The Berlin Tondo
See page 2
Photo: Johannes Laurentius
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The island of Jersey in the Channel Islands has long been famous for the discovery there of a remarkable series of Celtic coin hoards (Colbert de Beaulieu 1958). Scholars have agreed that these relate to and date from the time of the traumatic upheavals which accompanied the Roman conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar between 58 and 50 BC, and described by Caesar himself in his Commentary on the Gallic War (De bello gallico). Archaeologists and numismatists have focused on 56 BC, when Caesar was smashing the naval power of the Veneti and their allies amongst the tribes of Armorica (modern Brittany), and his legate, Quintus Titurius Sabinus, was defeating the armies of the North Armorican tribes who occupied the mainland territories immediately to the south and east of Jersey (Rice Holmes 1911).

During the summer of 2012 the archaeological scene in Jersey has been dominated by the discovery and subsequent excavation of another hoard of Celtic coins (De Jersey 2012). Compared with the previous hoards, this is one of the largest yet – in fact it is enormous. The excavation has been a collaborative project involving the Jersey Heritage Trust (JHT), the Société Jersiaise and Dr Philip de Jersey, the States Archaeologist for Guernsey, a leading expert on Celtic coins and particularly those of Armorica. The hoard was discovered in a field in the east of the island by metal-detectorists Reg Mead and Richard Miles. They recovered about a hundred coins from the ploughsoil, Celtic coins from Armorica and further afield, some Roman coins and part of a Bronze Age sword. Encountering a stronger signal, in May 2012 they found five Celtic coins and stopped digging; having realised how big the find might be, they were keen to have the site professionally excavated. In June a small team was assembled under conditions of some secrecy to excavate an area 2m square around the focus of the signal. After removal of the topsoil, the late Iron Age land surface was revealed with the pear-shaped pit containing the hoard cut into the natural loess. Because of the size of the feature and the constraints of working in a small trench, the team carefully removed the natural soil from around the pit leaving the hoard standing in relief. Neil Mahrer, conservator for the JHT then produced a scheme to lift the hoard as a block, protecting the contents from damage. The block was wrapped in cling-film, partially undermined, strapped to a board and then attached to a frame of scaffolding.

This, the only known contemporary painted portrait of a Roman emperor to survive from antiquity, depicts Septimius Severus, his wife, Julia Domna and their two sons Caracalla (aged 11) and Geta (aged 10). Tempera on wooden panel. Found in Egypt before 1932. Diam. 0.30m. Dated to AD 199-200, immediately following Geta’s Caesarship and coinciding with the family’s visit to Egypt. The emperor has a ruddy complexion and greying hair, the style of which imitates the god Serapis (see Fig. 2, page 17); the empress has her distinctive coiffure. Severus, Caracalla and Geta wear gold wreaths set with precious stones and hold sceptres, the empress wears a golden crown set with pearls, a pearl necklace and earrings. They wear white robes trimmed with purple and gold. Their relative positions in front of one another show their positions in the line of succession at that time. Geta’s face has been erased, evidently in antiquity, probably in connection with his damnatio memoriae, after his murder by Caracalla in late 211 or early 212 when the brothers reigned as joint emperors. This portrait would have been surrounded with a frame and probably displayed in a temple, possibly flanked by candles, in a similar way to the display of later Byzantine icons and altar pictures.

Editorial Note: The editor regrets the delay in publishing this issue of ARA. This has been due to circumstances beyond his control. Also we have been sorry to lose the services of Kristina Glikman, the assistant editor, who had to return to the USA early in 2012. The Annual Reports of ARA Events have been postponed to the next issue, although some individual events have been published and readers are referred to the report on the Symposium on Septimius Severus in this issue, and articles describing the study tours of the Rhineland, Jordan, Sicily and the East Midlands in the recent issues of ARA News.
which would provide the lifting points for a crane, in fact a miniature version of the frame used to surround and lift the wreck of the Tudor warship Mary Rose from the seabed off Portsmouth. Once the earth plinth on which the hoard rested had been carefully broken, the block was lifted slightly and another layer of board and foam was inserted below it, so the hoard could be lowered onto it for its removal from the trench. The whole exercise worked well and only three coins were dislodged from the hoard on its journey from the bottom of the trench to the Jersey Archives building by crane and flat-bed truck (Fig. 1).

Some preliminary work has started on the conservation of the hoard but not much can be done before the Treasure Valuation Committee can get to Jersey to examine it. Initial cleaning of a small portion has revealed that the hoard probably consists in the main (perhaps c. 90%) of a mass of staters and quarter staters of the Coriosolitae (Figs. 2, 4 and 5), and so in this sense, compares with the other Jersey hoards. The non-Coriosolitae associated with these coins will be of great interest (Fig. 3). The hoard also contains at least one item of silver jewellery and a sheet of folded, crumpled gold. It is still difficult to estimate exactly how many coins it contains, but it is certainly far more than the previous record for a hoard of Celtic coins, some twelve thousand coins found a few miles away at La Marquanderie, Jersey, in 1935. Philip de Jersey estimates it could be as many as sixty thousand! Although the hoard probably dates from the period of the Gallic War, or shortly thereafter, the excavation also revealed significant and somewhat unexpected evidence of a later, Roman presence on the site, in the form of a pit containing coins, spindle whorls and pottery. This material has yet to be analysed and it is not yet possible to say whether it was deposited quite soon after the hoard or possibly a century or more later. Together with the ploughsoil finds, this suggests that the immediate area around the hoard site has a great deal more to offer.
The coins of Armorica represent one of the most distinctive regional series of Celtic coinage in Gaul. Whilst the earliest types derive ultimately from imitations of the stater of Philip II of Macedon, their motifs – the obverse head and the reverse chariot and horses – develop into some of the most characteristic images on Gaulish coins. By the first century we have the widespread use of the cheval androcéphale or human-headed horse, sometimes accompanied by a charioteer and with a lyre, boar or (as on coins of the Veneti and Aulerici Diablites) a hippocampus (Figs. 3–6). The head types, usually facing right, have elaborately folded and curled hair styles from which swirl beaded cordons which sometimes, as in coins of the Veneti and Osismii, terminate in small heads. This imagery, probably indicating complex religious ideas, has led to recent suggested interpretations of symbolism of war and victory – the “power image” of the cords linking the main head to small heads representing a confederacy of dependant tribal groups. Other interpretations include reference to Lucian’s description of an image of the Hercules-like Gaulish god Ogmios trailing trophies of severed heads behind him (Green 1992, 154–5, Allen 1980, 135). Creighton (2000, 44–5, fig. 2.7) links these images to shamanism and “trance imagery”.

Philip de Jersey (1994) has divided the Armorican coinage into three phases based on the declining weight and silver content of the predominant billon stater types. The number of coin producing societies and the number of coins produced increases towards the final phase, whose issues account for nearly 95% of Armorican coins recorded from Britain. The billon staters and quarter staters of the Coriosolitae, a people whose territory occupied the area of north Brittany south-west of the Cotentin peninsula, make up a large part of the third-phase coinage. They have been found in huge numbers in Armorica, particularly from about 45 hoards, of which the largest are from Jersey. The latest hoard discovered, as we have said, is the largest so far. The imagery of these coins represents the final flowering of the corded head and human-headed horse series (Figs. 5 and 6). Coriosolitae coinage has been divided into six classes, now chronologically ordered in two groups: VI, V, IV, and I, III, II. The last class II is the most numerous. There appears to have been a break in time between the two groups. Gruel (1986) has suggested the second group may be a confederation issue, struck for the war effort. Indeed, the hoard distribution of mainly Coriosolitae coins has been traditionally interpreted as indicative of the flight of refugee soldiers commanded by Viridovix, following his defeat by Caesar in this area, the coinage having been struck to finance resistance to the Roman invasion. Perhaps the Channel Islands had been a source of mercenaries and after the war remained outside Roman territory. The real situation must have been far more complex, as some hoards seem to have been deposited after the Gallic War, for example the Le Câtilion hoard, Jersey, probably buried in 40–20 BC (Fitzpatrick and Megaw 1987). Clearly the coins continued in use for some time after Caesar’s conquest.

