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Handling Feet: Roman Jugs as an Example of the Significance of Roman Foot-Shaped Artefacts

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Roman jugs with handles terminating in human feet exemplify artefacts representing feet and footwear. Using a 'bricolage' of archaeological theory that includes object biography and contextual archaeology, this paper explores the many facets of significance attached to such artefacts through the case study of foot-handled jugs. By assembling a corpus, patterns of geographical and chronological distribution can be examined. The setting in which the jugs were found provides evidence for their possible significance, with many coming from religious or funerary contexts. Some were deposited in watery settings, maybe as ritual offerings. Foot-handled jugs are often found as part of valuable assemblages. The feet on the handles may be an amusing change from the more usual heads, or they may stand synecdochically for deities such as Isis or Mercury. The feet may also serve an apotropaic function. The jugs demonstrate how varied and multi-layered the symbolism of Roman foot-shaped artefacts is.



Introduction

Many cultures view feet as unclean, yet the Romans chose foot iconography for many ornaments. My research topic is the role played by feet and footwear in Roman cosmology and how far these concepts applied to the north-western provinces. This paper will explore what we can learn from foot-shaped artefacts about the identity, and beliefs, of the people who owned them using the example of jugs where the handles terminate in a human foot or feet. Such jugs form part of a series of case-studies of foot-shaped artefacts that constitute my doctoral research. The full corpus of 1,322 foot-shaped objects assembled for my study includes lamps, shoe-brooches, oil flasks, knife/razor handles, amulets, rings, stamp matrices, furniture feet, carvings of footprints, foot-fragments from statues, and human footprints in ceramic building materials. First, some background details of the foot-handled jugs will be given, then details of the theoretical approach, and methodology, adopted. A detailed discussion of the findings will follow, before summing up the many meanings of Roman foot-shaped artefacts.

Roman foot-handled jugs date from the late first to the third centuries AD (Hoss 2020: 67) and are made from copper alloy, with the exception of one ceramic jug from the Roman potteries in Berg en Dal (Tassinari 1973: 139). The copper alloy jugs were beaten from sheet metal (Szabó 1981: 57), with the handle cast separately and soldered on (Mustață 2017: 120; Hoss 2020: 66). Handle moulds were found in a metal-worker's workshop in Tartus, Syria (Héron de Villefosse 1900: 318). This study catalogued 79 examples, 24 of which are represented by detached handles only. The jugs come in two slightly different shapes (Tassinari 1973: 135). The 'occidental' group is tall and slender, with an extended cylindrical lower body (**Figure 1**), while the body of the 'oriental' variety is ovoid (Crummy 2015). The western-type jugs are all very similar in size and shape, with the only differences being whether the feet are bare or shod, left, right, or a pair (Radnóti 1938: 167; Tassinari 1973: 136).

Theoretical basis

The theoretical approach adopted for this study is one of 'bricolage', rather than purism. Preucel concludes that 'there can be no single, self-contained theory of material culture' (2006: 257) and Hodder (2005: 68) suggests that a general unified theory of material culture should be regarded with some scepticism. The consistency test for this theoretical bricolage approach is whether it works consistently in relation to the research objectives; that is, it enables a better understanding of things that are too complex for any single philosophy or social theory (Olsen 2010: 14). Studying the meaning of Roman foot-shaped artefacts is certainly complicated.



Figure 1: Occidental jug from Epagnette: Louvre Br.2697 (Photo: Louvre Museum. Reproduced with permission). Oriental jug from Boyer: Musée Vivant Denon 73.1.14. (Photo: P Tournier. Reproduced with permission).

Since some Roman representations of feet and footwear, including jug handles, are used in votive and apotropaic ways, it was necessary to consider theories around object agency, a hotly debated concept, due largely to the question of whether objects can have intentionality. This study would argue that objects used as *ex votos* were perceived by the users as having an influence on the gods, and apotropaic objects were regarded as having a protective effect. From a pragmatic point of view, this adds up to an acceptance of object agency. However, more nuanced approaches have been developed.

