

## Two Roman Bronze Birds from Oxfordshire

By MARTIN HENIG and R. A. CHAMBERS

The first bronze bird,<sup>1</sup> length 49 mm. (Fig. 1.1; Pl. 1) was found at Brize Lodge Farm, Ramsden near Finstock on the site of a villa or bath house.<sup>2</sup> It is a figurine, complete apart from its feet which are missing. The creature has round, bold eyes and a short wide beak; its wings, with pinions very roughly indicated, are partially displayed. While it is not possible to be certain as to the identity of the species, it certainly looks more like a dove than an eagle.

There are a number of bird figurines from the temple site at Woodeaton in Oxfordshire, conventionally described as eagles, though doubt was displayed with regard to the identification of some of them by Henig and Munby in 1973.<sup>3</sup> The closest parallel to the Brize Lodge Farm bird also has its wings partially displayed, but it is badly corroded.<sup>4</sup>

Other bird figurines may be noted from temple sites in Eastern Britain, notably at Willingham Fen, Cambridgeshire and at Felmingham Hall, Norfolk. In addition to use as ex-voto figurines, it is clear that birds ornamented sceptres and were even affixed to priestly head-dresses.<sup>5</sup> Birds attest a belief in augury, common to both Romans and Celts, for they occupy the air between the heavens and the earth, and their flight across the sky and their mysterious migrations were seen by both peoples to reflect divine will. Even if the site where the figurine was found was a domestic one, the bird *certainly* belongs to the category of religious material.

The second bird, an eagle which is shown seizing a hare (Fig. 1.2, Pl. 2), forms the plate of a brooch.<sup>6</sup> It was found on the important Roman small-town site of Asthall.<sup>7</sup> The brooch is 35 mm. long and is fitted with a hinged pin. The treatment of the bird's pinions

<sup>1</sup> The writers are grateful to Mr. J.T. Cashman for permission to publish this object. The drawing by Wendy Page has previously appeared in C.B.A. Group 9, *Newsletter*, 11 (1981), 42. The photograph by Nick Pollard is reproduced by permission of the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> Oxon. County Council Dept. of Museum Services, Sites and Monuments Primary Record Number (P.R.N.) 12,388.

<sup>3</sup> J.R. Kirk, 'Bronzes from Woodeaton, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia* xiv (1949), 30f, Pl. V; M. Henig and J. Munby, 'Three Bronze Figurines', *Oxoniensia* xxxviii (1973), 386 and Pl. XXX.

<sup>4</sup> Kirk, *loc. cit.* 31, No. 4, Pl. V D.

<sup>5</sup> M. Rostovtseff, 'Commodus-Hercules in Britain', *J.R.S.* xiii (1923), 94, Nos. 6 & 7; *V.C.H. Cambridgeshire* vii (1978), 84-5, Pl. XIV G; H.M. Gilbert, 'The Felmingham Hall Hoard, Norfolk', *B.B.C.S.* xxviii (1978-9), 168-70 and 172; M. Green, 'Theriomorphism, and the Role of Divine Animals in Romano-British Cult Art', in J. Munby and M. Henig (eds.), *Roman Life and Art in Britain* (BAR 41, 1977) 313f, Pl. 12, IX. For a sceptre head from Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire portraying a bust of Venus (?) with a dove by each shoulder see M. Henig and K.A. Leahy, *Antiq. Jnl.* lxiv (1984), ballot exhibits.

<sup>6</sup> The writers are grateful to Mr. A. Walker for permission to publish this object. The drawing by R.A. Chambers was previously published in C.B.A. Group 9, *Newsletter*, 12 (1982), 139. The photograph is again by Nick Pollard, Institute of Archaeology Oxford.

<sup>7</sup> P.R.N. 2255. On Asthall see P.M.M. Cook, 'A Roman site at Asthall, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* xx (1955), 29-39; also M. Henig and R. Wilkins, 'A Roman Intaglio showing the Genius of Comedy', *Antiq. Jnl.* lxii (1982), 380-1.

