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Roman Pottery Kilns at Gloucester

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THE GLOUCESTER ROMAN ANTEFIX: AN INTERPRETATION

A ROMAN antefix was found some time before 1860 immediately to the north-east of Gloucester cathedral and close to the rampart, which marked the perimeter of both the legionary fortress and the later *colonia*.¹ It consists of a head placed in front of a palmette. (Plate 1). The treatment of the palmette is entirely conventional, but the head is remarkable for its amalgamation of male and female characteristics. The hair is parted in the centre and waved to the sides of the head in a distinctly feminine style and earrings in the form of pendant globes dangle from the ears, but the facial features are clearly those of a man. Not only are the pronounced bulges of the frontal bone typically masculine, but the upper lip is covered by a moustache. The bristles of the moustache are not marked, but the edge of the upper lip which is visible underneath rules out any possibility of the moustache being mistaken for a projecting lip and the bristles may have been omitted because the head could not be seen at close quarters or because it would originally have been painted.

Usually the heads on antefixes are Medusas, deities of various kinds, or, less commonly, tragic masks. The absence of attributes and easily recognisable physical traits makes this head difficult to identify, but a clue to its possible identity is furnished by the combination of male and female characteristics, which suggests that it may be a bisexual Medusa and thus represent an intermediate stage between the normal female Medusa and the wholly masculine form as exemplified by the famous Bath Gorgon.² In favour of this identification is the glowering expression of the face, created by the furrowed forehead, the sloping eyebrows, the protruding eyes and the downturned mouth, which can all be paralleled on other Medusas.³ The omission of the usual wings and snakes constitutes no obstacle to this explanation. The male Medusa at Chester is wingless;⁴ that at Dorchester, at least in its present damaged condition, lacks snakes⁵ and parallels can be cited for female Medusas without either wings or snakes.⁶ Nor do Medusas invariably have long, unkempt hair. On some gems their hairstyles are very similar to those worn by Roman ladies in the late Republican and Augustan periods,⁷ and, to cite a Romano-British example, a Medusa on a shield, which was found at Wallsend and evidently belonged to a statue of Minerva,⁸ has short, neatly-curled hair and no wings.

Why Medusa should have been endowed with masculine characteristics is uncertain. The long, tangled hair and beard of the Bath Gorgon might suggest a conflation with a local water god, especially since it adorned the temple of Sulis Minerva and Sea Medusas are well known. However, this treatment of the hair and beard is not an obligatory feature of male Medusas and it is more probable that either the Graeco-Roman Medusa was identified with a local male demon or that it acquired masculine characteristics because it occupied a similar position on buildings to that of the Celtic *tête coupée*.⁹ That the male Medusa owed its genesis to Celtic influence is not necessarily invalidated by the male Medusa at Hatra,¹⁰ which, on present evidence, appears to be an isolated

1. Height: 2ft 3in (0.69m.) A. Way, *Catalogue of the Museum Formed at Gloucester* (1860), 7; J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain*, 2nd edn. (1963), 165-6, no. 96, pl. 103 (= J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain under the Romans* (1964), 151-2); J. F. Rhodes, *Catalogue of the Romano-British Sculptures in the Gloucester City Museum* (1964), 19-20, no. 6.

2. I. A. Richmond and J. M. C. Toynbee, *JRS* XLV (1955), 97-105; Toynbee, 161-4, nos. 90-1, pl. 96.

3. E.g. R. Bianchi Bandinelli, *The Buried City, Excavations at Lepcis Magna* (1966), pl. 118.

4. R. P. Wright and I. A. Richmond, *Catalogue of the Roman Inscribed and Sculptured Stones in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester* (1955), 54, no. 163, pl. 39; Toynbee, 158-9, no. 84, pl. 91.

5. *JRS* XLVI (1956), pl. 16, fig. 2.

6. E.g. E. Espérandieu, *Recueil général des bas-reliefs, statues et bustes de la Gaule romaine* no. 1053; M. Pobé and J. Roubier, *The Art of Roman Gaul* (1961), no. 217; N. L. Hirschland, *Papers of the British School at Rome* XXXV (1967), pl. viiia.

7. G. M. A. Richter, *The Engraved Gems of the Romans* (1971), nos. 242-3, 699.

8. R. G. Collingwood, *Roman Inscriptions and Sculptures Belonging to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne* (1926), no. 275; T. D. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art to A.D. 900* (1938), 19, pl. vii, 2; A. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (1967), pl. 33b.

