

# Eleventh and Twelfth Century Pottery from the Oxford Region

By R. L. S. BRUCE MITFORD AND E. M. JOPE

## I. A PITCHER FROM THE SITE OF THE ANGEL INN, OXFORD

THE pottery vessel figured in PLATE XI, A-B, and FIG. 8, no. 3,<sup>1</sup> was presented to the British Museum by Mr. (afterwards Sir) Augustus Wollaston Franks in 1887. He apparently acquired it from or through Mr. Henry Willett, whose collection of English pottery, together with that of Franks himself, forms the nucleus of the present British Museum collection. A manuscript letter written by Edgar Willett from New College and addressed to Henry Willett, was inside the vessel; a passage in the letter describes how Edgar Willett was taken by one Walford, apparently an Oxford dealer,<sup>2</sup> 'to a back part of the house where was a case nearly full of things dug up in the Angel.' This was, of course, the Angel Inn in the High Street, situated on the site of the Examination Schools.<sup>3</sup> This material included 'some very curious old pots . . . three or four had two handles; there were also a lot of little crucibles of earthenware.' Although no entry of the vessel illustrated here can be found in the British Museum registers, there can be little doubt from the manuscript letter inside it that, as is stated in the *Catalogue of English Pottery*,<sup>4</sup> it is in fact one of these 'very curious old pots' with two handles, and that there were originally several of them. The vessel, presumably a water-pitcher or ewer, is covered all over externally down to, and in streaks under, the base with a clear thin light-yellow glaze. The glaze is of uneven thickness; where thin it has a sticky appearance, and in thicker areas it is shiny and minutely crackled. The fabric is very thin and hard, paste-like in quality, and has a dry appearance. The vessel is unevenly fired, the surface approaching pink on one side of the vessel and grey on the other, the glaze varying in colour from a pallid mustard-flower

<sup>1</sup> I have to thank Mr. G. C. Dunning for his great kindness in allowing me to use his drawing of the vessel in advance of the appearance of his own publication of it. A note on the vessel has also appeared in *Brit. Mus. Quarterly*, XIII, 35 ff., with plate.

<sup>2</sup> And presumably, therefore, a member of the firm of Walford and Spokes, whose premises were close to the site, on the same side of the High.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. H. E. Salter, *Map of Mediaeval Oxford* (1934), Map v.

<sup>4</sup> R. L. Hobson, *Catalogue of English Pottery in the British Museum* (1903), p. 82 (B.200).

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yellow on the grey side to a slightly roseate yellow on the pink. The interior surface is light grey. The body is grooved internally on the wheel, which produces a slightly rippled outer profile. The base has been finished off both underneath and at the sides by trimming with a knife, which in one place skidded on the surface of the vessel leaving a series of ripples, and the surface has in addition apparently been smoothed off with the flat of a gritty knife, leaving tears and small holes in the surface, visible in the photographs. The rim-section and neck-profile are distinctive, and the very convex base, on which the vessel easily rocks, with its sharply defined edge, should be noted. On the lower part of the vessel there are a few flecks of undissolved brown pigment in the glaze. The fabric is quite foreign to Oxford, as is the peculiar shape, and the vessel is in fact an imported piece.

This globular form, with a short tubular spout against the neck and small loop-handles running into the rim, is common on the Continent, particularly in the Rhineland,<sup>1</sup> in the Carolingian period. Imported examples, of the authentic Rhenish so-called Pingsdorf ware, have been found in London<sup>2</sup> and recently at Pevensey Castle in Sussex, and the appearance of a number of closely analogous vessels of local manufacture in England in the late Saxon period<sup>3</sup> is an illustration of the influence of Rhenish trade in this period on native ceramic styles. The closest parallels to the Oxford vessel, however, are to be found concentrated in East Anglia, apparently at a later period. A comparison of it with fragments found at Alstoe Mount and Stamford Castle in Rutland<sup>4</sup> show that they agree in the smallest details. Attention may be drawn in particular to the identity of rim-section and neck-profile, and the thinness and rippled outline of the walls. The Alstoe and Stamford vessels have, however, only slight traces of yellow glaze, and from this one might suppose that the Oxford vessel, with its all-over glaze, was of a later date, perhaps in the second half of the 12th century, were it not for the presence of another parallel which suggests, contrary to all previously held opinions, that yellow glaze goes back to late Saxon times. At Southoe Manor, Hunts., Mr. T. C. Lethbridge has recently found a yellow-glazed handle, very similar in form and fabric to those of the Oxford and Stamford vessels,<sup>5</sup> in association with late Saxon pottery of St. Neots type. This

