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ROMAN AMPHORAE RECOVERED FROM THE
WOOTTON QUARR SURVEY, FISHBOURNE
BAY, ISLE OF WIGHT

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Identification was made of a group of amphorae sherds recovered during the Wootton Quarr Survey. These included amphora from Italy, Spain, France and possibly Palestine. Of particular interest amongst the Italian material were sherds from the late Republican amphora Dressel 1, suggesting that this area of The Solent was involved in maritime trade during the late Iron Age.

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ROMAN AMPHORAE RECOVERED FROM THE WOOTTON QUARR SURVEY,
FISHBOURNE BAY, ISLE OF WIGHT

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[HBMC Ceramic and Lithic Petrology Project]

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COMMENTS

This is a small group of amphorae which was recovered from various locations during the Wootton Quarr Survey. There are 43 sherds in total, with a number of them well-rolled by the sea, in some cases making identification difficult. Nevertheless, as a whole, the sherds that can be confidently associated with particular amphorae forms are of considerable interest. At least nine sherds, five of them handles, come from the most important of the late Republican amphora types Dressel 1. In addition, seven sherds belong either to this form or to the slightly thinner-walled Dressel 2-4, which was co-produced and then succeeded Dressel 1 on Italian kiln sites from about the late first century B.C. into the first century A.D. [Tchernia, 1986].

Most of the above material appears to come from Italy, with two sherds almost certainly originating in the Bay of Naples region. In addition, there are three sherds which may possibly also belong to Dressel 1, but this can

only be a tentative attribution at present.

During the second half of the second century B.C. and the course of the first century A.D., exports of Italian wine in the large and sturdy Dressel 1 amphorae appear to have flooded onto the Gaulish market. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that many thousands of these vessels have been discovered at a number of pre-Roman sites in France [Tchernia, 1983]. Dressel 1 also reached the Late Iron Age tribes of Britain, but by comparison with the French material the numbers of recorded vessels are extremely modest [Fitzpatrick, 1985]. A number of these Italian Dressel 1 vessels have been found in southern Britain, in particular at the coastal site of Hengistbury Head [Williams and Peacock, 1994]. While a few finds have also occurred on the Isle of Wight [Tomalin, 1987]. The Dressel 1 finds recovered from the Wootton Quarr Survey, including the sediments just offshore and also slightly further away in The Solent, suggest that the Isle of Wight probably played an important part in the cross-Channel trade that went on during the last two centuries B.C. Whether this was solely between the Iron Age tribes on both sides of the Channel or whether there was a direct Roman involvement is still something of an open question. In this connection, it is worth noting that a possible early Roman wreck has been reported off the Isle of Wight associated with Dressel 1 sherds [Peacock, 1994, 38].

Of the remaining amphorae sherds which have been

identified, the majority of them; Haltern 70, Southern Spanish and some of the Dressel 20, could also belong to the pre-Roman period, as all of these forms occur on late Iron Age sites in southern coastal Britain [Williams and Peacock, 1994]. It has to be said though, that as only plain bodysherds are involved, a somewhat later date than this is equally possible. The likely Palestinian sherd points to continuing trade in the Solent during the late Roman period.

In terms of amphorae, the Wootton Quarr Survey suggests that The Solent witnessed an important maritime trade activity during the late Iron Age. It is greatly to be hoped that further work will be able to provide more information both on the scale of this trade and also on the significance of the part played in this by the Wootton Quar area of the Isle of Wight.

CATALOGUE

DRESSEL 1

Several Roman amphorae sherds were recovered which almost certainly belong to the important late republican Italian wine amphora form Dressel 1. Unfortunately, it is not really possible to say whether this material, which is made up of small pieces of handles and bodysherds, belongs to the earlier Dressel 1A form or the slightly later Dressel 1B type [Peacock and Williams, 1986,

Classes 3 and 4]. In any event, a first century B.C. date is indicated, since the 1B variety went out of production before the end of that century [see Sealey, 1985, for references]. Taking fabric considerations into account, a minimum of perhaps eight or nine vessels may be represented by these sherds, all of which appear to be Italian in origin. Two of the sherds, nos. 1 and 8, are very probably from the Bay of Naples region.

