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PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF SIXTEENTH-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

IBERIAN POTTERY FROM NEWTON ABBOT, DEVON

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Introduction

A number of sherds suspected of being Spanish imports, recovered from excavations at Newton Abbot, were submitted for detailed fabric analysis. After an initial macroscopic examination with the aid of a binocular microscope (x20), the majority of the sherds were thin-sectioned and studied under the petrological microscope. Munsell colour charts are referred to together with free descriptive terms.

Results

Red micaceous 'Meriola-type' ware (NA 83/222; NA 80B/51; NA 83/840; NA83/758; NA 83/87; NA 83/400; NA 80B/25; NA 83/721; NA 83/337; NA 83/105)

A group of ten sherds in a hard, fairly smooth, normally light red (10R 6/6 to 6/8) micaceous fabric. Thin sectioning of some of these sherds shows frequent grains of quartz and flecks of mica, together with some plagioclase and potash feldspar, quartzite and iron ore. This material falls within the fabric range of Mediaeval and post-Mediaeval Iberian red micaceous pottery. This distinctive ware seems to have been made at a variety of places in both Spain and Portugal over a fairly long time span, rather than at a single centre (Williams, 1979). The individual production centres have yet to be recognized with certainty and their fabrics characterized.

'Isabela polychrome' (NA 80A/294)

Thin sectioning shows that the fabric contains frequent grains of quartz, with some flecks of mica and a little plagioclase felspar and cryptocrystalline limestone. The sherd from Newton Abbot is similar to sherds of Isabela polychrome previously analyzed from Cleeve Abbey, Somerset and Exeter. Andalusia, possibly Seville, has been mentioned as a likely source for Isabela polychrome (Goggin, 1968, 126-128), and the above material compares favourably with a sample of local clay from Seville. However, the principal inclusions are all of a fairly common nature, and as much of the Iberian Peninsula is composed of sedimentary rocks, other sources should not be ruled out at this stage.

Lead-glazed sherd (NA 83)

Light red (10R 6/6 - 5/8) sandy fabric with limestone inclusions, covered by a thick strong brown (7.5YR 5/6 - 4/6) glaze. Thin sectioning shows frequent grains of quartz, small pieces of cryptocrystalline limestone, limestone voids, normally with a white hazy reaction rim surround, flecks of mica, quartzite and plagioclase felspar. An origin for this sherd in an area of sedimentary rocks is suggested by the petrology, but it is difficult to pinpoint with any certainty a particular source within the Iberian Peninsula (cf. Mannoni, 1982; Vince, 1982).

References

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