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ROMAN AND POST-ROMAN POTTERY FROM TRETHURGY, CORNWALL

BLACK-BURNISHED WARE, CATEGORY 1 (BB1)

Sherds: 29(G[1].125), 19-21, 910, 455(G.329), 28(G.147), 14-16 (G.148), 17, 18(G.228), 801(b/s) and 751(base).

The colour aimed at seems to have been ideally black, or dark grey, with the core of the vessel invariably the same colour as the surface appearance. The clay contains a very high amount of distinctive quartz sand, which in fracture, against a dark background, gives the impression of a 'cod's row' appearance. All the pottery has received a characteristic burnishing treatment at the 'leather-hard' stage of manufacture. This has the effect of making the surface of the clay more compact, thereby reducing porosity. The burnishing appears to have been achieved mostly by freehand, and the short burnishing strokes are often clearly visible. The decoration is always burnished rather than incised, and consists of narrow shallow lines, sometimes rather loosely drawn.

The fabric of all the BB1 present appears virtually identical to material originating from the Wareham-Poole Harbour area of Dorset. A heavy mineral analysis was undertaken on one of the sherds (no. 18) and produced an assemblage characterized by a high tourmaline content. This agrees well with analyses on BB1 vessels shown to have been made in the Wareham-Poole Harbour area (Williams,1977,Group I), and a similar origin is likely for the Trethurgy material.

[1]Refers to Gillam's Types paper (1957).

The only certain early form present is the upright-rimmed cooking-pot, G.125 (A.D.120-180). Due to the longevity of the plain-rimmed dish form G.329 (A.D.135-340), it is difficult to say whether any sherds here are early or late. The remaining vessels, however, can be dated more closely, and it is possible to assign them to a late third century to fourth century date.

GABBROIC WARE

Sherds: 22, 30, 31, 35-61, 63-108, 111, 112, 115, 116, 127, 129, 130, 133, 135-141, 143-145, 302 and 932.

The majority of pottery from the site is clearly made from the same gabbroic clays derived from the Lizard and recognized by Peacock as being used for much Neolithic and Iron Age pottery in the South-West (1969a; 1969b). Thin sectioning of sherds 31, 33, 36, 44, 48, 60, 62, 97, 118, 122 and 124 confirm that the most prominant inclusions are made up of large angular grains of altered felspar and fibrous aggregates of brown amphibole. The mineralogy so closely resembles Peacock's description of the gabbroic clays of the Lizard peninsula (ibid.), that there seems little doubt that this material was also used for the Trethurgy pottery.

The colour of the gabbroic ware varies from buff to black; however, the consistent feature of this pottery is the high content of small white felspar fragments which protrude through the surfaces. There are a wide variety of forms present.

Interestingly enough, a large group of sherds in this fabric are obviously imitating standard Dorset BB1 forms, though without the accompanying schemes of decoration : 62(G.127), 110, 113(G.309), 109(G.316), 114, 118, 119, 121, 122, 124(G.227), 117, 120, 123, 125, 126, 128, 131, 132, 134(G.228), 142(G.330), 32-34(G.148), 146-147(lid). The majority of the vessels appear to be copying late BB1 forms, no doubt taking advantage of the latter's immense popularity, and as such reflect in some measure the Dorset BB1 group above.

GRASS-MARKED GABBROIC WARE

Sherd: Q829. Hard, rough fabric, grey (Munsell 5Y 5/1) surfaces, dark grey core. Impressions of grass or chaff can be seen on the outside surface.

