Hitching a Lift: Functional Context and Magical Symbolism in a Roman Linchpin from Wootton, North Lincolnshire

By ADAM PARKER and STUART McKIE

ABSTRACT

A unique linchpin depicting a human thumb, discovered in North Lincolnshire in the 1980s, is here reconsidered and particular emphasis is placed on its potential as an apotropaic symbol. This function is explored in terms of the wider material and literary basis for magical gestures in Roman Britain and the Roman world. The relationship between this image and the space in which it was used is also explored.

Keywords: linchpin; thumb; Lincolnshire; Wootton; magic

A Romano-British linchpin depicting a human thumb was discovered in the village of Wootton, North Lincolnshire in the 1980s (FIG. 29).[160] It was a casual find made by an agricultural worker in an arable field and was subsequently reported to the North Lincolnshire Museum. The find was purchased by the museum and initially published by Kevin Leahy and Martin Henig in a 1988 note in the *Antiquaries Journal* following its exhibition at one of the Society's meetings. Leahy and Henig briefly suggested that the depiction of a human thumb on this object could have served an apotropaic function, noting the familiar link between thumb and phallus in the vocabulary of Roman symbolic images.[161] The linchpin has received very little scholarly attention in the intervening 30 years, and more nuanced interpretations can now be offered. The decades since the original publication have seen a complete overhaul in scholarly understandings of Roman magical practices, most recently with the application of theoretical approaches from the material and sensory turns.[162] The aim of this paper is to examine this linchpin in close detail, exploring its significance from an embodied, material perspective.

DESCRIPTION

A linchpin is an object designed to hold a wheel onto an axle consisting, primarily, of a shank capped by a head. The iron shank would be pushed through a hole in the axle, with the option to add extra security by tying a thin rope through the loop on the thumb's underside. The linchpin has a large iron shank and head covered on its convex exterior with a thick cast copper-alloy casing. This casing is decorated with a flowing, scalloped edge comprising three roll-moulds sweeping diagonally to either side from the base and

[160] NGR: TA 087 160.
[161] Leahy and Henig 1988, 321.
[162] Boschung and Bremmer 2015; Betts 2017; Parker and McKie 2018.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the whole is surmounted in the centre by a larger than life-size, three-dimensional thumb (FIG. 29). The thumb depicts a large nail in its usual anatomical place; the 'nail side' of the thumb faces the curve of the upper edge of the casing. The underside of the thumb includes a large annular loop mounted within a squared frame. The object has a prominent dark green patina throughout, abraded occasionally on the upper edges of the scallop moulding to reveal the original brassy colour beneath. As Leahy and Henig suggest the linchpin is broadly of type 1c according to the typology defined by Manning: crescentic head with a peg-loop inserted into the head.[163]

The linchpin is unusual in having a decorative copper-alloy element in addition to an iron pin. Manning identifies two main types: those with spatulate heads and those with crescentic heads.[164] A few examples had large leaf-shaped heads set at right angles to the pin to provide a toe-step for mounting the vehicle.[165] The figural element of the copper-alloy decoration on the Wootton linchpin is notable.

