Some reflections on the Riemst - Caestert / Visé – Caster fortification in Belgium, part 2: on Iron Age/ Roman pottery shards

Summary

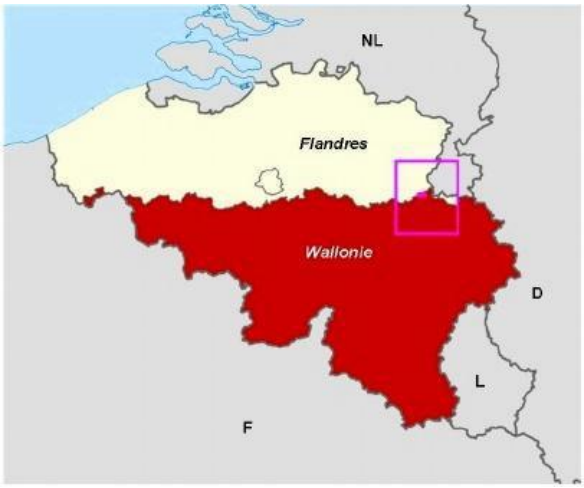
When Caesar revenged the Eburones in 53BC, he promised:"…the name of that state may be annihilated for such a crime…" suggesting no trace would ever be found of the tribe. He almost succeeded, almost. Because we still can find traces of the Eburones, even at the surface. This report is about recording information about the only 23 pottery shards found on the surface at the Iron Age fortification of Riemst- Caestert / Visé Caster in Belgium.*

Résumé

Lorsque César vengée les Eburons à 53 av. J.-C. , il a promis: » ... le nom de cet état soit être annihilé pour un tel crime ... » suggérant aucune trace ne jamais sera retrouveée de la tribu. Il a presque réussi, presque. Car nous pouvons encore trouver des traces des Eburones, même à la surface. Ce rapport traite l'enregistrement d'informations sur les seuls 23 tessons de poterie trouvés à la surface des fortifications de l' Age de fer à Visé - Caster en Belgique.*

** Julius Caesar, Gallic War 6.34*

Keywords: Iron Age, fortification, pottery, shards, surface finds, Caestert



The location of Caestert at the border between Flanders and Wallonie, just south of the Dutch city of Maastricht; the location is part of the communities of Visé and Riemst (Belgium)

Introduction

In some cases surface archaeological finds could contribute to the knowledge of a site or period: i.e. in case of discovering rare objects like human bones from a very distant past at a surface or when

archaeological evidence from excavations is rather poor in findings. In general, surface finds being *ex-situ* objects are regarded as completely irrelevant, even when officially reported to archaeological services. At the Iron Age site of Visé – *Caster* / Riemst **–** *Caestert* in Belgium, surface collected pottery shards however could provide some *additional information* to the knowledge about local pottery use derived from various excavations that took place in the area. This report is only meant to conserve and share information about some relevant surface finds which explains the large number of images in the appendix of this report.

Research and methods

In inhabited Iron Age or Roman settlements it is often not too difficult to notice pottery shards at the surface e.g. from molehills beside footpaths, where the moles did some sort of digging from deeper horizons and made artifacts visible at the surface. Some examples where this is the case are the protected Roman site at the hill of Vireux - Molhain and the Iron Age complex of Bourguignon -lès-Morey in France, which forts were inhabited over longer periods and where shards rather easily could be noticed at the surface as evidence for large scale use of the fortification. Such situations are also known from e.g. Iron age site Camp Hill Kirklington (GB) in the late 60s, where it is said "… a great deal of pottery shards were found on the surface of the hill over about 50 acres and especially near short lengths of ditches"...(Simmons, 1967). Another example in a complete different context – in this case the spread of manure - is the many surface finds of pottery shards found at the surface of Grassington Yorkshire used to date occupation of the site (Reed, 1990). The Iron Age fortification of Riemst - *Caestert* in Belgium however is quite different. Pottery shards or other remains are almost absent from the surface in the entire ca. 20 ha area of the southern part of the fortification (of a total area of ca. 35 ha); leaving possible traces from the Iron Age or Roman period exclusively to excavations that took place in the area. Such excavations took place between 1973 and 1975 by Heli Roosens with a result of a total of 36 Iron Age shards of handmade pottery (Verhoeven, 2008: Appendix 3), which is also a rather 'poor' result in relation with such large fortification. From these 36 shards, 18 are handmade red to red brown pottery, which is typical for the Iron Age. In the evaluation of Verhoeven in 2012, during excavation in a ditch, three additional shards of handmade Iron Age pottery have been found (Verhoeven, 2012:50).

The question was, if any evidence from the surface of the Iron Age fortification and the first shards have been found by accident beside a footpath in 2011. Other shards were surface collected in different periods of the years 2012-2015, either from the surface of the top part of the wall or were visible in mill hopes or at – less leveled – higher eroding surfaces. All objects were found by the naked eye, which is very time – consuming. Shards often mimic small loam chunks, natural stones and even tree bark by similar textures and colors. The shards have been washed, labeled, measured and photographed. Some macroscopic images have been made with help of a binocular microscope with magnification 10-40 x.

Results

A total of 23 pottery shards have been found, all with characteristics for the Iron Age – Roman period (ca. 100 BC – 50 AD), listed in table 1. No shards have been found from other periods.