<sup>1</sup> E.g., at the type-site at Pingsdorf, C. Koenen in *Böner Jahrbücher*, CIII (1898), 114 ff., pl. VI, fig. 15, 15a-b; also H. Arbman, *Schweden und das Carolingische Reich* (1937), pl. 18, 1 etc.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. M. Wheeler, *London and the Saxons* (London Mus. Guide, No. 6), pl. VIII.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158, fig. 33; J. P. Bushe-Fox, *Richborough*, III (Rept. Res. Comm. Soc. Antiq., 1932), p. 186, pl. XLII, no. 362.

<sup>4</sup> G. C. Dunning, *Antiq. Journ.*, XVI (1936), 396 ff., figs. 4, 28; 5, 8; 6, 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Cambridge Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, XXXVIII (1937), 158 ff., fig. 1, 7 (published upside down).

handle is in fact the first piece of glazed ware that has been referred to a pre-conquest date, and it suggests, in view of the early development of the yellow glaze which it indicates, that the Oxford vessel need not be referred on grounds of glaze to a date any later than that of the Alstoe and Stamford parallels, namely, the first half of the 12th century.

It has been said that the form and fabric of the Angel Inn vessel are foreign to Oxford, and it is to East Anglia, where these shapes are established, that one looks for its origin. In the University Museum of Archaeology and of Ethnology at Cambridge there are spout and handle fragments found locally<sup>1</sup> which exactly match the Oxford piece, in glaze and fabric no less than in form, and on these analogies it seems certain that the vessel or vessels found on the site of the Angel Inn, Oxford, were made in or near Cambridge.

This pitcher thus illustrates ceramic connexions between Oxford and East Anglia at an early period. One can assume a 12th century date for the vessel, and if the evidence from Southoe Manor be accepted, there is no reason why the date should not be in the earlier part of the century.

The interest of the find is increased by the fact that this imported vessel (or vessels) can be shown to have exercised an influence on the local potters. The light sandy fabric of the Oxford tripod-vessels, and more particularly the white fabric of the ovoid jugs of group A<sup>2</sup> from the site of the Bodleian extension, stands in marked contrast to the coarse clayey blue wares of the tripod-vessels of Gloucestershire, for instance, and of such vessels as that from Pit G<sup>3</sup>, and no. 4<sup>4</sup> in the list of unassociated vessels, from the Bodleian site, that is to say, the earlier 12th century ware in Oxford. Possibly these new developments in fabric were stimulated by the superfine quality and light colour of the body of this imported piece. However this may be, the influence of this East Anglian vessel is clearly marked in the bifid rim-sections of the ovoid jugs, in the tears and scratches that occur near the base of some Group A vessels (*e.g.* Well 2, 3 and 4, Well 14, 4 on the Bodleian site, *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 113), which indicate the same method of finishing, in the convex base, with sharply defined edges, of the ovoid jug from Well 2, and perhaps also in the brown points and flecks of undissolved pigment in the glaze, which is such a marked feature of some Group A vessels, and which occurs also, though inconspicuously, in the Angel vessel. This connexion between some vessels of what has been called Group A and the Angel pitcher, in view of the early complexion of the latter, reinforces the suggestion that Group A may belong to the late 12th, rather than to the early 13th century. R.L.S.B.M.

<sup>1</sup> Two fragments are from Christ's College library extension (1895) and King's College (1907). A third rim fragment was 'found locally.'

<sup>2</sup> *Oxoniensia*, IV, 115 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 114 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 125.

