

Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

ROMAN COSTUME & JEWELLRY

AH 32

Bracelet

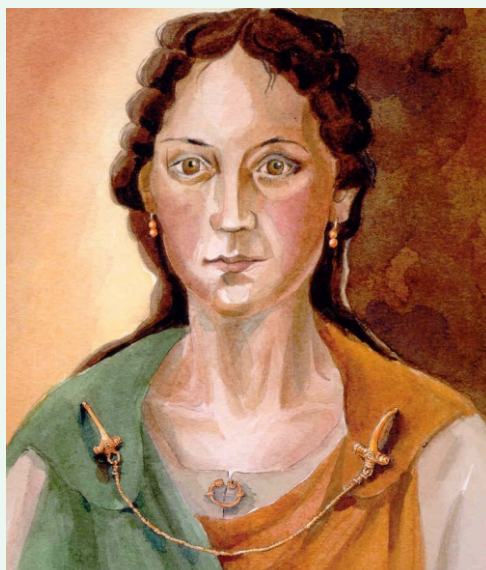
Numerous bracelets have survived from Roman Britain they were obviously very popular. This small bracelet has both of its ends flattened and drilled some sort of pin mechanism must have been used to close it. The pattern on this example is fairly simple, consisting of a series of grooves which would have been cut or filed by its maker.



Two Fibulae

Fibulae - safety-pin-like brooches - were used by both men and women to hold clothing in place. They were widely used in Britain before the Romans arrived, as well as afterwards, and there are many different styles, although all of them consist of a bowed back and a pin. While being primarily practical they also offered their wearers an opportunity for decoration and display. There are two fibulae fragments in this case one made of iron and badly corroded, the other made from bronze and in better condition.

Thousands of such fibulae like these have been found in Britain they must have been an everyday sight. Most styles are 'T' shaped. We can tell from statues that such brooches were worn with the cross-bar of the T facing downwards. The drawing below shows how such fibulae probably looked in use.



Above - a fibula found at Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum)

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Two Pins

Thousands of such pins have been found from Roman sites across Britain. Women often wore their hair in complicated styles that took a long time to do. These pins were probably used to keep plaits and loops of hair in place. The bone example has lost its head - it probably had a simple roundish one, like that on the bronze pin. Pin heads were sometimes even carved to look like tiny human heads.



Oval Gilt Bronze Brooch

This brooch looks as if it could have been made in the nineteenth century! However, brooches like this with an oval glass stone set in the middle were something of a Romano-British fashion in the third century and at least a hundred examples have been found. They seem to have been cheap imitations of an original which would have been made of gold, with a precious stone in the centre. This example has preserved its gilding, although often on such brooches it has been worn away. It is also missing its pin, but enough has remained to show its similarity to the more familiar T shaped brooches. Like them, this brooch would have been used by a fashionable Romano-British lady to fasten together items of clothing.

Faience Melon Bead

Evidence from Roman statues and paints suggests that women frequently wore more than one necklace at a time. A short choker-style necklace could be combined with one or several longer chains. Bead necklaces have seldom been found in a form which enables us to recreate their original appearance. As with this example, beads are frequently found as a single item - perhaps the one that rolled into a crack in the floor when a necklace string broke cascading beads in all directions. This type of bead is generally referred to as a 'Melon' bead. It is made of faience - a form of glass with light-blue or turquoise surface. Such beads are found all over the Roman Empire and were obviously very popular. Faience is particularly associated with Egypt, but such beads were also produced elsewhere. They are known to have been made in London and were probably also manufactured in smaller towns.

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Cloth Fragments

Roman Britain was famous for its cloth products, but no complete item of clothing has survived. The example in this box probably dates from the Roman period and was found in Egypt, where the dry conditions are more favourable than they are in Britain to the preservation of cloth.

Cloth was both exported from and imported into Britain. Archaeologists can use a variety of techniques to pinpoint the probable place where fragments of cloth were manufactured. For example, in the western half of the Roman Empire spinners twisted the fibres that made up their thread in a clockwise direction, but in the east they preferred an anti-clockwise direction. However, only very careful examination under a microscope will reveal such clues. Several small fragments of cloth that have been found in Britain that are thought to have been made in Egypt.

The fragment of plain, coarse cloth probably comes from a mummy. However, mummies were often wrapped in cloth made from torn up clothing, so this may well originally have been part of a tunic.

