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The Drapers' Gardens Hoard: A Preliminary Account

By JAMES GERRARD

ABSTRACT

Recent excavations by Pre-Construct Archaeology in the City of London uncovered a large hoard of twenty bronze, pewter and iron vessels and other objects in the fill of a Late Roman well. The hoard is the largest group of such objects to be excavated under modern conditions and is exceptionally well dated. This paper provides an illustrated catalogue of the vessels, discusses their date, and suggests reasons for their deposition.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007 Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd undertook an extensive developer-funded excavation ahead of the redevelopment of the Drapers' Gardens site in the City of London[1] (FIGS 1–2). Situated in the Walbrook Valley the archaeological potential of the site was clear and earlier excavations nearby had already revealed important evidence for early Roman industrial activity.[2] What was surprising was the quality of the surviving archaeological deposits. With the exception of modern basementing and many concrete piles, the site was largely undisturbed — a consequence of it having been open ground for much of the medieval and post-medieval periods.

The excavations revealed the course of a Roman street flanked on either side by substantial revetted Walbrook stream channels.[3] In the first century A.D. the wet and marshy nature of the land seems to have necessitated the dumping of material prior to the development of the area. The street, the course of which has been picked up in other nearby excavations,[4] was laid out roughly north–south through the excavation area. Fronting on to the road was a series of property boundaries of second- to third-century date containing multiple phases of various timber and brickearth buildings. Most of the fourth-century deposits and features appear (with some exceptions) to have been truncated by modern activity.

The finds from the site include extensive assemblages of pottery, animal bone, wood, and leather, as well as over a thousand 'small' or 'registered' finds. The latter category of objects includes some ironwork and copper-alloy objects extremely well-preserved by the anaerobic Walbrook silts. However, pride of place must go to a hoard of twenty bronze, pewter, and iron

1 The excavations were directed by Neil Hawkins and project managed by Tim Bradley and Jon Butler of Pre-Construct Archaeology for Exemplar Developments LLP and Canary Wharf Developments.

2 Blurton 1977; Seeley and Drummond Murray 2005.

3 Post-excavation analysis of the paper archive and finds is still in progress. For a brief summary of the site see Hawkins *et al*. 2007.

4 8–10 Throgmorton Street (Maloney and Holroyd 2000, 42).

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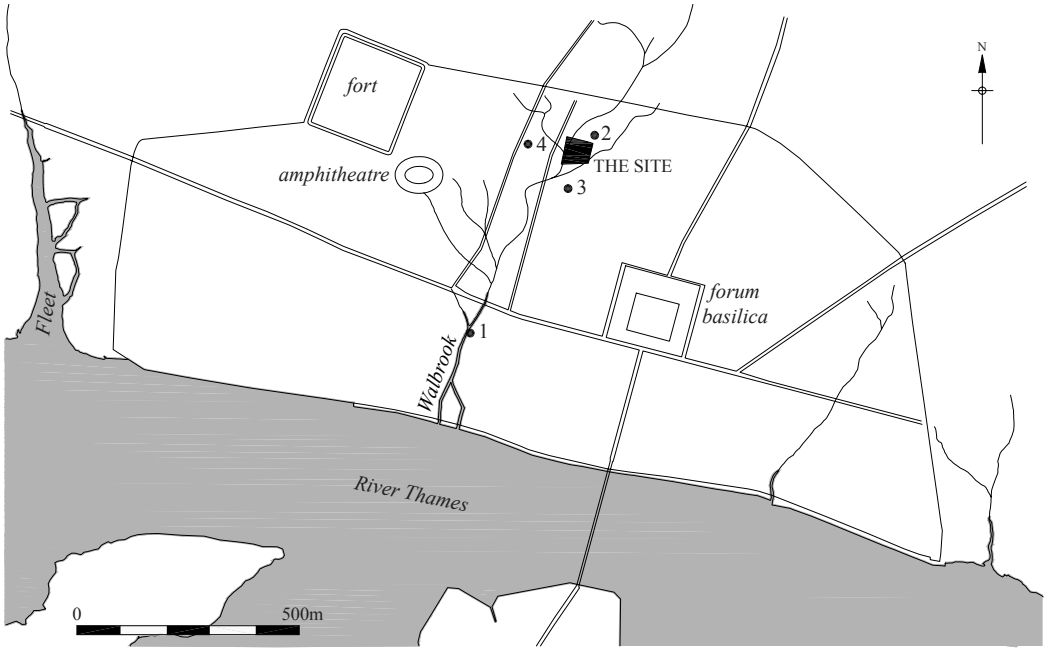


FIG. 1. Drapers' Gardens and the Roman city. Sites mentioned in the text: (1) Mithraeum, (2) 8–10 Throgmorton Avenue, (3) Angel Court, (4) early Roman kilns at 20–28 Moorgate.

vessels and other objects recovered from the fill of a late fourth-century well. The intention of this paper is to provide an interim account of these objects and their context prior to full publication.

THE DATE OF DEPOSITION

Information relating to the date, composition, and distribution of hoards of copper-alloy vessels from Britain was summarized several decades ago by Eggers and Kennett.[5] Since then a number of other bronze hoards has come to light,[6] but the dating of the British finds remains largely reliant on stylistic arguments and dated finds from the Continent. The dating of bronze hoards (in contrast to silver hoards) is further complicated by their apparent lack of association with coin hoards.[7] This is presumably because hoards of objects manufactured from precious metals were circulating as bullion alongside gold and silver coins,[8] whereas base metals did not function in an economically like manner. It is therefore fortunate that the date of the deposition of the Drapers' Gardens hoard can be fixed with relative precision and thus provides a useful British dated context for these finds.

The hoard was recovered from close to the bottom of a timber-lined well. The construction

5 Eggers 1968; Kennett 1971.
6 For instance Farley *et al*. 1988.
7 Robertson 2000.
8 Guest 2005, 26.

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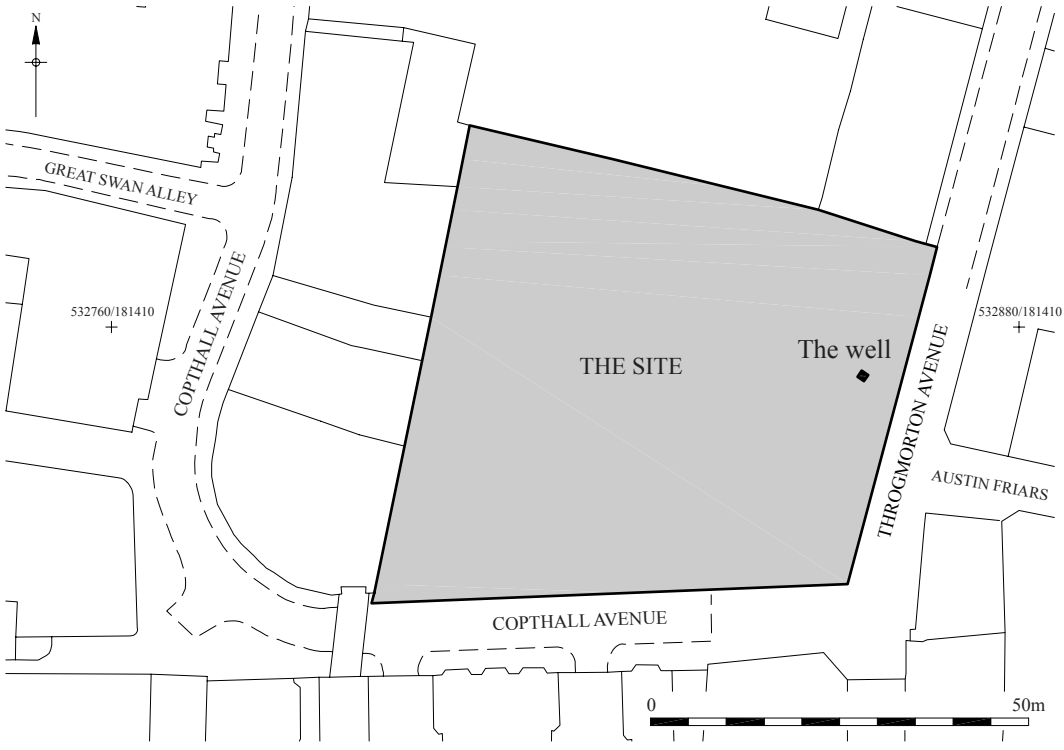


