

# Menas ampullae: a case study of long-distance contacts

Susanne Bangert

University of Oxford

## Menas ampullae and Abu Mina

Menas ampullae are small (from c. 8 cm diameter) clay so-called 'pilgrim-flasks'.<sup>1</sup> They are characterised by a lentoid body and a narrow neck with two handles and are typically decorated with a standard depiction of Saint Menas standing between two kneeling camels. These were produced between 500-640 in considerable quantity at the main site associated with the saint, Abu Mina, which is amongst the largest pilgrim sites in the Late Antique and early Medieval world. Its importance can plausibly be related to imperial interest, including a political agenda dominated by the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Abu Mina is situated in the Mareotis some 45 kilometres west of Alexandria, in what is today generally a dry area, but which was fertile in the sixth century, with extensive production of, for example, wine. The site extends for one kilometre and so, in terms of size, can be classified as a town. In the fifth and sixth centuries it featured a large church complex surrounded by impressive courtyards, hostels and baths, encircled by a residential area with town-houses, a possible school and further baths. There is evidence for lavish decoration of the church with both mosaic and marble revetment and ornate floors. A severe fire laid the centre in ruins early in the seventh century, probably at the time of the Persian invasion. A rebuilding programme was begun soon after, but with the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the mid-seventh century, large-scale international pilgrimage stopped. Although Saint Menas continued to be venerated at Abu Mina, the site was reduced to a shadow of its former glory, even if still

described as impressive by contemporary writers. Abu Mina seemingly became deserted in the tenth century, and eventually became completely ruined.

Until 1906, it was known only from documentary sources and the ampullae. The first excavations began at the hill, locally known from the many ampullae found there. Excavations have now taken place continuously since the 1960s, mainly by the German institute in Cairo, and apart from the pottery the site is very well published.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 1a Menas ampulla, 153 x 105 mm.  
Photo Ashmolean Museum  
(Bangert (Oxford, forthcoming) cat no 1).

<sup>1</sup> The ampullae are well published in recent catalogues such as Janette Witt, *Werke der Alltagskultur, Teil 1: Menasampullen* (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Bestandkataloge) (Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2000), p. 2; Gabriele Kaminski-Menssen, *Bildwerke aus Ton, Stein und Metall* (Liebieghaus Museum alter Plastik. Bildwerke der Sammlung Kaufmann) (Kassel, Druckerei und Verlag Gutenberg, 1996), III.; Catherine Metzger, *Les ampoules à eulogie du Musée du Louvre* (Paris, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1981) and Susanne Bangert, *The Ashmolean Collection of Menas Ampullae within Their Social Context* (Oxford, British Archaeological Reports International Series, forthcoming), the latter with a listing of c. 200 ampullae in British museums, as well as some of the discussion presented here. The subject of this article also features in Susanne Bangert, 'Menas Ampullae and Saxon Britain: Coptic Objects in a Pagan Kingdom', *Minerva*, 17 (2006): 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> The time span is based on the archaeological evidence from Abu Mina. The imperial interest is not explicitly testified in any source. For a discussion see: Bangert, *The Ashmolean Collection of Menas Ampullae*. A discussion of church leaders controlling local cults from a later period, but with obvious parallels, will be available in Gervase Rosser and Jane Garnett, *The Moving Image: Zones of the Miraculous in Italy and the Mediterranean World 1500-2000* (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> For a description of Abu Mina, see Peter Grossmann, 'The Pilgrimage Center of Abu Mina', in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden, Brill, 1998), pp. 281-302, or the catalogues mentioned in note 1. The excavation of the site has been ongoing since the 1960's and is published mainly by Peter Grossmann and other scholars from the German Institute in Cairo. The website of the modern monastery also has relevant information: [www.stmina-monastery.org](http://www.stmina-monastery.org) [accessed 9<sup>th</sup> January 2007].

