Red-Painted Pottery in North-Western Europe : New light on an old controversy

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There are two fundamental questions which have remained unsolved in the debate about early medieval red-painted pottery. The first concerns the question of continuity from the Roman period to the High Medieval. This is essentially a matter of date, or rather the lack of it. The second question concerns the origins of red-painted pottery, and the mechanisms inherent in the seemingly dispersed adoption of the technique around western Europe. This is, without doubt, a matter of archaeological methodology. It concerns, as is obvious, the movement of ideas and techniques. In the celebrated symposium on red-painted pottery (Hurst 1969) the participants advocated a range of widely differing views. In the first part of this paper I shall examine the question of continuity in the light of these views, and some new data. In the second part I shall discuss the origins of red-painted pottery and the transmission of ideas and techniques: the importance of prestige.

1.

The excavations at Hamwih have permitted the continuity question to be tested as well as providing some firm dated contexts for red-painted pottery. First, the evidence strongly suggests that the continuity theory is no longer acceptable, while, secondly, the red-painted sherds which have been found came from late eighth or early ninth century contexts (Addyman and Hill 1969, 92). This almost certainly leaves a hiatus of at least a century in the production of red-painted wares - that is between the later seventh century (cf. Ament 1964) and the later eight century. However, it should be emphasized that there is no evidence of any large-scale production of red-painted pottery in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. Those few vessels published by Ament (1964) appear to be isolated examples. The small collection of Hamwih sherds suggests that centres in northern Alsace (class 35), Trier (class 12), and the Beauvaisis (class 9) began red-painting pots in the later eighth century (fig. 5). The available evidence suggests that it was on a small scale at all these places. In Alsace, kiln-debris was discovered at Bouxwiller which included one red-painted vessel and several vessels of another unpainted type (Hamwih class 23) (cf. Rexer 1963; Hodges 1977). From Trier there is no evidence as yet to support the Hamwih data suggesting that a small number of vessels were smeared with red paint, but this as I have argued elsewhere may be due to the absence of later eighth and early ninth century ceramics (cf. Hodges 1977a). At the village site of Oberbillig near Trier, red-painted sherds similar to the Hamwih class 12 (Trier type) were found just before the last war in a late tenth century context (Anon 1939). A small number of red-painted Beauvaisis sherds suggests, in view of Hamwih's close contact with this region of France by way of Rouen, that the production of this particular ware was in its early stages while Hamwih was declining (cf. Hodges and Cherry forthcoming). It may have been in the later eight century that red-painted wares were first made in the Badorf-Pingsdorf region. There is no evidence of early eighth century production. Two classes of pottery from this region have to be considered: first, Hunneschans ware and secondly, the Zelzate costrel type. Hunneschans ware seems to have been fired in kilns on its own in the Badorf-Pingsdorf region (Lung

1955; Jannsen and Follman 1972). It is typically a roulette decorated Badorf-type with splashes of red-paint over the roller-stamping. From Haithabu there is a stamped varient of this decoration (unpublished: Schloss Gottarf, Schleswig). It seems likely that this ware was imitated, probably in the tenth century, by a centre at or near Huy on the Meuse (Lauwerjis, forthcoming). This production centre may account for the otherwise inexplicably early red-painted wares of this type from several tenth century burgh sites in Zeeland (on display in Middleburg and Aardenburg museums). The second Middle Rhenish type is the Zeizate costrel type. This famous costrel was dated by the hoard which it contained to about 870 and, contrary to previous suggestions, it must also be derived from the Badorf-Pingsdorf centres for its fabric is so similar macroscopically to that of relief-band amphorea in particular (cf. Bohner 1950, 216-217; Verhaeghe in Hurst 1969, 107-108). Several finds of similarly decorated costrels from Dorestad support this conclusion, while none are known from Hamwih where it might have been expected if it were a French Carolingian ware.

There is, then, no evidence for the continuity of the technique from the Roman period onwards. Rather the evidence suggests that a few vessels were made in the Merovingian period, although we know little of their origin; thereafter the idea of red-painting was abandoned north of the Alps until the later eight century. The idea was fostered in several large ceramic centres from the later eight century, and by the tenth century it was the primary product in the established industries in Alsace, in the Beauvaisis and in the Badorf-Pingsdorf region. The technique was adopted in many other northern European regions; in the Upper Seine, in the Middle Loire, one sherd from Orleans heavily tempered with mica suggests that it was made in Burgandy, and one sherd from Lille suggests it was at least tried by one potter in the Pas-de-Calais (Hodges 1977). Moreover, as I have already pointed out, there is a suggestion of a tenth century centre at or near Huy, while eleventh century red-painted wares were produced in Limburg (Briujn 1962-3). There is also a little evidence for red-painted wares of this date from the Saintonge, in western France (pers. comm., Dr. J. Chapelot). By this date it had become an important vogue though strangely one that appealed little to the English or their potters (Kilmurry and Mahany, forthcoming), yet it was adopted as far away as Poland during the twelfth century (De Bouard 1963, 445).

