

A Note on the Petrology of some Mortaria from the 1981-1983 excavations at the pre-Flavian Fortress site at Mancetter Village, Warwickshire

D.F. Williams, Ph.D., FSA
[HBMC Ceramic Petrology Project]
Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

Introduction

Three pre-Flavian orange-brown coloured mortaria, recovered from excavations at the early Roman fortress at Mancetter Village, were submitted for a fabric analysis in thin section under the petrological microscope. The main object of the examination was to compare the sherds one with another, to see if there are any noticeable differences between each fabric, also to see if they might possibly all have been made locally. For comparative purposes, a fragment of red coloured mortarium from the early levels at Usk was also submitted. Mancetter Village is situated in an area of glacial sand, gravel and alluvium, underlain by Keuper Marl, not far away from formations of Stockingford Shales containing sills of diorite and Hartshill Quartzite [Geological Survey 1" Map of England Sheet no. 169].

Petrology

[1]. Mancetter Fortress MV 81 (8)

A fairly clean clay matrix containing a scatter of subangular quartz grains, average size 0.30-60mm, together with some flecks of mica, quartzite, chert, a little sandstone, iron oxide and argillaceous material.

[2]. Mancetter Fortress M29 F6 (2)

Frequent subangular quartz grains, ranging in size between 0.05mm and 0.50mm, together with some flecks of mica, chert, quartzite and a little sandstone.

[3]. Mancetter Fortress 81M 15 F1/ 15 (5)

A fairly fine-textured clay matrix containing moderately frequent subangular quartz grains in the size range between 0.10mm and 0.80mm, together with some flecks of mica, slightly more chert than in nos. [1] - [2], quartzite and a little iron oxide.

[4]. Usk

A groundmass of frequent silt-sized quartz grains and shreds of mica, together with a scatter of slightly larger quartz grains normally under 0.30mm in size. Also present is a little iron oxide and some fine-grained sandstone.

Comments

The large Roman kiln complex at Mancetter was producing a range of pottery, including mortaria, from towards the end of the first century A.D. There is little evidence for production before this date, though it is quite possible that some pottery was made locally for the predominant use of the fortress garrison. The above three mortaria sherds from the Mancetter fortress do exhibit some slight textural differences from each other. However, although not exactly matched by the fabrics of the coarse ware vessels produced in the later dated Mancetter kilns, previously examined by the writer, they nevertheless all share some of the general range of non-plastic inclusions found in that pottery. It is quite possible, therefore, that some, or perhaps all, of the mortaria vessels in question were made from raw materials obtained within the Mancetter area. On the other hand, the mortarium sherd from Usk stands apart from the above as it appears to be much more micaceous and somewhat finer-grained than any of the three Mancetter sherds.