Later prehistoric pottery from Mellor (OVM 99 and OVM 00)

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Introduction

The pottery from excavations at Mellor (OVM99 and OVM 00) was examined by the author on 20th September 2000. The assemblage consisted of seventy-seven sherds weighing 274 grams and representing a maximum of seventy-six vessels. The material was quantified by number of sherds, weight and maximum number of vessels (ENV). The details of the pottery are summarised in Table 1. The paucity of comparative material (see Elsdon 1996, Matthews 1997, 1999, Knight, pers comm.) poses a considerable problem for the dating of the material and the establishment of parallels for the diagnostic vessels. For this reason a provisional site-specific type series has been created with parallels cited where possible. It is to be hoped that further work on the site will lead to this scheme being expanded and more precise parallels with other sites being established.

The pottery: fabrics

Fabric type 1

A fine, soft, sandy textured fabric with occasional large (1.00mm – 3.00mm), very hard, dark, angular, possibly igneous, inclusions and fine rounded quartz grit (0.1 – 0.2mm). Fired to an orange-brown colour throughout.

Fabric type 2

A hard, dense fabric containing abundant rounded and sub-angular quartz grains (o.2 – 0.4mm) in a black, reduced matrix.

Fabric type 3

A moderately hard, dense, black reduced fabric with rare, very fine quartz inclusions. Finely finished with a possible burnished surface.

Fabric type 4

A very distinctive, coarse fabric containing abundant large angular inclusions up to 6mm long. The rock types represented include sandstone and chert.

Fabric type 5

A moderately hard, muddy textured fabric containing moderate quantities of angular, non-crystalline rock fragments. Traces of grass stems could also be seen in the fired body. The surface was smoothed with some surface cracking. The fabric appeared to have a tendency to split, although the fracture was not laminated in the conventional sense.

Fabric type 6

A hard, brick red to orange fabric containing occasional angular to sub-angular lumps of rock. Some examples are little more than lumps of fired clay, but one sherd has an apparent surface (3008 SFN 90).

The pottery: vessel forms

Rim type 1

Low, flat topped, beaded rim on a globular body. The commonest type of rim in the assemblage. See Figure 1.

Rim type 2

A simple, unelaborated rounded rim with a slightly flattened top. See Figure 2. Parallels can be found for this rim shape (e.g. Elsdon 1996:A.6;8), but the extent to which they are significant is unclear, given the simple and plain nature of the rim.

Rim type 3

A round, beaded rim with a pronounced external bulge. Possible parallels include Pickburn Leys in South Yorkshire (Sydes 1993:Figure 41) although the fabric of the two vessels is markedly different. See Figure 3.

Other vessels

Although the majority of sherds appeared to be from domestic vessels, the possibility of industrial activity was indicated by a fragment of crucible fragments (contexts 1008, 1013 and 1028;95). Only spectroscopic analysis will demonstrate whether these vessels had been used for metal working and the types of metal involved. A fourth sherd (context 1031, SF 101) appeared to have a deposit on the surviving face, and may also be a crucible fragment.

Three sherds from context 3011 (SF40) appeared to be fragments of fired clay around an angular pebble measuring some 2cm by 1cm. It is unclear whether they were part of an exceptionally coarse tempered vessel or were fragments of a fired clay feature such as a hearth or furnace.

One sherd of briquetage was identified (Knight, pers. comm.) together with a further three sherds which may also be briquetage. Although precise parallels were not found, the most plausible origin lies in Cheshire.

Other material

A number of pieces of non-ceramic material were included alongside the pottery. These consisted of glass (Context 3010 SFN 48), unidentified slag (Context 1028, SFN 96) and two pieces of shale (Context 3014, SFN 94). The shale did not show any signs of being worked, although the working of this locally occurring material has been recognised from earlier sites in the area (Knight pers. comm.). The slag is consistent with the occurrence of crucible fragments, although identification of its precise nature will require further work. The glass fragment appears to have been melted, although whether this indicates the presence of glass working is not clear.

Discussion

Although at present the later prehistoric pottery from Mellor is 'floating' in the sense of lacking definite parallels and a position within an established chronological framework, its significance remains considerable. As one of the very few stratified groups of pre-Roman pottery from the western Pennine fringe, it offers the opportunity to begin the establishment of a regional type series. For this reason an attempt has been made in this report to define a number of fabric types. Serious consideration should be given in future years to the petrological analysis of selected sherds with a view to trying to identify possible source areas for the pottery and to establishing whether the material is of local or regional origin. In the meantime, there is very little doubt that the sherds recovered during the 1999 and 2000 seasons are of later prehistoric date, although they cannot, at this stage, be used to date the contexts in which they were found with any degree of precision. A broad date range within the Middle to Late Iron Age is suggested.

