

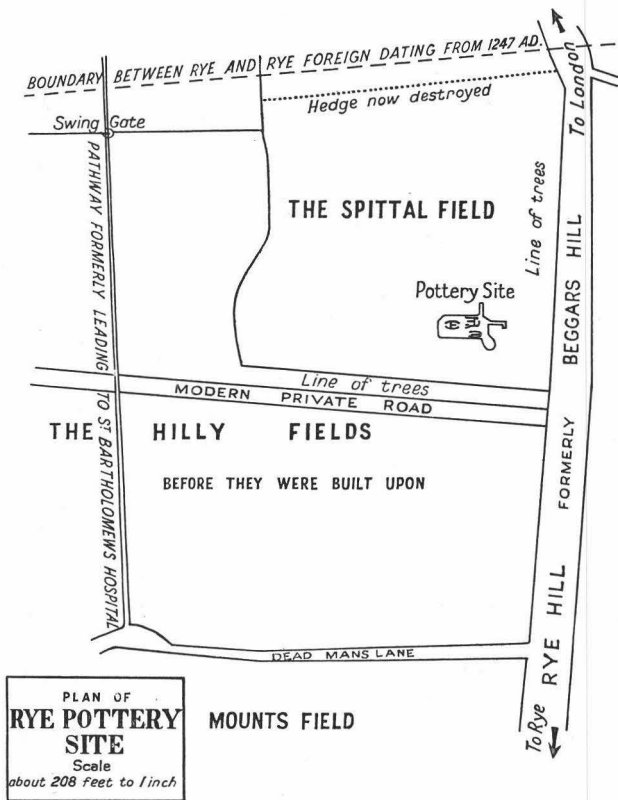


FIG. 1. MODEL OF THE RYE POTTERY KILNS (made for the Science Museum, Kensington).

MEDIAEVAL POTTERY, TILES, AND KILNS FOUND AT RYE. FINAL REPORT

By L. A. VIDLER

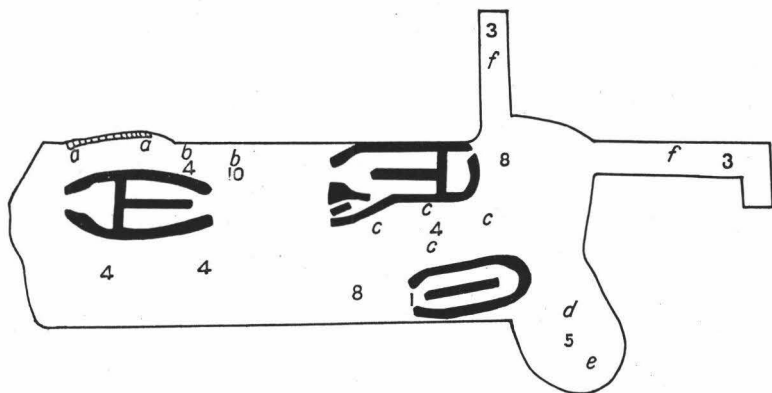
THE two previous reports that have appeared on the discoveries made in the Spital field, Rye, are to be found



in *S.A.C.* LXXIII. 83-101, and in *S.A.C.* LXXIV. 45-64, and these should be read in conjunction with this, the final report. By the time this appears in print the site will be filled in and the remains of the kilns and large

quantities of unwanted shards buried some 2–3 ft. below the surface, and now the field will return to its original appearance and use.

The plan that accompanies this report will enable any future excavator to find the site, should any be so unwise as to wish to dig it up again; at any rate the writer can promise him or her that their labour will add little



THE KILNS: scale approximately 20 ft. to 1 inch.

- a. Stone retaining wall.
- b. Finds of pottery with incised designs.
- c. Finds of smaller inlaid tiles.
- d. 'Head' pot.
- e. Pottery mould.
- f. Trial trenches.

Figures denote approximate depth in feet to virgin soil.

to the study of mediæval ceramics beyond what would be gained by the reading of these reports and a careful examination of the exhibits now safely housed in the Rye Museum.

It is natural that during an excavation extending over some five years and commenced in a state of blissful ignorance and complete lack of interest in ceramics of any kind, the knowledge gained by the actual excavation and that so generously imparted to the writer by experts in the craft, who have viewed the site and its products, should entail some correction to the conclusions put forward in my first and second reports. These I will now proceed to make.

