A case of mistaken identity? Laser-scanning the bronze "Claudius" from near Saxmundham

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The lifesize bronze head of a male (fig. 1) in the Weston Gallery of the British Museum is one of the most iconic artefacts of Roman Britain. Widely interpreted as a portrait of the emperor Claudius forcibly removed from a statue in or near the temple of Claudius at Colchester by British insurgents during the Boudiccan Revolt of A.D. 60/61, it has never been reported upon in detail,[1] and there has recently been some dispute as to both its identity and its significance.[2] In an attempt to produce an accurate record of the head whilst simultaneously addressing issues surrounding its identity, the nature of its decapitation and subsequent disposal, the artefact was subjected to a three-dimensional laser scan, the results of which are discussed here.
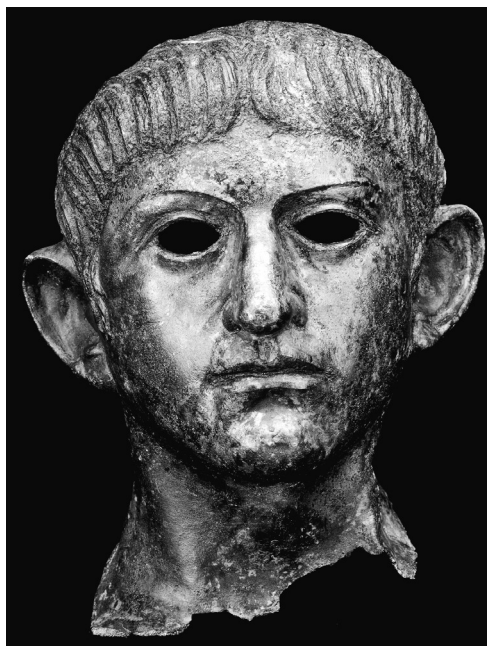
The head was discovered in 1907 by Arthur Godbold, a schoolboy playing in the river Alde near Rendham (Suffolk).[3] Upon recovery, the piece was whitewashed and placed within a private garden[4] before being acquired by E. R.

Fig. 1. The head from near Saxmundham, British Museum reg. no. 1965,1201.1 (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Hollond of Benhall Lodge, Saxmundham.[5] In December 1908, the portrait was brought before a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of London, where it received its first proper examination and identification.[6] An article promised for *Archaeologia* never appeared, although a brief note was published in the *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History*.[7] The first and only discussion was a summary report compiled by G. MacDonald for *JRS* some 18 years later.[8] In 1949-50, the head was cleaned, conserved, and fully photographed by the Research Laboratory of the British Museum. In 1961, it was placed on loan to the British Museum by Mrs D. H. Hollond.[9] Since being purchased in a Sotheby's sale (November 29, 1965), the piece has been on display in the Romano-British collection.[10]

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1   As noted by MacDonald 1926, 5-7; Toynbee 1964, 47; Hiesinger 1979, 116; and Russell 2006, 109.
2   Varner 2004, 72-73; Russell 2006, 109.
3   MacDonald 1926, 3; C. Twinch, pers. comm. 2005.
4   E. Masterton-Smith, pers. comm. 2008.
5   Toynbee 1964, 46-47.
6   MacDonald 1926, 3-4.
7   Ganz 1908.
8   MacDonald 1926.
9   Toynbee 1964, 47; Brailsford 1966, 85.
10   Inv. 1965,1201.1; see Brailsford 1966; Potter and Johns 1992, 39.

Description

The head, a hollow casting in bronze, measures 315 mm in height (including the neck) and 250 mm in width. The face is roughly heart-shaped with an unusually wide fore-head, an effect accentuated by the low-set ears, faintly slanting eyes, and tapering chin. It has been suggested that the apparent backward tilt of the head is reminiscent of certain equestrian poses; this may suggest that the figure had been mounted,[11] a possibility that has gained further currency following the discovery of a fragment of a bronze equestrian statue at Ashill (Norfolk).[12]

Facial features, especially the eyes and mouth, are crisply defined with a small, well-rounded chin, thin eyebrows and aquiline nose. The eye sockets may originally have held eyeballs, pupils and irises made of glass paste, enamel or coloured stone.[13] The coiffure is well-defined with hair combed forward from the flat crown in thick, comma-shaped locks and sideburns curling delicately over both ears. The heavy fringe is parted in a shallow V just over the inner edge of the right eye.

The back of the head has sustained multiple blows with a sharp implement, presumably during an attempt to dislocate it from the statue body. The front of the neck is extremely ragged where it has been ripped from the shoulders.

Metallographic examination has shown that the head has a very low lead content (6.6%) when compared with other examples of Roman bronze statuary which, on average, possess a lead content of $c.$15-30%.[14] Such a deficiency in lead (more commonly found in bronzes of the British Iron Age[15]) would be unusual if the piece had been manufactured in Britain, given the early Roman industrialisation of lead mines in the Mendip Hills, although low lead content might instead suggest a shortage of available raw material at the time of manufacture.[16]

Previous identifications

When it was first displayed at the Society of Antiquaries in 1908, Alma Tadema observed that the head had undoubtedly been "one of the reigning princes of the Augustan family",[17] and two observers at the meeting suggested that it was a likeness of either the emperor Tiberius or his brother Drusus. In 1914, F. Haverfield supposed that the "large bronze head, closely resembling Claudius", had probably been "torn from the Temple of Claudius … by British pillagers" during the Boudiccan Revolt.[18] G. MacDonald agreed, noting that Claudius was the first emperor whose statue archaeologists "could reasonably expect to meet with in the island". He summarized the main points of resemblance between the head from near Saxmundham and known portraits of Claudius as the flat head, luxuriant hair combed forward over the temples, broad forehead, prominent eyebrows, long

