

Early Medieval pottery

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Introduction

A single shoulder sherd (24g) of an early Saxon jar was retrieved from the river, adjacent to the known location of the Roman bridge, along with a collection of other contemporary finds and a significant assemblage of votive deposits of Roman date.

Description

The fabric is fine with few inclusions including sparse quartz (up to 0.5mm), iron oxide and white mica and the sherd has a brownish grey body with a dark grey burnished surface. The vessel is handmade and bonfire fired but the thin wall and neatly executed decoration indicate a fairly high level of competence in production. The sherd has a small triangular boss to the shoulder within a horizontal band delineated by two incised lines. The boss is applied, not pushed through from within as is commonly the case, and is itself delineated by two incised lines to each side, with a third running down the centre from the apex. The horizontal band is filled with diagonally incised lines, partially obscured by the burnishing of the surface. Below this band the vessel wall is corrugated, representing the top of long plastic bosses to the body with further incised lines between.

Dating and discussion

The vessel falls under Myres's *Buckelurnen* group, attributed predominantly to the second half of 5th century (Myres 1969, 46), although it has long since become apparent such precise dating on the basis of decoration cannot be substantiated (Hamerow 1993; Arnold 1997). Bossed vessels can be dated to the late 5th or 6th century (Vince 2008, 4; Sudds. 2007, 258; Hamerow 1993, 45).

Although comparatively infrequent to the north of the River Tees, contemporary pottery can be paralleled in the immediate vicinity of Piercebridge (Cooper with Vince 2008), broader Tees valley (Myres 1976, 72-3; Sherlock 1992) and in greater frequency to the south into Yorkshire (Evans 1996; Vince 2008). In the absence of direct physical comparison, or chemical

characterisation, it is difficult to be conclusive about provenance. The fabric has no ready parallel amongst the Piercebridge or Catterick assemblages, although Fabric 2 from Norton may offer a potential parallel (Sherlock 1992, 55). Indeed, given the fine fabric and finish it is perhaps most likely the vessel was made further south.

Significant focus has been placed on Iron Age and Roman ritual deposition in Britain but it is only in more recent years that Anglo-Saxon deposits have received similar attention. Symbolic or votive offerings, including pottery vessels, have been identified in pre-Christian funerary and settlement contexts (Crawford 2004; Hamerow 2006), but it would appear that rivers, and particularly crossing points such as bridges, also formed a focus for such activity (Lund 2010). The majority of depositions take the form of weaponry, tools or jewellery but it is perhaps conceivable that offerings of food were also made. At best the survival of these is likely to be somewhat fragmentary and consequently any potential parallels could be under-represented. Given the increasing evidence for early Anglian activity along the Tees and its tributaries, however, it is simply possible the sherd was washed into river from activity further upstream, the closet being the 5th and 6th century occupation in area of the fort (Cool and Mason 2008).

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