

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

REPORT

2828

SERIES/No

CONTRACTOR

AUTHOR

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May 1979

TITLE

Petrological analysis of Samian
Ware

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INTRODUCTION

The samian sherd from the Museum of London's collection (? ref) was thin sectioned and studied under the petrological microscope as part of a programme of analysis of arretine and samian pottery (Williams, 1978). Preliminary results show that the majority of samples from arretine and samian vessels contain only common inclusions such as quartz sand, mica and limestone. This range of inclusions is not particularly helpful in suggesting geological source areas, and by implication the likely production centres involved. However, a detailed textural analysis on sherds assigned to particular centres by name-stamp or stylistic features, does suggest that it may be possible to characterize their fabrics. The method entails an examination of the size, shape and frequency of the inclusions present in the clay, and is capable of allowing less distinctive sherds to be allocated to a production area by comparing material from known origins. The Museum of London sherd, due to its poor quality of decoration and manufacture, has therefore been compared with samian thought to have been made in this country by the Aldgate-Pulborough potter, as well as with early second century material from Les Martres de Veyre and Lezoux.

In thin section the Museum of London sherd was found to contain a groundmass of subangular quartz grains under 0.05mm in size, with a scatter of larger grains, average size 0.10-.20mm, set in an anisotropic matrix of fired clay. Also present were a few small siltstones and some flecks of mica. This fabric proved to be different from a sample taken from a sherd from Southwark thought possibly to have been made by the Aldgate-Pulborough potter (pub. ref ? sherd from 1-7, St. Thomas' Street, A.2. 48 (26)). The Southwark sherd contains more frequent mica and well-sorted quartz grains, average size 0.05-.10mm, as well as red iron ore grains and a little limestone. Both sherds were in turn different to two samples from Wiggonholt of the Aldgate-Pulborough potter (Webster, 1975, fig.3, nos.14 and 12). These latter sherds contain frequent well-sorted quartz grains up to 0.10mm in size and some flecks of mica. In addition, none of the above samples appeared similar in thin section to sherds from Les Martres de Veyre and Lezoux. The Les Martres samples tend to be of a much finer texture than the sherds from London and Wiggonholt, while those from Lezoux contain a significant amount of limestone. The exception to this was a sherd from Lezoux (Drusus II) with a slight pinkish-buff core in fresh fracture. In thin section this sample showed an isotropic matrix recalling material from Montans (Williams, 1978, 7).

CONCLUSIONS

The Museum of London samian sherd does not appear sufficiently similar in fabric to the alleged British samian sherds from Southwark and Wiggonholt, or to material from Central Gaul, to

suspect that it was made at the same centre as one of these vessels. However, at this stage it is not possible to say if the Museum of London sample was produced in Britain or not, only that it does not compare favourably with the above samples.

REFERENCES

- Webster, P.V. (1975) 'More British samian ware by the Aldgate-Pulborough potter', *Britannia*, 6(1975), 163-170.
- Williams, D.F. (1978) 'Petrological analysis of arretine and early samian: a preliminary report', in Arthur, P. and Marsh, G. (eds.), Early Fine Wares in Roman Britain, B.A.R. 57 (1978), 5-12.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Joanna Bird of the Southwark Archaeological Committee and Peter Webster for supplying the samples from Southwark and Wiggonholt respectively. Also to the Museum of London for generously making available comparative material from Central Gaul.