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Late Roman iconographic representations on Hispano-Roman bridle cheek-pieces

THE HORSE IN THE HISPANO-ROMAN WORLD

The horse has been one of the most useful animals to man, since, once it had been tamed, this “noble brute” was put to good use in the advance along the road of civilisation. With its help transport and communications were greatly facilitated and man was able to extend empires and civilisations to far-flung regions. An indispensable companion in hunting with dogs since the remotest of times, the horse became just as close a partner in certain areas of sport, such as horse or chariot races, for which we find the best examples in the games of the Roman circus. The horse also played a religious role as the complement of deities or myths, even being offered as a burnt sacrifice to appease the gods, or sacrificed by the augurs to reveal the future. In Rome such offerings took place during the Consualia, annual festivals in which horse races were also celebrated.

Such an outstanding character did not escape the notice of the writers of antiquity, who often paid homage to him in their works. Among the Latin authors there are frequent references to this beast and the different breeds that were to be found in the Empire. Hispano-Roman horses enjoyed a well deserved fame among the classical authors. For example, Strabo (3,4,15) informs us that “... Iberia produces a large number of deer and wild horses...” and that “the colour of the horses of the Celtiberi, which is dappled, changes on reaching the coastal zone of Iberia...”. Pliny (nat. 37,203) notes Hispania’s wealth of horses in the conclusion to his work *Naturalis Historia*, where he compares the wealth of the different regions of the Empire “... she [Hispania] is, it is true, poor in parts, but where fertile she yields cereals, olive oil, wine, horses and metals in abundance...”. We find the same idea in Mela (2,86). Pliny (nat. 8,166) also mentions several breeds of Hispanic horse in the 1st century, including some of their characteristics. Two varieties of horse were bred in the lands of the Gallaeci and the Astures: the *tieliones* and the *asturcones*. He describes the gait of the latter, which were the smaller, as follows: “... they do not proceed in the usual way, but have a lightness of step resulting from the simultaneous movement of both legs on the same side; the horses have been trained to trot in this way...”. The *asturcones* can still be seen in present-day Asturias and are cited by other writers of antiquity as native to this region.

A very popular legend, contemporary with this period, serves as an introduction to the present study. It was repeated already by Strabo (44,3,1) who attributed the speed of the horses of the Tagus region to their mares being sired by the wind Zephyr himself. This tradi-

tion circulated among other wellknown writers at the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire, such as Pliny the Elder (nat. 8,166 and 16,93), Virgil (georg. 3,271), Varro (rust. 2,1,19), Columella (6,27,7) and Silius Italicus (3,379–381). In the Late Empire, too, we find echoes of this legend in Servius Grammaticus, who, in his commentary on the Georgics (3,273), alludes to the tradition of these mares, sired by the wind, bestowing a short life on the offspring of such a union, a fact that he draws from Varro and Pliny. Isidorus of Seville (orig. 12,1,11) also refers to this last assertion. Furthermore, the name *Tagus* was a common one for horses at that time, perhaps in memory of the old legend, or by way of allusion to the animal's geographical origin. *Tagus* is the name of the horse appearing on the bridle-bit cheek-piece in the former Jules Sambon collection at Paris, or the equine portrayed in the mosaic of Aguilafuente (Segovia)¹.

In the late Roman period the horse rose to great importance. Research into its role in the world of the owners of the *latifundia* (large landed estates) of Hispania, or in that of other Mediterranean zones, is one of the most interesting of areas, although a critical survey has yet to be produced. The *possessores* or *potentiores* of these villas devoted themselves to breeding horses alongside their stock-raising activities, as the letters of Symmachus show². Dating from the transition of the 4th to the 5th century AD, these letters underline the importance of Hispanic horses which, in Rome, were famed as the best. In the world of the *latifundia*, horses contributed not only to the pleasures of the hunt for the *possessor*, as a part of his *otium*, but also represented a symbol of their owner's prestige at public games, especially the *ludi circenses*. A further point to bear in mind is the possible military character of some of these horses. Although it has still not been clearly demonstrated that the custom of maintaining private troops was general in Hispania, to defend the large villas against invaders or Bagaudae, it can certainly be affirmed that in some cases these private troops must have existed. Such troops would number possibly only a few men, so it is more logical to suppose that they were cavalry than infantry. It is possible that the soldiers who formed part of these private troops would be employed in the farm labours of the *latifundium*, too, belonging therefore either to the class of slaves (*servuli*), or to that of free peasants (*rusticani*). If to what we have just mentioned above we add the extent to which Hispanic horses were valued, the existence of stables for the breeding and training of horses is fully justified, for which the most direct archaeological evidence is the harness-fittings that occur very frequently on Spanish villas.

The tastes and minds of these landlords, who owned large stables for stud-farming on their domains, are reflected in the artistic objects that surrounded them. Among the iconographic themes preferred for the decoration of their houses we thus often encounter scenes of the hunt or the circus, in which the horse is a prominent element. These representations are very abundant in Hispanic mosaics, among which we shall pick out, to name but a few, the villa at El Ramalate (Tudela, Navarra), in which the owner of the estate (by the name of Dulcitus) can be seen mounted on his caparisoned horse and in the act of capturing an animal³; the pavement of Marianus and his horse Pafius, found in Mérida⁴, or the hunting scene portrayed in the mosaic of the villa at La Olmeda (Pedrosa de la Vega, Palencia)⁵. Murals with

¹ M. R. LUCAS PELLICER, La influencia africana en la iconografía equina de la villa de Aguilafuente (Segovia). Homenaje al Profesor Gratiniano Nieto. Cuad. Prehist. y Arqu. 13/14, 1986/87, 227–228.

² J. ARCE, Los caballos de Simmaco. Faventia 4, 1982, 35–44; J. M. BLÁZQUEZ, La caballería en Hispania durante el Bajo Imperio. Stud. Tardoant. II (Messina 1989) 45–76.

³ B. TARACENA et al., Excavaciones en Navarra II (1947–1951) (Pamplona 1956) 3–40, pls. 10–12.

⁴ J. M. ALVÁREZ MARTÍNEZ, Mosaicos romanos de Mérida. Nuevos hallazgos. Monografías emeritenses 4 (Badajoz 1990) 79–93.

⁵ P. DE PALOL, La villa romana de la Olmeda de Pedrosa de la Vega (Palencia). Guía de las excavaciones (Palencia 1986).

hunting themes featuring horses have been found in Mérida⁶. But it is perhaps in the realm of bronze harness-fittings that the figure of a horse is most often represented. Harness-fittings and, of course, cheek-pieces from the ends of bridle-bits, were frequently decorated with horses either trotting, or being ridden. This iconography must be placed in relation to images of victorious horses as symbols of wellbeing and good fortune. Together with the archaeological evidence, these iconographic representations enable us to form a picture of late Roman horsemanship.

HISPANO-ROMAN BRIDLE-BITS

The historical situation is reflected by the frequent appearance of pieces of horse-equipment on Hispanic territory, especially those associated with bridle trappings. Among the latter, pieces connected with the bit are the most abundant, the cheek-pieces of the bit being one of the most frequent finds. The most typical bit in Roman Hispania consisted of three elements: two cannons or bars of iron, with a ring or hook at each end, which would be linked in the centre to form a jointed mouth-piece; two cheek-pieces fitted to the outer end of each bar, and finally a pair of rings linked with each of the large rings of the bit. To the upper loops of the cheek-pieces would be attached the straps of the head-stall, while the terminal rings allowed the attachment of the reins (*habenae* or *retinaculae*), by insertion of their truncated biconical toggles. It has been possible to reconstruct this arrangement thanks to the complete bits found at Vega Baja (Toledo)⁷, Fuentespreadas⁸, Palencia⁹ and Clunia¹⁰. Also useful for reconstructing the composition of these *frena equorum* are several iconographic representations, such as the horse shown in the mosaic of the villa at Dueñas (Palencia). This type of bit was used in Hispania, at least, from the 2nd to the 4th century AD, as shown by the finds from Vega Baja and Fuentespreadas. The bits with a jointed mouth-piece represent a technical advance on rigid bits, as they free the mouth of the horse and do not harm it, since they exert their pressure on the corners of the lips. In the Roman world, this type of jointed bit was used above all on parade horses, but probably often also on horses belonging to the military cavalry and sometimes by racehorses.

