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**AXMINSTER
WOODBURY GREAT CLOSE EXCAVATIONS, 1990
THE ROMAN POTTERY**

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the winter and spring of 1990 a new water main, running between the village of Musbury and the A35 just east of Axminster in East Devon, was constructed by South West Water. An archaeological watching brief funded by South West Water was mounted along the route of the pipeline by Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit. The pipelaying entailed the fencing of a 10m wide working corridor, an 8m width of which was stripped of topsoil. Observations were made along the whole corridor after soil-stripping had been carried out in order to identify buried archaeological features and to recover artefacts.

In the vicinity of Woodbury Farm to the south of Axminster the pipeline passes close to an earthwork protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Devon No. 1031) which lies on the south side of the Roman road from Dorchester to Exeter (roughly followed by modern Woodbury Lane). Limited excavation and fieldwalking on the site in the early 1980s had pointed to the existence here of a substantial Roman settlement of third- to fourth-century date. This was thought to have been the successor to a first-century military site, probably a fort (Bidwell and Silvester 1981).

During the course of the watching brief it became clear that extensive archaeological deposits of Roman date existed in the field (formerly known as Woodbury Great Close) immediately to the west of Woodbury Farm (SY297974). Salvage excavations were therefore carried out along a 2m wide strip in the centre of the corridor prior to the cutting of the pipetrench. These extended over a length of about 210m between Wyke Lane and Woodbury Lane. The excavation phase of the fieldwork was grant-aided by English Heritage, who also provided funds for post-excavation analysis and report preparation.

SUMMARY OF EXCAVATION RESULTS

Although the excavations were limited in their scope due to the restrictions imposed by the pipe-laying operations, they did yield very significant results. Firstly, the ditch of a first-century fort was located at Woodbury Farm, immediately to the north-west of the earthwork described above. A provisional plan of the fort can now be reconstructed using additional evidence from aerial photographs and field survey. Sections of two Roman roads were also recorded: the east-west Dorchester-Exeter road and a north-south road which ran southwards from it along the west side of the fort. Evidence of first-century occupation was also recorded to the west of the fort. In the later Roman period an extensive settlement existed on the site. Evidence of occupation, including timber buildings, ditches and pits was recorded up to 250m west of the fort site and at least 95m to the south of the Dorchester-Exeter road.

Summaries of the results of the archaeological fieldwork on the pipeline, and the excavations at Woodbury Great Close are contained in Simpson (1991, and forthcoming).

THE ROMAN POTTERY (Figs 1-2)

Some 27 kg of Roman pottery was recovered from stratified deposits in the excavation at Woodbury Great Close, with nearly another 11 kg being derived from surface cleaning. A small group of pottery was also salvaged from contractors' spoil immediately to the south-west of Wyke Lane.

First-century wares and the date of the military occupation of Woodbury

Very little pottery was stratified in features associated with the fort, so that determination of the period of military occupation rests upon a consideration of all the first-century pottery from the site, much of which occurs residually in fourth-century deposits. The samian ware provides the best evidence, and a full catalogue is provided in Table 1. On the basis of the samian, G.B. Dannell has proposed a date of c. AD50/65-70/85 for the period of military occupation. The absence of distinctively Claudian vessels is very apparent, and so it would appear that Woodbury cannot be counted amongst the forts established within a few years of the conquest during the campaigns against the Durotriges. Rather the samian suggests a foundation at about the same time as the legionary fortress at Exeter, and hence Woodbury is probably to be regarded as part of the chain of forts established in Devon and Cornwall during the somewhat later action against the Dumnonii. A Dr. 18 of Flavian date was recovered from the filling of the fort ditch and the samian as a whole suggests that occupation may have continued for some years after the withdrawal of the legion from Exeter around 75. This is known to have been the case at Tiverton and possibly also some other south-western forts (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991).