Table 1. Overview of pottery shards from Riemst - *Caestert* (B)

IdNr.	Dimensions (LxWxH)[1] In cm	Descriptions	Color	Period[2]	Context
CAS01	5.4 x 4.2 x 1.0	Outside grey-brown, stripes, red inclusions Temper with quarts Linear grooves	Grey brown	Iron Age	Wall
CAS02	5.5 x4.0 x 1.3	Inner side burned; raw surface (‘*besmeten*’) possible fingertip impression; jar/cooking pot	Light brown	Iron Age	Wall
CAS03	5.0 x 3.3 x 1.1	Shard with glued loam; fresh break showing burned Inner side. Temper with quartz	Dark yellow-brown	Iron Age	Wall
CAS04	6.0 x 4.3 x 0.8	Combed outside, Red inclusions	Light brown rose	Iron Age	Eroded surface
CAS05	6.0 x 4.3 x 0.8	Grey (-ware)fine tempered, Red inclusions and quartz; small cracks on inner side Smooth	Grey and light grey	Iron age	Wall
CAS06	2.1 x 1.9 x 0.9 (f)	Outside grey smooth surface, inner sided black	grey	Iron Age	Wall
CAS07	3.0 x 2.0 x 0.9	Inner side burned black, temper with very fine rounded quartz	Light brown	Iron Age	Mills hope
CAS08	3.0 x 2.5 x 0.5	Smooth tempered ware, temper visible at the outside of shard; Mayen Ceramic?	Pink light brown	Roman	Eroded surface
CAS09	4.3 x3.7 x 1.0	Color/ texture like CAS02/CAS013; large jar/cooking pot		Iron Age	Wall
CAS010	3.7 x 2.2 x 0.6	Fragment of (Bottom) shard; smooth; inner core?	Black-brown	Iron Age?	Eroded surface

CAS011	2.7 x 2.5 x 0.7	Round shaped shard , grey core, red brown outer wall; temper with red grog and black inclusions; 'game disc type' Local ware	Light red-brown	Roman	Eroded surface
CAS012	3.0 x 1.4 x 1.2	One side smooth surface; Burned, thick wall, tempering with visible quartz; inner core?	Black	Iron Age?	Mills hope
CAS013	4.6 x 2.6 x 1.0	Color /texture like CAS02 and CAS09 ; large jar/cooking pot		Iron Age	Wall
CAS014	5.8 x3.9 x1.0	Smooth surface; grey stains on cross section, temper with quartz, inner wall dark grey 'paint' at surface	Grey	Iron age/ Roman	Wall
CAS015	3.7 x 4.0 x 0.7	Soft red ware; mica inclusions.	Orange-red	Iron age/ Roman	Eroded surface
CAS016	2.6 x 2.3 x 0.7	Rim shard red -pottery	Orange red	Iron age/ Roman	Eroded surface
CAS017	4.0 x2.0 x 0.8	Outer wall red/ inner core grey		Iron Age	wall
CAS018	2.0 x 1.0 x 0.6	Red pottery, smooth	Orange- red	Iron age/ Roman	**Eroded surface**
CAS019	2.2 x 2.0 x 0.6	Red pottery, smooth	Orange- red	Iron age/ Roman	Eroded surface
CAS020	1.4 x 1.5 x 0.6	Red pottery, smooth Dark red inclusions	Orange- red	Iron age/ Roman	Eroded surface
CAS21	3.0 x2.0 x 0.9	Inner surface smooth	Black/ Brown	Iron Age	Wall
CAS22	3.3 x1.5 x0.9	Inner surface smooth and fired with visible inclusions in temper	Black	Iron age?	Wall
CAS23	3.3x1.7 x1.0	Brown pottery many black inclusions	Brown	Iron Age/Roman?	Wall

1) Largest measured dimensions 2) The period is based on characteristics of pottery type

Context of finds

For obvious reasons (treasure hunting, etc) the exact find locations of the shards are not other specified in this report than by the global context.

Weathering

Without exception, all shards show intense weathering, either due to fire or to erosion circumstances. Shards are fragmented so only the inner core sustained, or show rounded edges on the break due to long time weathering at the surface and in the soil. Several shards show (longitude) surface cracks, probably caused by frost. Surface of shards show features that are rounded, loam is often glued at the surface.

Pottery types and characteristics of shards

The shards give only some information on types: the shards are of handmade pottery or some red pottery, with main distinction its color, its texture and wall thickness. Shards of handmade pottery have either smooth or raw cast outside, with often reddish or light brown oxidized surfaces (which in many cases is weathered), both vary in thickness between 0.8 and 1.0 cm. They would have belonged to bigger jars/ cooking pots. Most shards are wall shards, only one shard is a rim shard of a small cup and one is a possible part of a bottom. The shards have similar appearance as those found during the excavations e.g. from ditch 2010-2, from feature 7, image 31, p.50 in RAAP report 2162 (Verhoeven, 2012). Nine shards (CAS01, CAS02, CAS03, CAS04, CAS06,CAS07,CAS09, CAS013, CAS017) belong definitely to the red to red brown handmade pottery type typical for the Iron Age, in absence of any further characteristics they origin from the broad Middle- Late Iron Age period (Verhoeven , 2008). Four shards (CAS010, CAS012, CAS021 and CAS022) are black burned inner cores, with no further characteristics which make them difficult to date, but probably are from the Late Iron Age too.

