A Roman Lead Object with the Impression of a Radiate of Postumus

R. J. Bourne

I have had the opportunity to examine a curious pseudo numismatic object with a connection to the Gallic Empire. It was found by metal detector in the vicinity of Grimsby in north Lincolnshire.

The bulbous object, made of lead, is approximately 54 mm in diameter and 28 mm high and weighs approximately 570 grammes.

The lower surface has the impression of a raised cross hatching. Roughly in the centre there is a conical depression, 8 mm wide and of about the same depth.

The upper surface has an incuse and retrograde impression of a coin of the Gallic usurper Postumus, the style of the portrait and the small, neat lettering indicating that the coin that provided the impression was a product of the Milan mint, c 268. The finer details of the incuse design are sharp and suggest that a fresh coin was used to make the impression.
The Milan mint switched from producing coins of the legitimate Roman emperor Gallienus following the revolt of Aureolus who supported Postumus. Five series of radiate bronze coins have been assigned to the tenure of Aureolus, all bearing the name of Postumus, and the styling of the legend IMP C POSTVMVS PF AVG, as appears on this item, is attributable to the last two issues.

It was suggested to me that this may be a die for a coin of this period. This hypothesis I would reject with the item being too soft to sustain prolonged hammer blows. The colouration of the coin impression is slightly different to the majority of the lead object but there is nothing to suggest that this is a patinated bronze surface bonded to the lead and a deep scratch extending from the matrix across the surface of the coin impression also confirms a uniformity of the soft surface. Furthermore the whole surface of the coin is not impressed in the object to enable it to satisfactorily perform as a coin die.

This is, I believe, a weight, approximating as it does to 1.75 Roman pounds. The conical depression on the lower surface serving to perhaps adjust the weight to the desired level but could equally be used to locate or fix the weight to a surface or have an iron loop attached for use on a steelyard.

Footnotes
1. I'd like to thank Paul Dawson of Spink and Son Ltd for giving me the opportunity to borrow this item to record and examine.