Hoskins affirms that ‘asking questions about the agency of objects has led to the development of a more biographical approach’ (2006: 77), pointing out that Gell (1998: 11) suggests a more active model of an object’s biography, in which the object may not only assume a number of different identities, but may also ‘interact’ with those who look at it, use it, and try to possess it (Hoskins 2006: 76). Hoskins identifies two dominant forms of object biography, the second of which begins with historical or archaeological research and tries to ‘interrogate objects themselves by placing them in a historical context’ (2006: 78). This approach has been useful for interpreting the symbolism of

some foot-handled jugs since it provides a method to reveal the relationships between people and objects (Joy 2009: 540). Indeed, in her paper on foot-handled jugs, Tassinari (1973: 132) discusses the idea of a '*curriculum vitae*' for them, by which she means the steps for reconstructing their lives: finding their place of origin, date of manufacture, and establishing their movements across the Roman Empire.

Another theoretical approach which proved useful for studying the significance of Roman foot-handled jugs is 'contextual archaeology', since the symbolic and social meaning of Roman artefacts is 'not inherent and immutable, but rather determined by past actions and contexts' (Eckardt 2002: 27). Tilley (2001: 260) states that an object's meaning 'is created out of situated, contextualized social action which is in continuous dialectical relationship with generative rule-based structures forming both a medium for and an outcome of action'. In other words, an artefact is given significance when it is used by a person or group for a particular purpose.

Hodder explains that the first stage of the 'contextual archaeology' procedure is:

'to identify the network of patterned similarities and differences in relation to the object being examined and the questions being asked. This is a matter of taking the four dimensions of variation available to archaeologists – the temporal, spatial, depositional and typological' (1987: 6).

He then defines 'meaningful pattern' as 'that showing statistically significant similarities and differences' (1987: 6) and 'context' as 'the totality of the relevant environment' and 'all those associations which are relevant to its meaning' (1992: 13). The relationship between an object and its context is both complex and dialectic, as the context 'gives meaning to and gains meaning from the object' (Hodder 1992: 13). This approach may be criticized for its partial reliance on semiotics, but it has proved useful for this study because it fed into how the data were recorded and analysed.

Methodological steps taken in this research

Understanding foot-shaped artefacts as part of a social code, and their historically specific significance, calls for a detailed examination of the cultural context of their usage (Eckardt 2002: 28). In order to explore the meanings of artefacts in depth, Eckardt argues that 'we must first select artefacts that may be of social or cultural significance, and then compile a corpus, map their distribution, and examine their contexts' (2014: 2). In her 1973 study of Roman jugs with a handle ending in feet, Tassinari (1973: 128–130) outlines an artefact study method that produces an 'identity card', which includes, as far as possible, the date and place of discovery,

context, dimensions, state of preservation, a detailed description, photographs, and drawings.

This project, therefore, assembled data for a corpus of 79 jugs with handles ending in human feet, or handles detached from such jugs, from published sources and museum collections. Details of the published foot-shaped artefacts were obtained through a systematic literature review, beginning with the 40 jugs in Tassinari's study (1973). To this was added information from various museum catalogues (Radnóti 1938; den Boesterd 1956; Menzel 1966; Fiumi 1977; Faider-Feytmans 1979; Szabó 1981; Kohlert-Németh 1990; Nenova-Merdjanova 1998; Sedlmayer 1999; Pozo-Rodríguez 2001; Mustață 2017), archaeological reports (Forster and Knowles 1913; Liversidge 1958; Vanvinckenroye 1984; Pirling and Siepen 2006; Crummy 2011; Crummy 2015; Hoss 2020), other studies (Barthel and Kapf 1907; Nagy 1945; Bonnamour 1977; Sanie et al. 1980; Ruprechtsberger 1985; Spânu et al. 2016), and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) online database.

The corpus details were entered into a Microsoft Access database since this permits the inclusion of images and allows the material to be sorted according to a variety of criteria such as findspot, map coordinates (where available), material, size, chirality, date, and type. Some of these criteria are those advocated by Hodder (1987: 6) as the first stage of a 'contextual archaeology' approach. The greatest benefit of this method was that it facilitated the observation of chronological, spatial, and depositional distribution patterns. Distribution maps were created using QGIS software.

The most crucial field in the database for this study was the 'find-setting', a term chosen to avoid the ambiguity of the word 'context' in archaeology. The author decided on the following categories for the find-settings of foot-handled jugs:

- Funerary: burials, whether cremation or inhumation, and cemeteries;
- Military: legionary fortresses, forts, marching camps or mile castles;
- Religious: temples, sanctuaries, shrines and lararia;
- Villa/rural: this category is biased towards villas, which have received more attention than rural settlements;
- Urban: cities, *coloniae*, large towns, *civitas* capitals and small towns;
- Water: rivers, wells, springs and bogs;
- Other: anything not covered by the above;
- Unknown: due to the lack of adequate recording and reporting, this tends to be the largest category.

