

Notes and News

A LATE ROMAN BUCKLE- OR BELT-PLATE IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM, SAID TO BE FROM NORTHERN FRANCE (Fig. 1; Pl. VIII, A)

The subject of this note is an unpublished, openwork buckle- or belt-plate in the Continental early medieval collections of the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities at the British Museum.¹ The find-spot is uncertain, but it is said to be from northern France and to have come from an old collection. It represents an addition to a group of probably official or military, 5th-century belt-fittings, found both in this region and also in southern England, which shows close connections with the Quoit Brooch Style of the earliest Anglo-Saxon period.

Description

The plate, as it survives, is of copper alloy and is more or less square (length, 460 mm remaining; width, 410 mm; thickness, 2.5 mm). But in antiquity it has been hacked straight across one end (shown on the left), from the front, and would originally have been more rectangular. The cut has also removed any evidence that there might have been for a loop (which would have been integral with the plate in this type), for a hinge-slot for a tongue, or for the two attachment rivets that would probably have been at this end. Across the opposite end stands a row of four projecting, stylized and open-jawed animal heads: the two in the centre join back-to-back and the other two face in towards them at the corners. Each head has a small dot-punched eye under a central triangular forehead, and the eye of the head at the bottom corner, as illustrated, has a clear punched annulet around it, which appears to be lacking on the other three. A single ear projects at the back of each head, which is demarcated from the plate by a round hole (diameter, 3.0 mm), that also separates the curled-back lower jaw from the neck. The sides of the plate are bevelled and project slightly at the two remaining, original corners, which each have three notches in their edges and are pierced by rivets with flat-topped heads. Only traces of stubs of these rivets survive on the back; the belt may have been secured by burring them over small washers (as on an example from Andover; see below).

The plate has a decorative border round the three original sides, consisting of a single row of punched annulets (diameter, 1.0 mm) between double incised framing lines. The central panel is a little longer than it is wide, and has a simple openwork geometric design. The field has been cut away so that in each corner there is a projecting quadrant, which is pierced by a hole of the same diameter as those under the animal heads; the centres of the sides of the panel are linked by narrow transverse struts to the opposite sides, and by diagonal ones to the centres of the adjacent sides, forming a lozenge-shaped frame enclosing a cross. In each of the four right angles where the cross arms meet, there is a pierced projecting quadrant matching, and diagonally opposite to, those in the corners of the panel. Two incised border lines run along each pair of cross arms from end to end, where they meet similar lines along the edges of the struts of the lozenge. There is a small punched ring-and-dot, like that of the animal's eye noted above, placed in between the border lines of each cross arm at the junctions of the inner quadrants. The back of the plate is plain. Apart from the cut across one end, the front of the plate is slightly damaged where

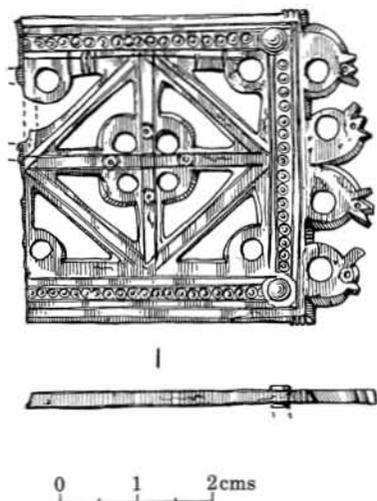


FIG. 1
Late Roman bronze belt-fitting

six or seven lighter blows, running parallel to the cut, have barely dented the surface in places.

