

REVIEW

Andrew Rogerson and Carolyn Dallas, Excavations in Thetford, 1948-59 and 1973-80, (East Anglian Archaeology Report 22) Norfolk Archaeological Unit, Norfolk Museums Service, 1984. 210 pp; 203 figs., 26 pl., 15 tables. Price not stated.

Malcolm Atkin, Brian Ayers and Sara Jennings, Thetford-type ware production in Norwich in Waterfront Excavations and Thetford Ware production, Norwich (East Anglian Archaeology Report 17, 61-104) Norfolk Archaeological Unit, Norfolk Museums Service 1983. 106 pp; 43 figs., 4 pl., 19 tables. Price not stated.

The study of late Saxon pottery has recently received two eagerly awaited contributions dealing with one of its most important products, namely Thetford or Thetford-type ware. These East Anglian products span the period from the break with Middle Saxon pottery traditions to the emergence of Early Medieval wares in the 12th century. Thetford or Thetford-type wares represent part of a grey ware tradition which stretched from York to Ipswich over an area roughly comparable with the Viking Danelaw. The publication of these two works not only enables comparison to be made on the nature and scale of the kiln production in Thetford and Norwich but also offers an opportunity for speculation on the regional organisation of the pottery industry.

Both the aims and the contents of the two volumes are rather different. The Norwich report by Atkin, Ayers and Jennings is the second part of a two-part volume reporting on work done by the Norwich Survey and the Norfolk Archaeological Unit in the city of Norwich. It is designed to bring together various fragmentary pieces of evidence which help to build up a corpus of data. The report offers an interim statement for Thetford-type pottery production in Norwich and intends to provide a basis for a more definitive study when suitable sites become available for excavation. The description of the kilns and pottery from Thetford, on the other hand, form part of a general report on excavations at Thetford written by Rogerson and Dallas. This includes the post-war excavations carried out in the town by Group Captain Knocker together with various examinations of the town defences by Knocker and Davison and more recent work by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit. The kilns excavated by Knocker are described in Part I and the pottery recovered from them is discussed in Part IV under the heading of Artefacts. The stated aim of the pottery section is to present a corpus of material.

Both reports discuss the excavation of the kilns and describe their structure. One of the Norwich kilns (site 424N) has been given an archaeo-magnetic date in the 11th century and another (site 336N) a C14 date of 1180 which was later recalibrated to 1210-1280. The kilns at Thetford could only be dated by their context and the associated pottery. This seems to place the kilns somewhere in the 11th century though the problem of accurate dating is one that is stressed. The reports go on to describe and illustrate the pottery recovered from the excavations. In the Norwich volume Sara Jennings presents this according to the kiln or waster group from which the pottery was recovered; Rogerson and Dallas, on the other hand, present the material typologically and refer to the site in the catalogue. There are thirty-two figures illustrating the Thetford pottery and seven illustrating the Norwich material. This difference can be explained by the fact that almost four times as much pottery was recovered from Thetford and the kilns there produced a greater variety of forms.

Both reports discuss the forms encountered in the groups and attempt to quantify their importance within the assemblages. In addition, in the case of Thetford, it was possible to describe the actual kiln load of kiln 1. The two reports attempt to place their assemblages within a chronological framework and both encounter the usual difficulties in ascribing absolute dates.

The reports both satisfactorily achieve their intended aims and will become valuable reference works for students of late Saxon pottery. Equally, both realise their own shortcomings. In the case of the Thetford report these derive from the many problems associated with writing up a forty-year old excavation when inevitably the site archive is not complete and some of the material has been lost. It says a great deal for the thoroughness of both Group Captain Knocker and the authors of the report that such a complete publication was possible. The authors of the Norwich volume did not have the same problems to surmount or the same bulk of material to deal with; the problems they encountered were more to do with the limitations imposed by the circumstances of recovery and the lack of opportunity for proper excavation of the sites.

The two volumes raise a number of very interesting points, all of which merit further research in the future. The origins of the Thetford ware tradition, for example, seem as obscure as ever despite the amount of work that has been carried out in recent times. Authors of both reports feel unable to tackle this question within the scope of their respective works. The Thetford volume alludes to the traditional view that the inspiration for the pottery comes from the Continent but does not develop the theme. The Norwich volume restricts itself to speculation on the relative chronology of the various centres producing Thetford-type wares, commenting on the importance of establishing the chronological position of Ipswich. The problem of fabric identification was also raised in both cases. Rogerson and Dallas make four divisions of Thetford ware fabrics - smooth, fine, medium and coarse. Jennings makes no such division of the Norwich material but noted certain differences between kiln and waster groups. Authors of both works refer to the visual similarity of the Thetford and Norwich products and the need for scientific analysis to show differences. This problem increases the difficulty of ascribing pottery assemblages not associated with kilns to their correct production centre. Clearly this is important for the understanding of how the regional distribution of pottery was organised. It is clear from the information presented in these volumes that the two centres produced a different range of goods; the kilns so far recognised in Norwich concentrated upon cooking pots and lamps while the Thetford kilns apparently produced a far greater range of forms including cooking pots, spouted and handled pitchers, dishes, costrels, bottles, lids etc. Jennings comments that a greater range of forms have been recovered from Norwich than is known to have been produced at the Norwich kilns and it may be that certain forms were traded from Thetford. Clearly there is a great deal of potential for further research into the organisation of the pottery industry at a regional level in the next few years - if the problem of visual confusion of the products can be overcome.

Finally, both volumes make a contribution towards understanding townscapes of the late Saxon period. In the case of Norwich there seems to be a pottery production zone centred around Bedford St. /Pottergate. In Thetford this is less clearly defined with Knocker's kilns occurring in site 2 North and Davison's kilns some 300 metres away. Perhaps the promised publication of Davison's kiln group

Dallas (in prep.) will show a chronological difference which might argue for a shift in industrial zoning within the city.

The 1980s look as if they will be a crucial decade for the publication of late Saxon pottery groups from eastern England. Kathy Kilmurry's work on Stamford ware (1980) and Maurice Barley's final publication of the Torksey kilns (1981) began the flow, and the next few years should see the publication of the Flaxengate (Lincoln) and Coppergate (York) reports as well as Davison's Thetford kiln report. Work currently under way in Ipswich must yield results and finds such as the Nottingham kiln (this volume) will hopefully continue. A great deal of data will therefore become available which is ideally suited for research into the growth of urban industries, regional and inter-regional exchange networks and which will result in a better understanding of the crucial late Saxon period. The two volumes from East Anglia have made a very useful contribution towards this aim.

Ailsa J. Mainman
York Archaeological Trust

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