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To Mrs Langdon,

PETROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ROMAN POTTERY FROM THE BRUE VALLEY, SOMERSET

A large quantity of Roman pottery, mainly third and fourth century forms, has been recovered from the numerous pottery mounds that straddle the lower Brue Valley north of the Polden Hills. A number of samples from Mrs Langdon's type series I–IV, based on this pottery, were selected for petrological examination. All the fabrics are relatively sandy and so the sherds were subjected to heavy mineral analysis: Table I shows the results in terms of non-opaque minerals. A sample of Burtle Beds sand collected in the vicinity of Chilton Burtle Farm (ST 388439), near to some of the pottery mounds, was also analyzed for comparison with the pottery.

TABLE I

Sample	Zircon	Tourmaline	Rutile	Kyanite	Andalusite	Staurolite	Garnet	Epidote	Apatite	Anatase	Barites	No. grains count
Burtle Beds sand	68.1	5.3	1.3	.2	.5	1.1	23.2	.3	–	–	–	628
Cooking-pot, Type IV	69.5	5.1	6.8	–	–	–	16.9	–	–	1.7	–	159
Cooking-pot, Type III	33.6	10.9	2.3	1.6	1.9	4.3	38.0	3.5	3.9	–	–	258
Cooking-pot, Type II	42.3	12.9	4.3	–	7.1	1.4	17.2	3.4	–	4.3	7.1	170
Late BB1[1] cooking-pot:1	8.8	85.2	2.2	.5	2.8	–	.5	–	–	–	–	176
Late BB1 cooking-pot:2	14.1	81.0	.7	2.1	.7	.7	–	.7	–	–	–	442
Late BB1 cooking-pot:3	37.4	61.1	.3	.6	–	–	–	.3	–	.3	–	313
Late BB1 cooking-pot:4	35.5	58.5	1.3	2.7	.7	1.3	–	–	–	–	–	676
Late BB1 cooking-pot:5	36.8	54.9	1.4	.8	2.6	.3	.6	2.0	.6	–	–	341
Late BB1 cooking-pot:6	41.5	51.3	4.4	.7	.7	.7	–	–	–	.7	–	535
BB1 flanged bowl:7	55.1	41.6	.4	.4	–	2.1	–	.4	–	–	–	245

Fabric I is represented by seven vessels, all black-burnished ware, six late cooking-pots (Gillam[2] 147/148) and a flanged bowl (Gillam 228). All these sherds produced assemblages characterized by a high tourmaline content, and agreed well with analyses on BB1 vessels shown to have been made in the Wareham-Poole Harbour area of Dorset (Williams,1977,Group I). A similar origin for these vessels is likely.

Included amoungst these BB1 samples is a sherd of the upper body of a late cooking-pot with herringbone decoration immediately below an upper girth line (no.6). This form of decoration is similar to the type mentioned by Farrar as indicating the existence of a late BB1 factory in the Brue Valley, an offshoot of the Dorset industry (1973,93). Another of the late cooking-pots (no.4) was found at King's Sedgemoor in association with a straight-sided dish, Gillam 329, which displays the 'Redcliffe Motif' on the inside base, considered by Farrar to be diagnostic of the supposed BB1 production centre at Redcliffe, Dorset (ibid.,90, and illustrated in Fig.1,no.7; see also Williams, 1977,192). Another five similarily decorated dishes were seen by the writer amongst the pottery recovered by Mrs Langdon, five from North Newton and one fron King's Sedgemoor.

It is significant that the local Burtle Beds sand sample produced an assemblage unlike that of the BB1 vessels analyzed above. In addition, the presence in the area of dishes displaying the 'Redcliffe Motif' suggests that Dorset BB1 products are well represented there. All this casts considerable doubt on the idea of a separate Brue Valley late BB1 industry. The moreso

2. Refers to Gillam's Types paper (1957).

if the pottery mounds are finally interpreted as the refuse heaps of salt workings, rather than those of potteries.(see Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain, 1956).

Of the remaining fabric types, all non-black-burnished fabric and forms, Type IV is perhaps sufficiently similar to the sample of local Burtle Beds sand to suggest that this is a local product. Type III has a low zircon content (33.6%) in comparison with that of the Burtle Beds sand sample (68.1%), though the character of the minerals present is such that an origin for this fabric in the general area is possible. It seems unlikely though that this sample and that of Type IV were produced at the same centre.

The salient feature of the heavy mineral assemblage for Type II is a fairly substantial amount of barites (7.1%). This alone is sufficient to distinguish it from the other two samples analyzed of Mrs Langdon's type fabrics, and also of the local Burtle Beds sand. A separate origin would seem to be indicated.

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