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## *Roman Spoons from Dorchester*

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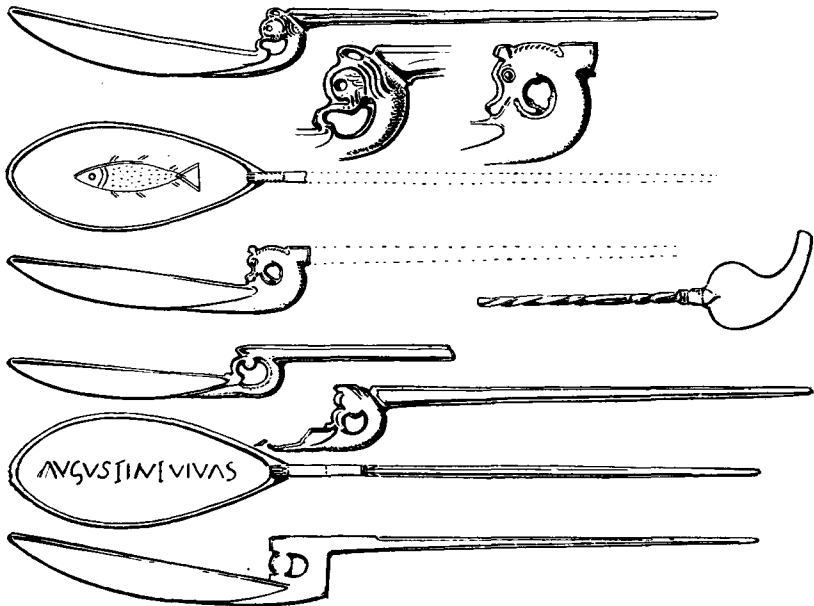
[Read 12th May 1921]

THE silver spoons in the Dorchester Museum, exhibited by Capt. Acland, F.S.A., were discovered in 1898 or 1899 on the Somerleigh Court Estate, in Dorchester, a prolific Roman site. The coins belonging to the find, over fifty in number, are all *siliquae*, dating from Julian II to Honorius (A.D. 360-400); among them is one coin of Licinius I, A.D. 317, which is probably intrusive. The coins, examined by my colleague, Mr. H. Mattingly, and to be published in the *Numismatic Chronicle* later in the present year, thus give the second half of the fourth century as the probable date of the find, a period with which the general character of the spoons is in agreement. The silver object figured with the spoons belongs to a small class represented in England and perhaps used as manicure knives. There is a specimen with a long handle and smaller blade in the British Museum.

The spoons are in all probability Christian. Dorset is one of the English counties from which Christian remains are already recorded; the mosaic floor of a villa at Frampton had the sacred monogram among its ornament, and two rings from Fifehead Neville bear the same symbol. Devon and Cornwall on the west and Hampshire on the east have also objects of the Early Christian period; the West Country as a whole must have had a considerable Christian population during the latter part of the Roman occupation.

Two reasons more especially suggest a Christian origin. The first is that a wish or acclamation AVGUSTINE VIVAS! is engraved in the bowl of one example. It seems to be the fact that

pagan spoons rarely, if ever, bear inscriptions of this kind,<sup>1</sup> which, as a class, belong to the time when Christian subjects or symbols, such as the sacred monogram, may also be expected to occur; inscriptions are frequently accompanied by such symbols. The second reason is the presence of the fish engraved, rather lightly, in the bowl of another spoon. This may not amount to proof of Christian origin, but it points in that direction. Another spoon engraved with a fish in a similar way was found at Thivars, in the



Roman Spoons from Dorchester ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ): details  $\frac{1}{4}$ .

Department of Eure-et-Loir, in the north of France, in a well on the site of a Roman villa.<sup>2</sup> In both these spoons the fish may well have a Christian significance, but their association with the Church is uncertain.<sup>3</sup> Though the spoon was never used in the

<sup>1</sup> de Rossi, *Bullettino di archeologia christiana*, Nov.-Dec., 1868, p. 81.

Other spoons discovered in England bear such acclamations. One, found at Colchester, has AETERNVS VIVAS; another, found near Sunderland, is broken and has an imperfect inscription: —NE VIVAS (*Archaeological Journal*, xxvi, 1869, p. 76). An unpublished spoon found near Barbury Castle, North Wilts., and now in the Devizes Museum, has the legend VERECV, perhaps part of Verecundus, scratched within the bowl.

<sup>2</sup> H. Leclercq, in Cabrol's *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, article *Cuiller*, col. 3175.

