

Editor: David Powell

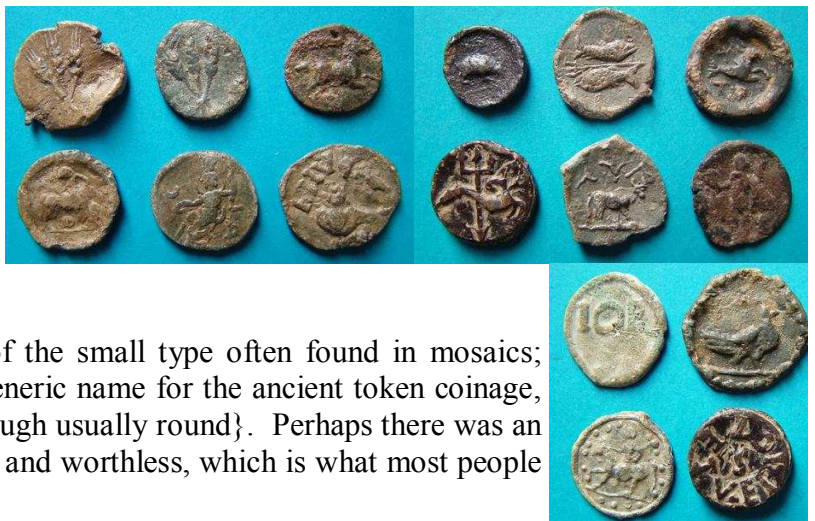
A free newsletter to all who share our interest in these fascinating and often enigmatic pieces. Please send the editor at least one 300 dpi JPEG scan, or a sharply focused photo print, of any interesting leaden token or tally in your collection. Send images as email attachments to LTJEditor@aol.com. See page 4 for information on back issues, etc.

Tesserae: An Introduction

Britain is not the only nation to use leads, nor is our favourite period of 1300-1850 the only age to use them. The economic historian M. Rostovtsev wrote in his "Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire" in 1926:

"The dearth of coined money of small denominations produced some interesting results which testify to a powerful development of economic life, the claims of which were but slowly and incompletely met by the state. In the reigns of Claudius and Nero, after the suppression of the local Gallic and Spanish coinages, numerous imitations of the copper coins minted at Rome appeared in the Western provinces, including the Rhine lands and Britain, and these imitations were tolerated by the Government. Moreover, in almost all the large and even in some of the small cities of the Empire the retail traders, bar-men, innkeepers, owners of ferries and passenger boats etc, issued their own money in the form of tokens and jetons. Great quantities of these tesserae, mostly of lead, have been found in the Tiber at Rome, some in Aquileia, some in Ostia, in Smyrna and elsewhere. It is possible that in some ports even the cities made regular issues of such tokens, as the metropoleis in Egypt certainly did."

Note those two words "and Britain"! For those of you living near any of the Roman cities or other sites in this country, there are some 2000-year-old lead tokens waiting to be found. "Dearth of coined money"? What stimulated the 17th, 18th and 19th century tokens issues, and our leads before them, in this country? Not much difference there.



The word "Tessera" actually means tile, of the small type often found in mosaics; however, it has come also to be used as a generic name for the ancient token coinage, which were occasionally of this shape {although usually round}. Perhaps there was an implied indication that the pieces were small and worthless, which is what most people think of our own leads.

What were these pieces? What were they worth, and what were they used for? Rostovtsev, this time in his "Tesserarum Urbis Romae et Suburbii" of 1903 { sorry what language do you expect the thing to be written in? } , suggests the following:

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--------------------|
| a. | Entertainment {theatre, circus, games, hunting, baths} | | |
| b. | Commemoration of public occasions | h. | Fishing |
| c. | Distribution of corn and grain | i. | Oxen and cattle |
| d. | Inns and lodging houses | j. | Guilds |
| e. | Transportation of merchandise | k. | Manufactured goods |
| f. | Chemists and druggists | l. | Prostitution |
| g. | Municipal issues by minor officials | m. | Maritime commerce |

Not too much different from the 19th century, I reckon? or most others of our recent acquaintance. People did the same basic things, with a little allowance for the different specifics of time and place, in most ages. Somebody has a token to go to the Coliseum to watch a gladiator fighting a lion, and nearly two millennia later his contemporary has another token to go and watch a Shakespearian play in London; far apart in history, but all the same basic principle.