From the second millennium BC there is good evidence for trade between Armorica and the Mediterranean world, and from the second century BC this traffic seems to have been controlled by the Veneti southward along the coast to the Garonne estuary and by the north-facing Coriosolitae across the Channel to the south coast of Britain. As indicated by amphorae, wine was one of the main commodities on the northward journey. British metals, especially tin, were traded southward in return. It is interesting that relatively few British coins seem to have found their way to Armorica, whereas as a distribution of Armorican coins has been recorded in Britain, mostly from a concentration of sites and find-spots centred on the south coast (Cunliffe and Jersey...
The vast majority belong to de Jersey's third phase, and nearly half of these are Coriosolitae issues, like those in the Jersey hoards. The rest mainly belong to the Baiocasses, who occupied the region immediately east of the Cotentin peninsula, due south of the Isle of Wight. None of these finds can be show to be evidence of trade per se and those from Mount Batten, Plymouth, and from early excavations at the trading port at Hengistbury Head (Bushe-Fox 1915, 65-71; Cunliffe 1987), from Ringwood and Portsea Island, are all either intact or dispersed hoards. Three coins have been recorded from the Isle of Wight, a billion quarter stater of the Osismii may have come from the temple at the Maiden Castle hill-fort, and a Coriosolitae stater from Calleva (Silchester) is probably from the Atrebatic oppidum. After Hengistbury Head the other south-coast site yielding a significant number of Armorican coins is the Iron Age and Gallo-Roman temple complex on Hayling Island (Briggs, Haselgrove and King 1993; King and Soffe 1994–2008). Amongst many others of Gaulish and British origin, these coins were deposited as votive offerings and have been excavated from stratified contexts where they were associated with other finds (Fig. 6). The religious activity took place from the middle of the first century BC and continued for the next half-century or so. By the time the temple was rebuilt in its Gallo-Roman form in the 60s AD, coins were still being deposited, and continued to be until the end of the fourth century AD. The Armorican coins include those of the Coriosolitae, Baiocasses, and an interesting series of British types which display Armorican influence. This last group has also been recorded as isolated finds in the mainland area adjacent to Hayling Island around Chichester Harbour, together with a range of surprising exotic Celtic coins (De Jersey 1989). These are probably associated with the as yet unexplored southern oppidum of the Atrebates, a political centre with which the temple must have been closely associated.

To sum up, it appears that the majority of Armorican coins in Britain arrived on the south coast, from a short time before the Gallic War to a decade or two afterwards. Together with the arrival of Commius himself, some were perhaps brought by refugees from the war. By the end of the millennium, this fascinating phenomenon had ceased and the pattern of deposition at the temple had changed its focus to the dynastic coinages of the British Atrebates, Regini and their associates. The custom of using Celtic coins, together with Roman Republican plated denarii, reflects a typical Gallo-Roman style of religious observance foreign to Britain, in the period just before the Claudian conquest of Britain, in a local territory politically dependant upon Roman support. This latest hoard from Jersey, when it is properly recorded and analysed, will, we hope, go some way to solving some of the outstanding issues, not only concerning the coins of the Coriosolitae, but also of the role of Armorica in the widest geographical and historical context during this fascinating and tumultuous period.

Following the ARA’s 2012 study tour of ancient sites and museums in Sicily, it was timely that two of the most remarkable statues from the ancient world to be discovered in recent years should travel from Sicily to London.

The Charioteer of Mozia (ancient Motya) was displayed by the British Museum from June to September to coincide with the Olympic Games. The loan of this impressive statue was the result of a collaborative agreement facilitated by the Italian Cultural Institute, between the British Museum and the Dipartimento and Assessorato dei Beni Culturali dell’Identità Siciliana. The
museum’s Duveen (Parthenon Sculptures) Gallery provided the appropriate setting (Figs. 7 and 8).

The statue was found in the island city of Motya lying off Marsala on the western tip of Sicily. After the part-British excavations of the Phoenician and Carthaginian city (Isserlin and Du Plat Taylor 1974) the statue was excavated in 1979 by Gioacchino Falsone from the rubble of a new fortified wall built around the city between 405 and 397 BC. Archaeological exploration of Mozia was begun by Joseph Whitaker, a British exporter of Marsala wine who bought the island. Today the statue is displayed in the island’s Museo Whitaker. Ever since its discovery this rare and renowned work of fifth-century Classical sculpture has engendered controversy.

Although a conference was held in Rome in 1986 to discuss it (Bonacasa and Buttitta 1988), scholars are still massively at odds over its contested interpretation (Cartledge 2012). The context and location of its discovery raise questions of its origin, but many aspects of its style, even within the sphere of Greek Classical sculpture of the fifth century, seem not to be quite what we have come to expect. Although the feet and arms are now missing, the Parian marble statue stands 1.81m high. It represents a heroic youth clothed in a long chiton of very fine pleated fabric. This realistically clings to his body so that the anatomical forms of his legs, buttocks and genitals are evident. Part of his left hand survives and another remarkable touch of realism is the way the fingers press into the hip and pull the fabric (Figs. 7, 8 and 9). A wide leather belt encompasses his chest passing under the armpits, squeezing the chiton, and is tied at the front with braces, where there are two holes in the statue for metal attachments (Fig. 7).

Although the face is abraded, its features are clear. It is crowned with curls, a row of three at the front and two at the back. The dome of the head has been left unfinished and five metal pins indicate that it must originally have been covered with a metal wreath or helmet (Figs. 10 and 11). Although no pigment survives, the statue would have been painted; the chiton probably left white.

In view of its provenance and style, is this statue Punic or Greek (Bell 1996)? Either it was made by a Greek sculptor or workshop for
an aristocratic ruler of Phoenician origin in Motya, or it was made elsewhere in the Greek world, a purely Greek commission, perhaps taken to Motya as loot by Carthaginians, some time before about 400 BC, the presumptive date of its contextual deposit. If a Punic commission, it could represent a god, hero, priest, official or private individual. If Greek, a charioteer seems the most likely interpretation, or as Prof. Olga Palagia (Athens University) has suggested, a seer (mantis). Most scholars agree that the statue is of a charioteer, part of a group, including chariot, horses and groom, set up by a wealthy aristocrat to commemorate his victory in a race in the Pan-Hellenic Games. Some aristocrats would compete themselves but often they employed professional charioteers. This invites comparison with the famous bronze Chariooteer of Delphi (Delphi Museum) dedicated by a Sicilian tyrant Polyzalos, lord of Gela, in 478 or 474 BC, again, all that survives from a group. He too is clothed in a long chiton, in fact a charioteer's yastes, but his belt is just above waist height. The right hand holds reins which might have been the case with the Mozia charioteer, even though the reins or a safety harness may also have been fixed at the two holes mentioned above. Alternatively, his missing right hand may have placed or adjusted a victor's wreath on his head.

The Mozia statue's head and face seem to hark back to the early fifth century. The style is Severe, almost Archaic, as in the kouros from near Mt Olympus (Athens Museum), the 'Kritian Boy' from the Athenian Acropolis, the Getty Kouros, and the Kouros of Agrigento (Sicily) (Rizza and De Miro 1985, pl. 238). These all belong to the tradition of forward-facing, heroic, (and always) nude male statues whose stance is much 'stiffer' than the Mozia statue. Only one nude kouros, from Syracuse, Sicily, has a chiton draped over his back (Rizza and De Miro 1985, pl. 228). The same head-type belongs to the metope relief showing Heracles (and Amazon) from Temple E at Selinunte, Sicily (470-60 BC) in Palermo Museum (Rizza and De Miro 1985, pls. 254-6) and the statue of Harmodios, from the Tyrannicides (Boardman 1985, pls. 3 and 6). In contrast to the Severe style of his head the Mozia charioteer's stance presents a slightly twisted S-curve, which Loewenstein (2012) has found alluring and even suggestive of feminine sexuality. But this is probably a display of the sculptor's virtuosity, apparent in a later fifth-century style where certain aspects of the human form are exaggerated. Here the wet drapery clings to the body after the sweat and toil of the race. Similar curved stances are displayed in the statue of Oinomaos from the east pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia (c. 456 BC). Oinomaos grasps his hip in parallel with the Mozia statue - and the wonderful pair of nude bronze warriors salvaged in 1972 from the seabed at Riace, near the eastern tip of Sicily, and dated to c. 460-30 BC (Regio Calabria Museum, Boardman 1985, 53-4).

