

The maritime role of the island of Vectis in the British pre-Roman Iron Age

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The distribution of Dressel 1 amphoras and Gallo-Roman ceramics in and around the Isle of Wight is examined. Some come from the floor and margins of the Solent seaway where trawling and natural coastal processes are at work. The authors suggest that islanders of the Iron Age were accomplished seafarers, active in cross-Channel trade. The creeks of the island provided natural havens for these activities while the eastern Solent seems to have offered a great sheltered anchorage in an important strategic position. This is equated with the *Magnus Portus* mentioned by the 2nd-century geographer Ptolemy. The authors consider that submerged artefact scatters and ancient anchorages are aspects of the European coastline which are in particular need of archaeological evaluation and protection.

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The geographic and economic background

By its very geography, the Roman island of Vectis has occupied a unique position from which indigenous skills in fishing, seafaring and coastal trading might be pursued (Fig. 1). Now known as the Isle of Wight, it has long been separated from the mainland of southern England by a drowned Pleistocene lowland. Now an open seaway, this strait is known as the Solent and it is here that new submerged archaeological evidence has been recovered from the seabed (Fig. 2). Despite difficult tides and currents, the Solent has been able to offer a particularly valuable anchorage on a southern English coastline which is largely characterized by inhospitable shores and inclement south-westerly winds.

Lying parallel to the predominant direction of wind and fetch, the English Channel coast seems to be naturally contrived to deny the mariner safe anchorage. These factors have made the shelter of

the Solent a particularly valuable asset and it can be argued that this was a defining factor when a *Magnus Portus* or 'great port' was identified on this coast by the 2nd-century Roman geographer Ptolemy (Fig. 3) (Rivet & Smith, 1979; Tomalin, 1998b).

Positioned on the southern margin of this 'great port', the Isle of Wight has been ideally placed to nurture maritime links with both local and continental markets. During the late pre-Roman Iron Age, these opportunities could be sought along the east and west axes of the southern British coastline and through those cross-Channel sea lanes which led to the mouth of the Seine, the sandy and hospitable beaches of Normandie and to the drowned valleys, or rias, of the Armorican peninsula.

While cross-Channel connections between Armorica and the pre-Roman Dorset port of Hengistbury Head have long been recognized, it seems that field evidence from the Isle of Wight and its adjoining seabed has largely escaped

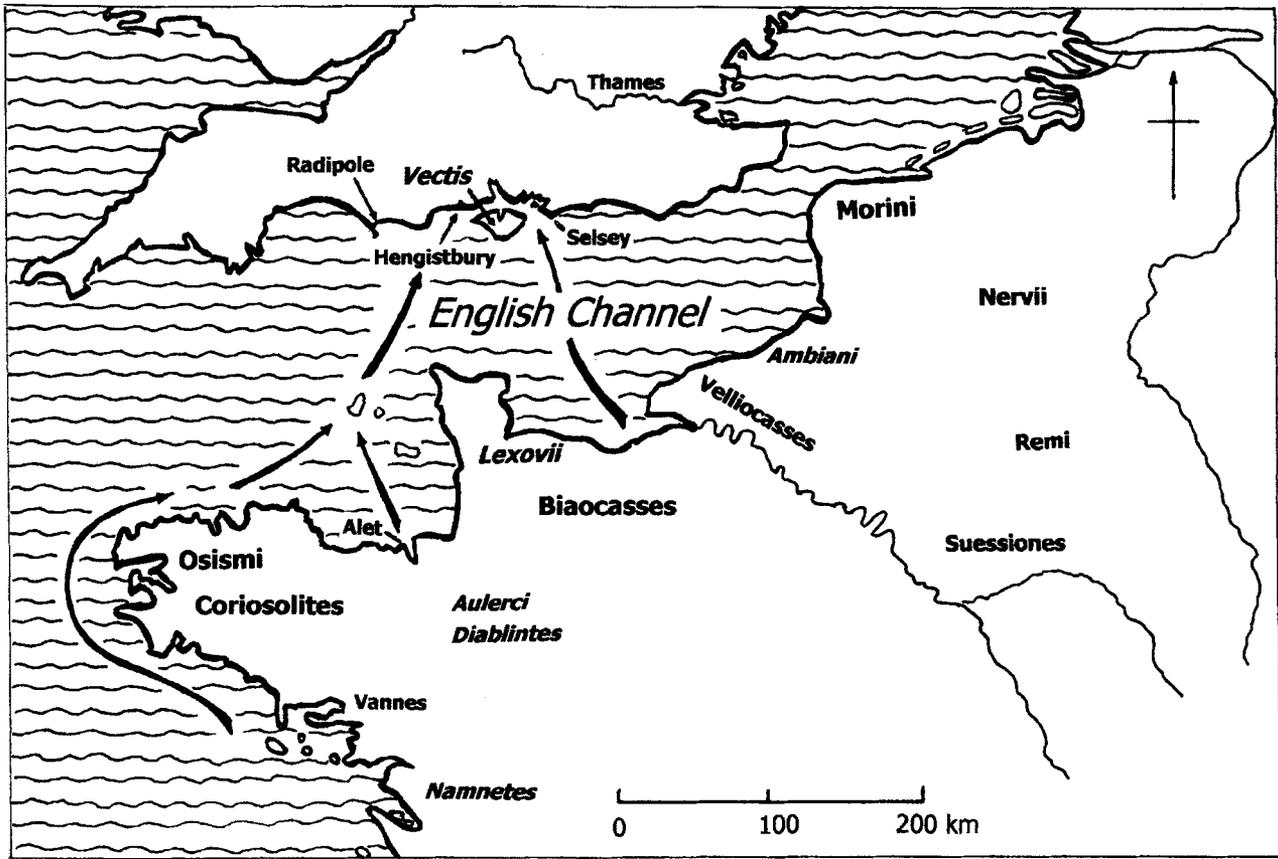


Figure 1. The Isle of Wight and its reciprocating Gallic neighbours. Tribes linked to the island by coin finds are shown in large type. Tribes linked to the East Solent and the Hayling temple are shown in small type. Tribes only represented by coin finds at Hengistbury are in italics.

archaeological attention. Recent archaeological investigations on the island have produced some notable examples of Iron Age and early Roman imports. These potentially offer a direct link between the island and the northern Gallic markets which could convey goods carried northward from the Mediterranean world. This article reviews those principal imports which have been found within the insular landscape of Wight and those which have been recovered from the adjacent seabed. Some of these latter discoveries have been made during the process of oyster trawling in the Solent and its associated creeks (Tomalin, 1998b). It now seems that the Iron Age inhabitants of the island might claim a significant role in the acquisition and handling of imported commodities. Evidence for these maritime interests is to be found in particularly vulnerable contexts in the intertidal zone, in the sub-tidal zone and in the eroding faces of retreating sea-cliffs.

Past and present investigations into the Iron Age archaeology of the Isle of Wight

During the 20th century, Iron Age archaeology on the Isle of Wight was largely limited to those chance finds which had been recovered during the processes of arable agriculture, coastal erosion or in modern development activities (Figs. 4 and 5). As a consequence, the number of reported discoveries was relatively few. Some published examples of early investigations include a pit or well revealed by a cliff-fall on the south-west coast (Dunning, 1935; Sherwin, 1939) and a small roundhouse discovered during development work in the Undercliff at Ventnor (Benson, 1954). A further example has been a small assemblage of Iron Age pottery of the 'saucepan pot' style. This was uncovered in 1915 during grave digging in the Mount Joy cemetery at Newport (Tomalin,

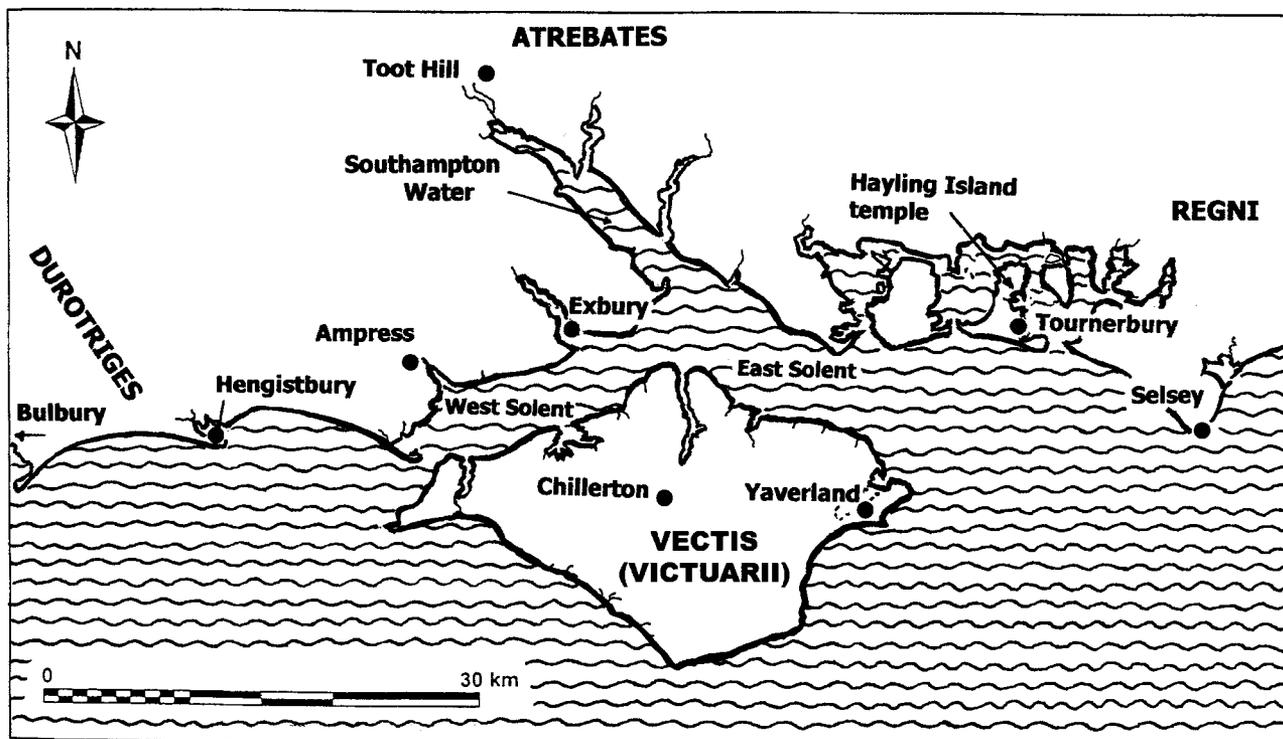


Figure 2. The Isle of Wight with its neighbouring tribal polities. The defended coastal settlements and oppida are also shown. Two defended sites on the Isle of Wight hint at an intra-island tribal division.

1992). During the late 1960s and 1970s a modest archaeological excavation was conducted on an Iron Age settlement at Knighton, in the parish of Newchurch. Unfortunately this site remains unpublished, but a selection of the finds has been cited by a variety of authors (Peacock, 1971; Cunliffe, 1982: 63; Fitzpatrick, 1985: 323; Tomalin, 1987: 32).

The impetus for this present paper has arisen from a need for an overview of Iron Age imports on the island. It has been prompted by four recent projects involving two coastal investigations and two land-based surveys (Fig. 5 sites 8, 16, 26, 27). The first coastal site is an offshore assemblage examined by an archaeological diving team between 1984 and 1987. It is situated just outside the medieval harbour at Yarmouth, where the underwater team investigated reports by local oyster fishermen who had recovered fragments of Dressel 1 amphoras. These had been netted from a depth of some 7 m to 16 m on the floor of the Western Solent. Some sherds of imported Iron Age pottery from Armorica and from Durotrigian territory in Dorset were also recovered.

The second coastal site to evoke new interest has been an intertidal strew of imported Iron Age and

Roman ceramics found on the shore of the Eastern Solent at the mouth of Wootton Creek. Like Yarmouth, this site had later served as a medieval anchorage and landing place. In Tudor times it was known as Wootton Haven. Finds from the intertidal mud imply that sea-going craft of the pre-Roman Iron Age had been moored, beached and unloaded here (Loader *et al.*, 1997; Tomalin, 1998b; Tomalin *et al.*, in press).