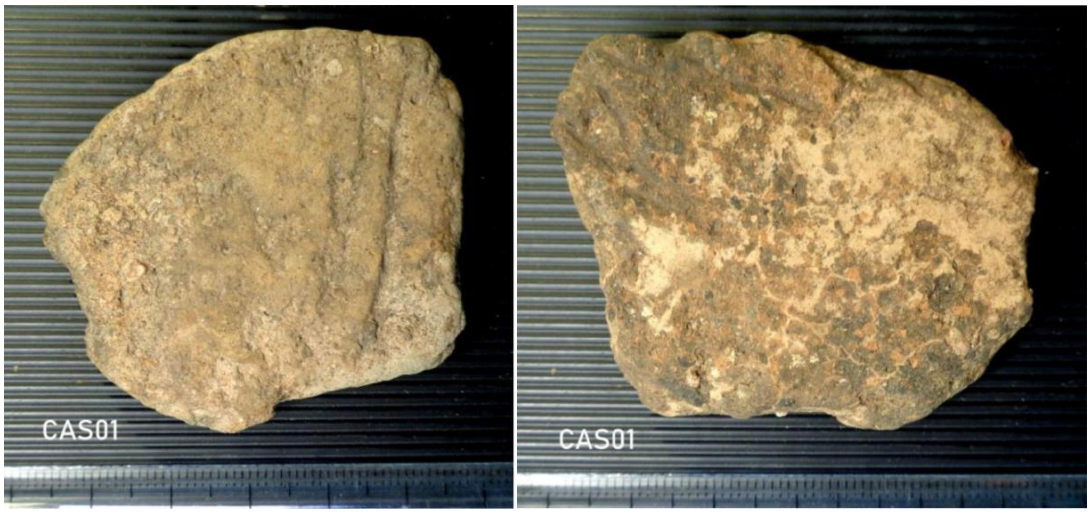
One shard (CAS01, probably CAS07) shows grooves; but the rough, random incised scratches which might appear vertical, diagonal or arched are thought to be performed for practical purposes - handling rather than decorating. Incisions at the shoulder of pottery however are an indication for Late Iron Age pottery (Bogaert, 2007). One shard (CAS02) shows a small round impression at the outer wall, probably a finger impression, which is a typical Iron Age decoration. Only one shard could be identified as a rim shard (CAS016), showing a simple rounded straight rim. The presence of low gradient mica in the temper (CAS015) could suggest the pottery is not a local type; probably these are a type of *Terra rubra* or Central Gaulish ware (Freestone and Rigby, 1986; see also Biddulph, Compton and Martin, 2015). One shard (CAS09) is containing a piece of charcoal, used as a temper. Red grog and black inclusions found in CAS05 and CAS011 are common as temper in Late Iron Age- and Roman pottery (like Roman grog tempered ware e.g. *mortaria* of the MO-MAGR groups (Willems, 2005) and those described by Marney (Marney, 1989)) and these shards can be attributed to the Late Iron Age to Roman period. The shards CAS05 and CAS014 are both quite different in appearance compared to the rest; they are not only the largest shards in dimensions of all shards

found at the surface, they are more regular in thickness (visible on the break) and have smooth surfaces. For all images and more details of the shards, see Appendix.

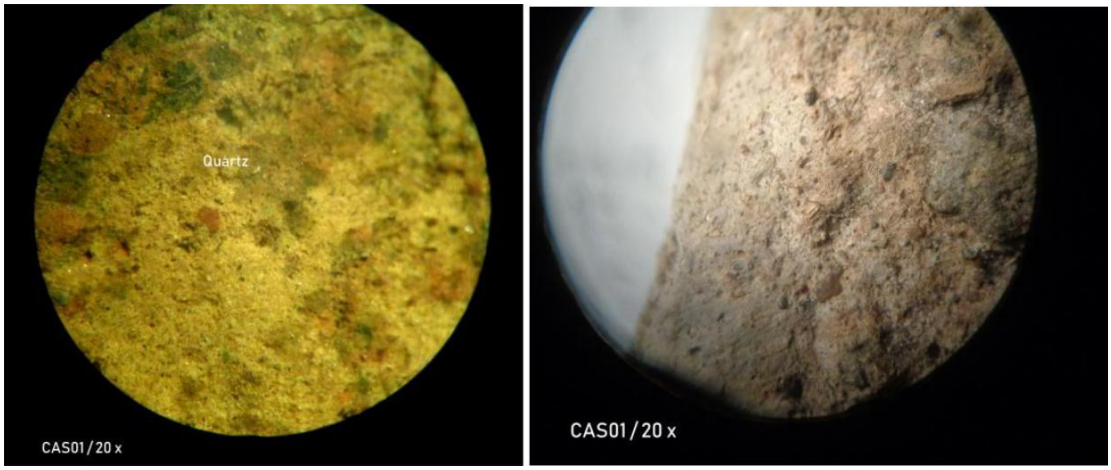
Discussion

The question is why we (usually) do not notice Iron Age shards at the surface of the Riemst - *Caestert* - fortification like in several other inhabited Iron Age or Roman fortifications, where we might notice them sometimes rather easy besides the footpaths in molehills or just outcropping at eroded surfaces. A first conclusion might be due to the land- use during the more than twenty centuries after the Iron Age fortification has been destroyed. A large part of the area has been leveled by the Romans to become a Roman military camp - a *castrum* , which gave Caestert /Caster it's name– it's possible most traces from the surface already have been wiped out. In later periods, from the middle Ages and beyond, the fortification possessed a castle and was visited and used several times for large scale military camps, even during the last World Wars. Possible shards at the surface would not long last under the shoes of soldiers, horses and cannons. In later periods, parts of the surface are reforested or used for agriculture; both cases negatively affect the quality of archaeological remains at the surface. The area is 'undermined' by a large tunnel system for marl mining, which cuased many collapses so the surface has been seriously damaged at many places. Gravels at the surface of large parts of the area show us how the top loess horizons have been removed – especially in areas closer to the rampart wall in the south – where the surface partially has collapsed creating large sinkholes where they filled the underlying mining tunnels. Back in 2015, some of the slopes of the largest stable sinkholes incidentally have been surface inspected, but not a single shard or any archaeological find has been made in that area. The lack of shards at the surface fits in an almost total lack of finds at the entire surface, including the lack of metal finds, which makes *Caestert* an unclear and insecure candidate for *Atuatuca* (Verhoeven, 2008, 2011). Contrarily, at the same time, the lack of any surface finds at this location could also mean Caesar did a 'good job' in trying to annihilate the Eburones tribe and in that case Caestert would be a good example how he almost succeeded in it. A second possible conclusion would be the site has only poorly been inhabited during the Iron Age, or would have had another (side-) function than habitation (religious, flight fortification). One of the direct explanations for lack of surface finds would be the *leveling* of the surface by the Romans, carried out for the construction / rebuilding of the defensive 7 meters high rampart, after the demolition of the Celtic fort. Possible finds would have ended up being buried in horizons somewhere deep in the wall, after being burned by the Romans, than crushed by the leveling process, mixed with gravels which is disastrous for all pottery, but especially for soft baked Iron Age pottery. This conclusion seems to be at least partially justified as indeed shards could be observed at some locations, sometimes spontaneously eroding from inner parts of the wall (Groen, 2014). Deteriorated inner black cores from pottery shards show how shards could slowly change beyond recognition. So, in case of eroding or 'working' horizons there is still a real chance to find (limited) archaeological correlate from the Iron Age – Roman period, right at the surface. The Iron Age fortification might still carry many traces that remain unnoticed because they are very difficult to notice or feature at unexpected locations. Even though all these objects are *ex-situ*, they might provide (some) new information about the interesting history in this area.

