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Metal Figurines in the Corinium Museum, Cirencester

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Metal Figurines in the Corinium Museum, Cirencester

By MARTIN HENIG AND JOHN MILES PADDOCK

The recent re-display of the best of the ancient figurines in the Corinium Museum seems a good opportunity to list and where necessary comment on them. With one exception all are cast in alloys of copper. One or two may well be *aliena*, but that is no reason to exclude them from scholarly notice, and they are after all part of the collecting history of Cirencester. The items are all small; there is also of course a fine Roman statuette of Cupid which was ploughed up in 1732 at the Leases in the town, and is now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Inv. 1887, 2256); the Corinium Museum has a copy on display. The late Prof. J.M.C. Toynbee suggested that it may have served as a table-lamp stand (Toynbee 1962, 130–1 no. 13, pl. 32).

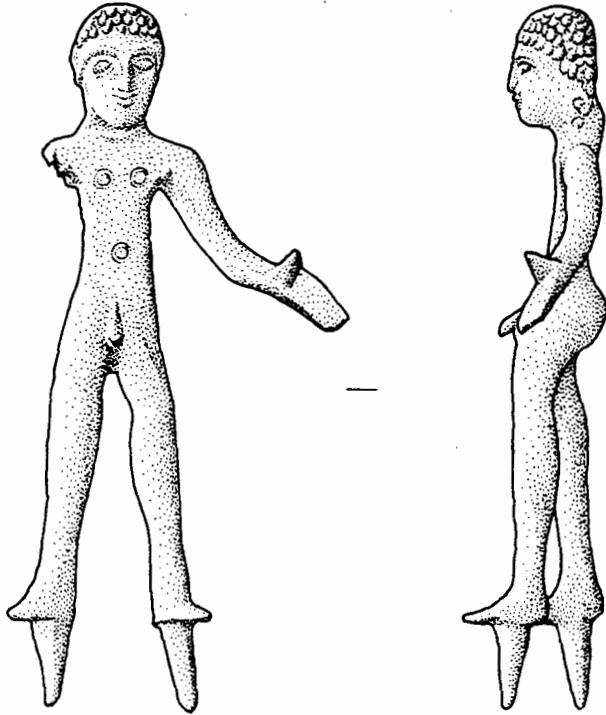
Pre-Roman figurines

1. B 752 (Fig. 1, 1)

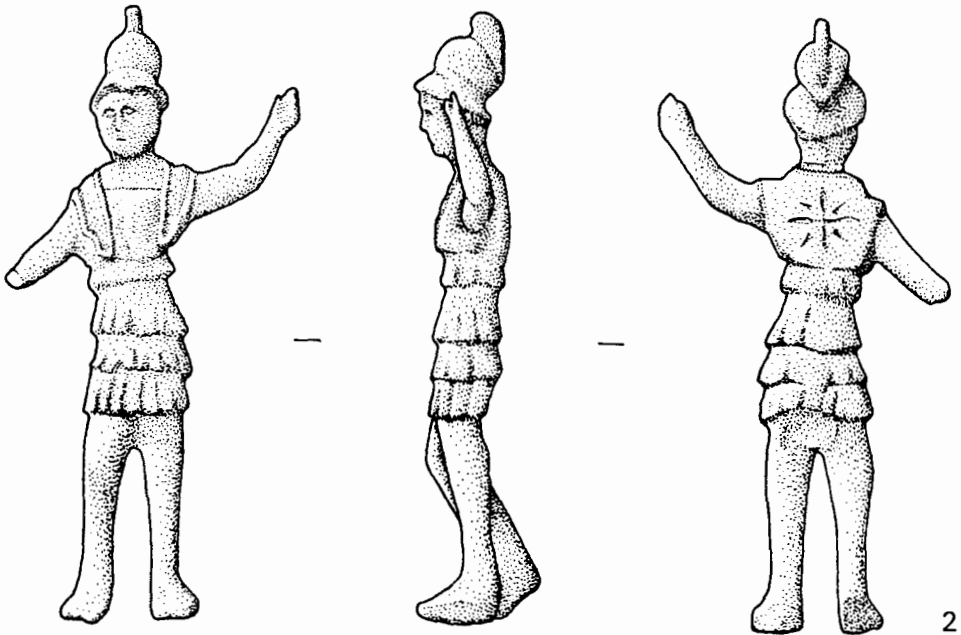
Nude male figure, head well modelled and crown shown covered in short curly hair indicated by means of semi-circles and circles. The torso is flat and the only details are two circles for the breasts and another for the navel. The right arm is missing; the left is complete to the hand, with the thumb shown at right angles. The legs are long in proportion to the body and the feet have spikes below them for fixture to a base. Dimensions: height 95 mm. There is no record of discovery. The type is North Italian, probably central Umbrian, and is as early as the fifth or fourth century B.C.. See Colonna 1970, nos. 225, 228, 237 and 248 for *comparanda* from Italy. The figurine is unlikely to have come to Britain in antiquity, but Colonna, *op. cit.* p. 200, includes a distribution-map which shows a diffusion of similar figurines north of the Alps and into Gaul. See Fleischer 1967, no. 210 for one from Vocklabruck, found with two other archaic figurines; also Adam 1984, no. 265, from Vieille Toulouse, and no. 266.

