PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY FROM WEEKLEY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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Introduction

A number of Iron Age decorated and plain sherds from Weekley, Northamptonshire, were submitted for a detailed fabric examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. The main object of the analysis was twofold: (1) to characterize in detail the fabrics involved and compare them both with each other and also with selected material from other local sites, and (2) if possible to suggest likely source areas for the pottery. All the sherds were initially studied macroscopically with the aid of a binocular microscope (x 20). Munsell colour charts are referred to together with free descriptive terms. The site at Weekley lies two miles north-east of Kettering on Upper Lias Clay, closeby to deposits of Great Oolite, Inferior Oolite, Northampton Sand and Ironstone and Boulder Clays (Taylor, 1963).

Petrology and Fabric

On the basis of the range of the non-plastic inclusions present in the pottery sampled, a number of broad fabric divisions have been made.

Group 1: Gabbro

WEEK 76 K1 nos. 14 and 15. Curvilinear decorated bowl (see attached drawing).

WEEK 76 k1 (1). Base of a (?) jar (clearly a different vessel to the one above).

WEEK 76 K1 (1). Small decorated bodysherd (probably representing a separate vessel)

WEEK 76 KII (1). " " " " " " "

All of the sherds are in a hard, fairly rough fabric, dark grey (Munsell 10YR 4/1) throughout, with small angular inclusions of white felspar clearly visible. In thin section the most prominent inclusions are made up of angular grains of partly decomposed felspar, some of which have altered to sericite, fresher plagioclase and colourless or brown grains of amphibole, many of which appear as fibrous aggregates. Also present is a little pyroxene, serpentine and some grains of quartz. This assemblage of minerals closely resembles Peacock's (1969a; 1969b) description of the natural weathering clays overlying the gabbro on the Lizard Head, Cornwall, and this is most likely to be the source of the clay used for the Weekley vessels (see also, for example, Freestone and Rigby, 1982; Freestone, 1982).

The curvilinear decorated bowl represented above is typologically similar to early Iron Age 'Glastonbury ware' bowls (Radford, 1951; Peacock, 1969b). The Weekley vessels, occuring as they do some 240 miles from the Lizard, lie well outside the main geographical distribution of Peacock's Glastonbury ware Group 1 (ibid.), which is centred mainly in Cornwall and Devon, with a few outliers to the east (e.g. the furthest at Chilgrove, Sussex, Cunliffe, 1979). To the best of the writers knowledge these four gabbroic vessels from Weekley are the furthest travelled of Peacock's Glastonbury ware Group 1 (1969b).

Group 2: Shell

WEEK sample 1. Sherd from a bowl with short upright rim and tooled curvilinear decoration.

WEEK sample 2. " " " " " " " "

WEEK 76 2 (1). Plain-rimmed sherd.

WEEK 76 K VII (5). Small bodysherd with tooled lines.

WEEK 76 K1 (1). " " " " "

Fairly hard, roughish fabric, varying in colour from reddish-buff (7.5YR 7/4 - 7/6) to dark grey (7.5YR N4/). All the sherds contain fragments of shell, though the quantity varies. In thin section it is possible to see some examples of shell

in which there is recrystalization of calcite, suggesting that it is fossiliferous. Weekley lies on the Jurassic Ridge, and so a fairly local source for the pottery seems likely. The local Boulder Clays should also be taken into account (see elsewhere, i.e. Rattray's report on the Roman material from Weekley). All the sherds also contain well-sorted grains of quartz, average size 0.10mm and below. In addition, WEEK 76 K1 (1) has a small amount of argillaceous material. Most of these pieces appear to be fairly angular, and should therefore perhaps be regarded as grog. See also the comments on Group 3 below.

Group 3: Argillaceous

WEEK 76 K1 (1). Small plain bodysherd.

WEEK 76 K1 (1) (2). Small fragment of decorated base.

WEEK 76 K1 (1). Small bodysherd with ? curvilinear decoration.

WEEK 76 K1 (1). Sherd with curvilinear decoration.

WEEK 76 K VII 2 (1). Plain upright rim.

Fairly hard, smooth fabric, with a slightly soapy feel, shades of grey in colour, and normally visible argillaceous inclusions. Thin sectioning shows a scatter of argillaceous material throughout the fabric, together with some grains of quartz and the odd piece of limestone. It is difficult always to be certain whether this should be regarded as grog (i.e. crushed up pottery) or naturally occuring clay pellets. Some pieces for example appear to be fairly fine-grained and quite well-rounded, pointing to clay pellets. However, as the majority of these inclusions tend to be fairly angular in shape and somewhat coarse-textured, they should perhaps be regarded as grog. A similar range of argillaceous inclusions have previously been noted by the writer in later Iron Age pottery from another Northamptonshire site: Gretton.