Appendix: Images of all shards from *table 1* viewed at both sides, cross -sections (except for CAS06 and CAS012 being inner wall fragments) and macroscopic images of various phenomena (temper, weathering, grooves)



Images (001) (002): CAS01, exterior wall shard, with parallel grooves and inner side wall shard; heavy weathering at both sides



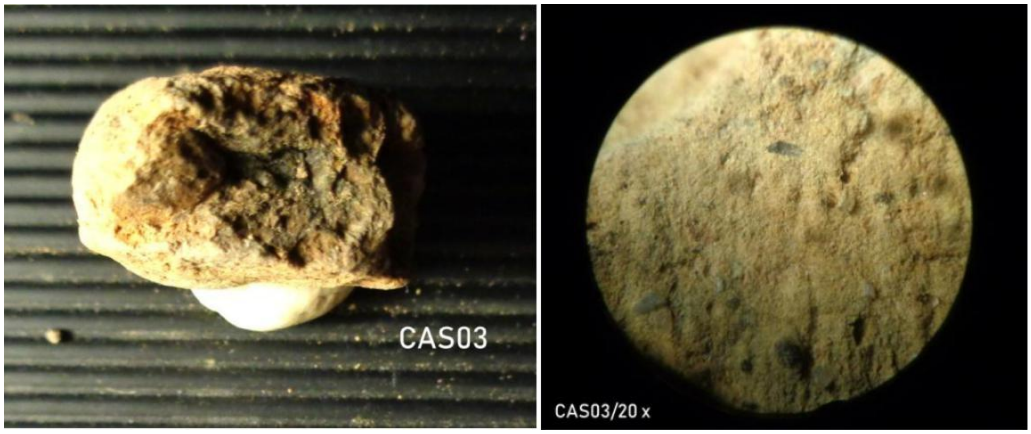
Images (003) (004): CAS01- MACRO (grog) temper with sand, containing quartz and dark red inclusions

Image (005): CAS01, cross section

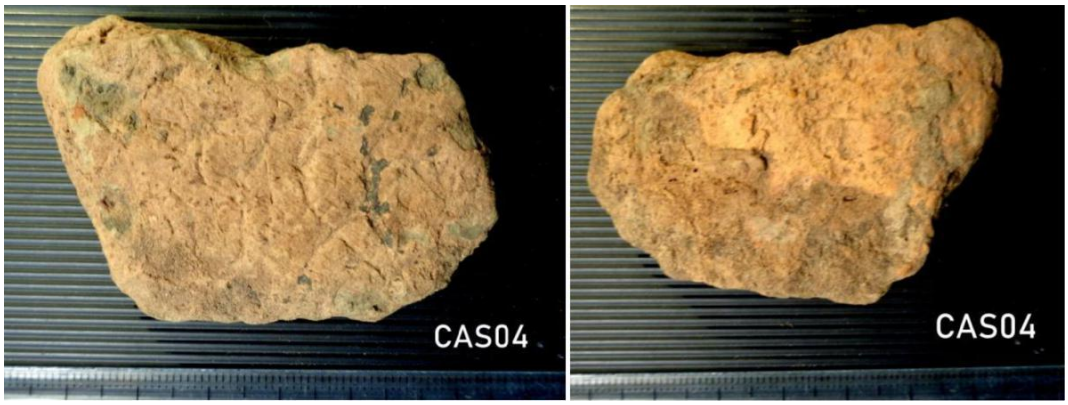
Images (006) (007): CAS02, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard. Possible fingerprint imprint on exterior of the shard

Images (008) (009): CAS02- MACRO weathering cracks on surface and cross-section

Images (010) (011): CAS03, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard. The break is fresh.



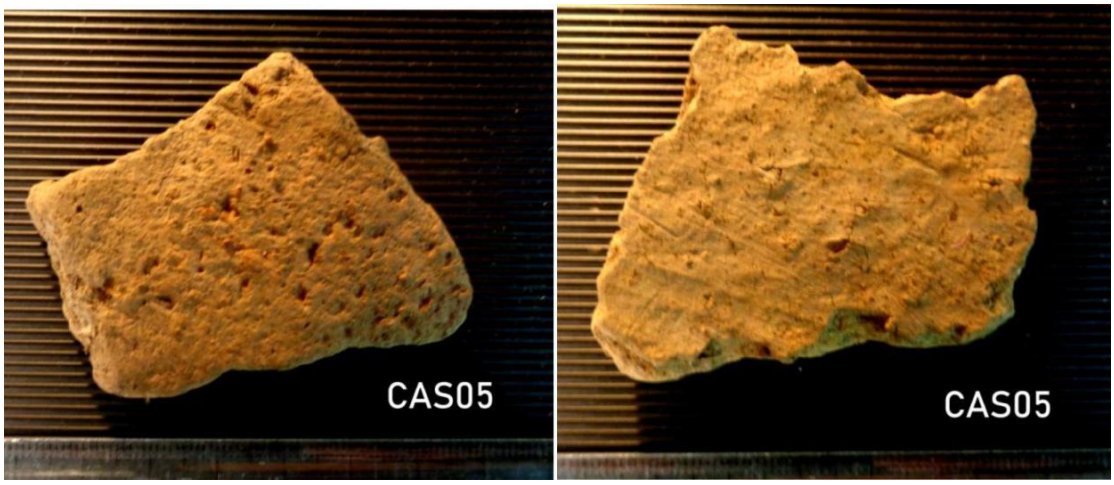
Images (012 (013): CAS 03, transverse cross-section shard (fragment) of fresh break and CAS03-MACRO macroscopic view of temper visible at the surface (outside of shard)