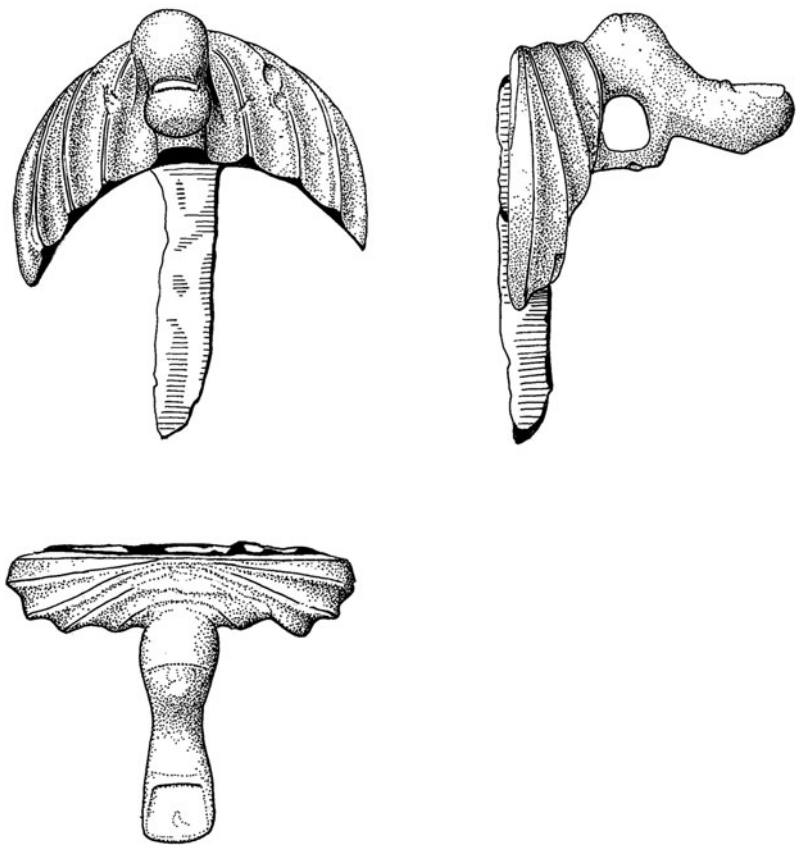

FIG. 29. The Wootton linchpin. (*Image reproduced with permission of Kevin Leahy*)

[163] Leahy and Henig 1988, 321; Manning 1985, 74.
[164] Manning 1985, 71–4.
[165] Crummy 2011, 55.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

PROVENANCE

The linchpin was recovered from an unstratified context, having been found in plough soil, and there have been no subsequent archaeological investigations in the immediate area upon which we may draw. There is no known Romano-British settlement in Wootton or its immediate environment, though a pair of rectilinear enclosures approximately 2 km away, near Thornton Curtis located on air photography from 2011, may be of Iron Age/Roman date.[166] The PAS records twelve coins from the parish of Wootton: a single denarius of Antoninus Pius,[167] three radiates,[168] seven fourth-century nummi,[169] and a possible siliqua dated to A.D. 364–402.[170]

A large number of Roman small finds associated with the nearby village of Kirmington, located 5 km to the south, may suggest a settlement somewhere in the vicinity.[171] Other Roman infrastructure in the surrounding hinterland includes the large villa and field-system at Winterton,[172] the settlement at Winteringham,[173] the Iron Age/Roman settlement(?) at Yarborough Camp, Croxton,[174] and a possible Iron Age/Roman ditched enclosure at Ulceby.[175] No Roman roads are known to have travelled through Wootton, though the Margary road no. 270 running south-east–north-west from Horncastle to South Ferriby passed approximately 5 km south-west of Wootton.[176] The PastScape monument record for the site at Yarborough Camp also suggests the existence of a prehistoric trackway from Croxton towards South Ferriby: as the crow flies this still does not take in Wootton directly, but moves the potential for a known roadway to within approximately 3 km of the modern village.

Clearly a brief survey of the Roman archaeology surrounding Wootton offers little opportunity to develop a contextual analysis of the thumb-shaped linchpin other than to say that other Romano-British material culture had penetrated the landscape surrounding the modern village of Wootton. While contextual information is important for the interpretation of small finds, it is nevertheless still possible to consider this isolated object within wider symbolic contexts.

EMBODIED MEANINGS: THE THUMB AS A MAGICAL SYMBOL?

