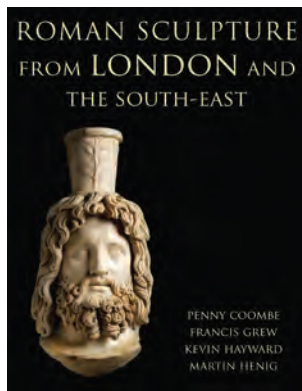


Roman sculpture from London and the South-East

PENNY COOMBE

One dark and chilly Monday in the winter of 2007, two overalled figures gingerly opened the doors to Bay 4 in the warehouse of the Museum of London reserve collections and the London Archaeological Archive. With small backpack hoovers strapped on, they moved further into the darkness as the overhead lights flickered. These were not *Ghostbusters*, but a conservator and myself, seeking out, cleaning and examining the Roman sculpture from London and South-East England, which would form part of the latest British contribution to the international *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* – a definitive catalogue of the sculpture of the Roman Empire.



was really the genesis of fascicule 10. Aided by a generous grant from the British Academy, and by help from experts and the curators at more than 35 institutions, this project has been completed by a team of four. Dr Henig has acted as academic director. Francis Grew of the Museum of London has undertaken a general editorial and co-ordinating role, which has been especially important in the later stages. Dr Kevin Hayward has provided specialist petrological analysis of the stone. I was employed as the research assistant.

The sources of stones and styles

The most significant innovation in this fascicule has been Kevin Hayward's petrological analysis and thin-sectioning of most of the pieces, included for the first time in the British Academy series. This has allowed identification of a far greater variety of materials than was possible in previous fascicules.

Dr Hayward had already demonstrated in his doctoral thesis the significance of understanding the source of the stone when attempting to set sculptures and stone-carving in their full socio-economic and geographic context.² We now have an insight into the important links between the Cotswold region and Londinium for the provision of stone and the transmission of a specific sculptural style. The evidence also shows that stone was imported from parts of northern France, especially into the region south of the Thames. All this emphasises the significance of supply via waterways – notably the Thames and the English Channel.

Styles of carving also travelled. The forms seen on the 'London Arch' and the 'Screen of Gods' (see below) have parallels in German and French monuments. Large blocks found in the foundations of the bastions of the Roman Wall in Londinium and at Verulamium could be reconstructed in the same manner as some of the largest of the funerary structures from the Rhine and Moselle, such as the mausoleum at Igel near Trier.³ Martin Henig has suggested that many items were carved

The project

The British Academy's contribution to this international publication project is the cataloguing of sculpture from Roman Britain. Since 1977, the Academy has published nine fascicules (parts) of its series. The new fascicule 10, which is being published in March 2015, covers Greater London, Surrey, Kent and Hertfordshire.¹

Dr Tom Blagg began listing items for inclusion in the fascicule some years ago, but sadly died before the work was fully under way. In 2007, the responsibility for completing the fascicule fell to Dr Martin Henig, who was already author of fascicules 7 and 9, which had catalogued all the sculpture from the Cotswold region and the North West Midlands respectively. It was particularly appropriate that he should now turn to London and the South-East because, between 1965 and 1967, he had compiled the original catalogue cards of items in the then Guildhall Museum's collection, which

1. Penny Coombe, Francis Grew, Kevin Hayward & Martin Henig, *Roman Sculpture from London and the South-East* (*Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani*, Great Britain, Volume I, Fascicule 10). Further information can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/pubs

2. K. Hayward, *Roman quarrying and stone supply on the periphery – Southern England: a geological study of first century funerary monuments and monumental architecture* (BAR British series 500, 2009).

3. E.M. Wightman, *Roman Trier and the Treveri* (London 1970), pl. 11.



Figure 1
A temple dedicated to Mithras was built beside the Walbrook, City of London, in the mid 3rd century AD. It was rededicated to Bacchus in the early 4th century. The site was excavated in 1954 because of building work. Among the fine pieces recovered was this head of the god Serapis. (Catalogue entry 16.)
Photo: copyright the Board of Governors of the Museum of London.



Figure 2

A frieze of Medusa heads, from the 2nd century AD. Imported by Thomas Howard, second Earl of Arundel (1585-1641), this was evidently one of the most highly prized classical antiquities in early 17th-century England, and inspired some of the greatest artists of the day. After Arundel's death, his London mansion off the Strand was requisitioned by Parliament during the English Civil War, and the collection broken up. Some are preserved in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, but others of his pieces were simply abandoned in the garden. This one was excavated on the site of the house in 1972. (Catalogue entry 47.) Photo: copyright the Board of Governors of the Museum of London.

when they arrived at their destination in order to avoid damage during transport, with evidence from London of workshops of sculptors originating from the Cotswolds.⁴ It is possible that artisans from other parts of England or even elsewhere in the North Western provinces were also located in London, to complete work that had been commenced before shipping.

