The Anglo-Saxon Pottery from the 1993-5 excavations at Pevensey Castle

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Methodology

All pottery thought to be of early-, mid- or late-Saxon date from the 1993-5 excavations was examined visually and using a binocular microscope. Ten fabrics were identified visually and assigned the codes CHARN, ECHAF and SX1 to SX8. Several sherds initially identified as putative Anglo-Saxon were identified as late Roman grog-tempered ware and excluded from further study. Brief descriptions of each of the fabrics were made at this stage (App 1). A record was made of the pottery at this stage, quantifying the material by sherd count and weight. Samples of these fabrics were then chosen for analysis by thin-section (Table 1). As a result of the thin-section analysis the visually-identified fabric groups can be revised, since several visual distinctions can be seen to have no petrological validity. The refined fabric groups are described below followed by a discussion of their stratigraphic position in the excavated sequence.

Table 1

TSNO	Context	Cname	Form	Comments
AG351	019	SX2	JAR	
AG352	025	SX2	JAR	
AG353	152	SX2	JAR	
AG354	22	SX4	JAR	
AG355	19	SX5	JAR	
AG356	076	SX3	JAR	
AG357	83	SX6	JAR	Thin-section lost (too thin)
AG358	084	SX2	JAR	
AG359	677	SX8	JAR	
AG360	722	SX2	JAR	
AG361	726	SX6	JAR	
AG362	726	SX7	LAMP	

Fabric Group descriptions

Sandstone-tempered wares (SX1, SX2 and SX3)

Seventeen sherds tempered with a sandstone-derived sand were present. Nine were featureless body sherds but the remainder all had features typical of early Anglo-Saxon pottery and it is assumed that all seventeen sherds are of early Anglo-Saxon date. Two had burnished outer surfaces, one was burnished inside and out, two were decorated with finger-tip impressions, two had a deliberately roughened external surface and one came from a carinated vessel with decoration applied with a round-ended tool.

All five decorated sherds are of types for which a 5th-century date is possible. Only one sherd had any signs of use, an internal deposit indicating either use for storing or boiling liquids.

Visually, these sandstone-tempered wares were divided into those with a micaceous but otherwise inclusionless matrix (SX1), those with a fine sandy matrix, in which rounded glauconite could be seen as a minor component (SX2), and those with a matrix containing streaks of red, haematite-rich, clay (SX3). Unfortunately, it was not possible to sample any sherds of SX1 because of their size or decoration but the thin-sections of SX2 and SX3 showed that there was glauconite in SX3, as in SX2. It is assumed that SX3 is simply a coarser, oxidised version of SX2.

Mixed flint, quartz and shell gravel tempered wares (SX4, SX5, SX6 and SX7)

Sixty-two sherds tempered with a mixed coarse sand/fine gravel were present. Thirty-nine were completely featureless. One sherd was an oval-sectioned handle, joined to the vessel at the top of the rim. Several sherds were from the rims or necks of vessels with everted rims and thickened necks, in some cases with evidence for body walls of very variable thickness. In total, twenty sherds had external sooting, suggesting that most were from cooking pots. In addition, one sherd came from a thick-walled storage jar and another from a pedestal lamp.

In thin-section it could be seen that the attempt to separate these sherds into those with predominantly flint temper (SX5), predominantly quartz sand temper (SX4), mixed temper (SX7) and predominantly shell temper (SX6) was not successful. Abundant flint was present even in sherds which by eye appeared to be mainly quartz sand tempered. It is likely that these fabrics were simply extremes in a continuum.

Shell-tempered ware (SX8)

A single shell-tempered sherd was present (although shell was present to a greater or lesser extent in many of the mixed gravel tempered sherds).

Chaff-tempered ware (ECHAF)

A single sherd contained only abundant organic inclusions. Since the sherd was very small (weight 4 gm) no further analysis was possible.

Granite-tempered ware (CHARN)

A single sherd contained fragments of coarse angular rock, some of which could be identified as a biotite granite. Since the sherd was small (weight 8 gm) no further analysis was possible. The sherd came from a vessel with an internally burnished surface.

Discussion

There are clearly two distinct groups of Anglo-Saxon pottery from the 1993-5 Pevensey excavations. The earlier group consists of sandstone-tempered and granite-tempered wares and the later group consists of gravel-tempered wares. The chaff-tempered sherd could belong to either group whilst the shell-tempered sherd might belong to the second group, or be of post-conquest medieval date.

