

ROMAN FOLDING SPOONS AGAIN AND SOME RELATED TYPES

David Sherlock

SUMMARY

This paper publishes a further type of Roman folding spoon (Type D), together with some related spoons with zoomorphic decoration — an addition to the type series previously published by the author.

INTRODUCTION

Thirty-six years ago in Volume 27 of these *Transactions* I published an article on Roman folding spoons, the first one to deal with this type of spoon, almost all of them from Roman Britain. Since then, as a result of visits to countless museums in Britain and abroad, similar spoons have come to my notice and also been published, along with other individual Roman spoons and groups of spoons. All of this research will I hope eventually lead to the production of a typology of Roman spoons; but meanwhile, fearing somewhat the procrastination of my typology, I publish one further type of folding spoon along with some spoons which are related either in their form or in their decoration. They are illustrated at various scales in Figs 1–3, lettered A–S. Most of these spoons have no archaeological context and so are of limited use for a dated typology. I believe therefore that they can be dealt with separately without affecting my larger work. The common themes of nearly all of these new spoons are some form of zoomorphic decoration in the round on the handles or on the joins between handle and bowl, a stylistic date-range in the later part of the Roman Empire, and a very wide distribution ranging from Rome itself to Britain in the west and

Syria in the east. All are unpublished unless a reference is cited here.

FOLDING SPOONS OF TYPES A AND B

I note here that there are two more almost identical examples of Type A in my original classification (Sherlock 1976) in Verulamium Museum, both unstratified; one from the triangular temple site in Insula VII (accession no. 1980.428) and the other from the stadium nearby (1995.106). Lengths with blades folded are 111mm and 104mm or with blades extended 187mm and 179mm respectively. Fig 1, A.

I have published an extended list of spoons of Type B, those with the lion moulded handle, in my note on a find from Wallsend (Sherlock 2007). Since then, one has come from Broughton, Hants, and about five others have been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (Worrell & Pearce 2011, 428). Fig 1, B.

FOLDING SPOONS OF TYPE C

The single example of this type is shown here again for completeness. The spotted chest denoting a leopard rather than a lion should be noted for my conclusions below (Sherlock 1976, fig 1). Fig 1, C.

FOLDING SPOONS OF TYPE D

For the sake of continuity I call the new folding spoons Type D. Only two of these are known to me. They are in the strictest sense ‘folding spoons’ in that they have no other

