

## **A Roman East Midlands shell-tempered cooking pot from the Gask Frontier.**

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### **Introduction**

Fieldwork in the vicinity of the Peel Roman Tower on the Gask frontier produced a small collection of Romano-British pottery. Amongst these sherds was the rim of a shell-tempered jar identified provisionally as either of medieval (London Shelly-Sandy ware) or Roman (Dales ware) type. This sherd was submitted for identification and analysis. Visual examination showed that the sherd was not of London Shelly-Sandy ware (which does occur on sites in the east of Scotland as a result of sea trade with London). However, it does have a very similar visual appearance to Romano-British coarsewares from the east Midlands. The rim form is everted, with a sharp neck and an internal ledge. This is similar to the form of the Dales ware jar (Loughlin 1977; 1998, 157).

A thin-section was made, sample number V1326, and stained using Dickson's method, so as to differentiate between dolomite and ferroan and non ferroan calcite.

### **Petrological Description**

The fabric consists of rounded fragments of fossiliferous limestone and shell in a groundmass of baked anisotropic clay minerals. The limestone consists of bivalve shell fragments composed of non-ferroan calcite in a matrix of ferroan calcite or, more rarely, dolomite. The shell fragments varied in thickness and structure. They included nacreous shell but also examples with complex layered structures and punctate brachiopods. In addition to the shell fragments of echinoid shell and spines were present. The pores within the echinoid shell were filled with ferroan calcite. Unidentified microfossils were common and had non-ferroan calcite tests and usually a ferroan calcite infilling. Moderate rounded opaque grains were present up to 0.2mm across. There were sparse rounded quartz grains up to 0.4mm across and moderate subangular and angular grains up to 0.2mm.

### **Conclusion**

In general, the petrological characteristics of this sherd are similar to those of the Dales ware sample in the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (1998). They probably indicate a Jurassic date for the limestone and thus exclude a Scottish origin. Furthermore, where shelly wares have been found north of the Humber they are almost certainly imported from Lincolnshire or the south east Midlands. Certain characteristics in this sample are more similar to shelly fabrics from the south east Midlands than to that of Dales ware itself. These include the high incidence of echinoid fragments, the varied fauna and the presence of brachiopod shell. Visually similar vessels have been noted from sites in the south of Lincolnshire. Some of these have rims which appear to be ancestral to the Dales ware form and occur in association with earlier Roman wares (pers comm Barbara Precious).

The Peel find is therefore a Romano-British vessel of midlands origin. It may be of Dales ware, and thus of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century date but could be from further south and possibly therefore closer in date to the occupation of the Gask frontier. Further analyses of comparative material from north and south Lincolnshire would be required to test this possibility.

## Acknowledgements

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## Bibliography

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