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## **Dressel 23 Amphorae from Winchester: the first evidence in Roman Britain**

The Spanish olive-oil trade was paramount in Roman Britain from the Claudian conquest to the mid third century AD, reaching its peak during the mid second century AD(1). The surviving material evidence for the trade can be seen in the presence on the sites of the period of many sherds of Dressel 20 amphora, the container from *Baetica* which carried the olive-oil(2). Dressel 20 is the most commonly encountered amphora form found on Romano-British sites, often constituting between 70-90 % of any total amphora assemblage. In the mid third century, the decline and ultimate disappearance of the Dressel 20 form may in part be due to the competition from North African olive-oil at this time.

In response to this competition, the Spanish olive-oil producers of the Guadalquivir region now developed a somewhat smaller, thin-walled version of the Dressel 20, known as Dressel 23 and identified by Beltrán(3) as the successor of the Dressel 20 type. The evolution of the Dressel 23 from the Dressel 20 was demonstrated by Martin-Kilcher(4) on the basis of the evidence from the sites at Augst and Kaiseraugst in Switzerland. Recent surveys and excavations in the Guadalquivir Valley at Tejarillo, Cerro de los Pesebres and La Graja have shown that Dressel 23 was produced in the same kilns which made the earlier Dressel 20 vessels(5).

The recent study of amphorae in the collection of Winchester Museums Service has provided the first evidence of Dressel 23 in Britain, and so it seems worthwhile to describe the form in some detail, in the expectation that further discoveries will be made in the future. The typical Dressel 23 form is that of a small globular vessel, somewhat "lemon shaped", with sharply oval handles, less thick than the normal Dressel 20 ones, with a short neck and generally a triangular rim. The average capacity of a Dressel 23 has been estimated at 27 Kg., as against 63 Kg. for Dressel 20(6).

Two of the four Dressel 23 rims from Winchester (2101; 1381.00.296) were closely examined and then thin-sectioned and studied under the petrological microscope in order to obtain more detailed information on the fabric (Dr D.F.Williams, Southampton University). The remaining two rims (1580.00.38; SLH57FS0) have the same fabric as 2102. In thin section it is clear that there are noticeable differences in fabric between the two samples. This suggests that they were made at two separate production centres in the Guadalquivir Valley, each utilising somewhat different clay sources.

There seems little doubt that olive-oil was the main content carried in the Dressel 23 amphora, although tituli picti (painted inscriptions) on two of these vessels also mentioned *olivas columbrares* and *olivas salitas* (CIL 4803-4804), two different kinds of olives. This type of amphora is widely spread in the western Roman Empire, though it was not as important as its predecessor Dressel 20. Apart from the production area, Dressel 23 have been found in other parts of Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Argelia, Romania and Palestine(7). The examples from Winchester complements the evidence of a general distribution of Dressel 23 accessing to some degree the same markets as the Dressel 20.

The date range for Dressel 23 is thought to have been from the second half of the third century AD until the end of the fifth century AD or perhaps the beginning of the sixth century AD(8).

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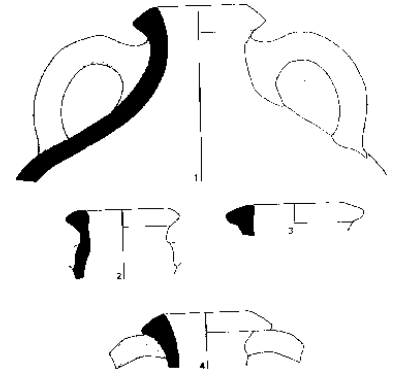


Illustration of Dressel 23 rims from Winchester : 1 ref.1381.00.296; 2 ref.SLH 57FS ; 3 ref.2102 ; 4 ref.1580.00.38

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