Two terrestrial sites particularly pertinent to this enquiry are located in the parishes of Carisbrooke and Newchurch. The Carisbrooke site lies in the Bowcombe valley, a location which might be considered the economic epicentre of Iron Age and Roman Wight (Tomalin, 2002). This chalk valley lies some 2.5 km west of the navigable head of the Medina estuary. Here, on the valley floor, plough-scatters have produced some notable fragments of early imported Roman wares at a location which later seems to have accommodated a central unenclosed settlement or *vicus*. This nodal point of the island's population remained in use in Saxon and early medieval times until the central settlement eventually shifted from Carisbrooke to Newport in the 12th century. This long history of occupation at the

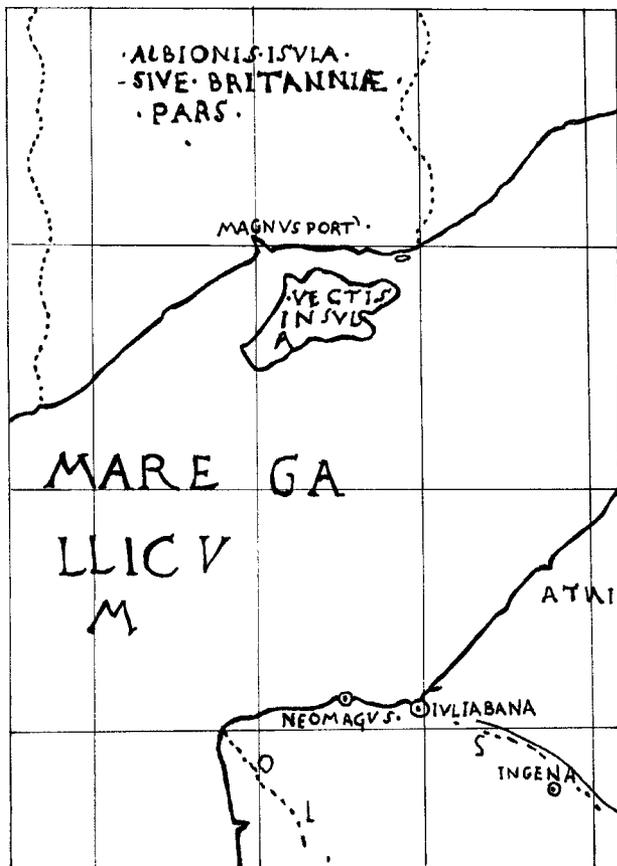


Figure 3. The location of the island of Vectis and the *Magnus Portus* as recorded by the 2nd century geographer Ptolemy and depicted on one of the medieval versions of his lost map.

centre of the island draws particular attention to the potential archaeological value of the sediments of the island's medial and navigable river, the Medina. This is an untapped and uninvestigated cultural resource which is now subject to the destructive process of dredging.

The second notable array of terrestrial finds comes from the valley of the Eastern Yar, in the parish of Newchurch. Here, in the neighbourhood of Mersley Farm, a ditched enclosure and a neighbouring field system have produced fragments of at least eight amphoras of Dressel 1 species and Dressel 2-4 type. The presence of contemporary Iron Age fields suggests significant cultivation on the chalk and greensand terrain in this part of the island. It is here that an Iron Age gully containing a large quantity of carbonized emmer and spelt wheat has recently been examined (pers. comm. Rob Scaife).

Further evidence of emmer cultivation has also been found some 4 km away, in another Iron Age settlement at Havenstreet. Also in the parish of

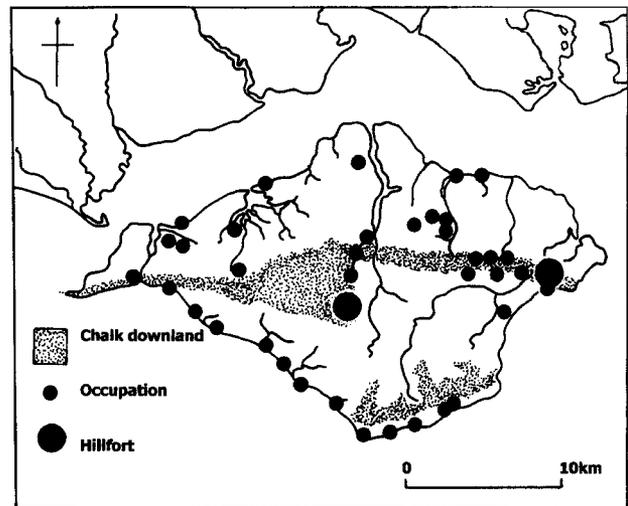


Figure 4. Iron Age sites on the Isle of Wight. A marked maritime distribution is drawn towards the northern creeks and the southern coast.

Newchurch lies the Iron Age farmstead at Knighton, some 1.3 km to the east of the Mersley Farm site. The character and proximity of all of these settlements offers a glimpse of a well-populated island generously endowed with fertile soils. Here the production of cereal crops might readily run to an exportable surplus.

Solent maritime relations in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC

It is now evident that, prior to Caesar's expeditionary landing in Kent in 55 BC, the Isle of Wight was already involved in the acquisition of Roman luxury goods from Gaul. Caesar's accounts tell us a little of just one such Gallic trading partner when he describes his encounters with the Veneti. The home of these particular seafarers seems to have been centred on the Atlantic port of Vannes in the Armorican coastal departement of Morbihan (Fig. 1). Caesar was clearly impressed when he commented that 'the Veneti are much the most powerful tribe on this coast. They have the largest fleet of ships, in which they traffic with Britain; they excel the other tribes in knowledge and experience of navigation' (BG, iii, 8). This account is helpfully supported by Strabo who remarks that 'the Veneti are those who fought at sea against Caesar, for they were prepared to hinder his voyage to Britain as they were using the emporion there' (Geog. iv. 4.1).

It is important to remember that, in writing his military memoirs, Caesar never set out to evaluate

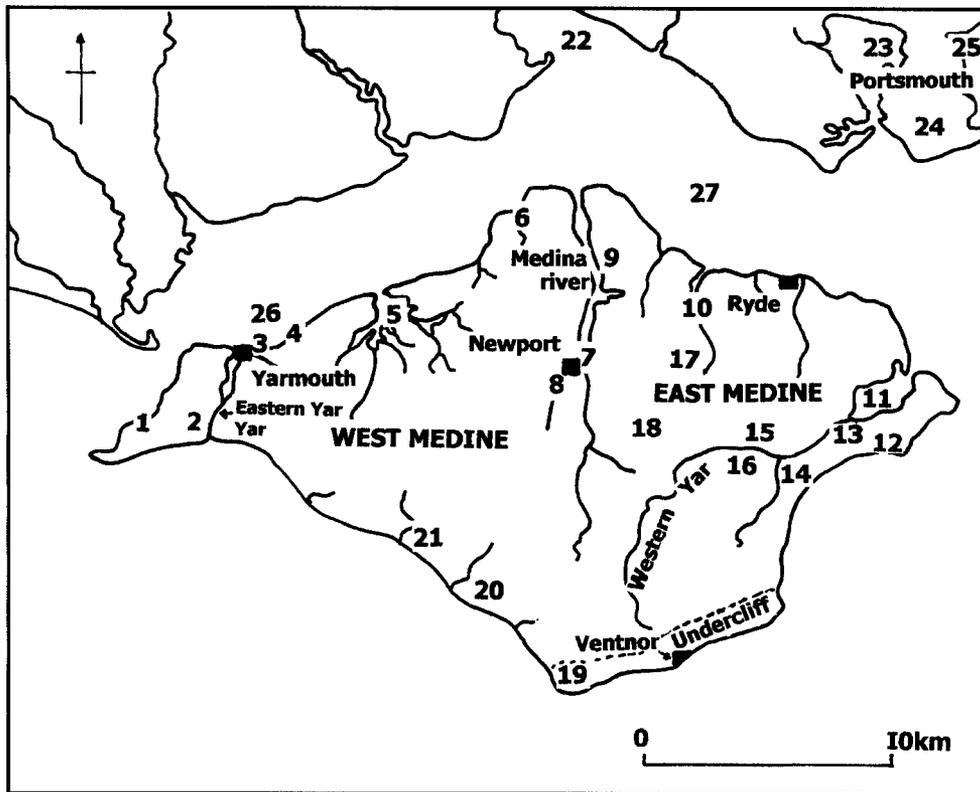


Figure 5. The location of sites cited in this text. 1 Colwell Bay; 2 Freshwater; 3 Yarmouth; 4 Bouldnor; 5 Newtown; 6 Gurnard; 7 Newport; 8 Bowcombe valley; 9 Medina river; 10 Wootton Creek/Haven; 11 Brading Haven (before reclamation); 12 Redcliff; 13 Yaverland; 14 Lake; 15 Knighton; 16 Newchurch/Mersley; 17 Havenstreet; 18 Combley; 19 St Catherines Point; 20 Atherfield Point; 21 Grange Chine; 22 Southampton Water; 23 Portsmouth Harbour; 24 Portsmouth; 25 Langstone Harbour; 26 Yarmouth Roads; 27 Ryde Middle Bank.

or describe the full nature of maritime relations between Britain and Gaul. Being notably hardy opponents and displaying specific maritime skills, the Veneti secured a particularly detailed description in the account of his Gallic campaigns. This should not divert us from considering those other Celtic tribes on the northern Gallic seaboard who might readily maintain their own ties with Britain.

A very clear hint of regular cross-Channel connections with another quarter of this coast can be found in the account of the flight of Commius to Britain. In 51–50 BC this seasoned campaigner was quick to use his own cross-Channel fleet when fleeing from the coast of Picardie and the vengeful army of Caesar. We should not overlook the fact that the place of self-exile chosen by Commius seems to have been the seaboard and hinterland of the Solent where his arrival seems to have been quickly accepted. Indeed, Cunliffe (1984, 1988) rightly points out that ‘Belgic’ immigrants from northern France were, arguably, already settled in the Solent-Hampshire region and we are

told that Commius had contrived to ‘join his own people who were already there’ (Fig. 2). Cunliffe (1988) also argues that by the mid 1st century BC a Seine-Solent axis had been established whereby maritime links could be maintained between kindred tribal groups each side of the Channel. This would certainly provide an appropriate background or pedigree for a location which Ptolemy was to identify as a ‘great port’.

Some further thoughts on the Hengistbury connection

The use of the word *emporion* by Strabo has fired some archaeological enthusiasms. These have focussed upon Hengistbury Head and its adjoining landing place in Christchurch Harbour. For some this seems to be the very coastal market where the Venetic ships unloaded their cargoes (Cunliffe, 1978; Mays, 1981; Cunliffe, 2001). Excavations within this ramparted promontory have produced

notable quantities of imported Armorican pottery and these have done much to bolster this appealing proposal (Cunliffe, 1987, 2001).

While many of the imported items at Hengistbury were no doubt intended for local consumption, it has been proposed that the redistribution of imported goods was also an important activity from within this coastal market place (Collis, 1984; Cunliffe, 1984, 1987). It has been generally accepted that this function served a terrestrial hinterland as well as an array of coastal trading partners who were drawn in through near-shore shipping routes along the Channel coast (Cunliffe, 1982: 63 fig. 14; Cunliffe, 2001: 404, fig. 9.27).

It is now evident that at least some Gallic goods arriving at Hengistbury were also of particular interest to the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight. The question which now concerns us is how was this island community involved? One proposition might see islanders playing a key role in the redistributive trafficking of imported luxury goods along the southern British seaboard. A more expansive proposition might see Vectensian seafarers as primary participants in an annual round of fair-weather voyages when both Gallic and British fleets could set to sea to exploit the cultural and economic differentials which awaited them on the opposed shores of the Channel. In essence, it seems that the Channel had engendered a trade sphere, and it is here that the Isle of Wight may have performed a significant role in an intercommunicating chain of coastal trading communities.

A commonly accepted model has focussed attention on the Dorset coast where an area of primary maritime contact with Amorica has been perceived to serve a Wessex hinterland (Cunliffe, 1982: 63, fig. 14; Cunliffe, 1984: 5, fig. 1; Cunliffe, 2001: 404, fig. 9.27). In this paper we have favoured a broader zone of maritime contact which accommodates seafaring links both to and from the Normandie coast as well as the Armorican peninsula. On the British shore (Fig. 1), this 'contact' seems to range from Radipole on the Dorset coast (Peacock, 1971) to the fortified site on the southern margin of the Sussex coastal plain at Selsey (Aldsworth, 1987). Such might be the true nature of the *emporion* cited by Strabo (Tomalin *et al.*, in press).

A further possibility might see this seaboard politically divided into two neighbouring entities (Fig. 1). Here the western, or Durotrigian seaboard, would maintain essential contacts with the Armorican peninsular and the Atlantic seaboard. East of Hengistbury, the Solent, and its network of

associated creeks and tidal basins, would provide an Atrebatian maritime front from which particular links might be forged with the coasts of Normandie and Picardie. Virtually at mid-point between these two British territorial entities lay the island of Vectis, where all maritime relations would need to be assiduously maintained with a disparate array of neighbours. Ptolemy denies us a tribal name in his notation of the island but, writing in the 7th century AD, Bede tells us that the islanders call themselves the Vectuarii [Vectuarii?].