Classifying find-settings proved problematic, since the categories, especially 'urban', and 'military', are quite broad and tend to lump sites together, due to a lack of precise

recording, although this may be necessary to create sufficiently large numbers of artefacts (Eckardt 2005:144) to gain a representative sample, so that biases inherent in small samples can be lessened. There is also a danger that the find-setting categories are used for convenience, or are historically derived (Eckardt 2002: 29), which could impact on the accuracy of any analyses. It is possible to modify find-setting categories 'in order to incorporate material culture patterns as well as possible regional or status differences' (Eckardt 2002: 30). In fact, 'water' was a later addition to the find-setting categories, after it was discovered that so many of the jugs were found in watery settings. This contextual approach helps to facilitate a focus on patterns of usage and deposition, and thus to interpret the social significance of Roman foot-handled jugs.

Results

Geographical distribution

Exactly where jugs with a handle terminating in a human foot were manufactured is unclear, apart from the evidence of handle-moulds from Syria. Nagy (1945: 526) proposes that the jugs were produced in upper Gaul or the Rhineland. Szabó (1983: 91–92) suggests the occidental type was probably first produced in Gaul in the late first century, with production spreading to the Danube in the second century. Sedlmayer (1999: 18–19) argues that the more widely dispersed oriental type may have been produced in the Rhine-Danube area, principally for the export market, and that the design was probably transported east by military units. While this is possible, data for this study show that only five of the 79 jugs were found on military sites, so their association with the army does not appear to be close, although the makers may have travelled with the army. It is uncertain whether any foot-handled jugs are known from Italy: Tassinari (1973: 135) found no Italian examples but Fiumi (1977: 135) catalogues a foot-handled jug in the Museo Etrusco Guarnacci, Volterra, which was probably found nearby. Crummy (2015) suggests that the Hauxton jug could be related back to Italy, and Szabó (1981: 63) talks of Italian influences on the jugs. What can be said is that jugs with handles ending in feet were probably manufactured in various workshops in several provinces (Crummy 2015).

The jugs have a wide distribution from Syria to Britain (**Figure 2**), but are mostly found in the northern provinces of Pannonia, Germania, and Gallia Belgica, where they appear to follow the trade routes of the Rhine and Danube, and in southern Gaul along the valleys of the Rhône and Saône (Sedlmayer 1999: 20; Crummy 2015). The geographical distribution of foot-handled jug finds is, however, not as straight forward as the eastern/western labels might suggest (Crummy 2006: 5). Oriental types have been found in Lux, Boyer (**Figure 1**; Bonnamour 1977: 22–23), Narbonne, and Epfig,

France (Tassinari 1973: 137), and as far west as Tarragona and Garciez-Jimena in Spain (Pozo-Rodríguez 2001: 176). Occidental types have been found in Ustikolina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Igar, Budafok-Háros and Székesfehérvár, Hungary (Szabó 1981: 54), and Bistrița, Romania (Mustață 2017: 120–122). In addition, three jugs in the corpus were found beyond the Limes, one in a grave in Bitgum, the Netherlands, and two in Romania, at Muncelu de Sus and Mălăieștii de Jos (Spânu et al. 2016: 244).

