

Martincamp Ware: a Problem of Attribution

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SUMMARY

'Martincamp' flasks have been widely published in Great Britain under the name of this village in the Seine-Maritime (Eastern Normandy), to the extent that their 'provenance' is well-established in the literature. However, the evidence supporting this definite attribution is weak. A study of 'Martincamp' wares on both sides of the Channel, particularly from London (Museum of London) and Dieppe (Castle Museum), showed that they could have been produced in a wider area, and that the production was not just limited to flasks. This demonstrates the fundamental problem of attributions made at distance in consumer sites when so little is known of the production centres.

INTRODUCTION

This paper arises from a study of 16th- and 17th-century pottery found in eastern Normandy, which was based on an important collection of some 250 vessels found during the excavation of the north tower of Dieppe castle and on the site of the Maladrerie, now housed in the Castle Museum (Ickowicz 1986; 1988)¹. The main aim was to create a type series for post-medieval pottery in Upper (*i.e.* Eastern) Normandy, and to carry a general overview of pottery trade on the southern side of the Channel in the 16th and 17th centuries²; the study thus included the identification and discussion of both imported and exported goods³.

The latter include seven examples of a type of vessel published in many English reports as '*Martincamp flasks*', and eight other vessels in '*Martincamp ware*'; this prompted a research programme to demystify what might be called a partial misidentification. Parts of this work were carried out in the Museum of London, the British Museum and the Southampton Archaeological Unit.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Martincamp is situated on the road from Paris to Dieppe, one of coastal ports closest to the capital. Dieppe was the principal trading place for the export of Martincamp pottery (Hébert n.d, 3); it was most active in the 16th and 17th centuries. The first documentary reference to a potting industry in the village of Martincamp dates to 1670, when the potters of Martincamp were granted the privilege of cutting wood in the neighbouring forest of Eawy (Hébert n.d, 5; Rogère n.d, 55). At the peak of the Martincamp industry, in the 18th century, it was the custom of the archbishop of Rouen to take 'the second after the first piece' of pottery in each cart from Martincamp. The only excavations that have taken place in the village of

date were concerned with 18th- and 19th-century wasters (Hébert 1983).

In France, the southern distribution of Martincamp ware was limited by the Beauvaisis potters, and later, in the 19th century, by the 'near tin-glaze' wares (*les 'culs noirs'*) of Forges-les-Eaux. In fact, even for the early periods, it seems that very little Martincamp pottery (including vessels other than flasks) has been found in archaeological contexts in France, and the ware only became famous through the antique dealers who started to plunder the site and its wasters.

It was during the 1960s that the form and obviously foreign fabric of these flasks first attracted the attention of English archaeologists (Biddle 1961; Hurst 1966). Their unusual shape (a wheel-thrown sphere, with a long thrown neck applied over a hole pierced through the dried sphere) was reminiscent of the glass bottles imported from Italy which, like the flasks, were often covered with wicker (see below). In 1966 a list of the English findspots and the types of flasks discovered was published by Hurst as part of the first typological study of them, although their source was not then known.

In 1974 an exhibition in Dieppe Castle Museum displayed two neck sherds, which were attributed to Martincamp by hearsay from an antiques dealer. The original source quoting the discovery of 'a number' of flasks in the same year on the site of Martincamp has proved to be unreliable (Ickowicz 1988, 65–66; 125), but the information came to English ears and became established in the literature (Hurst 1977; 1986), celebrating both the village and the flasks. Flasks or flask sherds attributed to Martincamp have now been found on more than a hundred sites across the British Isles (Hurst 1966; 1986, 102; see Fig. 5), not including the various sites in cities such as London (where Martincamp and/or similar sherds have been recorded on sixty sites), Norwich (Jennings 1981, 75–76), or

MARTINCAMP WARE: A PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION

Table 1. The dimensions of the complete flasks studied (*M*: maximum; *m*: minimum).

Fabric	Total Nr	Measurable Nr	DY = A.DX + B	DX		DY		Hc		H	
				M	m	M	m	M	m	M	m
●	16	6	-0,22.DX + 16,35	14,8	10,1	20,7	14,6	8,1	7,6	23,6	13,1
○	16	8	-0,18.DX + 14,39	12,8	9,6	19,3	12,3	11,1	5,8	30,4	18,7
X	10	4	0,76.DX + 2,35	17	10,6	19,7	12,8	9,7	6,8	21,3	16,7
*	2	1		14,6	-	15,2	-	11,1	6,7	21,9	-
◆+	16	5	2,09.DX - 21,18	17,5	9,5	18,7	15,3	11,1	7,5	27,5	24,7
▲	24	16	1,1.DX - 2,8	21,8	11,2	22,2	12,6	10,6	5,5	32,8	18,1
△	16	7	1,02.DX - 1,23	15,3	10,9	15,8	11,9	10,2	6,5	24,2	18,4

Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Since then, only two neck sherds have been found in the village itself in 1989, which were given to the author by one of the villagers (see below).

THE ANALYSIS

All the flasks in the reserve collection of the Museum of London (MOL) were studied, together with the sherds found on excavations in the City of London and some from Greater London⁴. A few flasks in the collections of the British Museum and Southampton Archaeological Unit were also examined. A survey of the English literature gave a good number of sites where Martincamp flasks or flask sherds had been found, and this overview was completed by a list of sites maintained and communicated by John Hurst.