11   Alma Tadema, quoted at MacDonald 1926, 3-4; Toynbee 1962, 12.
12   Lawson 1986.
13   Toynbee 1964, 47.
14   Craddock 1975, 155-56; Oddy and Craddock in Lawson 1986, 338-39.
15   Craddock 1975, 159-60.
16   Oddy and Craddock in Lawson 1986, 339.
17   MacDonald 1926, 3.
18   Haverfield 1914, 43.

but shapely mouth, weak chin contrasting with the powerful neck, and projecting ears.[19] J. M. C. Toynbee concurred, observing that the bronze head reproduced certain features of Claudius familiar from well-authenticated coin, cameo and sculptural portraits, namely "the flat crown of the head, the thick, neat hair, and the sharply angular bridge of the nose";[20] she felt confident that, despite certain inconsistencies, the Saxmundham head was "more like Claudius than any other emperor or prince of the Julio-Claudian period whose features we know".[21]

The first serious doubts surfaced in 1979 when U. Hiesinger published a survey of the portraits of Nero. He observed that the traditional identification of Claudius was unsupportable, the piece being better interpreted as a provincial copy of Nero, created at, or shortly after, his accession within the years 51-54.[22] E. Varner agreed, noting that the head was "clearly a provincial variant of Nero's second type" of portrait.[23] No consensus has emerged, and the label accompanying the head today notes that the head is "probably Claudius or Nero".

Origin and depositional context

The precise context of the bronze in the river Alde, at a considerable distance from any major Roman settlement, is unknown. Perhaps, as in the case of a variety of prehistoric and Roman metal objects recovered from watery contexts, it should be viewed as a ritual deposit, deliberately placed as an offering to a subterranean, aquatic or regional deity.[24] Placing prestigious goods in rivers, lakes, springs and bogs of N Europe is a practice that can be traced back to the Neolithic. By the Later Bronze and Early Iron Age, deposition in watery places in S England appears to have been increasingly dominated by exotic metalwork, especially weapons,[25] where the symbolic importance of an artefact outweighed its economic value, and possibly also by human heads.[26] The number of human skulls recovered since the 19th c. from the Thames suggests that during the later prehistoric period the deposition of heads in rivers may even have surpassed that of fine metalwork.[27] The decapitated bronze head in the Alde might thus be a symbolic deposit, combining reverence for the head with a need to consign important metal objects to the river, whether as isolated pieces or as part of a larger deposit, long since dispersed.

Structured deposits of Iron Age metalwork (most commonly coin hoards) often occur within rivers and springs associated with what may have been tribal boundaries.[28] The deliberate placement of such items at boundaries may have reinforced the demarcation of specific territories, the "intense performance of cult rituals" perhaps serving to increase the supernatural enforcement of particular border zones.[29] The deposition near Saxmundham lay on or close to the suggested boundary between two major tribal units, the Iceni

19   MacDonald 1926, 6.
20   Toynbee 1962, 123.
21   Ead. 1964, 47.
22   Hiesinger 1975, 116.
23   Varner 2004, 72-73.
24   Bradley 1998, 155-90.
25   Piggott 1950; Ehrenberg 1980; Fitzpatrick 1984; Bradley 1998, 183.
26   Bradley and Gordon 1988.
27   Bradley 1998, 180-81.
28   E.g., Haselgrove 1987, 133 and 137.
29   Wait 1985, 263.

to the north and the Trinovantes to the south, both key players in the revolt against Rome. An important imperial trophy, possibly taken during the destruction of a major Roman centre or fort, would have been a suitable offering to embed at the frontier between the two tribes. The head's violent removal from the body has led some to think that it derives from a sculpture destroyed during the sack of Colchester (*Colonia Claudia Victriensis*),[30] but the head could have stood in any number of Romanised centres or military installations targeted during the uprising, or the statue could have been toppled in an unconnected later event. Toynbee observed that the scale of the piece, lifesize rather than monumental, probably precluded it "from having belonged to the cult-statue of a deified emperor" erected within or close to Colchester's Temple of Claudius; she thought its size and scale implied placement in another public building or "open square in the town".[31] Alternatively, the size may suggest that the personnage, at the time of its creation, was a family member, rather than the emperor himself.

MacDonald viewed decapitation as part of a deliberate act of trophy-taking, the head being preserved intact "in order to be carried in triumph on a pike".[32] After the rebellion had been suppressed, possession of such an artefact would have been dangerous, and its final deposition in the Alde may, MacDonald theorised, have been due to its owner panicking.[33] If the head had formed part of an official statue at a Roman cult centre or fort, the removal of key body parts during the revolt could be seen, not simply as an act of trophy-taking, desecration or vandalism, but as a religious or ritualised act: capturing an imperial image to serve as an offering to native gods.[34] A parallel for such an action may be found in the severed bronze head of Augustus (also in the British Museum) that was taken from Egypt by an invading Ethiopian army around 25 B.C. and buried beneath the stairs of a temple dedicated to Victory at Meroë (Sudan).[35]

Laser-scanning

In an attempt to resolve both the identity of the bronze and the nature of the decapitation and its subsequent burial, the present authors undertook a three-dimensional, 360° scan. It recorded key points of the face, such as eye position, hairstyle and ear shape, to facilitate comparison and identification of the individual as well to highlight areas of damage, modification, alteration or repair. In addition to recording key peculiarities of the portrait, the scan facilitates a detailed examination of all surface irregularities by producing a virtual image which, unlike photographs, is unaffected by light conditions or visual distortion at the moment of capturing the data. Four images taken from the 3-D scan are reproduced here (figs. 2-5).

