

Three Roman Objects from the Culbin Sands, Morayshire

by *Martin Henig*

A considerable number of Roman finds have been recovered north of the Imperial frontiers. Although their significance is often problematic, in that it is hard to know whether they were objects of trade, the trophies of successful raids on the south, or casual losses during Roman expeditions into Scotland, they are potentially of very great interest.¹ The Culbin Sands material was originally in a private collection in Ireland, and was purchased for the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland at Sotheby's on 18th May 1970² (see *Museum Purchases*, item 3). All the pieces appear to be of second-century date.

1. The largest of the items is a brass trumpet-brooch of developed type, without enamelling, 63 mm long (*Museum no.* 1970, 23; fig 4: 1). The pin is attached to a spring and there is a loop at the head for the chain which would have linked it to a similar trumpet-brooch: these fibulae were worn in pairs. The plate is not pierced and the only decoration on the brooch is the conventional acanthus device in the centre of the bow.³

Trumpet-brooches are typically North-British and a number of examples have been found in Scotland, for example at Newstead, Mumrills and Traprain Law.⁴

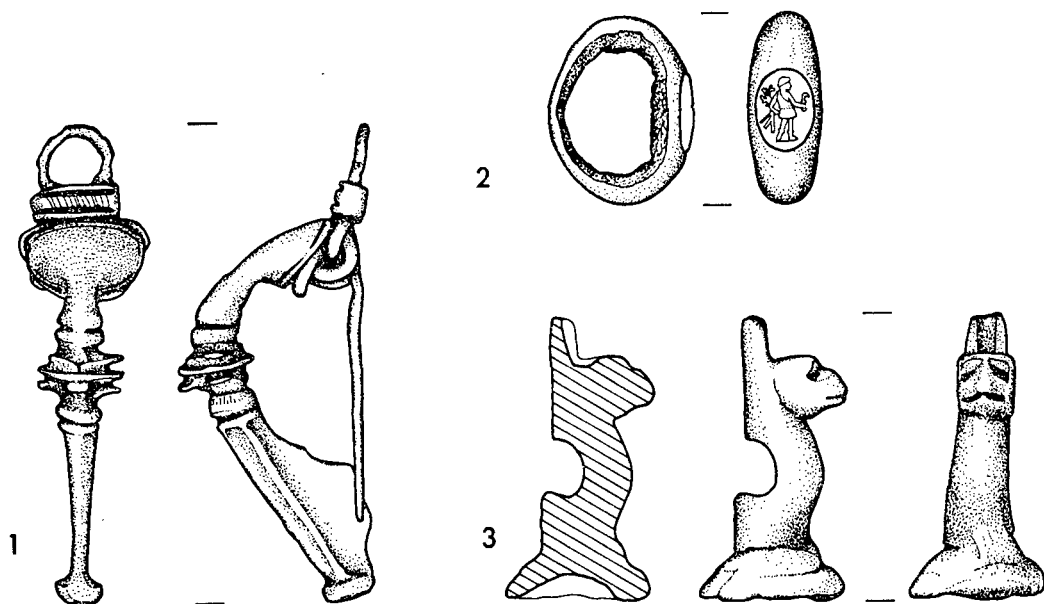


FIG 4 Roman objects from the Culbin Sands (†)

2. A more unexpected item of jewellery is a Roman silver signet-ring (1970, 25; fig 4: 2; Appendix). It is ovoid, 24×20 mm, and the hoop, which is rounded externally, expands towards the bezel. Henkel illustrates a similar silver ring from Kastell Zugmantel.⁵ British specimens of the type are recorded from Corbridge, Chesters and Chollerford (Northumberland), from Slay Hill Saltings (Kent), Chalgrave (Bedfordshire), Thistleton (Rutland) and Leicester.⁶

The ring contains a cornelian intaglio, oval and slightly convex, 10×8 mm (pl 29, a). The device, which is relatively well cut, is the god *Silvanus* standing to the front and facing right. He is bearded and wears a cap or diadem. His dress is a short tunic and boots, the usual garb for the countryman.⁷ In his right hand he holds a curved pruning-knife (*falx*) and in his left hand is a branch.

The type is a well-known one which may have become popular as the result of the identification of Antinoos (Hadrian's beautiful favourite who was drowned in tragic circumstances in the Nile, and came to be deified as one of the forces of nature) with *Silvanus*.⁸

Silvanus is shown on intaglios from Corbridge and Chesterholm (Vindolanda) in Northumberland, as well as on other stones from Rome, Aquileia and Carnuntum.⁹

3. The third object, of bronze, has a somewhat strange appearance (1970, 24; fig 4: 3). It is 37 mm long. A prong rises from a base of slightly conical shape. A semi-circular cutting on one side is balanced by a corresponding expansion on the other. Above this projection is the head of an animal, perhaps a panther. The two eyes and the mouth are indicated, but other detail is lacking. We have here a very crude example of a type of zoomorphic support which was commonly employed as an element in the construction of miniature tripods, such as were in use as decorative candlesticks.¹⁰ Although legs generally have claw-feet, the lion or panther-headed protome is characteristic of these supports.¹¹

As far as I am aware this is the first of these fittings to have been recorded from a site in Scotland.

