The Empress Pepper Pot from the Hoxne Hoard:

Cultural Interaction in a Late Roman Artifact

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Cultural interactions influenced the lives and material culture of the Romans in Britain until the end of Roman occupation in the fifth century CE. The Empress Pepper Pot from the Hoxne Hoard is representative of these interactions. Scholarship has often limited descriptions of the pepper pot to its craftsmanship and use of precious metals. Studies of the Hoxne Hoard primarily focus on the coins it contained. No one has extensively examined how the form, function, and context of the Empress Pepper Pot exhibit different cultural interactions. In this thesis, I investigate how the form of the Empress Pepper Pot expresses interaction with material culture from the Eastern Roman Empire. Additionally, I discuss the likelihood that the pepper pot contained pepper and connect this with the cultural interactions of the Indian Ocean spice trade. Lastly, I explore the practice of hoarding in Britain to investigate potential connections with native British customs.

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wife, Jessica, for being my chief supporter and the first editor to read any of my work. Thank you for your constant enthusiasm and love. I also want to thank my parents who first introduced me to *D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*, unknowingly sparking my fascination with the ancient world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After the Romans conquered Britain, they brought with them a plethora of new goods and material culture. For good or ill, the Romans had an indelible impact on Britain, establishing many cultural practices. The Roman period has provided a treasure trove of artifacts for archaeologists to analyze the effects of cultural interaction at the edges of the empire. Many of these artifacts were buried in hoards. Hoarding has been practiced all over the world, but it is particularly significant in the British archaeological record. While Anglo-Saxon hoards, like the Sutton Hoo burial, are the most well-known, Britain had a long hoarding tradition stretching back to the Neolithic period. The Hoxne Hoard dates from the end of Roman rule in Britain in the fifth century CE and is recognizably Roman in its contents. The artifacts, although quite extravagant, still predominantly reflect late Roman material culture. Yet how this material culture reflects cultural interactions of the time period is often overlooked.

The Empress Pepper Pot[1] (Figures 1-4) is a small sculpture that depicts the bust of a woman and her arms, measuring 33 mm in diameter, 103 mm tall, and 57.9 mm wide, and weighing approximately 107.9 g.[2] Its presence in the Hoxne Hoard complicates the simplistic view of the hoard as merely a Roman treasure trove. While a cursory analysis easily points to Roman origin, I believe that the cultural identity of this artifact is more nuanced, with various features that hint at non-Roman elements. This raises the question: how do the form, function, and context of the Empress Pepper Pot embody cultural interaction in late antiquity? Through centuries of war, diplomacy, and trade, the Romans absorbed, appropriated, or transformed cultural practices and goods from neighbors, subjugated peoples, and distant trade partners, and in this thesis, I investigate how one artifact can provide insight regarding these interactions.

[1] Abbreviations and citations in this thesis follow the *American Journal of Archaeology* 's Author Guide: www.ajaonline.org. Abbreviations of ancient Greek and Latin literary sources follow those listed in Hornblower, S., A. Spawforth, and E. Eidinow, eds. 2012. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For the Empress Pepper Pot, see especially Bland and Johns 1993, Johns and Bland 1994.

[2] Trustees of the British Museum, 1994.

CHAPTER II

THE HOXNE HOARD AND THE HISTORY OF SCHOLARSHIP

The Hoxne Hoard is named after the town of Hoxne in Suffolk, England where it was found in 1992. The Empress Pepper Pot is only one of four *piperatoria* discovered in the hoard.[3] Additionally, the hoard contained other artifacts including jewelry, tableware, toiletries, and over 14,000 coins.[4] These coins help to date the Hoxne hoard. The earliest date of the hoard is 407 CE owing to the presence of two *siliquae*, or silver coins, of emperor Constantine III, who ruled from 407 to 411 CE.[5] Its latest date is harder to establish because the archaeological record indicates that Roman coins became rare in Britain after 410 CE, but the coins in the hoard may have been in circulation for several decades before being buried.[6] The latest date theorized for the hoard is 450 CE, several decades after the major withdrawal of the Roman military.[7]

[3] Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[4] See Bland and Johns 1993; Johns and Bland 1994.

[5] Johns and Bland 1994, 167.

[6] Johns and Bland 1994, 167-168.

[7] Johns and Bland 1994, 167-168.

The Hoxne Hoard was excavated by the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Services between 1992 and 1994. These excavations provide important archaeological context regarding the land use of the area in which the hoard was deposited.[8] The stratigraphy and artifact yield around the find spot suggest that the area had been open farmland in the earlier Roman period in Britain, but the lack of artifacts from the fourth century CE demonstrates that the site was turned into pastureland or reverted to woodland by the time of the hoard's deposition.[9] This indicates that the hoard was not necessarily deposited in an oft-trafficked location, and may offer potential clues regarding the intention of the individual(s) who buried the hoard.

