

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 3/88

A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME  
TEGULAE FROM A ROMAN SHIPWRECK OFF  
YARMOUTH, ISLE OF WIGHT.

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#### Summary

Thin section analysis of four Roman tegulae showed that three contain a common range of inclusions making it difficult to predict origins. However, the fourth sample appears to have been made from the weathering of an amphibolite clay. This was certainly not made on the Isle of Wight. The Armorican Massif is a possibility.

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A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME TEGULAE FROM A ROMAN SHIPWRECK OFF

YARMOUTH, ISLE OF WIGHT

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Introduction

Four pieces of tegulae from a Roman shipwreck off the coast at Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, 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 suggest if they were made locally on the Isle of Wight.

Petrology

(1) A034 '86

Frequent subangular grains of quartz, up to 0.60mm across, together with flecks of mica and iron ore.

(2) A035 '86

A groundmass of small-sized quartz grains, mostly under 0.10mm across, with a scatter of slightly larger grains, flecks of mica and iron ore.

(3) AO37 '86

A fairly fine-textured matrix with a scatter of subangular quartz grains up to 0.80mm across, together with some iron ore and argillaceous material.

(4) AO20 '86 C-001

The fabric of this tegula is composed principally of angular reddish-brown grains of amphibole, with a few scattered grains of quartz and quartzite. The composition of the gabbroic pottery of the Lizard, Cornwall, at once springs to mind, but unlike that fabric the tegula from Yarmouth appears to lack the inclusions of plagioclase felspar that are common in Lizard gabbroic pottery (Peacock, 1969a; 1969b). Instead, it seems more probable that the tegula fabric was made from a clay derived from the weathering of an amphibolite, a metamorphosed basic igneous rock.

Comments

The first three samples of tegulae (nos. AO34, 35 and 37) contain a fairly common range of non-plastic inclusions that makes it difficult to suggest possible sources. They may have been made on the Isle of Wight, on the other hand they could come from some distance away. It is quite clear, however, that the fourth sample (AO20) was certainly not made on the Island. It is not possible to pinpoint a source with any degree of accuracy at this stage since the ship may have travelled some distance on its voyage, visiting many places. However, an obvious source that should be considered is the region of the Armorican Massif, with its wide range of igneous and metamorphic rocks. The late Iron Age Armorican decorated ware, for example, which is found in some numbers at Hengistbury Head on the Dorset coast, is made in a fabric thought to have derived from an

amphibolite rock (Cunliffe, 1987, Fabric A1).

References

- Cunliffe, B. (1987) Hengistbury Head, Dorset, Vol 1 Oxford University Comm. for Archaeology.
- Peacock, D.P.S. (1969a) 'Neolithic pottery production in Cornwall', Antiquity, 43(1969), 145-149.
- Peacock, D.P.S. (1969b) 'A contribution to the study of Glastonbury ware from south-western Britain', Antiq. J., 49(1969), 41-61.