

The Saxon pottery from Barking Abbey: part 2, the continental imports

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OVER 47 CONTEXTS on the Barking Abbey Industrial Estate have produced continental imports. As is the case with *Lundenwic*, the pottery comes largely from two different regions, north France/Belgium and the Rhineland, though the range is more limited. The larger group is termed 'North French Burnished Ware' (NFBW; see Fig. 1), and the fabric is hard, containing quartz sand, with generally grey or black surfaces (sometimes reddish-orange) burnished to varying degrees. They have been classified on the basis of fabric differences into 7 subdivisions, but all display typological affinities with the pottery produced in north France or Belgium during the late Merovingian/early Carolingian period. The few sherds attributed to a Rhenish source resemble relief-band amphorae produced in the Vorgebirge region of the middle Rhineland, and have been termed WALB (see Fig. 2), after one of the production sites at Walberberg¹. Similar sherds have been found both on the Strand and at Waltham Abbey, as well as *Hamwih*.

Some of the NFBW forms are found on the Continent in deposits from the late Merovingian post-grave good period (c. AD 670-720), not appearing in pagan cemeteries, but on settlements such as Douai in the 7th century and Brebieres and Proville in the 8th century. Carinated bowls (Fig. 1, no. 10) can be found in both Gallic and Rhenish industries, but the flat base is typical of the north French area (e.g. Huy, Baralle); such bowls occasionally occur in cemeteries belonging to the late 7th century. The pottery forms a later continuation of the burnished wares commonly found in Frankish graves.

The small quantity of Rhenish imports at Barking (c. 1.6% of the mid-Saxon assemblage by weight) contrasts with *Lundenwic* where larger quantities of pottery from both areas occur. One might expect the nature of Barking as an ecclesiastical centre rather than market port to be reflected in the pottery. Wine amphorae are poorly represented,

but not many Rhenish amphorae have been found at *Lundenwic*, and the north French jars probably acted as wine jugs (while barrels may have been used). The general characteristics conform to the London pattern, though reduced in quantity.

The terms and codes being used to 'tag' Continental imports await both correlation and standardisation. The publication of the *Hamwih* examples defined classes on the primary basis of colour, followed by fabric, thereby creating, for example, Classes 14 and 15², which gave rise to fabrics 130-161³. The *Hamwih* publications form a very important corpus and a starting point for anyone wishing to identify imports, and so despite the authors' recognition of the simplistic nature of the classification, similar colour-based numerical codes have been used elsewhere. The study of fabrics and forms at kiln sites on the Continent has yet to support any meaningful distinction between black, grey or even orange products. The reference framework used in the City employed a mnemonic common name coding based on industry, fabric or occasionally surface treatment and rarely colour (e.g. REDP for red-painted ware). That being developed for *Lundenwic* combines elements of the *Hamwih* system with other attributes, continuing and expanding the previously established DUA system. The same system was used for the Barking assemblage. German researchers have adopted a similar 'first stage' analysis of Frankish pottery, distinguishing basic categories of 'coarsewares', 'slipped and burnished wares', 'oxidised/reduced burnished wares', and 'near stonewares', further sourcing the pottery by thin-section. Just as many black and grey wares will have identical fabrics to some cream and buff wares; rather than forming a discrete category of pottery, all they share is type of surface treatment. For example, one pot bearing tin-foil decoration (classified as 'Tating ware') from *Hamwih* (Fig. 3, 10) is a late 7th – 8th century black burnish-decorated jar made at Mayen in the Eifel,

1. K. Böhner 'Frühmittelalterliche Töpferofen in Walberberg und Pingsdorf' *Bonner Jahrbuch* 155/6 (1955-6) 372-387.

2. R. Hodges, The *Hamwih* Pottery; the local and imported wares from 30 years' excavations at Middle Saxon Southamp-

ton and their European context, CBA Research Report 37 (1981) 21-28.

3. Timby, *op. cit.* fn. 18.

part of a range of burnish-decorated products that includes plates and pedestal cups (Fig. 3, 3-9). The tin-foil excluded it from its parent group, to be adopted by a mixed family in much the same

way that red-painted wares have been studied together to the exclusion of the related tradition of painting dark vessels with white paint in the same area.