Fig. 1b Variety of ampullae from Abu Mina. From Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und mittelalterliche byzantinische und italienische Bildwerke, Teil I: Altchristliche Bildwerke* (Berlin, 1909) Pl. LXVIII



- 1 City wall
- 2 Gates
- 3 North Church
- 4 Embolos
- 5 Peribolos
- 6 Martydom Church
- 7 Baptistry
- 8 Great Basilica
- 9 Hemicycle
- 10 Pilgrim Court
- 11 Hegoumenos Palace
- 12 Northeast complex
- 13 Hostels
- 14 Baths
- 15 House with Baptistry
- 16 Baths
- 17 possible School

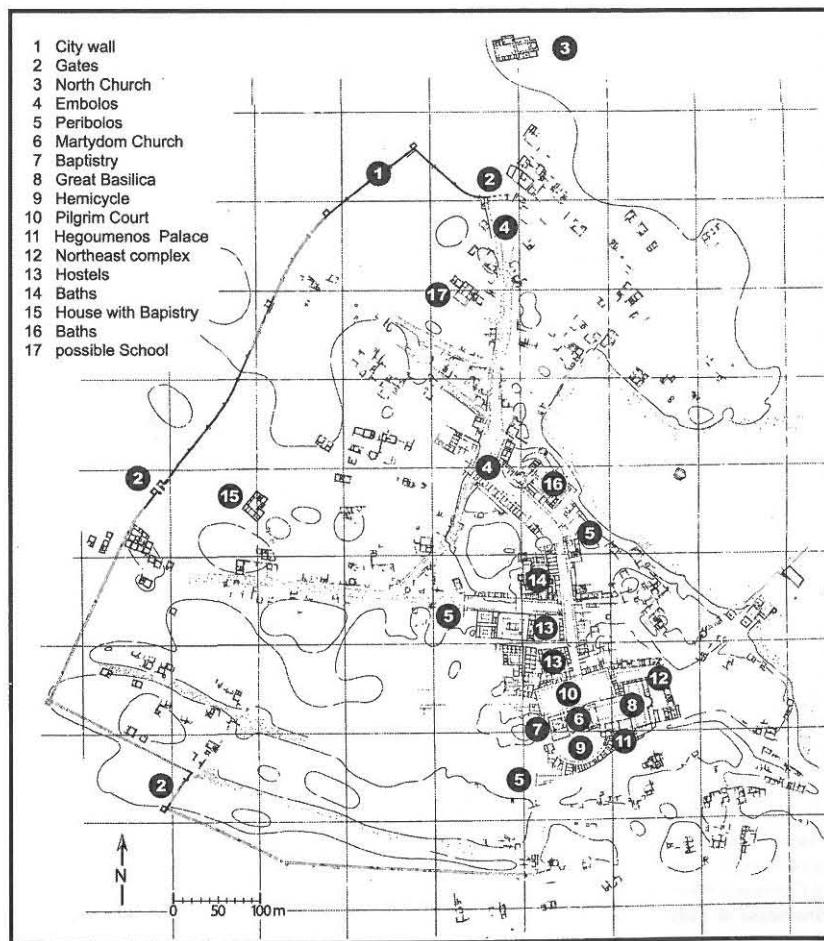


Fig. 2 Map of Abu Mina. Design by Keith Bennett. After Peter Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden, 2002) fig. 115

Various types of souvenirs were produced at Abu Mina in Late Antiquity but the ampullae are the best-known. They alone of the ceramics produced at Abu Mina have been found far and wide.<sup>4</sup>

### Find circumstances in Europe – are they reliable?

Unsurprisingly, the ampullae are mostly found in Egypt and the Levant, but finds have also been reported from the Black Sea region and Western Europe. The finds from Western (especially Northern) Europe have, however, been queried because the find circumstances in many cases are poorly recorded. The most comprehensive research so far on the presence of ampullae in Europe was published by Chiara Lambert and Paola Demeglio, and comprises a discussion of the relation between pilgrim routes and ampullae.<sup>5</sup> They list the present location of ampullae, but when compiling such a list a persisting problem is the way the provenance of the object is registered by the museum in question. Most of the ampullae discussed in the article were accessioned in a period where the focus was on the objects themselves. Often little attention was paid to provenance and find circumstances, two categories of information, which anyway could be virtually impossible to obtain. Thus, a typical museum register entry for a Menas ampulla would be ‘from Egypt’. This can, of course, mean ‘produced in Egypt’, or ‘found in Egypt’, or both. Indeed, such museum information was queried by Petra Lincheid, who questioned whether ampullae in collections in northern Europe can be taken as evidence for pilgrims travelling from Egypt in late antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Linscheid investigated ampullae reported to have been found in a local archaeological context north of the Alps, but concluded that there is no evidence for any of the finds being genuine.