Contemporary with these objects, the horse in the Dueñas mosaic gives a splendid illustration of the position in which they were worn (Fig. 1,1). The villa at Dueñas had two periods of occupation: one before the last quarter of the 3rd century AD and the other afterwards in the 4th century. The mosaic which features the horse was made with small tesserae on a fan-shaped background, a common late technique¹¹. Another indication of date is given by the label, with the inscription AMORIS, written in very evolved capital letters¹². The detail in which the mosaic was executed and the very precise representation of a complete late Roman head-stall deserve a close analysis.

We consider the fragment of mosaic that we are commenting on to be of prime importance for Roman Hispania, since in it are contained several metal items peculiar to, and very char-

⁶ L. ABAD CASAL, *La pintura romana en España* (Alicante 1982) 82–86.

⁷ J. AURRECOECHA, *Bronze studs from Roman Spain*. *Journal Roman Military Equipment Stud.* 7, 1996, pl. 1 and fig. 16.

⁸ *ibid.*, fig. 14.

⁹ P. DE PALOL, *Bronces romanos de la provincia de Palencia*. *Bol. Seminario Arte y Arq.* 33, 1967, 237–239, pl. 5.

¹⁰ P. DE PALOL, *Brozes d'epoca baix-romana i visigoda del Museu Episcopal de Vic*. *Stud. Vicensia* 1 (Vic 1989) 48–49, fig. 11.

¹¹ P. DE PALOL, *El mosaico de tema oceánico de la villa de Dueñas (Palencia)*. *Bol. Seminario Arte y Arq.* 29, 1963, 29–34.

¹² *ibid.*, 30.

acteristic of, Spanish archaeology. It is a case, furthermore, of a basic document for understanding the arrangement of head-harnesses in the period of the Late Empire. The Dueñas representation is exceptional in showing two of the most frequent metal horse-trappings found in archaeological discoveries in the Peninsula, i. e. the bridle-bit cheeks and truncated biconical toggles. The cheek which appears in this mosaic is of the simplest type, formed of a rod of iron curved into the required shape, for which the closest morphological parallels are to be found in the bridle-bits recorded at Fuentespreadas, tomb 1¹³.

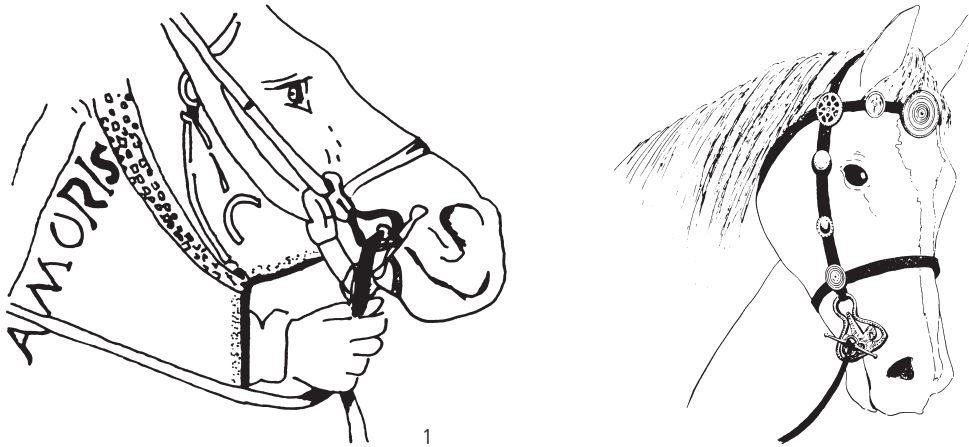
The basic straps which secured the head-stall on the horse were a noseband, a pair of cheek-straps, a browband and a headpiece, a throatlatch also frequently appearing. The set was completed by a bridle rein. This arrangement, although somewhat more complex, is present on the bronze head of an equestrian statue from Pollentia¹⁴. Nevertheless, the horse in the villa at Dueñas displays a rather more complicated harness, with both a snaffle and curb rein. The end result is a head-stall that resembles some used in contemporary riding, particularly those which are associated with the so-called German and French nosebands. Thanks to this mosaic the use in late Roman times can be established of a snaffle cheek-strap (“montante de filete” in Spanish equestrian terminology) with its corresponding rein, together with a second cheek-strap, somewhat like a curb strap (“montante de brida”), also with its own rein. Noseband, browband, headpiece and a throatlatch make up the rest of the harness, with the peculiarity of a floating strap hanging from the throatlatch that could have terminated in a crescentic pendant.

In contemporary horse-riding this sort of equipment entails the use of a double mouth-piece, of snaffle and curb bits; that of the snaffle being usually a simple bridoon, while that of the curb corresponds with the current L’Hotte, Scamperdale or Pelham model. The mouth-pieces of these modern curbs have two terminal rings, one for attachment to the rein and the other for the curb cheek-strap. Nevertheless, the Dueñas horse seems to have used a single mouth-piece, although with the typical cheek-pieces of the Roman world, to which should be added the truncated biconical toggles typical of Hispania and northern Morocco¹⁵. From the association of these two elements, cheek-pieces and toggles, with a harness that employs a double rein and cheek-straps to the cheek-piece and bit, one might draw several conclusions regarding Roman equitation in this specific geographical region. Some bronze cheek-pieces could have served to link the mouth-piece to the curb cheek-strap by means of their upper loops, at the level of the noseband; which leaves unexplained how the snaffle cheek-strap would be linked to the noseband, although we believe that this could be resolved by means of a lengthened toggle like that shown on the horse in this mosaic. The difference between the Roman and modern harness lies in the use of a single mouth-piece combined with two cheek-straps with their respective bridles, though for the moment we do not understand the exact functioning of this application, or the form in which the connection between the different elements of the head-stall at the level of the noseband can be resolved. As a working hypothesis we may venture that one of the head-stalls was for presentation, and had a double function: both as an adornment of the animal and as a means of restraining it when at rest. The ornamental nature of this second head-stall could be augmented by a collar or neck-adornment worn by the animal, a common element in other iconographic representations of parade horses, which is usually highly decorated.

¹³ L. CABALLERO ZOREDA, *La necrópolis tardorromana de Fuentespreadas (Zamora)*. Excav. Arqu. España 80 (Madrid 1974) 74–76, fig. 18.

¹⁴ AURRECOECHA (note 7) fig. 16.

¹⁵ J. AURRECOECHA, *Las guarniciones de cinturón y atalaje de tipología militar en la Hispania Romana, a tenor de los bronceos hallados en la Meseta Sur*. *Estud. Prehist. y Arqu. Madrileñas* 10, 1995/95, 74–75.



1 Figural cheek-pieces. 1 Horse shown on the mosaic at Dueñas, Palencia;
2 Reconstruction of a harness buried in tomb 1 at Fuentespreadas, Zamora.