The bodysherds nos. 13-19 listed below may also belong to this form, they are certainly Italian, but as they are somewhat thinner-walled they could equally well come from the slightly later form Dressel 2-4. This amphora was also made in Italy in much the same fabrics, and in some cases at the same kilns, which had also produced the earlier Dressel 1 form, and again seems mostly to have transported wine [Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 10].

[1]. 36,006: 0001: 5,049.

Part of an oval-shaped handle and bodysherd in a distinctive "black sand" fabric. This strongly suggests an origin in the Pompeii - Herculaneum area of Campania [Peacock, 1977].

[2]. IWCMC: 36,006: 0001: 5,050.

Part of an oval-shaped handle in a sandy reddish-brown fabric.

[3]. IWCAC 1526.0.386

Small part of a chunky, oval-shaped handle in a pinkish sandy fabric.

[4]. 36,006: 0001: 5,047.

Part of an oval-shaped handle in a light red sandy fabric.

[5]. 36,006: 0001: 5,061.

Bodysherd with handle-stub in a reddish-brown fabric.

[6]. 36,006: 0001: 5,211.

Bodysherd, possibly from the shoulder, in a light red sandy fabric.

[7]. 36,006: 0001: 5,055.

Plain bodysherd in a light red sandy fabric.

[8]. 36,006: 0001: 5212.

Thick, plain bodysherd in a reddish-brown fabric with "black sand" inclusions similar to no. [1].

[9]. 36,006: 0001: 5,054.

Large plain bodysherd in a light red sandy fabric.

[10]. 36,006: 0001: 5,213.

Thick, plain bodysherd in a dark reddish-brown sandy fabric with some limestone inclusions.

Possibly from a Dressel 1 vessel, but difficult to be sure.

[11]. 36,006: 0001: 5211.

Bodysherd in a sandy orange fabric. Possibly from a Dressel 1 vessel, but difficult to be sure.

[12]. 36,006: 0001: 5232.

Plain bodysherd in a dark reddish-brown sandy fabric. Possibly from a Dressel 1 vessel, but difficult to be sure.

[13]. IWAC 1526.0.1835 GF

Plain bodysherd in a red sandy fabric. Possibly from a Dressel 2-4 vessel.

[14]. IWAC 1526.0.1838GF KT 530

Plain bodysherd in a dark red sandy fabric. Possibly from a Dressel 2-4 vessel.

[15]. 10.7.89 100m NE of E

Plain bodysherd in a light red sandy fabric. Possibly from a Dressel 2-4 vessel.

[16]. 28/L/89 Shingle Bank

Plain bodysherd, buff surfaces and grey core. Possibly from a Dressel 2-4 vessel.

[17]. 36004.1.5143

Plain bodysherd in a sandy reddish-buff fabric.
Possibly from a Dressel 2-4 vessel.

[18]. 1526. 2260

[19]. 1526. 3324

Two plain joining bodysherds in a slightly
micaceous greyish-buff fabric. Probably from a
Dressel 2-4 vessel.

DRESSEL 20

All of these plain bodysherds come from the commonly
found Baetican olive-oil amphora Dressel 20. This form
had a long period of production, from the late first
century B.C. to shortly after the middle of the third
century A.D. (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 25).
Unfortunately, it is difficult to place most of the
Wootton Quarr sherds at any particular point within this
time span, although the fabric of one of them suggests a
date late in the series [no. 25].

[20]. IWCAC 1526.0.1895 GF AB 42

Plain bodysherd.

[21]. IWCAC 1526.0.1885 GF

Two plain bodysherds, possibly from the same

vessel.

[22]. IWCAC 1526.0.1553 GF KT

Four plain bodysherds, quite likely from the same vessel.

[23]. 10.6.89 110m from E

Plain bodysherd.

[24]. AB 20.6.89 On shugh bank

Possibly a Dressel 20 bodysherd.

