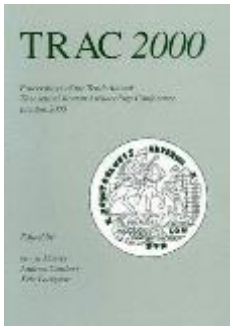

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10
'Romanisation' and the Body

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10.1 Introduction

What evidence do we have for the change in identity (whether ethnic, local or individual), of the native, non-élite Britons from the later Iron Age to the early Roman period? I propose here that such a change in identity may be examined by following the use of four different 'Roman' 'body-related' artefact types through time. Related to this, I hope to be able to gain insight into whether the categories of 'Roman' or 'native' (in any hybrid or creolised combination, *cf.* Webster 1997a, 2000) held any meaning to the native Britons in terms of how they structured or expressed their identities.

My four categories of 'body-related' artefacts (taken from a total of 37 sites from Essex and Hertfordshire) have all traditionally been interpreted as 'Roman' artefacts. They comprise hairpins; toilet instruments; brooches; and cosmetic grinders. These are all currently assumed to be representative of the *Roman* practices of grooming and adornment and general identity construction; *e.g.,* for the creation of Roman hairstyles; for grooming in a Roman manner; for holding up or holding together Roman-style clothes; and for the application of Roman-style cosmetics respectively. In this paper I wish to address the questions: were they were used by the Britons? If so, for what purposes, and did they structure their ethnic identity by the adoption, adaptation or rejection of these tools? These artefacts are especially useful for the determination of the aims of this paper because they are all relatively common in the archaeological record; most of them have a typology and chronology; and all of them are connected with appearance and, thus, identity.

10.2 Hairpins

Roman-style bone hairpins, which date from around AD 50 (Crummy 1979, 1992) have been found at many sites in Essex and Hertfordshire. However, we must not assume that these artefacts were necessarily used solely for creating Roman-style hairstyles. Out of all 37 sites examined, only nine had more than 20 hairpins. Of those, the greatest number was found at the *civitas* capitals of Colchester and Verulamium. Allowing for post-depositional factors and excavator error, this low number of hairpins might suggest that the complicated Roman hairstyles were only adopted by a minority of women or perhaps only worn on special occasions. However, we have no proof that these women were recreating Roman hairstyles, nor even that they were used by women. At the cemetery in Poundbury, out of six burials which were found with bone hairpins, two were biologically (though not necessarily gender) male (Farwell & Molleson 1993). Finds such as this demonstrate that we cannot make assumptions

about how people may have been exploring and constructing gender identities, (which Jundi & Hill 1998 tell us were fluid at this time) with new items of material culture.

Figure 10.1 presents a one possible typology of hair pins derived from the work of Crummy (1979, 1992). It seems that different hairpin designs prompted different choices and practices. For example, some hairpin types (such as Crummy Types 2 and 3) were very popular. Other hairpin types appear to have been 'boycotted' by certain sites. The sites of Gorhambury, Braughing-Puckeridge, Gadebridge Park and Baldock had no Type 6 hairpins, but did have those which came chronologically earlier and later. Verulamium had 557 hairpins and only three Type Six hairpins. Yet other sites were doing their own thing entirely: at Hill Farm in Gestingthorpe, Essex, 54% of all hairpins had a cross-hatched design on the pin head (Draper 1985). This compares with only three cross-hatched pins out of a total of 602 from Colchester. In fact, the cross-hatched headed pin is sufficiently unusual to be considered a 'miscellaneous' type by Crummy. It is not found in enough numbers to merit its own type in the typology, and has not been assigned a date within the chronology. It is thus simply labelled as 'Roman'. It should also be noted that not one of the settlements at Stansted had any hairpins at all (Cool, *pers. comm.*). At the very least, such a quick overview of the variations in the archaeological record between geographically close sites shows the potential folly in applying one chronology based on one typology (Crummy's typology and chronology was based on the hairpins from Colchester alone) to many different sites. Such chronologies and typologies are likely to be site-specific. We cannot be sure that people in different places were making and using certain types at exactly the same time as the archaeological record of different sites is rarely homogeneous.

