

Report on the Lithic Assemblage from Excavations at Mellor Hillfort

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A total of 39 worked lithic artefacts were analysed from the excavations at Mellor hillfort. Each artefact was numbered and located as to the context from which it came. A listing of each artefact analysed is provided (Appendix 1). It can be seen (table 1) that a significant proportion of the assemblage came from contexts 3011 (n=24) and 3002 (n=9).

Context	No.
1012	1
2005	1
3002	9
3010	1
3011	24
3014	2
3016	1

Table 1: numbers of artefacts analysed from each context.

Raw Materials

The identification of raw materials used is based purely on visual inspection and provides a general overview. The assemblage appears to be dominated by varieties of flint (table 2). No chert or other material could be definitely identified in the assemblage.

	1012	2005	3002	3010	3011	3014	3016	Total
translucent & semi-translucent flint	1		5	1	15	2		24
opaque flint		1	4		6		1	12
uncertain					3			3
total	1	1	9	1	24	2	1	39

Table 2: raw material analysis of the assemblage by context.

The assemblage is dominated by varieties of good quality translucent or semi-translucent brown, or grey-brown flint showing gradations between levels of translucency. The cortex tends to be smooth and nodular, displaying a sharp transition to the non-cortical material. Sources of translucent and semi-translucent material of this kind exist both to the west and east of the Pennines within boulder clay deposits. Within the opaque flint identified are a small group, from context 3002, of quite distinctive mottled grey flint. This material has its parent source in the Cretaceous limestone in the wolds of Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire but has workable secondary sources in the boulder clay deposits along the Trent Valley in Nottinghamshire.

Typology

The assemblage (table 3) contains just two retouched pieces, neither of which can

be regarded as being particularly chronologically sensitive. The debitage does however provide a number of useful observations as to the probable age and character of the assemblage.

	1012	2005	3002	3010	3011	3014	3016	Total
lumps/ nodules		1			2			3
flakes	1		4	1	11		1	18
blades			3		6	1		10
notched flakes					1			1
retouched flakes					1			1
core rejuvenation flakes/ blades			2		2			4
cores					1	1		2
total	1	1	9	1	24	2	1	39

Table 3: typological analysis of the assemblage by context.

The first point to be made is that the assemblage contains a relatively high number of blades to flakes (1.8 flakes for every blade). The small sample size limits what can be done statistically, but an analysis of the dimensions of the complete unretouched flakes and blades (table 4) does indicate that the assemblage contain a high proportion of relatively 'bladed' pieces (Pitts and Jacobi 1979) possibly indicative of a Mesolithic date.

Breadth / Length	0 – 0.2	0.2 - 0.4	0.4 – 0.6	0.6 – 0.8	0.8 – 1.0	>1.0
No.	0	1	1	3	3	3

Table 4 : analysis of breadth / length for complete unretouched flakes and blades

The 'bladed' character of the assemblage is reinforced by the presence of two blade cores (no's 17 and 22), weighing 27.9gm and 25.5gm respectively. Both of these would also fit easily into a Mesolithic assemblage. To these we can also add the four core rejuvenation flakes/ blades identified in the assemblage. These include a typical platform removal ('core tablet') (no. 3), a platform edge removal (no.35) and a plunging blade (no. 6) – all indicative of a core and blade technology.

	1012	3002	3010	3011	3014	3016	Total
Primary (>50% cortex)		1		4			5
Secondary (<50% but >0% cortex)		3	1	7			11

Tertiary (no cortex)	1	3		6	1	1	12
Total	1	7	1	17	1	1	28

Table 5 : stage analysis of all unretouched flakes and blades by context

Stage analysis of the unretouched flake and blade assemblage (table 5) reveals that a high proportion is corticated, with primary and secondary pieces accounting for c. 57%.

Discussion

Although the assemblage of 39 pieces is a small one, the evidence represented is quite informative. The assemblage contains evidence for quite a range of flaking activity including the maintenance, use and discard of blade cores along with the production of blades and flakes including a significant number of cortical pieces. The bladed character of the unretouched flake/ blade assemblage, along with the blade cores and core rejuvenation material may be indicative of a Mesolithic date. In contrast, it is not possible to point to any clear indications of activity relating to the Neolithic or Bronze Age periods.

Certainly, the use of translucent and semi-translucent brown and grey flint for Later Mesolithic assemblages in the region is well documented, as at Red Rafter (Stonehouse 1976), and at Dunford Bridge A and B (Radley et al., 1974). It is also interesting that context 3002 also produced a small collection of mottled grey, opaque Wolds flint. This material is usually associated with Earlier Mesolithic activity in the area (Jacobi, 1978; Radley and Mellars 1964; Myers 1989), and may be related to the presence near-by at Shaw Cairn, Mellor Moor, of further probable Earlier Mesolithic material (Myers nd).

In conclusion, the evidence may suggest the presence of a Later Mesolithic site at which a fairly broad range of knapping activities were undertaken. There may also be hints of an Earlier Mesolithic presence in the assemblage.

Bibliography

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