

Assessment of the Putative Late Saxon Pottery from Silbury Hill, Wiltshire (661 2007)

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A small quantity of pottery from the English Heritage excavations at Silbury Hill was identified by R Cleal as being possibly of 10th century date and was therefore submitted to the author for identification and assessment. Only two of the sherds could be positively identified as being of Late Saxon or medieval date and some of the remainder, in the author's opinion, are definitely of later prehistoric and Roman date, including one piece of Roman building material.

Factual Data

Nineteen sherds were submitted for identification (Table 1). Of these only two can be positively identified as being of late Saxon/early medieval date. The remainder are included in Table 1 for completeness.

Table 1

Code	Sherds	Vessels	Weight (gm)	Mean Sherd Weight
BATHA	1	1	5	5.00
IAFLINT	5	4	84	18.88
NBYA	1	1	22	22.00
OXID	1	1	1	1.00
RTIL	1	1	5	5.00
SHEL	1	1	64	64.00
UNID	9	8	14.1	1.70
Grand Total	19	17	195.1	10.95

Bath Fabric A (BATHA)

This ware is defined by its fabric, which contains moderate water-polished quartz grains and sparse flint, chert and/or calcareous inclusions in a silty groundmass containing some muscovite (Vince 1979). In this particular example, a single calcareous inclusion is present, which at x20 magnification appears to be sparry calcite.

Vessels of this fabric occur on numerous sites in west central Wiltshire, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire and petrological analysis indicates that they were probably made from Lower Cretaceous Gault clay, with added quartzose sand obtained from cover sands derived mainly from Lower and Upper Cretaceous deposits (Vince 1984). The calcareous inclusions are usually leached and in this example might come from an Upper Cretaceous *inoceramid* shell.

Iron Age Flint-tempered ware (IAFLINT)

The distinctive feature of this fabric is the presence of angular, probably fire-cracked, flint. This flint differs in appearance from that found in Bath Fabric A and other fabrics where the flint is of detrital origin, in the hackly surface of the fragments and the presence of crazing visible at x20 magnification. The five examples here include two with walls which are much thicker than those found on late Saxon or early medieval pottery and in one case the rim, shoulder and part of the upper body of a jar are present. One of the examples contains a mixture of fire-cracked flint inclusions and water-polished quartz grains. A recent study of this ware from various sites in Hampshire suggests that many of the Hampshire samples may have been produced near Winchester although those from North Hampshire (Silchester) might have a different source, and are later in date. These examples are large and fresh, with some spalling suggesting perhaps that they were dropped on the surface of the mound.

Newbury Group A (NBYA)

A single sherd of this fabric was found. It contains inclusions of subangular flint, some of which is brown-stained and perhaps of Tertiary origin. The groundmass is finer in texture than that of Bath Fabric A and at x20 magnification neither quartz silt nor muscovite are visible. This ware is found at Bartholomew Street, Newbury, in late 11th to early 12th-century contexts and a source in the Vale of Pewsey has been postulated (Vince 1997). Examples are known from sites in Northern Hampshire, Berkshire and eastern Wiltshire.

Roman Oxidized ware (OXID)

A single, heavily abraded sherd of oxidized ware is likely to be of Roman date. It has the appearance of a sherd from a ploughsoil.

Roman Ceramic Building Material (RTIL)

A single heavily abraded sherd of brick or tile is likely (in my view) to be of Roman date. It too appears to have been in a ploughsoil.

Roman Shell-tempered ware (SHEL)

The flat base of a wheelthrown jar made in a shelly fabric. At x20 magnification, the temper can be seen to include punctate brachiopod and nacreous bivalve shell, with few fragments larger than c.2.0mm across. The fabric contains no visible quartzose grains.

Shelly fabrics of this type were produced in the Roman period and in the late Saxon and early medieval periods in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, utilising the Middle Jurassic Cornbrash marls. The Cornbrash outcrops on the dip slope of the Cotswold scarp to the northwest of Silbury, but the distribution of both Roman and Late Saxon/medieval examples both point to a south-east midlands source. The flat, wire-cut base of this example can be paralleled in the Roman period and only occurs in the late Saxon period on very early (i.e.

late 9th to mid 10th-century) pieces, after which a sagging base is ubiquitous. Therefore, although a late Saxon date cannot be entirely discounted, it is more likely that this is a Roman vessel (see, for example, those from the production site at Harrold, Bedfordshire, Brown 1994).

Unidentified wares (UNID)

Nine sherds were too small for identification, including small abraded specks found in soil samples. However, none appeared to be of late Saxon or early medieval types.

Statement of Potential

The collection from the fortification of the top of the mound, found by Atkinson, is important because of its association with an early 11th-century silver penny. This is one of the few clear examples where these handmade, "early medieval" style vessels have been found in pre-conquest contexts in Wiltshire or the south-west (Vince 1984). However, these two new sherds add little to the existing evidence. There is therefore little potential for archaeological research on these two sherds.