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### II. OTHER POTTERY OF COMPARABLE DATE: ITS CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL RELATIONS

The East Anglian influences upon Oxford pottery indicated by Mr. Bruce-Mitford in the earlier part of this paper, where he claims that the pitcher from the site of the Angel Inn probably came from the Cambridge region, are strongly corroborated by a consideration of the chronologically-related coarse pottery. By the 11th century East Anglia had developed a high quality of pottery as compared with the rest of England. This pottery, known as St. Neots ware,<sup>1</sup> is chiefly of a soft shell-gritted paste, giving a smooth soapy surface, often with a purplish tinge; it is wheel-made and presents a striking contrast to anything which may be found elsewhere in Britain at that time.<sup>2</sup> The East Anglian forms are derived from those of Roman pottery as they persisted in the Rhineland through the Merovingian period.<sup>3</sup> It may be emphasised that there is no continuity of tradition for wheel-made fine pottery in East Anglia between the Roman period and the later Saxon, such as can clearly be shown in the Rhineland, and the rise of this style in eastern Britain must be due to some form of foreign influence during the 8th and 9th centuries: whether this may be attributed to a revival in North Sea trade is very doubtful in the light of the scanty evidence available, but the fact remains that the ancestors of the English examples are clearly in the Rhineland.

Later in the 11th century the soft shelly fabrics in East Anglia give way to fine harder-baked and more gritty wares,<sup>4</sup> but the influence of this East Anglian style with its fine shelly pastes and soapy texture may be traced at this period spreading westwards through the Oxford basin towards Somerset, and is here illustrated by several examples of cooking-pots, bowls, decorated jugs and spouted pots from the Oxford region<sup>5</sup> and from Somerset, which have certain affinities with the later Saxon pottery of eastern Britain. The West Country develops many stylistic characteristics of its own in the 12th and 13th centuries, but some types, such as the spouted tripod-pitchers,<sup>6</sup> are attributable largely to late Saxon origins.

#### 1. COOKING-POTS

The general form is shown in FIG. 8, no. 6, a reconstruction of a pot, the lower half of which was found intact in Logic Lane, Oxford (Ashmolean Museum

<sup>1</sup> For the type-site at St. Neots (Huntingdon) see *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.*, xxxiii, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the coarse pottery from Selsey (Sussex), *Antiq. Journ.*, xiv (1934), 393.

<sup>3</sup> *Trierer Zeitschrift*, xi (1936), 75, and especially *ibid.*, Beilagen 1 and 2, illustrates this continuity well.

<sup>4</sup> *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi (1936), 396 ff. (pottery from Stamford and Alstoe).

<sup>5</sup> For further examples see *Berks. Arch. Journ.*, xliv (1940), 54 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Antiq. Journ.*, xx (1940), 103 ff.

no. 1936.43). It is of fairly soft shelly fabric with smooth surface and purplish brown tinge, and has a very convex base, slightly knife-trimmed round the angle, —all of these being marked East Anglian characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Further rims of this type and fabric in this region come from Aylesbury (Bucks.)<sup>2</sup>, Yarnton (Oxon.)<sup>3</sup>, Hinton Waldrist (Berks.)<sup>4</sup>, and Oxford itself.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. BOWLS

FIG. 8, no. 5 shows the reconstruction of a flanged bowl of which a rim fragment was found at Yarnton, where two other examples of the type also occur. They are of the usual soft shelly fabric, with a light red tinge, soapy to the touch, and are exactly comparable with examples from Bedford, Cambridge, Northampton<sup>6</sup> and St. Neots,<sup>7</sup> being of a common and typical East Anglian form, whose origin may be traced to the late Roman bowl of the Rhineland.

The form is absorbed into the 12th century style of the south-western Midlands, especially in the Oxford region, where it may be seen in many bowls from Oxford itself,<sup>8</sup> and later into the 12th and early 13th century type from West Woodhay (Berks.)<sup>9</sup>

## 3. PITCHER

The pitcher, PLATE XI, C-D (Ashmolean Museum, 1911.259, from the Radcliffe Square, Oxford, 12 ins. high) is wheel-turned, of fairly hard, light red fabric, shell gritted and smooth to the touch, carefully made and thin-walled. It is decorated with parallel horizontal lines of a rouletted pattern of diamonds and triangles, rather clumsily made. It has a broad strap-handle, decorated on the back with a series of parallel slashes formed with a comb. The handle is finished off at the base with applied strips decorated with thumb-pressings. In the Museum is another fragment which is probably part of the body of a jug of similar shape and fabric with very much more carefully made rouletted decoration of similar design. This rouletting and the applied strip with finger-markings may be found on the later Saxon East Anglian pottery,<sup>10</sup> and their origins are easily traceable to the Rhineland area.<sup>11</sup>

This jug forms an intermediate stage between the later Saxon jugs of East

<sup>1</sup> Cp. St. Neots (Huntingdon), *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.*, xxxiii, 13, and Alstoe (Rutland), *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi (1936), 396 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Records of Bucks.*, ix, 282.