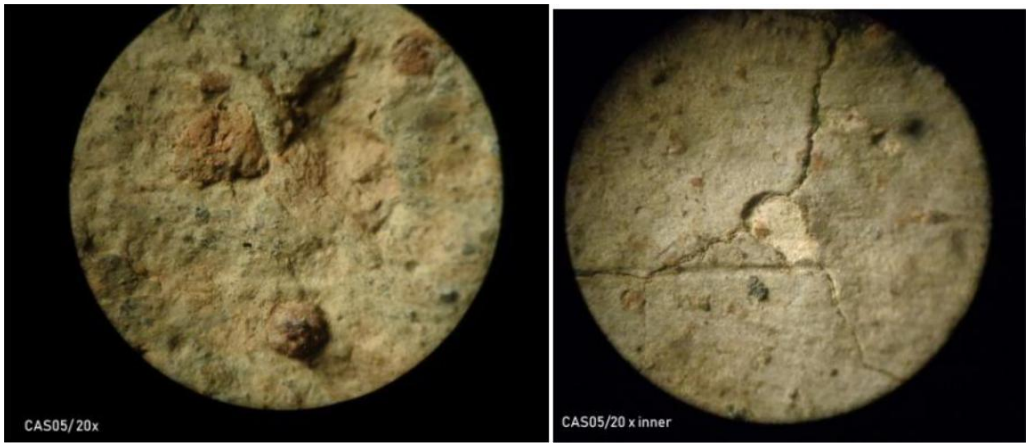
Images (014) (015): CAS04, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

Images (016) (017): CAS04- MACRO Combed effect and quartz on inner side with combed groove pattern

Image (018): CAS04, Cross section



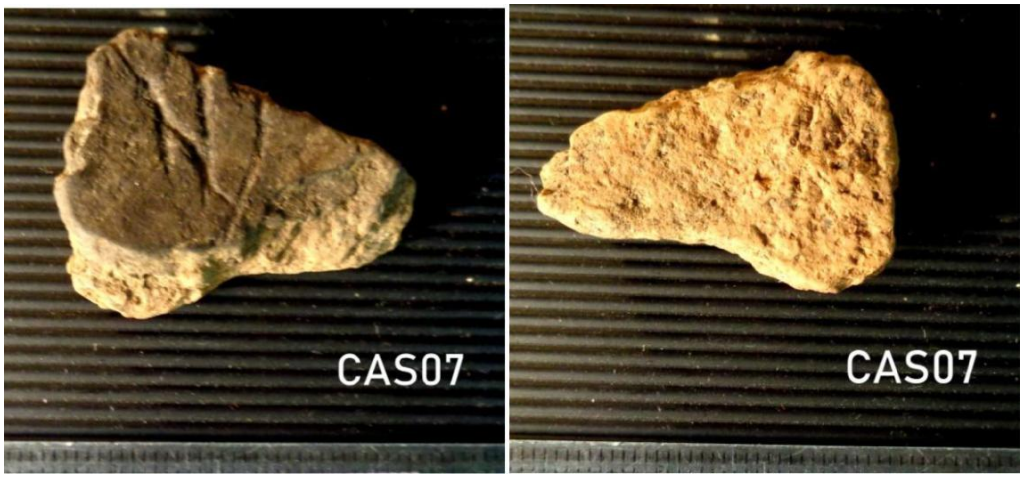
Images (019) (020): CAS05, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard



Images (021) (022): CAS05- MACRO, red grog inclusions outer wall and cracks with (volcanic) black inclusions at inner side of wall shard