Fabrics

Sherds from twenty-nine different sites in London (sixty-eight contexts in all) were checked to establish firstly that they were definitely from flasks, and secondly, whether any sherds recorded as Martincamp (MART) were in fact of Beauvais ware. Microscopic examination showed that the fabrics of clearly identifiable flasks and unidentified forms defined as MART were identical (with only one or two misidentified Beauvais wares).

The reference collection of the former DUA, now of MOLAS, contains eight different fabrics, as detailed in Appendix 1. All have some sand, but this is never an important component. The variety of tones in the fabric colours, however, is striking. Seven fabrics and colours can be distinguished:

Stonewares: purple
grey with brown surface, saltglazed or not
beige, unglazed

Earthenwares: purple, often vitrified, with chalky inclusions
red
pink
beige

A few earthenwares have a slightly micaceous surface, as a result of which it was once thought that they might be of Mediterranean production (Hurst 1986, 102). The two flask necks found in Martincamp in 1989, however, have a similar micaceous surface.

Petrological and chemical analyses by the Centre de Recherches d'Archéologie Médiévale (CRAM) of Caen University, which compared a few sherds from London and Southampton to two control samples of 'Martincamp' pottery⁵ gave rather interesting results. It appeared that the English red earthenware flasks were of exactly the same fabric as the control sample (neck sherd) collected in Martincamp⁶. The light fabrics found in England, however, were found to be chemically different from the redwares; they are also different from the light fabrics of the 19th-century wasters, and are in fact closer to Beauvais wares.

The most problematic fabrics are the purple stonewares, which are not so common in eastern Normandy. These seem to be closer to the purple stonewares of western Normandy, although no flask of this type has ever been found in that part of the region.

Flask Typology

According to Hurst (1966; 1986, 103), three groups can be defined:

Type I: flattened profile, off-white or light fabrics with buff surface.

Type II: more globular with one slightly flattened side, the other mammiform with clear throwing rings and a central nipple; dark brown stoneware fabric with accidental splashes of ash glaze.

Type III: even rounder in form than Type II, with a very wide range of colours, but mainly hard orange-red fabrics, some merging into Type II colours.

Since very few flasks have been found in France, no typological study had been carried out there before, and the following is the first attempt to establish a fuller fabric/form typology, using the Dieppe material, the complete flasks studied in England, and those found in various publications giving enough

MARTINCAMP WARE: A PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION

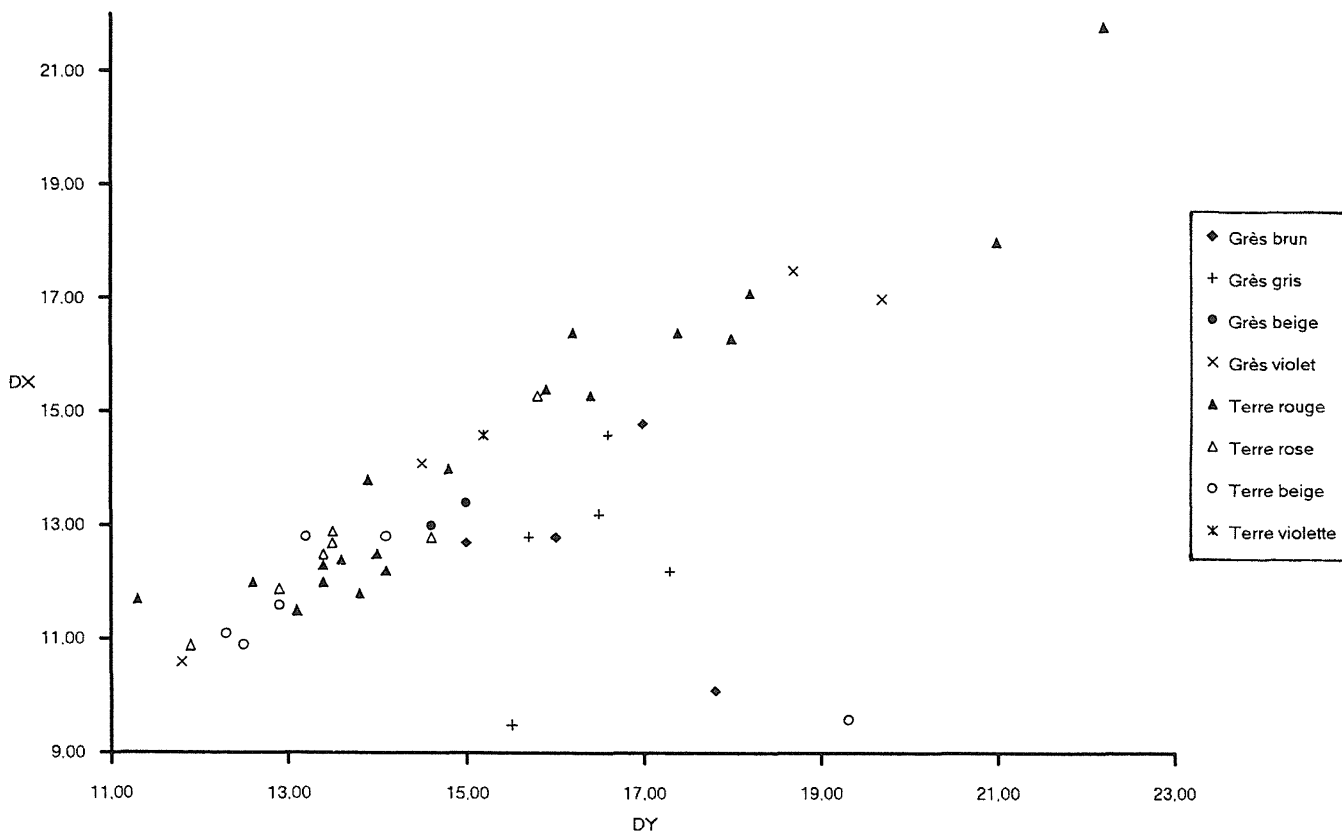


Fig. 1. Scatterplot showing the relationship between form and fabric, based on the measurements $DX \times DY$ (small diameter \times main diameter) of complete flasks.

details to allow their inclusion in the study. The latter sites are Aldwark (York), Dover Castle, Finchale Abbey, Norwich, Sandal Castle.