The bronze was scanned using a tripod-mounted Konica Minolta VI900 Laser Scanner, which is a 'point-and-shoot' style laser scanner using the Triangulation Light Block method to measure three dimensional points on an object's surface; this method works when a laser-generated beam is deflected from a rotating mirror onto the surface of an object. The beam is reflected back off the surface and is focused through a series of lenses onto a sensor. The point coordinate is determined by

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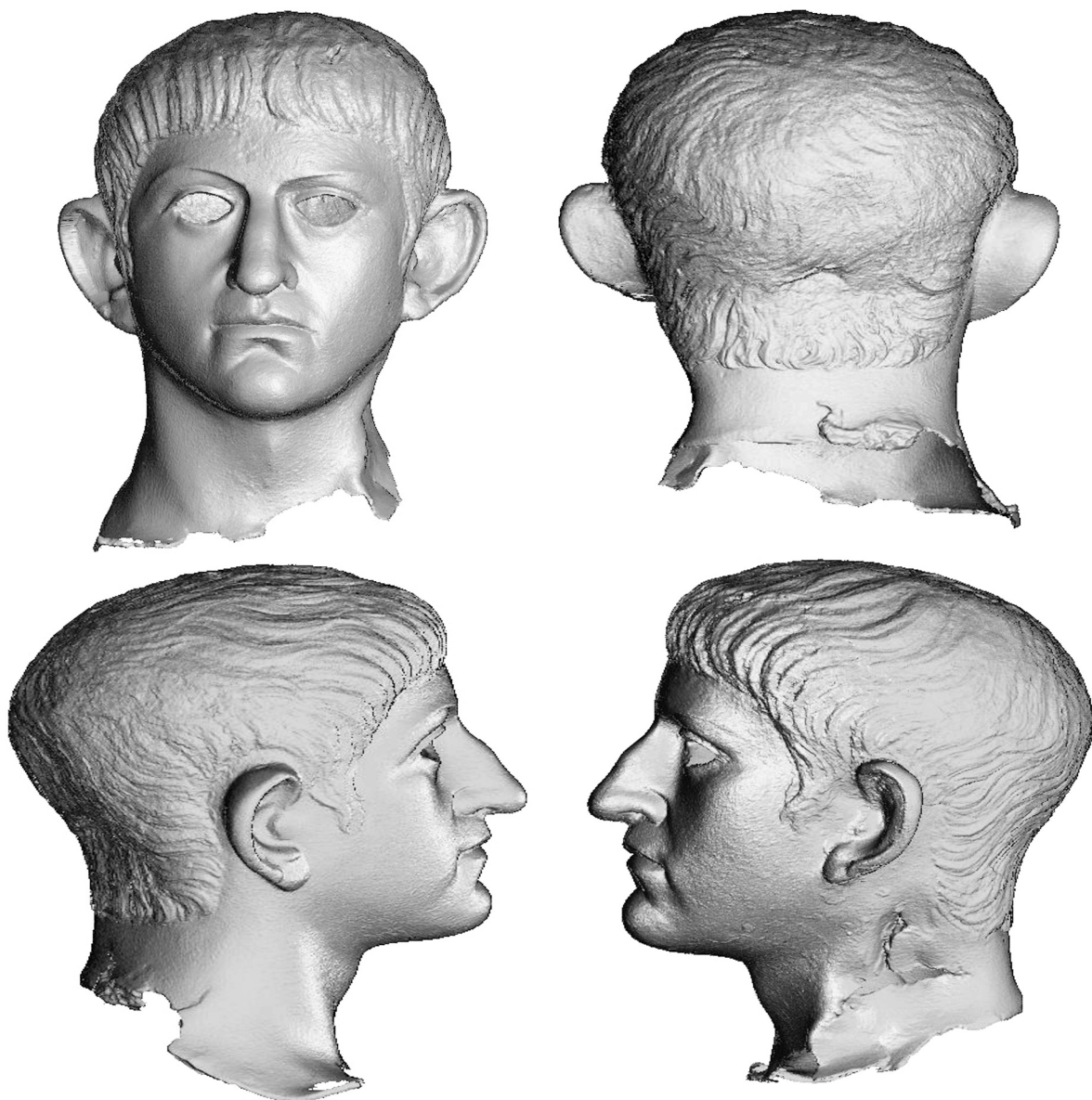30   Haverfield 1914, 43; MacDonald 1926, 3.

31   Toynbee 1964, 47.

32   MacDonald 1926, 6.

33   Dudley and Webster 1962, 106.

34   Celtic society in particular placed emphasis on the appropriation of enemy heads and their dedication as votive gifts: Field 2005, 56.

35   Varner 2005, 72-73.

Figs. 2-5. 3D scans of the same: front view, back view, right and left profiles (Bournemouth University).

triangulation using the known separation of the sensor and the mirror, as well as the location of the reflected beam on the sensor itself.

The head was mounted on its display stand and positioned on a rotating turntable set *c*.0.6 m from the scanner. Using a middle-range lens with a focal length of 14 mm, a field of view of *c*.0.4 x 0.3 m was achieved. The portrait was then rotated incrementally until a total of 55 overlapping scan point clouds were collected. Each scan had a laser point separation of ~0.5 mm and a point accuracy of ±0.05 mm.