Iron Age sherd with ompholos base

Fairly hard, rough sandy fabric, with frequent quartz grains protruding through

the surfaces, pinkish-white (Munsell 7.5YR 8/2) surfaces, light brown core (10YR 5/4). Thin sectioning reveals frequent well-sorted subangular quartz grains, average size 0.30mm-0.70mm, some pieces of flint and a few flecks of mica. It is difficult to suggest a likely source for this sherd when dealing with such a range of common inclusions. Flints can be found in the local Boulder Clays around Weekley (Taylor, 1963), and so a local origin is possible, though a source further afield cannot be ruled out at this stage.

Comments

From the above thin section results and a macroscopic examination of additional sherds in the hand-specimen, it is clear that the majority of Iron Age pottery at Weekley was made from materials that could be obtained locally or fairly locally. The exceptions to this are the gabbroic sherds which point to a source on the Lizard peninsular some 240 miles to the south-west.

The majority of the Iron Age sherds recovered from Weekley are non-decorated (information from D. Jackson), but there is a large minority group which contains a distinctive scheme of curvilinear decoration. It has been recognized for some time that Hunsbury and other sites in Northamptonshire have produced a distinctively decorated range of pottery based on the scroll and returning scroll variety, as opposed to the predominantly geometric patterns on contempory pottery in eastern England (Elsdon, 1975). The flowing scroll decoration on Hunsbury type bowls, represented also at Weekley and other local sites, bears a strong resemblance to the curvilinear decoration commonly present on Glastonbury ware gabbroic pottery (see Cunliffe, 1974).

At Weekley, for the first time, there is direct evidence for the movement of Glastonbury ware pottery in Northamptonshire, perhaps via the Jurassic Way (Grimes, 1951). It is difficult not to see in the Hunsbury type decoration a local copying or adaptation of the Glastonbury style decoration. Thin section analysis of curvilinear decorated pottery from Hunsbury, Twyell, Ringstead,

Hardingstone, Hemmingwell Lodge and Northampton, as well as Weekley (above), shows that all the sherds sampled (see attached drawings) contain raw materials that could be obtained fairly locally to the find-site, i.e. shell, ?grog, ironstone, quartz. While the variety and texture of the fabrics represented suggest that these vessels were not made at a single centre but produced at many different places.

