

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 215/87

NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF TWO
POSSIBLE 'VECTIS WARE' SHERDS FROM
REDCLIFF, ISLE OF WIGHT.

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Two sherds of Roman pottery thought possibly to belong to the local 'Vectis ware' tradition were thin sectioned for an examination of the fabric. This showed that texturally the Redcliff sherds were more similar to 'Vectis ware' material from other Island sites than to Dorset BB1 pottery, which can be confused with the latter ware.

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RC 78 (462)

RC 78 (82)

Both sherds are in a fairly hard, roughish sandy fabric with evidence of burnishing on the outer surface, darkish grey in colour but with some buff coloured areas probably due to firing conditions in the kiln/bonfire. No. 462 is a rim sherd from a carinated bowl with incised decoration (Tomalin, 1987, form 6), while no. 82 is a sherd containing a similar scheme of decoration.

Thin sectioning of both sherds shows a similar range and texture of inclusions in which subangular grains of quartz ranging up to 0.70mm across predominate. Also present is some quartzite, flint, iron ore and flecks of mica, set in a fairly clean light brown optically anisotropic matrix of baked clay. It is difficult to be certain of the origin of these two vessels when faced with such a range of common inclusions. It appears safe, however, to discount a Dorset BB1 (black-burnished ware category 1) source around the Wareham - Poole Harbour area. Although there is a superficial resemblance between the Redcliff material and Dorset BB1, namely both wares are dark grey to black in colour, burnished and contain a large amount of quartz sand, the two fabrics are different in texture and the form and decoration of Redcliff 462 is not known amongst the Dorset BB1 typology. Instead, the texture of the sherds from Redcliff compare

reasonably well with certain Roman 'Vectis ware' pottery from Gills Cliff, near Ventnor, thought to have been made locally on the Isle of Wight (ibid.). It is possible, therefore, that the Redcliff vessels may belong to the same 'Vectis ware' tradition.

Reference

Tomalin, D. (1937) Roman Wight: a guide catalogue, Isle of Wight County Council.