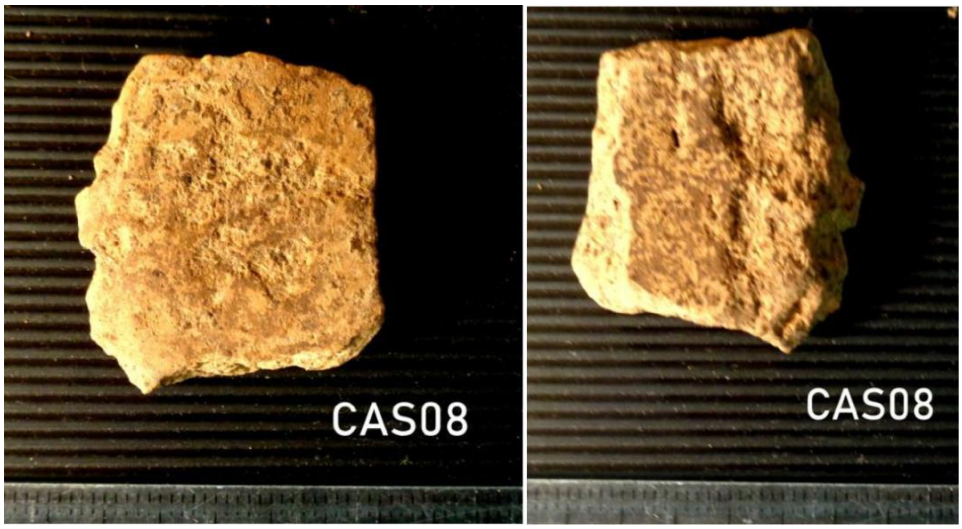
Image (023): CAS05, cross section

Images (024) (025): CAS06, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

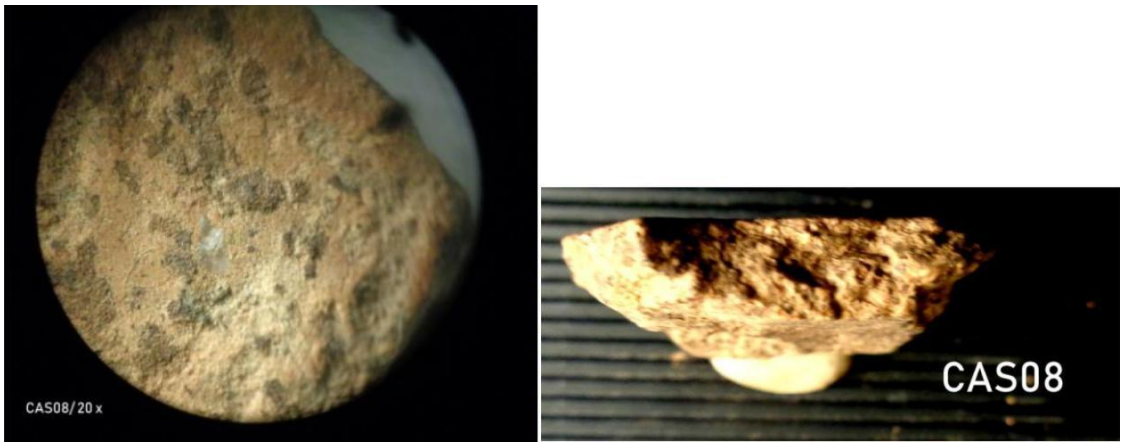


Images (026) (027): CAS07, inner side wall shard, exterior wall shard

Image (028): CAS07, transverse cross-section shard



Images (029) (030): CAS08, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

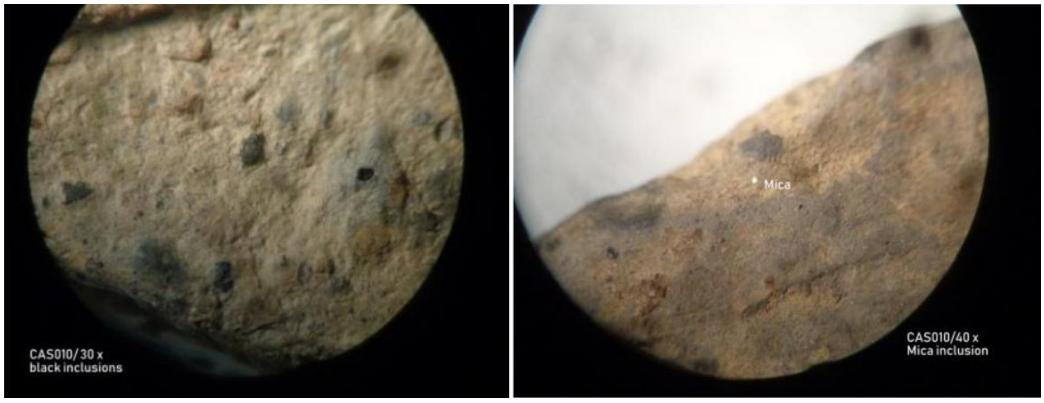


Images (031) (032): CAS08- MACRO, translucent quartz and black inclusions in temper and cross section

Images (033) (034): CAS09, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

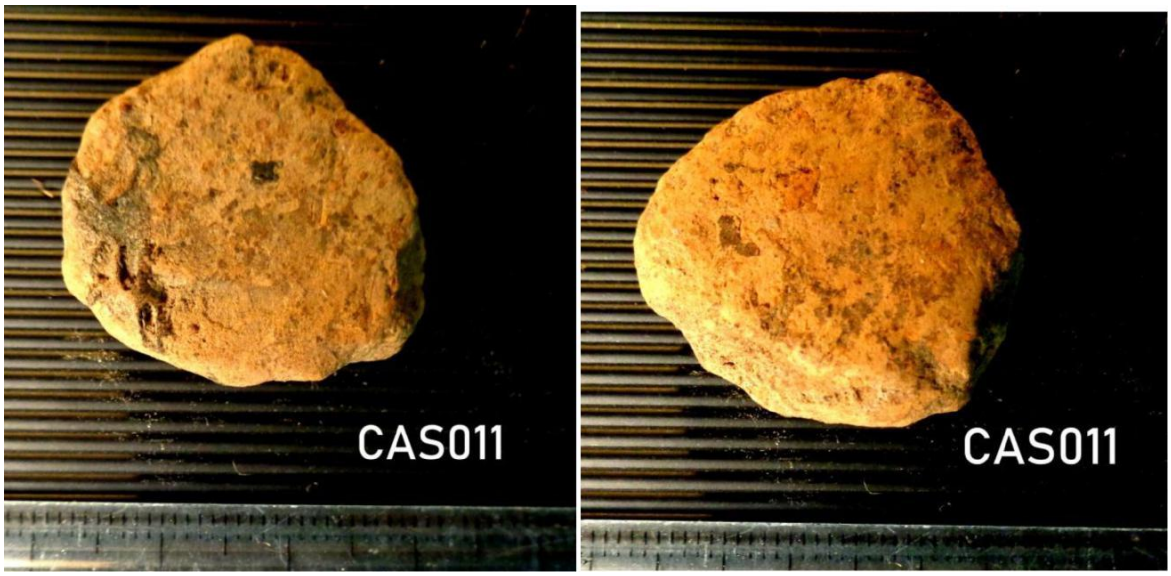
Images (035) (036): CAS09- MACRO Charcoal inclusion in temper and cross section

Images (037) (038): CAS010, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard



Images (039) (040): CAS010- MACRO, Black inclusions in temper, silver mica in temper