We must conclude that many people were making statements about their identities by the hairpins they chose to wear in their hair; further, the archaeological record would appear to suggest that these identities were site-specific. It seems that people were doing something different and not entirely conformist (however they perceived this) with their hair, even if it was only in terms of decorating it in a non-conventional way. However, while it is important not to read 'deliberate non-conformity' into what might otherwise be interpreted as simply a regional or personal preference, we must ask why people preferred certain types of hairpins over others -- was their choice deliberately different to what other people were doing? If they were decorating their hair in a non-conformist or deliberately different way, it is possible that they were also wearing it in a non-conformist or different way. The fact that only nine out of a total of 37 of sites under review had more than 20 hairpins might back up this suggestion. It seems likely that most people were doing other, non-Roman things with their hair. This British-style use of Roman hairpins is also reflected in the context of deposition of the hairpin, with most being found in pits and ditches in accordance with pre-existing Iron Age practices of ritual deposition (Hill 1995).

10.3 Toilet Instruments

Toilet sets, usually made up of ear-scoops, nail-cleaners and tweezers hanging from a chatelaine which was carried on the person, have their *floruit* in the mid to late first and second centuries AD. They show us the importance of grooming in Roman society. The fact that they were worn on the person suggests that to be *seen* grooming was as important as the act itself. Thus, we might conclude that to groom in public was not viewed with the same distaste as it is in our society. In addition, as tweezers are more common than nail-cleaners, which in turn are more common than ear-scoops

