The shale, jet and amber

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An assemblage of 49 fragments from 39 shale, jet and amber artefacts was recovered. This assemblage mainly comprises jewellery including armlets, finger rings and beads but there is also a single spindle whorl. All this material is from Roman period contexts (where phased) except for a single armlet from zone MFNA and two from zone MFP, which are of late Iron Age date.

The jet and shale was identified by eye and with the aid of a x10 magnification hand lens only. It is possible that some could be reclassified as other types of shiny black minerals with closer analysis but that was beyond the scope of this project. The assemblage was jointly recorded by Naomi Payne and Ruth Shaffrey and this report was written by Ruth Shaffrey.

Table 1: summary of shale, jet and amber

Function	No. fragments	No. objects
Armlet	38	29
Bead	4	4
Finger ring	6	5
Spindle whorl	1	1
TOTAL	49	39

Finger rings

A total of five finger rings were recovered, with plain oval bezels (where these survive) and D-sectioned bands. They range in internal diameter from 10-18mm and one of the rings has radiating linear ridges away from the bezel (SF2866). Four of the rings appear to be of jet and one of shale (SF5192).

Table 2: finger rings

Zone	Ctx	Feature	SF	%	Date	Notes	Size
MF04	9308	Layer	2866	10	undated	Probable bezel has a central nipple and radiating linear ridges, flanked by a pair of transverse linear ridges, with longitudinal ridges on the other side	
MF07	15161	Cobble layer	5192	30	RB	Plain with D-shaped cross-section	Internal diam: c 18mm x w: 5mm, d: 3mm
MF02	18026	Layer	1661	50	RB	Plain oval bezel, narrowing slightly at the shoulder, with shallow groove. Hoop with D-shaped cross-section, thickening beyond the groove and narrowing away from the bezel.	Internal diam 14.5mm x w: 5-7mm
MF04	18154	Layer	2737	50	RB	Plain oval bezel, constriction at the shoulder, hoop with D-shaped cross-section, narrowing away from the bezel.	Width of bezel 10mm
MF11	21071	Not on list	6494	50		Broken approximately in half. Plain oval bezel	Internal diam: 10mm x th: 5.5-7.5

Spindle whorls

A single shale spindle whorl was recovered from context 40004 (MF11), plus one of chalk (MF03, context 14168). As is typical of whorls of different materials, the whorls vary in size and weight. The shale example has symmetrical sides with flat faces of equal size. It conforms to Walton Rogers type C2 (2007) and can be paralleled by an example at Dorchester Greyhound Yard (Mills 1993, fig 78.12).

Table 3: spindle whorls

Zone	Ctx	Feature	SF	%	Date	Notes	Size	Wt (g)	Material
MF03	14168	Pit fill	2395	50	Undated	Spherical whorl with narrow slightly off-centre cylindrical perforation 5mm in diameter	Diam: 37mm x th:32mm	30	Chalk
MF11	40004	Layer	6513	100	RB	Symmetrical with flat faces of equal size. Perforation 7.5-8mm	Diam: 34 x th: 19	16	Shale

Beads

One bead was recovered. The single shale bead is cylindrical with a double perforation through the diameter and an attempted longitudinal perforation with small dimples at either end (MF01, 1025). A second piece of shale is a sub-rectangular flat piece with a central perforation of 3.5mm. It could be an armlet bead but these usually have two perforations and tapered ends so it is perhaps a small pendant.

Table 4: beads

Zone	Ctx	Feature	SF	Date	Notes	Size	Lithology
MF01	1025	Layer	346	IA+	Cylindrical bead with double perforation through the diameter. Attempted longitudinal perforation	L: 11 X diam 7mm	Shale
MF01	12041	Pit fill	822	RB	Sub rectangular flat piece with a central perforation of 3.5mm	L: >21mm x 14mm x 4mm	Shale

Armlets

Armlets form the bulk of the jet and shale assemblage with 38 fragments from 29 armlets, all of which are in a fragmentary state. Most of the armlets (26) are from the MF zone with only a single armlet from zone MFNA and two from zone MFP. All three of these are plain.

The armlets fall into five distinct groups: Plain, grooved, notched, double notched or double notched and grooved. Twisted/cabled armlets are absent from the assemblage. More than half of the armlets (17) are plain but they vary in their cross-sections including D-shaped, oval, circular and rectangular cross-sections, and in internal diameter, ranging from 65 to 85mm.