Some Vectensian connections with Normandie

If we postulate that Armorican imports on the Isle of Wight may have been no more than secondary acquisitions from the British mainland coast in Dorset, then we must look in other directions for potential sources of the island's continental trade. A little helpful evidence comes from the Normandie coast where finds of Durotrigian pottery and Isle of Wight Vectis Ware have been excavated at Deux Jumeaux and some other neighbouring sites in the region of Caen (pers. comm. Malcolm Lyne). These finds offer a potential Vectensian connection with the territory of the Lexovii. This is a tribe which was specifically cited in the 1st century BC by Strabo when he described how goods of the 'Lexobii' were 'conveyed to the ocean' via a point which is 'less than a day's run to Britain' (iv.1, 14). In his oft-quoted reference, Strabo goes on to name the more significant cargoes which were shipped out of Britain: 'grain, cattle, gold, silver and iron along with hides, slaves and clever hunting dogs' (iv. 5, 2). At this point it is certainly worth noting that the Isle of Wight has been able to offer two geological sources of iron (White, 1921: 184), and that evidence of iron working has recently been discovered on an Iron Age site at Havenstreet (Connell & Trott, forthcoming). It is also worth recalling that Iron Age 'currency bars' of this material were found in the Undercliff in the late 19th century (Westropp, 1881).

Armorican imports in the Wight-Solent region

While Armorican pottery occurs in some abundance at Hengistbury, it appears that it is still relatively sparse on the Isle of Wight. Imported Armorican coarse wares have been identified at Yarmouth Roads, Bouldnor Beach, Wootton

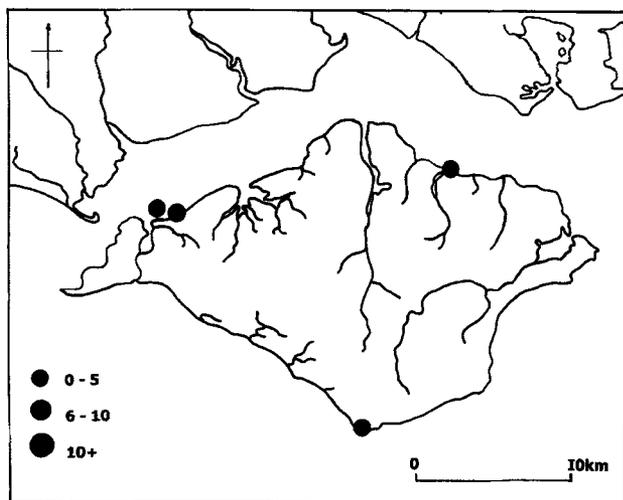


Figure 6. Armorican graphite-coated pottery in the Isle of Wight.

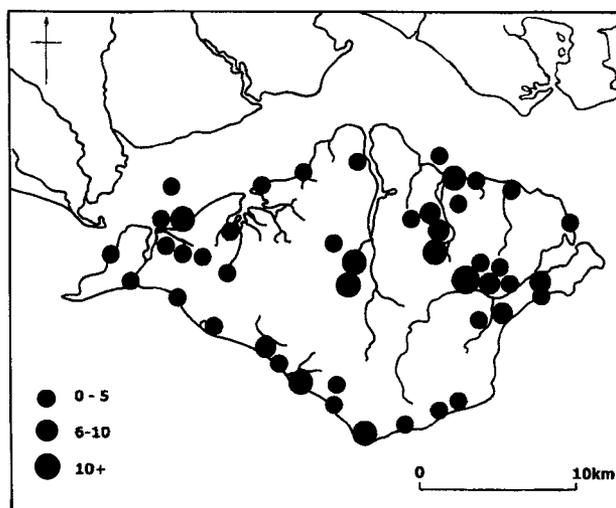


Figure 8. Durotrigian black burnished pottery of Late Iron Age style in the Isle of Wight.

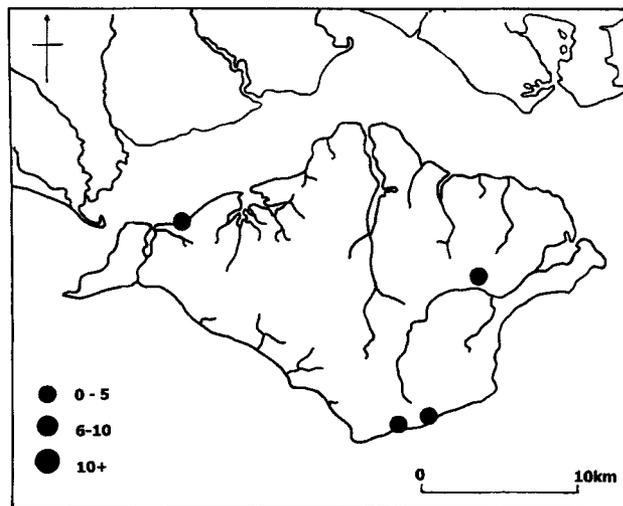


Figure 7. Armorican black cordoned pottery in the Isle of Wight.

Haven, St Catherines Point and elsewhere in the Isle of Wight Undercliff; these have been plotted in Figs 6 and 7. It is interesting to see that all these sites are coastal, and include the southern tip of the island at St Catherines Point. This site lies on the western margin of the Undercliff (Fig. 5); an area characterized by rocky shores and a long history of land movement and instability. Coastal sailing is dangerous here and approaches by foreign crews would be particularly difficult. On shore, the land is steep and ruckled with rock-falls, mudslides and grauben.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the arrival of imported Armorican goods on the

Undercliff coast was probably the result of local sailings to and from some neighbouring source of supply. Here the role of the coastal market at Hengistbury comes immediately to mind, but we should not overlook the fact that the Solent region also accommodated other Iron Age coastal ‘forts’ which might offer similar markets. On the mainland, these fortified communities of the coastal zone remain virtually unexcavated at Buckland Rings, Ampress, Exbury, Toot Hill and Tournerbury (Fig. 2; also Tomalin *et al.*, in press). On the island, a new discovery in a trial excavation by ‘Time Team’ has identified a fortified coastal hilltop on the eastern shore of Brading Haven (Trott, forthcoming). Collectively, all of these communities were, perhaps, landing points in a Solent-Seine maritime trading zone wherein Hengistbury (Cunliffe, 1988: 148) occupied no more than a peripheral position. It is interesting to observe, in Fig. 7, that the inhospitable environment of the Undercliff contains two other coastal sites where imported Armorican black cordoned vessels have been found. One explanation of these finds might lie in a cultural or ethnic link with Durotrigian territory and the coastal market at Hengistbury.

Where Late Iron Age black-burnished pottery of Durotrigian form is found on the island, it is well represented in the Undercliff (Fig. 8). Reciprocal ties between Dorset and a cultural enclave in the Undercliff could also be responsible for the introduction of shell-tempered pottery to the Durotrigian port at Hengistbury. Shell-tempered wares (fabric series D2) claim a significant presence

at Hengistbury and there now seems good reason to suspect that these may have been obtained from an Isle of Wight source.

Cunliffe (1982, 1984) also reminds us that Venetic shippers were only one part of a larger body of long-distance traders associated with northward movement of Roman merchandise. This would imply that the coastline around the Armorican peninsula was controlled by local merchants, who would have had knowledge of the local waters and weather conditions. This was certainly recognized by Caesar when he noted that 'the coast [of Armorica] lies exposed to the violence of the open sea and has but few harbours, which the Veneti control, they compel nearly all who sail those waters to pay toll' (BG iii 8). The same difficulties of navigation have also been recognized by Galliou (1984: 27) who has rightly emphasized the high incidence of amphora wrecks on the southern coast of Armorica.

It is difficult to say what perishable commodities may have been traded with the wine and pottery. At Hengistbury Head pottery, glass and metal were the principal surviving materials (Henderson, 1987: 180–186) but the presence of figs was also detected (Cunliffe, 1987: 341). The preservation of fig seeds certainly supports the notion that exotic foods were also in demand in pre-Roman Britain. These may have been imported together with early fruit and vegetables, which could easily fail to survive in the terrestrial archaeological record.

While archaeological evidence offers confirmation that Venetic voyagers crossed the Channel in the manner history records (Cunliffe, 1982: 43; Cunliffe, 1997: 53), it is important to remember that these seafarers from the French Atlantic seaboard were sailing into waters where tides, coastline, landmarks, shoals and other navigation hazards would be largely unfamiliar. Detailed coastal knowledge would be best suited to local voyagers, and this means that we should anticipate collaborative and reciprocal arrangements on both sides of the Channel.

Caesar's specific emphasis on Venetic sea power may also owe something to the geography of the Armorican peninsula. When describing the nature of Venetic vessels it is clear that they were built to withstand both the Atlantic and channel weather systems:

The Gauls' own ships were built and rigged in a different manner from our own. They were made with much flatter bottoms, to help them ride shallow water caused by shoals or ebb tides. Exception

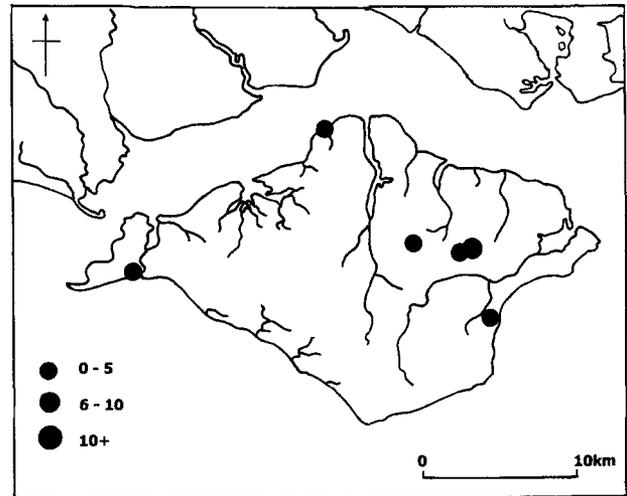


Figure 9. Gallo-Belgic coinage in the Isle of Wight.

ally high bows and sterns fitted them for use in heavy seas and violent gales, and the hulls were made entirely of oak, to enable them to stand any amount of shocks and rough usage. The cross-timbers, which consisted of beams a foot wide, were fastened with iron bolts as thick as a man's thumb. The anchors were secured with iron chains instead of ropes [like the iron anchor and chain found at Bulbury, Dorset (Cunliffe, 2001: 70)]. They used sails made of raw hide or thin leather, either because they had no flax and were ignorant of its use, or more probably because they thought that ordinary sails would not stand the violent storms and squalls of the Atlantic and were not suitable for such heavy vessels.

The Venetic ships 'were much better adapted for sailing such treacherous and stormy waters. When it began to blow hard and they were running before the wind, they weathered the storm more easily; they could bring in to shallow water with greater safety, and when left aground by the tide had nothing to fear from reefs or pointed rocks' (BG iii 13).

While Caesar tells us of the Venetic crossings he is infuriatingly imprecise about their destination on the British coast. On the Isle of Wight, some finds of Gallo-Belgic coins (Fig. 9) and pottery (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7) suggest that those communities sited on the shores of inlets or the open coast were either in direct contact with the Armorican seaboard or were importing goods by way of an entrepot such as Hengistbury.

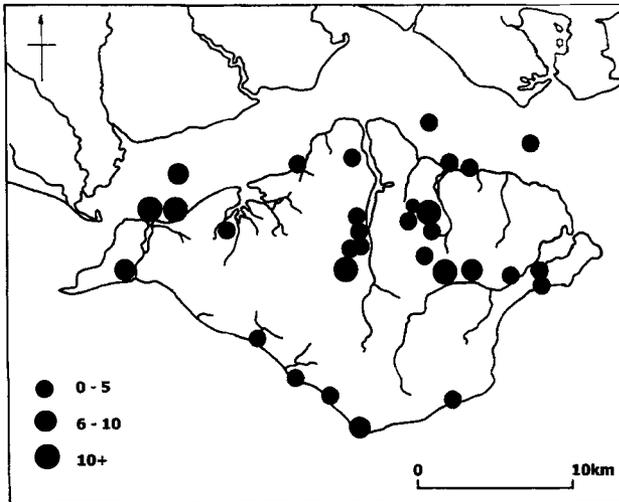


Figure 10. Amphoras of Dressel 1 sp. in the Isle of Wight.