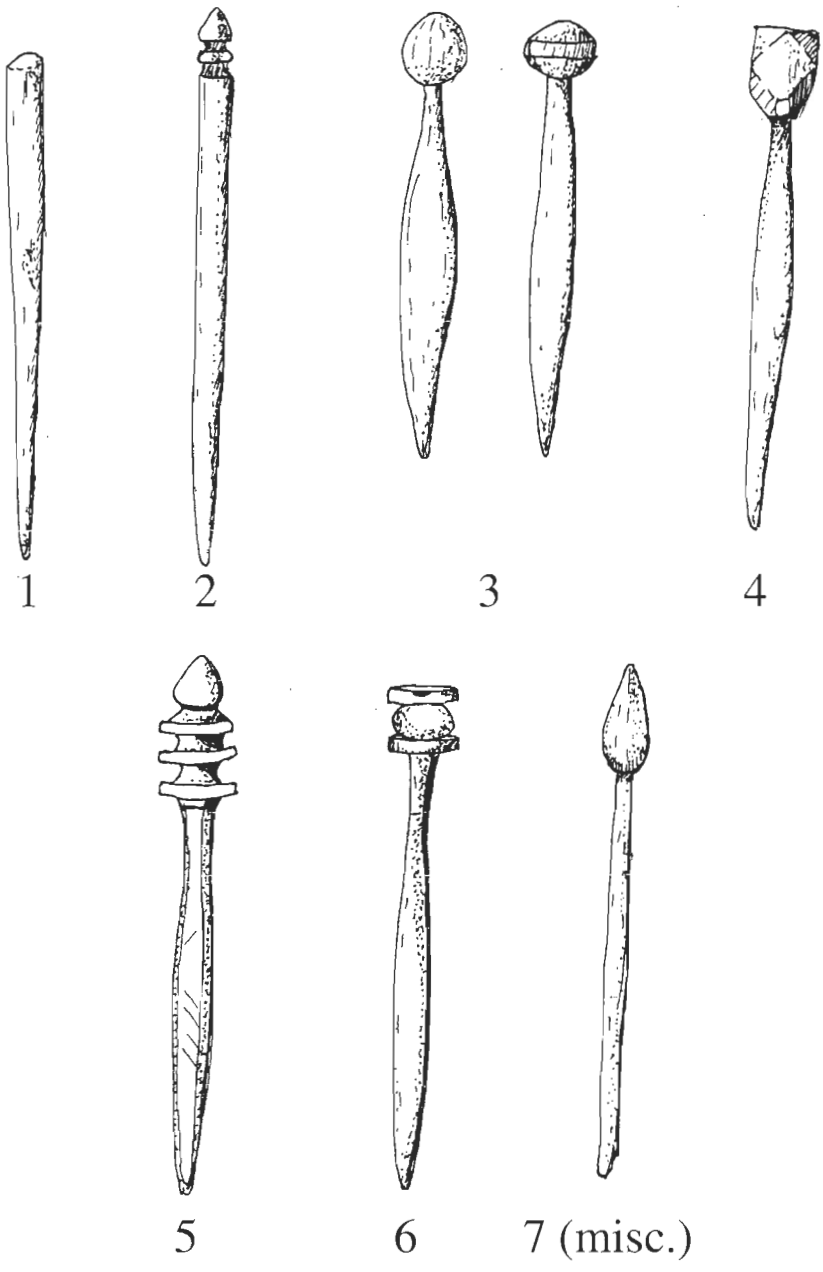

Figure 10.1: Bone pin typology (after Crummy 1979, 1992).

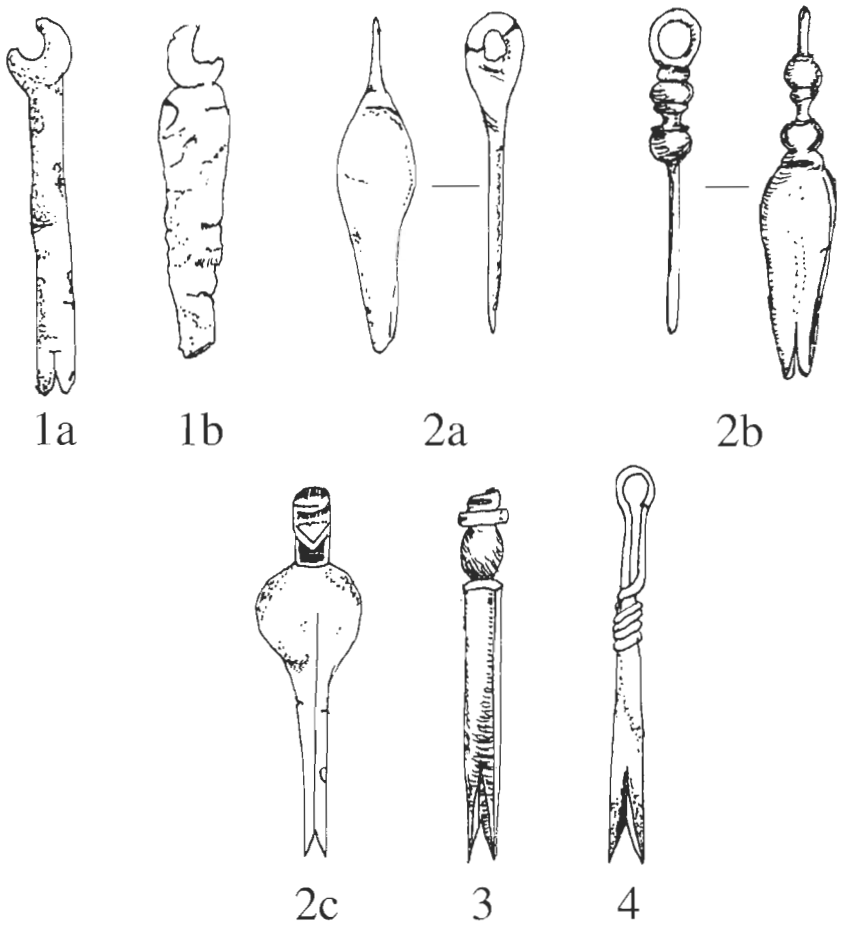

Figure 10.2: Nail cleaner typology (after Crummy 1983).

in the archaeological record, we might suggest that this is a reflection of the relative importance and visibility of plucking facial hair versus cleaning nails versus cleaning out ears.

