NOTES AND NEWS

Potters were operating in Saint-Jean-de-Fos in 1435, although no potter was named there until 1526. After that they were registered every 20 years. Up to 1615 approximately ten potters were working and from that date to 1740 there was a steady increase to 70 — peaking at 75 in 1830 and declining to termination in 1920.

Amongst the descriptions of form the 'pichet de barque' is picked out as 'Une pièce particulière qui dérive de l'orjol - d'autres recipients à liquide ont été fabriqués, mais de manière occasionnelle'. This statement certifies the origins of the form. The illustrations accompanying the publication show twisted handles exactly paralleling the Scarborough piece.

The dating of this piece is attributed in the article to the early 19th century although the author points out that the style of the vessels have a 'caractere archaisante', so the vessel was new or almost new when it was found in Scarborough. How it arrived there is another matter.

In conclusion, the vessel published as an English medieval Scarborough ware piece is shown to be southern French in origin, one of a large quantity of similar vessels produced in St-Jean-de-Fos, Provence in the early 19th century and deposited on the unwitting museum curator at the time of the great discoveries of kiln material in Scarborough in the 1850s.

KENNETH J. BARTON

NOTES

2 Ibid., 14.
3 Jean-Louis Vayssettes, Les potiers de terre de Saint-Jean-de-Fos (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987), fig. 164.
4 Description, 164; colour plate, opp. 192.
5 The illustrations are photocopies of the originals and are about a quarter of the pots' actual size.

THE STORVÅGAN PROJECT 1985–86: PRELIMINARY REPORT (PI. VI, B)

The earliest known urban settlement on the Arctic coast of Norway was Vågar in Lofoten. From written sources this settlement is known to have functioned as an economic, ecclesiastical and administrative centre of N. Norway, but the sources are silent after the end of the 14th century. Small-scale excavations in 1985–86 produced surprisingly rich material that shows no decline during the late medieval period. The finds seem to have the potential to give a quite new understanding of this rather special urban society.

The purpose of this report is to make known archaeological material that we think will be important for the understanding of many aspects of medieval society, both for the Arctic areas of Scandinavia and for the trade network of N. Europe as a whole. The economic basis of medieval Vågar (modern Norwegian: Vågan) was the rich cod fisheries of the Lofoten Islands. At least from the 12th century, local fishermen produced stockfish that was shipped to Bergen for export to the European market. Until the end of the 14th century, Vågar had the status of a small town.

The project that was established for this task was based on co-operation between the University of Tromsø (the Institute of Social Science), the Polish Academy of Science (the Institute of The History of Material Culture, PAN, Warszawa) and Lofót museet in Storvågan.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

In Storvågan, immediately W. of the present town of Kabelvåg, we find a c. 20,000 m² area of settlement deposits on the flat base of a rocky headland. The two bays are shallow and
sheltered and in total there are 400–500 m of shore-line with deposits down to the medieval
sea-level and up to c. 2.5 m thick. The greater part of them are damaged by later agricultural
activity.

Spread over the area, mainly to the NE. of Storvågan, are six or seven small localities
with medieval deposits. Their sizes are generally c. 500 m². These sites are similar to farm
mounds,¹ but are smaller. They are also located closer to each other than is found as a general
pattern in the North-Norwegian countryside.

The written sources have several references to a church in Vágar, but no physical
remains of medieval church buildings or cemeteries have been found so far. Also interesting is
that some 200 m E. of the medieval deposits in Storvågan there is a rock, today called
‘Brurberget’ (the bride’s rock). Our hypothesis is that this relates to the location of the Thing
mentioned in the written sources. Below the rock, on the sheltered side, there are vague
outlines of structures, but they have not yet been excavated.

The recent excavations (1985–86) were located in the supposed central harbour area. 
Because of complex stratification, limited resources and practical considerations, the design
of the excavation was based on 3 × 3 m modules connected to each other. In total c. 80 m³ of
 cultural deposits were investigated. The earlier test pits add another 30 m³.

RESULTS

The excavation located a densely built-up area with a sequence from the 8th to perhaps
the early 13th century. The building structures were mostly of local character. The
orientation of buildings and entry passages seems to be similar for all periods. Among the
 c. 70,000 registered finds, 70% are bones. Pottery fragments count for 7% (c. 4,500), but less
than 100 of these seem to be of 13th-/14th-century wares. They are mostly from the NW. part
of the Continent or of English origin. Even if this group of finds is small, it is of great interest
since we only have a handful of medieval pottery older than Siegburg material from 25 years
of excavations of medieval farm mounds in North Norway.

