

London-type Ware Expounded

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THIS VOLUME¹ presents a detailed chronological framework of *London-type ware*, the name given by the authors to the major groups of glazed pottery found in London from the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century and which, it is argued, continued to be manufactured into the fourteenth century. The chronology is based on the results of recent excavations.

The authors present a discussion of terminology, sources, fabric, techniques of manufacture, distribution, function and the origins and affinities of the ware. The various ceramic forms found are described in an apparently exhaustive type series. There are appendices dealing with thin-section and glaze analysis, and with drinking jug capacity. The relative frequency of London-type forms in dated assemblages is included in the body of the report, which is, as might be expected, copiously illustrated.

Anyone unaware of the progress of the study of medieval pottery over the last half century needs only to compare this volume with, say, any of the pioneering studies by the late Gerald Dunning, to be made aware of the distance that has been travelled. This has been made possible, of course, by the great increase in the number of archaeological deposits securely dated, at least from the late twelfth century onwards, by means other than the pottery they contain, and by technical advances in the study of the pottery itself.

In the case of London, the relevant contexts are largely those explored since 1973 by the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology, many of them dated by stratigraphical association and dendrochronology. The material from these contexts is fragmentary but, fortunately, the collections of the London and British Museums contain many complete vessels of comparable fabric and decoration to the excavated fragments, enabling the reconstruction of vessel types and typologies to be undertaken with confidence. This well-preserved material was largely recovered during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when commercial excavation in central London was still carried out by hand and collectors were willing to pay cash for complete vessels. If this had not been so, many invaluable historic specimens might have finished up as cock-shies.

The material thus surveyed is all from 'consumer

1. **Medieval Pottery: London-Type Ware**, by J. E. Pearce, A. G. Vince and M. A. Jenner. *London & Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper* no. 6 (1985). 151pp., 91 figs., 12 half tone plates, 8 colour plates. £6.00.

sites' and does not lend itself to the kind of analysis applied by Clive Orton to pottery from the kilns at Cheam². Wasters are rare among material from the City and there is as yet little indication of where the manufacturing centres may have been. While the distribution maps of find spots do strongly suggest an origin close to the medieval metropolis, it may well turn out that London-type ware comes from more than one manufacturing site.

The term *London-type ware* embraces at least six different fabric groups, all of which, however, are seen by the authors as having a London, or near-London, origin. In view of the date range involved, the sub-division into six fabrics is itself modest. The fabrics are identified by colour and variation in filler or temper. A mid-fifteenth century variant (late London-type ware – LLON) is to be the subject of a separate paper.

The report employs the Munsell notation for colours and, as Munsell charts do not always use common words for colours in ways that a non-specialist would understand, the resultant terminology has to be treated with considerable caution. Munsell charts are not cheap and are not available in, say, many public libraries and, therefore, nomenclature based on them can be of only limited usefulness despite its undoubted precision. This is a problem that needs addressing. There could be, for example, good reason for producing a 'medieval' equivalent of the charts produced some years ago by RESCUE for use with Romano-British pottery. At one time the Museum of London itself toyed with the attractive idea of ignoring colour altogether (it is notoriously variable in medieval ceramics) but this solution does seem to have been rejected.

The report contains no attempt to analyse examples of the ware by the methods recently applied by Anthony Streeten to kiln material from south east England. Most pottery from south east England lacks characteristic mineral inclusions, the usual filler being quartz sand. Dr Streeten has examined the grain sizes of inclusions and graphed them in an attempt to give an objective 'finger print' for the different fabrics. It would be interesting to see how such analysis turned out in the case of this large body of material – whether, for example, the material does or does not readily divide on this basis into the six fabrics isolated by other techniques.

2. C. Orton 'The excavation of a late medieval/transitional pottery kiln at Cheam, Surrey' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 73 (1982) 49-92 plus microfiche.

