The Pottery from Little Westfield Farm, Cottam, East Yorkshire (ARC0802)

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A small quantity of pottery was recovered from an excavation at Little Westfield Farm, Cottam, East Yorkshire, undertaken by Archaeoscope (Site Code: ARC0802).

The finds consist of abraded sherds of Roman pottery together with fresh sherds of Anglo-Scandinavian pottery. The latter is a regionally important find since it confirms that pottery was used in this part of the Yorkshire Wolds before the Norman Conquest (no examples of pre-conquest pottery have been found further north, in the Vale of Pickering) and shows that this pottery was imported to Yorkshire from a source in the Trent valley on the Lincolnshire/Nottinghamshire border rather than being produced locally[1].

Description

Pottery

Pre-Roman?

A single sherd of erratic-tempered ware (2004, ETW. Here coded IAERR) was identified, context arc08021039. This fabric contains large angular fragments of rock, which on analysis usually prove to be either fine-grained basic igneous rocks from England north of the Tees estuary or SE Scotland, or coarser acid igneous rocks of Lake District or Scottish origin. The fabric is one of the most common found in East Yorkshire in the pre-Roman Iron Age and has been thought to have continued in use into the century of Roman occupation. However, recent work at Melton, on the north bank of the Humber, suggests that the ware had ceased to be used by c.70AD, although this could be a local development related to the foundation of the fort at Brough and the ferry crossing of the Humber.

Roman

Eleven sherds of Roman pottery were identified. Four of these were Calcite-tempered vessels. Calcite-tempered ware is common in the Vale of Pickering and the northern Wolds from the Bronze Age through to the early Anglo-Saxon period and for much of this period the basic shape and manufacturing methods used to make the vessels did not evolve (2004, CTW, Here CALC). Only rim and shoulder profiles can provide a date for many of these vessels. Early Anglo-Saxon examples often have a slightly sandier fabric and differ in shape and can be discounted as a possibility for these four sherds.

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[1] This report is adapted from an assessment of the finds carried out in Summer 2008 (AVAC Report 2008/86).

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The remaining three sherds consist of a fragment of oxidized ware, similar in appearance to Eboracum ware (Monaghan 1997, here coded E1), an unidentified greyware jar base (here coded G0) and a body sherd from a Dressel 20 amphora (here coded AP25). All of these sherds are either abraded or have a coating of chalky concretions.

Anglo-Scandinavian

Eleven sherds of Torksey ware were identified (TORK). This ware was produced at Torksey, in the Trent valley, and is found on sites in central and North Lincolnshire, as well as Yorkshire. Analysis of the fabric of samples from sites in Doncaster, York and Beverley, and others, indicates that all the sampled sherds do in fact come from the Torksey kilns, despite the fact that an earlier study suggested that there was also a northern source for this ware (Brooks and Mainman 1984; Vince et al. forthcoming). A sample of one of the Cottam sherds was taken for thin section and chemical analysis. The results confirm that it was a Torksey ware product.

Early Torksey products often have a completely reduced fabric, and cab be decorated with roller-stamping. Later product (from the mid 10th to the mid 11th centuries) often have a "sandwich" firing, caused by being fired in an oxidizing atmosphere for much of the time, followed by the exclusion of oxygen (perhaps by the use of green fuel and/or by the closure of any flues for the final period. The Cottam sherds have this "sandwich" firing.

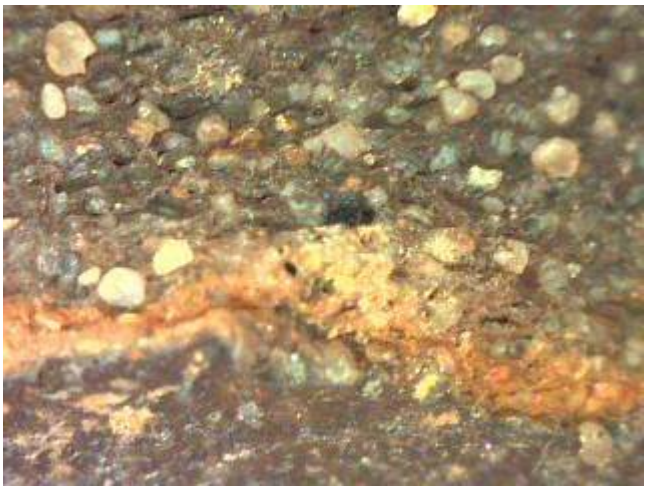

Figure 1 Close-up of broken edge of Torksey bowl rim, showing well-rounded quartz sand inclusions, typical of Trent valley terrace sands, and the "sandwich" firing.