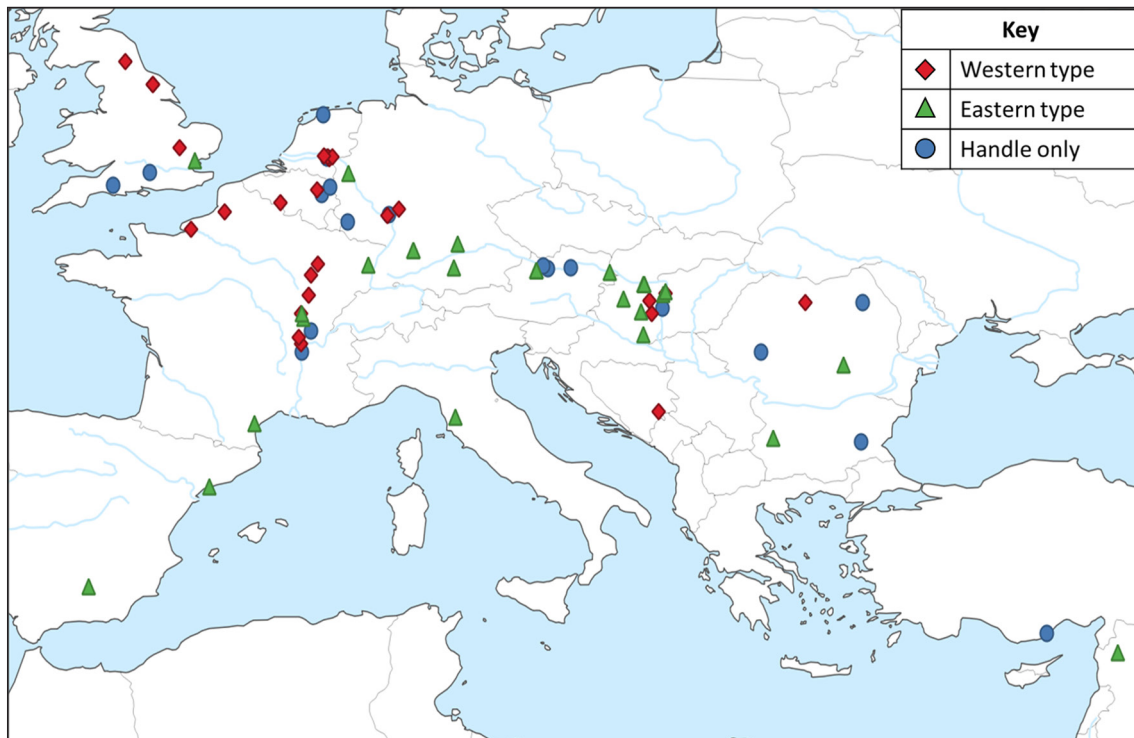


Figure 2: Map to show the geographical distribution of the different types of Roman foot-handled jug (Source: Author).

Focus on the feet

As mentioned above, there is some variation in the chirality of the feet on the jug-handles (**Figure 3**). The majority (38) are right feet, as might be expected due to Roman ideas of the right being auspicious (see, for example, Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 1.5; Horace, *Epistles* 2.2.37; Juvenal, *Satire* 10.5). However, 22 of the jug-handles have left feet and 15 depict pairs. This may be linked to the persistence of local beliefs, or to some form of resistance. It could also indicate the contractual use of left and right shoes proposed by van Driel-Murray (1999: 136). The foot symbolism on jugs may have been thought lucky enough (Eckardt 2013: 231), without the additional effect of chirality.

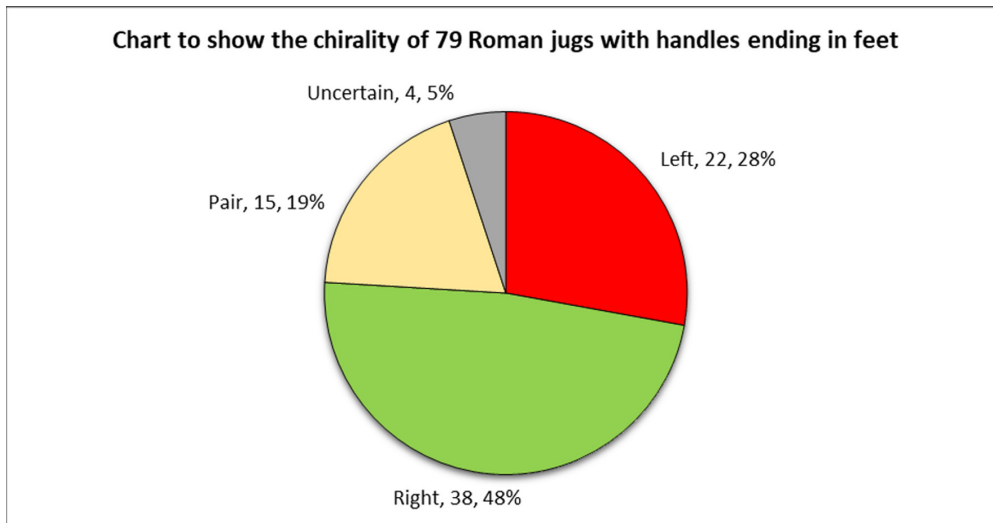


Figure 3: Chart to show the chirality of 79 Roman jugs with handles ending in feet (Source: Author).

