



Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 116/87

AMPHORAE FROM KING HARRY LANE,  
ST. ALBANS.

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Identification of a small group of Roman amphorae from the (?) late Iron Age cemetery at King Harry Lane, St. Albans. The forms present were Dressel 20, Camulodonum 185A and Dressel 7-11/Beltran 1 from southern Spain, a Rhodian style amphora from Rhodes and an almost complete Dressel 2-4 from Campania in southern Italy.

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Burial 36 SJ/DH

Neck and spike from a Rhodian style amphora. This form developed from late Hellenistic prototypes by the late first century B.C., and probably lasted until the early second century A.D. (Panella, 1973; Peacock, 1977a). It has been suggested by Peacock (1977a) that the predominance of this form on pre-Flavian military sites in Britain may be associated with the possible tribute of Rhodian wine exacted during the period A.D. 43-53, when Claudius rescinded the liberty of the Rhodians. The identification of this amphora type at the late first century B.C. Lexden Tumulus (Peacock, 1971), is now less certain (Williams, 1986). The material from King Harry Lane is in Peacock's Fabric 1 (1977a), with a probable origin in Rhodes itself.

Burial 53 SJ/EG

Bodysherd from a Dressel 20 amphora.

ST/AD, ST/AE, ST/AB, ST/AC

At least three Dressel 20 vessels are represented here by a number of rims and bodysherds.

This is the most common amphora type imported into Roman Britain, though recent research has shown that it was already present on a number of late Iron Age sites

(Williams and Peacock, 1983). Dressel 20 amphorae were made along the banks of the River Guadalquivir and its tributaries between Seville and Cordoba in the southern Spanish province of Baetica, where they were used for the transportation of olive-oil (Ponsich, 1974; 1979). This type of amphora has a wide date-range, from the Augustan prototype (Oberaden 83) with a fairly upright rim, a short spike and less of a squat bulbous body than the later form, to the well-known globular vessel which, with some typological variation was in use to at least the late third century A.D. (Zevi, 1967).

#### Burial 90 SB/PW

Handles and bodysherds from a Camulodunum 185A amphora.

This form has its origin in Baetica, Spain (Tchernia, 1980), the similarity in fabric with the more common Dressel 20 suggesting a source in the region of the River Guadalquivir (Peacock, 1971). Amphorae of Camulodunum 185A form (Halterm 70) recovered from the Port Vendres II shipwreck carry inscriptions describing the contents as defrutum, a sweet liquid obtained by boiling down the must (Colls et al, 1977; Parker and Price, 1981). For a more recent discussion of the contents and the interpretation of defrutum as belonging to the vins cuits, see van der Werff (1984). The date-range for Camulodunum 185A is from about the mid first century A.D. to around the mid first century A.D. (Colls et al, 1977; Tchernia, 1980).

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An almost complete Dressel 2-4 amphora, with the rim and most of the handles missing.

This form of amphora normally has a simple rounded rim, long characteristic bifid handles formed from two rods (the stumps can be seen in the King Harry Lane example) and a solid, slightly flared or knobbed spike.

Dressel 2-4 amphorae are the direct successors on Italian kiln sites to the Republican form Dressel 1B and occur in a similar range of fabrics (Peacock, 1977b), dating from the latter half of the first century B.C. to the mid second century A.D. (Zevi, 1966; Peacock and Williams, 1986). Tituli picti suggest that the main content carried was wine, although on occasion other commodities such as dates, fish sauce and even olive-oil could be carried in these vessels (ibid.).

A hand-specimen examination of the King Harry Lane vessel, supported by thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope, shows that it is in a distinctive 'black sand' fabric, caused by numerous inclusions of dark-coloured augite. The presence of yellow (melanitic) garnet in this 'black sand' fabric led Courtoise and Velde (1978) to suggest an origin for it in the Latium region of Italy. However, yellow-brown garnet is also a feature of the sands further south, and a Campanian origin, in particular the area around Pompeii and Herculaneum, has been advocated by Peacock (1977c). Further analysis by Velde and Courtoise (1983) using an electron microprobe has distinguished two separate compositional groups of yellow garnet. One source they propose is situated near to Rome and another in the Vesuvius region. The latter view agrees with Peacock's (1977c) suggestion, but as yet there is no archaeological evidence for an origin near Rome for the 'black sand' fabric. A Campanian origin seems more likely, since examples of bricks and tiles in the Pompeii - Herculaneum region are in an identical fabric (ibid.).

#### Burial 70 SB/FX

Part of the handle, body and rim of a Dressel 7-11/Beltrán 1 amphora.

This amphora probably derives from the coastal regions of southern Spain and contained marine products. The form is characteristic of the late first century B.C. into the first century A.D. (Beltrán, 1970; Peacock, 1974).

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