Table 1. Samian from the excavations (identifications by G.B. Dannell).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Types</i>
Pre-Flavian	2	Ritt. 9?; Ritt. 8 (Lezoux)
Pre-Flavian?	7	29; 15/17; 18(x2); 27(x3)
50-65	1	30
Nero-Vespasian	2	18; 27 (Lezoux)
65-80	1	29
Flavian	15	29(x4); 30; 37(x2); 37?(x2); 18(x4); 27(x2)
Flavian?	5	29(x2); 18; 18R
70-85	2	30; 37
Late Flavian	1	35/6
First Century	14	29(x4); 30(x3); 37; 18(x4); 27?; 33
Trajanic?	1	36
Hadrianic?	1	37
Hadrianic-Antonine	2	37; 18/31?
Antonine	6	37(x2); 31(x2); 33; 38
Antonine?	1	33
Second Century	3	37(x2); 18/31

Coarse pottery which can plausibly be associated with the military occupation includes sherds from three vessels in Exeter Fortress ware A (Fig. 1: 2; a rim as type 2, and another sherd with small nodular rusticated decoration as type 1). In addition the excavations of 1981/2 recovered fragments of three vessels in Fortress ware B (= fabric 190; Silvester and Bidwell 1984, 44). The Exeter Fortress wares have been found at a number of first-century military sites in the South-West, but not on rural sites such as Seaton and Holcombe (*ibid.*). The presence of these wares at Woodbury therefore provides confirmatory evidence for the military nature of the early activity. Other first-century coarsewares include vessels in Hand-Made Micaceous Grey ware (sherds from bead-rim bowls, bead-rim jars and cooking-pots type 4.2), a sherd from a flagon in Exeter fabric 405 (this fabric appears to date exclusively from the period of military occupation at Exeter), and a number of early black-burnished ware types. First-century forms in both South-East Dorset and South-Western BB1 are represented, with cooking-pots and bead-rim bowls dominant. None of the bead-rim bowls in the excavated assemblage possesses ribbed decoration, although a sherd with rib and dotted festoon was recovered from the Musbury-Axminster pipeline and another example was found in fieldwalking in 1988 by P.J. Weddell. One South-East Dorset BB1 vessel is of more than usual interest for both surfaces have been coated with a bright orange-red slip (Fig. 1: 1). Only two small sherds were recovered but they are sufficient to show that they come from a tankard. This example joins the four other recorded examples of red-coated tankards (Hod Hill (two), Jordan Hill and Ham Hill; for references and a general discussion of BB1 tankards see *ibid.*). One of the Hod Hill examples was stratified in a military deposit, and a similar early post-conquest date for the Axminster example seems probable. The trait is undoubtedly rare and was probably very short-lived. Brailsford (1958, 104) suggested that it may have been an attempt to imitate the metallic sheen of bronze vessels, but another explanation is possible. If, as seems likely, the practice dates from the period immediately following the conquest of the Durotriges, it may be viewed as an attempt by native potters to produce drinking vessels with the bright red finish to which Roman tastes were accustomed. These vessels may thus have been directed specifically at the military market (it is significant that three of the known examples have been recovered from fort sites). The limited number of examples suggests that the innovation was not particularly successful.

Samian apart, the site has yielded very few first-century finewares. There is only a single sherd of butt-beaker (fabric as those from Exeter, where *Camulodunum* form 113 is the only type represented) and one of probable imitation butt-beaker (in the same red fabric as those found at Exeter). *Terra nigra* and pre-Flavian finewares are both absent, although the quantity of early pottery is not sufficient for this to be regarded as particularly significant.

With the departure of the army it is possible that the site may have been abandoned for a time. There is certainly a gap in the samian assemblage until the early Antonine period, but this evidence must be treated with some caution as samian ware is not at all common in first-/early second-century deposits at the nearby farmstead sites of Holcombe and Seaton (Bidwell and Silvester 1981, 66). Amongst the coarsewares from the site there are a number of types which first appear in the late first/early second century (e.g. BB1 flat-rimmed bowls and dishes, vessel in Exeter Micaceous Grey ware), but all could equally well have still been in circulation in the second half of the second

century. It is possible therefore that there was a period of abandonment - or at the very least greatly reduced occupation - following the departure of the army, activity picking up once again in the second half of the second century. Thereafter occupation appears to have continued throughout the third and (at least) the first half of the fourth century.