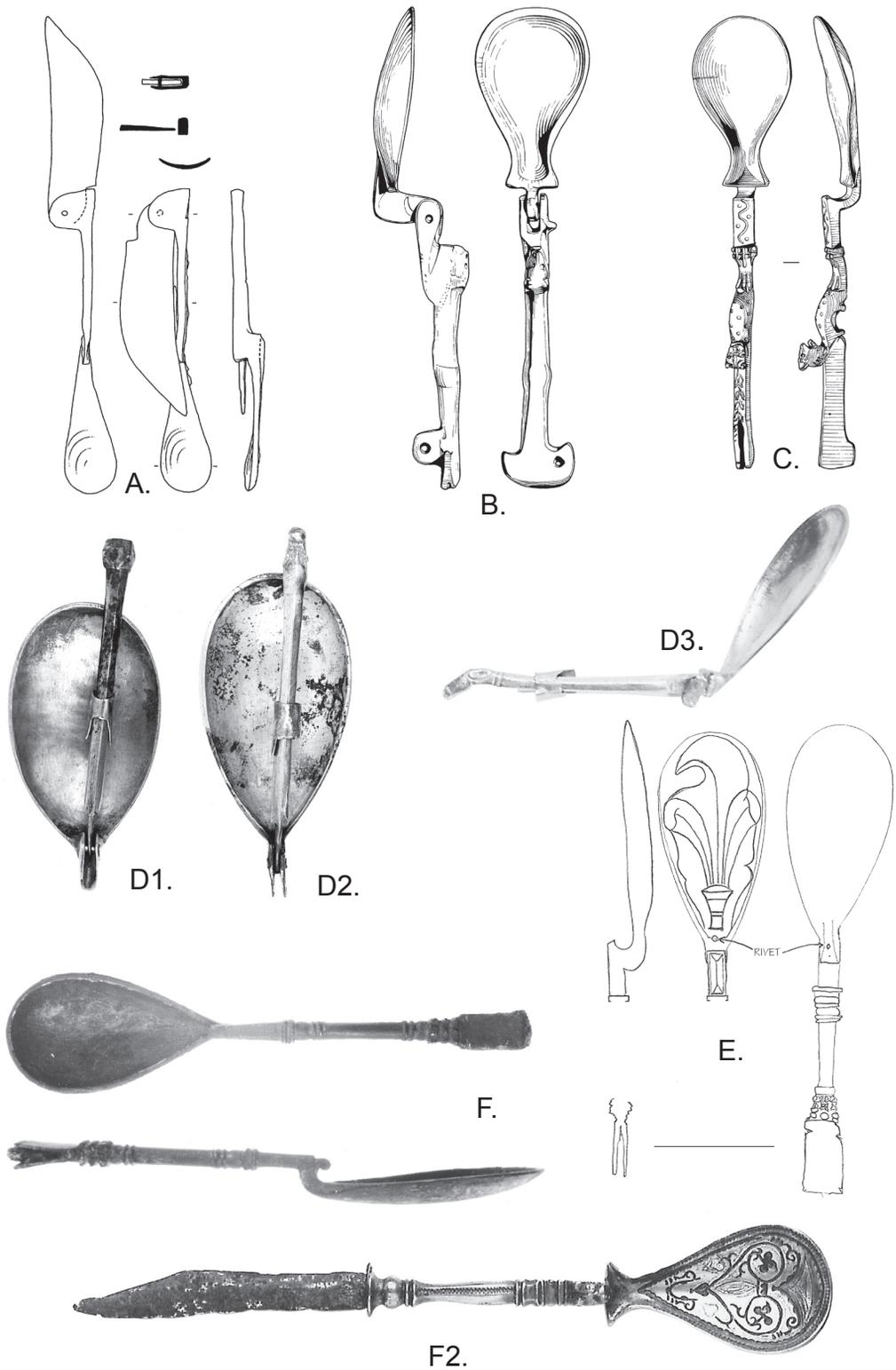


Fig 1. Spoons A to F2. Various scales.

implements such as knives or spikes folding with them like my other types. The spoon handle is hinged at the join with a rivet. It folds into the bowl or is kept extended by a sleeve sliding down the handle and over the hinge, thus holding the handle in position for use.

- D.1. Silver spoon, its oval bowl measuring 52mm by 33mm; handle 73mm long, hexagonal in section and ending with a faceted knop. Private collection, said to have come from Iran. Its present whereabouts unknown. *Boatswain & Knowles* 1978, 22, no. 108 (not *illus*). Fig 1, D.1.
- D.2. Silver spoon with gilt handle. Oval bowl measuring 59mm by 39mm; silver gilt handle 77mm long, square in section and ending with the stylised head of an animal, possibly a deer, its flattened ears extending back along the handle. Private collection, its present whereabouts unknown. Fig 1, D.2–3.

The shape of the bowls of this type is clearly Roman but the style of the animal head on D.2 derives from the eastern Empire, is possibly even Sassanian, and dates from the 4th century AD or later. A close parallel for such a head is to be found on a non-folding spoon in a sale of antiquities at Christies, New York, 14 June 1966, lot 54, which has a disc join between the handle and bowl like the disc in the Sutton Hoo spoons. A matching spoon and fork in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, also have these deer's head terminals (Ross 1962, 1, no. 2, pl XVI).

The sliding sleeve is also to be found on a folding spoon of the 14th century now in the Rotunda Museum, Scarborough (Alexander & Binski 1987, 282, no. 213). This spoon is very like these Roman ones but the shape of the bowl marks it as medieval.

SPOONS WITH ATTACHMENTS AT THE HANDLE END, ONE POSSIBLY FOLDING

These are probably not folding spoons, but the ends of their handles have a split section with holes for rivets and once held a fixed rather than a folding attachment; or, less likely, they held an extra part of the handle, perhaps in a different metal such as iron, or another substance such as bone

or wood. They have an extraordinarily wide distribution in the Roman Empire, as the following examples illustrate:

1. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1914.820. A silver spoon bought in Aleppo by T E Lawrence. Total length 118mm. The oval bowl is incised with a stylised floral design and is riveted to the handle (a mend?), the end of which is split as if to hold an extension but there are no holes for it to have been riveted. There is some moulded decoration near the end of the handle. Fig 1, E.
2. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum 1581M. A copper-alloy spoon found in Syria. Length 135mm. The oval bowl is very similar to that of the previous spoon but undecorated. There is a piece of iron wedged between the split ends of the handle suggesting there was a former fixing. Fig 1, F.
3. Jarash (*Gerasa*), Jordan, Archaeological Museum 0.1388. A copper-alloy spoon very similar to the last two but somewhat smaller. I have been unable to obtain further information since seeing this spoon in its showcase on a visit to Jarash in 2000. Fig 2, G.
4. Beddington Roman villa, Sutton, Surrey. A copper-alloy spoon, drawn by Christine Jones when it was brought to the Museum of London in 1988 but its present whereabouts unknown. Length 101mm; width of bowl 25mm. The bowl is purse-shaped and has slight evidence of right-hand wear. It is joined to the handle by a curved section ending in a stylised griffin's head or bird's beak. The handle has a very simple moulding and a thickening near the split end, the drawing of which suggests two rivet holes. Fig 2, H.
5. London, Christie's sale of antiquities 3 July 1996, lot 383. A silver spoon with purse-shaped bowl. Length 96mm. Its bowl is joined to the elaborate handle by a stylised griffin's head or bird's beak. The handle is moulded with a volute acanthus leaf design, out of which extend the chest and head of a feline, reminiscent of the lion's heads in some folding spoons of Type B (Fig 1, B above and see below, No. 15). Beyond the head, one of the split pieces is missing while the other piece now survives bent over the head. Fig 2, I.
6. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Greek & Roman Department 19.192.64. A silver spoon with purse-shaped bowl,

