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POTTERY AND BRIQUETAGE FROM BREAN DOWN, SOMERSET.

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Summary

Identification of two post-Medieval 'olive jars' from the River Guadalquivir region of southern Spain. Also characterization of a calcite tempered sherd, probably suggestive of a prehistoric date, and three samples of briquetage.

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POTTERY AND BRIQUETAGE FROM BREAN DOWN, SOMERSET

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1) Spanish post-Mediaeval 'olive jars'

702 context (13) 1985

790 context (13) 1985

Both sherds are in a hard, rough sandy fabric, lightish buff in colour with no. 790 having a light greenish glaze on the inside surface and drips of glaze on the outside surface. Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope shows that both sherds contain a similar range of non-plastic inclusions, the main features of which are fragments of schist, sandstone, chert, quartzite and limestone, together with discrete grains of subangular quartz, plagioclase and potash felspar and flecks of mica, set in a fairly clean clay matrix. It is normally considered that the earlier forms of Mediaeval and post-Mediaeval Spanish 'olive jars' were generally made in Andalusia, more particulary near to Seville or Cadiz (Goggin, 1960, 5). The petrology of the fabric of the Brean Down sherds would seem to confirm this, for there are many points of similarity in the paste of this material and that of the Roman amphora type Dressel 20, known to have been made in the region of the River Guadalquivir between Seville and Cordoba and to have carried olive-oil (Peacock and Williams,

1986, Class 25). A similar origin for the two Brean Down vessels appears likely.

2) Calcite tempered sherd

SOS89 Auger hole 40/950 Pot (251)

In thin section this sherd can be seen to contain twinned angular fragments of calcite scattered throughout the fabric, together with subangular grains of quartz, chert, quartzite and iron ore. Calcite inclusions in prehistoric pottery from Brean Down have already been noted in a previous report by the writer. This may suggest a prehistoric date for the above sherd, though it does not automatically follow and it is possible that it may be later. Calcite can be obtained from the local Carboniferous Limestone deporits at Brean Down, although a source further afield is also possible.

3) Briquetage

5814 context (53) 1985

5777 context (112) 1985

5522 context (53) 1985

In thin section all three samples of briquetage appear fairly similar, displaying little else but a groundmass of small well-sorted subangular quartz grains under 0.10mm in size, with a sparse scatter of slightly larger grains, flecks of mica and some iron ore. Also submitted was a sample of grey alluvial silty clay (context 232 from soil pit VI). A thin section taken from this clay compared quite favourably with the three briquetage samples and may indicate a possible source for the latter.

Reference

Goggin, J.M. (1960) The Spanish Olive-Jar: An Introductory Study (Yale University Pub. Anthrop. no. 62).

Peacock, D.P.S. and Williams, D.F. (1986) Amphorae and the Roman Economy (London, 1986).