THE VINDOLANDA SPOONS

with an Introduction on Roman Spoons

by Heide Birley
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The Vindolanda spoons are each illustrated with a photograph and in some cases also with drawings in the Catalogue.
Preface

This study of Roman spoons, with particular attention to the Vindolanda examples, was originally written as a dissertation in part-fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. in archaeology at the University of Frankfurt on Main, and was presented in 1996. The initial idea for the subject came from my participation in the excavations at Vindolanda in the late 1980s. I am particularly grateful to Robin Birley, Director of the Vindolanda Trust, and to Patricia Birley, its Curator, for their help and encouragement. My supervisor at Frankfurt, Professor Maria R.-Alföldi, not only approved the topic but in numerous discussions offered much valuable advice. Dr Joachim Gorecki likewise gave me many helpful suggestions. David Sherlock, himself an authority on Roman spoons, was very generous with his advice. My son Hanno gave me great help with the use of the computer. The English version, which has been revised, and incorporates details of spoons found since 1996, was prepared by my husband, Anthony Birley. Barbara Birley kindly made new photographs of the Vindolanda spoons.
Part I: Roman Spoons; a survey

1. Introduction

'Spoon' is defined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica as 'a small, shallow, bowl-shaped receptacle supported by a handle, used for eating, serving, and cooking foods.' As early as the neolithic period spoons made of wood, bone, clay or stone, as well as 'ready made' ones such as oyster or mussel shells, were being used. Some examples from ancient Egypt (beginning of the first millennium BC, New Kingdom), made of shale, ivory and wood, are elaborately decorated with symbols of the goddess Isis (fig. 1, nos. 1-3), while others combine representations from the natural world with religious motifs (fig. 1, nos. 4-8; Jackson 1892). One may well assume that such spoons were used not only at mealtimes but for cosmetic or ritual purposes.

![Fig. 1: Ancient Egyptian spoons](image1)

It seems to have been the Greeks who first made spoons out of metal. Celtic spoons—which are often referred to just as 'spoon-like objects' because of their unusual shape—had, instead of a long handle, a kind of flat plate-shaped extension, often richly decorated, with which the leaf-shaped bowl, which had a rather blunt point, was connected (fig. 2).

![Fig. 2: A Celtic spoon](image2)

The earliest Roman spoons so far known were found near Tivoli (the ancient Tibur), north-east of Rome, and date to the first century BC: ten large oval 'dessert'-spoons (ligulae), and seven small spoons with a circular bowl (cochlearia; Lipinski 1969; cf. Strong 1966: 117). Classical writers from the first century AD onwards—notably Petronius, the Elder Pliny and Martial (see below)—
refer to spoons as a standard component of Roman cutlery. Forks, by contrast, were apparently not used at mealtimes, while knives are only occasionally mentioned: food was mostly cut into pieces before being served at the table. Hence spoons were a particularly important item of everyday use, and silver ones of both sizes were favourite presents at the Saturnalia, as several poems by Martial show—and as his first work was published in AD 80, his last early in the reign of Trajan, he was an exact contemporary of Vindolanda’s periods I-III. For example, in the reign of Domitian, writing to his friend Quintianus, he tells him that he is only giving him a copy of his own poems, even though it is the time of year when others are giving as presents ‘slender spoons’ (graciles ligulae) and jars of dried damsons (Epigrams V 18, written between AD 91 and 96). In the next poem, addressed to the Emperor himself, ‘mighty Caesar’, Martial makes a scornful reference to those who give extravagant Saturnalia-gifts, such as ‘a spoon weighing half a pound’—clearly made of silver (Saturnaliciae ligulam...selibrae) (V 19.11). In a later poem his friend Paulus is jokingly reprimanded for only giving him a drinking-bowl at the Saturnalia—‘you might at least have sent me a ligula or a cochlear!’ (VIII 33. 23ff.). These names for the two different kinds of spoon, which crop up again in a similar poem to his friend Postumianus (VIII 71.9ff.; cf. also XIV 120, a silver ligula as a typical present for this Roman midwinter holiday), are explained below (section 1 2; and on the Latin words section I 2.8). Spoons are also found, together with other items of tableware, in Roman burials.

There have been several very differing approaches to research on ancient spoons. The meaning of the different Latin names has been much discussed, likewise the supposed use of spoons in religious or ritual contexts and hence their relevance to pagan or Christian ceremonies, and of course their geographical distribution and regional variations. There is hardly a museum anywhere which does not have some spoons in its collection. Unfortunately they are all too often inadequately displayed—or indeed not displayed at all. This is a pity: because their shape and function remained almost unchanged over many centuries, they are easier to identify for the visitor than almost any other object.

2. Research on Spoons

2.1. Their typology and the criteria for assigning them to particular categories

Spoons differ not merely in the material from which they are made but also in their shape, in the size and formation of the bowl, in the handle and in the way the two are joined. One may distinguish two quite different basic shapes, commonly referred to by specialists as ‘cultural types’, which determine their respective functions. Within these two basic groups one can make a further differentiation by comparing details of the spoons’ shape and decoration.

*Type I*: the small spoon, Latin cochlear (sometimes spelled cochleare or cochlearum; plural cochlearia).

Characteristics. The bowl of early spoons is circular; then from approximately the second century AD the small oval form was preferred. The handle is either round or square in section; it is often partly twisted; and it always has a sharp, pointed end. The joint between bowl and handle is flat in the earliest examples, but the handle often begins underneath the bowl, the so-called ‘rat’s tail’ arrangement. The later spoons no longer have this flat joint and the joint itself is often decorated.

*Type II*: the large spoon, Latin ligula (plural ligulae).
Characteristics. The bowl is a large oval, similar to the modern dessert or soup spoon. The handle is basically rounded, with a pronounced finial. The handle, at first completely straight, was later given a slightly curving form, which always ends with a bird's head; this is known as the 'swan's neck handle'.

In 1921 H.B. Walters (in his Catalogue of the Silver Plate in the British Museum) produced a typology of Roman spoons, which was to be often used in subsequent publications. This was revised by Donald Strong in his Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate (1966 and reprints). Strong identified three principal groups, chronologically determined, within which he assigned to each shape an individual type number; these 'Strong types' form the basis of the typology in the present work (Strong 1966: 155, fig. 32, 177, fig. 36; 204, fig. 40).

The two main types are very easily and unambiguously identifiable from their earliest appearance: the small spoon has a circular bowl and a straight handle with a sharp, pointed end, while the large spoon has an oval bowl and a thicker and proportionately shorter handle with a pronounced finial. However, in the course of the centuries these simple characteristics were modified. Spoons with a sharp-ended handle also acquired an oval bowl, while the large spoon—in so far as it still turns up at all—was given a curving handle with a bird's head as finial.

New criteria to define the two main types have been worked out. Particular attention is given to the following major characteristics:

1. the shape of the bowl—circular, oval, or fiddle- or pear-shaped. (The fiddle-shape is also referred to as 'purse-shape'.)
2. the construction of the joint between bowl and handle—flat, raised, or disc-shaped (with or without piercing).
3. the shape of the handle—round or square in section, often curved, pointed end, with or without a finial.

The very large late Roman spoons with curved handle are an exceptional category, so far known only from a small number of findspots, e.g. Canterbury, Kaiseraugst, Thetford and Traprain Law.

Within this general division into two main types it is possible to identify sub-groupings, so that one can point to spoons which diverge from the 'norm'.

In the two studies of the material from Augst (Riha & Stern 1982; Martin 1984), the main emphasis is given to technical aspects, e.g. comparisons of the weight of these spoons with those from elsewhere. (However, it must be noted that the use of the terms cochlear and ligula in these works is problematic, see section I 2.8, below.) British publications have concentrated more on the way spoons were actually used, and have aimed at a typological and chronological categorisation. Contributions by Catherine Johns, Kenneth Painter and, in particular, David Sherlock deserve special mention: their research has produced important advances in the study of Roman spoons (see Bibliography).

2.2 Exceptional shapes

2.2.1 Sieve-spoons

It must be stressed that the term 'sieve-spoons' does not refer to the wine-strainer, called column in Latin, an implement with a long handle and round 'business end', both parts of which were generally richly decorated: this was used to sieve wine seasoned with spices. These wine-strainers have been found particularly in late Roman women's burials, often associated with so-called toothpicks. In the present work we need rather to discuss briefly a particular category of spoons, of which only a small number has been found, with the bowl perforated for use as a sieve (Hauser 1992: 17 argues that this perforation was always secondary). A good example is the spoon (described as a ligula) from the sixth century AD Canoscio treasure (fig.3).
Fig. 3: A sieve-spoon from Canoscio (sixth-century AD)

The bowl has been perforated, in the form of a Chi-Rho with Alpha and Omega, for use as a sieve-spoon. Similar treatment has clearly been given to the pair of large sieve-spoons from the early fifth century AD Hoxne treasure. Both their bowls, which are transverse, and the dolphin-shaped handles are of a previously unknown type (fig. 4). The richly decorated bowls, 8.5 cm across—gold inlay in the form of a sea-god in the middle, with more dolphins at the side—are also pierced: both have beautiful, symmetrically arranged spiral perforations. Although it is not yet clear exactly what the purpose of such sieve-spoons was, it is difficult to imagine any other function for such luxury items of cutlery than at the table.

