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Excavations and Interventions in and around Cramond Roman Fort and Annexe, 1976 to 1990

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11.2.1 The Roman non-ferrous metal objects

Fraser Hunter

Four items from Cramond Road I (Site 2) are clearly linked to the Roman military. All are strap fittings for either soldiers or their horses. CR/84/173 is a strap terminal for a military belt, of common type (Illus 41a; Oldenstein 1976: 142–4, Taf 36, nos 291–304; Bishop & Coulston 2006: 110, fig 88, nos 11–12).

The most intriguing assemblage comes from Pit 1 (Illus 36 & 37) in the Cramond Road 1985 excavations, which produced three items of militaria (two copper-alloy openwork mounts and a silver pendant) as well as several denarii which point to a Severan date (see 12 ‘The Roman coins’ below). The openwork mounts are a style known as Trompetenmuster – combinations of trumpet motifs which became very popular along the frontiers in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Item CR/P1/85/172 was originally a disc-shaped mount with two opposed pelta motifs, each with one arm forming a comma-tendril which linked into the other pelta (Illus 36a); finds from South Shields (UK), Saalburg (D) and Zugmantel (D) show how it once looked (Oldenstein 1976: Taf 55, no. 674; Taf 69, no. 905; Allason-Jones & Miket 1984: 225–6, no. 3.778). The other has defied any precise parallel so far (Illus 36b), but there was a wide and inventive range of fittings in this style (eg Riegl 1927: Taf XIII–XV; for a related design, sadly unprovenanced, see Appels & Laycock 2007: 78, fig AA8.39). The style is notably rare on Scottish forts, perhaps suggesting it did not reach the area until the late Antonine period: there are a strap mount from Inveresk, two belt buckles from Newstead (both sites with late Antonine occupation; Hunter forthcoming; Curle 1911: pl LXXVI.1–2), and a further belt mount from the Severan fortress of Carpow (Birley 1963: 206, fig 11.8). The style was also imported to Iron Age sites, with examples from the hillforts of Clatchard Craig (Fife), Castle Law (Midlothian) and Traprain Law (East Lothian; Curle & Cree 1916: fig 28.1; Childe 1933: fig 13.2; Close-Brooks 1986: 169–70). Such mounts were used both for horse harness and for military belts (harness: Lehner 1923: Taf III–IV; belts: Fischer 2012: 122, Abb 128–9).

The third item is most unusual in form and material (Illus 36c, 37 & 38). It is a silver belt-hanger from a military belt, the first Scottish example of a well-known series of miniature weaponry (Hunter 2016). Despite its distortion it can be identified as a ring-pommel sword, the typical sword form of the later 2nd and 3rd centuries (Bishop & Coulston 2006: 131–3, fig 77). The distribution of such hangers and pendants is concentrated overwhelmingly in the province of Upper Germany (18 of the 22 known examples; Raddatz 1953; Hundt 1955: Abb 1.2–3; Oldenstein 1976: 154–5, Taf 39; Miks 2007: 187, Abb 28). Most have a suspension fitting in the plane of the pommel and were attached to a strap end in the form of a beneficiarius lance (as demonstrated by finds from Zugmantel; Oldenstein 1976: Taf 39, nos 367, 373). Ring-pommel swords and beneficiarius lances co-occur in other depictions (Miks 2007: Abb 28), and Oldenstein (1976: 152–7) argues that these pendants were intended to mark out beneficiarii, troops on special service for the provincial governor. The full-size lances are accepted as equipment of beneficiarii, but Miks (2007: 187) wisely cautions against assuming that the ring-pommel swords were also restricted equipment; he suggests they were chosen for these pendants because they remained recognisable in miniature form (Illus 39).

The concentrated distribution (Illus 40) suggests that the pendants were specific for beneficiarii of upper Germany, as Kovács (2005: 957) suggests; he notes an analogous category of miniature lance pendants from Dacia with a similarly restricted distribution. This makes the four pendants and one lance-shaped strap end found outside Germania superior of particular interest. Apart from Cramond, there is one from the town of Silchester (Boon 2000: 355, fig 166, no. 121), one Raetian example from the fort of Körshing (Germany; Oldenstein 1976: Taf 39, no. 374), one from the auxiliary fort of Baracs (Hungary; Kovács 2005: 961–2, fig 8), and one from the auxiliary fort of Thamusida (Morocco; Rebuffat 1977: 203, pl 70, no. 671). These must be connected to the movement of individual troops from upper Germany, as Kovács (2005: 962) argues, though it
is worth noting that three of the four are unusual in having a small suspension loop set transversely to the pommel rather than a loop in the same plane (only Silchester matches the German ones). In contrast, only one of the German finds, from Mainz, has such a fitting (Fischer 2012: Abb 272.4; Illus 39); these small loops could not articulate with the lancehead strap terminals, and must either have been held by wire or used rather differently.

The three other non-German examples lack any close context, though Silchester has produced another piece of *beneficiarius* insignia in the form of an openwork baldric terminal incorporating a lancehead design (Boon 1974: fig 8.4). This makes Cramond’s contextual information all the more interesting. Coins from the pit date it to the Severan period, when the fort was the focus of an imperial expedition, and members of the governor’s or emperor’s service would be passing through.

