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COIN PELLET MOULDS FROM OLD PLACE, SLEAFORD, LINCOLNSHIRE.

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Summary

A number of fragments of coin pellet moulds were examined and analysed. They were of rectangular shape and the analytical evidence suggested that they were used in the production of silver alloy flans for coin production. A larger group of similar moulds has been found on another part of the settlement and they are associated with a local mint.

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COIN PELLET MOULDS FROM OLD PLACE, SLEAFORD, LINCOLNSHIRE

A number of fragments of coin pellet moulds (AM Lab nos 840480-505) were examined and analysed in an attempt to identify traces of metal on the surfaces.

Coin pellet moulds are a characteristic find from major Celtic sites of the immediately pre-Roman Iron Age. They have been found all over Europe as well as in Britain (Tournaire et al 1982). There has been some dispute over the use of the term "coin pellet mould" with some people arguing that there is no conclusive evidence for their use in the production of pellets specifically for coin production (eg Casey 1983). The term is somewhat misleading in that they are not moulds in the usual sense but are used to produce pellets of metal of uniform weight (flans) for use in coin production. However Collis (1985) has argued that their use for the production of coin blanks is still the most likely explanation for their existence.

The moulds are in the form of rectangular shallow clay trays into which are made flat-bottomed circular holes, often in rows of up to seven by seven. Tylecote (1962) showed that individual cavities in a tray could be loaded with small fragments of sheet silver or copper which were then easily melted down by heating the charged tray under a charcoal fire and blowing air over each depression in succession. The use of precious metals such as gold and silver in the moulds meant that they would not have wetted the surface of the moulds and would have formed small pellets with convex surfaces. Collis suggests that the moulds would only have been used once and would have been broken up to remove the pellets (1985: 238).

There are a number of mould fragments from Old Place and they generally conform to the usual size and shape of other such moulds in Britain (eg Verulamium - Frere 1958: 13). A large group of some 3,000 fragments was found on another part of the Sleaford settlement (Jones et al 1976) and the fragments described here are a part of the same group. This site was an early Iron Age settlement which developed into a Belgic settlement and finally into a Roman town. The large number of coin pellet mould fragments suggests a local mint.

The mould fragments were all very similar, of reduced fired clay, and suggested a rectangular shape as one corner fragment was recovered (840482). The largest fragment contained seventeen holes in three rows with six holes in one direction (840494). The holes were mostly about 9mms in diameter, though some moulds had some larger holes of 10-11mms diameter which suggests that two sizes of flan were being produced.

All the mould surfaces were analysed by energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence (EDXRF) both before and after washing. In some moulds no traces of metal were detected, however some moulds had traces of copper, zinc, lead and/or silver. The majority of coins of this period were made of silver alloys and it is therefore likely that this was the main metal used in the production of the pellets. The other metals detected were likely to be present as impurities which wetted the surface of

the mould and therefore are more easily detected as they would have become chemically bound into the clay.

The moulds reported previously from Sleaford contained one fragment that had a pellet remaining in the mould. This was analysed and was found to be a copper-silver alloy with approximately 65-70% silver (Jones et al 1976: 239). The analytical evidence from the moulds analysed here would suggest that similar alloys were being used.

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