Medieval Pottery from a Kiln Site at Cheam: Part 2

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THE PURPOSES of this second interim report[1] on the kiln site discovered at 23 High Street, Cheam, in 1969 are firstly to describe the "red" Cheam pottery from the site, so that it can be identified by other workers, and secondly to set out what is known about the kiln itself, in the hope of promoting discussion on some of the problems that it presents.

Red Ware

Fabric

The colour is generally light red (Munsell 2.5YR 7/8) with a grey (N4 to 5) core in places, but can range from reddish yellow (5YR 6/8) to dark grey (N3). However, sherds of the former colour are soft and presumably underfired, while those of the latter appear to be overfired, so light red was probably the intended colour. The clay contains moderate inclusions of clear and colourless quartz (ie sand), mostly up to 0.25mm (0.01in) in size but some larger, and occasional pieces of red ironstone. The sand is generally too fine to be seen by the unaided eye, but coarse enough for the pottery to feel "sandy". The vessels are very hard and wheel-thrown, and frequently show signs of knife-trimming — mainly on the exterior of the base but also on the interior of some of the larger forms. Glaze is used sparingly: clear glaze is usually found on the interior of bases of pipkins, bowls and skillets and on the rim of pipkins, while a rich mottled green glaze is found on the exterior of some pipkins. Pitchers are often decorated with curvilinear patterns painted in white slip, while some rare examples of the "bottle" form[2] have white slip all over. Otherwise, decoration is restricted to horizontal grooving on shoulders, and incised wavy lines on the rims of chafing dishes.

Forms

The "red" pottery came from layers in, and over the top of, the kiln and stoke pit, and was in a very fragmentary state. Very few vessels could be reconstructed, and an attempt to find complete examples of matching forms in the Museum of London collection was not successful.

Pitchers

Pitchers are the most common class of vessel represented in the red ware. Two broad groups were initially distinguished, called informally "triangular" and "square" from the distinctive shapes of their rims. As work progressed, it became evident that the term pitcher may not be appropriate for all vessels of the second category. The "triangular" group (Fig. 4, Nos. 26-29) consists of large vessels with broad high shoulder and relatively narrow rim: most commonly 100mm (4in) in diameter but ranging from 80mm (3¼in) to 120mm (4¾in). There is a small pinched lip opposite a strap handle which can be attached either to the rim (as No. 26) or to the neck (as No. 27). In either case, the rim is strengthened by an external thickening of triangular section, and the handle has a pronounced thumbed groove on the upper surface. In rare instances the lip is located close to the handle (No. 28), or the shoulder is less pronounced (No 29). The base is sagging and extensively knife-trimmed with small pulled feet which seem not to be functional since in many instances they do not reach a horizontal surface on which the vessel is placed. As far as can be judged, the usual number of feet is four. Some vessels have a bunghole centred about 40-50mm (1½-2in) above the angle of the base, but it is not yet known what proportion would have had one. Many have white slip decoration and some also have grooving (as No. 26).

No complete example of the "square" pitcher was found. From the only example with a substantial amount of body (No. 30) they appear to be rather smaller vessels with wider rims: most frequently 160-180mm (about 7in) in diameter, but ranging from 140mm (5½in) to 220mm (9in). These rims have a roughly square external thickening (e.g. No. 31), handles are not common (but see No. 32, which may however be from a larger vessel) and lips do not occur at all. Vessels are usually undecorated, although No. 30 has simple grooving on the shoulder, and a few examples have white paint.

The two groups seem to have different functions. The "triangular" vessels, with lips and (some) with bungholes, could be used for storing (or preparing?) liquids, while the "square" ones, with no lip and a rim large enough to admit a hand comfortably, would be more suitable for the storage of dry materials.

1 The first interim report (Vol. **3**, No. 11, 300-4) dealt with previous finds in the area, site location and the "white" Cheam ware.

2 *ibid*, 303 and Nos. 17-20.