Fig. 4 Sieve-spoons from the Late Roman Hoxne hoard

2.2.2. Folding spoons

Another unusual type (not all that many examples have been found) is the 'folding spoon'—this is the standard description in some earlier publications (Robertson 1970: 217; Brodribb et al. 1971: 108; Sherlock 1976b: 250). More recently it has been argued that a better term would be 'folding cutlery', since almost all such spoons can be shown to have had attachments, so that further items could be added. On several examples one can recognise the remains of an iron knife. An intact one
from Albintimilium (Ventimiglia) in NW Italy and another from Cambridge (fig. 5) are indeed sets, comprising not only a spoon, but also a sieve-spoon, an ear-cleaner, tweezers, a tooth-pick and even a fork—which the Romans supposedly did not use (Baratte 1990: 83).

Fig. 5: Folding cutlery set from Cambridge

They could be folded in various different ways. The handle could be attached to the bowl as with ordinary spoons and a hinge made at the other end of the handle. This was surely the best way of making the implement stable. Then either a knife or other cutlery items could be added in this position. Spoons from London and Cologne, dated to the late second or early third century AD, are examples of this variety (Sherlock 1976b: 251, fig. 1, his type A, here fig. 6). The richly decorated
spoon found in Northern France, dated to the third or fourth century AD (Foltiny 1974: 265), was folded in this way (Sherlock 1976b: fig. 1, his type C; here fig. 6).

![Types of folding spoons](image)

**Fig. 6: Types of folding spoons**

A further method of folding was to make a hinge at the joint between bowl and handle (examples from Richborough, Traprain Law and Augst—the latter with a slight modification). Spoons of this kind, on which the handle is still preserved, can be seen to have had a second hinge at the upper end of the handle, to which further items could, again, be attached. It is worth noting that the majority of folding spoons have the fiddle-shaped bowl which came in at the end of the second century AD. All these spoons with fiddle-shaped bowls have a richly decorated handle in the form of a lion’s, panther’s or leopard’s head in the lower half, with the animal’s front legs holding the bowl, further up a bulge representing its hind quarters and legs and flattening out at the end into a shape like a double-headed axe (Sherlock 1976b: fig. 2, his type B; here fig. 6).

One can still only speculate about the use for which these implements were made. David Sherlock suggests that 'they were made for travelling, as a kind of convenient picnic set, like a modern pocket knife or a soldier's knife, fork and spoon that clip together' (Sherlock 1976b: 254). They could also have been offered to guests at dinner parties—or, as George Boon suggested, dinner-guests may have been expected to bring their own cutlery (pers. comm. cited by Sherlock 1976b: 255 n. 16). The ones found in burials in the Jakobstrassee, Cologne might support such an interpretation (Friedhoff 1991: 194). Sherlock regards it as impossible to distinguish from the provenance whether such items were 'military issue' or purely civilian, since those from Britain, only ten in total, make up such a small proportion, about 1%, of the total number of spoons from the province. At all events, these figures suggest that the type was not a great commercial success.
2.3 Finds and their context and dating

Spoons are found at both civilian and military settlement sites, and in burials and hoards. (Often enough, of course, isolated items with no archaeological context or associated finds form part of large museum collections, which makes it difficult to date and categorise them.) In this section a brief overview of a representative set of finds is offered, which will help to provide a context for the examples from Vindolanda.

Max Martin describes Late Republican, i.e. first century BC, spoons as simple, unpretentious implements, c. 10-16 cm long, with a thin, straight handle ending in a sharp point, fitted directly onto a small bowl (Martin 1984: 76). The known examples derive almost exclusively from hoards (e.g. Tivoli, cf. fig. 7 here) and are often associated with other tableware.

![Fig. 7: Late Republican spoons from the Tivoli hoard](image)

Spoons from the early or middle imperial period may be called 'objects in everyday use' (Riha & Stern 1982: 8). Examples from the continent that are clearly datable (mainly by pottery evidence) come from settlements on the left bank of the Rhine such as Augst, at villa-sites or at fortresses and forts such as Vindonissa and Rheingönheim. Finds of this period from Britain mostly derive from settlements—they were evidently not yet placed as offerings in burials, whereas a few have been found in first and second century AD burials on the continent (Simonett 1941). The main hoards or treasures from the early imperial period which include spoons are those from sites destroyed by Vesuvius in AD 79 (Pompeii, Boscoreale); but some are also known from the Balkans, e.g. the important find at Jabučje, datable to the first half of the first century AD, and, slightly later, that from Tekija (Popovic 1994: 255ff.). In Britain, the Backworth (Northumberland) hoard belongs to the mid-second century (Strong 1966: 177).
At the beginning of the third century AD, the custom of placing spoons as an offering in graves, which became widespread in late Roman times, can be documented in burials in the Roman provinces, e.g. at Cologne-Marienberg, Cologne-Bickendorf and Lullingstone in Kent. Spoons were evidently placed in graves either as an offering, i.e. as part of the dead persons' 'tableware', or because they were part of their personal property. Spoons have also been found in Germanic inhumations on the right-hand side of the Rhine, the so-called 'Elbe-German princely tombs' (the Leuna-Hassleben group). Several hoards can be dated to the same period, e.g. those from Manching, Notre Dame d'Allèngon, Vienne and Xanten. Some of these spoons carry inscriptions (Böhme 1970: 197), which at first were engraved on the inner side of the bowl (Emersleben, Cologne-Bickendorf, Xanten).

No such hoards are known from the territory on the right-hand side of the Rhine. In this area, as also in northern Gaul and southern Britain, it is above all burials which have produced such finds—not, however, in southern Gaul and the other parts of the Mediterranean. Different conceptions of the funerary rite seem to have prevailed in the latter regions, since spoons do not form part of the burial offerings there. Spoons are found in equal proportions in both male and female burials. The rich offerings—particularly the interment of fully clothed bodies with valuable personal possessions—in such fourth and fifth century AD graves in northern France and Belgium point to a prosperous Germanic upper class in late Roman times (Monceau-le-Neuf, Niederursel).

The silver spoons in the female burials have been interpreted as a kind of status symbol, comparable to the spurs and arrowheads in the male graves (Schulz 1933, cited by Böhme 1970: 178 n. 23). For example, the silver spoons in the burial at Samson (province of Namur, Belgium) lay directly next to or on a plate, together with other tableware, easily datable by the associated men's belt-buckles and women's brooches (fig. 8).

![Fig. 8: Silver spoon from the burial at Samson, province of Namur (Belgium)](image)

Spoons have also been found in children's graves, together with glass and pottery vessels. The Roman population in these provinces was likewise familiar with this custom, witness the two almost identical silver spoons from sarcophagi C and D at Cologne-Müngersdorf (fig. 9), bearing the inscription deo gratias ('thanks be to God').

![Fig. 9: Silver spoon from Cologne-Müngersdorf](image)
A series of major hoards derives from the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Britain is particularly strongly represented with Biddulph, Canterbury, the two Dorcheesters (Dorset and Oxon.), Great Horwood, Hoxne, Mildenhall, Thetford and Traprain Law. Further important finds (to mention only a few major hoards) are those from Carthage, Kaiseraugst and the Esquiline at Rome. In these troubled times, when the Western Empire was beginning to fall apart, not a few of its inhabitants decided to conceal their valuables in the ground—and, no doubt for a variety of reasons, were not in a position to recover them. Tableware, and hence spoons too, made of precious metal, are prominent in such hoards, along with coins, silver bullion, and gold and silver jewellery. Relatively few spoons of any kind have so far been found in the Iberian peninsula (D. Sherlock: pers. comm.): one can only speculate why this should be so.

The following brief chronological sketch of the history of Roman spoons begins with the Tivoli find, datable to the Late Republic or Triumviral period. It must be noted that as yet we have no solid information about the beginnings and early development of Roman spoons, let alone what directly influenced their emergence. As Strong put it: ‘Before the first century AD there is no evidence for their use at table’ (Strong 1966: 155). It is only in the early imperial period that more finds are available; and it is the numerous hoards of the middle and later Empire that allow us to build up a thoroughly reliable picture of the development of spoon-types and their association with contemporary tableware. The history of ancient spoons can then be pursued right into the seventh century AD, as shown by early Byzantine finds, e.g. from Antioch and Hama in Syria, Lambusa in Cyprus or Lampsaecus in Asia.

The Late Republican period

**Cochlear:** these early spoons have a round, thin-walled bowl, to which the handle, round or octagonal in section, is attached at the base. It ends in a point and the axis from handle to bowl is straight. The best examples come from the Tivoli hoard, with seven *cochlearia* (fig. 7, above).

**Ligula:** the large oval bowls of the early *ligulae* are wider and squatter than in later examples. The handles are square in section with a duck’s head finial and are linked to the bowl at an angle to it. No doubt it was thus easier to hold, the main weight being below. Here too the Tivoli hoard is the main example: its ten *ligulae* probably belonged to an original set of twelve.

The first and early second centuries AD

**Cochlear:** the small spoon for eating eggs, snails and shell-fish continues to have a round, thin-walled bowl. The thin, often decorated handle is round in section and has a pointed end. The axis from handle to bowl is straight. Examples are the *cochlearia* from Augst, Vindonissa and the Vesuvius towns. Towards the end of the first century AD the earliest spoons with an oval bowl, slightly set back from the handle, appear, e.g. at Augst and Vindonissa.

![Fig. 10: Cochlear of the second century AD](image_url)

**Ligula:** this continues to have a large bowl of oval shape; the handle, circular in section and often facetted along its length, ends with a knob or hoof as finial. Bowl and handle are connected at an
angle, with the joint under the bowl, the so-called rat’s tail. The treasure from the House of Menander at Pompeii has some good examples of this type (fig. 27, below).

