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Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 50/93

POSSIBLE DUROTRIGIAN POTTERY FROM  
SOUTH CADBURY CASTLE, SOMERSET

D F Williams PhD FSA

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### Summary

Thin sectioning and heavy mineral separation on a small range of late Iron Age forms from the South Cadbury Castle showed that three of the 10 sherds were almost certainly made in the Wareham - Poole Harbour area of Dorset. The other seven, despite seeming to have in the hand-specimen certain features which tentatively suggested a possible Durotrigian origin, each had a different fabric to that of the "standard" Durotrigian ware.

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POSSIBLE DUROTRIGIAN POTTERY FROM SOUTH CADBURY CASTLE,  
SOMERSET

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Introduction

A small programme of petrological analysis [thin sectioning and heavy mineral separation] was conducted on ten sherds of late Iron Age pottery from the "Durotrigian phase" at South Cadbury Castle. These sherds are in a range of forms, or display manufacturing techniques, not normally associated with Durotrigian pottery. The main aim of the examination, therefore, was to discover if the fabric of any of the sample sherds could be classified as "standard" Durotrigian ware, and as such likely to have been made in the Wareham - Poole Harbour area of Dorset.

The Durotrigian pottery made in the Wareham - Poole Harbour area, of both late Iron Age date and the Romano-British black burnished wares [BB1] of the first century A.D. onwards, occurs in a characteristic fabric. In the hand-specimen the pottery generally appears in a hard, very sandy fabric, mostly, but not always, dark grey to very dark grey/black in surface colour, with the burnished areas often acquiring a rich dark sheen. In fresh fracture the sherds exhibit a

distinctive-looking core, consisting of frequent light coloured angular quartz grains set against a black or very dark grey background, which gives the appearance of a "cod's row". In thin section the range of non-plastic inclusions comprise frequent subangular quartz grains, together with flecks of mica and invariably some pieces of shale, normally set in a fairly clean clay matrix. Occasionally, a little mudstone flint, quartzite, limestone or shell may also be present [Williams, 1986]. However, the products from this region of Dorset have in the past been more readily identified by heavy mineral separation. They produce a distinctive suite of non-opaque heavy minerals in which tourmaline, together with zircon, dominates the assemblage [Williams, 1977].

#### Catalogue of Sherds Sampled

##### White-Slipped Bowls with Bead Rim (BC3.11 and BC3.3)

[1]. *SC/N 102*

[2]. *SC/N 102*

Hard, sandy fabric, vertically burnished on the outer surface, and with traces of a white ?slip on the outer surface which carries on over to the inner surface just below the rim, very pale brown [10YR 7/3] in colour with a dark grey core.

In thin section, both sherds can be seen to contain quite tightly packed ill-sorted subangular quartz grains, ranging

from silt-sized to 0.60mm across, some of them polycrystalline, together some flecks of mica, iron oxides and a little flint.

A heavy mineral separation on sherd no. [1] produced a few grains of zircon.

[3]. *SC/N 102*

Hard, rough sandy fabric with patchy white ?slip, reddish-grey [10R 5/4 - 7.5YR N4/] throughout.

Thin sectioning shows moderately frequent large quartz grains, average size 0.40-0.80mm across, with some of them polycrystalline, scattered throughout a reasonably clean clay matrix, together with some flecks of mica, and a few fragments of flint and limestone.

A heavy mineral separation produced practically no non-opaque grains.

Necked Bowls (BD4.2)

[4]. *SC/N 102*

[5]. *SC/N 102*

[6]. *SC/N 102*

Hard, rough very sandy fabric, with quartz grains protruding through the surfaces, dark orangy-buff [between 5YR 7/6 and 7.5YR 7/6] with grey areas throughout.

In thin section the fabric is characterized by frequent well-sorted subangular quartz grains, average size below 0.30mm across, together with some flecks of mica and a little iron ore.

A heavy mineral separation conducted on sherd nos. [5] and [6] produced mostly zircon grains, with accessory rutile and tourmaline.

#### Carinated Cup (BD.8)

[7]. SC/W 030

Hard, rough very sandy fabric, with quartz grains protruding through the surfaces, dark buff [7.5YR 7/4] outer surface, light grey core and darker greyish-buff inner surface.

A generally similar fabric in thin section to sherd nos. [4]-[6].

A heavy mineral separation recorded some zircon with a few grains of rutile and tourmaline.

#### "Butt Beaker" Copies (JG)

[8]. SC/K 591

[9]. SC/K 580B

[10]. SC/D 609

Hard, very sooth sandy fabric with vertical burnishing on both surfaces, very dark grey surfaces, approaching black [2.5Y N3/1], with a lighter grey core.

The fabric of all three sherds appears very similar in thin section. They each show moderately frequent subangular quartz grains, generally ranging from 0.20-60mm in size, with a few slightly larger grains, which are scattered throughout a fairly clean clay matrix. Also present are flecks of mica, some pieces of shale, a little limestone and the odd piece of flint.

The heavy mineral residues of sample nos. [8] and [9] both display a tourmaline-rich assemblage.

### Comments

Of the ten sherds sampled, only the three "butt beaker" copies appear to contain a tourmaline-rich heavy mineral suite which leads one to suspect that they may have been made in the Wareham - Poole Harbour region of Dorset. The thin section results of these sherds show that there are also similarities with the fabric of Durotrigian pottery from this centre, although the South Cadbury sherds contain slightly more quartz grains than are generally present in Dorset Romano-British BB1.

A recent heavy mineral separation project on likely Durotrigian pottery from Maiden Castle, showed that the distinctive tourmaline-rich heavy mineral assemblage was present in a range of Iron Age pottery stretching back to

Wheeler's late Iron Age "A" phase [HBMC Ceramic Petrology report; Wheeler, 1943]. While at Gussage All Saints, the same Durotrigian fabric accounted for the majority of the middle and later Iron Age pottery on the site [Gale, 1979, Group 1].

Regarding the other sherds examined from South Cadbury, none of them match up petrologically to known Durotrigian pottery from the Wareham - Poole Harbour region seen by the writer. Unfortunately, the range and texture of the inclusions, in both thin section and heavy mineral assemblage, are of a common nature, giving little real indication of likely sources. It is possible that some, or all, may have been made closeby to the Wareham - Poole Harbour region, although alternatively they could have been made much nearer the find-site. All that can be safely said at present is that they appear to be made from clays not usually associated with the products from the Wareham - Poole Harbour area, and also, taken as a group, that they seem to come from a variety of sources.

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