FIG. 2. Site location plan with the modern street grid and location of the well marked.
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backfill of the well[9] contained a number of finds that provide a *terminus post quem* for the well's construction. Of the five coins recovered the latest are three Constantinian issues: the first two of these are slightly worn irregular coins of A.D. 330–335,[10] and the third an extremely worn irregular issue of A.D. 335–341.[11] Pottery from this construction backfill was generally of fourth-century date with, as might be expected from a City site, a strong residual component. It is, however, worth noting the presence of an abraded sherd of an Alice Holt/Farnham ware storage jar with combed curvilinear decoration; such vessels are considered to be of mid- to late-fourth-century date.[12] The coins and pottery thus provide a *terminus post quem* for the well's construction that cannot be any earlier than A.D. 335 and, given the state of the worn coin and abraded pottery sherd, could conceivably be as late as *c.* A.D. 350.[13] It is thus worth noting that, unusually for London, the well's oak planks were formed by splitting and trimming the

9 The material dumped behind the well's timber lining to infill the construction cut.
10 <181>: *LRBCI*, 60–2 and <214>: *LRBCI*, 48–50 (Hill and Kent 1965).
11 <194>: as *LRBCI*, 87–91 (Hill and Kent 1965).
12 Lyne and Jefferies 1979, 45 and fig. 29.4.45.
13 A sample of the well's lining was taken for dendrochronological analysis but unfortunately a match in the tree ring sequence could not be found for the timber.

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FIG. 3. The hoard *in situ* in the timber-lined well and cut through by a modern concrete pile.

wood rather than the more usual technique of creating sawn planks. The use of split planks is more common in Roman rural contexts and requires less organization and labour, which may suggest that the well was constructed at a time when the city's organized timber supplies were faltering.[14]

A *terminus post quem* for the hoard's deposition can also be established with some confidence. Two coins were recovered from the primary fills of the well directly below the hoard. Both were unworn issues of the House of Valentinian struck at Arles in the name of Gratian and dated A.D. 367–375 and A.D. 375–378.[15] This establishes A.D. 375 as the earliest date at which the hoard could have been deposited. Given that Valentinianic issues continued to circulate alongside coins of the House of Theodosius,[16] the coins could have been lost as much as twenty to thirty years after A.D. 375. However, their unworn condition may suggest that this is unlikely, although gauging age from wear is difficult.[17]

14 D. Goodburn pers. comm. On wells in London see Wilmott 1982.
15 <863>: *LRBCII*, 534; <864>: *LRBCII*, 529 (Carson and Kent 1965).
16 For instance Robertson 2000, no. 1549.
17 Brickstock 2004, 7.

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FIG. 4. The hoard after lifting but prior to cleaning and conservation.

In summary: the well was constructed no earlier than A.D. 335 and possibly as late as *c.* A.D. 350, and the hoard was deposited after A.D. 375. Despite this seemingly secure dating evidence some imponderables do remain. How old were the vessels when they were deposited and how old were the two coins of Gratian? The presence of wear and repairs on some of the vessels suggests that they had seen use, but whether the coins of Gratian were deposited soon after A.D. 375 or in the fifth century cannot be conclusively demonstrated.

CATALOGUE OF VESSELS

The twenty vessels and utensils are catalogued here by material and vessel type.[18] There were fifteen copper-alloy or bronze vessels, three pewter or lead-alloy vessels, and two iron utensils (Table 1). The hoard had clearly been arranged in the well in stacks or groups and was (as far as could be determined) a collection of vessels. There was no evidence to suggest that the vessels had been deposited individually over time. From records made in the field and during the lifting of the objects these groups can be broadly reconstructed. In Table 2 each stack is

[18] This is a preliminary descriptive catalogue. I am particularly grateful to Dr Noël Adams for her help and for providing a number of useful references, not least of which is Adams forthcoming.

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assigned an approximate area within the well and the ordering of the vessels runs from highest (top) (and thus last to be deposited in that stack) to lowest (bottom) vessel (and thus earliest to be deposited). It should be noted that these stacks or groups had been displaced by the insertion of a concrete pile during the 1960s and were not in any case mutually exclusive — there were overlapping vessels between stacks. Nevertheless, Table 2 hopefully serves to demonstrate that there was 'stratigraphy' or an order to the placing of the hoard and it is noticeable that the hanging bowl <854> was one of the first objects to go into the well while the trivet <815> was one of the last.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF VESSELS PRESENT BY MATERIAL

Material	**Number of Vessels**
Copper-alloy	15
Lead-alloy	3
Iron	2

TABLE 2. THE ORDER OF THE VESSELS WITHIN THE WELL BY ZONES. VESSEL NUMBERS RUN FROM TOP (LATEST) TO BOTTOM (EARLIEST) WITHIN EACH ZONE GIVING AN IMPRESSION OF THE PLACEMENT OF EACH VESSEL WITHIN THE WELL

	North-West	**Central-West**	**South-West**	**South-East**
Vessels numbers	<814>	<815>	<820>	<817>
	<813>	<821>	<822>	<818>
	<823>	<827>	<819>	<829>
		<824>	<816>	
		<825>		
		<826>		
		<828>		
		<853>		
		<869>		
		<854>		

1. FIG. 5.1 <854> Copper-alloy hanging basin. Rim diameter: 415 mm; base diameter: 125 mm; weight: 1852 g. With a diameter of *c*. 415 mm the vessel is the largest of its type known.[19] The form is like that of an 'Irchester' bowl: the rim is inturned and the vessel is flat based. The vessel was badly damaged by the 1960s pile. The bowl would have been suspended by chains attached to three rings held in place by zoomorphic escutcheons. Only one of these now survives but the position of another is visible. Dr Noël Adams has kindly provided the following additional information:

> The unique hanging bowl in the Drapers' Gardens hoard is significant in several respects. Not only is this the largest hanging bowl ever discovered in Britain, but

[19] Bruce Mitford and Raven 2005, 30 suggest a size range for hanging basins and bowls from 123 mm to 460 mm. However, they note that the 'largest sizes [are] typical of the Viking period in Scandinavia'.

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this is the first time such a bowl has been found in a coin-dated, late fourth-century context and in association with a range of Late Roman vessel types.

