

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 28/91

ROMAN AMPHORAE FROM
DERBY, LITTLE CHESTER

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

An examination of over 1300 amphorae sherds allowed the identification of a variety of forms, mostly from Spain, France and Italy. Also present were some possible sherds of a Palestinian origin.

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ROMAN AMPHORAE FROM DERBY LITTLE CHESTER

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Introduction

Well over 1300 amphorae sherds were recovered from the site, comprising a number of rims, handles and spikes, together with many bodysherds. Where possible, these have been classified according to form and fabric. The classification of types is based on Dressel (1899), Laubenheimer (1985), the Camulodunum series (Hawkes and Hull, 1947) and Peacock and Williams (1986), supplemented by descriptive terms suggested by Peacock (1971; 1977a,b) and in common usage. The overwhelming single type present is the common southern Spanish globular olive-oil vessel Dressel 20. Gaulish wine was also clearly reaching the site in reasonable amounts, as was southern Spanish fish produce. Amongst the smaller amounts of amphorae recorded were ?wine amphorae from the Bay of Naples region, and the types Richborough 527 and Palestinian, as well as a number of unidentified forms.

SHERD TOTALS

Dressel 20	112,227gms	88.4%	1,004	73.0%
Gauloise 4	6,360gms	5.0%	198	14.4%
'Black sand' fabric	274gms	0.2%	14	1.0%
Camulodunum 186sp	818gms	0.6%	7	0.5%
Southern Spanish	5,383gms	4.3%	49	3.6%
Richborough 527	58gms	-	2	0.2%
?Palestinian	68gms	-	5	0.4%
Undesignated	1,838gms	1.5%	95	6.9%
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	127,026gms		1,374	sherds

Dressel 20

This is the most common amphora form to be found on Romano-British sites (Williams and Peacock, 1983). It was made in great numbers at many kilns situated along the banks of the River Guadalquivir and its tributaries between Seville and Cordoba, in the Roman southern Spanish province of Baetica, and used almost exclusively for the long-distance transportation of the local olive-oil. This familiar globular-shaped amphora form was in production throughout most of the Roman occupation of Britain, with some typological development, mainly to the rims. A number of the latter were recovered from Little Chester, and these can be given given approximate dates when compared with similar dated material from August in

Martin-Kilcher's (1983) detailed typology of Dressel 20 rims.

- 1J 035/1200. Only a very small portion of rim remains, but possibly a second century A.D. type.
- 2J 028/912. Dated at Augst to the mid second century A.D. (*ibid.*, no. 29).
- 3J 026/539. Dated at Augst late first century A.D. till the mid second century A.D. (*ibid.*, no. 30).
- 4J 026/501. Dated at Augst around the mid first century A.D. (*ibid.*, no. 32).
- 5J 028/725. A fairly similar type is dated at Augst late second century A.D. to mid third century A.D. (*ibid.*, no. 40). A handle stub is attached to the rim on which is a incomplete and unidentified stamp *in ansa* reading from the summit of the handle downwards ?LV...
- 6J 026/558. Possibly similar to an early second century type at Augst (*ibid.*, no. 24).

Rims:

026

539, 501, 549, 558.

028

912, 725.

035

1200.

*Handles:*026

539, 501, 119, 107, 633.

028

877, 822, 900, 725[21.

035

1242, 1212, 1261.

036

1500, 1504, 1549.

*Basal Warts:*026

106, 169.

028

802.

*Bodysheds:*025

0004/BBI, 0004/BBM, 0004/BFI, 0004/BAC, 0004/CAM,

?0004/BBE, ?0004/BDL, ?0004/BEJ, 0004/BDM.

026

539[147], 562[30], 558[6], 551, 555[6], 545, 547, 544[3],
542[6], 635[38], 119, 162, 110[3], 109[4], 110[5],
132[2], 118, 158[2], 107[15], 169, 118[7], u/s[8],
113[4], 102[32], 047[3], 034, 044[10], 051, 054[2],
046[2], 043[2], 014, 006, 029, 044[21], 645[4], 672[3],
649, 663, 658[9], 660[6], 106[41], 633[9], 589, 579[3],
569[30], 637[4], 630, 587[2], 606[2], 583[9], 591[2],
510, 512[22], 514[2], 532[4], 527, 536, 530[7], 501[24],
550[2], 588, 056, 613, 062[7], 158.

