

AMPULLA

Unique ID: IOW-083774

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

An incomplete cast lead pilgrim ampulla of Medieval, thirteenth to fifteenth century date (AD 1200 – AD 1500). This is one of very few pilgrim souvenirs that can be assigned an origin in the Holy Land itself, from the discovery of an ampulla mould with similar motifs at a workshop in Akko, Israel (Danny Syon, pers. comm.). Length 54.0mm, width 39mm, maximum thickness of body 9.6mm. Weight 60.92g. The weight may include some soil within the body. In plan, the ampulla has a circular body. The neck is incomplete and the mouth is missing. Two suspension lugs, one at either side of the neck, are also missing. However, the stub at the lower end of one of the loops has survived. The body is stoutly made and has particularly thick walls. The edges are bevelled and are decorated with raised diagonal hatching, a common decorative feature on ampullae. One side has raised decoration in the form of a six-pointed “compass-drawn” flower (sexfoil) enclosed within a plain circle which is 24.0mm in diameter. The petals are identical and lanceolate-shaped. Each outer point of the petal is joined by an arching line. The other side also has raised decoration which depicts a fleur-de-lis motif. The petals and stalk emanate from a central pellet and the stem flares outwards at its base. The area between each side petal and the stem is filled with cross-hatching (less conspicuous on the left side). The body of the vessel, which has a light grey/creamy patina, is generally in good condition although it has a longitudinal bend and related fracture. The neck is damaged, corroded and has ragged edges. This damage appears to be old but may have been caused by recent ploughing. Another similar ampulla has been recorded from Binsted Parish, Hampshire by Charlotte Burrill, Berkshire & Oxfordshire FLO. See Portable Antiquities Scheme find: BERK-E3B315.

Notes:

Brian Spencer, formerly Senior Keeper at the Museum of London, who made a life-time study of ampullae, has published a close parallel from London (1998, 206 fig. 214b. He has further written: Ampullae or miniature phials were an important kind of souvenir. Generally flask-shaped, but with a narrow, flattish section, they were designed to contain a dose of the thaumaturgic water that was dispensed to pilgrims at many shrines and holy wells. Ampullae were made of tin or lead or tin-lead alloy and were provided with a pair of handles or loops so that they could be suspended from a cord or chain around the wearer's neck. Coming into use in the last quarter of the twelfth century, they were, in England, almost the only kind of pilgrim souvenir to be had during the thirteenth century. They were nevertheless available at a number of shrines, and thanks to returning pilgrims or to local entrepreneurs, probably featured as secondary relics in virtually every thirteenth-century English parish church. Until the early fourteenth century, ampullae took various forms, were frequently inscribed and usually bore representations of the cult-figure or relic that they were intended to commemorate.....Ampullae could be comfortably kept on the person or easily hung up in the home, or suspended, for the benefit of livestock, in the stable or cow shed or on the beehive. Ampullae were often donated to the neighbourhood, to be hung in the parish church. Almost as a matter of course, churches throughout thirteenth-century England secured possession of Canterbury ampullae containing what was perhaps the most famous of all elixirs, the water of St Thomas, tinged with the martyr's miracle-working blood (Spencer, B. 1990, 57-58). Examples of ampullae can also be seen in Spencer, 1990, Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum Medieval Catalogue Part 2. 57-62, figs. 170-189.

Find of note status

This has been noted as an interesting find by the recorder.

Subsequent actions

Subsequent action after recording: Returned to finder

Chronology

Broad period: MEDIEVAL

Subperiod from: Early

Period from: MEDIEVAL

Subperiod to: Late

Period to: MEDIEVAL

Date from: Circa AD 1200

Date to: Circa AD 1500

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 54 mm

Width: 39 mm

Thickness: 9.6 mm

Weight: 60.92 g

Discovery dates

Date(s) of discovery: Sunday 30th July 2006

Personal details

Found by: This information is restricted for your login.

Recorded by: Mr Frank Basford

Identified by: Mr Frank Basford

Other reference numbers

Other reference: IOW2006-64-1

Materials and construction

Primary material: Lead

Manufacture method: Cast

Completeness: Incomplete

Spatial metadata

Region: [South East](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [Isle of Wight](#) (Unitary Authority)

District: [Isle of Wight](#) (Unitary Authority)

To be known as: Isle of Wight

Spatial coordinates

Grid reference source: From finder

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 100 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector

Discovery circumstances: Metal detecting rally

General landuse: Cultivated land

Specific landuse: Operations to a depth greater than 0.25m

Spencer, B., 1990 [*Salisbury Museum Medieval Catalogue: Part 2, Pilgrim souvenirs and secular badges*](#) Salisbury: Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum 57-62, figs. 170-189 ,