Monumental architecture

Fragments are now all that remain of the sculptural embellishments of several noteworthy buildings from the region. At the Roman port of Richborough in Kent, a marble-clad arch, evidently surmounted by an equestrian statue, provided an awesome gateway to Britain in much the same way as Trajan's arch at Ancona must have welcomed sailors to Italy.⁵ Excavations in 1975 recovered 29 stones that had been reused as building material within the late-Roman riverside wall in London; Tom Blagg devised a masterly reconstruction to show how they had originally formed part of a single monumental arch (the 'London Arch'), perhaps from a nearby temple precinct. He also showed how another nine fragments retrieved from the same wall in the same excavation originally belonged to an impressive screen, one face of which depicted six deities (the 'Screen of Gods').⁶

4. M. Henig, 'Sculptors from the west in Roman London', in J. Bird, M. Hassall and H. Sheldon (eds), *Interpreting Roman London: Papers in memory of Hugh Chapman* (1996), pp. 97-103.

5. J.B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture* (second edn, Harmondsworth, 1981), pp. 179-81, ill. 109.

6. T.F.C. Blagg, 'The Roman Sculptured Stones', in C. Hill, M. Millett and T. Blagg, *The Roman Riverside Wall and Monumental Arch in London* (LAMAS Special Paper No. 3, London, 1980).

Marbles

The fascicule catalogues a quantity of very fine imported marble sculptures, unsurpassed in number and importance so far as Roman Britain goes. Perhaps the finest and the best known of the marbles are the 12 pieces recovered from the Temple of Mithras at Walbrook in the City of London, and the Baccheum that succeeded it (Figure 1). Outside the provincial capital, two marble busts were excavated from the cellar of the villa at Lullingstone in Kent, and there is an impressive statue of Venus from Hinxworth, Hertfordshire. Although now very fragmentary, 28 pieces belonging to a sarcophagus in Attic style and of Greek marble from Welwyn in the same county, as well as fragments from a statuette of Orpheus playing a lyre, hint at the presence of wealthy residents in that region, perhaps with direct links to Greece.

The opportunity has been taken to catalogue in this fascicule other pieces that were brought into the country later, particularly during the 17th- and 18th-century fervour for acquiring ancient art. The marbles imported by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, hint at the calibre and quantity of Roman art on display in London houses during this period (Figure 2). Two items in the fascicule, both identified as parts of sarcophagi, depict figures that have been extracted so neatly from larger objects as to suggest deliberate severing in order to aid transport and collection.⁷

7. Catalogue entries 45A and B.



Figure 3

This is a superb casting of the head of Hadrian from the early 2nd century AD, one of a mere handful of major bronze portraits of him to have survived from antiquity. Erected in his honour, the statue no doubt stood in the Forum until the head was roughly hacked from the body and thrown in the Thames – either as a cult offering, or after deliberate destruction by iconoclasts in late antiquity. (Catalogue entry 213.) Photo: copyright British Museum.

Destruction and survival

We know that the catalogue contains only a part of the totality of sculpture that must once have graced public and private spaces in the Roman South-East.⁸ Bronze sculpture was particularly vulnerable, as it was often melted down to be reused, but even some of the finer carvings in stone were not safe from a less glorious, if more functional, end.

Several of the bastions of the late-Roman inland city wall stood firm on foundations built on a base of sculptures. Bastions 8, 9 and 10 included the 'Camomile Street soldier', a funerary statue of a lion, and several blocks from large funerary monuments. Bastion 4 contained the tombstone of a young girl, Marciana. The funerary monument of Gaius Julius Classicianus, with its carving of the finest quality as befitted a procurator of the province, originally emerged from Bastion 2 – along with a 'complete quarry of stones' numbering 40 cartloads – during the 1852 excavations.⁹ The tombstone of the centurion Vivius Marcianus, the earliest Roman sculpture find from London, uncovered in 1669 during the rebuilding of St Martin-within-Ludgate by Sir Christopher Wren, bears a cramp socket in the chest of the figure as evidence of its reuse as a building block. Another example is the rare hexagonal tombstone of Claudia Martina, set up by her husband Anencletus who may well have been a slave.

In some cases, the very method of destruction or deposition ensured that the object has survived today, even where sculptures may have been deliberately destroyed or damaged in acts of political iconoclasm.¹⁰ A magnificent cast bronze head of Hadrian was thrown into the Thames but, protected by silt, it was preserved intact until dredged up in 1834 (Figure 3). Similarly, a right forearm and hand discovered in a well near Seething Lane in the east of the city was preserved by silt.