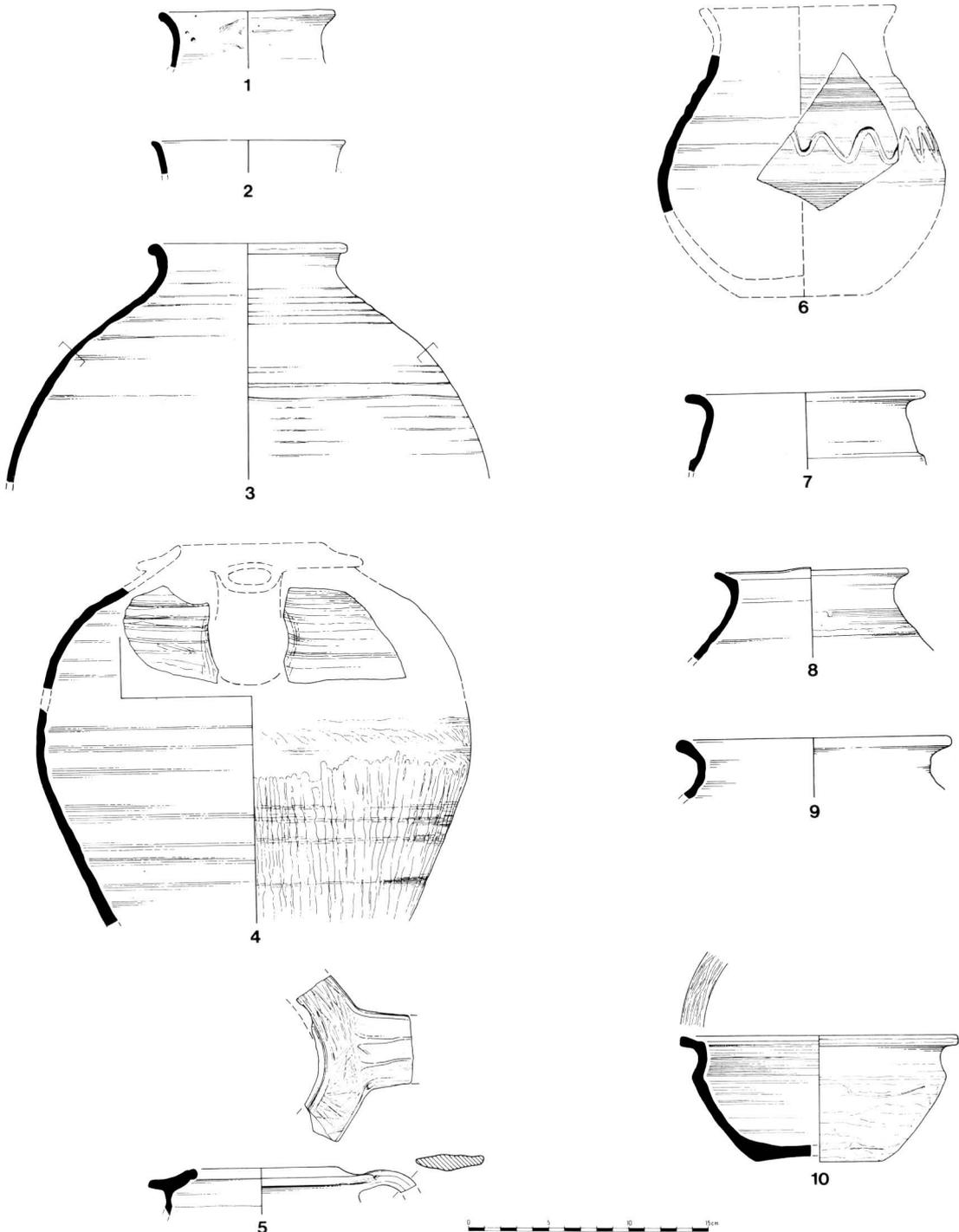


Fig.1: selection of North French Burnished ware (NFBW) from Barking Abbey Industrial Estate (1985). Contexts: 1=1525; 2=3191; 3=663/3316; 4=306/3738; 5=1684; 6=404/550; 7=1812; 8=3423; 9=1161; 10=3738. Scale 1:4.

