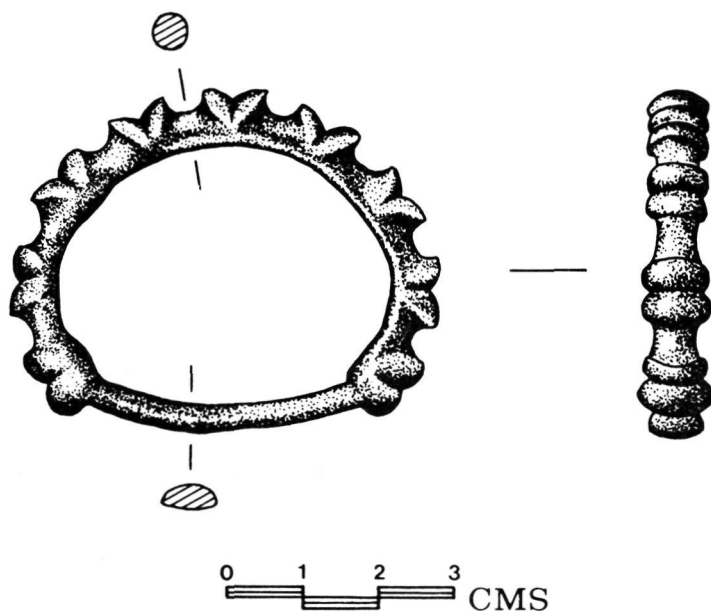


AN IRON AGE TERRET FROM THE THAMES FORESHORE AT ISLEWORTH, MIDDLESEX

JONATHAN COTTON

The terret is one of a number of scattered finds picked up between the tide-lines on the Thames foreshore at Isleworth, Middlesex, by Mr. John Gibson during the summer of 1975. Most of the objects, including the one here described, remain in the possession of the finder.¹

Measuring 56mm x 46mm, the terret is of cast bronze, and paralleled by single finds from Fairford, Glastonbury and Springhead, and multiple finds from Hod Hill and Hunsbury. It is a fine, developed example of Leeds' Class I² with bivalvular pursed-lip like mouldings characteristic of the type. More recently this feature has been used as the basis for a re-classification by MacGregor,³ and the terrets so distinguished placed in a separate 'ribbed' group with Spratling's 'Arras' (Yorkshire) terrets.⁴ MacGregor's classification is preferred here, as the three terrets from Arras — a single example from the Lady's Barrow, and the two surviving from the King's Barrow⁵ — although probably the best known, and perhaps the earliest, are at present the only northern representatives of a type otherwise restricted to the southern lowland half of the country.⁶



With nine bivalvular mouldings evenly spaced around its outer arc, the Isleworth terret can be compared with a similar example from Hod Hill,⁷ and with another, one of two unprovenanced terrets in Saffron Walden Museum,⁸ although examples with as few as six,

and as many as eleven or twelve mouldings are known.⁹ As a stylistic feature, the bivalvular moulding can be traced to the split-lip mouldings on the chapes of Piggott's Group II sword-scabbards,¹⁰ which have a continental La Tène II ancestry, and whose distribution correlates neatly with that of the ribbed terrets.¹¹

That the terret functioned as a rein-ring or rein-guide now seems certain, particularly in view of the many instances of wear or fracture noted at two opposing points on the ring's inner arc,¹² an observation which holds good for the worn facets on the Isleworth terret. Using evidence from the Stanwick and Polden Hill hoards, Leeds long ago argued that a double harness included five terrets,¹³ four small matching examples (of which this is one) and a larger and more elaborate fifth.¹⁴ Stead later demonstrated that the four small terrets were distributed in two pairs set in the yoke above each horse, and argued that the fifth was mounted on the front of the pole or on the front of the vehicle itself to guide the reins to the driver.¹⁵

Such items of prestige metalwork are unlikely to have been common enough for everyday use, and the weight of evidence does not indicate more than a small number of mobile craftsmen engaged in their production. The situation is perhaps best illustrated by the presence of a 'bronze foundry' within an agricultural settlement at Gussage All Saints in Wiltshire,¹⁶ where the excavated evidence suggests that the craftsmen were 'called in', and maintained only a short-term, but nonetheless intensive level of activity. Among articles of harness manufactured here by the *cire perdue* or 'lost wax' process, were terrets of the type under discussion.¹⁷