G.-R. Delahaye took nearly the opposite approach to that of Linscheid, assuming that ampullae present in small numbers at a location would be ampullae from a local context.<sup>7</sup> Delahaye, inspired by Lambert and Demeglio, traced ampullae along the pilgrim routes in France and mentions several unpublished ampullae from France, yet did not question the quality of the information provided by the accession registers of these various museums. Neither did he conduct any further investigation into the ampullae cited by Lambert and Demeglio. As several of

these ampullae were accessioned a long time ago, the *caveat* mentioned above must apply to them.

So, further investigation remains to be conducted before we can obtain a picture of how many ampullae have a North-western European archaeological context. The rest of this paper illustrates this point with reference to the ampullae in museum collections in Britain. As we shall see, we cannot assume that the presence of one or a few ampullae in a collection denote a local find.

### Finds in Britain: where are the archaeological contexts?

At face value, it appears that ampullae are recorded as having been found in an archaeological context in Britain. One, for example, was published in 1951 by R. O’Ferral.<sup>8</sup> The ampulla was found in 1949 close to the Roman Icknield Way in Derby, Nuns’ Street. Upon discovering the ampulla, staff at the British Museum were contacted, who reported back that no other ampulla had been found in Britain. O’Ferral consequently concluded that the ampulla could hardly date from the Late Antique or early Medieval period because ‘Communications between the fourth and seventh centuries were bad’ and the Roman-period road probably out of use. But this information can be amended: the British Museum had actually been given an ampulla in 1929, recorded as having been ‘found during excavations’ in Burgate, Kent in 1868. Unfortunately, neither the Canterbury Archaeological Trust nor the Society of Antiquaries is in possession of more specific information about the excavation as regards the ampulla. However, as this is not unusual for excavations of the nineteenth century, this need not mean that it is not a genuine find.

Moreover, this is not the only ampulla found in Canterbury. In recent years, another, privately-owned, ampulla has been made known to the Canterbury Archaeological Trust.<sup>9</sup> It was, according to family tradition, found in the Burgate area in the 1920s. Similarly, two more ampullae have been reported to the Canterbury Archaeological Trust by their present owner. These are likely to have been found in Faversham, Kent, but no further information is available.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed in Susanne Bangert, ‘The Archaeology of Pilgrimage’, in *Late Antique Archaeology* 5, eds. David Gwynn and Susanne Bangert (Leiden, Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Chiara Lambert and Paola Pedemonte Demeglio, ‘Ampolle devozionali ed itinerari di pellerinaggio tra IV e VII secolo’, *Antiquité Tardive*, 21 (1994): 205–231.

<sup>6</sup> Petra Linscheid, ‘Untersuchungen zur Verbreitung von Menasampullen nördlich der Alpen’, in *Akten des XII. internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie*, Bonn 1991, ed. Ernst Daasemann and Josef Engemann, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergänzungsband 20 (2 vols.) (Münster, Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1995), vol. 2, pp. 982–986.

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert-Robert Delahaye, ‘La diffusion des ampoules de Saint-Ménas en Gaulc’, *Le Monde Copte*, 27–28 (1997): 155–165.

<sup>8</sup> R. S. M. O’Ferral, ‘A Pilgrim’s Flask found in Derby’, *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society*, XXIV (1951). The present whereabouts of this ampulla is not known to the Derby Museum, according to the curator, Jonathan Wallis (pers. comm.).

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Simon Pratt from the Canterbury Archaeological Trust for the information on both the ampullae and excavations in Canterbury. I also appreciate the information given to me by the present owners of the ampullae. Simon Pratt also immediately pointed to the potential of investigating St. Augustine’s mission when considering Menas ampullae in Britain.



