

**Samian ware from Heslington East  
Assessment report-draft 1**

by G. Monteil

**1 Introduction**

A total of 241 sherds of samian ware were recovered from various excavations between 2008 and 2011 in Heslington East and submitted for assessment. The fabric of each sherd was examined, after taking a small fresh break, under a x 20 binocular microscope and was catalogued by context number. The data has been entered onto an MS Excel spreadsheet in which each archive catalogue entry consists of a context number alongside fabric, form and decoration identification, sherd count, rim EVEs and weight. The presence of wear, repair and graffiti was also systematically recorded.

At the time of writing no plans, sections or phasing are available and it is difficult to assess the assemblage in its archaeological context. Out of the 241 sherds, 93 come from cleaning layers. The following assessment report highlights the main components and interesting features of this samian assemblage and offers recommendations for future work.

**2 The samian assemblage**

	La Graufesenque	Les Martres	Lezoux	East Gaulish	Late Argonne	Total
beaker	1					1
bowl	1		1			2
CU11			1			1
cup			1			1
dish	1		23	12		36
DR18	3					3
DR18/31	2		4			6
DR18/31 or 31			1			1
DR18/31R or 31R			1			1
DR27	1		1			2
DR29	1					1
DR30	2					2
DR31			15	15		30
DR31R			5	8		13
DR32				1		1
DR33			12	10		22
DR35			1			1
DR37	2	1	28	9		40
DR38			3			3
DR45			5	3		8
LUDSb				12		12
mortarium			1	1		2
platter				4		4
Unid	3	1	35	8	1	48

<b>Total</b>	17	2	138	83	1	241
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Table 1: samian forms and fabrics in the assemblage (sherd count)

## 2.1 Condition and taphonomy

The samian group is partly formed of large sherds with abraded surfaces but also includes a number of small flakes and this is reflected in the average weight (c.15g) which is relatively low. The better preserved samian group comes from group 30 which has the highest number of sherds (27 sherds) and average weight (c.35g).

Only three samian fragments present evidence of slight burning from contexts 102, 438 and cleaning layer 810.

A very limited number of sherd links between contexts were noticed during recording between (484) and (485) both fills of the same linear feature.

## 2.2 The samian fabrics

The samian assemblage contains a range of fabrics and forms dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. material dominates however with Central and East Gaulish samian representing c. 91% the total (Tables 1 & 2).

	sherd	% sherds	EVE	% EVE	weight (g)	% weight
<b>South Gaulish-La Graufesenque</b>	17	7.05%	0.24	6.71%	102	3.29%
<b>Central Gaulish-Les Martres-de-Veyre</b>	2	0.83%			42	1.36%
<b>Central Gaulish-Lezoux</b>	138	57.26%	1.92	53.71%	1464	47.24%
<b>East Gaulish</b>	83	34.44%	1.415	39.58%	1485	47.92%
<b>Late Argonne</b>	1	0.41%			6	0.19%
<b>Total</b>	241	100%	3.575	100%	3099	100%

Table 2: samian fabrics in the assemblage (all quantification methods and relative proportions)

### South Gaulish

With only 17 sherds for an average weight of 6g, South Gaulish vessels are poorly represented in this group and suggest minimal occupation in the area in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The range of forms is poor and dominated by dishes and decorated bowls. Further analysis of the decorated fragments might provide a more refined date range for the group; the current evidence is consistent with a Flavian date.

Groups 72, 75, 76, 77, 81 and 84 have yielded South Gaulish samian only and this may have chronological significance. The earliest fragment, a decorated bowl form Dr.29 provisionally dated to the early Flavian period from feature 1080 belongs to one of these groups, no. 72. A dish form Dr.18 also potentially early was the only samian vessel recovered from fill 1065 of feature 1056 in group 77.

The rest of the South Gaulish material is found mixed with later material or comes from cleaning layers.

### Central Gaulish

There are only two fragments from the Trajanic Central Gaulish industry of Les Martres-de-Veyre, a decorated bowl from group 113 (spread 1002) and a flake in group 106. The relatively small quantity

of the ware is not unusual for the area (Monaghan 1997, 949) but provides meagre evidence for occupation in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

With 138 sherds, Central Gaulish samian ware from Lezoux plays a significant role in this group at 57% of the total sherds (Table 1). The average weight is quite low at c.12g and there are several flakes and unidentifiable forms both in stratified groups and cleaning layers.

Characteristically Hadrianic forms are poorly represented with two decorated fragments and a Dr.18/31 in group 113 (spread 1002), a cup form Dr.27 in group 30 (linear feature 481) and Dr.18/31s in group 30 (linear feature 481), groups 103 and 113. The rest and majority of the Central Gaulish material is Antonine however with several forms dating to this period, Dr.31, Dr.31R, Dr.33 and Dr.38. Some forms illustrate that Central Gaulish products were reaching the site until the latter part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD and possibly the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>: there are five examples of the mortarium form Dr.45 though only two in stratified groups (spreads 114 and 403).