Discussion

The plate belongs to a small group of copper-alloy buckles and belt-fittings from southern England and northern France which was first fully identified by Alison Cook in discussing the buckle from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Portway, Andover, grave 50.² The other pieces in the group comprise a second fixed-plate buckle, said to be from Amiens, France, a cut-down and reused half of a buckle with hinge lugs for a loop from the Saxon Shore fort at Richborough, Kent, and a hinged belt-fitting from Alfriston, Sussex, grave 103.³

The distinguishing feature of the group, as on the British Museum plate, is a rectangular openwork panel decorated with a cross enclosed by a lozenge-shaped frame. The quadrants at the centres of the crosses and at the opposite corners are either simply pierced, as here, or pierced and cut through, as on the Amiens buckle and Alfriston fitting. The four animal heads across one end of the plate occur on the Amiens, Alfriston and British Museum pieces, but not on the Andover one; this end is missing on the Richborough example. Decoration, if present, consists simply of incised straight lines, borders of punched annulets, running scrolls, or 'fir-tree' lines of small base-to-apex triangles, and symmetrically arranged ring-and-dots. The punch patterns are all ones which occur on late Roman metalwork, especially belt-fittings;⁴ some, such as the scrolls or 'fir-tree' lines, imitate patterns also found in mosaics and sculpture. Such lines of triangles are not that common in metalwork, but can be seen, for example, outlining the two mutually crossing squares on one side of a late 3rd/early 4th-century circular Roman scabbard-chape from a richly furnished grave at Cologne.⁵

The decoration does not, of itself, directly date the period of manufacture of the group of fittings under discussion with any precision, as the motifs were often copied later by Germanic metalworkers, as, for example, on bracteates of the 5th and 6th centuries.⁶ Nor are the contexts, where recorded, especially helpful. The plate from Richborough can, with fair certainty, be assigned to the Roman period (although it could be objected that it is unstratified), while the two pieces from later 5th/early 6th-century graves do not belong to any recognized Anglo-Saxon type. The Andover specimen at least retained its original

function at burial, but it is less certain about the Alfriston fitting, which was associated with a 5th-century, D-sectioned, copper-alloy tubular strap-runner.

Far more significant for dating is the broader relationship noted by Professor V. I. Evison with buckles from early Anglo-Saxon contexts decorated in the non-zoomorphic, or 'geometric', aspect of the 5th-century Quoit Brooch Style.⁷ Close similarities between the two groups of buckles are shown by their related openwork designs, the row of four open-jawed animal heads usually found at one end, and the scrolled ends of the loop. The paired heads represent simplified versions of those to be seen on chip-carved provincial Roman metalwork of the late 4th/early 5th century, for instance those of the two 'sealions' at the belt end of a buckle from Rouvrois, *dép.* Aisne, France, belonging to Böhme's finds-group A, and dating to the end of the 4th/first third of the 5th century.⁸ There is also the influence shown by the openwork decoration of the fittings on a Quoit Brooch Style pendant from Watchfield, Oxon., ?grave 1.⁹ The similarities are so close that the two groups must have been more or less contemporary. In the present writer's opinion Quoit Brooch Style metalwork belongs predominantly to the half century or so before the introduction of Salin's Style I to England, which can be placed probably not long after c. 475.¹⁰

However, it is important to distinguish here between form and style, in order to maintain the definition of the style. Although the southern English/northern French buckles are close in form to Anglo-Saxon Quoit Brooch Style buckles, especially the one from Mitcham, Surrey, grave 133,¹¹ they are not themselves decorated in the style.¹² The major differences between the two groups are that the opposed pairs of animal heads at one end are separated by a gap on the former, while their jaws meet on the latter; and the straight-armed cross within a lozenge appears recognizably only on the former group and silver inlay only on the latter. 'Fir-tree' lines can be seen on both the Amiens buckle of the first group and buckles and fittings of the second, e.g. the belt-plate from Faversham, Kent,¹³ but this pattern derives from late provincial-Roman metalwork and is not therefore diagnostic. In more ragged form, lacking setting-out lines, it also appears in border and median lines on a late 5th/early 6th-century Anglo-Saxon small-long brooch from Great Chesterford, Essex, grave 81.¹⁴ But, although the two groups are not stylistically identical, it may be suggested that they stand in the same relationship to each other as do provincial Roman and Quoit Brooch Style buckles and fittings in that the first group largely provides the model for the second. This may be best exemplified by the Anglo-Saxon five-piece belt-set in this style from Mucking, Essex, grave 117, which is based on Ypey's late Roman form A.¹⁵ It seems most likely that both groups co-existed at some point in the first third of the 5th century, on current dating of the Roman material, in order for imitation to have been possible. However, it is not impossible that this could have been carried out slightly later, after cessation of production of the Roman belts, but while they were still in use.

