

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 82/88

A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME
IMPORTED LATE ROMAN POTTERY FROM
THE ROMAN VILLA AT WITCOMBE,
SOMERSET.

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Thin section examination of two late Roman flagons/
amphorae showed that one may well have originated from
the eastern Mediterranean region, while the other was
more difficult to place.

Author's address :-

Department of Archaeology
University of Southampton
Highfield
Southampton
SO9 5NH

0703 559122

A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME IMPORTED LATE ROMAN POTTERY FROM THE

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D.F. Williams, Ph.D., FSA

(HBMC Ceramic Petrology Project)

Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

1) W2014 Two ribbed bodysherds and a small footring base

W2304 A sherd from the shoulder of the vessel

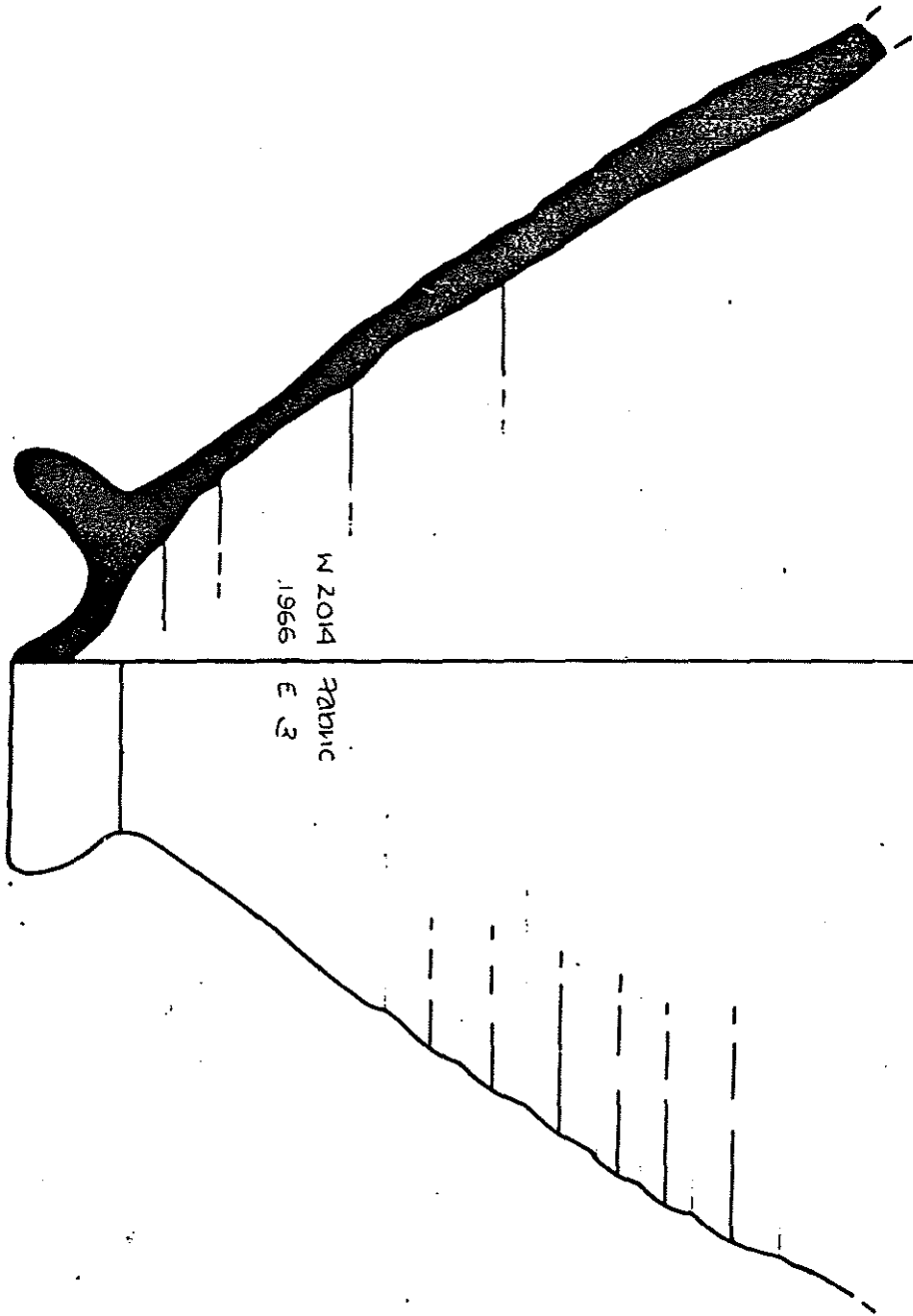
All four sherds are in a hard, rough fabric, slightly micaceous and with frequent light and dark coloured inclusions protruding through the surfaces, light buff (Munsell 10YR 8/4) outer surfaces, pinkish-red (between 2.5YR 6/8 and 5YR 7/8) inner surface and core. Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope shows a groundmass of small quartz grains and flecks of mica, mainly muscovite but with some biotite, with a scatter of pieces of lava, some with a trachytic texture, plagioclase and potash felspar, larger quartz and a little limestone. There can be little doubt that this vessel, probably a flagon rather than an amphorae given the relatively small size of the base, originates in an area of recent volcanic rocks. Italy at once springs to mind, but given the late context in which the sherds were found (associated with Valentinianic coins), a source around the Aegean or Anatolia might be more appropriate since this is the region of origin of many of the ribbed amphorae found in late Roman and post-Roman Britain (Tomber and Williams, 1986). Moreover, it is clear that flat-bottomed jars/flagons with ribbed bodies were made in similar fabrics in this region (cf. Robinson, 1959).

- 2) W1670 An everted bead-rimmed sherd belonging to a small (?) jar. The relatively small-size of the opening and the thin walls suggest that this is not an amphora.

Hard, fairly smooth sandy fabric, pinkish-white (Munsell 5YR 8/2) surfaces, reddish-yellow (5YR 5/8) core. Thin sectioning shows frequent well-sorted subangular grains of quartz mostly 0.20mm and under in size, together with some flecks of mica and a little iron ore. This very common range of non-plastic inclusions gives very little indication of a likely source area for this vessel.

References

- Robinson, H.S. (1959) The Athenian Agora, Vol. V, Princeton.
- Tomber, R. and Williams, D.F. (1986) 'Late Roman amphorae in Britain', J. Roman Pottery Studies, 1(1986), 42-54.



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