Amongst the most interesting aspects of the assemblage is the range of vessel types represented; alongside vessels of probably domestic type are crucible fragments and sherds of briquetage. The crucible fragments are paralleled by the presence of slag. Further work on the site should take into account the significance of this evidence in establishing the nature of later prehistoric occupation and activity in the area. In addition, attention to the distribution of material

across the site and, in particular, the context of deposition in ditches and pits, might be of significance in establishing regional similarities and/or differences with practices of structured deposition identified elsewhere in England.

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Context	SFN	Trench	Type	Number	Weight	ENV	Vessel part	Date range	Notes
1008		T1	Crucible fragment	1	4	1	Rim	MIA/LIA	Pointed rim, with vitreous slag-like deposit internally, ?crucible
1011	57	T1	Fabric 5	4	17	4	Body sherds	MIA/LIA	Two hard, coarse, hand made sherds
1013	56	T1	Fabric 1A	1	10	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	A hard, sandy textured oxidised fabric containing abundant rounded quartz grains
1013		T1	Fabric 1	1	7	1	Rim 1	MIA/LIA	Rim type 1- see text
1013		T1	Fabric 1A	1	17	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	Part of a crucible
1028	3	TI	Fabric 1	2	58	1	Rim 1	MIA/LIA	Blackened rim, oxidised, dull rd body
1028	95	TI	Crucible fragment	1	12	1	Rim	MIA/LIA	Cf. 1008; vesicular heavily burnt fabric with vitreos depost internally and externally
1028	98	TI	Fabric 5 type	1	9	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	Rather sparser inclusions than in Fabric 5
1031	101	T1	Fabric 1 type	1	2	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	A soft, sandy reduced fabric with a possible deposit on one side
2005		T2	?Briquetage	1	2	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	Notably harder than 6002, thus ?briquetage., soft, oxidised with rock fragments
3002	65	TIII(A)	Fabric 6	1	1	1	Fragment	?	Rounded fragment of oxidised fired clay
3002	67	TIII(A)	Fabric 6 type	4	4	4	Fragments	?	Rounded fragments
3002	68	TIII(A)	Fabric 6	1	1	1	Fragment	?	Rounded fragment of oxidised fired clay
3008	5	TIII	Fabric 6	2	4	2	Fragments	?	Hard, brick-red sandy textured fabric, unidentified/undated
3008	90	TIII	Fabric 6	1	4	1	Body sherd		
3008		T3	Fabric 1	1	6	1	Rim 1A	MIA/LIA	Rim type 1 - see text
3011	40	TIII	?Pottery	4	9	4	U/ID	MIA/LIA	Fired clay around a small angular pebble - see text
3011	49	TIII	Fabric 3 type	15	20	15	Body sherds	MIA/LIA	Fragments and crumbs
3011		T3	Fabric 2	1	8	1	Rim 2	MIA/LIA	Rim type 2 - see text
3011	92	TIII	Fabric 6	1	1	1	Fragment		
3022	9	TIII	Fabric 3	8	14	8	Body sherds	MIA/LIA	Fragments and crumbs with only two showing signs of a surface
3022	10	TIII	Fabric 4	1	7	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	Coarse tempered fabric ?Briquetage
3022	19	TIII	Fabric 3	14	15	14	Body sherds	MIA/LIA	Fragments and crumbs
3022	19	TIII	Fabric 3	1	8	1	Rim	MIA/LIA	A simple rounded rim, undiagnostic
3054	89	TIII (6)	Fabric 3	1	4	1	Rim 3	MIA/LIA	Rim type 3 - see text
6002		T6	Briquetage	1	16	1	Lump	Undated	Soft, oxidised fragment of briquetage with angular rock fragments
MC98 108		TC	Fabric 1 type	1	4	1	Body sherd	MIA/LIA	Occasional angular mineral grains, including mica
U/S		T1	Fabric 1	1	2	1	Body sherd	Undated	Rounded and abraded sherd in a reduced sandy ware
U/S		T1	Fired clay	2	5	2	Body sherds	Undated	Rounded and abraded sherds in a fine red oxidised fabric
	55	TI	Fabric 6 (?Briquetage)	1	2	1	Fragment	Undated	
	93	TIII	Fabric 6	1	1	1	Fragment	Undated	
Total				**77**	**274**	**76**			

Table 1. Later Iron Age pottery from Mellor.