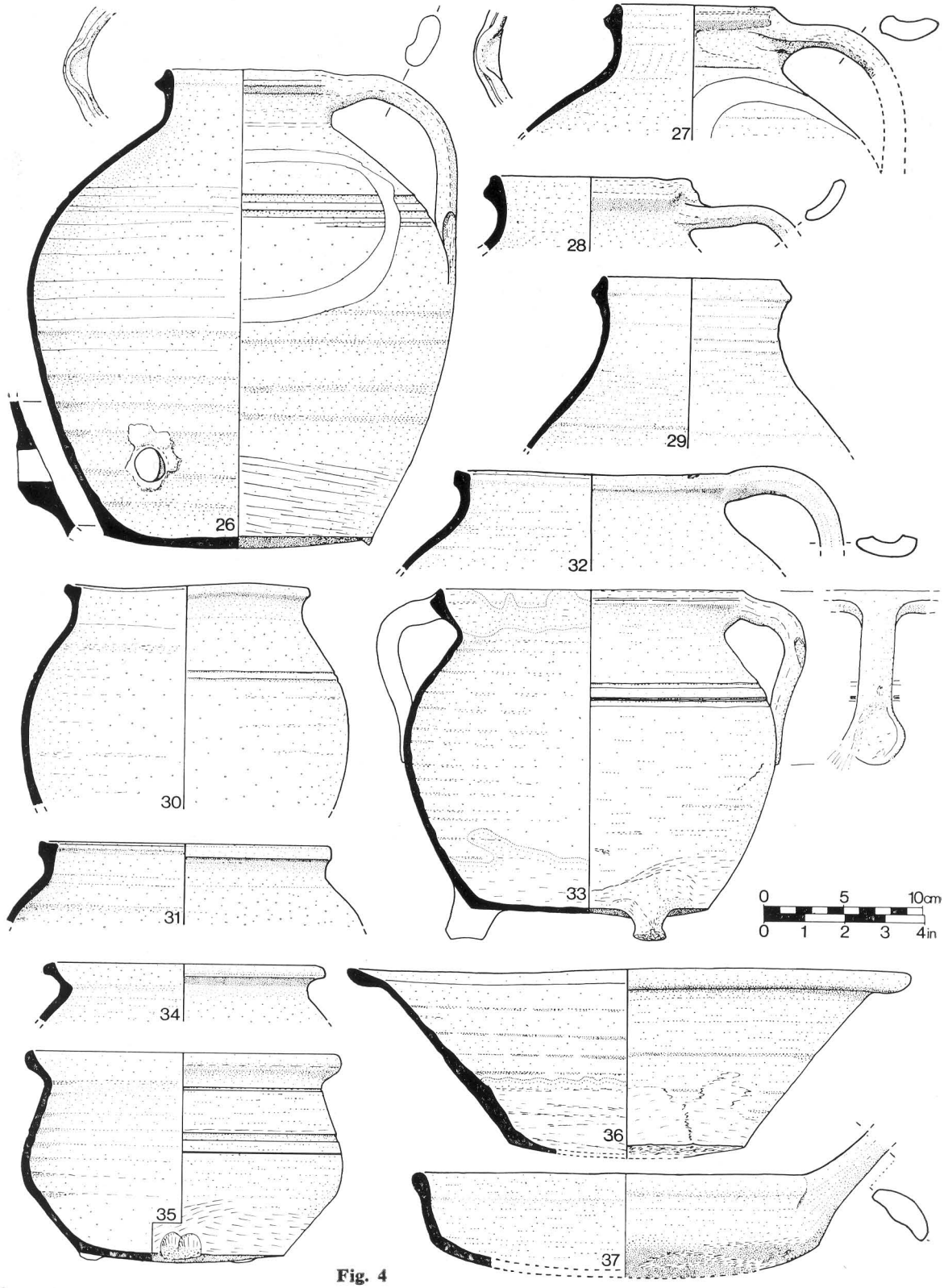

Fig. 4

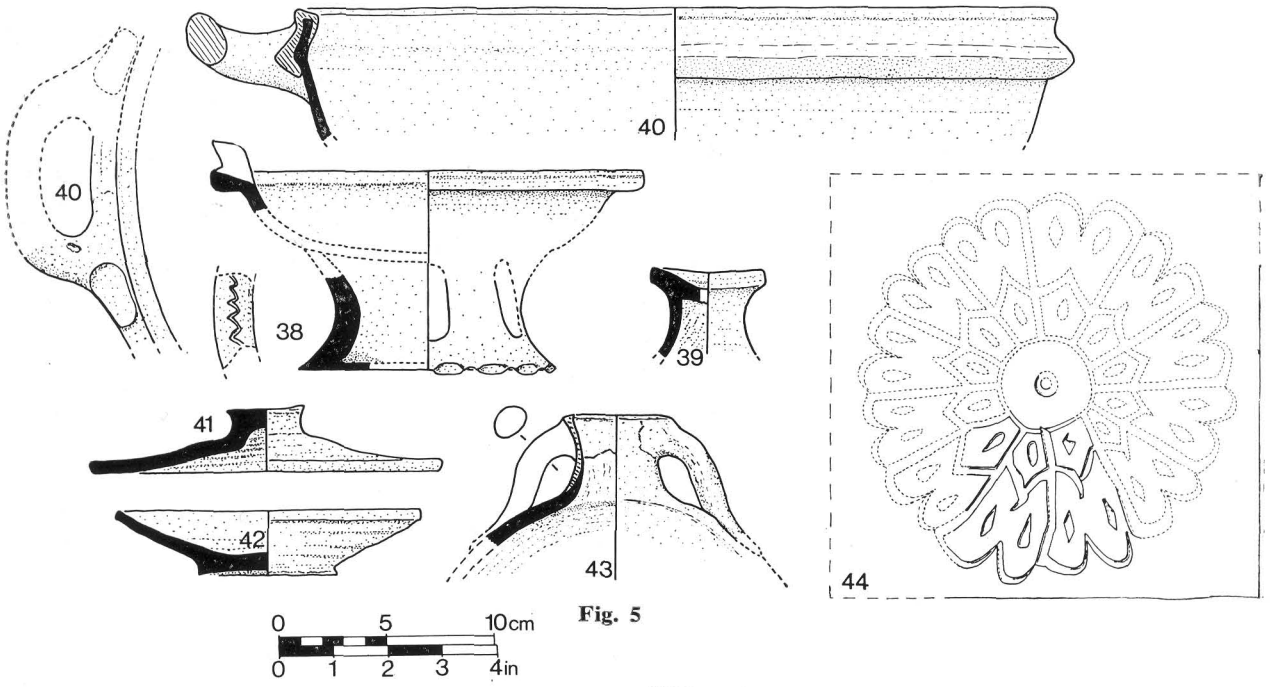

Fig. 5

Pipkins

Pipkins too are very common. Almost all are globular with a strongly everted rim, two rod handles and three small feet attached to a slightly sagging knife-trimmed base (see No. 33). There is a glazed zone in the base and patches or a zone at the rim. Like the pitchers', rims have an external thickening, usually either "triangular" (as No. 33) or "square" (as No. 34): other shapes occur but are not common. There is a single example of a squatter form (No. 35) with small pulled feet and apparently no handles

Bowls

These are less common than pitchers or pipkins but still an important element in the production. The usual form (No. 36) has a wide flanged rim, gently sloping sides and a heavily knife-trimmed sagging base. The interior is usually glazed. Rim diameter range from 340 to 440mm (13½ to 17½in), 380-400mm (15in) being the most common.

Other Forms

Several other forms are present in small quantities. They include skillets (No. 37), chafing dishes (No. 38), costrels (No. 43), wall-sided bowls (No. 40), lids (No. 41), small dishes (or lamps), (No. 42) and a watering pot (No. 39).