The concept of magic has been subject to a great deal of semantic and theoretical discussion in recent years and we do not use the term lightly.[177] Leahy and Henig suggest, at the end of their published note, that the depiction of a thumb on the linchpin may have served an apotropaic function through its comparison with the phallus. We can elaborate on this suggestion. The thumb, as part of a fist, was a common motif depicted on fist-and-phallus objects. In this instance the fist represented the *mano fico/manus fica* 'fig sign', a gesture of good luck in the Roman world depicted by the thumb held beneath fingers and protruding beyond these (FIG. 30).[178] In Roman Britain, this symbol was primarily depicted on objects designed to be mounted or suspended as objects of personal adornment. Greep has identified three distinct types of fist-and-phallus pendants in bone: those of type B1 are simple and manufactured from long strips of bone (the medullary canal frequently visible on the reverse) and are consistently first century in date; type B2 are curved pendants, centrally perforated and decorated with grooves; type B3 are laterally perforated and, in 1983,

[166] NGR: TA 1166 1985; PastScape no. 1580943.
[167] A.D. 138–61; PAS: NLM-D573F1.
[168] A.D. 260–96; PAS: NLM-E551D8; NLM-D4E793; NLM-D3B686.
[169] PAS: NLM-E515A7; NLM-D5A174; NLM-D52272; NLM-D54A51; NLM-D50306; NLM-D4A874; NLM-D378B5.
[170] PAS: NLM-E577B3.
[171] PastScape nos: 78820, 78823, 78834, 78840, 8501, 8504, 883588, 883589, 883591.
[172] NGR: SE 9096 1799; Stead 1976.
[173] NGR: SE 928 222; Rowlandson 2010.
[174] NGR: TA 0810 1201; PastScape no. 78829.
[175] NGR: TA 1235 1466; PastScape no. 1325793.
[176] Bishop 2014, 146. An interactive map of Margary road numbers is available: http://romanroadsinbritain.info/margary.html (Accessed 07/01/2018).
[177] See McKie and Parker 2018 for an overview.
[178] Ovid, *Fasti* 5.433.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were confined to Verulamium.[179] All of Greep's fist-and-phallus types are first or second century in date. Further variation may be found in metal examples and so in addition to Greep's bone typology, the fist-and-phallus may each project from an upwardly curved bar,[180] or be stylised and joined together by a rectangular plate.[181] The only known group of such objects from Roman Britain is the set of six pendants from an infant's burial in Catterick.[182]

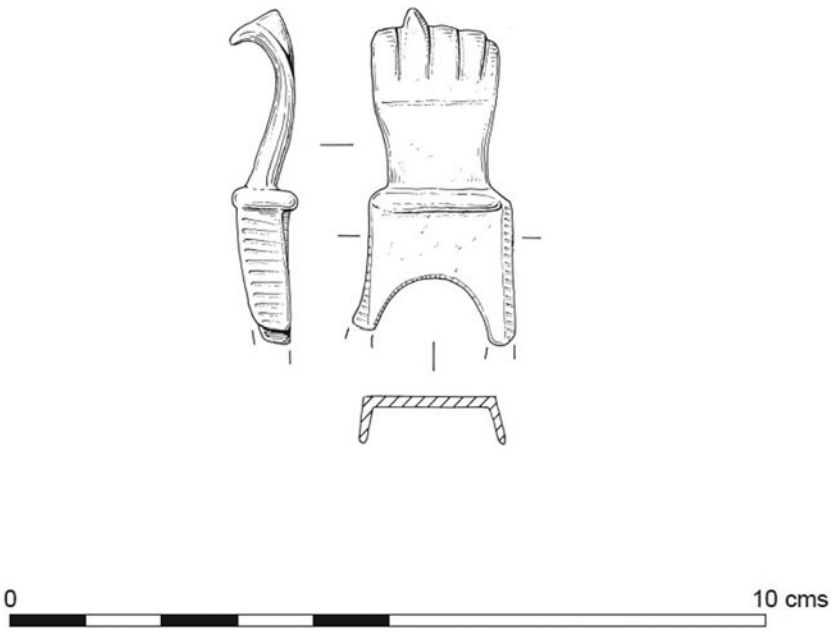

FIG. 30. Drawing of a mount depicting a clenched fist making the *mano fico/manus fica* gesture by tucking the thumb beneath the forefinger; PAS: LIN-2BE126 (Wellingore, Lincs.). (© *Portable Antiquities Scheme [CC BY Attribution SA 2.0]*)