A thin sectioning of the sherd showed that the grass impressions are confined to the outside only. Petrologically, the composition of the paste shows very little difference to that of the large gabbroic group above, and so it seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the Lizard gabbroic clays were also used in this case. Similar grass-marked pottery from Cornwall and the Scilly Isles has beem studied by Peacock and also found to have been made of gabbroic clays (1975, 47).These results taken together would seem to contradict Thomas' (1968) view:(a) that such grass-marked pottery was made locally at each find-site (unless it is advocated that the clay and not the pots were transported), and (b) if we

assign a fifth or sixth century date for the appearance of this class of vessel (most of the pottery mentioned by Thomas was found associated with post-Roman imports, like the Trethurgy sherd), that there was a complete break between Roman and post-Roman native pottery. The petrological results suggest that the grass-marked pottery so far sampled was made at the same centre, or at least in the same area, as the bulk of the Roman coarse pottery at Trethurgy, and therefore that the tradition of making pottery from the Lizard gabbroic clays continued from the Roman period (and before) into the post-Roman era. The output of such gabbroic pottery-making in the post-Roman period appears to have been greatly reduced compared with the Roman period, as the distribution of grass-marked pottery only occurs in small amounts in Northern Cornwall and the Scilly Isles (Thomas, 1968).

SAMIAN

The, on the whole, small scraps of samian listed in the catalogue seem acceptable as designated. No signs of 'A' ware here.

COLOUR-COATS

A). Probable Oxford wares: 199, 215, 311, 490, 528, 694, 786, 896, 907 and 915.

B). Probable New Forest wares: 25, 483, 572, 636, 807 and 947.

C). Remaining sherds undecided between these two, and other, centres.

AMPHORAE

DRESSEL TYPE 1

Sherd: 306. Hard, rough fabric, light red throughout, and containing a large quantity of black sand.

A thin section of the sherd shows a similar compesition to Peacock's Fabric 2, with a provenance in the Caecuban and Falernian areas of Italy (1971a,164-165). The form is characteristic of the first half of the first century B.C. This form of amphora is not well represented in Cornwall, apart from Trethurgy, a Dressel Type 1A has recently been found at Carn Euny.

SOUTH SPANISH GLOBULAR

Sherds: 8, 176, 357, 446, 489, 613, 767 and 872. Hard, rough sandy fabric, orangy-buff throughout.

Identification of individual forms is difficult, though Dressel 20 is probably represented by no. 489. The group as a whole can be dated to the first two centuries A.D. (ibid., 171).

BLACK MICA FABRIC

Sherd: 23. Hard, rough fabric, dark grey (Munsell 10YR 4/1) throughout, and with conspicuous black mica inclusions all through the fabric.

This sherd has a particularly distinctive appearance in the hand specimen and is easily recognisable. Similar examples of this fabric have come from fourth century contexts at Stoke Gabriel, Devon (Phillips,1966,23), and from thirteenth century levels at Beere, Devon (Jope and Threlfall,1958,126). An origin on or near to a large granite formation seems likely, as the large quantity of mica present is obviously granite detritus.

POST-ROMAN IMPORTS

The terminology employed here follows Radford's (1956) original classification of imported post-Roman wares at Tintagel into Class 'A' (red ware bowls and dishes of finely levigated clay) and Class 'B' (Amphorae), and Thomas' (1959) sub-division of the amphorae into four types, Bi to Biv.

'A' WARES

Four small sherds from Trethurgy can be accepted as belonging to Class 'A': 1, 46, 248 and 678. Due to the smallness of the sherds involved it is difficult to identify with any exactness the forms involved. However, vessels in this class

comprise bowls and dishes with a thin red slip, slightly darker than the paste, commonly with wall-sided rims, often decorated with rouletting (Radford,1956,figs.13 and 14).

Radford's division of the 'A'wares at Tintagel into Ai and Aii was based to a large extent on the apparent softness of fabric of Ai and the hardness of Aii (ibid.). This seems to have been due to the acidity of the local soil conditions rather than implying that the two sub-classes originated from different areas. Thin sectioning of samples of both sub-classes from Tintagel showed no significant difference between them. The inconsistency of having two sub-classes of 'A' wares was previously noted by Alcock at Dinas Powys (1963, 125-126), though this division still continues to be used (Laing,1975,270).

