

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 35/88

A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF A  
STAMPED ROMAN TILE FROM SEATON,  
DEVON.

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Thin sectioning was carried out on a Roman tile stamped LEG II AVG in order to characterise the fabric and see if it indicated a local origin. The inclusions were of a common nature and difficult to pin-point to a particular source. Because of this a comparison was made with brick and tile (unstamped) from Caerleon, where identical stamps are known. Texturally, the Caerleon material is quite different to the Seaton tile.

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A small sample of a third century A.D. tile stamped LEG II AVG from Seaton, Devon, was submitted for a detailed fabric analysis by thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope. In the hand-specimen the tile is hard, rough and sandy, weak red to light red in colour (between Munsell 10R 4/2 and 6/9). In thin section the non-plastic inclusions in the fabric consist of a groundmass of frequent well-sorted quartz grains, average size up to 0.10mm, with a scatter of slightly larger grains in the size-range 0.20-.30mm, many small flecks of mica, mostly muscovite in composition, and some iron ore, set in an optically anisotropic clay matrix.

The range of inclusions noted in the Seaton tile are commonly encountered in Roman pottery and tile, and it is difficult to say with any confidence if it was produced and stamped locally or imported from outside the find-site area. Identical stamps of the Second Legion are known from Caerleon, and with this in mind four samples of brick and tile (unstamped) from Caerleon thought to have been locally made (Fabrics A, B, C and D), were submitted for comparison of the fabric with that of the Seaton Stamped tile. Under the microscope the four samples from Caerleon appear reasonably similar. All have a fairly clean clay matrix containing subangular quartz grains ranging up to 1.50mm in size, some metaquartzite, chert, a few flecks of mica and iron ore. Fabrics E and F are slightly more sandy than the other two samples.

On this evidence, the Seaton stamped tile is texturally different from the Caerleon material, suggesting that it was not made at the same production centre. If it is possible, it would be interesting to see how a sample from a LEG II AVG stamped tile from Caerleon compares with both sets of analyses.