<sup>3</sup> Ashmolean Museum; an unregistered fragment.

<sup>4</sup> *Berks. Arch. Journ.*, xliiv (1940), 56, fig. 3, 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Ashmolean Museum; from Lincoln Hall, Market St., 1939.

<sup>6</sup> Northampton Museum: *Assoc. Arch. Soc. Reports*, xvi, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.*, xxxiii, 137.

<sup>8</sup> *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), 130, fig. 27, no. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Berks. Archaeol. Journ.*, vii, 267.

<sup>10</sup> Cp. Alstoe (Rutland): *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi (1936), 396.

<sup>11</sup> Dorestad (Holland): *Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen*, xi, 72, figs. 56-7.

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Anglia,<sup>1</sup> derived probably from the Roman form,<sup>2</sup> and the jug type as it became assimilated into the 12th century style of the West Country, well exhibited in the Lydney jug.<sup>3</sup> All these show the persistence of the diamond and triangle rouletted pattern.

This Radcliffe Square jug must therefore be considered as an early stage in the development of jug manufacture in the Oxford region and may be attributed on stylistic grounds to the late 11th or early 12th century. Although its own form is not one which persisted to any great extent in the region,<sup>4</sup> its style of handle-decoration is common upon the large globular pitchers, of which there are several in the Ashmolean, and which may be considered the precursors of the tripod-pitchers:<sup>5</sup> these globular pitchers are equally of distinctive late Saxon origin. The applied strip running down from the handle is a characteristic also preserved in the tripod-pitchers.

### 4. SPOUTED POTS

#### (a) Oxford

FIG. 8, no. 1 illustrates two fragments of a spouted pot in coarse gritty fabric with a pale grey core and buff red slip surface. Several large pieces of flint stand out. The everted rim is decorated on top with transverse notches probably made with a thin stick.<sup>6</sup> Apparently the whole surface was covered in somewhat haphazard fashion with the rosette-stamped impressions, but no fragment remains below the half-way line to show how far down this decoration extended.

The best parallel to this pot is from Castle Neroche, Somerset.<sup>7</sup> This is decorated with a series of three parallel incised lines swirling about its surface, a style which is common over Somerset and Gloucester, and often found in Oxford, on globular pots of very similar fabric.

#### (b) Bath

FIG. 8, no. 4 shows a portion of the upper part of a coarse vessel of grey-cored shelly fabric with a smooth grey-buff surface from the site of the Roman

<sup>1</sup> Examples from Bedford, *Bed. Mod. School Field Club Journ.*, IV (1937), 116-123; and from Ely (Cambs.), *Antiq. Journ.*, IV (1927), 371.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Niederbieber: Oelmann, 'Die Keramik des Kastells Niederbieber,' *Röm.-German. Kommission*, 1914, pl. II, no. 42.