The other unusual feature of the Cramond example is its material. All other known examples are of copper alloy, though Oldenstein (1976:...
Illus 37 The silver belt-pendant and copper-alloy Trompetenmuster mounts. Photo: © Trustees of National Museums Scotland

Illus 38 The silver belt-pendant from Cramond Road. Photo: © Trustees of National Museums Scotland

Illus 39 Intact example of a ring-pommel sword belt hanger from Mainz (after Fischer 2012: Abb 272.4)

156) notes that some have a white metal coating, intended to emulate silver. It is no surprise that such a prestigious emblem would be in a precious metal; Boon (1974: fig 8.4 caption, 309 n8) notes that the related sword belt plates from Vechten (NL) and Silchester are in silver and tinned bronze or base silver respectively, and Miks (2007: Abb 28 X, Ω) illustrates a silver brooch and a silver dagger sheath terminal sharing this iconography; these items were clearly intended to impress.

It seems unlikely that the Trompetenmuster mounts and pendant came from the same belt, given the mixing of silver and copper alloy. The pendant had clearly seen use as the suspension
loop shows wear, while heat-damage suggests that attempts had been made to recycle it, although its context of discovery, in Pit 1 alongside other belt fittings and coins, seems to be a small hoard of valued items.

The sword pendant from Cramond, while melted and unimpressive-looking, is thus a find of international significance which shows the wide-ranging connections of the Roman army and throws fresh light on the troops involved in the Severan expedition.

A further ten items – a fragment of riveted sheet, a needle, a washer and an unidentified sheet fragment – are undiagnostic and cannot be proven to be Roman, though this is not unlikely. The washer, for instance, can readily be paralleled on Roman sites, including Cramond itself and South Shields (Holmes 2003: 110–11, illus 101; see also Allason-Jones & Miket 1984: 252–3, 3.1073, 3.1081), while cast barrel-shaped beads or spacers are a type well known from Roman fort sites (e.g. Birrens: Robertson 1975: fig 30.2–4; South Shields: Allason-Jones & Miket 1984: 266–7, 3.1298).

11.2.1.1 Catalogue of Roman objects

Openwork Trompetenmuster harness mount; recent damage makes the design unclear, but parallels suggest it was symmetrical, comprising paired peltas linked at the margins by one end forming a comma-tendril scrolling into the boss

Illus 41 Non-ferrous metal objects: (a) strap end (CR/84/173); (b) bead or spacer (CR/78/2/313); (c) mount (catalogue no. 1, Pit 3); (d) needle (CR/38/1053); (e) annulate (C79/2/453). Illustration by Alan Braby
of the central stalk, the two tendrils in rotational symmetry (cf Oldenstein 1976: Taf 55, no. 6/74). An incised groove defined the edge of the surviving tendril from the mount’s margin. An integrally cast stud with disc head (diam: 8mm; shank diam: 3.5mm) gives a strap thickness of some 5.5mm. Rear of casting flat; tendrils have a keeled profile. 22 × 17.5 × 10mm; weight: 2.94g. Extn W, Feature XI (Pit 1), Mid Level. Illus 36a.

▶ CR/P1/85/173
Openwork Trompetenmuster harness mount, slightly distorted from removal; one side lost relatively recently. The asymmetrical design is difficult to describe as corrosion and loss obscure details; two integrally cast studs on the rear with disc heads (diam: 6.5–7.5mm; shank diam: 3mm) for a strap 4mm thick provide an alignment for the piece. The design is in two sinuous halves which are joined where they touch by two lentoid bosses. The intact half is an S-formed double-ended trumpet; one end joins a smaller such motif, the free end domed to give an almost zoomorphic impression; this high-relief element joins a flat-ended trumpet which branches from the long slope of the main S, linking the design. The other half is incomplete; what survives is a shorter curve with a flared trumpet end, but both ends are broken and it is likely that they were linked by a further double-bossed ‘head’ motif. The rear is flat. L: 33.5mm; W: 21mm; Th: 9mm; weight: 2.96g. Extn W, Feature XI (Pit 1), Mid Level. Illus 36b.

▶ CR/P1/85/172–4
Silver pendant, partly melted, representing a ring-pommel sword. The circular ring pommel, oval in profile, has a small suspension loop set transversely on top and a slight internal protrusion at its base. The left side of the design below this is distorted and melted, but the right side preserves the straight edge of the grip, the protruding hilt guard in higher relief (comprising two perpendicular bars), and the straight edge of the blade or scabbard. The end is broken, the surface heat-affected in places. The suspension loop (internal diam: 3mm) is thinned from use-wear on its upper edge. L: 32mm; W: 13mm, Th: 9mm; weight: 4.08g. Pit 1. Illus 36c & 38.

▶ CR/84/173
Strap-end. Flat elongated cast copper alloy pendant, sub-square head (remaining length: 11mm; W: 12mm; Th: 4mm) with symmetrical lobate decoration, broken across large perforation (Diam: 8mm). Extending from head is lozenge-shaped protrusion (W: 4.5–9.5mm), damaged at extreme tip. A similar strap fitting comes from Newstead (Elliot & Hunter 2012: 191, fig 16.4, no. 9). L: 45.5mm. Illus 41a.