PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF A ROMANO-BRITISH GLAZED SHERD FROM ARMSLEY, HAMPSHIRE

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A sherd of Romano-British glazed pottery from Armsley, Hampshire, typical of the small group of glazed wares found at the site (Musty, 1969), was submitted for petrological examination. The object of the analysis was twofold: firstly, to more closely characterize the fabric of this distinctive type of pottery, and secondly, to see if the non-plastic inclusions contained in the clay give any clue as to the likely production area involved. Previously, two separate source areas have been suggested for the Armsley glazed pottery: the Mendips (Musty,1969) and Wiltshire/northern Hampshire (Arthur,1978).

The sample sherd analyzed is in a fairly hard, light red sandy fabric, with an orange to brown glaze on the outside surfaces. Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope shows numerous well-sorted subangular quartz grains in the size-range 0.05-.30mm, flecks of mica and a little iron ore, set in a brown, optically anisotropic matrix of baked clay. This assemblage of minerals is far too common to indicate any one particular area, but may prove useful texturally if similar material from known or suspected sources could be compared to it.

Rather unusually, also present in the Armsley thin section were a number of heavy mineral grains. This suggested that a heavy mineral separation might prove worthwhile, even though the amount of pottery available for additional analysis was small, about 3.5gm weight.

Heavy mineral separation was therefore adopted in an attempt to further characterize the pottery and at the same time see if the results would be more forthcoming in indicating likely areas of origin. In view of the small size of the sherd, the prepared sample was centrifuged rather than subjected to the more normal settling method of separating out the heavy minerals. Recent tests have shown that centrifugation greatly increases the number of grains recovered when dealing with finer-textured or smaller amounts of pottery (Williams,1979).

The heavy mineral residue of non-opaque grains obtained from the Armsley sherd consisted almost exclusively of andalusite, a detrital heavy mineral which is commonest in Tertiary deposits (Milner,1962,40). On this evidence, the source of the Armsley glazed wares is more likely to have been located on the Tertiary deposits of Wiltshire/northern Hampshire than the Carboniferous and Triassic deposits of the Mendips and surrounding region. This is not to say of course, that other Tertiary source areas may not be equally likely.

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