The Drapers' Gardens hanging bowl preserves a single escutcheon with a lion-head hook and a suspension ring; it would probably have been suspended from three of these ringed hooks. Hemispherical bowls suspended by rings held by hooked escutcheons are typical vessels of the early Anglo-Saxon period in Britain.[20] The question of the earliest date for the beginning of this sequence has been repeatedly addressed in the literature. Many scholars have argued that such bowls must have been manufactured in the fifth century,[21] but this has been difficult to prove as the majority of intact hanging bowls (as opposed to detached escutcheons) have been found in Anglo-Saxon burial contexts from the mid-sixth[22] to the first half of the seventh centuries.[23] A *terminus post quem* of A.D. 375 for the Drapers' Garden hoard suggests that this bowl was made in the second half of the fourth or early fifth century, thus spanning to some degree the gap between the early medieval sequence of hanging vessels and the straight-walled hanging basins of the Roman period (whose primary period of production was *c*. A.D. 220/230–300/310) from which these bowls ultimately derive.[24]

The interpretation of the Drapers' Garden bowl as a transitional vessel is supported by the size and form of the bowl. The only other bowl comparable in size in Britain was found in a bog at Newham in Northumberland.[25] The closed form of the Newham bowl is similar to native British Irchester bowls from which hanging bowls are generally seen to have derived.[26] While the Drapers' Gardens bowl shares some features with Irchester bowls, such as a channelled rim and sunken base, its heavy fabric (similar to Roman vessels) and open spreading profile are quite different to the main sequence of Anglo-Saxon-period hanging bowls.

The surviving Newham escutcheon is also circular with a small projection like that on the Drapers' Gardens bowl; unlike the latter, it is mounted with its lion hook overlooking the rim in the manner of some hanging basin hooks. These feline protomes derive from one primary group of Late Roman escutcheon hooks which depicted panthers springing from vine leaves, a Dionysiac iconography reflecting the role of hanging basins within drinking sets such as that found in the Drapers' Gardens well. While hanging basins may have contained warm or clean water to mix with wine, the function of early medieval hanging bowls may have evolved to hold water solely for drinking or perhaps washing.[27] The adaptation of animal escutcheons to a rounded bowl form is generally assumed to be a Romano-British

20 Brenan 1991 and Bruce-Mitford and Raven 2005 are primary catalogues with reviews of the literature.

21 Kendrick 1932, 163; Leeds 1936; Brenan 1991, 7–9; Bruce-Mitford and Raven 2005, ch. 8.

22 Brenan 1991, 65–74, 131.

23 Leading Stevenson 1976, 250–1 and Geake 1999 to argue that hanging bowls were not manufactured until the seventh century.

24 These are Eggers types 79, 83–7, primarily from Phase C2 of the Late Roman Iron Age in Europe. Adams forthcoming catalogues the Roman hanging basins and examines their relationship to hanging bowls.

25 Bruce-Mitford and Raven 2005, 228–30, figs 276–7. The Newham bog bowl measures 38.2 cm in diameter; three other large Viking-period bowls are known from Scandinavia.

26 Bruce-Mitford and Raven 2005, 11.

27 Adams forthcoming.

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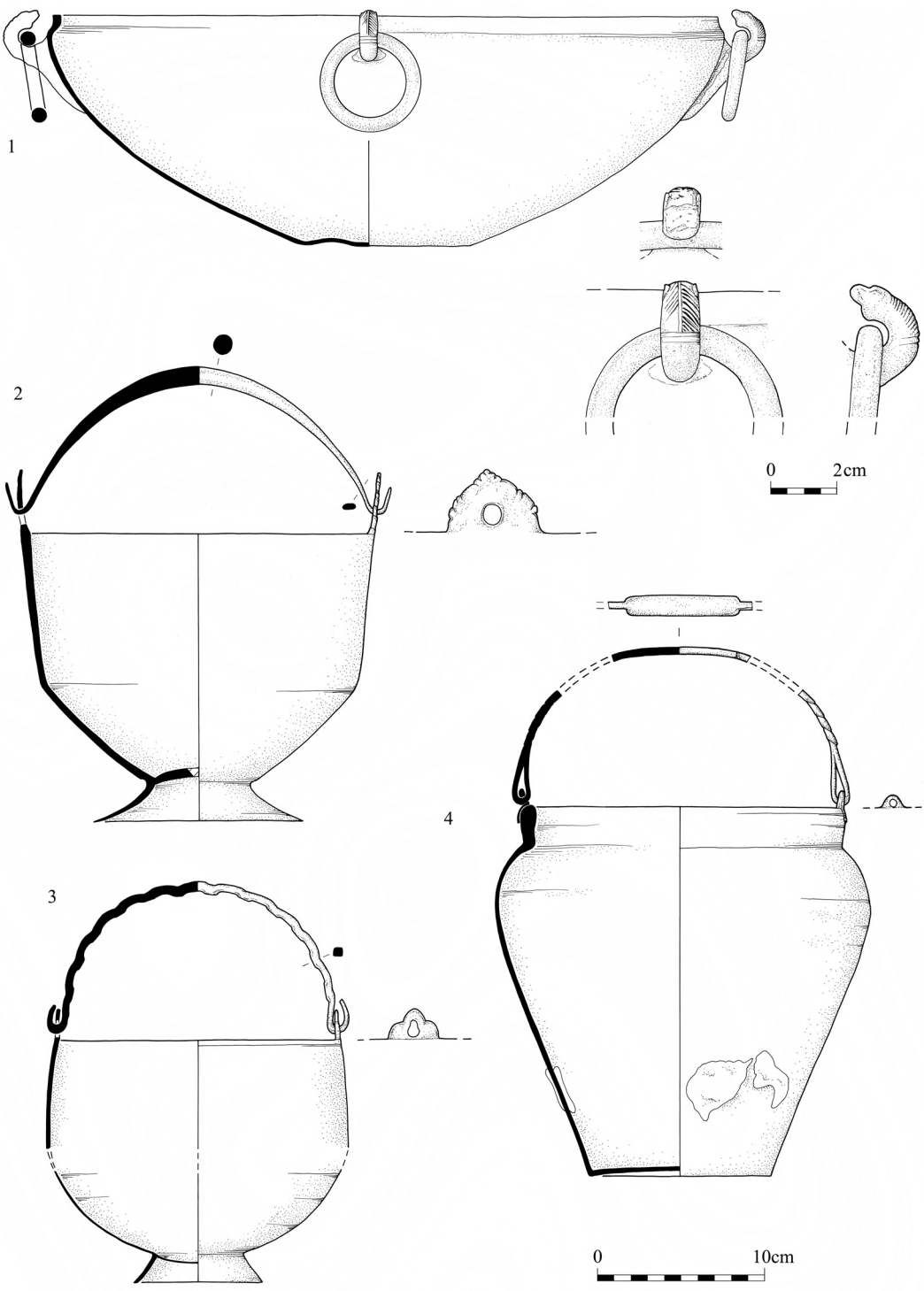


FIG. 5. Vessels from the hoard, Nos 1–4 (Scale 1:4).

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development, but the unusual form of this vessel and its association with continental vessel types suggest we must allow for the possibility that this development began outside of Britain.[28]

2. FIG. 5.2 <821> Copper-alloy carinated bucket of 'Hemmor' type,[29] with vertical rim and triangular lugs. Rim diameter: 212 mm; foot-ring diameter: 125 mm; weight: 1107 g. The base is slightly convex and a splayed foot-ring is attached externally. There is a drilled hole from the manufacturing process at the centre of the base which has been plugged and filled.

3. FIG. 5.3 <824> Copper-alloy bucket of 'Hemmor' type.[30] Slightly inturned rim and a hemispherical base above a splayed pedestal foot. The vessel has trefoil-shaped lugs securing a handle, which is complete and decorated. The base of this vessel has a drilled central hole from the manufacturing process but is detached from the rest of the vessel along a weld/solder line. The metal is in a poor state of preservation and too fragile to be handled. Rim diameter: 178 mm.