Image (041): CAS010, cross section



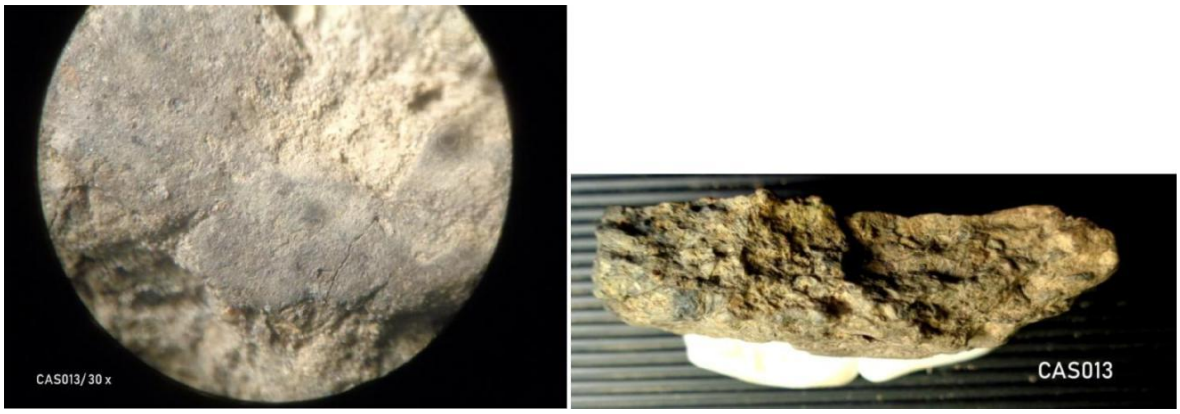
Images (042) (043): CAS011, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard, red grog tempering at the surface

Image (044): CAS011- MACRO Black inclusions and red grog in temper

Image (046): CAS011, cross section

Images (047) (048): CAS012, exterior of wall shard, inside wall shard, burned; outside smooth, inside might be fragmented (remains of only the inner part of shard)

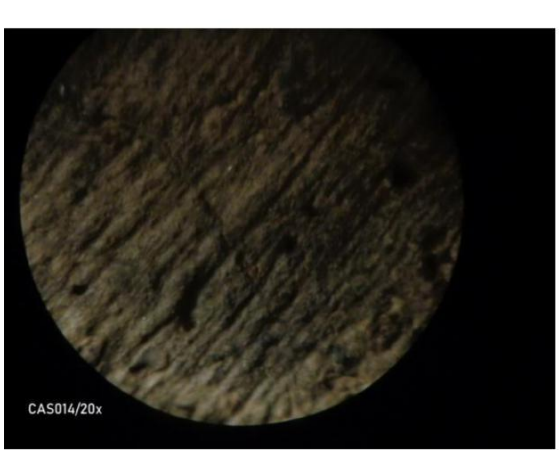
Images (049) (050): CAS013, exterior wall shard partially covered with the red-brown raw cast, inner side wall shard black and damaged



Images (051) (052): CAS013- MACRO remains of inner smooth surface (original surface almost absent) and cross section

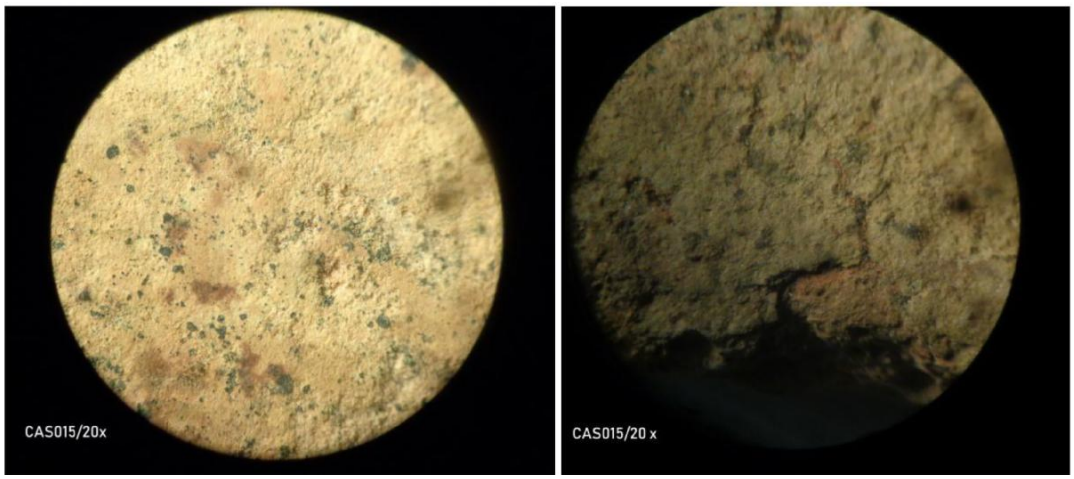
Images (053) (054): CAS014, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

Image (055): CAS014, transverse cross-section (original break)



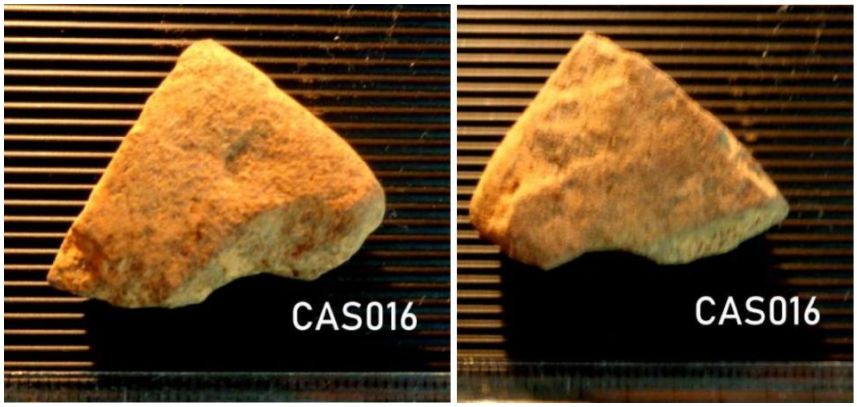
Images (056) (057): CAS014- MACRO combed pattern outer side of shard and light grey inner side with black inclusions

Images (058) (059): CAS015, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard, with possible twisted cord impression



Images (060) (061): CAS015 - MACRO Black inclusions outer wall, right image showing some 'layering' of shard