2. 1984/58/287 (Fig. 1, 2)

Mars, standing with left arm raised and the right lowered but broken off at the elbow. He wears a crested Apulo-Corinthian helmet, a cuirass (ornamented at the back with a star-motif) and a belted triple-tiered skirt composed of *pteryges*. Dimensions: height 86 mm; width across shoulders 15 mm. The figure comes from the Royce Collection and was supposedly found at Swell (not published by Grinsell 1964, pp. 5–33 or 1966, pp. 209–13). It is once again North Italian, probably of the third or second century B.C.. However, there is similar bronze in Plymouth City Museum, said to come from the Iron Age trading station of Mount Batten (Henig in Cunliffe 1988, p. 70 and fig. 36, no. 128), and it is possible that this, too, is evidence of Early Iron Age contacts with the Mediterranean world. Also see Adam 1984, no. 263.

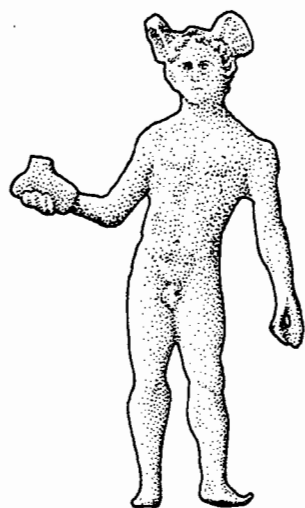


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Fig. 1 (1/1).



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5

Fig. 2 (1/4).

Roman figurines

Deities

3. B 596 (Fig. 2, 3)

Mercury, nude with prominent wings in his hair. His right arm is bent at the elbow and he clutches his money-bag in his right hand. His left arm hangs by his side, and he presumably originally held his caduceus in his left hand, but this is now missing. Dimensions: height 65 mm; width at level of purse 35 mm. From the Leases, Cirencester. This is a common type in Gaul, though rare in Italy, and according to Boucher is probably the type created by the Greek sculptor Zenodorus for the Arverni in the reign of Nero (Pliny, *N.H.* xxxiv, 44; see Boucher 1976, pp. 89–91, pls. 35 and 36). For examples in Belgium note Faider-Feytmans 1979, nos. 30–33.

4. B 594 (Fig. 2, 4)

A *youthful Lar* wearing a tunic, belted around the waist, and boots is figured upon a circular stand. His left arm is raised and bent at the elbow; he holds a rhyton in his left hand. His right arm is held at the level of his waist and there is a patera in this hand. Dimensions: height 67.5 mm. Possibly from Kingsholm, Gloucester. The base of the stand is marked 'Kingsholm Glos'. The type with the *Lar* quietly standing is rarer than the type with him walking or dancing with his tunic billowing out. There is a similar bronze in the Felmingham Hall (Norfolk) cache, but with attributes reversed as Toynbee (1964, 85) notes. Also see Walde Psenner 1983, no. 43 from Trento. *Lares* were generally displayed in pairs and so mirror images would have been frequent.

