3088

PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF 'SUB-RAETIAN' MORTARIA FROM CHESTER

D. F. Williams, Ph.D.,
(DOE Ceramic Petrology Project)
Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Three samples of 'sub-raetian' types of mortaria were submitted for thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope. The object of the analysis was twofold: firstly, to more closely characterize the fabrics involved, and secondly, to see if the non-plastic inclusions contained in the clay give any clue to the production areas involved. The results are as follows:

1. AG 75 IV (29)

   Thin sectioning shows a fairly clean clay matrix with a scatter of subangular quartz grains ranging in size from 0.05mm to 0.50mm and some flecks of mica.

2. CHE/AG 1975-8 (667) 3008

   Thin sectioning shows a groundmass of numerous subangular quartz grains under 0.10mm in size, with occasional larger grains and flecks of mica.

3. CHE/AG 1975-8 (137) 3007

   Thin sectioning shows a fairly clean, micaceous clay matrix, with frequent subangular quartz grains, average size 0.15-.60mm, quartzite and some sandstone.

Conclusions

All three samples appear to be different in thin section,

though there is a possibility that Sample 2 is merely a more sandy version of Sample 1. However, in the case of Sample 3, there can be little doubt that different raw materials were used than for the other two samples, suggesting that the three mortaria were made in at least two centres. Unfortunately, the inclusions present in all three samples are fairly common and by themselves are not distinctive enough to geologically pinpoint any particular area, though the small fragments of sandstone identified in Sample 3 may indicate an origin on the Triassic sandstones that cover Chester and the surrounding region. What are needed now are comparative mortaria samples from know or suspected production sites to see how they match up to the mortaria from Chester. In particular, the texture of the fabric of Sample 3 is fairly distinctive, and should allow an easy comparison.