The footwear type on six of the jugs is unclear, due to wear, fragmentation, or lack of recording. Most of the feet (53) are bare, and may, therefore, represent the feet of deities (Croom 2010: 74), while 18 wear sandals of a type that are seen on portraits of goddesses (Goldman 2001: 107). The feet on these jugs may, therefore, constitute an example of feet as synecdoche for deities, and hence could be apotropaic, invoking the god's protection. Shoes protect feet from cold, thorns, snakebites, and other harms, and may, therefore, protect metaphorically against evil influences (Forrer 1942: 77–78; van Driel-Murray 1999: 131; Eckardt 2013: 231). This study has found that the apotropaic use of Roman representations of footwear can be seen most clearly in foot-shaped amulets, but other foot-shaped artefacts appear to have performed this function, including foot-handled jugs.

Patterns of deposition

In order to assess the social significance of these foot-handled jugs, patterns in their find-settings were examined (Figure 4) as part of a contextual archaeological approach. The precise find-location of six jugs in this study is unknown, but only one is from an unknown country. The find-setting of 25 is unrecorded. Seven came from unspecified urban sites and, as previously mentioned, five from military sites. Four are from religious settings, one villa or rural, and 20 from water. The three from other find-settings came from a pottery, and two sand quarries. Funerary settings account for 14 foot-handled jugs, 10 oriental type and four occidental, 12 of them from graves. The contextual archaeological approach and the object biography of the jugs prompted the following interpretations.

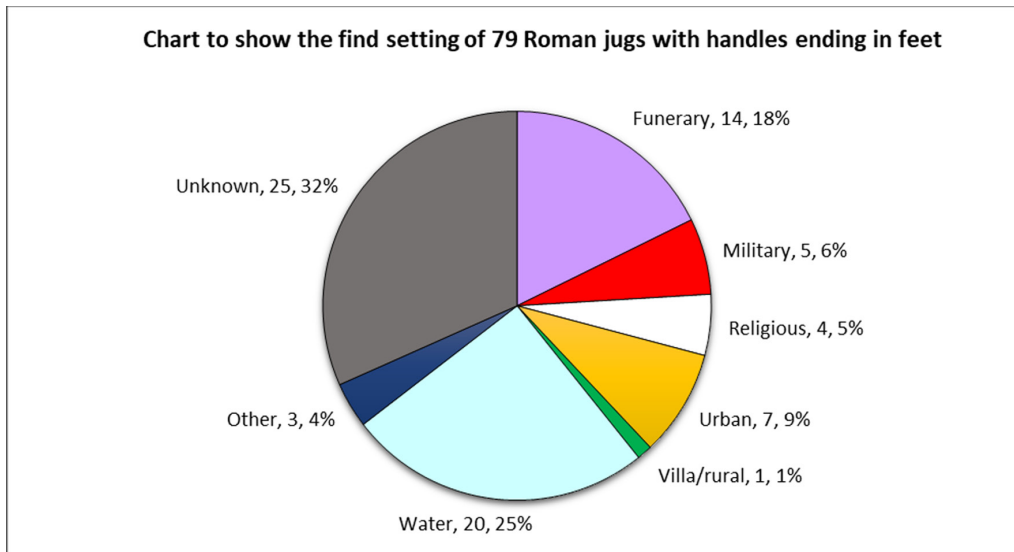


Figure 4: Chart to show the find-settings of 79 Roman jugs with handles ending in feet (Source: Author).

Funerary jugs

The inclusion of foot-handled jugs in funerary settings shows their significance as status markers, since many were found with other expensive items, although there is no recorded evidence for the age or gender of the deceased. These are all examples of the creation of an image of ‘the beautiful dead’ (Pearce 2013 : 458). The deceased’s mourners were showing that they could afford to put these valuable items in the ground. The foot-handled jug from the Roman cemetery at Krefeld-Gellep, Germany, recovered in association with cremation grave 5595, contained nine coins, the latest of which dates to AD 259 (Pirling and Siepen 2006: 311), and was found with other copper alloy and some glass vessels (Pirling 1993: 393–395). The jug from grave 3 in Wehringen Roman cemetery, Germany, was found with a copper alloy tripod, a four-legged table, seven further copper alloy jugs, three cups with ram’s head handles, 40 pieces of pottery, including a red painted plate and bowl (Szabó 1981: 64). The foot-handled jug found in Nagytétény, Hungary, came from a chariot burial that also included a folding stool, a bucket-handle, a copper alloy patera with an ornate handle, various other vessels, and three strigils (Károly 1890: 107 and Plate II). The other foot-handled jug from a funerary site was found next to ritual hearth 2 in the south-western Roman cemetery, Tongeren, Belgium, along with three complete pottery vessels (Vanvinckenroye 1984: Plate 126). A foot-handled jug from a Roman tomb in Ustikolina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, was found with an Eggers-Type 79 copper alloy bowl, a pan with a handle, a spear-shaped copper alloy object, and a copper alloy fibula (Szabó 1981: 64). Judging by the grave furniture, these are high-status burials. The funerary use of foot-handled jugs may be linked to

