The early imperial ‘apron’

M.C. Bishop

One of the elements of his equipment which makes the Roman infantryman of the early Principate so readily identifiable is the ‘apron’, sometimes erroneously referred to as the ‘sporran’ (the term ‘Hängeschurz’ is often used in German). Scholars have long associated it with some sort of protective function for the lower part of the abdomen and this view has seldom been questioned until comparatively recent times.2

Whilst no literary or sub-literary references are known, there is a wealth of detailed representational material available for study, and this is backed up by a large number of finds from the archaeological record, a few of which provide the necessary keys to understanding most of the practical functional aspects of the ‘apron’. It is thus possible to explore such issues as the possible evolution of this item of equipment, the elements which went to form it, and ways of identifying isolated fragments in the archaeological record. Any conclusions on the purpose of the ‘apron’ must, however, remain tentative suggestions based upon careful consideration of the range of options.

THE REPRESENTATIONAL EVIDENCE

The representational evidence, which is almost exclusively sculptural, falls into two main categories: private funerary and state propaganda. Broadly reflecting the provincial and metropolitan garrisons respectively, the various caveats associated with these sources are, by now, well-known and it is difficult to summarize the various considerations without running the risk of over-simplification.3

In the following, these will be considered by category and statistical information (such as number of straps or numbers of studs) summarized in tabular form for ease of reference. However, it is important to stress that any attempt to look for standards in such matters runs the risk of pre-judging important issues such as artistic licence on the part of the sculptor or individual preference on the part of the wearer.

The Rhineland Tombstones

The tradition of military figural tombstones in the Rhineland is a particularly rich source of detail on the apron. The chronological range of the stelae depicting aprons appears to be from Tiberian through to at least the Flavian, possibly even Hadrianic, periods, with those of the latter portion of this span showing a greater degree of conformity (although there are fewer examples of later representations).

In the select catalogue that follows, each entry gives the name of the soldier (where known), his unit, and the present location of the stone (which is not necessarily its findplace). The apron is then described in terms of the straps, studs, terminals, and its relationship to the waist belts. Any sculptural peculiarities are noted where they may affect the interpretation of the relief.

1. C. Largennius, miles of legio II Augusta, Strasbourg (Fig.1). Date: before A.D.43. An unusual example of the half-figure genre, but with the apron continued over the die below the niche, finishing just above the uppermost guide-line cut for the lettering. The apron has eight straps but appears to have been carved in two halves, as there are a differing number of circular, flat-headed studs on the right (seven) and left-hand (eight) portions. The central line dividing the apron in two is also perceptibly deeper than the othersix, so it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that more than one sculptor was involved in producing the apron. Each strap is finished with a narrow horizontal bar above a waisted fitting, below which is a teardrop-shaped, knobbed terminal. There is no obvious indication of a hinge for each pendant. There is a discernible difference between the terminals of the left and right portions of the apron, those on the right being shorter and slightly cruder. At the top of the apron, and partially lying beneath the lower (dagger?) of the soldier’s two (uncrossed) belts, is a rectangular plate decorated with diagonal cross-hatching. This plate lies at a slight angle to
the horizontal, conforming to the way in which the belts are being worn.4

2. Annaius Daverzus, miles of cohors IV Delmatarum, Bad Kreuznach (Figs.2–3). Date: Tiberio-Claudian. Arguably the finest depiction of an apron. Shown with eight straps, each bearing either 16 (right-hand six) or 17 (left-hand two straps) circular, flat studs, the apron reaches almost to the hem of the tunic. Each strap is finished with a rectangular plate (approximately equivalent in height to four-and-a-half studs). There is a raised bar near the bottom of this, below which is a very clearly-depicted hinge attaching the knobbed, teardrop-shaped terminal. There is a bordered rectangular plate at the top of the apron, which appears to lie beneath, and follow the angle of, the lower (dagger) of the two crossed belts. Although the apron is angled at the top, the knobs of the pendants are all level, which may explain why the sculptor has shown a larger number of studs in the two left-hand straps.5

3. Tib. Iulius Abdes Panthera, miles of cohors I sagittariorum, Bad Kreuznach (Fig.1). Date: Tiberio-Claudian. Shown with an apron of six straps, each with fifteen circular, flat-headed studs. The straps are finished with a hinged, knobbed, teardrop-shaped terminal pendant, although no terminal plate seems to be shown. The bottom of the apron is approximately four studs height above the hem of the tunic. There is a rectangular plate at the top of the apron, aligned horizontally and not on either of the crossed belts. The plate passes beneath both the lower (dagger) and upper (sword) belts and has the appearance of being attached to the latter.7

4. Hyperanor, miles of cohors I sagittariorum, Bad Kreuznach (Fig.1). Date: Tiberio-Claudian. This apron has eight straps, each (apparently) with fifteen circular, flat-headed studs. The straps are finished with a hinged, knobbed, teardrop-shaped terminal pendant, although no terminal plate seems to be shown. The lowest point of the terminal pendants is approximately three-studs’ height above the hem. There is a rectangular plate at the top of the apron, apparently passing beneath the lower (dagger) of the two crossed belts. This plate has been heavily damaged, but appears nevertheless to have been undecorated.6

5. Q. Petilius Secundus, miles of legio XV Prima gens, Bonn (Fig.4). Date: Claudio-Neronian? The apron on this stele is rather heavily damaged, but clearly had four straps, each probably with

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**Fig.1: Reliefs 1, 3, and 4 (not to scale).**
nine studs, terminated by a lunate pendant with a secondary pendant. The straps pass over the lower (dagger) and under the upper (sword) belt (the belts are not crossed). The apron is about three-quarters of the length from belts to tunic hem.8

6. Unknown miles (legionarius?), Bonn (Fig.4). Date: Tiberio-Claudian? A three-strap apron passes over both belts; it is not clear to which belt it was attached, nor which belt belongs with which sidearm. There are five circular, flat-headed studs on each strap, with what seems to be a domed stud at the bottom of each, with a lunate extension (presumably intended as a pendant). The apron would appear to have occupied about one half of the distance between belts and tunic hem (the hem is missing).9