Image (062): CAS015, cross section



Images (063) (064): CAS016, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

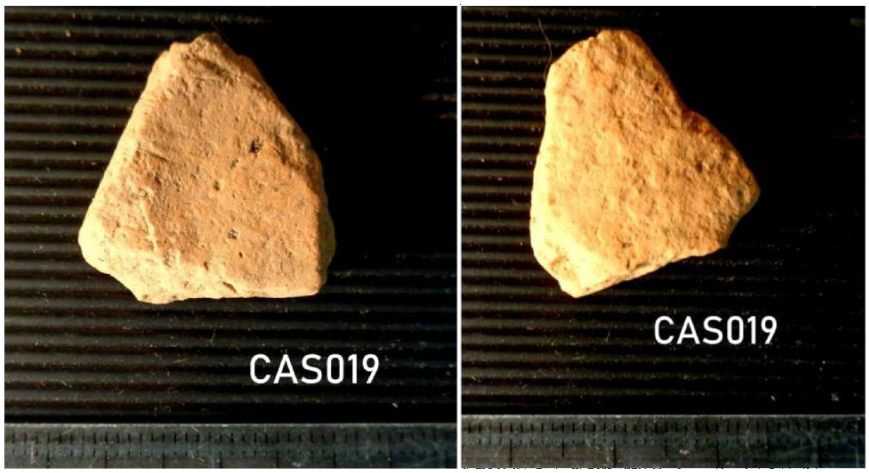
Image (065): CAS016, Shape of rim and cross section

Images (066) (067): CAS017, inner side wall shard and exterior wall shard

Images (068) (069): CAS017- MACRO Features of smooth black surface and cross- section

Images (070) (071): CAS018, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

Image 071a: CAS 018, cross section



Images (072) (073): CAS019, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

Images (074) (075): CAS019- MACRO Missing temper inclusions at smooth surface; cross section

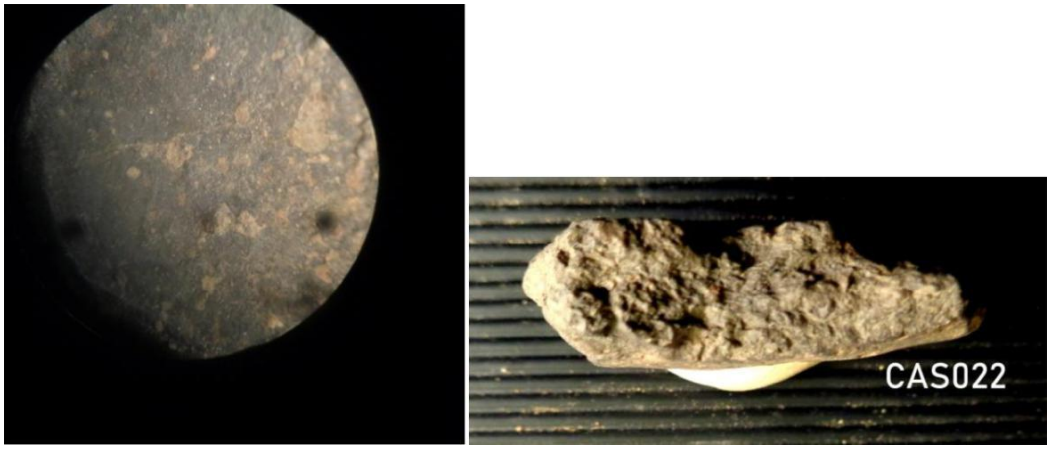
Images (076) (077): CAS020, exterior wall shard, inner side wall shard

Image (078): CAS020, cross section

Images (079) (080): CAS021, outside wall and inner side of wall shard

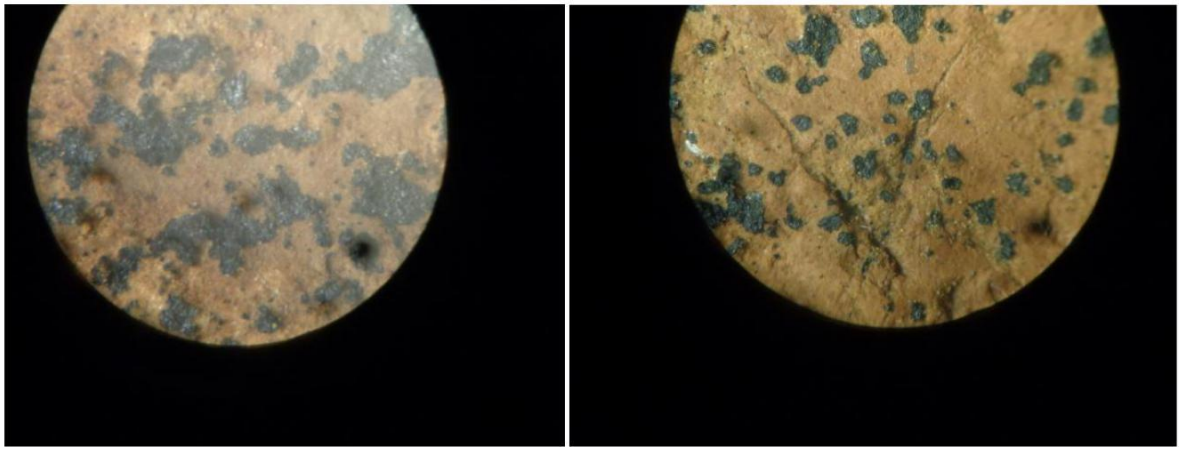
Image (081): CAS021, cross section

Images (082) (083): CAS022, outside wall and inner side of wall shard



Images (084) (085): CAS022 -MACRO Inclusions in fired inner side and cross section

Images (086) (087): CAS023, outside wall and inner side of wall shard



Images (088) (089): CAS023 -MACRO Black pattern of inclusions and black inclusions with typical surface cracks

Image (090): CAS023, Cross section

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