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PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY FROM MEARE, SOMERSET

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Introduction

Seven samples of Iron Age pottery from Meare were submitted for thin section examination under the petrological microscope. The object of the analysis was twofold: (1) to characterize in detail the fabrics involved and compare them with each other, and (2) if possible to indicate likely source areas. All the samples were initially studied macroscopically with the aid of a binocular microscope (x20). Munsell colour charts are referred to together with free descriptive terms.

Petrology and Fabric

Fabric 1

(1) MVE '54, F8, Box 209; (2) MVE'54, 12; (3) MVW '79, 2769, F4

Soft, rough, somewhat vesicular fabric, with a slightly 'soapy' feel, varying in colour from pinkish-grey (5YR 7/2) to dark grey (10YR 4/1). Fragments of limestone can sometimes be seen on the surface, or more usually in the core. Thin sectioning shows frequent microcrystalline limestone and shelly limestone set in a light reddish-brown anisotropic clay matrix. The shelly limestones are composed almost entirely of fragments of shell that have been recrystallized into calcite. A number of brachiopod fragments

can, however, still be recognized.

Fabric 2

(4) MVE'82, 1630, F8; (5) MVE'82, 1050, F4; (6) MVE'59, 27

Fairly soft, rough fabric, again with a slightly 'soapy' feel, varying in colour from pale brown (10YR 7/4) to dark grey (10YR 4/1). Fragments of white shell can be seen scattered throughout the fabric. Thin sectioning shows inclusions of shelly limestone, including brachiopods, with some calcite grains, set in a dark reddish-brown anisotropic clay matrix.

Fabric 3

(7) MVE'56, 19, F4, Box 47

Soft, rough highly vesicular fabric, pinkish-grey (7.5YR 7/2) to grey (7.5YR N5/) in colour. Thin sectioning shows little but a number of fairly well rounded voids, some argillaceous material and a few quartz grains, set in a light brown anisotropic clay matrix. It is difficult to be sure of the original nature of the inclusions in this sherd. The extant argillaceous material and the degree of rounding of the majority of the voids point to some form of argillaceous property - either 'grog' (crushed up pottery) or, perhaps more likely, naturally occurring clay pellets.

Comments

Recent petrological analysis of pottery from Meare, together with local clay sampling, has suggested that much of the pottery from the site is of fairly local manufacture (Bailey, 1981). Clay sampling of the Lower Lias Beds of the Isle of Wedmore, 4km north of Meare, and the Polden Hills, produced a fairly close-match for Fabric 1 (ibid.). While the Rhaetic Clay Beds of the Isle of

Wedmore are the nearest source of the shelly limestone characteristic of Fabric 2 (Green and Welch, 1965). Due to the common nature of the (?)argillaceous material in Fabric 3, it is difficult to predict a likely source.

Bibliography

Bailey, J.V. (1981) Pottery Production in the Iron Age Lake villages of Somerset unpublished undergraduate dissertation, Southampton University (1981).

Green, G.W. and Welch, F.B.A. (1965) Geology of the Country around Wells and Cheddar (London, 1965).