7. Pintaius, signifer of cohors V Asturum, Bonn

(Fig.4). Date: Tiberio-Claudian. Most of the detail of the apron has been removed by a break across the midriff of the figure. There are four straps with circular, flat-headed studs, which pass over the lower (dagger?) belt (to the rear of which they must have been attached, given that the buckle of the upper belt is directly above the apron. The apron occupies half the distance between the belts and the hem of the tunic. The straps are terminated with a long-necked lunate pendants, each of which contains a secondary pendant. The excess material from the top belt hangs down in front of the apron, although whether it too had a terminal pendant cannot now be discerned due to the damage.10

8. Firmus, miles of cohors Raetorum, Bonn (Fig.4). Date: Tiberio-Claudian. This figure is depicted with an eight-strapped apron, each strap of which
Fig. 4: Reliefs 5–10 (not to scale).
has ten circular, flat-headed studs. There is a rectangular terminal plate above a further, waisted, plate, finished with a teardrop-shaped pendant. At the top of the apron is a bordered rectangular plate which passes below the lower (dagger) belt. The apron reaches almost to the hem of the tunic.\(^\text{11}\)

9. Unknown *miles*, Bonn (Fig.4). Date: Tiberio-Claudian? The figure is shown with six straps on the apron, one of which is formed from the excess material from the upper belt. It is not clear to which of the crossed belts the single sidearm (which looks like a dagger) is attached. Both the upper belt and the apron straps are left plain, suggesting that either these items are unfinished or the detail may have been added in paint. Each strap (including the excess material from the belt) is terminated by a knobbed, teardrop-shaped, pendant. The straps pass over the lower belt and under the upper and terminate a short distance above the tunic hem.\(^\text{12}\)

10. Unknown *miles*, Bonn (Fig.4). Date: Tiberio-Claudian? This figure has an apron with four straps each with 16 circular, flat-headed studs. Beneath a narrow horizontal bar, there is a rectangular plate at the bottom of each strap, approximately as high as three studs, and this is in turn terminated by a knobbed, teardrop-shaped, pendant, each which has a suggestion of twin suspension necks. At the top of the apron is a bordered rectangular plate with decoration similar to that on the belt-plates. This plate passes beneath the lower (dagger) or the two crossed belts. The short length of excess material from the upper belt is terminated by a knobbed, teardrop-shaped pendant. The apron reaches almost to the hem of the tunic.\(^\text{13}\)

11. Unknown *miles*, Bonn. Date: Tiberio-Claudian? This apron has four straps, and although the detail is rather indistinct, there would seem to be about 11 studs on each strap, a terminal plate, and teardrop-shaped pendant. There is a rectangular plate at the top of the apron and this passes beneath the upper (sword) belt. The belts cross. The apron hangs almost to the hem of the tunic.\(^\text{14}\)

12. Unknown *miles*, Koblenz. Date: Tiberio-Claudian? The apron on this fragmentary tombstone has six straps hanging from a decorated, bordered, rectangular plate. The terminals have been damaged and there appears to be at least 16 studs on the straps.\(^\text{15}\)

13. Cn. Musius, *aquilifer of legio XIV Gemina*, Mainz (Fig.5). Date: before A.D.43? The excess

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Fig. 5: Reliefs 13–15 (not to scale).
material of the single belt is in four separate strands, one of which passes through the buckle, and all four of which hang down almost to the tunic hem and are terminated by a crude (teardrop-shaped?) pendant. No studs or other mounts can be distinguished.16

14. P. Flavoleius Cordus, miles of legio XIV Gemina, Mainz (Fig.5). Date: before A.D.43? The apron on this figure has six straps, although the second from the left is rather incompetently depicted where it passes beneath the shaft of the pilum. Certainty on the number of circular, flat-headed studs is not possible, due to damage, but there appear to be 21 on each of the straps. The terminal pendants are teardrop-shaped and (originally) knobbed. Excess material from the lower (sword) belt hangs down and is finished with a teardrop-shaped pendant. The straps apparently pass under the upper (dagger) but over the lower of the crossed belts, and the terminals rest just above the hem of the tunic.17

15. C. Faltonius Secundus, miles of legio XXII Primigenia, Mainz (Fig.5). Date: A.D.43–70? The soldier on this stele is shown with a four-strapped apron which is shown passing over the upper (sword) of two crossed belts. A maximum of only four circular, flat-headed, studs survive (on the left-hand strap) due to damage in this area, which has also removed all trace of the terminals. However, it is clear that the apron only reached two-thirds of the distance from the belts to the tunic hem.18

16. Genialis, imaginifer of cohors VII Raetorum, Mainz (Fig.6). Date: Flavian. A simple four-strap apron is depicted on this figure, each strap having five circular, flat-headed studs. Each strap is terminated by a rectangular plate, equivalent in height to slightly more than one stud, and finished with a rather crude, knobbed, teardrop shape. The apron, which passes over the upper (dagger) belt, finishes two-thirds of the way between the two crossed belts and the tunic hem.19

17. Unknown miles, Mainz (Fig.6). Date: Flavian? (by analogy with Genialis, which it closely resembles in style). This figure has an apron with four straps, three of which display six circular, flat-headed studs, whilst the fourth, on the left-hand side, is markedly narrower and has seven studs. In each case, the straps are finished with a rectangular plate and a teardrop-shaped pendant. The straps pass over both (crossed) belts, but follow the angle of the lower (dagger) belt. The straps reach to a point two-thirds of the way

Fig.6: Reliefs 16–18 (not to scale).
between the belts and the hem of the tunic.\(^{20}\)

18. Unknown *miles*, Mainz (Fig.6). Date: Tiberio-Claudian? Only part of this figure survives, but his apron had at least five straps, with a minimum of 12 circular, flat-headed, studs. No terminals survive, but there is a large, bordered, rectangular plate at the top of the apron and this rests below the lower (dagger) of the two crossed belts. The apron would seem to have taken up at least two-thirds of the distance between belts and hem (the hem is missing).\(^{20}\)