Johns argues that the linguistic and visual pun of the 'fig sign' relates explicitly to the vulva and, thus, the fist-and-phallus elements are representative of both male and female genitals.[183] One might question the binary nature of this interpretation given the existence of fist-and-phallus imagery in which an additional phallus or a vulva is incorporated onto the standard one fist/one phallus motif.[184] A group of fist-and-phallus pendants from Roman Catterick depicting a scallop shell as a bridge between the two elements has been argued to be an allusion to Venus and, potentially, thus a vulva.[185] The interpretation of one group as male and one as female is perhaps a little reductionist and is thrown into question by the unique group of pendants from Catterick, as it is associated with the inhumation of an infant.[186]

Hands were meaningful symbols in the Roman Empire. Given the close association between hands and phalli, there may be a temptation to interpret them as intuitively 'male' symbols. Conversely, however, engendered usage of the two main types of 'hand' motif can be identified with hairpins clearly associated with female personal adornment.[187] The right hand, when depicted clasping another, is a symbol of

[179] Greep 1983, 286–7.
[180] e.g. Bishop 1988, 98; PAS: NLM863.
[181] e.g. Cool *et al*. 1995, 1538, no. 6322; Parker 2015, 140, fig. 5.
[182] Wilson 2002, 66–70, fig. 260, no. 244; Parker 2015.
[183] Johns 1982, 74.
[184] Bishop 1988, types 10d to 10o; Parker 2015, 140, fig. 6.
[185] Parker 2015, 141–3.
[186] Parker 2015, 137–8, 147.
[187] Eckardt 2014, 154.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

marriage between men and women (*dextrarum iuncto*) and thus non-gendered in this scenario.[188] Overall, if there is a gendered narrative in the hand motif it is ambiguous at best and we should certainly be wary of the 'thumb equals phallus' interpretation.

Eckardt, in her 2014 book *Objects & Identities*, dedicates a chapter to 'Embodied Meanings' in which she explores the forms and possible meanings behind the use of whole hands on portable objects in the North-Western Roman provinces. We can highlight here that hands were widely depicted on bone and metal hairpins, often holding a spherical object between thumb and forefinger, but occurred also as knife handles, key handles and votive hands.[189] In these contexts, hands are frequently represented holding and supporting a spherical object, and there is possibly a tentative connection between this common image and our linchpin, where the thumb is supporting a large annular wheel or axle. Equally, this connection between images may be broadly paralleled in the function of the two object types, the hairpin and linchpin: both are designed to be physically inserted (and when relevant, removed), to support the fixing of something, and are used in such a way as to be visible to others.

There are few other figural depictions of single thumbs from Roman Britain; perhaps the most similar in form is a bone 'rod' from Gloucestershire, now in the British Museum (FIG. 31).[190] This rod depicts a realistic human thumb, carved intricately to depict the knuckle and nail. Unfortunately, the unstratified nature of the bone rod and its unknown original function prevent further comparison between it and our linchpin beyond their figural similarity.

FIG. 31. A bone rod, from Gloucestershire, depicting a human thumb; on display at the British Museum. (© *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

[188] Eckardt 2014, 169.
[189] Eckardt 2014, 153–61.
[190] BM no.: 1896, 0501.52.