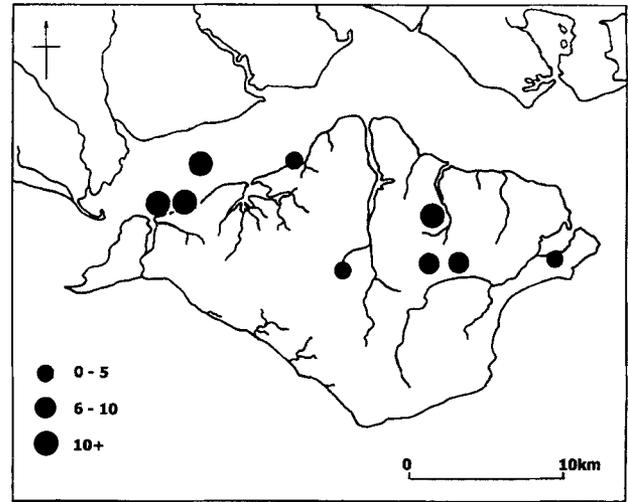


Figure 11. Amphoras of Dressel 1A form in the Isle of Wight.

Early amphoras on the Isle of Wight

Amphoras of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC

On the Isle of Wight, the main evidence for cross-Channel trade in the pre-Roman Iron Age comes from finds of Italian amphoras of the type described as Dressel 1 species. Since this form was described and subdivided by Heinrich Dressel in 1899 it has undergone several re-appraisals and amendments. For our purpose it is important to note that production of the Dressel 1A form, otherwise described as Class 3 by Peacock and Williams (1986: 86–88), can be attributed to the late 2nd century to mid 1st century BC. During much of this period it is accompanied by the parallel production of the 1C variant. This has since been denoted as Class 5 by Peacock and Williams (1986: 91–92).

An important chronological difference arises with Dressel form 1B (otherwise PW Class 4). This came into production shortly after the first quarter of the 1st century BC and it persisted at least into the final decade of that century. Unfortunately, amphoras of all three Dressel 1 variants can be largely indistinguishable when only small featureless pieces survive. This is commonly the case on the Isle of Wight where it has been necessary to use the generic term Dressel 1 sp. to describe undifferentiated body sherds.

Amphoras of Dressel 1 sp. come from 16 sites in the interior of the island (Fig. 10). They have also been found in eight sites on the island's coast. To these must be added four intertidal locations and four underwater sites. A concentration of these

Italian wine vessels can be detected in the centre of the island, in the Newport-Bowcombe area (Fig. 5 locus 8). This location could be reached by a short overland journey of some 2.5 km from the head of navigation on the Medina river. Another scatter seems to follow the course of the Eastern Yar river through the fertile valley of Arreton. It is here that the earlier Dressel 1A form has been recognized (Fig. 11). In Roman times, this river was navigable at least as far as the site which was later occupied by the maritime villa adjacent to Brading Haven. There is certainly very good reason to suspect that the lower section of this river was highly valued as a port or haven for local vessels (Tomalin & Hanworth, 1998).

On the seabed at Yarmouth a third concentration of Dressel 1 sherds has been found. Interpreted as an anchorage strew, this includes both the 1A and 1B forms (Figs 11, 12, 27). Not far from this site, another intertidal strew has been found on a shingle spit at Bouldnor. Both sites may be connected in some way by the dynamics of sediment transport and seabed mobility. A further coastal find of this type comes from a beach on the Western Solent at Gurnard.

On land, amphoras of the Dressel 1A variant are also present at the East Wight settlement sites at Yaverland, Knighton, Mersley, Havenstreet (Fig. 5 sites 14–17; Fig. 11). At Knighton, Tiberio-Claudian tableware comprising Terra Rubra beakers of form GB 23A and rouletted ovoid beakers of form GB 24A are also present. At this site we should envisage a pre-Claudian date for the arrival of these imports for an examination of the

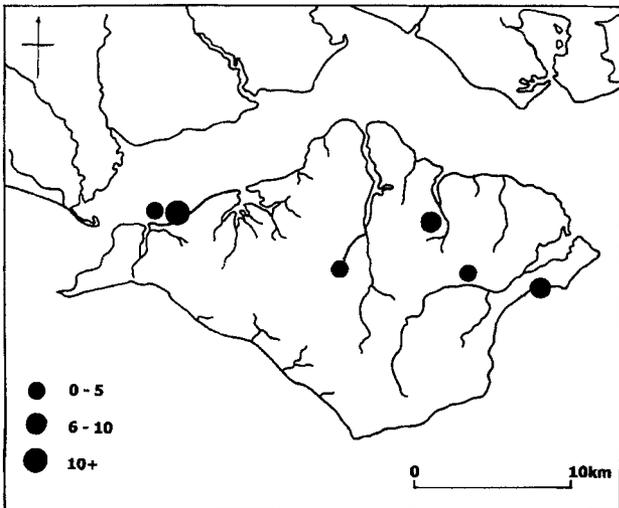


Figure 12. Amphoras of Dressel 1B form in the Isle of Wight.

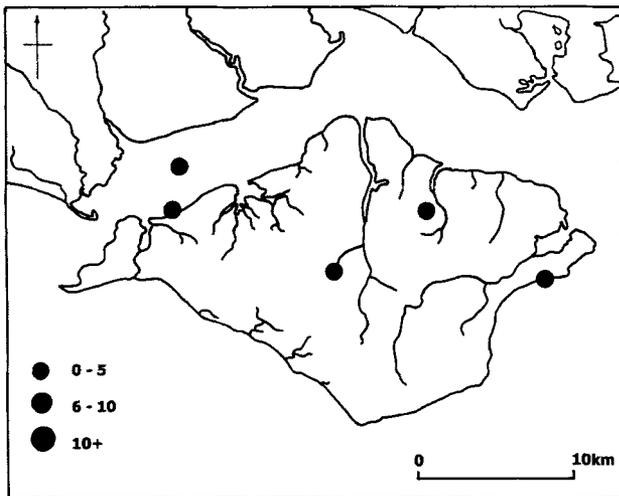


Figure 13. Amphoras of Dressel 1-Pascual 1 form in the Isle of Wight.

site assemblage (by DT) suggests that the settlement was abandoned at, or prior to, the Claudian invasion.

Amphoras of the 1st century AD

Further amphora fragments recovered from Yarmouth Roads indicate that use of this anchorage was certainly continuing in the 1st century AD. At least one example of Dressel 1-Pascual 1 (PW Class 6) was discarded here and this, apparently, betrays the delivery of a consignment of Catalonian wine (Fig. 13). It seems, from the general chronology of North European examples of this Spanish product, that this delivery was probably made in

Augustan times when northerly exports seem to have experienced something of an Indian summer (Peacock & Williams, 1986).

It was probably also around this time that contemporary tableware including Terra Nigra and Terra Rubra platters and beakers was arriving on the island. It should be noted, however, that production of Pascual 1 nevertheless persisted until the closing quarter of the 1st century AD. This means that a later date cannot be entirely precluded. Fig. 13 shows that other imported examples of this type were discarded by Vectensians not far from the heads of their other major navigable inlets. These lay in the lower Medina valley, Wootton Creek and Brading Haven.

Reference can be made here to an uncorroborated report of an assemblage of 'carrot-shaped' amphoras allegedly recovered in the early 1980s by divers in Southampton Water. This description might be tentatively ascribed to the 'carrot amphora' otherwise known as Camulodunum 189 or PW Class 12. This is an import of the early 1st century AD and it is otherwise known in the Solent region at Fishbourne Roman palace (Cunliffe, 1971). The divers' haul is said to have been obtained during night dives somewhere off the mouth of the Hamble river, but no examples have ever been examined. Another form, known only in the offshore zone is the Haltern 70 amphora (PW Class 12). A confirmed example of this type has been trawled from the floor of the Western Solent in the vicinity of the mouth of Newtown harbour. A fragment of another has been recovered in the Eastern Solent from the shoal known as the Mother Bank. From the floor of the Channel another find has also been reported (Fig. 14).

The anchorage at Yarmouth Roads has produced some further products of the 1st century AD. These are amphoras of Dressel type 2-4 (PW Class 10). Normally this was a type of amphora which was used to deliver wine from Italy, Spain or southern France. The Yarmouth examples could have arrived any time between the later 1st century BC and the mid 2nd century AD, but when the distribution of sherds within the island is examined in Fig. 15 it can be seen that there is a striking similarity with the distribution of Dressel 1 sp. of the 1st century BC (Fig. 10).

Given that the latter type was virtually obsolete at the opening of 1st century AD it may not be unreasonable to suggest that amphoras of Dressel type 2-4 were the natural successors of this form. This could allow for the pattern of wine consumption or amphora-use within the island to remain

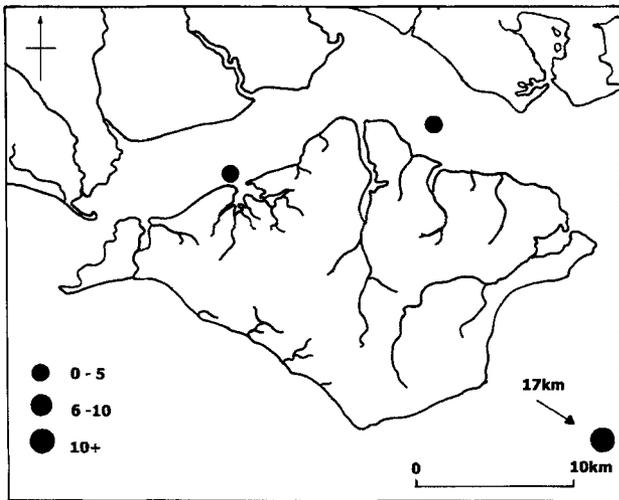


Figure 14. Amphorae of Haltern 70 type in the region of the Isle of Wight.

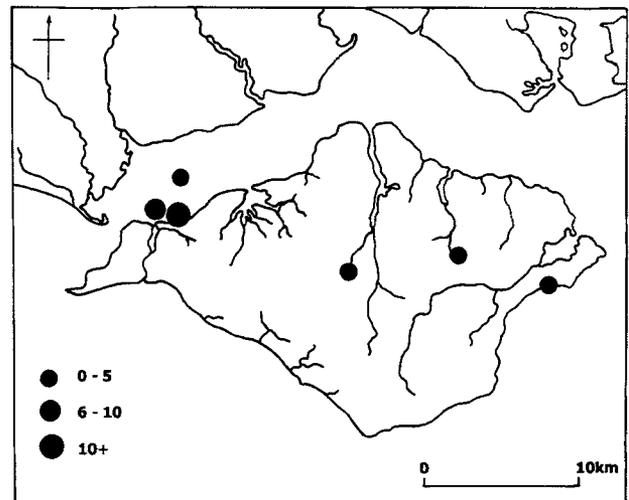


Figure 16. Amphorae of Dressel 20 type found in Iron Age and putatively Iron Age contexts in the Isle of Wight.

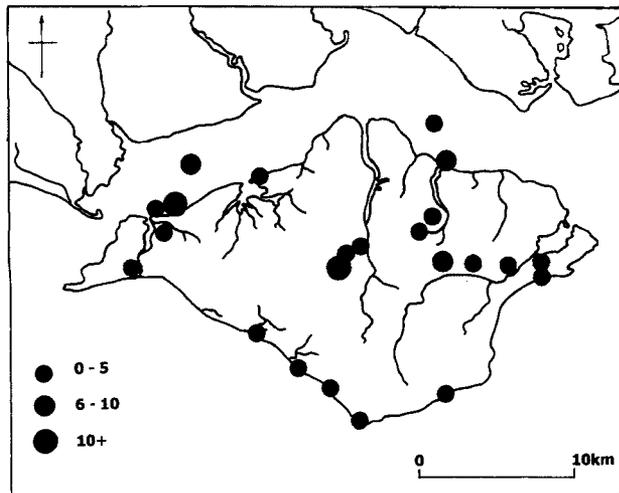


Figure 15. Amphorae of Dressel 2-4 type in the Isle of Wight.

exactly the same; at least until the event of the Claudian conquest. At Hengistbury one sherd of Dressel 2-4, recovered from a pre-Roman context, seems to corroborate the early arrival of this commodity in the Solent region. It is also evident, however, from a further 14 sherds found at Hengistbury, that this trade also continued after the Roman conquest (Williams, 1987).

It is just possible that Spanish olive oil from Baetica may have been consumed by Vectensians towards the close of the pre-conquest period. This liquid was exported in the large globular amphorae of Dressel type 20 (PW Class 25). Fragments of this type have been recovered from Yarmouth Roads

and Bouldnor Beach where the date of discard is uncertain. Another seabed example has been also been trawled from the mid-Solent in the region of Brambles Bank (Fig. 27, no. 5). On the island, a few sherds of this type have been identified at Bowcombe, Redcliff and Mersley Down (Fig. 16; Trott, in prep. A). At the latter site the context of the find was certainly pre-conquest.

