Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 88/89

ROMAN HONESTONES AND OTHER WORKED STONE FROM WROXETER, SHROPSHIRE.

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Summary

Identification of the types of stone used for Roman honestones, counters, spindle whorl and tessera. A wide variety of stone was used for these objects, most of which was probably obtained fairly locally to the find-site. The exception being five honestones of possible Kentish Ragstone.

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ROMAN HONESTONES AND OTHER WORKED STONE FROM WROXETER, SHROPSHIRE

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(HBMC Ceramic Petrology Project)

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HONESTONES

1). A.M. Lab. 821623 4711 WB84 206

Fragment of a well-worn honestone of dark red New Red Sandstone, rectangular in section, 10.2cm long, one end broken.

2). A.M. Lab. 844422 6032 WB84 405

Pebble honestone of dark grey indurated mudstone, roughly rectangular in section, 11cm long. ?Carboniferous.

3). A.M. Lab. 855531 6167 WB98 178

Light grey pebble of indurated mudstone, roughly rectangular in section and possibly used as a honestone on the two ends, which are rounded, 14.4cm long. ?Carboniferous.

4). A.M. Lab. 821625 4783 WB90 92

Grey quartzite pebble possibly used as a honestone, roughly rectangular in section, 7.1cm long. ?Pre-Cambrian or ?Cambrian.

5). A.M. Lab. 870001 WB80 179

Small fragment of a grey sandy limestone that may have come from a honestone. ?Keuper.

6). A.M. Lab. 8650002 6367 WB80 3

Small fragment of honestone in a grey limestone, wedge-shaped in section.

7). A.M. Lab. 855532 6168 WB98 178

Fragment of honestone in a light grey calcareous sandstone, rectangular in section, 11.4cm long, broken at both ends and with distinctive grooves running along the corners. Thin sectioning and study under the petrological microscope of this stone and one from no. 8 below shows frequent equal-sized quartz grains, up to 0.30mm across, set in a matrix of calcite, with a scatter of brachiopod fragments and the odd grain of ?glauconite. The source originally suggested for this particular type of honestone was the Stony Stratford - Towcester area of Northamptonshire (Cantrill, 1931, 96-98), based on an examination of some 100 unused examples recovered from the Wroxeter Forum (Atkinson, 1942, 128-129). However, more recent analysis of this material has drawn attention to the petrological similarities of this stone and Kentish Rag (Rhodes, 1986, 240-241). It is possible, therefore, that these honestones from Wroxeter may have come from a source even further away than was originally considered.

8). A.M. Lab. 844421 6008 WB90 204

Two similar honestones to no. 7.

(a) 5.8cm long, broken at both ends.

(b) 6.5cm long, broken at both ends, very worn and lacking the 'grooves' mentioned above.

9). A.M. Lab. 830405 5195 WB97 121

Similar honestone to no. 7, 2.3cm long, broken at each end.

10). A.M. Lab. 844423 6045 WB98 145

Similar honestone to no. 7, 6.8cm long, broken at one end, worn and lacking the 'grooves' mantioned above.

11). A.M. Lab. 811179 4494 WB80

Fragment of honestone in a dark grey strongly micaceous flagstone, rectangular in section, 8cm long, broken at both ends. Similar stone to no. 4 disc below.

12). A.M. Lab. 821628 4851 WB90 20

Elongated grey pebble of a slightly micaceous sandstone possibly used as a honestone, wedge-shaped in section, 14.6cm long.

13). A.M. Lab. 821626 4792 WB90 100

Elongated thin grey pebble of a slightly micaceous sandstone possibly used as a honestone, roughly rectangular in section, 13.2cm long.

14). A.M. Lab. 835911 5370 WB97 140

Flat darkish-grey pebble of a slightly micaceous sandstone with well-rounded edges possibly used as a honestone, 10.6cm long.

NON-HONESTONES

1). A.M. Lab. 811177 4385 WB18 11

Pebble of strongly metamorphosed phyllite, tabular in shape and with no real signs of having been used as a honestone.

2). A.M. Lab. 835908 5462 WB98 70

Rounded natural-shaped pebble.

ROUNDED DISCS/COUNTERS

These come in a variety of sizes and thicknesses, but all appear to have been deliberately worked to form a roughly rounded disc shape.

