

# Chapter 13. Mortaria

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## I. Fabric descriptions

### Fabric 1

*Fabric*: hard, fine-textured, cream matrix with pink core; surface, granular.

*Inclusions*: frequent, rounded, tiny to smallish-sized, mostly transparent quartz with rare red-brown and black material. The abundance of inclusions causes the granular surface.

*Trituration grit*: no evidence on the single sherd that any were ever applied. It may have been thought that the abundant inclusions would provide a sufficiently hard and granular surface, but there could have been trituration grits only near and in the base.

Probably a fairly local source within about 20 miles

### Fabric 2

Oxford white fabric (Tomber and Dore 1998, 174-5)

### Fabric 3

Oxford white-slipped, oxidised ware (Tomber and Dore 1998, 177)

### Fabric 4

Oxford red-slipped ware (Tomber and Dore 1998, 176)

### Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill, Warwickshire (Tomber and Dore 1998, 188-9)

### Fabric 6

*Fabric*: hard, drab cream; matt, brown slip.

*Inclusions*: frequent, minute to small, mostly quartz with some red-brown sandstone and black material.

*Trituration grit*: no internal surface survives.

See Fabric 10, probably the same source.

### Fabric 7

*Fabric*: Pale grey merging almost to a dirty cream, but reduced on the surface of the surviving flange to a dense black which appears to penetrate the fabric too deeply for it to be a slip; the reduction extends just underneath the flange.

The surface of the flange has been smoothed or polished. Inexplicably, there appears to be a little black accretion over one of the fractures.

*Inclusions*: frequent, minute to small, almost entirely quartz, with a little red-brown and rare black material.

*Trituration grit*: none survives.

probably fairly local

### Fabric 8

*Fabric*: drab cream

*Inclusions*: fairly frequent to frequent, tiny to small, red-brown, quartz and black material

*Trituration grit*: black iron slag.

Probably a more local source in the East Midlands rather than the lower Nene valley (Tomber and Dore 1998, 117-9)

### Fabric 9

*Fabric*: pale brownish-cream, although one sherd is red throughout, due to firing; red slip

The fabric is similar to that produced in the Verulamium region (*i.e.* Brockley Hill and Radlett), but the use of a partial slip or of a red slip on the normal pale brownish-cream fabric would be distinctly irregular though not entirely impossible. Unfortunately there is not enough trituration grit surviving to be of any help. Possibly first half of the 2nd century.

### Fabric 10

*Fabric*: drab cream; thick, opaque, brown slip, probably all over though only traces now survive.

*Inclusions*: frequent, tiny transparent and pinkish quartz with some red-brown and rare black material. The abundant inclusions make the fabric a very tough one.

*Trituration grit*: almost certainly no trituration grit was added.

The fabric is similar to Fabric 6, but with even more inclusions; possibly the same source. East midlands, perhaps local. There could be a local tradition of using the brown slip.

#### Fabric 11

*Fabric*: fairly fine-textured, pale brownish-cream; texture powdery. There are small patches which could be the remains of a red-brown slip.

*Inclusions*: frequent, mostly barely visible at x20, with few small-sized, mostly quartz with some red-brown and very rare black material.

*Trituration grit*: white quartz with hackly fracture and very rare red-brown sandstone.

East Midlands, probably local.

Fabrics 1, 6, 10 and 11 have so much in common that they are likely to be variations of the same basic fabric. Furthermore, Fabrics 6, 10 and 11 probably had a matt, red-brown slip which is a very unusual feature with cream or brownish-cream fabrics. They are products of a workshop with a limited market and it is likely to be relatively local. Such a workshop is unlikely to have a long production life and all of the relevant sherds could well be second-century despite the use of what amounts to a colour-coat.

## II. Discussion

The excavations produced 61 mortarium sherds, weighing a total of 4.010kg. The details of weight, sherds and individual vessels are shown in Table 13.1.