NOTES

1. J Curle, *PSAS*, LXVI (1931–2), 277–397.
A Robertson, *Britannia*, I (1970), 198–226. Trade was probably the most important factor.
2. *Sale Catalogue*, 30 no. 138.
3. For the type: R G Collingwood and I A Richmond, *The Archaeology of Roman Britain*, (revised edition, London 1969), 296–7 and fig 104 nos 49–53 = R (ii).
4. J Curle, *Newstead. A Roman Frontier Post and its People* (Glasgow 1911), 321–3 and pl LXXXVI, no. 16. *PSAS*, LXIII (1928–9), 553–5 and fig 115 no. 1 (Mumrills); *PSAS*, LIV (1919–20), 65, fig 7 nos 6 and 7, fig 8, no. 1 (Traprain Law).
5. F Henkel, *Die Römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande* (Berlin 1913), 56 and pl XXI, no. 410.
6. D Charlesworth, *Arch Ael* fourth series, xxxix (1961), 29 no. 63 and pl III, 13 (Corbridge). *Ibid.*, no. 65 = *Arch Ael* first series, III (1844), 144–5 fig (Chesters). *Trans Hawick Arch Soc*, 17th April 1900, ring from Chollerford, now in Wilton Lodge Museum, cited. F H Marshall, *Catalogue of Finger Rings, Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the British Museum* (London 1907), 184 nos 1164–6 (Slay Hill Saltings). M Henig, *Britannia*, I (1970), 254 and pl XXIV, A no. 2 b. (Chalgrave). Information E Greenfield (Thistleton). *VCH*, Leicestershire I, 204 =? Leicester Museum Br. 75.
7. Cf *Arch Ael* fourth series, XLIX (1971), 215–230, for the intaglio from South Shields which depicts *Silvanus-Cocidius* also wearing a cap and a tunic, as well as boots with leggings.
8. Cf G E Rizzo, 'Antonoo-Silvano', *Ausonia*, III (1908) 3–17. For *Silvanus* on a Hadrianic bronze medallion, F Gnecci, *I Medaglioni Romani*, II (Milan 1912), 5 nos 16–23, pl xxxix, 1–3. *Silvanus* is, of course, found in pre-Hadrianic art; e.g. on Trajan's arch at Beneventum (A V Domaszewski, *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien*, II (1899), 181 no. 3, 184 no. 77).
9. D Charlesworth, *Arch Ael* fourth series, xxxix (1961), 32 no. 5 and pl ix, 3 (Corbridge). Information Robin Birley (Chesterholm). R Righetti, *Gemme e Cammei delle Collezioni Comunali* (Rome 1955), no. 33, pl 1, 13. G Sena Chiesa, *Gemme del Museo Nazionale di Aquileia* (Aquileia 1966), nos 505–6. R Noll, *Kunst der Römerzeit in Österreich* (Salzburg 1949), fig 77.
10. *Annales de la Société d'Archéologie de Bruxelles*, IX (1895), 430, pl xxii, fig 1 (Tirlemont, Belgium). Also note an example from Colchester, *Trans Essex Arch Soc* third series, part 1 (1971), 82 and fig 27, no. 15. For a full discussion, cf Martin Henig, 'Zoomorphic Supports of Cast Bronze from Roman Sites in Britain', *Arch Journ*, cxxvii (1971), 182–7, especially nos 6–10.
11. No. 10 (= J P Bushe-Fox, *Richborough IV*, 1949, 130 and pl xxxvii, no. 130), from a bucket, does *not* have a clawed foot.

APPENDIX

Examination of Silver Signet-Ring (1970.25)

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The ring was thought to be made of silver and was analysed to confirm this and to identify the other constituents of the alloy. A non-dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectrometer, with radioisotope excitation, showed the surface metal to be silver alloyed with copper and containing minor/trace amounts of lead, zinc, gold, antimony and bismuth. The copper is present at the 3–12% level and this is consistent with the addition of brass as hardener and deoxidant.



a Cast of intaglio from Roman finger-ring, Culbin Sands (1)



b Glamis: front of cross-slab fragment.
Photographs by courtesy of *The Courier and Advertiser*