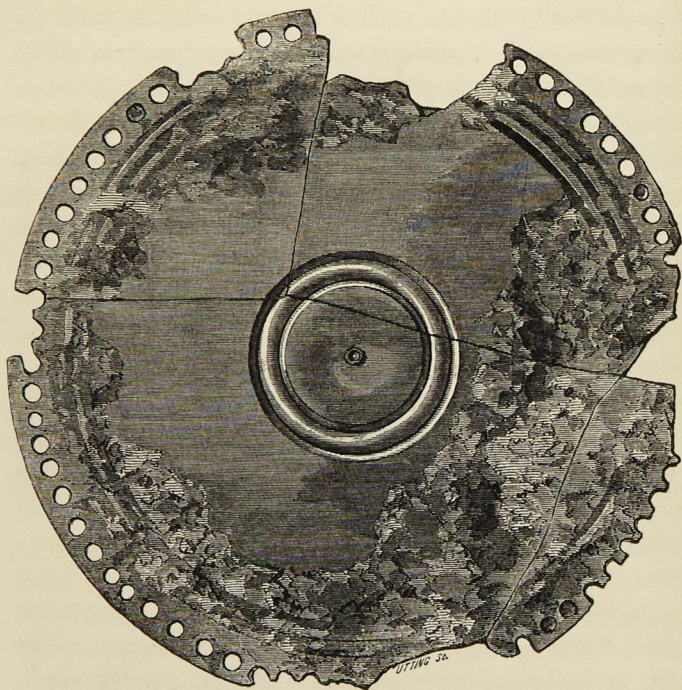
COMMUNICATED BY

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THE Roman Mirror, or Speculum, of which an illustration is given, was found at Caister in the year 1857. It was, unfortunately, broken by the spade at the time of discovery.

Many, nay most, of the Roman camps remaining in this country have furnished numerous articles once forming the toilet of Roman ladies. Fibulæ, armlets, rings, unguentaria, charms, pins for the adornment of the hair and confining the dress, may be found in collections relating to this period of our history. The mirror, or speculum, is however an object of very rare occurrence; indeed, it is believed that not more than a dozen examples could be furnished by antiquaries in this country, discovered within our own Castra. The reason is obvious: brooches, jewels of the smaller kinds, pins, &c. would exist in numbers, attached to the toilet of a lady of the Empire—while a single mirror would be sufficient to reflect those countenances which struck the Britons so strongly at an early period of the imperial conquest, and brought the beauty of the Roman ladies into a repute so high with the barbarians as to originate the saying, that the face of a Roman matron was able to subdue a greater number of native warriors than the swords of an entire cohort.



ROMAN SPECULUM FOUND AT CAISTER.

Although examples of the speculum are few, yet much might be said relative to their history, not only as respects the toilet but also regarding the magical purposes to which they were applied. In these pages, however, it is necessary to keep as strictly as possible to local circumstances, and to such remarks as may be connected with individual specimens.

While Greek and Etruscan mirrors are abundant in collections, those of Roman origin are, as before observed, extremely scarce; so much so, indeed, that it is always desirable to note down when and where an example is discovered.

Mr. Albert Way, in speaking of the mirror now engraved, says: "The pierced edge of your mirror is a curious feature . . . . The perforated edge, I find, is a peculiarity in these brittle-metal specula; and I fancy it had some design possibly connected with the expansion of the metal. These specula were made chiefly at Brundisium. The best example I can find, which has been discovered in this country, was dug up in Southwark. . . . There is one exactly like yours in the Copenhagen Museum. This is curious, for although Roman reliques occur in Denmark, they are few and in small variety—only the objects of most value and rarity—for I believe the Romans never penetrated so far north to make any settlements. The reverse of the Copenhagen specimen is exactly like yours, the size rather smaller."

Mr. H. Syer Cuming, who has also examined the Caister speculum, observes: "The mirror discovered at Caister is one of the rarest objects of Roman art met with in England; indeed, the speculum may be numbered among the scarcest items of the Roman toilet any where discovered, for as the majority seem to have been formed of silver, they offered tempting baits for the destroyer, who sacrificed them for the value of the metal. Until I began to look for examples, I had no idea so few had been found in this country.

. . . . . We learn from Plautius that the reflecting field of the speculum was kept bright with pounded pumice-stone used with a sponge; and one of the Colchester mirrors has a handle so contrived that a sponge may be conveniently suspended to it. The Caister speculum may have had a manubrium, but I am inclined to think it was a simple disc which was held in the palm when in use."

Mr. Cuming, besides the Colchester mirrors mentioned in his letter, which were found at West Lodge, near that town, and may be found figured in the *Archæological Journal*, Vol. V., p. 138, also speaks of examples found in Deveril Street, Southwark, described in the *Archæologia*, XXVI., p. 467; a specimen contained in a bronze case discovered at Coddendam, Suffolk, in 1823, mentioned in *Archæologia*, XXVII., pl. 25; and the perforated speculum in the Copenhagen Museum, engraved in Worsaae's *Afbildninger*, pl. 73., fig. 292, to which allusion is made by Mr. Way.

