A NEW TYPE OF 9TH AND 10TH-CENTURY POTTERY FROM WINCHESTER (FIG. 4)

The purpose of this note is to draw attention to a distinctive type of pottery, perhaps of 9th to 10th-century date, which occurs at Winchester. It was independently recognized by one of us (MB) during the 1961–71 excavations under the term 'sandy ware import', and by the other (JRC) as 'late Saxon sandy ware' while preparing earlier excavations in the city for publication. Definitive publication must await consideration of the recent finds, especially those from the Lower Brook Street site. The majority of vessels so far identified are very fragmentary, and only four vessels, all cooking pots, have profiles which are complete or can be reconstructed (FIG. 4).

The pottery stands out from contemporary types by its thickness and by its hard, harsh and very sandy fabric. It is generally bluish or brownish black, sometimes bluish grey, occasionally with a slight bituminous or more probably heavily burnt and charcoalled surface. The interior shows clearly that the pots have been turned on a fast wheel. The fabric is generally thicker than later medieval sandy wares, averaging 6 mm. in thickness, though the 'fine sandy ware' of 12th-century date is similar. This latter fabric sometimes has incised wavy-line decoration, and usually lacks the evidence of wheel-turning. There are also one or two Roman fabrics which might be confused with the early sandy ware discussed here. However, as the illustrations demonstrate, the forms are purely medieval, especially the sagging base, and confusion with Roman types could only be possible with body sherds.

Two thin sections of the vessel from Frederick Place prepared by S. A. Mackenna were examined under the petrological microscope by Dr D. P. S. Peacock. He reports: "A dark matrix of baked clay can be seen packed with numerous particles of well-sorted quartz sand. The grains are generally subrounded, about 0.3 mm. across, and are usually composed of discrete quartz crystals, though some polycrystalline grains are present. Accessory minerals include tourmaline, epidote, and a small rounded particle of carbonate. There is no internal evidence to suggest a possible source and without comparanda of known origin it is difficult to assess the place of manufacture."

Dating evidence is at present tenuous. The sandy ware is generally absent from the numerous large rubbish pits which were a feature of medieval Winchester from at least the beginning of the 11th century, the vessel from the Westgate Car Park being an exception. The pit from which this came contained typical medieval gritted-ware cooking pots, but the excavations of the last decade have shown that this latter ware was already well established in late Saxon times, and was probably in use by the 9th century. The sandy ware also occurs in the water-logged peat deposits which were a major feature of excavations in St George's Street, between Upper Brook Street and Parchment Street. The peat apparently filled man-made features, possibly drainage ditches, dating from before the formal development of the system of brooks in the N.E. quarter of the city. Glazed pottery, such as Winchester ware, and tripod pitcher ware,
does not occur in these deposits, but is found in the overlying levels, as well as in the later medieval rubbish pits. The sandy ware may thus predate the appearance of Winchester ware, for which a date around 950 has recently been suggested.2

The best evidence will emerge in due course from study of the pottery from the Lower Brook Street excavations. On that site occupation along Tanner Street (now Lower Brook Street), itself probably laid out c.880–6, began during the 10th century. The new street and its street-side development replaced an earlier complex, some kind of urban estate, which had begun as early as about 700. The sandy ware in question was found in deposits related to this earlier complex, and only rarely in the earlier layers of the 10th-century street-side development, where it might in any case be residual. On this evidence the sandy ware was probably going out of use at the end of the 9th or fairly early in the 10th century. The date of its first use, or first appearance in Winchester, is unknown, as also is its place of origin.

Further evidence comes from Frederick Place, a site which lay on the line of a Saxon street which still in part survives as Staple Gardens. The compact cobbles of the earliest street overlay the Roman deposits. Above this street a thin layer of silt had accumulated, and in a hollow in this silt several fragments of sandy and gritted wares were found. Above this layer there was a rubbish deposit with many gritted cooking
pots, and an elaborate Winchester-ware sherd. A date around the middle of the 11th century is likely for this latter group. As the street-system seems to have been laid out towards the end of the 9th century the sandy-ware vessel is probably in this case of 10th-century date.

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NOTES


3 Ibid., pl. v, 1.

4 We should like to thank Dr D. P. S. Peacock for reporting on the sherd from Frederick Place, and S. A. Mackenna, for preparing the thin section. The drawings are the work of Nicholas Griffiths, Winchester Research Unit, and Eric Wayman. Miss Katherine Barclay read and commented on the text.

LOW COUNTRIES BLACKWARE

K. J. Barton has recently written on the blackwares of N. France. When this was read by continental scholars it seemed to cause confusion in three ways over the problems of terminology, distribution and production.

Terminology is the most difficult as an examination of the literature shows that what Barton calls blackware is termed grey or blue-grey in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Here a further confusion arises over the use of blue-grey, for this type which is reserved in Germany for the earlier wares of Paffrath and other Rhenish centres. We think that this needs clarifying and that these terms should be defined and, if possible, a single name given to each type. Discussions are in progress between Belgian, Dutch, French and German colleagues and it is hoped to present a further note in a future volume of Medieval Archaeology. Throughout this note the term blackware is used without prejudice to a hoped for future agreement on a joint terminology.

On the matters of distribution and production STEFAN VANDENBERGHE of Mechelen (Malines) writes:

1) Distribution. Barton names a very few towns round Lille and then suddenly refers to Mechelen and Brussels. Between these centres there is a large area with important medieval towns where a great deal of blackware pottery is found. Why not mention Bruges, Ghent, Oudenaerde and Courtrai which provide better parallels to the French material? Indeed it is illogical to speak about blackware pottery from N. France when it covers a much wider area of distribution.

2) Production. In Belgium as far as I know no blackware kilns have been found in Ath, although their presence may be possible. At Mechelen too this is a little previous. There were medieval potters as is clear from the documentary evidence but no blackware kilns have been found there. In this connexion Barton refers to two jugs from Bedford published by Kennett, but these have no parallels at Mechelen. In any case Ath, Mechelen and Aardenburg were not the only pottery centres in the Low Countries. This has been confirmed for oxidized wares by the recent kiln discoveries at Haarlem, Utrecht and Bergen op Zoom. Also compared to the very important stoneware production centres at Siegburg, Langerwehe and Raeren, it is unlikely that there was a large export as these Low Countries kilns manufactured mainly kitchen utensils for the local market. If we want to progress in the study of blackware, then all the smaller and larger workshops between France and Denmark must be studied fully. This must occur in close association with the red oxidized pottery dating from the same period.