The context of the bridle-bit from Vega Baja (Toledo) was a Roman tomb belonging to a doctor, probably a military doctor (*miles medicus*) who was a *miles ordinarius*. Up to now it is the oldest bit in the whole Hispanic series, being also one of the rare groups that can be precisely dated, from the coin of Marcus Aurelius that was associated with the grave goods, dating the burial to the second half of the 2nd century AD. The bridle comprised a bit and a series of studs that ornamented or fastened the straps. The bit, in turn, was found to consist of a jointed mouth-piece accompanied by two lateral cheeks and as many truncated biconical toggles. The same decorative impulse connects the elements which carry the ornament, since both cheeks and studs are pelta-shaped. In the burial there were none of the small buckles peculiar to horse-harness, used to fasten and adjust some buckles with others, which leads us to think that the straps could have been fastened by means of studs like those found in the burial. This feature does not seem to be exclusive to the horse under discussion, since in Hispania this type of buckle is almost unknown, in contrast with the overwhelming abundance of other metal horse-trappings. From this perhaps the fastening of the straps by means of studs and eyelets instead of buckles may be considered to be a Hispanic characteristic. If we consider that the studs, of which there were at least six, served to join or reinforce the points of union of the straps and we distribute them over a conventional Roman head-stall, the following composition would result: browband, head-piece, cheek-piece, throatlatch, noseband and strap linking the latter with the browband; to which might be added a further putative strap between the noseband and browband. As may be observed, the arrangement is broadly comparable with the head-stall shown on the equestrian statue of Pollentia, coinciding not only in the strapping, but also in the correspondence between the position of the mounts of the latter and the studs of the former.

In Fuentespreadas, burial 1, there appeared two complete bits, comprising cannons jointed by means of rings, two figure-of-eight cheeks and a series of small rings (Fig. 1,2). The grave goods, dating to the end of the 4th or beginning of the 5th century AD, comprised a rich variety of objects: harness-fittings, tableware of bronze, glass and pottery, elements of personal adornment (belt-buckles, etc.), ironwork and weapons¹⁶.

¹⁶ CABALLERO (note 13).

HISPANO-ROMAN BRIDLE CHEEK-PIECES

Over the years these types of bronzes have been the subject of numerous interpretations and classifications in Spain. At an early stage of research it was even thought that they could be cases of Phoenician or Greek examples. The use ascribed to these objects was first noted by Santos Gener, who discounted their use as belt-fasteners and classified them as horse-trappings¹⁷. Later, Palol dated them to the Dominate period and maintained the hypothesis of their use on horse bits¹⁸, as was to be confirmed after study of the bit in the Fontaneda collection¹⁹. A symmetrical disposition of these fittings came to be suggested by the appearance of pairs with identical decoration, such as the twin roundels from Santa Elena (Jaén)²⁰. We also owe to Palol the division of these fittings into five main types²¹. The first group comprises circular cheeks with openwork decoration of geometric patterns, among which are included those ornamented with horseshoe arcs (“keyholes”) and those with inscriptions. Under the second type are grouped the cheeks with chi-rhos, while those decorated with various scenes make up the third. Palol’s group IV consists of openwork cheeks decorated with horses, the iconography in perfect accord with the use to which they were destined. Finally, the fifth type comprises cheeks with symmetrically confronted zoomorphic representations, among which those featuring panthers or felines are prominent. On the other hand, in the light of finds at Conímbriga, Pereira urges a new classification, arranged in two main series by form and decoration²². According to their morphology we encounter three main groups. In type A are the decorated circular plaques, a group in which he distinguishes those in sheet metal cut with a graver or die, and those cast in a mould. In group B are found those formed of a simple curved hoop, like the ones from Fuentespreadas; while in C we have examples with a S-shaped profile decorated with zoomorphic motifs. Pereira established two broad divisions based on ornamental criteria: I (undecorated cheeks) and II (decorated cheeks). Recently G. Ripoll has proposed a new classification with 11 divisions, extending Palol’s initial typology²³. Of all the series of late Roman cheek-pieces, the most interesting iconographically are those with figural decoration which may be divided into three main groups: 1) confronted animals in heraldic pose, frequently panthers or dolphins; 2) horses shown singly or in scenes; 3) scenes, generally of a mythological nature, or representations of *venationes* (wild-beast hunts).

CHEEK-PIECES WITH HERALDICALLY CONFRONTED ANIMALS

The representation of animals heraldically confronted, with back-turned heads, is an iconographic motif of great antiquity. Originating in ancient oriental heraldic iconography, it became common throughout the western Mediterranean basin and in present-day central Europe. Confronted animals also enjoyed popularity in the Roman iconographic repertoire, so it is not necessary to search for ancient roots or distant oriental parallels in order to account for the appearance of these animals on our bridle cheek-pieces.

¹⁷ S. DE LOS SANTOS GENER, La falera de Monturque (Córdoba). Mem. Mus. Arqu. Prov. 11/12, 1950/51, 31.

¹⁸ P. DE PALOL, Algunas piezas de adorno de arnés de época tardorromana hispanovisigoda. Archivo Español Arqu. 25, 1952, 298.

¹⁹ PALOL (note 9) 238.

²⁰ P. DE PALOL, Dos piezas de arnés con representaciones de caballos. Oretania 5, 1960, 218.

²¹ PALOL (note 18) 297–391.

²² J. PEREIRA, Elementos de freios tardo-romanos de Conímbriga. Conímbriga 9, 1970, 7–15.

²³ G. RIPOLL LOPEZ/M. DARDER, Frena equorum. Guarniciones de frenos de caballos en la antigüedad tardía hispánica. Espacio, Tiempo y Forma I,7, 1994, 292–293.

Cheeks decorated with a hybrid animal, formed by the figure of a dolphin with a tail ending in a horse's head, are of frequent occurrence, as on the examples from Cástulo²⁴ and in the Ariadne Galleries, New York²⁵ (Fig. 2,1). It is not clear how this symbiosis between horse and dolphin should be interpreted. Dolphins often appear on harness-fittings, such as so-called 'reins-guides' or decorative mounts, but never as hybrid animals. The importance of the dolphin in late Hispanic iconography is underlined by its frequent occurrence on the upper loops for the cheek-straps on the bridle roundels under discussion. As no more than a hypothesis we might venture a connection between these dolphins and the Roman circus, where figures of dolphins were used as 'lap-counters'. The association between circus iconographic motifs and our cheek-pieces is clear, too, in the other groups which will be analysed below, perhaps presenting us with the same inter-connecting link that surrounds the two main activities in which Hispanic late Roman society made use of horses: hunting parties and circus games. We know of only one case in which the confronted animals are genuine dolphins (and not hybrid animals) and that is in the example found in the Roman villa at La Olmeda (Palencia)²⁶, where they hold a shell in their mouths (Fig. 2,2).

More frequent still are cheek-pieces decorated with confronted felines, generally panthers. There are more than a dozen examples known, which may be divided into three groups: 1) female panthers joined at the breast. Notable examples are the cheeks from La Torre (Ávila)²⁷, Elche(?)²⁸ (Fig. 2,3) and Castro de Viladonga²⁹; 2) panthers flanking a vase, as on the piece from Conímbriga³⁰ (Fig. 2,5); 3) hybrid animals with the head and forelegs of a feline, a dolphin-shaped body, and the tail of a fish in the form of a pelta. The only pieces known come from Conímbriga³¹ (Fig. 2,6). Except for the cheek from Conímbriga, on which the panthers are associated with a wine-container and so may be included in the iconographic cycle relating to Dionysus, the rest may now be connected with the games of the amphitheatre and hunting parties, as will be further analysed in our conclusions.

The typology of the animals which feature in circus hunting-spectacles, represented singly and not in scenes (such as the panthers just mentioned), is completed by the cheek decorated with two confronted bears in the former Rosentingel collection now housed in the Archaeological Museum, Barcelona³². It is a unique piece of its type, since we know of no other example showing plantigrades. On it the animals appear in a naturalistic landscape indicated by means of vegetal leaves. The pose in which they are shown, standing on their back legs, is very typical of these animals (Fig. 2,4).