**The second and third centuries AD**

*Cochlear*: the bowl is still round but has become heavier and more solid. The inner edge of the bowl is more deeply worked, with convex moulding (fig. 10). As with the early *ligula*, which was gradually going out of fashion, its handle is joined to the bowl in the form of a rat’s tail. Among the latest specimens of this early form are those from Backworth and Cologne. In place of the round bowl the oval one is from now on ever more frequently found. At the beginning of the second century it is almond- or pear-shaped, and in the course of the century the fiddle-shape becomes more and more popular and remains the standard form of *cochlear* right on into the third century. All the same, pear-shaped and fiddle-shaped bowls are found side by side throughout the whole of the second century. The bowl is now offset from the handle with an openwork joint. The handle either tapers to a point or is moulded throughout its length; it often has an openwork scroll, a spiral pattern or fluting. A good example of this much favoured type of spoon—which was still in use, as an ‘antique’, as late as the fourth century, as in the Esquiline treasure—is that from Niederbieber fort (fig. 11). This fine silver spoon, with fiddle-shaped bowl and richly decorated handle, was found in a building to the right of the *praetentura* (Lehner 1911: 282) and is clearly datable: the fort was built in the last decades of the second century, as its stamped tiles demonstrate (Schallmayer 1987: 487).

![Fig. 11: Silver spoon from Niederbieber](image)

*Ligula*: from now on this type of spoon is distinguishable from the *cochlear* only by the greater size of its bowl and the shape of the finial (cf. Strong 1966: 177f.; Martin 1984: 56, 58ff., 95). The two types of spoon seem to have to some extent merged into one. All the same, examples from Berthouville and Manching show that the original shape was still in use, even if found less frequently.

In general, the original short, light *cochlear* developed into a heavy, solid dessert spoon, which because of the dropping of the bowl could be held in the hand more easily. The earliest examples of decorated bowls now occur. A spoon from Trier-St. Irminen (fig. 12) has a small, richly decorated, fiddle-shaped bowl; its handle was perhaps at one time lengthened by an additional piece made of organic material or it may even have had a knife attached to this end (Sherlock 2003).
The fourth and fifth centuries AD

Cochlear: the handle, which, as previously, still ends in a point, becomes ever longer and is square in section. The markedly offset joint is gradually made thicker: instead of an openwork volute it now has a closed one, which is also richly decorated. The bowl is now a long oval form or pear-shaped. The spoon as a whole is now larger (e.g. Kaiseraugst and the British hoards) and more richly decorated than before, while the inside of the bowl carries Chi-Rho signs or other inscriptions (fig. 13).

Round bowls, likewise richly decorated, continue to turn up from time to time, perhaps as a conscious revival of the earlier fashion, as in the hoard of late Roman silver from Carthage (fig. 14).

Ligula: here one has to ask whether the new form should really still be called a ligula. It is basically a large, oval bowl with a curved—'swan's neck'—handle ending in a bird's head, which sits either on top of or at the side of the bowl's edge. There are fourteen examples of this late type of spoon in the Kaiseraugst hoard, and it is also found in Britain, e.g. at Canterbury and Traprain Law (fig. 15).
Later centuries

Late Roman and Merovingian spoons are all called *cochlearia*, even though they almost all have a finial. They are now heavier, and Stefan Hauser, noting that sets of spoons can be correlated to the Roman system of weights, suggested that spoons may have been priced and sold according to their weight in metal (Hauser 1992: 92, n. 412).

2.4 Spoon manufacture and materials used

The early, thin-walled examples of the small metal spoons with round bowls were probably, at least in the case of the very fragile bowl, hammered out from a slug (Riha & Stern 1982: 26). Marks of this working can often still be detected. As M. Martin noted, they 'have either been hammered out of metal bars or cast into their present shape and then finished by hammering' (Martin 1984: 97). Likewise E. Foltz concludes on the basis of the parallel grooving, which spreads out in the bowl in a fan-shape, and could only have been created by hammering, that 'the spoons were hammered out from a bar c. 10 mm thick' (Foltz 1984: 364).

Heavy metal spoons were cast. Slugs have been found with casting- and join-marks (e.g. Augst, Castleford) and in 1967 half of a marble mould was found in a *taberna* at Augst, in the remains of the staircase. Clay moulds are also conceivable, which would have had to be broken after casting, or boxes with sand moulds, for which, however, models (counter-dies) would have had to be made first. The often elaborately worked piercing in the volutes probably arose as the result of casting, followed by drilling, chiselling and filing.

One may roughly distinguish three techniques in the metalworking: first, hammering, beating, or striking, which involved no chipping or shaving and hence no loss of weight; second, casting, with slight loss of volume and weight during finishing; third, a process involving filing, boring and turning, which would result in considerable loss of volume and weight. One may well postulate that a combination of all three techniques was generally used.

The different types of spoon were widely distributed throughout the entire Roman empire. Hence it has not yet been possible to decide with certainty in individual cases whether a spoon was an
import or produced by a local workshop. Probably one may assume that simpler spoons were produced locally (cf. I 2.7, Workshops). At Rome important workshops are known, at least for silver spoons, employing a large number of slaves. Such silversmiths, themselves former slaves, *liberti*, were sought-after craftsmen, not only only in Rome but in many provincial cities. Cleopatra, for example, is said to have gone for her silverware as far as Rhosus in Syria, where well-known silversmiths had their workshops (Strong 1966: 15f.).

The materials used for making spoons were wood, bone, ivory, glass, iron, pewter, brass, bronze and silver, but only rarely gold. As far as the copper-based alloys are concerned, there was an increasing tendency to add lead, which was cheaper. Genuine high quality bronze spoons, with a high percentage of copper (and corresponding amount of tin), found in the first century AD, disappear almost completely thereafter (Riha & Stern 1982: 29). The differences are, however, not apparent to the naked eye and can only be detected by analysis of the metal.

Wooden spoons are found extremely seldom, although one can certainly assume that wooden utensils, including spoons, not least because they were not very heavy (for soldiers' packs), but also as being simple and cheap to make, were often preferred to those out of other materials. But wooden utensils that were no longer fit for use no doubt did not end up in rubbish, as did broken pots, but in most cases will have been burned (D. Baatz: pers. comm.).

Bone spoons generally had a circular bowl, very occasionally an oval one (Dangstetten, Wroxeter). They are always carved in one piece from a single cattle bone, then ground and polished smooth. Bone spoons have often turned up in first century AD levels in forts and civilian settlements, for example at Augst, Avenches, Hofheim, Rheimünheim, Verulamium and Vindonissa. From the mid-second century onwards they are no longer found. The reason for this, it may be inferred, was that the coming into fashion of the offset bowl meant that the thin joint would be too fragile in carved bone spoons. E. Riha has detected a concentration of bone spoons in provincial towns and a greater preference for metal spoons at legionary fortresses, and attributes this to 'higher purchasing power or greater degree of Romanisation, or both, among the military' (Riha & Stern 1982: 32). Further research is probably required before this phenomenon can be explained. For a bone spoon from Vindolanda see Catalogue no 8, below.

A fine example of a glass spoon is known, described as 'iridescent, pale bluish-green...2nd-3rd century AD, with wide oval bowl and spirally twisted handle' (Sotheby, Sale catalogue, 20 November 1987, lot 121; found at Beth-Gibia in 1898). Similar spoons are known in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge and (fragmentary) in the British Museum, Metropolitan Museum, New York and the Sangiorgi Collection, Rome (D. Sherlock: pers. comm.). See fig 16.

![Fig. 16: Glass spoon from Beth-Gibia, Sotheby sale, 1987](image)

Some of the first century AD light cochlaria with circular bowls and needle-shaped handles were made of brass. Without analysing the metal content, they can only be distinguished from bronze spoons by the experienced specialist. Ten brass cochlaria with circular bowls, dating to the first
and second century AD, have been found at August, one of them with remains of eggshell adhering to it.

Pewter spoons were made in the second and third century AD from an alloy with about 51% tin, 24% lead and the remainder copper. They are often referred to as made of 'high lead-content bronze'. The low melting point of this alloy made the production costs cheaper. When found in excavations, the patina or degree of corrosion are at first glance indistinguishable from that on higher quality bronze alloys. However, after cleaning the metal looks whiteish grey rather than yellow and in general is of a softer and more flexible consistency. To prevent them bending, pewter spoons were generally fitted with an iron handle, hence the term 'composite spoons'. All the same, the different melting points of iron and tin meant that the joint was a serious weak spot. This may be the reason why only the bowl of the pewter spoon from Vindolanda was preserved (Catalogue no. 19).

The 'classical' bronze spoons are made of between 80 and 90% copper and between 6 and 20% tin. However, as early as the beginning of the second century AD the proportion of tin and lead began to rise steadily. The original bronze with very little lead content gave way to an alloy with a high proportion of lead. The so-called 'white metal wash', which one finds not only on many bronze spoons but on metal vessels as well, was made mainly of pewter. One effect of this was, of course, to make simple bronze spoons look as if they were made of silver, but the main reason for this process was different: bright metals oxidise when in contact with food. In general, spoons made of copper alloys form the majority of all spoon finds. It appears that pewter-washed copper alloys ('imitation silver') predominated in urban settlements and villas, while a greater number of simple bronze or even bone spoons have been found in rural settlements. Perhaps it was a question of social status.

From the third century BC onwards silver tableware had been in great demand. Collectors paid incredible sums for beautiful pieces. The so-called 'luxury laws', such as the *lex Claudia* of 218 BC, set limits on the amount of table silver (likewise of jewellery and on the cost of other items) which individuals were allowed to possess. The importance of silver plate in the domestic, political and economic life of the Roman Empire cannot be overestimated... There was hardly any family that did not possess some item of table silver and to have been brought up in a family that had none was a sign of the most abject poverty' (Strong 1966: 124). Hence it is not surprising that spoons found in burials or in hoards are mostly silver (even if other materials disintegrate faster). An anecdote from the biography of Caesarius, Bishop of Arles in the sixth century, illustrates this point. When King Theodoric presented him with a silver bowl weighing about sixty pounds, the ascetic bishop had it auctioned for charity two days later, 'because he never used silver at his table—except for spoons' (*Vita Caesarii* 1.26).