In my historical survey in *S.A.C.* LXXIII I stated that

Canute granted the manors of Steyning and Rameslie to the Abbey of Fécamp. This should read that Canute granted the manor of Rameslie and probably the manor of Brede and Edward the Confessor the manor of Steyning to the Abbey of Fécamp. I also stated that, with the exception of a piece of the Stag Tile, found in Rye Church, none other of the smaller type had been found elsewhere. My friend Mr. H. J. Cheney has since



FIG. 2.

pointed out that an illustration of a complete tile, No. I. 1 in my report, appeared in *S.A.C.* III, as from an unknown source and since then I have myself seen a complete example hanging in the porch of Battle Church. Both these, unless the illustration is of the Battle tile, were evidently made at the Rye pottery.

As none of the kilns found were complete above the springing line of the sides of the baking chamber, it is a matter of conjecture what form the original roofs took. It is, however, suggested in the illustration in *S.A.C.* LXXIII. 87 that these were barrel shaped and therefore permanent. I should like now to suggest another alternative, namely, that they were only built in a permanent form up to this springing line and that a temporary roof was put on and removed for each baking.¹ This

¹ This was customary with Roman pottery kilns, and apparently in mediæval times: see Salzman, *Engl. Industries of the Middle Ages*, 168.

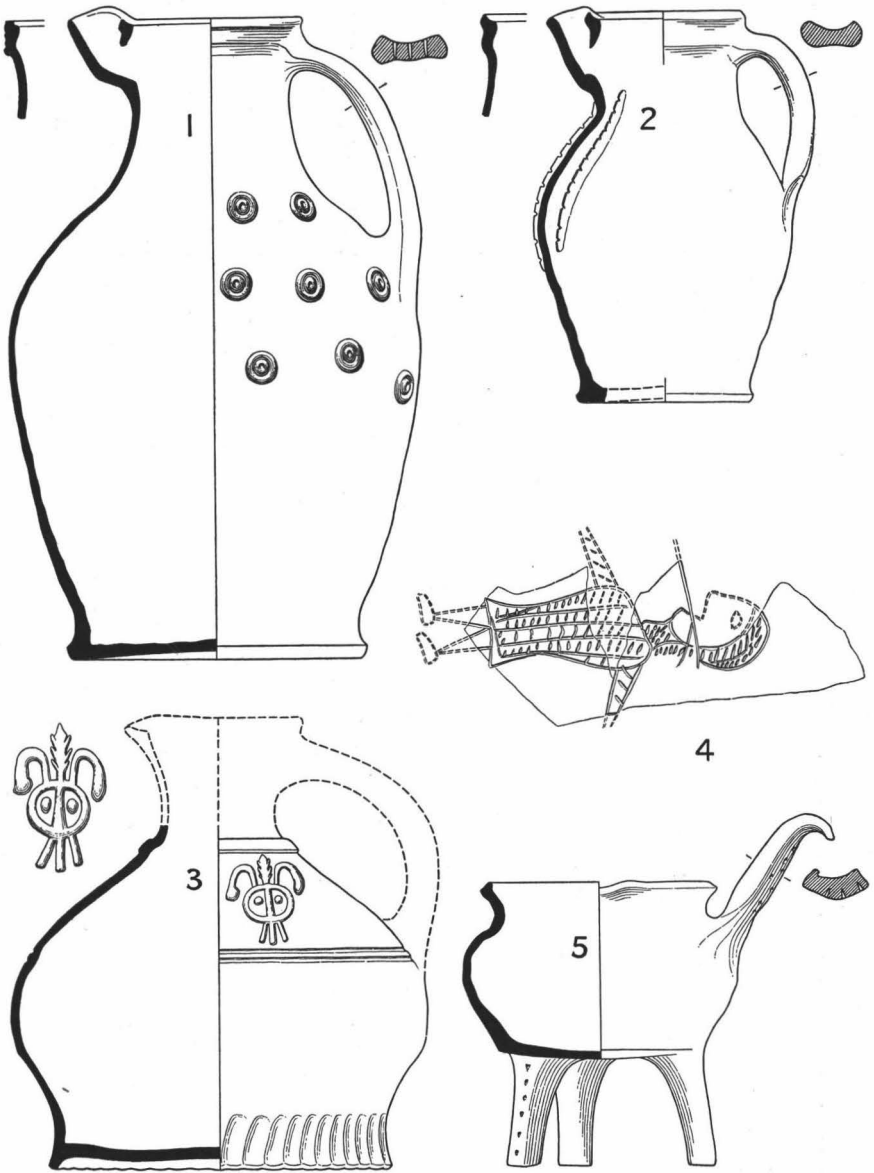


FIG. 3. POTTERY FROM THE RYE KILNS.