On the question of definition it is essential that fresh claims of discoveries of Quoit Brooch Style metalwork are confirmed by critical comparison with the basic corpus listed and augmented by Professor Evison,¹⁶ and with further reference to the definition by Sonia Hawkes.¹⁷ Additions apart from the Mucking belt-set have been made since by other authors, notably Böhme.¹⁸ A buckle from Morningthorpe, Norfolk, grave 367,¹⁹ although it has no inlay, shares swastika motifs with the Mucking grave 117 belt-set. It also shares typical 'winged' ring-and-dots with the Faversham belt-plate, as do too a further buckle and a bracelet from Mucking cemetery, graves 823 and 631 respectively, which are noted by Hirst and Clark and should likewise be added to the corpus.²⁰

However, on current evidence, it is difficult to agree with the view that the knife-sheath fittings from Brighthampton, grave 22, represent an example of the style.²¹ The decorative patterns of these mounts, such as the running and C-scrolls and space-filling network of dotted lozenges, are certainly of late Roman derivation, but they also occur on 5th-century, northern Germanic metalwork,²² while, on the other hand, there are none of the characteristic features of the non-zoomorphic aspect of the style, such as silver inlay or 'winged' ring-and-dot punches. The sheath comes most probably from a late 5th/early

6th-century workshop in northern Gaul, as the distribution map for U-shaped chapes with tongue-shaped plate inserts makes clear; also the ring-and-dot running scroll between tooled borders of the central loop of the sheath's sling is closely comparable with the decoration, in double rows, of the scabbard mouthpiece from Mézières, Ardennes, grave 68, France.²³

Nor is there any convincing reason for accepting into the corpus Dr M. Henig's recent offering of the entirely new category of 'quoit-brooch rings', three from Amesbury, Wilts., and one from near Wantage, Oxon.²⁴ Their somewhat crude intaglio designs, with no trace of inlay or indeed of any recognizable Quoit Brooch Style animals or punch-work, are in fact the precise opposite of the almost heraldically posed animals of the style, for which the flat treatment of their bodies within an incised outline is an essential feature, and among which the stags and griffins of the rings are unknown.²⁵ This is not a matter that can simply be entrusted to the 'beholder's eye' to decide, but requires due consideration of both the archaeological and artistic aspects of the style. The latter have been dealt with above, while the exclusively Anglo-Saxon contexts of insular examples of the style, which is best known for its occurrence on an Anglo-Saxon type of brooch, are a strong indication that the style is to be associated with the early Anglo-Saxons. Further examples from Merovingian-period contexts in northern France are probably a reflection of Anglo-Saxon settlement in this region, though to what extent is a matter for debate. It may be categorically stated that these late 4th/early 5th-century Roman rings are not at all representative of the Quoit Brooch Style, the continental origins of which have been well established by researchers into its late Roman, and Roman-period Germanic antecedents. Instead they may be more meaningfully compared with Roman metalwork from the Rhineland and Low Countries, where intaglio designs on metal rings of animals, both fantastic and real, and of human busts, are not uncommon, and often occur on square bezels, as with the British examples.²⁶ It is further worth noting that very similar helmeted heads to those on one of the rings from Amesbury, with the same tooled crests, can be seen on the plate of an early to mid-5th-century provincial Roman buckle from Vieuxville, grave 177, Belgium.²⁷

The discovery of a belt-fitting of the Amiens/Andover group at Richborough suggests that they were made for the late Roman military. Although the Alfriston and Andover pieces are from female graves, their contexts are of the Anglo-Saxon period and type, and the fittings therefore need not necessarily have been worn in late Roman women's fashion.²⁸

