

Derek Hall

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The ceramic assemblage from the excavations at Tarbat comprises 2116 sherds from 249 contexts ranging in date from the 12th to 19th centuries. The entire pottery assemblage has been examined by eye and identified to an accepted fabric name where possible. A selection of fabrics was submitted for ICPS (Chemical Sourcing).

2.0 CLAY SOURCING

The MacAulay Soil Survey Map of Easter Ross indicates the presence of a large deposit of potentially workable clay less than 2 miles to the South West of the site close to Toulvaddie. Field prospection by the author in 2011 identified a deposit of blue grey lacustrine clay in this vicinity and a sample was submitted to SUERC for ICPS analysis and comparison with the potential locally produced redwares from the excavation.

3.0 POTTERY FABRICS

3.1 Scottish Redwares

This assemblage is dominated by sherds in variations of this fabric type being represented by 1701 sherds. Recent analysis has indicated that from at least the early 13th century this pottery tradition is prevalent in medieval Scotland where there are riverine red firing clays available, essentially all the main river valleys (Haggarty, Hall and Chenery in press). In recent years Redware fabrics have been identified from excavations at Dornoch and Hilton of Cadboll and from fieldwalking at Tarradale on the north side of the Beaully Firth (Hall 2009, 9,10; Hall 2010; pers comm E. Grant). Although the Tarbat assemblage is very fragmented sufficient evidence is provided by handle, rim and base fragments to attempt to reconstruct the vessel forms. Splash glazed jugs with strap handles are the most common form represented with some sherds suggesting that the potters are copying imported vessels from Yorkshire, this is best represented by ribbed rod handles, decorated bridge spouts and a fragment of a decorative arm from a figure jug. Some sherds are smoke blacked and may be from jars used for cooking, although it would appear from other Scottish assemblages that due to their poor resistance to heat shock Scottish Redware fabrics were not normally used for producing such vessels. Unusual vessel types in this assemblage include a small skillet/ladle handle and heavily rilled bodysherds (C1318 (3234) for example). There is also

evidence for bodysherds in this fabric having holes drilled in them and being reused possibly as spindle whorls (C1343 (2940); C1378 (1366)). Some of the redware fabrics have a very high quartzite content (visible as white spots) (C1318 (3236) for example) something that has previously been noted for the Redwares from Inverness (MacAskill 1982) and some of the North Eastern Scottish redwares that have recently been recorded from excavations by AOC Archaeology at the Bon Accord Centre in Aberdeen (Haggarty and Hall forthcoming). A very distinctive purple heat skin is also visible on some sherds, something that has been identified as a distinctive trait of Scottish Redwares indicating the leeching of iron from the fabric during firing, interestingly there are also Redware fabrics present that do not exhibit this effect. There are occasional sherds which appear to be crosses between Organic tempered wares and Redwares (very micaceous) (C1293 (1057) for example) also (F 137 C1367 (1281)). There is also an unidentified fabric with large red sandstone inclusions (25/C1007) which could be a Redware variant and occasional sherds have very large white quartz inclusions (5307 C1877 for example). Generally these redwares are quite highly fired. Based on our current knowledge of the Scottish medieval pottery industry these Redware fabric types and vessel forms would seem to date no earlier than the 13th and 14th centuries and no later than the 15th/16th centuries (Haggarty, Hall and Chenery).

3.2 Organic Tempered Wares

This broad range of hand made fabrics is found on the Scottish West Coast and in the Highlands and Islands and represents a pottery tradition that covers at least 2,000 years (Cheape 1993; Lane 2007). This assemblage contains 82 sherds in this fabric type. The handmade nature of these vessels makes the reconstruction of complete forms difficult but perhaps the most distinctive sherd from the assemblage is the ‘looped’ rod handle from C1366 (1363) (ICP sample 3) which seems to be trying to copy an imported vessel form. Such a wide date range for this tradition makes accurately dating sherds of the earlier part of this industry difficult if not impossible unless they are found in association with other datable material or from scientifically dated levels. This small group from Tarbat is found in association with medieval Redware fabrics and would therefore seem to be of that date.

3.3 Whitewares

Recent analysis and study suggests that white firing clays have always been hard to find in Scotland or may even have not ever been present North of Fife and Strathclyde (Jones et al 2006). This means that any Whitewares from this excavation are likely to be imported rather than locally produced. The small number of such sherds (22) are quite small and difficult to provenance but included amongst them is a Scottish White Gritty Ware basesherd from a very distinctive flat bottomed straight sided jar of Scottish Borders type (C1366 (2422) (*ibid.*

2006). These vessels are thought to be of 12th-century date, are very well thrown and have now been found from sites at Robert's Haven, Caithness and Quoygrew, Orkney indicating that they are being traded up the Scottish East Coast (Hall forthcoming a and b). This vessel type forms the basis of the as yet unproven argument for a strong monastic involvement in pottery production and trade in 12th century Scotland (Haggarty 1984). There is also a bodysherd from a splash glazed Scottish White Gritty Ware jug from the fill of posthole F 260 (C1694 (2590)) which is liable to date to the 13th or 14th centuries. Two joining bodysherds from C1078 (1896) are from a well glazed jug decorated with applied scales in a fabric which is liable to be of Northern English origin and of 13th or 14th century date. A further small bodysherd from a vessel that is well glazed light green with brown flecks and green streaks resembles Stamford Ware C1264 (239) which would date to the 11th or 12th centuries (Kilmurray 1980).