One of the sherds comes from an inturned-rim bowl, a mid-10th-century and later type (Young and Vince 2005) and the rest are body sherds which, from their curvature are probably from jars.

Figure 2 Inturned-rim Torksey ware bowl (Illustration: C Bentley)

In contrast to the earlier wares, all of these sherds, despite their small size in some cases, have unabraded surfaces and no chalky concretions. This suggests that they have not been subjected to the same shallow burial in the subsoil which is presumably responsible for the condition of the earlier sherds.

Stone

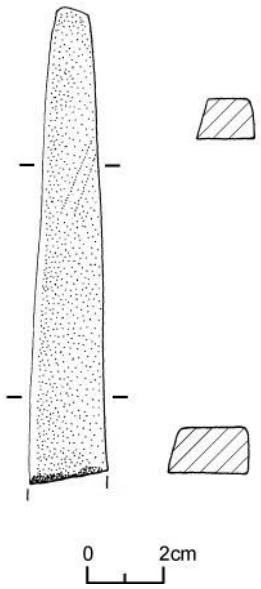

Figure 3 Blue Phyllite Hone (Illustration: C Bentley)

The tip of a small, very neatly-made honestone, in blue phyllite, was recovered from the fill of ditch arc08021020 (Fig 3). Blue phyllite was probably mined for hone manufacture in the Eidsborg area of southern Norway and examples of these hones are typical of the pre-conquest period, whereas the Norwegian Ragstone, a coarser schist from the same area, continued to be exported after the Norman conquest (Pritchard 1991). An example from Winchester had traces of gold streaks of varying pureness on one face and has been argued to have been a touchstone, used to assay gold. The small well-made shape of the Cottam example makes such a use quite possible for this example too.

Assessment

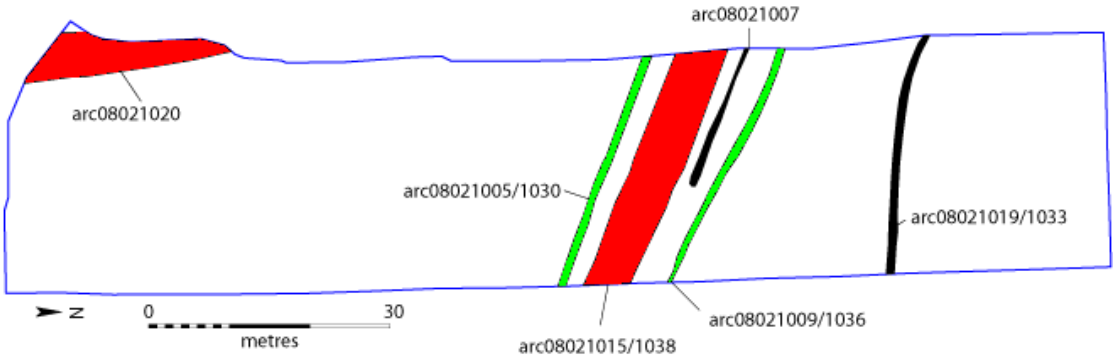

Figure 4 Key: Green = Roman finds only; Red = Anglo-Scandinavian finds; Black = no finds

Ditch arc08021005

Two fills of this ditch produced single sherds of Roman pottery

Ditch arc08021009

The fill of this ditch produced two sherds of Roman pottery.

Ditch arc08021020

The fill of this ditch produced the blue phyllite honestone.

Trackway arc08021015/38

The primary fill of this trackway produced two sherds of Roman pottery and one sherd of Anglo-Scandinavian pottery. The upper fills produced 9 sherds of Anglo-Scandinavian pottery, the sherd of Iron Age pottery, and four sherds of Roman pottery (and a further sherd, recorded as being found but not present in the collection).

