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A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME LATE SAXON / EARLY MEDIAEVAL POTTERY FROM WEST COTTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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Summary

Thin section analysis of a number of samples of pottery that are also being examined as part of the organic residue project by the Department of Biochemistry, University of Liverpool. The petrological approach was able to characterize the pottery under three general fabric groupings: Shelly coarseware, Oxford oolitic ware and Lyvedon ware.

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A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME LATE SAXON/EARLY MEDIAEVAL POTTERY FROM WEST COTTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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[HBMC Ceramic and Lithic Petrology Project]

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Introduction

Fifteen small samples of late Saxon and early Mediaeval calcareous pottery recovered from recent excavations at West Cotton, were submitted for a fabric examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. The West Cotton site forms part of the programme of the Raunds Area Project, which is looking in some detail at the archaeology of a region of Northamptonshire centred on the small town of Raunds. One aspect of the study of the pottery from West Cotton involves a programme of organic residue analysis, which is being carried out by the Department of Biochemistry, University of Liverpool. This current project will also involve experiments with replica vessels, as far as possible similar in every respect to the pottery obtained from the excavations at West Cotton.

It is hoped that the petrological information outlined below will provide addition information on the size, frequency and inclusion type of the original sherds, in

order that the modern vessels can be as alike their late Saxon and early Mediaeval counterparts as possible. All of the sherds submitted were initially studied macroscopically with the aid of a binocular microscope [x20]. Munsell Soil Colour Charts are referred to together with free descriptive terms.

Petrology

"Shelly Coarseware"

Fairly hard, slightly rough fabric, packed with clearly visible small inclusions of white shell, which give the sherds a somewhat "soapy" feel. Reddish-yellow to red colours sometimes occur on the inner surfaces [5YR 7/8 - 2.5YR 5/6], but the more usual colour of the sherds is reddish-grey to dark grey [5YR 5/2 - 10YR 4/1], with a grey core.

1]. *RP57*

2]. *RP32*

3]. *RP50*

4]. *RP29*

5]. *RP71*

Closely packed inclusions of randomly orientated, curved plates of fossiliferous shell showing calcite recrystallization predominates throughout the section.

Amongst the shell are a few small fossil bryozoa fragments, a free-floating, colonial, normally marine animal. Also present are some irregular-shaped pieces of cryptocrystalline limestone, a sparse scatter of small quartz grains generally under 0.10mm, with the odd slightly larger grain ranging up to 0.40mm across, a little iron oxide and a few small strands of muscovite mica.

The bryozoa fragments noted in these samples might possibly represent the form cheilostomata, which is known to occur in the Jurassic [Majewske, 1969, 35].

"Oxford Oolitic Ware"

In the hand-specimen, all these samples, which are in a fairly hard, roughish fabric, can be seen to contain prominent inclusions of rounded ooliths. The outer surfaces of the sherds are normally oxidized or partly-oxidized light red [2.5YR 6/6] to dark greyish-brown [10YR 5/2], all with a light grey central core.

6]. *RP59*

Frequent inclusions of well-rounded ooliths displaying their concentric structure within the limestone body occurs throughout the clay matrix. Also present is a moderate amount of subangular grains of quartz, average size ranging between 0.10 - 0.50mm, with a few examples displaying polycrystalline faces, together with a few

fragments of fossil shell, shelly limestone and small flecks of muscovite mica.

7]. *RP30*

8]. *RP20*

9]. *RP34*

10]. *RP52*

A slightly different fabric to no. [6], in that these four sherds lack the larger-sized quartz grains which are present in the former sample, although they still contain the characteristic ooliths, with some shelly limestone. In this group the clay matrix is slightly finer-textured than is the case in no. [6], with the quartz grains normally not exceeding 0.10mm in size and small flecks of muscovite mica.

"Lyveden Ware"

Hard, rough fabric, containing many small white plates of shell, with a slightly "soapy" feel. The surface colour ranges from light reddish-brown through light grey to dark grey [2.5YR 6/6 - between 10YR 5/1-4/1]. The deserted Mediaeval village of Lyveden lies on Cornbrash and Oxford Clay, which thinly overlie deposits of Great Oolite clay. Boulder Clays are closeby [Taylor, 1963].

11]. *RP70*

12]. *RP25*

13]. *RP38*

Frequent pieces of randomly orientated, curved plates of fossiliferous shell showing calcite recrystallization. Amongst the shell are a few fragments of bryozoa and some pieces of shelly limestone, set in a fairly fine-textured clay matrix which contains only a sparse scatter of quartz grains normally under 0.10mm in size but with a few slightly larger grains, a little argillaceous material and some strands of muscovite mica.

14]. *RP24*

Similar to nos. [11-13] but with frequent subangular quartz grains generally below 0.30mm in size.

15]. *RP67*

Similar to nos. [11-13] but with a moderate scatter of subangular quartz grains ranging up to 0.50mm in size.

Bibliography

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