footwear in Roman burials. The deceased were often provided with shoes to assist and protect them on the journey to the Underworld (van Driel-Murray 1999). The author's research revealed 1,769 Roman burials across 190 sites with evidence of footwear. The depiction of the feet of deities on the handles would have made the jugs more protective. The jugs may also have been part of burial rituals to do with cleansing.

Jugs from religious settings

Three of the foot-handled jugs were found in, or near, religious sites. The Corbridge example was found at site 43, within the eastern military compound, near three temples, together with a bone plaque depicting a mother goddess (Forster and Knowles 1913: 235 and 276; Crummy 2015). This may be a votive deposit. Caution is, however, needed in associating this jug directly with the temples, as there is an intervening wall (Crummy 2015). The jug from Heybridge was found in a small pit next to the road approaching the site's temple precinct (Crummy 2015). Like the Corbridge example, no direct link can be established with the temple (Crummy 2015). However, a foot-handled jug from Igar, Hungary, was deposited in a sanctuary as part of a votive hoard containing a copper alloy *balsamarium* in the shape of a black African male head, a cauldron inscribed MANLVCI F, an umbo, a cup with a handle, and part of a buckle (Szabó 1981: 63). Szabó (1981: 63) interprets this example as sanctuary equipment. It is worth noting that many Roman altars have jugs carved on the side (Mustață 2017: 45) as a symbol of the cleansing associated with religious ritual, for which the jugs may have been used.

Jugs in watery settings

Twenty of the foot-handled jugs in the corpus come from find-settings involving water. This is the largest category of find-settings in this study's database and is greater than the number from funerary find-settings (14) or found with hoards (9). Eggers (1966: 100-110) provides some comparative data for the find setting distribution of Roman copper alloy jugs in general. He catalogues 23 from Britain, of which eight (35%) are from burials, five are from hoards (22%), two are urban (8%), the find-settings of two are unknown (9%) and three are from wells (13%). The remaining three (13%) are possibly from the river Granta near Hauxton Mill (see below), of which one is foot-handled. This shows a similar proportion of other types of Roman jug being deposited in watery contexts to this study's findings. Western-type jugs have often been found 'in association with rivers, wells, and springs, in or near sanctuary sites, suggesting that they were purpose-made ritual, rather than domestic, vessels' (Crummy 2011: 114; see also Szabó 1981: 63). Jugs from the corpus deposited in wells may support this argument. The jug from Grand, Vosges, was found

in a well at a depth of 12 metres along with other objects: a copper alloy cauldron, two pans, a knife, a saw, some scissors, two padlocks, and three ceramic vessels (Maxe-Werly 1871: 166–171). Slightly higher up in the fill were an oval copper alloy dish that had been silvered, and fragments of a disc that was a Roman calendar (Maxe-Werly 1871). A well in Bad Cannstatt, Germany, contained two foot-handled jugs, one complete and the other fragmentary (Tassinari 1973: 136). A foot-handled jug was excavated with other copper alloy vessels from the Cartanyà well in the *colonia* forum in Tarragona, Spain (MNAT 2021). The case is similar for the jug-handle from a well at Jupille-sur-Meuse, Liège, Belgium (Tassinari 1973: 136). The above all appear to be valuable items and are unlikely to have been merely thrown away, suggesting special deposition. A foot-handled jug handle was found in fill 6436 of well 5735 in Silchester (Clarke and Fulford 2011: 43). Other special deposits came from the same fill: a maple writing-tablet, a bucket handle, and a dog's scapula (Clarke and Fulford 2011: 313–314). Crummy interprets this jug-handle as a votive deposit (Crummy 2011: 114), which is likely, since animal bones in wells are indicative of structured deposition (Merrifield 1987: 32) and dog bones are of particular significance (Morris 2008: 9). While it is possible that complete jugs found in wells were used for drawing water and dropped in accidentally, the assemblages found with the foot-handled jugs in wells point to ritual deposition. The author's research into 1,311 Roman wells shows that the practice of depositing actual footwear in wells was fairly common. This was sometimes to mark a stage in a well's biography, its opening or closure, (van Driel-Murray 2011: 337; van Haasteren and Groot 2013: 25), and sometimes part of a votive process where one shoe was deposited and the other retained as a reminder of the vow (van Driel-Murray 1999: 136). The deposition of foot-handled jugs in wells may be linked to these practices.