To conclude, the Mozia statue probably formed part of a monument set up to commemorate a chariot-race victory won by a Sicilian tyrant in c. 470-50 BC. It is a "product of an age in which admiration for the athletic male body was widespread...it thus approaches more closely, and perhaps even exceeds, the limits of the expected." (Bell 1995, 7; Spivey 2004).

The spectacular bronze, the Dancing Satyr of Mazara de Vallo (Figs. 12 and 13), now joins the Warriors of Riace in being presumably jettisoned in antiquity from ships. Where the ships were sailing from or to remains a matter of speculation. This statue was recovered from the seabed off Mazara on the south-west coast of Sicily, only c. 30 km from Mozia. It was discovered by fishermen dragging nets at a depth of c. 500 m, in two parts. First, a leg was found in 1997, and then in 1998 the head and torso were located. After conservation at the Istuto Centrale per il Restauro, Rome, it was put on permanent display at the Museo del Satiro, in the Church of Sant'Egidio, Mazara, where it normally stands 2 m high supported by a steel armature on an anti-seismic base. From September to December 2012 the generous loan of the statue provided the centrepiece of a major exhibition, Bronze, at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in which over 150 masterworks of all ages and from all parts of the world, were displayed (Ekserdjian 2012).

Made using the lost-wax technique, this unique cast depicts a young satyr flying through the air in an ecstatic Dionysiac (Bacchic) dance. He must have formed part of a group of dancing satyrs and maenads. Now he is missing both arms, one leg, and a separately cast tail originally fixed to the base of his spine. The bronze is extremely well preserved.
despite millennia spent on the seabed. His head (Fig. 13) displays the typical satyr’s snub face with pointed animal ears and has thick hair blowing out behind. The whites of his eyes are of inset alabaster and the missing irises and pupils would originally have been of coloured stone or glass. His raised arms would probably have held a thyrsos (staff topped with a pine cone) and a kantharos (drinking cup), and he may have worn a pardalide (panther skin). His legs are human rather than those of a goat. In many ways this satyr seems to be a supreme example of the type which developed in Hellenistic sculpture from the fourth century BC onwards. Several known examples are portrayed in a light elegant style (leptos, glaphyros) expressing Dionysian playfulness and merriment. Dancing satyrs can be found in small bronzes, both Hellenistic and Roman, such as the statuette of Nikomedia (third century BC; Smith 1991, pl. 151) and the famous Dancing Faun from the Tuscan Atrium of the House of the Faun, Pompeii, where brown-haired satyrs are also depicted in a mosaic and in the Dionysian paintings of the Villa of the Mysteries.

Athenaeus (c. AD 200) writing in his Deipnosophistai helps us envisage the original Dionysian group. He gives us a secondhand account of the Great Procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (286-243 BC) in Alexandria. Along with a five-metre-high statue of Dionysos, a mechanical statue of Nysa, the god’s wetnurse, stood up, poured an offering of milk and sat down. The procession also included silenoi, satyrs and maenads, some of them real people, others fabricated (Rice 1983).

Scholars differ over the date of this piece. Some give the fourth century BC, an original work of the great Greek sculptor Praxiteles, or a faithful copy (Moreno 2005). Others date it to the third or second century BC or even an example of the Hadrianic Hellenising taste of the early
second century AD. The high lead content of the copper alloy has suggested it was made in Rome and that it may have formed part of a group aboard one of two vessels laden with precious objects stolen by the Vandal, King Genseric, after the Sack of Rome in AD 455.

The Royal Academy exhibition also included loans of other remarkable ancient pieces. Not least amongst these were the Thracian portrait head of King Seuthes III from Bulgaria (Fig. 14) and, at last on public display for the first time, the Crosby Garrett Roman cavalry helmet (Fig. 15), both discussed in the last issue of this Bulletin (ARA 20, p. 43, fig. 13, and Editorial pp. 2-6). The Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, generously provided two famous pieces from Herculaneum. The identity of the over-life-size statue of Lucius Mammius Maximus (AD 41–54) is known from an inscription in bronze on its marble pedestal set up in the theatre (Fig. 16). But scholars differ over the identity and gender of the person celebrated in the bust with corkscrew curls found set up in the atrium of the Villa of the Papyri (Fig. 17).

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Jersey hoard
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Fig. 17. Bronze bust with applied copper corkscrew curls (The Tolomeo Aplione) from Herculaneum. Height: 41 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples/Royal Academy of Arts, London. Photo. © Grahame Soffe.


Cartledge, P. A., 2012, Greek Charioteer, Victor or "None of the Above"? The Mystery of the Motya Charioteer. Univ. of Cambridge.


The distribution pattern of Roman villas in Britain is now well established, with most located in the lowland zone of south and east England, with a few examples in the most fertile coastal regions of south-east Wales. Until 2010, the area of Ceredigion had no known Roman villas and archaeologists have been content to view large parts of west and north-west Wales as either within a 'military zone' or too unstable for potential villa-owners to invest long-term in Romanised forms of settlement – a 'native' mode of settlement remaining dominant throughout the Roman period. This interim report describes the exciting discovery and excavation of a Roman villa where we would least have expected one. The directors of the project are Dr Jeffrey Davies, a specialist in Roman Wales who excavated in the 1980s at the nearby Trawsgoed Roman fort and who has recently retired as Reader in the Department of History and Welsh History at Aberystwyth University, and Dr Toby Driver, Aerial Investigator and Team Leader of Reconnaissance Team with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMM).

The remains of a small late-Roman villa have now been confirmed by excavation at Abermagwr near Aberystwyth, demonstrating the establishment of at least one Romano-British farming estate far beyond the previously known limits of villa-building in Wales (Fig. 1). This discovery raises significant new questions about the regional economy and society of late Roman Wales, and the probability of other villa discoveries in the heartlands of mid- and north Wales, in the future. The purpose of this short note is to describe some of the key discoveries to date. As it has been compiled immediately after the second season of excavations with a large amount of post-excavation processing and analysis awaited, what is presented here is likely to be refined and possibly amended as work proceeds in future.

Discovery of the villa
Abermagwr lies towards the northern edge of the Trawsgoed basin in north Ceredigion, where the Ystwyth valley opens to form a broad, level gravel basin measuring c. 1.7km east-west by 3.5kms north-west/south-east. Trawsgoed Roman fort lies at its centre, on the eastern bank of the Ystwyth. About 1.5km distant from the fort, the north-west corner of a double-ditched enclosure at Abermagwr had long remained a puzzle, since its discovery as cropmarks through aerial photography in 1979. It was photographed from the air on several occasions thereafter but could not be assigned a definite
date. In 2006 Royal Commission aerial photography revealed the whole of the 1.1 hectare enclosure, together with the footings of a stone building in one corner of its interior (Fig. 2). Though this caused some excitement it was another three years before the opportunity arose to take the discovery forward.

In 2009 a geophysical survey was commissioned by RCAHMW of what was then postulated to be either a Roman villa or temple, or possibly even a medieval building. This unexpectedly revealed an even clearer plan of a rectangular winged building, 22m long (Figs. 3 and 4). Although the plan was characteristic of a Roman villa, and the building would have been confidently identified as such in south Wales or lowland England, it was both unusual and unexpected in mid-Wales. For this reason a two-week trial excavation was undertaken in July 2010 by the authors and funded by the Cambrian Archaeological Association (CAA) with logistical support from the Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) and RCAHMW. This comprised a trench across the central part of the building, from north to south, with a second trench across the double ditches of the outer enclosure to its north. This confirmed the Romano-British date of the building though not of the enclosure ditches. A second season of excavation was undertaken for three weeks in July 2011. The previous year’s excavation trench over the villa was extended, allowing a large part of the building to be properly examined (Fig. 5). Smaller trenches were also dug through the double ditches of the enclosure, and at other points on the site with a view to answering particular questions. This work was again generously supported by the CAA, DAT and RCAHMW. Additional funding was provided by the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (the Roman Society) and the Society of Antiquaries of London.