The two 'Hemmor' buckets (<821> and <824>) are both likely to have been antiques when deposited. Vessels of this type were used as pyre-goods in the third-century Brougham cemetery and other examples are known from third-century and earlier contexts.[31]

4. FIG. 5.4 <820> Heavily leaded copper-alloy bucket with an iron handle. The vessel is complete but somewhat squashed. Rim diameter: 192 mm; base diameter: 128 mm; weight: 2376 g. The handle is broken and there is a plugged repair to the lower body of the vessel. The form of the vessel is very much like that of a Black Burnished 'cooking pot' but with a vertical rim.

5. FIG. 6.5 <816> Copper-alloy bucket with internal rounded lugs to secure a handle moulded with ovolos. The bucket is decorated with parallel horizontal moulded ribs at the top and bottom. The top of the lower pair of mouldings marks a weld where the base of the vessel has been joined with the top. The bucket has three external moulded trefoil feet. There is a circular drilled hole from the manufacturing process in the base. Rim diameter: 284 mm; base diameter: 246 mm; weight: *c*. 2000 g. This bucket is not easy to parallel; a similar bucket is illustrated from an early fifth-century grave in Nubia and it may be that a Mediterranean origin should be sought for this vessel.[32]

6. FIG. 6.6 <813> Copper-alloy cauldron with internal triangular lugs for the simple handle. The vessel has a rounded base below a carination and an out-turned rim. There is a hole from the manufacturing process drilled in the centre of the base. Rim diameter: 265 mm; weight: 1081 g. This type of vessel is known as a 'Westland Cauldron'. Such cauldrons are relatively common finds in Germany beyond the Rhine and Scandinavia, where they seem to have been in use from the late fourth until the sixth century.[33] However, they are a product of Gallo-Roman workshops and are sometimes associated with trivets.[34] This may explain the presence of <815> in the hoard. A similar cauldron is illustrated by Kennett from the Halkyn Mountain hoard.[35]

28 A few hanging basins, such as that preserved in one of the vessel hoards found in cisterns at the military fort at Rainau-Buch, Germany, while still straight-sided, begin to assume a more rounded form closer to that of a hanging bowl (Plank 1979, 117, Abb. 4).

29 Eggers 1951, Taf. 7.58.

30 This vessel is too poorly preserved to provide an exact parallel in the Eggers series but is not unlike Eggers 1951, Taf. 7.58.

31 Mould 2004, 374; den Boersted 1956, 44–5.

32 Török 1987, 127 and pl. 31.16.

33 Adams forthcoming, note 75.

34 Den Boersted (1956, 49, no. 160 and pl. XV.160a) describes a third-century or later shallow cauldron 'found on an iron tripod' at Nijmegen.

35 Kennett 1971, fig. 5.2.

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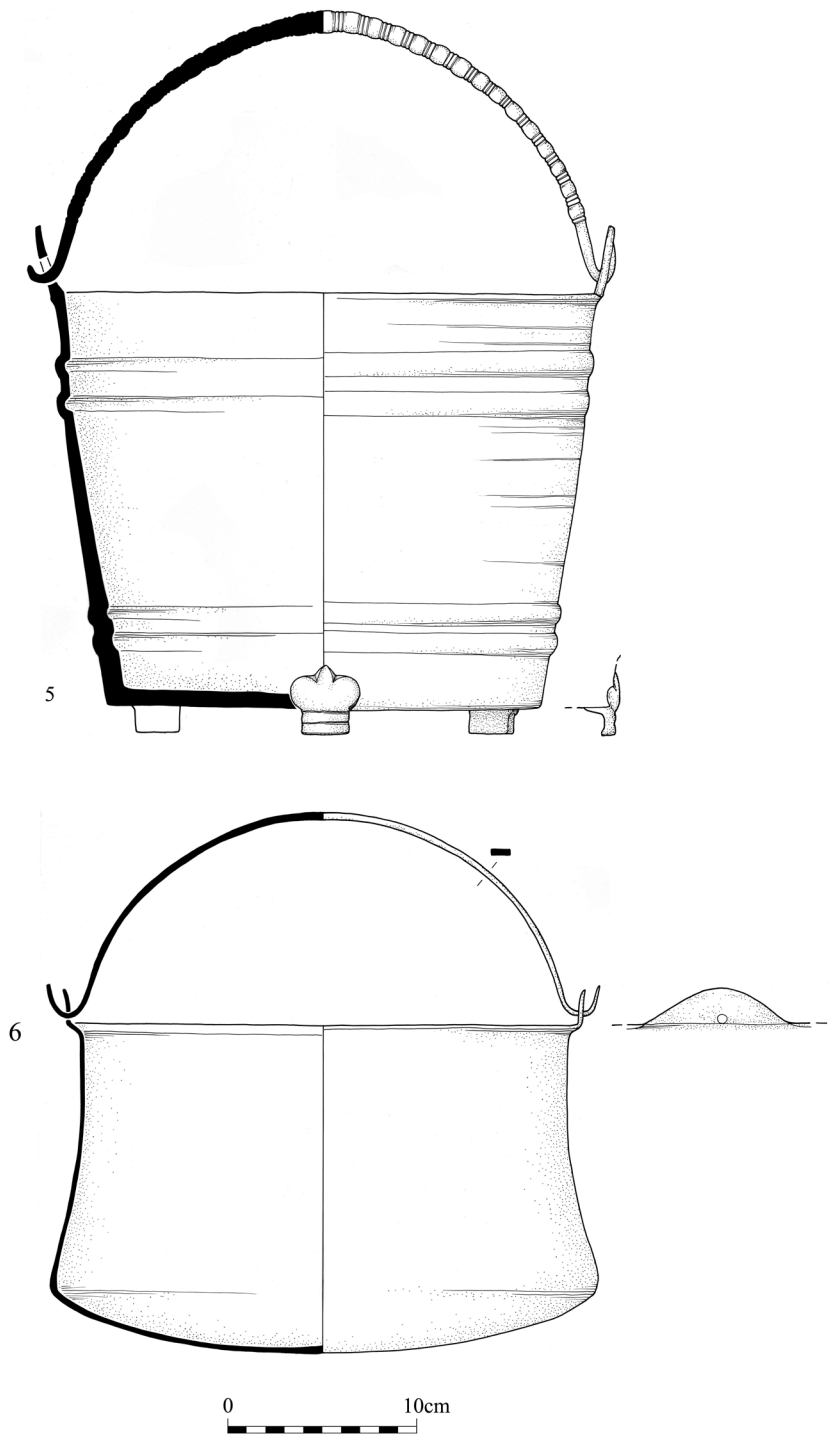


FIG. 6. Vessels from the hoard, Nos 5–6 (Scale 1:4).

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7. FIG. 7.7 <815> Iron trivet, complete but one leg is loose and the ring is broken in one place. All three legs have simple, slightly protruding feet.[36] Diameter: 227 mm.

8. FIG. 7.8 <818> Copper-alloy bowl with flat rim folded up and over at edge. Decorated with raised and separated beads along the rim. Rim diameter: 319 mm; foot-ring diameter: 1221 mm; weight: 1000 g. Slight internal scratches may be use-wear. This vessel can be classed as a *Perlrandbecken*, an apparently very late Roman form that is common in early medieval contexts on the Continent.[37] Similar vessels are known in silver from the Traprain Law treasure where they are dated to the late fourth or early fifth century.[38] This vessel and the following two *Perlrandbecken* are of diminishing sizes that would have enabled them to serve as a 'nested' set.