The occurrence of a second buckle of this group, possibly from northern France, requires a reassessment of the distribution pattern. It is no longer possible to argue that the Amiens buckle has to be an import from England, but nor is the evidence any more conclusive for the English pieces being Roman exports from Gaul. Instead it is possible that such belt-fittings were made to a similar pattern on both sides of the Channel, a plausible explanation being their supply to the forces of the Saxon Shore.²⁹ In the case of Britain this would almost certainly have been before the break with Rome, *c.* 410, following the rescript of Honorius.³⁰ Production could have continued later into the 5th century in Gaul, and a date in the first half of the 5th century is therefore proposed for the British Museum belt-plate. The buckle form could then have been imitated by Germanic — above all Anglo-Saxon/Jutish — craftsmen serving with, or who had served with, mercenary units in the late Roman army in northern Gaul and the lower Rhineland. This seems most likely to have happened with many of the other elements which make up the Quoit Brooch Style, for instance on the derivative Mucking grave 117 belt-set. A further consideration is that the development of the style could also have been influenced by Gallo-Roman artisans in a transformation of northern Germanic figural representation. It is possible that some of them joined in the Anglo-Saxons' migration to Britain, since they very probably found employment with them on the Continent.³¹ The extent to which the Anglo-Saxons absorbed Roman cultural influences while still living on the Continent, both as the direct result of military service and through cultural contacts across frontiers, should

not be underestimated. The fields of costume and decoration are two such important areas of influence and can be paralleled by linguistic borrowings and calendrical innovations.³²