explanation would account for no evidence being found of any doors or apertures in the sides of the baking chamber, as the pots could then have been lowered and taken out through the open top. Such a roof could easily have been made of wood and clay, of which there would be ample supplies on the spot.

There is little further to report about the floor tiles,

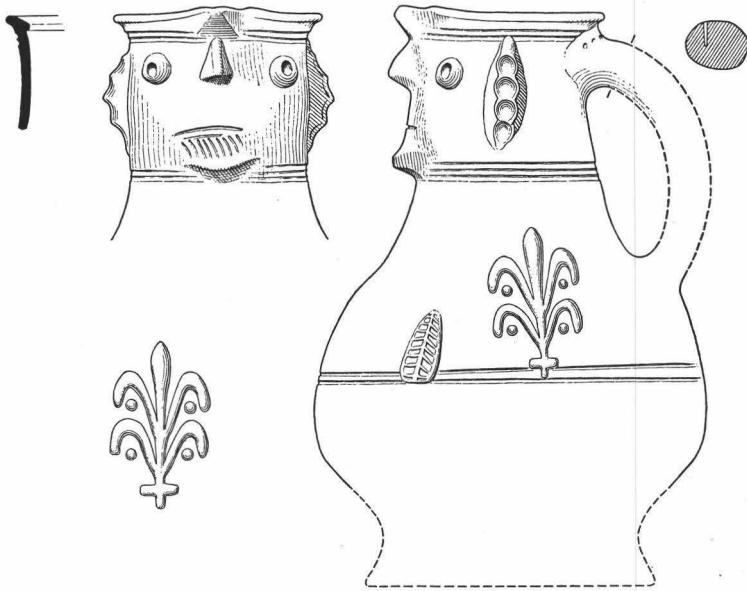


FIG. 4.

though many more fragments have been found, but they have added little to our designs. The remainder of the dragon tile mentioned on p. 47 of the second report has been found and it is now illustrated. Tile No. II. 4 has proved to be parts of two different tiles, neither of which is sufficiently complete or interesting to be worth reproduction.

In a hole some 5 ft. deep to the east of the most southerly kiln a very interesting assortment of discoveries was made, differing in many respects from anything found elsewhere. As reported before, pots painted white outside were one of the features of the site; here

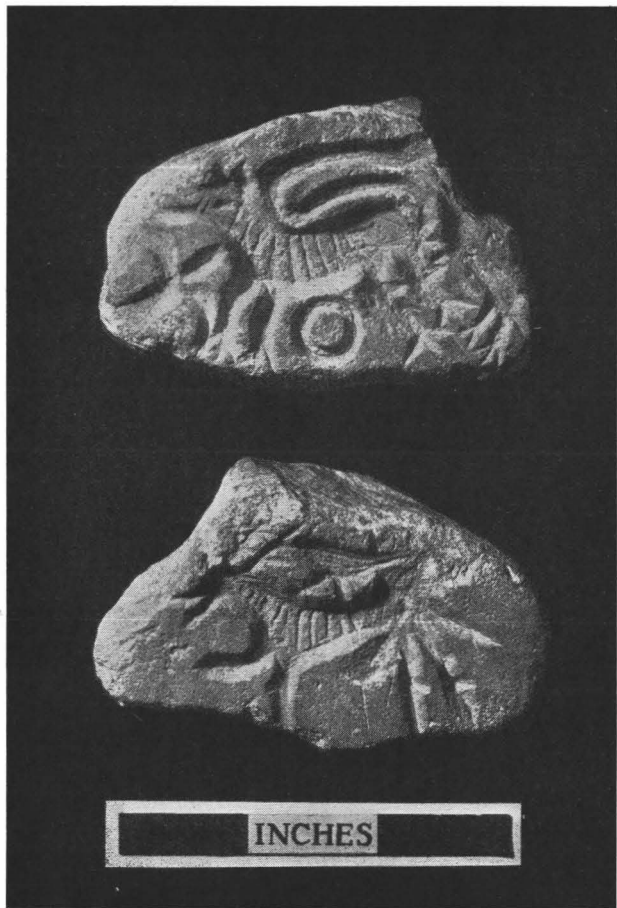


FIG. 5. POTTERY MOULD.