The individual point clouds were rendered to create a mesh representing the 3-D surface of the portrait. Overlapping points in adjacent scans were then used to create a composite object which could be rotated and inverted for study. A major advantage of using 3-D data to analyse the portrait is the ability to move a theoretical light source across the surface. This creates a shadow effect which enhances the visualisation of the cast. Precise metrical analysis could also be carried out to enhance interpretation and aid comparison with other portraits recorded by more basic photographic methods.

Identification

The distinctive coiffure makes it clear that the portrait was influenced by, and almost certainly manufactured within, the Julio-Claudian principate (27 B.C.–A.D. 68).

The possibility that the head may have depicted a Roman official, perhaps a governor or some other important individual, was originally considered by Toynbee, commenting that, while improbable, it was something that could not be entirely discounted.[36] The province of Britain was overseen by 7 governors during the Julio-Claudian era,[37] but there are no positively attested likenesses with which to compare our piece, and in any event it is unclear whether such a commemoration of a provincial official would or could have been sanctioned by the state. The same applies to other exceptional individuals within the province. For example, there are no known portraits of the 11 British kings recorded as surrendering to Claudius in A.D. 43 or of the rulers of the client kingdoms that followed. It is also unlikely that the head was intended to represent a particular Greco-Roman or indigenous British deity since portraits of gods usually take on a more idealised form.

Numerous supporting characters in the Julio-Claudian dynasty[38] are known to have had state-sanctioned portraits disseminated to key parts of the empire, but since Britain was incorporated comparatively late the list of candidates who received an official likeness diminishes considerably. Within this small group, Germanicus (the adopted grandson of Augustus and brother of Claudius) and Britannicus (Claudius' biological heir), are possible, given their close relationship to Claudius and the possibility that our piece originated from an imperial cult centre, but their known likenesses, as recorded in sculpture and coinage, do not compare well with our piece, especially with respect to the hairstyle.[39]

The possibility that the bronze was intended to represent a portrait of Augustus or Tiberius can also be discounted, since both men possessed distinctive physiognomic peculiarities,[40] none of which are apparent here. Equally, it does not seem to represent Gaius (Caligula); while there is a degree of variety in his recorded portraiture,[41] he possessed a "broad cranium, high forehead, hollow temples, close-set eyes beneath straight brows, straight nose, and narrow mouth with protruding upper lip",[42] and the best signature for identifying him, his hairstyle,[43] does not equate at all well with our piece. Further, portraits of Caligula are comparatively rare since, following his assassination in 41, most of his likenesses were officially removed,[44] and it seems unlikely that a portrait of him would have been created in Britain after A.D. 43.

It is not known whether any portraits of Claudius were made prior to his becoming emperor. As a member of the Julio-Claudian family, we should perhaps expect such to

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36   Toynbee 1962, 123; 1964, 48.
37   They were Aulus Plautius, Ostorius Scapula, Didius Gallus, Quintus Veranius, Suetonius Paullinus, Petronius Turpilianus and Trebellius Maximus.
38   They include Gaius Caesar, Lucius Caesar, Marcellus, Drusus the Elder, Germanicus, Britannicus: cf. Rose 1997.
39   Kleiner 1992, 129-34; Rose 1997, 59-126.
40   Kleiner ibid.; Rose ibid.
41   E.g., Poulsen 1958; Varner 2004, 22-23.
42   Kleiner 1992, 127.
43   Best described as a "cap of layered hair arranged in comma-shaped locks" brushed to the right across the forehead: Kleiner 1992, 127.
44   Varner 2004, 23-30.

have been commissioned, but as a sickly individual he may have been kept out of the public gaze. His earliest representations seem to date to the year of his accession (A.D. 41), when he was 51. Although certain anachronistically youthful portraits exist, notably on a gold coin struck in 41 or 42 showing a young man "with smooth skin, strong jaw and neck, even features and a full cap of layered hair that grows long on the nape of the neck", the bulk of the images, particularly those in stone and metal, depict a man in his early 50s (figs. 6-7) "with bags under his eyes, sagging jowls, furrows in his forehead, and creases in his cheeks and neck".[45] The overall effect, while perhaps intended to suggest someone in deep thought, actually creates an almost

Fig. 6. *Aureus* of Claudius, A.D. 46-47 (© Trustees of the British Museum).

