

## The Roman Archaeology Conference, 27-30 March 2014

The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies' biennial conference will be taking place at the University of Reading. There will be a reception and keynote welcoming lecture on the Thursday evening, followed by two-and-a-half days of parallel sessions, ending on the Sunday afternoon with an optional excursion to Silchester Roman Town. This year the conference is joined by TRAC, the Study Group for Roman Pottery and the Roman Small Finds Study Group.

Website: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology/Conferences/RAC2014/>



### Roman metal small finds in context

Session organiser: Hella Eckardt (University of Reading, UK)

This session brings together a range of specialists to demonstrate the social and cultural meanings that can be extracted from Roman metal artefacts. Some of these artefacts have long been published but have benefitted from recent re-examination while others are new finds. All papers share a contextual, artefact-centred approach, but individual speakers have employed different methods to address the overarching question of what metal small finds can reveal about life in the Roman provinces. Case studies range from an exploration of social practice through an analysis of the design and use wear of Roman spoons to the contextual analysis of material culture from the major Romano-British urban sites of London and Colchester. For the latter sites, two papers discuss the ritual use of material culture, be that the repertoire and distribution of bronze figurines or the peculiar nature of the London Walbrook assemblage. Several speakers relate metal finds to other artefact categories such as pottery, and indeed to other categories of data such as human remains, epigraphy and isotope analyses. It is often through such comparative and contextualised approaches that more nuanced meanings can be revealed.

The aim of the session is to highlight the research potential of what can be neglected objects, and to present the results of some very recent work.

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#### Friday, Room G10, Henley Business School

- 2.00 *Design, function and everyday social practice: a case study on Roman spoons*, Ellen Swift
- 2.30 *Metropolitan styling. The figurines from London and Colchester*, Emma Durham
- 3.00 *'Treasure', 'trash' and taphonomy: Approaches to the excavation and interpretation of Roman finds from the Walbrook valley*, Michael Marshall, Natasha Powers, Sadie Watson
- 3.30 Tea
- 4.00 *First generation urban communities: comparing ceramic and brooch assemblages in Roman Britain*, Martin Pitts
- 4.30 *What's in the name? 'Britishness' of British-made brooches abroad*, Tatiana Ivleva
- 5.00 *Immigrant soldiers at Hollow Banks Quarry, Scorton? New work on crossbow brooches, burial rites and isotopes*, Hella Eckardt

## **Design, Function and Everyday Social Practice: a Case Study on Roman Spoons**

Ellen Swift (University of Kent, Canterbury, UK)

This paper explores the design and function of Roman spoons, utilising both design theory and empirical study of artefacts to further our understanding of Roman everyday living, especially the construction and performance of culturally specific behaviour. Documentation of different kinds of wear marks shows that Roman spoons had a wider variety of uses than those often assumed from textual sources. Evidence of design intended, consciously or not, for right-handed users, and wear resulting from left-handed and right-handed use, allows us to explore how cultural convention was enacted and contested through everyday objects. The wider relationship between the design and function of everyday objects is shown to be complex. While some developing features of spoons apparently relate to changes in dining behaviour, more overt stylistic aspects do not appear to be related to function, and were arguably influenced by a wider context of social competition and the display of cultural knowledge.

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## **Metropolitan Styling: the Figurines from London and Colchester**

Emma Durham (University of Reading, UK)

Bronze figurines are an important artefact category, providing insights into manufacture, art and religious beliefs. The figurines from London and Colchester make up some 14% of the figurines recorded in my recent PhD from all of Britain. As one might expect they range from high quality figurines, some imported from Italy, to stylised provincial examples, many of which may have been produced in Britain and possibly even London or Colchester. A wide variety of types is found within these two towns, but one factor that stands out is the concentration of Eastern deities, particularly those of the Cybele and Isis cults. This paper will review the collections from London and Colchester within the wider context of figurines from Britain as a whole and what they can tell us about the religious habits of their inhabitants.

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## **'Treasure', 'Trash' and Taphonomy: Approaches to the Excavation and Interpretation of Roman Finds from the Walbrook Valley**

Michael Marshall, Natasha Powers and Sadie Watson (MOLA, UK)

The river Walbrook, which flowed through the heart of Londinium, has produced one of the most important collections of finds from Roman Britain. This material, recovered by workmen, antiquarians and archaeologists over the course of centuries, includes many thousands of well preserved artefacts as well as a notable collection of human remains. This material has played an important role in the interpretation and display of the city but there has also been fierce debate as to what the 'special' character of Walbrook assemblages really reflects: votive deposition into the river, casual dumping of rubbish, the use of middens in landscaping or simply the superb preservation of finds in waterlogged deposits. This paper surveys previous interpretations, discusses some methodological approaches to characterising deposition in the valley as well as presenting evidence from large scale excavations by Museum of London Archaeology at Bloomberg Place which shed new light on the problem.

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## **First Generation Urban Communities: Comparing Ceramic and Brooch Assemblages in Roman Britain**

Martin Pitts (University of Exeter, UK)

This paper compares elements of finds and pottery assemblages in Roman Britain, with emphasis on exploring the diverse cultural scenarios presented in the establishment of Britain's first urban communities. By isolating recurrent combinations of particular artefacts (or 'suites'), and examining assemblages in the light of pre-Claudian as well as Continental comparanda, I suggest that new ways of visualising cultural geographies are possible for this crucial formative period. In particular,

I argue that past interpretations of Claudio-Neronian urban communities (e.g. Chichester, Colchester and London) have been disproportionately driven by studies of (often later) settlement patterns and written historical sources. The finds data seemingly present a rather different – and arguably more nuanced picture, in which the nature of pre-conquest political affiliation and connections with Continental and military communities constitute major fault-lines of difference.

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## **What's in the Name? 'Britishness' of British-Made Brooches Abroad**

Tatiana Ivleva (University of Leiden, Netherlands)

British-made brooches were the result of cultural mixtures (a combination of Roman, Continental and British craftsmanship) and once they were brought abroad they ended in mixed cultural conditions (within a multiethnic Roman provincial society). Being made in Roman Britain and brought overseas for the purpose of fastening clothes, their functional aspect started to be overshadowed by other meanings attached to them by their owners, users and viewers. In this way these objects underwent a 'conceptualised' mobility just as their users experienced physical mobility, moving from one place to another within the Roman Empire. This paper presents the result of my recently completed PhD thesis on the mobility of Britons and the circulation of British-made objects in the Roman Empire.

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## **'Immigrant Soldiers at Hollow Banks Quarry, Scorton?' New Work on Crossbow Brooches, Burial Rites and Isotopes**

Hella Eckardt (University of Reading, UK)

Portable material culture generally, and dress ornaments in particular, are sometimes used to distinguish between locals and immigrants, but recent work on skeletons from Later Roman Britain shows that there is not always a straightforward link between identities as expressed through material culture and burial rite and geographical origin as defined by isotopic signatures. Excavation at Hollow Banks Quarry in Scorton (Yorkshire) revealed a small (15 burials) later Roman cemetery, characterised by an unusually high number of crossbow brooches and belts and by the unusual age and sex profile of the people buried there. The paper explores whether burial rites often viewed as intrusive in Britain (such as the wearing of personal ornaments in death) can be related to geographical origin. The new data from Scorton will be contextualised through a comparison with other later Roman burials, in particular Catterick and Lankhills (Winchester).

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