

Post-excavation Assessment of the Roman Rotary Quernstones

Site code: ONE94

Undated

Author: D F Williams, D P S Peacock, P Rowsome, J Taylor



Museum of London Archaeology
© **Museum of London Archaeology**
Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf
Road, London N1 7ED
tel 0207 410 2200 fax 0207 410 2201 email
mola@mola.org.uk



**POST-EXCAVATION ASSESSMENT OF THE ROMAN ROTARY QUERNSTONES FROM
NO. 1 POULTRY, LONDON
[Site Code: ONE94]**

D.F. Williams and D.P.S. Peacock
[Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton]

P. Rowsome & J. Taylor
[MoLAS]

Significance of Assemblage

The Poultry rotary querns are a truly remarkable assemblage without parallel in Britain, or indeed western Europe, and thus worthy of detailed investigation. There are as many as c. 1000 fragments, many of them occurring as large segments of upper or lower stones. These all come from within Area 12 of the site and seem to have been used as cobbling for the emplacement of a large timber-lined water tank, located close to the Walbrook stream. As a general rule, querns are not found in closely dated contexts, but in this case the associated cistern is believed to have been constructed c. A.D. 70-90 [to be confirmed by dendrochronology]. A majority of the querns are in the dark grey, fine-grained vesicular nepheline-tephrite lava from the Mayen area of the Eifel Hills region of Germany, but fragments of millstone grit and quartzite sandstone are also present.

This find is of particular significance because: [a] of its size, [b] it seems to be a closely dated assemblage, and [c] it may possibly represent the debris from an importer's yard. Careful study will provide a marker horizon which will undoubtedly further our understanding of the development of the international trade in Mayen querns, which seems to have been important in both the Roman and Saxon periods.

Research Aims

The investigation has the following objectives:

- 1]. How many individual querns are represented?
- 2]. The completion of a full record of the assemblage should allow an internally viable typology to be constructed.
- 3]. Are the dimensions of the querns standardised. Do they conform to Roman measurements? How do they compare to Mayen querns from other Roman sites in Britain, both early and late. How do the measurements and typology compare to Saxon Mayen querns, which were also imported into Britain in large numbers.
- 4]. As a priority, it needs to be established whether or not these querns were actually used before they were broken.
- 5]. The majority of the querns display crisp, clear, tooling marks of which there are at least three varieties. It is important to decide whether these are relicts of production technology or of recutting used querns.
- 6]. How should this large assemblage of querns be interpreted? They could, for example, be waste material collected from a nearby importers yard or perhaps from a nearby mill or bakery or even ship's ballast, arriving in London after use elsewhere. Equally this might be the debris of a millwrights yard where querns were brought for recutting.
- 7]. Such a large group of Mayen querns should be used as a focal point for assessing the importation of this type of quern to Roman Britain as a whole. For example, Mayen querns

are often found on military sites. What was the role of the army in the dissemination of Mayen querns?

8]. A full petrological examination will be undertaken to see how far it is possible to differentiate and group the material, hopefully with selected samples from the Mayen quarries for comparative purposes. An initial visual examination suggests that there are clear differences in the size and number of vesicles, perhaps reflecting different parts or horizons in the Mayen lava flow.

Bibliography

Bessac, J-C., 1986. L'outillage traditionnel du tailleur de pierre de l'antiquité à nos jours. Paris.

Hassall, W.O., 1962. How They Lived: an anthology of original accounts written before A.D 1485, Oxford.