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Evidence of a Belgic Mint found at Verulamium, 1957

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PARTIAL excavation of the two buildings known as Insula XXVII, 4, and Insula XXVI, 2, had been carried out in 1956 by students under the direction of Mr. S. S. Frere, Director of the Bluehouse Hill emergency excavations. The surface of a Roman street running in a north-westerly direction from the south-east Gate had been exposed near its junction with the east to west street which partially underlies Bluehouse Hill. Walls flanking the road surface appeared to be the outer protective walls of these buildings against the traffic at the junction of these two streets.

Since the 1957 excavation season necessitated intensive research in the area between the basilica and theatre, members of the St. Albans Society Archaeological Group volunteered to obtain more details of the plans of both buildings and further dating evidence. The houses appeared to be in use in the second century and consisted of rooms decorated with painted plaster and with floors of *opus signinum*. These overlay earlier structures part of which had been constructed over a pit which had been filled but which caused drastic subsidence to the floor levels of the second and third-century houses. Though work continued at week-ends until the Contractors were tearing down the hedges and destroying the Roman foundations preparatory to the road widening operations there was no time to clear the site completely.

While the hedges were being removed, an operation only possible during the temporary closure of one traffic lane on the modern road, the mechanical excavator uncovered an extensive deposit of Belgic mint mould fragments. This was cleared by the staff of the Verulamium Museum who were standing by during the whole of this operation. In addition an emergency excavation was carried out by the members of the Archaeological Group who cleared out several shallow depressions and pits near the area of the mint debris deposit. A considerable amount of dating

evidence was thus obtained with the minimum of delay and the Museum authorities are most grateful for this prompt action.

One fragment of mint mould had been recorded from this area in 1956.¹ The other recorded discovery of mint debris in the same season had come from the pre-Roman level 400 yds. to the east near the river, this had aroused more speculation. The Belgic settlement at Prae Wood stands 700 yds. to the north-west on the level ground above the river valley. Three fragments of mint debris have subsequently been found at St. Michael's Bakery together with a coin of Cunobeline and traces of Belgic trafficking appear to increase with further research in this central portion of the Roman city. There is insufficient evidence to make deductions about the exact location of the mint or mints. The deposit found at this junction of Insulae XXVII and XXVI was concentrated in one pit, a few scattered pieces came to light in the adjoining shallow depressions where the Belgic platters with their illegible potters' stamps and the butt beakers were later discovered. No trace of a structure was discovered which could be associated with the Belgic period.

The whole of Pit A where the mint debris was discovered was cleared. At the bottom was one almost complete mould, lying face downward but, though cracked, it could be reassembled. For the first time the measurements of a Belgic mould could be taken; 6 in. by 6 1/2 in. with rounded corners (see Plate 2). Averaging 1/2 in. in thickness it has seven rows of seven circular depressions with the fiftieth depression in the apex formed by the widening of one side. One small fragment was picked up which still had a pellet of bronze in the circular depression.

The moulds are made of coarse sandy clay and only roughly trimmed along the sides. The depressions vary from 2/10 to 3/10 in. and the] diameters show an even greater range from 4/10 to 6/10 in. The theory is that molten metal was poured into the depressions and allowed to solidify then the blank discs would be struck by the die. Some of the fragments show a considerable

¹ *Ant. J.*, XXXVII, 1956, p. 6, n. 4.

degree of vitrification and suggest the possibility of being used several times before finally being discarded.

It is possible that this deposit is merely the refuse dump of the actual mint site, the working area of the mint may have been destroyed when the first Roman road or other structures were laid out. No trace of the mint or debris from one came in the many trenches dug on the south side of the modern road by the contractors. The pits cleaned out in the vicinity of the deposit on the north showed a spread of tumbled flints which had sealed one square timber post-hole. The pottery associated with these traces was dateable to the Flavian period, e.g. Dr. 29, and the only coin was a Sestertius of Domitian.

From the evidence of the grey imported Belgic platters and the butt-beakers it would seem that the mint was active during the period of Tiberius and that there may not have been such a decline in the activity of the mint at Verulamium in favour of Camulodunum.

THE POTTERY (Fig. 1).

Terra Nigra.

1. Platter with thick side tapering slightly to a thinner base. Soft dull black ware.

2. Platter with side slightly curved and splayed outward. Rim defined by a ring on the inner side. Shallow foot-ring and flat base. Hard grey fabric with burnished surface subsequently damaged through extensive flacking.

3. Thin moulded and splayed side with a well-defined rim. The base has a slight kick and a potter's stamp of "C.IMI," three faint concentric circles are marked on the surface of the platter.

