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Summary

A small programme of thin sectioning six Bronze Age sherds showed that all but one contained some form of grog tempering. However, rather unusually, in four of these sherds the pieces of grog were fairly sparsely distributed within the clay matrix and were subordinate to other, more frequent, types of non-plastic inclusions. They may possibly represent some form of local copying of beaker grog-tempering of pottery. The one Saxon sherd sampled may be related in fabric to Saxon pottery from Upwich, near Droitwich.

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A PETROLOGICAL NOTE ON BRONZE AGE AND SAXON POTTERY FROM ASTON MILL, KEMERTON, WORCESTERSHIRE

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Introduction

Six sherds of Bronze Age pottery and one sherd of Saxon ware from Aston Mill were submitted for a detailed fabric analysis in thin section under the petrological microscope. All the sherds 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 Aston Mill lies some five miles north-east of Tewkesbury, on Lower Lias formations (Geological Survey 1" Map of England Sheet no. 216).

Petrology and Fabric

1). HWCM 2252 R(109) (5.5) Decorated Beaker sherd.

Fairly hard, roughish sandy fabric, dark buff (between 7.5YR 7/4 and 6/4) outer surface, grey (10YR 4/1) inner surface and core. Thin sectioning shows a fairly clean clay matrix containing a scatter of subangular

quartz mostly under 0.20mm in size, some iron ore, flecks of mica and many small angular pieces of grog (crushed up pottery).

2). HWCM 5145 D(1028) Plain bodysherd of Bronze Age pottery.
Hard, rough sandy fabric with a scatter of small white fragments of limestone, shades of dark grey (5YR 4/1) throughout. Thin sectioning shows a fairly clean clay matrix which contains subangular quartz grains up to 0.60mm in size, small fragments of limestone, iron ore, a little calcite and some largish pieces of grog which contain small pieces of limestone.

3). HWCM 5146 D(1083) Rim sherd of Bronze Age pottery.
Fairly, hard, soapy fabric containing many inclusions of shell, dark grey (10YR 4/1) outer surface and core, lighter shade of grey inner surface. Thin sectioning shows frequent inclusions of shell scattered throughout the clay matrix, associated with this is a little sparry calcite indicating that the shell is fossiliferous, some shelly limestone, a few quartz grains under 0.05mm in size, flecks of mica, iron ore and some pieces of angular grog which contain small pieces of shell and limestone.

4). HWCM 5145 D(1038)a (4.5) Small sherd of Bronze Age pottery.
Similar fabric to no. 3, only this sherd has a reddish-brown (2.5YR 5/6) outer surface and dark grey (5YR 3/1) inner surface and core.

5). HWCM 5145 D(1038)b (5.1) Small Bronze Age sherd.

Fairly hard, slightly rough sandy fabric, buff (between 7.5YR 7/2 and 7/4) external surface and margin, very dark grey (7.5YR N3/3) internal surface and margin. Thin sectioning shows a fairly fine clay matrix containing a scatter of subangular quartz grains up to 0.60mm in size, some flecks of mica, iron ore and the odd piece of argillaceous material which may possibly be grog, it is difficult to be certain.

6). HWCM 5145 D(1079) Decorated Bronze Age sherd.

Fairly hard, soapy fabric containing many small inclusions of shell, light grey (5YR 5/1) outer surface, darker grey (5Y 3/1) inner surface and core. Thin sectioning shows little else but frequent fragments of shell set in a fairly clean clay matrix. In some cases it is possible to see some recrystallization of calcite in the shell suggesting that it is fossiliferous.

7). HWCM 5144 T(4) 5(107) Plain bodysherd of Saxon pottery from Grubenhaus.

Hard, burnished but slightly rough, sandy fabric, black (2.5YR N2.5/) throughout. Thin sectioning shows a sparse groundmass of quartz grains under 0.05mm in size, with a scatter of larger subangular quartz grains ranging up to 0.80mm across. Also present are some large pieces of quartz sandstone, iron ore,?chert, flecks of mica and a few grains of plagioclase felspar.

Comments

Four, perhaps five, of the six Bronze Age sherds examined contain some form of grog tempering. It is interesting to note that pieces of grog are even present in samples 3 and 4, both of which have a high content of shell in the clay. There would appear to be no particular technological reason for the deliberate addition of grog in these two sherds and, in fact, the latter is only sparsely represented. It is tempting, though at this stage very hypothetical, to see sample 1, which contains little else but small pieces of grog (the beaker sherd), as an import to the site. While samples 2-5, in which grog plays a subordinate role in the clay matrix, represent locally made pottery. Certainly the limestone and fossiliferous shell present in samples 2-4 point to a fairly local origin on the Lower Lias. However, this may be too simplistic a view, since it is not possible petrologically to give any indication of the likely source of sample 1.

Sample 6 contains frequent inclusions of fragments of shell, but there are no obvious fossils such as crinoid ossicles which characterize the Iron Age Fabric group 16 at nearby Beckford, in this sampled sherd from Aston Mill.

A comparison of the Saxon sherd sample 7 was made with Saxon pottery from Upwich, near Droitwich, which had been previously thin sectioned (A.M. Lab. Report 163/88). This showed that the Aston Mill sherd contained a similar range of non-plastic inclusions to Upwich Fabric group 2 : Quartz/Sandstone, which probably utilized the local Keuper Marl deposits (Geological Survey Map of England Sheet no. 182). The Aston Mill sherd is slightly finer-textured than the Upwich material, though an origin on the Keuper Marl is perhaps more likely than the local Lower Lias.