

Forum Ware

A Distinctive Type of Early Medieval Glazed Pottery in the Roman Campagna*

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FORUM WARE is the name suggested here for the distinctive class of lead-glazed pottery found by Giacomo Boni in the *Lacus Iuturnae* in the Forum at Rome. It is one of the earliest types of glazed pottery found on medieval sites in the Roman Campagna and belongs to a group of wares recognized in 1930 by Prof. D. Talbot Rice.¹ These were among the earliest medieval glazed wares made in the Mediterranean region outside the principal areas of Byzantine and Islamic occupation. This article describes the characteristics of Forum Ware and discusses the evidence for its source, distribution and date.² It leads to the conclusion that the ware dates from considerably before the 14th century, as was originally suggested, although recent opinion has tended to place it in the late rather than the early middle ages.

The excavators of the *Lacus Iuturnae* discovered that, some time after the 5th century, its basin had been filled to a depth of about two metres with latrine refuse. This deposit contained a vast quantity of archaeological material: sculpture, small finds and pottery, among which were more than 1,500 pieces of lead-glazed ware, including 83 complete or nearly complete vessels. There were, in addition, 'thousands of fragments' of amphorae.³

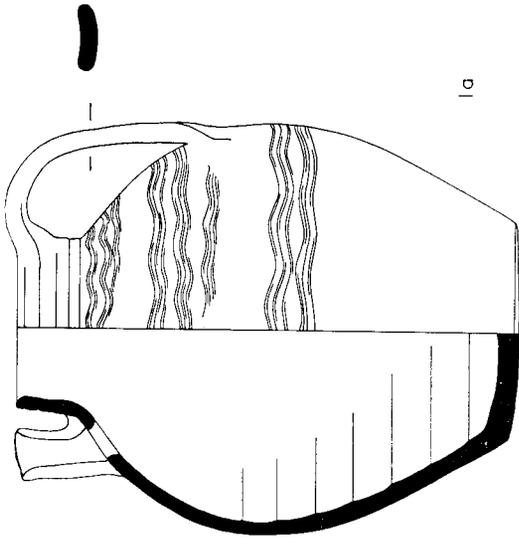
The glazed pottery may be divided into five main types. These not only have the same kinds of fabric, glaze and, in most cases, applied decoration, but also share a number of structural features, such as rilled or occasionally plain cylinder necks, pinched or tubular spouts and strap-handles with a kidney-shaped cross-section.

* This discussion of recent work in Italy, which confirms the early date of glazed pottery there, leads to reconsideration of the origin of Stamford ware in England and of the sparse glaze of the Low Countries (Cf. G. C. Dunning *et al.*, 'Anglo-Saxon pottery: a symposium,' *Med. Archaeol.*, III (1959), 37-42). There have also been important new discoveries of early glaze in France which makes it necessary to reassess the earlier evidence from that area also. In addition recent work in Italy and Spain provides important evidence for the development of red-painted wares which will affect current views of the origin of wares of Pingsdorf type (*ibid.*, pp. 55-71). We hope to publish an article on these new developments in a future volume of this journal (Ed.).

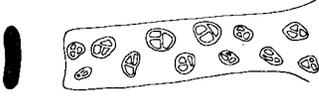
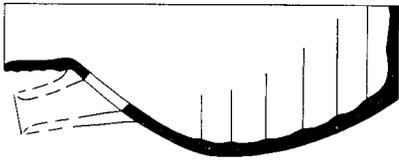
¹ D. Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Glazed Pottery* (1930), p. 21.

² I am extremely grateful to Prof. G. Carettoni for his generous permission to study and publish the pottery from the *Lacus Iuturnae*, which is under his care in the Antiquarium of the Roman Forum. I am also grateful to the Director of the British School at Rome, Mr. J. B. Ward-Perkins, for his helpful comments on this article.

