for the Norfolk Arch. Unit. ANL Report 2817.

PETROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF POTTERY FROM THE ROMANO-BRITISH KILN AT WITTON, NORFOLK

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The sherd (OS 196 K1) is in a moderately hard, fairly smooth fabric, with greyish-brown (Munsell 2.5Y 5/2) surfaces and dark grey core. A decorative scheme consisting of a series of parallel burnished lines appears on the outside surface.

In thin section under the petrological microscope the sherd was found to contain a groundmass of subangular quartz grains under 0.10mm in size, and a scatter of larger grains, average size 0.20-.30mm, set in an optically isotropic matrix of fired clay. Also present were flecks of mica and a few grains of plagioclase felspar. A heavy mineral analysis on the sherd produced too few grains for a reliable reading, but zircon, garnet, tourmaline and kyanite were noted. The quartz grains present in the sherd are within the size range that occurs naturally in impure clays, and this may indicate that sand was not added as a tempering medium to the pottery. This could however be checked against local clay supplies.

A thin section examination was also conducted on a sherd from Brancaster (Fabric 5), where the decoration resembled that on the sherd from Witton. However, a comparison between the two samples revealled textural differences implying separate centres of production.

Much of the Romano-British pottery from East Anglia consists of sandy wares in fairly similar forms, like the Witton and Brancaster sherds above, where oftem it is not possible to suggest a particular origin with any degree of confidence. In these circumstances, it may be useful at some stage in the future to set up a detailed programme of thin sectioning (supplimented by heavy mineral analysis) which might be able to establish textural characteristics for the products of each known kiln, thereby going some way in helping to allocate suspected products to those same kilns.