A few scholars have guided subsequent discussions of archaeological and iconographic interpretation. Catherine Johns and Peter Bland have written the most extensively about the hoard and its contents.[10] They published a short monograph on the Hoxne Hoard in 1993, establishing the most common interpretation of the pepper pot as a Roman empress and describing its basic function.[11] They offer possible identifications of several Roman

[8] Johns 2018, 16.

[9] Johns 2018, 16.

[10] Bland and Johns 1993; Johns and Bland 1994; Johns 2018.

[11] Bland and Johns 1993, 25-26.

empresses but admit that these are speculative.[12] Although they cannot determine a proper identification for the figure, they claim that the form of the pepper pot was directly inspired by Eastern Roman steelyard weights in the shape of Roman empresses.[13] While Johns and Bland's theories are widely accepted, Anne McClanan challenges the connection between the pepper pot and steelyard weights.[14] She states that the resemblance between the pepper pot and the weights is vague, and iconographic elements identifying the weights as empresses are missing from the pepper pot.[15] The interpretation of the pepper pot's form is still not entirely settled.

The proposals by Johns and Bland, as well as the challenge of interpretation established by McClanan, are vital for my own interpretations. I discuss them at greater length in my own analysis, but I am not disputing them as much as adding to their interpretations to look not just at the *what* of the pepper pot, but the *who.* In other words, previous scholarship about the Empress Pepper Pot has not delved into the cultural processes that led to its creation, use, and deposition in a hoard.

[12] Bland and Johns 1993, 26; Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[13] Bland and Johns 1993, 26; Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[14] McClanan 2002, 60.

[15] McClanan 2002, 60.

In this thesis, I explore the various cultural identities of the Empress Pepper Pot, including its connections to the Roman east, India, and Britain. I examine the similarities among the forms of the Empress Pepper Pot, other Roman pepper pots, and late Roman/early Byzantine steelyard weights. I discuss the evidence that the Empress Pepper Pot actually held pepper to support its Indian cultural implications, and I consider the Indian Ocean spice trade to outline the movement of Indian goods across the Roman empire to Britain. Finally, I review hoarding practices as they pertain to the context of the Empress Pepper Pot to try to determine if it is emblematic of native British traditions.

CHAPTER III

VISUAL ANALYSIS

The Empress Pepper Pot is ornately designed, considering its small size. It is primarily made of silver, but has golden accents in the hair, eyes, mouth, parts of the clothing, jewelry, and a scroll in the figure's hand, taking the form of an elite woman.[16] At the top of the pepper pot, there are three small protrusions sticking out from the hair. The hair is gilded and styled elaborately with hair styled in rolls at the sides and braids pulled from the nape and gathered at the top of the head.[17] It is parted in the middle of the figure's head just above the forehead, and striations in the rolls give the illusion of individual hairs. The eyebrows are fascinating in that they are not only fashioned as two curved lines cut into the silver, but upon closer inspection, one sees that there are small vertical striations that represent hair. The gilded eyes are quite large and wide with small divots for pupils. The nose is large with distinct nostrils and a long nose-bridge. The gilded mouth has slightly rounded lips divided by a line that turns up on the left side of the face, possibly mimicking a smirk. The chin is small for the size of the face, and makes the

[16] Bland and Johns 1993, 25-26.

[17] Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

entire head appear very rounded. The lower half of the figure is equally ornate.

The top and bottom of the pepper pot are divided by the figure's long and wide neck. At the bottom of the large neck, there are complex gilded necklaces. The woman's clothing looks like a *dalmatica*, a type of long tunic popular among upper class men and women in the late Roman and early Byzantine periods.[18] Thin curving lines in the *dalmatica* portray folds in the fabric. There are two wide gilded stripes, or *clavi*, running downward from the figure's shoulders, and they are decorated with embroidered designs.[19] The sleeves of the *dalmatica* end in vibrant gold bands, and the wrists are covered by gilded bracelets. The lower arms and hands are held in front of the chest and feature small divots to create knuckles. On the right hand, the thumb, ring finger, and pinky are curled inward while the index finger and middle finger point outward to the top of the gilded scroll held in the woman's left hand. At the bottom of the figure, there is a metal band with a twisting motif that separates the figure from its plain silver base and feet (Figure 5). The roughly rectangular base is raised on several small feet, and the interior of the pepper pot is hollow.

[18] Isid. *Etym*. 19.22.9; Cleland et al. 2007, 46.

