

## A Romano-British cosmetic mortar from Chipstead

The small copper-alloy object from Chipstead (fig 1) was a chance find recovered in 1998. It is in the form of a shallow bowl with plain rounded ends, with a wide groove on the inner curve and a central loop, most of which is now missing, on the outer. The groove has a rolled rim and there are deep notches at each side of the loop, but it is otherwise undecorated. Apart from the damage to the loop, there are chips and abrasions along the edges. The object measures 64mm in length, with a surviving width of 7mm and surviving height of 17mm. The capacity of the groove is difficult to measure accurately due to the damage to the lip, but is around 0.4–0.5ml.

The object forms one element, the mortar, of a two-piece pestle and mortar set (Jackson 1985, 165). Their function is clearly seen when the two elements are found together: the pestle fits snugly inside the groove of the mortar (fig 2), and both sometimes show wear facets. Both elements had loops, placed either in the centre or at one end, so that they could be strung together for safekeeping but separated for use (Jackson 1985, 171). They have been identified as cosmetic grinders, used to prepare dry mineral grits or pellets, such as the various coloured ores of copper and lead, for painting the face; the pointed ends of the pestles could also be used to apply the powder to eyes or eyebrows (Jackson 1985, 172; 1993, 168–9). Of the very small number of complete sets to come from secure contexts, three were accompanied by other toilet implements, providing additional support for this identification (Jackson 1985, 171; 1993, 165–7).

Although these grinders date mainly from the Roman period, there is sufficient evidence, from a small number of dated sites and from the Celtic style of the zoomorphic decoration on some of the pieces, to show that they were introduced during the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age. It seemed initially that their *floruit* lay in the 1st to 2nd centuries AD (Jackson 1985, 171, 175–6), but an increase in the number of finds from dated contexts since 1985 shows that the majority date from the 2nd to 3rd centuries (R Jackson, pers comm). Over 500 are now recorded and their distribution is, with one possible exception, restricted to Britain (R Jackson, pers comm; Jackson 1985, 172; 1993, 167). An insular origin is indicated too by the wide variety in both design — some have zoomorphic or knobbed terminals, some have enamelling or other surface ornament — and in craftsmanship, in contrast to the relatively standardized appearance of most small Roman bronze implements (Jackson 1985, 168–9).

No Surrey finds were known when Jackson prepared his original catalogue (1985, 176–92), but he has since recorded three: an end-looped pestle from the 1981–7 excavations at the Beddington villa, a zoomorphic end-looped mortar from ‘woodland in Surrey, near the river Mole’ (*Treasure Hunting* magazine, January 1984, 69) and a centre-looped mortar from Warlingham Court Farm (British Museum accession no PRB 1990.4.1.1) (Jackson forthcoming, nos 15, 250, 313). A find from the Ashtead villa may be a centre-looped pestle, but has an unusually large loop and a flat rod; it is broken at each end and it is not now possible to identify it with certainty (R Jackson, pers comm; Lowther 1927, fig 2, no 12; Guildford Museum accession no AS312).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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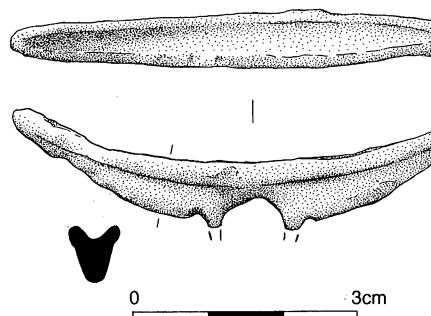


Fig 1 Romano-British cosmetic mortar from Chipstead (1:1). (Drawing by David Williams)

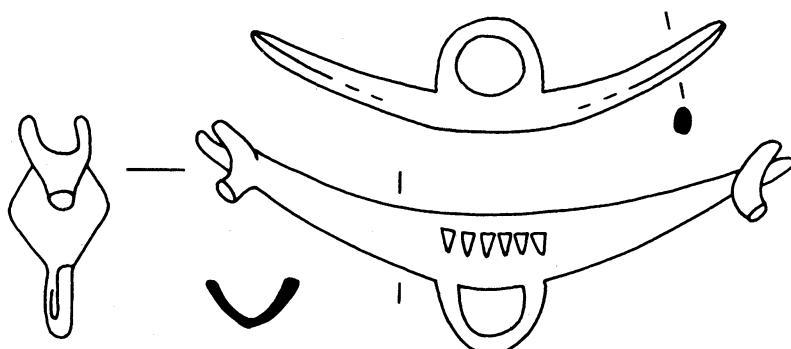


Fig 2 Illustration showing the relationship between the components of a pestle and mortar set: Romano-British cosmetic set from St Pancras cemetery, Chichester, decorated with bovid-head terminals and triangular cells for enamel (1:1). (After Jackson 1985, 184 and fig 7, no 57)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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