### 2.5 Decoration

The inside and outside of the bowl, parts of the handle and both sides of the joint are suitable surfaces for decoration and for inscriptions. Naturally the two sides of the bowl offer the most space; and of course, as the outside or underneath part of the bowl is mostly not visible to the user, the upper or inside surface is the favoured position.

The best examples of bowls decorated on the inside that are known at present are those from the remarkable Hoxne hoard. This was buried between the years 410 and 415 in Suffolk and discovered by chance in 1992: it is composed of 14,780 coins and 200 further gold and silver objects, including 78 silver spoons. These spoons are without exception decorated or inscribed, all on the inside of the bowl (fig. 17).
The engraved and gilded figures, such as dolphins and mythological sea-creatures, are taken from the traditional repertory of themes, as known from Britain and the rest of the Empire, not just on spoons but on other tableware elements, such as large plates (Canterbury; Dorchester, Dorset; Augst; fig. 18).

The fish has frequently been described as a Christian symbol when used by the Roman engravers, but it can be interpreted in a purely 'secular' way. A. Radnoti was able to show that the fish was not necessarily a Christian symbol, but, just like mussels and dolphins, simply a popular decorative element for the Roman engraver of the imperial period (Radnoti 1965; see also the Mildenhall and Traprain Law hoards). J. Engemann, too, concludes that 'the extremely frequent representation of fishes for decorative purposes in non-Christian as well as Christian art in Late Antiquity' is an argument against the fish on spoons having a symbolic Christian meaning (Engemann 1972: 167; fig. 19).
A further particularly popular motif in the decoration of the inside of the bowl is the hare. Its significance is so manifold that it is hardly possible to offer a single explanation. The hare was taken to be a fertility symbol or a magical remedy. But it also crops up as the companion of the goddess Artemis or in the general context of the cult of Dionysus. It is impossible to say whether or not the user of the Lambusa spoon (fig. 20) perceived the hare engraved on its bowl, shown lying on the table, in the first instance as delicious roast meat: it was of course a favourite Roman dish.

Birds are often depicted in scrolls or among foliage, or, as at Vindolanda (Catalogue no. 19), sitting on a cantharus; others are shown in the scroll surrounding an inscription (Essweiler: LVCILIANE VIVAS, Engemann 1972: 167). Bulls, lions, griffins, horses, boars, stag and rams (Lambusa) were also favoured motifs on the inside of the bowl (fig. 21).

The two handled cantharus is found again and again on the inside of the bowl of large spoons, as on the silver one from the fort at Langenhain (fig. 22). (Radnoti 1965 discusses the cantharus as decoration, together with the scroll, on the handle of an oval dish.)
The pewter spoon from Vindolanda (Catalogue no. 19), which is exactly matched by one from London (in the Museum of London), is also decorated with a cantharus. In this case a parrot, 'the bird associated with Bacchus's Indian triumph', sits on the rim of the vessel. 'The cantharus is a most potent symbol of immortality and is especially associated with Bacchus' (Henig 1977: 352ff.).

The Lambusa spoons, datable to about the middle of the seventh century, mark the last examples of decoration on the inside of the bowl. At this time, in the east, the first examples of decoration on the outside of the bowl are found.

In the course of the third century the joint between bowl and handle became ever more elaborate, which offered a further possibility for decoration. At first the joint itself was worked in various forms. There were animals' heads (Dorchester, Dorset) and, above all, every kind of variation of the volute. In the course of time these became increasingly solid (Kaiseraugst), until in the fifth century the closed 'disc' itself became the surface for decoration (Monbadon), mostly on the left side, the one facing the right-handed user.

Decoration of the spoon handle is already found on the ligulae from Campania, with, for example, the end being in the shape of a ball or a hoof (Pompeii, also Manching). Later types have a baluster finial (Krefeld-Gellep). But the whole handle could also be embellished by giving it a spiral form, or various elaborate intermediate pieces (see the illustrations of the Niederbieber finds). Some cochlearia had clearly had a handle with a finial made of organic material which has now perished (Trier-St. Irminen; similar spoons are also known from Xanten and Cologne-Bickendorf).

Finally one must mention the large spoons of late date, which are described as ligulae by some scholars, with the entire handle, in the form of a swan's neck, made into a decorative element (Canterbury, Kaiseraugst, Thetford, Traprain Law etc.; see fig. 15, above).

2.6 Inscriptions

There was space for an inscription on the same parts of the spoon as were available for decoration: the handle, the joint and the inside of the bowl. On the back of the bowl only graffiti are found.
Inscriptions name the owner or the person who had received a spoon as a gift, often with formulaic good wishes: PAPITTEDO VIVAS, 'Papittedo, may you live!' (Mildenhal, fig. 23);

![Fig. 23: Silver spoon from the Mildenhal treasure](image)

VTERE, 'use' (Malton, Colchester, fig. 24, Vindolanda); FELIX, 'happily' (South Shields, fig. 24, Canterbury)—one assumes that in these cases there was originally a pair of spoons which together would give VTERE FELIX, 'use happily!', a favourite formula on other Roman objects of daily use, such as drinking cups, bowls and plates, and also on rings, brooches and belt-buckles (Sherlock 1984: 84).

![Fig. 24: Spoons from Britain with VTERE and FELIX](image)

An example from the Isola Rizza/Verona hoard shows this popular formula still being used in the fifth century, on six silver spoons, on the inside of the bowl. Graffiti are rare (Kaiseraugst is exceptional in this respect). Probably a good number will have been gradually wiped away during cleaning.

Isolated examples of inscriptions are found at least as early as the third century, in most cases on the inside of the bowl (Cologne-Friesenstrasse, Cologne-Bickendorf). One from Xanten is an exception, the so called 'Galianus spoon', which has been described as 'the earliest known spoon inscription north of the Alps' (Böhme 1970: 187; fig. 25): the inscription is on the upper side of the handle.
But one must also note the spoons found in Britain with VTERE and FELIX on the joints, at Malton, South Shields, Canterbury and Vindolanda: they are identified by Sherlock as of known third century type (Sherlock 1984: 83). Indeed, the Vindolanda spoon with this inscription was found in a level which can be dated as early as the end of the second century (Catalogue no. 17).

Fourth-century inscriptions run from along the inside of the bowl onto the handle, again so that they could be seen by a right-handed user. The same applies to the joint. The Thetford hoard from the end of the fourth century offers a good example of inscriptions (RIB II 2420.19 and 24) on both surfaces, bowl and handle. As well as various other small finds the hoard includes thirty-three silver spoons of very varied shapes, most of them decorated or inscribed (Johns & Potter 1983). Northern Gaul and Belgica apparently have almost no finds of this type (Böhme 1970: 187).

Generally speaking, from the beginning of the fifth century the inside of the bowl was no longer used for inscriptions. From this time onwards they are consistently found, in most cases, on the joint of square handles (Rome, Esquiline). In the sixth century, in the course of which the joint between bowl and handle gradually changed from being an open-work volute to a closed surface, this relatively large flat surface was also well suited to be used for inscriptions. The monograms from the eastern provinces of the Empire are particularly well known in this respect, but they do not occur in the west. The Sutton Hoo 'Saul' and 'Paul' spoons, from the sixth century, are inscribed on the handle (Sherlock 1972).

### 2.7 Workshops

In principle one may assume that simple metal objects, including the majority of spoons, were made in the same place as they were used, in other words that workshops were set up where there was a demand for their products. Increasing numbers of finds of moulds, half-finished objects and metal waste have come to light. At Haltern large quantities of slag, moulds and half-finished objects from iron and bronze-working have been found, likewise at Dangstetten, Rheingönheim and Hedernheim, and, in Britain, at Cardiff fort, Verulamium and Chedworth villa, to mention only few sites. Metalworking has also been identified at Vindolanda (see below). A mould for spoons, in this case of pottery, is known from Faimingen fort, and many fragments of such moulds have been found at Castleford fort in Britain (see fig. 26).

In her dissertation on metal workshops in the north-west of the Roman Empire, published in 1994, B. Grillfs was able to show that the 454 workshops which she identified were distributed almost equally between towns on the one hand and civilian settlements and military sites on the other. It was only very specialised establishments, producing precious metal and luxury items, that were located almost exclusively in towns (Grillfs 1994: 68). London is a good example of this: as well as blacksmiths' forges (for ironworking), two goldsmiths' workshops with crucibles and traces of gold have been excavated there.
Because the different types of spoon were distributed over the entire Roman Empire, it is extremely difficult to establish, in individual cases, whether a spoon was imported or made locally. State or imperial workshops are known to have existed in Gaul, which was economically highly developed, which no doubt exported their products to neighbouring provinces. Major coin mints were situated in Gaul, and also silversmiths' workshops, which certainly produced in the first instance to supply the emperor, but also produced for export. Cologne too had metal engravers' workshops, as well as many others (pottery, glass, textiles). A bronze- and silversmith whose wares were signed SACIRO is known here. Martin comments that 'on the other hand, certain types of spoon, above all British and Gallic examples from the late fourth and early fifth century with animal's head on the joint, may be characteristic of their area of distribution at that time—after all, they recall...contemporary animal's head belt-buckles from Northern France' (Martin 1984).