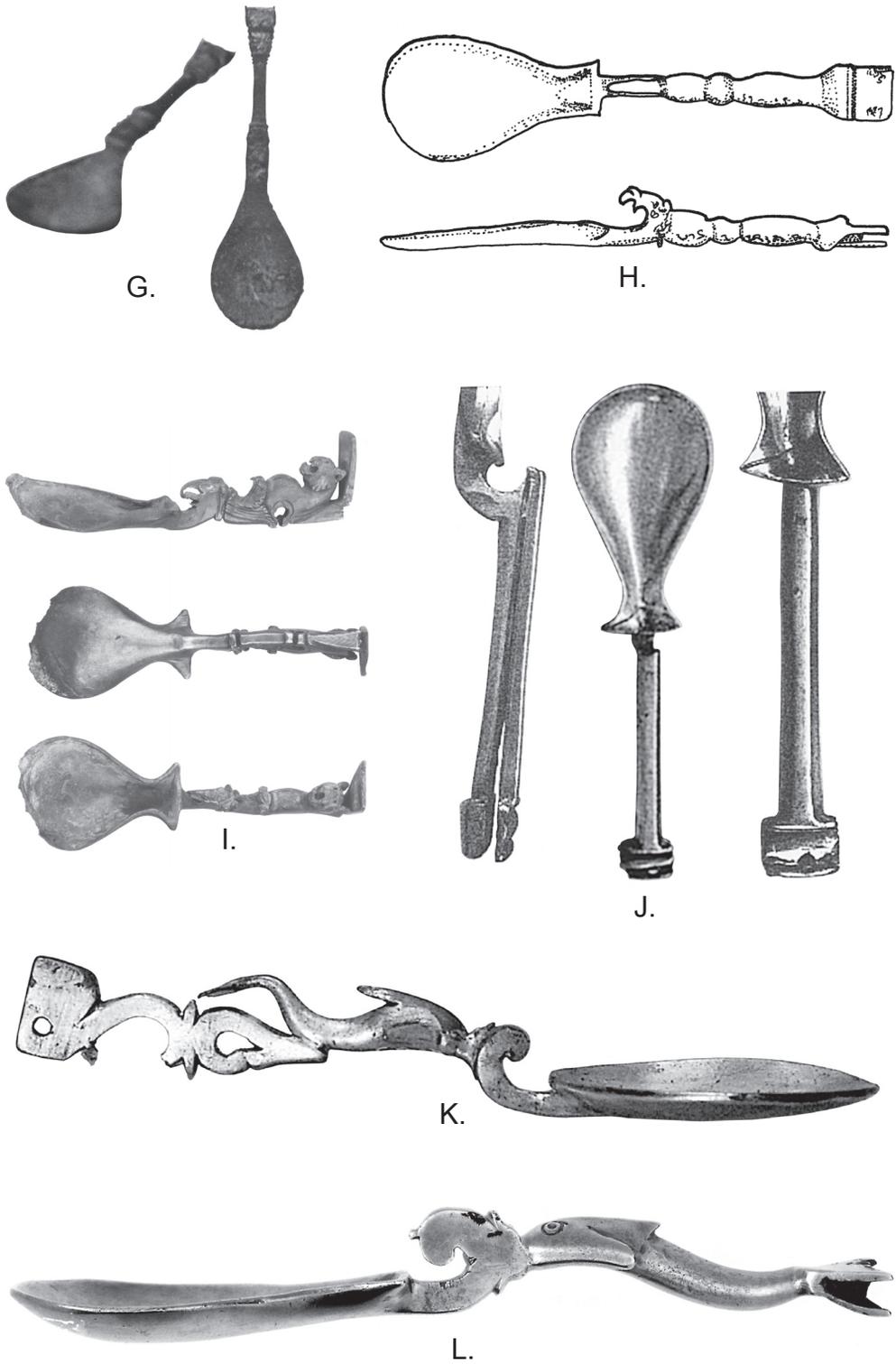


Fig 2. Spoons G to L. Various scales.

probably from Italy. Length 106mm. The join and handle are plain in contrast with Nos 1–5 above. The split at the end has one rivet hole and continues down part of the handle, along one side of which there is a groove. This may well be a folding spoon, but the implement attached by the former rivet is more probably a spike than a knife blade, like the spikes along the sides of Type B folding spoons. Fig 2, J.

There are several points to note about this group of spoons. They are all much the same size, varying from 101 to 135mm. The shapes of the bowls are of 2nd- or 3rd-century style and not much later. The flat ends of the handles are on the same plane as the bowls. There is a piece of iron still wedged in the end of No. 2, which suggests it once held the remains of a knife blade. If the others also held iron, the spoons in this group would be another type of the Roman knife-cum-spoon which I published in 2003 (Fig 1, F2). In some of those the end of the handle was flat, looking something like a seal matrix but with a hole for the iron knife blade to be fixed in, a more secure method of fixing than the flat split sections just described. But here it would have been possible to remove the rivets and to replace the blade if it became broken or worn, as suggested by Hattatt for the riveted blade of a surgeon's scalpel (1989, 479 and fig 30, no. 188). They too had either oval or purse-shaped bowls.

The bird- or griffin-head joins are paralleled in other silver spoons, for example a chance find in 1985 from Billingsgate, London (drawing in Museum of London files), a spoon in the Mont Tourveon hoard (Sherlock 2003, 334, fig 7), a 4th-century silver spoon with a decorated bowl from Anatolia (Cologne 1973, no. 423, fig 187), a 6th-century spoon found in a Frankish grave at *Gelduba*, Krefeld-Gellep (*Germania* 42 (1964), pl 55), one from a 4th-century chieftain's grave at *Panticapaeum*, Kersch (*JdAI, Archäol Anzeiger* 1908, 174–5, fig 2), and three others listed by Bierbrauer (1975, 251). There are, of course, many other spoons with zoomorphic designs on the joins, mainly in the form of feline heads, for example in the Mildenhall, Dorchester and Hoxne hoards.

SPOONS WITH DOLPHIN HANDLES FOR ATTACHMENTS

These spoons have handles moulded in the form of dolphins and flat ends to their handles, also possibly for fixed knife blades like those of the preceding group.