In his detailed study of Eastern late Roman fine pottery, Hayes confirmed that the majority of the British post-Roman 'A' ware forms and fabrics are similar to Late Roman 'C' types that are overwhelmingly concentrated in the Aegean area (1972, 323-370). Hayes suggested that due to the basic uniformity of type, the ware was almost certainly produced in a single region, possibly near Pergamon in Asia Minor (ibid.).

The Trethurgy sherds can probably be dated to the end of the fifth - beginning of the sixth century A.D. (Fowler, Gardner and Rahtz,1970,31; Hayes,1972,336-337).

Bi AMPHORAE

Sherds: 2, 63, 82, 92, 108, 130, 199, 235, 281 and 637. Fairly hard, smooth fabric, pinkish-creamy throughout. Inclusions of

white limestone are commonly visible. A scheme of deep horizontal grooves set close together occurs on the upper part of the vessel(for the complete form see Thomas,1971,fig.61).

A thin section was made of no. 108 and the petrology agreed well with the description given by Peacock for his analysis of Bi sherds from Glastonbury Tor, i.e., a clay matrix composed mainly of limestone and mica (1971b). Recent work by the writer on this type of fabric suggests a possible origin in the Greek Islands or North-West Asia Minor (Williams,forthcoming).

A late fifth - sixth century date seems appropriate to the Trethurgy Bi sherds (Thomas,1959,104).

Bii AMPHORAE

Sherds: 73, 121, 180a, 184, 188a, 221, 256, 500, 565, 569, 666, 743, 801, 802 and 954. Hard, rough fabric, reddish-buff throughout, and with horizontal ribbing irregularly spaced (for the complete form see Emery,1938,Type 6).

A thin section examination of no. 221 shows that in addition to pyroxene and limestone noted by Peacock in Bii sherds from Glastonbury Tor (1971b), the section also contains serpentine, suggesting an origin in an area of ultra-basic rocks. A heavy mineral analysis on the same sample produced large amounts of diopside and enstatite. This suggests derivation from peridotite, an ultra-basic rock.

Close parallels to British Bii amphorae are to be found in some numbers in the Eastern Mediterranean region, indicating a

seaborne distribution (Thomas,1959; Hayes,1973), and an origin in that area for this type of amphora is highly likely. The distribution of ultra-basic rocks in the Eastern Mediterranean coastal area is not widespread. Small amounts are to be found on Cyprus, Lesbos and Euboea, while larger formations occur in South-West Asia Minor and Northern Syria. If the Bii amphora was intended for carrying olive-oil (Thomas,1959,92), it is tempting to see it originating from the Antioch region of Northern Syria, which is suspected of being the centre of a large olive-oil export trade during the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. (Liebeschuetz,1972,79-81). It is possible that the diopside/enstatite sand may have derived from the large ultra-basic formations to the north of Antioch. However, such a view is speculative until Eastern comparanda can also be analyzed.

A similar date range mentioned above for the Bi amphora also applies for the British finds of the Bii.

Biv AMPHORAE

Sherds: 12 and 319. Fairly hard, deep red or reddish-brown fabric, heavily micaceous, with a decorative scheme of broad shallow fluting (for the complete two-handled form see Emery,1938,Type 13a).

These sherds were not sectioned, but they appear identical in the hand-specimen to a typical Biv fabric. The two-handled Biv amphorae is normally assigned a late fifth-mid sixth century date on British post-Roman sites. However, as pointed out by Peacock (1977), where small body sherds of this fabric are involved (as is the case at Trethurgy), it cannot be automatically

accepted that they are post-Roman in date. Prototypes of the two-handled Biv form are found in one-handled vessels from pre- fifth century contexts at Bath and Ospringe in what appears to be a similar fabric (ibid.).

For a discussion of the possible origins of the Biv amphora see Williams (forthcoming).

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