Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Site 10, Silk Willoughby to Staythorpe Pipeline (ssp252:00 Int 10, Field 54)

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An assemblage of Anglo-Saxon pottery was recovered from Site 10 (F92, C1132). The assemblage consists of 68 sherds, representing 28 vessels (assigned numbers 105.01 to 105.28 by the author).

The sherds vary in size from small scraps to semi-complete vessels. There are some recent breaks but in the main the breaks appear to be ancient.

Some of the pottery has definitely been subjected to burning after breakage. This is clear in two cases, where spalled surfaces have been oxidized (105.02 and 105.10). In the majority of cases, however, the sherds show signs of use and are therefore likely to be domestic debris. The assemblage appears to be a contemporary group of pottery, and seven of the vessels are represented by sherd families rather than single sherds.

In addition, there were two sherds of similar character from context 1079, a spread below the topsoil.

Wares

Examples of seven different fabrics were present in the assemblage. These are SSTMG, LIM, CHARN, SSTCL, RQCL, ESAXIMP and ESAX. The sherd classified as ESAXIMP may be an example of Badorf ware but this requires confirmation through chemical analysis. The sherds classed as ESAX contain no large inclusions but have a micaceous groundmass similar in texture and colour to that of LIM.

Furthermore, within two of these fabric groups there were significant differences between the fabrics of individual vessels. The major fabric differences almost certainly imply that the vessels were produced from differing raw materials, and were brought to the site in a completed state. The minor differences are likely to indicate separate 'batches' of clay, perhaps indicating that as a rule pots were produced in small batches rather than the mass-production found in the late Roman or mid Saxon periods. One of the vessels contains sparse coarse gravel composed of acid igneous rock fragments together with a rounded quartz sand. This variant has a slightly different chemical composition to the 'standard' CHARN fabric and is more common on sites of mid Saxon date.

Manufacturing techniques

It is likely that all of the pottery (except for a probable imported vessel) was made by hand using wide coils. No evidence for these coils was observed however.

Two methods of finishing were observed: burnishing, in which a smooth tool (such as a pebble or bone) was rubbed over the surface of the pot some time after it had been formed (ie leather hard) and

fettling, in which a rough tool (probably a scrap of wood) was used to pare away excess clay. Only four sherds showed signs of burnishing (although one cannot discount the possibility that several more vessels were burnished but have subsequently lost their burnishing through weathering). Two were externally burnished (CHARN and SSTMG) and two internally (LIM). Six vessels were fettled, all but one of them internally. Four of the sherds were of CHARN fabric, one of SSTMG whilst the externally fettled sherd was of SSTCL.

Forms

Most of the sherds came from vessels of closed forms of moderate size (classed as JAR). Two sherds came from particularly large vessels (LIM and SSTMG) and two from particularly small jars (also LIM and SSTMG). One sherd came from a biconical jar (SSTMG). Four hemispherical bowls were present, three in LIM and the fourth in a fabric which has the appearance of an untempered LIM fabric (ESAX). One small bowl was present (LIM). The bowls, therefore, are either produced in LIM or a fabric likely to have been produced alongside the LIM fabric.

Most of the vessels had simple rounded rims but one jar had a short everted rim, a type which seems to become more common in the mid Saxon period.

Function

Eighteen of the 28 vessels had some sign of use. The three types of evidence present were sooting on the exterior of the vessel (13 examples), a deposit of burnt food on the interior (8 examples) and a yellowish deposit of 'kettle fur' on the interior (1 example). In four examples the food deposit was found on vessels without traces of sooting and even where soot was present it was not evenly distributed, being most common at, and just below, the rim. Thus the proportion of vessels used in cooking was probably even higher than the 64% recorded. There was less evidence for the use of bowls for cooking (2 out of 5) than of the jars (15 out of 20). The vessel with the kettle fur deposit was one of the two 'untempered LIM' sherds (ESAX).

Decoration

Only one vessel was decorated, the small SSTMG jar. This was covered with stamps from a simple circular, round-headed, tool. Since the base was present it was possible to see that the stamps went right down to the base angle. In several cases a subsequent stamp had distorted a previous impression, because the stamps were so close together and were impressed when the clay was very plastic. Assuming that the pot was inverted whilst the stamps were being applied we can see that the decoration was applied in an anticlockwise direction. This probably implies that the potter was right handed, holding the stamp in the right hand and the pot in the left.

One of the LIM small jar bases was a small pedestal.

Dating

The pedestal base form is known from the 5th century but continued later. The use of random stamps, especially all of one kind, as an all-over body decoration on the other hand was thought by Myres to be a 7th century feature. The imported vessel is tentatively identified as Badorf ware, which evolved from a much coarser Walberburg ware during the late 7th/8th century. The absence of sherds of Maxey ware or Ipswich ware would normally point to a date before c.700. The lack of any flat-topped rims would also point to a 7th-century or earlier date. However, in the Trent valley there is a lack of finds of mid Saxon wares, which suggests that for some reason the area may have been outside their market region. Furthermore, both CHARN and LIM occur on sites in Lincolnshire which are clearly middle Anglo-Saxon in date and therefore probably continued to be used into the mid Saxon period.

We must therefore conclude that the assemblage is probably 7th century (and therefore belonging to the end of the early Anglo-Saxon period) but could be 8th (and therefore mid Saxon).

