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ABSTRACT

The beautiful, 13cm tall figurine from Strata Florida (Wales, UK) surfaced in 1902 but disappeared into oblivion soon afterwards – because it was deemed an ethnographic import from the American Northwest Coast. It was rediscovered in the early nineties by the second author. In this paper, the ‘Strata Florida Manikin’ is placed in the context of the northern and north-western European woodcarvings; it is argued that the 2000 year old boxwood figurine is most probably an artefact made on British soil.

Keywords: WALES, WETLANDS, WOODEN ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURES, IRON AGE, ROMAN PERIOD, BOXWOOD, *BUXUS*

Introduction

In 2001, one of us (WS) was involved in the organisation of the exhibition *Mosens Guder* or *Facing Wood*, which was held in Silkeborg Museum, Silkeborg, Denmark, from 1 August 2001 until 13 January 2002. The exhibition brought together many of the prehistoric and early historic anthropomorphic wood carvings known from northern and northwest Europe, ranging from the Mesolithic ‘Willemstad Manikin’ to the Slavonic ‘Twins’ from Fischerinsel, a period of some 7000 years (Van der Sanden and Capelle 2001). One of the most intriguing was the figure known as the ‘Strata Florida Manikin’ from Wales. The figurine appeared in 1902, but was dismissed as probably being an ethnographic import. At some point between then and the 1970s it was acquired by a local museum. In response to a request made by Bryony Coles for any further information on British wooden figurines (Coles 1990, 324), the other author of this piece (RT) offered this discovery as a

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candidate. Coles then made her own examination of the figurine and published her description (Coles 1993, 19–21), but could not decide whether it was a native or an exotic piece.

In preparation for the exhibition, some new investigations and examinations were undertaken (Van der Sanden and Capelle 2001, 39, 57, 92–93), and subsequently more effort has been made to try and find out more about the circumstances of the discovery and its context. This new research justifies what may be the final attempt to try and prove whether this is a native Welsh figurine, which needs to be considered alongside those found elsewhere in northern and north-western Europe.

Wooden anthropomorphic figures in northern and north-western Europe – a survey

All in all, we know of less than a hundred ancient anthropomorphic wooden carvings from the region that stretches from Ireland in the west to Poland in the east, and from Finland in the north to central Germany in the south. These come from a period that spans around 7000 years. To illustrate how small this number is, compare it with the number of wooden anthropomorphic figures found in two sanctuaries in France, dating from the Roman period: the Sources de la Seine, northwest of Dijon, excavated between 1963 and 1967, and the Source des Roches at Chamalières, near Clermont-Ferrand, excavated between 1968 and 1971. On these two sites, many hundreds of complete wooden figures and wooden heads, legs, arms, etc. were discovered. The Chamalières site alone yielded 2600 anthropomorphic *ex-votos* (220 of these represent complete human figures). These figures have all been published in an exemplary way by French archaeologists (Deyts 1983, Romeuf 2000). Compared to these numbers, the number of ‘northern’ wooden carvings is indeed very limited.

The first discovery that was reported in the northern world was a wooden figure with a distinct pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth, found in Oakhanger, Great Britain, between 1760 and 1780 (Coles 1993, 17–19). Unfortunately this figure has disappeared and is only known from antiquarian descriptions. This makes it a ‘paper figure’; the first of what would become a series.

The first discovery that *survived* – a large part at least – is the famous Roos Carr group. This important find was made in 1836. Originally it comprised at least eight figures and various other objects. Some of these were however too decayed for removal. In the decades that followed several other finds were made, mostly during peat cutting and other extractive activities. In Great Britain the Kingsteignton figure and the Ballachulish female were discovered, in 1866/67 and 1881 respectively. In Germany the figures from Alt Friesack and Possendorf came to light in 1857 and 1859. In Denmark the ithyphallic Broddenbjerg Man and the seated Rude Eskildstrup Man were discovered in 1880 and 1889 respectively and slightly later the club-like Nordmyra figure was found in a Swedish bog. Not all of these accidental discoveries survived, however. The Possendorf figure disappeared soon after the discovery and the same holds for the Kjæræng figure, found by peat cutters in 1876 on Zealand, Denmark. They thus belong to the army of paper figures. The majority of these figures were found without associated objects, the

Possendorf figure being the exception to this rule. Of course there were speculations on the origin and antiquity of these remarkable figures. Some British authors thought it likely that the Roos Carr figures and the Ballachulish female were of Scandinavian origin, and the Roos Carr figures were dated to the time of the Danish invasion in the 9th century AD. Others opted for a pre-Roman date for the Kingsteignton figure.

