

Pottery from fieldwalking and excavation at Dunnington, North Yorkshire

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Archaeological fieldwork carried out by the Dunnington through the Ages group, under the supervision of Duncan Stirk, in the parish of Dunnington, North Yorkshire, produced a group of Romano-British pottery, recovered from the filling of an enclosure ditch discovered through aerial photography, and material from fieldwalking.

The enclosure ditch finds form a closely-datable assemblage of late 1st to early 2nd century date whilst the fieldwalking collection is mainly of later Roman date but includes some medieval sherds.

Methodology

All of the pottery was examined by eye and, where necessary, using a stereomicroscope at x20 magnification. The pottery was classified using the system employed by Monaghan at York Archaeological Trust (1997) and a record made of the ware code, form, decoration, use, and condition of the sherds. The quantity of pottery of each type within a deposit was recorded by sherd count, the maximum number of vessels represented and the weight in grams. All identified wares were separately bagged so that the results of this study can be correlated with the finds archive.

Description

Finds from the Enclosure Ditch

The pottery

Two hundred and sixty four sherds of pottery were recovered from the ditch excavations. They came from four separate sections through the feature, whose fill was excavated in two or three blocks, depending on depth. The pottery from each excavated deposit was examined to see if there was any difference in date or character from top to bottom of the fill, or any difference between the four sections, but none was found. The pottery is therefore treated here as a single assemblage.

The pottery included examples of nine wares (Table 1).

Table 1

Ware Code	Group	Name
B3	Burnished wares	Local burnished greyware
E1	Eboracum ware	Eboracum 1

G1	Grey wares	Local greyware
IACALC	Handmade coarsewares	Calcite-tempered
IAERR	Handmade coarsewares	Erratic-tempered
IASST	Handmade coarsewares	Sandstone-sand tempered
M14	Mortaria	Mancetter/Hartshill
R2	Rustic wares	Local rustic ware
S1	Samian ware	South Gaulish

The wares fall into three groups: handmade coarsewares (138 sherds, 2.463Kg); locally-produced Romano-British wares (123 sherds, 1.251Kg) and wares imported from other parts of Britain or the continent (2 sherds, 0.063Kg).

The handmade coarsewares were grouped into three wares on the basis of their inclusions. The most common, IAERR (105 sherds), contained moderate large angular fragments of gravel, between 1.0mm and 4.0mm across. To judge by the results of studies of Iron Age pottery in the Vale of York, these inclusions are likely to be a mixture of rocks which are available in the local boulder clay and other material, such as bone and slag. Thin section analyses of these Iron Age ceramics have shown that the material was probably prepared by fire-cracking (heating and then immediately throwing the material into water, causing fracturing through thermal shock) rather than by using local boulder clay, which would include a wider mixture of inclusion types and would include both angular and rounded fragments. Without further analysis it is not possible to say for certain that the same preparation techniques were used in this slightly later material, but visually they are very similar. All of the sherds in this group come from shouldered jars with everted rims and flat bases, the standard form in the pre-Roman Iron Age.

The second most common group, IASST (31 sherds), contained a better-sorted sand in which fragments of Millstone Grit and grains derived from the weathering of Millstone Grit are visible. These inclusions are probably deliberate temper and the temper is likely to be a fluvio-glacial sand. This tempering technique is not as common in the pre-Roman Iron Age as it is in the Roman period and it is notable that the vessels made in this fabric seem to be copying Romano-British forms. Similar vessels are known from York from very late Roman contexts (i.e. late 4th-century or later) and a very similar fabric was employed by Anglo-Saxon potters in the Vale of York, from the mid 5th to at least the early 8th centuries.

The third group, IACALC, is represented by only two sherds, one from the lowest ditch fill and one from the highest. It contains large angular voids which are present as a result of the leaching out of calcite inclusions. Thin-section analysis of visually similar sherds has shown that the inclusions were sparry calcite, from veins in the chalk, and that the fabric contains glauconite, which locally is only present in the Speeton Clay, which outcrops in the southeast corner of the Vale of Pickering. Such vessels became extremely common in Yorkshire, and elsewhere in northern Britain, in the late 4th century, but the sherd from the

lower fill of the ditch has a wider cordon at the shoulder, not a feature of these late Roman vessels.

The locally-produced Romano-British vessels are classed by Monaghan into four groups: burnished wares, Eboracum ware, greyware and rustic ware. However, all have a similar fabric, being made from a slightly gritty boulder clay. Wasters from the production of similar vessels have been found on either side of the Foss, immediately to the east of the Fortress in York. The majority of these sherds come from greyware jars, probably used in cooking. Fourteen of these greyware sherds come from one or more jars with panels of barbotine dot decoration. These sherds all come from the same section across the feature and were recovered from the upper, middle and lower deposits, suggesting that the entire fill was a single event.

The next most common RB type was Eboracum ware. This group included a roulette-decorated bowl, represented by several sherds, whilst the remaining sherds came from jars or flagons whose exterior surfaces had been lathe turned on the potters wheel.

