Petrological analysis of vessel from SAY97

Alan Vince

Introduction

A sample of a vessel provisionally identified as Anglo-Saxon from SAY97 (CS3 PL23 context 378) was submitted for petrological analysis. In thin-section the sample contained moderate subangular fragments of grog (deliberately added fired clay), moderate subangular quartz grains up to 0.3mm across and sparse rounded glauconite up to 0.2mm across. Some of the latter are well-preserved pellets with the characteristic "squashed pea" profile often found in glauconitic clays. The grog fragments vary in texture but are mostly isotropic, with quartz temper and a grey colour. Others are red-firing and contain quartz silt.

The clay matrix consists of anisotropic clay with moderate angular quartz grains and sparse flakes of muscovite, both up to 0.1mm across.

Discussion

Grog is an unusual tempering material in Anglo-Saxon vessels, being much more common in Iron Age and, particularly, Romano-British vessels. The texture and colour of the grog fragments show that it was not produced by refiring and crushing the same clay as used to produce the pot but from other vessels (or daub, or fired building material), of various fabrics.

The glauconite, angular quartz silt and muscovite were probably present in the original parent clay. Such micaceous, silty, glauconitic clays are characteristic of the Cretaceous (and later) periods and in Buckinghamshire were probably obtained from the Gault clay at the base of the Chalk scarp.

Conclusion

It is highly likely that this vessel is of Iron Age or Romano-British date. The form, a shouldered jar with burnishing on the exterior, could be of any date with this period (there is a resurgence of grog-tempering in the late Roman period, especially in the south-east counties such as Hampshire, Kent and Sussex).