In the 20th century the accidental discoveries continued. In 1922 the Dagenham figure was discovered in marshland near the Thames. Peat cutting activities in the 1930s and 1940s led to interesting discoveries in Ireland (Ralaghan figure), Sweden (Sundborn figure), Denmark (Spangerholm phallus, Kragelund Mose planks and the Rebild figure) and Germany (Braak couple). It was in only a few instances that archaeologists were able to inspect the original locations of discovery.

After the middle of the 20th century, chance discoveries are replaced by finds made during scientific excavations (Van der Sanden and Capelle 2001). Behm Blancke excavated the remains of 70 or so cult sites near the villages of Oberdorla and Niederdorla in Thuringia between 1957 and 1964/5 and discovered a large number of anthropomorphic figures, among them several *Astgabelidole* or 'forked branch idols'. Andersen excavated the well-known cult site at Forlev Nymolle in the valley of the Illerup A in 1960 and discovered the nearly 3m tall 'Mother Earth' underneath a pile of stones. Ørsnes excavated the weapon deposit at Ejsbøl between 1955 and 1964 and found one zoomorphic and two anthropomorphic figures, dating from the 4th and 5th centuries AD. In Oss-Ussen, the Netherlands, a carved plank was found at the bottom of a lined well dating from the Late Iron Age (1981). For the Slavonic world we mention the work of Gringmuth-Dallmer and Hollnagel at the site of Fischerinsel – an island in Lake Tollense – where, in the late 60s they found two large anthropomorphic wood carvings in the context of a 12th century, late Slavonic settlement. The other noteworthy excavation is that by Schuldt, in the 70s, on the site of Gross Raden. Among other structures Schuldt unearthed a 9th century temple, which originally was decorated on the outside with tens of 3m long anthropomorphic planks.

The post-war excavations also revealed the association of wooden figures with bog trackways. It started with Hajo Hayen's work in the Wittemoor, near the town of Oldenburg. In 1965 and 1966 he found several anthropomorphic figures along the trackway known as XLII (Ip). Shortly after the discovery of the first figures in the Wittemoor, John Coles, working in the Somerset Levels, discovered the little hermaphrodite god-dolly in between the Bell A and Bell B track. In the 1980s other, less convincing figures were found on, below and alongside trackways in the Grosses Moor near Lake Dummer, the Meerhusener Moor near Aurich and the Mount Dillon bogs near Corlea in Ireland. We may ask whether these Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman period objects would ever have been interpreted as anthropomorphic if the Wittemoor planks had not been discovered.

In the 1990s the discoveries during archaeological excavations went on. The Nydam excavations, led by Rieck, yielded three magnificent wooden heads, which once decorated the 4th century AD ship that had been discovered by Engelhardt in 1863. Schirren excavated the Late Iron Age, Y-shaped Bad Doberan torso in 1994 and in the same year Danish archaeologists excavating in the town of Haderslev, found a wooden head that, according to a dendrochronological date of wood found nearby, was carved in the 15th century.