4. Platter with moulded side and junction between side and base well defined similar fabric and burnish to No. 3. The potter's stamp reads IULIO.^f"ATESAN"

Mr. Hull has pointed out that there is a similarity between this stamp and that of the Arretine Potter "ATEIXAN"

EVHO

5. Fragments of platter with the stamp . . . IIPER. Grey ware.

6. Fragment of a platter with the stamp . . . RA. Grey ware.

7. Fragment of platter with the stamp . . . IIRH. Grey ware.

Butt Beakers.

1. Tapering side and cylindrical base. Buff-coated pink ware. Decoration consists of engine precision-curved vertical lines in a band around the bulbous part of the body of the beaker (Fig. 1, 6).

2. Base only of a second beaker of darker fabric and decorated with vertical lines.

3. Fragments of a very thin beaker. White ware. Decorated with a band of rouletting around the bulbous part of the beaker. Cf. Prae Wood, *Wheeler Report*, Plate LV, p. 175.

4. Fragments of a grey beaker of pink fabric with decoration of applied rectangles on the body.

Bulbous-bodied Jar.

1. Jar with very bulbous body and short everted rim. Brown ware (Fig. 1, 5). Cf. *Clausentum*, Fig. 19, 3.

2. Fragments of a second example similar to 1.

Large Storage Jar.

Very coarse gritty fabric. High neck and thick out-turned rim (Fig. 1, 7).

