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Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 188/87

PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF TWO  
ROMAN AMPHORAE SHERDS FROM THE  
MARLOWE SITE EXCAVATIONS,  
CANTERBURY, KENT.

D F Williams PhD FSA

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#### Summary

Identification of a late Roman Chalk 6 amphorae form. The other sherd bears some resemblance in the hand-specimen to the late Roman Bii eastern Mediterranean amphorae found in Britain in post-Roman contexts, but is made from a different fabric and its precise form and origin must remain in doubt for the time being.

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PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF TWO ROMAN AMPHORAE SHERDS FROM THE MARLOWE  
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1) 16 WS 78 (Marlowe I) (29) 302: Period 10 Pit (1100-1400)

Part of a thick stumpy grooved handle with a small portion of plain rim attached. The fabric of the sherd is hard, rough and sandy, with a scatter of small white lumps of limestone, buff colour throughout (Munsell 7.5YR 7/6). Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope shows frequent subangular grains of well-sorted quartz, mostly under 0.60mm in size, together with some cryptocrystalline limestone and a little chert set in an anisotropic matrix of baked clay.

In the hand-specimen this sherd superficially resembles the late Roman Bii eastern Mediterranean amphorae found in Britain in post-Roman contexts (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 44). However, the Canterbury handle does not compare favourably with the fabric normally associated with the Bii form, as it appears to lack the inclusions of serpentine and pyroxene that are present in the clay of the latter type (*ibid.*). It is possible that the Canterbury vessel may be typologically connected in some way with the Bii amphora, but at this stage it is not certain. The range of non-plastic inclusions mentioned above, for example, are too common to indicate an origin from any one particular region. The source, and to some extent the form, of this amphora sherd must therefore remain in some doubt for the time being.

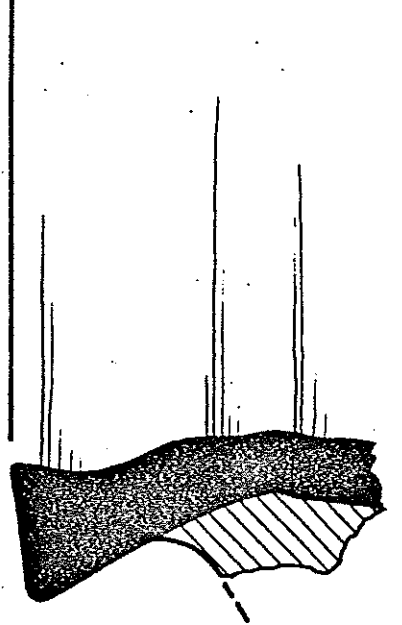
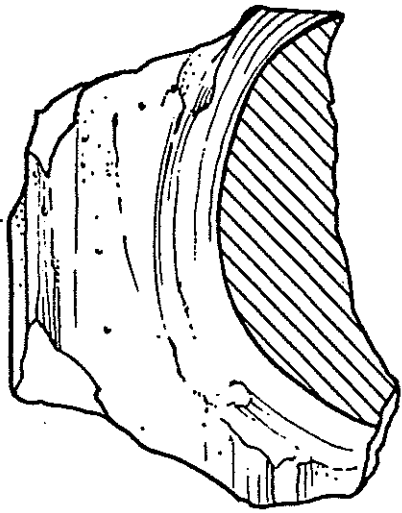
2) MIV 80 (Marlowe IV) (443) 378: Period 61-7 Layer of dark earth (450-700 - 700-850)

Part of a flat-rimmed amphora sherd in a hard roughish reddish-buff fabric (between Munsell 5YR 7/6 and 7.5YR 7/4), with frequent inclusions of white limestone throughout. Thin sectioning shows plentiful small fragments of crystalline limestone, some subangular quartz, feldspar and occasional pieces of lava, set in an anisotropic matrix of baked clay.

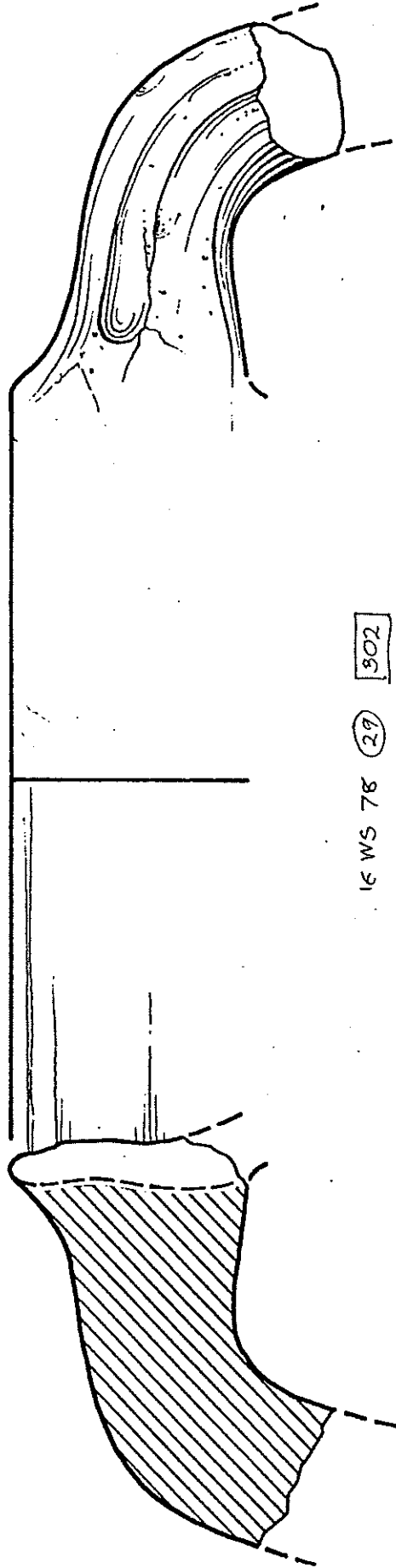
This sherd is from a Chalk 6 type of amphora (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 50). The complete form displays a spindle-shaped body with the two handles made from a single rod of clay, oval in cross-section. The origins of this form are unknown, as are the contents carried. Examples are known from Chalk, Kent; Caerleon and Avenches (Peacock, 1977). The Chalk vessel was found in contexts deposited after c. A.D. 360, while that from Caerleon was associated with other pottery probably dating between A.D. 250-350 (ibid.).

References

- Peacock, D.P.S. (1977) 'Late Roman amphorae from Chalk near Gravesend, Kent', in J. Dore and K. Greene (eds.), Roman Pottery Studies in Britain and Beyond, BAR Int. series 30, 295-300.
- Peacock, D.P.S. and Williams, D.F. (1986) Amphorae and the Roman Economy (London, 1986).



MIV '80 (443) 378



16 WS 78 (29) 302

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