

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 163/88

A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SAXON
POTTERY FROM UPWICH, NEAR
DROITWICH, WORCS.

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Summary

A small number of representative sherds were submitted for a fabric examination in thin section. On the basis of the range of non-plastic inclusions present in the sherds a number of fabric divisions were made:
(1) organic, (2) quartz/sandstone, (3) quartz/sandstone/limestone, (4) quartz, (5) shell and (6) limestone/calcite. The majority of these groups were probably made locally, although nos. (5) and (6) may have come from further afield.

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A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SAXON POTTERY FROM UPWICH, NEAR DROLOWICH,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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Introduction

A small number of representative sherds from Upwich were submitted for a detailed fabric examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. The main objective of the analysis was to confirm the validity of a provisional identification of sherds in the hand-specimen into fabric groups. All the sherds submitted were initially studied macroscopically with the aid of a binocular microscope (x 20). Munsell colour charts are referred to together with free descriptive terms. The site at Upwich is situated on Keuper Marl, near to glacial deposits (Geological Survey 1" Map of England Sheet no. 182).

Petrology and Fabric

On the basis of the range and texture of the non-plastic inclusions present in the pottery samples, a number of broad fabric divisions have been made. The original fabric numbering of the sherds has been retained.

(1) Organic

Fabric 4 : 2691

Fabric 4 : 2326

Both sherds are in a fairly hard, smoothish fabric containing conspicuous organic impressions on the outer surfaces, probably representing chaff or grass, and are unevenly fired to shades of light and dark grey. Under the microscope frequent elongate voids can be seen in the paste, suggesting that vegetable matter was deliberately added to the clay at some stage of the pottery making. Also present are a scatter of subangular quartz grains, flecks of mica and a little fine-grained sandstone, all no doubt naturally occurring inclusions in the clay.

(2) Quartz/Sandstone

Fabric 1 : 3130

Fabric 1 : 2326

Fabric 1 : 2671

Fabric 1 : 2326

Hard, roughish sandy fabric, shades of light to dark grey throughout. Chaff or grass impressions appear on the surfaces of no. 2671, and a few voids are to be seen in the paste, but not so frequently as in No. (1) above. In thin section there are frequent discrete subangular grains of quartz to be seen, together with some quartzite, flecks of mica, a little chert and a few small fragments of a quartz-sandstone.

(3) Quartz/Sandstone/Limestone

Fabric 3 : 2826

Fabric 6 : 2326

These two sherds are similar to those in (2) above, but in addition to the inclusions listed they also contain a few irregular lumps of limestone.

(4) Quartz

Fabric 2 : 2326

Hard, rough very sandy fabric, dark grey (5YR 4/1) throughout. Thin sectioning shows densely packed subangular quartz grains, with some flecks of mica and a little quartzite.

(5) Shell

Fabric 5 : 2326

Hard, thin smoothish fabric, dark grey (10YR 4/1) throughout, heavily packed with small pieces of shell when viewed in fresh fracture. Thin sectioning shows many small fragments of shell scattered throughout a fairly clean clay matrix that appears to contain very little other non-plastic inclusions except for a few quartz grains. It is difficult to be certain with only this single example, but it is possible that there may be some recrystallization of calcite in one or two pieces of shell, suggesting that this may be fossiliferous.

(6) Limestone/Calcite

Fabric 6 : 3127

Hard, thick roughish sandy fabric with a scatter of small white limestone inclusions, patchy light grey/orangy-brown outer surface and dark grey inner surface and core. Thin sectioning shows frequent grains of subangular quartz, some of them up to 2mm across in size, and small irregular pieces of limestone, together with a scatter of larger fragments of calcite.

Comments

The above thin section results suggest that the majority of the sherds sampled may have been made from raw materials obtained at no great distance from the find-site. Organic tempered pottery such as is present in the two sherds of group (1) is not uncommon in Saxon pottery, though the presence of sandstone in the Upwich sherds may point to the use of the local Friassic clays of the area which contain sandstone (Mitchell et al, 1961). This is probably also the case with groups (2) and (3) where the sandstone inclusions are more frequent. It is difficult to suggest where the quartz tempered sherd of group (4) might have been made other than a fairly local origin.

The remaining two sherds are more problematical. The shell tempered sherd of group (5) recalls the fabric of Late Saxon shelly ware. This is found mainly at sites along the River Thames, with outliers as far away as Northampton and Worcester (Vince, 1985, fig. 6). However, the Upwich sherd may be from a potentially early context and so it may be necessary to look for a more local origin, perhaps the Jurassic formations of the region (Mitchell et al, 1961).

Calcite is commonly found in limestone areas, and in the case of the Upwich sherd of group (6) may indicate a source in the Jurassic, Carboniferous or Silurian areas of the region (ibid.). However, this is not to rule out a source further afield, and it may be worth while noting that calcite appears in ninth century Saxon pottery from Cheddar (Rahtz, 1979, fabric G).

References

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