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PETROLOGY OF CERTAIN SEVERN VALLEY WARE FABRICS

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Introduction

Nine sherds of what is generally described as Roman Severn Valley ware were submitted from Kenchester and Worcester for petrological examination in thin section under the polarizing microscope. The object of the analysis was twofold : (1) to determine whether slight macroscopic differences between some of the sherds is significant, and (2) to try to establish whether the pottery was being produced at different geographical locations or merely represents small variations from one centre. The results of the analysis are listed below with a description of the fabrics. Munsell colour charts are referred to together with free descriptive terms.

Results

Kenchester

1. HWCM M51 RID. Soft, fairly smooth fabric, reddish-yellow (5YR 6/6) surfaces, dark brown core.

   Thin sectioning shows numerous subangular grains of quartz, some up to 0.60mm. across, but most falling in the range 0.10-.30mm., and small pieces of iron ore.

2. West Gate 19 u/s RIC. Small bowl or dish. Soft smooth fabric, reddish-yellow (5YR 7/8) throughout.

3. HWCM 119 P.236 RIC. Everted-rimmed jar. Soft smooth fabric, reddish-yellow (5YR 7/6) throughout.

Both sherds are in a very fine-textured micaceous fabric. Thin sectioning shows a fine-grained matrix containing numerous subangular quartz grains, average size 0.05-.10mm., and many small flecks of white mica.

4. HWCM 119 4425126 RIA. Fairly soft smooth fabric, with frequent vesicles where (?) vegetable matter has burnt out during firing. Light red (2.5 YR) surfaces, light grey core.

5. HWCM 119 827 RIB. Fairly soft slightly smooth fabric, reddish-yellow (5YR 6/8) surfaces, light grey core.

In thin section both sherds reveal numerous subangular quartz grains, average size 0.10-.40mm., flecks of mica, iron ore, some argillaceous material and fragments of medium-coarse sandstone.

Worcester

6. WS 76 1498 Fabric 25. Hard moderately smooth fabric, displaying frequent vesicles where (?) vegetable matter has burnt out. Reddish-yellow (7.5 YR 6/6) surfaces and light grey core.

7. WS 76 1498 Fabric 23. Hard smooth slightly micaceous fabric, reddish-yellow (5YR 7/6) surfaces, light red core.

In thin section both sherds contain numerous subangular quartz grains, average size 0.10-.20mm., flecks of mica, a certain amount of iron ore and argillaceous material and some fragments of medium-coarse sandstone.

8. WS 76 1625 Fabric 35. Very hard slightly rough fabric, greyish-brown (10YR 5/2) outside surface, deep red inside surface and core.

9. WS 76 1498 Fabric 23/25. Hard smooth slightly micaceous fabric, pink (5YR 7/4) throughout.

Thin sectioning shows that both sherds contain a scatter of subangular quartz grains, average size 0.05-15mm., red iron ore, a little argillaceous material and fragments of a fine-grained sandstone.

Discussion

The above analysis shows that overall the sampled sherds of Severn Valley ware are clearly not homogeneous in their respective range of inclusions, and as a consequence of this probably do not represent the output of a single centre. Samples 4 and 5 from Kenchester and 6 and 7 from Worcester are fairly similar in thin section, however, and there may be a connection between them.

The distribution of Severn Valley ware products occurs throughout the Severn Basin and a number of known or suspected kilns making this pottery have been discovered in the region (Webster,1976). Unfortunately, the type of inclusions present in the Kenchester and Worcester samples are comparatively common in this area and so it is not possible to suggest likely sources for the sherds. However, this small programme of work does give a slight indication that it may prove to be a worthwhile exercise at some stage in the future to analyse material

from the known kiln sites for Severn Valley ware to see if it is possible to characterize the texture of the fabrics for each production centre.

Reference

Webster, P.V. (1976) 'Severn Valley ware: a preliminary study', Trans. Bristol & Gloucester Arch. Soc., 94 (1976), 19-46.