The 1990s were also noteworthy because for the first time the figures were studied in greater detail. Capelle (1995) brought all the continental figures together in his *Anthropomorphe Holzdole in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*. Bryony Coles (1990, 1993, 1998) studied the Irish and British figures as a group. She obtained radiocarbon dates and had the wood species determined. Coles realised that typology is not very reliable in dating wooden figures and that scientifically-based dating was needed. This becomes the more clear if, for example, one considers the date given in 1970 by Megaw in his *Art of the European Iron Age* for the Ralaghan figure (Megaw 1970, 164 and Figure 280). On the basis of a certain resemblance with wooden carvings from the Source de la Seine, he thought it not unlikely that the Irish figure dates to the 1st-2nd century AD. Radiocarbon analysis has shown that it is at least 1000 years older. Coles (1998) also tried to find a pattern in the wood species that were chosen for the British and Irish figures. She put forward the hypothesis that the definitely male figures that were made of oak might well represent Thor and that the sexually ambiguous figures, which are made of evergreen species, might have something to do with Odin or Odin's precursor. This would explain the asymmetrical eyes (Odin sacrificed one of his eyes to gain wisdom and understanding).

Coles (1993, 19–21) mentions the Strata Florida Manikin briefly. She came to the conclusion that it is not possible to say whether this figurine is a British antiquity or an ethnographic import. She added, however, that so far no ethnographer had made a positive identification of the style of carving.

The Strata Florida Manikin

The figurine (Figure 1) is first mentioned and life-sized photographs were published anonymously in the 1903 volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (vol. III, 6th series, 284–286). Only the following few lines were given:

‘Wooden figure found at Strata Florida, Cardiganshire – The remarkable carved wooden figure here illustrated belongs to the Rev. D.L. Davies, Vicar of Talgarth, and was exhibited by him when the Association visited his church during the Brecon Meeting in 1902. It is stated to have been found at Strata Florida, Cardiganshire. Mr. C.H. Read, F.S.A., of the British Museum, to whom the figure has been shown, expresses an opinion that it is of foreign origin, probably North American.’

The Cambrian Archaeological Association was founded in 1846, and is concerned with the archaeology, antiquities and history of Wales. Each year it holds a summer field meeting, where the members are guided around sites in a particular locality. In 1902, the meeting was held in south Brecknockshire and involved a visit to the medieval church of Talgarth. The Reverend David Lewis Davies (died 1937) was not a member of the association and does not seem to have had any antiquarian interests. He was trained in southern England, in Chichester, Hampshire and held posts in Wiltshire and Herefordshire, before taking his first appointment in Wales in 1900, when he became vicar of Talgarth (Crockfords 1937, 325). He therefore had had no professional

associations with Strata Florida, which is about 54km to the north west of Talgarth. Efforts have been made to trace surviving relatives of the Rev Davies without success. Charles Hercules Read (1857–1929) was the keeper of British and medieval antiquities in the British Museum. He published the guides to the early Iron Age antiquities of central and western Europe (Read 1905) and the Bronze Age antiquities held in the museum's collections (Read 1920). As such, he might have been expected to have had some knowledge of some of the figurines from Britain or elsewhere in Europe when he came to examine the Strata Florida Manikin.

What happened after 1903 with this figurine is shrouded in darkness. We only know that at some point after this date it was acquired by the Carmarthen Museum in south Wales. However, it was not catalogued until the museum was moved from the town centre to Abergwili, near Carmarthen, in the 1970s. There is no documentation to show when and how it was acquired by the museum (Inv. no. e75.2638). However, there is no doubt, thanks to the 1903 photograph, that it is the same object as the one published in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*: a three-dimensional anthropomorphic figurine with a large head, sloping shoulders, a rectangular body with several drilled holes, two vertical legs and no arms.