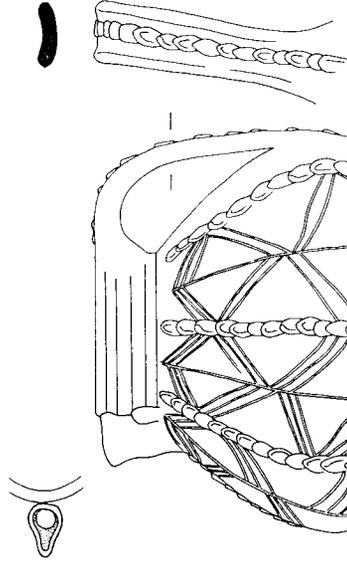
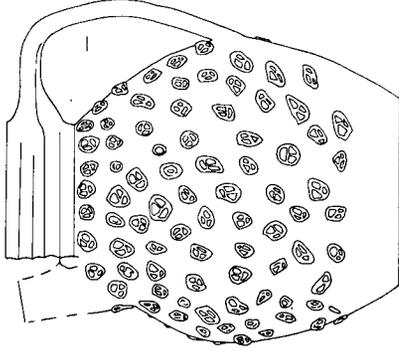
³ G. Boni in *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1901, pp. 41-144, particularly pp. 97 ff. 72 of the 83 complete or nearly complete vessels of Forum Ware found in the *Lacus* are now in the Antiquarium. Others, which have not been included here, are in the Palazzo di Venezia at Rome and the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche at Faenza. For those in the former, see Frederico Hermanin, *Il Palazzo di Venezia* (1948), p. 347.



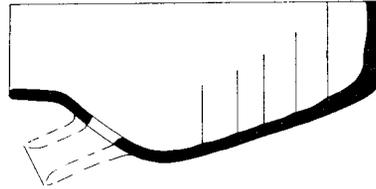
1a



2a



2c



2d

FIG. 16

THE FORUM, ROME

Forum Ware from the *Lacus Fualnae*, types 1 and 2 (p. 57). Sc. 1.

It is clear, therefore, that they are closely related. The types are as follows (FIGS. 16–17 and PL. IX):

1. Globular pitchers with straight tubular spouts starting just below the neck, comprising:
 - a. Large or smaller vessels, about 27 and 18 cm. tall respectively, with narrow cylinder necks.
 - b. Smaller vessels with broad cylinder necks.
2. Biconical jugs with spouts which are either tubular or, more often, pinched and pressed back to touch the neck immediately below the rim, comprising:
 - a. Vessels with roughly biconical bodies and pinched or, rarely, plain or bridged tubular spouts.
 - b. Vessels carinated shortly below narrow cylinder necks, with tubular spouts.
 - c. As *b*, but with broad cylinder necks.
 - d. Vessels with broad biconical bodies, their diameter equalling or exceeding the total height.
3. Ovoid jugs, nearly always with spouts pinched and pressed back against the neck, comprising:
 - a. Normal ovoid jugs.
 - b. Vessels with three handles.
4. Small ovoid jugs with tall, flaring necks and long tubular spouts.
5. Jars with globular bodies, everted cylinder necks and two handles.

The fabric of Forum Ware is coarse and fairly hard, varying in colour from dark grey to light greyish pink, with a few examples of dull red; grey, however, predominates. Unglazed surfaces are generally pink, tinged either orange or grey. The clay contains small, opaque white particles which are usually visible through the glaze. It may also contain purplish inclusions or a little mica.

The glaze is applied thickly to the outside of the pot, including the handle and spout, and to the interior of the neck. Splashes of glaze frequently occur on the inside of the vessel and the under side, too, may be partly or completely covered. The surface is usually rough and fritty, and although the acidic soil conditions in the *Lacus Iuturnae* have contributed to this effect, it is clear that the method of glazing was not always successful. The colour ranges from drab green, through yellow-brown to brown. It is patchy and may vary considerably on a single piece; nevertheless, about one-third of the vessels are basically brown and another third are tinged with yellow. On two examples, the colours are apparently varied on purpose so that one half of the vessel is green and the other chestnut. The technique required to achieve this effect is perhaps related to that of 9th-century Byzantine potters who produced a mottled green and brown finish by firing vessels in a reducing atmosphere and then, after allowing them to cool slightly, introducing a draught which oxidized the hottest parts of the surface.⁴

Forum Ware is usually decorated with applied 'petals' made from the same

⁴ R. B. K. Stevenson in G. Brett, W. J. Macaulay and Stevenson, *The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors, First Report* (1947), p. 35.