The Copenhagen example is precisely like the Caister specimen in design. The diameter is  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches—half an inch less than the Caister mirror. The mirror figured in the twenty-sixth volume of the *Archæologia*, p. 467, discovered in 1835 in ground in Deveril Street, Southwark, used as a place of burial in the Roman period, had, with others discovered in the same place, evidently been inclosed within a funeral urn, and broken previously to enclosure. It was circular in form, and not less than five inches and a quarter in diameter. Round its rim were perforations like those of the Caister specimen, with this difference, that the holes in the London example appear larger in the engraving, and therefore less numerous than those in the Caister mirror. Like others, the reflecting surface was extremely brittle, and, by its rapid oxydation on exposure to nitric acid, must be presumed to have been largely amalgamated with copper. The metal, or rather the metallic compound of which the reflecting disc of these mirrors

is composed, is well known even in our own time as *speculum metal*; and the disc of a reflecting telescope is apparently identical in its combination with the face of the Caister mirror. The Deveril Street example is now in the British Museum. The marginal perforations to which we have drawn attention in the Southwark, the Copenhagen, and the Caister mirrors, occur also in the elegant example found at Pompeii, figured in the *Illustrations of Ancient Art*, by the Rev. E. Trollope. The Coddendam speculum was found with Roman urns in that parish, the exterior case being ornamented with a fine head of the emperor Nero on one side, and on the other the figure of the same emperor addressing his army.

Besides the examples to which reference is made by Mr. Way and Mr. Cuming, Douglas in his *Nenia Britannica* mentions two specula spoken of by Morant in his *History of Essex*, and a third figured in pl. 20 of the *Nenia*, obtained probably from an ancient burial place at Ash, near Sandwich, Kent. This last specimen is circular, and, presuming it to be engraved in its proper size, the diameter is nearly four and a half inches. As figured, no perforations are seen round the border. At pages 80 and 81 of the *Nenia* the author gives a long and interesting note relative to the history of Roman mirrors, and mentions their connection with magical ceremonies, as related by Lucian and others. This note contains remarks so curious and interesting as to be worthy of insertion in these pages.

Douglas commences his observations with some obscurity, but it is best to give his exact words. He says:—

“An urn with ashes, which contained a metal SPECULUM. A leaden coffin, situated North-east and South-west: near the head, bracelets of jet and four bodkins of jet; near the coffin, an urn with ashes, and two brass coins of ANTON. PIVS, and ALEX. SEVERVS; also another urn, which contained a SPECULUM; a black vessel of about two gallon measure;

two bottles of clay; two clay lamps; and a metal vessel. Many other facts of the discovery of metal *specula* in any antient sepulchres might be collected. Pliny has exactly described these mirrors composed of tin and brass; see lib. xxxiii. cap. ix. Atque ut omnia de speculis peragantur hoc loco optima apud majores fuerant Brundusina, *stanno & cere* mistis. In lib. xxxiv. cap. xvii. he says, these were an antient kind of mirrors, which Brundusium was celebrated for, but which were in disuse from those invented of silver, and which were in such common use, that the most menial servants had them. In confirmation of Pliny, that servants carried them about them, there is a passage in Petronius Arbiter to the following substance. ‘Before Chrysis could return, she snatched from the maid servant a *pocket-mirror*; and having practised her features to try the power of her charms, she adjusted her discomposed drapery, and repaired with great haste to a temple of Venus to make her offerings.’ The same author, in satyrizing the profusion of Trimalchio, says, that the room of this sensualist was strewed with pin-dust, mixed with vermilion and saffron; and, what was most extraordinary, the dust of a *mirror*.”

“Many of these funereal relics may be interpreted as ornamental decorations for apparel, such as the beads, gems of various kind; and when other relics occur in forms differing from personal decoration, they may be considered as relics in which the owners delighted, and in some instances may apply to magical uses. Superstition may have prevented surviving kindred or friends from appropriating them; weak minds may also have been apprehensive of contamination from the possession of them, and have consigned to the grave many valuable effects, which the less superstitious would have reserved. But as, in authors heretofore cited, it appears that the dead in several ages, and in dissimilar regions, as also of dissimilar persuasions, have been buried with many rich decorations, we must conclude, by a natural interpretation, that

those relics which bear no affinity to the attire have been buried with an eye to some other kind of usage. We have found several relics to have been evidently appropriated to magical ceremonies; and though a *mirror* may have been applied to the operations of dress, as well as a pot or vessel to the ordinary offices of domestic life, still, if such implements are discovered to have been used by the antients in magical rites, and as having past a doubt found several relics so applied, why scruple to consider the *speculum* as such?"

"Cælius Rhodiginus, lib. viii. c. xxxiii. assigns a moral reason for the invention of mirrors; and says, Socratem philosophum scribit Apuleius, speculo, quod mirum fortasse videatur, ad morum disciplinam esse usum. Quippe suasisse discipulis fertur, crebro ut semet in speculo contemplantur, atqui eorum foret pulchritudine sibi complacitus, procuraret, ne corporis dignitatem morum dehonestamento pollueret. A most excellent apology for self-admiration. Seneca says, cited by Rhodiginus, 'specula esse invente, ut homo ipse se nosceret.' No man should therefore go without one in his pocket."

All the examples now mentioned are described as being circular; but it must be added that, in the excavations made by Mr. Clayton on the line of the Roman wall in the county of Northumberland, a fragment of a *speculum* was discovered of *rectangular* form. This is fortunately preserved by Mr. Clayton in his collection at Chester.