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We must also make a visual comparison with copper-alloy fittings capped with a single finger, bent at right angles but depicted in the round, from Roman Alcester and Springhead.[191] They include the nail and moulded lines surrounding the joints. Both were capping a cylindrical object, probably in the same manner as a tap finial in the Rijksmuseum.[192] The latter included a vertical bracing bar to hold the distal phalanx straight. It capped an open pipe which was perforated laterally by a pair of large circular holes. The turning of the finger may have opened or closed a water supply and the digit thus pointed to a direction of open or closed. We may also draw attention to a large copper-alloy nail or shank capped, at right angles, by a stylised digit from Verulamium.[193] It was one of a series of such clamps which was used to clasp a late first-century building inscription onto a wall in the Basilica.

Although the existence of all of these objects is pertinent to this subject, they do not advance the issue of meaning. For this we might turn to the Roman literary evidence. Although none of this was produced in Britain, it may give us an idea of how the symbol of the thumb was conceived in antiquity. The most overtly magical evidence naturally comes from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (*PGM*) — a series of 'do-it-yourself' guides to magical practice from Roman Egypt.[194] Within the *PGM*, there are four rituals that make prominent use of thumbs, either those of the human practitioner or even of the supernatural forces being invoked in the spell. For example, the gesture of holding the thumbs features as a method of binding both mortals and supernatural entities.[195] Corbeill has studied in detail the specific importance of the thumb as a symbol of power in the Roman world, and it must be the case that these spells from the *PGM* were connected to this wider belief.[196] The thumb was considered the most powerful of the digits, and in the arena the thumb of the magistrate giving the games held the power of life and death for gladiators.[197] Two of the references to thumb-holding in the *PGM* are in charms, either to be written down or spoken aloud, aimed at gaining power over certain deities (Selene in IV.2326 and Hekate in 70.4–7) and so seem to be metaphors making use of the image of the thumb as the most powerful digit. The other two thumb-holding references come from instructions for relatively short rituals, and require the performer to hold their own thumbs while repeating a short phrase seven times:

> *PGM* 36.161–6: A charm to restrain anger and charm for success. No charm is greater, and it is to be performed by means of words alone: hold your thumbs and repeat the spell seven times: '*ermalloth archimalloth*[198] stop the mouths that speak against me, because I glorify your sacred and honoured names which are in heaven.'
>
> *PGM* 69.1–3: '*phnounebee phnounebee*, give me your strength, for I am Abrasax[199]' say it seven times while holding your two thumbs.

[191] Lloyd-Morgan 2001, 76, no. 14, fig. 61; Penn 1959, 58; Jarrett 2008, 263.
[192] Zadoks-Josephus *et al*. 1973, 111, no. 197.
[193] Discovered during excavations of the St Michael's school site in 1955 by Saunders and Lunn, the results of which have never been formally published. At the time of writing this was on display in the Verulamium Museum, accession no.: 1988.256.
[194] For the texts see Betz 1992. By drawing from these texts, we are not suggesting that the person who made our linchpin had access to them, or even that they were available in Roman Britain. The *PGM* were produced in the specific context of Egyptian temple traditions, and the extent of their wider circulation is a matter of debate (see, for example, Frankfurter 1998, 228–33 and Dieleman 2005, 285–94). Nevertheless, Graeco-Egyptian magical traditions influenced, and were influenced by, beliefs and practices common across the Roman world, including Britain. Thus, the *PGM* does include descriptions of specific ritual practices that can be paralleled in Roman Britain. For example, *PGM* X.24–35 required *voces magicae* (see note 198, below) and magical characters to be drawn on a gold sheet, of a type that we find in Britain (e.g. RCHME 1962, inscribed object no. 132; PAS: BERK-0B6771). Equally, *PGM* IV.1716–1870 and XII.270–350 describe the construction of magical gems which share many features with the example from Welwyn (Frere and Tomlin 1992, no. 2423.1; fig. 23).
[195] *PGM* IV.2326–7, 36.161–77, 69.1–3, 70.4–7.
[196] Corbeill 2004, 41–66.
[197] Some Roman authors connected the word for thumb – *pollux* – to the verb for exerting power – *polleo*; see Corbeill 2004, 42.
[198] These are so-called *voces magicae* — words that were nonsensical to humans, but which were believed to have power in invoking supernatural forces.
[199] Abrasax is the name of a gnostic demon who is commonly invoked in Greek magical texts.