7. Rome, Crypta Balbi, exhibition, 20 February 2008 (I have been unable to obtain more information). A silver spoon with oval bowl and gracefully moulded handle. Onto an inverted comma-shaped join a stylised dolphin is attached by its head; near its tail is attached the pierced bud of a flower, its stem planted in the flat piece to be seen in the examples 1–6 above. The flat piece also has a rivet hole but no attachment. Unlike the examples above, the flat piece stands at right angles to the bowl. Fig 2, K.
8. London, British Museum, Department of Prehistory & Early Europe P1997.10.1.1. A silver spoon of unknown provenance. Length 116mm; width of bowl 28mm. Onto a purse-shaped bowl with a comma-shaped join is attached a curved dolphin, similar to the dolphin in No. 7 but having eyes and dorsal mouldings. Its tail is split like the ends of Nos 1–6 above and contains remains of iron, perhaps once a blade. Fig 2, L.
9. Colchester, from excavations at Middleborough, MID78 SF17 2020. The handle of a folding spoon of copper alloy in the shape of a crested dolphin with eyes marked and moulded tail. Surviving length 59mm. The split flat section is beyond the mouth, which would allow the bowl to fold, so it is not the same as other folding spoons but more akin to my original Type B. Crummy 1983, 69, fig 73. Fig 3, M.
10. Budapest, National Museum MNRR 6.1926.53. A silver spoon from Dunaújváros (*Intercisa*). Length 134mm. This spoon, with oval bowl, scrolled join and moulded dolphin handle, is *not* of the same type as Nos 7–9 above since its handle ends in a short spike with turned mouldings. But it is included here because the dolphin is similarly well moulded, with a realistic tail, fins, dots for eyes and its mouth open to clasp the scrolled join on the end of the bowl. Fig 3, N.

The Colchester example is the only one from a precise context, having been found during archaeological excavations. The others are of silver and divorced from their original context after their re-discovery.