strained expression.[46] The forehead is generally high, the chin tapers and recedes, and sometimes (in the later portraits especially) he has a prominent fleshy underfold. Attempts at realism may have appealed to Claudius' desire to escape the idealised image favoured by his immediate predecessors (especially Augustus) by returning to the values of the Late
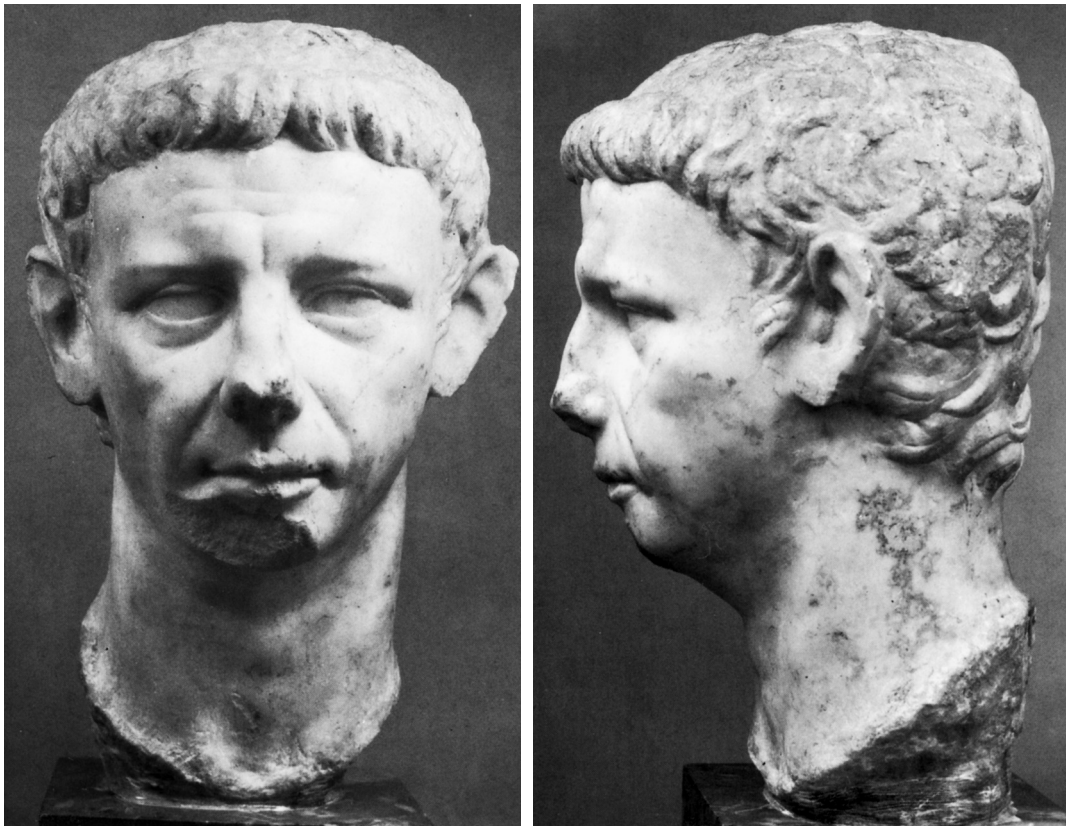

Fig. 7. Front view and left profile of Claudius in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo (© Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

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45   Kleiner 1992, 130-31, fig. 105.
46   Suhr 1955, 321.

Republic; certainly he seems largely to have eschewed the more complex Julio-Claudian coiffure, preferring a simpler style, hair combed forward and parted "near the inner corner of the left eye",[47] the parted locks "turning back toward the centre at the temples"[48] to create a pincer-like effect.

When our head is compared with established portraits of Claudius, certain points of disparity emerge. Chief amongst these is that the head fails to display the high, vertically-furrowed brow so characteristic of his image. Further, our bronze does not possess "the marked distance between the nostrils and the slightly protruding upper lip, the folds of flesh round the mouth, the double chin, and the powerful and stocky neck"[49] more typical of his portraits. The "huge flap-like ears" are "distinctive of some, but not of all, Claudius' portraits". The particular hairstyle of our piece has also caused concern, for he clearly sports hair that "forks, more in the Augustan manner, above the forehead, the free area of which is roughly triangular".[50] Its apparent youthfulness has also created difficulties. Mac-Donald had to accept a considerable degree of idealisation in order to marry the head's youthful appearance with an emperor who was over 60 at the time the temple at Colchester was conceived,[51] while Toynbee conceded that the artist can have never seen the emperor "in the flesh", for he rendered him with leaner, more refined features than he possessed in real life.[52] The lifesize scale may further suggest that it was not intended to represent a reigning or deified emperor, the person depicted not yet having risen to become *princeps*.

Further archaeological discoveries since Toynbee was writing, alongside improved access to museum databases, have increased the number of Julio-Claudian portraits available for comparison.[53] In particular, understanding of Claudius' successor, Nero, has improved considerably, providing more likenesses with which our bronze may be fruitfully compared. Although Nero's memory underwent sanctions immediately following his death in 68 (his portraits being hidden, vandalized, defaced, mutilated or recarved into the likeness of another), there are sufficient, if incomplete, examples, when combined with his coin portraits, to indicate four major portrait types, each celebrating an important event in his 14-year reign or immediately before,[54] and recording his development from a young prince, through adolescence and maturity, to corpulent *princeps*:

1. The earliest images, produced from A.D. 50, probably to celebrate his formal adoption by Claudius, show a slender and boyish individual with a delicate, centrally-parted coiffure of elongated, comma-shaped locks and lengthy sideburns (figs. 8-11). The face is smooth and regular with a rounded chin, aquiline nose, crisply defined lips, and enlarged, almond-shaped eyes.[55]

2. The second type, commemorating his ascendancy to the throne in 54, shows a broadly similar hairstyle, but the face is less boyish, possessing more muscle-tone (figs.

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47   Varner 2004, 25-26.
48   Kleiner 1992, 133.
49   Toynbee 1962, 123.
50   Ead. 1964, 47.
51   MacDonald 1926, 6.
52   Toynbee 1964, 47-48.
53   E.g., Hiesinger 1975; Kleiner 1992; Rose 1994; Born and Stemmer 1996; Varner 2004; Giroire 2007.
54   Varner 2000a, 128.
55   Kleiner 1992, 136; Varner 2004, 48.