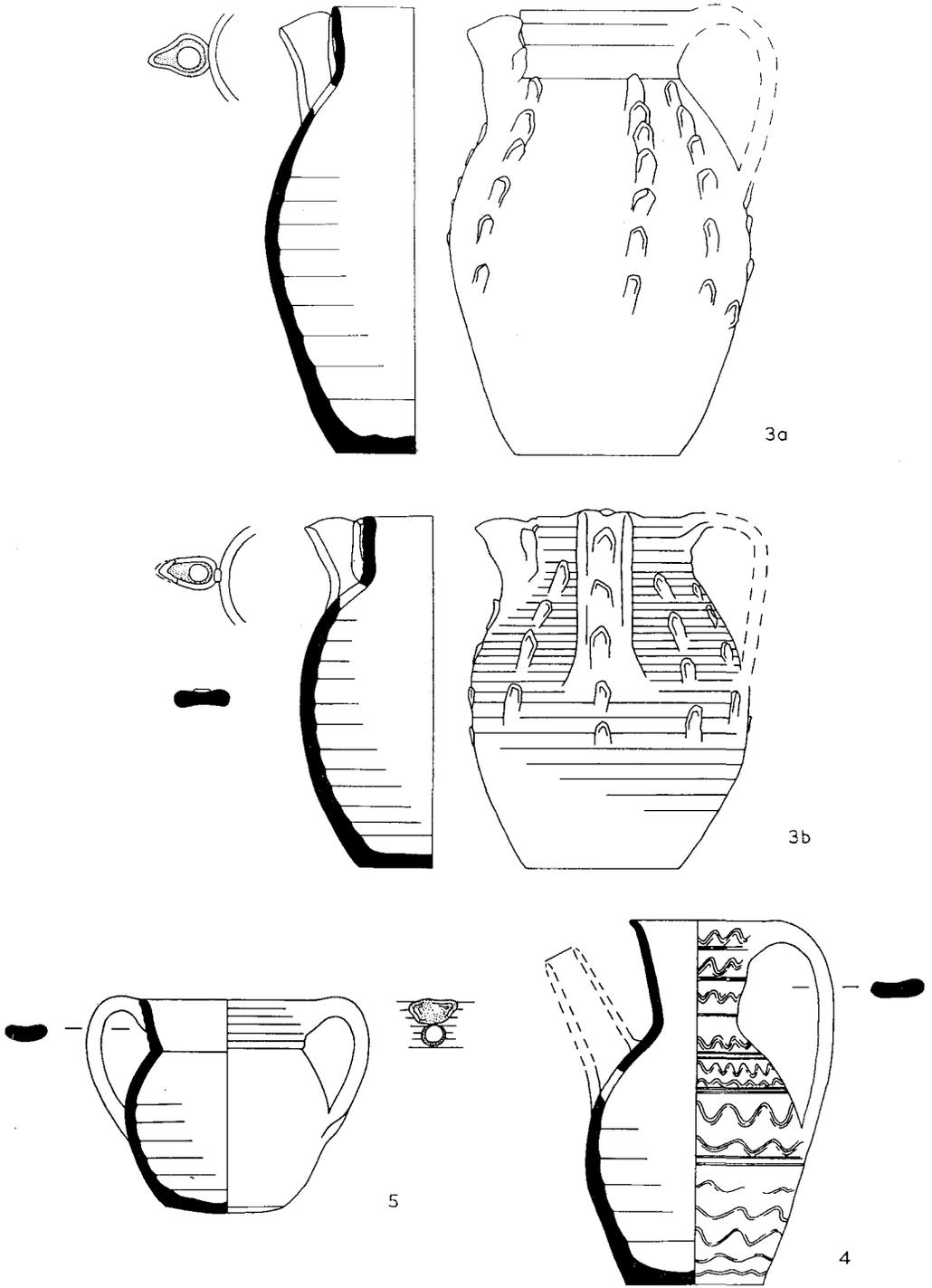


FIG. 17
 THE FORUM, ROME
 Forum Ware from the *Lacus Iuturnae*, types 3-5 (p. 57). Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$.

clay as the rest of the pot, sometimes accompanied by combed or incised decoration made before the handle, spout and petals were added. With two exceptions, on which the petals are applied either all over or in an elaborate pattern, they are placed in single vertical rows. Three or sometimes four rows occur on either side of the body and consist of between four and eight petals each. Shorter rows are placed on the handle and under the spout. In a few cases, incised decoration occurs alone. About one-eighth of the vessels is undecorated.