19. Unknown *miles*, Mainz. Date: Tiberio-Claudian? A fragmentary tombstone showing a figure holding two spears (an auxiliary infantryman?) and wearing two parallel belts. These have plain plates and seven fine, studless, straps hang from the lowest belt. One of these straps may be surplus material from the upper belt, as an eighth strap passes through the buckle of the lower belt and hangs nearby.\(^{22}\)

20. Unknown *miles*, Mainz (private collection). Date: Tiberio-Claudian? This fragmentary stele apparently features an eight-strapped apron with 16 studs on each and teardrop terminals. The straps hang from a rectangular plate which passes over the sword and under the dagger belts, and it was presumably attached to the latter. The soldier is presumably an auxiliary infantryman, since he holds two spears.\(^{23}\)

21. Unknown *miles*, Mannheim (Fig.7). Date: Tiberio-Claudian (the ?Mainz-type sword compares with those on the Bad Kreuznach figures)? There are six apron straps shown here, but there is only one stud on each strap, immediately above a rectangular terminal plate, below which there is a knobbed, teardrop-shaped pendant. The straps, which occupy two-thirds of the distance between belts and tunic hem, pass over the upper (dagger) of the two crossed belts. In addition, the surplus material from the belts has in both cases been allowed to hang down, and at least one of these (the less-damaged, right-hand example) is finished with a teardrop-shaped terminal.\(^{24}\)

22. Licaius, *miles* of cohors I Pannoniorum, Wiesbaden (Fig.7). Date: Tiberio-Claudian. Six straps are depicted on the apron of this figure, but concretion adhering to the stele renders some of the detail uncertain. The three right-hand straps have nine circular, flat-headed studs each, the three on the left eight. In each case, there appears to be a sub-rectangular plate at the bottom of each strap, below which is a teardrop-shaped
terminal. The apron terminates some three studs’ height above the tunic hem. It passes beneath the lower (dagger) of the two crossed belts.25

23. C. Valerius Crispus, miles of legio VIII Augusta, Wiesbaden (Fig.7). Date: Flavian. The apron here has four straps and reaches to the bottom of the soldier’s body defence. Despite damage, nine circular, flat-headed, studs can be discerned on each strap. A crude, teardrop-shaped terminal finishes each strap. The straps pass over the single waist belt.26

24. Unknown miles, Baden-Baden. Date: Flavian. This rather crude figure has an apron with four straps that reach two-thirds of the way between the belt(s) and tunic hem. A maximum of ten studs is visible, with a teardrop-shaped terminal. The relationship of the apron to the belt(s) is hidden by the paenula.27

Other Funerary Monuments

Although (in most cases) not of the same quality as the Rhineland tombstones, other depictions are to be found on funerary monuments from other parts of the empire.

25. Unknown miles, London (Fig.8). Date: Flavian? A single apron strap is visible on this figure, the rest presumably concealed by the paenula. The strap itself is depicted as bordered and there are at least three and, on grounds of spacing, probably four circular, flat-headed studs shown. A hinged, bordered, lunate terminal finishes the strap, which reaches two-thirds of the way between the waist belt (which is concealed beneath a fold in the tunic) and the hem of the tunic.28

26. L. Sertorius Firmus, aquilifer of legio XI Claudia, Verona (Fig.8). Date: Tiberio-Claudian? Five straps, tapering towards the bottom, and finished with ivy-leaf terminals. The straps pass under the lower (sword) of the two crossed belts. The apron reached two-thirds of the way between the belts and the bottom of the pteryges, which presumably coincide with the hem of the tunic.29

27. C. Castricius Victor, miles of legio II Adiutrix, Budapest. Date: Flavian—Hadrianic. The apron of this figure is disproportionately large, but represents six straps, each with seven circular, flat-headed, studs. The terminals are lunate, with secondary pendants, with some suggestion of suspension necks. The straps pass over the single (dagger) belt (which is concealed, due to the curious oversize nature of the apron). The apron reaches three-quarters of the way from the belt to

Fig.8: Reliefs 25–6 and 28 (not to scale).
28. C. Valerius Valens, milites of legio VIII Augusta, Corinth (Fig. 8). Date: Claudio-Neronian? Five apron straps with up to five studs are visible under the paenula. Three of these have four circular studs and all have lunate terminals with secondary pendants. The apron extends half way between the two studded belts and the tunichem and passes under the belts.

29. Unknown miles, Cassaco. Date: Tiberio-Clau—
dian? The figure has a number of straps resembling an apron, but probably representing the excess material from both (crossed) belts (four from each?); the precise number of straps is difficult to determine, probably eight. In the case of the upper belt, one part of the belt passes through the buckle, the other three hang free. These straps are decorated with small, widely spaced, dome-headed studs (at least seven). The apron length seems to have been greater than three-quarters of the distance from the belts to the hem of the tunic.

30. Minucius, centurio of legio Martia, Padova (Fig. 9). Date: second half of first century B.C.? Possibly one of the earliest full-figure military stelae, the fact that this figure is shown with a series of three pendant straps beneath his horizontally-worn dagger (one of them being wrapped around it) is especially interesting. At least one of these straps may be surplus belt material and the three of them take up approximately two-thirds of the distance from belt to tunic hem. Three more straps are wrapped around the sword.

31. P. Marcius Probus, custos armorum, Bergamo. Date: first century A.D.? The relief in the lower panel of this tombstone depicts the deceased surrounded by various items of weaponry, including a dagger(?) and belt, the excess material of which is divided into four with lunate terminals.

32. Cottiedius Attianus, milites of cohors IX Praetoria, Assissi (Fig. 9). Date: second half of first century A.D. (Pompeii-type sword)? A relief above the inscription includes a sword and dagger, each with its own belt. The excess from the sword belt is divided into four short straps, each terminated with an ivy-leaf terminal. The dagger belt, on the other hand, has five straps, again finished by ivy-leaf terminals.