The form study was based on the four characteristic dimensions which could be measured:

- DX: Small diameter = height of the thrown sphere.
- DY: Main diameter = diameter of the thrown sphere.
- H : Height of the flask, including neck.
- Hc: Height of the neck, = H - DY.

The results, illustrated in Fig. 1 and in Table 1, give the flattening ($DX \times DY$) of the flasks according to their fabric, showing variations in size, clusters and linear functions for each fabric. These confirm, more or less, the typology proposed by Hurst, but demonstrate firstly how hard it is to make a proper and precise correlation between forms and fabric types, and secondly, the need to supplement the database with other finds from England, France and other countries.

From this study, it appears that red and pink flasks are more regularly spherical (coefficient A closer to 1); this agrees with Hurst (*ibid.*), although the dimensions span a very wide range. Most, however, form a group between $11.2 < DX < 12.5$ cm and $12.6 < DY < 14.1$ cm. Pink fabrics and most beige flasks have similar dimensions, but the latter are often flatter.

The distribution of the beige stonewares is too wide to permit any conclusion to be drawn. Grey stonewares show a steeper linear function, including two examples close to the regular spherical redwares, and two more or less flattened examples. Purple stonewares are few, but show a tendency to flattening as the height rises.

The red and beige flasks are the largest, but the neck length can vary greatly. The longest necks are found on grey stoneware or beige and purple earthenware flasks (see Figs. 2 and 3).

Other form types

A comparative examination of the forms encountered in the Dieppe collection and in London led to the recognition of a wider range of forms of 'Martincamp' production.

I had already associated the flasks with standing costrels of similar fabric. These have a short neck, vertical strap handles and a flat base showing the same throwing marks as the 'Martincamp' flasks (Ickowicz 1988, 124, No. 2; see Fig. 4, No. 6). The fabric of these costrels (grey with a brown surface) differs from that of most flasks found in England or Beauvais, but is identical to that of some examples found in Dieppe. The form is like that of the Beauvais costrels, but the latter have horizontal strap handles (see Fig. 4, No. 7);

