

R E V I E W

Anglo-Saxon Pottery by David H. Kennett. 21 x 15 cm. 22pp text, 1 plate, 1 map, 30 other figs. Shire Publications Ltd., 1978. Price £1. 25.

Medieval Pottery by Jeremy Haslam. 21 x 15 cm. 30pp text, 8 plates, 29 figs. Shire Publications Ltd., 1978. Price £1. 25. Both paperback.

Shire publications have produced two more titles in their series Shire Archaeology. Both volumes are welcome additions to the small corpus of easily accessible general works on pottery.

Kennett discusses fabric and technology (Chapter 2, two pages) following a rather generalised introduction. Chapter 3, (less than one page) is concerned with dating. Chapter 4 is entitled Shape and Decoration. There follows a list of important sites, museums with good collections, and a bibliography (of three works). The plate is succeeded by a distribution map and 173 clear pottery drawings.

Haslam has a slightly different approach. A two page Glossary and techniques section is followed by an Introduction (Chapter 1), Saxo-Norman potters (Chapter 2), and a two page chronological and countrywide synthesis of Medieval pottery (1100-1500) comprises Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with some regional types. Kilns are covered in half a page (Chapter 6) and there follows a list of Museums and a bibliography (also of three works). Eight plates, including one delightful manuscript illustration precede 29 figures of good but sometimes repetitive drawings.

So far so good, but who, one wonders, are the books aimed at? It seems to this reviewer that they both fall between two stools and satisfy neither the archaeological nor the 'lay' reader. On the one hand, the authors may have the general public in mind to judge by the nature of the works, slim, cheaply priced and elementary in approach. On the other hand the concentration on typological variants seems to imply an audience with some positive archaeological background.

From the archaeological viewpoint, both can be taken to task on several counts. Kennett could have referred to some of the key settlement sites such as Mucking and West Stow, instead of considering cemeteries alone. The application of scientific techniques to the study of Anglo-Saxon pottery is full of potential and his faith in brooches as a means of dating is worth a smile: "It is the brooches which date the pots, not the pots which date the brooches" (his italics). Haslam's Glossary and techniques is an unhappy section. Anthromorphic and zoomorphic decoration is allowed nine lines of text (75 words) whereas fabric, of central importance to the study of pottery, is allocated one line (11 words). Apparently crushed shell was the usual tempering agent in the early medieval period. Calcareous inclusions were used certainly, but so were non-calcitic materials.

The interested layman would surely prefer to see pottery discussed in broader contexts. Instead of concentrating on types, more information on kilns, the potters themselves, the development of the craft in the general context of population, town and economic development, imports and other types of culinary equipment is an alternative approach more suited to the general public. Much of this information, of course, is not available in the Early Saxon period, but Kennett could have considered settlement archaeology in more detail.

All these points may seem carping given the very reasonable price - £1.25 each and it must be said that both works should be on the archaeologist's bookshelf. The easily available works of Myres and Hurst will inevitably be preferred to Kennett's but archaeologists will certainly be indebted to Haslam for the collection of nearly 500 pottery profiles.

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1.12.78.