

Exploring Romano-British Identities through Dress Accessories and Toilet Instruments

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The lecture was illustrated by artefacts from London, although the speaker pointed out that similar finds are made throughout the country. Information from new, large assemblages from London plus some from the archives are being collated to shed light on the lives of Londoners during the Roman period. At that time, there was a contrast in styles of town planning between the areas east and west of the Walbrook River, with the east being more formally 'classical' in its layout and the west being more irregular; the finds from each area seem to reinforce this difference.

Tacitus, in 'Agricola, Book 1' wrote of the Britons "Step by step they were led to things which dispose to vice, the lounge, the bath, the elegant banquet. All this in their ignorance they called civilisation, when it was but a part of their servitude" and it is true that modes of dress and personal adornment began to resemble those of Romans, but local people were keen to identify with their new Roman neighbours and this was an important way of doing so.

There are a number of things we would like to know about people living in London at this time:

- their age
- gender
- ethnicity
- legal status (e.g. free or enslaved)
- profession
- religion
- wealth
- family connections

Some of this information can be obtained from inscriptions, writing tablets and other means, but also by objects such as jewellery, although this can sometimes be misleading. For example, gold should be an indicator of wealth and some gold is found in London, but not in large quantities. This could be because the display of gold was considered vulgar and less conspicuous metals were used; or it could be that gold was on display but was frequently melted down and used again. More modest items were made of silver, sometimes plated, bone or copper alloy.

An interesting copper alloy *bullae* was found at the Bloomberg London site, close to Walbrook; *bullae* were worn as amulets by young boys and set aside at adulthood. A later, similar item was found on a woman, being worn as a pendant; this seems to be in imitation of the original use of *bullae* but without the social connotations. Amulets and jewellery in gold and amber (e.g. phalluses and miniature gladiator's helmets) are often found with children and seem to have some protective quality.

Finger rings are often reflective of peoples' interests and aspirations, e.g. pastoral or mythological scenes; they also mark passages through life, e.g. weddings or betrothals. One site contained several images of Bacchus/Silenius. Does this indicate a particular interest in that area? Most finger rings are made of iron or copper alloy, with a small amount of gold. Most adult men wore plain, practical rings, sometimes with intaglios or keys, whereas women and children had a wider range and were more decorative.

There were lots of bracelets from Middle Walbrook, typical of later Roman bracelets, including pennanular strip bracelets from the mid-1st century worn by soldiers, possibly as military honours; also large stone (shale or jet), plain examples, again worn by men, possibly also connected with the military.

Brooches from the assemblages contain an unusually high proportion of continental types, reinforcing the image of the population of London as immigrants and soldiers. British styles are found mostly to the west of the Walbrook and continental styles to the east, around Cornhill; the suggestion is that the British Iron Age population was living in the west and the immigrant population in the east, although later occupation of the west appears to be military.

Hairpins are frequently found; earlier examples are sometimes of copper alloy and are longer than later ones, probably reflecting the more elaborate hairstyles of earlier times; most are of bone.

There is much evidence of how people took care of themselves, particularly finds of tweezers and nail cleaners; the latter seem to be primarily British; also of cosmetic grinders, mainly found in the Walbrook valley.