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BARRY AGER

NOTES

- ¹ Registration no. MLA 1990, 6-5, 1.
- ² A. M. Cook and M. Dacre, *Excavations at Portway, Andover, 1973-1975* Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph no. 4 (1985), 96, fig. 63, 2, pl. 17:51, 2.
- ³ V. I. Evison, 'Distribution maps and England in the first two phases', in id. (ed.), *Angles, Saxons and Jutes. Essays presented to J. N. L. Myres* (Oxford, 1981), 126-67, at 134, pl. 11a; B. W. Cunliffe (ed.), *Fifth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent* (London, Society of Antiquaries Research Report no. 23, 1968), pl. 35, 104; V. I. Evison, *The Fifth-Century Invasions South of the Thames* (London, 1965), 51, fig. 23g.
- ⁴ B. M. Ager, 'The smaller variants of the Anglo-Saxon quoit brooch', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 4 (1985), 1-58, fig. 15, GR, nos. 3, 8, 24, 37-39.
- ⁵ W. Holmqvist, *Tauschierete Metallarbeiten des Nordens* (Stockholm, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien Handlingar, Antikvariska Serien, 70:2, 1951), 19-21, Abb. 5, 2.
- ⁶ Ager, op. cit. in note 4, fig. 15, S, B and AS, nos. as above.
- ⁷ Evison, 'Distribution Maps', op. cit. in note 3, 134.
- ⁸ H. W. Böhme, *Germanische Grabfunde des 4. bis 5. Jahrhunderts zwischen unterer Elbe und Loire* (Münchener Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, 19, 1974), Taf. 132, 13; id., 'Gallien in der Spätantike. Forschungen zum Ende der Römerherrschaft in den westlichen Provinzen', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz*, 34-2 (1987), 770-73, revising his earlier chronological phasing.
- ⁹ B. M. Ager, 'Quoit Brooch Style pendant', in C. Scull, 'Excavation and survey at Watchfield, Oxfordshire, 1983-92', *Archaeological J.*, 149 (1992), 124-281, at pp. 243-45, illus. 70, 83, 136, and 72. The belt-fittings of Ehrenbürg-Jamoigne type there mentioned (on p. 245), with very similar double pairs of animal heads to those of the museum's plate, represent an Alamannic imitation of late Roman metalwork, according to H. W. Böhme, 'Ein germanischer Gürtelbeschlag der Zeit um 400 aus Oberfranken', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 1 (1977), 13-24, Abb. 1-5.
- ¹⁰ B. M. Ager, 'The alternative quoit brooch: an update', in E. Southworth (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: a Reappraisal* (Liverpool, 1990), 153-61, at p. 160.
- ¹¹ V. I. Evison, 'Quoit Brooch Style buckles', *Antiq. J.*, 48 (1968), 231-46, fig. 2f; id., 'Distribution Maps', op. cit. in note 3, 134, pl. 11b.
- ¹² Ager, op. cit. in note 9, 244.
- ¹³ Ager, op. cit. in note 10, 158, pl. 2b. A superficial resemblance between the overall effect of the decoration of this plate and Roman belt-plates of the 1st century A.D. must be disregarded, as neither decorative motifs nor technique are at all comparable on critical examination. I take this opportunity to correct my own error in attributing winged ring-and-dots to the Mucking grave 117 buckle when the patterns are in fact tendril scrolls, of which they are a simplified form.
- ¹⁴ V. I. Evison, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Great Chesterford, Essex* (London, CBA Res. Rep. 91, 1994), fig. 38, 81/2. The two groups of buckles are not adequately distinguished in the classification for belt-fittings from Anglo-Saxon graves (both are under group B3) proposed by R. H. White, *Roman and Celtic Objects from Anglo-Saxon Graves* (Oxford, British Archaeol. Rep. British Ser. 191, 1988), 48. Among the differences noted here, it should be emphasized that the Roman type is not inlaid.
- ¹⁵ Evison, op. cit. in note 11, pl. 53.
- ¹⁶ id., *Invasions*, op. cit. in note 3, 62; and op. cit. in note 11.
- ¹⁷ S. C. Hawkes, 'The Jutish Style A. A study of Germanic animal art in southern England in the fifth century A.D.', *Archaeologia*, 98 (1961), 29-74, at 40-45.
- ¹⁸ H. W. Böhme, 'Das Ende der Römerherrschaft in Britannien und die angelsächsische Besiedlung Englands im 5. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz*, 33 (1986), 469-574, at 523-26, though his accompanying map, Abb. 47 misleadingly omits northern French occurrences. With Evison I would exclude the Brighthampton, Oxon, grave 31 scabbard-chape, which is either S. Scandinavian, or a local copy, see S. C. Hawkes, 'The early Saxon period', in G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (Oxford, 1986), 64-108, at 79.
- ¹⁹ B. Green, A. Rogerson and S. G. White, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Morning Thorpe, Norfolk* (Dereham, East Anglian Archaeology Rep. 36, 2 vols., 1987), fig. 426], pl. xiv.
- ²⁰ S. M. Hirst and D. Clark, *Excavations at Mucking, Essex, vol. 3: the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries* (London, English Heritage Archaeological Report, forthcoming); I am most grateful to the authors for permission to refer to these discoveries in advance of publication.