Fig. 8. *Aureus* of Nero minted A.D. 51-54, shown in his mid-teens, his first main portrait type (© Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 9 (right). Front view of Nero in his first main portrait type (© Musée du Louvre).
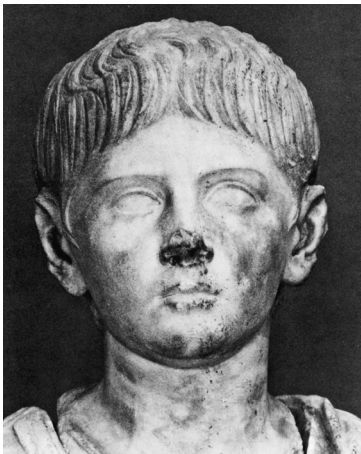

Fig. 10. Front view and left profile of Nero in his first main portrait type (© Museo Nazionale di Antichità, Parma).
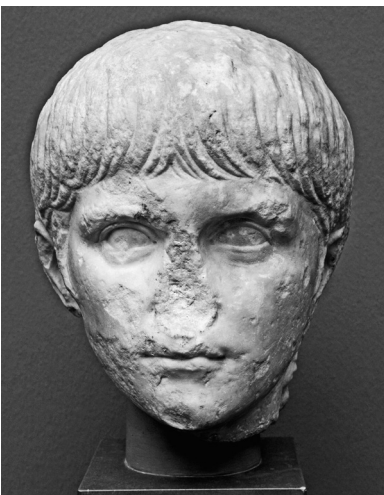

Fig. 11. Front view and left profile of Nero in his first main portrait type (R. Ulrich; courtesy of Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen).

Fig. 12. *Aureus* of Nero minted A.D. 56-57, shown in his late teens, his second main portrait type (© Trustees of the British Museum).
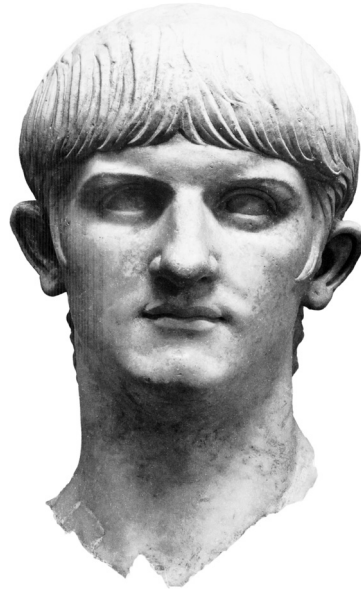

Fig. 13 (right). Front view of Nero in his second main portrait type in the Museo Nazionale, Cagliari (© Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

12-13). The chin is clearly defined and the slightly lopsided ears are noticeably more prominent.[56]

3. In 59, the third main portrait type, probably celebrating the fifth anniversary of his succession,[57] Nero possesses heavier features: a broad face, thick neck, and visible under-chin, with more deeply set eyes and less well defined lips.[58] The hairstyle changes too, individual locks being longer and fuller, his forward-combed forehead curls pushed up to form a crest.[59] Some versions show long, curling side burns, occasionally accompanying a light beard.

4. His final portrait type, probably from 64, the tenth anniversary of his reign, shows a bulky face with very small eyes, the fleshiness of the body image possibly intending to communicate the more positive elements of royalty, namely "luxury, wealth and beneficence".[60] The coiffure is more ornate and complex, with thick, well-pronounced curls, the locks curling across the forehead to the left in an unbroken line.[61]

The earliest portraits of Nero, from the time of his formal adoption by Claudius in 50 (aged 13) to his accession as emperor in 54 (aged 17), are perhaps the least familiar to a modern audience. Three of the best-known examples of the teenage prince are from the Julio-Claudian group in the basilica at Velleia (now in the museum at Parma), a piece of unknown provenance now in the Louvre, and another, thought to come from Cremna, now in the Detroit Institute of Arts. These were all probably created in acknowledgement of Nero becoming heir apparent (in place of Claudius' biological son Britannicus) and all

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56   Kleiner ibid. 136-38; Varner ibid.
57   Varner 2000a, 128.
58   Id. 2004, 48.
59   Kleiner 1992, 138.
60   Varner 2000a, 128.
61   Kleiner 1992, 139; Varner 2004, 49.

are set in similar postures: toga-wearing youth, arms slightly outstretched. Portraits such as this could have been swiftly disseminated throughout the empire, both at the time of adoption and also at the accession.

Our bronze possesses few of the features that define and distinguish Claudius, such as the high furrowed brow, the receding hairline, coiffure, double chin and fleshy mouth, but it does possess characteristics defined within the type 1 and 2 portraits of the young Nero, especially the hairstyle, nature and form of the mouth and eyes, as well as the slightly lopsided positioning of the ears. The comparison is not perfect, however, for there are some inconsistencies in style and form, but as a provincial copy in bronze of an 'official' likeness in stone, our head fits more securely within the known portrait typology of the fifth *princeps* than that of any other member of the Julio-Claudian house. Its rather stylised physiognomic peculiarities, together with the very low lead content, suggests that, instead of being a portrait created under central Roman authority, it was a piece of state-sanctioned provincial art, a regional variant of Nero's second major portrait type showing a more adolescent, muscular face created around the time of his accession in 54.

The nature of the decapitation strategy and the damage sustained

The precise nature of the attack upon the piece has never been discussed other than to note the extreme level of violence employed, but an analysis of the injuries sustained permits a consideration of the decapitation strategy. The left side of the neck is marked by a series of chopping punctures, especially evident to the area around and below the left ear; the right side shows a rough tear, the lower section of which has been bent outwards at an angle of 70°. It is thus likely that the statue had been toppled and was lying on its right side as the assailant(s) struck multiple blows to the lower neck in an attempt to detach the head. Having been punctured along the left side, the head was manoeuvred downwards (towards the right shoulder) in a rough fashion, ripping and distorting the neck. The bronze, which is considerably thicker at the base of the neck (16 mm, as opposed to 4.3 mm elsewhere) fractured along a straight plane at the back of the head where it originally joined the shoulders (presumably having been cast separately).