[19] Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

The bottom has a rotating disk with small openings for filling with spices.[20] Its usage appears to be roughly analogous to modern pepper shakers.

The form of the Empress Pepper Pot bears little resemblance to the other pepper pots in the Hoxne Hoard as well as other known pepper pots. The three other Hoxne pepper pots (Figure 6) are also gilded silver with the same kind of base plate mechanism but are shaped like Hercules and Antaeus, a reclining goat, and a dog attacking a hare.[21] There is no apparent thematic connection among the four pepper pots. A second- or third-century CE silver Roman pepper pot (Figure 7) from the Chaourse Hoard in France has the shape of a cloaked man, possibly an enslaved man, sitting and resting.[22] This pepper pot also has no visual elements in common with the Empress Pepper Pot. While it may be tempting to draw connections among these artifacts, such as how none of the pepper pots is shaped like elite men, too few Roman pepper pots have survived to make a statistically relevant conclusion. Fortunately, the Empress Pepper Pot borrows stylistic elements from other late antique artifacts that suggest more information about it.

[20] Bland and Johns 1993, 26.

[21] Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[22] Snowden 2010, 239, 241.

The exact identity of the woman portrayed in the Empress Pepper Pot is a mystery. Bland and Johns identify her as a late Roman Empress, possibly Helena, mother of Constantine I, Aelia Flacilla, wife of emperor Theodosius I, or Licinia Eudoxia, wife of Valentinian III and Petronius Maximus.[23] The basis for this claim stems from the similarities in form and iconography of the Empress Pepper Pot and a type of late Roman/early Byzantine steelyard weight in use in the fourth and fifth centuries CE (Figure 8).[24] These small bronze weights are shaped like eastern Roman empresses and are hollow, allowing them to be filled with varying levels of lead to serve as counterbalances on a type of small scale used for weighing bulk goods.[25] They have been found in various Roman and Byzantine sites, but they seem to have originated in Anatolia in the late Roman period.[26] The level of cultural interaction at play in a late Roman artifact with eastern Roman motifs found in a British context is highly intriguing, although I am reluctant to claim that the pepper pot was made in the Roman east. After all, there are many similarities, but there are also differences.

[23] Bland and Johns 1993, 25-26; Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[24] McClanan 2002, 29-64.

[25] McClanan 2002, 30-31.

[26] McClanan 2002, 33.

Like the Empress Pepper Pot, steelyard weights also portray upper class women in the same or similar poses as the pepper pot has. They are busts, portraying the figures from abdomen to head, and they follow the rough shape of the pepper pot, showing elite women in fancy dress and jewelry holding a scroll in the left hand and gesturing with the right. It is common for these figures to hold a scroll in the left hand, denoting erudition.[27] Byzantine empresses were popularly displayed this way to exhibit their cultural sophistication and education, rare luxuries afforded to the wealthy and powerful.[28] The similarities end here, and the differences may outweigh them in the pepper pot's identification.

The differences between the pepper pot and the steelyard weights include not just the material, but also the presence of a diadem, the type of clothing, and the gestures of the right hands. The steelyard weights wear diadems, symbols of imperial status, but the Empress Pepper Pot is lacking one, calling her identification as an empress into question.[29] The figures are typically portrayed as wearing a *palla*, a type of Roman shawl,

[27] McClanan 2002, 45.

[28] McClanan 2002, 45.

[29] McClanan 2002, 45, 60.

wrapped around the shoulders.[30] Additionally, none of the known examples of eastern Roman steelyard weights points to the scroll, instead holding the right palm either flat against the body or upturned.[31] Bland and Johns concede that the Empress Pepper Pot may not represent a specific person but rather a generic imperial female figure.[32] McClanan states that while the scroll is a symbol of affluence, it is not specifically indicative of the imperial family.[33] These differences are noteworthy, but the similarities still make the connection between the pepper pot and the steelyard weights significant.

Regardless of the figure's status, the Empress Pepper Pot is similar enough in appearance to the steelyard weights that it suggests either intention or that it was a popular form in late Roman material culture. However, the latter is challenged by a lack of similarly shaped artifacts in the archaeological record, but that does not mean that they did not exist. Both possibilities make meaningful statements about the nature of cultural interaction between far sides of the empire in the waning days of Rome. Either way, trade brought ideas and goods

[30] See McClanan 2002, 29-64.

[31] McClanan 2002, 45.

[32] Bland and Johns 1993, 26; Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[33] McClanan 2002, 60.

across the expanse of Roman territory. This is supported by the coins in the Hoxne Hoard. They originated in mints across the empire, including those at Trier, Lyons, Arles, Milan, Ravenna, Rome, and even as far away as the one at Antioch.[34] This is particularly fascinating because the Hoxne Hoard was likely buried around the same time that the Roman Empire abandoned Britain. There were still important economic and cultural ties between east and west until the end of Roman Britain.