**Fig. 3 Recorded finds of Menas ampullae in Britain.**  
After Harris, 2003, fig.53

Yet another ampulla found in Britain was published in 1956.<sup>10</sup> The ampulla was ‘found in a peat layer two feet below the sand at a point 300 yards seaward of Dove Point’ at Meols in 1955, and was presented to the Grosvenor Museum in Chester. The finds from Meols are prolific and already by 1863 the first monograph on the site had been published by Abraham Hume.<sup>11</sup> There is a Roman phase at the site and also metalwork possibly dating to c. 400-600. Three Byzantine coins have been found subsequently, not far from where the Menas ampulla was found.<sup>12</sup> The archaeological context may, however, be problematic, as the site is being washed out of the escarpment and consequently many finds are made on the beach, rather than through stratigraphic excavation. It should also be mentioned that there might be another ampulla from the Meols area.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In ‘Miscellanea’, *Journal of Chester Archaeological Society*, 43 (1956): 48.

<sup>11</sup> Abraham Hume, *Ancient Meols; or, some account of the antiquities found near Dove Point, on the sea-coast of Cheshire* (London, 1863).

<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Philpott, ‘Three Byzantine Coins found near the North Wirral Coast in Merseyside’, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 1998, 148 (1999): 197-202. These are coins of: Justin I (518-27) follis, Maurice Tiberius (582-602) follis of regnal year 19 = 600/1 and Justinian I (527-65) deca nummulum.

<sup>13</sup> David Griffiths, ‘Great Sites: Meols’, *British Archaeology*, 62 (2001): 20-25. The site will be further discussed in David Griffiths and Robert A. Philpott, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast* (forthcoming).

A further ampulla, in The Yorkshire Museum, is recorded in the registers as having been found in York, but unfortunately without any additional information. There might, however, be more ampullae found in the north-east. In an 1891 guide to the collections of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society there is a reference to two ampullae found in 1881 at Shincliffe, near Durham (the York ampulla is also described).<sup>14</sup> So far, a search for further information concerning these two ampullae has been to no avail, but in the light of the other ampullae reported, it is reasonable to accept that this reference might concern a genuine find, especially as the York Archaeological Trust have reported Eastern Mediterranean amphorae from York itself.

None of the British finds, as appears from the description above, are certainly from stratigraphical excavations. When considered alone, none of them could be – nor have been – accepted unconditionally. Yet, collectively, they are worthy of further attention. As many as nine ampullae are reported from Britain. This is a significant number in relation to reported finds elsewhere in Europe. It is also, as observed by Anthea Harris, a significant total compared to the number of other types of imported objects found in Britain between the fifth and seventh centuries.<sup>15</sup> Consequently it is worth while to consider the context of these finds.

### The British context

There appear to have been two major routes by which objects from Alexandria are likely to have reached Britain: one across continental Europe, along the Rhine corridor and eventually passing into the south-east of Britain.<sup>16</sup> The connection to the Mediterranean could either have been along the Rhône or through Italy and the Alps. The other route would have been by ship through the Straits of Gibraltar and up the Atlantic coast of Europe. These ships would have sailed on the high seas, only occasionally putting in at the coast for example in search of fresh water.<sup>17</sup> They may well have landed on the western coast of Britain: in Cornwall and Wales, and, possibly, at Meols. Ken Dark has focused attention on evidence suggesting that Byzantine Constantinople found it worthwhile to send merchants to Britain, even if the mercantile profit in itself did not justify such expeditions.<sup>18</sup> The more obvious non-mercantile reason could be an ideological one, and diplomatic activity is

<sup>14</sup> Charles Wellbeloved, *A Handbook to the Antiquities in the Grounds and the Museum of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society* (8th edn) (York, 1891), 227 and Elizabeth Hartley, pers. comm.

<sup>15</sup> Anthea Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West. The Archaeology of Cultural Identity AD 400-650* (Stroud, Tempus, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Harris, p. 64ff.