Nine or 10 separate blows evident above the left clavicle and around the neck appear to have been created by a single iron axe, mattock or small entrenching tool. A further area of substantial damage visible upon the neck itself, directly below the left ear, has the appearance of two discrete blows again using a small iron axe or mattock, the blade of which measured 42 mm long and *c.*7 mm wide. Although a direct comparison with the (successful and so less well preserved) chopping punctures across the lower neck could not be made, the 'signature' of the impact is sufficiently similar to suggest that the same weapon, presumably wielded by the same individual, was employed in all cases. A more substantial impact (37 by 18 mm) visible on the right side of the neck along the line of the tear, which seems to have been distorted during removal of the head, could also have been generated by the same iron implement. One, possibly two, hefty blows to the back of the head, ostensibly with a blunt object *c.*27.75 mm wide, flattened the overall shape of the bust, severely deforming its rear profile. Possibly this damage occurred during toppling or from a blow with a hammer or other blunt instrument directed by a second assailant who was attempting to facilitate the dislocation and removal of the head, but, given the relative thickness of bronze at the back of head, such damage could also have been generated by the iron implement (and by implication by the same individual) noted above, the blade in
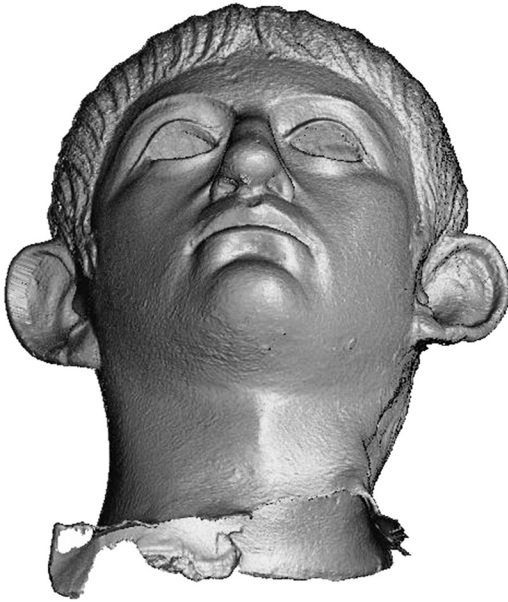
Fig. 14. 3D scan of the head from near Saxmundham, looking up towards the chin. Viewed from this angle, it is possible to suggest that the facial proportions may have been altered so as to limit visual distortion for the spectator below, though damage sustained to the back of the head during its forcible removal should be taken into account (Bournemouth University).

this instance failing to penetrate the metal fully.[62]

The violence of the decapitation may have distorted the overall proportions of the head, creating the 'heart-shaped' facial form. Alternatively, assuming that the statue had been designed to stand at some height, the wide forehead, low-set ears and tapering chin may have been part of a deliberate attempt by the sculptor to counteract the possibility of any visual distortion. When viewed from below, such an alteration of bodily proportions could create a sense that everything was anatomically correct (fig. 14).

Conclusions

Contrary to received wisdom, the bronze head may be identified not as Claudius but as his successor Nero. The decapitation and subsequent disposal of the head in a river could relate to a period of provincial instability, such as occurred during the revolt of Boudicca in 60/61, or to the sanctions enacted upon Nero's memory following his suicide in 68. Despite the re-identification, it remains possible, as was suggested by previous scholars, that the head was taken as spoil from a Romanised site attacked during the Boudiccan insurgency, since images of the current emperor Nero would have been in circulation[63] and already on prominent display in the urban centres[64] or military installations[65] of southern Britain. As the adopted son and heir of Claudius, a life-size statue of Nero would have been appropriately place within or close to the temple of the deified Claudius in Colchester, a site specifically targeted by the insurgents. Yet although the most important, Colchester was not the only focus of the imperial cult in Britain. There is growing evidence for additional cult centres,

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62   Two small holes in the crown relate to the effects of bronze disease rather than to damage sustained during the process of removal or subsequent display.

63   A polychrome bronze statuette of a "cuirassed emperor", about one third life-size, was found in *c.*1795 at Barking Hall in Suffolk and is now in the British Museum (P&E 1813, 0213.1), where it is interpreted as an idealised portrait of the younger Nero depicted in the guise of Alexander the Great, although the pose, now missing shield and spear, is perhaps more reminiscent of Mars in the clothing of a Julio-Claudian *princeps.* From nearby Coddenham a bronze circular cased mirror, probably found in the 19th c. and also now in the British Museum (Reg. no. 1838, 0331.1), bears a likeness of Nero taken from his third main portrait type of A.D. 59-64: Toynbee 1964, 39 and 334.

64   Such as Colchester (*Colonia Claudia Victricensis*), Chelmsford (*Caesaromagus*), London (*Londinium*) and St. Albans (*Verulamium*).