The Romano-British building

The form and plan of the stone building, together with the finds (see below), demonstrated that Abermagwr had all the trappings of the main house of established villas elsewhere, including a slate roof and possibly glazed windows. It comprised a block of three main rooms measuring 22m east-west by 8m north-south, with a verandah (Room 7) and two projecting alae or wings (Rooms 4 and 5) on the south (Figs. 3 and 4). A small room (Room 6) measuring 5m by 4m was later added to the rear of the building. Excavations in 2011 also confirmed the planned addition of Room 8 alongside the eastern ala. In plan this was a distinctly Romanised building, architect-designed, and probably commissioned by a wealthy local. Although it faces due south, it is oddly skewed in the upper north-east corner of the double-ditched enclosure leaving, or avoiding, a ‘blank’ area to the west. From the evidence of excavated Roman villas elsewhere we may expect a pre-villa phase of occupation, in the form of early timber buildings, or contemporary timber barns and byres. As yet any firm traces of these structures have proved elusive on the existing geophysical surveys but the 2011 section of the double-ditched enclosure, in Trench D, to the east of the villa house revealed a probable re-cut inner ditch. This suggests that the enclosure existed early in the history of the site, with the inner ditch being re-dug contemporaneously with the life of the stone villa house.

Whilst the nearby Roman fort at Trawsgoed was abandoned by c. AD 130 at the latest, finds from the villa indicate occupation from the mid-third century through to the mid-fourth century. Pottery analysis by Dr Peter Webster has demonstrated some residual pottery on site from the first and second centuries, with the majority of finewares and kitchen wares dating from the late third to the middle of the fourth century. Three coins of Constantine I, minted in the first quarter of the fourth century, were discovered in 2010 and were crucial for the later dating of the site, all being found lying on or near clay floor surfaces.
beneath roof collapse. Two further base silver denarii were discovered in 2011. One, discovered in the rear Room 6, has been identified as an issue of Severus Alexander, mint of Rome, AD 224, and was probably not in circulation beyond 250. On present evidence the stone building cannot be shown to predate the later third century; therefore, pre-villa structures or settlement within the double-ditched enclosure cannot be dismissed.

The building was roofed with stone tiles — referred to as ‘slates’ — split from local shale, forming the earliest known slatted roof in Ceredigion. The majority were pentagonal — cut with five straight sides and one narrow point — to form a highly decorative roof, common elsewhere in Romano-British contexts. Triangular-trimmed slates from the very ridge were also recovered. Some of the slates were extremely heavy and a full report will elucidate some further details of the timberwork of the roof required to support them. The walls were built of local stone on deep cobble foundations, the quantity of quarried stone recovered from the site, even after robbing, makes a full stone elevation more likely. The villa was fronted by a cobbled yard of dumped river gravel. This was also found at the rear of the building bordering the enclosure ditches.

No convincing evidence has yet been found of any mosaic or tessellated flooring or painted wall-plaster. Despite an initial narrow trench, the 2010 excavations established that all the rooms examined were floored with clay, as was the verandah, whilst a stone-edged hearth was set into the west side of Room 2. Evidence of several other hearths was uncovered in Room 2, comprising areas of intense burning on the clay floor. In 2010 these were initially attributed to later activity but the relationship of the intensely burnt areas to a collapse of burnt roofing slates against the floor was not clearly established. However, the widening of the original trench allowed a far better opportunity to examine Rooms 2 and 6, revealing some unexpected details.

The main feature of Room 2 was the central slab-lined hearth, 110cm by 95cm, floored with flat slates. Some 1.7m south of the hearth was a small circular clay-dominated oven set against the south wall of the room (Fig. 6). Although cut by a later post-hole and linear feature, likely to post-date the end of the villa, the western half survived, measuring 60cm in diameter with a 35cm-long throat, accessed from the north. It was here that meals would have been cooked and, in 2010, a near-complete cooking pot was found broken alongside the oven. The clay floor of Room 2 was carefully laid, and gradually dipped in the centre towards the main hearth. Some of the most interesting features observed on the floor were rectangular scorched marks against the north wall. These may possibly be interpreted as the positions of fitted wooden benches or furniture which stood against the wall and were lost in a fire at the villa. These potential fixtures can be placed in context by a find from Room 6. As well as four glass beads found scattered across the floor, a fine bronze furniture fitting was also discovered, giving us a vivid picture of the quality of Roman furniture in the building. Additional finds from Room 6 included sherds from a deep convex faceted-and-front-cut cup or bowl with several zones of decoration — a high status find from the villa.
iron nails intact, demonstrating it was made and used after the villa roof had wholly or partly collapsed. An interesting late phase in the use of the villa is shown by a series of large post-holes dug through the different rooms of the building; one or possibly two in Room 6, and two in Room 2. A further linear feature, possibly a beam-slot for a partition wall, had been dug across the verandah and into Room 2, destroying part of the oven. It may be that these show a sagging roof being propped up during the use of the building in its ruinous state or, alternatively, footings for a new timber building erected within the ruins. This fragile evidence of a late-Roman, or post-Roman history of the villa is part of what makes the Abermawr site so special. As the site has never been deep-ploughed, stratigraphic evidence survives here that has been lost from so many other villa sites in south Wales and southern England.

**Building materials and stone robbing**

At the upper level, around 20cm below the plough-soil, excavations initially encountered considerable quantities of quarried building stone and slates. Where the geophysical survey had shown Roman wall lines, voids in the rubble in-filled with finer soil, were encountered. These turned out to be robber trenches, a feature of many archaeological sites where good quality cut building stone was simply too precious a commodity to be left in a ruin.

In the 2011 season further robber trenches along the wall lines were encountered. The robbing had been ruthlessly efficient, with all quarried cut stones from walls removed. All that survived (and what was indicated as wall lines on the geophysical survey) were the underlying deep foundations of the walls, consisting of boulders and cobbles from the nearby Rivers Magwr and Ystwyth, and hard-packed clay. These foundations were massive, and their construction would have required

A further trench, Trench E, was opened in 2011 alongside the south-eastern *ala* to investigate a potential drain identified on the geophysical survey, suspected to indicate a bath-house. This trench was the most problematic, and revealed a large pit filled with dumps of building material and domestic rubbish, including quantities of Roman brick and tile. It may be that this was the construction trench for a heated room in a possible bath-house, added to the south-eastern *ala.*

**Stone pilae** to support a raised floor of a hypocaust may have been inserted, but it was never completed.

**The end of the villa**

The 2011 season has shed light on the final years of the villa and how its abandonment may have come about. Excavation confirmed that part of the slate roof over Room 2 collapsed during a fire and fell onto the clay floor. Then, at least one fireplace in Room 1 was built of roofing slates, some with their
hundreds of tons of material to be brought to the site. Only in one place had the robbers left a single block of wall stone in situ. This was found, backed by clay-bonded cobbles, on the footing of the south verandah wall. It was barely 20cm below the topsoil. Robbing may have occurred when the nearby Trawsgoed mansion was under construction in the sixteenth century, as place-name evidence indicates that the villa was probably a standing ruin into medieval times. Two fragments of post-medieval clay tobacco-pipe stems recovered from the robber trenches in 2011 may yet give us a more precise date for the robbing episodes.

The original fabric of the villa’s walls would have been prestigious prior to plastering, consisting of neat squared blocks of locally-quarried stone. Some indication of their original quality can be gained from a deposit of original wall stones found in Trench E. These may have been dumped or formed part of a collapse, and were found along with several layers of other dumped material. Several of the best cut stone blocks have been preserved from the excavation for future museum display.

As described above, the fine-cut wall stones were robbed after the villa had gone out of use, but the possibility also arises that they may have been robbed in the first instance by the villa builders themselves from the nearby ruins of the long-abandoned Roman fort at Trawsgoed, together with bricks and tiles from the fort’s bathhouse.