9. FIG. 7.9 <829> Copper-alloy bowl with outward-turned rim decorated with moulded raised beads (*Perlrandbecken*). Straight-sided with foot-ring. Rim diameter: 258 mm; foot-ring diameter 89 mm; weight: 681 g. Central drilled hole in the base.

10. FIG. 7.10 <822> Copper-alloy bowl with an outward-turned rim bent down at the edge (*Perlrandbecken*). The rim is decorated with raised and separated beads and there is a splayed foot-ring attached to the underside of the vessel. Rim diameter: 238 mm; foot-ring diameter: 96 mm; weight: 476 g.

11. FIG. 7.11 <826> Copper-alloy bowl with outward-turned rim and moulded beads along the edge (*bassin à bord godronné*). Flat base with a drilled central hole (plugged and filled) from the manufacturing process and raised foot-ring. Rim diameter: 305 mm; foot-ring diameter: 122 mm; weight: 567 g.

12. FIG. 7.12 <853> Copper-alloy hemispherical bowl (*bassin à bord godronné)* with out-turned rim. The rim is decorated with raised beads and the base has a raised foot-ring. There is a hole in the centre of the base from the manufacturing process, which is unfilled but backed by the foot. Rim diameter: 271 mm; foot-ring diameter: 83 mm; weight: 486 g.

13. FIG. 8.13 <817> Copper-alloy bowl with simple outward-turned rim and a flat base. In good condition. The inside has fine scratches that are likely to be scouring lines and there are possible tool marks externally. Rim diameter: 336 mm; base diameter: 160 mm; weight: 1666 g.

14. FIG. 8.14 <819> Copper-alloy carinated bowl with simple out-turned rim and convex base, paralleled by vessels from the Helmsdale hoard.[39] The vessel has been repaired along the carination and is tinned internally with fine scratches from use. Some of the continental analogies for this type of vessel are dated as early as the first half of the second century and it may be that this vessel was an antique when it was deposited in the Late Roman period.[40] Rim diameter: 305 mm; base diameter: 185 mm; weight: 821 g.

15. FIG. 8.15 <825> Lead-alloy bowl. Shallow with an inturned rim and projecting flange decorated with raised semi-circular beads. Rim diameter: 140 mm; foot-ring diameter: 50 mm; weight: 319 g.

36 Den Boersted (1956, 49, no. 160) illustrates an iron tripod from Nijmegen found in association with a cauldron.

37 Kennett 1971, 140–2.

38 K. Painter in Hartley *et al.* 2006, 236, nos 240–2.

39 The vessel is similar to Eggers 1951, Taf. 9.84 but lacks suspension rings. Better parallels are provided by two vessels from the poorly dated, ?late Roman Helmsdale hoard (Spearman and Wilthew 1990, illus. 4.4–5).

40 Spearman and Wilthew 1990, 76.

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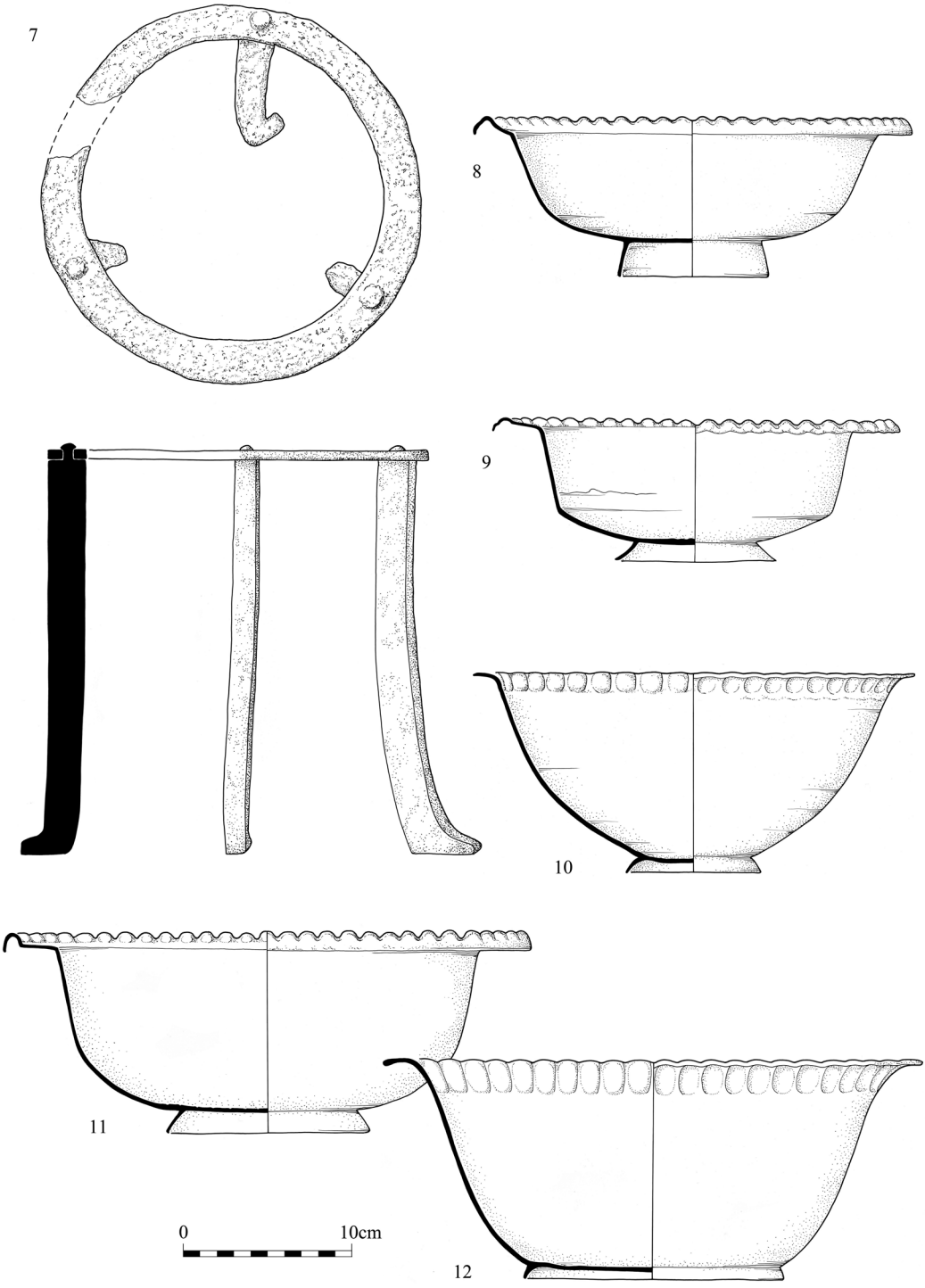


FIG. 7. Vessels from the hoard, Nos 7–12 (Scale 1:4).

