

WEEK 2 THE ROMAN ARMY IN BRITAIN
BELTS, BROOCHES AND LATE ROMAN SOLDIERS



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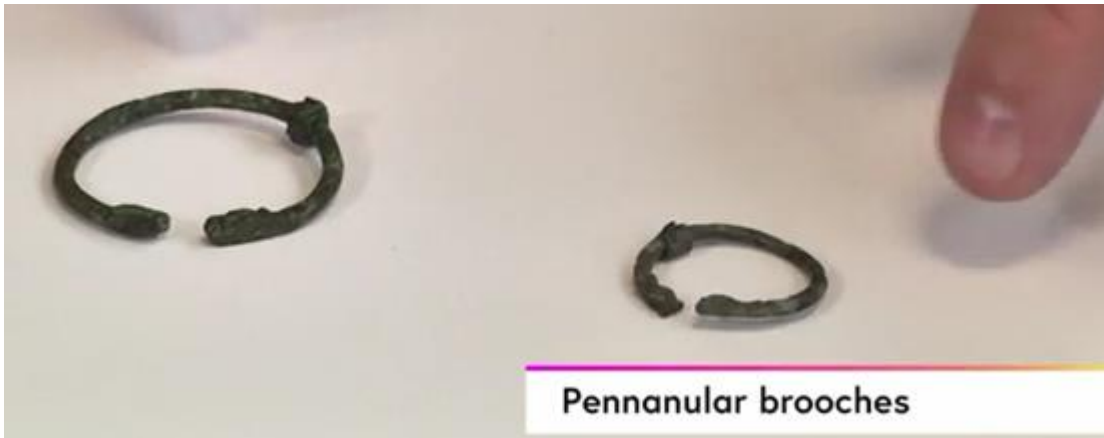
We have here a few objects that are quite typical of the late Roman army. These are all examples from Hadrian's Wall, and it's worth going through to think about how the late Roman soldier appears to people that aren't soldiers, to his fellow soldiers, but also how his appearance is different from a soldier in the second century. Now, these are all objects of the

fourth century, and if we think about this going from head to foot, we can see the visual impact that a soldier would have.



So we start here with this crossbow brooch. This is an object which is found in a lot of Roman artistic representations of soldiers. And this would be worn like so, on the shoulder, and it would hold the cloak, which would be a very important bit of a soldier's equipment. Now, one of the things you have to remember with a crossbow brooch is that it is quite big. It's very easy to see, but also, in its original colour, it would be very bright, shiny, a bit gold and lustery. It's just through time, the colour has changed to this green colour. So it would be very striking when it's seen on the shoulder.





Another type of brooch that we have from the northern frontier are these pennanular brooches, so-called because they have two terminals. These also would be worn on the shoulder. These are smaller examples, but if you look closely, you can see there's animal-like decoration on the terminals. We have here a replica of a slightly later date, but this, too, would be worn on the shoulder to hold the cloak up.



Moving to the opposite end of the soldier, we have spurs that soldiers would wear. These attach to their boots or their shoes. This is missing its actual spike, its spur, its prod, but we find these occasionally along Hadrian's Wall and are evidence of cavalry. One of the more important types of fittings, however, are belt fittings. So you can see here a few

examples that we have from the wall. These two are what we call strap ends.



These would fit at the end of a strap that would feed through the buckle, and are usually described by their shape. So this one is a heart shaped strap end.



You can see the point, and there's a hint of the two lobes. This one is an amphora shaped strap end, so-called because it looks like an amphora that Roman wine would be transported in.



In addition to strap ends, we have belt stiffeners, mounts that would go onto the leather belt, and that would help it stay stiff and straight.



And you can see examples of all of these elements and a buckle if we look here on this reproduction belt. Now, this is an example based on a belt that was found further south in England that has all the elements we talked about. So you can see here there's a buckle, we have these stiffeners, and at the opposite end, we have a strap end.



And this is quite broad. You can imagine what it would look like to see someone wearing this walking down the street, along with a crossbow brooch on the shoulder and spurs on the feet. So the Roman soldier not only has a sense of appearance that's going very distinct to anyone who's a soldier, or even those who aren't soldiers, but also there's a sound. A soldier will have a bit of a jingle and jangle to him. If you imagine the sound of cowboys in those Western movies as they're walking down the streets, a soldier with all his equipment-- his sword, his helmet-- would also have that same sensation.

What's most important about these, though, is that while they are from Hadrian's Wall, they're not only representative of Hadrian's Wall, but are similar to examples that are found across the other frontiers of the Roman Empire. This is important because it shows us that the army on Hadrian's Wall, even in the fourth century, is part of that broader Roman frontier army. And so the fittings, while there are some local peculiarities, are generally the same as elsewhere in the Roman Empire, and it helps us remember the importance of the empire across a very large territory.