TABLE

Type	Spout		Decoration			
	Tubular	Pinched	None	Incised	Incised and applied	Applied
1	6	—	4	2	—	—
2	5	13	—	—	4	16
3	4	38	4	1	4	34
4	2	—	—	2	—	—
5	—	—	1	—	—	—

As the table shows, each shape of vessel is associated with a different combination of spout-forms and types of decoration. These differences appear to be chronological and the basis for a relative chronology is afforded by two observations. Firstly, incised motifs usually consist of straight or wavy horizontal lines which underlie and ignore the scheme of applied decoration when they occur together; pots with incised decoration only, therefore, are thought to be relatively early. Secondly, vessels with pinched rather than tubular spouts more closely resemble the forms of the earliest maiolica jugs from the Roman Campagna and so are assumed to be late. Applying these criteria we obtain the following sequence:

- A. Globular jugs with tubular spouts, either plain or decorated with combing or incision only (type 1). Smaller jugs with tall, flared necks (type 4) and, possibly, undecorated jars (type 5).
- B. Biconical jugs with tubular or, more often, pinched spouts and incised and applied, or simply applied, decoration (type 2). The most elaborate types of ornament and the variegated glazing effect would be associated with this stage.
- C. Ovoid jugs, usually with pinched spouts and petal decoration (type 3).

This typology suggests that the earliest Forum Ware was either plain or decorated with simple incised motifs. An experimental stage occurred after the introduction of applied ornament and this was followed by a period when vessels were produced with a standard shape and decoration. The close similarities between all the glazed pots from the *Lacus Iuturnae* imply that this development took place within a relatively short space of time.

Henry Wallis conjectured that Forum Ware was manufactured at Rome⁵ and this is now confirmed. One of the vessels from the *Lacus* is a waster, so distorted that it would have been unusable, and several others are 'seconds'.

⁵ H. Wallis, *Art of the Precursors* (1901), p. 6.

The ware has been found on eight sites in the Roman Campagna and at one outlying site, in the Tavoliere of north Apulia (FIG. 18). Although a distribution clustered round the principal source is to be expected, it is very likely that the scarcity of evidence from sites outside the Campagna has resulted in a greatly oversimplified pattern. The pottery from sites near Rome has been collected in the course of the British School's topographical survey of south Etruria.⁶ Among the early medieval sites which yielded Forum Ware are two 8th-century *domus-cultae*, Santa Cornelia and Santa Rufina.⁷ The stratified sherds from Santa Cornelia,

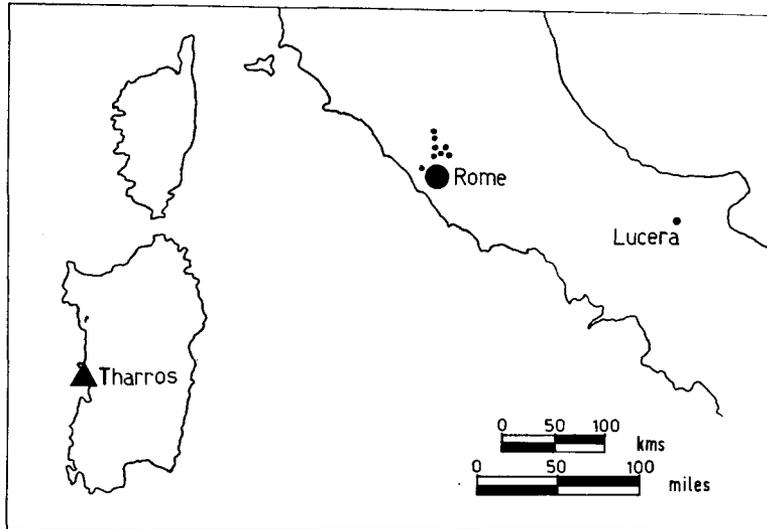


FIG. 18

SKETCH-MAP SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF FORUM WARE
with find-spots marked by dots. The occurrence of other early glazed ware at
Tharros is marked by a triangle

discussed below, are particularly important evidence for ascribing the ware to the early rather than the later middle ages. In 1964, a fragment of Forum Ware was found during excavations at Lucera Castle, 12 miles from Foggia, in north Apulia.⁸

The early date originally suggested for Forum Ware was derived partly from its apparent association with sculptured fragments of the 8th and 9th centuries in the *Lacus Iuturnae* and partly from the occurrence of two lead-glazed vessels in an early medieval tomb at Tharros, on the west coast of Sardinia. The tomb was reported to contain coins of Justinian (518–65) and Heraclius (610–42) and was accordingly ascribed to the early 7th century.⁹ In fact, neither vessel finds a parallel among the pottery from the *Lacus* although one of them, a handled cup,

⁶ I am grateful to the Director for permission to use material collected during the topographical survey.