CHEEK-PIECES WITH HORSES

This group is one of the most numerous and heterogeneous, the unifying element being the artist's interest in the figure of the horse, making the animal the main feature of the piece, as a result of which the models are quite varied. The iconographic themes chosen for these bronzes chime perfectly with their functional nature as horse-trappings, besides which they have

²⁴ J. M. BLÁZQUEZ et al., Cástulo IV. Excav. Arqu. España 131 (Madrid 1984) 50–51, fig. 22,76.

²⁵ Ariadne Galleries, Treasures of the Dark Ages in Europe. Ausstellungskat. New York (New York 1991) 136, no. 228.

²⁶ PALOL (note 5) 51.

²⁷ E. PÉREZ HERRERO, Cama de bocado tardorromana hallada en La Torre (Ávila). Homenaje al Prof. Almagro II (Madrid 1983) 429–438, fig. 1A.

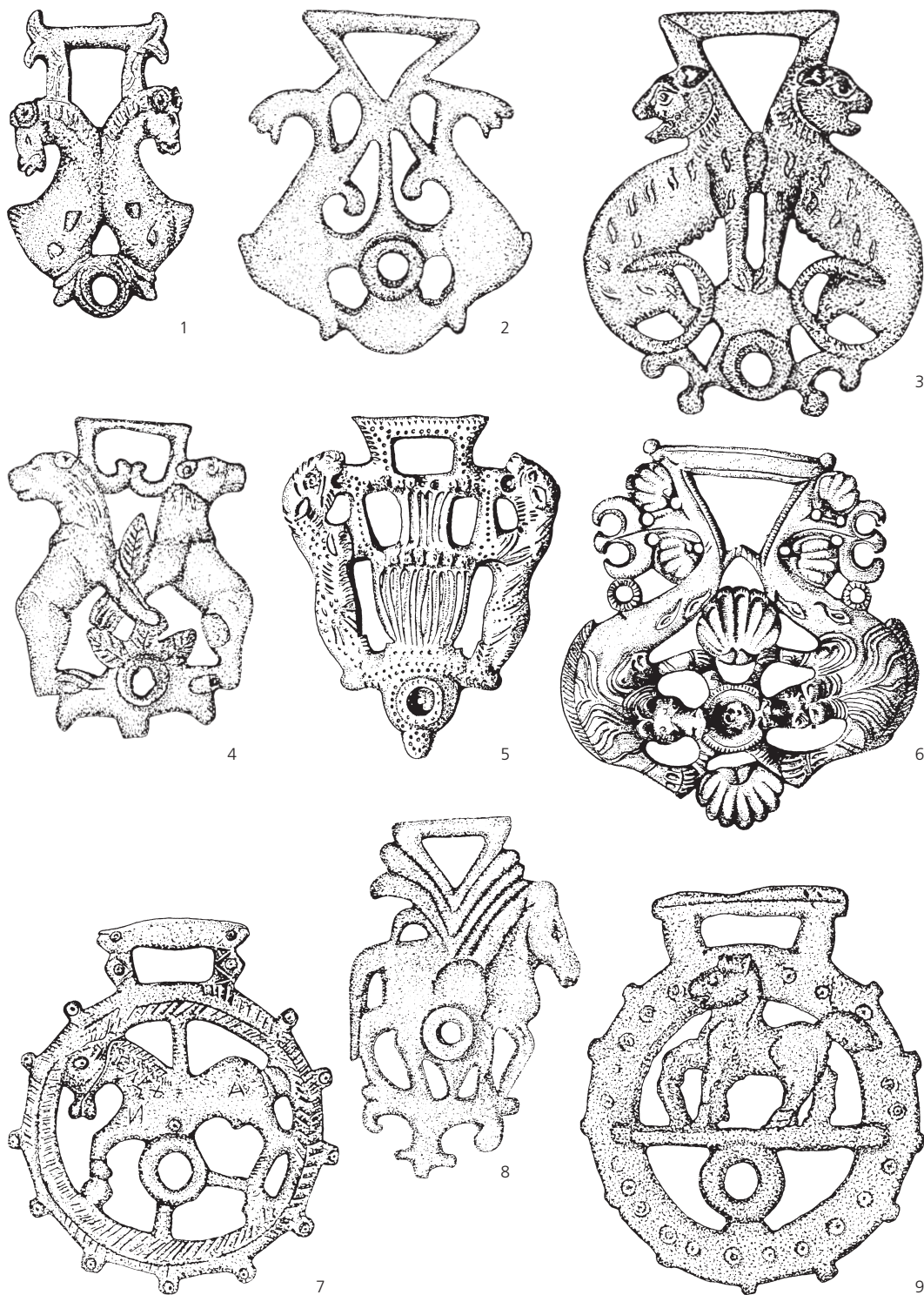
²⁸ P. DE PALOL, Bronces de arnés con representaciones zoomórficas. Ampurias 15/16, 1953/54, 286, fig. 5C.

²⁹ F. ARIAS VILAS/M. C. DURÁN (Hrsg.), Museo do Castro de Viladonga (Castro de Rei, Lugo) (Santiago de Compostela 1996) 117.

³⁰ PEREIRA (note 22) 14, fig. 2,3.

³¹ *ibid.*, 14, fig. 1,1–2.

³² PALOL (note 28) 284, fig. 4C.



2 Figural cheek-pieces. 1 Findspot unknown (Ariadne Galleries, New York); 2 Villa of La Olmeda, Pedrosa de la Vega (Saldaña Museum, Palencia); 3 Elche(?) (National Archaeological Museum, Madrid); 4 Findspot unknown (Barcelona Archaeological Museum); 5–6 Conímbriga (Conímbriga Monographic Museum); 7 Clunia, Burgos(?) (Instituto Valencia de Don Juan); 8 Clunia (Burgos Archaeological Museum); 9 Santa Elena, Jaén (Linares Museum, Jaén).



3 Figural cheek-piece. 1 Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cáceres; 2 Cártama, Málaga (Málaga Archaeological Museum); 3 El Coronil, Seville (Seville Archaeological Museum); 4 Findspot unknown (Ariadne Galleries, New York); 5 Findspot unknown, drawing of one of the pair (see Fig. 5; London, British Museum; reg. nos. MLA 1990,4-2,1-2); 6 Findspot unknown (Lázaro Galdiano Museum, Madrid); 7 Burgos(?) (Burgos Archaeological Museum).

good parallels in the late Roman iconographic cycles of the major arts, above all in painting and mosaics. In spite of the morphological variety that exists, we can establish four different groups: cheeks with single, riderless horses, horses with riders, horses in scenes of *venationes*, and horses heraldically confronted.

Some of the riderless horses shown singly have the animal's name inscribed, e.g. the one probably from Clunia (Burgos) with the inscription in Greek: ΕΛΥΧ, which can perhaps be interpreted as [F]ELIX³³ (Fig. 2,7); and the Hispanic example of unknown provenance in the Jules Sambon collection with the inscription TAGVS in a rectangular panel in front of the horse³⁴. Within this group the cheek from Clunia certainly deserves special mention³⁵, since it is the only case where the horse is not placed inside a circular frame as usual, but stands free (Fig. 2,8). In addition the vegetal motif against which it rests its back could be interpreted as the palm-leaf emblem of victory in sport, a subject that we shall deal with in the conclusions. Other cheeks in this series are the set from Santa Elena (Jaén)³⁶ (Fig. 2,9) and the piece from Monturque (Córdoba)³⁷.