5. C 105 (Fig. 2, 5)

Head of the god Vulcan, torn, evidently in antiquity, from a very fine figurine, made of a heavy leaded alloy. This is a sensitively-modelled rendering, with somewhat concave face, deep-set eye-sockets (the eyes were probably separately made) and full mouth, with lips slightly parted. The face is framed by two tiers of curling locks above and by a bushy beard below. On the head is his cap (*pileus*) with lappets. Dimensions: height 45 mm; width 33 mm; Cripps collection; said to have been found in Cirencester. This item was published by Toynbee (1962, 140 no. 34, pl. 38; *eadem* 1964, 96) as a head of Jupiter Dolichenus; but there is no evidence for his cult at Cirencester, and in any case that deity has a Phrygian cap rather than a conical one (see Menzel 1986, no. 5 from Bonn). Comparison should instead be made with the highly classical figure of a seated Vulcan from Richborough, in the Ashmolean Museum (Henig and Wilkins 1982) as well as with the very fine provincial figurine from Catterick (Henig and Wilson 1982; the Cirencester head is in fact cited on p. 372). The *pileus* of the latter has similar lappets.

6. B 595 (Fig. 3, 6)

Diana Venatrix. The goddess is running and at the same time attempting to take an arrow from her quiver with her right hand; her left hand, which presumably held her bow, is missing. She has her hair bunched up in a chignon with four points, and wears a tunic with overfold and boots. Dimensions: height 54 mm; width across base of tunic 22 mm. From Gregory's Nursery Garden, Cirencester. The bronze is cited by Toynbee (1964, 84–5). Compare the similar but finer figure in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons (Boucher 1976, 153, fig. 274). Also see Henig in Hurst and Roskams 1984, 183 and pl. 18 no. 1, from Carthage. The type is derived from a Greek prototype of the fourth century B.C..

7. A 314/26 (Fig. 3, 7)

Applique. Hollow casting in the form of a nude, female torso. The arms are not indicated and the body terminates abruptly above the navel. The physiognomy is typically Celtic with triangular, wedge shaped nose, almond-shaped eyes with the pupils indicated by means of small punch-marks, and a slit mouth. The hair style approximates to that worn by women of fashion in Flavian times with a high diadem of hair rising to an apex over the forehead. The hair on the crown of the head is kept close to the scalp and may even be held in place with a hair-net. At the nape of the neck is a chignon. The breasts are not highly developed; very small circular indentations represent the nipples.

The base of the applique houses the socket of an iron pin which projects at right angles, indicating that the object was attached to an item of furniture or to some other object. Dimensions: height 56 mm; width 25 mm; shank of iron pin projects 33 mm. Cirencester, from excavation at Parsonage Field, 1959 (Richardson 1962). From rough paving sealing the wall trench of a late third to fourth century boundary wall north of the courtyard of building II.

Published by Toynbee 1964, 103–4, pl. xxvi as a British goddess. The nudity certainly suggests a goddess, presumably Venus, although the human coiffure suggests that there may be a link with portraiture. There is, for example, a marble statue in Copenhagen showing Venus with the head of a contemporary Roman lady (see Lawrence 1972, 268, pl. 82b) and one of us has found examples of portraits in the character of Venus on cameos (Henig 1990, nos. 78 and 79). It is suggested that iconographically this is very much a Roman object, belonging to the *mundus muliebris* and perhaps ornamenting a woman's clothes chest. The craftsmanship, however, is certainly local.

8. B 760 (Fig. 3, 8)

Applique. The casting consists of the bust of a young satyr with prick-ears and hair standing erect (indicated by means of vertical file cuts). The face has well-defined features, the nose is flattened and triangular in shape and the almond-shaped eyes with pupils clearly indicated fix the observer with a steady gaze. The mouth has lips slightly apart.