⁷ J. B. Ward-Perkins in *Antiquity*, xxxviii (1964), 8.

⁸ I am grateful to the excavator, Dr. G. D. B. Jones, for permission to mention this fragment.

⁹ *Op. cit.* in note 5, p. 5.

7.5 cm. high, is decorated with four horizontal bands of petals applied to the upper part of the body.¹⁰ Both are glazed green on the outside and, unlike Forum Ware, have a yellow-brown glaze on the interior. An almost identical cup with applied decoration, apparently found at Rome, is in the Vatican Museums.¹¹

Wallis first expressed caution about dating the pottery from the *Lacus* and compared the pinched spouts of Forum-Ware jugs with those of later medieval *maiolica arcaica*.¹² Further doubt about the date was voiced by R. B. K. Stevenson.¹³ It seems probable, however, that an early medieval date can be sustained. Part of the evidence lies in the *Lacus* deposit itself and the remainder in the British School's excavation at Santa Cornelia and in a comparison with two classes of Byzantine pottery from the east Mediterranean.

The medieval filling of the *Lacus Iuturnae* did not contain a single fragment of archaic maiolica and, as this would almost certainly be present in any large deposit of glazed pottery accumulated during the later middle ages, its absence suggests a date before the mid 13th century for the group as a whole. Santa Cornelia¹⁴ is identified as *Capracorum*, one of the *domuscultae*, or food-producing estates, founded by Pope Hadrian I (772-95).¹⁵ Three major periods of building were recognized by the excavators:

1. an early medieval agricultural occupation.
2. a church and other buildings of the *domusculta* period, which began *c.* 780 and flourished principally in the following hundred years.
3. a later church, probably built during the early 12th century.

Forum Ware was found in a number of deposits belonging to period 2 and in at least one deposit which may belong to period 1. It is clear, therefore, that Forum Ware does not belong to the later middle ages but was manufactured well before the 12th century. Despite the applied decoration found at Tharros, however, the evidence for its occurrence before *c.* 780 is equivocal.

Excluding the vessels from Tharros and the Vatican Museums there are three types of medieval pottery with applied decoration from the Mediterranean region which may be compared with Forum Ware. Two of these suggest that it was made fairly early in the period *c.* 780-1125, represented by the *domusculta* phase at Santa Cornelia. The best-known class of medieval pottery with applied decoration found in the Mediterranean is Byzantine 'Petal Ware' which was manufactured from the 9th century until about 1000.¹⁶ It has overlapping horizontal rows of petals, usually made from different coloured clays, and so does not appear to be directly

¹⁰ H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Roman Pottery in the Departments of Antiquities, British Museum* (1908), p. 3 (nos. K16 and K17), and *op. cit.* in note 5, figs. 13 and 14.

¹¹ Inventory no. 1337.

¹² *Op. cit.* in note 5, p. 7.

¹³ *Cahiers Archéologiques*, VII (1954), 89.

¹⁴ The site of Santa Cornelia, 10 miles N. of Rome, was discovered in 1961 and excavated between then and 1964 by members of the British School at Rome under the direction of Mr. C. M. Daniels. I am grateful to Mr. Daniels for permission to use the evidence the site provides for the date of Forum Ware.

¹⁵ J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Antiquity*, XXXVII (1963), 38.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* in note 1, p. 21 (type A2), and Charles H. Morgan II, *Corinth*, XI, *The Byzantine Pottery* (1942), p. 51.

related to Forum Ware, although, as Talbot Rice suggested,¹⁷ some connexion probably exists. However, two examples of petals made from the same clay as the rest of the vessel and applied in vertical rows, like Forum Ware, were found among the earliest Byzantine pottery at Corinth.¹⁸ These are a cover with streaky brown lead glaze on the outside and a strap-handle glazed brownish green. Brown-glazed pottery was introduced at Corinth in the early 9th century and persisted throughout the middle ages. The cover is typologically early and probably belongs to the 9th century because during the 10th it became customary to use figured relief decoration on this type of vessel.¹⁹

The third type of pottery with applied decoration sometimes compared with Forum Ware is represented by two jars from Messagne, near Brindisi, in Apulia.²⁰ These have a coarse cream body and are glazed on the outside in bright green. One, if not both, was allegedly found in a tomb and so might be early medieval, but the circumstances of the discovery are not certain.