In a study of mould fragments from Castleford, Sherlock justifiably expresses some surprise that no examples of the spoons made in them have yet been found, either at Castleford itself or anywhere else in Britain (Sherlock 1986: 384; fig. 26). All that are known are similar 'fiddle-shaped [or 'purse-shaped'] bowls', which crop up almost everywhere, e.g. at Aldborough, Colchester, London, South Shields, York—and at Vindolanda.

Fig. 26: Spoon moulds from Castleford

Gralfs concludes that mass production cannot be detected in any of these workshops, whether urban or rural, unlike the situation with pottery manufacture: 'Metal workshops were as a rule small or medium establishments with between one and three craftsmen' (Gralfs 1994: 75). She regards
Capua, already mentioned in connection with bronze-working by the Elder Cato (On agriculture 135), simply as a workshop that served its immediate environment, not as 'a centre of the bronze industry...Even neighbouring Pompeii catered for its own needs in all types of metal goods.'

In other words, it is clear that metal workshops producing objects for everyday use were spread all over the Empire. This meant that high transport costs could be avoided and those parts of the population whose purchasing power was low could be better supplied. Luxury goods and the working of precious metal, on the other hand, were confined to urban establishments. Such products were intended for a restricted number of customers, who were in a position to pay for high transport charges.

To sum up: there is plenty of evidence for metal-working in the western half of the Empire. In her book on Roman forts, Anne Johnson attempted to identify fabricae inside both legionary fortresses and auxiliary forts on the basis of finds and plan. Examples have been found located in the central range, as well as in the praetentura and retentura. Finds of iron slag, metal objects, craftsmen's tools, burnt clay and remains of moulds increasingly suggest that each fort could have largely supplied its own needs. To be sure, it remains uncertain to what extent workshops in auxiliary forts produced their own goods as well as carrying out repairs (Johnson 1983: 183ff.).

2.8 Cochlear and ligula: on the names and specific functions of Roman spoons

The original names and also the specific functions of Roman spoons are—unlike many other ancient objects—reliably recorded in ancient literary sources. In the Flavio-Trajanic period the poet Martial, in one of the two-line epigrams in his fourteenth book, the Aphthoreta, on Saturnalia presents, jokingly makes a ligula say: 'Although knights and senators call me ligula, I am called lingula by uneducated schoolmasters' (XIV 120). Of course, the schoolmasters were quite right—the word is a diminutive of lingua, 'tongue', and was no doubt originally written lingula, hence literally meant 'little tongue', so called because of its shape. This was the larger 'dessert spoon'. In his next poem (XIV 120), he makes a little cochlear, the name of which came from the Greek word kochlos, 'shell', itself describe what it was used for: to eat snails and eggs. The round bowl was used as an an egg-spoon, while with the sharp end of the handle one could pick the snail out of its shell. Other poems by this author (quoted above, I.1) make the difference between cochlear and ligula clear (VIII 33.24) and especially how the two differ in size (VIII 71.9). Archaeological finds from the contemporary Vesuvius towns illustrate what he meant, for example in the treasure from the House of the Menander at Pompeii (fig. 27).

![Fig. 27: Cochlearia (above) and ligulae from the silver hoard from the House of Menander at Pompeii](image-url)
The principal characteristics of the two forms are very obvious: the little *cochlear* with circular bowl, to eat eggs, and long pointed handle for snails and shellfish, used instead of a fork, and the *ligula* with its large, oval bowl, ideally suited for eating soup and other dishes such as stews, hence in appearance similar to our soup-spoon. The *ligula*'s handle is shorter, compared with that of the *cochlear*, and had an end-piece or finial, mostly a round knob or animal's foot, later a baluster.

The Elder Pliny—writing a few years before he lost his life during the eruption of Vesuvius in August AD 79—also comments (*Natural History* XXVIII 19) on how *cochlearia* were used. In a section of his work devoted to spells and incantations and the like, he notes that after eating eggs or snails it was usual straightaway to break their shells or to pierce them with the *cochlearia* (meaning with their sharp end, of course) with which they had just been eaten—to ward off any such 'imprecations'! He reports in another passage (XXI 84) how the whitest part of yellow beeswax, which had been heated in sea water after adding soda, was collected with *ligulae*—which he spells *lingulae*—for a variety of medicinal uses (cf. also *Med. Plin.* III 21). There are even Roman paintings which document the use of spoons, again at Pompeii, two still lifes, from the Casa dell'Ara Massimo and the Vicolo del Fauno. The latter is reckoned to be the earliest surviving such illustration: it showed eggs, egg-cups and *cochlearia* together on a plate. It was reproduced in a nineteenth-century work on Campanian wall-painting (Helbig 1868: 1668; cited in RE 4.1, 1900: 156), but seems to have gone missing: a search in the National Museum in Naples a century later failed to trace it (K. Schefold 1957, cited by Steiger 1967: 42 n. 14). A similar scene is shown on a mosaic at Antioch in Syria: in the centre of a large platter stands a sauce-bowl (*paropsis* or *acetabulum*), and around it two artichokes, two pigs' trotters and two egg-cups with eggs in them, and next to the latter two *cochlearia* (fig. 28).

![Mosaic from Antioch with one of the earliest depictions of cochlearia](image)

Confirmation, if it were needed, for their use as egg-spoons is provided by a find from Augst: a brass *cochlear* which still had pieces of eggshell sticking to it (Riha & Stern 1982: 10).

One may thus identify these spoons, *cochlearia* and *ligulae*, as the basic items of Roman cutlery, attested from the Republican period onwards. The shape of the *cochlear* of this time, with circular bowl and needle-shaped handle, is evidently 'a variety that frequently crops up in all the Roman provinces' (Riha & Stern 1982) The majority of the spoons found at Vindolanda are of this shape, specifically in two versions, as at Augst: a lighter one, worked from thin sheet-metal, the handle of which is straight and comes directly out of the bowl (Catalogue nos. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10) and a more solid type, in which the handle is added on to the lower part of the bowl (nos. 2, 8, 11). The bowl itself in these somewhat heavier examples has a groove running all round it, known from the Backworth hoard and on one from Cologne (fig. 10, above).
Riha regards the light, thin version, made of brass or bronze with only a little lead, as the earlier and dates it to the first century AD. It was probably hammered in many cases (Martin 1984: 56) and there are parallels for this shape in bone (not at Vindolanda). The solidier version, which is always moulded, in silver or in a tin and lead alloy, is dated by Riha to the second century. The handle of this type occasionally has a square joint.

There appear to be no problems about naming and categorising the early types of spoon. However, at the beginning of the second century a new type came into use. It has an oval bowl, but smaller and of a different shape to that of the old ligula, and a pointed handle. But the sources tell us nothing about a new name. Hence there is a little uncertainty as to how one should describe the new type. Some scholars go by the form of the bowl and label all oval-bowed spoons ligulae (e.g. v. Schnurbein 1977: 103: 'The spoons from the [Regensburg] cemetery are all ligulae'). Others are guided by the form of the handle (Riha & Stern 1982, Martin 1984). The result is that in more recent publications every spoon that has a pointed handle is described as a cochlear, whereas if the handle has an end-piece the spoon is called a ligula. Sometimes one is up against the confusing situation that items of otherwise completely identical shape are sometimes called a ligula and sometimes a cochlear, for the sole reason that the handle-end is slightly different or the bowl slightly larger (Riha & Stern 1982: plate 29). In that case, the two virtually identical third century fiddle-shaped spoons, from Emersleben Grave 2 and the Neupotz hoard, would both be ligulae, since they both have a separately formed end-piece to the handle (fig. 29). Yet the fiddle-shape is in my view completely typical for the cochlear in this period.

![Fig. 29: Spoon from the Neupotz hoard](image)

The categorising of the terms cochlear and ligula known from first and early second century literary sources thus turns out to be problematic from the mid-second century onwards. The large late spoons with swan's neck handle from fourth and fifth century sites, always either silver or silver-gilt, are referred to repeatedly in recent publications as ligulae. There is no literary authority for a special nomenclature (Gelsdorf 1987: 33f.). Strong actually recognises in these spoons a fourth basic type and places them chronologically at the very end of his series (Strong 1966: 204ff.).

F. Gelsdorf proposes in this connection that one should use the ancient terms only for the earliest examples, from the first century AD, for which these terms were originally intended. All later examples should, in his view, be labelled neutrally just 'spoons', as was indeed already the case with Strong's typology (Gelsdorf 1987: 35). He regards such a procedure as unavoidable, if only because both the older types continued to exist alongside the new ones. The old style ligula is represented unchanged in the third century Manching silver hoard, while the cochlear with circular bowl, by now richly decorated on the inside, is found at Carthage even in the fourth century.

The separate nomenclature of the two types of spoon, originally determined by their respective function, in the course of time became completely obsolete. But both names live on in modern
languages. There seems to be a north-south divide here. The majority of Romance languages, those spoken in areas around or close to the Mediterranean, have words for spoon derived from *cochlear*: Spanish *cucharra*, Portugese *colher*, French *cuillère*, Italian *cucchiaio*. But Welsh *llwy*, German *Löffel* and Dutch *lepel*, Czech *lžice*, Polish *łyżka* and Romanian *lingura* derive from *ligula*; all these languages are spoken in areas once in or just beyond the northern provinces of the Roman Empire (cf. Gelsdorf 1987: 35). The English 'spoon', by contrast, derives from neither, but from a word originally meaning a chip taken from a larger piece of wood or horn. Likewise the Scandinavian languages have terms unrelated to the two ancient names: Danish *spaan*, Norwegian *spøn*, Swedish *sked*. No doubt the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians were too far removed from the Roman world to be influenced by its dining culture.

