

Assessment of Pottery and Clay from East Leake, Leicestershire (ELQ06)

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A small quantity of pottery and a sample of clay were submitted to the author for assessment. The finds include a sherd of probable later prehistoric date, sherds of a Roman greyware and a number of sherds of early to mid Anglo-Saxon date. The latter are in fresh condition and indicate occupation on the site.

Description

Prehistoric Pottery

A single sherd, from context 1012, is probably of late Bronze Age or Iron Age date, based on the size and curvature of the sherd and the external surface treatment of rough vertical wiping.

The fabric contains moderate large angular fragments which at x20 magnification appear to be quartzite. Their hackly fractures suggest that they are derived from fire-cracked quartzite pebbles rather than coming from natural gravel. They certainly appear to have been deliberately added to the clay. The only other inclusions visible at x20 magnification are fragments of dark red clay/iron pellets. However, this should be checked using thin section analysis.

Roman Pottery

Three sherds from a single wheelthrown greyware vessel were recovered from context 1000. At x20 magnification the fabric contains moderate angular fragments of a white loosely-cemented siltstone or fine sandstone. The groundmass contains abundant coarse silt/fine sand presumably derived from the weathering of this rock. This very distinctive fabric is not known to the author, nor is the identity of the rock obvious.

Early to Mid Anglo-Saxon Pottery

Fifteen sherds of early to mid Anglo-Saxon pottery, representing no more than 4 vessels and weighing in total 114gm were recovered. All are fresh in appearance and have not been weathered.

The sherds probably all come from jars, two of which show signs of use (sooting on the exterior). One sherd comes from a decorated vessel, bearing two parallel grooved lines (applied with a round-tipped tool, such as a bone pin tip) and a single round stamp. This

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sherd probably comes from a vessel of 6th-century date but without a larger fragment it is not possible to determine a closer date.

Three fabrics are present:

The first, a base sherd from a jar with a sagging base, consists contains abundant granitic inclusions, including large biotite sheaves (CHARN). The site lies about 9 miles northwest of the Mountsorrel granodiorite outcrop, and boulder clays containing fragments of this rock occur to the south and southeast of the outcrop. The vessel, therefore would have to have been carried at least 9 miles, possibly considerably more. Such vessels are known from a wide area of midland England (Williams and Vince 1997).

The second consists of a plain body sherd and the decorated sherd, contains abundant fragments of overgrown quartz grains, derived from the Millstone Grit, in a fine-textured groundmass. Similar fabrics occur in the Vale of York, where the local gravels and boulder clays match these characteristics. However, it is possible that boulder clay containing solely Carboniferous material might be present closer to East Leake.

The third fabric consists of 12 sherds from a single globular, everted rimmed jar. The groundmass is fine-textured with moderate organic inclusions. Moderate angular fragments of rock also occur in the fabric. At x20 magnification these include biotite granite, a ferruginous sandstone (possibly of Triassic origin) and fragments of a silica-cemented sandstone. The closest parallels to the latter known to the author are of lower Cretaceous origin (greensands). These have distinctive characteristics in thin section.

Clay

The sample of clay has a dark red colour, indicative of a high haematite content. It does not seem to have been burnt, however, and it is likely that the red colour is present in the natural outcrop. A Triassic age for the clay is likely and it could therefore be of local origin.

Assessment

Interpretation

The later prehistoric and early to mid Anglo-Saxon potsherds are fresh and indicate occupation on the site in these periods. The date of the early to mid Anglo-Saxon occupation, if we take all four vessels as being a contemporary assemblage, is probably 6th century. However, it may be that the settlement had a much longer period of use. The presence of sooting on the later prehistoric and some of the early to mid Anglo-Saxon vessels is probably also evidence for occupation.

Retention

All the pottery should be retained.

Further Work

The decorated sherd and the vessel from context 1006 should be drawn and the stamp should be sent to Diana Briscoe for inclusion in the Archive of Anglo-Saxon pottery stamps.

All three Anglo-Saxon pottery fabrics and the later prehistoric pottery vessel should be thin sectioned to confirm the visual identification of the fabrics and to determine more closely the source. Chemical analysis of the fabrics would also enable the fabrics to be compared with material from the Vale of York and other sites (such as Catholme in the Upper Trent valley, Losco-Bradley and Kinsley 2002) where visually similar fabrics have been recorded and sampled.

Costing

Task	Unit Cost	Total
Illustration of two vessels	Quote needed	Quote needed
Thin section analysis	£24.00 plus VAT	£96.00 plus VAT
Chemical analysis	£24.00 plus VAT	£96.00 plus VAT
Total		To be added

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Context	Action	Cname	Subfabric	Description	Form	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition	Use
1000		CHARN		SAGGING BASE;BURNISHED EXT	JAR	B	1	1	12	FRESH	SOOTED EXT
1000	TS;ICPS	SSTMG			JAR	BS	1	1	17	FRESH	SOOTED EXT
1000	DR;AS STAMP ARCHIVE	SSTMG		TWO PARALLEL INCISED GROOVES AND CIRCULAR STAMP	JAR	BS	1	1	3	FRESH	
1000		GREY	S ANG FINE SST/COARSE SILTSTONE FRAGS IN FINE SANDY.COARSE SILTY GROUNDMASS	WT	JAR	BS	3	1	11		
1006	DR;TS;ICPS	ESAXX	BIOTITE GRANITE;SILICIOUS SST;RED SST;CHAFF;FINE GROUNDMASS	CRUDE EVERTED ROUNDED RIM;OXID EXT BODY AND BLACK RIM/SHOULDER	JAR	BS	12	1	82	FRESH	
1012	TS;ICPS	PREH	ANGULAR QUARTZOSE ROCK FRAGS <4.0MM	VERTICAL SMOOTHING EXT	JAR	BS	1	1	15	FRESH	SOOTED EXT
1012		CLAY		HAEMATITE-RED CLAY	SAMPLE	BS	1	1	160		

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Bibliography

Losco-Bradley, Stuart and Kinsley, Gavin (2002) *Catholme: An Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Trent Gravels in Staffordshire*. Nottingham, Trent and Peak Archaeological Unit.

Williams, D. and Vince, A. (1997) "The Characterization and Interpretation of Early to Middle Saxon Granitic Tempered Pottery in England ." *Medieval Archaeol*, XLI, 214-219