

TWO ROMAN SILVER INGOTS FROM KENT

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In September 1980, a late-Roman silver ingot, newly discovered at Reculver, was found to be Treasure Trove at a coroner's inquest held on 4th September at Herne Bay Police Station (Plates I and II)¹. The ingot is the second of its type to have been acquired in recent years by the British Museum from Kent, the previous example having no precise find-spot within the county.²

The newly discovered ingot is shaped like a double axe-head, and is stamped on one side with the inscription EXOFFI/ISATIS in two lines, the first S in the second line being reversed. The inscription is within a frame 2.7 by 1.9 cm., and is in two lines, with a border and dividing line of fine beading. The ingot weighs 317 grammes, and its maximum dimensions are: length, 12.6 cm.; width, 7.3 cm.; thickness, 0.65 cm. The weight of the ingot is only a little short of one Roman pound.³

The ingot was examined by the British Museum Research Laboratory, who reported as follows:⁴ "The ingot was analysed by X-ray fluorescence with the following results: copper, 3.7 per cent; silver 94.9 per cent; gold, 0.4 per cent; lead, 0.5 per cent; zinc, <0.1 per cent. X-ray diffraction analysis was carried out on some of the surface material on the ingot. No corrosion products of silver were

¹ For the first publication of this ingot see T. Tatton-Brown, 'A New Late-Roman Silver Ingot from near Reculver', in *K.A.R.*, no. 62. (Winter 1980), 40-1. Much of the information in this paper was kindly passed to me by Mr. T. Tatton-Brown, Director of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, and by my colleague, Miss C.M. Johns, of the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, British Museum.

² K.S. Painter, 'A Late-Roman Silver Ingot from Kent', in *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 84-92.

³ For the Roman pound see H. Chantraine in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real Encycl.*, ix, A.I. (1961), 617 ff., s.v. 'uncia'.

⁴ For this report we are indebted to Dr. M. Cowell.



(Photo. British Museum)

Roman Silver Ingot, fourth Century A.D. Found at Reculver in 1980. Height: 12.6 cm.



(Photo. British Museum)

Roman Silver Ingot. Found at Reculver in 1980. Detail of Inscription.

detected, only calcite and quartz which is presumably derived from attached soil. This might suggest that a land-based burial environment is involved."

The Research Laboratory's conclusions are supported by the evidence given by the finder, Mr. L. Claringbould of Faversham, who told the coroner's inquest that he had found the ingot in a lump of clay on the beach near Bishopstone Glen.⁵ It had clearly fallen recently from the top of the cliffs, where London Clay can be seen *in situ* above the pebbles and sands of the Oldhaven Beds.⁶ It is very likely that the ingot had been hidden by a Roman soldier from Reculver at the very end of the Roman period and never reclaimed.⁷ When the ingot was buried, presumably at the time of trouble at the very end of the fourth century A.D., the cliff would have been well over a mile further north, and the Roman road leading westwards from the now destroyed West Gate of Reculver fort may well have passed close by. In the medieval period the 'King's High Way', a road from the medieval village of Reculver on the west side of the fort to Bishopstone was also not far away. All these roads and the main part of the village of Reculver have now been eroded.⁸

The inscription on the Reculver ingot, EXOFFI/ISATIS, is an abbreviation for *ex offi(cina) Isatis*, 'from the workshop of Isas'. Other ingots with the same stamped inscription have been found at Richborough, and at Balline, Co. Limerick.⁹ The only other examples of the name come from Spain, in a dedication to Aesculapius, and from Lillebonne in France.¹⁰

By contrast with the relatively precise find-place of the Reculver ingot, that purchased by the British Museum in 1970 is known only to have been found somewhere in Kent, probably only recently before that date because its existence had not previously been recorded.¹¹ Shaped like a double axe-head, and stamped on one side

⁵ N.G.R. TR 208689.

⁶ Geological observations by Mr. T. Tatton-Brown.

⁷ T. Tatton-Brown, 40; R. F. Jessup, 'Reculver', in *Antiquity*, x (1936), 179-94.

⁸ T. Tatton-Brown, *op. cit.*, 41: 'See map of 1685 of Reculver, recently republished in S. Johnson, *The Roman Forts of the Saxon Shore*, 1976, 47.

⁹ K.S. Painter, 'A Late-Roman Silver Ingot from Kent', *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 84-92; Richborough: p. 87, no. 4, now at the Royal Museum, Canterbury; Balline, p. 88, no. 16, now at the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

¹⁰ A. Holder, *Alt-Celtischer Sprachsatz*, Leipzig 1904, s.v. 'Isas'. Spain, Santiago de Caçem, *CIL* II, 21: [F]abius Isas. France: Lillebonne, Holder quotes Schuerm. 2717, 'Of Isas.'