At present seven cheeks are known showing horses with riders with a raised hand. We wish to describe in detail one of these which has been recently found, and has not yet been published, from Dehesa Boyal (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cáceres; Fig. 3,1; 4). It consists of a circular cheek on which the outer ring has a toothed outline. The surface of this ring is decorated with incised contour lines. The central part of the cheek is occupied by a figure of a horse and rider in relief, the latter shown full face, raising his right arm and apparently wearing a breast-plate. The horse, in profile to the right, is shown in a fair amount of detail: mane, harness-straps and the brand-mark of the owner or stable in the form of an ivy-leaf (*hedera*). The horse's hooves are supported on a base formed of S-shapes, which could equally well represent snakes or vegetal stems. Beneath the horse is the circular hole through which the snaffle-bit passed. The upper loop for the cheek-strap is broken. It corresponds to a parade bit, to be precise from the right-hand side of it, as may be deduced from the position of the figure. The two most similar pieces are those of the Ariadne Galleries, New York³⁸. They could have come from the same mould as the one from Cáceres, since they are almost identical in both dimensions and form. They even show the stable-brand in the shape of an ivy-leaf (*hedera*). What distinguishes the cheek from Cáceres from those in New York is the later cold working to which it has been subjected. Also the 'teeth' of the ring on the New York pieces are decorated with incisions. Very similar, too, to the roundels described is the piece from Puente Genil (Córdoba). The latter is superbly preserved, which allows its incised decoration to be clearly observed. Thus on the horse's head is placed a palm-leaf of victory, while on its haunch the stable-brand XT is visible³⁹. Another very similar cheek is the one in the Metropolitan Museum (inv. no. 1990–77), although the treatment of horse and rider is much more schematic and less naturalistic⁴⁰. On its haunch a stable-brand has recently been noted: CLD. Finally, the cheek from Cártama (Málaga), although it shows the same scene, is distinguished from the above pieces by its general treatment of the figure⁴¹. The Cártama rider raises both hands, not just one, and, furthermore, wears a short tunic (Fig. 3,2).

³³ PALOL (note 18) 311–312; RIPOLL/DARDER (note 23) 310.

³⁴ PALOL (note 18) 311.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 312.

³⁶ PALOL (note 20).

³⁷ PALOL (note 28) 282.

³⁸ Ariadne Galleries, Spain. A heritage rediscovered, 3000 BC–AD 711. Ausstellungskat. Dallas 1992 (New York 1992) no. 166.

³⁹ M. DELGADO TORRES, Una nueva rueda de freno tardorromana con representación de jinete procedente de Puente Genil (Córdoba). *Anales Arqu. Cordobesa* 7, 1996, 301–307.

⁴⁰ RIPOLL/DARDER (note 23) 326–327.

⁴¹ E. SERRANO RAMOS/A. DE LUQUE MORAÑO, Una villa romana en Cartama (Málaga). *Mainake* 1 (Málaga 1979) 157, pl. 4.



4 Figural cheek-piece. Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cáceres.

We may interpret the horses with riders described above as participants in a hunting-party, even though the animal being hunted is not shown, thanks to a further example found at El Coronil (Seville)⁴². The Sevillian piece also has a horseman with his right hand raised after wounding the animal (perhaps a boar) which is being trampled between the legs of the horse (Fig. 3,3). We could accordingly connect this whole series of horsemen with the iconographic cycle of the hunt. Curiously, on several of the cheeks with which we are dealing, the upper loops for the cheek-straps are decorated with dolphins.

To conclude this section on cheeks with horse decoration we shall note one very special example. Its uniqueness stems not from the iconographic subject represented, common for example in mosaics, but from the fact that it is the only specimen in bronze known at present. We speak here of the roundel in the Ariadne Galleries, New York⁴³. On it appear two horses facing in to a very stylised palm tree (Fig. 3,4). Each animal raises one of its forelegs and its mane is provided with a palm-leaf. Stable-brands can be seen on their hindquarters. This relates iconographically to a typical representation of triumphant circus horses, common in the mosaics of North Africa, e.g. the example in the house of Sorothus at Hadrumetum⁴⁴. In Hispania the best parallels for this piece are the mosaic of Aguilafuente (Segovia), datable to the 4th century AD⁴⁵, and a brick with relief decoration found at Osuna (Seville)⁴⁶. The horses in the Segovian mosaic have their names inscribed on their flanks: TAGVS and EUFRATA. This has a bearing on another characteristic of late Roman horses that deserves comment, i.e.

⁴² PALOL (note 10) 46, fig. 9.

⁴³ ARIADNE GALLERIES (note 25) 136–137.

⁴⁴ H. SCHLUNK / T. HAUSCHILD, *Die Denkmäler der früh-*

christlichen und westgotischen Zeit. Hispania Ant. 1 (Mainz 1978) 57, Abb. 35.

⁴⁵ LUCAS (note 1) 219–235.

⁴⁶ SCHLUNK / HAUSCHILD (note 44) 177, pl. 72a.

that many circus horses were named after rivers. Indeed, the name TAGVS, alluding to the river that crosses the centre of Hispania, appears in numerous documents of the 4th century, not only in mosaics, but also for example on *defixiones* and bronzes such as one of the cheeks described above, from the former Jules Sambon collection (Paris). The initial sense of these names would be to record the horse's geographical origin, since they generally refer to regions traversed by rivers famous for stud-farming. But also a symbolic parallel could be drawn with the speed of the rivers, owing to the continuous movement of the waters, perhaps in connection with legends such as the one commented by Pliny on the mares sired by the wind⁴⁷.

CHEEK-PIECES WITH SCENES

Cheek-pieces with scenes are proportionately much less common than those noted above. We may distinguish two main types according to their subject matter: mythological scenes and scenes of *venationes*. The latter are closely related to the group noted previously, and it would have been equally possible to form a single division including both the cheeks with horsemen and those with which we shall deal below.

There are three cheeks decorated with *venationes* known at present, none of them showing horsemen. Two of them, from Burgos(?) (Fig. 3,7) in the Archaeological Museum at Barcelona⁴⁸, and from Seville(?) in the Episcopal Museum at Vic, are very similar. On both we encounter a series of animals arranged in pursuit of each other around the ring. In the upper half is placed a corpulent bear, on the right a dog which turns its head towards the bear, and on the right a stag, while in the lower half we see a boar. The third member of this group is an unpublished pair of cheeks, housed in the British Museum (Fig. 3,5; 5). On them is shown a series of figures and animals, also in a giratory arrangement. A lion dominates the upper half, pursued by a dog on the right and attacked by a hunter with a javelin(?) on the left. Behind the dog appears another hunter crouching down, and in the lower half a bird. The scene portrayed is a 'one-off', as no other bridle-bit cheeks with similar scenes are known.

Nevertheless, we may certainly cite Hispano-Roman cart bronzes with hunting scenes, such as the one housed in the National Archaeological Museum at Madrid⁴⁹. But it is above all that we find the best parallels in mosaics. In fact the cheeks in the British Museum reflect an isolated image of a great chase, in which there used to take part a large number of horses and dogs in pursuit of a variety of wild animals. In mosaic art horsemen are often combined with hunters on foot⁵⁰. The classical style of showing the hunter on foot is perfectly recognisable on the cheeks under discussion, slightly crouched, poised for the spear-thrust, and at the same time in a defensive pose. These types of hunting-party, above all those where a figure on foot attacks a boar, are a transference of the myth of Meleager to a context in which the subject loses its mythical character, to be converted into a reflection of the activities of the owner of the villa. Among the multiple examples that could be cited we shall refer solely to the pavement of the Great Hunt at the Roman villa of La Olmeda (Palencia)⁵¹.

