

Introduction

1.1 Synopsis

This is a study of Roman military associated artefacts found in the south-east of England from sites and areas not traditionally assumed to have an active military presence following the initial conquest phase of AD 43. There is a significant, and growing, body of artefactual evidence from published sources, unpublished museum collections and particularly the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database to suggest a reassessment of the military presence in the civil zone of the province is necessary.

There are three primary questions that this study seeks to address;

1. What is the nature and distribution of Roman militaria within the survey area?
2. Is it possible to critically re-assess the currently assumed military connection for any of these artefacts?
3. What are we able to infer from the distribution and nature of these artefacts about military/civilian interactions and the occupation of Britain.

There are three primary objectives that this study seeks to achieve. Firstly, I will establish the distribution and nature of the military associated artefacts found within the survey area from AD 43 – 280. The resulting distribution patterns of specific artefact types, that I will suggest are traditionally those most commonly associated with the Roman military, will then be analysed. These categories include not only artefacts such as weapons and armour, but also the fittings for military belts and horse harness.

Secondly, as a part of this process I will critically re-assess some of the object types that have sometimes been argued to have a military connection. The analysis of not only the distribution patterns for the objects that form the primary data, but also their decoration and possible social context will enable me to argue that some objects are positively associated with the military while others have a more questionable association.

Thirdly, I will evaluate how the study of Roman militaria may be utilised to offer insights into the nature of military and civilian interactions and the occupation of the province of Britannia.

This book presents two sets of case studies, three regional, Colchester, Chichester and Buckinghamshire, and three artefactual, *armillae*, Trompetenmuster mounts and harness mounts.

1.2 Genesis

Nicolay's (2007) study of Roman militaria from non-military sites in the *Civitas Batavorum* presented an artefact-led approach that combined objects recovered from excavated sites and museum collections, with those recovered via non-traditional methods, predominantly metal detecting. He argued that the nature and distribution of the finds indicated the presence of veterans returning to their homeland after completing their term of service and proposed a lifecycle model for Roman soldiers (Nicolay 2007). The recording of metal detected finds in the Netherlands at the time of his study was limited and even after recent changes in legislation and the development of the Portable Antiquities Netherlands (PAN) network it is still in its infancy. In the UK, the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) has been operating nationally since 2003 and in some regions, since the late 1990s. The national PAS dataset is substantial, over 1.5 million objects have been recorded from England and Wales with Roman objects making up a significant percentage of this total (Pearce and Worrell 2022, 475). While there are biases and potential issues with this data, it nonetheless offers an unparalleled opportunity to explore the distribution of small finds not only within those sites fortunate enough to be excavated, but also across the Roman and modern countryside.

Originally, I had intended to test Nicolay's theory that these objects might represent returning veterans, perhaps identifying veterans of British *auxilia* through their material culture. However, as I collected data and processed it, it became clear that the distribution of militaria within the province of Britannia was a product of more diverse and complex factors. Simultaneously it became evident that there was a need to re-assess the strength of some artefacts' military connections, either due to the increase in evidence since the connection was suggested (Ch.9) or because the quantity and distribution of object types had not been properly assessed in the past (Ch.11-12).

The final evolution of this project, presented here, addresses a common assumption, perhaps articulated best by Mattingly, that the troops present in the civil zone were predominantly those seconded on official business, and while visible, were relatively few in number (2006, 129). While there is little need to question Mattingly's figure of 2000 soldiers operating in this manner and under various official auspices (2006, 129.), I will argue that we should not confine the rest of the army to the frontiers, and perhaps question the division between military and civil zones entirely. Jilek and Breeze (2007) sought to demonstrate the potential of studying military finds in their discussion

of Roman fortlets and other small bases. They argued for a more dynamic societal view of *militaria* beyond the traditional discussions of form and function (2007, 199; Ch.2.5). In his summary of military equipment studies, Bishop states that ‘each piece of military equipment has a story to tell’ (2011, 132). These are stories of manufacture, ownership, deposition, use and societal status (Bishop 2011, 132.). *Militaria*, like any form of garment or dress is a way to broadcast aspects of personal identity to the world. On a basic level it demonstrates an association with the Roman military and the state it (in theory) served, allegiance to Rome and not her enemies. However, as with all expressions of identity it is multi-layered, defining the army as a group apart from the civilian, possibly separating legions from one another and from the *auxilia*. Aspects of *militaria* may also have been adopted and adapted by the wider civilian population for a range of reasons in a manner not too different from the way aspects of modern *militaria* have permeated into wider everyday fashion.

1.3 The Road Ahead

The following chapter (2) will present the scholarly context in which this work sits and demonstrate why a comprehensive review of the Roman military within

provincial society is essential. It will argue that the study of the Roman army has, in many ways, become isolated from mainstream Roman archaeology in Britain, this is particularly true of work on military equipment and *militaria*. Chapter 3 explores the definitions of military equipment and *militaria*, and the distinction between the two, presented within previous scholarship. It is from this that I will define the parameters of this study in chapter 4 along with the methods of data collection and methodological premise for the following case studies. Chapter 5 will also set out the wider distribution pattern of the data, across the whole of the study area, against which the following case study chapters are set. There are six case studies, the first three (Ch.6-8) are regional studies, while the second set (Ch.9-11) are focused on individual artefact types that have previously been strongly associated with the Roman military. The final chapters extrapolate from the previous case studies and suggest that aspects of *militaria*, particularly horse harness fittings, were used more widely in the context of some pre-conquest cultural continuity (Ch.12). While other aspects of *militaria*, more firmly connected to the Roman force of occupation, should be seen as evidence for more widespread military activities within the province of Britannia, possibly relating to military supply and provincial control (Ch.13).