There is no clue from the text for how exactly this would work, and there are a number of possibilities. The simplest would be enclosing the thumb within the clenched fist, so perhaps this is the most likely, but the *manus fica* gesture of holding the thumb between index and middle fingers (discussed above) could also fit the description.[200] It is also possible to hold the thumbs in the clenched fist of the opposite hand, which brings the hands and wrists together in a posture that could almost represent the wearing of shackles by a bound captive. Speculation over which of these gestures is accurate could be virtually endless, and in the end, we must admit that we can never be sure based on the available evidence. It is likely that either the practitioners themselves understood how the gesture was to be performed, or that the wording was left intentionally vague to allow for individual variations depending on specific circumstances.[201] Understanding exactly how these gestures were performed is not necessary for the interpretation of our linchpin. However, the existence of these texts does demonstrate the power attributed to the thumb in the Roman world, and its role not just in apotropaic or protective rituals, but in aggressive magic too.

Although only in passing, there is one final literary reference to thumbs that seems pertinent here. In *Epodes* 5 (ll. 46–8), Horace describes Canidia, the archetypal witch of Roman literature, as having untrimmed thumbnails. Ogden tentatively suggests that this might be for the purposes of digging necromantic pits or sacrificing humans and animals, and it is certainly part of the bestial image of Canidia and the other witches in this poem.[202] Although Ogden suggests that all of the witch's fingernails are likely to have been untrimmed, the fact that Horace makes specific mention of the thumbnail is unlikely to be accidental and could very well be making reference to the idea of the thumb as the most powerful digit.[203]

This section has taken in a very wide range of evidence, from bone pendants in Roman Britain to spells on Graeco-Roman-Egyptian papyri and classical Latin poetry. In some ways this is emblematic of the difficulty in studying Roman magical beliefs and practices; the often scant and frustratingly vague nature of the surviving sources for these things means that nets must be cast very wide. These sources come from very different cultural and historical contexts and should only be combined into a synthetic picture with great care. Nevertheless, we do not think it is too much of a stretch to argue that they suggest a common understanding of the thumb as a powerful magical symbol, possibly associated with the phallus and available for use in either protective or aggressive rituals.

FUNCTIONAL AND PHYSICAL CONTEXTS

The thumb has been clearly selected for use in a very specific space, and this immediate functional context is crucial for interpreting its meaning. The interior of the thumb points (as if away from the body) towards the axle and the road, not the wheel or the vehicle. Leahy and Henig suggest that, because of its positioning, the thumb on the linchpin could also be figuratively 'holding' the axle down, keeping it secure.[204] The digit remained hovering over the axle, in close physical proximity to it, rather than revolving with the wheel. The thumb was a fixed point, a static object which functioned to hold or fix the wheel in place. It pointed towards the wheel axle, not to the passengers or the cargo. Perhaps in this position the addition of the thumb gesture may have provided a supernatural element to the permanence of this fixture. The hand, or possibly the fist, to which this raised thumb should have been attached is not depicted on the object. Does the detached, isolated nature of this thumb hold added significance? Quite possibly. In regard to Roman phallic amulets, Whitmore has noted that some of their efficacy could have come from their ability to shock, surprise or distract a viewer because of their presence in places where one would not expect to see a penis.[205] A wheel is not the natural place to see a thumb, just as the neck is anatomically not the natural place to see a penis (although ancient viewers may have been familiar with phallus amulets worn on

[200] Sittl 1890, 102–3, 123.
[201] See McKie 2016 for further discussion of the importance of individual creativity in Roman magical rituals.
[202] Ogden 2002, 116.
[203] The Latin is *irresectum pollicem.* Our thanks to Marie Bennett for alerting us to this reference.
[204] Leahy and Henig 1988, 321.
[205] Whitmore 2018, 26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

necklaces). Our linchpin could be tapping into these ideas of detachment and surprise for its magical potency. This could be further enhanced by the isolation of the thumb away from the rest of a human hand to which it would normally be attached.