33. Ser. Ennuius Fuscus, milites of cohors VIII voluntariorum, Split (Fig. 10). Date: Flavian? The apron on this figure, although partially obscured by his paenula, has three straps, the one which is completely visible exhibiting six circular, flat-headed studs. There are knobbed ivy-leaf terminals on the straps, which emerge from under the single belt. The apron appears to have taken up at
least two-thirds of the distance from belt to hem (although the hem is not depicted).36

Metropolitan Propaganda Monuments

34. Cancelleria relief A, Rome. Date: Flavian. A number of Praetorian soldiers are depicted, one of whom (the figure carrying a small round shield and a 'beneficiarius' spear) wears a short apron (partly obscured by his paenula) of at least three bordered straps. A maximum of three circular, flat-headed, studs are visible on one of these. The straps are terminated by teardrop-shaped pendants. The apron is about one-third of the length between the waist and the tunic hem.37

35. Trajan's Column, Rome (Fig.10). Date: Trajanic. Citizen infantry are shown both with and without aprons, varying in the number of straps where they do exist (sometimes three, most commonly four), although almost uniformly very short. Some are bordered, have studs, and rudimentary ivy-leaf terminals.38

36. Trajan's Arch at Puteoli, Rome (Fig.10). Date: Trajanic. One figure is shown with an apron of six straps, although two have been largely removed by damage. These have five circular, flat-headed, studs each and small lunate terminals. The apron occupies about one-third of the distance from the waist to the tunic hem.39

37. Great Trajanic frieze, Rome (Fig.11). Date: Trajanic. A standard-bearer on this relief has an apron with six straps which pass over his single belt. These, although partially damaged, were each decorated with three circular, flat-headed studs and finished with ivy-leaf terminals. The apron is roughly one-third of the length between belt and tunic hem. Fragmentary aprons can be glimpsed elsewhere, as on a cornicen (just the terminals survive some damage to the apron area) or a citizen infantryman (probably five straps with ivy-leaf terminals and small studs, worn over two uncrossed belts). This last-mentioned example occupies about one-quarter of the distance between belts and tunic hem, barely covering the second belt.40

38. Plutei/anaglypha Traiani, Rome. Date: Trajanic. Praetorians are shown on this tax-record burning relief. There are four straps on the aprons, with rudimentary teardrop-shaped terminals. The aprons reach one third of the way from waist to tunic hem.41

39. Chatsworth relief, Chatsworth House (Fig.11). Date: Hadrianic. This, another tax-record burning relief, shows Praetorians with three-strap aprons.
Each strap is bordered and has at least two, small, domed studs, fairly widely spaced. The aprons, which pass over the single belt, occupy about one-third of the distance between waist and tunic hem, and have ivy-leaf terminals.42

40. Praetorians, Paris. Date: Claudian? Two figures in the foreground have recognizable aprons. That on the right has three bordered straps passing over his belt, reaching half way to the tunic hem. There are ivy-leaf terminals but no studs apparent. The figure on the left also has three bordered straps, but his are finished with double 'caterpillar' terminals.43

Provincial Propaganda Monuments

41. Triumphal arch, Orange. Date: Tiberian? In several cases, where swords and their (plated) belts are shown draped, the excess material from the belt has clearly been divided (usually into three), although the reliefs are insufficiently detailed to carry any studs or terminals.44

Miscellaneous

42. Relief at Pula (Fig.11). Date: second half of first century A.D.? Representation of a Pompeii-type sword and sheath, attached to a belt, the surplus material from which has a lunate terminal with a circular stud above it.45

43. Relief at Pula. Date: first century A.D.? This depicts a dagger and scabbard attached to a belt, the excess material from which is divided into four straps, each finished with a teardrop-shaped terminal.46

44. Relief at Pula (Fig.12). Date: first century A.D.? A dagger and its belt are depicted with the surplus material in the form of four straps, three with five bossed studs each and finished with a lunate terminal with secondary pendant, whilst the fourth (presumably that which passed through the buckle) has four studs and an ivy-leaf terminal.47

45. Relief from Marseille (Fig.12). Date: first half of first century A.D.? A congeries armorum relief depicts a sword and belt, the excess material from the belt being divided into four straps, each finished with an ivy-leaf terminal.48

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

We are fortunate in having two very important archaeological finds which elucidate the constituent parts and, to a limited extent, the operation of the
Table 1: Summary of Representational Data

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>unit</th>
<th>No. of straps</th>
<th>No. of studs</th>
<th>Terminals</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Top Plate</th>
<th>Waist/hem distance</th>
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<td>cohors VII Raetorum</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>?</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>&gt;12</td>
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</tr>
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<td>?</td>
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<td>cohors I Pannoniorum</td>
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<td>miles</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
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<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<td>aquilifer</td>
<td>legio XI Claudia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C. Castricius Victor</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>legio II Adiutrix</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>C. Valerius Valens</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>legio VIII Augusta</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
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<td>miles</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>8?</td>
<td>&gt;7</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Minucius</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>legio Martia</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>P. Marcii Probus</td>
<td>custos armorum</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>lunate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Cottedius Attiama</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>cohors IX Praetorian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>Ser. Ennius Fuscus</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>cohors VIII voluntarium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>[Cancelleria relief A]</td>
<td>beneficiarii?</td>
<td>cohors Praetorian</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>[Trajan's Column]</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>various</td>
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<td>cohors Praetorian?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>lunate</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>[Great Trajanic Frieze]</td>
<td>signifer</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>[Putei Traiani]</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>cohors Praetorian?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>[Chatsworth relief]</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>cohors Praetorian?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&gt;2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
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<td>[Paris relief]</td>
<td>miles</td>
<td>cohors Praetorian?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>[Orange arch]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>[Pula relief I]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>lunate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>[Pula relief II]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>teardrop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>[Pula relief III]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>[Marseilete]</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'apron'. A third, potentially even more important, find exists (the Herculaneum 'soldier'), but its publication does not appear to be imminent, and the available details limited, so it is only of peripheral help here. These allow us to interpret the much more numerous component pieces when they occur.