Sources	Wt (g)	Sherds	Vessels (min represented by rim sherds)
Local	2400	9	6
Local/VRW	45	2	2
Mancetter-Hartshill	330	8	3
Oxford	1235	42	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4010</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>24</b>

Table 13.1 Mortaria sources

*(Mortaria from local sources weigh more than those from the Oxford potteries which are more prolific both in number of sherds and number of vessels. This results from the greater density of the local fabrics combined with the survival of one complete vessel (2 sherds) compared with the thinner, more fragile Oxford mortaria.)*

Sources	c. 100–180	180–240+	240–400	300–400
Local	5	1	0	0
Local or VRW	2	0	0	0
Mancetter-Hartshill	1	1	1	0
Oxford	0	4	8	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 13.2 Sources throughout the 2nd to 4th centuries using rim-sherds (where rim-sherds belonged to one pot, they are counted as one)

The mortaria from these excavations date from the 2nd to the 4th centuries; there is nothing which could be dated to the Flavian period. All the 2nd-century pottery pre-dating c. AD 180 is residual throughout Phases 3 to 5 and does not even appear in Phase 2 which has only two Oxford mortarium rims dating to AD 180-400 and one dating to AD 240-400. Phase 5 has the only mortarium which can be directly attributed to the 4th century. Although close dating is impossible with later mortaria, the sequence points to a *floruit* of the site in the 3rd and 4th centuries: ten of the 24 mortaria represented by rim-sherds are later than AD 240 and up to six others are more likely to be 3rd century than earlier.

Despite the fact that 61 sherds provide only the tiniest of assemblages, it is still sufficient to show some outstanding features. Small local workshops provided most of the mortaria up to some point in the 2nd century, after which these sources were either defunct or minimal. The rarity of Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria suggests that local sources held up until the Oxford potteries began to extend their markets and intensify their production from the late 2nd century onwards. The two sherds which could possibly be from the important potteries in the Verulamium region both exhibit

a feature (a partial brown to red slip) which is very unusual there, but which could well be a feature in a local workshop. The only sherd which could by any means be attributed to the potteries in the lower Nene valley in the 3rd and 4th centuries is also slightly abnormal and may well be from another, possibly local source. The lack of obvious mortaria from these sources is notable. It points up the success of the small workshops which were active in a relatively local area in the 2nd century and the stranglehold which the Oxford potteries had later.

### III. Catalogue of mortaria

Rim sherds too small for any attempt at a diameter have been recorded as 4%. Context numbers are given in parentheses next to each catalogue number.

#### 1. (1-0)

Fig. 13.1 no. 13

1 sherd; 70g; diameter approx. 360mm; 5%; flange fragment; Fabric 6

This fabric could well be from the same source as Fabric 10; the use of the brown slip provides a link as well as the heavy tempering. This sherd probably dates from the first half of the 2nd century. East midlands, perhaps local.

Unphased

#### 2. (1-0)

1 sherd; 10g; bodysherd; Fabric 2

Oxford. Unphased

#### 3. (1-2)

1 sherd; 10g; 4%; flange fragment; Fabric 2

Oxford; Young type M10; dated by Young to AD 180-240. Unphased

#### 4. (1-2)

1 sherd; 15g; thin, hard body sherd; Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill potteries, Warwicks; certainly later than AD130 and perhaps 3rd or 4th century. Unphased

#### 5. (1-38)

1 sherd; 30g; body sherd; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries. Ph 2 G1

#### 6. (1-70)

1 sherd; 5g; body sherd; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries. Unphased

#### 7. (2-0)

Fig. 13.1 no. 17

1 sherd; 20g; diameter 220mm; 8%; Fabric 4

Oxford potteries; Young type C100.2; AD 300-400. Unphased

#### 8. (2-4)

(originally recorded as grey ware R06C form no. DV318)

1 sherd; 30g; 4%; too small to assess the diameter with any confidence; it must be large, at least 360mm, but it appears to be much more; Fabric 7

Without more surviving, it cannot be said with any certainty whether this rim sherd is from a mortarium. The diameter appears too large; the rim-section of the surviving part of the flange is possible for a mortarium as far as it goes; the fabric is highly exceptional, but not impossible.