1). A.M. Lab. 788115 1194 WB14 34

Small thin disc of light grey lime-rich slate, 2.4cm D.

2). A.M. Lab. 788122 893 WB22 33

Part of a thin disc of dark grey slate, 5.6cm D. ?Ordovician.

3). A.M. Lab. 788133 915 WB22 35

Thick disc of light grey fine-grained sandstone. ?Keuper.

4). A.M. 788144 1952 WB80 7

Thickish disc of a dark grey very micaceous flagstone, 4.6cm D.

5). A.M. Lab. 788143 928 WB60 10

As for no. 4, 3.1cm D.

6). A.M. Lab. 788142 2979 WB86 3

As for no. 4, 5.6cm D.

7). A.M. Lab. 788123 917 WB60

As for no. 4, 5.1cm D.

8). A.M. Lab. 786435 7073 WB86 2

As for no. 4, though with a central hole, 3.5cm D.

9). A.M. Lab. 786436 2139 WB80 51

As for no. 4, 3.3cm D.

10). A.M. Lab. 786438 3335 WB90

As for no. 4 but thinner, 1.7cm D.

11). A.M. Lab. 786439 3336 WB90 17

As for no. 4 but thinner, 1.6cm D.

12). A.M. Lab. 786440 3305 WB90 9

As for no. 4, 1.9cm D.

13). A.M. Lab. 786456 1735 WB80 4

As for no. 4, 5.8cm D.

14). A.M. Lab. 786460 352 WB38

As for no. 4, 2.6cm D.

15). A.M. Lab. 786462 326 WB16

As for no. 4, 5.7cm D.

16). A.M. Lab. 793570 4218 WB98

As for no. 4, 5.4cm D.

17). A.M. Lab. 793575 4297 WB98

As for no. 4, 6cm D.

18). A.M. Lab. 793579 4353 WB98 8

As for no. 4, 6.1cm D.

19). A.M. Lab. 793582 4370 WB98 10

As for no. 4, 3.5cm D.

20). A.M. Lab. 811180 4588 WB98 12

As for no. 4, two discs (a) 9.2cm D and (b) 7.4cm D.

21). A.M. Lab. 786442 3689 WB96 22

As for no. 4 but thicker (1.8cm), 7.6cm D.

22). A.M. Lab. 788130 3690 WB96 22

As for no. 4 but larger and thicker (1.2cm), 8.1D.

23). A.M. Lab. 788117 317 WB12 42

Half of a large disc of the same stone as for no. 4, radius 9.8cm, 1.5cm thick.

SPINDLE WHORL

1). A.M. Lab. 783103 770 WB59 10

Half of a spindle whorl of mudstone, 3.5cm D. ?Carboniferous.

TESSERA

1). A.M. Lab. 870004 WB98 57

Light grey fine-grained limestone. ?Silurian.

2). A.M. Lab. 870002 WB98 139

As for no. 1.

3). A.M. Lab. 870003 WB98 44

As for no. 1.

4). A.M. Lab. 8650118 WB98 40

Dark grey Carboniferous limestone.

5). A.M. Lab. 870280 WB98 19

As for no. 4.

COMMENTS

Wroxeter is situated some 5 miles south-east of Shrewsbury, on Bunter Sandstone. There are a variety of other solid rock formations in the region, including New Red Sandstone, Carboniferous sandstones, limestones and mudstones, Triassic sandstones, Cambrian quartzites, Ordovician slates and shales, Silurian limestone and Pre-Cambrian igneous rocks (Geological Survey 1" Map of England Sheet no. 152). In addition, much of the area is covered by glacial drift, and this includes erratics such as granite, basalt, greywackes and slates. Many of the stones identified in the catalogue could therefore have been obtained fairly locally. The majority of these stones are in a dark grey micaceous flagstone, one of which is a honestone (no. 11) and the remainder are rounded discs/counters (nos. 4-23). These may have come from the local Pre-Cambrian or Cambrian deposits or, in the case of the discs/counters, have been reused roofing tiles of micaceous flagstone which were found at the site and thought possibly to have come from Old Red Sandstone formations to the south of Wroxeter (Cantrill, 1931, 95-96). The five honestones (nos. 7-10) of calcareous sandstone with a distinctive 'grooving' on the edges are potentially the furthest travelled of all the material, possibly coming from as far away as Kent, though more work is needed before this attribution can be confidently accepted.

References

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