The nail cleaner typology presented in Figure 10.2 is after Crummy (1983). A typology exists for nail cleaners only. This is because there is insufficient variation through time in the design of tweezers or ear-scoops. Crummy (1983) categorised nail cleaners into Types One to Four. Although these form the vast majority of nail cleaners found in Essex and Hertfordshire, they are not the only ones. Drury (1988, Figs. 64.42–64.45) divided nail cleaners from Chelmsford into types A, B, C and D, where types B and D overlapped with two of Crummy's types. There are, however, many other types of nail cleaner design. Crude, 'home-made' types were found at Station Road, Puckeridge (Partridge 1979, Fig. 7.3); Gadebridge Park (Neal 1974, Fig. 62.191) and Hill Farm (Draper 1985, Fig. 12.76). Further, there are some well-made but unusual nail cleaners at sites such as Kelvedon (Rodwell 1988, Figs. 48.45, 51 and 52), where three out of four nail cleaners were unusual types; similarly, at Gadebridge Park cleaners illustrated in Figs. 62.184 and 190 were also unusual (Neal

1974). Hill Farm, which also had its own style of hairpins, had a unique nail cleaner type (Draper 1985, Fig. 12.77).

Other variations in toilet instruments as a whole are seen, for example, at the cemetery at Stansted, where the instruments making up the two toilet sets (normally a combination of ear-scoop, nail cleaner and tweezers) comprised a *ligula* rather than an ear-scoop. A toilet set was also found with a nail file in Balkerne Lane at Colchester (Crummy 1983, SF 1941/2106), also the location of a toothpick (SF 1939/372), the only one from the 37 sites under review; further, a small knife for attachment to a toilet set was found at Hill Farm (Draper 1985, Fig. 12.75).

These local variations in design and, in some cases, in choice of grooming instrument may also reflect the variation in use between different sites. These local, site-specific practices may have emphasised the importance of site-specific identities within which individual identities based on age, gender and status may have existed. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that women were the only people who used toilet instruments. It is more likely that they were used by anyone who wanted to groom themselves or modify their appearance.

We must remember that toilet instruments were present in Britain before the Roman period and throughout the Iron Age, albeit in smaller numbers, *e.g.*, the tweezers and probe from Gussage All Saints in Dorset (Wainwright 1979, Fig. 87, 3075 and 3004 respectively) which date to the first century BC–AD; and also the iron tweezers from Winnall Down, Wiltshire (Fasham 1985, Fig. 43.20) which belong to the middle Iron Age. Toilet instruments were also present in the Bronze Age, so it is likely that those present in the Iron Age represent a continuation of use rather than an introduction of a new practice from the continent. It is entirely possible that people continued to use toilet instruments in the later Iron Age and early Roman period for native-style grooming and, as such, their increase in number could have been a continuation of earlier practices rather than what some might call 'Romanisation'. It is likely that toilet instruments may have held no *a priori* association with the Romans as they existed before the conquest. People may also have been using them to recreate the identity of their ancestors in themselves in order to reinforce their native identity as part of an alternative discourse to new ways of self-representation and identity. If this is so, 'Roman' or continental influence *may* have been responsible for the increased use of toilet instruments, but not in the most obvious way.

Because we have no clear idea *exactly* how these instruments were used beyond general cleaning and plucking, it is possible that they were used in many different ways by different groups of people for different purposes. It is likely that appearances were cultivated according to such social categories as gender, age-group and status as well as family-, clan- or site-specific practices. These variations in practices may well be reflected in the variation in the toilet instrument typology discussed above.