Of cheek-pieces with a mythological subject we know only of the set housed in the Lázaro Galdiano Museum (Madrid). On it we see a man on foot who wields a club in his right hand

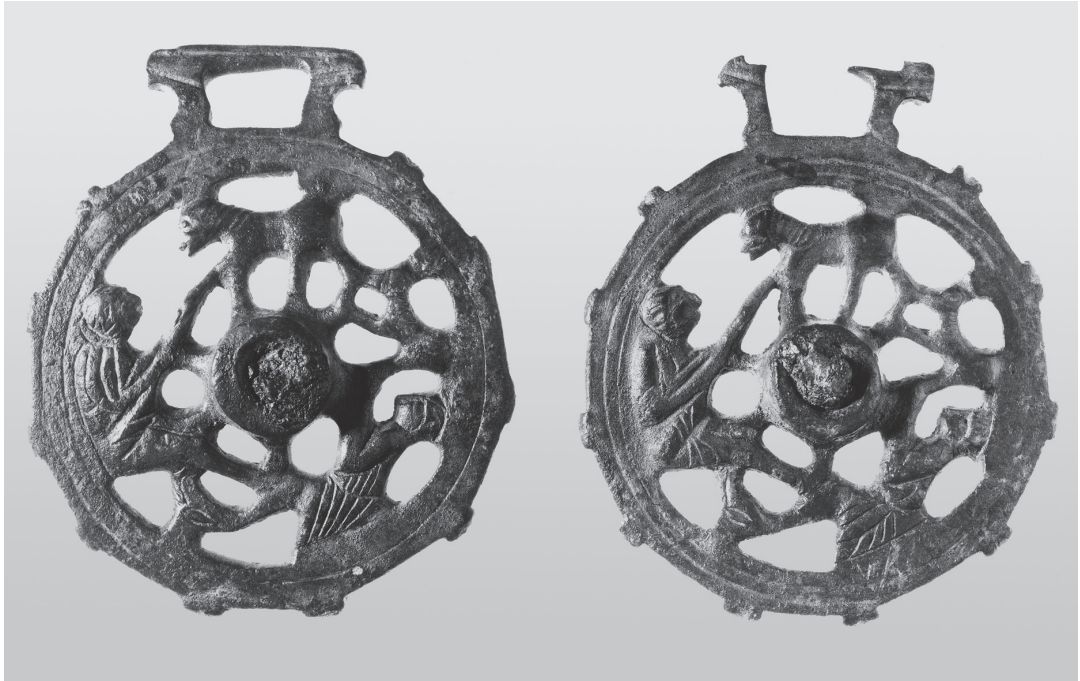
⁴⁷ RIPOLL/DARDER (note 23) 339.

⁴⁸ PALOL (note 28) 329–330, fig. 1.

⁴⁹ Los bronzes romanos en España: catálogo de la Exposición. Ausstellungskat. Madrid (Madrid 1990) 101, no. 302.

⁵⁰ M. GUARDIA PONS, Los mosaicos de la antigüedad tardía en Hispania: estudios de iconografía (Barcelona 1992) 325–335.

⁵¹ PALOL (note 10).



5 Figural cheek-piece. Findspot unknown
(see Fig. 3,5; London, British Museum; reg. nos. MLA 1990,4-2,1-2).

while wrestling with a rampant lion (Fig. 3,6). The scene clearly alludes to one of the labours of Hercules, that of his fight with the Nemean lion. The legend says that Hercules confronted the lion hurling arrows at him, but when he saw that they failed to kill the beast, he chose to smite him with a club and then strangle him. This is precisely the moment chosen by the bronze-smith to show on the cheek-pieces under consideration here.

CONCLUSIONS

These cheek-pieces have taken us into the sphere of the most socially elevated segment of Hispano-Roman society, and one which had a special relationship with the horse. It passed its leisure-time with the horse, whether on horseback (in *venationes*, equitation, etc.), or simply watching (at the *ludi circenses*). But the horse also contributed to its economic well-being, which is why they were bred in the great *villae*. At the same time they bestowed social prestige on their owners, like that enjoyed by the most famous stables, as confirmed by the letters of Symmachus to Eufrasius of Hispania⁵². The cheek-pieces also clearly display the main iconographic repertoires typical of the Late Roman Empire, which were not exclusive to Hispania, but usual in the other provinces, too. On the one hand the allusions to the sphere of circus games, the amphitheatre and *venationes* form a recurrent theme, the subjects all intimately linked around the horse. But, on the other hand, continuity is shown into late Antique Hispania from the purest Roman classicism of the first period, visible in the cheeks decorated with Hercules and the Nemean lion. This taste of the late Roman owners of *latifundia* for tradition

⁵² BLÁZQUEZ (note 2) 49–55.

and innovation infuses all the arts of the time, not only mosaics and painting, but also the minor metal arts. We have only to recall the magnificent belt-buckle in the Ortiz collection, on which a typical hunting scene alternates with another scene of mythological type⁵³.

The exact chronology of these figural cheek-pieces cannot be fixed, since we are ignorant of the archaeological context for the majority. The decoration they display has converted them into pieces coveted by antiquarians and private collectors, which is why many of them are housed in museums and collections far from their findspots. They can be only broadly dated to the 4th–5th centuries AD from the style, the iconography and epigraphic features presented by some of the examples. From the distributional point of view we may assert that they are typical products of Hispanic bronze-smiths. Two of the known cheeks refer in their inscriptions to the workshops where they were made, although we have not cited them in our study since they lack figural decoration. The first, found in Mérida, is a cheek with geometric decoration on which can be read: EX OFFICINA NECLECLTI⁵⁴. Palol notes the difficulty in reading the bronze-smith's name, since its first syllable could be either IN or AN, the two Cs could be Gs and, between the L and the syllable TI, there seems to have been a separation mark. García y Bellido, in his work on artists' names in Roman Spain, offers the same reading as Palol, indicating that, from the onomastic point of view, he is aware only of the feminine form Neglecta⁵⁵. The origin of the example housed in the Faculty of Santiago de Compostela is unknown; its inscription reads: EX OFFICINA I⁵⁶. Both pieces give the typical formula "EX OFFICINA", although the one from Mérida was engraved and the Galician one is cast. It is quite remarkable that the name or indication of the workshop takes up the whole decorative field of the piece, the inscription constituting the sole decorative element on the object. This could be symptomatic of the prestige of the bronze workshops that made them, or perhaps we are dealing here with an official workshop specialising in military harnesses like those that produced belt-buckles. Faced with an abundance and repetition of established models, such as the hybrid dolphin/horse creatures, which could imply a rather standardised production, we encounter other pieces which might be qualified as 'unique'. The latter could be individual commissions carried out at bronze workshops, although it is also possible that they were manufactured in the *villae* themselves, used perhaps by itinerant bronze-smiths. Among these 'unique' cheek-pieces may be included those of the British Museum and the Lázaro Galdiano Museum. The Hispanic-ness of these pieces is supported by the concentration of finds in the Iberian Peninsula, especially in the present-day territories of Andalusia, Extremadura, Castilla-León and Castilla-La Mancha. Few examples have been found outside of Hispania, such as the cheek with panthers from Lectoure (Gers, France)⁵⁷, or the one with a hybrid dolphin/horse from Volubilis (Morocco)⁵⁸. These pieces, found in the neighbouring regions of ancient Hispania, could demonstrate the existence of a limited trade in this kind of material. In this respect we cannot forget the close contacts between Mauritania Tingitana and Hispania during the late empire, visible not only in the metalwork of this period, but also in architecture and mosaic art. Thus in the African province there existed bronze workshops that produced geometric cheek-pieces similar to those of Hispania, although it does not appear that these workshops manufactured any figural examples in the late Roman period.