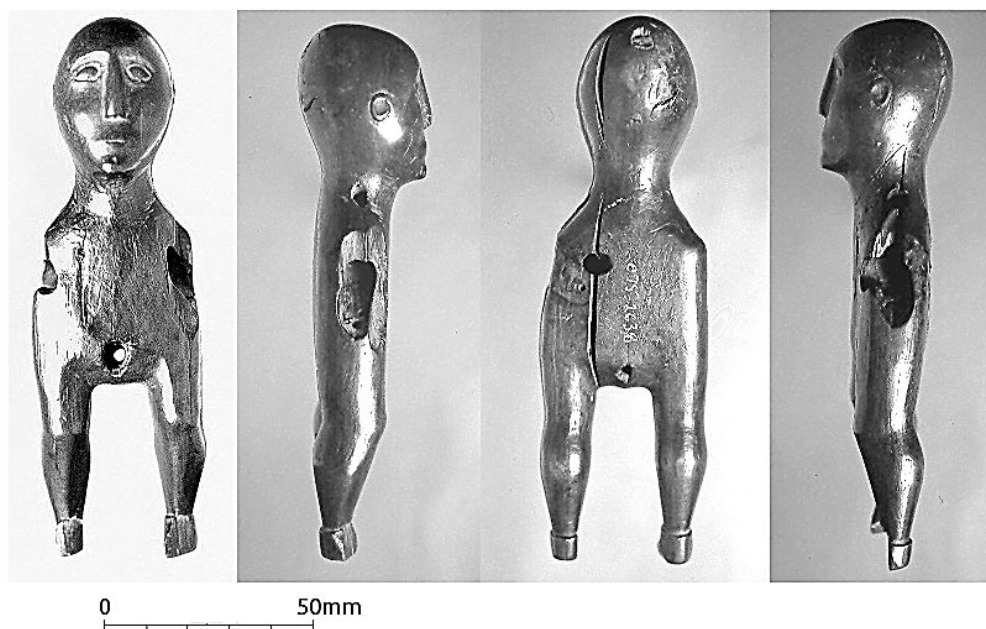


Fig. 1. The Strata Florida Manikin: front, right side, back and left side view.
Photos courtesy Carmarthen Museum

Description of the figurine

The anthropomorphic figurine is only 12.9cm tall and has a maximum diameter of 4.0cm at the hips. The relatively large, oval head – from top to chin 3.5cm and from ear to ear 2.9cm – has delicately carved eyes, nose, mouth and ears. The oval eyes are surrounded by oval ridges; these ridges we see again at the ears (irregular round) and the mouth (rounded rectangular). The eye ridges are indicated, as well as the cheeks. In the long and straight nose the wood carver even indicated the inter-nasal septum. The mouth is closed and the chin protrudes. The person indicated seems to be bald, as there is no indication of hair on the head, nor of a moustache, whiskers or a beard.

The armless trunk, which shows no human features, has a series of holes drilled through it (Figures 1 and 2):

1. A hole from the middle of the left side of the figure diagonally to the right side of the neck.
2. A hole from the middle of the right side of the figure diagonally to the left side of the neck.
3. A hole in the left shoulder, extending from the front to the back of the trunk; intersects with 1.
4. A 'pubic' hole which extends from the front of the trunk to the back; in the middle of the trunk there is a bifurcation, a second hole going up into the body.
5. A tiny hole in the back below nr. 3, ending in the trunk.
6. A tiny hole in the left side of the chest of the figure, ending in 1.
7. A small hole in the lower end of the right shoulder hole.
8. A small hole in the lower end of the right shoulder hole.
9. A hole near the top of the back of the head, partially filled with wood.

The size of the holes varies. The two crossing holes, 1 and 2, have diameters of 4mm and 5mm in the neck; the diameters of the holes at the side of the trunk cannot be measured accurately because of the damage at these places. The diameters of hole 3 are 8mm (front) and 5/7mm (back, vert./horiz.) respectively; those of 4 are 6.5/9.0mm (front, horiz./vert.) and 3mm (back) and those of holes 5 and 6 are both 1mm. Holes 7 and 8 have a diameter of 1.5 and 2mm respectively. Hole 9 is sub-rectangular, 5mm by 4mm.

The legs, which have a length of 4.3cm, are straight and parallel to each other. They are carefully executed; knees, calves, ankles and feet can clearly be recognised. The upper legs are rather short. Both feet are damaged; most of the front portion of the left foot is lost and part of the front portion of the right foot. The photo published in 1903 shows a complete left foot (l. 17mm), although a fissure can be seen at the spot where the foot now ends. Apparently this part of the figurine got lost between being photographed in 1902 and today. The old photo gives the impression that the person was clad in shoes.