MARTINCAMP WARE: A PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION

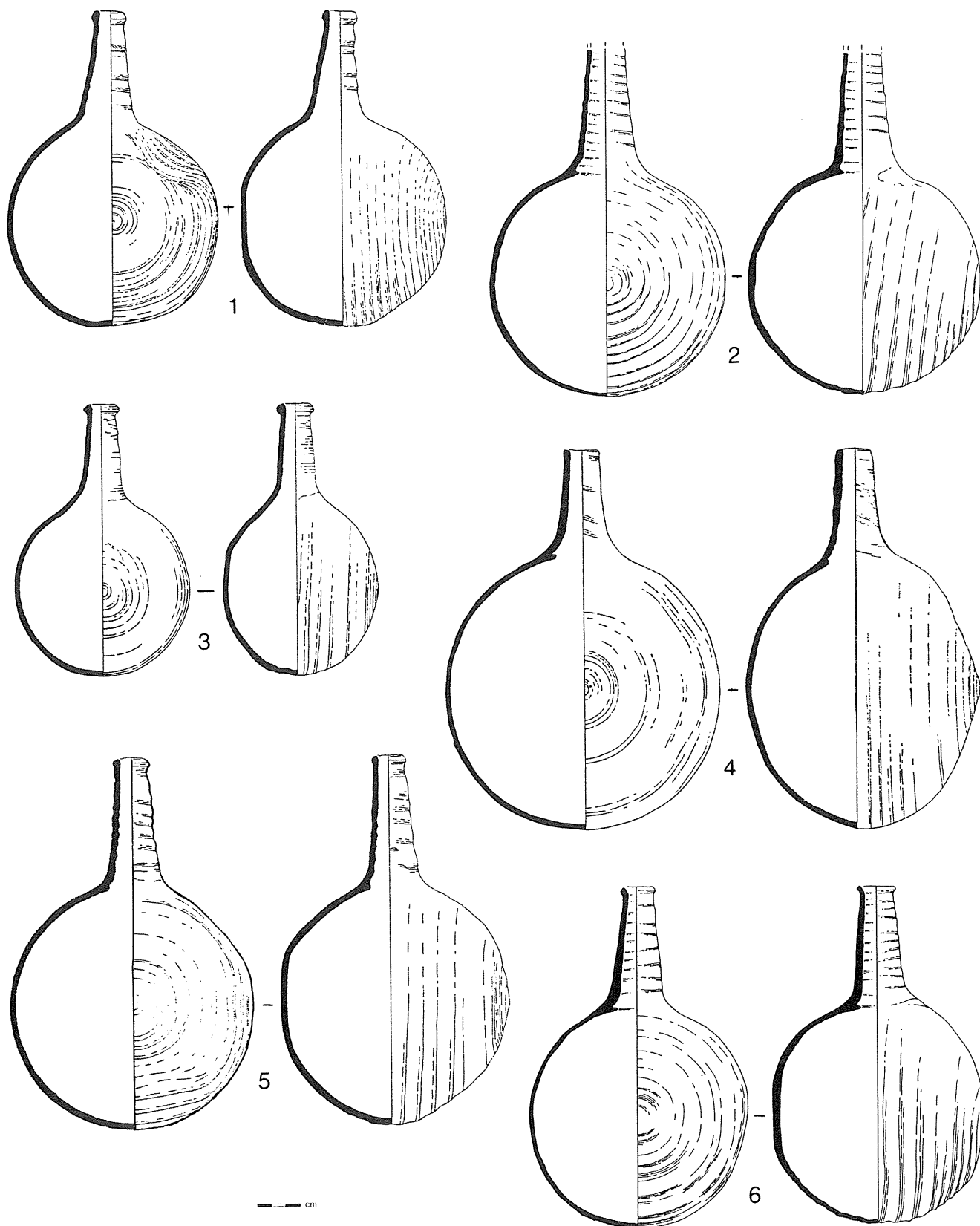


Fig. 2. 'Martincamp' flasks. No. 1: purple stoneware with brown surface (5807). No. 2: red earthenware (FNC88 372). No. 3: beige-brown earthenware (29.163.8). No. 4: red earthenware with brown surface (5808). No. 5: red earthenware with pink surface (5805). No. 6: beige earthenware with reduced grey flaming (BIS82 282). All are in the Museum of London (drawings by Paul Stroud and Danny Hacker). Scale 1:4.

MARTINCAMP WARE: A PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION

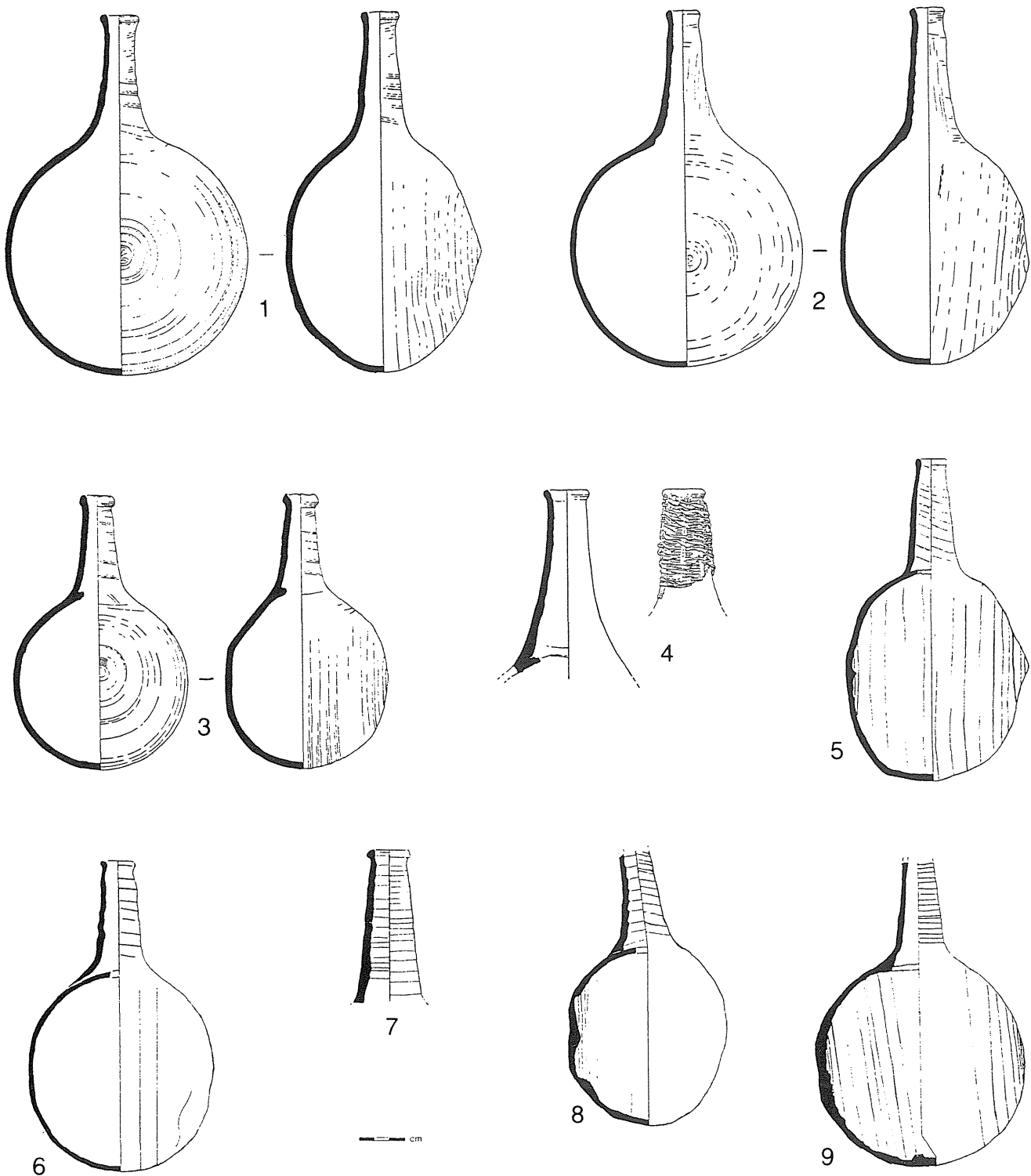


Fig. 3. 'Martincamp' flasks. No. 1: beige stoneware, brown surface (27.30/31). No. 2: stoneware, orange surface (78.185/3). No. 3: earthenware, pink-brown surface (80.93/38). No. 4: beige stoneware, covered with wicker (13581). No. 5: red-brown earthenware (Castle TN4). No. 6: red-brown vitrified earthenware (Castle TN2). No. 7: purple earthenware with pinkish surface (Town BN3). No. 8: purple stoneware (Town BN2). No. 9: purple stoneware (Town BN1). Nos. 1-3 are in the Museum of London (drawings by Paul Stroud); Nos. 4-9 are in the Castle Museum, Dieppe (drawings by P. Ickowicz). Scale 1:4.