He wears a garment, fastened at the left shoulder, which is probably intended for an animal-skin garment (*nebris*). Its stylised folds are barely three dimensional, being indicated by means of simple lines. The reverse of the piece is slightly concave and completely unworked except that a lug of square section projects from it. Dimensions: height 46 mm; width 29 mm. Bathurst Collection, said to have been found in Gloucester. A somewhat similar applique, though rather more fully modelled, showing a satyr wearing a *nebris* comes from the villa of Tarrant Hinton, Dorset (information from Mr. A.G. Giles). Another attachment from Littlecote, Wiltshire figures a Bacchic figure dressed in the same garment but sporting an elaborate chaplet or crown (Henig in Walters 1988, 409–10, fig. 5). A third example of an applique in the form of a Bacchic bust was found at Coldharbour Farm, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (information from Mr. M.E. Farley, publication forthcoming) but it is, alas, headless. This applique is again of local British workmanship.

9. 216 F 28 (excavation small find number) (Fig. 3, 9)

Razor handle in the form of a bust of Minerva. Her features are highly schematised, and although the crest of her Apulo-Corinthian helmet is shown, her aegis is not clearly indicated. The physiognomy is simplified and mask-like with prominent somewhat rounded eyes, long nose and slit mouth.

The bust stands on a flattened trapezoidal pedestal ornamented with horizontal lines and