The Mainz 'Apron' Strap

In volume 2 of his Alterthümer unser heidnischen Vorzeit, Ludwig Lindenschmit published an apron strap that was found 'in dem römischen Pfahlbau am Dimeser Ort bei Mainz' and recorded that it was held in a private collection. His caption notes that his illustration shows 'vordere und Rückseite der Erzbeschläge eines jener Riemen' but makes no explicit reference to the leather strap to which the objects appear to be attached.

The object illustrated consists of a strap – presumably leather – some 13.5mm wide and at least 223mm long, with what appears to be a row of stitching holes down either side, close to the edge (Fig.13). On this are mounted 11 round, flat-headed, studs, averaging 16mm in diameter, which are fastened to the leather by means of small circular roves at the end of the shank. The end of the strap is encased in a fitting
which appears to be riveted to it by means of a single conical-headed rivet (with a similar, but slightly larger, rove on the reverse to those of the studs). A small, pinnate, pendant is evidently hinged to this terminal. The metal fittings – the studs, terminal mount, and pendant – are described as being made of Erz. This can mean either brass or bronze, but, given Lindenschmit’s use of the term for all the other items illustrated on the page where he illustrated it, it seems more likely that he was using the word in the wider sense of ‘copper alloy’. If, then, the strap itself is original, it is indeed a unique find. The stitching along either side of the strap can be paralleled on surviving straps from horse harness and was probably intended to prevent the strap stretching in use. It is a detail that is mimicked on at least one instance in the representational record.

The Dimesser Ort to the north-west of the fortress and town at Mogontiacum was the harbour area and the description of the findspot (Pfählbau) may suggest that the object came from structures associated with the harbour.

The Tekije Hoard

In 1948, a hoard of objects was found on the banks of the Danube at Tekije, in Serbia. Apart from an important collection of silver belt fittings (plates, buckles, and dagger frogs) and some coins, which provide the dating evidence for the find, there were a number of silver studs (Fig.14,6), strap mounts (Fig.15,3), and strap terminals with hinged pendants (Fig.16,6 and 8).

The 48 flat-headed studs, which ranged from 14 to 18mm in diameter (and 0.96–1.82g in weight), were of silver and had two raised, concentric rings on the underside of the head, centred on the shanks. One silver strap mount was recovered, 52mm by 18mm and weighing 5.95g. This was decorated with a single row of beading around each side, and pierced by three rivet holes, equidistantly placed along its long axis and each of which was surrounded by an engraved, concentric circle. There were slight expansions at both of the ends with the short sides.

A total of ten strap terminals were included in the hoard, eight of them with attached lunate pendants, two with teardrop shaped examples. The strap ends themselves, which have a copper alloy backplate, taper slightly from top to bottom. At the top end, they
The Mainz 'apron' strap (after Lindenschmit; scale 2:3)

are decorated with three transverse mouldings, at the bottom with a single, broad bar beneath which is a moulded loop (and external ornamental lobes) with a subrectangular aperture. Two rivets served to attach the fitting, through its strap, to the backplate, and these rivet heads were moulded. The lunate pendant, similarly made of silver, has a suspension neck which is bent over the rear face and secured with a dome-headed rivet. A secondary, teardrop-shaped, pendant hangs between the arms of the lunula (which have small, biconical terminals), its suspension neck passing through a small aperture in the body of the larger pendant. Both large and small pendants are decorated with punctum decoration that uses zig-zag and tendril motifs. The complete terminal sets (mount and pendants) weigh between 14.89 and 24.47g, but despite the disparity in weight, it was felt that

'...on peut constater une parfaite unité dans leur facture et leur style, et par suite on peut dire que ces pendentifEs constituent une garniture unique et qu'elles ont été faîtes en série dans un même atelier'\(^57\)

These eight fittings had a total height of 105mm.

The two fittings with teardrop-shaped pendants (with a total height of 94mm) had identical fixed elements to the other eight, but the pendants were markedly different. They each had a moulded terminal knob and central stud in the form of a child's head. The two items, to all intents and purposes identical, nevertheless differed a little in weight (8.99 and 10.61g).

Given that the most recent coins in the hoard dated to the time of Domitian, it was felt that the Dacian disturbances of A.D.83–6 or 89 were the most likely occasion upon which the material was deposited.\(^58\)

The Herculaneum 'Soldier'

Although still awaiting publication, this member of the Roman military (whether he be soldier or marine), excavated on the beach at Herculaneum, was equipped with belts and apron. The death of the individual dates to the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D.79. The strap terminals and pendants associated with him are very similar to those recovered from the Tekije hoard. Rectangular terminal plates each bore two rivets with moulded heads, one above the other, to secure the strap. Lunate pendants with smaller, teardrop-shaped, secondary pendants, were suspended from the terminal plates. The terminus ante quem of A.D.79

Fig.13: The Mainz 'apron' strap (after Lindenschmit; scale 2:3)
Fig. 14: Excavated examples of 'apron' studs from Rheingönheim (1–5, 7–10, 11–14), Tekije (6), London (16–17), and Caerleon (15). (Scale 1:1; for sources of illustrations see Appendix).
provided by the eruption of Vesuvius compares favourably with the suggested date for the Tekije material.  

Studs

The Mainz strap and the Tekije hoard provide us with some dimensions for apron studs (between 14 and 18mm), as well as structural details, such as the raised rings on the underside of the head, which might form the basis for a wider examination of the archaeological evidence.

Studs are one of the commonest of metallic finds on Roman military sites in the north-west of the empire. There were wide ranges of sizes, shapes, and — evidently — functions. They could apparently be used to adorn both leather and wood, although distinct forms seem to have been used in such cases. However, amongst those studs designed to be attached to leather, there do not seem to be any readily identifiable criteria to aid with the identification of function beyond those already suggested for recognizing military apron studs.