A surprising find was a number of waster floor tiles, of the same fabric and apparently fired in the same kiln as the pottery. They were large, about 8in (200mm) square and 1-1⅜in (25-35mm) thick, about the same size as Dutch tiles imported into Essex and London in large quantities in the late medieval period[3]. Most were finished with mottled green glaze or white slip covered with a clear glaze, although some had only white slip (the glaze may have failed to "take" in the firing). The most interesting example has a crude representation of a Tudor rose incised through the white slip, and glazed over (No. 44).

Kiln Furniture

No kiln furniture has been identied, except for a few "roof" tiles, which show firing scars and dribbles of glaze, and which may have been part of the surface of the central pedestal. Evidence of firing accidents (e.g. distorted vessels, vessels stuck to each other) and even firing scars were surprisingly rare, the latter perhaps reflecting the small amount of glaze used on the pottery.

Dating, distribution and parallels

The associated finds provided very little dating evidence[4]. If the interpretation of the decorated tile, No. 44, is correct, a date of 1485 or later is indicated for at least part of production. Unlike the white ware, the red ware has not yet been found in securely dated deposits, suggesting a date of post-1440 (Trig Lane) or post-1480 (Baynard's Castle)[4]. Similar pipkins, bung-hole pitchers and wall-sided bowls have been found in published groups from Toppings

[3] Mrs. E. Eames, *pers. comm.*

4 *op. cit.* fn. 1, p.303.