[34] Bland and Johns 1993, 13-14.

CHAPTER IV

FUNCTION AND EVIDENCE OF CONTENTS

The Empress Pepper Pot has a simple function that most modern diners might recognize. The disk on the base has heart-shaped openings that, when turned to meet with matching holes in the body, allowed the hollow pepper pot to be filled with spices.[35] In addition, when turned again, the disk has small holes that allowed for the contents to be sprinkled onto food.[36] This same mechanism is present in the other Hoxne pepper pots, and it is tempting to imagine all four filled with different spices to be used in the same meals, but this is just curious speculation.[37] However, this speculation highlights how "pepper pot" may not be the best name because the original contents of the Empress Pepper Pot as well as the accompanying pepper pots are unknown. If they had survived, the contents of the pepper pots could reveal a preference for either locally grown spices and herbs or imports as another form of cultural interaction. While it is impossible to say if the Empress Pepper Pot held pepper, there is ample evidence that makes pepper a strong candidate.

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[35] Bland and Johns 1993, 26.

[36] Bland and Johns 1993, 26; Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

[37] Bland and Johns 1993, 26; Johns and Bland 1994, 171.

Unfortunately, while many Roman era food remains have been recovered in Britain, they do not fully reflect the foods available in the period. Archaeobotanical remains are only preserved in specific circumstances, and some foods do not preserve well.[38] Furthermore, spices often only survive in waterlogged contexts found in urban areas, much unlike the rural countryside of Suffolk where the Hoxne Hoard was recovered.[39] Nevertheless, by examining surviving archaeobotanical and other archaeological remains, it is at least possible to make informed speculation about the Empress Pepper Pot's contents.

The Romans enjoyed many spices, and the archaeological record shows that they introduced new food items to Britain, including approximately fifty new plants in the first century CE alone.[40] A 2011 study of archaeobotanical remains finds that there were 181 archaeological records of taxa introduced in Britain during the Roman period, but due to the complexities of preservation, these likely encompass only a small portion of the Roman British diet.[41] Fortunately, there are other archaeological remains that reveal the presence of foodstuffs in Roman Britain.

[38] Van der Veen 2016, 815.

[39] Van der Veen et al. 2007, 206; Van der Veen 2016, 815-816.

[40] Van der Veen 2016, 819.

[41] Livarda 2011, 144.

For example, in tablets found at the Roman fort of Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall in northern England, there are references to several spices, including anise, caraway, cumin, lovage, mustard seed, thyme, and black pepper.[42] All of these options complicate the possible contents of the Empress Pepper Pot, but the social implications of pepper usage in the Roman period may be enlightening.

Many Roman era food remains have been found in southeast England, including Suffolk, and although this may be related to the high volume of archaeological excavation in the region or the local conditions of preservation, it is also reflective of the affluence of this region during the Roman period.[43] This high level of affluence is supported by exotic food remains, evidence of horticulture associated with elite rural villas, a variety of fine ceramics, and the stable isotopes surviving in human bones from this period, all evidence of a varied diet.[44] The Vindolanda tablets may complicate the idea of pepper as a luxury item, as Roman soldiers on the frontier did not wield the kind of wealth that scholars traditionally have believed is requisite for

[42] *Tab. Vindol. II* 175, 204 (Bowman and Thomas 1994); *Tab. Vindol. III* 588, 591 (Bowman and Thomas 2003; Cool 2006, 67.

[43] Van der Veen 2016, 817.

[44] Van der Veen 2016, 821.

purchasing black pepper.[45] Additionally, *De Re Coquinaria*, a Roman cookbook attributed to Apicius, lists pepper in almost every recipe, hinting that it may have been more widely available than thought.[46] However, these facts do not necessarily contradict the elevated social implications of pepper consumption.

Textual evidence preserves the prices of pepper in the Roman Empire. In the first century CE, Pliny the Elder recorded that a *libra* (~328.9g or 11.6 oz) of black pepper cost four *denarii*, equaling several days' worth of a foot soldier's annual salary.[47] However, long pepper and white pepper were also popular among Romans, and Pliny prices them at fifteen *denarii* and six *denarii* per *libra* respectively.[48] It should be noted that these prices likely reflect the availability of pepper in the Italian peninsula where Pliny lived, and prices in remote provinces may have been higher. Additionally, while these prices are from several centuries prior to the Empress Pepper Pot, the combination of internal strife and invasion may have made the

[45] Cool 2006, 67.

[46] Cobb 2013, 140; Parker 2002, 43. For a few examples of these recipes, see Donahue 2013.