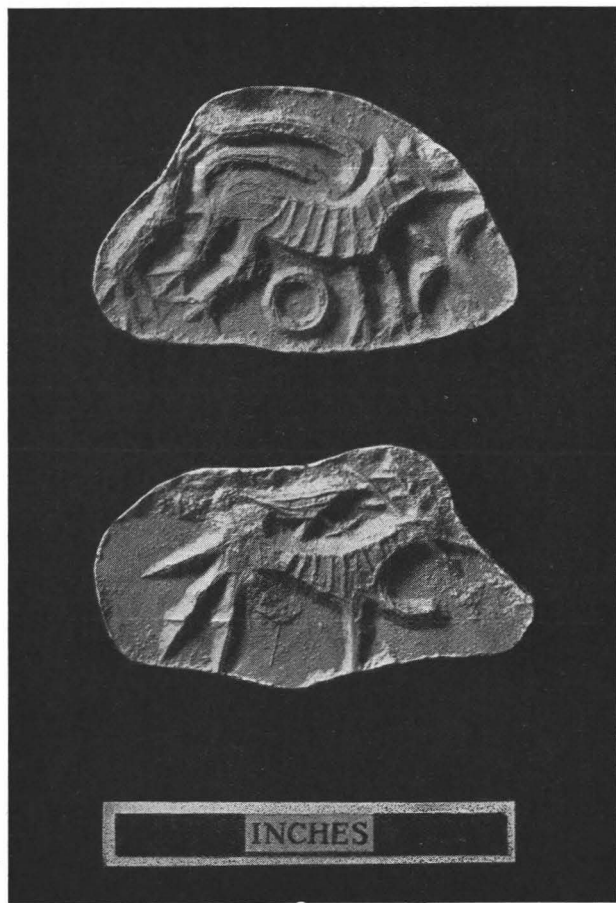


FIG. 6. CASTS FROM POTTERY MOULD.

were a large number of pots painted white inside, many large and well glazed with impressed stamps and designs, among them one with a row of fleurs-de-lis with head-knops round the middle (see Fig. 3, No. 3). Also here were found parts of head pots, the only ones found on the site, including one large one with a man's head of bold design and staring eyes, with curiously shaped ears (see illustration, Fig. 4). Below on the front of the pot was a double fleur-de-lis. In this same hole was found the three-legged pipkin, which was found with two legs broken off, one of which turned up near by (see Fig. 3, No. 5). Almost at the bottom, near the virgin clay, was found what is possibly the most important discovery on the site. Early in the excavation the late Mr. Ruskin Butterfield, who had taken the keenest interest in the work throughout, told the writer to keep a sharp look-out for pottery moulds, as they were of the greatest rarity. He told him it was very unlikely he would find any, as he believed they were all of wood and the site was much too damp for their preservation. However, one did turn up here and it proved to be of oolite and with a design incised on each side. Though no impressions from it have been found, it may have been accidentally lost before any were made; we have the authority of Mr. Bernard Rackham, F.S.A., and of Mr. G. C. Dunning for stating that it is undoubtedly a pottery mould (Figs. 5 and 6).

The designs are of great interest and have been referred to Mr. G. C. Druce, F.S.A., and he has identified one as being a representation of the story of the 'Tiger and the Mirror' from the Bestiaries. Here we have the tiger, the little tiger, and the mirror, but not the knight, unless he is represented by the fleur-de-lis. The story can be found in *Arch. Cant.* XXVIII. 364 et seq. On the other side is a stag with a bird on its back. They are boldly drawn and deeply incised and very little injured by their long interment.

Of the incised designs on pots, a few more pieces have turned up; a further part of the head of the Christus, and two more parts of an unidentified design which is

still something of a puzzle. It appears to be a knight in armour, prone on his back, with apparently an arrow or weapon in his mouth. Can it be a picture of Harold at the Battle of Hastings (see Fig. 3, No. 4)?