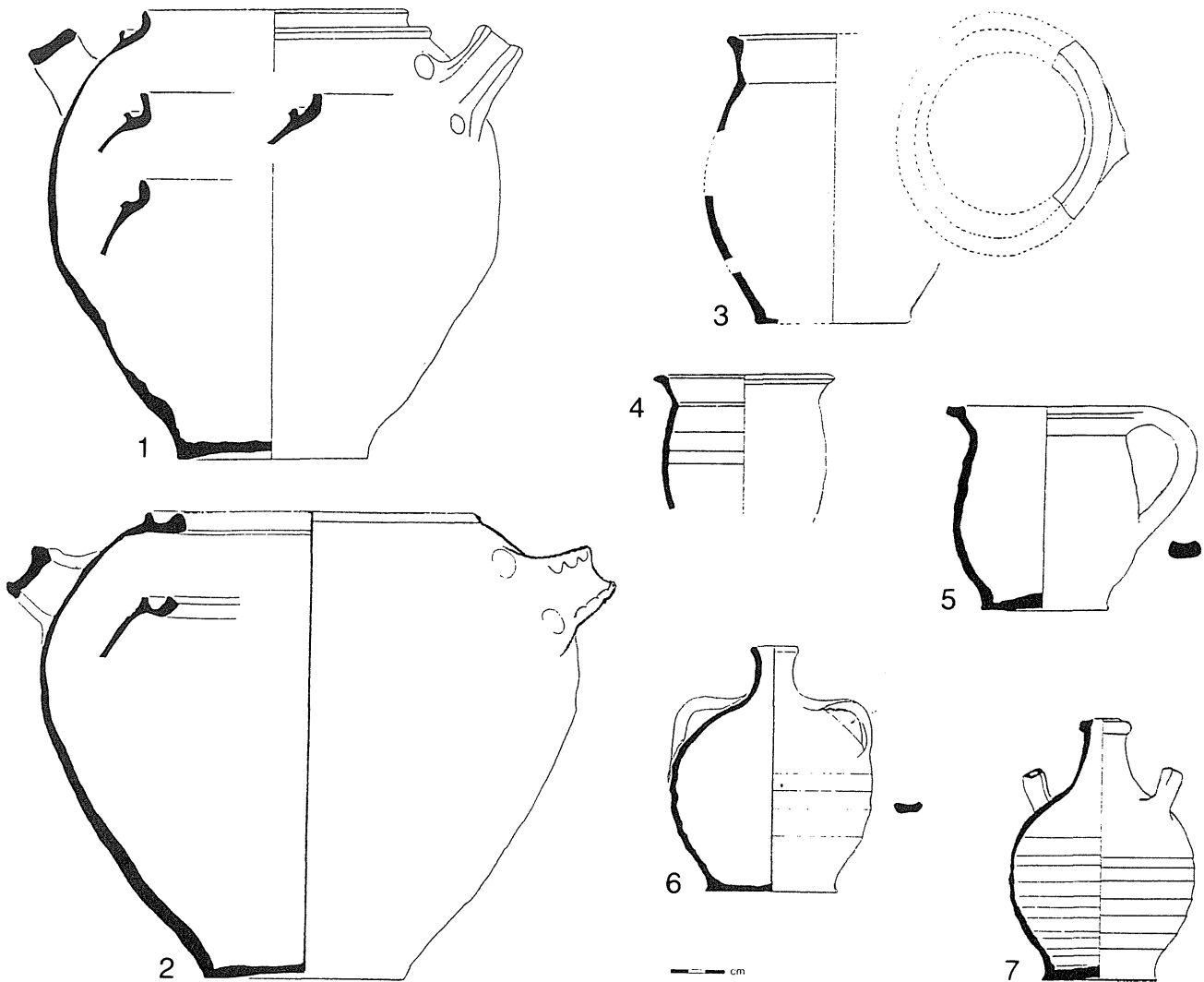


Fig. 4. Vessels in the Castle Museum, Dieppe (drawings by P. Ickowicz). Nos. 1 and 2: globular pots with lid-seated rim, pale yellow, orange and beige stoneware; height 210–270 mm. First attributed to Beauvaisis (Ickowicz 1988, 112–3), they now seem to come from the same area as the light-coloured stoneware flasks. Nos. 3 and 4: grey stoneware with purple iron wash, fabric very similar to some flasks; probable height 165 mm, neck diameter 102 mm. No. 5: vitrified beige earthenware with purple-red iron glaze; height 117 mm. No. 6: grey stoneware costrel with brown outer surface. No. 7: pinkish-beige stoneware costrel; height 153 mm. Scale 1:4.

given the proximity of Beauvais, this suggests that they could have influenced the production of such costrels in a more local fabric.