If it is a mortarium, it would best fit with a 3rd- or 4th-century date when a tradition developed in certain areas of making mortaria in reduced fabrics. The most successful of these workshops were in Norfolk, Suffolk and probably Essex (see Darling 1993, 193-4). There is also evidence for a minimal production of reduced mortaria in the Holme-on-Spalding Moor industry in east Yorkshire in the 3rd century or later (Halkon and Millett 1999, 264 and fig. 5.38, M4, where it is described as 'possibly 2nd-century', but the dating is uncertain and most of the locally made pottery is believed to be later). The rim profile does not fit with the production in East Anglia and it is unlikely to be from Yorkshire. A local source is more probable. Ph 5 G74

#### 9. (2-103)

1 flange fragment; 20g; diameter approx. 300mm; 6%; Fabric 9

See no.10 below. Ph 3 G64

**10. (2-103)**

1 sherd with incomplete rim-section; 25g; Fabric 9

These two sherds (nos 9 and 10) probably belong to two different mortaria because no.9 had slip under the flange while no.10 has slip only on top of the flange and inside. Although the fabrics seem identical the colour of no.9 is red throughout, due to firing and no.10 is pale brownish-cream.

The fabric is similar to that produced in the Verulamium region (*i.e.* Brockley Hill and Radlett), but the use of a partial slip or of a red slip on the normal pale brownish-cream fabric would be distinctly irregular though not entirely impossible. Unfortunately there is not enough trituration grit surviving to be of any help. All things considered, the two sherds taken together would fit best in the first half of the 2nd century. Ph 3 G64

**11. (2-168)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 7

4 sherds from a mortarium with incomplete rim-section; 100g; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Young type M10; dated by Young to AD 180-240

Condition: well-worn; slight burning on bead. Ph 4 G69

**12. (2-171)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 5

1 sherd; 20g; 4%; Fabric 3

Oxford potteries; Young type WC4; AD240-300. Ph 4 G52

**13. (2-171)**

1 sherd; 15g; body sherd with beginning of rim; Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill; thin, hard fabric which would best fit a date after AD 250. Ph 4 G52

**14. (2B-14)**

1 body sherd; 10g; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries;burnt. Ph 3 G65

**15. (2B-15)**

1 base sherd; 20g; joins no.32; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries. Ph 3 G81

**16. (2E-13)**

1 sherd; 70g; body/base sherd; Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill; heavily worn. The trituration grit dates the vessel to after AD 130. Ph 3 G78

**17. (2E-14)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 1

2 sherds; 940g; diameter 210mm; 100%; Fabric 10

Two sherds joining to make a complete vessel with bold, high bead, curved downward flange and with the bead broken and turned out over the flange to form the spout. There are now only small traces of the matt, but opaque brown colour coat which made this a colour-coated vessel. The fabric is so heavily tempered that one can be reasonably certain that no further grit was added as trituration grit. It could be regarded as a flanged bowl, but its sturdy character and the spout suggest that it would be used as a mortarium. This form is of the same basic type as no.29 in (5a-68), which in the Verulamium region is AD 140-200; this is probably of similar date despite the colour-coat which one would not expect so early. It can certainly be attributed to a source in the East Midlands, perhaps a local one. Ph 3 G78

**18. (4D-8)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 4

4 sherds from one mortarium with incomplete rim-section; 160g; diameter approx. 290mm; 25%; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Young type M22; AD 240-400; very heavily worn; Ph 5 G76

**19. (4D-10)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 3

11 joining sherds; 435g; diameter 260mm; 45%; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Young type M22.14; AD 240-400; Ph 3 G43