[47] Plin. *HN* 12.14.28; Speidel 2002, 88.

[48] Plin. *HN* 12.14.28.

prices of imports increase, particularly at the northwestern edge of the empire. However, with Pliny writing in the first century CE, it is unclear how significant pepper was to Romans in the fifth century CE.

Late Roman history and legal codes support the continued importance of imported pepper to the Roman economy. In 408 CE, contemporary with the Hoxne Hoard, Roman officials bribed the Visigoth leader Alaric, whose army had blockaded Rome, with 5,000 pounds of gold, 30,000 pounds of silver, and 3,000 pounds of pepper to leave the city in peace.[49] Perhaps pepper was prized in the same way as precious metals. In the sixth century CE, Byzantine emperor Justinian had Roman laws codified. In one of these codices, the *Digesta*, there is a list of imports subject to duty tax, including pepper, indicating that it was still a desired good in late antiquity.[50] It is reasonable to assume there was a market for pepper among the elite, but how can we be sure that the Empress Pepper Pot is representative of elite Roman culture?

[49] Zos. 5.35-43; Parker 2002, 45.

[50] *Dig.* 39.4.16.7.

Culturally, pepper and other spices were associated with elite multi-person banquets while personal meals were often bland.[51] The Hoxne Hoard is equivalent to 5234.8 g of gold, a substantial amount, and the owners would have been among the wealthy elite who engaged in banqueting practices.[52] With all of this information in mind, one may argue that the Empress Pepper Pot is emblematic of the wealth needed to enjoy any variety of pepper. Any of the four pepper pots from the Hoxne Hoard could have realistically contained pepper, and for the purpose of this thesis, I next will discuss the Empress Pepper Pot in this role.

[51] Cobb 2013, 141.

[52] Gerrard 2016, 856.

CHAPTER V

PEPPER AS EVIDENCE OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Romans traded far and wide to acquire exotic spices. The town of Berenike on the Red Sea coast of Egypt was significant for the Indian Ocean trade network with its ports moving goods from the Mediterranean to the eastern coast of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka, and vice versa.[53] Black pepper has been recovered in large amounts in the archaeological record of the port of Berenike, a testament to the town's significance in the Indian Ocean spice trade.[54] Myos Hormos, another major Red Sea port for the Romans, has yielded similar finds in addition to inscriptions in Prakrit and Old Tamil, pointing toward a local population of South Asian merchants.[55] The archaeology of the spice trade outside of Roman territory further attests to the direct cultural interactions between Romans and Indians.

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[53] Sidebotham 2011, 3.

[54] Sidebotham 2011, 79.

[55] Wakankar 1966; Whitcomb and Johnson 1978; Salomon 1991; Salomon 1993; Sidebotham 2011, 185. Wakankar (1966) excavated a potsherd with a fragmentary Prakrit inscription, and Salomon (1991, 732) offered a translation, identifying names and a list of goods. Whitcomb and Johnson (1978) excavated a potsherd with a fragmentary Old Tamil inscription containing only a few figures in a first- or second-century CE trash heap.

The flow of goods in the Indian Ocean trade network went both ways. Roman goods were exported to India in return for spices. Tamil Sangam poetry from the period mentions Roman and Persian outsiders referred to as *Yavanas* who came to southern India looking for pepper.[56] Pepper originated in southern India and the Ghat Mountains, and it was traded in ports along the Kerala coast.[57] Roman wine and olive oil amphorae have been discovered in the remains of important trading hubs on the Indian coast from the first millennium CE, including Arikamedu and Muziris.[58] The most important Roman import in India was currency. Silver and gold Roman coins have been found not only in coastal trading ports, but all over India.[59] This wealth allowed the Romans to indulge in their culinary obsession with pepper for centuries. Yet, after pepper shipments left India and traveled a considerable distance to Egypt, the spice still had a long way to travel to reach Britain.

Once shipments of pepper reached Roman ports on the Red Sea, their dissemination throughout the empire relied on the steady movement of goods along Roman roads and trading hubs.

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[56] *Akananuru* 149, 7-11 (Wilden 2018); Sidebotham 2011, 225.

[57] Sidebotham 2011, 224.

[58] Fitzpatrick 2011, 49-50.

[59] Parker 2002, 67.