65   Possible Claudian/Neronian forts have been identified at Baylham House, Coddenham and Pakenham in Suffolk, and Ashill, Caistor St. Edmund, Saham Toney and Threxton in Norfolk: Webster 1980, 116-17; Davies 2009, 147-54.

especially in the southern and eastern regions where the introduction of worship may have been a voluntary act of devotion on behalf of the native élite. Other candidates are the temple cum theatre or temple cum amphitheatre groupings, most prominently at Gosbecks[66] southwest of Colchester and at Frilford[67] west of Abingdon, that in other provinces are associated with the state religion.[68]

The earlier suggestion that the severed head originally formed part of an equestrian statue is also unproven. The portrait's backward tilt, first noted in 1908, could relate to the original design of the imperial figure, standing above its audience, his eyes perhaps fixed on the heavens, or instead it could result from the way in which the head has been forcibly wrenched from its body. The discovery of a fragment of equine statuary at Ashill (Norfolk)[69] may increase the possibility that an equestrian portrait of the emperor was targeted by insurgents, but there is no certainty that head and horse were part of the same sculptural assemblage.

Nero was one of a number of emperors who, after death, were condemned as an enemy of the Roman people and whose likeness was abused through a series of memory sanctions. The term *damnatio memoriae* covers a variety of actions intended not only to cancel the identity of a 'bad emperor' but also to "eradicate all of his accomplishments from the collective consciousness of the Roman people".[70] Evidence of *damnatio* can be found in most surviving portraits of Nero, the likenesses having been deliberately vandalised, mutilated or defaced. At Cos, a portrait of Nero housed almost certainly within the agora had been assaulted with a chisel, the blade causing extensive damage to the brows, eyes, nose, lips and chin.[71] Similar damage can be seen on a portrait in Cagliari.[72] Other likenesses in stone were refashioned, excess marble being removed in order to create the portrait of a successor,[73] whilst still others may have been removed, hidden from view or placed in long-term storage,[74] perhaps with the hope to re-use them later.[75] But not all images were mutilated, recarved or hidden: some were overthrown and decapitated, possibly with a view to re-aligning the identity by adding the likeness of another emperor to the torso at a later date. Once removed, heads were sometimes discarded. Likenesses of Nero such as one from Rome now in the National Gallery of Oslo and one of unknown origin now in the Louvre, for example, show evidence of water damage, possibly suggesting that both had been disposed of in a river or stream.[76] Our head could be just such a product of abuse *post-mortem*, a method of disposal that may have particularly appealed in Britain with its long tradition of placing valuable metal artefacts in rivers, lakes and bogs.[77]

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66   Drinkwater 1983, 111-14.
67   Hawkes and Crummy 1995, 178.
68   Burnham and Wacher 1990, 178.
69   Lawson 1986.
70   Varner 2004, 2.
71   Ibid. 49.
72   Ibid. 50.
73   This generally applies to the later emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian: Pollini 1984; Varner 2004, 52-65.
74   Varner 2000b, 16-18.
75   This seems to apply to Nero's earliest togate type, as in the case of the pieces in the Louvre, Parma and Detroit (see above pp. 400-01): Varner 2004, 67.
76   Varner ibid. 72.
77   Bradley 1998.

A possible comparison for the detachment and subsequent discard of our head may be found in a gilded bronze portrait of Nero, first identified in Berlin[78] and now in an American private collection.[79] Its original context and associations are unknown although it has been suggested that the combination of style and quality point to manufacture in Rome.[80] The portrait belongs to his fourth main type, dated between A.D. 64 and 68,[81] depicting a corpulent Nero with small, deep-set eyes and broad, fleshy cheeks and chin. His hair is ornately styled with thick, pronounced curls combed forward and up above the forehead to create a distinct crest.[82] The ex-Berlin bronze had been beheaded with some force, axe blows puncturing the neck behind the left ear, the subsequent dislocation and removal creating a rough tear across the right clavicle,[83] although in this instance detachment of the head did not result in any distortion of the facial proportions, perhaps indicating that its removal was conducted under relatively controlled conditions. Decapitation probably coincided with the *damnatio* that followed Nero's death, the need to remove and bury the portrait overriding any economic considerations or scrap-metal value.[84]

If our head had been mutilated and disposed of during the same *damnatio*, it is perhaps strange that the likeness was one of Nero in his teenage years (according to Varner, his second portrait type, dating to the mid-50s) and not in later life, for that would mean that it had survived the Boudiccan revolt unscathed. It is conceivable, of course, that a bronze statue of the youthful *princeps* was brought to Britain from elsewhere only after the suppression of the revolt and the restoration of civic life. Alternatively, the head may have been damaged during the prolonged period of civil unrest that followed Nero's suicide. It should also be noted that during the process of dislocation and removal no attempt was made to damage the face itself, as one might perhaps expect in an operation associated with a *damnatio* (though it is equally true that no sign of violence appears on the face of the type 4 portrait formerly in Berlin[85]). There is no obvious intent to damage or 'hurt' the portrait by applying force to the sensory organs, the nose, eyes and mouth being especially well preserved. Rather, the intent throughout the removal process was evidently to keep the image intact and recognisable, perhaps for display as a trophy or for secure disposal or ritual dedication elsewhere.[86]

Whatever its original location, context and significance, the balance of probability is that this provincial bronze statue of Rome's fifth emperor was toppled and decapitated during the Boudiccan Revolt of 60/61. The final deposition of the head in a watery context at the boundary between the Iceni and Trinovantes tribes was probably a religious or ritualised act as an offering to native deities following the destruction of a major Roman urban, religious or military centre.

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78   Born and Stemmer 1996.
79   Varner 2004, 70; 2005, 71.
80   Id. 2004, 70.
81   Hiesinger 1975, 120-24; Kleiner 1992, 138-39.
82   Kleiner ibid. 139; Varner 2004, 49.
83   Born and Stemmer 1996, 11-16 and 19-25.
84   Varner 2005, 73.
85   Born and Stemmer 1996.
86   Field 2005, 56.

Acknowledgements

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