The figurine has a chocolate-brown colour and a shiny appearance. Coles has already noted that the head and legs have highly finished surfaces, in contrast to the trunk. Faceting is visible at the legs and pubic area. The figurine has several splits: a small one at the left neck/shoulder region and a large at the left side of the back, extending from the head down to the underside of the trunk, only interrupted in the neck region. There is a small metal (copper?) pin in the right side shoulder hole, next to holes 7 and 8. The age of this pin is not known. The small sized holes 5 and 6 may originally have contained similar pins.

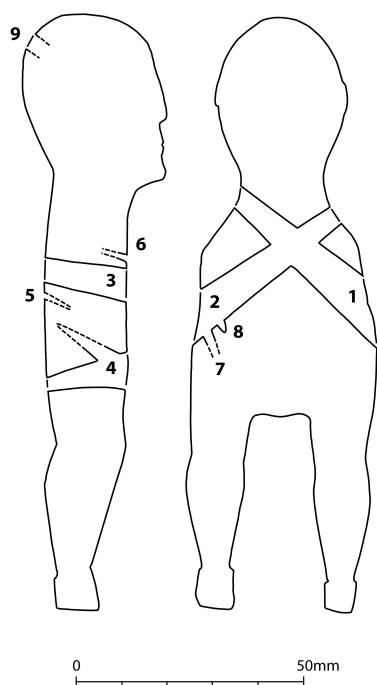


Fig. 2. *The Strata Florida Manikin. Drawing recently made by M. J. Rouillard, University of Exeter, to show all the perforations*

Wood species and C14-analysis

Bryony Coles (1993, 20) described the piece of wood from which the figurine was made as follows (Figure 2).

'It was made from a half or two thirds stem of roundwood with pith that can be traced from top back of the head and down the centre left of the trunk to the left groin. The flat back of the figure may be a split radial surface but the front flatness of the trunk was achieved by carving. Growth rings can be seen on the head and left cheek in particular, various small knots indicate the position of side branches, and one branch looks to have been trimmed off the top of the head.'

The wood has a shiny surface. This, according to Coles, might have led C.H. Read to think that the figurine is a North American import. In 2000, during the preparations for the exhibition *Mosens Guder/Facing Wood*, the first author first tried to find ethnographic parallels for this extraordinarily beautiful carving, which is so different from the other insular, much more crudely executed anthropomorphic figures. Perusal of the literature on the art of the American Northwest Coast (e.g. Carlson 1983; Wingert 1949) led to the conclusion that

convincing parallels were lacking. According to Carlson (written comm.) the realistic facial attributes of the Strata Florida figurine are not totally outside the Northwest Coast wood carving tradition, but carvings with similar faces are extremely rare. The best example he knows is an Ozette bowl carved in the shape of a human, dating from around AD 1500 (Daugherty and Friedman 1983, 188, fig. 10:4). He concluded that it is not very likely that the British Museum were right in their judgement, a hundred years ago.

The literature on wooden anthropomorphic carvings – small and large – from the Northwest Coast indicates that the material chosen was likely to be either cedar, maple or yew wood. The next step therefore was to have the wood species of the Strata Florida Manikin identified. This analysis was done by Nigel Nayling of the University of Wales, Lampeter. His conclusion was that the object is made of box wood (*Buxus sempervirens* L.), which corresponds well with the shiny surface. Nayling also took a sample for radiocarbon dating. The sample was dated by C14-AMS in the *Centrum voor Isotopen Onderzoek*, University of Groningen (GrA-15317). The result was 1990 ± 50 BP, which calibrates to 43 BC – AD 67 (1 sd) or 111 BC – AD 127 (2 sd).

All the new information made it clear that – as regards the place of origin of this figurine – there is no need to look outside Europe. But that is not to say that there are still no problems concerning the origin of this figurine, as box is not the easiest species to

deal with in terms of distribution of the tree, whilst the radiocarbon result spans the major cultural transition in Britain from late Iron Age to Roman.