As with other ribbed terrets, the dating of the Isleworth example depends largely on the stylistic analogues provided by the Group II sword-scabbards. These, with their La Tène II background, belong to the second half of the 2nd and 1st century B.C.¹⁸ Broad agreement is established by the 2nd-1st century B.C. dating of the Arras cemetery¹⁹ with its three bronze-flashed iron terrets, which may perhaps be placed at the head of the ribbed terret sequence. Further, Spratling ascribes terrets of this type to the first of the two main phases into which he divides the bronzes of the southern British later pre-Roman Iron Age, and for which a 1st century B.C. date is argued,²⁰ although MacGregor suggests that the chronology may have to be extended into the 1st century A.D. to provide the stylistic inspiration necessary for later types.²¹ The Isleworth example may therefore be dated to the 2nd century B.C. — early 1st century A.D., with the emphasis in the latter half of the period, and compared with the famous parade pieces attributed to the 'Thames school' of bronze-smiths (e.g. the Brentford 'horn-cap', and the Battersea shield) which are all similarly dated.²²

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

1. Precise details of the findspot have been deposited with the Museum of London, and may be consulted there. It is hoped to make the other finds, which include part of an Early Bronze Age handled beaker; a small quantity of scrap bronze which includes a

fragment of Late Bronze Age lead-bronze sword blade and part of a (?) chape; two La Tène I brooches; and a number of British 'potin' coins, the subject of a further note at a later date. The publication of the terret in advance of these pieces is as a result of a request by the Museum of London.

2. E. T. Leeds *Celtic Ornament in the British Isles down to A.D. 700* (Oxford 1933) 118-9.
3. M. MacGregor *Early Celtic Art in Northern Britain* 1 (Leicester 1976) 38.
4. M. G. Spratling 'The Bronze Foundry' in G. J. Wainwright & M. G. Spratling 'The Iron Age Settlement of Gussage All Saints' *Antiquity* 47 (1973) 118.
5. I. M. Stead *The La Tène Cultures of Eastern Yorkshire* (York 1965) 89-91.
6. MacGregor *op. cit.* in note 3, Map 6. A second ribbed terret from Hod Hill (J. W. Brailsford *Antiquities from Hod Hill in the Durden Collection* (London 1962) 15, No. 17.), together with part of another from Torberry Hill, Sussex (B. W. Cunliffe *Iron Age Sites in Central Southern England* C.B.A. Research Report 16 (1976) 14 and Fig. 14 No. 2.), can be added to the sixteen examples listed in MacGregor *op. cit.*, of which the most important are the multiple finds from Hunsbury (3); Hagbourne Hill (2); Barbury Castle (2); and the King's Barrow, Arras (2).
7. Brailsford *ibid.*, 15, No. 17.
8. Information from Sheila Jordain (pers. comm.).
9. Examples with six mouldings include that from Glastonbury; with seven mouldings, one of the King's Barrow terrets; with eight mouldings, those from Hagbourne Hill and Richmond's excavations at Hod Hill; with ten mouldings, that from the Lady's Barrow, Arras, and one of the Hunsbury terrets. The larger of the two unprovenanced terrets from Saffron Walden Museum has eleven mouldings, while a second, somewhat corroded example from Hunsbury has eleven or possibly twelve mouldings, and although now broken, the Springhead (Kent) terret may have had as many as twelve or even thirteen. For individual references see MacGregor *op. cit.* in note 3.
10. S. Piggott 'Swords and Scabbards of the British Early Iron Age' *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 16 (1950) 5-10 and Figs. 2 & 3.
11. Compare Piggott *ibid.* Fig. 5 and MacGregor *op. cit.* in note 3, Map 6. Little significance is here attached to the absence of the terrets from the Thames, as this may be explained by the nature of the objects themselves, which are small enough to escape the casual attention of dredging-workers.
12. MacGregor *op. cit.* in note 3, 39.
13. Leeds *op. cit.* in note 2, 121-2.
14. A view amply corroborated by the complete set of harness recently recovered from the chariot burial at Garton Slack (T. C. M. Brewster 'The Garton Slack Chariot Burial, East Yorkshire' *Antiquity* 45 (1971) 290-1).
15. Stead *op. cit.* in note 5, 44.
16. Spratling *loc. cit.* in note 4.
17. *Ibid.* 121-2.
18. Piggott *op. cit.* in note 10, 24.
19. Stead *op. cit.* in note 5, 82.
20. Spratling *op. cit.* in note 4, 122-3.
21. MacGregor *op. cit.* in note 3, 42.
22. R. Canham 'The Iron Age' in *The Archaeology of the London Area: Current Knowledge and Problems* London Middx. Archaeol. Soc. Special Paper No. 1 (1976) 47-8.