

AN UNUSUAL LATE ROMAN MORTARIUM FROM CAISTER BY YARMOUTH,

NORFOLK: Mr. Paul Arthur and Dr. David Williams write :

Fulford has recently published evidence for a significant amount of late Roman ceramic importation into the Romano-British provinces from Gaul and the Rhineland¹, whilst other workers have drawn attention to late imports from further afield, notably Tunisia².

An internally glazed mortarium, excavated at Caister by Yarmouth by the late Charles Green in 1952, can now be added to the growing list of late Roman imports. Although, by itself, it provides little justification to be regarded as an article of trade, it's possible source as suggested by the petrological evidence offered below is interesting. Pending the full publication of the Caister excavations³ the find cannot be examined in it's full context. However, it is referred to in the site notebook as SF 1570, and comes from Room I of a rectangular building, beneath a burnt wattle partition wall. It was associated with many coins of the House of Constantine.

The vessel (Fig. 1) is a deep-bowled mortarium with a maximum external diameter of about 290mm. The fabric is hard fired and ranges from orange to dark buff and light brown, some of the reduction possibly having been caused by a later subjection to fire. The vessel displays fettling marks around the base and has wet finger slurry marks on the exterior surface. There is an internal lead glaze which, in most areas, comes up to the bead of the mortarium but does not run over the top

and onto the flange. Beneath the glaze are rounded white quartzite trituration grits which are present some two-thirds of the way up the interior surface. The lead glaze is thick and varies from a light green to a dark treacle brown. Round spots of glaze are visible on the exterior of the vessel. Although no spout remains amongst the sherds recovered, it is likely that the mortarium was originally spouted.

The closest parallels to the Caister mortarium are found distributed throughout Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, southern Germany, northern Italy and northern Yugoslavia. Garbsch illustrates a large number of such vessels from the Mooseberg near Murnau⁴ (Fig. 2), which lies between the Danube tributaries of the Lech and Isar, south-west of Munich. Associated coins are mainly fourth century A.D, ending with an issue of Arcadius. The contexts of these mortaria on other sites would also seem to indicate a fourth century date for their circulation.

The knowledge of a kiln site producing such vessels at the Tac-Fovenyusztá villa in Hungary,⁵ and the recent discovery and excavation of another kiln site at Carlino in north-east Italy,⁶ has led the writers to set up a research programme to examine this group of late Roman ceramics.⁷ As part of this programme a small sample of the Caister vessel was thin sectioned and studied under the petrological microscope. It compared favourably with a similar analysis of an internally glazed mortarium found at Aquileia in northern Italy, a sherd of which was kindly

supplied by Dr. Luisa Bertacchi. Both samples contained numerous well-sorted grains of subangular quartz, average size 0.10mm., some limestone, flecks of mica, a little brown hornblende and a scatter of chloritoid grains. The presence of chloritoid in the sections suggests a source for the raw materials in an area of metamorphic rocks. The sample from Aquileia might point to an eastern Alpine source, though of course other areas are equally possible, and it is worth noting at this stage that the fabric appears to differ from that of a sample of a glazed jug from the nearby kiln site at Carlino.

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1. M.G. Fulford, 'Pottery and Britain's Foreign Trade in the Later Roman Period' in D.P.S. Peacock (Ed.), Pottery and Early Commerce, Characterization and Trade in Roman and Later Ceramics, London, 1977.
2. J. Bird, 'African Red Slip Ware in Roman Britain' in J. Dore and K. Greene (Eds.), Roman Pottery Studies in Britain and Beyond? Oxford, 1977; and D.P.S. Peacock, 'Roman amphorae: Typology, fabric and origin' in Coll. Ecole Franc. Rome, forthcoming.
3. We are grateful to Miss Barbara Green for allowing us to publish the Caister mortarium in advance of the site report. For summaries of the original excavations see J.R.S. XLIII, 1953, 122.
4. J. Garbsch, Der Mooseberg bei Murnau, Munich, 1966, Taf. 45-51.
5. E.B. Thomas, 'Die Romerzeitliche Villa von Tac-Fovenypusztá' in Acta Archeologica Hungariae VI, 1956, pp.120-123.
6. L. Bertacchi, 'La Ceramica Invetriata di Carlino' in Aquileia Nostra XLVII, 1976, pp.181-194.
7. P. Arthur and D.F. Williams, forthcoming.