<sup>17</sup> J. Wooding, ‘Cargoes in Trade along the Western Seaboard’, in *External contacts and the economy of Late Roman and Post-Roman Britain*, ed. K. R. Dark (Woodbridge, Boydell, 1996), pp. 67-82.

<sup>18</sup> In K. R. Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Stroud, Tempus, 2000), e.g. p. 230. See also Harris, p. 136. I appreciate the introduction to British trade patterns given to me by Ken Dark and Anthea Harris.

suggested as a likely reason. How can the ampullae be assessed within this framework?

One, maybe two, ampulla were found at Meols, a ‘sand-dune’ site and location of a coastal market town in western Britain; another is found by the Roman road in Derby, which led to the north and to Hadrian’s Wall. It is possible that these ampullae could be representative of a cross-country trade, eventually ending at Meols, or further west. As noted above, at least one ampulla is from York, which was the seat of the Dux Britannica; that is, the location of the central administration of the north (as listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* early 5th century). Another two ampullae are reported to have been found at Durham. Four are from the south-east: Canterbury and Faversham in Kent. There are secure Late Antique and early Medieval contexts in Canterbury where, at the end of the sixth century, continental missions headed by Augustine landed to promote Christianity in Britain. The archaeology of Faversham is impressive for this period, and it has been suggested as the possible location of Roman Duroleum. The finds from York are also interesting. According to the Venerable Bede, the origin of the Minster in York is a chapel of timber erected on the occasion of the baptism of the Northumbrian king, Edwin, in 627. Edwin had married Ethelburga, a Christian princess from Kent, and Paulinus, later to become bishop of York, accompanied her north, converting his host-to-be and thousands of Northumbrians.<sup>19</sup> This episode has been considered by many scholars (although by no means all) as a ‘re-Christianisation’ of the country, with a very ‘Roman’ style of Christian worship gaining dominance over sub-Roman Christian traditions. If there were, as is also sure, sub-Roman Christians in this area Augustine’s mission could be seen as a period of renewed expansion of Christianity in the region. Before discussing this further, it is relevant to outline the possible reasons behind the presence of ampullae in Britain.

#### Why might ampullae have been transported to Britain?

The find of a Menas ampulla does of course not prove that a person from Britain went on pilgrimage to Abu Mina and came back with an ampulla. This *could* have been the case, but ampullae might also have been traded, as was other objects from the East, perhaps as amulets. The ampullae do confirm the possibility of transport of an object from the area of Alexandria to Britain.



Fig. 4 Ampulla found at Meols (Photo David Griffiths, Grosvenor Museum Inv. No. 43.M.56, Chester)

It is plausible that the ampullae travelled these long distances from their production centre during the course of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century. Of course, this is not certain: their properties as liquid containers are very dubious, so it is inconceivable that they could be in use because of their actual contents for long after they left Abu Mina, although their perceived contents and their former proximity to the shrine may have enhanced their value. Yet, as well as the trade in amulets, there remains the possibility that a few ampullae were traded throughout the Middle Ages, just as they were traded in Victorian times. However, as mentioned below, access to Abu Mina from Western Europe became more difficult from the eighth and ninth centuries. It therefore remains a likely scenario that, for whatever reason, people living in the sixth and seventh centuries found it worthwhile to bring Menas ampullae from Abu Mina to Britain.<sup>20</sup>

The British material is, as mentioned above, not plentiful, but so far comparable numerically with that from Germany and France, and certainly larger than what has been described from the Iberian Peninsula, where there

<sup>19</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, (ed. and trans.) Judith McClure and Roger Collins, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969): 97, II.xiv.

<sup>20</sup> An article soon to appear – William Anderson, ‘Menas flasks in the West: pilgrimage and trade at the end of antiquity’, *Ancient West & East*, 5 (2006): n.p. – discusses the trade context of Menas ampullae across Europe but, as pointed out by Anderson, only on the basis of the articles also mentioned here.

are very few reported finds of ampullae indeed. It can also be mentioned that, so far, no ampullae have been found in an Irish or Scottish archaeological context.<sup>21</sup> This leaves the ampulla/ampullae found at Meols as to date the only known ampulla in 'Celtic' Britain.