Discussion

The condition of the Iron Age and Roman pottery from the site, and the low quantity of sherds, suggests that this pottery was present in the subsoil, probably through the manuring of fields for agriculture during the Iron Age and Roman periods. It may have arrived in the fills of ditches arc08021005 and arc08021009 at any date after this and does not necessarily provide the date of use of these features, nor of their backfill and disuse. Furthermore, the relationship of these two features to the trackway, arc08021015/38, suggests that they are associated with it in some way, possibly as part of an earlier phase or as contemporary ditches.

The Anglo-Scandinavian finds, by contrast, are in fresh condition and present at a higher frequency. They suggest that occupation took place very close to this site, if not on it, during the period of currency of the finds.

Fieldwork in the Cottam area directed by Julian Richards (Richards 1999) has already shown that there is a remarkably high density of dispersed settlement in the area in the mid Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods but the pottery finds from these sites have always been slight, in comparison to the finds of metalwork and coins. This site, however, suggests that these Wold settlements were pottery-using and that the pottery was obtained from a distant source, as was the honestone. The most likely immediate source for these finds would have been York, suggesting that the intensification of use of the Wold downlands was related to the need to supply the growing settlement of York with agricultural produce.

This site is the furthest to the north east of the Torksey kilns that Torksey products have been confirmed, although they have been reported from Thwing (the Thwing Anglo-Saxon pottery was not deposited in Hull and East Riding Museum when last checked by the principal author). They might have arrived at Cottam either through York (water transport between Torksey and York was certainly in operation in the 14th century and was probably used from the late 9th century when the Torksey industry began). This journey would have invoilved about 60 miles water travel followed by 31 miles overland. Alternatively, they may reflect an overland route along the Jurassic ridge to the Humber, then across the river by ferry (South Ferriby to North Ferriby) and continuing via Beverley and Driffield to Cottam (72 miles). In either case the distances involved, and the fact that all of the pottery used was Torksey ware, suggests that by the 10th/11th century the rural economy in Yorkshire was reliant on market exchange for the supply of minor goods, and therefore probably also for the exchange of agricultural produce.

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Appendix 1

Context	REFNO	class	cname	Form	subfabric	Action	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use
arc08021039	arc08020018	POTTERY		vessel			NOT PRESENT IN ASSEMBLAGE	BS	1	1	0	0.00		
arc08021004	arc08020004	POTTERY	AP25	AMPH				BS	1	1	62	62.00	ABRA	
arc08021010	arc08020002	POTTERY	CALC	JAR				BS	1	1	2	2.00	LEACHED	
arc08021010	arc08020003	POTTERY	CALC	JAR				BS	1	1	3	3.00	CONCRETED	
arc08021043	arc08020025	POTTERY	CALC	JAR			no other finds - could this have dropped in from section?	BS	2	1	2	1.00		
arc08021000	arc08020001	POTTERY	CALC	JAR				BS	1	1	3	3.00	LEACHED	
arc08021002	arc08020005	POTTERY	E1	JAR				BS	1	1	2	2.00	ABRA; CONCRETED	
arc08021039	arc08020016	POTTERY	G0	JAR				B;BS	4	1	19	4.75	ABRA; RECENTLY BROKEN	
arc08021039	arc08020022	POTTERY	IAERR	JAR				BS	1	1	7	7.00		SOOTED EXT
arc08021022	arc08020010	STONE	STONE	HONE STONE	BLUE PHYLLITE	DR	TAPERING; 10 THICKEST WHERE BROKEN; 5 END; 5 THICK	PART	1	1	7	7.00		
arc08021012	arc08020008	POTTERY	TORK	JAR				BS	1	1	3	3.00		
arc08021011	arc08020007	POTTERY	TORK	JAR				BS	2	1	1	0.50		
arc08021043	arc08020025	POTTERY	TORK	JAR				BS	1	1	1	1.00		
arc08021039	arc08020017	POTTERY	TORK	BOWL		DR; TS; ICPS	INTURNED RIM BOWL	R;BS	2	1	18	9.00		
arc08021039	arc08020019	POTTERY	TORK	JAR				BS	1	1	1	1.00		

arc08021039	arc08020021	POTTERY	TORK	JAR	TS; ICPS		BS	1	1	11	11.00
arc08021039	arc08020024	POTTERY	TORK	JAR			BS	2	1	9	4.50
arc08021039	arc08020026	POTTERY	TORK	JAR		interface between 1039 and 1040	BS	1	1	2	2.00

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