9. Ross, 90.

10. Toynbee, pl. 248.



PLATE I. The Gloucester Roman Antefix

phenomenon unrelated to the British male and semi-male Medusas. Although the Gloucester antefix may thus be said to reveal local influence in its subject, stylistically it is entirely classical. The superimposition of a head, bust or figure on a palmette is a frequent *motif* in Roman architecture, which was known to the Etruscans,¹¹ but was probably acquired by the Romans direct from the Greeks of south Italy and then transmitted through Italy to the northern provinces.¹²

The antefix can be dated only on stylistic grounds. The tightly-coiled tips of the palmette have been regarded as an indication of 2nd or 3rd century A.D. date,¹³ but do in fact occur in the 1st century A.D.¹⁴ The feminine hairstyle with its broad, flat central section and close waves is sometimes called the Agrippina coiffure. It was in fashion throughout the Julio-Claudian period and continued to be worn during the Flavian period.¹⁵ That it could have lasted slightly longer in such a remote part of the Empire as Britain is not inconceivable, but cannot be proved. The wavy shoulder locks, which hang down behind the ears and should not be confused with ribbons, were typical features of late Republican and Augustan hairstyles, but were also worn spasmodically with the Agrippina coiffure. They do not, however, show that the head is to be dated to the early Julio-Claudian period, when the transition from the Augustan hairstyle to the mature Agrippina coiffure took place, since this would imply an impossibly early date for the antefix.

Thus the stylistic evidence points to a 1st century A.D. date for the antefix. The questions arise whether this dating can be related to what is known of the history of Roman Gloucester and whether, as a result, the antefix can be more precisely dated. The building to which the antefix belonged has not been discovered and could well have been some distance from the findspot of the antefix. Its size cannot be calculated from the size of the antefix because the original position of the latter is unknown. The antefix could have been one of a series placed along the sides of a very large building, probably a major temple, in order to cover the joints in the roof tiles. On the other hand, it could equally well have served as the central acroterion above the pediment of a fairly small shrine, perhaps about four metres or less in width.¹⁶ All that can be said is that the building was of stone, was in the classical manner, and if the quality of the antefix is any indication, was well constructed. Such a building would not have been erected in the legionary fortress, which was established at Gloucester in the late Neronian or early Flavian period,¹⁷ since the fortress was built of timber. Nor does it seem likely that an extramural civilian settlement would have contained a stone-built shrine from which this antefix could have come. It is more probable that the antefix belonged to one of the new buildings in the *colonia*, which superseded the legionary fortress towards the end of the 1st century.¹⁸ Although some, if not all, of the first domestic buildings of the *colonia* had timber and clay superstructures on stone foundations, the forum was built of stone and was decorated with Purbeck and foreign marbles¹⁹ and there is no reason why the *colonia* should not have had other stone buildings in the early years of its existence. The date of the antefix can therefore be narrowed down to the late 1st century A.D.

Finally the chronological relation of the Gloucester antefix to the wholly masculine Medusas must be considered. The male Medusas at Dorchester and Chester can both be dated to the 2nd or

11. E.g. *Notizie degli Scavi* (1919), 27, fig. 10.

12. Ch. Picard, *Revue Archéologique* (1963), 113-87.

13. L. Buddle and R. Nicholls, *A Catalogue of the Greek and Roman Sculptures in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (1964), 108, no. 173.

14. E.g. Picard, 129-31, figs. 8-11; S. Bazzarin, *Stele romane con ritratti dal territorio padovano* (1958), 36, fig. 27.

15. G. A. Mansuelli, *Le stele romane del territorio ravennate e del Basso Po* (1967), 54-5.

16. Cf. H. Rolland, *Les fouilles de Glanum 1947-56* (1958), 99, 104 for the dimensions of the temple of Valetudo at Glanum.

17. Coins of A.D. 64 and 66 have been found, but Samian ware is believed to indicate an early Flavian date (H. Hurst, *Antiquaries' Journal* LII (1972), 39, 50, 53). Whether pottery can be used to prove an early Flavian as opposed to late Neronian date is debatable, and the possibility that M. Trebellius Maximus was responsible for the fortress cannot be altogether ignored (cf. S. S. Frere, *Britannia* (1967), 93).