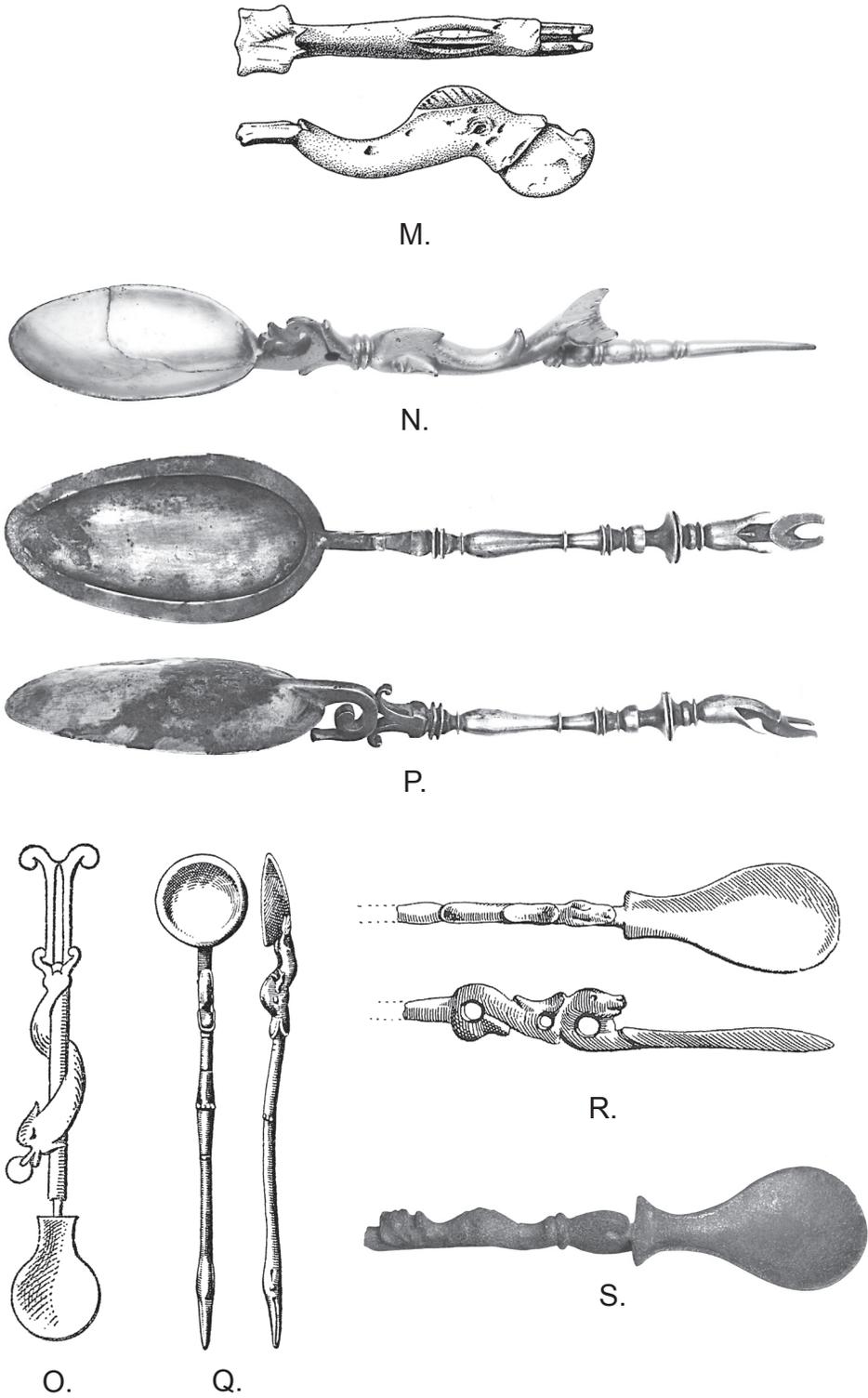


Fig 3. Spoons M to S. Various scales.

TWO MORE DOLPHIN HANDLES AND THREE OTHER ANIMAL-HANDLED SPOONS

These spoons are included in this article because of their zoomorphic decoration but they do not fold nor do they have any other implement attached. I do not discuss the many dolphins inscribed on the bowls of spoons from Hoxne, Thetford and elsewhere (Johns 2010, 109f); nor do I discuss the little lion's-head joins between the bowls and the handles of the spoons from Dorchester (Dorset and Oxon.), and similar hoards.

11. London, British Museum, Department of Greek & Roman Antiquities 1814.7-4.707. Provenance unknown. A bronze spoon with purse-shaped bowl. Total length 171mm. The handle has a dolphin twisted around it, head towards the bowl, and it ends in a sort of lyre shape. Published in Jackson 1892, 110, fig 9, where it is said to be 'ancient Greek'. This lyre shape may actually be a stylised anchor since the dolphin-and-anchor symbol is found in classical art and was copied in the Renaissance. It has been interpreted as meaning *festina lente*, 'hasten slowly' (Avery 2009, 114–19). Fig 3, O.
 12. London, private collection, acquired via Jack Ogden Ltd in 1980. A silver spoon. Provenance unknown. Length 181mm. Width 35mm. The bowl is in the shape of a 1st- and 2nd-century *ligula* (Strong 1966, fig 32; Sherlock 1999, 176, fig 3) with a broad flat rim, and is joined to the handle by a scroll coming up from under the bowl. The handle is forked at the join and baluster moulded, very like a spoon from Egypt in the British Museum (Department of Greek & Roman Antiquities 1907 7-17, 7; Walters 1921, no. 94) and another which is unprovenanced in the Victoria & Albert Museum (1906, 527). The end of the handle appears from underneath to end in a hoof moulding, a form which is found on 2nd- and 3rd-century spoons (Sherlock 2008, 265), but in fact it represents the tail fins of a dolphin. Two small pin pricks for eyes are just visible and the dorsal fins are on the same plane as the tail fins. Its mouth is joined to the last of the baluster rings on the handle. Fig 3, P.
 13. London, British Museum, Department of Greek & Roman Antiquities 1814.7-4.1121. A silver spoon with small circular bowl. Length 133mm. Provenance unknown.
- 'The handle is in the form of a duck's head, turned away from the bowl, from the mouth of which issues a long stem ending in the head of another bird(?) with small head and long narrow beak' (Walters 1921, 28, no. 101). There are feathers represented at the join of the handle and the bowl. There is gilding on the bird's eyes, on the bird's mouth and on the beading around the handle. The bowl has a convex moulding on the inside which Strong (1966, 177) identified as a 2nd-century form. The slim-lined bird's head at the end can be matched on a spoon from a 2nd- or 3rd-century tomb at Mtskheta, Georgia (*Antiq Journ* 74 (1994), 33, fig 20) and others elsewhere. Fig 3, Q.
14. Lydney Park, Glos, site museum. The surviving length of a copper-alloy spoon is approximately 93mm. Joined to its purse-shaped bowl is a handle in the form a crouching hare or hound, its head above the bowl and its ears folded back in conventionalised form (Bathurst 1879, 57 and pl XXV, where it is described as a 'swan's head hanging from a garland'; Wheeler 1932, 85, fig 19, 91). Fig 3, R.
 15. Barnard Castle, Bowes Museum 1957/13. A copper-alloy spoon from excavations at Piercebridge Roman fort in 1934 (but not mentioned in the report). Surviving length 89mm; width of bowl 25mm. The handle is in the form of the front of a feline with its head, chest and leg resting on a disc, and a pierced oval on the end of a purse-shaped spoon. Beyond the head the rest of the handle is missing. This feline is reminiscent of the lion on the folding spoons of Type B (above, Fig 1, B), the spotted leopard on Type C (above, Fig 1, C) and, more especially, the splendid Roman table legs surviving in shale and other materials (Liversidge 1973, 153 and pl 33). Fig 3, S.

