

A NOTE ON THE COMPLETION OF THE FINAL DRAFT OF THE
'BASIC TERMINOLOGY FOR MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN NORTH GERMANY'

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The 'Basic Terminology for Medieval Pottery in North Germany' was set up by a working party in Schleswig-Holstein and this system was published in first draft form in Volume 7 of Medieval Ceramics. The final draft has now been worked out and will be published shortly, as

Erdmann W., Kühn H.J., Lüdtke H., Ring E., Wessel W., 1984 'Rahmenterminologie zur mittelalterlichen Keramik in Norddeutschland'. Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt 14

It was not possible to publish in full the final draft but this short note will try to give some idea of the aims and content of the Basic Terminology.

Since 1982 there has been an annual conference in Schleswig dealing with special themes concerning medieval ceramics. As a first step towards a common understanding some members of this colloquium started work on the 'Basic Terminology'. For practical reasons we limited this regionally to North Germany and chronologically to the 8th-15th century. At the same time there is close contact with colleagues who are dealing with similar problems in South Germany and in the Rhenish area, and therefore the systems we are developing are comparable.

An essential part of the 'Basic Terminology' is a list of all observable criteria of the pottery. This is divided into three sections: technology, shape (including decoration) and function. The list is intended to be a general check list and not a key list - a key list must be set up by every researcher according to the specific material but using the 'Basic Terminology' as a guide. The technological criteria refers to the kind of firing, hardness, type and size of temper, surface, colour, glaze, forming techniques and other points. The main intention was to define the single aspects in an objective way and in a way which was quantifiable. The hardness, for example, is classified into four groups which are determined by the MOHS scale; the size of temper is measurable in millimetres and is divided into four classes according to geological terms. The determination of colour is a special problem. Every specification of colour has to refer to a standard colour system but the Munsell book of colour is very expensive (and therefore very rare!). It is also very time-consuming to determine the colour of every single sherd, and becomes impractical when dealing with some 10,000 sherds. In an effort to solve this problem we are working on a colourboard which includes twenty colours which can be used for ceramic study. When this is completed we will try to publish it.

The 'Basic Terminology' tries to use traditional terms whenever possible, especially in the case of the names of wares. All the wares occurring in medieval times in North Germany (both locally produced and imported wares) are described in the 'Basic Terminology'. Each ware is strictly defined according to technological criteria, but the name of the ware can be taken from the name of a famous discovery place, such as Pingsdorf. This means, therefore, that Pingsdorf ware is a precisely described type of ware and not that every sherd of 'Pingsdorf-ware' was actually produced in the village of Pingsdorf.

Notice should be taken of two newly defined wares of which there are many small groups. These are 'weiche grauware' (soft grey ware) and 'harte grauware' (hard grey ware). We defined these groups according to the English 'early blackware' and 'late blackware' or the Scandinavian 'aeldre svartgods' and 'yngre svartgods'. The term bluegrey should not be used in future. Most of the sherds with a metallic surface which are called 'bluegrey' in Great Britain belong to Paffrath ware while some sherds belong to the ordinary 'harte grauware' or late blackware. In Germany the term 'bluegrey' has been used less precisely than in England and misunderstandings can (or have) happened.

To describe the shape, the 'Basic Terminology' includes a table. This consists of five columns each dealing with different parts of the vessel, for example, type of base, spout, handle etc. These features can then be combined to describe the vessel in a standardized way. There is a further list of basic terms dealing with decoration which is divided into the type of decoration and its position on the vessel. There is also a table which defines and names the different parts of the vessel and makes some proposals about the documentation of pottery. We have suggested ceramic material should be published at a 1:3 scale.

This brief summary can only give an idea of the complete work. The system aims to be very flexible at every point so that additions can be made. This will undoubtedly become necessary in time and perhaps eventually it will be possible to expand the system for wider application.

Criticisms and questions are welcome to:

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N.B. It may be of interest to readers to know that the Landesmuseum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Schleswig, has started to collect a range of samples of different types of ceramic wares which occur in northern Europe. We would like to hear from anyone who can support this project by sending us reference sherds and we may be able to exchange pottery with them.