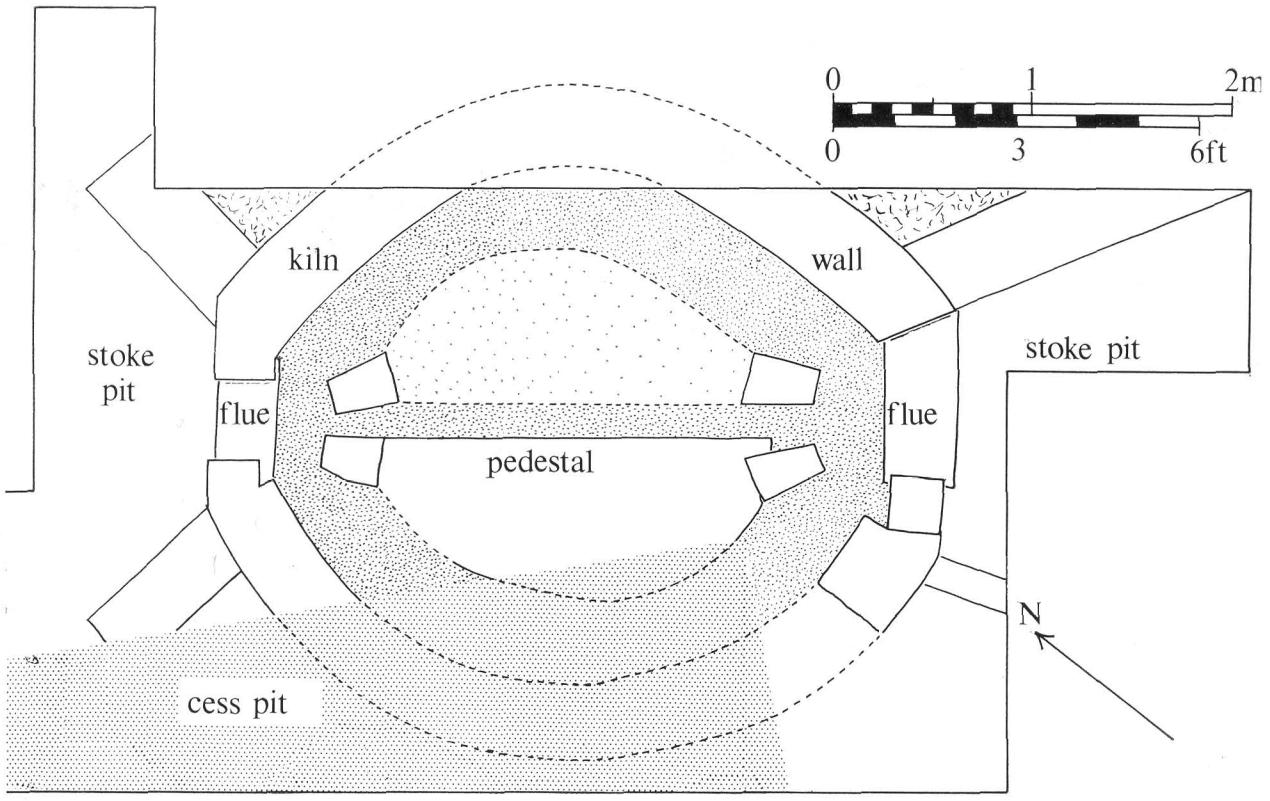

Fig. 6: Simplified plan of the kiln.

Wharf[5] and 1-7 St. Thomas' Street[6], Southwark, dated *c.* 1520 and *c.* 1480-1520/50, but since the dating at both sites is based on other pottery it must be used cautiously. Similar vessels have also been found in large unpublished groups from Baynards Castle and Gateway House[7], provisionally dated to *c.* 1500 and *c.* 1530. An early 16th century date therefore seems most likely for the Cheam red ware.

None of the pottery mentioned here has been positively identified as coming from Cheam, and indeed Cheam red ware is surprisingly difficult to find among excavated groups from the City or Southwark. Recently, however, small amounts have been identified from excavations at GPO, Newgate Street, and Cutler Street sites[7], as well as from excavations carried out by P. Marsden at Blackfriars (ship 3)[7,8]. So far, it has not been identified elsewhere.

One reason for the difficulty in identifying Cheam red ware is that very similar pottery was made at two other sites, Woolwich and Kingston. Forms broadly similar to Nos. 26, 36, 38, 39 and 40 were found in phase 1 at Woolwich[9], and Woolwich earthenware fabrics are difficult to distinguish from Cheam ones even under a low-powered microscope[10]. Similar forms have also been found in recent excavations in Kingston, in circumstances suggesting the presence of a kiln nearby[11], but a comparison of the fabrics has not yet been made.

The Kiln

The kiln was oval in shape, about 3m (10ft) long and probably 2.6m (8ft 6in) wide internally, aligned roughly n.n.w-s.s.e. and with a flue at either end (see Fig. 6). The wall of the kiln was constructed mainly of blocks of Reigate stone (i.e. greensand), backed with stone and brick.

5 Harvey Sheldon, "Excavations at Toppings and Sun Wharves, Southwark, 197)-1972", *Trans. L.A.M.A.S.* **25** (1974), 76-85.

6 S.L.A.E.C., "Southwark Excavations 1972-74," *Joint Publication No. 1. L.A.M.A.S. & S.A.S.* (1978) 378-84.

7 Unpublished pottery examined by the author.

8 I am grateful to P. Marsden for allowing me to use this evidence.

9 S. Pryor and K. Blockley, "A Seventeenth Century Kiln Site at Woolwich", *Post-Medieval Archaeol.* **12** (1978), 44-49, see Nos. 7, 15, 28, 26 and 9.

10 I am grateful to Kevin Blockley for supplying specimens from the Woolwich Kiln.

11 Mrs. M. P. Smith, *pers. comm.*

The split central pedestal was about 2.5m (8ft 3in) by 1.75m (5ft 9in) overall, with a central gap about 0.2m (8in) wide, leaving a space about 0.4m (1ft 4in) wide between the pedestal and the kiln wall. Both ends of the two pedestal halves were formed of single large blocks of Reigate stone. The rest of the western half consisted of brick and stone rubble, while the eastern half appeared to have been robbed, and showed only as a "ghost" of unburnt sand. The wall survived to a maximum height of 3 courses, 0.48m (1ft 7in), and the pedestal to a maximum height of 0.33m (1ft 1in).