CONCLUSIONS

A deer, lion, leopard or panther, griffin, dolphin, hound or hare, and duck seem an unlikely menagerie to find decorating the handles of Roman spoons. Can we make any sense of them today, given that the spoons are all different and not part of a set, unlike the stag, lion, panther, griffin, hare, tiger, horse, bear, boar and bull which are engraved on the bowls of a 6th-century set of Roman spoons from Cyprus (Dalton 1901, pl xxv)? They have a wide stylistic date range, and our

own interpretation of their significance may not be the one intended by their makers.

Both deer, an attribute of Diana the goddess of hunting, and hares were hunted; the latter were associated with fertility. The hound-and-hare is a familiar type of handle on Roman folding knives (Hattatt 1989, 497, fig 36, nos 242–3; Liversidge 1973, 157, fig 66c). The lion was the prize beast in any classical hunt and an educated Roman would have known the story of Hercules and the Nemean lion and perhaps also the story of Polynices at Argos with his shield depicting the head and chest of a lion, as depicted on Greek vases and as found carved on Roman table legs (see No. 15 above). The leopard (*panthera pardus*) was an animal associated with Dionysus in feasting and revelry. Ducks, a delicacy seen in Roman mosaics of food, were netted; so too were deer, as in a mosaic with a hunting scene from Utica (Dunbabin 1978, pl K).

The dolphin on the other hand was not hunted but was a happy symbol of love and good luck. A constellation called Delphinus commemorated both the dolphin that saved the poet-singer Arion from drowning and the dolphin that found Amphitrite for Neptune (Avery 2009, 28–38, 76–7). They were psychopompic creatures, serving as bearers of the heroic dead on their journey to the Elysian Fields. Silver ladles in the Mildenhall and Hoxne hoards also have moulded dolphin handles, as do other objects such as the Hoxne toilet utensils (Johns 2010, nos 147–8; see also Bierbrauer 1975, 271 for two spoons from Desana with circular bowls and dolphins supporting their handles). A ‘dolphin brooch’ is a term now used to describe a type of Romano-British brooch (Collingwood & Richmond 1969, 295). A purse-shaped spoon in the silver hoard from Autun (France) has its bowl engraved in niello with the figure of a dolphin, its tail coiled, devouring a fish (Baratte 1992, 210, figs 4 and 6). As a sign of good luck the presence of the dolphin on a spoon may perhaps be compared with inscriptions on other Roman spoons of similar dates reading VTI FELIX or VTERE FELIX meaning ‘good luck to the user’ or ‘use (this and be) happy’ (Frere & Tomlin

1991, nos 2420.52 *etc*). In this sense spoon No. 12 above with its little dolphin ‘kissing’ the end of the handle parallels the myriad of medieval apostle spoons with a little figure on their ends and modern silver teaspoons with lucky charms. We may note here also an unprovenanced and unpublished spoon in the Musée d’Aquitaine, Bordeaux (accession no. 62.51.35), which has a little winged Victory moulded on the end of its handle. This spoon is of 4th-century Mildenhall type.

The griffin is the only fabulous animal represented here. It was said to have the head and wings of an eagle and the body and hindquarters of a lion. It was believed by the Greeks to inhabit Scythia and to guard its gold.

Finally, we may note that there appears to be no Christian symbolism intended in any of these objects. So in conclusion, we can assume that the spoons were luxury objects once belonging to wealthy and educated Romans or provincial Romans of the 2nd to 4th centuries AD with wealth enough to afford both silverware and hunting and the knowledge to appreciate the mythology associated with these creatures. A folding spoon might well be a useful item for travelling to the hunt or to produce at a hunting lodge feast (Sherlock 2008, 253).

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dauidasherlock@gmail.com

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