**20. (4D-23)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 9

1 sherd; 65g; diameter 280mm; 12%; rim sherd joins no.30 (see below); Ph 2 G62

**21. (4F-1)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 16

1 sherd; 20g; diameter 190mm; 8%; Fabric 2

Oxford; close to Young type M22.7; AD240-400; burnt; Ph 4 G57

**22. (4F-1)**

Fig. 13.1 nos 8 and 12

2 sherds; 50g; diameter 280mm; 12%; joins 1 sherd; 20g; 6%; Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill; a near vertical, smooth hammerhead with thin walls and groups of diagonal bars painted on the rim at intervals. For a similar mortarium at Segontium see Hartley 1993, fig. 17.31, no.37; AD 270-370; Ph 2 G57

**23. (4F-9)**

1 sherd; 35g; 4%; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Young type M21.4; AD240-300; Ph 5 G76

**24. (4F-10)**

1 sherd; 10g; body sherd; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Ph 5 G76

**25. (5A-12)**

1 sherd; 45g; diameter approx. 290mm; 8%; Fabric 2

Some traces of an unusual matt red slip; Oxford potteries

4 sherds from a mortarium with incomplete rim-section; Young type M10; dated by Young to AD 180-240; Ph 5 G77

**26. (5A-16)**

1 sherd; 25g diameter 290mm; 10%; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Young type M22.7; AD 240-400; Ph 5 G77

**27. (5A-7)**

1 body sherd; 55g; joins rim no.28 below; Ph 5 G77

**28. (5A-32)**

1 rim sherd; 35g; diameter 280mm; 5%; joins no.27 above; Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill; condition: heavily worn; both sherds singed. The rim-profile fits well with the work of mid- to late Antonine potters like Sennius (Hartley 1961, 11) whose optimum date is AD 150-170; Ph 5 G77

**29. (5A-68)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 14

1 sherd; 75g; diameter 240mm; 9%; Fabric 1

There is no evidence on this single sherd that any trituration grit was ever applied. It may have been thought that the abundant inclusions would provide a sufficiently hard and granular surface, but there could have been trituration grits only near and in the base. It is superficially similar to fabric made in the workshops at Brockley Hill, Radlett and Verulamium, but it also has similarities to Fabric 6, 10 and 11 and probably comes from the same workshop as these. Condition: worn.

The rim-profile can be closely matched at Verulamium (Frere 1972, fig 130, no. 1039) and the spout made by breaking the bead and turning it out onto the flange is typical for this form. The form was made initially in the potteries in the Verulamium region and potters who moved from the Verulamium region to other workshops took the form in their repertoire. Thus it was produced in by potters in the Walbrook valley in London (Seeley and Drummond-Murray 2005), and in the Oxford potteries (Young 1977, type M10); it was probably produced on a very limited scale in some of the workshops in the upper Nene valley. Production in the Verulamium region began cAD 140, early enough to reach forts on the Antonine Wall. The optimum date for it is AD 140-200, the initial date being a firm one while the date for the end of production is less certain; Ph 3 G38

**30. (5B-12)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 15

1 sherd; 20g; 4%; fragmentary rim section from the same mortarium as no.20; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; burnt along the top of the bead; Young type M17; AD 240-300; Ph 5 G77

**31. (5B-15)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 6

1 sherd; 30g; incomplete rim-section, but a high upright bead (no flange); Fabric 8

The trituration grit and the bead suggest that it is probably from a reeded-rim mortarium of the type made in the lower Nene valley from around AD 230. The fabric is not readily attributable to the main industry there; the vessel is obviously made in the tradition of that industry and can be attributed to a source in the East Midlands. Ph 4 G44

**32. (5B-15)**

1 body/base sherd; 25g joins no.15. Ph 4 G44

**33. (5B-16)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 11

1 sherd; 100g; diameter 320mm; 13%; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries; Young type M22.9; AD 240-400. Ph 2 G42