Conclusions

While the process of obtaining specialist reports on pottery, metalwork, glass, building materials and environmental samples now begins to unravel a more complete and closely dated history of the villa, wider questions about the landscape and context of the villa will present themselves. A sub-ovoid single-ditched enclosure of Iron Age type in the field to the west of the villa, near Tan yr Alth Farm, may be a precursor to the villa and requires an evaluation trench to establish its date. The presence of a few sherds of late first to early second-century pottery together with brick and tile, including types normally found in hypocaust structures of similar date, raises issues as to the nature of activity within the enclosure ditches prior to the construction of the stone villa building. On present evidence the stone building cannot be shown to pre-date the late third century; therefore, the existence of pre-villa structures or settlement evidence of some kind within the double-ditched enclosure cannot be dismissed. Whilst Abermagwr is presently the most north-westerly and isolated Roman villa in Wales, this is unlikely to reflect the real situation. A thriving, prosperous, high status Romano-British farming estate would have possessed client farms and enjoyed a network of friends and neighbours in the wider landscape. Clearly we are not at the end of the story of late-Roman settlement and farming in Ceredigion and mid-Wales in general, but very much at the beginning.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The ARA thanks Richard Suggett and Nicola Roberts of RCAHMW, who kindly set up the exhibition on the Abermagwr project on the first evening of the ARAs Study Tour of Roman North Wales, at Bangor University, in July 2011. It had been originally proposed to include a visit to the excavations during the tour, but time and distance prevented this. However, the authors are thanked for the guided tour of the excavations, given to the editor and ARA members P Heritage, N Hogben, D Rider and D Sleep immediately after the ARA Study Tour.
On 27 November 2011 the Association for Roman Archaeology held its Annual Symposium at the British Museum jointly with the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (The Roman Society) to mark the eighteen-hundredth anniversary of the death of the emperor Lucius Septimius Severus at *Eboracum* (York). The symposium was built around a discussion of some of the latest archaeological and architectural evidence from Libya and Britain, and also drew from the well known ancient literary sources relating to the career of this, one of the greatest and most influential of the Roman emperors. His reign marked a number of important changes in the course of the empire, not only in the arrangements of government and the provinces and a reorganisation of the imperial army, but also in other fields, such as art and architecture. Lectures were given by three main speakers (Fig. 1). Dr Philip Kenrick (The Society for Libyan Studies) showed how the emperor made his mark on his home city in North Africa. Dr Nick Hodgson (Principal Keeper, Tyne and Wear Museums) concentrated on the evidence of the great British military campaigns which took up the last years of the emperor’s life. Dr Fraser Hunter (Principal Curator, National Museums Scotland) then examined the evidence for the effects of these campaigns on the native populations of northern Britain. As a supplement to and to introduce the proceedings Dr Hafed Walda (King’s College, London University) gave an eye-witness account of the current state of Libya’s archaeological heritage after the recent uprising and Civil War.

The symposium was devised by Sam Moorhead (Trustee of the Association for Roman Archaeology and Honorary Secretary of the Roman Society) and Dr Fiona Haarer (Secretary of the Roman Society). The speakers were introduced by Sam Moorhead and Dr Andrew Burnett CBE (President of the Roman Society and Deputy Director of the British Museum). It took place in the BP Lecture Theatre, at the Clore Education Centre, the British Museum, and was well attended by members of both the ARA and the Roman Society (Fig. 1).

**LIBYA**

How Gaddafi tried to topple a Roman emperor

To introduce the Symposium, the Libyan archaeologist Dr Hafed Walda welcomed delegates “on behalf of the new government” in Libya. He had recently returned to his homeland to assist the provisional government and other bodies in the process of trying to safeguard Libya’s cultural heritage and make provisions for the future. He was able to confirm that the extraordinary archaeological sites of Libya, including *Lepcis Magna*, *Sabratha*, *Cyrene* and two other sites designated World Heritage Sites by UNESCO, had survived the conflict unscathed. He had also participated, with other experts from inside and outside Libya, in a meeting convened by UNESCO at its Paris Headquarters on 21 October 2011. This had examined
the preservation of cultural heritage in the country, notably measures to safeguard cultural sites, prevent illicit trafficking, protect museums and strengthen cultural institutions in the wake of the Civil War and the overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi’s regime. The meeting had addressed the findings of the mission to Libya organised in September by the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (the emblem created by the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict – The Hague 1954).

He went on to speak about Gaddafi’s relationship with Septimius Severus. For years a bronze statue of the Roman emperor had stood in Green Square (now Martyrs’ Square) in Tripoli, Libya’s capital. It witnessed all the major events there, from the Italian colonial government, the British administration, the era of King Idris and then the years of the Gaddafi regime. In the late 1970s, as things became tougher under the dictator, the statue started being used as a way of cloaking and depersonalising subversion – “Septimius Severus became the mouthpiece for opposition” – people would ask each other “what’s Septimius Severus saying today?” So Gaddafi decided to topple him. The statue was duly removed from Green Square. Later in the 1990s, the Department of Antiquities decided to reinstate it but in a new location – at Lepcis Magna. In 1993 there was a grand ceremony and Gaddafi was invited, but he refused to attend. His aides said “no wonder – he sees Septimius Severus as a rival!”

During the Civil War there had been considerable concern for the safety of Lepcis Magna. There were allegations that pro-Gaddafi troops and missiles were being hidden in the Roman city and that Gaddafi was using it as an “archaeological shield” against NATO air strikes. With such explosive storage the risk of damage was great. With the fate of the Baghdad Museum and ancient sites in Iraq after the US-led invasion in mind, fears for all Libya’s sites and museums were great. It was also felt that the USA had become disconnected from Libya’s heritage, US citizens had been banned from Libya by Gaddafi between 1986 and 2004, after the US bombing of Tripoli and UN sanctions. Relations had normalised by 2006 but relatively few American tourists and scholars had visited Libya, particularly Tripolitania. However, at the beginning of hostilities in 2011 the Blue Shield Committee had provided NATO with a ‘No Strike List’ of heritage sites that should be preserved in the conduct of air operations. The list was compiled by Karl von Habsburg, President of the Committee in Austria, and Dr Joris Kila of Amsterdam University, Chairman of the International Military Cultural Resources Work Group. They have now returned to make an assessment of the damage inflicted by the conflict. They had commended the fact that museums and sites had been shut for their protection during the war. At the National Museum in Tripoli portable objects such as coins, jewellery and small busts were hidden away, but larger pieces such as mosaics and statues had to be left in place. But as it turned out, only a gallery dedicated to Gaddafi’s professed achievements sustained damage. A display of a car and a military jeep used by him had been smashed. The museum will not be opened until it is considered safe to do so. Despite the use of regular security patrols it is far more difficult to protect open sites like Lepcis and Cyrene. Some open sites had been close to air strikes and escaped with only cosmetic damage. On the whole the ‘No Strike List’ had been very effective. NATO’s mission in Libya ended on 31 October 2011, completing one of the most successful air campaigns in the history of the Alliance. That the campaign was carried out without serious damage to the ancient sites is a major achievement.