A close similarity was noted between the fabrics of beige stoneware flasks found in England and the 'grands pots globulaires' in the Dieppe collection (Fig. 4, Nos. 1, 2). The latter sometimes display the same irregularity in the wall as found on some flasks, notably the very irregular thickness of the wall near the base of flask DIEP-BN2 (Fig. 3, No. 8): and a flask from excavations in London (site code: nfw; context: [68]). One of these globular pots, analysed by Daniel Dufournier in Caen, was attributed to the Beauvaisis area, contingent on the poor knowledge of the wares produced in eastern Normandy. But this form has not been yet recognised by Beauvaisis archaeologists. These pots sometimes have an orange slip very similar

to the streaky orange-grey surface of some flasks found in London. Others have a totally orange surface.

These two forms probably come from the same production area or site.

DISCUSSION

Distribution

'Martincamp' flasks were apparently mainly destined for export; their frequency in the British Isles (see Fig. 5) and occurrence in Canada (Decarie-Audet 1979) contrast markedly with the lack of evidence from France, where they are almost unknown. In Great Britain the distribution follows the eastern coast northwards to Scotland, with evident distribution centres such as the ports of Hull (Watkins 1987,

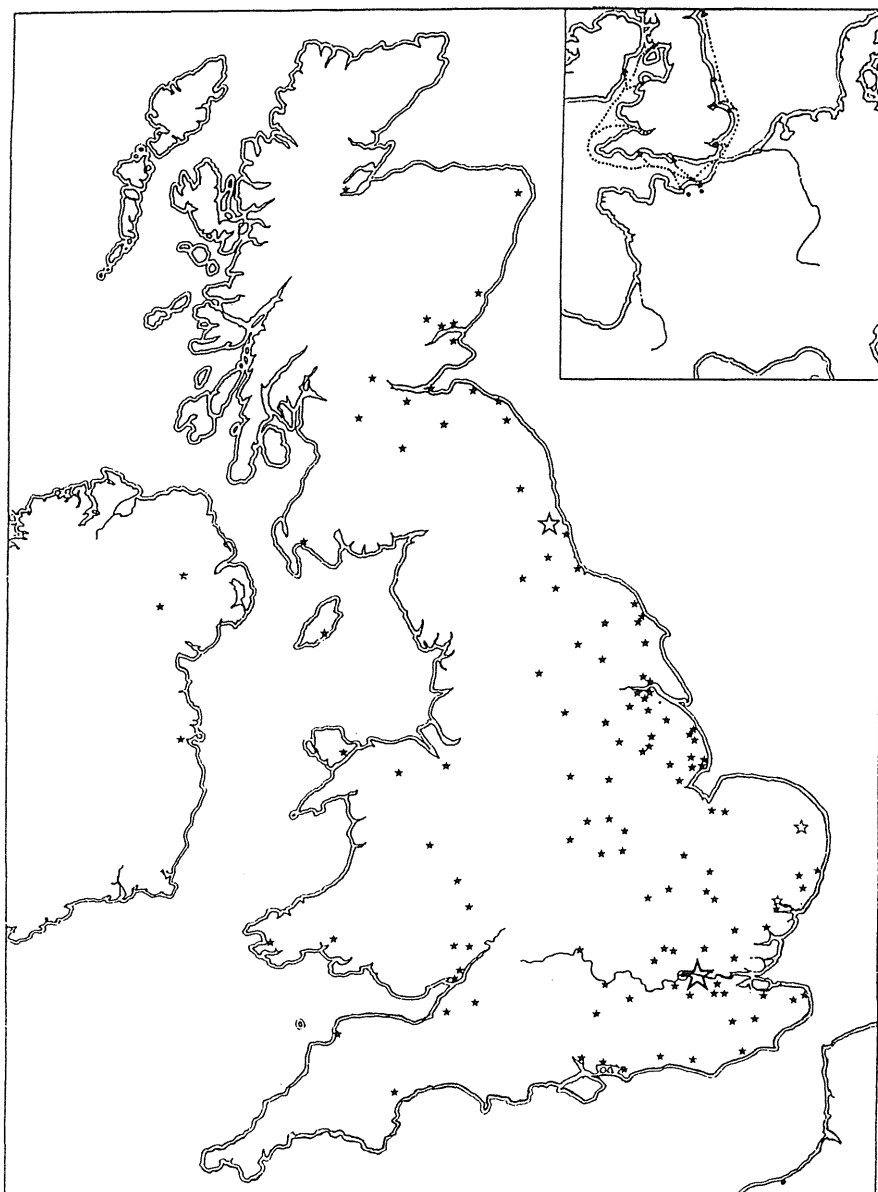


Fig. 5. The distribution of Martincamp flasks in the United Kingdom.

135), Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Harbottle and Ellison 1981), and Edinburgh. The port of Blakeney was a transit port northwards on this route (see below; J. G. Hurst pers. comm.). The south coast was also covered by this trade, but not as much and mainly on its eastern half. The ports of Cardiff in Wales and Dublin in Ireland were also relays towards inland markets and further north in Beaumaris, on Anglesey (Courtney 1986, 31–33).

Most findspots seem to be castles (*e.g.* Mayes and Butler 1983) or abbeys, but this bias must reflect the nature and selectivity of archaeological excavations and archaeologists, which often gives greater attention to prestigious places and historical monuments than to ordinary habitations, either within or distant from urban areas. The forty sites in Norwich where 'Martincamp' pottery has been found mostly fall into the latter group, as do many of the London sites.

