Pots for life and pots for death. Food and vessel use in the Middle Bronze Age at Kingsmead Quarry, Berkshire

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Julie Dunne (University of Bristol) and Alistair Barclay (Cotswold Archaeology) presented their exciting results from organic residue analysis of Middle Bronze Age (MBA) vessels excavated from the multi-period site Kingsmead Quarry (CEMEX), Horton, Berkshire. This work, carried out by Wessex Archaeology over a period of fifteen years, revealed a complex enclosed and subdivided Bronze Age agricultural landscape comprising field systems and two substantial farmsteads. Each farm was associated with burials, domestic refuse and metalwork (Chaffey *et al.*, forthcoming).

The MBA Deverel-Rimbury potsherds to be analysed were selected from a range of deposit types from which different types of vessels, including, bucket-shaped vessels, bowls and globular jars (**pots for life**), were sampled. The lipid residue results showed that nearly half the vessels (48%) were used to process dairy products and the remainder ruminant carcass products (52%).

We also sampled sherds from different parts of some of the more complete vessels, rim, body and base, in order to investigate vessel use, i.e. modes of cooking and relationships between form and function. Interestingly, these results show that lipid distributions in different parts of the vessel can reveal whether they were used to boil foodstuffs and sometimes fry or bake meat. However, the most astonishing result of the day related to an extremely large Bucket Urn, which we calculated would hold around 5.5 gallons – enough to feed between 45 and 90 people! Because of their size, these are normally assumed to be storage vessels but extremely high lipid distributions from a rim sherd suggested that the vessel was filled to the brim with ruminant carcass products. The dominance of cattle bones at the site might suggest the cooking of beef stews, presumably for large groups of people, perhaps as part of some ceremonial activity. Another explanation might be that the pot was used to boil animal bones to extract fat.

Five bucket and jar-shaped vessels from urned burial deposits (**pots for death**) were also sampled, revealing three vessels contained lipids, two in high concentrations, suggesting these were used as cooking vessels prior to their final use as a cremation urn. The remaining

two vessels, both considerably smaller, contained no/trace lipids which may suggest these were either not used as cooking vessels prior to their secondary use or were fashioned solely for use as burial urns.

Hopefully, these results really demonstrated the potential of organic residue analysis to prehistoric pottery assemblages, not just to investigate diet and animal management practices but also to look at vessel use.

Bibliography

Chaffey, G., Barclay, A. J., and Pelling, R., forthcoming *Kingsmead Quarry, Horton Volume 1. 2003−2009 excavations*, Wessex Archaeology Monogr. **32**