David Powell On His Classification System

Type 32: Full Length Human Figures



It is fitting, as we reach the end of the classification system, and follow it with a short series about tesserae, that the outstanding types {28 and 32} are the two which are both particularly prevalent in the ancient series and quite rare in modern times. Such English examples as we find of type 32 are nearly all mediaeval or not long after, as is illustrated above.

Provided the figures are moderately full, it does not matter whether they are sitting, standing, running, riding or laying down. There are a number of pilgrims' tokens in the early series, which are thought to indicate entitlement to eat at certain hostleries en route to Canterbury and the like; there are his {Fig.2} and hers {Fig.1} versions, dependent on the presence or absence of a headscarf. Fig.2 depicts a chap sitting down on the roadside munching an apple, whilst in Fig.1 his wife has opted for liquid refreshment whilst carrying her belongings in traditional swagbag on a stick; very much as Dick Whittington is often depicted in childrens' tales, although, as described in my article on type 16, he was actually quite an eminent person in his day. Delightful, to see the common actions of eating and drinking depicted so clearly.

The king of Fig.3 classifies as type 27 rather than type 10 because most of the main part of his body is visible. Fig.4 is probably a bishop, from the crozier, and all four of these pieces, are around 1300-1400 and 16mm in diameter. Figs.5-7, by contrast, are Roman; Fig.5 being particularly well struck, and hinting stylistically at a date of around 200 AD. Change it to silver and it could easily be a denarius, apart from the residue from the casting channel; it is of very similar diameter. Perhaps the horse is also a clue; it is of heavier build and more humble origin than those which normally appear on Republican and Imperial coinage. Figs.6,7 are more typical tesserae, darker, cruder, of the size of quadrans rather than denarii, and depict two of the many gods, goddesses, emperors and personifications {of virtues} beloved of the Roman population. These last are rather difficult for us to understand; suffice it that the Romans visualised qualities such as hope, peace, abundance, happiness, fertility, concord in the form of people, each of whom when depicted could be identified by the presence of certain characteristics. For example, "Abundantia" would usually be seen carrying a cornucopia {horn of plenty}, crammed with goodies, whilst "Concordia" would often involve the shaking of hands.

Figs 8,9 are in the same vein, except they feel spurious; they are larger and thicker, around 20mm diameter, around the size of a Roman as, but whilst at least pseudo-Roman in style do not feel very convincing. It would be good to have more feedback from anyone who finds these.

Fig.10, for the first time, is more modern; probably not too much so, perhaps mid 17th cent. The figure shown is debatably smoking, and this could well be contemporary with the main token series, on which the subject is sometimes mentioned. The issuer could well be a tobacconist. Fig.11 depicts an elegantly dressed soldier, no doubt an officer, parading a horse of some breeding; clearly they are not riding into battle. The piece shown does not possess a date, but I have seen another which I believe had one; 1770-ish, if I recall.

Roman type
32s, from
Ficorini:



Baltic Bale Seals

We had a foretaste of these in April, when I illustrated a couple found in Gainsborough, Lincs, and reputed to be linked to the Baltic cloth trade; their Cyrillic script a novelty, but at least Lincolnshire is on the coast facing east. However, Nigel Tucker has now sent in four found in, of all place, Devon; i.e. right over the other side of the country. He has read that SPB, on the top of several pieces, stands for



St.Petersburg; which begs the question, what towns do the other abbreviations stand for, and what does the rest of the writing mean? Not a question I thought I would have much hope of answering, until I found the following description of a journal article, published by the Tayside and Fife Archaeological Committee, on Google:

John Sullivan: 'Lead Seals of Russian Origin in Fife'; abstract --- Lead seals, although known from various European countries and usually referred to as 'Russian flax bale seals', have been little studied. They can, however, provide information on their town of origin, contents of the bales they sealed, and initials or names of owners and inspectors in Russia responsible for quality control. The article studies 233 seals found in Fife and provides a guide to their identification, sets out characteristics by which seals from different Russian towns can be recognised, and points out changes in their design from the late 18th to early 19th century.