The early Anglo-Saxon pottery contains decorated and burnished vessels and there is little evidence for the use of the vessels. It is likely therefore that they were not primarily used for cooking, which would certainly have led to at least one sherd being sooted. In the absence of a thin-section of fabric SX1 it is not possible to say whether or not all the sherds of sandstone-tempered ware are from the same source. Furthermore, it is not possible to say for certain that the chaff-tempered ware is non-local. Chaff is a component in the sandstone-tempered fabric and it was not possible to examine the clay matrix without a thin-section. The granite-tempered sherd, however, cannot have been locally produced and the well-made, burnished nature of the vessel rules out an origin in the south-west of England at this period. It is likely, therefore, that the vessel is either from the English midlands or from Scandinavia.

Table 2 Sherds (and average sherd weight) by Phase and fabric group

Phase	CHAFF	CHARN	GRAVEL	SST	SHELL
Unphased			1 (4)		
3	1 (4)	1 (8)	37 (9)	6 (9)	
5			1 (10)	1 (12)	
6			4 (8)		
10			5 (11)	2 (9)	1 (12)
12			14 (11)	6 (14)	
13			1 (3)	1 (5)	
15				1 (12)	

The dating of the gravel-tempered pottery is less certain. None of the sherds had any characteristics of early Anglo-Saxon pottery and the form and manufacture of all the featured sherds suggests a mid- or late-Saxon date for the majority of the vessels. Similar vessels are known from late mid-Saxon contexts at Saxon Southampton and from the earliest deposits in medieval Southampton, thought to date to the 10th or early 11th century (Timby 1988; Brown 1994). There is, however, no obvious difference in fabric between these wares and the medieval coarsewares from the Pevensey site and featureless body sherds might therefore be either of mid/late Saxon date or later medieval intrusions.

The shell-tempered sherd, SX8, comes from a feature cutting through the Phase 5 clay and could be of post conquest medieval date.

The stratigraphic context of these sherds is summarised in Table 2. This shows that there is no clear progression from deposits containing sandstone-tempered sherds to those containing gravel-tempered ones. Indeed, if anything, the stratigraphic sequence is reversed (the ratio of gravel to sandstone

tempered sherds is higher in Phase 3 deposits than in later deposits). All of the sherds are small (as can be seen from their average weight given in Table 2) and there is every possibility that all of them, including those in Phase 3, have undergone several cycles of redeposition. The high degree of reworking of these deposits is also indicated by the quantity of Roman pottery found in what are clearly post-Roman deposits.

A model which would fit the ceramic evidence would be that the Phase 3 dark earth was deposited during the late Roman period and that its surface remained the ground surface from the 5th century until the construction of the keep in Phase 6 and that all finds from later deposits are reworked from the Phase 3 dark earth. Whether post-Roman occupation was continuous or consisted of two or more distinct episodes is unknowable from the ceramic evidence. Firstly, neither assemblage is large enough to give a clear view of its character and secondly there are in fact few good chronological indicators within the ceramics of this period in southern England except where large quantities of imports are present, as at Southampton.

Bibliography

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Appendix One

Cname	explan	Source	Colour	tempering	manufacturing method	surface treatment	forms	dating
SX1	Sandstone tempered - micaceous matrix	Unknown but presumably south-eastern England. Matrix similar to later Anglo-Saxon wares from Pevensey	Black	abundant fragments of white sandstone	Handmade	Burnishing; grooved lines	Jars	5th to 7th centuries.
SX2	Sandstone tempered with ?glauconitic matrix	Same as PEVSX1? South-eastern England.	Black	Sandstone fragments;glauconitic matrix	handmade	burnishing	jars	5th to 7th century.
SX3	Quartz sand tempered (GSQ) plus pellets and streaks of red clay (haematite rich)	SOURCE	COLOUR	TEMPERING	handmade	SURFACE TREATMENT	jar	DATING
SX4	Quartz sand (GSQ) with sparse flint and shell	Same range of inclusions as other Pevensey wares - southeast England	black or oxid light brown	GSQ;FLINT;SHELL	hand		jars	only body sherds seen; look like medieval-style cps
SX5	Flint sand. Probably several	SOURCE	black cores sometimes witb brown	FLINT	hand		jars and cooking pots	mid/late Saxon?

	sources represented		surfaces					
SX6	Coarse flint and shell-tempered gravel tempered	SOURCE	black core with light brown ext surface	FLINT;SHELL;MICACEOUS MATRIX	HANDMADE	ROUGH	COOKING POTS	MID-LATE SAXON ON FORM/MANUFACTURE
SX7	Flint, shell and quartz (GSQ) sand	Southern coast?	black with oxidized light brown surfaces	FLINT;SHELL;GSQ;MUSC MATRIX	handmade	rough	cooking pots; lamps	MID-LATE SAXON ON FABRIC AND FORM
SX8	a Shell-tempered ware	Probably local to Pevensey - basic clay may be Cretaceous or Tertiary (glauconitic?)	COLOUR	SHELL;GSQ (FINE SAND/SILT SIZED);MUSC;GLAU	HAND		COOKING POT	DATING