Third- and fourth-century material

Much of the site was covered by a black deposit containing finely comminuted charcoal which sealed the majority of the Roman features. The principal dating evidence from this material comprises a bead rim from an Oxfordshire colour-coated vessel of indeterminate form, a New Forest colour-coated beaker and a South-East Dorset BB1 conical flanged bowl. This points to a date after c. 270 and very probably after c. 300 for the deposit (Oxfordshire colour-coated ware has not been found in contexts which can be shown to predate the fourth century in Devon). One of the features sealed by the deposit (660), however, produced a sherd from an Oxfordshire colour-coated bowl with stamped demi-rosette decoration, a motif not used before c. 340. If the evidence of this one sherd is taken at face value therefore the black material must have been deposited after that date. There is nothing in the assemblage which need necessarily preclude a mid or late fourth-century date, for distinctively late Oxfordshire, New Forest and South-East Dorset BB1 forms are not particularly common, and the deposit also contained a considerable quantity of residual material.

Storage jars: a production centre at Woodbury

The black deposits, and in particular context 609, yielded an unusually high proportion (37% of the assemblage by weight) of sherds from grey ware storage jars, some of which are clearly wasters. Fig. 2: 26 is heavily overfired and the fabric has split and crazed. Waster body sherds include two with impressed thumb decoration. Considerable variation exists in the fabric of the storage jars although they all contain inclusions of quartz grits, fragments of grey slate or shillet, red-purple grits and occasionally soft white material. The coarseness of the fabric varies considerably according to the size of the vessel. The surface colour ranges from grey to buff. It therefore seems very probable that storage jar production was taking place at Woodbury, although a programme of petrological analysis is required before we can be certain that this is the source of all the jars found in Exeter and East Devon. The majority of storage jars from this area, however, display sufficient similarity in form and fabric to suggest that they are likely to be products of a single industry. Storage jars also occur widely on sites in South Somerset, although some of these vessels possess a markedly different fabric from those found in Exeter and so production at more than one site seems probable. On the evidence of stratified examples, storage jars were current in Devon from the Antonine period until the fourth century. It is not known whether production at Woodbury spanned the whole of this period.

A limited range of other vessels may have been produced alongside the storage jars at Woodbury. A mortarium (Fig. 2: 21) has a large crack near its base and is certainly a second if not a waster. There are also a small number of oxidised vessels which could be local products. These are frequently micaceous, and have ferrous, purple and ochreous inclusions (Fig. 2: 20, 21, 23; Silvester and Bidwell 1984, Fig. 4: 55-6, 58-9).

Residual black-burnished and fine wares

The black deposit contained a large quantity of residual material, as is amply demonstrated by the fact that South-Western BB1 is more prevalent in this group than South-East Dorset BB1 (24% of the assemblage by weight, compared with 22%) despite production of the former having come to an end in the first half of the third century. Much of the pottery assigned to the period of military occupation also came from these levels. For this reason it has not been considered worthwhile to present quantified data on the composition of the group by fabric. Of note, however, is the very small quantity of South Devon ware in the group (less than 1% by weight) and the presence of a few sherds of Norton Fitzwarren ware (Fig. 2: 24; termed fabric 107 in Bidwell and Silvester 1984).

Fine wares represented (in all deposits including unstratified material) are Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (52gm, recognisable forms are two Dr. 38 imitations and a sherd with demi-rosettes); New Forest (160gm, all from beakers); Nene Valley (6gm) and *Moselkeramik* (31gm). Amphorae present are Dressel 20 and a body sherd of *Camulodunum* 185 fabric.