On the coast of the neighbouring mainland, the Dressel 20 form is well represented at Hengistbury where 203 sherds have been recovered from Roman levels and four sherds have been found in Late Iron Age contexts (Williams, 1987: 272-273). The latter sherds are particularly interesting because they seem to attest to pre-conquest consignments. Dressel 20 amphorae generally offer poor evidence for dating because, after the production of some Augustan prototypes, a long period of production carried this form into the late 3rd or even the 4th century AD (Peacock & Williams, 1986: 136-140). It should be noted that the distribution of Dressel 20 find-spots in Fig. 16 shows only those examples which are known or suspected to have come from pre-conquest contexts. The national pattern suggests that 'this is the most common amphora imported into Roman Britain' (Williams, 1987: 273) and for this reason later examples have been excluded.

It may not seem unreasonable to suppose that by the time imported Spanish olive oil was arriving in Britain at the close of the 1st century AD, Vectensian influence or participation in the Western Atlantic sea route was all but defunct. With British interests now focussed up-Channel on

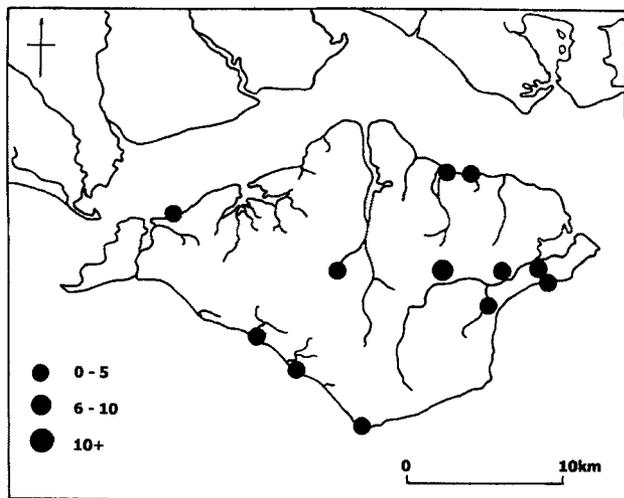


Figure 17. Atrebatric pottery in the Isle of Wight.

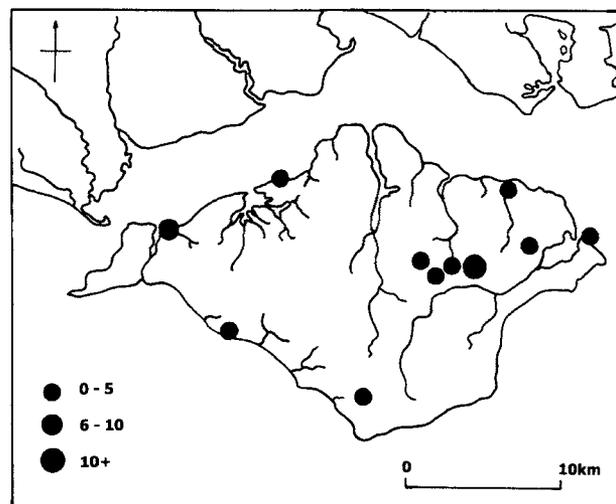


Figure 18. Atrebatric coinage with British C, D & Q types in the Isle of Wight.

the Thames-Rhine maritime link, many Vectensian voyagers may have lost their role in any direct ferrying of amphoras from Gallic markets. While the importation of Dressel 20 amphoras and olive oil into Britain in the 1st century BC was well below its eventual optimum, its flow to its pre-conquest recipients was undoubtedly as generous as any part of the Romanized world (Peacock, 1984: 40–41). This may reflect tastes for new and appealing foods, which, once embraced, were unlikely to be willingly relinquished.

A general change in the source of maritime imports into southern Britain may be reflected in the incidence of Dressel 2–4 amphoras (Fitzpatrick, 1985). In the Isle of Wight (Fig. 15) the concentration of these wine-carrying vessels is mainly coastal and riverine. The overall pattern suggests that wine imported in these containers may have been more commonly consumed in the eastern half of the island. Such a concentration could accord with the strengthening of those other favoured sea-lanes which linked southern Britain with the mouths of the Rhine and the Seine (Fitzpatrick, 1985: 313; Cunliffe, 1997: 57). It may also reflect a particularly strong tie between the inhabitants of East Wight and the Atrebatric/Regnensian population of the East Hampshire-West Sussex mainland where the custom of wine consumption may have been readily embraced. Although the number of finds is sparse, it is certainly interesting to observe that the distribution of Atrebatric pottery and coins on the island seems to show a slight but similar easterly bias (Figs 17 and 18).

Indigenous coarseware and the Durotrigian influence

We may suspect that the trading networks between Hengistbury Head and the island still continued during the later part of the 1st century BC. This seems evident in the examples of Durotrigian pottery and coins found on the island and within the Solent. Durotrigian early black-burnished pottery is concentrated mainly around the coast or at inland sites lying close to creeks or rivers (Fig. 8). Recent work at Wootton Haven and Bouldnor Beach has produced some intertidal and sub-tidal finds of this pottery. This suggests that consignments may have been delivered to islanders or brought home from Dorset to be landed at these coastal havens. Further examples of Durotrigian early black-burnished pottery have also been found in the Bowcombe and Arreton valleys while others have been found at St. Catherines Point (Trott, in prep. B) and Atherfield Point (Trott, in prep. C), on the island's south-western seaboard (Fig. 5).

It seems that around the mid 1st century BC the use of Durotrigian early black-burnished pottery on the island was effectively eclipsed by an indigenous production of similar wares. Local insular versions were usually brown in appearance, although a few black examples seem to have persisted. This brown-burnished pottery has since won the appellation of Vectis Ware (Tomalin, 1987: 30–40). Early examples of these hand-made vessels have been found in middens on the island's southern seaboard at Ventnor and the Undercliff. In the

Roman period, this Vectensian potting industry quickly adapted to produce many standard forms, but, unlike the black-burnished ware of Dorset, this product never seems to have found a significant export market.

Fine wares for the table and the serving of wine; the Atrebatian influence

While the local production of Vectis Ware was gathering momentum, it seems that the interests of the island's northern and eastern neighbours were turning towards the Rhine and the Seine as new potential sources of trade. In the period *c.* 50 BC to 43 AD the communities north and south of the lower Thames were developing a culture which was closely related to kindred Belgic tribes in north east Gaul. It seems that cross-Channel trafficking was now being advanced, in particular, by the Trinovantes whose boats were able to operate out of the Thames estuary (Fig. 1). The result of these activities was the importation of amphoras of Dressel 1B and Dressel 1 species on the Essex coast at the oppidum and port of Camulodunum (Fitzpatrick, 1985: 312 fig. 4; Carver, 2001).

The role of the Atrebates and Regni in the advancement of this Belgic culture in southern and eastern Britain has always been problematic. North of the Thames, in Hertfordshire and Essex, the rich series of La Tene III aristocratic graves has presented a particularly distinctive culture (Stead, 1967; Cunliffe, 1987: 150–157). In the Welwyn series of burials, amphoras, cordoned buckets, cups (*tazze*), jugs, and platters have emphasized a new sophistication in the love of drinking and eating with the aid of the finest imported tableware (Carver, 2001). In Atrebatian territory evidence of these luxuries has been less common and less explicit in the archaeological record, although this could be for no other reason than a reluctance to commit these items to the grave. Carver, however, has questioned the premise that the amphoras in this region were necessarily used to convey imported wine. Cunliffe (1984): 9) has posed the critical question as to whether items of this kind were introduced through overland ties with Camulodunum and the Catuvellauni, or whether they were acquired independently by means of Atrebatian links with the Normandie coast.

In the Isle of Wight Undercliff, the recovery of a La Tene III warrior burial seems to offer robust evidence of conformity with Belgic funerary practice (Stead, 1967). This is seemingly reinforced by a

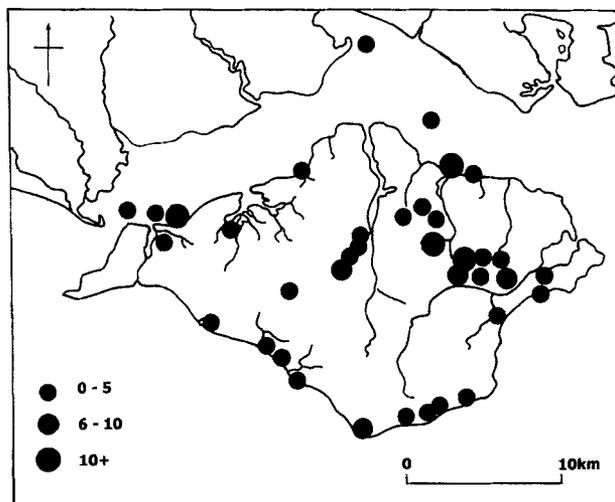


Figure 19. Imported Gallo-Belgic pottery in the Isle of Wight.

putative burial at Packway, Newchurch, where a large white ware *lagena* and a Vectis ware copy of an ovoid beaker were included with some other ceramics in a grave-shaped pit (Tomalin, 1998a). The importation of Gallo-Belgic tablewares into the island strongly suggests that the Late Iron Age inhabitants were developing a culture which was closely related to contemporary social practices and viticultural interests of the continent. By the opening of the 1st century AD, this could be specifically fuelled by the supply of Southern Spanish wine which, by now, was being delivered in Dressel 2–4 and Pascual 1 amphoras. These supplies were presumably accompanied by other perishable commodities which are currently lost to the archaeological record.

The incidence of Gallo-Belgic imported pottery in the island can be seen in Fig. 19. This largely conforms with that of Dressel 1 sp. and Dressel 2–4 amphoras. It can be argued that many of these Gallo-Belgic imports attest to the wealth and status of certain Vectensian families, but we must also be aware that not all such goods are necessarily pre-Roman in date. This proviso arises where the Roman military was also supplied with North Gaulish and Italian commodities during and after AD 43. The supply of military contractors, as well as local Iron Age traders, can be also reflected in the distribution of early Samian, and wine delivered in Haltern 70 amphoras (Fig. 14) (Varoqueaux, 1964; Harmand, 1966).

Fig. 14 shows the distribution of Haltern 70 amphoras in the region of the Isle of Wight and it is interesting that all of these are off-shore finds of the kind that might be lost either through the

wrecking process (Parker, 1992: 218–219), or through the discard of ‘gash’ goods from ships at anchor. In contrast, the distribution of Arretine ware is largely terrestrial, although it has also been found in small quantities in the intertidal strew at Bouldnor. On the island, this early fine ware has also been found, in similarly small quantities, at Knighton, Combley, St Catherines Point and the Bowcombe valley.

At Knighton the context of Arretine pottery seems assuredly pre-conquest, for there is no evidence of occupation here after AD 43. Similar Arretine forms, found in post-conquest contexts at Fishbourne Palace in West Sussex (Dannell, 1971: 260–266), show how ambivalent this pottery can be when we seek to trace the course of maritime trade in the pre-conquest period. At St Catherines Point a stamped Arretine platter was recovered from a pre-conquest midden (Trott, in prep. C).

Where other Gallo-Belgic, or Gallo-Roman, exports have been identified, their context generally favours a pre-conquest date. At St Catherines Point a domestic rubbish pit produced a small fragment of a Pompeian Red Ware platter. This was found in association with a Central Gaulish Terra Nigra platter and a Terra Rubra butt-beaker. These last items appear to be discards from a wealthy settlement nearby. A further collection of Italian, Armorican, and Gaulish ceramics has been recently found at Bouldnor, where ships containing goods of this type may have been moored and unloaded. Yarmouth Roads is still recognized as a particularly favourable offshore anchorage for visiting sail craft.

The evidence assembled in this paper demonstrates that anchorages of this type can readily claim a significant prehistory, and that their submerged archaeology can have a particular pertinence to the interpretation of events on land. Immediately west of the Roads and the mouth of Yarmouth harbour lies Black Rock. This is a submerged limestone reef which, with a lower sea level in the Roman period, could present a significant danger to approaching craft. In the vicinity of this rock, sherds of a wine-serving *lagena* and a Terra Nigra ovoid beaker have been recovered.

The importing of shale

Shale is not available as a usable material within the geology of the Isle of Wight but, with a coastal voyage of some 40 km, it is readily available from the Dorset cliffs at Kimmeridge. On the island,

crude unworked fragments of shale have been found on the East Solent coast at Wootton Haven, and on the south-western coast at Grange Chine (Trott, in prep. D). At Bouldnor Beach square-bored cores and unworked slabs of shale have been recovered, as well as fragments of bracelets and turned vessels. The recovery of a shale item from the shore of the West Solent coast at Colwell Bay is particularly interesting because this includes a roughed-out ‘doughnut’ ring, or *torus*, which may have been either stored or used on ship (Fig. 20). Other examples of these rings have been recovered from coastal locations at Freshwater, and the fortified coastal settlement at Yaverland.

