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Summary

Eight sherds of Iron Age pottery were thin sectioned to characterise the fabrics more closely and see if it was possible to suggest likely source areas. Four fabric groups were tentatively formed: (1) quartz, (2) glauconitic, perhaps from a source in Wiltshire, (3) shell, and (4) shelly limestone, possibly Jurassic.

Author's address :-

Department of Archaeology
University of Southampton
Highfield
Southampton
SO9 5NH

0703 559122

PETROLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF IRON AGE POTTERY FROM BALKESBURY, HAMPSHIRE

D.F. Williams, Ph.D., FSA

(HBMC Ceramic Petrology Project)

Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Introduction

Eight sherds of Iron Age (or slightly before) pottery from the 1973/1981 excavations at Balkesbury Camp 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 with each other, and (2) if possible to suggest likely source areas for the pottery. The site of Balkesbury Camp is situated on the Upper Chalk, closeby to deposits of Clay-with-flints and River Gravel (Jukes-Browne, 1908).

Petrology

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

1) Quartz fabric

Sample 4 BC73 67(3) part of D255

Thin sectioning reveals little except frequent subangular grains of quartz up to 0.60mm across, average size below 0.30mm, and a little flint. The common nature of the inclusions makes it difficult to make a judgement on whether this vessel is likely to be locally made or imported to the site.

Sample 7 BC73 71(8) part of D198

Frequent grains of subangular quartz, average size under 0.40mm with a few larger grains, together with some flint, quartzite and flecks of mica. This is a countersunk-handled vessel, which suggests a Durotrigian origin (Brailsford, 1958; Cunliffe, 1974). However, the Textural properties of the Balkesbury sherd differ from those normally associated by the writer with pottery made in the Wareham-Poole Harbour area of Dorset (Williams, 1977, Group 1). A heavy mineral separation was undertaken but produced too few grains to give a meaningfull result. It is quite possible, for example, that the vessel may have been produced in another part of Dorset.

2) Glauconitic fabric

Sample 5 BC73 111(6) part of D260

Sample 6 BC73 299(9) part of D645

Sample 8 BC73/81 36 1041, 1450, 1475 part of D305

All three sherds contain reddish-brown grains of limonite (altered glauconite), together with frequent grains of subangular quartz, some flecks of mica and a little flint. Texturally samples 5 and 6 are very similar with the average size of quartz falling under 0.30mm, while sample 8 contains a slightly larger size range of quartz which is not quite so densely packed as is the case with the other two sherds. Phosphatic nodules containing dark green glauconite do occur in the area of Balkesbury (Jukes-Browne, 1908), so a local origin is quite possible for these three vessels. However, the decorative style of samples 5 and 6 is reminiscent of certain glauconitic fabric pottery from Danebury for which a Wiltshire source was tentatively suggested (Cunliffe, 1984). If these two Balkesbury vessels belong to this group they can perhaps be regarded as imports to the site.

3) Shell fabric

Sample 1 BC73/81 36 69(6) fabric R12 pot no. 39

Sample 3 36-1547

Thin sectioning shows a fairly fine-textured fabric containing many small fragments of shell and a few quartz grains. In addition, sample 1 has a little shale and sample 3 pieces of angular flint. In both cases it was not possible to decide if the shell was recent or fossiliferous. It is therefore difficult to say if it is likely that these vessels were made locally or not.

4) Shelly Limestone fabric

Sample 2 BC73 45(4) part of D167

Numerous small fragments of shell can be seen under the microscope, together with occasional pieces of limestone and a few grains of quartz. The limestone is a shelly limestone or biosparite, and it is possible that some at least of the many pieces of shell may have come from it. Echinoid spines and ? brachiopods may be present. It is difficult to be certain of the origin of this vessel, but a Jurassic limestone may be the source of the inclusions, in which case the vessel would have been imported to the site.

References

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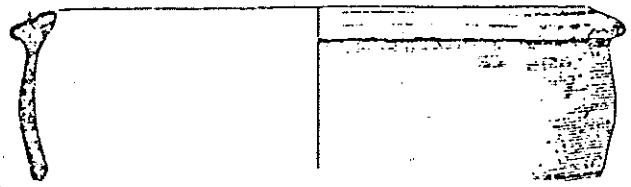
Balksbury.



TS 2 (D167)
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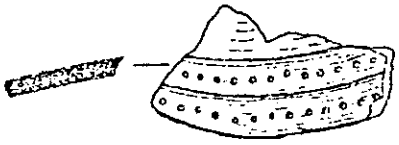

TS 4 (D255)
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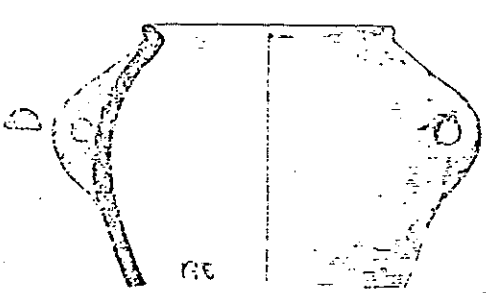
TS 5 (D260)
scale 1/4

TS 6 (D645)
scale 1/3



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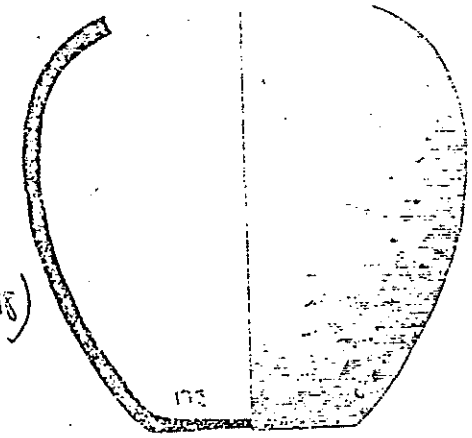

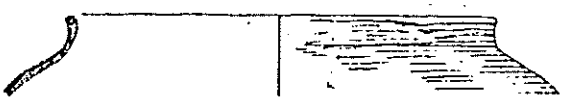

TS 8 (D505)
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