References

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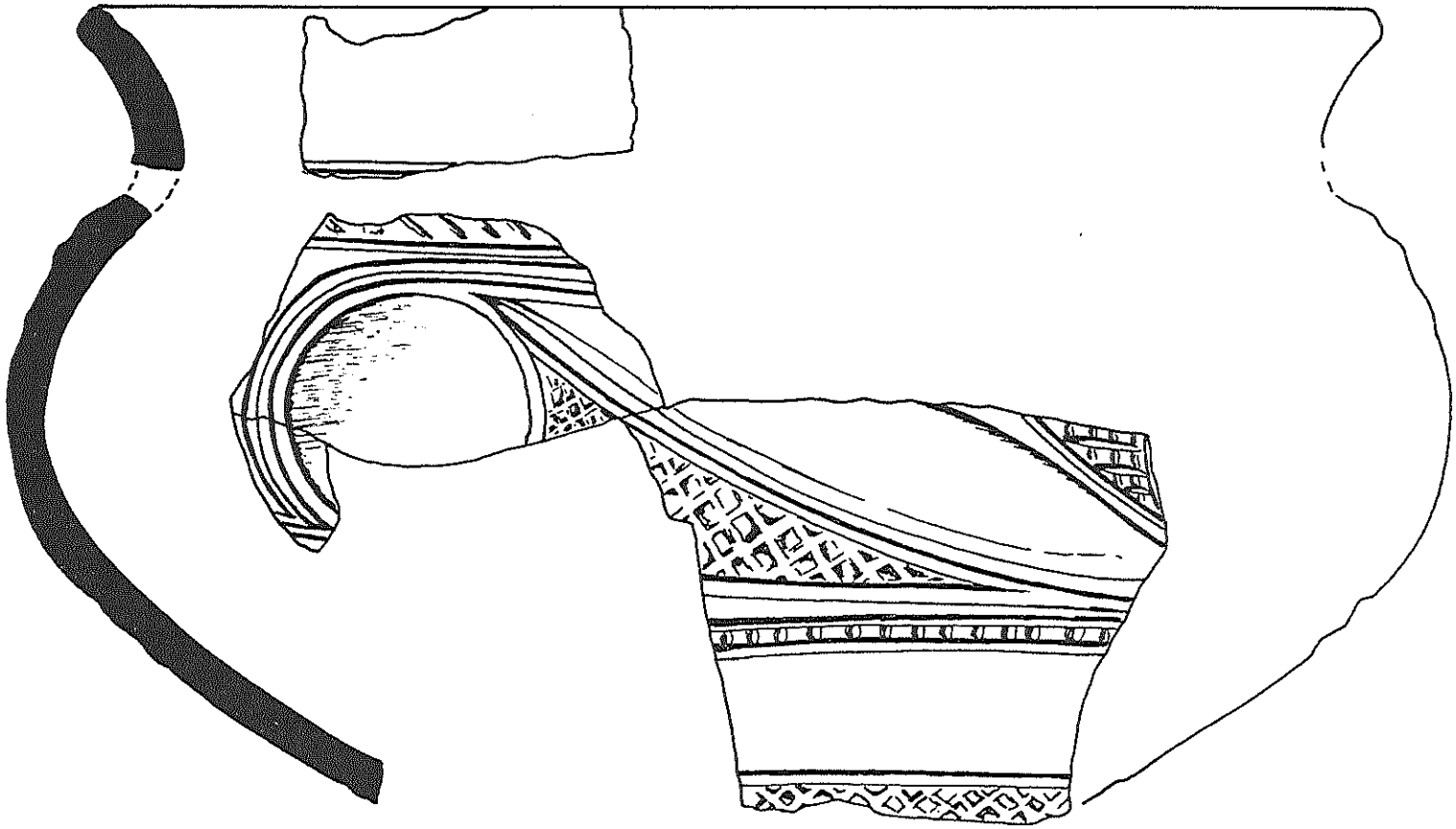


References:
See. Fig Nos. 3. Page 45.
Pol Nos: 14+15.
Cont on Glastonbury ware
SW. Britain DPS Peacock
Ant Journ. 1969 Vol XLIX Pt 1.

CASTLE DORE. RADFORD 1951.
Journ Roy Inst Cornwall

WEEKLEY 76.
NORTHANTS DITCH K1

Fawn Br to Very Drk Br.
Burnished in places on inner face.
Decoration in smooth tooled lines.
Roundel depressed.

Fabric Very hard & gritty.
Inclusions of Angular Quartz grains

R.J.F.