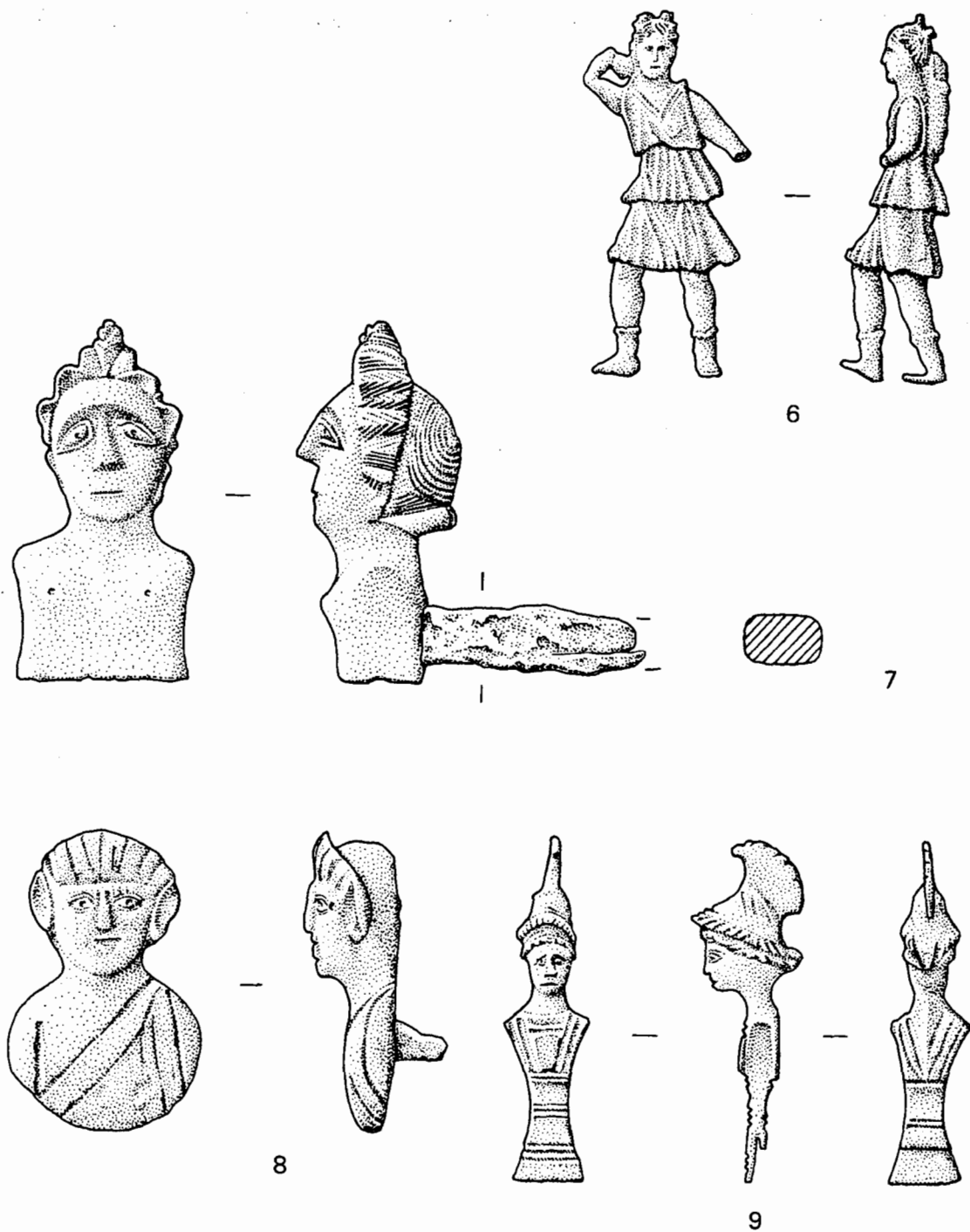


Fig. 3 (h).

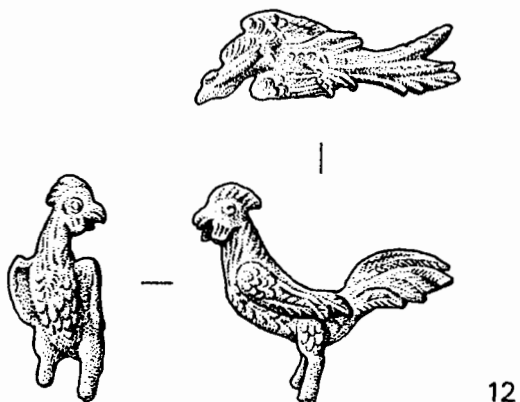
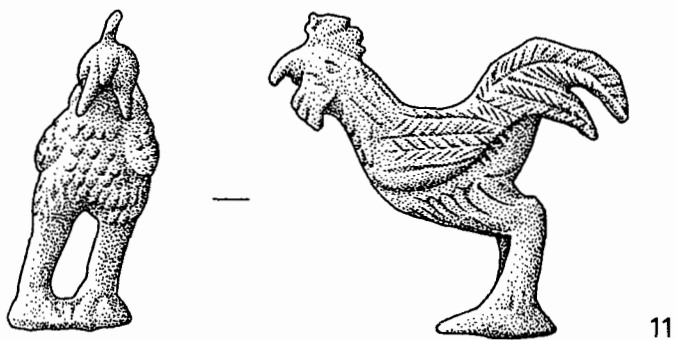
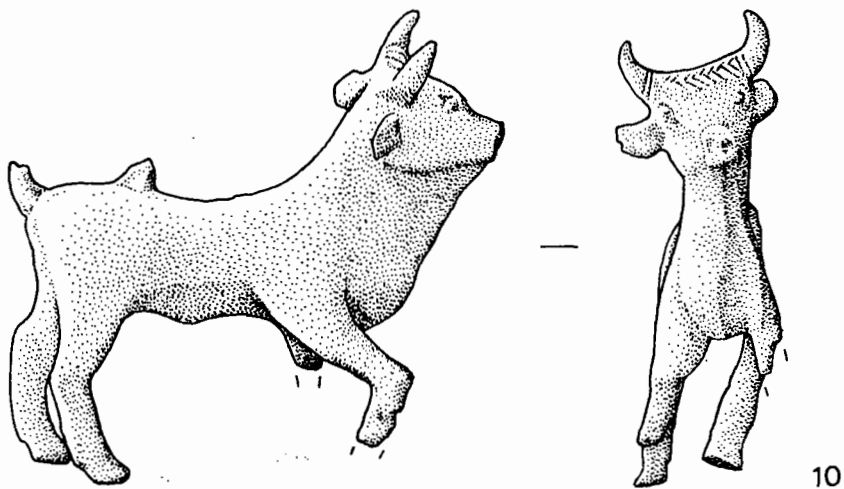