028

914, 806[8], 801[3], 865[2], 901, 895, 1112, 877, 1113,
912, 904, 809, 913, 862, 900[10], 822[2], 806[11],
900[11], 725[3], 762, 739, 746, 734[5], 727[10], 725,
796[48], 812, 862.

029

301[2].

033

990[4], 977, 945[18], 944[2], 942[6], 947[3], 950[16],
941[9], 945[2], 969.

035

1258[7], 1245[7], 1242[4], 1200[11], 1212[19], 1217[3],
1235, 1259[2], 1211, 1286, 1270[34], 1287[3], 1274,
1261[20], 1292, 1346[2], 1310, 1336[2], 1329, 1340[8],

1342, 1297[6], 1296[3], 1341[2], 1345, 1347[2], 1318,
1354[6], 1301[5], 1216, 1352[6], 1113.

036

1528, 1527[3], 1504[7], 1549, 1500[21].

037

1606, 1602[2].

Gauloise 4

It is difficult to be absolutely certain in the absence of rims, but in all probability the following handles, bases and bodysherds belong to the flat-bottomed southern Gaulish amphora type Gauloise 4 / Pelichet 47, or at any rate a closely related form (Laubenheimer, 1985). This amphora form predominantly carried wine, and in Britain does not seem to appear on sites dated before the Boudiccan revolt, but then becomes very common up to the late third to early fourth centuries A.D. (Peacock, 1978; Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 27).

Handle:

026

569.

*Flat Bases:*028

725, 727.

*Bodysherds:*025

0002/AAD, 0002/AAF, 0004/BAC, 0005/CAC.

026

539[9], 510[4], 512[2], 527, 102[7], 029[4], 160, u/s[5],
113, 150, 569[5], 591[3], 539[5], 549[2], 562[5], 536,
508, 040, 158, 157.

028

858[3], 901[3], 822, 900[3], 725, 781, 742[2], 727[2],
784[2], 725.

029

301.

033

990[3], 982, 960, 945[6], 941[4], 951[6], 969.

035

1258[11], 1200[3], 1259[3], 1270[3], 1287, 1296, 1245,
1261[8], 1251, 1203, 1216, 1340[2], 1212[4], 1297[2],
1310, 1258[13].

Q36

1500[7], 1504[2], 1544, 1542, 1527, 1500[4], 1549.

Q37

1605, 1602[4], 1600[2], 1602[5].

'Black Sand' Fabric

The majority of the sherds listed below are in a dark red to reddish-brown fabric, with the exception of 035/1200 which is buff-coloured. In all the sherds there are conspicuous dark-coloured grains of augite clearly visible to the naked eye. This is the well-known 'black sand' fabric, generally assumed to originate in the area of Italy around Pompeii and Herculaneum and to be found in the local pottery, tiles and bricks of that region (Peacock, 1977a). Three of the sherds from Little Chester come from the shoulder junction of an amphora, and this is likely to be a Dressel 2-4 type. The remaining sherds in all probability also represent this form as well. It is difficult to be certain given the small size of the sherds, but 026/145, US, 087, 079 and 014 may well originate from the same vessel. These Little Chester vessels would almost certainly have carried wine, and can probably be dated to the first, or possibly early second century A.D. It is not yet clear how far the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 would have affected pottery production in the region (cf. D'Arms, 1981, Chapter 4).

Bodysherds:026

145, US[3], 087[2], 079, 014.

028

733, 734[3 shoulder sherds].

033

941

035

1200

Camulodunum 186sp

The portion of handle and the plain bodysherds listed below may well belong to this particular amphora type, which was made along the southern Spanish coast from the late first century B.C. to the early second century A.D., and carried the local fish-based products (Peacock, 1974; Peacock and Williams, Classes 17 and 18).

Handle:028

876.

*Bodysherds:*026

539[4], 544.

028

808.

