

EARLY MEDIAEVAL POTTERY FROM THE BROUGH OF
DEERNESS, ORKNEY

D. F. Williams, M.D., F.S.A.

(DOE Ceramic Petrology Project)

Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Fifteen sherds of Early Mediaeval pottery, and two ? moulds, from the Brough of Deerness, Orkney were submitted for fabric examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. The object of the analysis was twofold: (1) to determine the rock and mineral content of the samples and to see if there are any noticeable fabric differences in the material submitted, and (2) if possible, to suggest whether the sherds are likely to have been made in the area of Deerness. All the samples were firstly studied macroscopically with the aid of a binocular microscope (x 40). Munsell colour charts are referred to, together with free descriptive terms.

FABRIC 1 DS 75 AR (40), DS75 AR (52), DS75 AR(60), DS76 BV (91).

Hard, rough sandy fabric, reddish-brown to light-red throughout (10R 6/3 to 2.5YR 6/6). Thin sectioning shows a ground-mass of quartz grains, average size 0.15mm and under, together with a scatter of larger grains up to 1.20mm across, sandstone, discrete grains of plagioclase and potash feldspar, flecks of mica and a little granite in one or two of the sherds.

FABRIC 2 DS75 AR (61), DS76 BD (94), DS75 BF (54c), DS75 AR (65),
 DS76 BD (98), DS75 AR (44), DS75 AR (68A), DS75 AR (50),
 DS76 BD (117), ? mould DS76 BD (110), ? mould DS76 Bd (164)

Hard, rough sandy fabric, containing prominent inclusions of

sandstone, normally light to dark shades of reddish-grey in colour (5YR 4/2). Sherd BS75 AR (68A) has vegetable impressions on the outside surfaces. Thin sectioning shows a similar range of inclusions to Fabric 1, but with more frequent and slightly larger quartz grains and pieces of sandstone, producing a coarser texture. In addition, sherds BS75 AR (68A) and BS75 BF (54C) contain a small number of elongate vesicles, suggesting that chopped grass or chaff may have been present.

FABRIC 3 BS76 BF (31)

Hard, rough slightly sandy fabric, dark grey throughout (5Y 4/1). Thin sectioning shows a fairly clean clay matrix containing a scatter of quartz grains, flecks of mica and frequent fine-grained pieces of sandstone.

FABRIC 4 BS76 BF (79).

Small rim heavily charged with pieces of shell. Not sectioned.

Comments

The Brough of Deerness is situated on Middle Eday Sandstone Deposits, which are often coarse and pebbly, the latter consisting largely of granite, quartzite and vein quartz. Given the petrology of the above samples there is, therefore, no reason to suspect anything else but a fairly local origin for the pottery.