Assessment of the Archaeological Potential of Early Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Lodge Farm, Skendleby (FSPL-07)

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A small collection of early Anglo-Saxon pottery was recovered from archaeological fieldwork at Lodge Farm, Skendleby. The sherds were examined at x20 magnification by the author to assess their potential for characterisation.

Description

At x20 magnification a variety of inclusion types are present. These include:

- Quartz. Rounded grains with a polished surface, but without any evidence for iron-rich, calcareous or silica cement.
- Igneous rock. Subangular fragments of dark (grey/black) crystalline rocks, probably basaltic and light (white/pink) crystalline rocks, sometimes with biotite.
- Bivalve shell. Including almost flat fragments with a prismatic structure. These are inoceramids.
- Clay/iron. Well-rounded, usually ovoid shaped grains c.0.2mm across with a shiny red-brown surface and dull red-brown interior.

Discussion

The quartz grains are typical of lower Cretaceous rocks in Lincolnshire and occur in the Spilsby sandstone, which is normally cemented with calcite, and in the Carstone and, less abundantly, in the Red Chalk. They also occur in the Claxby Ironstone, where they are cemented by an iron compound. In thin section it is often possible to see the cement and grains from the Claxby Ironstone, and similar rocks, can usually be detected at x20 magnification.

The igneous rock is typical of boulder clays in eastern Lincolnshire and cannot be used to determine the precise source of the clay used.

The oolitic iron ore grains, however, are much more distinctive. Oolitic iron ore occurs in the Lower Jurassic in Northwest Lincolnshire (e.g. the Frodingham Ironstone, but also present in earlier and later Lower Jurassic strata). However, a much closer source to Skendleby is the Roach Formation, and, according to the 1:50000 geological map of the area, the Claxby Ironstone Formation in this area is also a ferruginous sandy clay.

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http://www.avac.uklinux.net/potcat/pdfs/avac2007024.pdf

Assessment

Ferruginous ooliths are not commonly found associated with lower Cretaceous rocks and minerals in Lincolnshire and their abundance in some of the Skendleby fabrics suggests that the vessels containing them were made from a boulder clay (to account for the igneous rock fragments) which contains material from the Roach Formation or the Claxby Ironstone Formation. Given that the ice flow in the Wolds area was undoubtedly north to south, this combination of inclusions can only have been present near the present day outcrop of these oolitic clays or further to the south. Outcrops of the Roach formation occur in the valley immediately to the west of Lodge Farm, although they are obscured by boulder clay. They also outcrop at Dalby Hill, Grebby, Scremby and Candleby. Boulder clays in the Partney area and fired clay made from them have been examined by the author and do not contain these ferruginous ooliths and nor are these ooliths present in early Anglo-Saxon pottery from sites in the Vale of Ancholme (such as Barnetby-le-Wold).

It therefore seems that pottery with a combination of ferruginous ooliths and lower Cretaceous rock and mineral inclusions must have been made in a limited area on the southern or south-western fringe of the Lincolnshire Wolds.

One of the most contentious issues concerning early Anglo-Saxon pottery is its place and mode of production. One would have expected that vessels were made within the settlement on a domestic basis but vessels containing distinctive rock and mineral suites not obtainable locally have been found on several sites in Lincolnshire and in the case of Brough, Nottinghamshire, in the Trent valley between Newark and Lincoln, most of the pottery contains rock fragments which outcrop in north Leicestershire (Williams and Vince 1997) and do not occur in local Trent valley gravels whilst vessels with a quartz sand which could be of Trent valley manufacture are a minority (Vince 2003).

However, the analysis of pottery from Barnetby-le-Wold indicated probably local production (Vince 2004) and this appears to be the case at Skendleby as well.

It is important to confirm this conclusion using thin-section and chemical analysis of a sample of vessels and to publish the results of this analysis to indicate that even if large-scale movement of pottery was taking place along the Trent valley, and along the Jurassic ridge, the Wolds appear to have had a more self-sufficient economy.

Costing

Thin section and chemical analysis of a single sherd of pottery, plus the technical report, is currently available for £48.00 plus VAT per sample, rising to £50.00 plus VAT per sample after 1st April. A sample of six sherds would be sufficient to characterise this ware.

Bibliography

Vince, Alan (2003) Petrological and Chemical Analyses of Anglo-Saxon Pottery from Glebe Farm, Brough (GFB). AVAC Reports Lincoln, AVAC

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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