

TWO NATIVE BRONZES OF THE ROMAN PERIOD FROM LONDON IN THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM, SYDNEY

BY J. V. S. MEGAW, M.A., F.S.A.

Amongst the varied collection of Old World antiquities donated in 1860 by Sir Charles Nicholson, Bt., to form the nucleus of the Museum of Antiquities of the University of Sydney—now generally known as the 'Nicholson'¹—are two small bronzes (Pls. I and III, *a-c*). Although the earliest published catalogue of the Nicholson Museum is brief to the point of uselessness on these bronzes,² both objects appear to have been obtained in London with a miscellaneous lot of Roman and post-Roman date and are recorded as having been found in the City. Both bronzes seem best to be regarded as provincial or indeed Romano-British in manufacture and fairly close parallels can be cited from well-authenticated British locations.

The human head, which in its present state is some 25 mm. high, is a bronze casting; considerable wear has made it impossible to judge the degree of post-casting finishing although in view of the general crudity of the modelling this does not seem likely to have been great. The piece is clearly now incomplete, having apparently snapped off below the shoulders along the line of two fixing holes, one of which is visible in the rear view here published (Pl. I, *c*); just above the break, diagonal lines indicate some sort of a tunic. The little male bust—clearly not 'female' as stated by Reeve in his catalogue entry—calls to mind one of the bucket escutcheons from Brough on Humber (*Petuaria*) first published some thirty years ago (Pl. II).³ The Brough head which, as Professor Toynbee has recently remarked, exhibits many of the traditional Celtic facial traits while being largely classical in its inspiration,⁴ shares with the Nicholson head a straight fringed and carefully combed coiffure and a downward slant to the mouth—the hair particularly recalls Julio—Claudian work; notwithstanding, the Brough head, with its beard, heavy brow ridges and more definitely 'stranded' hair, also recalls the native coinage portraits of Cunobelin.⁵ For the same stylization in a later context one may compare the stone head, now lost, from the Roman fort at Hulme, Manchester,⁶ while other native but probably imported pieces which exhibit something of the same mixture of 'classicizing' of later Celtic art are two anthropoid sword hilts, one of Hawkes' Class F from a burial at North Grimston, Yorks, and one of the succeeding Class G ('about 100 B.C.' and after) from Ballyshannon Bay, Co. Donegal.⁷ In contrast, the Nicholson piece has less of the characteristic lentoid eyes of Celtic iconography than the Brough head but the disproportionately large eyes and the emphasised lids can also be seen in a cruder and even more clearly native piece, the bronze bust of a Celtic goddess from Cirencester probably of at least third century date;⁸ the Cirencester goddess also shares with the Nicholson bronze a broad nose. The only other bronzes from Britain even partially comparable are the two very similar figures of roped and seated captives—from their form presumably once more vessel attachments—found, respectively, at Brougham, Westmorland, and London. Although these are clearly the work of a craftsman inferior in skill to the maker of either the Nicholson or Brough heads, they continue the traditional representation of the clean-shaven Celt.⁹ The slit mouth, button eyes, and conjoined nose and brow ridge of the Westmorland piece follows the style of the head on the foot of a fibula from the Late La Tène cemetery of Giubiasco, Ct. Ticino, where the head in fact is a Celticized provincial silen as seen on the imported provincial Roman jug from Stanfordsbury, Beds.¹⁰

Though a quick search for comparable material amongst the rich and diverse small bronzes found in Gallo-Roman contexts does not reveal anything immediately recalling the Nicholson head, it is of course easy to point to instances of a similar slight 'barbarizing' of well-established provincial Roman patterns.¹¹ In short, the Nicholson bronze, no less than its closest stylistic parallel, the Brough mount, even if not of proven provenance, is clearly in keeping with the mixed traditions which characterise so much of the art of the British Isles in the first centuries of the Roman occupation. Its putative use as a mounting—possibly for a bucket or vat—would continue a tradition first established in Britain by the strangely helmeted heads of the Aylesford bucket.¹²

The boar's head mount in the Nicholson Museum (Pl. III, *a-c*) once more is an object which, though it must be of comparatively late date, is wholly native in feeling. The head is again a casting and measures 35 mm. from the tip of the snout to the tail-like rear projection. There are signs of filing at several points, particularly in the area between the snout and the fore-legs. A most striking resemblance between this piece and a bronze of much the same size in the London Museum, recorded as having been found in the City in Eastcheap, will be clear from the illustrations (Pl. III, *d-f*).¹³ The similarity extends even to a lateral and well-worn hold towards the end of the snout. A third boar mount consisting once more of only the frontal part of the animal was found in the Roman occupation levels of Aldborough (*Isurium Brigantum*).¹⁴ The form of these bronzes is such as to suggest their attachment to the rim of a cup or other vessel, the hole being for a suspension ring. As Dr. Ross has noted, the boar is 'the cult animal *par excellence* of the Celts';¹⁵ previously, the present writer, in publishing a first century A.D. bronze bowl with boar's head spout made in south-western Britain and exported to central Poland, has also illustrated the use of the boar as a kind of totemic feature amongst the continental and British Celts.¹⁶