Apart from the practical function of spoons, some scholars have discussed their possible significance in religious cult. In particular, V. Milojčić (1968) attempted to interpret certain spoons in this way. In his study of the Carnuntum spoons, H. Vettes argued for a connection between those with a Christogram and baptism or the Eucharist, and pointed out that silver spoons are still given as baptism gifts in Southern Germany today (Vettes 1968: 149). Böhme commented as follows: 'From the fourth century onwards Christian inscriptions or symbols are also found on other everyday objects. The spoon was part of the tableware of the Roman and Germanic upper class. Spoons have been found, either on top of or underneath pottery or metal vessels, in 22 out of 33 burials of fourth and fifth century date, in most cases together with chicken bones (Böhme 1970: 190).

A cultic background was also postulated by H. v. Petrikovits, who associated the twelve spoons of a cutlery set with the twelve apostles: 'The Latin rite of the Eucharist may not have had anything to do with spoons—but the Greek rite did.' However, later in this study he commented that 'spoons were part of the cutlery of the Roman world. Hence silver spoons are found together with silver tableware in Roman period hoards' (v. Petrikovits 1966: 173, 178).

Martin (1984) had no hesitation in regarding the spoons simply as part of the tableware, without any cult significance. Tóth expressed a similar view: 'The character of the objects themselves does not permit one to attribute to them any liturgical use, and nor do the sources attest any regular liturgical significance for spoons' (Tóth 1991: 114). Likewise Bierbrauer 1975, Painter 1975 and, above all, Engemann find Milojčić's theory unacceptable. Engemann did not see even in the association of the Christogram with the popular fish-motif any cultic meaning: rather, they signified purely secular good wishes. People of the early Christian period, in his view, had 'more of a free and easy attitude to representations of biblical scenes and to symbols'. The sole function of spoons was, he emphasised, 'for eating' (Engemann 1972: 155ff.).

Finally, one may cite C.A.Winter, who argued that 'none of the sources, literary, representational or archaeological, allow the conclusion that there was a custom of distributing the bread and wine in the Eucharist with a spoon'. Further, 'it is not permissible to identify a spoon as Christian or the name of a godfather on it solely on the basis of its inscription', since 'the use of a spoon for liturgical purposes is not known in the Church in the west, and even in the eastern Church not for the period in question' (Winter 1990: 272).

2.9 The 'spoonful' as a measuring-unit

Just as today we measure certain ingredients when cooking in dessert spoons or teaspoons, the Roman spoon had a specific function as a unit of measure. Columella refers to both types of 'spoonfuls', the *ligula cumulata* and the *cochlearia cumulata* (*On Agriculture* XII 21.2-3) and the Elder Pliny, when giving instructions about mixing certain herbs with honey, gives the quantities in *cochlearia* (*Natural History* XX 118; XXIII 76). Information such as this cannot of course be verified by archaeology.

One of the small *cochlearia* in the Museum Kam at Nijmegen has three concentric grooves on the inside, which are so thin—indeed they are scarcely visible—that they can hardly have been
intended as decoration. One can well imagine in this case that their purpose was to measure powdery or creamy substances.

The Romans no doubt took over their system of measurement from the Greeks (Hultsch 1882: 102). It was placed under the control of the aediles (Mommsen, *Staatsrecht* II 1: 470) and remained unchanged into late Byzantine times (Hultsch 1882: 115). Pliny describes the *ligula* as a spoon for ladling, about the size of half a *cyathus* (=23 ml), the smallest cubic measure taken over from the Greeks. The *cochlear* was a quarter of a *cyathus* (=11.5 ml).

### 2.10 Sets of spoons and their weight

As is still the case today with our sets of cutlery, spoons were produced as early as Late Republican times in sets, evidently with twelve in each. S. Hauser asked whether, in a Christian context, this number can be associated with the twelve apostles (Hauser 1992: 88), as had already been argued by H. v. Petrikovits. Sets of twelve spoons are known from Mainz (Martin 1984: 83) and from late antique finds at Antioch (now at Dumbarton Oaks) and Lampascus (Hauser 1992: 88). Martin argues on the basis of this and other evidence that twelve was the regular size of a set.

A set of this size already corresponded to the weight of a Roman pound (327.45 gm), or to its fractions, in Republican times, and this remained the case as late as the early Middle Ages. In other words, the customer ordered spoons from the producer according to weight and the weight in question was then divided into sets of twelve. The result was that spoons within a set might look almost identical but the weight of each could vary by several grams.

It is interesting to note that in the course of time spoons became steadily heavier. A dozen *cochlearia* in the late Republican period weighed about one sixth to one quarter of a pound, at the very most half a pound; by the third century AD this had gone up to between half and three quarters of a pound and in the fourth century to between three quarters and one pound.

Petronius describes in his *Satyricon* (33.6), with a nice piece of exaggeration—which indeed applies to this entire section of the work—spoons that weighed not less than six pounds each, and how 'eggs' made of pastry were pierced with them. In real life, by the fifth and sixth centuries twelve spoons could already weigh two pounds of silver (Desana, Isola Rizza), and in the seventh century as much as three pounds (Antioch, now Dumbarton Oaks).

For the period under discussion in the present work, that of the Roman Empire, the details of the weight and number of these late silver spoons cannot have been of decisive significance. As far as pottery production in our period is concerned, we know that, for example, *terra sigillata* services could consist of three or four pieces each and the same is true for table silver. One may well assume that similar figures applied to the spoons that went with them.
Part II  The Vindolanda Spoons

3  The site of Vindolanda

Vindolanda lies almost exactly halfway between the North Sea and the Solway Firth, each some sixty km distant, to east and west. It occupies an escarpment or plateau, sharply defined on its south side by a small stream, the Doe Sike, which flows into the Chineley Burn on the east of the plateau. This is formed by the confluence, just below the north-eastern corner of the later stone fort, of two other streams, the Brackies or Cockton Burn coming from the north-west, the Bradley Burn from the north-east. The Chineley Burn itself flows into the River South Tyne about one km to the south. Just over half a km east of Vindolanda towers the heather and bracken-covered Barcombe Hill, along the ridge of which stone quarries, that were to be exploited by the garrison, still show up prominently. The east-west Roman road, the Stanegate, ran past the fort’s northern rampart. Beyond it the ground rises markedly, up to the rugged north-facing crags of the Whin Sill, 1½ km distant, along which Hadrian’s Wall was later to be constructed.

![Map of Vindolanda and surrounding area](image)

Only to the west of Vindolanda is the ground level; and on this side there are plentiful springs, ensuring a regular water-supply. The internal lay-out of the earliest fort, of cohors I Tungrorum, is not known, but that of the cohors VIII Batavorum, at least, faced west. From its west gate, then, the via praetoria ran east to join the north-south via principalis. Opposite the road-junction the headquarters building, principia, was erected, to the south of the principia the massive commanding officer’s residence, praetorium.

The fort’s name is Celtic: vindos meant ‘white’ or ‘shining’; it survives as Welsh gwyn and Irish fínn—and in the word winter, the ‘white season’. Several other place-names in Britain began Vindo-: Vindobala (Rudchester) and Vindomora (Ebcaster), also Roman forts, are examples close to Vindolanda; and Vindogara was a native settlement in Ayrshire. Vindobona on the Danube (modern Vienna) and Vindonissa (near Brugg in Switzerland) are well-known sites on the continent, both housing legionary fortresses. landa meant ‘enclosure’ or ‘lawn’, from the same root as Welsh llan. One can guess why the place got the name: soon after sunrise in winter, the plateau stays in the
shadow cast by Barcombe after the frost all round has melted: for half an hour or so it really does look like a 'shining enclosure' or 'white lawn'. The name must already have existed when the Romans first saw Vindolanda, in the early 70s. No trace of a British settlement has yet been detected. It is likely that there was at least a holy place there: the Celts attached sacred significance to springs, streams and rivers. The watersmeet at Vindolanda would have been an ideal place for a shrine or sacred grove (A. Birley 2002: 49ff.).

Vindolanda seems to have been occupied continuously from c. AD 85 until at least the fifth century. After the construction of Hadrian's Wall, it seems to have been integrated into the Wall system and in the late document listing Roman officials, the Notitia Dignitatum (40.32), the commanding officer of the last garrison, cohors IV Gallorum, is listed with others 'along the line of the Wall' (per lineam vallii). For the different periods of occupation see 3.2, below.

Fig. 31: Vindolanda's successive forts: Period I is shown red, Periods II-III green, Period IV blue, the late stone fort black.
3.1. The finds

The twenty-six Vindolanda spoons were without exception recovered as isolated finds, some of them in the Vicus area, others from the forts, in particular from the early timber forts. In the latter some were found at levels as deep as six metres below the modern surface. The spoons from the Vicus and the west ditch of the stone fort are nos. 2, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17 and 18. Those from the early timber forts are nos. 3-6, 8-10, 13, 19-26. The remainder were strays or unstratified: nos. 1, 7 and 16. All the spoons are made of metal, except for no. 8, which is bone.

3.2. The distribution of the spoons within the successive periods at Vindolanda

*Period I*, c. 85-92, a relatively small fort, probably some 1.8 to 2 hectares in area, of which only the southern end of the innermost west ditch and more recently further ditches on the west side have been excavated; the garrison was the cohors I Tungrorum (TV II 154, where the editors assign this tablet to Period II; but see now A. R. Birley 2002: 59ff., 168ff., n.9). One spoon, no.20, Strong type 32a, was found in one of the outer ditches of this period.