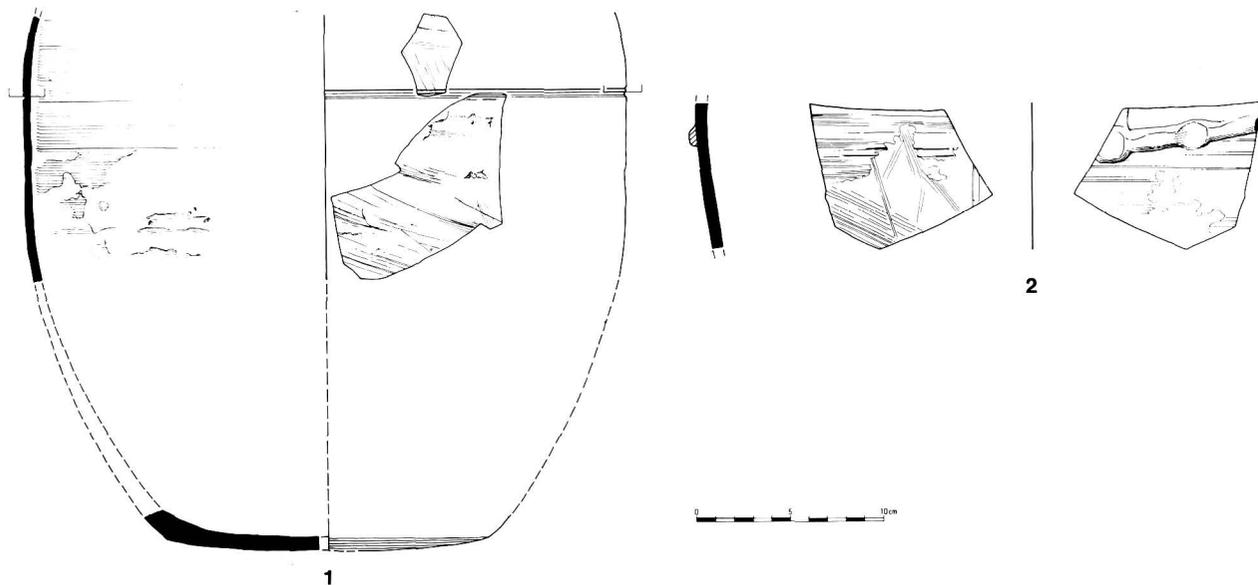


Fig. 2: Rhenish imports (WALB) from Barking Abbey Industrial Estate (1985). Contexts: 1=683/798/823; 2=34-23. Scale 1:4.

Discussion

The emergence of the distinctive wheel-finished Ipswich form has in the past been associated with familiarity with Rhenish globular pots (*Kugeltöpfe*), attention being drawn to the similarities of the jar bases, which are trimmed to a sagging profile and the occurrence of suspension holes on rims. Some elements, such as the way in which the pinched spouts are applied to the jars, also reflect characteristics found on burnished pottery from 'north France'⁴ and even Frisian *Kugeltöpfe*, some of which have vertical lugs. Rhenish pottery predominates at Ipswich, which is equidistant from Quentovic and Dorestad, and accepting that Dorestad established its commercial links with East Anglia and Essex from the late 7th/mid 8th century onwards, later imports from this area will have influenced the local industry. If the mid 7th century date for the beginnings of Ipswich production is accepted, one can suggest a fusion in the thick-walled IPS vessels of imported domestic pottery styles from several regions on the Continent amid a climate of growing commercial contact. Merovingian wheel-thrown pottery, bottles and

some jars, from kilns somewhere in north-east France and east Belgium are known in south-east England (mainly east Kent) in the 6th and 7th century, while English metalwork, and some handmade Saxon pottery appears on the Continent (through intermarriage, immigration, contact) in the same area. Imports have been found with handmade wares at Lower Brook Street, Ipswich from an early occupation phase predating the use of Ipswich ware⁵.

A similar process would appear to be occurring in the Rhineland for a period from the end of the 7th century, with the adoption by at least one industry of new designs combinations on burnished wares such as incised zig-zags and panels of pecking (Fig. 3, nos. 5-9) which are alien to the earlier 7th century indigenous tradition, and closer to Germanic (Saxon) taste, though some elements are familiar on Alamannic pottery⁶. While 'Gallic' and 'Rhenish' zones of cultural contact may be suggested, hopes for a simple definition of such market areas are not supported by the growing data on fluctuations in pottery imports. The spread-

4. For example, L. Blackmore and M. Redknapp 'Saxon and Early Medieval Imports to the London Area and the Rhenish Connection, Fig. 2 no. 7 from Jubilee Hall' in D. R. M. Gaimster and M. Redknapp *Keramik des Mittelalters und der beginnenden Neuzeit im Rheinland BAR-S440* (1988) 223 f. Globular pots from the Merovingian cemetery at Rue-des-Vignes in north France are shown in Fig. 7. No. 1 with burnished lattice is from grave 26, early 8th century, and 2 from grave 43, end of 7th century. Redrawn from B. Florin 'Réflexions sur la céramique du Haut Moyen-Age' *Mémoires de la Société d'Émulation de Cambrai* 98 (1985) Fig. 19. Burnished decoration occurs both in north France and Germany.

5. K. Wade 'Ipswich' in R. Hodges and B. Hobley (eds) *The Rebirth of Towns in the West AD 700-1050* CBA Res. Rep. 68 (1988) 93-100; for recent summary of evidence, see M. Welch 'Contacts across the Channel between the Fifth and Seventh Centuries: a review of the archaeological evidence' *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 7 (1991) 261-9. A recurrent problem is the lack of a good chronology for both continental and local forms.

6. M. Redknapp 'Late Merovingian Black and Red Burnished Wares from Mayen (Rheinland-Pfalz)' *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt* 14 (1984) 403-416. This period coincides with the extension of Saxon missionary activity into Frisia and South Germany; Willibrord's famous *scriptorium* at Echternach was only 80 km southwest of Mayen.

ing distribution of burnished wheel-turned imports from the north French region on sites from *Hamwih* to *Eofofornic* (York), suggest complex mechanisms of exchange and redistribution⁷.