Table 1
Red-Painted Decoration

	a: finger applied	b: brush applied	c: splashed
Beauvaisis	x	x	
Alsace		x	
Trier			x
Hunneschans ware	x		
Zelzate costrel type	x		
Upper Seine valley type		x	
Middle Loire type	x	?x	
Pingsdorf	x	x	
Huy	x		
Limburg	x		
Orleans black painted sherd		x	
Lille sherd		?x	

In the published symposium on red-painted pottery Tischler considered the origins of this technique to be in northern Spain. He suggested a diffusion in which the techniques of red-painting may have reached the Rhineland by 'political relations, religious connections and the lively interchange of ideas between Spain and the Rhineland' (in Hurst 1969, 102). Zozaya commenting on the subject was reserved, but recently he was suggesting that both the techniques of red-painting and glazing were diffused to Spain from the Byzantine Empire, most probably by traders active in the Mediterranean (pers. comm.). This view was tentatively advanced by F. Verhaeghe in the symposium (Hurst 1969, 112), although he no longer upholds it (pers. comm.). Furthermore, it was a view supported by Whitehouse's thorough study on the Italian red-painted pottery (Hurst 1969, 137-143). Yet more recently Whitehouse has considered the origins of the techniques to be in northern Europe, and not in Italy (pers. comm.). A northern European origin was advocated forecefully by De Bouard and Guibert, and cautiously supported by Lobbedey.

More recently Alain Ferdiere (1974, 251-252) has suggested that the Upper Seine potters might have been influenced by Roman red-painted vessels once produced in that region, which were still lying around on ruined sites. Roman residual pottery may have been one influence and it would perhaps account to a certain extent for the variation of red-painted styles. It should be noted, incidently, that there is a marked technical difference between those potters that used (a) predominantly their fingers to apply the decoration : the Rhenish, Middle Loire, Limburg and 'Huy' potters, and (b) those that chiefly decorated the pots using a brush of some sort as did the Alsace, the Beauvasis and the Upper Seine potters (see Table 1). It is important to emphasize, furthermore, that the early technique seems to have been improved upon little in Alsace or in the Beauvasis where the ninth century vessels are as competantly decorated as the later medieval ones. In view of these factors it is worth drawing attention to two points made by the ethnographer George Foster concerning potters : first, they are some of the most conservative of craftsmen, and secondly, changes in ceramic styles only tend to take place when they are economically expedient (1965, 51).

It seems, then, that if the continuity thesis is no longer tenable, the re-adoption of the red-painting technique was most probably a style of decoration favoured by those who obtained pots from the potters - the clientele. Therefore, the simplest thesis is that the potters copied either Mediterranean, or Spanish or Roman residual vessels as a result of pressure of some kind from their patrons. The case for diffusionism is the most cogent and easily presented, but, as so often with this model, the mechanisms inherent remain unsatisfactorily obscure. In this early historic example I believe these mechanisms may be examined, reiterating earlier but largely unsubstantiated contentions.

It seems probable that most of the craftsmen operating in western Europe were patronised by the two economic forces that required what we may term luxury goods. These forces were the royalty including the small aristocracy and the church. There is no evidence either archaeological or historical for towns in the later eighth century, the period in which the red-painting of pottery was re-adopted. Any trading of surplus goods was probably on a limited basis and determined primarily by the irregular need for specific luxuries as opposed to the necessity of 'exporting', the latter being the

raison d'etre of the market economy with which we ourselves are familiar. The few documentary references to periodic markets must be borne in mind, and of necessity the craftsmen and merchants who might have attended them (Latouche 1967, 158-160). However, there is as yet no archaeological evidence available to substantiate these references. Elsewhere I have argued that there is evidence that the church was integral to the production of Tating Ware, a theory earlier expounded by Dr. A. Lundstrom (1971), and that, therefore, the church was also integral to the Mayen pottery industry and to an important Frankish class, the Hamwih class 14, which share similar petrologies (Hodges 1977). It seems quite as probable that the great centralized ceramic industry in the Badorf-Pingsdorf region near Cologne was an auxiliary industry to the Middle Rhineland wine-industry which, it might feasibly be suggested, was controlled, that is patronised, by the Carolingian Emperor (cf. Ennen 1956, 400, 402). This would explain the unusual size and output of these centres as well as the exceptional nature of this small area in the negotiations of the Treaty of Verdun in 843 A.D. Moreover, the church and the aristocracy were clearly the foremost consumers of wine, and it was almost certainly as accoutrements to this trade that many of these vessels were made.