Box: distribution in space and time

Buxus sempervirens – belonging to the family *Buxaceae* – is an evergreen small tree, which grows very slowly and is very long lived. It can reach a height of 8m. The leaves are elliptical to oblong and shiny dark green above. The wood is very hard and dense, and the foliage is aromatic. Both the leaves and fruits are poisonous; the alkaloids they contain are lethal when digested in very large quantities.

What is of special interest here, of course, is the natural distribution of *Buxus sempervirens*. Hegi's distribution map in his *Illustrierte Flora von Mitteleuropa* (1925, 204–213, esp. Fig. 1811) illustrates that there is a strong connection with the Mediterranean (Figure 3). The main areas seem to be north and north-eastern Spain, south and central France, the Balkans, the Caucasus and north-west Turkey. Box occurs in the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Apennines, Corsica and Sardinia. It can even be found in the French Jura Mountains and the valley of the Semois in southern Belgium. In Ireland, *Buxus* does not occur, but in Britain the species has been found growing in a few areas of chalk in Surrey, Kent and the south Cotswolds; in locations known as Boxhill, Boxley and Boxwell (see e.g. Perring and Walters 1962, map 178/1; Rodwell 1991, 219, 222 and 227). According to Godwin (1975, 175–176) they are generally taken to be natural occurrences. In this he seems to follow Pigott and Walters (1953) who are of the opinion that box might well have arrived in Britain by natural means early in the Holocene.

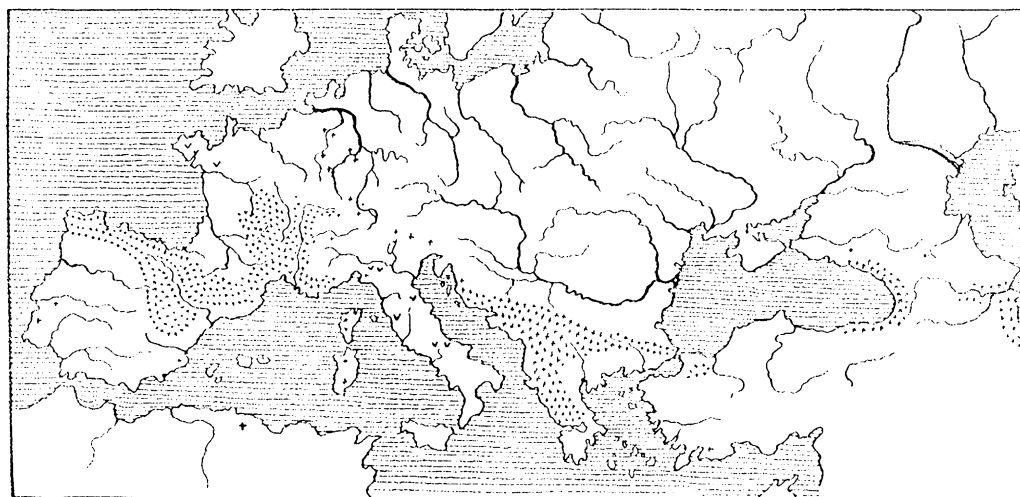


Fig. 3. The distribution of *Buxus sempervirens*; after Hegi 1925, fig. 1811

Box in Great Britain at the transition of the Iron Age/Roman period

To assess the probability that the Strata Florida figurine was carved on British soil, it is relevant to know whether there is any *hard evidence* that box was native there around 2000 years ago. Pliny, for example, states that good quality *Buxus* was to be found in the Pyrenees, Corsica, Phrygia and Asia Minor, but unfortunately he does not mention Britannia. Objects of boxwood are, however, regularly found in Roman contexts in the United Kingdom (and the continent as well). It is most commonly encountered as finely carved artefacts like combs, bowls, boxes, spoons, spindle whorls and flutes (Earwood 1993; Gale and Cutler 2000, 54–5; Pugsley 2003). Such objects have been discovered during excavations at Roman sites in London, Carlisle, Newstead, Vindolanda and Chew Valley Lake. Only one of these objects incorporates a carved human figure. This is a scoop whose handle consists of a bearded male head with a simplified body and vestigial limbs carved to form the grip. There is a spiral on the chest. This was found with a 3rd century timber quay at the Thames Exchange in London (Frere 1991, 270 and fig 21). In Wales, discoveries seem to have been limited to combs recovered from the northern auxiliary forts of Caerhun (Baillie-Reynolds 1936, 240) and Caernarfon (Boon 1985, 98–101). No boxwood objects that predate the Roman period have been identified in Britain.