CATALOGUE (Figs 1-2)

The vessels selected for illustration are those which are either of above average importance, are previously unrecorded, or are good examples of comparatively rare types. In addition, all the storage jar rims are illustrated as they presumably reflect the range of types produced at the site (although only one vessel is an actual waster). Types refer to those used in Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, where a full description of the fabrics can also be found. Excavation context numbers are given in brackets at the end of each catalogue entry.

An archive listing the pottery by context and quantified by weight and percentage of rim diameter is held in the R.A.M. Museum, Exeter.

1. South-East Dorset BB1 with internal and external bright orange-red slip. Tankard (609, 679).
2. Exeter Fortress ware A, cf. type 6 (616).
3. South-East Dorset BB1, base from a bowl as type 33 (640).
4. South-Western BB1, type 16 (698).
5. South-Western BB1, large narrow-mouthed jar (669, 671).
6. South-Western BB1, type 49.2 (669).
7. Exeter Sandy Grey ware, type 2.3 (615).
8. Exeter Sandy Grey ware, biconical cup (717).

9. Exeter Sandy Grey ware, type 29 (the only other example is from Holcombe) (634).
10. Exeter Sandy Grey ware, jar (605).
11. Hard dark brown gritty fabric with inclusions of white quartz; yellow and red material. Light brown micaceous surfaces (640).
12. Exeter Micaceous Grey ware, cf. type 48 (633).
13. Dark grey sandy fabric fired to a hardness akin to stoneware (609).
14. Exeter Gritty Grey ware, cf. type 29 which may well be a lid rather than a bowl (635).
15. Exeter Sandy Grey ware, cf. type 38 (615).
16. Fabric close to South-East Dorset BB1 but apparently wheel-thrown (640).
17. Mortarium. Soft micaceous orange-brown fabric with red-brown slip. White quartz trituration grit. Exeter mortarium fabric FB32. A Caerleon product datable to c. 110-150.
18. Mortarium. Hard rough fabric with abundant red ferrous and small black grit inclusions. Pale yellow-buff trituration grits. The vessel is well-worn and has been repaired in antiquity with a lead rivet. A local product imitating the mortaria produced in Central France (Exeter types TC8-18). Similar local copies of these mortaria are known from a number of other first-century military sites. Date c. 50-85 (606).
19. Mortarium. Hard cream fabric with moderate frequency of quartz grit inclusions. White quartz trituration grits. A Rhineland product, cf. Exeter types TC56-8, datable to c. 140-250/300 (609).
20. Hard light red fabric with abundant small rounded black grit and red/purple inclusions. Local? (635).
21. Soft orange slightly micaceous fabric with numerous red/purple inclusions up to 4mm across. Local? (635).
22. Mortarium. Light orange fabric with abundant white, grey and purple inclusions. Larger grade inclusions act as trituration grit on interior. Crack near base - second or possible waster. Local product unlikely to date before the third century (635).
23. Buff surfaces with orange core. Dark grey rounded inclusions. Local? (667).

24. Norton Fitzwarren ware. Form paralleled at production site (Leech 1977, Fig. 138, 8-9).
25. Storage Jar fabric (619).
26. Storage Jar fabric. Obvious waster (619).
27. Storage Jar fabric (635).
28. Storage Jar fabric (609).
29. Storage Jar fabric (604).
30. Storage Jar fabric (619).
31. Storage Jar fabric (609).
32. Storage Jar fabric (635).