The cache of sculptures that includes a hunter god (Figure 4), a small stone box topped by a reclining female figure, and the leg from a fine marble carving of Neptune, excavated in 1977 from a well under Southwark Cathedral (albeit, interred after suffering significant damage), may have been buried for similar reasons, though perhaps here it was the result of Christian, rather than political zealotry.¹¹

Excavation and preservation

In the mid-19th century, Charles Roach Smith tirelessly campaigned for the key works to be preserved and

displayed to the public, his efforts providing the core of the London collection held mainly at the British Museum.¹² Excavations conducted by W.F. Grimes and Museum of London Archaeology have continued the tradition. Elsewhere, Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit has excavated part of the *Classis Britannica* fort in Dover together with the sculptures from it. As the City evolves and further development takes place throughout the region, we can expect the collection to grow, perhaps even adding items of a quality to rival the statue of an eagle carrying a serpent in its mouth discovered in late 2013 probably from a funerary context, and included in this fascicule as an appendix (Figure 5).

The continuing story

The very fact that other items will appear over time highlights the limitations of any printed catalogue. There are other restraints in producing the work. Although we have attempted to identify every piece, in many cases certainty is difficult. Indeed, some of the stones have been the subject of debate for many years, and arguments about several of them will no doubt continue. In other cases, the item is so fragmentary as to be almost impossible to identify, while others have deteriorated since they were found. Bastions, river and experts in conservation have preserved the collection for us for now, but a couple of the objects grow increasingly friable.

Finally, while many of the sculptures are of interest individually, there are others of less moment. For Adolf Michaelis, Sir John Soane's wide-ranging collection of antiquities incorporated, alongside high value or high interest pieces, an 'immeasurable chaos of worthless fragments'. This is too harsh a judgement to be applied here, and indeed it misses the point.¹³ Important for some individual pieces and their complex provenance, it is in the collection and identification of *comparanda*, and in bringing together disparate items that the significant value of the assemblage is shown. For instance, examples from Verulamium, London and Springhead have allowed us to identify a new category of bronze clamp, each cast in the form of a human thumb (albeit at different scales) – probably designed to hold inscriptions in place on a wall. Together, the number of fragments of column and capital, or at least the larger examples like that from Verulamium, provide evidence for significant buildings in their various locations.

This fascicule is a resource, the start of the story, not the end, and an important one in which we can record what is here before any further decay or loss. We trust it will be of interest and use to scholars, now and in the future.

8. Suetonius, *Divus Titus*, iv.1.

9. Burkitt, 'Excavations near the Roman Wall on Tower Hill, London', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 8 (1853), p. 240.

10. B. Croxford, 'Iconoclasm in Roman Britain?', *Britannia* 34 (2003), 81-95, doubts Christian iconoclasm in many cases.

11. R. Merrifield, 'The London Hunter-God and his Significance in the History of Londinium', in Bird *et al.*, *Interpreting Roman London*, p. 106.

12. M. Henig and P. Coombe, 'Roach Smith and the antiquities of London: the sculptures', in H. Wiegel and M. Vickers (eds), *Excalibur: Essays on Antiquity and the History of Collecting in Honour of Arthur MacGregor* (BAR International Series 2512, 2013).

13. C.C. Vermuele, *Catalogue of the Classical Antiquities in Sir John Soane's Museum, London* (London, 1953), p. 30.



Figure 4
Recovered with other carved stonework from a well in the crypt of Southwark cathedral during excavation in 1977, this figure of a hunter god was probably carved by a sculptor from the Cotswolds in the 2nd to 3rd century AD. In his left arm the hunter cradles a bow; with his right, which is a little too large in proportion to the rest of his body, he reaches up and back to draw an arrow from the quiver he carries on his back. He is flanked by a dog at his left, and by a stag at at his right. (Catalogue entry 74.) Photo: copyright the Board of Governors of the Museum of London.



Figure 5

In a powerful representation of the eternal struggle between heaven and the underworld, an eagle with wings partially spread clasps a writhing serpent firmly in its beak. Approximately half life-size, both eagle and serpent are meticulously carved. The bird's feathers are of varying length and profile, ranging from those at the neck to long, slightly curving pinions in the wings. This rich texturing is characteristic of Romano-British art at its best. The statue shows almost no weathering. This, and the fact that the back is less detailed, suggests that it was designed to be displayed in an alcove or niche within a building, most probably a burial chamber. (Catalogue entry 229.) Photo: copyright Museum of London Archaeology.