AML Rpt. 4365 Site No [illegible]

PETROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ROMAN POTTERY FROM CHESTER

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Introduction

Nine sherds of Roman pottery from various sites in Chester were submitted for thin section examination and study under the petrological microscope. The nine samples appear to represent four types of ware: (1) Red colour-coated orange fabric, used for dishes; recognized from late (?) sub Roman contexts; (2) Thin orange/brown corrugated fabric, probably from amphorae; recognized from late(?) sub Roman contexts; (3) Thin brown micaceous fabric(s) with white or red slip, the first certainly from large vessels, possibly amphorae; and (4) White-slipped orange fabric, probably from amphorae; thought by Charles Thomas to be closely comparable to the late amphorae of unknown origin found in 1981 at St. Blaise. The main objectives of the examination were: (a) a detailed characterization of the fabric of each sherd; (b) confirmation that sherds ascribed to certain groups are similar in fabric; and (c) if possible to suggest likely source areas for the pottery. Munsell colour charts are referred to, together with free descriptive terms.

Petrology and Fabric

(1) Abbey Green, Chester

75/8 IV - 258 Sa80. Fabric no.418. Base of red colour-coated dish.

Fairly hard, roughish fabric, containing frequent flecks of conspicuous golden mica with grains of quartz and white felspar also present, light red (2.5YR 6/6-6/8) throughout, with traces of a darker red slip on the (?) inner surface. Thin sectioning shows frequent flecks of mica, mostly muscovite but with some biotite, together with discrete grains of ill-assorted subangular quartz ranging in size up to 2.50mm across, potash felspar and some sandstone fragments.

The range of non-plastic inclusions suggests an origin in a geologically heterogeneous area, but it is difficult to say more at present.

(2) and Abbey Green, Chester

(3) 75/8 IV 693 Sa79. Fabric no.422. Almond-shaped amphora rim.

75/8 II 88 Sa78. Fabric no.423. Ridged (?) amphora bodysherd.

Hard, slightly rough sandy fabric with some small pieces of white limestone, light red (between 2.5YR 6/8-5/8 and 10 R6/6) surfaces, greyish-brown central core. Thin sectioning shows a groundmass of subangular quartz grains, average size below 0.10mm, with frequent larger subangular to subrounded grains in the size-range 0.30-0.90mm, a few flecks of mica, some limestone fragments and a little argillaceous material.

It is clear that these sherds come from an area containing sedimentary rocks.

(4) St. Mary's Hill, Chester

and (5) 77 v/s 12 Sa1. Ridged (?) amphora bodysherd.

Old Market Hall, Chester

67-9 Tr A3/NE - SE No Sa1. Ridged (?) amphora bodysherd.

Hard, fairly smooth micaeous fabric, pinkish-white (7.5YR 8/2) outer surface, light reddish-brown (5YR 6/3) inner surface and core. Thin sectioning shows a groundmass of frequent quartz grains, average size under 0.10mm, and small flecks of mica, together with some grains of plagioclase felspar, clinopyroxene and volcanic rock.

The petrology suggests an origin in an area of volcanic activity - perhaps somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean region.

(6) Hunter Street School, Chester

79 III 293 Sa56. Ridged (?) amphora bodysherd.

Soft, fairly smooth micaceous fabric, buff (7.5YR 7/4) to reddish-yellow (5YR 7/6) throughout. In thin section this sherd shares similarities with sherds (4) and (5), in that it contains frequent flecks of mica, though it appears to lack the clinopyroxene and volcanic rock present in the latter two samples.

(7) Hunter Street School, Chester

79 IV 260 Sa8. Fabric no.200. Ridged (?) amphora bodysherd.

Hard, slightly rough, sandy fabric, white (10YR 8/1-8/2) throughout. Thin sectioning shows a scatter of subangular quartz grains ranging up to 0.50mm in size together with flecks of mica.

It is difficult to predict likely origins when dealing with such a common range of non-plastic inclusions.

(8) Hunter's Walk, Chester

79 I 3 Sa40. Fabric no.400. Plain (?) amphora bodysherd.

Thick, fairly hard, slightly rough sandy fabric, with occasional grains of felspar and augite scattered throughout. Thin sectioning shows frequent subangular grains of quartz, average size up to 0.50mm, together with flecks of mica, potash felspar, clinopyroxene and volcanic rock.

The petrology suggests an origin in an area of volcanic activity - perhaps Italy or the eastern Mediterranean region.

(9) Hunter's Walk, Chester

79 II 128 Sa41. Fabric no.200. Plain (?) amphora bodysherd.

Thick, hard, slightly rough sandy fabric with occasional limestone, pinkish-white (7.5YR 8/2) surface, light red (between 2.5YR 6/6 and 6/8) inner surface and grey central core. Thin sectioning shows a scatter of subangular quartz grains up to 1mm in size, quartzite, sandstone, limestone, including foraminifera, some plagioclase and potash felspar, (?)chert, phyllite and flecks of mica.

The range of non-plastic inclusions suggests an origin in a geologically heterogenous area, but it is difficult to say more at present.

Comments

It has not been possible to tie down any of the above sherds to a likely source, despite the fact that some samples have a fairly distinctive fabric. It is likely, however, that much of this material comes from the Mediterranean region, in particular the eastern Mediterranean area. Unfortunately there are large areas in this region, for example Asia Minor and Syria, where we have little information on the amphorae types produced there. It is clear that a great deal of work

needs to be done on certain types of later Roman amphorae before anomalous sherds such as those from Chester can be confidently identified.