This note has attempted to summarise the main characteristics of the Saxon pottery from Barking, and outline a few issues which bear on the study of the Abbey's domestic and foreign relationships beyond the monastic enclosure.

7. A. J. Mainman *forthcoming* 'The Pottery from 46-54 Fishergate' *Archaeology of York series 16.6* (1992).

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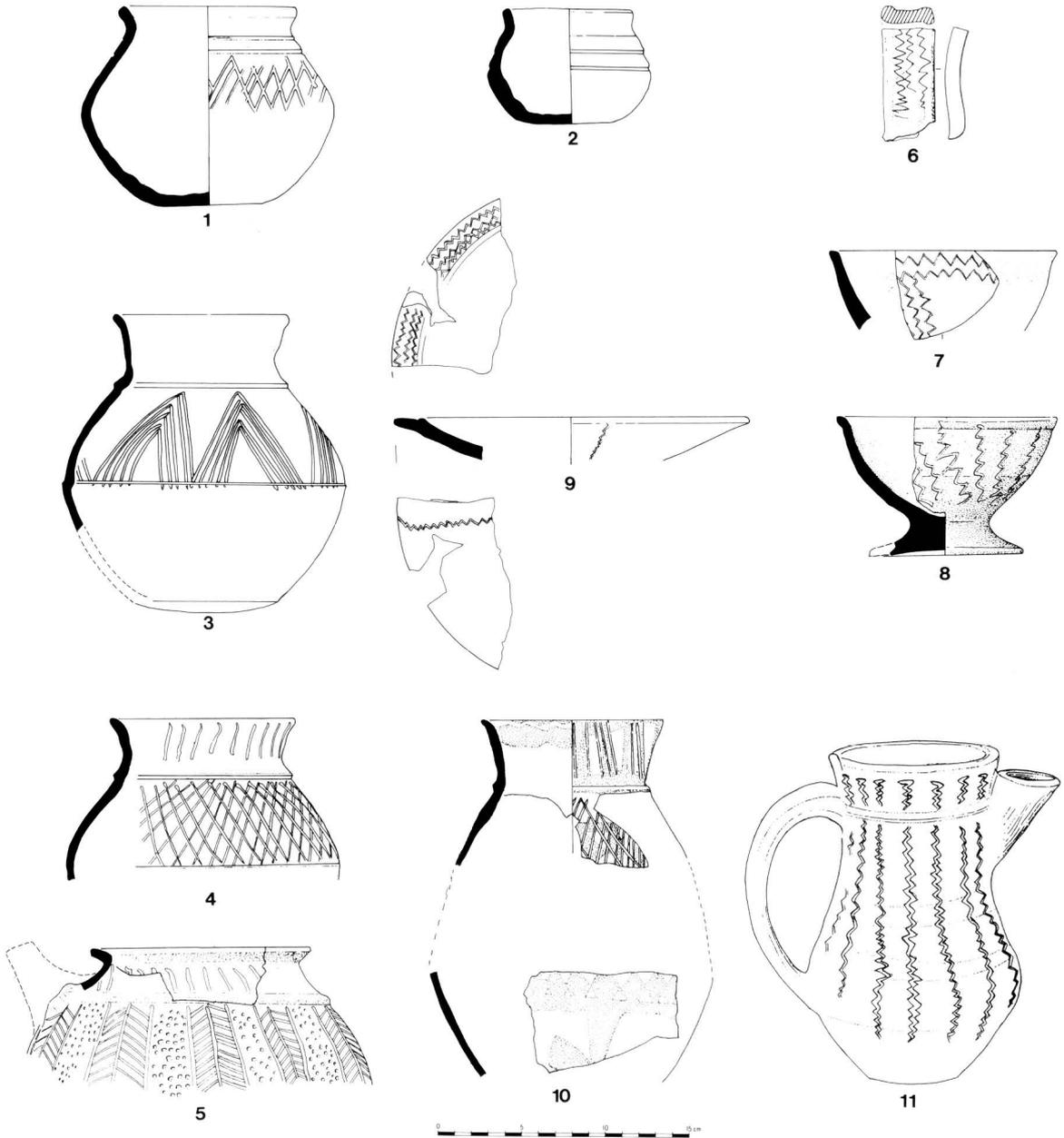


Fig. 3: acculturation, opportunism, developing tradition? Comparison of various vessels from mid-Saxon or contemporary sites. 1-2: Rue-des-Vignes, France; 3-9: kilns at Mayen, Rheinland-Pfalz; 10: *Hamwih*, with burnished and tin-foil decoration, assigned to Mayen area by thin section. 11: Trier pitcher dated to 8th century, with incised zig-zag but no tin-foil.