Roman Stamped Tiles from Lincoln and their Origin

MALCOLM TODD

In 1957 there was found in the primary fabric of the recently discovered baths in Lindum Colonia a large group of stamped tiles. The stamps are of the same types as those already recorded from Lincoln, the first three letters being invariably L V L: the final letter of the four is variable, A, D, E, and F being represented. The letters of all the stamps are in relief within a plain cartouche. The stamped surfaces of the tiles do not appear to have been exposed to the weather but most of the stamps themselves have a curiously rubbed appearance and this is probably due to their being impressed from worn dies. On several stamps there are very faint traces of stops between the letters.

Apart from those stamps bearing the name of a legion or auxiliary unit from purely military buildings, this is an unusually large group of tile-stamps for this early date and considerable interest attaches to their interpretation. In the preliminary note which described their discovery, they were interpreted as the products of a civilian concern, the stamps themselves being modelled on those issuing from legionary tileries. This is unacceptable for two reasons. First, this is unusually early for civil manufacture of tiles on this scale in the north-western provinces: other large private firms seem to be phenomena of the late third and fourth centuries and, north of the Alps, there is nothing of certainly civil origin on the scale of these Lincoln stamps in the first and second centuries. Secondly, an abbreviation of the tria nomina of a private manufacture to the three letters L V L, on which this hypothesis rests, is unparalleled and un-Roman. Other possible ways of interpreting the stamps should be examined and one is to hand, although it raises an immediate difficulty: identical and closely related stamps are known and they are in another province.

The normal expansion of L V on a tile-stamp would be legio quinta. Enormous numbers of stamps reading L V . . . . as well as LEG V . . . . have been found on the site of the double legionary fortress of Xanten (Vetra) in Lower Germany where the unit was stationed in the time of Nero and during the years 68-70. There is a strong general similarity between the Xanten stamps and the Lincoln group, notably in letter-forms, and more striking still two of the stamp-forms from Lincoln are exactly paralleled at Xanten, viz. L V L A and L V L F. While exact parallels for the Lincoln stamps can be found, however, a difficulty arises over the expansion of the final two letters of the stamps. Most of the tile-stamps of the fifth legion, as will be seen from a conspectus of them in the Appendix, bear the name of the man, whether centurion or civilian purveyor of tiles and bricks, who was responsible for the running of the
MALCOLM TODD

kilns or the individual batches of tiles. It is, however, difficult to believe that L A, L D, L E and the rest are abbreviations of personal names, any more than L V L can be short forms of the *tria nomina*. Moreover, as was originally suggested, the final letters of the Lincoln stamps appear to make up an alphabetical sequence A - F. For the moment no satisfying solution is to hand and this may be the result of gaps in our knowledge of the Lower Rhine series of stamps. In recent years a large number of hitherto unrecorded tile-stamps of the fifth and fifteenth legions have been found and publication of this material may double the total number of stamps. As yet all that can be suggested is that the penultimate L is the code for the kiln or kiln-group and that the final variable letter indicates the batch of tiles from individual firings. There is no ground on which this can be substantiated and it is a suggestion, not a conclusion.

Whatever the difficulties connected with the expansion of the stamps, there seems every reason for identifying the Lincoln tiles with those of the *legio quinta* at Xanten. The occurrence in Britain of the stamps of a legion stationed in Lower Germany at nearest may seem odd but there is one explanation which is both plausible and which agrees quite well with the late first century date suggested by the excavator for the Lincoln bath-house. From A.D. 70 on, the great fortress at Xanten lay empty of troops. What remained of the fifth legion after the disgrace of A.D. 69 was transferred to the Danube front. It would be strange if no use was found for the enormous quantity of building material at Xanten for good building-stone is scarce on the Lower Rhine, although clay for brick, tile and pottery manufacture is abundant. There would, therefore, have been a considerable surplus of tiles. Sea-traffic between the Lower Rhine and Britain has always been brisk and this must have been particularly true of the Flavian period. It is possible that a ship-load of tiles was considered the quickest and most convenient way of dispersing useable building material to the places where it was most needed. Another possibility is that the tiles were used as ballast on vessels carrying other goods from Germany to Britain. The import into eastern England of Dutch tiles in the seventeenth century and incidental import of the same commodity as ballast down to about 1725 is worth calling to mind.

This explanation here offered is the most natural expansion of these important tile stamps, covers all the facts of the case and violates neither the dating of the bath-house in which they were used nor the date at which civilian stamping of tiles seems likely to have begun.

Appendix

(Some forms of the tile-stamps of the fifth legion Alaudae. All of these stamps are in the collections of the Landesmuseum, Bonn.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L V</th>
<th>L V AEMILI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L V</td>
<td>LEG V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L V B</td>
<td>ADRIVS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L V F</td>
<td>L V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L V L</td>
<td>AVITVS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L V M</td>
<td>LEG V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BLAESI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30
ROMAN STAMPED TILES FROM LINCOLN AND THEIR ORIGIN

L V P
L V AV
L V L F
L V MA
L V R
L V L A
L V S
L V T

L V
CLEM
L V
CRISPI
L V
CVPITI
LEG V
DOMITI
L V
IVLIVS
L V
METI
L V
NIGRI
L V
SEVER
L V
VALERI
L V C
IVLI
L V L
PIPONI
L V L VA...

Notes

1 Journal of Roman Studies xlviii, 153f. Strictly speaking, some at least appear to be bricks, lateres, but the designation "tiles" has been used throughout this paper.

2 Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum CILVII, 1251. Hubner (p.50) ascribed them to a civilian manufacturer.

3 L V L E from St. Benedict’s Sq. All stamps from baths at Cottesford Place.

4 Archæological Journal cxvii. 68.

5 Abreviation of legio to L on tile-stamps is not as common as LEG but it is far from rare. Legio quinta indeed used it as often as LEG.

6 Bonner Jahrbücher 119,1910, 293-8: 122, 1912, 390-4: 124, 1914, 164-5. Large numbers recovered since 1914 are at Xanten and Bonn.

7 cf. a rare example from Britain, from Holt, Y Cymrodor xli, 1930, 141 (SVII LOGO PR).

8 Archæological Journal, cxvii, 68.

9 Pauly-Wissowa, Realencyclopaedie der Altertums-wissenschaft xii, 1569.

10 Apart from material from dismantled buildings, there may well have been a stockpile of lateres and imbrices for repairs.

11 Brought to my attention by Mr. M. W. Barley.
Two Roman stamped tiles from Lincoln.