*Period II*, c. 92-98, a considerably larger fort, of which the estimated size is c. 3 hectares, with the central range located above the innermost west ditch of the previous fort; the garrison was the cohors VIII Batavorum equitata (?milliaria) (TV II 282, 396). Three spoons were found in this period, nos. 5, 6 and 9; and no. 4 may be either period II or III. They are small, light spoons with a circular bowl, of the type Strong 32a, and are typical of the first century AD.

*Period III*, c. 98-105, basically the same fort as in period II, although the praetorium and south gate were extensively rebuilt; the garrison was still the cohors VIII Batavorum equitata (?milliaria), which left Vindolanda for good at the end of this period. This is the period in which the prefect Flavius Cerialis, writer and recipient of the largest single group of writing-tablets, served. The terminal date can be brought down to AD 105 by the evidence of the tablet Inv. 1474A, a list of Cerialis’ expenses (first published by Bowman & Thomas 1996: 307ff.): this list mentions one of the consuls of AD 104 and probably went on into the next year (thus A. R. Birley 2002: 128ff.). At most three spoons were found in this period, nos. 4, which might however be from period II, 10, of a transitional type associated with the end of the first century AD and the beginning of the second, and 24, Strong type 32a.

*Period IV*, c. 105/6 to c. 120/122. The fort was even larger than that of period III; the praetorium of that period was replaced by a double barrack-building and the period IV praetorium was a little further to the west. The dating of the start of the period is achieved by combining the evidence from tablet Inv. 1474A (cf. above) for the end of period III with the dendrochronological evidence that at least one of the timbers from period IV was from a tree felled in the winter of 103-4 (J. Hillam in VRR III 120, 123). R. Birley notes that ‘the levelled site of Vindolanda III lay vacant for some time. A layer of leaves...had accumulated on the surface of spread turf before building work commenced’ (VRR I 92). A writing-tablet from period IV is dated by the consuls of AD 111 to December 110-February 111 (TV II 186). A draft letter of appeal may have been intended to go to the emperor Hadrian, who visited the area in AD 122 (TV II 344, with A. R. Birley 1997: 135ff.). The garrison was once again, as in period I, cohors I Tungrorum (TV II 295), although elements of other units are also attested: the equites Vardulli, presumably the cavalry section of the cohors I fida Vardullorum equitata (TV II 181), and legionary troops (TV II 180). Four spoons derive from this period, no. 13, an oval-shaped, completely preserved example, similar to Strong type 36b (‘second or third century AD’), 21 and 25, both Strong type 32a, and 8, a bone spoon, similar to Strong type 36a.
**Period V, c. 120/122 to c. 140.** At the end of period IV a new building of uncertain function was erected on the levelled site of the barrack-block. The garrison was probably still the cohors I Tungrorum, as suggested by a spearhead with the inscription TVNG punched on the blade (VRR II 91) and by the discovery inside the visible stone fort of a diploma issued to a veteran of the cohort in AD 146; he had presumably been enrolled in AD 121 (RIB II 2401.9). Three spoons were found in this period: no. 3 is an early type with circular bowl, Strong type 32a ('1st century AD'); no. 19 is a type datable to the second or third century AD, Strong type 36b; no. 22 is Strong type 32a. A fourth spoon, no. 26, Strong type 36a, may belong to this period or to period VI.

**Periods VI-VIII** represent phases of the stone fort which is still visible today, respectively from c. 140-c. 222, c. 223-late third century, and late third to fourth centuries—but the exact dating of the change from period V to VI and VI to VII remains less than entirely certain. The first stone buildings of the vicus belong to period VII. Nos. 2, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17 and 18 come from the stone fort or its Vicus, but none are clearly stratified. They include almost all spoon-types from the first to third centuries AD. No. 2 has a circular bowl of first century type and no. 11 has a similar bowl but of second century type. No. 12 has an oval bowl and is probably second century in date, likewise no. 18. Nos. 14, 15 and 17, with fiddle-shaped bowls, are second or third century in date. No. 26 may belong to period VI or period V (cf. above). All these types are found elsewhere in closely datable sites such as Pompeii, early forts in Germany such as Hofheim, Rheingönheim or Aislingen, or in later forts along the Limes in Germany, Faimingen, Straubing and the Saalburg.

It may be noted that no mention of spoons has so far cropped up in the Vindolanda writing-tablets.

**Summary of the levels in which the Vindolanda spoons were found**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>unstratified</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>periods VI or VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>period VI</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>unstratified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>period V</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>periods VI or VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>period II or III</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>periods VI or VII</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>period II</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>period V</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>period II</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>period IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>unstratified</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>period IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>period IV</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>period V</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>period II</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>period IV</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>period III</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>period IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>periods VI or VII</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>period III</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>periods VI or VII</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>period V or VI</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>period IV</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>period IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>periods VI or VII</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Catalogue of the Vindolanda spoons

1 Cochlear, circular bowl, now fragmentary; otherwise complete; Strong type 32a
Material: copper alloy
Dimensions: 13.2 cm long; bowl c. 2.0 x 1.7 cm
Weight: 2 grams
Year excavated: 1991, unstratified
Date: probably early second century
Parallels: nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 20, 21, 22
Inventory no. 5507

2 Cochlear, circular bowl, now distorted; completely preserved; Strong type 36a
Material: copper alloy
Dimensions: 13.8 cm long; bowl 2.4 x 2.5 cm
Weight: 4 grams
Findspot: outside SW corner of stone fort I, in Antonine ditch
Year excavated: 1986
Date: period VI, c. AD 160
Parallels: nos. 4, 8, 11, 23
Inventory no.: 3491
3 Cochlear, circular bowl; now fragmentary; Strong type 32a
Material: bronze, with silver wash
Dimensions: 13.4 cm long; bowl 2.4 x 2.2 cm
Weight: 3 grams
Findspot: western part of Room 16 of period V building
Year excavated: 1986
Date: period V, c. AD 140
Associated finds: dupondius of Hadrian (Area 12); tablet TV II 353
Parallels and references: as for no. 1, above; R. Birley 1994: 123
Inventory no.: 3284

4 Cochlear, circular bowl; completely preserved, with particularly stable handle (now bent), which has rather faint decoration
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 14.2 cm long; bowl 2.2 x 2.5 cm
Weight: 8 grams
Findspot: Room XVIII (workshop) of period III praetorium
Year excavated: 1988
Date: period II or III, end of first or beginning of second century
Associated finds: As and sestertius of Domitian, dupondius and sestertius of Nerva
Parallels and references: as for no. 2, above; R. Birley 1994: 82
Inventory no.: 4462
5 Cochlear, circular bowl; completely preserved; Strong type 32a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 14.4 cm long; bowl 2.4 x 3.2 cm
Weight: 4 grams
Findspot: Room F/G of period II praetorium
Year excavated: 1988
Date: period II, c. AD 92-98
Associated finds: pottery, writing-tablet TV II 210
Parallels and references: as for no. 1, above; R. Birley 1994: 44
Inventory no.: 4045

6 Cochlear, circular bowl; completely preserved; Strong type 32a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 14.0 cm long; bowl 2.2 x 2.2 cm
Weight: 4 grams
Findspot: water-tank, L, of period II praetorium
Year excavated: 1988
Date: period II, c. AD 92-98
Associated finds: pottery, sestertius of Domitian
Parallels and references: as for no. 1, above; R. Birley 1994: 48
Inventory no.: 4152
7 *Cochlear*, only the circular bowl, now fragmentary, is preserved; Strong type 32a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: now 2.8 x c. 2 cm
Weight: now 1.5 grams
Year excavated: 1987, unstratified
Date: the type is of the first century AD
Parallels and references: as for no. 1, above
Inventory no.: 968

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8 *Cochlear*, only the circular bowl is preserved; similar to Strong type 36a
Material: bone
Dimensions: 2.4 x 2.3 cm
Weight: 2 grams
Findspot: period IV barrack
Year excavated: 1991
Date: c. 105-120/122
Parallels and references: as for no. 2, above
Inventory no.: 5373
9 Cochlear, circular bowl; the upper part of the handle is very twisted; Strong type 32a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 14.0 cm long; bowl 2.0 x 2.0 cm
Weight: 4 grams
Findspot: water-tank, L, of period II praetorium
Year excavated: 1988
Date: period II, c. AD 92-98
Associated finds: pottery, sestertius of Domitian
Parallels and references: as for no. 1, above; R. Birley 1994: 48
Inventory no.: 4183
10 *Cochlear*, circular bowl; the point of the handle is broken off; Strong type 32a  
Material: silvered bronze  
Dimensions: what is preserved is now 9.5 cm long; bowl 2.0 x 2.0 cm  
Weight: 5 grams  
Findspot: room 15 of period III praetorium  
Year excavated: 1988  
Date: period III, c. AD 98-105  
Associated finds: As of Domitian (AD 77-8)  
Parallels and references: as for no. 1, above; R. Birley 1994: 79  
Inventory no.: 4129

11 *Cochlear*, circular bowl; the point of the handle is broken off; Strong type 36a  
Material: silvered bronze  
Dimensions: what is preserved is now 15.1 cm long; bowl 2.4 x 2.4 cm  
Weight: 7 grams  
Findspot: Antonine ditch of stone fort I  
Year excavated: 1987  
Date: period VI, c. AD 160  
Parallels and references: as for no. 2, above  
Inventory no.: 3707
12 Cochlear, only oval bowl, very fragmentary, is preserved, together with remains of joint to missing handle
Material: bronze with silver wash
Dimensions: c. 2.7 x 1.3 cm
Weight of what survives: 2 grams
Findspot: near west gate of stone fort I
Year excavated: 1984
Date: period VI or VII, second or third century AD
Inventory no.: 103

13 Cochlear, oval bowl; completely preserved; bowl has faint teeth-marks; similar to Strong type 36b
Material: silvered bronze
Dimensions: 15.6 cm long; bowl 3.2 x 2.0 cm
Weight: 7 grams
Findspot: room VII of period IV barrack
Year excavated: 1988
Date: period IV, c. AD 105-120/122
Inventory no.: 4199
14 *Cochlear*, only the fiddle-shaped bowl is preserved;
Strong type 36c
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 4.2 x 3.0 cm
Weight: 8 grams
Findspot: south side of the west gate of the stone fort
Year excavated: 1985
Date: third century AD shape
Parallels: nos. 15 and 16, below
References: Riha & Stern 1982: 35, plate 25; 238;
Sherlock 1984: 83
Inventory no.: 476.