The rough nature of these items with their hand-bored apertures suggests that they pre-date the practice of lathe-turning which seems to have been adopted some time during the first part of the 1st century BC (Calkin, 1955; Cunliffe, 1982). The context of the Yaverland find could imply that semi-raw shale was shipped through the Solent for processing elsewhere, but this type of shipment certainly seems to be unnecessarily wasteful. An alternative explanation might be that these crude rings had been carried from the Dorset coast while being used as fishing weights, or that they were commonly carried for whittling and shaping on board ship. In any event, these items attest a clear maritime link with the Dorset coast.

The same can also be said of a Purbeck stone anchor (Fig. 21) which has also been recovered from the sea at Bouldnor (Tomalin, 1987: 93). The style of this anchor can be well matched with other Purbeck limestone examples recovered from the Durotrigian coast in Bournemouth Bay and Chapman’s Pool (Markey, 1991). The environment of the Chapman’s Pool anchor is of some interest because its finder reports that this is a relatively inaccessible cove, rich in crabs and lobsters, yet seldom entered by boats in excess of 5 m.

Coin evidence for cross-Solent and cross-Channel relations

Affinities with the Durotriges of Dorset

A broad scatter of Durotrigian coins on the island provides a reaffirmation of strong links with the Late Iron Age population of Dorset (Fig. 22). The distribution of these coins is similar to that of Durotrigian pottery in the island and this certainly seems to confirm westerly links through the movement of boats and cargoes (Brown, 1987: 40–45). A

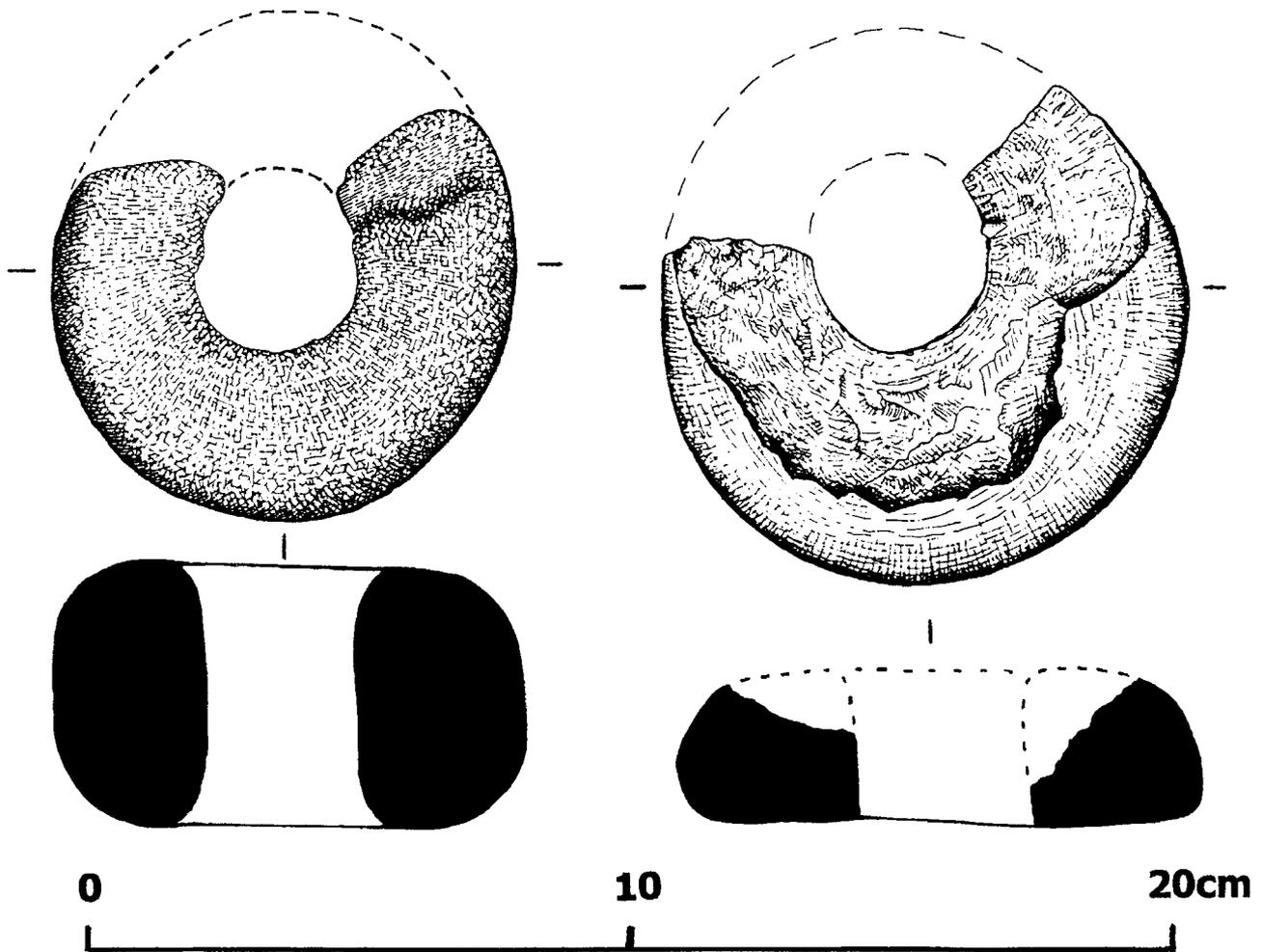


Figure 20. Torus shaped items of imported Durotrigian shale from Freshwater and Colwell Bay in West Wight.

more pressing question is whether the coins and the pottery are evidence of much stronger ties such as those which might be drawn from traditional ethnic bondings. When we come to consider the quantities of Iron Age coins found on the island it would seem that Durotrigian issues exceed all others at a level of 53%.

Atrebatian relations

Where Atrebatian coins have been plotted (Fig. 18) their distribution is generally similar to those of the Durotriges. Yet even when the gold coins of British C and British Q are added as potential inception issues of this group, the total number within the island is still small. An interesting absence can be seen at the epicentre of the island in the region of the Bowcombe valley. Here it seems that only Durotrigian coins are to be found and we may

wonder whether the use of Atrebatian issues was ever firmly established in central and western Wight.

While the purpose of Iron Age coins is still a matter of debate, it seems undeniable that their discrete geographic distributions often remain a good general guide to the politics of tribal ethnicity and territoriality (Allen, 1977; Cunliffe, 1981; de Jersey, 1994; Cunliffe & de Jersey, 1996). These general principles certainly seem to place the Isle of Wight under notable Durotrigian influence, but it is also evident, from the incidence and style of 'saucepan pot' ceramics in the island, that Atrebatian traditions and kinships were certainly at work. One idea, yet to be adequately explored, is the possibility that a 'coming of age' took place on the Isle of Wight in the 1st century BC. At this time a surplus in the production of cereals might have fuelled the successful pursuit of cross-Channel

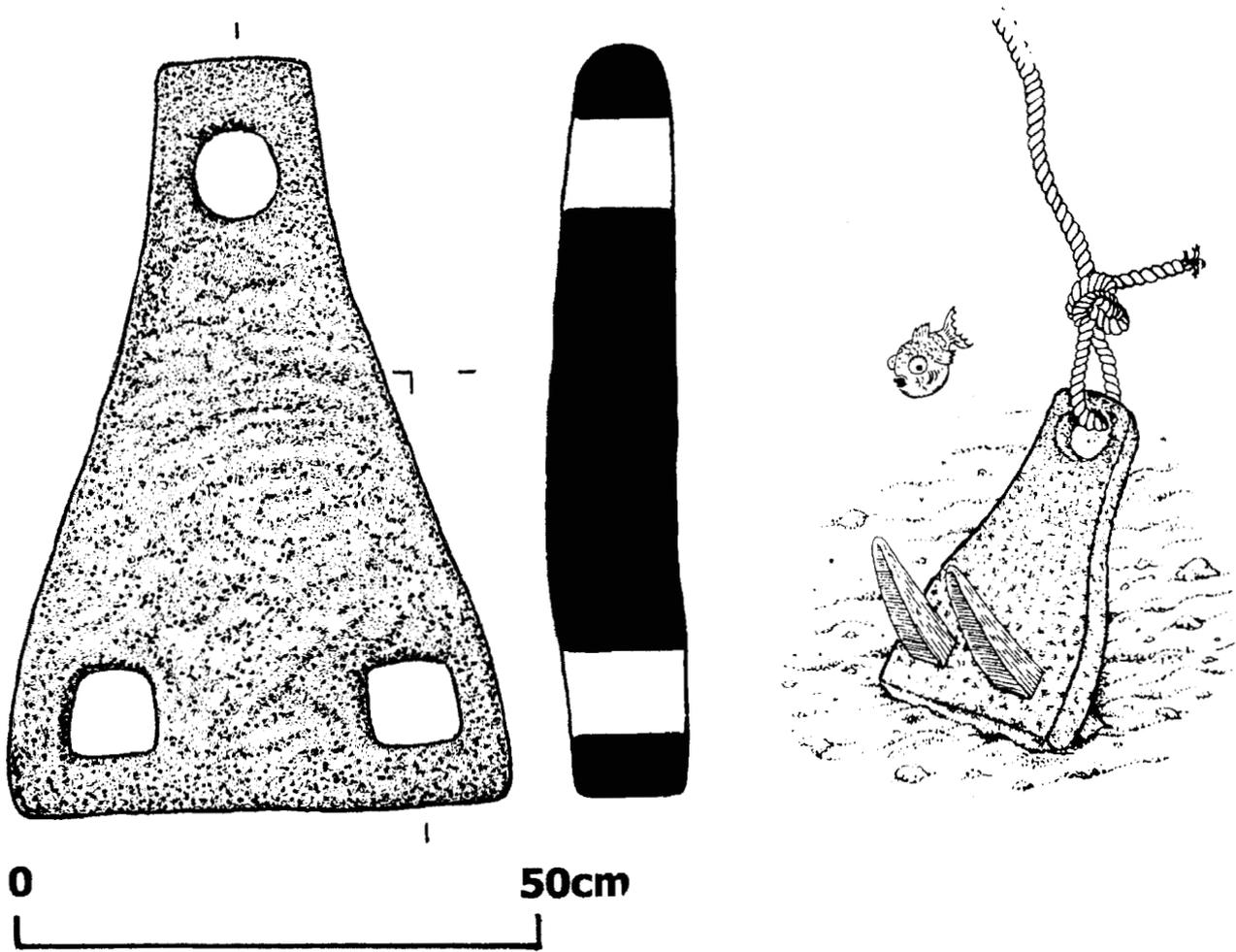


Figure 21. Purbeck stone anchor from the seabed of the Western Solent at Bouldnor, Isle of Wight.

voyaging, and this could have secured political and economic independence or security for Vectensians. One result of such a change could be a weakening of ties, or obligations, to Durotrigian neighbours or homelands in Dorset.

Relations with the Regni

Another result of a mastery of the local sea-lanes could be the opening up of new and rewarding links with the Regni of East Hampshire and West Sussex. In a link such as this it would seem that the lost Regnensian port, or oppidum, at Selsey (Aldsworth, 1987) might play an important role. On the island, similar maritime links may have been specifically pursued through Brading Haven. It is on the eastern shore of this haven that the fortified settlement at Yaverland may have fulfilled a particularly important role. Such transactions would lead us to the opening of the 1st century AD

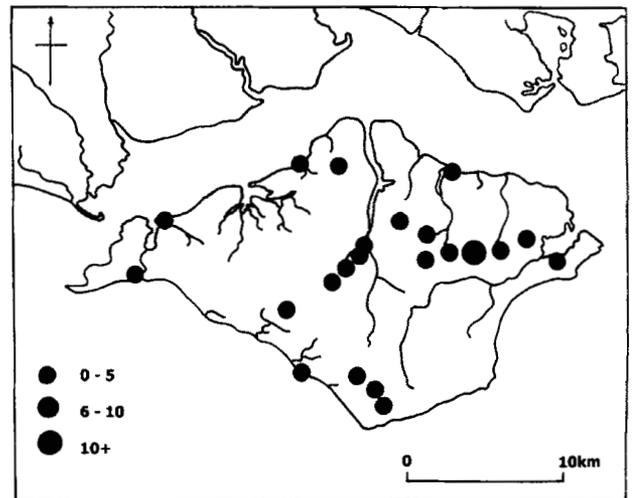


Figure 22. Durotrigian coinage in the Isle of Wight.