In the later sixth century, the western sea-route seems to have declined, whereas the eastern land-route expanded.<sup>22</sup> The implication of this development is that the Menas ampullae probably reached Meols by land if it arrived after the sixth century. If so, the Menas ampullae in Britain are found in, or have passed through, the non-'Celtic' context of the East and South. This confirms, as far as negative evidence can, that the most likely route of the ampullae into Britain was that of the Rhine system.

Still bearing in mind that the ampullae could just be representatives of a general trade in amulets, it is tempting to consider other possible explanations, suggested by the find spots of the ampullae. The ampullae in Canterbury, for example, may be related to the interest of the Papal see in Britain from the late sixth century onwards.<sup>23</sup> It is well known that this interest resulted in the Augustinian mission in 597, with the arrival in Britain of southern Europeans who came to promote Papal Christianity. The ampullae could have been brought to Britain in the context of the mission.

Another possibility could be that Anglo-Saxon Christians went on pilgrimage to the Mediterranean and brought the ampullae back with them. This issue leads to the discussion of how many Christians there were in these parts of Britain in the sixth and seventh centuries, to be discussed further below. However, if pilgrimage were to be envisaged only *after* the Augustinian mission, it might be argued that a very short time is left to bring perhaps (at least) nine ampullae back to Britain. Moreover, it has to be considered that Abu Mina had periods in the seventh century, such as the 'Heraclean' war (609) and the Persian invasion (619-28), when the site may have been less able to receive pilgrims. From the end of the Persian invasion to the Islamic conquest and the end of the archaeologically recorded ampullae production is little more than ten years.

If pilgrimage is envisaged *before* the Augustine mission it would presumably be from by British, rather than Anglo-Saxon Christians. If so, it is remarkable that most of the finds do not appear near the known northern and western British religious centres of the sixth century; rather the opposite, in fact.

The first option mentioned – that of the Christians from southern Europe bringing ampullae with them – is consequently a more likely scenario than Anglo-Saxon

pilgrimage to Abu Mina. The tantalizing question to ask is then why would these southern Europeans have brought Menas ampullae with them to the British Isles?

It is an interesting point that Gregory the Great preached one of his homilies in a church in Rome dedicated to Saint Menas.<sup>24</sup> A letter is also preserved from Pope Gregory to the (Chalcedonian) Patriarch of Alexandria, Eulogius, telling about the baptism of a considerable number of British ("more than ten thousand Angli").<sup>25</sup> There is no reason to doubt the contact between Rome and Alexandria nor knowledge about the veneration of St Menas in Rome. This leads back to the question of Christians living or being present in south-east Britain before the Augustinian mission of 597.

### **The presence of Menas ampullae and Christianity in South and East Britain**

Some scholars suggest that the population of eastern Britain never became de-Christianised in the fifth and sixth centuries, despite the fact that its Anglo-Saxon rulers were pagan.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, William Frend summed up the British situation as a 'failed promise', in which Romano-British Christianity failed to develop in fifth-century eastern Britain, compared to the development of Christianity in fifth-century Gaul.<sup>27</sup> According to Frend, Augustine was re-introducing Christianity, even in Kent, not simply introducing Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons. John Blair describes the situation in Kent – although Augustine did meet the cult of Saint Sixtus – as a 'clean slate'.<sup>28</sup> Another option, that Christianity initially declined, but was re-introduced from Gaul prior to the Augustinian mission, is raised by Ian Wood's argument that Kent had many similarities to a Christianised Frankish province in the sixth century.<sup>29</sup> Since 'normal' archaeological evidence for Christianity, such as churches, generally is lacking in these parts of Britain, this tends to support the opinion that no organised form

<sup>24</sup> Hom. xxxv, *In Evang. In Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies*. Translated by D. Hurst (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1990) pp. 301-11. For references to the location see Henri Leclercq, 'Ménas (saint)', in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, 11,1 (Paris, 1933), cl. 387.