There is also evidence that the Romans extended the natural distribution of box in Britain by planting it within their gardens. Cunliffe (1971, 128) speculated on its use in the gardens of the first century AD palace at Fishbourne. To support this, box hedge clippings have been excavated at the Winterton Roman villa, Yorkshire (Dimbleby 1978) and within the Roman fortress and colonia in York itself (Hall *et al* 1980, 146; Kenward *et al* 1986, 247). Given the slow rate of growth of this tree, it is most unlikely that a specimen planted by a Roman in Wales would have reached a sufficient size to make the Strata Florida Manikin within the maximum range of the radiocarbon date. Box stems and leaves have been found packed within the coffins of some Roman burials, suggesting that it had some ritual function (see Gage 1840 and Allison 1947 for example).

There are however some indications – and we immediately admit they are not very overwhelming – that *Buxus* was a native of Britain long before the Romans appeared on the scene. Waller and Hamilton (2000) published a pollen diagram from the base of the Caburn valley (East Sussex). One grain of *Buxus* pollen was identified from a level radiocarbon dated to 7217–6939 cal. BP. As Waller comments (written comm to P. van Rijn, BIAx-Consult 17–08–2000): ‘Obviously the inferences you can draw from one grain are very limited – but it’s exactly the type of location you would expect to find box’. In addition there is the – tentative – identification of boxwood charcoal from Whitehawk Neolithic enclosure near Brighton (Ross Williamson 1930, 82) and from Cissbury camp near Worthing, which dates to the Late Iron Age and the Roman period (Curwen and Ross Williamson 1931, 31). Perhaps one more argument can be found in a distinct style of Roman period combs, which is only found in southern Britain. Pugsley (2002, 2003) argues that, as style and technique are quite distinctive and do not appear on the continent, they might represent a little local industry using locally available boxwood. Unfortunately, there are no pollen records for box in Wales (pers. comm Astrid Caseldine) and there are no chalk downlands in the country, which would provide a suitable habitat for this species – if box did grow in Britain, it was most likely in England, not to the west in Wales.

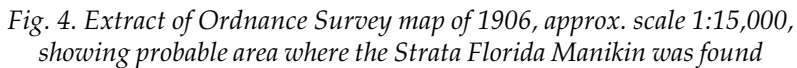
Can the little Strata Florida figure be brought in as an argument in favour of Pugsley's theory that *Buxus* was a native species? As was said earlier, the figurine has an exotic appearance. Probably that is because of the large head and the shiny appearance. At the same time, however, there are several details that link it to the group of British and Irish figures. Take for example the parallel legs, which is a common feature of most of the insular figures: Dagenham, Kingsteignton, Roos Carr, Ballachulish, Lagore and Ralaghan. The second detail is the hole in the pubic area, which is also an insular characteristic: Ralaghan has it as well as Dagenham and the Roos Carr figures. As Coles (1998) has pointed out, these 'sexually ambiguous' figures are made of evergreen species: Ralaghan is made of yew, just like the Roos Carr figures, and Dagenham is made of pinewood. Strata Florida – with its pubic hole running all the way to the backside of the figurine – is made of an evergreen species too. A fourth detail is the two holes in the neck of the figurine. The same phenomenon can be observed in the Kingsteignton figure, which is a few centuries older than the Strata Florida Manikin. Perhaps these four characteristics – parallel legs, pubic hole, evergreen wood species and neck holes – may be seen as indications that the figurine was British in origin. The object was carved from an old tree, as the stem that was used for the purpose must have had a diameter of at least 4cm.