Foot-handled jugs have also been found in rivers and water-logged ground. The author's corpus contains examples taken from the river Saône at Lux, Boyer, Beauregard-Jassens, and near Chalon-sur-Saône (POP 2021). Three of these were isolated finds and may have been dropped while collecting water. However, the examples from Lux and Chalon-sur-Saône were found near river crossings (Dumont 2002: 58) and could be foundation offerings (Eckardt 2021: 21–22) or *ex votos* for a safe crossing (Dumont 2002: 66). The jugs taken from the Danube at Budafok-Háros, Hungary (Szabó 1981: 52), the Waal near Nijmegen (den Boesterd 1956: 81), and one from Schallemmersdorf, Austria (Sedlmayer 1999: 18), were also isolated finds. Szabó (1981: 63) suggests that this type of jug may be a vessel used to store water used for ritual purposes from *in vivo flumine* rather than domestic water collection, and that the nature of the sites is related to the rites of sacrifice.

Other riverine deposits of foot-handled jugs form part of assemblages. The Boyer jug was accompanied by other vessels including a copper alloy pan (Bonnamour 1977: 21). One foot-handled jug from the Waal near Nijmegen was found with another type of jug, a pot with a lid, a large vessel, and a *patera* (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden 2021). This is reminiscent of the sets of flagons and *paterae* commonly carved on the sides of Roman altars (Henig 1984: 131; Mustăţă 2017: 48–53), so there could be an element of sacrifice in these deposits. The Epagnette jug (**Figure 1**) was found in a peat bog near the river Somme (Tassinari 1973: 136), possibly a votive watery context, and was filled with Hadrianic coins. This coin-hoard would have increased the value of the offering. It is debateable whether the jug from Hauxton should be classed as a watery find. Hurrell (1904: 496) reports that it was found above Hauxton Mill ‘between the mill stream and the rivulet which carries off the water when the mill is not working’, and rivers change course over time, so it could conform to the pattern. However, both Liversidge (1958: 11) and Eggers (1966: 99) suggest that the accompanying finds of two further copper alloy jugs, four glass vessels, an iron lamp, and ceramics, including a barbotine cup, may indicate a burial similar to those in Belgic *tumuli*, and therefore high-status. Nevertheless, many of the foot-handled Roman jugs found in watery settings appear to have been deposited for ritual purposes, as markers of a stage in an object biography, as votives, or as symbols of sacrificial rites.

Jugs in hoards

It is not unusual to find foot-handled jugs in association with other bronzes or with Roman coins, some of which have already been discussed. This study found nine examples of foot-handled jugs associated with hoards. A jug found between Chaumont and Langres, France, was filled with Roman coins (Tassinari 1973: 136). A group of three copper alloy jugs found by a detectorist near Nunnington, North Yorkshire, includes two with foot-handles (PAS YORYM-68EAC1). As well as a foot-handled jug, the ‘Vieille Bruyère’ sand quarry at Givry, France, yielded an assemblage of two cauldrons, a balance rod, a second copper alloy jug, four copper alloy bowls, three tinned dishes, some greenish pottery, and some glass vials (Moisin 1954: 181). The jug from Nida-Heddernheim, Germany, was found with other bronzes (Szabó 1981: 64), as was a handle from Enns-Lauriacum, Austria (Sedlmayer 1999: 18 and fig. 25). The Weißenburg hoard, which includes a foot-handled jug, comprises 114 objects, including 18 copper alloy statuettes, ten other figurative bronzes, eleven silver votive sheets, three copper alloy face masks, an iron helmet, 20 copper alloy vessels, 18 copper alloy fittings and 33 iron implements (Donderer 2004: 235). It was thought that this hoard may have been left by plunderers (Donderer 2004: 236) but Donderer (2004: 238) argues that

the hoard was carefully deposited, which does not fit with looters. It may have been a temple treasure, based on the cult statues in the hoard, but Donderer posits that the assemblage is too heterogeneous for this (2004: 236). He suggests that it should be viewed as being left by a trader in metal goods (Donderer 2004: 242).