¹¹ Painter, *op. cit.* See note 9. The ingot is now in the collections of the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities. Its registration number is P.1970, 7-2.1.

with the inscription EX OFF CVR[MISSI], "ex officina Cur(missi)", in two lines, the ingot weights 319.47 grammes. Its maximum dimensions are: length, 12 cm.; width, 9.8 cm.; thickness, 0.7 cm. The ingot was cast, and a plug has been inserted in the bottom right-hand corner, presumably to make up the weight, which is only a little short of one Roman pound. This ingot was also examined by the British Museum Research Laboratory. On the composition of the metal they reported: "Two samples were taken for analysis by emission spectroscopy and both showed the metal to be essentially pure silver, containing small amounts of copper, gold and lead and traces of tin, bismuth, iron and silicon. This is the expected result for Roman silver. Quantitative analysis by atomic absorption and photographic methods revealed that the ingot has the following composition: silver, 95.2 ± 1 per cent; copper, 4.10 per cent; gold, 0.81 per cent; lead, 1.22 per cent; iron, 0.10 per cent." On the structure of the metal and the mineralisation they reported, "A taper section was polished on the under-side edge, and the structure of the metal was examined on the metallurgical microscope. The structure was found to be that of pure cast silver with fairly small evenly sized grains, and showing no signs of internal stress in the metal."¹²

The second line of the inscription, CVRMISSI, might be thought to be a personal name, and the whole inscription might be expanded to 'ex off(icina) Curmissi', 'from the workshop of Curmissus.' The same inscription, however, occurred on one of a number of ingots in a hoard from Coleraine.¹³ Mattingly and Pearce discussed the inscriptions on the ingots in the Coleraine hoard as follows: "The 'Patricius' of one ingot — a good fifth-century name — will have been the owner of a private "officina". . . The CVR MISSI of the other inscribed ingot must, according to Willers, represent a proper name. But the analogy of the inscription on a gold bar found in Siebenburgen (G. Elmer, in *Numismatičar*, Belgrade, 1935, 19), CVR THESS IN ARC AVR OB PROB ET SIGN, where CVR THESS is read as *curator thesauri sacri*, suggests a similar rendering for CVR MISSI here — *curator missionum*. A technical use of *missio* or similar word to mean, perhaps, "issues", is not attested, but is surely not impossible. The point seems to be that *curator* has an official sound and that the possibility of its use on one of these

¹² For this report I am indebted to my colleagues A. E. Werner and W. A. Oddy.

¹³ H. Mattingly, J.W.E. Pearce, and T. D. Kendrick, 'The Coleraine Hoard', *Antiquity*, xi (1937), 39–45, esp. 43–4.

bars forbids us to be very sure that the bars are unofficial.¹⁴ Mattingly and Pearce's hesitation was occasioned at least partly by the fact that the Coleraine inscription cannot be matched elsewhere.¹⁵ The discovery of the Kent ingot, however, with its identical inscription, gives confidence in the reading, and, with the Siebenburgen inscription and the fact that Nicanus was responsible for officially distributed plates and ingots, makes more probable the interpretation of CVRMISSI as *curator missionum* and not as '(workshop of) Curmissus'.

These two silver ingots are the fifth and sixth such officially stamped late-Roman ingots to have been found in Kent, giving a total of six of eleven known from Roman Britain, while eleven are catalogued from Ireland, and a total of fifty-six are known to the writer from the whole of the Roman Empire and its fringes. The list for Kent now reads as follows:¹⁶

1. Canterbury. 316 gm. 10.9 by 8.3 cm. Found with no. 2. No inscription. Royal Museum, Canterbury. Double-axe-shaped. *J.B.A.A.*, xxviii (1965), 1-15, and 12, no. 1; *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 86, no. 2, Pl. XXVb.
2. Canterbury. 320 gm. 11.9 by 4 cm. Found with no. 1. No inscription. Royal Museum, Canterbury. Bar-shaped. *J.B.A.A.*, xxviii (1965), 1-15, and 12, no. 2; *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 86, no. 3, Pl. XXVb.
3. Reculver. 317 gm. 12.6 by 7.3 cm. Inscribed EXOFFI ISATIS in two lines, the first S in the second line being reversed. British Museum, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities; registration no. 1980, 10-2, 1. Published above.
4. Richborough. 11 oz. 41½ gm. = (approx.) 314.5 gm. Inscribed EX OFFI ISATIS, with no crossbar in the A of ISATIS. Royal Museum, Canterbury. Double-axe-shaped. J. Garstang, *Arch. Cant.*, xxiv (1900), 272; F. Haverfield, *Additamenta ad C.I.L. VII*, 640; *Antiquary*, 1900, 335; *J.B.A.A.*, xxviii (1965), 12, no. 3; B.W.

¹⁴ 'Curator' does not merely have an 'official sound', but is in fact well attested as an official title. See, for example, A.H.M. Jones (ed. P.A. Brunt), *The Roman Economy*, Oxford, 1974, s.v. *curator*.

¹⁵ Holder, *op.cit.* s.v. 'Curmissi', interprets the word as a name, 'Curmissus'; but his evidence is solely the ingot from Coleraine here being discussed.

