MOUNT

Unique ID: HESH-43BE84

Object type certainty: Certain Workflow status: Published

Cast lead alloy figurine of later Roman date 260 - 350 AD. The figurine is likely to be the terminal fitting of either a staff or more likely a mount from a vehicle. It is incomplete and irregular in plan and profile; being broadly shaped as a male torso (bust) and head depicted in three dimensions. The two arms project, one from either side; both are broken and incomplete. The depiction of the figure is non-anatomical; in that the head is outsized in comparison to the body, being both elongated and enlarged. The figurine is also decorated with both cast and incised decoration. The figurine measures 61.3mm high, 62.6mm maximum width, is 26.3mm maximum thickness and weighs 239.51 grams. The base of the bust is relatively flat with a sub-rectangular opening forming a small skirt or sleeve; this is presumably the method of fixing the figure as a mount. The opening measures 22.8mm length, 6.1mm maximum width / 4.6mm minimum width. The thickness of the metal around the sleeve is a uniform 3.7mm thick. The variation in internal widths is due to the centre of the socket being crushed and narrowed. This crushing may well be deliberate in that a large irregular subrectangular depression is present on the reverse face. This depression seems as if it has been formed deliberately with a tool, possibly a chisel or pliers. If this were the case it is likely to be a relic of the process used to secure the figurine mount. There is not a similar scar on the front face of the mount, which is decorated. This scar is similarly patinated to the rest of the artefact, suggesting that this is damage pre-deposition and thus of antiquity. The depth of the socket also varies from 8.5mm - 10.1mm, this is due to the base of the socket undulating along its length. The head is cast solid in one piece, it is out of proportion with the rest of the body and the features (such as eyes) are also slightly enlarged. As already mentioned it is cast and decorated in three dimensions, therefore designed to be seen on all sides. The head is depicted with tight wavy hair and close cropped beard which extends from the hair line and fills the cheeks and chin. It does not seem to extend onto the neck. In addition to the beard the head is shown wearing a long drooping moustache which delineates the mouth and extends onto the beard. Detailing on the hair is achieved by incised curvilinear lines which extend from the forehead backwards in a swept back fashion. The hair on both sides of the head is similarly swept back over the ears. The beard is augmented by incised vertical lines and the moustache with curvi-linear lines following the overall shape. The two ears are relatively large and positioned high on each side of the head, they are cast and finely modelled with a C shaped rib. The facial details consist of a high forehead with prominent brows. The nose is cast but does not project, instead detailing is shown by recessing the adjacent areas, which is probably cast but also augmented by incised carving. The nose itself has a prominent bridge but button / snub base. To either side of the nose, beneath the brows the eyes are positioned. These are large an oval / lentoid in shape. The project above the level of the face and the eyelids are clearly defined causing the figure to have wide eye expression. At the centre of the eye a small raised circle is present representing pupils. The mouth is formed in the area defined by the beard and moustache; it is shown simply as an incised line, with the lower lip being a lentoid pellet. The neck is clearly shown and is unaugmented. The head measures 31.9mm high, 22.6mm wide and is 26.3mm thick. The neck extends onto the body or bust of the figurine. The shoulders are broad and slightly sloped; they extend onto the relatively small arms. The left arm is best preserved being broken at the wrist. The arm is held or raised with the elbow being bent and the forearm cocked. The arm in shape is stylised being broadly sub-rectangular with faceted edges. It has been abraded in the ploughsoil and some of the detail has been lost. All that remains are the possible armour (discussed below) and a series of

