

A FACE URN FROM LAKENHEATH

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In January, 1957, deep ploughing, 15-17 ins., on the north outskirts of a well known R-B habitation area brought up sherds of a large grey urn ornamented on the shoulder with a face mask. There was little discolouration of the surrounding soil, no bones, coins, oyster shells or sherds of other pots. (Map ref. 52/729836). In 1950 a rim sherd of a light grey urn with face on shoulder was found on the south out-skirts of this site. The ware is fine and hard, beard and whiskers are shown by small stamped rings.^{1,2}

After restoration the urn stands just under 14 ins. high, diameter $11\frac{1}{4}$ ins., mouth 7 ins., base $4\frac{1}{4}$ ins. The rim is sharply everted. In addition to the face mask there are five zones of decoration, separated by double grooves. The lower half of the rim is moulded to a cable pattern; at the base of the neck there is a band of notched ornament; the upper part of the shoulder has a wide band of lattice burnishings on a matt ground; below there is a double zone of scored markings; and below this a wide zone of rather faint cursive decoration. In the middle of the lattice pattern the face has been sculptured by applying strips of clay to the surface. The eyebrows and nose are heavily moulded, the eyes are slits in bands of clay, the chin is formed from a lump of clay with a slitlike mouth, and the curve of the cheeks is obtained by pressure from within outwards. No beard is present but the whiskers are well-marked, giving a somewhat lionlike appearance. The fabric is fine and hard, medium grey. The lower part of the urn is polished (Plate XXXVI).

This urn is remarkable for its size and lavish decoration in addition to the mask. Inspection of face urns found in the Eastern counties has shown that the large grey type is uncommon compared with the number of coarse yellow clay urns, usually handled, which have been found in the Colchester grave groups.³ None of these are more than 12 ins. high. Colchester Museum contains examples of large grey urns of similar shape and size to the Lakenheath pot, some with matt bands and scored or incised decoration but with no masks. These are ascribed to the 3rd and 4th centuries. One smaller grey pot (height 8 ins., diameter 7 ins.) of similar appearance has a face mask on the shoulder, frilled

¹ G. Briscoe, *Proc. Camb. Arch. Soc.*, xli, 67.

² G. Briscoe, *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxvi, p.80, fig. 17a.

³ May's *Catalogue of Roman Pottery*, Colchester, 1930.

PLATE XXXVI



Face Urn from Lakenheath

decoration on the rim underlip and a cordon of cross-hatching at the base of the neck. The clay is hard grey, nearly black, polished top and bottom and with a band around the girth. It was found in a rubbish pit with a Samian bowl of Trajan-Hadrian date.⁴ A fully restored urn of fine grey hard ware with mask on shoulder is in Ipswich Museum, found at Ixworth in 1937. It is 12½ ins. high, diameter 11¼ ins. The rim is everted, eyebrows and beard formed by small slashes with a band of notches around the neck. These three examples with full profiles have no handles.

A near parallel to the Lakenheath urn is shown in May's *Catalogue*, pl. LII, and there are a few fragmentary grey masks in Colchester Museum. Grey fragments of faces have been found at Caistor, now in Norwich Museum; at Wattisfield, Suffolk;⁵ and at Ixworth, one in the Ashmolean Museum and one in Moyses Museum, Bury St. Edmunds.

These grey urns of fine hard ware with masks on shoulder appear to form a separate group from the buff handled face vases of coarse yellow clay which are such a prominent feature of the Colchester grave groups. They are not known to be associated with a grave, the style of decoration is different and they do not possess handles.

I am greatly obliged to Mr. M. R. Hull for information about the pottery in Colchester Museum, and to Mr. N. Smedley for permission to describe the unpublished urn in Ipswich Museum.

The Lakenheath urn has been deposited at the Mildenhall Museum.

⁴ *Colchester Museum Report*, 1924, 13, and pl. III.

⁵ Maynard *et al.*, *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxii, p.194, pl. III(a).