

## Two Roman face-mask jars from Camelon

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In July 1972 during trenching operations within the south camp of the Roman fort at Camelon (NGR NS 86358126) a quantity of Roman pottery was recovered by Mr T Smith, Larbert, and Mr E J Price, Grangemouth. Included in this material, which has no securely

stratified context, were sherds comprising the greater part of two face-mask jars. Although one vessel is now badly abraded it would appear that both jars had been complete, or very nearly so, until the time of their recent disturbance. Both vessels are now in the possession of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (FX 360/1).

### THE VESSELS

FX 360 (fig 1 upper). Sixty-two sherds from the rim and upper body, including part of the face, representing possibly 50% of the complete vessel. The jar is in a coarse buff/orange fabric with a cream slip which would appear to have been applied in two coats covering the complete exterior and upper interior areas of the vessel.

Of the face only fragments now remain indicating the position of the eye and eyebrows with the chin and beard 'floating'. No other portions of the face can be discerned from the mass of body sherds. Both the eyes and the chin have been created by thumb-pressed protrusions, with, in the case of the chin, four lines of vertically cut notches portraying a beard. The eye has also been given more realism with the addition of a horizontally cut slit to represent the eyelid half covering the pupil.

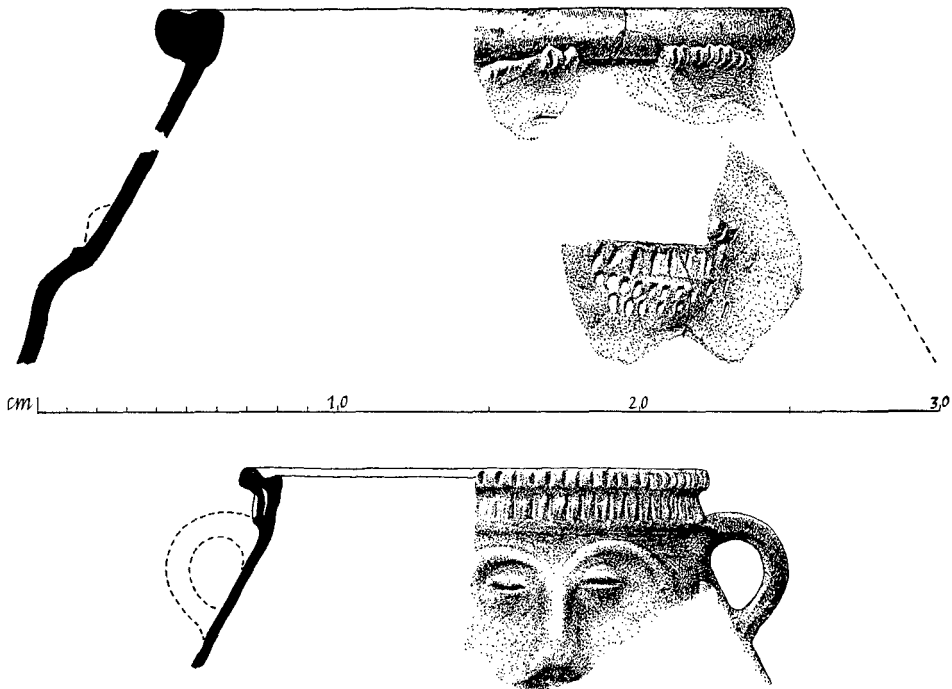


FIG 1 Face-mask jars from Camelon: upper, no. FX 360, lower, no. FX 361

FX 361 (fig 1 lower). Nine rim and body sherds forming the complete rim and shoulder portions of the vessel and parts of two loop handles, these being asymmetrically placed 144° apart. The jar is in an orange fabric with a grey core. The exterior displays a fine scatter of small brown grit particles, this having been covered with a cream slip similar to that of vessel FX 360. The rim, which has an internal ledge possibly for a lid, has been turned over leaving a cavity

behind the heavy vertical incisions on the exterior of the vessel. The face has been severed at the base of the nose and the vessel is badly abraded, large areas of the cream slip having been totally removed, almost certainly in the recent past. Unlike the previous example the facial features on this vessel have been created entirely by the application of further clay to the plain surface of the jar providing eyebrows, eyes, nose and cheeks while the nostrils have been hollowed by a rectangular, pointed instrument. The eyelids are again represented by slits on the eyes, the right hand slit being 5 mm higher than the left.

## DISCUSSION

Three distinct types of Roman pottery vessel can be identified as regularly carrying representations of human faces or indeed complete heads. These are as follows:

- 1 Flagons with small, lifelike models of human heads, 50-75 mm in height, acting as mouths or spouts for the vessel. This class of vessel, manufactured at Worms and Trier, would appear to be commonest in the third and fourth centuries AD and to be widely distributed throughout the northern provinces of the Roman empire. No examples however are noted north of Hadrian's Wall. (Bushe-Fox 1928, 104, no. 184; May 1930, 116, nos 138-40, 301.)
- 2 Oil lamps moulded to imitate faces. This type of vessel, again of foreign manufacture, would appear to be relatively uncommon, examples being noted from London and Colchester (May 1930, 185 nos 36-7) while in Scotland one example has been recovered from Camelon (Anderson 1901, 391).
- 3 Jars or vases of a normal domestic design, with or without handles and often with finger-frilled rims. These with the addition on the shoulder of applique facial features, often accentuated by outpressing of the body, are by far the most common type of face vessel. Like category 1 these vessels would appear to be manufactured in the Trier-Heddernheim-Augsburg-Cologne area and to be imported into this country from the late first century AD onwards. The distribution, as with types 1 and 2, is predominantly southern (May 1912, 45; May 1930, 143) with only scattered outliers in the northern frontier zone. The previously described vessels from Camelon are of category 3 and are paralleled in Scotland only by fragments of three vessels of a similar nature from Balmuildy (Miller 1922, 94). The faces noted on vessels of category 3 vary from very crude likenesses as on the Balmuildy vessels to representations, showing much more artistic ability, of actual human faces or more commonly faces of a votive nature depicting the deity Pan.

The Camelon vessels, although not stratified, can be assigned to the central area of the south camp which during the Antonine period probably formed part of a civil settlement. Although only speculation one might hypothesise that both vessels come from a building or area used for religious or funerary purposes; confirmation of this however awaits further scientific investigation of the site.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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