Although Dieppe was the main trading port for pottery produced inland in Normandy, English archives such as the Port Book of Blakeney (East Anglia) for Christmas 1617–18 (E190/485/18; J. G. Hurst, pers. comm.), show that there were some similar imports from Rouen: 'From Roan, 20 small stones called French stones, 30 dozens earthen bottles covered with wicker' (see also the records for Christmas 1700–1701: E190/515/22). A similar 16th-century reference exists for Elbeuf (Allan 1984, 113; Courtney 1986, 31). London imported twice as many flasks from Rouen as from Dieppe in 1567–1568. The London Port Book for those years give references to a total of 4104 earthenware and stoneware bottles, some covered in wicker, traded through London (Dietz 1972; L. Blackmore pers. comm.). The basic price mentioned varies between £3.11s for 50 dozens and £2.5s. for 30 dozens of bottles.

MARTINCAMP WARE: A PROBLEM OF ATTRIBUTION

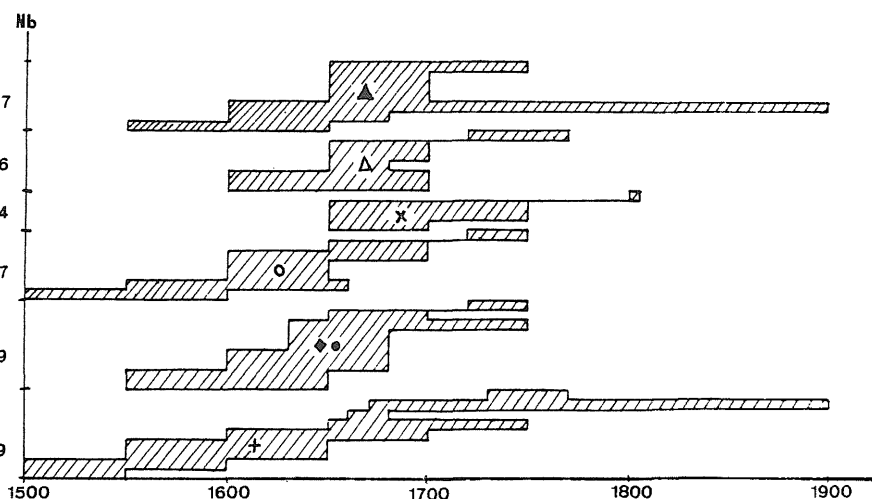


Fig. 6. The distribution of 'Martincamp' flasks in dated contexts in London, by fabric type (for key to fabric symbols see Fig. 1).

Wicker casing has been found on several sites in England, notably at Nonsuch Palace, Cheam (Biddle 1961, 16), and in London (MOL, Acc. no. 13581, see Fig. 2, No. 4). This casing was common on glass bottles, which were sometimes imported in the same ships (Courtney 1986). The archives of Beaumaris and the Blakeney Port Book are absolutely clear, however, on the identification of *earthen bottles*.

Such foreign documentary evidence is very important, as no French equivalent has been found at this date which quotes the real provenance of the flasks passing through the French ports. No port book is available for Dieppe, and the archives of the city are poor, due to bombardment by the English and Dutch navies in 1694. Further work is required on the archives of the port of Rouen, which might offer more information.

The port books also demonstrate by what means the flasks could reach such areas as northern Scotland and Ireland, and also Canada (Decarie-Audet 1979), with which Dieppe had already developed commercial and religious relationships in the 17th century (Guibon 1940).

We still do not know what these flasks contained, if anything. No reference to a special liquid is associated with them, and no deposit has been noticed in the examples studied here that could be analysed. Furthermore, we do not know of any beverage produced in that time in Normandy that England did not produce, except perhaps wine, mentioned by Dumoulin (1631, 2; 31) in the 17th century; the main wine trade, however, was concentrated in the south-west of France. We could thus admit, as proposed by Allan (1983, 42), that the flasks were exported empty.

Provenance

Neither from Fig. 1 nor from the sherd analyses is it possible to define a typology showing a clear differentiation between one or several workshops, either in the

same village or in different centres. Considering the variety of fabrics, however, and the similarity of some of the stonewares to the products of other industries, their attribution to the village of Martincamp alone seems geographically too limited.

To extend the attribution of these vessels to the Beauvaisis area, however, would probably be to create a new myth, since the 'Martincamp' type of flask was never encountered in the excavations around Beauvais by Cartier (pers. comm.). The typical Beauvais flask, which is far more famous in France, is that called '*crapaud*' (toad) with a short neck, handles and a flat base at the bottom of the body, or four nipples opposed to the neck, used as feet to keep the vessel vertical when open.

To date, no great number of flasks has ever been found in Martincamp or identified as wasters of Martincamp. A landowner claimed that he had found a 'good number of them' in his garden, but could only show a few sherds, among them two necks and no complete example⁷.

At present, therefore, the available evidence is too limited to prove anything. A wider attribution, extended to several villages in the Pays de Bray would be more satisfactory. But this hypothesis needs some arguing. If we have very few provenanced flasks from Martincamp, we have none from the neighbouring villages. The numbers of flasks exported to Great Britain and Canada indicate an important industry. But so far we have no precise idea of the volume of the first productions of Martincamp, just as we know very little, on a wider scale, about pottery production in eastern Normandy, apart from the 17th-century faience of Rouen (Halbout and Vaudour 1984; Vaudour n.d.).

Pending proper archaeological excavations in Martincamp, it must be understood that the village name can only be used as a general term which may include a wider area than just the village. It is important that the

present observations are confirmed or invalidated by excavation of 16th- and 17th-century kilns and wasters, of which none were explored by Mme Hébert. Investigations in other villages of the region should also be attempted.

