

## CHAPTER 15

# THE OYSTER SHELL

*By Sandie Williams and Elizabeth Somerville*

A small quantity of oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) was recovered from the south-east pits and wells and from the south-east layers (6.004kg) (Table 24). No oyster was found in association with any of the buildings of Period 3 and 4 or the northern pits. The majority of the oysters were in fragmentary condition and were quantified by weight.

TABLE 24. QUANTIFICATION OF THE OYSTER SHELL IN THE PITS IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF THE TRENCH

<u>Pit/Well</u>	<u>Weight (g)</u>
3406 (P4)	25.08
3102 (P4)	87.11
5693 (P3)	8.55
5735 (P4)	205.01
1750 (P4)	2.66
2434 (P4)	1.66
2601 (P4)	26.79
6290 (P3)	1070.10
5039 (P3)	362.90

### PERIOD 3

Oysters were present in all three of the south-east pits and wells, but the only significant quantity (1.070kg) was found in a single context in the layers slumping into 6290 and dating to the early to mid-second century. From the south-east layers as a whole 3.329kg were recovered from 34 contexts. The largest quantity from any context amounted to only <700g, while the majority of those contexts with oysters produced <100g from each.

### PERIOD 4

Oysters were present in very small quantities in each of the Period 4 pits and wells with the largest quantity only 205g from well 5735. Mussels were present in two pits. A small quantity of oyster was recorded from the south-east layers (885g) from nine contexts. The largest quantity from a single context was <650g, with the majority of layers with oysters only producing <100g from each

### AGEING AND INFESTATION

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From the very small available sample of complete umbos and valves, infestation by *P. ciliata* was identified from 15 umbos and one valve (Table 25). *C. celata* was identified on two valves and a single incidence of infestation by *P. hoplura* was noted on one fragment. Despite the

virtual absence of evidence of the latter infestation, the pattern of infestation compares with that identified among the later second-century assemblage at the North Gate (Silchester) and at Fishbourne and suggests an origin for the oysters from the south coast (Somerville 1997; 2006). In terms of age the material is also similar to that of the North Gate and Fishbourne assemblages with a modal age of five years (Table 25). There were only two umbos with an age of more than ten years.

TABLE 25. OYSTERS: SUMMARY OF INFESTATION AND AGE

<b>umbos showing infestation:</b>					
	pc	ph	cc	none	n/a
u/s	5	0	0	6	13
left	8	0	0	3	0
right	2	0	0	6	4
total	15	0	0	15	17
<b>valves showing infestation</b>					
	pc	ph	cc	none	
left	1	0	1	0	
right	0	0	1	0	
total	1	0	2	0	
<b>Ages</b>					
yrs	no umbos	no valves			
3	3				
4	4				
5	6				
6	4				
7		1			
8	1				
9					
10+	2				
not aged	28	3			

## DISCUSSION

Although the total quantity of oysters was significantly greater than from the fourth century (1.308kg) (Williams 2006), oysters made a very marginal contribution to diet in the second and third century in the north-east of Insula IX. It is likely that the very small quantities recorded from the pit and well contexts as well as from certain of the south-east layers were residual and redeposited. The largest single assemblage (>1kg) from the Period 3, early second-century slumps into 6290 might be contemporary with the date of the deposit and may have derived from a single meal. This may also be the case with the only two other contexts, one from Period 3 and one from Period 4, which produced notable, but still small quantities (<700g) of oyster. The distribution between Periods 3 and 4 was approximately 3:2. In terms of the pattern of infestation and age the small assemblage compares both with that from the Silchester North Gate and from Fishbourne. The oysters probably originated from the south coast.