[25]. 1526. .2995

Plain bodysherd, probably late in the series.

?CAMULODUNUM 185A

The fabric of the two sherds listed below is virtually identical to the Dressel 20 material described above. However, both sherds are somewhat thinner-walled than is normally the case with Dressel 20, which suggests that they may have come instead from another Baetican amphora form which has a similar fabric to Dressel 20, Camulodunum 185A/Haltern 70 (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 15). This type of amphora is generally thought to have carried *defrutum* and olives, and seems to have been in production from about the mid first century B.C. until at least the later first century A.D.

[26]. 36004.0001.5147

[27]. 36004.0001.5148

Two well-worn joining bodysherds.

GAULOISE 4

Both of these sherds probably belong to the southern French flat-bottomed amphora form Gauloise 4 (Laubenheimer, 1985). This container, which predominantly carried wine and was imported to Roman Britain in great numbers, occurs on Romano-British sites from shortly after the Boudiccan revolt until the early fourth century A.D. (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Class 27).

[28]. 36,076 0001 5,066

Handle.

[29]. IWCAC 1526.0.1839 GF

Plain bodysherd.

SOUTHERN SPANISH

This single sherd most probably comes from the coastal region of southern Spain and may well have come from an amphora which was used to carry some form of fish-based products (Peacock, 1974). A plain sherd such as this is

difficult to date, and it could lie anywhere from the late first century B.C. up to the second century A.D.

[30]. 36,075.0001.5,013

Plain bodysherd.

?PALESTINIAN

This ribbed sherd comes from the rounded bottom section of an amphora. It is in a very hard, sandy fabric with visible inclusions of white limestone, and has reddish-brown surfaces and grey core. This distinctive form and fabric recalls the late Roman Palestinian amphora types Zemer 53 and Almagro 54 (Peacock and Williams, 1986, Classes 48 and 49). A thin section was made of the Wootton Creek sherd and studied under the petrological microscope. While not proving to be an exact match with previous Palestinian amphorae sectioned by the writer, it nevertheless displayed enough similarity to suspect that it may well belong to the same general class of vessel. If correctly identified, the Wootton Creek vessel may have carried Palestinian wine and should date from the third/fourth centuries A.D. to the sixth century A.D. Palestinian amphorae only seem to occur in limited numbers in Britain.

[31]. 36004.1.5142

UNASSIGNED

[32]. 36,006: 0001: 5,043.

Plain bodysherd in a dark reddish-brown sandy fabric. Not I think from a Dressel 1 vessel. Perhaps instead from a ?Spanish amphora.

[33]. IWCAC 1526.0.1924 GE KT 534

Very small, reddish-grey sandy plain bodysherd.

[34]. IWCAC 1526.0.2009 GE

Small, well-worn plain bodysherd, light red surfaces with a grey core.

[35]. 36,075 0001 5,012

Plain bodysherd in a reddish-brown sandy fabric.

[36]. IWAC 1526.0.474 24.6.89

Small, well-worn plain bodysherd, reddish-brown surfaces, grey core.

[37]. IWAC 1526.0.3 GE

Two well-worn plain bodysherds.

[38]. 36004.0001.5144

Plain bodysherd in a sandy fabric, reddish-buff surfaces and grey core.

[39]. 3,6076.0001.5,042

Plain bodysherd in a sandy fabric, reddish-buff throughout.

[40]. 36004.0001.5145

Plain bodysherd in a sandy fabric, buff surfaces and grey core.

[41]. 36004.0001.5146

Plain bodysherd in a sandy greyish-buff fabric.

[42]. IWAC 1526.0.387

Small oval-shaped handle and separate gently ribbed neck-sherd, both in a quite gritty light coloured fabric.

[43]. 1526. 3451

Plain bodysherd in a somewhat micaceous reddish-buff fabric.

NON-AMPHORAE

[44]. 1526. .2399 KT578

Small plain sherd in a very sandy reddish fabric.
Not sure if this is from an amphora or not.

[45]. 1526.0.1774 GE

Flat base of a ?large coarse bowl or dish.

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