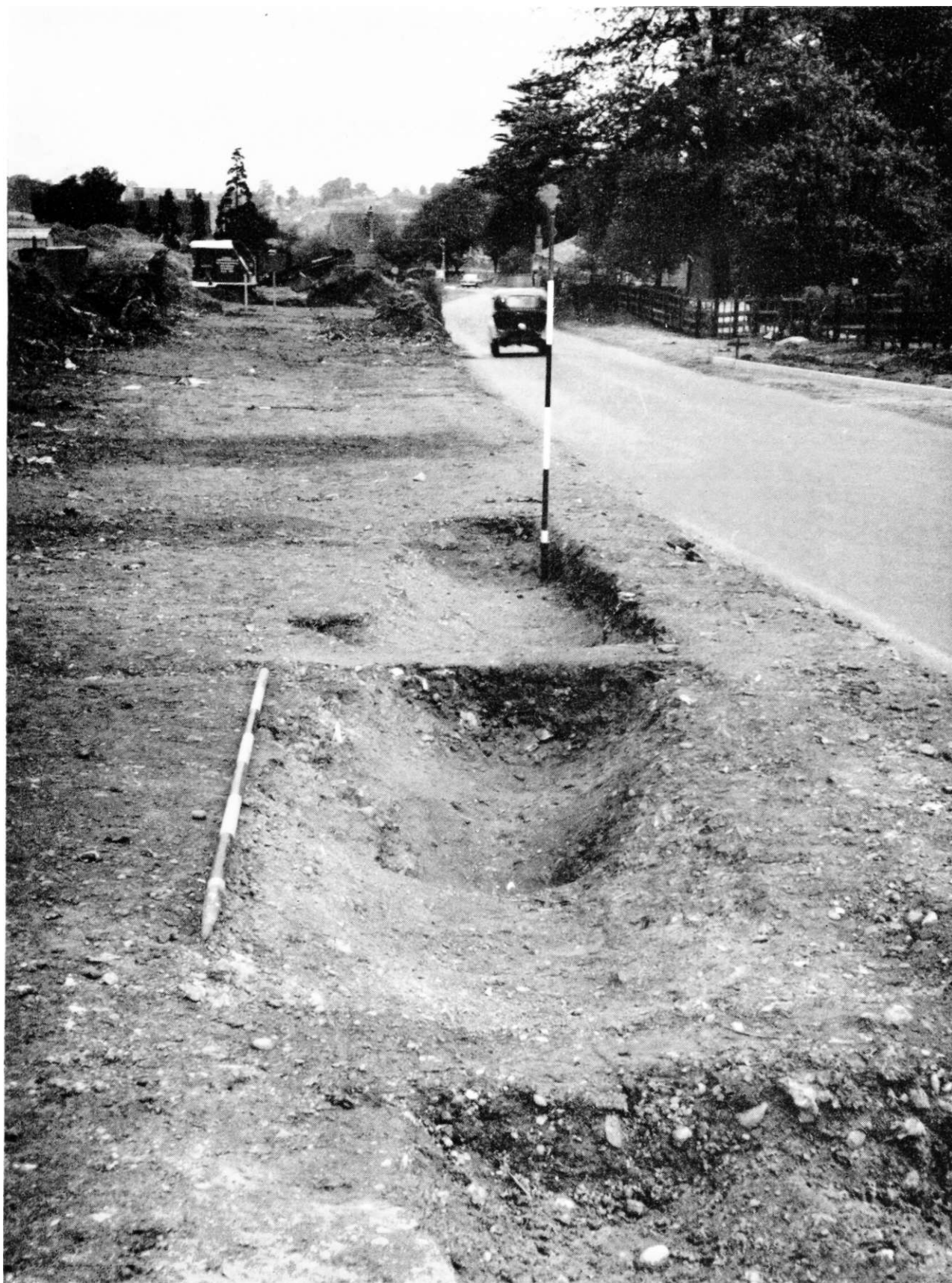


PLATE I. VIEW OF THE AREA ON THE NORTH OF BLUEHOUSE HILL WHERE THE BELGIC MINT DEBRIS WAS DISCOVERED. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE HEDGE WAS CONTINUED) TOWARDS THE RIVER. THE SHALLOW PITS DUG IN THE AREA OF THE MINT DEPOSIT ARE IN THE FOREGROUND.

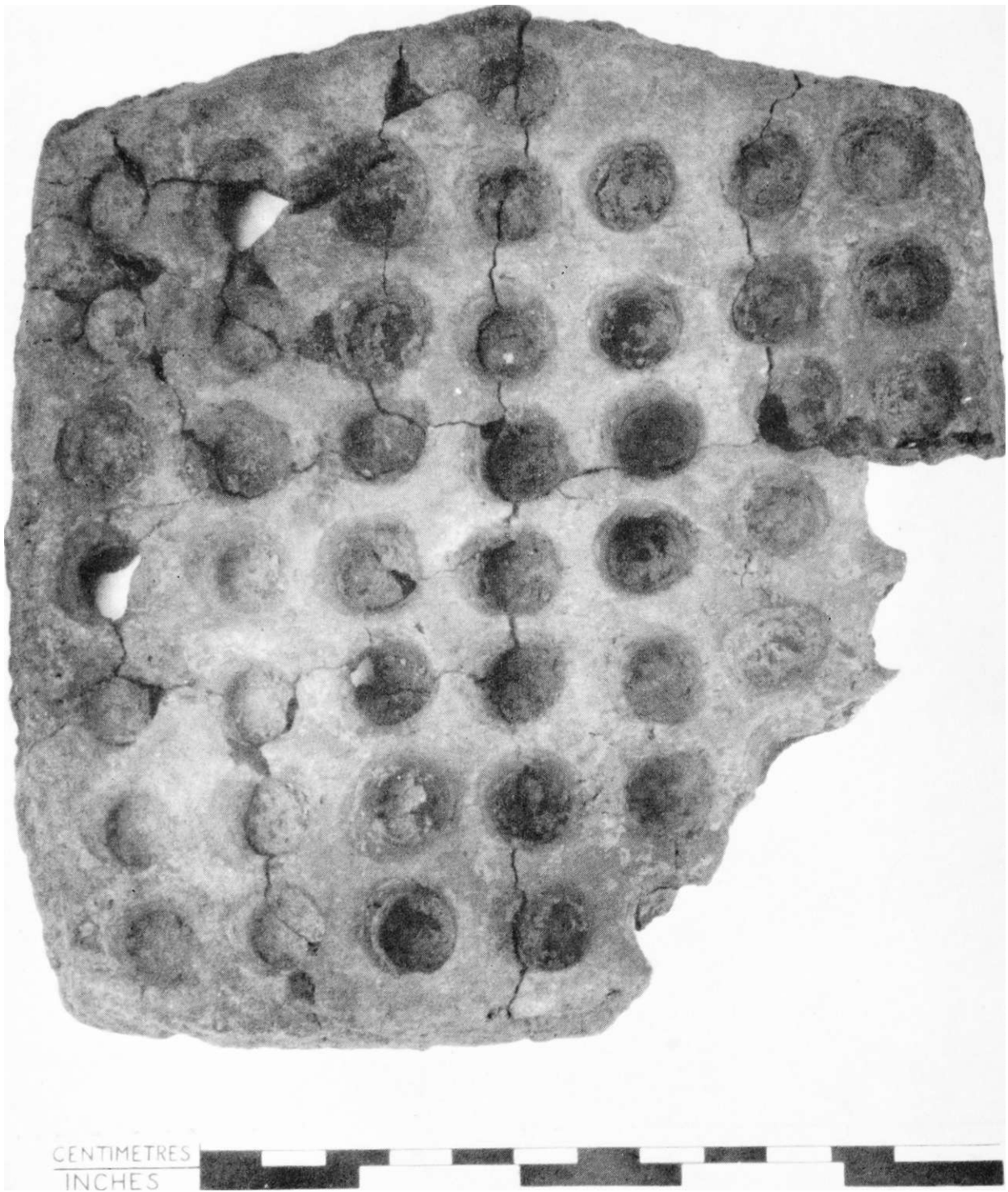


PLATE 2. THE ALMOST COMPLETE MINT MOULD FOUND BROKEN IN PIT A. IT HAS SEVEN ROWS OF SEVEN DEPRESSIONS AND THE FIFTIETH DEPRESSION AT THE TOP.

