CADBURY CASTLE: PREHISTORIC POTTERY DISTRIBUTION IN THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE

RICHARD TABOR

SUMMARY

This paper presents summary preliminary period-based plots of prehistoric pottery collected from test and shovel pits in the hinterland of Cadbury Castle, south-east Somerset. It summarises this aspect of the South Cadbury Environs Project's work up to December 2003.

INTRODUCTION

Currently funded by the Leverhulme Trust and sponsored by the University of Bristol, the South Cadbury Environs Project (SCEP) was established at the time a report of Leslie Alcock's excavations was being prepared (Barrett *et al.* 2000), after a documentary search of Cadbury Castle's immediate landscape revealed how little was known of the area. It began with *ad hoc* fieldwalking in 1992, and metamorphosed through several project designs over the coming years. Whilst the overall sampling plan had been established by 1996 the variety and intensity of techniques continued to evolve until 1998. Geophysical survey became the principal technique, whilst fieldwalking was replaced almost entirely by shovel pitting. The linkage between the two data sets was investigated with test pits excavated to natural.

A survey necessarily depends on well-excavated stratified deposits for relative dating of activity across the wider landscape. For general recognition of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity the durability of flint is invaluable, but for the later prehistoric periods pottery is the key artefact. The project has benefited hugely from analysis of the Cadbury Castle material by Leslie Alcock (1980) and Ann Woodward (2000), and this has been supplemented by the author's work on pottery from the nearby excavations at Milsoms Corner (Tabor 2002, 34–50). Surveys using fieldwalking or shovel testing for the collection of later prehistoric artefacts risk reliance on ceramic fabric without form, as the material is usually heavily degraded in a ploughsoil. However, SCEP's test pits have produced prehistoric sherds in excellent condition which have greatly increased confidence in dating activity areas.

METHODOLOGY

The bulk of the magnetic survey was carried out with a Geoscan FM36 gradiometer, with readings taken at 0.5m intervals along traverses 1m apart. On Sigwells, where the smaller memory capacity of the FM18 restricted the number of readings which could be collected in a



Fig. 1 Magnetometer survey (grey-filled areas indicate extent of survey)

single session, the sampling interval was 1m. Conversely, over the past year the project has used a new instrument, the dual system Bartington Grad 601–2, which has much greater capacity, allowing four readings per metre. In excess of 160ha have been covered so far (Fig. 1).

The surface collection was by shovel pitting (or shovel testing: Smith and Thorpe 1995). Units comprising 60 litres of topsoil were passed through a 1cm gauge mesh, collected at every 20m along lines set at 20m intervals. For every hectare covered a 1m² test pit was dug by hand to the natural geological surface. Where shovel pitting was impractical, particularly during 2003 when the ground became severely baked, a minimum of a further 2m² of test pits were dug, frequently targeted at geophysical anomalies (Fig. 2).

The methodology and its rationale are treated in much greater detail elsewhere (Tabor 2002, 9–13; 2004a, 96–101).

THE POTTERY

In its early phases the project had high expectations that it would be possible to assess sherds' places in the well-established fabric chronology set out by Leslie Alcock (1980). However our work, particularly over the last three years, has revealed increasingly a tension in the expected relationships between forms and fabrics. It has become clear that whilst some mixtures had a much earlier inception, others persisted over a significantly longer period. In this respect the use of test pits has been a particular boon, allowing the retrieval of good quality diagnostic sherds.

The excavations from Milsoms Corner (1995–99) provided a remarkably long stratified sequence extending from the Early Neolithic through to the first century AD, and this formed the backbone of a project series. It is hoped that this will be linked to an absolute chronology



Fig. 2 Location of test and shovel pits (black circle = TP; grey hatching = SP)

in the near future but in the meantime it has been tied to Cadbury Castle's pottery, with revisions imposed by the stratigraphy. However, the sequence is problematic as the record appears to be biased towards a series of brief episodes probably dating to the first half of the first millennium BC, with thinner Middle and Late Iron Age assemblages. Both assemblages have been amplified following excavations of an enclosure on Sigwells (Tabor 2004b) and it is now possible to present provisional pottery distributions derived from survey work up to the end of 2003.

