

Shell impressions in Saxon pots from Mucking, Essex

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Stamps on sherds of Saxon pots were recognised as having been made by a shell and clay impressions were sent to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory for analysis.

Pot 1: A/S Cemetery 2, Cremation 416

Line of 6 shell stamps formed by apex of a gastropod shell impressed obliquely with the right hand. The maximum diameter of any impression is 6 mm, but the shell employed is likely to have been of a much larger specimen as there is no sign of the lip surrounding the aperture in the outer whorl, and small species or juvenile specimens of about this size might prove too fragile and difficult to extract once pushed into the clay. It is not possible to identify the species of snail involved, but the apex of Helix (the common or Roman snail) would produce impressions of about these dimensions, with the whorl size gradually increasing as seen in the pot stamps.

Pot 2: Grubenhäus 17, 405 x 370

Line of 3 impressions formed by a gastropod shell apex pushed squarely against the clay. The maximum diameter is approximately 6mm. and the centre of each is flattened, suggesting the use of a shell with a blunter apex, but of a similar species of large snail such as Helix.

Pot 3: Grubenhans 30, 252 x 389 (3)

2 smaller shellstamps with a maximum diameter of 2 mm and a more acute apical angle. Again, there is no sign of an aperture in the outer whorl, therefore the shell is of a larger individual. It is likely that the apices of most large terrestrial gastropods are too blunt to have been responsible for the impressions, whereas many larger pond snails such as Limnaea and Viviparus species do have more acute apices which the impressions in this pot resemble.