

Assessment of the Fired Clay from North Killingholme, Lincolnshire

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A small collection of fired clay from archaeological investigations in North Killingholme, Lincolnshire, conducted by Lindsey Archaeological Services was submitted to the author for identification and assessment. The collection is mostly unidentifiable fragments but includes a few pieces which might be from pyramidal loom weights, of Iron Age or early Roman date.

Description

Fabric

The fragments were all examined at x20 magnification. All have a similar fabric, containing rounded fragments of Chalk and red fine-grained sandstones and mudstones in a micaceous groundmass. One piece in addition contains subangular fragments of fine-grained basic igneous rock and acid igneous rock. All are probably made from chalky boulder clay.

All of the fragments have oxidized surfaces but the possible loom weight from context 425 has a large fragment broken off it and is dark grey/black inside. Also, the various broken faces have browner surfaces than the original surfaces. This suggests that the object broke up as it was burnt and that the original weight was probably used in an unfired state.

Form

No examples of wattle impressions were found and it is unlikely therefore that any of the fired clay comes from wattle and daub structures. Only three fragments have original faces and all of these could have come from tall pyramidal loom weights, although in no case is the identification positive. In addition, one group of fragments have a highly vitrified surface, perhaps 1-2mm thick, and the normal oxidized surface below. This suggests that they were briefly subjected to a high temperature, causing vitrification. This may have been aided by the presence of alkalis, as in wood smoke. These pieces could also be from an intensely but briefly heated weight and do not have the degree of vitrification one sees on hearth lining, tuyere fragments and the like.

Assessment

The fired clay is probably mainly or entirely from pyramidal loom weights which have been accidentally burnt, perhaps in a conflagration. This form of loom weight is mainly found in pre-Roman Iron Age contexts although one might expect, as with other aspects of Iron Age culture, that there was some continuation of their use after the conquest.

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<http://www.avac.uklinux.net/potcat/pdfs/avac2006011.pdf>

Retention

The fired clay should be retained since it provides an indication of the clay resources used at the site and, since the objects were probably used in an unfired state, these are likely to have been located close to the site. It would also be possible to undertake thermoluminescent dating on the fragments.

Further Work

The large fragment from context 425 should be illustrated, to show the evidence for its identification.

Appendix 1

Action:	Context:	SUBFABRIC:	Nosh:	NoV:	Weight:
	708	R CHALK;R RED SST; R RED MUDSTONE;MICACEOUS SANDY;OXIDIZED	1	1	15
	823	R CHALK; SA BASIC;SA ACID IGNEOUS;MICACEOUS;OXIDIZED	1	1	11
	823	R CHALK;R RED SST; R RED MUDSTONE;MICACEOUS SANDY;OXIDIZED	1	1	9
	304	R CHALK;R RED SST; R RED MUDSTONE;MICACEOUS SANDY;OXIDIZED	3	1	3
	806	S R CHALK;S SA SST;MICACEOUS SANDY;OXIDIZED	1	1	7
	803	R CHALK;R RED SST; R RED MUDSTONE;MICACEOUS SANDY;OXIDIZED	5	1	35
DR	425	R CHALK;R RED SST; R RED MUDSTONE;MICACEOUS SANDY;OXIDIZED	1	1	282