The area immediately outside of each flue was bounded by diverging "wing" walls, 1.0m (3ft 3in) long at the northern end and at least 1.6m (5ft 3in) long at the southern. They seem to have revetted the natural sand into which the stoke pits (and the kiln itself) were cut. The floor of the kiln is about 0.33m (1ft 1in) below the surface of the sand, as far as can be judged after allowing for sand redeposited when the pit for the kiln was dug.

Discussion

This simple description of the kiln and its products raises many questions, some of which are below:—

(i) *operation of the kiln*: this is a large example of a twin flue kiln, having perhaps three times the volume of comparable kilns, e.g. Cheam 1923 kiln[12], (possibly late 14th century), Farnborough Hill[13] (c 1580) and even Potterspury[14] (mid 17th century). Did it have an open or domed top? how was it loaded? to what temperture was it fired? how successfully?

(ii) *production of pottery*: were both red and white ware fired in the same kiln? At the same time? Or was the red ware later than white ware? If so, why change? Was it made by the same potters? Or new ones moving into the area? Was there an hiatus?

(iii) *distribution of the pottery*: the red ware is apparently far less common outside Cheam than is the white ware. Why? Was less produced? (At least two and possibly four, dumps of white ware are known[15], but only one of red ware.) Was production unsuccessful? Or was it produced primarily for a more local market? Was the London market lost to more suitably located kilns (e.g. Woolwich, Kingston, South Lambeth[16])? Is there any connection with Nonsuch Palace, only 1½km (1 mile) to the west?

12 C. J. Marshall, "A Medieval Pottery Kiln discovered at Cheam", *Surrey Archaeol. Collect* **35** (1924) 79-94.

13 F. W. Holling, "A Preliminary Note on the Pottery Industry of the Hampshire-Surrey Borders", *Surrey Archaeol. Collect,* **68** (1971) 84.

14 P. Mayes, "A 17th-century kiln Site at Potterspury, Northamptonsire, *Post-Medieval Archaeol* **2** (1968) 55-82.

15 Parkside, 19-23 High Street, The Harrow Car Park (see *op. cit* fn. 1) and Whitehall, 1 Malden Road, (N. Nail, *pers. comm.).*

16 Rhoda Edwards, "London Potters circa 1570-1710", *Jour. Ceramic Hist.* **6**, 4.

(Continued from p.346)

the practice of travellers illegally using post-horses to pull vehicles when the statutary mules were *defecta* and in short supply, suggests that the fall-out rate of the latter was high (*C.Th.*8.5.24). It is perhaps not surprising that the slang term for a *raeda* was *flagella (C.Th.* 6.29.5).

If the large numbers of mules were required for the *cursus publicus,* greater numbers were needed for use by the army, and their all-purpose duties as beasts of traction to pull vehicles loaded with arms, supplies, wine barrels and artillery, — sharp-shooting arrow firing machines (*ballistae*) mounted on two-wheeled carts as mobile field guns — or to act as simple pack animals, are all depicted in great detail both on Trajan's column and the column of Marcus Aurelius[30].

If a mule escaped conscription into the army or the slavery of service with the *cursus publicus,* other openings in civilian life were available — as tow-path animals pulling barges (Horace *Satires* 1.5.13, Strabo *Geog.* 5.36) or as members of long teams of mules harnessed in tandem to drag large blocks of marble (Martial *Epigrams* V. 22.7.8) or, as fragmentary reliefs from the area around Luxembourg and West Germany show, as the main motive force to push the curious grain harvesting machines (*vallus*)[31], and even in old age there was no escape since Apuleius (*Metamorphoses* IX.11-13) tells us that *muli senes* were sentenced to the eternal repetitious drudgery of turning the baker's mill round and round.

30 See Vigneron *op. cit.* in Note 24, Pls. 59-63.

31 K. D. White, 'Gallo-Roman Harvesting Machines' *Latomus* **26** (1967) 634-647.

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