Worth mentioning also is a group of leather finds (c. 2,300 pieces). Most of these are
shoes or shoe-parts of medieval or late medieval origin. There are strong indications that
shoes were produced on the site. The textile fragments (c. 80, mostly wool) show marked
variation in quality.

A group of soapstone fragments (c. 60) is also important. They indicate production of
vessels and net sinkers from raw material brought to Storvågan from different quarries.
About 100 fragments of slate plates (for baking) were probably imported from the area S. of
Bergen.

Iron fragments and wooden artefacts from the whole of the chronological scale,
post-medieval glass and brick fragments conclude the abundant finds. The list of more
infrequent finds categories is long and contains both personal objects and tools. Comments
on these will have to wait.

The overall impression of this assemblage of material is that the medieval portion of it
has an urban flavour. The post-medieval material seems to be more like what we are
acquainted with from farm mounds and fishing villages along the North Norwegian coast.
Compared with the lack of written sources, it is surprising that the post-medieval material is
present and in such abundance. A further comparison between the medieval and the
post-medieval material will, perhaps, give a better understanding of the economic and social
change that accompanied Vágar’s drift from a focus for central powers and also out of the
written sources.

CONCLUSION

The beginnings of Vágar are still vague. The results of radiocarbon datings will indicate
if there are older structures further uphill than close to the medieval shore-line where our
excavation was.

¹
As a whole, this material is connected to the first introduction of urban life to the Arctic area. This situation gives us an opportunity to study early urbanization in a cultural and economic setting very different from the general European situation. Another interesting line of approach is that Vågar is at one end of one of the major medieval trade systems, the stockfish/grain connection between England and the Continent and the North Atlantic areas. Until now, only the southern branches of this system have been investigated archaeologically.

Not least interesting is the study of the growth and change of Vågar as part of the cultural and economic development of the Arctic coastal settlement of Norway. At least in the High Middle Ages, it must have functioned as a centre for this region. The problems of the transition from the Viking period to the medieval and from the medieval to the post-medieval are of major importance.

REIDER BERTELSEN and PRZEMYSLAW URBANCIZYK

NOTES


THE LUND CONFERENCE 1987

The 30th Annual Conference of the Society was held in Lund, Sweden from 10–15 September 1987 on the theme of ‘Southern Sweden in the Middle Ages’. The Society was welcomed on the first evening by Erik Cinthio, formerly Professor of Medieval Archaeology in the University of Lund, who gave a short address on medieval archaeology in Sweden and contacts between the Institute of Archaeology in Lund and the Society for Medieval Archaeology. The following lectures were given on Friday 11 September: ‘Scania’s role in medieval Denmark’ (Olaf Olsen), ‘South Scandinavia in the Viking age and its external relations’ (David Wilson), ‘Recent research on Viking-age Scania’ (Johan Callmer), ‘A new find of a Viking-age hoard in Scania’ (Birgitta Hårdh), ‘Excavations of medieval rural settlements in the past ten years’ (Ingmar Billberg), ‘Castles and earthworks’ (Anders Odman), ‘Church archaeology in Scania’ (Barbro Sandnér), and ‘Medieval towns in Scania’ (Anders Andréhn). There were two excursions: on Saturday to SE. Scania including the royal church of Dalby and the castle of Glimmingehus, and on Monday to NE. Scania when the medieval towns of Vä and Åhus and the church of Lyngsjö were visited. On Sunday there was a tour of the cathedral and museums in Lund.

The Society is extremely grateful to the Institute of Archaeology, University of Lund, for providing accommodation for the conference and for organizing the lectures and excursions. Lund City Museum (Kulturen) also kindly provided lunch and dinner for the members of the conference on the Sunday, and the final evening reception and dinner were given by the Dean and Chapter of Lund Cathedral.

HELEN CLARKE

THE CHICHESTER CONFERENCE 1988

The 31st Annual Conference of the Society was held in Chichester from 15–18 April 1988 on the theme of ‘Medieval Sussex’, and was based in Bishop Otter College. The opening lecture