As long as we are ignorant of the extent of pottery production in Martincamp, there will be a real difficulty in attributing the flasks to this village alone.

Dating

A list of sites and contexts containing 'Martincamp' sherds or vessels obtained from the computer records in the then DUA and DGLA provided details of the associated archaeological material and the spot-dates for each group (see Fig. 6). An important concentration appears slightly later than previously expected, between 1600 and 1700, with a higher density of flasks discarded between 1650 and 1700. This somewhat alters the chronology accepted until now, as the flasks were thought to be more common in the 16th century. After 1750, they become rarer, and the production, or at least their importation, seems to stop. The latest examples can be interpreted as surviving vessels, partly because of the strength of the stoneware fabric and perhaps also because of the wicker protection.

This analysis only focusses on the City of London. Better results could be obtained on a national (or even international) scale, since the London chronology is not, at present, as extensive as that of other sites such as Southampton or Exeter where the earliest flasks date back to the end of the 15th century (*c.* 1480).

CONCLUSION

A ceramological and distributional study of the flasks found on so many British sites was necessary before starting wider research on the French side of the Channel. It must be taken as a preliminary to, and further justification for, the undertaking of excavations on the presumed site of production in the village of Martincamp, which will be the only means of resolving the questions raised here.

APPENDIX 1.

Fabric descriptions of sherds in the MOLAS reference collection.

Descriptive codes

B: stoneware S: sand I: Iron
f: salt-glaze w: definitely wheelthrown
[.]: site code and context number.

Stonewares

- BSfw 1216 [nfw 68, 74]. Light grey core, darker surface. Rare sand $0.1 < x < 0.25$ mm. Red-orange glaze on beige surface.
- BSw 2104 [al B+]. Orange core with grey margin, orange and grey outer surface; orange inner surface. Fine sand $0.1 < x < 0.25$ mm transparent to brown-red. Black iron $0.25 < x < 0.5$ mm and one red inclusion.

- BSw 2105 [al 1241]. Dark grey core with matt brown and reddish inner surface. Fine sand $0.1 < x < 0.25$ mm. Air pockets. Coarse black iron < 1 mm and finer red iron.
- BSIw 3835 [cut 882]. Buff core and surface. Laminar structure. Fine white and red sand. Iron: very fine with long red-rust stains and a few black ones.

Earthenwares

- Sw 1163 [nfw 68]. Beige core and surface; very smooth outer surface. Medium and fine white and red sand. Fine black iron.
- Sw 1164 [nfw 68]. Pink core, pink-brown surface with natural salt-glaze; matt orange-pink inner surface. Medium white sand < 1 mm. Fine black and dark-red iron.
- ISw 1162 [nfw 68]. Pink and dark grey outer third of core; grey and orange outer surface, and pale pink-orange inner surface. Medium white and red sand < 1 mm. Coarse red iron *c.* 0.5 mm.
- Sw 1963 [al 1156]. Red core and surface. Rare very fine sand, but more medium sand < 1 mm. Fine black iron. White chalky inclusions < 0.1 mm.

Footnotes

- This paper is derived from that presented at the MPRG annual conference on Late Medieval Imported Pottery, held in Southampton, March 1993.
- This project was carried out during the fourth year of my degree in archaeology.
- The former comprise not only ceramic vessels from many European countries, following the main trends demonstrated by Hurst (1986), but also (residual) shells from West Africa for a grotto decoration, which were found in the same context as the pottery (Ickowicz 1991).
- The former were excavated by the then Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA), the latter by the then Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA). These finds are now in the collections of the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOLAS) and the MOL.
- The first control sample comprised 19th-century wasters from Martincamp (some possibly 18th-century); the second is a neck sherd given to me by a villager in 1989 (MART; MART1-2).
- See note 5.
- See note 5; on a second visit, the same man said that he had never found anything other than the two necks.

Acknowledgements

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Résumé

Les gourdes de Martincamp (Seine-Maritime) ont déjà fait en Angleterre l'objet de publications suffisamment approfondies pour en attribuer la fabrication au village dont elles portent le nom. Or les éléments certifiant cette provenance sont trop maigres pour confirmer avec certitude cette attribution. L'étude parallèle des nombreuses gourdes découvertes dans le Royaume-Uni (en particulier à Londres), et celles découvertes en Normandie (en particulier à Dieppe) a montré que leur attribution peut être sans doute élargie à un secteur plus large, et que la production ne consistait pas qu'en des gourdes. Elle pose le problème de fond des attributions à distance à partir des sites de consommation, sans connaissance particulière des sites de production.

Zusammenfassung

'Martincamp' Flakons sind in Großbritannien derart weitverbreitet unter dem Namen dieses Dorfes in Seine-Maritime bekannt, daß ihre 'Herkunft' in der Literatur gesichert scheint. Dagegen sind die Anhaltspunkte, die eine solche Zuschreibung stützen könnten, eher schwach. Untersuchungen der 'Martincamp' Ware auf beiden Seiten des Kanals besonders in London (Museum of London) und Dieppe (Schloßmuseum) haben gezeigt, daß diese Töpfereien in einer viel weiteren Gegend hergestellt und nicht nur auf Flakons beschränkt sein könnten. Neben den Untersuchungsergebnissen werden auch einige der Probleme beleuchtet, die eine Zuordnung aus der Ferne (vom Sitz des Konsumenten) mit nur geringem Wissen über den Produktionsort mit sich bringen.