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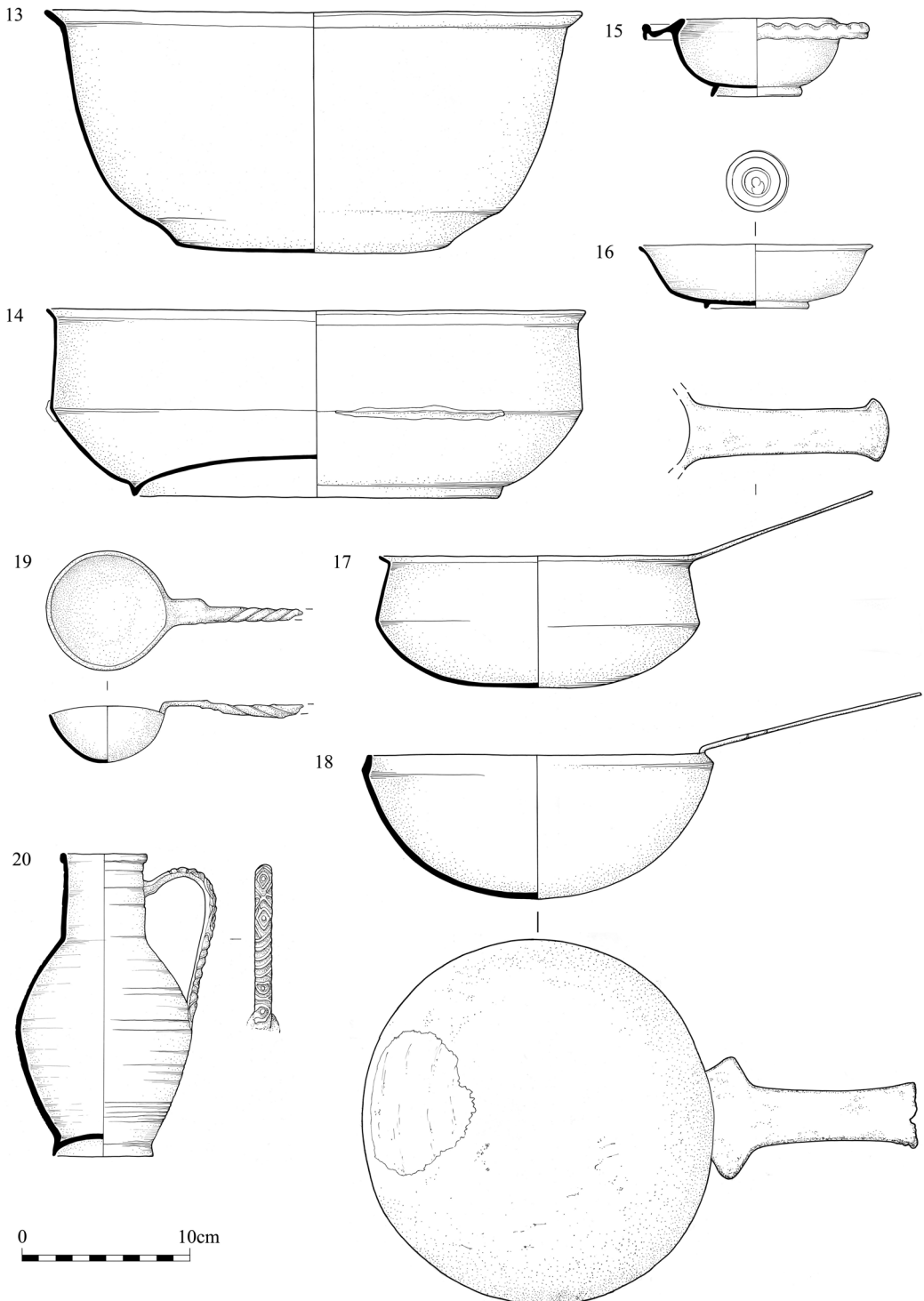


FIG. 8. Vessels from the hoard, Nos 13–20 (Scale 1:4).

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16. FIG. 8.16 <828> Lead-alloy bowl. The form is reminiscent of samian form Dr. 31 but without a basal kick. A similar vessel was recovered from a mire at Abercynafon, Wales.[41] The interior is decorated with incised concentric rings and there is a slight foot-ring. Rim diameter: 150 mm; base diameter: 62 mm; weight: 258 g.

17. FIG. 8.17 <823> Copper-alloy skillet. Carinated, with a hemispherical base and concave sides above the carination. There is a simple, plain out-turned rim. The handle has a single terminal expansion. Similar to a skillet from Irchester illustrated by Kennett.[42] Rim diameter: 195 mm; weight: 238 g.

18. FIG. 8.18 <814> Copper-alloy skillet, complete. It has a short handle with a slightly splayed end and opposing triangular protrusions near the base. There is a possible circular repair on the underside of the base. A skillet from Swaffham has similar decoration on the handle.[43] Rim diameter: 203 mm; weight: 538 g.

19. FIG. 8.19 <827> Iron ladle with 'barley twist' handle. A similar object is described by Manning.[44] Rim diameter: 70 mm; weight: 53.6 g.

20. FIG. 8.20 <869> Lead-alloy jug with a moulded, decorated handle. Complete and in good condition but squashed. Rim diameter: 40 mm; base diameter: 50 mm; weight: 674 g.

CATALOGUE OF OTHER OBJECTS

A small number of other objects may also have formed part of the hoard.

1. FIG. 9.1 <866> A complete but deliberately bent and broken copper-alloy strip bracelet, with incised multiple decorative motifs and a riveted clasp. A well-known type of Late Roman bracelet.[45]

2. FIG. 9.2 <867> and <868> Iron bucket binding with fixing holes.[46] This is an almost complete binding but no other bucket fittings or wooden bucket staves were recovered so it is unclear whether it should be considered part of the hoard.

3. FIG. 9.3 <865> A small iron ring. Objects such as this could have served a multiplicity of functions and its presence in the well may not be connected with the deposition of the hoard.[47]

HOARD COMPOSITION

Quite why this collection of over twenty vessels and other objects was assembled and deposited at the bottom of a well is a subject for debate and two possible interpretations are discussed more fully below. However, before moving on to the specifics of that debate it seems reasonable to highlight a number of issues that relate to the hoard's composition and their possible significance.

The first issue relates to the hoard's origins. Within the collection of vessels are a number of

41 Earwood *et al*. 2001, fig 3.1.
42 Kennett 1971, fig. 9.7.
43 Kennett 1971, fig. 15.
44 Manning 1985, 104–5.
45 Crummy 1983, fig. 47.
46 Manning 1985, 103.
47 Crummy 1983, 161.

