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Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 14/94

ASSESSMENT OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEBRIS FROM BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER ROMAN SMALL TOWN, GLOUCESTER

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Summary

About 2kg of technological debris is mainly fuel ash slag. This relates to a high-temperature process which occurred on or near the site, but the nature of this process cannot be established.

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Assessment of technological debris from Bourton-on-the-Water Roman small town, Gloucestershire

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This major Roman settlement or small town has been investigated at various times during the 19th and 20th centuries. The 1966-7 and 1971 excavations are being re-evaluated as part of a survey of Roman small towns in the Cotswolds (Timby 1993). These excavations revealed several Roman buildings which have been interpreted as a posting house, a stable block (or a building used for iron-working (McWhirr 1981,65)), a wayside shrine and a bakehouse, although these interpretations are currently under review. Recording was extremely poor at these excavations, but most of the material discussed here comes from Colin Renfrew's excavations in River Ground. A small amount of technological material is from excavations at Whiteshoots Hill (Fosse Way).

About 2kg of technological debris was examined for this assessment (see table). This material is most likely to be of 2nd to 4th century AD date (date range based on the pottery found at the site).

About half of this material is fuel ash slag. This is a pale grey-green, lightweight, highly-vesicular substance, created when silica (*eg* from the clay in furnace/hearth walls) is fluxed with alkalis from a fuel (*eg* wood or charcoal), in a number of high-temperature process including pottery firing and accidental burning (*eg* of wattle and daub buildings). In this case, ironworking slags were also recovered, so the fuel ash slag may have been produced in a ironworking hearth. However, the amount of ironworking slags examined (*c.*1kg) is very low and there were no furnaces or hearths recorded at the site; the ironworking debris may be residual or not in its original context. The small stone which appears to be very iron-rich (context 384) could possibly have been used for ironsmelting but it does not appear to have been roasted. The extensive work which would be needed to establish fully the nature of this sample is not warranted.

Conclusions

This material does not add substantially to the interpretation of the site. A high-temperature process has been identified, but its exact nature cannot be established from the available data.

References

McWhirr A 1981. Roman Gloucestershire

Timby J 1993. Roman small towns in the Cotswolds, Post-Excavation Programme 1993-1994; Notes for Specialists (Cotswold Archaeological Trust)

Bourton-on-the-Water technological material							
	Type of material, by weight (in grammes)						
Context	Date	ND Fe slag	Smithing slag?	Dense Fe slag	Iron-rich stone	FAS	Totals
384	2nd-4th?				30		30
387	2nd-4th?	24					24
391	2nd-4th?			106			106
401	2nd-4th?		155				155
493	2nd-4th?			70			70
497	2nd-4th?	195					195
522	2nd-4th?			530			530
All other contexts*						1008	1008
							Total weight of technological material = 2118

ND Fe slag = Non-diagnostic iron slag; FAS = fuel ash slag

* From Whiteshoots Hill (Fosse Way).