The distribution of London-type ware is illuminating. It found its way, doubtless by sea, up the east coast as far as Aberdeen, and, in the thirteenth century, to Inverness. But it was also going overland as far as Exeter, Hereford and Gloucester. This does not invalidate, of course, John Hurst's oft-argued dictum that we should all be cautious about long range analogies for medieval pottery. After all, almost every magnate in the land came to London with his baggage train sooner or later and pottery bought in London should have found its way to key provincial sites: the surprise is, perhaps, that it has not yet been identified among collections from such centres as Winchester, Southampton, Oxford, Bristol, Caerphilly and Chester. As with many archaeological 'blanks', this may merely reflect the absence of a search rather than reality. If London-type ware reached Hereford, Gloucester and Newbury, it ought to have reached Oxford and Worcester. Similarly, if it reached Perth and Aberdeen, it ought to have reached Edinburgh, Berwick and Newcastle. The authors do not tell us where they have searched and not found: only where they have searched and found. They disarm criticism by saying that no systematic search has been undertaken outside the home counties, and this is absolutely understandable. It is to be hoped that excavators throughout the country will be alerted by this publication, as in many cases there will be little to distinguish the odd sherd of London-type ware from locally produced pottery.

The volume contains summaries of the principal dating evidence from the City, and the chronology established adds greatly to the precision of that proposed by earlier writers. The bulk of the report,

however, is taken up by a detailed, masterly and well-illustrated type series: jugs (with a complex range of decoration), pitchers, drinking jugs and bottles, cooking pots, pipkins, tripod pipkins and cauldrons, dripping dishes, bowls and dishes, condiments, chafing dishes, aquamaniles, miscellaneous forms and roof furniture are the categories described. The lion's share goes, naturally enough, to the decorated jugs, and the use of detail-photographs of some decorative elements and colour photographs of a selection of jugs is particularly welcome. This will provide an invaluable tool for the analysis of assemblages of medieval pottery from the home counties, particularly from those sites (the majority) where dating depends on the pottery. The illustrated discussion is accompanied by a useful chronological summary chart of the type now familiar to readers of *the London Archaeologist*.

A short discussion of origins and parallels, couched in comfortably familiar, art-historical terms, rounds off the volume. Some of the references to French material may have to be revised in the near future when Jacques Nicourt's *Céramiques médiévales parisiennes* (promised for March 1986) is published, and one has an uneasy feeling that Ken Barton's invaluable work on the material from Normandy has only scratched the surface of what must be a very large body.

In summary, this is a most welcome publication, that one expects to find useful for many years to come. It is particularly useful that the information is published in monograph form and not buried in a *collections* or *transactions*. Unfortunately one cannot say that about all the important material that has come from the City.

Books

Farms, Villages and Cities, by Peter S. Wells, *Cornell University Press*, 1984. 270 pp., 65 figs., index, bibliog., £11.25.

THE INTERPRETATION OF changes has been the primary concern of a number of archaeologists on both sides of the Atlantic during the last fifteen years and much has been written on the subject. This book sets out to interpret changes in cultural life in central Europe in the first millennium BC. The author's main concern is with the growth of large communities, and he looks at one particular aspect; the 'advances in commercial activity'. Each of five chapters covers a period of roughly two hundred years and examines some of the relevant archaeological data. Within each chapter the approach is similar and Wells reviews evidence for settlement, economy, production, trade and the distribution of

wealth. His thesis is that the development of towns is directly linked to the development of trade, and the driving force was the self-interest of entrepreneurs – 'the movers and shakers' of society.

Initially it is the exploitation of minerals which is seen as being responsible for the appearance of rich entrepreneurs and the early development of towns in central Europe. Hallstatt (salt) and Sticna (iron) are used as examples. Greek expansion and desire for raw materials are seen as giving rise to the 'towns' of the Heuneburg and Bologna, and the rich burials associated with them are considered to be those of the commercial leaders. A period of disruption and decline followed before Roman expansion and the intensification of iron production became the prime motivators in the development of 'oppida' such as