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15 *Cochlear*, only the fiddle-shaped bowl is preserved;
Strong type 36c
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 4.3 x 3.8 cm
Weight: 9 grams
Findspot: on the inner side of the stone fort west wall
Year excavated: 1984
Date: third century from the shape
Parallels, references: see no. 14
Inventory no.: 630
16. *Cochlear*, only the fiddle-shaped bowl is preserved; Strong type 36c
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 4.4 x 2.8 cm
Weight: 6 grams
Year excavated: 1984, unstratified, from Vicus site LXXXIV
Date: third century from the shape
Parallels, references: see no. 14
Inventory no.: 2112

17 *Cochlear*, only the fragmentary fiddle-shaped bowl is preserved, together with joint for handle; the engraved inscription VTE[RE] was originally filled with red enamel; Strong type 36c
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 5.6 x 2.5 cm
Weight: 5 grams
Findspot: west ditch of stone fort I
Year excavated: 1987
Date: period VI or VII, second or third century
Parallels, references: Sherlock 1984: 81 cites several similar examples from Britain; see also RIB II 2420.50
Inventory no.: 3641
18 Cochlear, with oval bowl, completely preserved. Bowl decorated inside and outside, joint with reinforced square profile; similar to Strong type 36b
Material: silver
Dimensions: 15.4 cm long; bowl 4.1 x 2.4 cm
Weight: 16.5 grams
Findspot: west ditch of stone fort I
Year excavated: 1989
Date: period VI, c. AD 160
Inventory no.: 5048

19 Cochlear, only the heavily decorated oval bowl preserved; similar to Strong type 36b
Material: pewter
Dimensions: 4.0 x 3.0 cm
Weight: 4 grams
Findspot: Room 15 of period V building
Year excavated: 1984
Date: period V, c. AD 120-140
Associated finds: dupondius of Hadrian (Area 12), pottery, brooch
Inventory no.: 1522
20. Cochlear, circular bowl, complete, Strong type 32a
Material: copper alloy
Dimensions: 14 cm, bowl 2.0 x 2.2 cm
Weight: 2 grams
Findspot: period I outermost ditch (no.4)
Year excavated: 2001
Date: period, c. AD 85-92
Associated finds: pottery, coin of Vespasian
Parallels, references: see no.1; A. Birley 2003: 3ff.
Inventory no.: 8462

21. Cochlear, circular bowl, handle partly broken, Strong type 32a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: 4.1 cm, bowl 2.2 x 2.2 cm
Weight: 2 grams
Findspot: period IV, room 7, the most northerly room of ?schola
Year excavated: 2001
Date: period, c. AD 120/122-140
Associated finds: writing-tablet (account for lanceae), coins of Trajan
Parallels, references: see no.1; A. Birley 2003: 20ff.
Inventory no.: 8128
22. Cochlear, circular bowl, damaged, Strong type 32a
Material: copper alloy
Dimensions: 13.3 cm long; bowl, damaged at sides, length 2.1 cm
Weight: 2 grams
Findspot: period V, ?hospital
Year excavated: 2003
Date: period V, c. AD 120-140
Parallels, References: see no. 1
Inventory no.: 9190

23. Cochlear, circular bowl, Strong type 36a
Material: silver
Dimensions: handle partly broken,
3 cm survives; bowl 2.4 x 2.4 cm
Weight: 6 grams
Findspot: period IV, fabrica(?)
Year excavated: 2003
Date: c. AD 105-120/122
Parallels, references: see no. 2
Inventory no.: 9118
24. *Cochlear*, circular bowl, handle partly bent, Strong type 32a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: handle 12.1 cm; bowl 2.0 x 2.0 cm
Weight: 5 grams
Findspot: period III praetorium
Year excavated: 1993
Date: c. AD 98-105
Parallels, references: see no. 1
Inventory no.: 6240

25. *Cochlear*, circular bowl, Strong type 32a
Material: copper alloy
Dimensions: handle 14.8 cm; bowl 2.3 x 2.3 cm
Weight: 4 grams
Findspot: period IV barrack
Year excavated: 1992
Date: c. AD 105-120/122
Parallels, references: see no. 1
Inventory no. 6099
26. *Cochlear*, circular bowl with rim, handle incomplete, Strong type 36a
Material: bronze
Dimensions: handle 5.5 cm; bowl 2.2 x 2.2 cm
Weight: 6 grams
Findspot: period V or VI, towards guard-chamber of stone fort west gate
Year excavated: 1992
Date: c. AD 120-160
Parallels, references: see no. 2
Inventory no.: 5944
3.4 The function of the Vindolanda spoons

The spoons from Vindolanda were without question intended for eating, but, as today, they could from time to time be used for measuring, cf. Columella, *On agriculture* 12.21.2: 'One heaped tablespoonful, or an ounce.' The findspots, either inside or close to living-quarters, strengthen this inference and underline the fact that the *cochlear* was the spoon in general use in the Roman period, while the *ligula* was a supplementary utensil for special purposes. No examples of the *ligula* or of the very small kind of 'mini-spoon', used for applying ointments or cosmetics, have been found at Vindolanda.

3.5 Conclusions

The twenty-six spoons so far found at Vindolanda were each found individually, three being unstratified. All but one (no. 8) are made of metal. A few fragments of wooden utensils could not be identified as from spoons used for eating: they probably belonged to ladles. The spoons are datable by associated finds such as pottery, coins or in some cases writing-tablets. They span the period from the late first century to the mid-third. The 'fiddle-shape' spoons are generally regarded as being a third-century type and could well have been lost slightly later than the mid-third century. The dating of Roman spoons is in fact somewhat problematic. Some 'dating margins' cover as much as four centuries, particularly because a utensil such as a spoon is unlikely to have been affected by changing fashions as much as, for example, a brooch. Changes in shape were probably continuous and the periods of use can hardly be fixed exactly.

Particular features can be noticed in nos. 17, 18 and 19:
17, a fiddle-shaped bowl with the inscription VTE[RE] on the joint, is a well known third century type and the same inscription can be found on other spoons from Britain (Malton, Colchester) as well as on other objects from the rest of the Empire.
18 has a bowl of which the shape points to the second or third century. No parallels can as yet be offered for the decoration. This is the sole example so far of a silver spoon.
19, by contrast, has an elaborately decorated bowl, with bird, cantharus, foliage, mussel shell and beaded rim, of a type known in other pieces of Roman tableware. There is an exactly identical example in the Museum of London (Henig 1977: 352ff. and pl. 15. III c; Jones & Sherlock 1996) and a similar one was found at the Saalburg.

Thus the spoons found so far at Vindolanda, although relatively few in number, offer a representative selection of *cochlearia* of the middle Empire period. But no *ligulae* have yet been found.
Appendix - The Langenhain spoon

The bowl of a silver spoon was found during field-walking on the site of the cohort fort of Langenhain in the Wetterau (western Wetterau section 4 of the Upper German-Raetian Limes, ORL no. 13). It is exceptionally well-preserved and richly decorated, and can be securely identified as Roman from its shape and type of decoration (see fig. 21, above).

Although the handle is missing, the bowl, c. 4.2 x 2.6 cm, can be defined as part of a cochlear. Since the handle had clearly been at the narrow end, one may rule out describing the oval shaped bowl as belonging to a ligula, which always has the handle attached to the broader end. Furthermore, the joint between bowl and handle is in the form of a volute, which was never used on the ligula. One may therefore assume that the missing handle, either round or square in section, would have had a pointed end without a finial. M. Martin dates spoons with an openwork roll with no further attachment to the bowl to the late fourth century (Martin 1984: 78). This dating is difficult to reconcile with the presumed end of the occupation of Langenhain fort soon after the middle of the third century.

The decoration of the bowl, which may originally have been inlaid in niello, displays popular Roman decorative motifs: a mussel shell and a cantharus, with a beaded rim around them. Mussel-shells were especially favoured by Roman architects to fill semi-circular niches. There is also one on the Dolichenus spoon from the Xanten hoard, dated to the end of the third century (Gelsdorf 1984), together with the double axe of Jupiter Dolichenus—this spoon is joined to the handle at the broad end, and hence can be defined as a ligula.

The cantharus, a 'Dionysian' motif that is often used, can be found on almost every item of Roman tableware, often associated with vine-leaves or birds. The cantharus is also known on mosaic floors, for example together with dolphins at Verulamium or with birds at Cirencester. One of the Vindolanda spoons (Catalogue no. 19) is also decorated with a cantharus, on which a parrot is perching.

Thus one can find points of contact between the Langenhain spoon and others, even if no exact parallel is so far known.
Bibliography and Abbreviations

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fig.1, Jackson 1892;
2, Rock 1869;
3, 9, 20, 21, 23, Hauser 1992;
4, 17, Bland & Johns 1993;
5, 16, 26, David Sherlock;
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Those in part II derive from the Vindolanda Trust.