Unfortunately Libya has a history of looting smaller portable antiquities and the recent conflict encouraged an escalation of this activity. Hafed Walda described the most serious instance. In March 2011 at the outbreak of the uprising a major theft of the so-called Benghazi Treasure took place at the National Commercial Bank of Benghazi, on Tahir Square, Benghazi, the scene of some of the worse violence of the war. The adjacent building, the Headquarters of the Secret Police, was destroyed. Thieves had used a pneumatic drill to make a 30cm-diameter hole though 70cm of steel-reinforced concrete to enter the bank vault. Power tools had been used to tear open two chests containing c. 7,700 Greco-Roman and Islamic coins, three hundred

Fig. 2. Bust of Septimius Severus. Greek marble. The head is attached to a bust (to which it does not belong) draped with a paludamentum. Ht. (excluding foot) 0.66m. Found in 1776 on the Palatine, Rome. This portrait type (dated AD 196-206) shows the emperor’s allegiance to the cult of Serapis, and imitates the cult images of that Greco-Egyptian god in the hair-style and beard, particularly the corkscrew curls hanging over the forehead. British Museum. Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.
rings, necklaces, bracelets and medallions and forty bronze and ivory figurines. Most of these artefacts had been excavated from Greco-Roman sites such as the Temple of Artemis at Cyrene (excavated in 1917-22). They had been taken to Italy during the Second World War and returned in 1961. The vault’s contents had last been checked in 1974 but no proper catalogue had ever been made; further objects were added to it in 1980. Dr Walda said the theft had clearly been an “inside job”. The bank had not mentioned the theft to the Department of Antiquities for two months and had then accused the Department of carrying it out. UNESCO and Interpol were now involved in trying to recover the treasure. Another important object, stolen from the museum at Sabratha in 1990, has recently been returned to Libya by Mario Monti, the Italian Prime Minister when in Tripoli to sign a treaty with the new government. This is the head of a Roman statue of Flavia Domitilla Minor, daughter of the emperor Vespasian and sister of Domitian and Titus, and excavated from Sabratha. It had “turned up” at a Christies’ sale in London in 2011, sold by a Swiss collector to an Italian buyer, who had then relinquished it to the Italian police.

Hafed Walda, whose family comes from Misratah near Lepcis, said that Libya had helped launch his archaeological career and he now felt that he owed a debt to his country, to help its ancient heritage to survive and prosper in future. At another recent conference in Rome he had thanked NATO for sparing the sites. The Gaddafi regime had disconnected heritage from the identity of Libya, heritage had been neglected and marginalised and there were few resources to prevent looting and clandestine digging and to provide for archaeological training and conservation. The Department of Antiquities, still run on colonial lines, required extensive overhaul and modernisation. The new government needed a massive input of know-how and funding to deal with the huge task of conserving the country’s heritage, a task it could only carry out with international help. Heritage needed to be a national priority together with education and health. He repeated this message at the ‘Libya Matters Workshop’ held at King’s College, London on 18 February 2012, a conference organised by the Society for Libyan Studies with King’s College and again supported by members of the ARA and the Roman Society.

Lucius Septimius Severus: Libya’s most distinguished son?
The second speaker to take the floor was Dr Philip Kenrick of Oxford, an acknowledged expert on ancient Libya and author of a recent archaeological guide to Tripolitania, the western coastal province (Kenrick 2009). He took as his title “Lucius Septimius Severus: Libya’s most distinguished son?” and started by alluding to the uprising against Colonel Gaddafi which had taken place in 2011, and drew attention to the irony of the fact that he had been overthrown after 42 years, having been in power for almost exactly the same time as the Severan dynasty in the third century AD! His purpose was to paint a picture of the cultural background from which Severus had come, and he pointed out that while we may consider the emperor to have been a ‘Libyan’, there has been throughout history a major geographical and cultural divide between different parts of what is now Libya. Severus came from Tripolitania, which had been settled in the first millennium BC by Phoenicians, and would have had little in common with the inhabitants of Cyrenaica, who were principally of Greek decent.

Urban settlement in Tripolitania was centred on the three Punic emporia of Sabratha, Oea and Lepcis (Magna), founded between the seventh and fifth centuries BC. At the time, therefore, of the entry of Tripolitania into the Roman province of Africa Nova in 46 BC, there were already cities of considerable size and prosperity in the region. The agricultural wealth upon which this prosperity was largely based is clear from the misfortune of Lepcis Magna in the civil war between Pompey and Caesar. Having (willingly or otherwise) supported the losing side, Lepcis was deprived of its freedom and required to pay an annual fine of over a million litres of olive oil. This shows that the cultivation of the oil must already have been a developed commercial enterprise (Mattingly 1988).

It was in the Augustan period that a number of public buildings now visible at Lepcis were first constructed, including the market (9-8 BC) and the theatre (AD 1-2). These buildings were erected at the expense of local grandees, who are unequivocally of Punic descent. The market and the theatre were paid for by the same man, named in three identical inscriptions in the theatre (Fig. 3). His name is Annobal Rufus, son of Himilco Tapaius; he describes himself in typical Punic terms and the text of the inscription is
The future emperor Lucius Septimius Severus was born into this milieu in AD 145. His family had probably become Roman citizens in the later first century AD and at the age of 17 he went to Rome to study. He had a kinsman, C. Septimius Severus, at whose request he was granted senatorial rank by Marcus Aurelius. Thereafter he entered upon a senatorial career of public service, though we know little of the details. In 191 he was governor of Pannonia Superior, based at Carnuntum on the Danube in Austria and with three legions under his command. Thus it was, in early 193, that following the murder of Commodus and, three months later, that of Pertinax who had been installed as his successor, Severus had the backing of sufficient forces to assert his claim to imperial authority.

It took a further four years fully to confirm his position, and once safely established as emperor, Severus spent much of the remainder of his life campaigning with the army, but an emperor would wish none the less to commemorate himself architecturally. In Rome a vast triumphal arch, dedicated to him in 203, still stands at one end of the Forum (Fig. 4) but he reserved his more lavish architectural designs for his native city of Lepcis Magna. Here we can see in greater detail than anywhere else how a Roman imperial building project was conceived and carried out (Bianchi Bandinelli et al 1966; Ward-Perkins 1951 and 1993; Kenrick 2009).

The port was enlarged and redeveloped; it was approached by a monumental colonnaded street, and alongside the street was laid

Fig. 4. Arch of Septimius Severus, Forum Romanum. 21m high, Proconnesian marble. View of the forum side from the south. The arch crosses the triumphal route up to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline. The inscription on both faces of the attic states that it was awarded to Severus and his sons Caracalla and Geta in AD 203 for having “restored the Republic and expanded the dominion of the Roman people.” The gilded bronze lettering has been robbed revealing the dedication was altered after Caracalla murdered Geta in 212. The relief scenes show episodes from the Parthian campaigns, including the liberation of Nisibis, the siege and fall of Edessa, Seleucia and Cesareph, flying figures of Victory, and other deities. The reliefs are three-dimensional versions of painted panels which Severus sent back to Rome to show the Senate how the campaigns were going and to be displayed in triumphal procession. As coins show, the arch was originally crowned by gilded bronze statues showing the emperor riding in triumph in a chariot with six horses, his sons on horseback on either side and other statues.

This photo taken in 1911, the seventeen-hundreath anniversary of Severus’s death.

Photo: Cesare Faraglia, Rome, after Pietro Stettiner, Rome in her Monuments. 1912.

Fig. 5. Four-way (tetrapylon) Arch of Septimius Severus at Lepcis Magna dedicated to the emperor by his native city. 16.5m square at the base. Partially reconstructed, from the surviving remains over 20 years by Guidi, Vergara Caffarelli, Stucchi and Di Vita. Marble over limestone. Constructed probably c. AD 203, to coincide with the visit of Severus to his birthplace. View from south looking at outer face of arch on left beyond which the cardo maximus proceeds into the city and here crosses the main east-west route.

Photo: © Mike Shepherd.
out a huge new civic centre, with a forum, basilica and temple. There was also a bizarre triumphal arch with spiky broken pediments (Figs. 5, 6 and 7), a tetrapylon placed at the key cross-roads where the main road inland from the original city centre crossed the coast road. Already in the Byzantine period much of its superstructure had fallen and its reconstruction is uncertain in detail; there is even a possibility that the marble facings (designed in Roman feet) were grafted onto a pre-existing core (designed in Punic cubits – for another purpose?)! The arch was perhaps completed in 203 when Severus visited the city. The main project, however, took many years to bring into being, and indeed its principal components were not dedicated until five years after his death.

The colonnaded street was a feature of urban design which Severus would have encountered in the years that he spent in Syria. Alongside the street was a huge new forum, surrounded by porticoes on three sides and with a huge temple on the fourth. Behind the porticoes on the north-east side was a row of offices and then a vast two-apsed basilica. The temple, on a massively high podium, was itself immensely tall, with columns of red Aswan granite raised upon sculpted plinths of Pentelic marble. This is probably the “excessively large temple to Bacchus and Hercules” (the patron gods of the city and of Septimius Severus) recorded disparagingly by the historian Cassius Dio (Dio 76, 16, 3). The port was enlarged by joining together several offshore islands and constructing additional mole and a sturdy lighthouse, of which part still survives.

