

TOKEN

Unique ID: LON-E98F21

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

A worn and corroded Roman copper alloy spintria, dating to the late first century BC to early first century AD. The object comprises a flat, copper alloy disc. On the obverse are two naked lovers engaged in a sexual act; the female lies on her front beneath the male who straddles her. They lie on a bed or couch decorated with a swag. The depiction is classified as 'Scene V' by Buttrey 1973. On the reverse are the Roman numerals 'XIII', with a dot above the last two 'I', inside a circumferential border. An exact parallel for this spintria exists in the Department of Coins and Medals' collection at the British Museum (R 4476). Although 'spintriae' are commonly identified as brothel tokens, due to the erotic nature of some scenes depicted on them, there is no evidence to suggest that they were used in such a manner. They are not mentioned in any ancient sources, nor have they been found in buildings identified as 'brothels'. It is equally likely that they acted as gaming counters, and that the erotic images on them were merely decorative. For a more detailed discussion of their function and dating, see Buttrey, T. (1973) 'The spintriae as a historical source' *Numismatic Chronicle* Vol. XIII, p. 52-68 and Chapter 8 in Clarke, J.R. (1998): *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art* (Berkeley).

Notes:

This is an important find and exciting find for London as the majority of spintriae are unprovenanced. However, as the spintria was not found in a closed context, it is impossible to determine whether the spintria was lost during the Roman period or more recently.

It transpires that a further spintria was discovered on Skegness beach. The SMR record can be accessed at:

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MLI41709&resourceID=1006

However, this spintria shows no signs of wear or patination, suggesting that it was not an ancient loss. The Skegness example may be an antiquarian/modern loss or perhaps a modern forgery.

Find of note status

This is a find of note and has been designated: National importance

Subsequent actions

Current location of find: Museum of London

Subsequent action after recording: Donated to a museum

Chronology

Broad period: ROMAN
Period from: ROMAN
Period to: ROMAN
Date from: Circa 27 BC
Date to: Circa AD 37

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1
Length: 18.9 mm
Width: 17.7 mm
Thickness: 2.5 mm
Weight: 3.85 g

Personal details

Found by: This information is restricted for your login.
Recorded by: Miss Kath Creed
Identified by: Miss Kath Creed
Secondary identifier: Dr Philippa Walton

Materials and construction

Primary material: Copper alloy
Completeness: Complete

Spatial metadata

Region: [London](#) (European Region)
County or Unitary authority: [Greater London Authority](#) (Greater London Authority)
District: [Hammersmith and Fulham](#) (London Borough)
Parish or ward: [Ravenscourt Park](#) (London Borough Ward)

Spatial coordinates

4 Figure: TQ2575
Four figure Latitude: 51.460183
Four figure longitude: -0.202123
1:25K map: TQ2575
1:10K map: TQ27NE
Grid reference source: GPS (From FLO)
Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 100 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector
Discovery circumstances: Found on the Thames foreshore
Current location: Museum of London
General landuse: Open fresh water

Specific landuse: Running water

Clarke, J.R., 1998 [*Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art*](#) Berkeley: University of California 243-274

finds.org.uk