⁵³ M. FEUGÈRE, Apollon et Daphné sur une boucle de ceinturon tardo-romaine en argent doré. Arch. Korrbibl. 22, 1992, 126–130, fig. 3–6.

⁵⁴ PALOL (note 18) 304, fig. 3,8.

⁵⁵ A. GARCÍA Y BELLIDO, Nombres de artistas en la España Romana. Archivo Español Arqu. 28, 1955, 19.

⁵⁶ PALOL (note 28) 282, fig. 2a.

⁵⁷ C. BOUBE-PICOT, Une phalère de mors à decor animalier du Musée de Lectoure (Gers). In: Mélanges offerts à Monsieur Michel Lambrousse. Pallas 1986 (Toulouse 1987) 387–392, pl. 3,4.

⁵⁸ C. BOUBE-PICOT, Les bronzes antiques du Maroc III. Les chars et l'attelage. Études et Trav. Arch. Marocaine 8 (Rabat 1980) 95, no. 81.

The importance of horse-breeding in Hispania during the Late Roman Empire is displayed by the overwhelming presence of equine figures used as decorative features. It is entirely fitting that the horse becomes the principal subject of the ornamental repertoire of objects destined to be used on the animals themselves. Thus 'reins-guides', such as the one from Morón de la Frontera (Seville)⁵⁹, or Burgillos del Cerro (Badajoz)⁶⁰; strap-distributors, such as the one in Ariadne Galleries, New York⁶¹, or decorative mounts, e.g. from Borox (Toledo)⁶², give this creature pride of place in their decoration. This predilection for the figural motif of the horse is in harmony with the taste prevailing in the rest of the Empire, where even objects of personal adornment feature this animal as a decorative element. Only by way of example we could cite the belt-buckles with plates decorated with riderless horses from Argeliers⁶³ and Santiago de Compostela⁶⁴.

In the present study we have confirmed the iconographic relationship that existed between some of the cheek-pieces and the world of the circus. The image of the victorious horse in circus races was a very popular decorative motif in Roman art of the 4th and 5th centuries AD. The iconography reserved, especially in the beginning, for circus scenes, was later adapted to show also the favourite horses used in spectacles, hunts or parades by landowners. But it is pertinent to ask why decorative motifs suitable for the iconographic cycle of the circus appear on the cheek-pieces used on parade or hunting horses. It is obvious that the cheeks we are concerned with were never the trappings of circus horses, so it merits the trouble of attempting to answer this question. The explanation could be twofold. On the one hand, the prestige enjoyed by circus horses could justify the owners of parade or hunting horses in using such iconography on the harnesses of their own mounts. In this way there would be assimilation between the prestige of these elite horses and the more ordinary ones employed in everyday life. But, on the other hand, we cannot forget either the symbolic character of the subject chosen, since from all the iconographic cycle of the circus it is those representations of victorious horses that are selected. Both on the cheeks from Burgos and Puente Genil and on the one of the Ariadne Galleries the horses disport a palm-leaf of victory. We could interpret this decorative motif as a wish for good luck, possibly showing eagerness for good omens for the hunting activities for which these horses were reserved.

It is known from the writings of Salvian, Procopius and others that Roman games were still being held in Italy and southern Gaul in the 5th to mid 6th centuries, and there was a circus recorded at Zaragoza in 504⁶⁵. But by around this time the *venationes* had ceased in the West, for largely economic and religious reasons, and the former grand spectacles may have dwindled to little more than animal fights. Horse-races survived at Arles only until the mid-6th century, and this seems to have been an exceptional case due to the town's political status, while most of the other hippodromes of Gaul had been abandoned by the end of the 4th or early 5th centuries. It is therefore questionable whether any of the Hispanic cheek-pieces decorated with animals or scenes, whose iconography is so closely connected with the events of the old Roman circus, can be dated much later than the end of the 5th or beginning of the 6th

⁵⁹ A. BLANCO FREIJEIRO, El pasariendas romano de Morón. *Archivo Español Arqu.* 40, 1967, 99–103.

⁶⁰ A. FERNÁNDEZ DE AVILÉS, Pasariendas y otros bronces de carro romanos hallados en España. *Archivo Español Arqu.* 31, 1958.

⁶¹ Ariadne Galleries (note 25) 136 no. 229.

⁶² AURRECOEHEA (note 7) fig. 10a.

⁶³ M. CATHALA, Notice sur un cimetière gallo-romain. *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Scientifiques de l'Aude* 14, 1903, 189–198.

⁶⁴ P. DE PALOL, La necrópolis de San Miguel del Arroyo y los broches hispanorromanos del siglo IV. *Bol. Seminario Arte y Arqu.* 34/35, 1969, 147–149, fig. 25, 1.

⁶⁵ B. WARD-PERKINS, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Urban public building in northern and central Italy AD 300–850* (Oxford 1984) 92–118; Y. HEN, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul AD 481–751. Cultures, beliefs and traditions 1* (Brill 1995) 216–226.

century; especially when by that time shows of any kind had totally disappeared all over provincial Italy itself, and had become rare even in most towns there already in the 4th. However, until secure archaeological contexts can be provided, it is not possible at present to be more certain how long this very distinctive type of fitting remained in use after the end of the late Roman period, if indeed it did.

The appearance of signs (ivy or circles), or letters (initials or complete words in the genitive) is frequent in the equine images of late antiquity, corresponding to the brands that identified stables and their owners. Among the number of examples that can be cited for Hispania alone we shall mention the circus horses in the mosaics of Mérida and Barcino⁶⁶. But we wish to go further in their interpretation than has been done with these marks of ownership. For this we shall take as a basis the mosaic of Hadrumetum, where on the flank of the horse called AMOR it is possible to read SORO on the back and THI on the shoulder, alluding to the stable-owner: SOROTHUS. Equally the appearance of stable markings on the haunches and backs of the horses depicted on the bronze cheeks would indicate a personalisation of the objects. We may presuppose that the cheeks with identical markings belonged to the same landowner, although they are found in places far apart, since they would identify a definite stable. Thus the cheeks with horsemen from the Ariadne Galleries (New York) and Dehesa Boyal (Cáceres) could belong to one and the same stud-farm. Curiously, these cheeks which we have just mentioned appear to have come from the same mould, which could indicate the manufacture of mouth- and cheek-pieces to the order of a landowner to supply harnesses for the horses of his stables. The example in the Metropolitan Museum which follows the same iconographic model as the preceding, but with a different stylistic finish and with the mark CLD, would therefore represent a different stable. We could say the same of the cheek from Puente Genil, which is similar to the preceding but with the mark XT. In this respect it is a pity that the great majority of Hispanic examples have lost their exact find-spot, since they could provide a further source to take into account in reconstructing a panorama of the *latifundia* in the Late Roman Empire. It is appropriate to place the personalised stable-markings, of which we have just spoken, in relation to another type of Hispanic cheek-piece, which we have not included in the present article since they have epigraphic decoration. On the latter the decorative inspiration devolves on the openwork inscriptions displayed by the pieces. In these inscriptions it is usual to find the name of the owner of the object, as in the case of the specimen from La Olmeda⁶⁷, which again puts us onto the fresh track of personalised orders to bronze workshops, or local production in the *villae* themselves.

