

Pottery from excavations at Hrísbú

2002-2008

A total of 164 fragments of pottery were found during the period of 2002-2008. Although found in all areas, all of the material is treated as a single assemblage, deriving from the contexts dated to post 1500. The majority of the pottery is highly fragmented and flaked. The exceptions are the fragments found in the probable drainage pits, which show a high percentage of refitting. The assemblage was split into broad fabric types and discussed in more detail below.

Most of the ceramics are refined industrial **white earthenwares**, either plain or undecorated. Decorative styles include transfer printed (or tissue printed), painted, sponged and banded wares. The transfer printed designs are of a wide variety both in colour and decoration motives. An example is an almost complete soup plate (2008-21-221) with a transfer printed design in black colour. The central motif is a mixture of Chinese elements placed in English panoramic scenery. The rim band consists of a floral mesh type pattern and scenic vignettes placed at regular intervals. Three set of repair hole are visible; two on the rim and one on the base/central motif. Wedgwood produced a similar central scene under the name “Brussels”. Based on the dates of production for the decoration motives and colour the plate dates to 1830-1860. Polychrome hand-painted decoration is also present in the pottery assemblage from Hrísbú comprised of floral decoration in blue, red and green colour originating from probably Belgium/Germany or Denmark (e.g. 2007-21-045 and 2007-21-049).

Table 1 Pottery fragment count for excavation years according to ware type.

Excavation year	Fragment count according to ware type			
	Redware	Stoneware	Whiteware	Porcelain
2001	-	-	2	-
2002	-	-	2	-
2003	2	-	9	-
2005	-	-	8	-
2006	-	1	5	-
2007	3	-	46	-
2008	1	1	48	36
Total	5	2	120	36

Four of six **red earthenware** fragments are from the same vessel. It is a dish or large bowl with remains of white slip trail-line decoration under clear lead glaze on the interior. One of the rim fragments (2003-41-035) has a repair hole drilled through the body. All the fragments have splashes and drops of clear lead glaze on the exteriors, which could be an indication of poorer workmanship, thus lesser quality of the vessel. Place of origin is Holland or Germany. Unfortunately, this type of earthenware vessels changed very little since the middle ages. A more precise dating would acquire further detailed analysis.

Only two **stoneware** fragments are present at Hrísbú belonging to two different vessels. 2006-27-066 is a body fragment of a Westerwald ware, probably a jug/bottle or chamber pot, although the fragment is too small for certain vessel identification or a more precise dating. There is a small part of the characteristic cobalt blue decoration visible on the exterior of the fragment. Westerwald jugs have

been found at many excavations in Iceland and are even listed in church inventories (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1996: 101-102).

Fragment 2008-21-242 is half of an inkwell with light brown salt glaze on exterior and one incised line just above the base. This type of stoneware inkwells was very common during the nineteenth century. Their shape changed very little through time thus making dating difficult (ibid.: 106). Similar inkwells have been found at Austurstræti-Lækjargata, and Tjarnarbíó in Reykjavík, and Skálholt (Colic 2009a; Colic 2009b).

The **porcelain** pottery fragments all came from the 2008-year's campaign. The thirty-six sherds belong to four different vessels, from the same context (C 171), a fill of one of the four drainage pits. There are three tea/coffee cups and one saucer. Two of the tea/coffee cups have polychrome decal floral decorations, dating to after 1890. The third one has a gold gilded line over the glaze. The last porcelain vessel (2008-21-223) is a porcelain saucer decorated with "Blue Fluted Plain" or "onion flower" motives and is of Danish or German origin dating to the nineteenth century. A maker's mark is found on the exterior of the base depicting either number 10 or 16.

Other notable characteristic of the assemblage is the presence of repair holes. One of the vessels is an almost complete black transfer printed refined white earthenware soup plate with three sets of repair holes. Several of other fragments show unsuccessful drilling attempts.

Dating of the assemblage is broad, spanning the whole of the 19th and early 20th century, with a few possible exceptions (e.g. red earthenware and the Westerwald fragments). Unfortunately, no specific stratigraphic sequences are available for a more precise dating. All contexts containing pottery fragments are from the phase dating to post-1500 Katla eruption.

A more closed group would be the ceramic material found in four straight narrow trenches, running from N-NW to SSE. The trenches widen to the south and extend to outside the excavation. Starting from the highest elevation point and their orientation, these trenches are interpreted as an attempt to drain the upper home field. Context 2008-195 contained more than half of the ceramic assemblage; seventy-five fragments belonging to nine individual vessels, including all the porcelain finds. Other finds include modern glass fragments, and iron objects. The pottery fragments from the ditches date to the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The high percentage of refitting, together with the type of vessels suggest that the deposition was a single event rather than a process of accumulation. The presence of the heavily repaired transfer printed white earthenware soup plate amongst the more modern vessels would suggest discard after an accident resulting in their simultaneous breakage. Alternatively, simply a replacement of the old tableware vessels with newly purchased ones.

The pottery assemblage from Hrísrú represents the vessels and ware types commonly found in Icelandic households of the 19th and early 20th century. Similar pottery fragments have been found during excavations of Austurstræti-Lækjargata, Tjarnarbíó, Garðarstræti in Reykjavík; Skálholt, Skútústaðir and Bessastaðir amongst others.

References:

Colic, E. (2009a) 'Finds from Tjarnarbíó', in: Sveinbjarnarson, Ó. G. *Fornleifauppgröftur í Tjarnarbíói, Reykjavík*, Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands FS436-08201

Colic, E (2009b) 'Viðauki I. Gripir', in: Snæsdóttir, M. and Hansson, O. *Fornleifauppgröftur á Lóðum Austurstrætis 22 og Lækjargötu 2*, Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands FS437-08311

Sveinbjarnardóttir, G. (1996) *Leirker á Íslandi. Pottery found in excavations in Iceland*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornleifafélag and Þjóðminjasafn Íslands

Pictures:



2008-21-221: An almost complete soup plate with a transfer printed design in black colour. The central motif is a mixture of Chinese elements placed in English panoramic scenery. Dating ca. 1830-1860.



2008-21-222: tea/coffee cups with polychrome decal floral decorations, dating to after 1890.



2008-21-223: Saucer with “Blue Fluted Plain” or “onion flower” motives of Danish or German origin dating to the nineteenth century



2008-21-242 is a half inkwell with light brown salt glaze on exterior and one incised line just above the base. This type of stoneware inkwells was very common during the nineteenth century.



2006-27-066 is a body fragment of a Westerwald ware, probably a jug/bottle or chamber pot, although the fragment is too small for certain vessel identification or a more precise dating.



2003-41-035 is a dish or large bowl with remains of white slip trail-line decoration under clear lead glaze on the interior. The rim fragments has a repair hole drilled through the body. Place of origin is Holland or Germany. This type of earthenware vessels changed very little since the middle ages.