Amongst those flat-headed studs published from a site such as Rheingönheim,60 we may note examples that fall within our size parameters and have the characteristic rings underneath the head (Fig.14,1–5, 7–10, 11–14), but the fact that identical studs of a slightly greater diameter are also represented (up to 21mm) may lead to the suspicion that our 14–18mm limit can perhaps be extended somewhat. It is worth noting in passing that the same site produced flat-headed square studs (19.5mm square) that may well bear consideration.

Some flat headed studs bore niello inlaid decoration (Fig.14,16–17), very characteristic of 1st-century military equipment and a number of these have come from London. Many of these also had rings beneath the head, so these seem fairly strong candidates as apron studs; however, not all bore the rings, which may lead us to conclude that, likewise, not all apron studs were marked in this way. Presence of rings may argue for identification as an apron stud, but absence need not preclude the same conclusion. Some of the niello-inlaid studs retain traces of tinning, hardly unexpected on first-century equipment.61

Another class of stud of more-or-less the right dimensions bore relief decoration (Fig.14,15), sometimes recognisable as members of the Flavian dynasty. These too have been identified as ‘apron’ studs.62

Mounts

One class of strap mount found amongst military
Fig. 16: Excavated examples of 'apron' terminals from Wroxeter (1, 5), Rößtissen (2, 4), Darmstadt (3), Tekije (6, 8), and Caerleon (7). (Scale 1:1; for sources of illustrations see Appendix).
equipment of the early principate may have formed part of the ‘apron’. Small, rectangular plates (Fig.15), some of them decorated with niello inlay, appear to be of about the right dimensions (10.5–16mm in width at Rheimheim; 9–14mm amongst British examples). Most fall well below the normal size for plates from waist-belts. The motifs employed are different to those found on cavalry strap mounts, but do resemble those employed on inlaid belt plates. Their association with infantry equipment thus seems logical, if incapable of proof at the moment.63

The Tekije hoard included a mount of similar design to the terminal plates in that collection (Fig.15,3) and it is possible that this was an apron mount, although the fact that only a single example came from the collection does little to confirm the widespread use of such plates.64

Many of the Rhineland tombstones seem to depict large, rectangular, plates which cover the whole width of the upper portion of the apron. It is possible, but by no means certain, that this was an attempt to represent matching sets of such mounts being worn on apron straps.

Terminals

The Tekije and Mainz finds confirm the use of hinged, or articulated, terminal pendants for aprons (Fig.16), a detail that some of the tombstone sculptors took the trouble to reproduce. Two types of pendant
seem to predominate, the lunate and the teardrop. By
comparison with the size of the Tekije lunula, a
number of similar pendants can be identified from
other sites, one of the most impressive being an
example from the fortress baths excavations at Caer-
leon, which has three (rather than the more normal
one) secondary pendants (Fig.16,7).65 More mundane
examples exist from many sites of the period.66
However, when it comes to identifying teardrop
shaped apron terminal pendants, there is one major
obstacle: the similarity between such pendants and
secondary pendants found within larger lunate pen-
dants.67 Distinguishing the terminal plates to which
the pendants were hinged is even harder, and there
appear to be no parallels recognized, as yet, for that on
the Mainz strap.68

Objects Frequently Mis-Identified as ‘Apron’ Fittings

A variety of objects occur in archaeological reports
which have, at some time or another, been claimed as
apron fittings. Some do not even date to the period
when the apron was in use.

1. 2nd/3rd-century strap terminals (Fig.17,4–6, 9).
Particularly common in all parts of the empire which
have produced military equipment of this period are
the narrow, waisted pendants with a large, frequently
triangular, aperture, through which a strip passes, is
doubled back on itself, and attached to the strap end at
either side. More than enough dating evidence exists
to show that these are not found in pre-Antonine
contexts and there are even some hints that they
belong with horse harness, rather than the equipment
of men. In third century infantry equipment, the only
functional role for strap terminals seems to have been
to finish the excess material from belts. These were
usually worn in pairs and not articulated.69

2. Strap terminals in 1st-century cavalry harness
(Fig.17,7–8). Certain types of harness arrangement
included pendant straps which hung from the main
junctions of Celto-Roman harness, and these were
finished with weighted strap ends. These fittings are
readily identifiable as such because they use the same
decorative motifs as other elements of horse
harness.70

3. Studs employed in 1st-century cavalry harness
(Fig.17,1–3). Used to attach functional and decorative
strap mounts, these too are easily recognised by their
use of appropriate decorative designs.71

Table 2: Summary of Chronological Spread of
Representations of Aprons

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</table>

EVOLUTION OR PARALLEL DEVELOPMENTS?

Dating and the Representational Evidence

Our examination of the representational evidence
would seem to have isolated three basic types of
apron:

1. formed from the excess material of a belt after it
   (or part of it) has been passed through a buckle;
2. separate straps, passing underneath a belt and
   fastened to its rear in some undefined way;
3. separate straps, passing over a belt and fastened
to its rear in some undefined way.

If the shortcomings of representational evidence
are, for the time being, overlooked, the question of the
interrelationship of these three types is the most
pressing. Plotted chronologically (Table 2), we can
see how the three types seem to have fared during the
first century A.D. Representations of aprons of types 1
and 3 are found throughout the first century A.D., but
those of type 2 are predominantly Tiberio-Claudian,
although the inherent bias introduced by the Rhine-
land tombstones (most of which are type 2) must be noted here.

Dimensions

The apparent tendency for the apron to shorten with time, before disappearing completely, has been commented upon by others, and this too can be tested by reference to a chronological chart (Table 3). However, once again the results are far from clear. It is apparent that long aprons (>75% of the distance between waist belt and tunic hem) are almost exclusively found on the Tiberio-Claudian reliefs (the bulk of which come from the Rhineland) and that shorter aprons (33–66%) are found throughout the first century, although they predominate in Metropolitan art.