Early Bronze Age (Fig. 3)

Early and Middle Bronze Age material culture from Alcock's excavations was extremely sparse, although we should bear in mind that less than 7% of the interior was covered. Our findings suggest that there was certainly activity in the wider landscape, and indeed the barrows at Sigwells demonstrate that. The attribution of the project's material to this period has depended almost entirely on fabric analysis, as very few diagnostic forms have been found. Typically sherds are thin-walled, in a soft fabric including grog and sometimes coarse angular quartz. There is a marked focus of sherds to the near east and west of Cadbury Castle, but there are significant groupings at Sigwells, on the slopes of Littleton and in Manor Field (for the location of named fields see Fig. 1). Whilst close proximity to water is a feature of the concentration in the valley to the east of Cadbury, and, to a lesser extent, of the concentration at Milsoms Corner, the foci at Sigwells and Manor Field (Weston Bampfylde) are both on rises several hundred metres away from the nearest source. The Sigwells group is close to a twin barrow and might possibly be associated with that. Otherwise there is a notable preference for lighter soils and avoidance of heavy soils and north-facing slopes. Whilst the distribution of flint (not illustrated) is much more general and includes difficult soils, if pottery is sometimes indicative of settlement it seems highly likely that arable farming was an important part of Early Bronze Age subsistence.



Fig. 3 Early Bronze Age pottery distribution



Fig. 4 Middle Bronze Age pottery distribution

Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 4)

During this period lighter soils continue to be favoured but whilst there remains a focus of activity around the hill, there are fewer signs of settlement activity further afield. There are two areas of probable specialised activity. To the west of Homeground, in an area between two springs issuing from the lower slopes of the north and north-east of the hill, a test pit produced an abundance of cordoned sherds datable to the earlier part of the period in amongst many softly baked lumps of clay. The geophysical anomalies had characteristics of burnt mounds, although possibly of clay rather than stone (Fig. 5). A test pit in North Field (Weston Bampfylde) targeted an amorphous area of high readings and revealed a waterlogged deposit including a very large lias slab in the section and a small amount of diagnostic pottery associated with an abundance of squat flint flakes.

Once again the avoidance of difficult soils suggests that arable agriculture was significant although large enclosures within a rigorous long linear boundaries system evident at Sigwells implies the importance of livestock as well. The system had been thought to be Romano-British, but excavations in 2000 (Tabor and Johnson 2002, 18, and cut F004 in fig. 12) and 2003 (Tabor 2004b) now strongly suggested that it is no later than Middle Bronze Age.

Late Bronze Age to Earliest Iron Age (Fig. 6)

The period here is fairly broad, probably extending from around 1100 BC to 600 BC. Materially it ranges from the post-Deverell Rimbury plain wares (Woodward's ca 4) through tripartite jars and bowls, some decorated, to bipartite jars (ca 5). At its latter end it is probably contemporary with Danebury's EEIA (Brown 2000, 80) and intriguingly excavations at Sigwells in 2002 produced a style of pottery which seems to have been introduced from that region, although of a local fabric (Tabor 2004b). The characteristic local fabrics are calcite mixtures, sometimes including shell, giving way to predominantly plate and crushed shell. There are rare examples with quartz and flint inclusions.

The most striking aspect of the period is the focusing of pottery, and with it probably settlement activity, around the pre-hillfort Cadbury Castle at a time when its plateau was already settled. The excavations at Sigwells in 2000 and 2003 (trenches 8, 9 and 10) do show activity further afield (Tabor and Johnson 2002, 13–23), but it appears to be very localised in time and space (within a short-lived enclosure), and probably associated with peripatetic craftsmen (Tabor 2004b), possibly metalworkers.

Early Middle Iron Age (Fig. 7)

Following Alcock's sequence this phase leads up to the construction of Cadbury Castle's ramparts. In the main the material culture is defined by Woodward's ca 6, although the later products in some ca 5 style fabrics are also included. Excavation at Milsoms Corner, on a spur overlooking the west approach produced a significant assemblage of this period but otherwise there is a remarkable absence of it from the wider landscape. This may in part be due to over precision in assigning sherds to particular phases but it is likely to reflect a real trend in the settlement distribution of that time. As such it implies a high degree of nucleation on the hilltop, and perhaps that field systems to the east and south of Cadbury were already in use. This contrasts with the situation at Danebury where the perception is of a wider distribution of activity at a comparable stage (Cunliffe 2000, 163–71). However, it must be borne in mind that most of the sites were further away from Danebury than any of the areas covered by SCEP are from Cadbury Castle.