The flutings on the linchpin's head may be compared with examples from Brading, Isle of Wight, and Tiddington, Oxon., though these comparanda do not advance our interpretation.[206] A group of four matching linchpins from Sandy, Beds., provide a useful point of comparison with this object. The group includes four pins, all iron and with a decoratively engraved, floriate panel on the stem evident on the example that has been cleaned (and presumed to be evident on the remaining examples in the set).[207] The assemblage from Sandy highlights that decorative linchpins could form part of matching sets. It is, perhaps, not an unreasonable assumption that the Wootton linchpin may also have formed part of a set.

Wheeled carts came in numerous forms and matching the different shapes and functions of these vehicles to their Latin names is a quagmire, though for the sake of completeness it seems pertinent to briefly outline them here. Two-wheeled vehicles include: *carpentum* (covered), *birota* (two-horsed, for hire) and *plaustrum* (the principal wagon). Four-wheeled vehicles include: *pilentum* (state carriage with four wheels used in religious processions), *currus triumphalis* (triumphal chariot), *carruca* (travelling carriage, which may include beds) and *reda* (Gallic, with two or four horses).[208] In all cases there is a clear presumption that the linchpin would be matched with an identical example on both sides of the vehicle. After all, thumbs, in their normal anatomical position on people, come in pairs — one left and one right. In terms of its magical function, it also makes sense to duplicate the image on all the vehicle's wheels so as not to favour one or more over others. If one wheel needed protecting, then presumably they all did. Consider then, a moving cart with two or four outwardly-pointing thumbs visible. To a standing viewer, only one or two of these thumbs would be visible and they certainly were conspicuous. The copper-alloy material used would have been particularly eye-catching in bright sunlight or flickering torch-light. Naturally, this was a wheel fixing and thus exposed to all elements, so we must consider that the pin could also have been caked in mud and drenched by rain. There is no clear use-wear, though the corrosion of the iron pin perhaps masks this, thus we have no indication of the lifespan of this object; it could have been used and/or curated for years or decades, regularly removed and replaced in one wheel or used on multiple vehicles, placed in once and left for a longer duration, or even fallen off on its first day of use. The discovery of additional examples, particularly from stratified archaeological contexts, may shed light on this issue in future.

Perhaps one of the vehicle types was more appropriate to have a thumb-shaped linchpin? Perhaps the copper-alloy exterior was a symbol of higher status — adding that extra bright, brassy, shine to a wheel that did not need it to function? This socioeconomic concern is not mutually exclusive with the proposition that the thumb represented an apotropaic device. By extension, an apotropaic function accorded to this thumb-shaped linchpin was intended to protect whatever was held above the wheel (cargo, passengers) from the dangers of the road. Myriad possibilities spring to mind for how this may have manifested itself. In searching for comparisons to this function, we may again turn to the contextual use of phallic imagery. In the case studies of both phallic stone carvings in the north of Britain and polyphallic *tintinnabula* more widely, one of the authors has argued that these both had a spatially limited zone of efficacy, in other words they were designed to protect their immediate surroundings to the scale of a room or structure.[209] This limited efficacy is relevant to the case of a linchpin. Presuming the existence of matching pins on the other wheels, the extent of an apotropaic effect to each individual wheel may be speculated to have encompassed the whole vehicle and its immediate surroundings. Merrifield once described the efficacy of the phallic image as a kind of 'lightning conductor' for bad luck.[210] A recent experimental study by Whitmore into the worn position of a phallic pendant upon a human body corroborates this idea by highlighting that the pendant was designed to point outwards, to face the direction of travel of the wearer.[211] The deliberate outward projection of a large cast thumb could be

