

# COMPOSITE OBJECTS

## GLOSSARY

**Composite:** item composed of multiple materials with differing chemical and physical properties (e.g. a bone-handled knife), or an object made of more than one metal (e.g. tinned object, thin sections).

**Galvanic (bimetallic) corrosion:** electro-chemical process where one metal corrodes preferentially when in contact with another.

## STORAGE

Composite objects may need specialist assessment to select the most appropriate storage method. Avoid separating the object into its constituent parts unless absolutely necessary.

- ◆ Use padding (Plastazote; acid free tissue puffs) to support weak and fragile areas.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

Composite objects can contain materials that require contrasting environmental conditions. You may need to decide to favour one constituent material over another. Seek specialist advice if needed.

## LABELLING AND MARKING

Many composite objects can be given surface marking.

- ◆ Undertake a documentation check to ensure that the information is correct before remains are marked.
- ◆ Ensure that marking is clear and legible.



Anglo Saxon bucket © Museums Worcestershire

- ◆ Use a layer of Paraloid B72, then ink, then a layer of Paraloid B72 to seal.
- ◆ Mark bag or box, or use archive label if object is not suitable for direct object marking.

## INDICATORS OF DECAY

- ◆ Corrosion.
- ◆ Mould.
- ◆ Lamination or disintegration.

## WHERE YOU WILL COME ACROSS COMPOSITE OBJECTS

- ◆ In archaeological objects of all periods.
- ◆ In archaeological excavation archives.
- ◆ In statues, carvings and architectural features.

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## HANDLING

- ◆ Be aware that composite objects can be less robust than they appear (because of burial processes).
- ◆ They can be uneven in weight if one component has decayed more than another.
- ◆ Use nitrile gloves.
- ◆ Use two hands to support objects when handling them.
- ◆ Handle small items over a padded surface or in the box.



Antler handle and greenstone chisel © Bristol Culture

## LOOK OUT FOR

Composite objects containing iron and copper may be at additional risk from galvanic corrosion. This increases the susceptibility of iron to corrosion, and makes it corrode more quickly.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

- ◆ The risks from a composite object depend on the materials it is made of, see relevant factsheets.



Brooch with enamel © Bristol Culture

## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Brown, D.H. (2011a) *Archaeological Archives – A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation* (Second Edition) Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF)

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Watkinson, D. and Neal, V. (1998) *First Aid for Finds* (Third Edition; London; Rescue/UKIC Archaeology Section, revised 2001)