Interpretation

This collection may be transitional between the early Anglo-Saxon period and the mid Saxon period and has features typical of both:

The wide range of fabrics present is an early feature and is related to the as-yet-unknown production and distribution system employed in the 5th to 7th centuries. The rounded rims of most of the vessels is typical of early assemblages.

The high proportion of vessels used for cooking is a late feature, as is the presence of an imported vessel and the short everted rim of one of the jars. The high proportion of CHARN and LIM vessels is probably mainly explained by the location of the site but would also support a late date, as would the presence of the sandy CHARN variant.

Assessment

This assemblage is of considerable interest. It's isolated nature makes it unlikely to be contaminated by residual or intrusive finds and internal characteristics suggest that it dates to the early Anglo-Saxon/mid Saxon transition, ie 7th or 8th century. Very little pottery of this date is known, and almost all comes from sites where the interpretation is complicated by earlier or later occupation.

The assemblage therefore is worthy of publication. This would require scientific analysis of the wares present, to confirm their identification and illustration of all drawable vessels.

Costing

Task	Cost
Thin-section analysis of 28 vessels at £21 plus VAT per vessel, including report	£588.00
Chemical analysis of 28 vessels using Inductively Coupled Plasma Spectroscopy, at £21 plus VAT per sample, including report.	£588.00
Illustration of 10 vessels at £11 plus VAT per vessel	£110.00
Preparation of publication report	£168.00
Total	£1454.00
VAT	£254.45
Grand total including VAT	£1708.45

Appendix One: List of catalogued pottery

Context:	REF NO:	Description:	Feature:	Action:	Cname:	Form:	Nosh:	NoV:	SUBFABRIC:	PART:
1132	105.01	KETTLE FUR INT;MANGANESE STAINING ALL OVER	F92		ESAX	JAR	1	1	MICACEOUS;LAMINATED CLAY PELLETS	BS
1132	105.02	SPALLED DURING FIRING	F92	DR	ESAX	BOWL	1	1	MICACEOUS;LAMINATED CLAY PELLETS	R
1132	105.03	RIBBED EXT	F92		ESAX IMP	JAR	1	1	LIGHT-COLOURED;FEW INCLUSIONS;HARD-FIRED	BS
1132	105.04	FETTLED EXT	F92		SSTCL	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.05	SLIGHT SOOTING EXT	F92		SSTCL	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.06		F92		SSTCL	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.07	ROUNDED RIM	F92	DR	RQCL	JAR	1	1	NUMEROUS VOIDS (OOLITIC LST?);SPARSE CHAFF	R
1132	105.08	FOOD DEPO INT	F92		SSTMG	BICONIC JAR	1	1	OXID EXT	BS
1132	105.09	ROUGH BURNISHING EXT;FETTLING INT	F92		SSTMG	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.10	SPALLED AND OXID POST-BREAKAGE	F92		SSTMG	LARGE JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.11	FOOD DEPO INT	F92		SSTMG	JAR	1	1	OXID EXT	BS
1132	105.12	SOOTED EXT	F92		SSTMG	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.13	SOOTED EXT	F92		SSTMG	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.14	SOOT AROUND NECK;FOOD DEPO INT;SHORT EVERTED RIM	F92	DR	SSTMG	JAR	1	1		R
1132	105.15	ROUND-HEADED CIRCULAR STAMP USED ALL OVER EXT;DEPO INT;SOOT EXT?	F92	DR	SSTMG	SMALL JAR	5	1		B
1132	105.16	ROUND-BASED, ROUND RIMMED VESSEL;OXID EXT	F92	DR	LIM	BOWL	10	1		PROF
1132	105.17	ROUNDED RIM;OXID EXT	F92	DR	LIM	BOWL	10	1		R
1132	105.18	ROUND-BASED;ROUND RIMMED; SOOTED EXT	F92	DR	LIM	SMALL BOWL	3	1		PROF
1132	105.19	BURNISHED INT;OXID EXT;SOOTED EXT	F92		LIM	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.20	BURNISHED INT;OXID EXT;SOOTED EXT	F92		LIM	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.21	ROUNDED RIM;SOOTED EXT	F92	DR	LIM	BOWL	1	1		R
1132	105.22	SOOTED EXT;OXID EXT;PEDESTAL BASE	F92	DR	LIM	SMALL JAR	1	1		B
1132	105.23	OXID EXT;FOOD DEPO INT	F92		LIM	LARGE JAR	8	1		BS

1132	105.24	OXID EXT;FOOD DEPO INT;FETTLED INT	F92		CHARN	JAR	1	1	MICACEOUS GROUNDMASS	BS
1132	105.25	SOOTED EXT	F92		CHARN	JAR	1	1		BS
1132	105.26	BURNISHED EXT;FETTLED INT;SOOTED EXT;DEPO INT	F92		CHARN	JAR	4	1		BS
1132	105.27	FETTLED INT;SOOTED EXT;DEPO INT;ROUNDED RIM	F92	DR	CHARN	JAR OR BOWL	1	1		R
1132	105.28	FETTLED INT;OXID EXT	F92		CHARN	JAR OR BOWL	2	1	PLUS ROUNDED QUARTZ SAND	BS
1079	83	LEACHED			ASSHQ	LARGE JAR	1	1	A SHELL;S RQ	BS
1079	83	VABR			CHARN	JAR	2	2		BS
1079	83	VABR			SSTMG	JAR	2	2		BS