Art and Reality

The fundamental problem with which we must deal is the reliability of the representational evidence, given that the two major strands (Rhineland funerary and Metropolitan propaganda) differ in all major aspects: date, size, and form. The natural tendency nowadays is to regard the earlier, provincial, representations as the more accurate, but sufficient non-Metropolitan reliefs showing short aprons exist to suggest that these are not a mere aberration on the part of sculptors in Rome.72 There is certainly a high degree of stylization on Metropolitan works, but to dismiss a work such the Cancelleri relief A as stylized would be to overlook other demonstrably accurate details, such as the depictions of the caligae or pilum on that monument.73 It must be accepted that there were short aprons throughout the first century and that this type may have come to dominate amongst the troops of the Rome garrison (although none of the Rome reliefs show the use of excess material, there is nevertheless a soldier of a Praetorian cohort shown with such an apron: No.32). However, the prevalence of longer aprons amongst Rhineland tombstones may have been as much a regional, as chronological, phenomenon.

So, how accurate are the surviving representations of aprons? Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered directly, since our parameters for assessing 'accuracy' are only poorly defined. Even if the Rhineland tombstones are very 'accurate' and present a near-photographic representation of the deceased, how is the apron of Largennius (No.1) to be assessed, with a differing number of studs on its two halves: which half represents the truth? The answer must be that the image is supposed to convey an impression of the dead soldier (just as the decoration of the dagger scabbards and belt plates of some stones look like, but are not exact replicas of, the inlaid decoration on the real items recovered from the archaeological record).74 Artistic licence is evidently at work (witness the added studs on two straps of the apron of Annaeus Daverzus, No.2, designed to balance the awkward transition of the apron from sloping top to level bottom), therefore expecting consistency in the number of studs (and perhaps even straps) on aprons would be unreasonable.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ‘APRON’

The ‘Apron’ as Armour

It has been traditional to explain the apron as an
item of body armour designed to protect the soldier's lower abdomen and private parts. However, this is to misunderstand not only the dynamic behaviour of a series of straps, but also to ignore the main traits in Roman armour development in the first century A.D.

If a thrust from a sword, dagger, or spear were aimed at an apron, it would pass straight through, as the straps, with nothing to hold them together, would simply part. A cutting or chopping blow would most likely cut clean through the straps, deflected from the studs (which never overlap and are not attached to each other) onto the leather. If the Mainz strap is taken as an example, on a given length of the strap, then less than 87% of the area of the strap is actually covered by the heads of the studs.

The study of Roman body armour in this period shows that both these contingencies are unlikely to have occurred. Many Roman foes were Celtic and fought with a downward slashing blow from a sword: this explains why Roman armour in the first century A.D. is always reinforced on the shoulder area and why the helmets are designed to deflect downward blows. The whole philosophy of armour design is against the downward blow, not against the thrust to the midriff, since that was (apparently exclusively) a Roman technique. Given that some Germanic peoples fought almost exclusively with the thrusting spear, this last observation is interesting, given that the Romans clearly tailored their body defences to a Celtic enemy.

The 'Apron' as a Unit Identifier

If the apron did not work as armour, then it may be that it could in some way be used to identify units. There was certainly a wide range of strap/stud numbers, as well as terminals, so it might be tempting to interpret this variety as a rudimentary system of unit identification. There may be something in this argument, but it must surely have been secondary to the major indicators of identity such as standards or shield devices, and we may well do better to see it more as part of the general persona of a unit, along with the types of helmet used, the favoured belt-plate or dagger scabbard designs. Certainly, in those case where units occur more than once in the representations, there is little sign of uniformity. Indeed, individuality amongst – or even within – units must have been largely a product of a fairly loosely organized production system.

The ‘Apron’ as Status Display

Far from being an obvious asset, the apron came close to being a hindrance, if modern reconstructions are any guide. Not only could it physically hinder a running soldier, but it was also prone to at least partial disintegration, if the finds from the archaeological record are any guide. However, this observation only serves to underline the fact that, in the eyes of Roman soldiers at least, any inconvenience was thought worth tolerating for whatever benefit did accrue from wearing this item of equipment. This begs the question: for what purpose did Roman infantrymen wear the apron?

It is easier to say what it was not for, but the unexciting answer to the question must be that it was fashionable. Indeed, this is one of the most appealing explanations for the appearance of studs bearing portraits of the Flavian emperors.

The decoration of excess belt material is certainly related to, if not synonymous with, the development of the apron. It seems to have appeared in the second half of the 1st century B.C., reached a zenith of elaboration in the first half of the 1st century A.D., then simplified in the second half and finally disappeared not long into the 2nd century A.D.: a classic example of typological evolution in artefactual terms. However, as we have seen, the picture is by no means as clear-cut as that summary suggests. Simple forms were found fairly early on, and excess belt material continued to appear in the second half of the 1st century A.D.

Perhaps the best explanation of the apron lies in a sociological, rather than military, interpretation. Its role as a status marker has been advanced before and it would certainly have contributed to the visual impact of the soldier, characterized when not in armour by his sword belt and the length of his tunic. Its importance was clearly uppermost in the mind of the sculptor of Largennius' tombstone, for not only does it hang below the rest of the figure, over the inscription die, but it was left until after the die moulding had been carved before it was finished.

Any movement on the part of the soldier instantly proclaimed his presence with the sort of jingling of stud against stud that must have been unmistakable. The military penchant for straps continued into the 3rd century A.D., when many soldiers are to be found on tombstones apparently fidgeting with surplus belt material.
RECONSTRUCTING THE APRON

Finally, it is appropriate to attempt a summary of what can be deduced about the physical form of the ‘apron’. Consisting of a varying number of leather straps, probably stitched along either side to prevent undue stretching, the ‘apron’ was either part of the belt itself or a separate entity, attached to the rear of the waist belt in some way. There is no evidence for the way in which this attachment could have been achieved; simple logic suggests it was either sewn or riveted to the rear of the belt before any belt plates were attached, although this rendered its repair rather awkward.