Stylistically, the form of both the putative London boar mounts is that of the crouching figure from a Romano-British shrine at Findon¹⁷ and the head from the Willingham Fen cult hoard;¹⁸ closer still are the boar representations on the later British coinage of Tasciovanus, Cunobelin, and Epaticcus.¹⁹ Further touches of native, Belgic stylization, particularly in the Eastcheap mount, can be seen when comparison is made with the smaller of the two free-standing boars from the (presumed) Belgic burial at Hounslow.²⁰ The fantastic elaboration of the dorsal crest on the Nicholson piece likewise calls to mind a free-standing figure, here one of the two bronze sheet boar figures from the Neuvy-en-Sullias sanctuary, another example of the combination of native and classicizing in late Celtic representational art²¹; all these parallels would suggest a date in the first two centuries A.D. for the London mounts.

NOTES

- 1 For a brief history of the original Nicholson collection and later additions see J. V. S. Megaw in *Teaching History* 15 (1965), 7-15.
- 2 Edward Reeve, *Catalogue of the Museum of Antiquities of the Sydney University* (1870), no. 489—'Bronze Head of an Animal probably that of a boar'; no. 561—'small Bronze Head of a Female'.
- 3 Philip Corder and I. A. Richmond in *Antiq. J.* XVIII (1938), 69 and PL. XXIX=our Pl. II.
- 4 J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain under the Romans* (1964), 120; see also Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (1967), 94 and fig. 61.
- 5 Toynbee, *op. cit.*, Pl. II, k.
- 6 F. A. Bruton, *The Roman Fort at Manchester* (1909), 34 and Pl. 12; Ross, *op. cit.*, 86 and fig. 54.
- 7 C. F. C. Hawkes in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* XXI (1955), 211-5 and Pl. XXVII, 4-5.
- 8 Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 103-4 and Pl. XXVI.
- 9 Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 120 and PL. XXXII, c-d.

- 10 Giubiasco: W. Kramer in *Germania* 39 (1961), Taf. 42, 1 (= gr. 221); compare also the head at the base of the handle of the bronze flagon from gr. 32: P. Jacobsthal, *Early Celtic Art* (1944), no. 393(d). Stanfordbury: Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 42 and Pl. III, c: for the Late La Tene 'Kelheim' type see J. Werner in *Bayer. Vorg.* 20 (1954), 46-52.
- 11 Compare E. Esperandieu and H. Roland, 'Bronzes antiques de la Seine Maritime' = XIII *suppl. a Gallia* (1959), nos. 40, 44, and 98 and G. Faider-Feytmans, 'Recueil des Bronzes de Bavai' = VIII *suppl. a Gallia* (1957), nos. 49-50.
- 12 T. G. E. Powell, *Prehistoric Art* (1966), 225 and ill. 226; for dating of the grave see Anne Birchall in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* XXXI (1965), 243-9 and 302. Sir Cyril Fox, *Pattern and Purpose: Early Celtic Art in Britain* (1957), 68 dates the bucket itself to 'c. 50 B.C.'
- 13 Ross, *op. cit.*, 311 and Pl. 79b. The boar was purchased by the Museum as part of the F. G. Hilton Price Collection without further details as to provenance. Hilton Price, who died in 1909, was a well-known City banker, collector and amateur archaeologist. I am grateful to the London Museum and Miss J. K. Macdonald for supplying photographs and information on this piece.
- 14 H. Ecroyd Smith, *Reliquiae Isuriacae* (1852), Pl. 25, fig. 16.
- 15 Ross, *op. cit.*, 308.
- 16 Megaw in *Antiq. J.* XLII (1963), 27-37.
- 17 Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 126 and Pl. XXXII, b.
- 18 Ross, *op. cit.*, Pl. 80, a; see also F. M. Heichelheim in *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* XXXVII (1937), 52-67.
- 19 R. P. Mack, *The Coinage of Ancient Britain* (2 ed., 1965), nos. 115, 164, 179, 183, 243, 289, and 299; Toynbee, *op. cit.*, Pl. II, i.
- 20 S. Piggott and G. E. Daniel, *A Picture Book of Ancient British Art* (1951), 24 and fig. 66-67.
- 21 A Varagnac, G. Fabre, and M. Mainjonet, *L'Art gaulois* (1956) 146 and Pls. 47-48 preceding.