

The Medieval Pottery of Paris

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IN THIS BOOK¹, Jacques Nicourt proposes a typological evolution and relative chronology based mainly on the study of contents of graves and other deposits excavated between 1965 and 1968 at Notre Dame. The dating is by small find and coin association, and there is no cross-correlation with dendrochronology as there has been with some of the major London deposits². Together with the Notre Dame material, Nicourt has considered some other small assemblages from Paris as well as material from museum collections.

The book includes a 'catalogue' of key pieces which consists of a scale drawing of each piece, including about 300 vessels whose total or near-total form can be reconstructed with some confidence. While drawing conventions vary through the pages of illustrations, the variations do not prevent the drawings from being clearly understandable – often the opposite is the case – and draughtsmanship is of a highly professional standard throughout. The pieces illustrated are only allocated in the main to century periods (although in some cases there is some sub-division of the centuries) and the detailed stratigraphical relationships between the pieces are hard to find in the text. In many cases I have so far been unable to uncover information I would like to find. Over a more extended period it may be possible to build up a concordance, but the archaeologist with a restricted ability to read French will find it hard work.

Nicourt provides a fascinating and detailed morphological analysis of his material that is also excellently illustrated. The division into vessel types is different from that to which we have become used on this side of the Channel, but that in no way invalidates the scheme, which makes a welcome attempt to introduce more precise terminology than has been common in Britain. This section of the book contains a number of ideas that I hope to try

1. J. Nicourt, *Céramiques Médiévales Parisiennes*. Jeunesse Préhistorique et Géologique de France, 1986. 366pp, many figs. and pl., some in colour. 280FF plus postage from J. Nicourt, 18 Place Francois-Sicard, 37000 Tours, France.
2. For reservations about the dendrochronological dating of the London deposits see Jean le Patourel's review of J. E. Pearce et al *Medieval Pottery: London Type Ware*, 1985, in *Medieval Ceramics* 9 (1986) 85.
3. B. Rackham, *English Medieval Pottery*, 1948, plate 40; Surrey

out in the near future on some British material. Some of Nicourt's sub-divisions within vessel types do seem to be over-fussy, however, and this is evidenced by the way in which it is sometimes difficult to match drawings in the 'catalogue' with the classification.

The illustrations include some nice parallels to old friends from this side of the Channel – for example the pedestal-based jugs from Seething Lane and Sutton³ and the imported jug from Alsted, Mers-tham⁴. However, London readers will probably be primarily interested in the effect of Nicourt's work on the dating of imports. Paris ware is not common in London: Vince⁵ mentions a single Paris jug from Swan Lane, dated to the late 13th century by analogy with vessels published by Barton⁶. These vessels would be placed by Nicourt, if I read him correctly, earlier in the century. But Nicourt's excavated material seems to be thin in the late 13th century, so the Vince/Barton date may not be so very wrong.

Sherds of Rouen ware, or alleged copies of Rouen ware, are found more frequently in London. The Rouen kilns were clearly supplying Paris, and their products feature in this volume. Nicourt argues convincingly for an extension of the date range provided by Barton for this ware⁷. Nicourt also criticises the consequences of Barton's work in dating Rouen ware from its association with English contacts: subsequent dating of English contacts from Rouen ware has tended towards circularity.

This attractive and well-produced volume is not one that many will find easy to absorb. But it will be an indispensable work of reference for anyone working on medieval pottery groups in SE England where imports from Normandy or the Île de France may be anticipated, or where French influence may be suspected.

Archaeol Collect 52 (1952) 86.

4. G. C. Dunning in L. L. Ketteringham *Alsted*, Res Vol Surrey Archaeol Soc 2 (1976) 45-7.
5. A. G. Vince 'The Saxon and medieval pottery of London' *Medieval Archaeol* 29 (1985) 25-93, esp. 54.
6. K. J. Barton 'The medieval pottery of Paris' *Medieval Archaeol* 10 (1966) 59-73, esp. figs. 23 and 24.
7. K. J. Barton 'Medieval pottery at Rouen' *Archaeol J* 122 (1965) 73-85.

Letter

KENTISH RAGSTONE

MAY WE ASK the co-operation of your readers in the investigation we are making as to the sources and uses of Kentish

ragstone? We would like small samples of any stone they may find in buildings or on sites they may be excavating, with any information they may have as to the date of its incorporation. Any reasonable expenses incurred will be reimbursed.
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