

FIGURINE

Unique ID: HESH-FF83C3

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

Carved soapstone bovine (Ox or Cow) figurine of Roman date (100-350 AD). The figurine is naturalistic in style and incomplete having three broken legs; two of which were discovered close to the find. The carving has been achieved from a combination of whittling and carving, probably using a knife. Although some of the elements are stylised in design the overall impression of the figure is life-like and well proportioned. In shape the body of the ox is sub-rectangular from which extends the horned head and four sub-rectangular D shaped cross sectioned feet. The head is triangular in shape with two projecting horns (of which one is worn and the other broken) beneath which the ears extend and are oval in shape, the eyes are pointed oval and deeply recessed and the snout / mouth is rounded. Detailing around the neck and snout and eyes is achieved by both diagonal cuts and an element of cross hatching. The neck is thick and chunky with roles of skin depicted, the V shape of the neck forms a central ridge which extends beneath the body of the ox and terminates between the rear legs. The four legs extend from the body, each terminates in a flat foot suggesting that the cow stood upright; the position of the legs also suggests that the pose of the animal was in mid stride - leading with the right foot. The body of the cow is similarly naturalistic in design with the flanks, back and belly being shown through carved profiles and incised knife marks. The tail at the rear drops down one of the legs and terminates in a stylised point. Apart from the bulk, size and horns, the sex of the cow is not depicted, the lack of udders and general bulk of this example would suggest a male ox but the sex is ambiguous. The figurine is a mid yellow to pale white colour with the incised decoration discoloured (possibly deliberately) to a grey back colour. Distinct wear can be seen on one face where the surface of the figurine is polished smooth and is a pale yellow colour. All bar one of the breaks is recent, the old break is worn and polished; the new breaks show a white powdery crystalline structure. The fact that the legs were discovered close to the figurine suggests that they are brittle in nature and the archaeological deposit they were from is relatively undisturbed. A direct parallel for this figurine has not been found; however, Martin Henig has suggested comparable parallels in the carving known from Wroxeter, specifically the bone leopard knife handle. The soapstone used for this carving /figurine is not found in Britain and so must have been imported; it is likely that a native craftsmen would have fashioned this example from an imported soapstone block, rather than it being an imported figurine. The figurine stands 51.3mm tall, 52.7mm in length and 21.0mm thick. It weighs 51.15 grams Thanks are extended to Martin Henig for his thoughts and expertise.

Find of note status

This has been noted as an interesting find by the recorder.

Class: bovine

Chronology

Broad period: ROMAN

Period from: ROMAN

Date from: AD 100

Date to: AD 350

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 52.7 mm

Height: 51.3 mm

Thickness: 21 mm

Weight: 51.15 g

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Materials and construction

Primary material: Stone

Spatial metadata

Region: [West Midlands](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [Shropshire](#) (Unitary Authority)

District: [Shropshire](#) (Unitary Authority)

To be known as: Atcham

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: From a paper map

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Chance find during metal detecting

General landuse: Other