With such grand designs, it is not surprising that they ran behind schedule and over budget! The forum and basilica were not dedicated until 216, five years after the death of Severus. Even so, there are signs throughout the complex of unfinished work. Beyond the basilica a space of open ground was entirely cleared, perhaps for a second forum, but nothing was actually built there. Mouldings around arches remain unfinished. In the nave of the basilica there are even column-bases which have been rounded and polished on exactly half of the circumference only, towards the nave; and in the adjoining passageway the excavators found architectural elements that had never actually been used!

Clearly, by the time that the complex was formally inaugurated, either the money, or the will to spend it, had run out. The project will have depleted not only the imperial coffers, but probably also those of other members of the local elite, who would have felt compelled to contribute. The fall of the Severan dynasty with the death of Severus Alexander in 235 will have resulted in further impoverishment of the city, and it is notable that there is virtually no new public building activity at Lepcis for the next hundred years. The ascendency of one of their own to the imperial purple might have seemed to the people of Lepcis Magna in retrospect a decidedly mixed blessing, but in the longer span of history, it is not unreasonable to see him as Libya’s most distinguished son!
BRITAIN
It has recently become clear that during the campaigns of Severus in Britain and for a period after his death, a gem workshop was set up in the province to serve the imperial entourage (Henig 2009; Marsden and Henig 2002; Marsden 2011). As Prof. Martin Henig has reminded us ‘the presence of three Severan gems (Figs. 8 and 9) of high quality at South Shields need occasion no surprise.’ ‘For a couple of years Britain was in many respects the hub of the empire. Here large-scale building projects ranged from the remodelling of the Canterbury theatre to the construction of new docks and perhaps a temple-complex in London. There must have been considerable activity at York, the centre for the campaigns. Here Severus had his palace and here he eventually died.’ (Henig 1986; 2004).

"Wishing to subjugate the whole of Britain, he invaded Caledonia": the British expedition of Septimius Severus, AD 208-211
Dr Nick Hodgson, the third speaker, took as his title this blunt statement from the ancient historian Cassius Dio (Dio 76. 13. 1).

In 208 the emperor Septimius Severus, aged 63 but “in his heart more enthusiastic than any youth” set out for Britain, knowing, we are told, from astrology and omens that he would not return and would die in his third year in the island. With him travelled his wife, Julia Domna, his co-Augustus and 20-year old elder son Antoninus – known as Caracalla, his younger son Geta (see Cover Photo) and the whole of the imperial court and retinue. After careful preparations, while Geta and trusted officials administered the empire from York (Eboracum), a vast army, led in person by Severus and Caracalla, moved into what is now Scotland.

What really brought Severus to Britain? Some would see the concern of the emperor to give his dissolute sons a taste of military life, or to re-establish the loyalty of the army as decisive. But troubled relationships and warfare with the peoples beyond Hadrian’s Wall are persistently cited in our sources from the 190s. The most balanced conclusion is that a situation of worsening frontier trouble combined with the personal desire of an energetic and belligerent emperor to take the field and solve the problem.

The targets were the Maeatae, probably occupying the northern Scottish lowlands, the Antonine Wall area and Fife, and the Caledonii, dwelling further north, perhaps beyond the Tay. A newly emerged regional response to the Roman empire is indicated, seated in the fertile lowlands of Perthshire and Angus.

The literary sources can be combined to indicate an imperial departure in 208, a campaign led by Severus and Caracalla, a surrender, a revolt, first by the Maeatae, then joined by the Caledonii, a second genocidal campaign by Caracalla alone (210-211), during which Severus died at York in February 211 (Fig. 10).

The only evidence for the extent on the ground of the Severan campaigning is provided by archaeology. Supply-bases, far south of the theatre of war, are at Corbridge (Carlea) on Dere Street (Bishop and Dore 1998), and at
South Shields (Arbeia) at the mouth of the Tyne (Bidwell and Speak 1994) (Fig. 11). At South Shields a series of rare lead seals have been found, bearing portraits of Septimius Severus and his sons Caracalla and Geta, dated by the imperial titles to 198-209 (Allason-Jones and Mikel 1984). The discovery in 2000 of such seals

(Fig. 12) in the construction levels of the supply-base now establishes beyond doubt that this establishment was created at the time of the Severan expedition. The archaeological evidence also shows the supply-base had reached its maximum extent by this time and was full of granaries rather than barracks (Figs. 13 and 14).

It is traditional to associate two of the recognisable series of marching camps in Scotland to the Severan campaigns, the 63 acre (25 ha) and the 130 acre (55 ha) groups. But there is no direct dating evidence for any of these camps and the link with Severus is purely circumstantial. The sequence of phases of occupation recognised at the fort of Ardoch seems to establish that these camps are later than the first century and the huge 130 acre ones are the latest of all and thus are most likely to be Severan. There is now no archaeological suggestion that Severus marched as far north as the Moray Firth; the distribution of those camps that are most likely to be Severan, the 130 acre series, suggests an advance to the Stonehaven area on the North Sea coast and no further (Jones 2011) (Fig. 11).

The fort of Cramond on the Firth of Forth, is one of only two permanent Roman bases in Scotland known to have been occupied at the time of the Severan expedition (Holmes 2003). The other, Carpow, is a 9.7 ha fortress on the south bank of the Firth of Tay (St Joseph 1973; Dore and Wilkes 1999; Casey 2010) (Fig. 15). Recent claims that this fortress might be of much earlier origin (the 180s have been suggested) are not convincing. Despite the difficulties surrounding the fragmentary building inscription from the site (Wright 1964), the circumstantial and archaeological evidence, particularly the clear Severan date of the South Shields supply-base and the similarity of the pottery found within it to that at Carpow, favour a fortress founded in connection with the Severan expedition and intended as a coastally supplied outpost to dominate south-east Scotland.

What had been the real objectives of the expedition? It is perhaps wrong to think that the intention was to occupy and directly govern Scotland. There were at least three years of opportunity to build roads and forts other than the boldly projected coastal outposts of Cramond and Carpow, but it is striking that nothing like the Antonine fort network of the 140s was ever begun. So we can see how the Roman response to frontier problems had shifted in the two or three generations between Antoninus Pius and Septimius Severus from expansion of directly Roman occupied territory to management or neighbouring peoples through aggressive and far-reaching war.

What did the campaigns achieve? North-eastern Scottish society was probably terribly damaged by the Severan expedition, but was not ravaged entirely out of existence, for the diplomatic contacts indicated by the denarius subsidy hoards
(see below) continued down to the reign of Severus Alexander (222-235). This is not to deny that wide-ranging changes in the native settlement pattern are connected to the presence of the Roman forces, but merely to reject a direct link with the short-term presence of absence of Roman forces. There is a long historical tradition of seeing the Severan campaigns as successful because of the peaceful state of Britain in the third century. But the ‘third-century peace’ may really be an effect of the absence of literary sources for the period.

"Barbarians in revolt" – Caledonia before and after Severus

The fourth speaker, Dr Fraser Hunter, also took his cue from Cassius Dio (Dio 76. 15. 1). Indeed, as he demonstrated with several quotations, the surviving literary sources, primarily Cassius Dio and Herodian, provide a graphic account of unrest on the northern frontier in the late second and early third century, culminating in the great invasion led by Severus in 208-211 and ending with his death in York and his sons’ desire to return to Rome. The ancient authors do not portray it as a great success – it was clearly an adventure fraught with difficulties – but they unite in condemning the barbaric character of the native inhabitants, while a series of propaganda coins and monuments commemorate the ‘great victory’ (Fig. 16). Yet this is only one side of the story: in recent years archaeology has started to give a voice to the ‘barbarians’.