Unstratified finds from south-west of Wyke Lane

33. Soft fine orange micaceous fabric with abundant small black grit and occasional larger brown/purple inclusions. Because of the acidic soil conditions it is uncertain whether the vessel originally possessed a colour-coat. Local? (518).
34. Storage Jar fabric (518).
35. Buff-cream fabric with occasional small red inclusions. A *Gallia Belgica* product, cf. Exeter type TC49, datable to c. 160-230. Note that the rim has been worn away in one area and is not a spout as shown (518).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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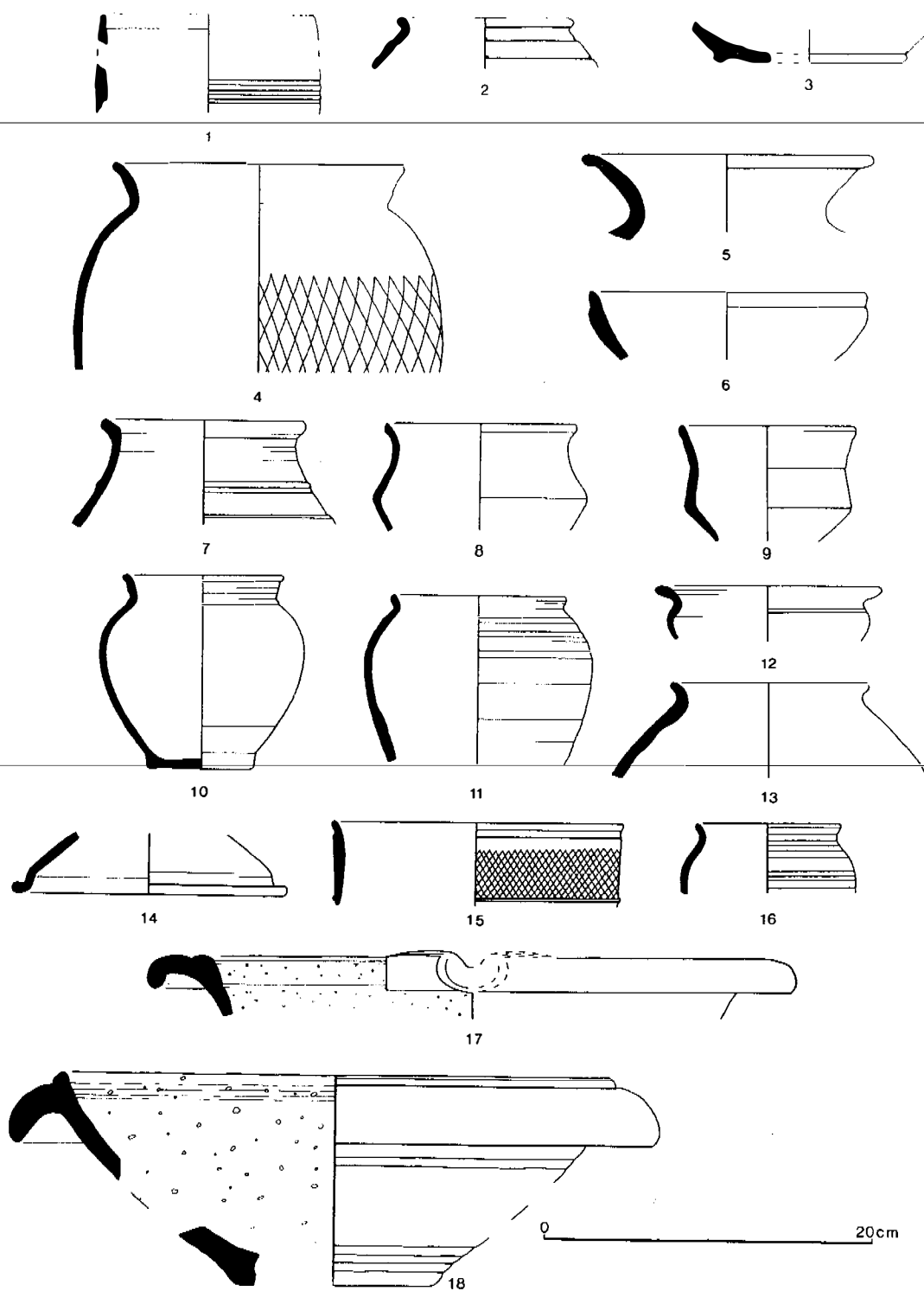


Fig. 1 Roman pottery, Nos 1-18.