<sup>3</sup> We may notice the occurrence of the fish in the service of pewter vessels found on the site of a Roman villa at Appleshaw, in Hampshire, and now in the British

Western Church in the administration of the Eucharist, it does seem to have been employed in early times for transferring wine to the chalice from the larger vessels in which it was brought as an offering, and for placing the bread upon the paten in order that it might not be touched by the hands. But spoons certainly made for these purposes are far to seek. Nearly all the Early Christian examples known to us were originally made for secular or family use ; many, like one of the Dorchester spoons, bore the owner's name with a wish for health and long life, and some were doubtless birthday, or perhaps even christening, presents. It is true that numbers of spoons were bequeathed, with other plate, to churches ; but where any record exists it seems to show that they were employed for the service of pilgrims and other visitors to churches, who were frequently given refreshment by the clergy. The circumstances of discovery at Thivars seem rather definitely against ecclesiastical use, and all that we can say is that the spoons under discussion probably belonged to a Christian family living at Dorchester in the second half of the fourth century.

The interest attaching to these spoons is not exhausted by the inscription on one, and the possibly Christian emblem on another. In more than one case the volute between stem and bowl terminates in an animal's or monster's head. A spoon preserved at Rome has a gryphon's head in this position, and, since it is treated in a classical style, the idea of placing a head at this point may well have suggested itself to a Greek or Roman. But the heads on the Dorchester spoons are not Greek or Roman but barbaric,<sup>1</sup> and of a type which finds its affinities in a definite region, Picardy, in the north of France. Barbaric ornament from this district, dating from the latter part of the fourth century, must be Teutonic, and is likely to be Frankish.

It is clear that this raises a problem of some importance. There were no Teutons in the west of England at this early date ; only in the Thames Valley may there have been a few settlements. But even supposing these to have certainly existed at the time in question, we have no evidence that a Roman population lived on such terms with them as to have copied their ornament upon its utensils. Such early Thames Valley settlements would, moreover,

Museum ; the fish is engraved on a small pointed-oval dish (*Archæologia*, lvi, p. 12). Having regard to the chalice-like form of a cup belonging to this service, we may at least consider the possibility that this dish and cup may have had a sacred use, since the presence of the *Chi-Rho* on another vessel shows that the whole belonged to a Christian family.

<sup>1</sup> What appears to be a similar head is seen on a spoon among the Roman antiquities excavated at Lydney Park, in Gloucestershire (W. H. Bathurst, *Roman Antiquities at Lydney Park*, with notes by C. W. King, pl. xxv, fig. 4).

be of Saxon origin, and the beast-heads appear to be Frankish. It would seem, then, that we have to cross the channel to discover a probable place of origin for these spoons. Such a place is found at Vermand, near St. Quentin, where large Roman cemeteries were excavated about forty years ago. The finds brought to light on this site, which was successively a fortified camp and a town, include a number of objects with Christian subjects and symbols, quantities of things purely Roman in type, including some silver spoons, large numbers, again, of things Frankish in type, chiefly brooches and other ornaments.<sup>1</sup> On these Frankish objects occur animal's or monster's heads very nearly allied to those on the Dorchester spoons, especially to the type in which the creature seems to be biting the edge of the bowl: this type seems to have been popular at Vermand.

At Vermand, therefore, we have a site where two conditions are found making it likely that such spoons as these from Dorchester may have been made in that part of France: first, there was a Roman-Christian population using the ordinary types of Roman utensils, glass, pottery, etc.; secondly, there was side by side with it an immigrant Teutonic (Frankish) population, using a particular kind of biting beast as ornament. The Roman civilization of Vermand seems to have been practically wiped out by the Vandals and Goths in A.D. 407. This date just allows time for the arrival of late fourth-century spoons from the district in England, with which communications must have been frequent.

The problem must be solved by those who have made a special study of Early Teutonic antiquities, especially in regions where, as in Picardy, barbaric and Roman influences met. Before we can assign the spoons an origin in our island we must show that the motive of the mordant beast could have been known to craftsmen working in England at the date suggested by the coins.

It has a rather melancholy interest to note that in 1914 the Somme was again overrun; and again Vermand lies in an area devastated by Teutonic forces. This time it is destined to rise from its ashes, and the town of Cambridge has aided in its restoration. Possibly in the course of building operations more relics of the period about A.D. 400 may be discovered—some may even find their way to Cambridge. If among such objects spoons should occur with the beast-heads actually on their volutes, as we see them in the Dorchester examples, the origin of the Dorchester spoons in Picardy would become almost certain. It is very probable now.

<sup>1</sup> For the antiquities of Vermand see T. Eck, *Les deux cimetières gallo-romains de Vermand et de Saint-Quentin*, 1891.