Fig. 4 (1/2).

with a notch at the base for affixing to an iron razor blade. Dimensions: height 52 mm width 13 mm. From the Chessalls, Kingscote, Gloucestershire. Published by Henig 1979, 19, fig. 16.

Somewhat similar handles come from Ospringe, Kent (Whiting 1920, 66, pl. opp. 65) and Woodeaton, Oxfordshire (Kirk 1949, 40, pl. iv). They have also recently been discussed in a paper by George Boon (1991, especially pp. 30–32, fig. 4 g–j).

Animals

10. B 526 (Fig. 4, 10)

Bovine; probably a bull rather than a cow or an ox although it is without sexual attributes. The animal holds its head high; it is heavily dewlapped and has prominent ears and horns. The tail is curved upwards over its rump. Its left fore-leg and part of its tail are broken away. Dimensions: length 70 mm; height 54 mm. Compare examples from Pompeii, Boucher 1976, p. 171 fig. 314 and Mathay in Gaul, *ibid.*, p. 222 fig. 377; Augst in Switzerland, Kaufmann-Heinimann 1977, no. 91; also from Germany, Menzel 1966, no. 94 in the collection at Trier, and *idem* 1986, nos. 128 and 131, at Bonn. Both two-horned and three-horned bulls occur on Romano-Celtic bronzes. Bulls were often endowed with divine attributes by the Celts (see Ross 1967, pp. 302–6). Amongst the Romans, the sacrificial bull was of great importance. The figurine would have been an appropriate gift for deposition at a shrine.

11. C 106 (Fig. 4, 11)

Cockerel. The bird has a well-defined comb, a ruff of feathers around its neck, rather stylised plumage composed of v-notches on its chest and three separate tail-feathers. Dimensions: length of body 49 mm; height 41 mm. Compare cockerel-candlestick from Nettleton, Toynee 1964, p. 128, pl. xxxva. For other cockerel figurines in Roman Britain see Rook and Henig, 1981, pp. 356–9. Like the figure from Aston, Herts. there discussed, it probably comes from a group of Mercury and his cult animals.

12. A 361 (Fig. 4, 12)

Cockerel, silver with gilt wings, tail and comb. Its head is turned to the right (presumably facing a figure of Mercury). This is a very finely detailed work of art, as can be seen for example in the neatly delineated breast-feathers. The feet are lost. Dimensions: length of body, 35 mm; height 29 mm. From Cirencester, Watermoor School site (CIR.67 c I i). Previously published in *JRS* 58 (1968) p. 198 n. 136, pl. xvii.3., and McWhirr 1986 p. 239 n. 1, pl. 157. Note the small silver cockerel standing at the feet of a silver figure of Mercury from Macon (see Walters 1921, no. 29 pl. v) and *exhn. cat. Trésors d'orfèvrerie Gallo-Romains*, Paris 1989, no. 137 (illustrated as no. 136). For a cockerel in a bronze group of Mercury, ram, tortoise and cockerel see *Britannia* 3 (1972) pp. 329–30 pl. xxv, B and C (Verulamium).

Note

The Corinium Museum has also acquired by the gift of Raglan PLC the particularly handsome 'bust of Mars or a hero' almost 7 cm high, found in Cricklade St., Cirencester in December 1989 and perhaps the finest of all known British examples of that type of razor-handle (previously published, *Britannia* xxiii (1992), 217–8, and Cotswold Archaeological Trust, *Annual Review* 3 (1991–2), 20–1, figs.) — [Ed.].

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