These arguments can be sustained by a host of examples from a range of archaeological and historical information, and for a variety of crafts at this time. In this light we may well imagine how a member of a monastery or court who, on a pilgrimage to Rome, envied the red-painted Roman vessels he had seen, and simply asked for similarly decorated pots to be made by a potter(s) whom he perhaps could commission for the task. This might explain why the technique alone was copied; and not the forms; it explains also its slow rise to general appeal, from the later eighth until the tenth centuries. The rapid adoption of the technique during the tenth century by many leading potteries bears out Foster's point about economic constraints being the primary reasons for change in this conservative industry. In the tenth century the inception of the market may also have assisted the spread of the technique. It was, in any case, a relatively simple technique to copy providing the potters had access to iron oxide.

In fact, pottery was a minor luxury; it was integral to wine-drinking, in a specialist sense in the church (cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1975, 223), and more often in the long-halls of an heroic society. Prestige is an important element in all emergent hierarchical societies. It is a mechanism of engaging power, especially in centrally stratified societies whose ranking is fragile and in certain circumstances vulnerable to challenge (cf. Cherry, forthcoming). Establishing and sustaining that prestige in early medieval Europe took a variety of forms, some documented in contemporary texts, others documented by archaeologists. The greatest gift to the church was certainly one way. In the Migration period the most elaborate attire in one's grave was another way, more obvious to the archaeologist; a manner splendidly given form in the Sutton Hoo ship-burial. It follows, therefore, that since early medieval Europe turned to the Mediterranean as the centre of its civilisation, all aspects pertaining to that culture were held in some esteem. The Emperor Charlemagne has clearly bequethed to us this contemporary belief in the form of his great palace and *Dom* constructed of marble pillars from Ravenna and other riunous sites in Italy. It was in all a symbol of his right to the title of Holy Roman Emperor. More commonly this belief is apparent in most of the contemporary chronicles; to go on a pilgrimage to Rome was perhaps the greatest and most valuable human endeavour by a christian in northern Europe.

Renfrew has lucidly demonstrated the importance of prestige in trade, : his prestige chain network facilitates goods to be taken enormous distances (1975, 50-51). In the Migration period cemeteries this is most manifest. Because the evidence is more exact at that time we can also observe the prestige chain operating in the case of ideas. One example is garnet inlaid jewellery, an idea diffused from Lombard courts; to Merovingian courts; two centuries later to the Kentish court, then in all probability to the other petty 'courts' of seventh century England.

We may conclude that socio-economic forces govern the production of objects which archaeologists recover. This is a platitude, yet one in the context of medieval archaeology in particular which needs to be stressed. Unless we understand the mechanisms which are implicit in these forces, we shall not realize the full value of our archaeological data. The developing mechanisms of production and innovation in medieval ceramics should, as in this pre-market instance, shed useful light on similar industries and problems in other non-literate complex societies.

Composée de deux parties, cet article soulève de nouveau les problèmes concernant les origines, le développement, et la dispersion de la poterie peinte.

La première partie reconsidère le problème de continuité, et, se fondant sur l'analyse des trouvailles de Hamwih, conclut que la technique fut adondonnée au nord des Alpes du temps romain jusqu'au début du huitième siècle. Le développement suivant est tracé à travers le nord de l'Europe, des petits centres alsaciens aux plus grands centres d'Alsace, Beauvaisis, Badorf-Pingsdorf etc., notant que la technique ne fut jamais aussi populaire en Angletterre.

La deuxième partie s'occupe des problèmes de méthodologie. Les différentes hypothèses concernant les origines et la dispersion de la technique (Hurst 1969) sont résumées, et de nouvelles raisons socio-économiques sont proposées. Soulignant le rôle qu'ont joué l'église dans le développement des industries céramiques de Tating, Mayen et Hamwih 14, et la cour et l'église, les deux consommateurs plus grandes, dans l'industrie du vin, à laquelle l'industrie céramique de Badorf-Pingsdorf fut probablement subsidiaire, Hodges constate que la reprise de la technique fut la résponse à la demande deces deux puissances économiques, qui, ayant peut-être vu des vaisseaux mediterranéens, ou survivants ou pendant des pèlerinages, en voulaient des copies.

Il s'applique à renforcer l'importance de reconnaître les influences sociales comme le prestige (Renfrew 1975), l'admiration des choses mediterranéenes, les pèlerinages, ainsi que des influences économiques, la loi de l'offre-demande, le debut des marchés, pour mieux comprendre non seulement ces problemès-ci, mais aussi de tels problèmes en diverses civilisations complexes at non-litéraires.

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