By way of decoration, the ‘apron’ bore a varying number of copper alloy (or even silver) studs, rectangular plates at the top end, and terminal plates, each with a hinged pendant, at the bottom. The studs (and probably the rectangular mounts too) were initially neatly attached with roves, although repairs were often effected by bending over the shanks of replacements, once they had been passed through the strap (cf. Fig. 14, 8).

APPENDIX: SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 14
Rheingönheim: ULBERT, 1959
Tekije: MANO-ZISI, 1957
London: WILMOTT, 1991
Caerleon: ZIENKIEWICZ, 1986

Figure 15
Rheingönheim: ULBERT, 1959
Tekije: MANO-ZISI, 1957
Ham Hill: GREW & GRIFFITHS, 1991
Colchester Sheepen: GREW & GRIFFITHS, 1991
Waddon Hill: GREW & GRIFFITHS, 1991
Chichester: GREW & GRIFFITHS, 1991

Figure 16
Wroxeter: BUSHE-FOX, 1915
Riibtissen: ULBERT, 1959
Darmstadt: LINDENSCHMIT, 1870
Tekije: MANO-ZISI, 1957
Caerleon: ZIENKIEWICZ, 1986

Figure 17
Riibtissen: ULBERT, 1959
Caerleon: ZIENKIEWICZ, 1986
Longthorpe: FRERE & ST. JOSEPH, 1974
Mainz: LINDENSCHMIT, 1870

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr J.C.N. Coulston provided much encouragement and useful discussion on aspects of the sculptural depiction of the apron, as well as reading a draft text of this paper. My wife, Martha Andrews, also read and commented upon it (as well as lived with the drawings for far too long), and I am grateful to both of them for their help.

NOTES
2. WEBSTER, 1985, 125.
4. ESP.5495; pers. obs. 1982. I am grateful to Dr J.C.N. Coulston for pointing out that the ‘apron’ appears to have been carved after the mouldings at the top of the die, since it stands proud and the mouldings on either side of it do not quite align. The element of pre-planning in this serves to underline the importance the sculptor attached to the straps.
5. ESP.6125; pers. obs. 1982.
7. ESP.6136; pers. obs. 1982.
15. ESP.8534
16. ESP.5790; pers. obs. 1982.
17. ESP.5835; pers. obs. 1982.
22. TUF1, 1988, No.12, tav.XIII,2.
23. Ibid., No.3, tav.III
27. ESP.GERM.465; pers. obs. 1982.
28. BISHOP, 1983.
31. KOS, 1978. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for allowing me access to his notes on, and photographs of, this relief, which he has inspected.
32. FRANZONI, 1987, No.24; UBL, 1989. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for allowing me access to his notes on, and photographs of, this relief, which he has inspected.
34. FRANZONI, 1987, No.55. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for allowing me access to his notes on, and photographs of, this relief, which he has inspected.

FRANZONI, 1987, No.24; UBL, 1989. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for allowing me access to his notes on, and photographs of, this relief, which he has inspected.


FRANZONI, 1987, No.56. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for allowing me access to his notes on, and photographs of, this relief, which he has inspected.

Ibid. Pl.XXI.2.

HOFMANN, 1905, No.57.

MAGI, 1945.

CICHORIUS, 1896—1900, Scenes IV, XIII, XV, XXII—III, XLVIII, LII, LX, LXVI, LXIX, LXXXVI, CI, CVI, CX, CXVI—II. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for these references and for access to his photographs of the reliefs.

KAHLER, 1951.

KOEPPEL, 1985, Nos.9—16. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for access to his photographs of the reliefs.

KOEPPEL, 1986, No.2. I am grateful to Dr Coulston for access to his photographs of the reliefs.

KOEPPEL, 1985, No.8.

KOEPPEL, 1983.

AMY et al., 1962.


Musée Borely, Marseille.

LINDENSCHMIT, 1870, Heft 10, Taf.4,2.

BISHOP, 1988, 106.

Cf. BISHOP, 1983, 37, Fig.2.2.

CUPPERS, 1990, 458, Abb.374.5.

MANO-ZISI, 1957.

Ibid., 86, pls.XV,25; XVI,25.

Ibid., 83, pls.XIV.22; XV,22.

Ibid., 84—6, pls.XIV,23; XV,23—4; XVI,24; XVII.

Ibid., 84—5.

Ibid., 110—11.

Peter Connolly, pers. comm. Cf. GORE, 1984, 572 fig., with a 'reconstruction' on 573.

ULBERT, 1969, Taf.29,27—43.

WEBSTER, 1959, Fig.6,151; full publication of the London studs will be in BISHOP, forthcoming.


Rheingönheim: ULBERT, 1969, Taf.27,14—15, and 17; Britain: GREW & GRIFFITHS, 1991, Fig.8,37—43, 45—7; 17,186 and 188.

See above, n.52.

ZIENKIEWICZ, 1986, Fig.60,132.

E.g. Wroxeter: BUSHE-FOX, 1915, Pl.XVIII.32.

ZADOKS-JOSEPHUS JITTA & WITTEVEEN, 1977, Pl.32.22.

See above, n.46.

Cf. Webster in EVANS & METCALF, 1992, 125.

See BISHOP, 1988, 103, Figs.52—3.

BISHOP, 1988, 104.

73. MAGI, 1945, Figs.23—7.
75. WEBSTER, 1985, 125.
76. Calculations based on the illustration in LINDENSCHMIT, 1870, Heft 10, Taf.4,2, with four 21mm diameter studs over an arbitrarily selected length of 96mm of strap.
77. Thrust to midriff: Vegetius, Epit. de re mil. 1,12 (but note II,23); German fighting style: Tacitus, Germ. 6,1—2; Celtic enemy: CONNOLLY, 1991.
79. Ermine Street Guard, pers. comm.
80. Cf. PETERSON, 1992, 56 for a contemporary illustration of this tendency!

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