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PETROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BLACK-BURNISHED POTTERY, BRIQUETAGE AND CLAY FROM OWER, DORSET

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INTRODUCTION

A small number of Romano-British black-burnished ware vessels associated with the 'potters yard' (181,147) were submitted for examination under the polarizing microscope, together with samples of briquetage and clay from the site. The object of the analysis was threefold: (1) to see if it is possible to characterize the black-burnished ware products associated with the Ower (?) kiln, (2) to see how the briquetage fabric compares with the pottery, and if local production is possible, and (3) to compare the clay samples submitted with both the pottery and the briquetage.

RESULTS

The sherds of black-burnished ware were firstly thin sectioned and then submitted to a heavy mineral separation. Thin sectioning showed a clay matrix containing frequent grains of quartz, average size 0.20-.60mm, and a little shale. Inclusions of shale have previously been note in black-burnished pottery found at Butcombe (Fowler,1968), Exeter (Bidwell,1977) and by the writer in 'waster' samples from a number of sites in the Wareham-Poole Harbour area of Dorset. The heavy mineral residue from the Ower sherds produced a tourmaline-rich assemblage characteristic of black-burnished pottery made in the above mentioned area (Williams,1977). However, neither the

proportion of the different minerals present nor the character of the grains, vary sufficiently from other black-burnished ware produced in this region to characterize the heavy mineral suite of the Ower material.

Heavy mineral separation on a sample of briquetage also produced a high tourmaline content similar to that obtained from the pottery. There were some differences in thin section though, the briquetage containing a higher percentage of shale, and mudstone also appears to be present. A local, or fairly local, source for the briquetage would be in keeping with the petrology.

Several samples of baked clay (Feature 388; Kiln oven and flue) and unbaked clay (Fill of clay box in potters yard and trample on yard; Post-Pad building; Pipe trench) were also studied in thin section and compared with the pottery and briquetage. None of the clay samples sectioned appeared to contain noticeable amounts of the shale/mudstone present in the pottery and briquetage, though a few fragments were noted. Instead the clay was found to contain a very high quartz content, especially the samples from the structure of the kiln, the latter possibly a deliberate addition for refractory purposes.

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