From ports on the Egyptian coast, merchants traveled on Roman roads across the eastern desert of Egypt to the Nile where goods were carried by boat to Alexandria.[60] Shipments would then leave Alexandria to be shipped all around the Mediterranean. In the first century CE, Roman emperor Domitian established the *horrea piperataria*, a pepper warehouse, in Rome, and from here, it could travel overland to Roman towns and cities across the continent.[61] This movement is corroborated by archaeobotanical remains of pepper in important settlements in Gaul and Germania that served as trade depots.[62] From Gaul, pepper would be shipped across the English Channel to Roman London, where it has also been recovered in the archaeological record.[63] From London, it could have made its way to villages and towns in Britain, particularly the affluent southeast where the Empress Pepper Pot was found. From Indian ports to Roman British dinner tables, pepper symbolizes international cultural interaction in antiquity.

[60] Sidebotham 2011, 125-127, 155.

[61] Parker 2002, 45; Sidebotham 2011, 226.

[62] Livarda 2011, 157.

[63] Livarda 2011, 156.

CHAPTER VI

CONTEXT AND CULTURAL TIES WITH BRITAIN

Artifacts do not exist in a cultural vacuum, and their contexts are just as important to their identities as form and function.[64] However, the Empress Pepper Pot's context as part of a hoard is the most complicated aspect of its cultural identities. Myriad cultures practiced hoarding, and hoards with Roman artifacts are certainly not confined to Britain. It is difficult to claim with any certainty that a hoard is representative of one culture's practices, but by exploring the nature of hoarding in Britain at the end of Roman occupation, we may discern cultural interactions.

The common belief is that late Roman hoards in Britain were deposited to protect them from looting in a time of political turmoil.[65] The historical context of the period supports this conclusion. At the beginning of the fifth century CE, Britain was plagued by raids from the Irish in the west, Picts in the north, and Saxons in the east.[66] To add to the island's issues, in 402 CE, imperial authorities began siphoning Roman soldiers

[64] For more about context in artifacts from Roman Britain, see Rogers 2014, 160.

[65] Aitchison 1988, 273; Johns 1996; Guest 2014, 119; Jackson 2021, 241.

[66] Collins and Breeze 2014, 65-67; Jackson 2021, 246.

out of Britain to serve in other regions deemed more important.[67] A few years later, disgruntled Roman troops in Britain named one of their officers, Constantine III, emperor, and he and the army departed Britain to turn back an invasion in Gaul, leaving the island practically defenseless.[68] As Bland points out, there is a rise in hoarding in the late empire coinciding with major historical events like those mentioned here and thus these hoards indeed seem intended for safekeeping.[69] The Empress Pepper Pot and other artifacts of the Hoxne Hoard may have been buried in the ground to keep them out of the hands of invaders.

It is unclear how to determine the intention behind the deposition of the Hoxne Hoard. Johns describes multiple conditions under which hoards were buried for protection, including safekeeping for individuals, groups, churches, temples, the military, craftsmen, and commercial interests.[70] She also states that some hoards may have been used as personal bank vaults, with the owners occasionally returning to add to or withdraw from them.[71] Hoards could also serve ritualistic

[67] Jackson 2021, 247.

[68] Jackson 2021, 248.

[69] Bland 2020, 129.

[70] Johns 1996.

[71] Johns 1996, 14.

purposes, including offerings to gods from temples or individuals.[72] Lastly, hoards could simply indicate that people unintentionally misplaced their belongings.[73] The Hoxne Hoard is not inherently indicative of any of these practices, but the neatness of its deposition provides some insight.

One clue that hints at the intention behind burying the Hoxne Hoard is the evidence for containers. When it was excavated, the artifacts were neatly assorted, metal fittings for containers were found, and the soil was clearly demarcated the shape and size of the box that held the treasure but has since rotted away.[74] Small silver locks and bone inlay found with the artifacts hints that some items were packed into smaller boxes before being placed within the chest.[75] Johns asserts that "treasures buried for safekeeping and later recovery would normally have included some form of container or wrapping."[76] This does support that the hoard was deposited deliberately rather than accidentally, but any identification past this is merely speculation. Still, hoarding predates the Romans in

[72] Johns 1996, 15.

[73] Johns 1996, 15.

[74] Bland and Johns 1993, 12.

[75] Bland and Johns 1993, 12.

[76] Johns 1996, 4.

Britain, and a certain degree of speculation may be in order to investigate connections to pre-Roman tradition.

While it is controversial to tie late antique hoards to earlier practices, I should note that hoarding has a long history in Britain stretching back to the Neolithic. Over two hundred Roman era hoards with a date of 388 CE or later have been found in Britain, the most from any province, supporting the importance of hoarding on the island.[77] Peter Guest describes this as an unusual phenomenon for this period, the first time since the later British Iron Age that such large volumes of precious metal crafts were buried and not retrieved.[78] Intriguingly, many late Roman hoards in Britain were buried in the same areas as pre-Roman Iron Age hoards, particularly in East Anglia, including Suffolk, perhaps corroborating the survival of native traditions.[79] Michael Fulford asserts that fifth-century CE Roman hoards are highly reminiscent of those from the British Iron age and earlier, presenting strong links to the pre-Roman past in southeastern Britain.[80] If the Empress Pepper Pot was buried as part of a long-standing local ritual,

[77] Moorhead and Walton 2014, 99-100.