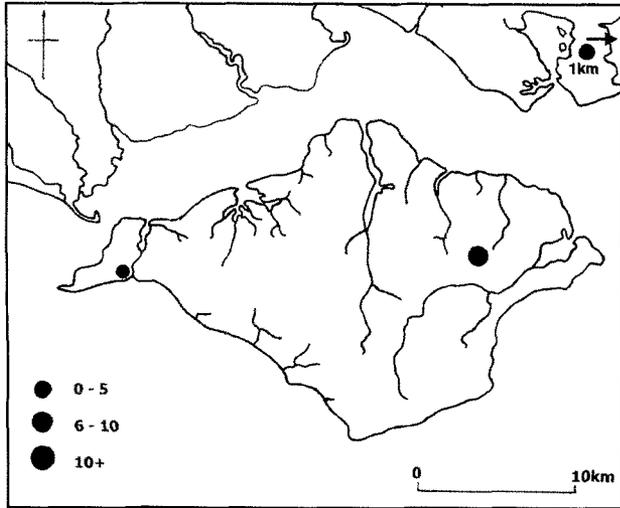


Figure 23. CRAB coinage in the Wight-Solent region.

when Gallo-Belgic tablewares of Tiberio-Claudian type were arriving in the valley of the Eastern Yar.

Intra-island politics and potential division within the land of Vectis

A further assertion of insular independence may be the issuing of coins in the form of the CRAB silver units and minims. The distribution of these rare and fragile coins has long been centred upon the Solent region in much the same manner as the 'thin silver' coins found in this area (Bean, 2000: 197–199; Wellington, 2001: 43–44). Recently some new discoveries of CRAB coins have shifted their numerical superiority to the eastern sector of the Isle of Wight (Fig. 23). Another recent find on the island is a fused lump of molten silver staters which seem to be Biaocassian in origin (Fig. 24). Apparently struck in the Bayeux region of northern France, these seem to have been consigned to a smith or moneyer's stock at Freshwater, in the western tip of Wight (Tomalin, 2000, 58). This new evidence provides a further hint that the coins of others may have been reprocessed into a distinctly Vectensian type.

In the pre-conquest years of the 1st century AD it is possible that shifting political interests and alliances on the mainland were able to create two divergent polities within the Isle of Wight. In West Wight, later known as the West Medine, we might postulate a decline in prosperity as Durotrigian maritime interests faltered with the collapse of the Armorican sea trade. In East Wight, or the East Medine, we may suspect the rise of a new prosper-

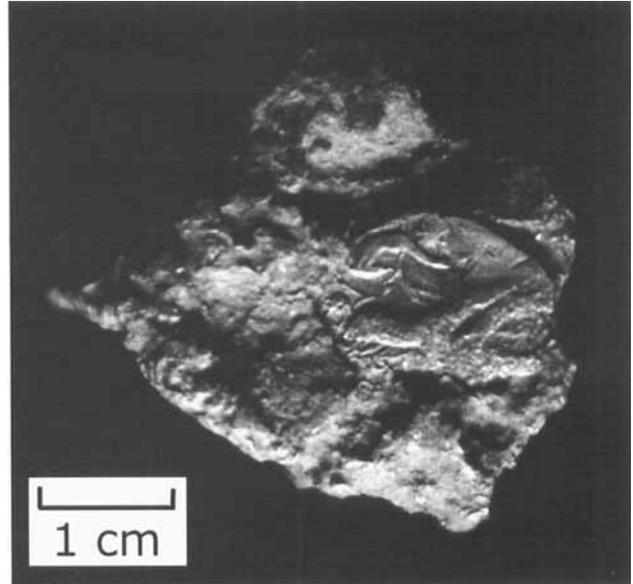


Figure 24. Molten silver coins containing one semi-preserved Gallic coin of *Biaocassian* style. Found near sherds of Dressel 1 species amphoras at Freshwater, Isle of Wight. (Photo: John Fletcher.)

ity in the Eastern Yar valley. It was this sector of the island that was particularly well positioned to pursue fresh opportunities through the up-Channel and cross-Channel sea-lanes. This, perhaps, was a prosperity which was simultaneously pursued on the neighbouring mainland by King Verica, whose pro-Roman stance and love of imported wine seems to be endorsed by the display of the vine leaf on certain issues of his gold currency (Allen & Haselgrove, 1979; Bean, 2000).

It might be proposed that those political dilemmas which apparently produced pro- and anti-Roman factions among the Atrebates were probably at work in much the same manner amongst the Late Iron Age population of Wight. Where a strong anti-Roman stance was taken amongst the Durotriges, we might postulate that the West Wight population adopted a similar stance. As the southern, pro-Roman, faction of the Atrebates remodelled themselves as the Regni or Regnensians and drew upon Gallo-Roman trade, so, it seems, the East Wight population may have followed suit. This may be the time when fortifications were erected in East Wight to defend the haven-side settlement at Yaverland (Fig. 2). Where Durotrigian influence arguably prevailed in West Wight, we might postulate that a parallel response took place which culminated in the unfinished construction of a promontory fort on the high chalkland at Chillerton Down (Fig. 2).

In East Wight the inlets of Brading Haven and Wootton Creek were able to offer valuable bases from which crews, craft and investment might set sail into an easterly sphere of maritime trade. In many respects, these harbours, together with those of Langstone, Chichester and Selsey, may have operated on a shared or collective footing. Gallic coinage brought ashore in the East Solent region provides a reasonable indication as to where some of the principal cross-Channel links may have been secured. From a Gallo-Belgic E coin from Sandown, in the Isle of Wight, we might suspect easterly sailings along the English Channel coastal route known as 'the Downs'. This would lead to the Kent coast where contact seems evident with the Morini in the Pas de Calais. A Potin coin (Wellington, 2001 inv.106) suggests similar easterly contacts leading, perhaps, to the Cantacii of Kent. A coin of the Corieltavi (Wellington, 2001 inv.107) may also have found its way by this route, having been carried from Midland Britain to East Wight by means of the Dover Strait.

Gallic coins on the Vectensian and Solent coasts

On the north shore of the eastern Solent, in the Iron Age temple on Hayling Island, a modest collection of coins carried from north-eastern France intimates possible transactions involving the Ambiani and the Nervii (King & Soffe, 1994: 38). These tribes could be accessed through the valley of the Somme, where the large unexcavated hill-forts at Liercourt-et-Erondelle and La Chausee-Tirancourt may have played a significant role from their prominent positions overlooking the navigable river. Such links between peoples of the chalklands of Picardie and those of the chalklands and vales of Hampshire and West Sussex is historically attested in the migration of the Gallic Atrebates under Commius in the later 1st century BC (Cunliffe, 1988: 148).

It is particularly interesting to see that coins marked Commios are noticeably absent from the Isle of Wight while even his successor, Tincomaros, is represented by no more than two coins.^[1] This provides some reinforcement to our suspicion that Atrebatian politics or allegiances had failed to impact upon the population of the Isle of Wight until some time after the death of this leader or a similarly named successor.

From the mouth of the Seine, the Veliocasses were well placed to maintain maritime contact with the Solent coast and this seems to be attested by a single coin found in the Hayling temple (King &

Soffe, 1994: 38; pers. comm. Haselgrove for quantity). It is possible that this nation controlled the passage of goods travelling downstream from the tributary valleys of the Marne and the Aisne. It was here that the Suessiones and Remi were issuing coins which were also able to make their way to the Hayling temple.

From the region of Bayeux, in Normandie, the Baiocasses were issuing coins which were eventually to filter through to Hayling and the Isle of Wight. Twentieth-century history has shown that the broad sandy strands of Normandie are particularly suited to hasty or impromptu landings so perhaps these coins were acquired through British or Vectensian summertime sorties to this accommodating coast.

West of the Contentin peninsular, in the territory of the Coriosolites, the Gallic port at St Severan (Alet) in the neighbourhood of St Malo, was able to provide a potential marshalling point for cross-Channel goods (Langouet, 1984; de Jersey, 1993; Cunliffe, 1994, 2001). This seems to have included consignments of Dressel 1A and 1B amphoras. Amongst the items making the crossing to Hengistbury, the Isle of Wight and Hayling were occasional coins of this nation. At Hengistbury the number of these coins amounted to no fewer than 19, yet in the Isle of Wight and Hayling there are a mere two in each case. This evidence seems to suggest that the Alet-Hengistbury route was a link specifically forged between the Durotriges and the Coriosolites.

On the island of Vectis, the Morini, the Baiocasses, the Coriosolites, and the Osismi are all represented by coin finds; yet their numbers are minimal. If Vectensians had secured specific trading partners on the northern French coast, we are still unable to detect clear tribal identities for these contacts, although the molten coins found at Freshwater (Fig. 24) provide a significant hint that the Baiocasses of Upper Normandie may have been particularly involved. It is unfortunate that only one partially molten coin can be identified in this fused mass. In the past considerable faith has been placed in the interpretation of Iron Age coins and their distributions, but where the barrier of the Channel is concerned we must also consider the possibility that if coins were tokens or commodities which were carried abroad by sea, then they may, more often, have been promptly melted down and recycled on their arrival.

This leaves us to contemplate the true nature of Iron Age maritime trade and the commodities which are likely to have escaped the archaeological

record. Where Strabo named eight notable commodities which were exported from Iron Age Britain, it is salutary to recall that after the gold, silver and iron have been discounted, this leaves 63% which might have little chance of surviving in the archaeological record.

Where Gallic goods were exported to Britain or carried and consumed by the Vectensians of Wight, should we realistically expect amphoras and tableware to be the principal items of cargo? It is at this point that we might turn to the documentation of Anglo-Norman maritime commerce in the medieval and post medieval periods. In the Southampton city port records there are accounts of the arrival of Norman exports of wine, walnuts, figs, cider, Calvados, and early fruit and vegetables. The port books for the 15th century show regular visits by French craft and complementary sorties by Solent craft. These often show a stay in port of some three to five days. In the clement summers of the 1st century BC might we expect something very similar?

Discussion and conclusion

The archaeology of the Iron Age Wight has long relied upon inadequate field evidence. This has left important questions concerning demography, social hierarchy and tribal identity unresolved. Some recent excavations and fieldwork within two specific areas of the island now suggest that access to some imported goods was almost commonplace among certain sectors of the island's Iron Age population. This realization has drawn attention to the anchorages and inlets of the island, where new submerged evidence of maritime activity has now been found.

Important questions arising from these discoveries are those concerning tribal identity and the political complexion of the island in the century prior to the Claudian invasion. It has been suggested by Cunliffe (1973, 1984, 1988) that the arrival of Caesar's adversary, Commius, on the Wessex coast confirms, or consolidates, a substantial movement of Belgic peoples from Gaul. It seems that the rule of this charismatic leader, and perhaps that of a successor who may have been similarly named Commios (Bean, 2000: 200), persisted until *c.* 20 BC. During this time it has been assumed that contact with the Gallo-Roman world may have been restrained or resisted. After this date we can suspect a move to more pragmatic

policies under the hand of Tincomarus whose coins come to favour Roman imagery (Bean, 2000).

It has been suggested that the territory held by Commios largely coincided with the mapped distribution of the coins bearing his name. In the past this has been interpreted as a territory covering most of Hampshire and West Sussex, or 'from Beachy Head to the Salisbury Avon and from the Berkshire Downs to the Channel coast' (Cunliffe, 1973: 14). Recently Bean (2000: 11–12, 119 fig. 4) has advocated greater caution in any postulation of territory. He has also shown in his distribution maps that virtually no coins of this ruler are to be found west of Southampton Water. Arguably, this leaves both the Isle of Wight and the Western Solent detached from this perceived mainland 'kingdom'.

A pertinent question is the role and stance of the population of the Isle of Wight during the volatile reign of Commios. From the evidence assembled in this paper we suggest that Vectensians stood apart from the domain of Commios in Hampshire, and that they were able to draw support from long-founded ethnic ties with the Durotriges of Dorset. This seems to be born out by the general acceptance of Durotrigian silver coinage in the island. It is certainly the antithesis of a case, recently postulated by Martin Henig (2002: 40), for an Atrebatian ancestry. These coins include late debased forms, which, like Vectis Ware, would agree with an enduring Durotrigian link.

In the past it has been generally assumed that the reign of Commios saw an avowedly anti-Roman stance amongst the Atrebates. This assumption has been based on the premise that the Commios on the coins is either the same as, or is the immediate successor to, the Commius cited by Caesar. It has been implicit that such a history would impede or discourage maritime trade with the Gallo-Roman world. It is, perhaps, in this situation that Vectensians would be so very well placed to act as the essential intermediaries.