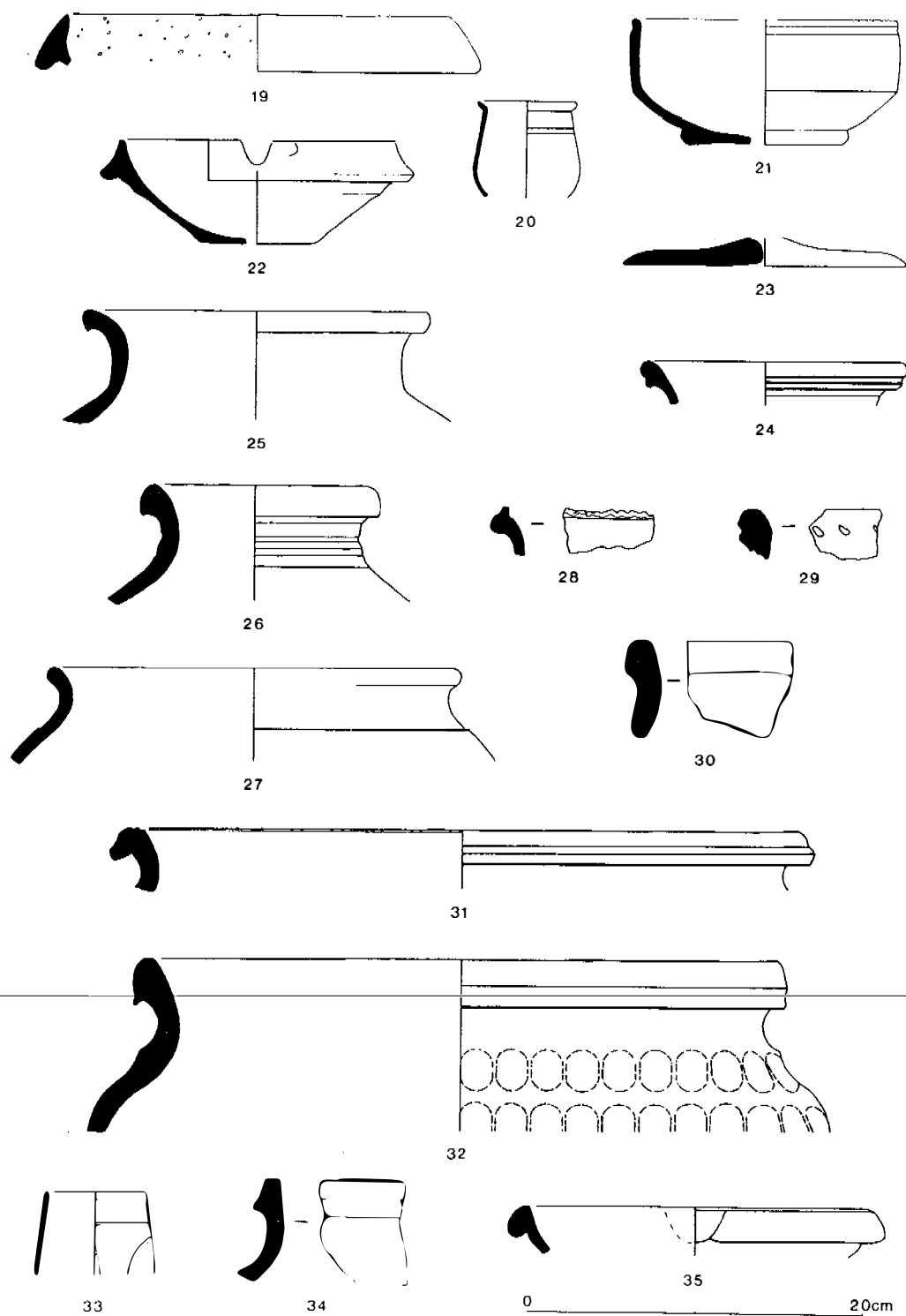


Fig. 2 Roman pottery, Nos 19-35