[206] Leahy and Henig 1988, 321.
[207] The group formed part of the Sandy hoard of metalwork and is in the British Museum (BM no.: 1915, 1208.331–334).
[208] Crummy 2011, 50–1.
[209] Parker 2017, 118–21; 2018.
[210] Merrifield 1987, 170.
[211] Whitmore 2017, 57–9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X19000096 Published online by Cambridge University Press

incorporating similar logic — attempting to capture or attract negative supernatural forces before they were able to interfere with the important workings of the cart itself. In her most recent study of phallic amulets, Whitmore has identified a strong association between phallic amulets and pack animals in the Roman world, again with the assumption of an apotropaic effect.[212] Although these amulets seem to have normally been attached to the animals themselves, there is reason to believe that vehicles could be protected in this way too. Another Romano-British linchpin, from Chelsham in Surrey, is described by Bird as phallic, further strengthening this connection between phallic imagery and transportation.[213] The protection of vehicles seems a reasonable desire as vehicles are valuable, expensive objects in themselves, and take on an enhanced value when used to transport people, produce or other goods. The wheels were the crucial parts of a vehicle in providing locomotion, and therefore were the natural targets for protective magical rituals or amulets. The thumb linchpin was most obviously intended to protect the wheels and axle from damage while in motion, but there is another possibility. Among the curse tablets found in the temple of Mercury at Uley, Glos., was one written by a man named Honoratus. In this curse, Honoratus complains to the god that someone has stolen 'two wheels, four cows and many small belongings from my house'.[214] Other curses from Roman Britain confirm that draught animals and associated objects were not uncommon targets for thieves.[215] With these curses in mind, could it be that the Wootton thumb linchpin was intended as a magical anti-theft device?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Access to the object and its associated paper archive was kindly and valuably provided by Rose Nicholson, Collections Manager, North Lincolnshire Museum in November 2017. The linchpin forms part of the collection of North Lincolnshire Museum, Scunthorpe, is accessioned as SCUNM: 1988.001.001 (WOTAA1) and was on display in the permanent Roman gallery at the time of writing. Thanks to Carly Silver for inspiring the title of this paper, to Hella Eckardt for her valuable editorial input and to the two reviewers for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. Any errors remain the responsibility of the authors.

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doi:10.1017/S0068113X19000096

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[212] Whitmore 2018, 23–4.

[213] One arm of the crescentic linchpin head survives and this has a flattened profile on its upper edge; where this intersects with the rounded terminal a ledge is created. Bird (1997) identified this as a *glans*, although it should be noted that this interpretation is far from certain. Depictions of phalli in Roman material culture more often incorporate a fully moulded or prominently incised *glans* and/or foreskin.

[214] Tomlin 1993, no. 72; see Tomlin 1999 for further details on the text.

[215] Also from Uley: nos 1 and 5 (a draught animal and a bridle, respectively); theft of a pony from Marlborough (Hassall and Tomlin 1999, 378–9); theft of a mule from Ratcliffe-on-Sour, Notts. (Hassall and Tomlin 1993, 310–13); theft of a ploughshare from Bath (Tomlin 1988, no. 31).

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A Hint of Exeter's Hinterland and Port: A New Large Aisled Hall Building at Wessex Close, Topsham, Devon

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ABSTRACT

A large aisled hall building excavated at Topsham, near Exeter, Devon, dates to the late second and third centuries A.D. and would have been used simultaneously for domestic accommodation, crop processing, fish sauce making, industrial activities and storage. Its large size is unique in the hinterland of Roman Exeter and this is almost certainly due to its prime position next to both the Exe estuary and the Roman road between Topsham and Exeter. The issues raised in regard to the relationship between Exeter and its hinterland are discussed.

Keywords: Exeter; Topsham; aisled hall; port; fish sauce