Together with the horses, panthers are another of the animal motifs preferred by the bronze-smiths for decorating horse-trappings and cart fittings. As in the former case, these beasts do not occur solely on the cheeks that concern us here, but they often feature in the decoration of 'reins-guides', as on an example in the Museum of Mérida⁶⁸, or on decorative mounts⁶⁹. However, it is very difficult to determine whether the panthers that appear on these bronzes are linked with the cycle of Dionysus, or are merely the quarry of hunting activity; except in certain cases, as on one of the cheeks from Conímbriga. Nevertheless, we believe that this an-

⁶⁶ M. DARDER, El mosaic circenc de Barcino. Implicacions iconogràfiques a partir de les aportacions semàntiques. *Butlletí Reial Acad. Catalana Belles Arts San Jordi* 7/8, 1993/94, 251–281.

⁶⁷ P. DE PALOL/J. CORTÉS, La villa romana de La Olmeda, Pedrosa de la Vega (Palencia). *Excavaciones de 1969 y 1970 I. Acta Arqu. Hispánica* 7 (Madrid 1974) 95–97, fig. 24, 10.

⁶⁸ M. MOLINA/G. MORA, Una nueva teoría sobre los llamados pasarriendas: en torno a una pieza de carro del Museo de Mérida. *Archivo Español Arqu.* 55, 1982, 205–210.

⁶⁹ Comprising type N in the classification of these objects published in: AURRECOECHA (note 7).

imal was chosen as a decorative motif mostly because it recalled the *venationes*, like the bears that appear on the cheek in the Archaeological Museum of Barcelona. This hypothesis could be supported by the pose the animals adopt when they are not shown heraldically disposed. In effect, the panthers that appear on the cheeks are placed heraldically, since that is the arrangement that best suits the form of the object. But, when panthers are shown on 'reins-guides' or on decorative mounts, the pose is totally different. On these other objects the panthers appear as ferocious beasts, in postures that suggest attack or flight from a hunter. If we observe the decorative mount from Sanlucarejo (Cadiz)⁷⁰ with a running panther glancing backwards, we may confirm that its best iconographic parallels are the mosaic scenes in which a panther or lion appears, pursued by a horseman. We find similar scenes of a feline and mounted hunter on, for example, the above-mentioned buckle in the Ortiz collection or in the mosaic of El Hinojal (Mérida)⁷¹.

The horsemen that appear on all these cheek-pieces, whether or not accompanied by wounded animals, are likely to be hunters. Although some authors have at times interpreted the riders with raised arms as a mythological image⁷², we think that in reality they show the hunter at the very moment of bringing down their quarry. Similar scenes are common in the 4th-century mosaics and murals of Hispania. In them the hunter raises his right hand after throwing his spear and with his left hand reins in his careering horse, which lifts its front hooves while the wounded animal writhes between its legs. The raised hand could be simultaneously an expression of exultation at the triumph won and a sign to the other hunters that the quarry had been caught. Among the Hispanic cases dating to the first half of the 4th century, we could mention the mosaic in the street of Holguín, Mérida⁷³, or the mural of the villa at Dehesa de las Tiendas (Mérida)⁷⁴. From the end of the 4th century are the mosaics of the villa at El Ramalete⁷⁵ and Cardañajimeno (Burgos)⁷⁶. In all the Hispanic examples that we have just cited the animal that has been hunted down is a stag, which indicates a fresh parallel for our bronzes, when we bear in mind the cheek from El Coronil (Seville). Outside Hispania, for example, we have the horseman found in Carthage⁷⁷. Also, some belt-buckles are known decorated with horsemen identical to those we are reviewing, such as one in silver from Szösény-Puszta (Hungary), with a stag between the legs of the horse⁷⁸, and another in gold in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, with a boar turning on the rider⁷⁹.

In spite of our interpretation, we should not omit to mention the great similarity between these Hispanic horsemen and others that occur within the Empire. Tóth analyses this type of representation in relation to a late Roman glass vase found at Szabadszállás (Hungary), which has medallions decorated with horsemen with raised hands⁸⁰. This author discounts any link between these figures and the Thracian and Danubian rider-gods, in order to relate them to equestrian images glorifying the victorious emperor⁸¹. Representations of emperors

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, no. 185.

⁷¹ J. M. ALVÁREZ MARTÍNEZ, La villa romana de El Hinojal en la dehesa de Las Tiendas (Mérida). Not. Arq. Hispánico 4, 1976, 433.

⁷² RIPOLL/DARDER (note 23) 350.

⁷³ ALVÁREZ (note 4) 84, pl. 45.

⁷⁴ ABAD (note 6) 85, fig. 115.

⁷⁵ J. M. BLÁZQUEZ/A. MEZQUIRIZ, Mosaicos romanos de Navarra. Corpus de mosaicos de España 7 (Madrid 1985) 64 ff.

⁷⁶ J. M. BLÁZQUEZ et al., Atalanta y Meleagro en un mosaico romano de Cardañajimeno (Burgos, España). Latomus 45, 1986, 310, fig. 7.

⁷⁷ D. BUCKTON (Hrsg.), Byzantinum: Treasures of Byz-

antine Art and Culture from British Collections. Ausstellungskat. British Museum 1994 (London 1994) 67, no. 55a.

⁷⁸ B. THOMAS, Spätantike und Frühbyzantinische Silbergegenstände im mittleren Donaugebiet, innerhalb und außerhalb der Grenzen des Römerreiches. Actes de la Table Ronde Paris 1983: Argenterie Romaine et Byzantine (Paris 1988) pl. V, 6–7.

⁷⁹ F. BARATTE, La plaque de ceinture du Coudray. Mon. et Mém. Piot 62, 1979, fig. 21.

⁸⁰ E. H. TÓTH, Ein spätantiker Glasbecherfund aus Szabadszállás. Acta Arch. Acad. Scien. Hungaricae 23, 1971, 115–138.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 126.

on horseback raising their arm in salute are known from at least the period of Marcus Aurelius, though they are more popular in the 4th century AD. An example of the latter is on late coins, where emperors such as Constantine the Great or Probus appear in this triumphal pose. The fame of this iconographic motif led to similar horsemen appearing on Coptic textiles and even to its occasional survival into the 12th–13th centuries AD⁸². The Hispanic horsemen that we are analysing may perhaps be influenced by these representations, though we think it is more correct to apply the conclusions of M. Mackintosh. In her study of the Divine Rider this author demonstrates how the variations that the different images of horsemen present in Roman art are very limited, which meant that craftsmen always had recourse to the same stereotypes, even for expressing subjects as different as victorious emperors, deified heroes, or the Dioscuri, etc.⁸³ In fact, if we analyse the figure of the mounted hunter in late Roman art, we shall confirm the existence of two basic models: the horseman with his right hand lowered, when he still grasps a spear; or with his right hand raised, when he has already thrown the javelin. It seems as if the same, stereotyped kind of horseman had served to represent the figure of the hunter in the various types of hunting. It is the attitude of the hunted animal that varies its model the most, from the stags that writhe on the ground to the boar that rounds on the hunter to defend itself from the onslaught.

The *venationes* therefore comprise one of the most characteristic iconographic cycles on this class of object. This is in accordance with both the prevailing tastes of the time and the hunting activities appropriate to the great owners of the *latifundia* who used these harnesses. Not only are the horsemen to be interpreted as mounted hunters, but the animals shown singly are the classical ones of the *venationes* that frequently appear in mosaics, on sarcophagi and minor objects of this period. This panorama is completed by the splendid cheek-pieces of the British Museum, on which is shown a hunting-party on foot, with all the typical elements. The adoption of this iconographic theme is not fortuitous, since we may affirm that these cheek-pieces were used on both hunting and parade horses. The wealth of decoration shown by the majority of the examples would also be in accord with the social prestige that such horses bestowed, whose proud owners adorned them as a further outward sign of their riches.

⁸² *ibid.*, 128.

⁸³ M. MACKINTOSH, *The Divine Rider in the art of the western Roman empire*. BAR Internat. Ser. 607 (Oxford 1995) 1, 15–16.

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