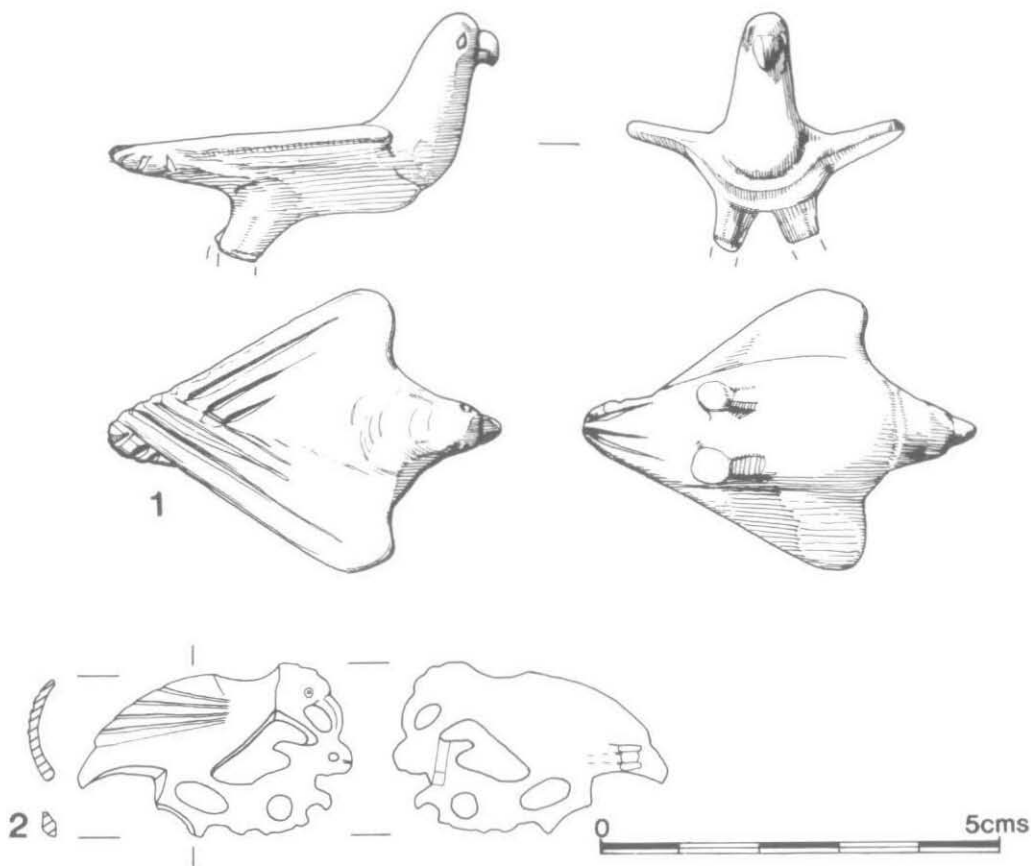


Fig. 1.1: Bronze bird from Ramsden. 2: Bronze bird from Asthall.

and the circular eyes of both eagle and hare provide a stylistic link with the Ramsden figurine.

The device of the Asthall brooch is common in ancient art, being found in many parts of the Greek world and the Roman Empire, but this representation is assuredly Romano-British. Again a religious connection may be suspected, for other figured brooches, especially enamelled 'Horse-and-rider' and 'Capricorn' brooches, are often found at shrines, and two parallels to our brooch have been found at the temple sites of Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk, and Cold Kitchen Hill, Wiltshire respectively. It is probable that such brooches could be purchased at stalls or booths set up outside *temene* and either taken away as souvenirs or dedicated as offerings to the gods of the place.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Information from Castle Museum, Norwich; R. Hattatt, *Ancient and Romano-British Brooches* (Sherborne, 1982) 162-3, No. 165. Horse and Rider brooches: *ibid.* 161, Nos. 156-60, Kirk, *op. cit.* 14 and Fig. 3, No. 6. S. Butcher, 'Enamels from Roman Britain' in M.R. Apted, R. Gilyard-Beer and A.D. Saunders, *Ancient Monuments and their Interpretation, Essays presented to A.J. Taylor* (Chichester, 1977), 54-6, Fig. 7. Capricorn: M. Henig 'Art and Cult in



Plate 1. Bronze bird from Ramsden. Scale 2:1. (*Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Oxford*)



Plate 2. Bronze bird from Asthall. Scale 2:1. (*Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Oxford*)

the 'Temples of Roman Britain', in W. Rodwell, *Temples, Churches and Religion: Recent Research in Roman Britain* (BAR 77, 1980), 108-9, Pl. 5 IV; D. Dudley, 'Excavations on Nor'nour in the Isles of Scilly, 1962-6' in *Arch. Jnl.* cxxiv (1967), 46-9, Nos. 130, 132, 133 for enamelled capricorn, horse and rider and bird from a site now regarded as a shrine.