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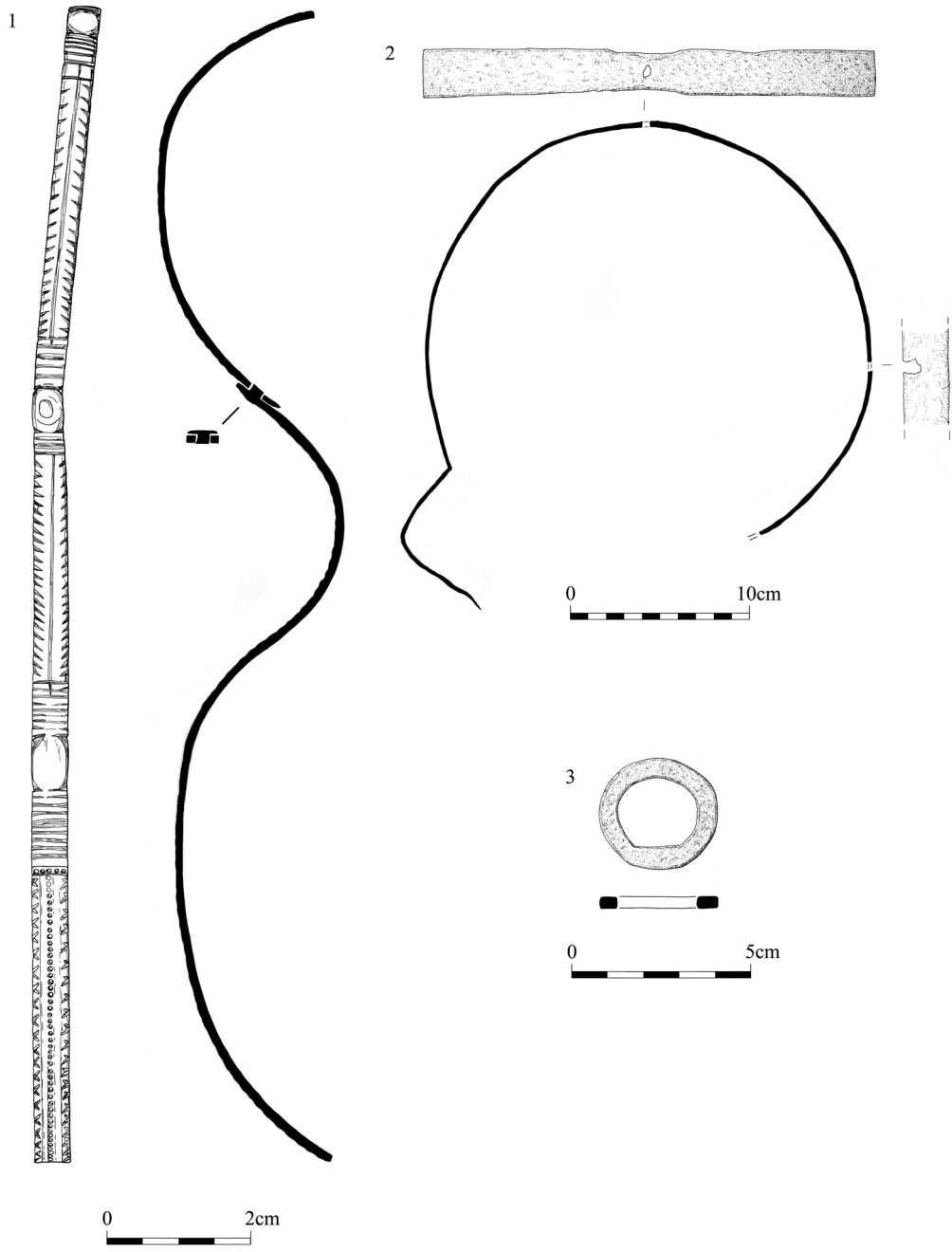


FIG. 9. Other objects from the hoard. Nos 1 and 3 at scale 1:2; no. 2 at 1:4.

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items that were produced at different times. The Hemmor buckets are the most obvious examples and may have been one to two hundred years old at deposition. Similarly, the repaired damage on the carinated bowl suggests a vessel that had seen considerable use prior to its deposition in the period A.D. 375–450. At the other extreme the hanging bowl and the *Perlrandbecken* may have been relatively new items and perhaps only decades old when they came to be deposited. This suggests that the hoard represents a group of objects assembled over time rather than a group of newly-manufactured objects.

There are also strong indications that whoever assembled the hoard had access to vessels produced in different regions of the Roman Empire. Many of the objects are probably of Gallo-Roman origin and some may have been produced in centres on the Rhine. The most exotic object is possibly the bucket, which is paralleled by a fifth-century grave-find from Nubia. This unusual vessel may have been manufactured in an Eastern Mediterranean centre and travelled an extremely long way from point of manufacture to deposition.[48] Equally unusual is the hanging basin. The form of this vessel is similar to the so-called 'Irchester' bowls, which are usually seen as an insular form and may suggest that the vessel was produced in Britain. That said, Irchester bowls — a form of vessel that is usually well represented in British copper-alloy vessel hoards — are notable by their absence. The possibility that the hoard was assembled on the Continent cannot be ruled out and Adams (above) would not preclude a continental origin for the hanging bowl. Alternatively, it could be suggested that the hoard indicates that Irchester bowls were no longer in use during the very late fourth and early fifth centuries. However, this seems unlikely given the typological connections between Irchester bowls and the early medieval hanging bowls (Adams, above).

Finally, it is worth making a number of general observations about the hoard's composition (Table 3). The fact that the hoard contains vessels made from a variety of different materials and that they were all useable would appear to indicate that this group of objects cannot be considered as a so-called metalworker's hoard. This material is not scrap hidden prior to reuse or concealed to stock. It looks like a set of tableware. There are groups of objects that can be considered 'sets'. The three *Perlrandbecken* probably form a set and the two *bassin à bord godronné* may also form a set. The Westland cauldron and trivet could also be associated with one another. This suggests a hoard of table- and kitchenware and the various handled buckets and skillets may be associated

TABLE 3. THE HOARD'S COMPOSITION BY VESSEL TYPE AND MATERIAL

Vessel Type	**Copper Alloy**	**Lead Alloy**	**Iron**
Hanging bowl / basin	1		
Bowls	9	2	
Buckets	2		
Cauldrons	1		
Skillets / Ladles	2		1
Jugs		1	
Trivet			1
Total	15	3	2

[48] This is not surprising. Small quantities of eastern Mediterranean amphorae from Late Roman London and coins with eastern mintmarks attest to continuing links (however tenuous) with this region.

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with either the consumption of liquids or ablutions.[49] Finally, the function of hanging bowls remains a mystery but the general consensus seems to be that these vessels were associated with liquids. Overall the impression that the hoard gives is of a set of tableware associated with the preparation, display, and consumption of food. It would seem to be of higher status than the normal Late Roman ceramic assemblages but of far lower status than silver plate.

THE CONTEXT OF DEPOSITION: RATIONAL OR RITUAL?

The hoarding of coins and other objects is a phenomenon that was widely practised in Britain before, during, and after the Roman period. However, there is little consensus as to why objects were hoarded and why their owners failed to recover the hoards.[50] Hoards may have been buried for safe-keeping and not recovered due to an untimely demise or forgetfulness, or they may have been gifts to the gods. There is often, with a few exceptions, no way of choosing between these rational or ritual options. The interpretation of the Drapers' Gardens hoard provides a useful case-study to which these interpretative viewpoints can be applied.

A 'rational' explanation could relate the hoard's deposition to a number of historical events that occurred during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The two coins of Gratian are too late to allow an association with Ammianus' 'Barbarian conspiracy' of A.D. 367 but could allow an association with Magnus Maximus' adventure of A.D. 383. Alternatively, the events of the early fifth century — the usurpation of Constantine III in A.D. 406/7, the Honorian rescript in A.D. 410, and even the process of the *adventus Saxonum* — might all offer occasions that could have led to the deposition of the hoard for safe-keeping. That said, so might any number of unrecorded and even trivial events between A.D. 375 and 450.[51]

The alternative view is that the hoard was deposited as some type of ritual act with the vessels being given as gifts to the gods. The use of watery places, wells, and shafts as ritual *foci* is well attested in Roman Britain and seems beyond reasonable doubt.[52] Indeed, examples of this phenomenon are known from London and the city's immediate hinterland.[53] Two of the best examples are a Late Roman well excavated below Southwark Cathedral, which was found to contain a number of fragments of religious and funerary sculpture along with the articulated skeletons of a dog and a cat,[54] and a large Roman shaft containing twenty-five animal skeletons, including three horses laid nose to tail, at Keston, Bromley.[55]

The well fill immediately above the Drapers' Gardens hoard contained an incomplete skeleton of a juvenile red deer aged four to five months. If the animal was born in May or June, as is typical today, then the skeleton was probably deposited in the autumn or early winter. Red deer skeletons are unusual in Roman assemblages but are known from a 'ritual' pit in London's Eastern Cemetery and from a late fourth- or early fifth-century well at Baldock (Herts.).[56] The presence of the partial deer skeleton would seem to be indicative of 'ritual activity' and mark the final act in the placing of this deposit. The first act appears to have been the placing of a

49 It is interesting to note the absence of handled sieves or 'wine strainers' that are a feature of other Late Roman hoards (Kennett 1971, fig. 10).