The sources define the enemy as the Caledonii and the Maeatae. Scholars have struggled for centuries to pin them down – not helped by the looseness with which ancient authors use the term Caledonia – but surviving place-names put them in the area of the Forth Valley and the lands immediately to the north. The merging archaeology of north-east Scotland, from the Firth of Forth to the Moray Firth, tells a story of small-scale, competitive groups rather than large-scale tribal chiefdoms – indeed, the lack of centralised authorities to deal with and conquer made the invaders’ task all the harder. Yet the ancient descriptions of them are nothing but stereotype, and the recognisable hyperbole should make us very cautious of cherry-picking those aspects of the accounts which may seem more plausible.

So what were these barbarians like? Recent work stresses the agricultural wealth of this area, the scale and grandeur of the massive timber round-houses (up to 20m in diameter), and the craft skills – seen in fine regional versions of Celtic art (Fig. 17), but also in expert glass-making and iron-smelting producing high-quality natural steel. These societies had developed links with the Roman world since the Flavian period, choosing particular items, such as jewellery and feasting gear.
(Fig. 18), to use as prestige goods in their own social exchanges.

Yet it seems there was often an edge to these contacts which could flare into violence. The sparse written sources talk more about the conflict, but the archaeology gives clues to the frontier politics – the giving of gifts and subsidies to keep the peace, or to stir internal rather than external dissent.

This is well illustrated by recent excavations at Birnie, near Elgin, in Moray (Hunter 2002; 2007; 2012) (Fig. 19), a major Iron Age power centre in contact with the Roman world for over a century, culminating in the burial of two hoards of 310 denarii (Holmes 2006) (Fig. 20). With near-identical quantities of coins, arriving only a few years apart (in c.193 and 196), they look like part of a system of payments.

Such hoards are abundant in these troubled decades, and concentrate in hotspots of the Caledonian heartlands and in neighbouring tribal areas. Along with the coins came fine brooches, glass vessels and a range of other material (Fig. 18). It seems the elites of these areas grew rich on Roman goods – and perhaps became dependent on them for their status.

Any such dependency would be a dangerous thing. The Roman diplomatic effort was intended initially to create ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, to cause tensions within local societies. Then, in the early third century, the supply of prestige goods to the troublesome area was turned off. Late Roman finds are all but absent from the north-east, and even traces of settlements are hard to pin down at this date. It seems that there was considerable turmoil among the people of this area, and we may pinpoint the interference of the Romans as the cause.

This interference may have been effective for Roman needs in the short term, but in the long term it was disastrous. There may have been relative tranquillity in the third century, but from the wreckage of these earlier societies emerged an anti-Roman faction – the Picts, a markedly more dangerous group who became the bogeymen of the late Roman frontier (Hunter 2005).
So where does this leave the impact of Severus? It was arguably his policies rather than his invasions which had a major effect on local societies, building a dependency on Roman goods which was then exploited by his successors when they removed the supply. The Roman state may have won the battle, but it lost the war. Its interference in tribal societies set in train a series of still-opaque processes which created and altogether more fearsome enemy – a parable for empires now as then. There is much still to argue over in this picture, but the evidence from the ground is giving a voice to the ‘barbarians’ who get such a bad press in the classical sources.

Editorial Note: This article is based on summaries of the papers given at the Symposium, kindly provided by the contributors. The editor also thanks John Bithell for making an audio recording of the proceedings and Bryn Walters for a transcription of it. A short report on the Symposium was published by The Guardian newspaper (Higgins 2011).

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General:


Ancient Sources:


Libya:


Britain:


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Like their modern counterparts, the inhabitants of Roman Southwark, the southern suburb of the Roman city of London on the south bank of the River Thames, possessed a wide variety of personal jewellery and dress accessories. The Roman community favoured brooches, bracelets, earrings, hair pins, necklaces and finger rings (Cowan et al 2009, 229-231). Rings were fashioned from a wide range of materials including gold, silver, copper-alloy, iron, bone and glass, and exhibit a range of styles indicating that as now both cheap and expensive items were produced. Jewellery of some kind or another was thus widely available according to taste and financial means.

The context of the finger ring

Excavations within St George’s Church, Borough High Street, in the London Borough of Southwark were conducted in 2005-06 by members of the Museum of London Archaeology team during the stabilisation of the foundations and the enlargement of the crypt. Limited fieldwork revealed a number of fragmentary early Roman clay and timber buildings. These buildings appear to have been ‘ribbon development’ flanking the western side of the north-south aligned bridge approach road, just to the north of the convergence of the Roman Watling and Stane Streets (Cowan et al 2009, Fig. 4). One of these buildings (B8 in the site archive) consisted of a short east-west aligned length of brick-earth sill, together with an area of brick-earth floor. The make-up levels and floor surfaces for this building produced eight objects, the largest group of accessioned finds recovered from any single Roman feature on site. Two poorly preserved copper-alloy brooches from the make-up are likely to be Colchester forms, in use until c. AD 70. The first was a one-piece brooch and the second, a Polden Hill brooch (Hull types 90 and 95-97; Bayley and Butcher 2004, 148 and 159). The floor surface contained a silver finger ring with serpent-head terminals (site code SGY05 context [379] <25>). Other finds from the floor and its make-up included fragments of domestic vessel glass, one of which was a fine quality colourless fragment. The glass fragments also included part of a wheel-cut vessel, probably a cup, and part of a square bottle. The presence of the ring and the fragment of luxurious and expensive glassware suggest that the inhabitants of this building possessed some wealth or social standing. Ceramics from the floor make-up date from c. AD 50-100.

Description of the ring

The ring consists of a hoop of silver, rounded in section and c.3mm thick; this is expanded at each end into a terminal in the form of a serpent’s head, somewhat flattened and measuring 9.7mm in length by 7.9mm in breadth (Figs. 1 and 2). There is a narrow slight flange around the lower part of each head, the result of hammering into a form or die, and which as we will see relates it to distinctive, provincial forms of the serpent-ring. It is unfortunate that too much of the detail of the heads has been lost through surface corrosion, which suggests that the alloy was only base silver. The external diameter of the ring is 23mm and the internal diameter 17mm.
Discussion of the ring
The use of serpent-jewellery is very ancient and was widespread throughout the Hellenistic world from whence it was taken over by the Romans. The snake is almost certainly intended for a serpent of the Linnaean genus Colubridae, most probably the Aesculapian snake connected with deities who possessed healing powers, notably Minerva, Apollo and of course Aesculapius (Johns 1997, 35). Thus, as a symbol, it is both beneficent and apotropaic.

Serpent rings have a well-defined typology and this form where the two heads simply meet belongs to Johns type B (Johns 1997, 36, Fig. 9). Comparison may be made with rings of first-century date from the Campanian cities, for example two silver rings from the palaestra and the casa del tramezo at Herculaneum (Hörich 1989, 52-54, nos. N57 and N62) and with an example from the Franks Bequest, said to have been found in a sewer in Great Russell Street, London (Marshall 1907, 181 no. 1137; Johns 1996, 44 and 46, Fig. 3.6). These are first-century examples, no later than early Flavian in date. The snakes in these examples, however, have naturalistic well-rounded heads (type Bi), unlike the somewhat flattened form of the St George’s serpent which approximates rather more to the large number of snake-rings, including 32 of this general type, from the Snippetsham Roman jeweller’s hoard of the mid-second century AD (Johns 1997, 37-39 and 100-105, nos. 243-274). These (type BiI) have flattened heads as though what was being shown was simply a snake skin, with a flange. In the Snippetsham examples, however, the flattening of the head is more pronounced and the flange is far more obvious.

The St George’s example seems to be intermediate between the Pompeian (BiI) and Snippetsham (BiII) forms which would suit a date in the later first century, to which the ring found on a floor surface associated with fragments of clear glass vessels and first-century brooches undoubtedly belongs. There is no reason why this ring should not have been made in London, which has provided evidence for the early manufacture of jewellery (Henig 1995, 34 and Fig. 15), and certainly the technique is suggestive of local (i.e. insular) workmanship. The rather flattened heads and evidence for flanges imply that the heads were beaten out into a die, probably similar to an example found inside the east gate of the Roman town of Alchester, Oxfordshire (Henig 1999). If so, it surely belongs towards the beginning of the provincial (Romano-British) series of snake jewellery which flourished especially in the second century AD.

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