Two of the hoards featuring foot-handled jugs come from beyond the Limes in Romania so their significance may have varied from hoards from within the Roman Empire. The hoard from Mălăieștii de Jos contained 74 coins dating from Vespasian to Valerian I, a fibula, five bracelets, a pendant, and two silver ingots (Spânu et al. 2016: 237). The hoard was not buried in a funerary context or in a house (Spânu et al. 2016: 237). Indeed, Spânu et al. argue that, since the hoard is composed of a jug and coins from the Roman Empire together with jewellery that ‘reflected the preferences of the *Barbaricum* elites’, it is ‘a significant cultural landmark for the crossroads of the Principate in its nadir phase with the earliest migrations taking wing in the Lower Danube region in the last decades of the 3rd century’ (Spânu et al. 2016: 255). The Muncelu de Sus jug contained 667 coins, ranging from the late republic to Marcus Aurelius (Sanie et al. 1980: 249). This hoard is, therefore, substantially earlier than that of Mălăieștii de Jos. At the same site seven silver vessels and three further coin-hoards of a similar date were discovered (Sanie et al. 1980: 249). Due to the value of these deposits, it is suggested that Muncelu de Sus could have been the residence of an important Dacian leader and the coins may have been *stipendia* received by one of the Costoboc kings (Sanie et al. 1980: 266) which were buried as a result of Roman action in East Carpathia beginning with Marcus Aurelius (Sanie et al. 1980: 266).

These hoards containing foot-handle jugs may have had a variety of different and overlapping significances (Millett 1994: 100), which were possibly not the same as within the Roman Empire. Some may be collections of valuable metal for recycling. Others may be markers of power and status. The foot was a symbol of domination (Dio Cassius 50.24.3; 52.34.8; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Maximinus* 28; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Probus* 20), so the inclusion of foot-handled jugs seems appropriate. The hoards could also represent votive deposits (Millett 1994: 103; Gerrard 2009: 179).

Conclusions

This paper has presented a case study of foot-handled jugs as an example of Roman foot-shaped artefacts, exploring their social significance through the theoretical approaches of contextual archaeology and object biography. This discussion is based on a catalogue of 79 jugs or detached handles which were found across the northern areas of the Roman Empire. The relative rarity of Roman foot-handled jugs compared with other types (Szabó 1981: 63) may have rendered them more valuable. Thus they

are appropriate markers of status. Many of these jugs appear to have been of ritual significance, being used in funerary and sanctuary contexts, and as votive deposits, possibly because the depiction of feet on the handles represents deities (Croom 2010: 74). Religious symbols, such as the feet of divinities, are common on objects found in hoards (Millett 1994: 100), so this may be why the foot-handled jugs were considered appropriate containers for, and components of, valuable hoards. The feet may, as with other Roman foot-shaped artefacts, have performed an apotropaic function.

The symbolism of Roman artefacts in the form of feet and footwear is varied and multi-layered. It is unnecessary to consider 'deposition in the ground or in wet places as either sacred or profane', since these actions were probably 'invested with significance in both spheres' (Millett 1994: 104). The ritual use of Roman foot-shaped artefacts may be evidenced by specimens from graves, temples or shrines, and deposited in watery contexts. The author's research includes a corpus of 1,322 foot-shaped objects across 12 different types. Of these, 44% of those with a known find-setting, and 26% of all foot-shaped objects in the corpus come from a ritual setting, be it funerary, religious, or watery. It is, of course, necessary to be aware of a bias towards these find-settings, since objects are more likely to survive when carefully deposited, rather than become fragmented or be melted down and recycled. Nevertheless, the evidence we have does point to the reasonably common deposition of foot- and shoe-shaped artefacts in ritual settings.

While some foot-shaped artefacts may be mere novelties, many of them were chosen to display power, wealth, and status. Some were religious offerings or added to the preparedness of the dead for the journey to the Underworld. Foot-shaped objects were regarded as having apotropaic properties, seen most clearly in amulets. This paper has, through the example of jugs whose handle terminates in human feet, demonstrated how ubiquitous, polysemous, and important representations of feet were in Roman life.

Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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