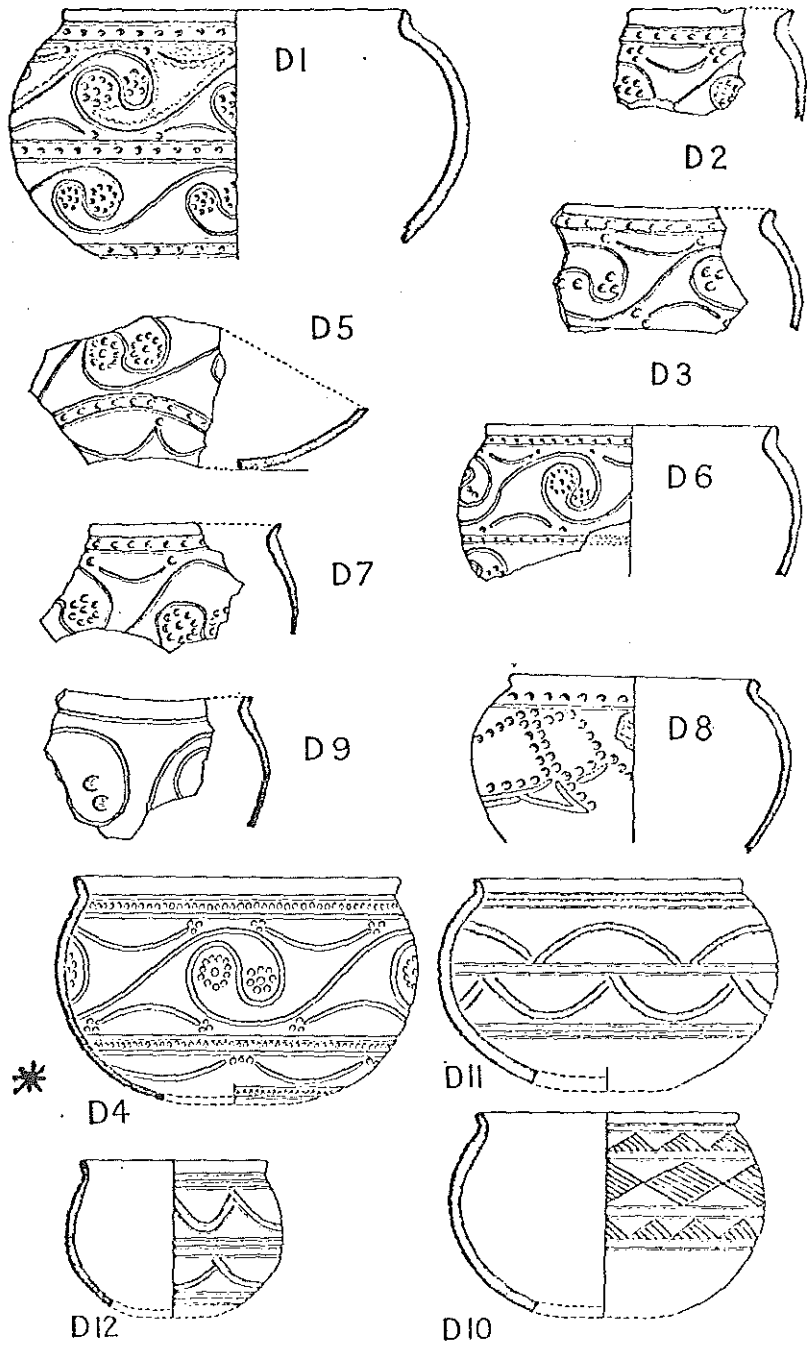
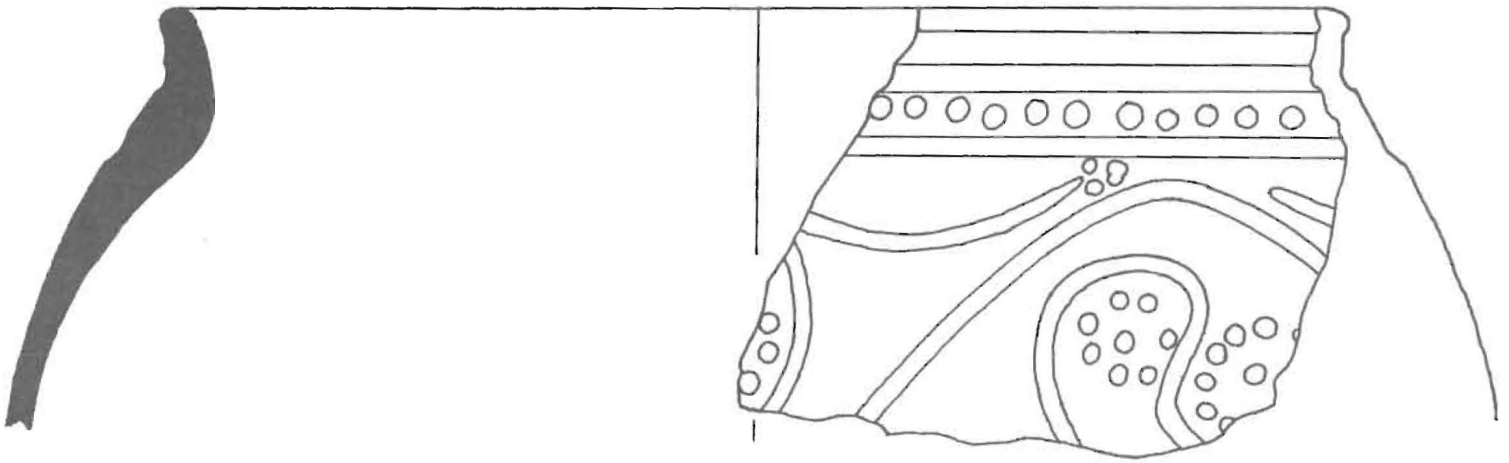