It might now be argued that the aristocratic families of East Wight were foremost in grasping this opportunity. The fertile soils of the upper Eastern Yar offered a good economic base from which to raise food surpluses for export. The mouth of this river formerly opened into a great natural haven and this was particularly well suited for the harbouring of a fleet (Fig. 5 site 11).

Once the families of the East Wight region had consolidated their short-haul links with the neighbouring communities around the natural harbours of Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester, trade

and marriage ties with the south eastern Atrebatas or Regni would naturally ensue. The first sign of an Iron Age maritime community in this sector of the island seems to be on the eastern shore of the former great inlet known as Brading Haven. It is here that the development of a ramparted settlement occurred at Yaverland, and it is surely no coincidence that the opposing shore of this very same haven was to become the site of a highly successful maritime villa in the post-conquest period.

The pattern of intense agrarian activity within the Eastern Yar valley can be readily matched with a variety of similar settlement sites in Hampshire and Sussex. Small Iron Age farms, such as those at Mersley and Knighton, would certainly be capable of producing a surplus of cereal crops. These, together with textiles and hides, might be exchanged for luxuries such as Italian wine and Gallo-Roman tableware. The nature of the field system near Mersley Farm, Newchurch (Trott, in prep. A), suggests that effective arable cultivation was taking place on the chalk scarp. It also implies that ambitious regimes of agriculture were being pursued on the fine fertile soils which were to be found in the neighbouring greensand vale. On the chalkland scarp, the grazing of sheep would also have been pursued and this could offer rewarding yields of wool and hides. A similar scenario is implicit in the catchment of the farmstead at Knighton, while further down-river we might postulate other successful communities at Brading (Trott, 1999), Yaverland, Lake, and possibly at Redcliff (Tomalin, 1989).

A healthy surplus production at all or any of these sites might win acceptable exchanges amongst the Baiocasses or Lexovii. Similarly, the production of salt is well attested in the Iron Age Isle of Wight (Figs 25 and 26) yet there will never be much hope of proving its export through archaeological evidence.

It might be claimed that, in the environment of Iron Age Wight, access to Italian wine might be available to any community that could exert the maritime acumen to secure access to boats and cargoes. This might be claimed for those families who were living in the catchment of the Eastern Yar, at Knighton and Mersley Farm. It might also be claimed by those living at Havenstreet, who were not far from the natural haven of Wootton Creek. The presence of Dressel 1A amphoras at all of these sites seems to support such arrangements, yet Carver (2001), 25, 28) cautions us that such an assumption is based upon relatively small quan-

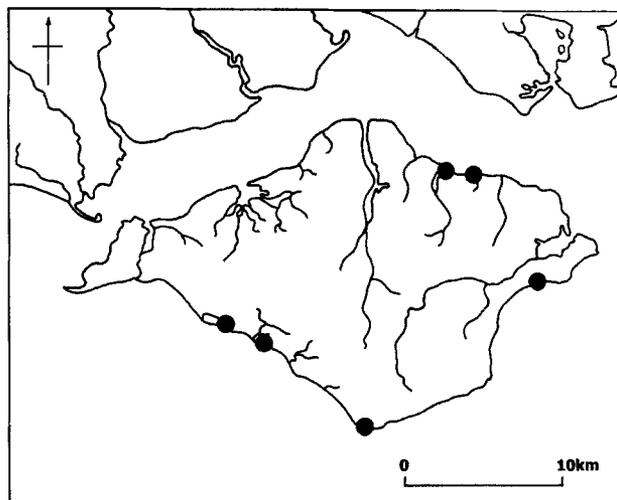


Figure 25. Salt-working kilns of Iron Age and Roman date in the Isle of Wight.

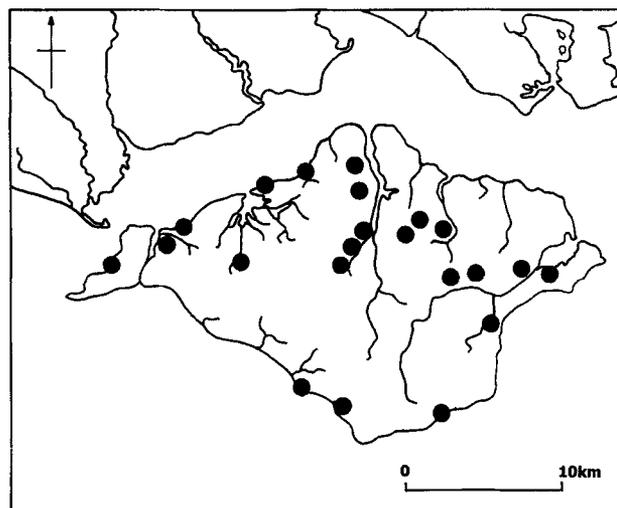


Figure 26. Briquetage in the Isle of Wight.

tities of sherds and that the actual presence or consumption of wine is still unproven. Moreover, Carver considers that amphoras may also have been employed in secondary uses such as the storage of water or the processing of salt.

At these East Wight sites the variable presence of clay loom weights, briquetage vessels and iron slag has also been noted. This provides for further speculation on ways in which amphoras could have been re-used. In one sense, however, the question of secondary use is immaterial because, whatever these uses may have been, the field evidence now demonstrates that the Vectensian population had certainly secured easy access to these and other exotic goods. This could only be achieved by

sustained familiarity with the coastal markets of northern Gaul.

It was probably during the early reign of King Verica that notable cultural changes were effected in the Isle of Wight. This, perhaps, was the time when the Tiberio-Claudian drinking cups and Terra Rubra and Terra Nigra serving vessels were arriving on the island. On the mainland the prolific issue and distribution of Verica's gold coinage indicates a prosperous Regnensian kingdom and it is, perhaps, in association with this that the eastern half of the island had a particular role to play. In view of the stylistic analogies noted by Bean (2000: 199), it seems that the early years of Verica's reign were also the time when the small fragile silver coins of the CRAB issue were struck. Now that some nine examples of the CRAB issue have been found in East Wight and one has been found in West Wight, we are bound to ask whether these coins were judiciously produced by one who was seeking to underline a political and territorial distinction which had been built upon the maritime independence of the island of Vectis.

We cannot claim that the Iron Age communities of the Isle of Wight held sole control over the transportation of all of their imported Gallic goods, but we can now recognize a people who were capable of crossing and mastering the sea. It is interesting to see that fragments of prestigious imports were able to find their way on to relatively modest settlement sites and into the rubbish of domestic middens accrued by the island's coastal communities. This seems to suggest that access to exotic items was not confined to an elite, but was open to a wide spectrum of those Vectensians who were adept in seizing and manipulating the opportunities they had gained through their unique maritime position.

This review has shown that evidence for maritime activities in Iron Age Wight has been historically dependent upon terrestrial finds of pottery and coins. Discussion has revealed some marked limitations in the value of this evidence. There also pervades an overriding suspicion that many of the principal items carried in cross-Channel shipments were perishable goods that were unlikely to survive in terrestrial archaeological contexts. An important departure in this review has been the recognition of beach strews and anchorage scatters. Amphora fragments recovered from Yarmouth Roads and the Western Solent (Fig. 27) seem to be compatible with the use of the *Magnus Portus* in Late Iron Age times. Scatters such as these must prompt the realization that valuable archaeological resources

are still concealed within the European seabed. Where these resources have been noted in this study there remains a pressing need to investigate their parent sub-tidal sediments. Similarly, where the processes of submergence and coastal recession are active, there is a further need for prompt and sustained archaeological intervention.

At present an inability to identify and counter threat to these resources is a problem which the United Kingdom government has yet to overcome. This problem is epitomized by the off-shore regulatory system in the Solent, where the existing licensing system for the control of navigational dredging and other offshore impacts is failing to give due regard to the archaeological potential of the seabed. At present there can be no doubt that archaeologists and cultural resource managers will need to focus far more of their protective and investigative energies on those human impacts which are currently so poorly regulated in the submerged dimension of Europe's historic coastline. It is particularly unfortunate that those natural harbours which were so important to Europe's first maritime communities are proving to be the very same locations which are subject to high industrial and developmental stress today. We would certainly welcome contact with researchers who are examining the character of archaeological strews in other harbours and anchorages.

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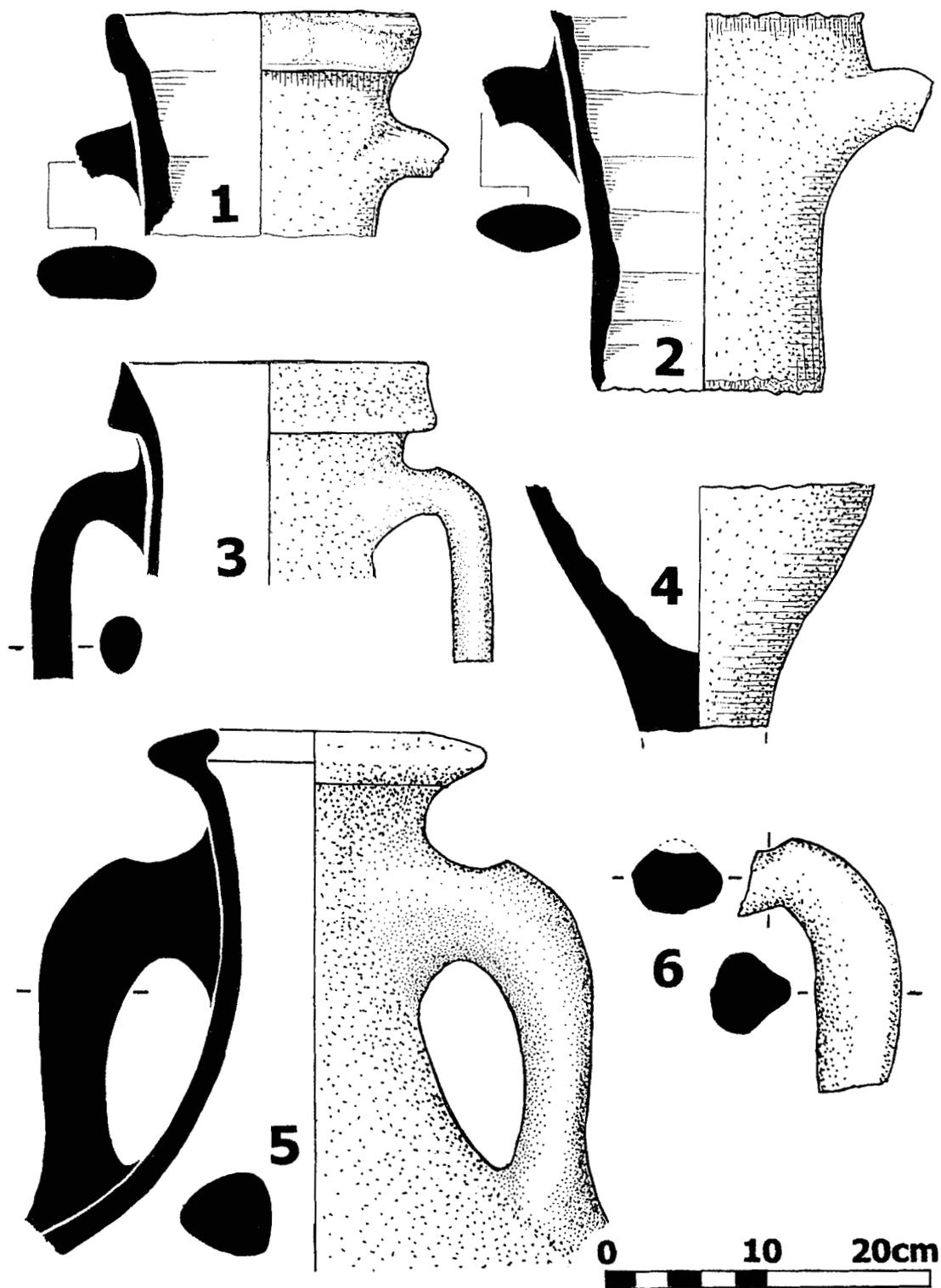


Figure 27. Dressel 1 amphora finds from Yarmouth Roads (1-4) and Dressel 20 finds from the Eastern Solent (5-6).

Roman and other sherds from their oyster trawls. We also thank the many diving and recording participants of the former Isle of Wight Maritime

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Note

- [1] A total of 116 Iron Age coins found on the Isle of Wight have been recently listed by Wellington (2001). To these may be added at least six more Durotrigian coins and a CRAB coin from Freshwater. It should be noted that a printer's error in the Wellington inventory has misrepresented entries 18–20 which are gold staters of Verica and not issues of Tincomaros as the heading suggests.