[78] Guest 2014, 117.

[79] Jackson 2021, 241.

[80] Fulford 2001, 215.

it would be an important link with the native culture of Britain.

While it would be thrilling to tie the Hoxne Hoard to native tradition, the evidence is not strong enough to make such a bold assertion. Johns acknowledges that there are similarities between pre-Roman and Roman era British hoards, but she urges caution with making this claim because it must be explicitly demonstrated rather than being based on circumstantial evidence.[81] Richard Reece argues against assigning purpose to hoards entirely, claiming that is impossible to determine and is thus an "impediment to classification."[82] Yet, regardless of the purpose, be it Roman safekeeping or native British practice, the Empress Pepper Pot's context makes a statement about cultural interaction. If the hoard was buried for safekeeping by fleeing Romans, it indicates interaction, albeit violent, between the inhabitants of Britain and the Irish, Pictish, and Saxon invaders. If the hoard was buried in some kind of British practice that survived throughout Roman occupation, it indicates how Roman goods were used in local practices as a form of cultural interaction. Both possibilities are equally as exciting.

[81] Johns 1996, 1.

[82] Reece 1988, 262.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The form, function, and context of the Empress Pepper Pot exhibit a variety of interactions. The form of the Pepper Pot demonstrates a stylistic interaction. As the steelyard weights can attest, Roman material culture had a degree of regional specificity. The similarity in appearance between the Empress Pepper Pot and these weights suggests an interaction between Roman Britain and the Roman East, two regions with cultural and linguistic differences. This does not necessarily indicate a direct interaction between peoples from these two regions. If the pepper pot were produced elsewhere and brought to Britain, the net of interaction would have included everyone who made, bought, sold, stole, lost, or otherwise handled the pepper pot. Perhaps it traded hands among Greeks, Gauls, Germans, Dacians, or others before making its way to Britain. Even if it were made locally, the Empress Pepper Pot still exemplifies how popular art forms spread: for viewers in Britain, it was a tangible connection to artistic styles that originated far from the island.

The Empress Pepper Pot, along with its accompanying pepper pots, also embodies the connection between India and Roman Britain owing to its function in transmitting culinary practices

from the former to the latter. Cuisine is by its very nature a cultural interaction as it is always changing and incorporating outside influences. Since many cuisines may share basic ingredients, spices are often what make regional cuisines unique. When spices are traded between cultures, their respective cuisines are forever altered, representing the adoption of outside customs. This is why spices are some of the most significant indicators of cultural interaction. While Roman diners may have not consciously considered this interaction when seasoning their food, it was no secret that pepper was an expensive import from distant lands. After all, pepper had to travel from southern India to Egypt before making its way across the entire empire to get to Britain. Even through hand-over-hand trade and not direct contact, diners in Roman Britain were still engaging with the culture of India by altering their own dining practices to include Indian flavors. Whoever used the Empress Pepper Pot to season their food was the last link in a long chain of culinary interactions between India and Roman Britain.

The archaeological context of the Empress Pepper Pot may be indicative of other interactions as well. The Hoxne Hoard may have been deposited to keep valuable belongings out of the hands of invaders. If this is the case, the deposition was a violent interaction. Cultures do not only interact through friendly

trade or artistic influence. Oftentimes, interactions between cultures are violent, and cultural practices are changed to anticipate this violence. Therefore, this burial may have been the result of directly or indirectly violent interactions with Irish, Pictish, or Saxon invaders. Alternatively, the archaeological context of the Empress Pepper Pot may represent a cultural interaction with the past. It may be that those who deposited the Hoxne Hoard followed pre-Roman British hoarding customs. Even if those who left the hoard behind considered themselves Romans regardless of their British cultural heritage, the pepper pot's archaeological context may indicate how Romans continued to perform non-Roman ancestral traditions using Roman material culture. Of course, these two types of interactions are not mutually exclusive, and Roman subjects could have engaged with pre-Roman tradition while also protecting their valuables.

The Empress Pepper Pot is, without question, a Roman artifact. However, just as being a Roman citizen did not limit cultural identity, being Roman does not limit the cultural influences discernible in the artifact and its archaeological context. The Romans interacted with neighbors, conquered peoples, trade partners, and invaders alike, and these interactions affected aspects of Roman society, including material culture, cuisine, and practices like hoarding. I hope

this thesis demonstrates that, while the Empress Pepper Pot was made by Romans, it would have never existed or been deposited in a hoard if it were not for these many interactions, and they are all significant in the study of ancient art.