Six sherds, all from the same section and recovered from the upper and lower fills, were decorated with rustication, plastic clay smeared onto the surface with the fingers.

Finally, a single greyware lid with burnished decoration on the exterior was recovered from the upper fill of the feature.

The non-local sherds consist of the rim and spout of a wall-sided Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium (from the lower fill of the ditch) and a sherd from a South Gaulish Samian ware bowl of unidentifiable form.

The date of the assemblage

The handmade coarseware includes a number of sherds which would not be out of place in an Iron Age context. However, it also includes some for which a Roman date is evident. The size and condition of the sherds was recorded and there is no difference in mean size (gm/sherd) or in recorded condition between the three wares present, nor between sherds from different sections or from the lower, middle or upper fills of the feature. It is therefore likely that the vessels are actually all of Roman date. In York itself, "Native" wares occur in small quantities in late 1st and early 2nd-century deposits but are absent from later assemblages. Whilst it is possible that in the countryside the use of these wares was both more intensive than in York and continued later, the character of the Romanised vessels in the assemblage also points to a late 1st to early 2nd-century date.

Three decorated vessel types present have limited periods of use: the barbotine-dotted greyware jars, the roulette-decorated Eboracum ware bowl and the rustic greyware jars. All three are of types which occur in the late 1st century and which flourished before the

introduction of Dorset Black Burnished ware (BB1) in c.120AD and its rapid emulation by the local pottery industries. However, there is a single vessel with burnished decoration, the lid. Burnish-decorated lids were part of the Black Burnished ware repertoire, although the Dorset vessels tend to have burnishing on both sides whereas this example is only decorated on the outside. Nevertheless, this single vessel might push the date of this assemblage closer to c.120AD than to c.80AD. One could also make a case for one of the sandstone-sand-tempered handmade coarsewares being a copy of the Dorset BB1 flanged bowl.

Other finds

In addition to the pottery, two fragments of Romano-British roof tile (*tegulae*) were recovered. One is definitely identifiable as a tegula, because it has a knife-cut cut-out, a feature which enabled one row of tiles to be locked to the next. These tiles were produced in the same area to the east of the Fortress as the Romanised pottery.

A small collection of daub was also present. This daub was tempered with organic matter (probably added as animal dung) and includes one fragment with two flat faces at right angles. It might therefore be from a mud brick rather than a wattle and daub structure. Mud bricks were employed in the early Roman period in military and urban contexts but were not part of the Iron Age cultural tradition.

Other finds included wood charcoal and burnt bone.

Finds from Fieldwalking

Roman Pottery

Twelve sherds of Roman pottery from fieldwalking were submitted. These include two erratic-tempered handmade coarseware sherds (from 0103 O2 and 0504) and two calcite-tempered coarseware sherds (from 0103 B8 and R9). The remaining eight sherds are of locally-produced greyware. These include a flanged bowl rim with a beaded rim, a late Roman form (from 0103 O2) as well as a roulette-decorated jar body sherd, of similar date to the decorated vessels from the ditch. Given that this collection includes late Roman material, it is possible that the two calcite-tempered sherds are also late Roman.

Medieval Pottery

Two sherds from York Gritty ware jars were recovered, from 0103 L4 and 0504. This ware was probably produced in West Yorkshire (the closest source being at Thorney) from the late 11th to the 13th centuries. The vessels were jars, probably used for cooking.

Other Finds

A thick, flat slab of gritty black material was recovered from 0103. Although it cannot be positively identified without further analysis it has the appearance of tarmac and is thus likely to be of modern date.

Conclusions

A consideration of the finds from the ditched enclosure suggests that they were deposited in a single event, with no difference between the lowest and the highest fills, in the late 1st to early 2nd century, probably close to c.120AD. The debris includes roof tile and possibly also mud brick, indicating the presence of a Romanised building nearby. The fieldwalking finds indicate continued Romano-British activity, perhaps extending to the end of the Roman period, and then again in the late 11th to early 13th centuries. This latter activity might be the result of manuring of fields rather than occupation.

Future work

The collection of pottery from the ditch fill is remarkable, in the writer's experience, in that it is usual to find little or no pottery on sites of Iron Age to early Roman date in the countryside around York, where pottery use in general starts in earnest in the early to mid 2nd century. It includes several vessels which could be illustrated and which are not well-covered by the YAT monograph (Monaghan 1993). Furthermore, the presence of such a large collection of "Native" wares provides an opportunity for detailed analysis of the fabric, to test whether the same preparation techniques were used in this case as in the pre-Roman Iron Age, and to compare the fabric of the sandstone-sand tempered ware with that of vessels for which a York area source has been postulated and to illustrate the range of rim forms present. Finally, the daub fragments are of interest, since, if they are mud bricks of early Roman date and locally-made this would indicate the presence of Romanised builders in the area rather than simply the purchase of Roman tile by local inhabitants. Therefore, the postulated Romanised building(s) might have some official function (either military or civil) as opposed to being evidence of a local man made good.

Bibliography

Monaghan, Jason (1997) *Roman Pottery from York*. The Archaeology of York 16/8 York, Council for British Archaeology.