A further piece of one of the many fragmentary designs of ships that have been found turned up when filling in the site and, as it supplies a good example of the steering oar, it is reproduced in Fig. 7. The badge on the sternpost, which on several of them appears both

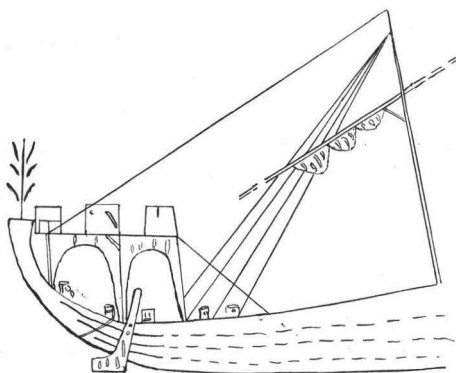


FIG. 7.

fore and aft, is, so far as we can discover, only to be found elsewhere on the earliest seal of Melcombe Regis, c. 1285.¹

The model that has been made of the kilns for the Science Museum at South Kensington is illustrated in Fig. 1.

To Mr. Gerald C. Dunning, of the London Museum, the writer again owes his thanks for the drawings of the pots he has so kindly made. These are, of course, only a fraction of those found, mended, and exhibited from this site, but they have been chosen so far as possible to give some idea of the many types and sizes that they made at the Rye Pottery.

To all those who have assisted in the work of excavation—there has been no paid labour—the writer tenders his most grateful thanks.

¹ See *Dorset N.H. and Arch. Soc. Proc.* LV, 33, Fig. 1.

REPORT ON THE POTTERY ILLUSTRATED

BY G. C. DUNNING, F.S.A.

The pottery selected for illustration includes some of the most decorative vessels yet found, and amplifies the already wide range, both as regards forms and decoration, which is one of the distinctive features of the products of this remarkable site. All the pots illustrated may be referred to the fourteenth century, that is, the period of major activity at the kilns.

Large jug (FIG. 8), originally about 14½ in. high, of grey ware with buff surface, and a thick dark green glaze covering the neck and body nearly to the base. The incised shields are equally spaced round the upper part. It is very doubtful if these shields, and those already published from the site,¹ have any heraldic significance. In the minor arts of the mediæval period, heraldic devices were frequently used solely as decorative motifs. For instance, exact parallels for the two left-hand shields on this jug occur, with another shield, on a fourteenth-century tile from Westminster, in the London Museum (A 9517).

Jug (FIG. 4), about 12 in. high, of grey ware with light red surface, entirely covered with a thick dark green glaze. The form, with a marked constriction above the base, is a common one at Rye. On the front of the pot, below the pinched-out lip, is a face or mask, made by applying pieces of clay to the surface and modelling the features by hand. The nose is aquiline, the mouth is a single incised line, the chin is pointed and the beard indicated by incised lines, the eyes bulging, and the ears are ridges of clay marked by finger-tip impressions. Although crude the face does not lack expression, and has the stodgy stare usual to mediæval face-jugs.

On the body of the pot is a band of stamped pattern, made by pressing the stamp against the surface, and preventing the wall caving inwards by holding the fingers against the inside of the pot. There are two stamps, which appear to alternate round the vessel; a large fleur-de-lis and a small leaf-like design. The heraldic fleur-de-lis stamp also occurs at Rye,² and is here duplicated to form a decorative pattern.

FIG. 3, no. 1. Jug of graceful form and excellent technique, 13¼ in. high, of light ware, with speckled light green glaze, also on the inside of the neck and inside the base. The decoration consists of three rows of applied stamped pellets. The bridge-spout is of the 'parrot-beak' form characteristic of the early fourteenth century, and made in imitation of the spouts of polychrome jugs of about the year 1300, imported from south-western France.³

¹ *S.A.C.* LXXIV. 55, Pl. VII. 1.

² *S.A.C.* LXXIV. 49, Pl. III.

³ *Archæologia*, LXXXIII. 110 ff.

