

A Roman Bronze Bowl from Sandy

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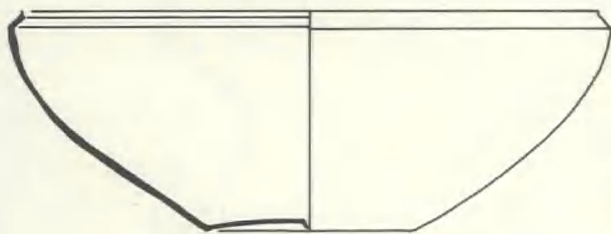


Fig 7 Bronze bowl from Sandy.

Bedford Museum have three late Roman bronze bowls found at Sandy in 1856 in the course of railway building.¹ These, it is hoped, will form the subject of a detailed study in the *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal* at some future date when further research has extended the known distribution of the types there represented beyond the present area of Britain, northern France, Holland, Belgium and the Rhineland, with outliers in free Germany.² Indeed, the distribution of the bassin bord à godronné has already been expanded to include the possibility of examples in Italy and Malta as a villa at Melita has a mosaic representation of one type,³ and in the main distribution area an example is known from the settlement at Belfort, above Maastricht.⁴ The recently discovered hoard from Burwell, Cambs,⁵ has brought to light a further example of the general type of fourth century hoard which has been the subject of two recent and extended essays.⁶ In view of their lengthy treatment of the types with continental connections there seems little validity in a speedy publication of the Sandy hoard in an English periodical and it is better to await the results of further fieldwork.

There is, however, a fourth late Roman bronze bowl from Sandy whose exact find-spot is unknown but which was not connected with the hoard found in 1856. In 1900 it was purchased by the British Museum from Mr G. F. Lawrence of Wandsworth, London, together with a quantity of material from the Thames at Hammersmith. The bronze bowl (fig 7) is well-preserved (with the exception of a (?) modern hole below the rim) with a golden brown patina to its convex, rounded profile, and has the distinctive features of an omphalos base and a thickened and inturned rim. The rim has a diameter of 231mm.⁷

This vessel has appeared in the archaeological literature a number of times but has not previously been illustrated. It has been attributed to the late pre-Roman Iron Age by Sir Cyril Fox⁸ on account of the strange 'water-clock' theory of R.A. Smith⁹ and partly on the not particularly close comparison of the Sandy bowl with a vessel from the River Wissey. Smith, himself, however, a long time ago suggested that it might be Anglo-Saxon on account of its analogous form to hanging bowls, through clearly it never had any escutcheons and in view of this a late Roman date was possible.¹⁰ It is this suggestion, made originally in 1904, which has recently been demonstrated as the most valid. Smith compared this bowl to four of the bowls in the Irchester hoard,¹¹ namely those of Kendrick's 'Irchester type'¹² and this type has recently been shown to be a product of the native Romano-British bronze industry of the late fourth century.¹³

NOTES

- 1 *Bedford Modern School Museum Guide*, 1926, 45 and pl 9; D H Kennett 'Late Roman Bronze Vessel Hoards in Britain' *Jahrbuch des Romisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 16, 1969, 123-148, esp 124 and 138-145 with fig 2.
- 2 Kennett, 1969, 138-145; see also D H Kennett 'The Irchester Bowls' *J Northampton Mus* 4, 1968, 12-29.
- 3 This is the traditional site of the shipwreck of St Paul (*Acts* 28). I owe knowledge of this mosaic to Mr H O Heather who kindly showed me a slide. The mosaic representation shows a bowl with two handles, a feature not otherwise known, but the godrons are clearly visible: i.e. continuous and not separate bosses are represented on the rim.
- 4 Bonnefantum Museum, Maastricht; as far as I am aware not yet published.
- 5 A preliminary note has appeared *Ant J* 50, 1970 344 with pl 59. I understand publication of this hoard by Mr A. Gregory is in preparation and will appear in a future *Proc Camb Ant Soc*.
- 6 Kennett, 1968; Kennett, 1969.
- 7 British Museum, accession number 1900, 10-3, 6.
- 8 C Fox *Archaeology of the Cambridge Region*, 1923, 105.
- 9 *PSA* 21, 1907, 319-334.
- 10 *VCH Beds* 1, 1904, 184.
- 11 Kennett, 1968, 29-32 with figs 6 and 7.
- 12 *Antiquity* 6, 1932, 162.
- 13 I am grateful to Mr J W Brailsford for access to the bowl and for permission to publish this object in the collections of the Department of Prehistory and Roman Britain, British Museum, London.