- ²¹ Hawkes, op. cit. in note 18, 79; J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), 12, fig. 15.
- ²² Ager, op. cit. in note 4, fig. 15, nos. 18, 23; for the lozenges see the top left-hand one of a pair of birds on the Nydam silver scabbard-chape, G. Haseloff, *Die germanische Tierornamentik der Völkerwanderungszeit. Studien zu Salin's Stil I* (Berlin, Vorgeschichtliche Forschungen 17, 3 vols., 1981), Taf. 8; K. Böhner, 'Germanische Schwerter des 5./6. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 34.2 (1987), 411-90, Taf. 78.
- ²³ W. Menghin, *Das Schwert im Frühen Mittelalter. Chronologische-typologische Untersuchungen zu Langschwertern aus germanischen Gräbern des 5. bis 7. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Stuttgart, Wissenschaftliche Beibände zum Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, Bd. 1, 1983), Abb. 51, 1a and Karte 17; for discussion of the dating of his early groups, see further id., 'Schwörter des Goldgriffspatenhorizonts im Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica* 26-7 (1994-95), 140-91, esp. 152-58; and P. Périn, 'Les tombes de "chefs" du début de l'époque mérovingienne. Datation et interprétation historique', in F. Vallet and M. Kazanski (eds.), *La noblesse romaine et les chefs barbares du IIIe au VIIe siècle* (Paris, Mémoires de l'Association Française d'Archéologie Mérovingienne 9, 1995), 247-301.
- ²⁴ M. Henig, *The Art of Roman Britain* (London, 1995), 172, figs. 101 and 103; see also J. W. Brailsford, *Guide to the Antiquities of Roman Britain* (London, 1964), 26; H. Tait (ed.), *Seven Thousand Years of Jewellery* (London, 1986), 230, ill. 581-83; B. Deppert-Lippitz, 'A group of Late Antique jewelry in the Getty Museum', *Studia Varia* 1 (Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum Occasional Papers on Antiquities no. 8, 1993), 107-40, 125, fig. 23; I am indebted to my colleague Dafydd Kidd for the latter reference.
- ²⁵ Hawkes, op. cit. in note 17, 42-43; Evison, *Invasions*, op. cit. in note 3, 53, 63.
- ²⁶ F. Henkel, *Die römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande und der benachbarten Gebiete* (Berlin, 1913), nos. 58, 98-99, 113, 401, 972 and 982.
- ²⁷ Böhner, op. cit. in note 22, Abb. 21, 2.
- ²⁸ See M. Martin, 'Zur frühmittelalterlichen Gürteltracht der Frau in der Burgundia, Francia und Aquitania', in G. Faider-Feytmans et al. (eds.), *L'Art des Invasions en Hongrie et en Wallonie* (Morlanwelz, Monographies du Musée Royal de Mariemont 6, 1991), 31-84, at 37.
- ²⁹ Ager, op. cit. in note 9, 244.
- ³⁰ See Hawkes, op. cit. in note 18, 66; id., 'The south-east after the Romans: the Saxon settlement', in V. A. Maxfield (ed.), *The Saxon Shore. A Handbook* (Exeter Studies in History, no. 25, 1989), 78-95, at 80-81.
- ³¹ Ager, op. cit. in note 4, 13; the author is hereby revising his view expressed on p. 17. Affinities between the style and the cruder, more naturalistic decoration of a late Roman gold bracelet, possibly of insular manufacture, from Hoxne, Suffolk, are noted by L. Webster and M. Brown (eds.), *The Transformation of the Roman World AD400-900* (London, 1997), 213 (cat. 5d). In the light of this new find it is possible that the style also reflects some degree of native influence on early Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship.
- ³² A. Wollman, 'Early Latin loan-words in Old English', *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993), 1-26; G. Rausing, 'The days of the week and Dark Age politics', *Formwännen* 90 (1995), 229-38.

A GREAT SQUARE-HEADED BROOCH FRAGMENT FROM BUCKINGHAMSHIRE (Figs. 2, 3)

In 1995, Mr Francis Brooks drew our attention to a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon brooch which he had found about six years previously in the parish of Bledlow-cum-Saunderton, Buckinghamshire. The object was found in a large arable field on the western slope of a dry valley. Mr Brooks was unable to recall the precise findspot. The topography of the field suggested no obvious location for a cemetery although the evidence of air photographs hints at the possibility of this find having been made within a rectangular field system of Romano-British or earlier date. No other significant finds are known from this field apart from one late Anglo-Saxon penny.

The item in question is the footplate terminal lobe of a great square-headed brooch, modelled in the form of a full-face mask (Fig. 2). It is in a gilt copper alloy with a row of crescent-shaped punchmarks along the bottom edge. This fragment measures 20 mm by 28 mm and is 2 mm thick. The back of the fragment is completely plain.

This fragment provides us with the second known Anglo-Saxon great square-headed brooch from the county of Buckinghamshire. The other specimen was found in grave 8 of the cemetery at Dinton Folly, excavated in 1991 (Fig. 3).¹ These two brooches are, on the extant evidence, highly similar in form. Both belong to group X of the Anglo-Saxon great square-headed brooch series according to a new classificational scheme.²

There are now nine known members of this group, eight with known provenance, and these have an interesting and coherent distribution. This centres on the area of southern Cambridgeshire, just E. of the area of northern Buckinghamshire where the two