**34. (5B-22)**

1 sherd; 5g; bodysherd; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries. Ph 5 G77

**35. (5B-38/40)**

1 sherd; 20g; diameter 240mm; 8% Fabric 4

Oxford potteries; Young type C97; AD 240-400. Ph 3 G43

**36. (5B-76)**

1 sherd; 45g; base/bodysherd; Fabric 2

Oxford potteries. Ph 5 G77

**37. (5C-4.02)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 10

1 sherd; 90gms; diameter 270mm; 15%; Fabric 5

Mancetter-Hartshill; one sherd from a four-reeled hammerhead with upright top bead; 3rd century. Ph 3 G3

**38. (Unstratified)**

Fig. 13.1 no. 2; Fig. 13.2

3 sherds; 1255gms; diameter 390mm; 24%; Fabric 11

There are small red-brown patches on the surface, especially underneath the spout; these probably mean that the mortarium had a matt red-brown slip which is extremely unusual with stamped mortaria in cream fabrics. Condition: worn; some burning on the inside of the base. The three joining sherds make up about one quarter of the mortarium. The right-facing potter's stamp survives. Three other examples of the potter's stamp are known, all from Verulamium and all in Verulamium region fabric (Tomber and Dore 1998, 154, VER WH). Conflation of the stamps allows a reading, left to right, of A or M RS·C followed by B or E (R reversed), but only further finds can provide a full reading. The stamp is easy to recognize, but it is not possible to suggest the potter's name or the meaning of the stamp. The difference in fabric of the Newnham one to those found at Verulamium indicates that the potter moved from that area to somewhere in the East Midlands, probably somewhere not far from Newnham, but certainly no further away than the Northamptonshire area. The rim-profile fits a date in the first half of the second century, perhaps AD 110-140 (many parallels for the form can be found in mortaria made in the Verulamium region). Unphased

**IV. Mortaria by Phase and Group**

(NB Date column: AD180–400 is more appropriate for the site than AD100–400, see discussion)

Group	Context	Sherds	Weight	Source	Date
1	1-38	1	30	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)
20	5a-12	4	45	Oxford	180–240
42	5b-16	1	100	Oxford	240–400
62	4d-23	1	65	Oxford	180–240

Table 13.3 Phase 2

Group	Context	Sherds	Weight	Source	Date
3	5c-4.02	1	90	Mancetter-Hartshill	200–300
38	5a-68	1	75	Local Beds	140–200
43	4d-10	11	435	Oxford	240–400
43	5b-38	1	20	Oxford	240–400
64	2-103	2	45	Local or VRW	100–150
65	2b-14	1	10	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)
78	2e-13	1	70	Mancetter-Hartshill	130–350
78	2e-14	2	940	Local (complete)	140–200
81	2b-15	1	20	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)

Table 13.4 Phase 3

Group	Context	Sherds	Weight	Source	Date
44	5b-15	1	25	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)
44	5b-15	1	30	Local/LNV style	230–300
52	2-171	1	20	Oxford	240–400
52	2-171	1	15	Mancetter-Hartshill	c250–350
57	4f-1	1	20	Oxford	240–400
57	4f-1	2	50	Mancetter-Hartshill	270–370
69	2-168	4	100	Oxford	180–240

Table 13.5 Phase 4

Group	Context	Sherds	Weight	Source	Date
74	2-4	1	30	Local	?date
76	4d-8	4	160	Oxford	240–400
76	4f-9	1	35	Oxford	240–300
76	4f-10	1	10	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)
77	5a-7	1	55	Mancetter-Hartshill	150–170
77	5a-16	1	25	Oxford	240–400
77	5a-32	1	35	Mancetter-Hartshill	150–170
77	5b-22	1	5	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)
77	5b-76	1	45	Oxford	100–400 (180–400)
?	5b-8.12	1	20	Oxford	180–240

Table 13.6 Phase 5