10.4 Brooches

From the later pre-Roman Iron Age and especially at the time of the Roman conquest, the brooch stands out in the archaeological record from all other types of jewellery. This is because it is found in markedly increased numbers during this period. The increase is so sharp and dominates the small-find assemblage to such an extent that the phenomenon has been characterised as the 'fibula event horizon' by Hill (1995, 1997), and is related to what Willis (1997) called a 'deposition Geist': a wider phenomenon of increased deposition of material culture at this time.

One of the reasons why the brooch, above all other pieces of jewellery, became such a ubiquitous item in this time of flux is suggested by Jundi & Hill (1998). Because gender, social and cultural identities were increasingly fluid in the Late pre-Roman Iron Age (LPRIA) and after the Roman conquest, dress and appearance and even the brooch may have been an important way to differentiate between these identities. However, were people signalling their identity, whether what we might recognise as 'native', 'Roman', both simultaneously or any number of hybrids, with brooches?

We must be aware, of course, that there is no simple division between being 'native' or 'Roman'. For Barrett, for example, being 'Roman' was a question of 'bodily dispositions, movement, appearance, the occupation of places, relations of domination, and the submission of the self to other authorities' (Barrett 1997, p. 60). Being Roman was a lived experience for its subjects, differing from individual to individual and over time and space. It was a practice. Thus, the presence of Roman / imported Mediterranean material culture on a settlement does not prove that the inhabitants were Romanised. They may have been using Roman objects in a 'native' way for 'native' (*i.e.*, indigenous, traditional) practices.

When it comes to brooches, however, it may be difficult to know how people were using them. We cannot just ask whether they were being used in a 'Roman' or a 'native' manner, *i.e.*, whether they were being used to hold up 'native' or 'Roman'-style clothes, because these two categories are polyvalent. A combination of clothing types may have been worn. It may not have been merely a choice between one thing or the other. In addition, a brooch does not, of itself, have any independent 'ethnic identity', but is merely used in certain ways by certain people for certain reasons. By examining the brooch itself, we can perhaps gain a deeper insight into the identities that it helped to create.

As an example, I would like to take the Roman period Dragonesque brooch. Jundi & Hill (1998) argued that it drew upon pre-existing visual motifs relating to the past to assert a non-Roman identity. This assertion could be argued to be a form of covert resistance against being 'Roman'. There are also other examples of brooches that, one might argue, had this potential, as discussed below.

The active construction of a non-'Roman' identity can be a strong statement even if signalled only to other non-Romans as a way of 'thumbing one's nose' at the Romans behind their backs. This would have been especially effective, and perhaps a source of amusement, if this were done using signals that would not necessarily have been readable by, or visible to, Romans. An example of this is suggested by the parallel of 'gay men in a straight world' by Matthews (1994). He tells us that 'gay men have resorted to a number of devices to make themselves mutually recognisable whilst remaining hidden to the rest of the world. This can take the form of dress codes involving clothing, jewellery, hairstyles, make-up and tattoos, although such codes may need to be relatively fluid, subtle or ambiguous, otherwise they may become readily readable by heterosexuals' (Matthews 1994, p. 123).

What 'mutually recognisable but hidden' devices might be found in the brooches of the Essex / Hertfordshire region? The most popular brooches of this region are, without doubt, the Colchester (originally an import but also made in Britain) and Colchester derivatives (a British version of the Colchester), which date to around the time of Conquest and beyond. On examining these brooch types more closely, we see that there are subtle differences. While the Colchester was made in one piece, Colchester derivatives were made in two pieces. The Colchester was undecorated while Colchester derivatives were decorated with such features as enamel, loops and head-studs. The Colchester was simple, plain and had a curved bow. The bows of

Colchester derivatives were often humped and decorated with a crest and cavetto mouldings.