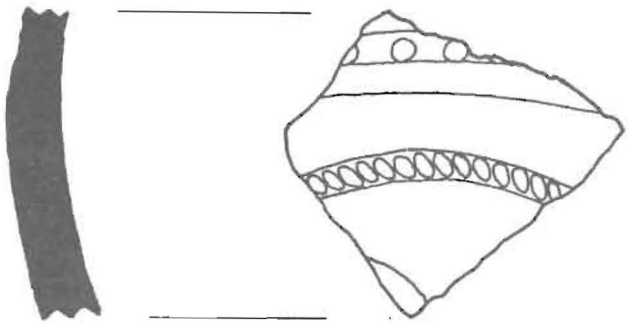
FIG. 6. DECORATED WARE. ¼

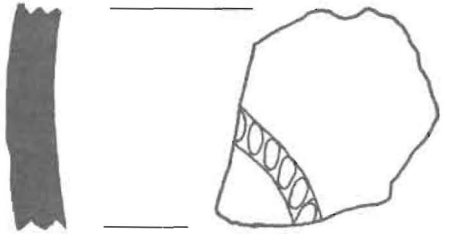
D 4 and D 10-12 from drawings by G. C. Dunning

Northampton



Hemmingwell Lodge





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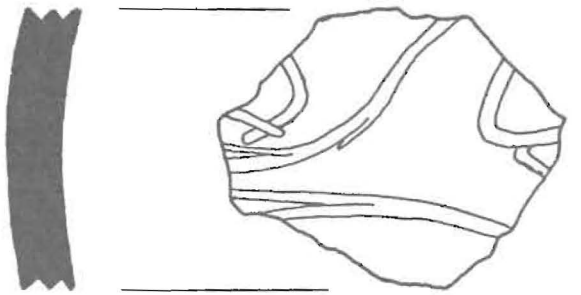
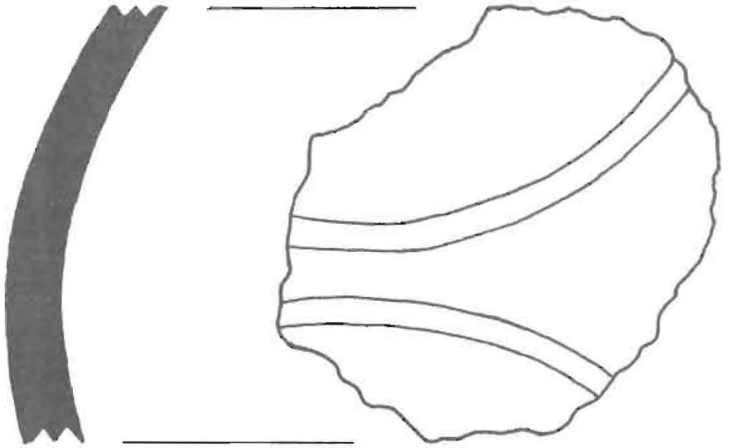
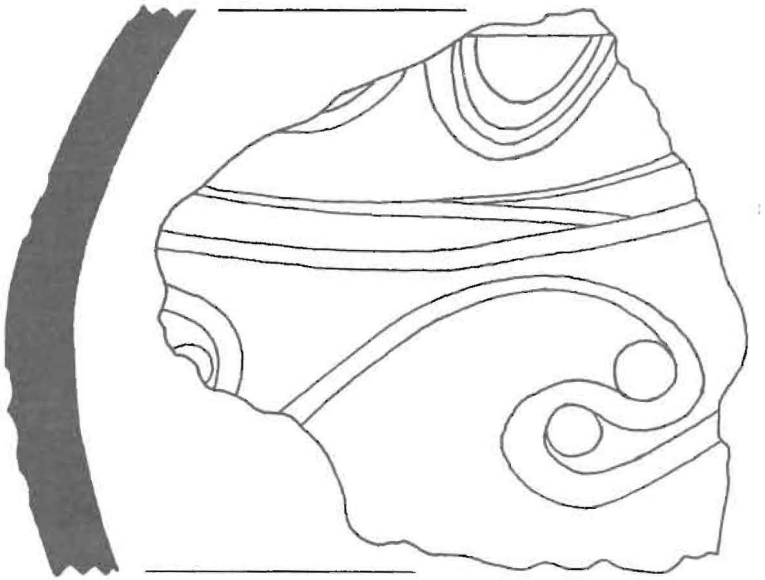
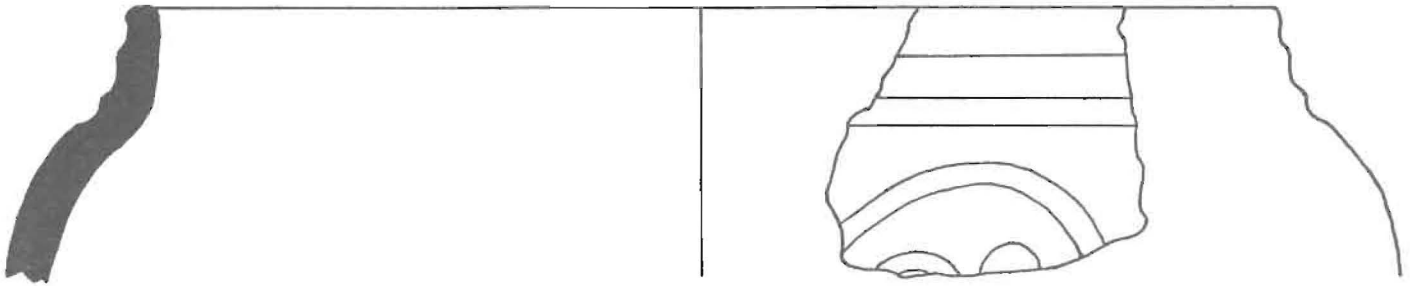