I can recommend John's excellent article in Vol.6 of the TAFAC Journal for those wishing further details, but herewith a brief summary. Any over-simplifications are my own.

There are three families of Russian bale seal commonly found in this country, distinguished by the initials on the first line of their obverse, as follows:

ARX {ARCH}	= Archangel {always Cyrillic?}
CAB {SPB }	= St.Petersburg {Cyrillic or Western script}
NP {NR}	= Narva {always Cyrillic}

John originally regarded the latter pieces as being of unknown origin but I am fairly confident after finding the following passage on the Net: "**Narva, Estonia:** Trade between Tayside and Narva began at the end of the 1820s with ships bringing timber and a little flax. This trade increased through the 1830s. By the late 19th century Narva was the region's major industrial city and rivalled Reval (Tallinn) as a port. "

The Archangel pieces are typically around 27-28mm diameter as opposed to the 21-22mm of the other two, and are of substantially different {and less attractive} style. In this article we shall forget Archangel and concentrate on St.Petersburg and Narva, whose pieces are similar. They may generally be interpreted something along the following lines, although there are exceptions {witness the rather earlier piece on the right}:

Obv.line 1:	Port initials as above.
Obv.lines 2,3:	Codified data, probably identifying the producer, to be discussed.
Obv.line 4:	Date
Rev.line 1:	LD
Rev.lines 2,3:	Initial and surname of quality control officer
Rev.line 4:	Reference number, to be discussed



To be continued next month.....

CS Corner: Regional Varieties

Following last month's exhibition of groups of regional varieties, another couple for your consideration.

Dumfriesshire - a small group, all c.1825-45



Perthshire

Two styles, octagonal and square, hail from this part of the country.



Picture Gallery

A rare piece indeed, token or coin, which has not only a month on it but also a day! Fig.1 is a communion token from Gask, Perthshire, dated 13 June 1701; that being either the day of issue or, more probably, the day of foundation of the church, which will not have been long before. Fig.3 is another communion token, from Anstruther, Fife, and is unlikely to be of much later date because of the barred A; and again Fig.4, although the parish of origin is anonymous. There are many unknown pieces in this series, so much both to find and learn!

Diagonal pieces are known, albeit rarely, in the main 17th cent series; why not amongst their lead counterparts? Fig.2, which could equally be a pass, came from near Winchester. Fig.5 came from near Bredon, Gloucestershire and was described as, "a crude man figure with a radiate crown, or it may be a devil head with horns". It is exceptionally small, barely 10mm diameter; we thought that it ought therefore be c.1500, and most likely ecclesiastic. To this suggestion my correspondent replied after further research that there was apparently, "a monastery cell, now disappeared, in Bredon, part of the outlying cells of Tewkesbury abbey; but we still have the fine old church of St Giles, believed also to be part of the cell, and the Tithe Barn, one of the finest in England." This link sounds extremely likely.



Fig.6 is another of Alex Kussendrager's photos from the Netherlands, not that you can necessarily tell that immediately, and shows a particularly crisp type 16 shield.

Finally, what looks a very ordinary type 1 from Yorkshire reader Bill Swainston, albeit with the north-country empty outer rim which I have hitherto associated with the northern reaches of adjacent Co.Durham; but note, ever so faintly, characters within the angles! This one, starting at 8 o'clock, seems to read TU16{nn}; can't make out the last two digits, but we've never had a dated type 1 before.



WANT BACK ISSUES ?

You can view ALL back issues at www.leadtokens.org.uk

AT THREE CRANES

If you have any lead tokens with part of their legend reading

AT THREE CRANES please contact Phil Mernick who is researching them. Email: phil@mernicks.com Phone:020-8980-5672

WANT TO READ MORE ABOUT LEADEN TOKENS AND TALLIES?

Buy **Treasure Hunting Magazine** where you'll find articles on LT&T topics occasionally published.