Around 20% of the Lezoux sherd count is made up of decorated vessels a figure that appears quite high considering the location of the site. Even when filtering out the material from cleaning layers, the percentage of decorated vessels remains high at 22% of the total sherd count. The percentage of decorated vessels is within the smaller civil settlement and rural average (Willis 2005, chart 17) but will need further investigation and comparison with local groups.

A partial stamp on a dish form Dr.31 was recovered from cleaning layer 19. A tentative reading would suggest that it is an illiterate stamp: VIIVI[ but further analysis might identify a potter for the stamp.

### **East Gaulish**

East Gaulish vessels are well represented in this group and are in relatively good condition particularly in group 30 where several fragments of a large dish form LUDSb were recovered in contexts 484, 485 and possibly 587. The average weight for East Gaulish vessels is 23g, the highest amongst the assemblage.

With the exception of a decorated bowl Dr.37 from spread 1045 which could be from La Madeleine and therefore Antonine, the rest of the East Gaulish material appears late and mostly from Rheinzabern and Trier. The range of forms is relatively limited but illustrates that East Gaulish material was reaching the site from the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. There are forms typical of the latter part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD present: several mortaria machining layer 213, fill 497 and context 1145), dish form Dr.31R/LUDSb (contexts 484, 485 and possibly 587 and 1099), a platter form Dr.32 in finds group 1015 and cup forms Dr.33 with very chunky walls and bases. Further analysis of the decorated bowls present will shed more light on the chronology of the East Gaulish vessels.

A partial and abraded stamp was recovered from context 1033 in group 106, the fabric is soft and the slip very thin which suggest Trier as the origin. The reading is ]INVS which could be from potter Paterninus though a full identification of the exact die will be necessary.

### **2.3 Use wear and repair**

A single vessel presents evidence of repair, a bodysherd from an East Gaulish dish recovered from context 510, group 37. The fragment presents one lead rivet in situ and two sets of small drilled holes. With only one repaired fragment, this assemblage would be more typical of an urban group (Willis 2005, table 73) where access to fresh samian supply was relatively straightforward and the need to curate samian vessels less essential.

A number of vessels display signs of internal wear; flanged bowls Dr.38s from machining layer 217 and feature 481 and all of the mortaria show signs of use.

### **3 Concluding remarks and recommendations for future work**

The samian group from Heslington East contains a range of fabrics and forms that suggests occupation on site from the late 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD to the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD. The evidence for 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> century is however limited and will need to be assessed against the stratigraphical evidence and the rest of the Roman pottery. There is a clear peak in discarded samian quantities from the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD with a relatively high number of late Central Gaulish and East Gaulish vessels. This pattern fits with the evidence from York, especially from the extra-mural areas (Dickinson 1997, 945) but will need further analysis to be fully appreciated. The functional profile of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD samian group, albeit based temporarily on sherd count suggests a pattern close to the smaller civil centres average (Willis 2005, charts 16) for this group with dish forms dominating, decorated bowls at around 20% and cups in third place. Further phased analysis of the functional samian categories might refine this pattern.

The assemblage contains a number of decorated bowls that warrants further analysis. Though the number of decorated bowls is rather limited, a full analysis of the decorated samian will hopefully better determine the dating of the South, Central and East Gaulish groups. This will also enable comparison of the samian assemblage from Heslington East to published material from York (Dickinson and Hartley 1993, Dickinson 1997) and surrounding area.

There are only two name stamps in the group, only one of which from a stratified layer. Further analysis of these stamps might provide more chronological information.

The current assemblage should be integrated with the samian assemblages previously excavated by York Archaeological Trust and with those excavated by On Site Archaeology. It is unclear whether the samian material from these excavations has been fully recorded and the data available. If it hasn't, further analysis of these samian groups will be required.

#### **Estimated cost for further work**

##### ***Decorated and stamped material***

Full analysis and rubbings of the decorated pieces are recommended. Once mounted; the rubbings can be scanned for illustration purposes (guidelines can be provided by GM) and form part of the archives.

Number of days for identification, rubbing and scanning:

1 day @ £195 per day=£195

##### ***Further analysis on the whole assemblage and report writing***

The whole assemblage was fully quantified at the assessment stage so no further work is required in terms of basic recording. However, once groups and phases are defined, the information should be integrated in the samian database and functional and spatial analyses of the stratified samian groups undertaken. Discussion with Ruth Leary about the nature of each group and phase will also be essential.

The final report will include a section on decorated samian and the stamps that will list the potters present and provide a finer chronological assessment of the group. The report will also include an assessment of the phased functional profile of the assemblage, further work on the significance of the group in a local, regional and national context.

Further analysis of the whole group once phases are in place: 1/2 day @ £195 per day

Full analysis report: 1.5 days @ £195 per day

**Estimate for further work = 3 days @ £195 per day = £585**