Multon Park

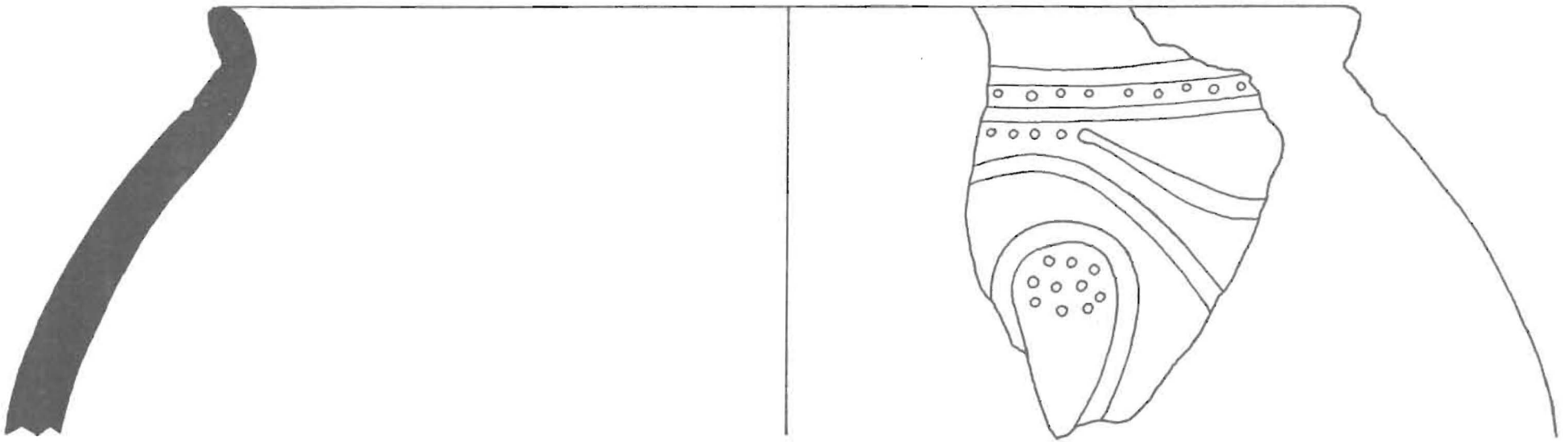




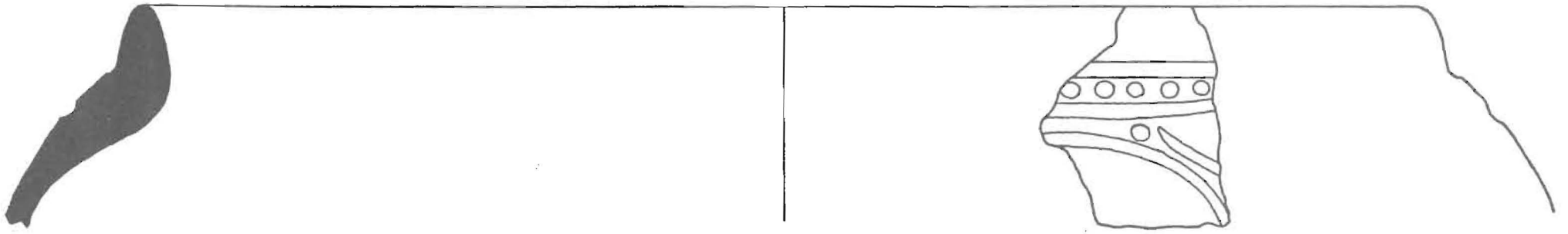
Twyeli



Hardingstone



Northampton



Ringsteed