¹⁶ All the ingots from Kent now listed were weighed or re-weighed specially for this paper or for my papers of 1965 or 1972. The ingots numbered 6 and 7 in the 1972 paper were included there on the basis of a personal communication to me; but they have now been omitted because late in 1980 Dr. F. Jenkins assured Mr. T. Tatton-Brown that there are in fact no silver ingots which were found at Wingham.

Cunliffe (Ed.), *Fifth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*, Society of Antiquaries Research Reports, no. 23, Oxford 1968, 253; *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 87, no. 4.

5. Richborough. 317 gm. 12.3 by 7 cm. No inscription. British Museum, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities; on loan from the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, Department of the Environment. *J.B.A.A.*, xxviii (1965), 12, no. 4; B.W. Cunliffe, *op. cit.*, 107, and Pl. L, no. 243; *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 87, no. 5, Pl. XXVIa.

6. Kent. Exact find-place not known. 319.47 gm. 12 by 9.8 cm. Inscribed EX OF CVRMISSI. British Museum, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities; registration no. 1970, 7-2.1. Published above, and in *Antiq. Journ.*, lii (1972), 84-92, and 87, no. 8, Pl. XXII.

Officially stamped silver ingots of this type occur comparatively frequently during the fourth century. They were made because in the later empire, unlike earlier times, the Treasury required large sums in gold and silver for payment to its soldiers and officials.¹⁷ The government department of the *Sacrae Largitiones* was mainly responsible for the collection of taxes and levies, which included levies for clothing and recruits (both eventually commuted to payment in gold), a land tax, and a surtax (*collatio glebalis*) on the property of senators, while levies of gold, made on the accession of emperors and on each quinquennial anniversary, were imposed on senators (*aurum oblativum*) and the *civitates (aurum coronarium)*, and a similar levy was imposed on merchants and traders (*collatio lustralis*).¹⁸

The redistribution of the gold and silver to the soldiers and officials fell quite naturally to the collecting departments, that of the *Comes sacrarum largitionum*, 'Count in charge of the sacred distributions', and that of the *Comes rerum privatarum*, who was primarily responsible for imperial property which had accrued to the emperor through legacies and confiscations. Ingots are well attested among these imperial gifts. Payments to soldiers probably took place on the emperor's birthday, with supplementary payments on

¹⁷ J.P.C. Kent, 'Gold Coinage in the Late Roman Empire', in R. A. G. Carson and C.H.V. Sutherland Eds., *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly*, Oxford 1956, 190-204.

¹⁸ A.H.M. Jones (Ed. P. A. Brunt), *The Roman Economy. Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History*, Oxford 1974, 203-4, and 216-9; A. H. M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, London 1966, 154-67.

the occasion of imperial accessions and quinquennial celebrations.¹⁹ The five-yearly donative consisted of five gold *solidi* per man; but the accession donative, at least between A.D. 361 and 518, is known to have been five gold *solidi* and one pound of silver.²⁰ The practice of presenting pounds of silver is known to date at least from A.D. 305.²¹ It is related to the distribution of coinage, third-century evidence for which comes from the eastern and western extremes of the empire, and which continued through the following centuries, many of the higher denominations being mounted as pendants in jewellery.²²

Plate, as well as ingots and coin, was also being distributed by the early years of the fourth century and consistently thereafter.²³ The relationship between presentation plate and ingots is well attested. Six double-axe two-pound bars of silver, for example, found at Šabač in Yugoslavia, bear the same signature, that of Flavius Nicanus, as do the plates made for Licinius' decennalia and discovered at Červenbreg in northern Bulgaria, confirmed as donatives by their inscriptions.²⁴ Plate and ingots, furthermore, are found associated in the same hoards, as at Kaiseraugst in Switzerland and in the Canterbury Treasure itself.

¹⁹ Kent, 1956: see note 17, above.

²⁰ A.D. 361: Ammianus Marcellinus, xx, 4.18; Painter, *op.cit.*, 85.

²¹ J.W. Salomonson, 'Zwei spätrömische Geschenk-silberbarren mit eingestempelten Inschriften in Leiden', in *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen*, 63 ff.

²² A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1964 iii, 187–8; P. Bastien and C. Metzger, *Le Trésor de Beaurains (dit d'Arras)* (Numismatique romaine, x (1977); J.P.C. Kent and K.S. Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World Gold and Silver A.D. 300-700*, British Museum, London 1977, nos. 171, 172, 191, 192; K. Weitzmann (Ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century: Catalogue of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 9, 1977, through February 12, 1978*, New York 1979, nos. 61, 276, 295.

²³ Painter, *op.cit.*, 85; Kent and Painter, *op.cit.*, 20–6; B. Overbeck, *Argentum Romanum: ein Schatzfund von spätrömischen Prunkgeschirr*, Munich 1973; R. Laur-Belart, *Der spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst, Aargau* (Basel, 3rd edition) 1967.

²⁴ Painter, *op.cit.*, 85, 89, 91.