Southern Spanish

It is difficult to be certain, but the two portions of handles and bodysherds listed below, probably all one vessel, may possibly belong to an amphora originating from the coastal regions of southern Spain (Peacock, 1971; Peacock, 1974). Fish-based products were almost certainly carried and the vessel probably dates to the first or second centuries A.D.

*Handles:*028

787[2].

*Bodysherds:*028

787[47].

Richborough 527

Two small bodysherds in the characteristic coarse greyish-green volcanic fabric associated with the Richborough 527 type (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 13). In a recent paper by the writer and Paul Arthur, it is suggested that the origin of this heavy elongate amphora form is perhaps more likely to be found in Campania, Italy, than the Massif Central region of France, previously considered a possible source (forthcoming; Peacock, 1977b). The majority of the British finds date to the first century A.D., although it is clear that production of this form lasted much longer than this. Three Richborough 527 vessels have recently been recovered from early to mid third century A.D. deposits at New Fresh Wharf in London, while a large cache from the Temple of Augustus at Pozzuoli are dated to the later second century A.D. / early third century A.D. (Green, 1986; Williams and Arthur, forthcoming). The rather wide mouth of this type may indicate that the contents carried were bulkier than a liquid, possibly some kind of fruit.

Bodysherds:

Q35

1217[2].

?Palestinian

Five ridged bodysherds, possibly all from the same vessel, in a hard, rough sandy fabric, dark grey throughout [between Munsell 10YR 5/1 and 4/1]. Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope shows frequent subangular to subrounded grains of quartz, some cryptocrystalline limestone and the odd grain of tourmaline. The petrology is reminiscent of certain late Roman Palestinian amphorae and may well suggest a similar source, although there are noticeable differences in the hand-specimen of these latter vessels compared with the Little Chester sherds (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Classes 48 and 49). Given the fragmentary nature of the Little Chester sherds, it is difficult to say with any confidence exactly what type of form is represented here.

*Bodysherds:*026

014[2], US, 040.

033

941.

Undesignated*Rims:*028

725 [One thickish everted rim and a bodysherd with part of a smallish oval handle attached. It is difficult to identify and provenance these particular sherds. Both are most likely to be from the same vessel and appear in a hard, somewhat rough sandy fabric, light red throughout [Munsell 2.5YR 6/8]. Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope shows little but frequent subangular grains of quartz and a little shelly limestone, giving few pointers to a likely source area].

036

1500 [This rim, which is slightly scalloped on its inner edge, may represent a flagon. Alternatively it is possible that it may be a variation on the flat-bottomed southern French amphora Gauloise 7, which has a somewhat similar rim, and was produced during the first and second centuries A.D. (Laubenheimer, 1985)].

*Handles:*026

591[?flagon].

035

1270[?flagon].

*Bodysherds:*025

0004/BEF.

026

539[7], 150, 557, 550, 023, 118, 014[2], 535.

028

858, 901, 908, 1112[2], 929, 930, 725[4], 812.

033

941.

035

1347[4], 1301[5], 1305, 1245, 1200[4], 1259, 1261[3],
1341, 1340, 1270[7], 1212[11+ 1 ridged], 1297[3], 1310,
1258[5], 1287[5], 1305[2 ridged-possibly eastern
Mediterranean. From same vessel as 1212?].

037

1600.

Amphorae Stoppers

Fragments from a number of thin 'stoppers' which were sometimes used to seal the necks of amphorae. As far as one can tell, the form appears to be somewhat similar to those used for Dressel 20 and Haltern 70 amphorae recovered from the Port-Vendres II shipwreck, though it seems likely that the type was in fairly general use (cf. Colls *et al*, 1977, Fig. 14). The majority of the Little Chester examples are fairly fine-textured and white to buff in colour, though there are a couple of red coloured pieces also present.

025

0004/BBN.

026

628, US, 054, 155, 047[4], 062[2], 589, 102[2], 157, 532, 501[4].

028

905[4], 801, 896[3], 841, 725[3], 821[2].

035

1200 [2], 1296, 1261[5], 1301, 1270[2], 1212[4].

033

945, 962.

Non-Amphorae*Bodysherds:*025

?0004/BCB.

026

501[41, 658, 040, 023, 637[21, 555.

028

?830, 877, 904, 900, 734,

033

941.

037

?1606, 1602.

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