incised chevrons on the lower arm. The break on the arm is abraded and patina removed, it is likely to be an old break but this cannot be confirmed. The right hand arm is similarly shaped but broken at a point above the elbow. This arm is held lower than the left and is similarly styled with faceted edges. The broken edge is similar abraded with relatively fresh metal exposed. Below the arms the bust expands slightly to a crisp edge at the base. The shape of the bust, excluding the arms, is broadly sub-rectangular. The front face of the bust is decorated with a cast design, which may have been augmented although abrasion has removed much detail. The design is broadly that of a cuirass, Roman breast plate, which extends over the shoulder and possibly onto the upper arms, across the breast. The detail is broadly lost. The detail is also not replicated on the rear face, unlike that shown on the back of the head; it is possible that this area may originally have been concealed when on display. The body of the bust stands 30.8mm high, and is 24.5mm minimum width (at shoulders and 31.3mm width at the base: it is 13.5mm thick at the shoulders and 116.6mm thick at the base. The left arm projects a maximum of 23mm from the body and tapers along its length from 9.7mm to 6.1mm diameter. The right arm projects 15.6mm from the body and tapers along its length from 10.2mm - 7.2mm. Overall the figurine / mount has a mid grey brown coloured well polished patina, which has been abraded in places. There is no evidence of active corrosion present. Areas on all surfaces of the figurine have a mid brown red colour. It is possible that this is due to the burial environment or corrosion of the metal. However, this distortion in colouration does not match the areas of most abrasion. It is possible that it is an applied colour, but again this does not respect specific areas for example it appears on both the hair, beard, face and bust and is not defined to just one area or style of decoration. A direct parallel for the fitting has not been found. However a number of similar styles of decoration and also skirted fitting have been suggested. Martin Henig has suggested that the dating of this example should be viewed as being from the Tetrachy (293-313 AD) where the style of very short hair and beard is more common. He further suggests two board parallels in form. The first being the Porphyry bust of Galerius in Cairp (Weitzmann et al, Age of Spirituality (1979) p.12 no.5). The second is a similar bronze statuette depicting a cuirassed emperor with similar eyes, allegedly from England (Mitten and Doeringer, Master Bronzes from the Classical World (1967-1968), p.285 no.279). This second example is dated to the late 2nd or 3rd century. The catalogue entry suggests that this figure shows provincial workmanship which is revealed by almond-shaped eyes outlined by deep incision, schematized gouges indicating hair. It also suggests that the face resembles that of a bust, possibly Commodus and that it is the generalised image of an emperor probably produced by a Gallic or British craftsman. Sally Worrell has also provided a parallel for a statuette mount with a similar rectangular socket which is from a vehicle fitting from Cologne in Heinz Menzel's 'Die Romischen Bronzen Aus Deutschland III Bonn' (1986). She has also found a similar styled bust in Toynbee's 'Art in Roman Britain' (1963 125 no. 5 pl. 5 also nos. 2-4) which is suggested to be one of the usurper emperors who detached Gaul and Britain from the Roman Empire, 275-80 AD With these parallels it is therefore suggested that this figurine is most likely to be from a mount from a Roman vehicle. It is most likely to depict an Emperor, possibly one of the Tetrachy, although the style could suggest a late 3rd or early 4th Century date (260-350). Finally, that it was highly likely that it was produced by a Gallic or British craftsman. Sincere thanks are extended to Martin Henig, Ralph Jackson and Sally Worrell for their very useful comments, expertise and dated parallels.

Find of note status

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

Class: Vehicle Sub class: Figurine

Chronology

Broad period: ROMAN Period from: ROMAN Date from: AD 260 Date to: AD 350

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 61.3 mm Width: 62.6 mm Thickness: 26.3 mm Weight: 239.51 q

Discovery dates

Date(s) of discovery: Monday 19th January 2009

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Materials and construction

Primary material: Lead Alloy Manufacture method: Cast Completeness: Complete

Spatial metadata

Region: West Midlands (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: **Shropshire** (Unitary Authority)

District: **Shropshire** (Unitary Authority)

To be known as: Shrewsbury

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: From finder

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector General landuse: Cultivated land

Weitzmann, K., et al., 1979 Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to

Seventh Century. New York:: Metropolitan Museum of Art,