Fig. 5 Dipolar responses possibly associated with Middle Bronze Age burnt features



Fig. 6 Late Bronze Age and Earliest Iron Age pottery distribution



Fig. 7 Early Iron Age pottery distribution



Fig. 8 Middle to Late Iron Age pottery distribution



Fig. 9 Distribution of probable 1st-century AD pottery

Middle to Later Iron Age (Fig. 8)

The period covers the duration of Cadbury's hillfort zenith, cas 7 and 8. It aims to exclude ca 9, although overlaps in forms and fabrics as currently understood make absolute definition impossible. New ceramic forms include proto bead-rim vessels and, during the long currency of ca 8, Glastonbury-style bowls, as well as saucepan-pot type vessels.

Three decades ago, during the early stages of work at Danebury, Hampshire, Barry Cunliffe speculated that the landscape was probably populated with farmsteads radiating at roughly every 1km around it. By the time of publishing the final report of the Danebury Environs Programme (Cunliffe 2000, 184) he had concluded that habitation on the hillfort was so highly nucleated during the Middle Iron Age that there was no other settlement within a radius approaching 10km around it. He cites supporting negative evidence from survey and other archaeological work around Maiden Castle, Dorset. The results from around Cadbury Castle provide a sharp contrast.

The test pits show marked concentrations on the west (Fig. 10) and east (Fig. 11) sides of the hillfort, the latter coinciding with field systems extending through much of the valley there. An assemblage of over 80 sherds from a test pit about 300m north of the north-east gate may also belong to this phase, although at present it has been allotted to the Late Iron Age (see Fig. 9). A group of over 70 sherds from Worthy, Weston Bampfylde, many from a decorated BD5-type vessel deliberately deposited in a ditch, fit well within Cadbury 8, and are likely to date to the later 1st century BC or the early 1st century AD. It seems highly likely that there was settlement here but more sporadic test pit finds from elsewhere may be less conclusive. The very few scrappy sherds from Great Woolfester may have been redeposited from the quarry immediately to its south, an area of high ground with a steep scarp down to the river Cam, which might well have suited settlement. Excavation has produced other striking examples. A buried soil at the head of Hicknoll Slait's north scarp encountered around 200 later Middle Iron Age sherds, although no features, whilst trenches in the south-east and north-west of Sigwells have revealed ditches, and ditches and pits respectively which yielded Middle Iron Age pottery.

Late Iron Age (Fig. 9)

So far test pits have yielded a smattering of material, fairly widely dispersed across the sampled areas. However, this is due partly to a problem of attribution as until recently Black Burnished sherds were almost invariably treated as Romano-British. A cluster of sherds from several test pits in the south end of the valley between Cadbury Castle and the east ridge includes many bead rims but no later forms and these will be added to the Late Iron Age data base.

The absence of diagnostically Romano-British vessels from these 1st-century contexts, several of which are ditch fills, implies a period of rupture. In the first instance it is tempting to suggest that it occurred shortly after the invasion of AD 43, but metalwork from East Field and Sigwells Trench 12 suggest a date closer to AD 70. This evidence should surely be considered in the light of the massacre deposits at Cadbury's south-west gate, as well as the persistence of a shrine building into the AD 60s. There appears to have been a deliberate slighting and closure of the wider landscape during the 1st century, most probably towards AD 70. At a time when there was a garrison to feed at Ilchester the Roman authorities seem to have been prepared to forgo productivity from a substantial area of fertile land.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The project has been fortunate in receiving new funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Board which will allow it to employ a full time researcher and assistant from April 2004 until







March 2008. The project will be sponsored jointly by the Universities of Oxford and Bristol, under the guidance of Dr Gary Lock, during this period. This will enable continuing application of the same battery of field techniques over the whole of the originally planned area, although ploughzone survey will have less of a role on the deeper and more difficult soils. It will also give the opportunity for more keyhole and larger scale excavations to test the hypotheses generated by the results so far. The evidence will then be added to an increasingly sophisticated Geographical Informations Systems data base which will facilitate reconstructions of successive landscapes.

Over the next four years the project will focus on a chronological span from 1000 BC to AD 100.

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AUTHOR

Richard Tabor, Department of Archaeology, University of Bristol

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