Two armlets are decorated with simple notches in a single line around the armlet. In some cases these appear to be grouped as in SF6266 where the notches are in groups of 12 (MF10, layer 40061). These have internal diameters of 45 and 55mm and are the smallest

armlets from the site suggesting that it was a design reserved for the wrist rather than the upper arm, or perhaps for children.

Two armlets have simple grooving as seen at Silchester (Lawson 1974, fig 5). Four armlets are adorned with opposed notches. One is a relatively common form with examples from (for example) Colchester, Dorchester (Dorset), Silchester and York in having just the opposed notches (Allason-Jones 2011, fig 10; Mills 1993, 78.3; Allason-Jones 1996, 30, no 63; Lawson 1974, fig 5.42), as well as more locally at Dorchester-on-Thames (Rowley and Brown 1981, fig 22.21). Four others have opposed notches combined with transverse grooves that give a stepped profile to the armlets (SFs 3586 and 2821, both from the subsoil and SF2907, which was unstratified). These seem to be less common than either the double notched or the grooved alone, with none for example from the large assemblage at Silchester, but there are similar examples elsewhere (e.g. Timby et al 2014, fig 168.52).

The grooved and/or double-notched armlets range from 60-90mm in internal diameter.

Table 5: armlets

Ctx	Zone	Feature	SF	Date	Section	Type	Notes	Internal diam (mm)
2024	MF01		463		Oval	Plain	With lathe ridge	
2070	MF01	layer (in R build)	867	RB	Rect	Plain	With lathe ridge	
2205	MF03	layer (in R build)	1986	RB		Plain	With lathe ridge	
2221	MF03	Layer	1949	RB		Plain		
2222	MF04	Cobble layer	2817	RB, 4th century		Grooved and double notched	Four grooves giving a stepped profile with two rows of notches	70
3022	MFNA08	fill ring ditch	29	LIA	D	Plain		65
3107	MFP10	Not listed	209			Plain		
4242	MFP11	Pit fill	476	IA		Plain		
9052	MF01	Layer	912	RB, 2nd century	D	Plain	With lathe ridge	65
9304	MF05	Layer	3234, 3236, 3237, 3251	RB	Rect	Double notched	Two rows of notches	75
9378	MF05	Layer	3256	Undated	D	Plain	With lathe ridge	70
14024	MF02	Midden layer	1364	RB	Rect	Plain	With lathe ridge	65
14163	MF03	midden layer	2509	RB, 4th century		Plain	With lathe ridge	80
15017	MF06	Layer	6800	RB	Oval	Grooved	Three lightly incised grooves	90
15063	MF07	found, cut fill	5312	RB, 4th century	Oval	Plain		85
15081	MF05	Subsoil	3663, 3798, 3799	RB		Plain	Rounded exterior	
15081	MF05	Subsoil	3667, 3486	RB	Rect	Double notched	Small notches to either side	
15081	MF05	Subsoil	4054	RB		Plain		

15081	MF05	Subsoil	3586	RB		Grooved and double notched	Two parallel grooves creating a stepped profile. Lower steps and upper step are notched along the length	70
15193	MF06	Layer	4768	RB	Rect	Double notched	Small triangular notches alternate on either side	
15203	MF07	found, cut fill	5573	RB, 4th century	Circular	Plain		
15203	MF07	found, cut fill	5573	RB, 4th century	Circular	Plain		70
18000	MF04	Topsoil	2907	Unstrat		Grooved and double notched	Four external grooves, giving a stepped external profile with notches to either side	60
24002	MF05	Subsoil	3821	RB	Rect	Grooved and double notched	Central ridge demarcated by a groove and second ridge either side. The outside ridges are notched. With lathe ridge	90
24002	MF06	Subsoil	4339	RB		Grooved	Three longitudinal grooves	85
29002	MF07	Subsoil	5525	RB		Plain		
34003	MF07	Subsoil	5298	Undated		Double notched	Small notches along either edge	70
40000	MF10	Topsoil	6230	Unstrat		Notched	Notches in sections. Lathe ridge inside	55
40061	MF10	Layer	6266	RB		Notched	Notches in sections of 12. Lathe ridge inside	45

Discussion

The assemblage principally comprises jewellery in the form of jet/shale armlets (both plain and decorated), jet/shale finger rings and shale/amber beads. Such jewellery is not common on Roman sites in the area and is indicative of the nature of the site. The spindle whorls are evidence for domestic activity and can be seen in the light of other domestic tasks such as tool sharpening and cereal processing, which area evidenced by the other stone finds.

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