It is known, therefore, that petal decoration was used by Byzantine potters from the 9th century and the similarity between Forum Ware and some of the earliest brown-glazed pottery from Corinth suggests that the former, too, may have been manufactured about this date. This is consistent with the association in the *Lacus Iuturnae* with sculptured fragments of the 8th and 9th centuries and with the date of period 2 at Santa Cornelia.

Two pieces of negative evidence from the Roman Campagna reinforce the case for an early medieval date. Forum Ware was completely absent from the three medieval settlements outside Rome excavated by Dr. Hans Stiesdal in 1957.²¹ These are deserted plateau or promontory sites and they therefore belong to the characteristic form of later medieval settlement in the Campagna, which is thought to have developed during the 9th and 10th centuries.²² The earliest references to the three sites, found in the *Liber Pontificalis*, are of the 9th, 10th and 13th centuries respectively and they were all occupied at least until the end of the middle ages. In addition, it is now known that a more accomplished type of glazed pottery was manufactured at Rome during the later 12th century, for a waster occurs among the vessels built into the campanile of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo, probably when it was erected between 1158 and 1181.²³ Pottery of this type was exported to the neighbouring countryside and sherds have been collected from five sites north of Rome, including Santa Cornelia²⁴ and one of the settlements excavated by Dr. Stiesdal, Torre Pietrapertusa. While it is not impossible that the two wares were in contemporary use at Rome, the combined evidence of the *Lacus Iuturnae*, of

¹⁷ *Op. cit.* in note 1, p. 21.

¹⁸ Morgan, *op. cit.* in note 16, pp. 181 (no. 32) and 184 (no. 60).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁰ Anna Schilardi in Armando Maiuri (ed.), *Il Salento* (1960), p. 199, using Nicola Vacca, *La Ceramica Salentina* (1954), and information given to me by Dr. Vacca.

²¹ *Analecta Romana*, II (1962), 63. I am grateful to Dr. Stiesdal for permission to examine the material from these excavations.

²² J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Geographical Journal*, CXXXVIII (1962), 389-405, particularly 399 ff.

²³ Adriano Prandi, *Il Complesso Monumentale della Basilica Celimontana dei Ss. Giovanni e Paolo* (1963), pp. 325 ff. and 495 ff.

²⁴ The fragments from Santa Cornelia were found either unstratified or in deposits of period 3.

the four excavated sites in the Roman Campagna, and of similar pottery elsewhere in the Mediterranean region points to the conclusion that the developed type of Forum Ware was one of a group of medieval glazed wares with applied decoration. This group includes the vessel from Tharros, the almost identical pot in the Vatican Museums and possibly the two jars from Messagne. It was related to Byzantine pottery with petal decoration, the most elaborate type of which is known as Petal Ware. Forum Ware itself seems to have been obsolete by the 12th century and was probably manufactured principally during the 9th century.

PLATE IX



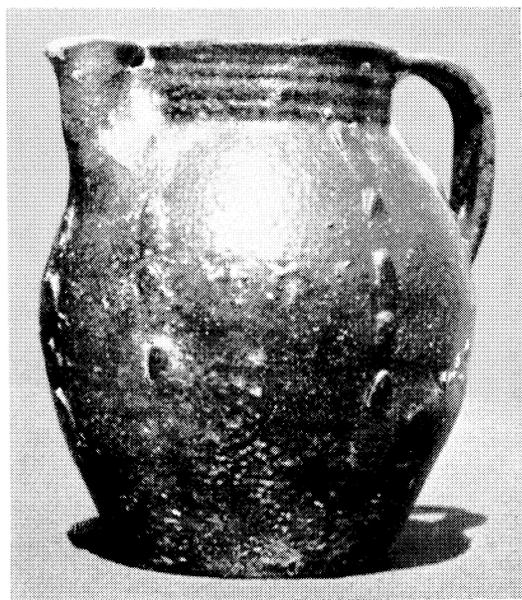
A



B



C



D

FORUM WARE, *LACUS IUTURNAE*, THE FORUM, ROME (p. 57 and FIGS. 16-17)

A. Type 1a. Ht. 26·3 cm.
C. Type 3a. Ht. 21 cm.

B. Type 1b. Ht. 21·6 cm.
D. Type 3a. Ht. 25·4 cm.

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