The importance of the pieces discounted by the author as being of Late Saxon or medieval date should be assessed by a specialist in the iron Age and Roman pottery of Wiltshire.

Storage and Curation

All of the pottery should be retained and it does not require special storage conditions.

Bibliography

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Appendix 1

Context	REFNO	period	class	cname	Form	subfabric	type	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition	Use
3002		5	POTTERY	UNID		OXID;ABUNDANT RQ, SOME GSQ <0.3MM	Fill	BLACK SURFACES	BS	1	1	2	SPALLED	
4804	200728508	6	POTTERY	RTIL	-	POORLY MIXED;V LITTLE QUARTZ;ANGULAR GROG/RELICT CLAY <4.0MM	Layer		BS	1	1	5	VABR	
4804	200728507	6	POTTERY	OXID	JAR/FLAG	OXID;NO VISIBLE INCLUSIONS	Layer		BS	1	1	1	VABR	
4805	200728515	6	POTTERY	IAFLINT	JAR	BLACK FIRED;FIRE-CRACKED FLINT/CHERT TEMPER	Layer	SHOULDERED JAR WITH THICK WALLS AND SMALL BEADED RIM	BS	1	1	63	FRESH, SPALLED	
4805	200728522	6	POTTERY	IAFLINT		BLACK FIRED;FIRE-CRACKED FLINT/CHERT TEMPER	Layer		BS	1	1	2	SPALL	
4805	200728517	6	POTTERY	UNID	JAR	GSQ <0.3MM;ROUNDED FEORE <0.2MM	Layer	POSSIBLY A BATHA VARIANT BUT ALSO POSS IAGLAUC	BS	1	1	2	FRESH	
4805	200728516	6	POTTERY	IAFLINT	JAR	BLACK FIRED;FIRE-CRACKED FLINT/CHERT TEMPER	Layer	SHOULDERED JAR WITH THICK WALLS	BS	2	1	17	FRESH	
4805	200728513	6	POTTERY	UNID		SPARSE GSQ <0.3MM;ROUNDED FEORE <0.2MM	Layer	SPALL WITH NO ORIGINAL SURFACES	BS	1	1	2	SPALL	
4805	200728510	6	POTTERY	IAFLINT		BLACK FIRED;FIRE-CRACKED FLINT TEMPER;MOD GSQ <0.3MM	Layer		BS	1	1	2	FRESH	
4820	200728519	6	POTTERY	UNID	JAR	SPARSE GSQ	Fill		BS	1	1	5	FRESH	

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ID	Sample No.	QTY	Material	Form	Context	Description	Notes	BS	1	1	2	Condition	Other	
4820	200728518	6	POTTERY	UNID	JAR	<0.3MM;ROUNDED FEORE <0.2MM SPARSE GSQ <0.3MM;ROUNDED FEORE <0.2MM	Fill	BS	1	1	2	FRESH		
4845	200728529	6	POTTERY	UNID	-	GSQ <0.3MM;ROUNDED FEORE <0.2MM	Layer	POSSIBLY A BATHA VARIANT BUT ALSO POSS IAGLAUC	BS	2	1	1	SPALL	
4845	<9526>	6	POTTERY	UNID			Layer		BS	1	1	0.1	VABR	
4886	200728765		POTTERY	NBYA	JAR	SA BROWN- STAINED FLINT;S GSQ <0.3MM;SPARSE MUSC IN GROUNDMASS		SAGGING BASE SHERD	B	1	1	22	FRESH	BLACK DEPO INT
4886	200728766		POTTERY	BATHA	JAR	M GSQ <0.3MM;RARE SPARRY CALCITE <2.0MM		VERTICAL RIM WITH ROUNDED, SLIGHTLY BEADED TOP	R	1	1	5	FRESH	
4889		6	POTTERY	SHEL	JAR	ABUNDANT FOSSIL SHELL INC PUNCTATE BRACHIOPOD AND NACREOUS BIVALVE	Layer	FLAT WIRE-CUT BASE;DEEP FINGER GROOVE AROUND INT OF BASE ANGLE	B	1	1	64	FRESH	SOOTED SIDES NONE ON BASE
UNSTRAT			POTTERY	UNID	SPINDLE WHORL	DARK GREY INCLUSIONLESS FABRIC WITH ABUNDANT CALCAREOUS SPECKS		PROBABLY FASHIONED FROM POTSHERD;FLAT TOP DECORATED WITH THREE CONCENTRIC GROOVES;LOWER SURFACE SPALLED;SIDE SCRAPED AND HOLE BORED	BS	1	1	0	FRESH	