18. For the dating of the *colonia* see the appendix below.

19. Hurst, 53-5.

3rd century A.D., the former by the inner markings of the eyes, the latter by the style of the hair and beard. The date of the Bath Gorgon, however, is less certain. Two architectural details of the temple of Sulis Minerva,²⁰ the omission of the modillions from the cornice and the form of the Corinthian capitals, which have tendrils extending onto the abacus, occur as early as the Flavian period. But they are also found later and the inner markings of the Gorgon's eyes, although possibly not an entirely reliable dating criterion in the case of a work so unclassical in style, suggest a 2nd or 3rd century date for the Gorgon. If the Gloucester antefix is in fact earlier than all the male Medusas, it would appear that the male Medusa did not evolve directly from the female type but indirectly via a bisexual type, for which the androgynous Medusa on the Gloucester antefix provides evidence.

APPENDIX

RECENT EXCAVATIONS have revealed that the legionary fortress at Gloucester remained in being until the late 1st century, when it was succeeded without a break by the *colonia*²¹. It is possible that the fortress was retained on a care-and-maintenance basis after the establishment of a new fortress at Caerleon c. A.D. 74/5. Wroxeter provides a close parallel for this. Numismatic evidence shows that the *colonia* cannot be earlier than A.D. 87. Its foundation is usually dated to the reign of Nerva (A.D. 96–8) on the strength of a solitary grave inscription at Rome,²² which reads: *D(is) M(anibus)/ M(arco) Ulpio Ner./ Quinto Gleui/ mil(iti) fr(umentario) leg(ionis) vi V(ictricis)/ Calidius/ Quietus collega/ fratri obseruato/ piissimo b(ene) m(erenti) f(aciendum) c(urauit)*. The Nervan dating of the *colonia* depends on the interpretation of *Ner.* in line 2. Mommsen²³ was the first to suggest that it shows the colony at Gloucester to have been a *colonia Neruiana*. His opinion, which was expressed only as a brief conjecture incidental to his discussion of Scolacium in Calabria, has been generally accepted by scholars as a certainty. Garzetti,²⁴ however, has pointed out that it is far from certain, but without going into detail. The great drawback to Mommsen's suggestion is the improbability that the name of the *colonia* would be split in two by the insertion of Ulpius' cognomen. A place name could come either before or, more often, after the cognomen, but should not be divided like this. Miss Smallwood²⁵ has suggested that *Ner.* is one of Ulpius' cognomina and that his full name was Marcus Ulpius Nerva Quintus. Another possibility is that *Ner.* is Ulpius' patronymic and should therefore be expanded in the inscription as *Neruae*. Usually the father's praenomen was given as the patronymic, but it could be replaced by his cognomen.²⁶ Strictly speaking the father's name should be followed by *f(ilius)* in the appropriate case, but this was sometimes omitted in the provinces and, while the evidence for its omission in Rome is slight and dubious,²⁷ it is quite possible that, since Ulpius came from Britain, his nomenclature conformed to provincial rather than metropolitan practice. The inscription cannot therefore be used by itself as conclusive proof that the *colonia* was a Nervan foundation. The discovery of two coins of A.D. 87 in different parts of the city²⁸ may be fortuitous, but the possibility that the colony was founded in or not long after A.D. 87 is worth considering. At about that time the legionary fortress at Inchtuthil was abandoned and Legio ii Adiutrix was sent to Moesia. The empty fortress at Wroxeter was demolished at the same

20. Richmond and Toynbee, 98–9; B. Cunliffe, *Roman Bath* (1969), 35–8.

21. Hurst, 24–69.

22. *CIL* VI, 3346.

23. Th. Mommsen, *CIL* X, 12.

24. A. Garzetti, *Nerva* (1950), 76.

25. E. M. Smallwood, *Documents Illustrating the Principates of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian* (1966), 115, no. 334b.

26. *CIL* II, 1070 provides a good parallel: *M(arco) Postumio/ Neruae f(ilio)/ Quarto* etc.

27. *CIL* VI, 6991, 23259, 28649, 29453 may all record ex-slaves, in which case the word omitted would be *libertus* or *liberta*. See also R. Cagnat, *Cours d'épigraphie latine*, 4th edn. (1914), 60.

28. Hurst, 40, 50.