

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

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AUTHOR	K F Hartley and Dr D F Williams June 1979
TITLE	Mortaria from Harston, Nr. Cambridge

MORTARIA FROM HARSTON, NEAR CAMBRIDGE

K.F. Hartley and D.F. Williams*

*(DOE Ceramic Petrology Project)

Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Mortaria

Very soft, smooth fine-textured fabric, much abraded, pinkish-white (Munsell 7.5YR 8/2) throughout, sometimes slightly brownish with a red-brown colour-coat which only survives in tiny patches. Trituration grits: medium to large-size dullish white quartz and quartzite (some coloured grains), with a little flint (some coloured fragments).

Thin section study of the fabric under the petrological microscope shows frequent small fragments of semi-coarse crystalline limestone, together with a groundmass of quartz grains, under 0.05mm in size, and flecks of mica, set in an anisotropic matrix of baked clay.

The red-brown slip, the rim-forms used and even the fine-textured matrix are clearly an attempt to reproduce mortaria of the type made at Baldon, Dorchester and elsewhere in the Oxford region (Young, 1977). A migrant potter could be involved but not necessarily.

In addition to the sample of mortarium, a thin section examination was also conducted on three other vessels found at the site: two very fine-textured bowls, with a bright red (10R 4/6) colour-coat, and a grey-ware sherd. The sections from the two bowls proved to be similar in composition to that

of the mortarium sample, if slightly more fine-textured. In contrast, the grey-ware sample contains a scatter of shattered quartz grains, in the size range 0.20-.50mm., set in an isotropic matrix of baked clay. With such common inclusions, it is not possible to say if the grey-ware sherd is likely also to be a local product. All that can reasonably be said at this stage is that it appears to have been made of a different clay to the other samples, rather than an unrefined version of the clay used for the finer-textured vessels.

Young, C. (1977) The Roman Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region B.A.R. 43 (1977).