The location of discovery

In the absence of any other evidence, the location of discovery has to be taken as 'at Strata Florida' as the 1903 description states. Strata Florida is best known for the remains of the Cistercian Abbey (Robinson and Platt 1998), which stands in a beautiful remote valley 2km east of the village of Pontrhydfendigaid. The small church, which stands alongside the ruins, is the centre of a very large parish, which includes vast tracts of the hilly country to the east and the villages of Pontrhydfendigaid and Ystrad Meurig to the west. It has to be assumed from the well preserved nature of the figurine, and the locations of discovery of the similar finds from elsewhere in Britain and northern Europe that it must derive from a wetland context. If this were the case, then the most likely area would be the northern end of Cors Caron or Tregaron Bog, which falls into the parish of Strata Florida.

Tregaron Bog is one of the best-preserved lowland raised mires in Europe (Figure 4). It covers 800ha and forms three independent domes in a former glacial meltwater lake, and is drained by the Afon Teifi (Davies and Kirby 1994, 55). It was the first raised mire to be described in any detail in Britain (Erdtman 1928) and has been the subject of a number of pollen studies since that date (Godwin 1981, 27–37; Caseldine 1990, 16). It is particularly fruitful for those studying the historic period as it has suffered very little peat cutting (Turner 1964).

The surroundings of the bog are sparsely populated but some peat cutting has reduced the size of the original bog at its southern end close to the small town of Tregaron and more extensively at its northern end close to the village of Ystrad Meurig. This activity has led to a number of discoveries of potential votive objects over the years. This includes a small late Bronze Age hoard of a spearhead and two palstaves (Davies and Kirby 1994, 217) and a perforated stone axe hammer (Evans 1950). There is also the description of a well-preserved human head found by peat diggers in 1811 in Gors Dol-fawr, the very



northern end of Tregaron Bog (Briggs and Turner 1986, 187). These finds, whose locations were not accurately recorded, were spread over a large area, and do not suggest a major ritual complex. Potential settlement contemporary with the radiocarbon date of the figure is also widely dispersed. There is an unproven Iron Age enclosure at Y Gaer (National Grid Reference SN 7218 6633) close to Gors Dol-fawr, and a more substantial hillfort at Pen-y-Bannau Camp (SN 7420 6692). However, these sites are typical of local late prehistoric settlement and do not suggest the area is special. The nearest proven Roman site is the fort at Llanio (SN 645 570), about 12km to the southwest and the Roman road comes no closer than 8km away.

Conclusions

The calibrated radiocarbon date for the Strata Florida Manikin provides a fixed point around which to base a conclusion. Even then the date range spans the end of the Iron Age and the beginning of the Roman period. This part of Wales never really adopted the Roman lifestyle, so cultural and religious traditions of the Iron Age are likely to have been maintained. The problem remains that, as the figurine is made of box wood, it is either an object imported from southern England or from further afield, or it is made of a piece of timber imported from the same distance. This creates some uncertainty about the provenance of the object in the continuing absence of any corroborative evidence.

Good parallels for the Strata Florida carving are lacking. However, apart from its small size and unusual raw material, the figurine does have a number of similarities with other British wooden figurines, which makes us confident that it is not an exotic object.

Many other questions regarding this small anthropomorphic figure remain unanswered. What happened to the arms and phallus of the figurine, if they ever existed? Where they deposited with it but overlooked by the finder? What (divine) person does it represent? Following Bryony Coles' hypothesis and assuming it is a god, it might well be Odin or his precursor (Coles 1998, 170). The hypothesis, however, is based on a very limited number of figures. Furthermore, according to the hypothesis we would expect one of the eyes to be damaged. No such damage is visible, however. The eyes are identical.

We have no idea in what context the figurine played a role although we may, on the basis of its size, safely assume that it did not function in the same way as the continental figures such as those from Broddenbjerg, Rebild, Braak and Oberdorla, which functioned as focal points in open-air cult sites. Perhaps the manikin is destined to remain a very beautiful if ultimately an enigmatic object.

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