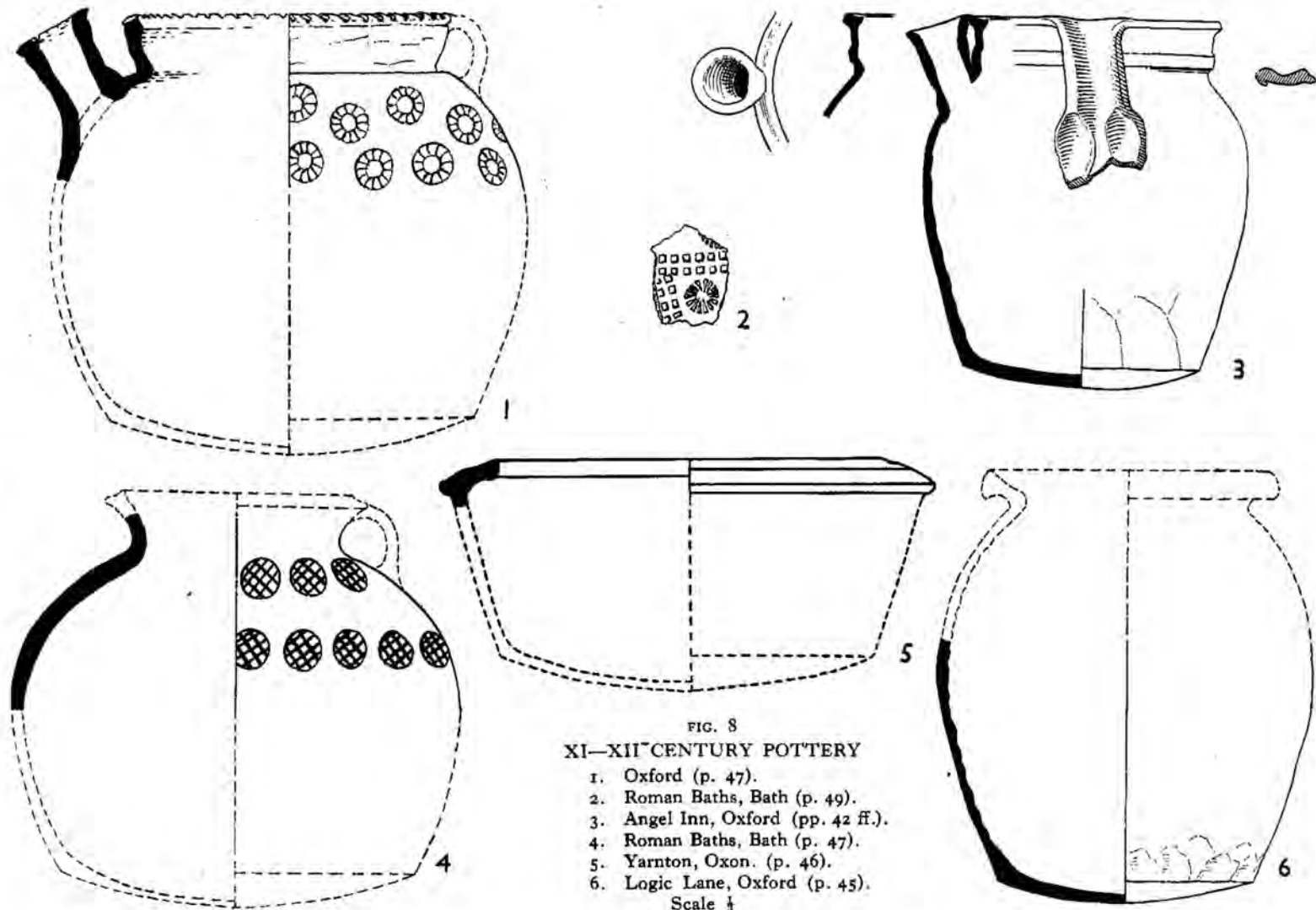
<sup>3</sup> *Antiq. Journ.*, XI (1931), 260, fig. 9: several other examples are known from the West Country.

<sup>4</sup> There is a fine pale buff pitcher of this form in the Ashmolean (an old accession, unregistered), which probably belongs to the early 13th century.

<sup>5</sup> Globular pitcher: *Oxoniensia*, IV (1939), 104, pl. X, no. 1. Derived tripod: *ibid.*, pl. X, no. 5, and fig. 22 B, p. 98. See also *Antiq. Journ.*, XX (1940), 103.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. portions of rim and spout of what was probably a tripod-jug from Cirencester in the Ashmolean Museum. Winchester has a characteristic style in this type of spouted pot with decorated rim.

<sup>7</sup> *Somerset Arch. Coll.*, XLIX (1903), 37, fig. 2.



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Baths, Bath. It is now in the Museum of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Society, by whose courtesy it is here published. The very heavy individual stamps may be closely paralleled by those from the Pithay, Bristol.<sup>1</sup>

The use of this particular separate stamp is common upon the pagan Saxon wares of eastern Britain: in the transition from pagan to later Saxon period it may be seen upon the exceedingly crude pot from Heworth (Durham),<sup>2</sup> datable by coins to c. 685. The only examples of its use in the later Saxon period—in fact, the only examples of any separate stamps, apart from continental ones<sup>3</sup>—are the Richborough pitcher,<sup>4</sup> dated, though without real stratigraphic evidence, to c. 750, and its parallels from Ipswich and London. The recrudescence of this earlier Saxon characteristic in the late 11th and early 12th centuries seems almost confined to the south and west, and is almost unknown in the east, where the genuine high-quality later Saxon pottery was abundant. It may be seen in the examples above from Oxford, Bath, and Bristol, and there are a few other smaller separate stamps from Wallingford<sup>5</sup>, Bath (FIG. 8, no. 2), Winchester, Chichester,<sup>6</sup> Pevensey (Sussex)<sup>7</sup>, and Rayleigh Castle (Essex)<sup>8</sup>. Rouletted decoration, on the other hand, is common on the later Saxon pottery of East Anglia, and this influence is clearly seen on the late 11th and early 12th century pottery of western, but not of southern Britain.