50 Reece 1988; Künzl 1993; Millett 1994; Johns 1994; 1996; Petts 2003.

51 Reece 1994 highlights the problems inherent in associating an archaeological event with a historically recorded event.

52 Ross 1968; Pearce 2004, 92–4; Petts 2003.

53 Beasley 2006, 53–64 has provided a useful overview of this phenomenon in London and Southwark.

54 Hammerson 1978.

55 Philp 1985.

56 I am grateful to Kevin Rielly (pers. comm.) for discussing the red deer skeleton with me. Eastern cemetery: Barber and Bowsher 2000, 19–20, 319–20. Baldock: Chaplin and McCormick 1986, 410.

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deliberately bent and broken bracelet (and possibly the coins) at the bottom of the well. As this is the only personal object in the hoard, this too may have had some particular ritual significance.

Metal vessels were clearly perceived to have been appropriate gifts to the gods in the Late Roman period. The discovery of pewter vessels in clearly ritual contexts in a shrine at Great Dunmow, Essex,[57] and from the sacred spring at Bath, where some were inscribed with pagan dedicatory inscriptions,[58] would appear to be strong evidence that this was the case. Elsewhere hoards of pewter from a Late Roman well at Heybridge, Essex,[59] and a Late Roman pit at Appleshaw, Hants.,[60] contained vessels embellished with chi-rho monograms. Here it is interesting to note the discovery, at a date before 1925, of a pewter dish decorated with a chi-rho from Copthall Court, just south of Drapers' Gardens.[61] Indeed, it has even been suggested that many of the truly extraordinary finds assemblages from the Walbrook were votive deposits and that the whole of the Walbrook Valley may, despite its sometimes industrial-looking character, also have served as a focus for religious belief and ritual practices.[62]

The other factor in favour of the Drapers' Gardens hoard being a ritual deposit, rather than a 'hoard of flight', lies simply in its size. This is not a convenient box or pot filled with coins that can be easily and surreptitiously transported and hidden. It is a large group of metal vessels that could only be moved by several individuals or in a number of trips. Nor was the hoard being hidden in an empty landscape. Large assemblages of pottery from the revetted Walbrook stream indicate that this channel was still open and having substantial quantities of pottery and other refuse dumped in it in the period *c.* A.D. 350–400/450.[63] Once in the well the likelihood of it being accidentally discovered by someone drawing water was probably quite high. However, whether the well was left open with the vessels in it or deliberately backfilled remains a moot point. There were no obvious dumps of rubble or other materials that might point to deliberate infilling. Equally, there were no discernible context boundaries that could be interpreted as demonstrating gradual infilling. Furthermore, any evidence that may have once existed for the well being left open and not maintained (such as an erosion cone) over a long period of time has been lost by modern truncation. Therefore it cannot be conclusively demonstrated that the well was either deliberately infilled or allowed to silt naturally.

If the interpretation of the Drapers' Gardens hoard as a ritual deposit is accepted then it can be seen as a southern outlier of a regional pattern of hoarding focused on the Cambridgeshire fens (FIG. 10). Hoards of Late Roman copper-alloy vessels,[64] ironwork,[65] and especially pewter and lead 'baptismal' tanks[66] are all focused in this area. Quite what prompted this ritual act remains beyond conclusive reconstruction. Certainly the late fourth and early fifth centuries were a time of great social, economic, and political upheaval and in uncertain times people are perhaps more likely to turn to their gods than in times of stability. It is also tempting to see the deposition of the hoard and infilling of the well as a communal act, marking the abandonment of this part of *Londinium* with a sacrifice of prestigious objects.

57 Wickenden 1988, figs 30.16 and 34.13.
58 Henig *et al*. 1988.
59 Petts 2003, 111.
60 Read 1898. On the ritual deposition of pewter vessels in general see Beagrie 1989; Poulton and Scott 1993.
61 Wheeler 1925, 25. No further details are known of this object's discovery. It is currently in the collections of the Museum of London (J. Hall pers. comm.).
62 Merrifield 1995. The mithraeum (FIG. 1) is not far distant (Shepherd 1998). The Thames probably also fulfilled a 'ritual' role on a much greater scale (Rhodes 1991, 183–5).
63 These assemblages contain all of the late fourth-century ceramic indicators in London: Overwey/Portchester D ware, calcite-gritted or late shell-tempered wares, as well as late Argonne and Mayen ware imports from the Rhineland.
64 Kennett 1971.
65 Manning 1972.
66 Wedlake 1958; Petts 2003.

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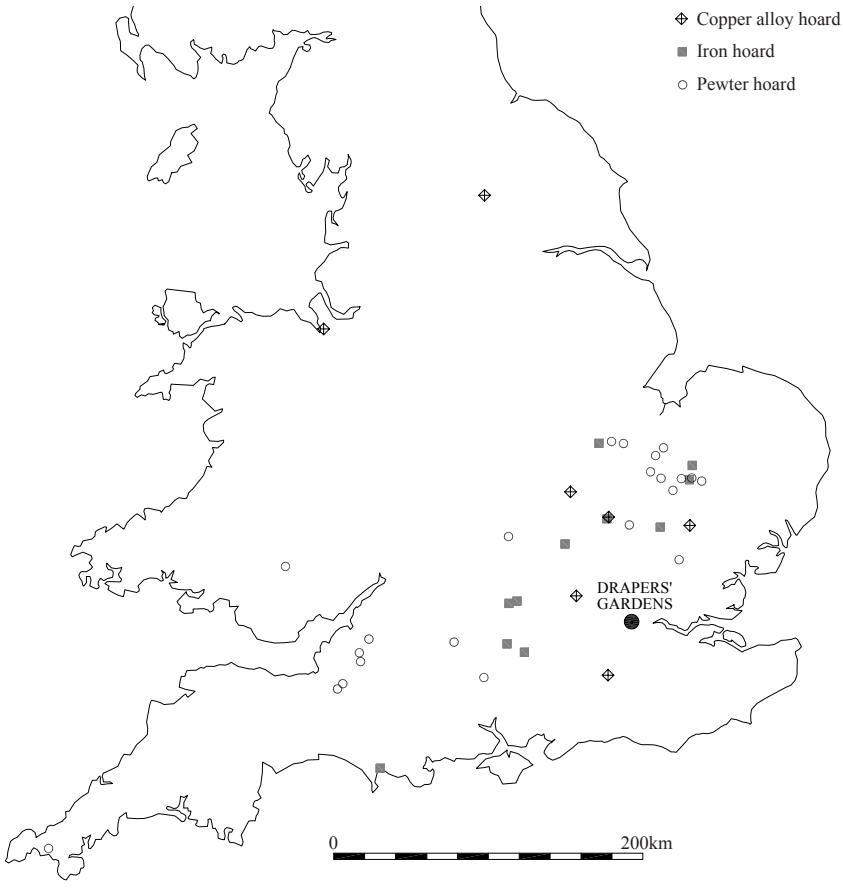


FIG. 10. A distribution map of Late Roman copper-alloy, pewter, and iron hoards (after Kennett 1971, Wedlake 1958, and Manning 1972).

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