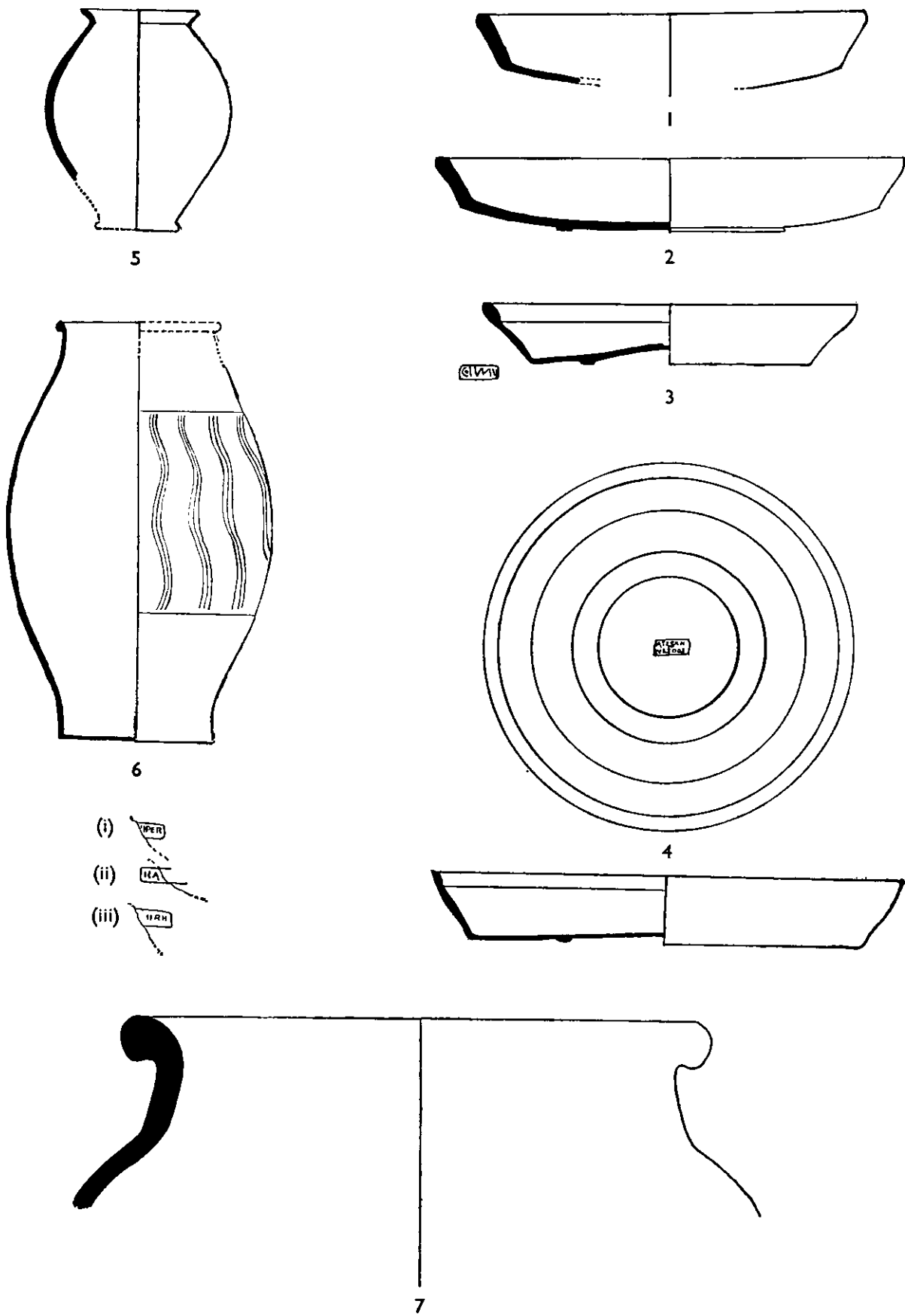


FIG. 1. (1/4.)