Because these features are fairly subtle, it can be assumed that brooches played a rôle important enough for people to want to come close to examine and admire them, and to notice, understand the significance of, and appreciate the subtle differences. We can see that decoration was the chief difference between the Colchester and its derivatives. This is exemplified in one single but important feature, which proves to us that the Colchester and its derivatives were seen as different types in the minds of the metalsmiths and the inhabitants of Britain as well as to us. They consistently had a different metallurgical composition and were thus different colours.

Bayley (1985) states that whereas most LPRIA copper-alloy brooches in Britain are made of bronze (an alloy of copper and tin with or without lead), first century imported brooches found in Britain have shown to be made of brass, *i.e.*, an alloy of copper and zinc. This sudden appearance of brass demonstrates conclusively, according to Bayley, that these later brass brooches were not part of Britain's indigenous metalworking tradition. Given this information, using x-ray fluorescence (XRF) and atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS) on the brooches to discover their composition, Bayley went on to show that whereas Colchester brooches were almost universally made of brass (although they were not universally imports, as unfinished Colchester brooches have been found at Baldock), Colchester derivatives were mostly made of leaded bronze, and sometimes of unleaded bronze or leaded gunmetal. This follows for the sites from Essex and Hertfordshire under examination in this paper. What was the reason for this? Bayley suggested several: that brass is malleable and springy and is thus suitable for making the hammered out one-piece Colchester brooches. Leaded bronze, on the other hand, is not suitable for wrought work, and can crack if hammered, and so is cast instead in two pieces. But why did the change in metal and the change from Colchester to Colchester derivative take place? Bayley makes several suggestions: did a change in the metal available to the craftsmen prompt a change in design, or did the new design permit the use of a different but cheaper alloy? Had the exploitation of Britain's mineral resources by the Romans reduced the volume of metal available to the civilian population, forcing a return to indigenous bronzes?

I suggest that the main reason why the Colchester derivative was adopted by some was to do with its colour. Whereas brass is an attractive golden colour, bronze is browner with the main decoration of the Colchester derivative brooch lying in its mouldings, enamelling and addition of chains. In rendering, perhaps reinterpreting, the Gallic-origin Colchester in a British style and making the Colchester derivatives out of bronze, the same metal as LPRIA brooches and, indeed, at some sites favouring these brooches above those made of an attractive golden brass, the colour of imported brooches — indeed, the brass Colchester brooches made in Britain were made to be almost identical both visually and in composition (see Bayley 1989, p. 270, Fig. 86) to their Gallic inspiration and predecessor, differing only in the cross-section shape of the bow — a statement was being made. Similarly, a rejection of bronze brooches at some sites in favour of those of brass and those imported from the continent might be said to be making a different statement.

It could be argued that those who favoured bronze were, on some level, signalling their association with the past, the ancestors and a 'native' identity, whereas those who favoured brass were signalling their rejection or indifference to the past and old ways of identification, and an association or affiliation with a new 'Gallic' or 'Roman' modes of identity. The choice of brooch is likely, however, to have been a purely personal preference and need not necessarily have symbolised either 'Romanisation'

site	total no. of brooches	Colchester (%)	Colchester Derivative (%)
Hertfordshire			
King Harry Lane settlement	40	17.5	10
King Harry Lane cemetery	236	43.6	0.4
Skeleton Green	75	24	1.3
Gadebridge Park	31	16.1	38.7
Gorhambury	58	13.8	19
Baldock	162	11.1	9.9
Braughing	94	10.6	9.6
Verulamium	113	9.7	15
Essex			
Colchester	172	5.8	25
Sheepen	280	29.6	9.6
Chelmsford	74	2.7	43.2
Kelvedon	33	21.2	6
Stansted settlement	68	16.2	32.3
Stansted cemetery	17	11.8	35.3
Harlow	238	15.1	23.5
Holbrooks	137	8.8	32.1

Table 10.1: Relative percentages of Colchester and Colchester derivative brooches.

or rejection, as I discuss below. We should also bear in mind that an artefact which we may interpret as continentally influenced or inspired may still have been used in a very traditional way in the society where it was used.