3.4 Yorkshire Type Wares

Vessels in these distinctively glazed fabrics are the most common imports in the Scottish east coast burghs in the 13th and 14th centuries (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 227-52; Jennings 1992). These ornately decorated vessels seem to have had a marked effect on the local redware potters as it is quite plain that they try very hard to copy them (see Scottish Redwares above). The Tarbat assemblage continues a small number of sherds from vessels in this fabric type largely from C1000 and C1002. Although there are a very small number of sherds (5) they all come from well glazed highly decorated vessels of fairly high status such as jugs with facemasks and tubular spouts (C1002 (111); C1000 (992)) an aquamanile (C1002 (191)) and a small narrow necked vessel (C1000 (7669)). Excavations within the church at Tarbat also produced sherds from an aquamanile (Hall 1998).

3.5 Paffrath Type Ware

There is also a single small rimsherd from C1426 (1163) which may be a product of the Paffrath (Blue Grey) pottery industry in Northern Germany, ladles in this fabric are known from excavations in Perth and Aberdeen and are dated to the 11th/12th or early 13th centuries (Verhaege 1983). A single bodysherd from Context 1284 (1661) is in a similar slightly thicker hard fired fabric and may also be a product of the Paffrath kilns.

3.6 Rhenish Stonewares (Raeren)

From the mid-14th century vessels in these very highly fired stoneware fabrics become fairly common imports into Scotland. The three sherds from Tarbat are all from Raeren Type stoneware vessels and one of them is from a Raeren jug with a splayed frilled footring (C1000 (1477)) that dates between 1475-1525 (Hurst et al 1986).

3.7 Unidentified

The unidentified material (282 sherds) is largely made up of small bodysherds that are difficult to accurately provenance but does include an everted rimsherd from a small unprovenanced greyware jar used for cooking with splashes of external lead glaze (C1368 (2505) ICP sample 21).

3.8 Tile

There is a single piece of thin (14mm) flat unglazed redware tile from C1368 (2035) which is difficult to date but could potentially be medieval.

4.0 ICPS SAMPLING OF POTTERY FABRICS (CHEMICAL SOURCING)

Twenty-six samples of Redwares, Organic Tempered Wares, Yorkshire Type Wares, Whitewares and Unidentified Fabrics were chosen by the author and George Haggarty for submission to SUERC (East Kilbride) for analysis.

4.1 Statistical Interpretation of Chemical Sourcing Data

Dr Simon Chenery (British Geological Survey)

The Tarbat samples have been divided into three groups: *redware*, organic tempered ware (*OTW*) and *other* which includes Scottish White Gritty Ware, Yorkshire Type Wares and an unprovenanced greyware.

Simple x-y graphical plots of data are the first and most rapid method of interpreting the chemical relationship between samples. Bi-variate plots of Th versus U and Th versus La, Tarbat redware and OTW appear inter-mixed. The *other* ware has a greater spread and in particular Tarbat samples 19, 20 and 21 separate. All samples except these fall within the main body of NE Scotland redware but seem to most closely match Rattray (Aberdeenshire) and Quoygrew (Orkney).

5.0 DATE AND PROVENANCE

Generally the assemblage of pottery from Tarbat would seem to date consistently to the 13th and 14th centuries with a very small element present suggesting activity in the 12th century, there are no sherds of Scottish Post Medieval Oxidised or Reduced Wares present suggesting that occupation dates no later than the 16th century (Haggarty, Hall and Chenery in press). All of the Organic Tempered Wares would seem to be of medieval date and there would seem

to be a hiatus in pottery use at Tarbat as there are no ceramics present from the early monastic horizons. Apart from a few sherds of Tin Glazed Earthenwares and Brown Glazed Earthenwares from the ploughsoil horizons there are no ceramics any later than early 16th century present on the site either. The ceramic evidence would seem to consistently be suggesting that the major medieval phases at Tarbat date between the 13th and early 16th centuries. There are no imported wares present from France, the Low Countries or Iberia, trade connections are only suggested between the rest of mainland Scotland, Northern England and the Rhineland.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The pottery assemblage from Tarbat is one of the largest such assemblages from excavations in the Scottish Highlands and is of value in the continuing study of the development of Scotland's medieval pottery industry. The domination of the assemblage by a variety of Redware fabrics is of interest and the interim results of the chemical sourcing suggest that local production may be taking place. The absence of any ceramics from the early monastic phases is of interest and can be paralleled by a similar absence from the early deposits across the Firth at Dornoch (Colman and Photos-Jones 2008).

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