### 5. LOOM-WEIGHT

The list of antiquities from the Oxford region with late Saxon affinities is completed by a baked clay bun-shaped loom-weight (Ashmolean Museum, 1931.516: 4½ ins. diam.) from Carfax, Oxford. The wearing away of the clay by the suspending string through the central hole may be clearly seen. The bun-shaped weight supersedes the annular<sup>9</sup> type towards the later Saxon period, and examples are usually attributed to the 8th to 10th centuries. At Dorestad, where evidence suggests occupation from the early 7th to later 9th century, the transition from one to the other may be seen.<sup>10</sup> The bun-shaped type occurs commonly in the Rhineland and Low Countries sites datable to the 8th to 10th centuries: in England examples may be quoted from London<sup>11</sup> and Selsey (Sussex).<sup>12</sup>

E.M.J.

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. Bristol & Glos. Arch. Soc.*, XLVIII (1926), 251, pl. VII, nos. 22 and 23.

<sup>2</sup> Blackgate Museum, Newcastle: poorly illustrated in *V.C.H. Durham*, I, pl. opp. p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> *E.g.*, Dorestad: *Oudheid. Meded.*, XI, 72, fig. 56, nos. 3, 5 and 6.

<sup>4</sup> J. P. Bushe-Fox, *Richborough*, III (Rept. Res. Comm. Soc. Antiq., 1932), pl. XLII, no. 362.

<sup>5</sup> *Berks. Arch. Journ.*, XLII (1938), 69, fig. 2, no. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, LXXVI, (1935), 166, fig. 5, no. 2.

<sup>7</sup> I have to thank Mr. F. Cottrill for showing me this fragment: both it and the Winchester one are like the Chichester example.

<sup>8</sup> *Trans. Essex Arch. Soc.*, XII, 171.

<sup>9</sup> *E.g.*, Sutton Courtenay (Berks.): *Archaeologia*, LXXII, 82, and LXXIII, 147.

<sup>10</sup> There is no account in English: see *Berichte des Röm.-German. Kommission*, XVI (1925), 141 ff., and especially *Oudheid. Meded.*, XI, 86, fig. 67, nos. 26-29.

<sup>11</sup> *London and the Saxons* (London Mus. Guide, No. 6), p. 155, fig. 31, no. 2, and pl. VI.

<sup>12</sup> *Antiq. Journ.*, XIV (1934), 398, pl. XIV, fig. 2.



PLATE XI



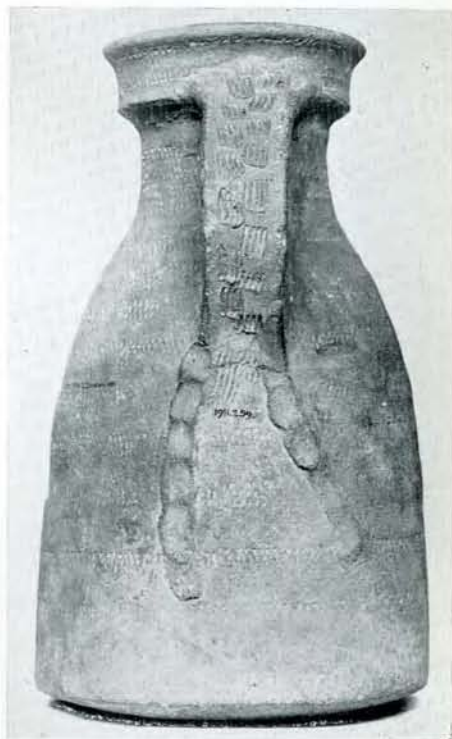
A



B



C



D

XI-XII CENTURY POTTERY

A, B. Pitcher, 12th century, from the site of the Angel Inn, Oxford (pp. 42 ff.). Scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

*After BMQ., XIII, by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.*

C, D. Pitcher, late 11th to early 12th century, from the Radcliffe Square, Oxford (p. 46). Scale  $\frac{2}{3}$ .

*Phh. Ashmolean Museum.*