Willis (1994) examined the question of imports from a different perspective. He suggested a reason why it was necessary to make British copies of Gallic imports in a different metal. He suggests that imports from the Continent were culturally and politically sensitive objects which may have carried a potential to be highly subversive of established social relations, not least because they came from outside the British social order. He suggests that the definition and circulation of imports would therefore need to have been managed and controlled. This was achieved through the production, by indigenous communities, of copies or imitations of the imported material. Through copying or re-interpreting an import in a familiar manner using local technologies, the import may have been rendered acceptable to indigenous populations, thus legitimating both the copy and the copied. A similar suggestion was made by Helms (1988), who described how objects from lands regarded as dangerous could be considered impure or polluted and thus needed to be rendered in a native style if they were to be made clean.

If Willis and Helms were right, how would this translate into the actions and motives of the people of Britain? Simply, those who wanted to signal a 'native' identity would wear the Colchester derivative brooch, which had been rendered into a 'safe' and acceptable medium. Those who were not interested in keeping the 'native' *status quo*, but preferred to wear the subversive Colchester brooch with a continental origin, made a statement by wearing a culturally and politically sensitive object.

However, while not denying the ability of Colchester and Colchester derivative brooches to symbolise native and foreign identities, they may have had other meanings

on a local level: meanings that reflected aspects relating to gender, age and status. Different people could interpret the same brooch in different ways. The Colchester and Colchester derivative brooches were probably multivocal artefacts and were used to symbolise multiple identities. We cannot be sure that they were used purely to symbolise pro-native and pro-Roman identities.

10.5 Cosmetic grinders

Cosmetic grinders are currently believed to have been used for grinding and applying Roman-style cosmetics (Jackson 1985, 1993, forthcoming). I have investigated the possibility that they were used for grinding, mixing and applying native facial or body pigments such as woad for body painting or tattooing; practices that were mentioned by the classical authors (see Carr 2000, forthcoming, for full theory which also discusses other sources of evidence including coins, plant remains and potential tattooing / body painting / dyeing paraphernalia). I have argued that they were used for native rather than Roman cosmetics on the basis that they are not found outside Britain; that the Romans had their own artefact, the stone palette, for grinding cosmetics; that a small handful date to pre-Conquest times; and that they are made in a 'native' and not a 'classical' style (Jackson 1985).

To derive the indigo pigment from the woad plant (*Isatis tinctoria L.*), it is necessary to adopt the following procedure: chop up the leaves of the plant, boil them in water, and leave them to steep for an hour. Strain the liquid and throw the plant matter away, then add ammonia (perhaps in the form of urine) to the liquid until it reaches pH9 or above. Stir the liquid in air for 10–15 minutes until blue particles appear on the top, let the particles settle, then decant, leaving the sediment (or indigo) to dry out. The indigo is then powdered for further use (Buchanan 1987).

I suggest here that the cosmetic grinder was used to powder the indigo or woad and also to mix the pigment with a binding agent or to prepare the pigment for tattooing instead of body painting. I further suggest that the design of the cosmetic grinder and the decoration of the mortar terminals relate to possible agents needed to bind the pigment to the body. The terminal designs include bovine and duck heads (the binding agent in this case being milk or egg whites, or perhaps the fats and juices from cooking beef or duck); and also phallic designs (the binding agent being semen). A binding agent of fat is an important consideration when we remember that the Britons are recorded as having gone into battle naked (Diodorus Siculus V, 29–30). This would have kept them insulated. Experimental work (Carr 2000) showed that beef fat was the most effective binding agent: it cooled to a consistency of shoe-polish suggesting that it could be saved until it was next needed. We should be aware, however, that literary *topoi* such as those given by Diodorus Siculus could have been merely part of the rhetorical vocabulary used to articulate concepts of the 'uncivilised' natives (*cf.* Stewart 1995).