APPENDIX:

FIGURES

Figure 1: Empress Pepper Pot, front. Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 2: Empress Pepper Pot, rear. Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 3: Empress Pepper Pot, left side. Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 4: Empress Pepper Pot, right side. Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

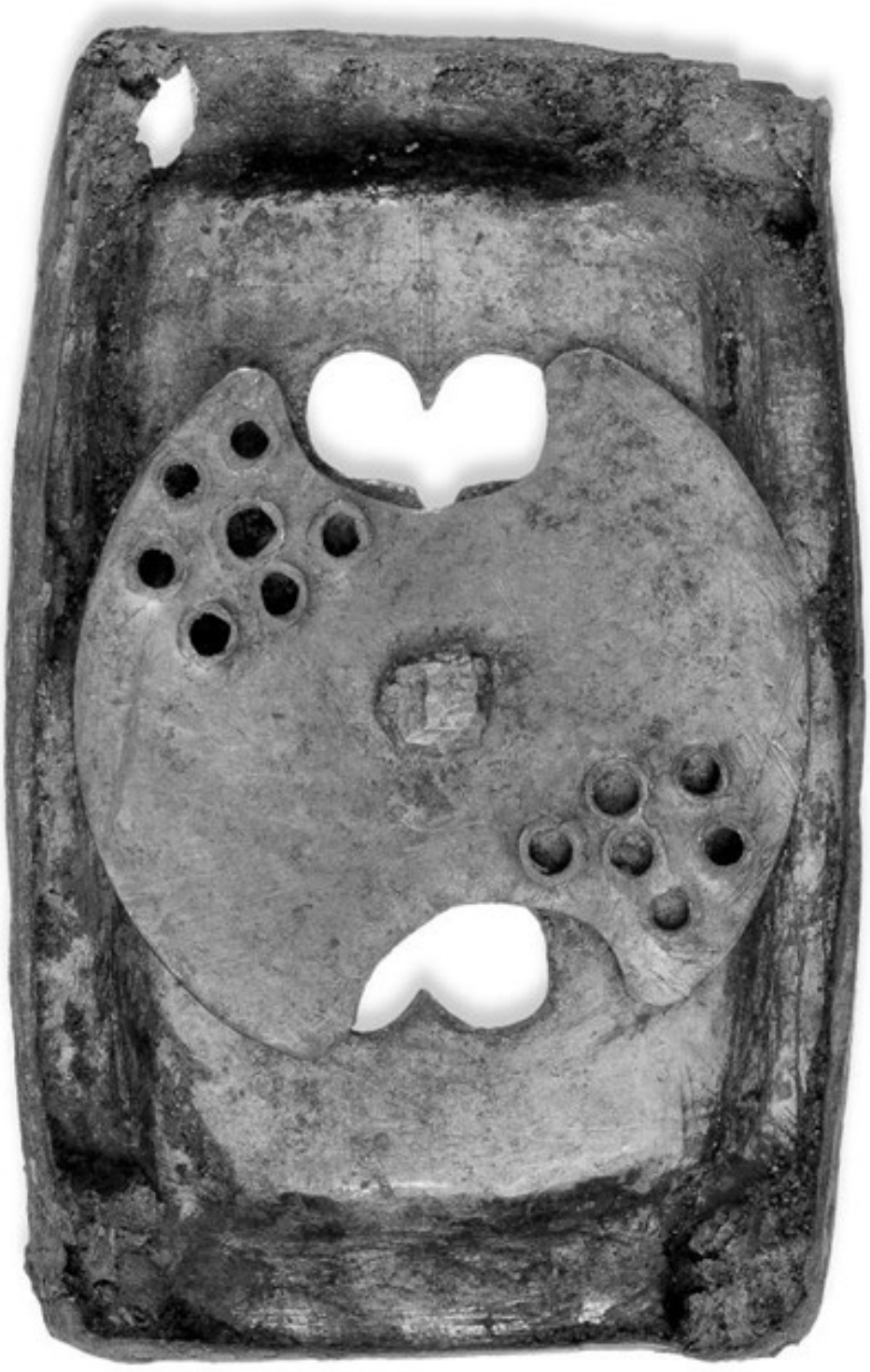

Figure 5: Empress Pepper Pot, baseplate mechanism. Image courtesy of the *Trustees of the* British Museum.

Figure 6: Pepper pots from the Hoxne Hoard. Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 7: Pepper Pot from the Chaourse Hoard. Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 8: Late antique eastern Roman steelyard weight. Image courtesy of Artstor.

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