<sup>25</sup> In Epistle XXX, David L. Edwards, *Christian England* (London, Collins, 1981), 1: Its story to the reformation. 48ff., Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 112, also Ian Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), pp. 1-17.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Ken Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Stroud, Tempus, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> W. H. C. Frend, 'Roman Britain, a Failed Promise', in *The Cross goes North. Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Martin Carver (York, Woodbridge: York Medieval Press; Boydell, 2003), pp. 79-92 (91).

<sup>28</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London, Longman, 1994), pp. 176-80; it also appears that considerable Frankish interests were vested in the mission: Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English'.

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication (2003) to the author by keepers of the National Museums

<sup>22</sup> Harris, p. 191.

<sup>23</sup> See above note 9.

of Christianity existed at the time of Augustine.<sup>30</sup> However, other forms of evidence have been compiled to the opposite effect. For example, David Howlett has shown that Latin proficiency in Britain was at distinguished level.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, an analysis of the issues Augustine discussed with Pope Gregory suggests that they are points raised by audiences experienced in Christian practice.

The literature concerning Augustine's mission is extensive, and indicates that the mission had directives from Pope Gregory to the effect that the existing British Church should be subordinated to that of the incoming Papal Church.<sup>32</sup> Incidentally, this seems to be corroborated by Blair's argument that Saint Sixtus was adopted as a local saint, and perhaps by the case of Saint Martin's church in Canterbury, which Bede informs us predated the mission.<sup>33</sup> It must be remembered that the Christian church for most of its life had fought sectarians – Christians who taught falsely – and such endeavours also can be considered as 'mission'. As Martin Henig puts it, 'Contemporary records make it clear that Pope Gregory I was not really worried about paganism: he was far more concerned about a flourishing Celtic church which appeared to take little heed of Rome...'.<sup>34</sup>

What connection can be seen between these aspects of Christianity in Britain, Menas ampullae and long-distance contacts? Reasons for the transport of Menas ampullae are outlined above. If a religious motive is accepted

behind the transportation of the ampullae, it is very tempting to see a link between this motive and the situation of Christianity in Britain.

The hypothesis is based on the suggestion that the production of Menas ampullae should be assessed in the context of the momentous debate concerning the true nature of Christ. The Abu Mina production only took place in a period where the site was under imperial, that is, pro-Chalcedonian (or diophysite), control, in what seemingly was a generally non-Chalcedonian (or monophysite) area.<sup>35</sup> It follows that the Menas ampullae may have had a pro-Chalcedonian connotation. The Augustinian mission was, of course, pro-Chalcedonian, as it was initiated by the Pope. This is not to say that debate in Britain concerned the Chalcedonian issue, but to suggest that the ampullae belonged in the camp of orthodoxy, in the view of Rome and Constantinople. The mission went to a country where a Church known for its stubborn adherence to non-Papal (although not monophysite) values existed, and even flourished in some areas.<sup>36</sup> Is the presence of the Menas ampullae in eastern Britain connected to this perception of Britain?

It will be interesting to see where Menas ampullae may be discovered in the future, and whether the hypothesis outlined above will be vindicated. If so, humble pilgrim souvenirs will provide valuable material evidence for church politics at a high level and the long-distance contacts involved.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica. Culture and Politics in Roman Britain* (Stroud, Tempus, 2002) p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> David Howlett, 'Continuities from Roman Britain' in *Pagans and Christians – from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Papers in honour of Martin Henig*, ed. Lauren Gilmour (Oxford, Archaeopress: 2007), pp.175-188.

<sup>32</sup> Clare Stancliffe, 'The British Church and the Mission of Augustine', in *St. Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard Gameson (Stroud, Sutton, 1999), pp. 107-151.

<sup>33</sup> Bede *EH*, I. 26 p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica*, pp. 128, 138-142. The quoted sentence from Martin Henig, 'Roman Britons after AD 410', *British Archaeology*, 63 (2002): 8-11.

<sup>35</sup> Bangert, *The Ashmolean Collection of Menas Ampullae*. See also above note 2.

<sup>36</sup> Harris, p. 155; Stancliffe, p. 113.