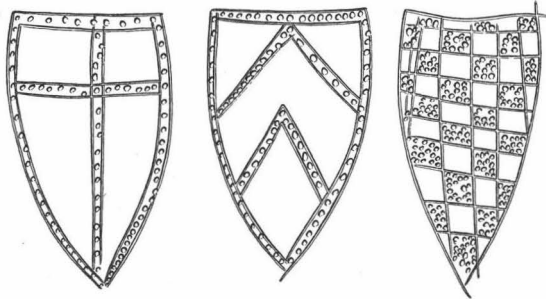
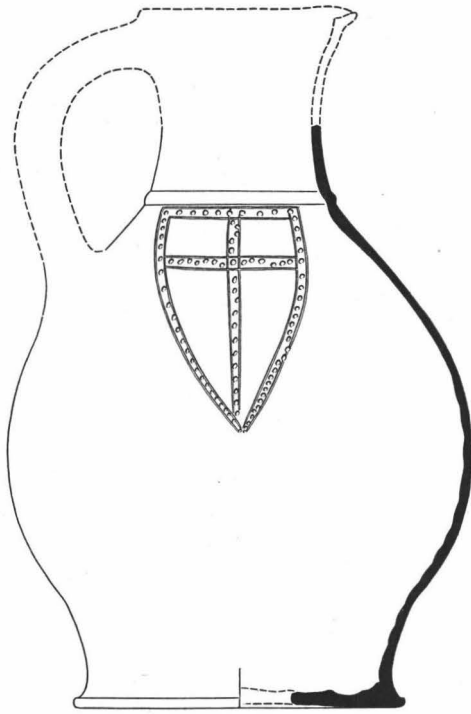


FIG. 8.

No. 2. Jug, 8 in. high, similar to the last but of coarser make and heavier profile; light red ware, white-coated outside and also inside the neck. Below the bridge-spout are three vertical applied bands, each marked by notches made by a tool. A large 'bib' of mottled green glaze covers the bands and front of the pot.

This jug is an instructive transitional form, in which the white-coating, derived from the late thirteenth-century jugs with red painted designs, occurs with applied decoration of normal mediæval character.

No. 3. Jug of light red ware, white-coated inside and green glazed outside. The base is marked all round by a series of faint vertical flutings. The stamp on the upper part is a combination of a fleur-de-lis and a circle with pellets, perhaps intended for a ring brooch, such as were sometimes copied as decorative patterns on fourteenth-century pottery.

No. 4. Fragments of a large vessel of grey ware with thick green glaze. The marks of wheel-turning on the inner surface show that the incised figure was lying prone. The head, body, and arms of the figure are covered with short incised marks, apparently to represent chain-mail. A long incised line passing through the face appears to be a spear or lance, and the figure is probably a fallen warrior, defeated by another standing over him or on horseback.

No. 5. Skillet of light red ware with green glaze on the inner surface of the base and splashed on the rim. The handle and three tall legs are pricked to prevent cracking of the thick clay in firing. On one side the rim is pinched out to form a lip.

This is a copy in clay of the contemporary bronze skillets;¹ another example, from Bodiam Castle, dated to the fifteenth century, has recently been published.²

FIGS. 5-6. Fragment of stone, measuring about $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $2\frac{1}{4}$ in., by 1 to $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick, roughly chipped all round the edge. The faces are almost flat and deeply carved with designs in reverse.

(1) On one side is an animal with a long tail over its back, and a smaller animal behind it (see above, p. 113). In front is a fleur-de-lis and below is a circle. There is a small splash of yellow glaze near the upper edge.

(2) On the other side is a stag with a bird perched on its back. Although the workmanship is extremely crude, the attitude of the animals is quite realistic, and the carving is probably local work. The stone has been examined by Mr. Kenneth P. Oakley, of the Department of Geology, British Museum (Natural History), who reports that it is a hard white limestone with 'pin-hole' structure, probably not local.

The object may be identified as a stamp for decorating pottery, although it is curious that no example of this stamp used as such has

¹ British Museum, *Guide to Medieval Antiquities*, p. 240, Fig. 155.

² *S.A.C.* LXXVI. 224, Fig. 2, P 35.

been found. On the other hand, there is not a single mould for the numerous stamps that do occur on the pottery. Stamps for decorating pottery are extremely scarce, and those found at Lincoln¹ and Nottingham² are made of baked clay. This stone stamp is therefore a notable addition to the material from the Rye kilns.

¹ *Archaeol. Journ.* LIX. 9, Figs. 10-11.

² *Trans. Thoroton Society*, XXXVI. 85, Pl. v, 6.