The different binding agents produce a variety of colours, from steely grey-blue through intense midnight blue to black. Some of the colours yielded were similar to those used in military camouflage palettes. The steel-blue colour produced by mixing beef fat and indigo has the potential to yield the face almost invisible in certain lighting conditions (Lt. Patrick Larkin, *pers. comm.*), another advantage in wearing it into battle.

To answer the question of why the Britons might have used body paint or tattoos, we should be aware that tattoos signify courage; the backwards-and-forwards motion

of the grinding 'male' and 'female' parts of the cosmetic grinder would signify virility (Jackson, *pers. comm.*); and indigo painted on the body with semen as a binding agent would signify fertility. The display of such manly attributes would have been important in battle. Further, the woad plant has anti-bacterial properties (Philip John, *pers. comm.*), and thus would have helped protect the warrior's wounds from going septic.

However, one of the most important rôles of body paint or tattoos is in providing marks of individual or group identity. These would also have marked the wearer as 'non-Roman'. Thus, cosmetic grinders could have been used in native body art in the early Roman period as a means to symbolise native identity or ethnicity. The grinders had the potential to be used by the Britons as tools of resistance, either against the Romans or against their own fellow Britons who chose to conform to the more 'Roman' standard of appearance.

While body painting for various ceremonies or rituals could have been easily washed off afterwards, leaving Romans none the wiser (useful for Britons with duplicitous affiliations), tattooing would have acted as a strong symbol of resistance against the Romans. It could have acted as a private joke among the Britons, a hidden discourse, signalled among themselves by acts such as casually rolling up a sleeve.

However, we must not assume that all body painting and tattooing in the Roman period was performed for reasons of resistance; they may also have acted simply as statements of identity which would have included information regarding gender and status. If so, there is no reason why they could not have been used in combination with what some may term a more typically 'Roman' mode of appearance in terms of hairstyle and dress. As Webster (1997b) puts it, 'resistance ... and acceptance need not be regarded as discrete responses but may occur simultaneously'.

10.6 Conclusion

My conclusions from the examples above are fourfold. First, all the artefacts listed above arrived in the archaeological record at subtly different times. Toilet instruments were present throughout the Iron Age but flourished in number in the late first and early second centuries AD; cosmetic grinders were arguably pre-Conquest but were greatest in number during the first and second centuries AD; hairpins were post-Conquest; and brooches increased in number during the Conquest period. Thus, even if the concept of 'Romanisation' was an uncontroversial one, it would still not be possible to argue in favour of a single process of a 'Romanisation of the Body'. What we can say is that, over time, people were investing more time, attention and commitment to their appearance and to grooming ever-smaller and subtler details of the body in their daily regimen, especially in the region of the face, hair and hands.

Second, but perhaps most obviously and importantly, not all 'Roman'-style artefacts were used solely for 'Roman'-style ways of life. Rather, artefacts were incorporated into existing spheres of use and meaning for indigenous practices as part of the pre-existing, pre-'Roman' trajectory. Thus, to refer to a 'Romanisation' of the body is a misnomer.

Third, there was great heterogeneity within three of the artefact classes mentioned above: the hairpins, toilet instruments and relative percentages of Colchester and Colchester derivative brooches. In addition, no two cosmetic grinders are identical (Jackson 1985). We should not be surprised at this. Such variation is normally ignored due to the constraints of the Romanisation model with its emphasis on homogeneity

and gradual uniform change. 'Roman' styles of material culture may have been used by some to articulate a 'Roman' identity (which may have varied widely and should not be regarded as 'fixed'), but may also have been subverted, appropriated and transformed (or even have occurred simultaneously) in varying, heterogeneous, and more localised expressions of ethnicity, status and gender.

Finally, people would have picked and chosen artefacts from a variety of sources from the available repertoire of which Mediterranean imports were a part. This repertoire would have been combined in unique ways by various social groups. Native people would have appropriated these new goods and invested them with new values for use within pre-existing social contexts. They would have used them for their own ends and within their own practices to fashion and construct local identities.

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