

THE EARLIEST DATED FINDS OF GLAZED POTTERY IN RIBE

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Summary

This paper describes the earliest dated sherds of glazed pottery found in Ribe. Probably all the 43 sherds are of foreign origin, Andenne, Northern France and maybe also Flanders. The exact datings by dendrochronology confirm that some glazed pottery was imported to Ribe in the second part of the 12th century (c. 1150; after 1144 but before 1180; between 1180 and c. 1225). These imports may have led to a later, local production of glazed pottery in South Scandinavia. The datings from Ribe correspond with new results from Lübeck and confirm that the dating of glazed pottery in Denmark should not always be restricted to the standard dating of highly-decorated pottery.

Ribe is situated on the south-west coast of Jutland, a few kilometres from the sea to which the town is connected by the river, which divides the town into two parts (Fig. 1). Excavations on the northern side of the river have revealed the existence of a wealthy trading place in the 8th century with numerous imports from the Rhineland. In the middle of the 9th century the Danish king allowed a church to be built in Ribe, the first mention of a settlement with that name (Bencard 1981).

Until recently, however, no archaeological finds from either side of the river can be dated to the Viking Age, although Ribe and its bishops are mentioned during that period. The town excavations, which have been carried out almost continuously since 1955, show the existence of a medieval town from the 12th century and onwards with a renewed and steady participation in the North Sea trade. This is clearly demonstrated by the finds of imported pottery in Ribe (Bencard 1972; Madsen 1982, 83; Jensen, Madsen & Schiørring 1983).

The small excavation, which is to be presented here because of the occurrence of some early and well-dated sherds of glazed pottery, took place near the centre of Ribe on the southern side of the river (Fig. 1). The layers were about 5 metres thick, but only the uppermost 2.5 metres could be fully excavated. Drillings into the ground proved that the natural subsoil lay under sea level. This corresponds with other observations, and shows that this whole area of the town rests on massive layers of fillings in the western part of the river bed (Madsen & Mikkelsen 1985). This filling (phase I) was composed of clay and dung. On top of it was found a wood construction, probably a refuse container, entirely made of oak planks (phase II). The wood could be dated by dendrochronology to some time after the year 1144, its youngest, preserved annual ring being from 1131 (dating by Wormianum, Aarhus).

On top of this came layers which marked the building of a house, and later on its destruction by fire (phase III). After this followed another house (phase IV),

to have been mixed into the layers by some accident during the excavation. The fact is, however, that the individual sherds were found scattered in all five phases, being parts of not less than 21 find-complexes in phases I-V.

Fig. 3 gives a division of the sherds into groups of wares. Thirty-two of them are made entirely of pipeclay and must have been imported. The remaining eleven sherds, which consist of red- or grey-fired clays, could, with the exception of one sherd, be of South Scandinavian origin, their decoration being made of imported pipeclay.

Phases	B		C					Total	
	B1	B2	Andenne		North France OBS (Rouen)				
			partly glazed/ glazed	glazed, rouletted	bi- chrom.	green glazed	Others		
V - c. 1225	2	6	3		4	4	5	24	
IV 1179/80 -		1	3	1			2	1	8
III before 1179/80		2						2	4
II after 1144			3						3
I c. 1150			4						4
	2	9	13	1	4	6	8	43	

B: 11 sherds

C: 32 sherds

Fig. 3.

Fig. 3. The glazed pottery including both groups B and C from the phases I-V

Most of the sherds come from glazed jugs. In phase I is a base sherd from a sparsely glazed Andenne jug with thumb-impressions on the edge of its knife-trimmed sagging base, (Fig. 4. 1). One sherd, in phase II, is probably from the rim of a pot or bowl (Fig. 4 2), and a base sherd from the same phase seems to be from a candlestick (Fig. 4. 3). In phase IV a flat base sherd from a jug was recovered (Fig. 4. 4). These sherds as well as some of the others (Fig. 3) could be Andenne products (Borremans et Warginaire 1966, Fig. 12, 8; 21, 8 and 10, 12 Clarke 1975. Lüttke 1985, Taf. 37). From phase IV were recovered the first two sherds of green glazed wares from Northern France. Jugs with bichromatic decoration only seem to occur from phase V.

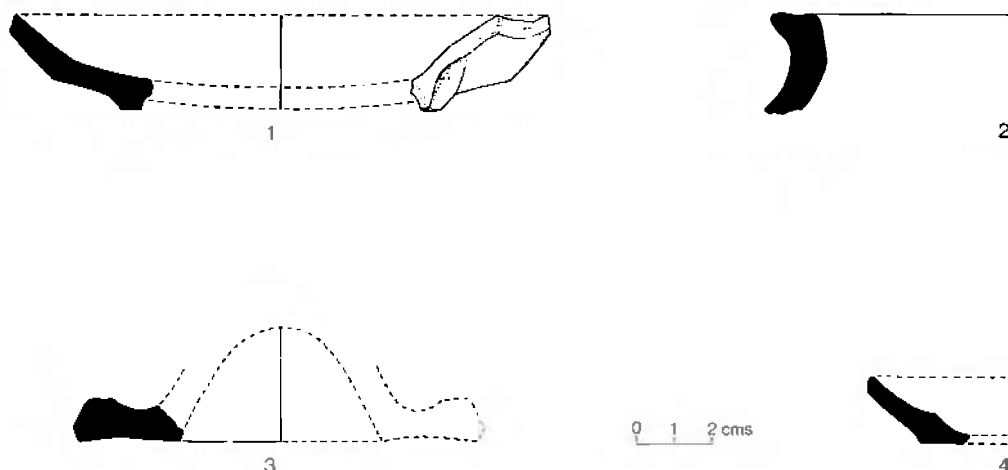


Fig. 4. 1: base sherd from a partly glazed jug, phase I
 2: rim sherd, probably from a partly glazed pot or bowl, phase II
 3: base sherd from a candlestick, phase II
 4: base sherd from a partly glazed jug, phase IV

The red- and grey-fired sherds in group B consist of some which are glazed (B1), and some that have, in addition, an applied slip or decoration in pipeclay. Only one (B2) sherd from phase V can be defined, namely as a piece of an "Aardenburg" jug with rouletted patterns and greenish glaze. The other eight sherds in group B2 all seem to be from jugs with vertical strips of pipeclay as their main decoration, perhaps to some degree inspired from the northern French wares.

One of the sherds in B1 is from a jug with greenish lead glaze on the grey, reduced surface of the red ware. The inside is also grey. The other sherd measures c. 8 x 8 cm, is 0.5 cm thick and comes from the bottom of a frying pan or maybe a dripping pan. The ware is greyish with a red surface, covered by a colourless glaze with greenish spots. The underside of the sherd is grey and sooted.

The dating of phase V seems to be in the first part of the 13th century. In the latest layers of activity in the phase IV house were sherds of (a) locally-made greywares (Kugeltopf); (b) of an amphora in Pingsdorf ware; and (c) of near-stoneware with spots of so-called "Lehm-glasur" or better "Sinterengobe" (Fig. 2). This corresponds with the finds in phase V and with the observations from several other excavations in Ribe (Bencard 1973; Madsen 1982).

The excavation which has been dealt with here testifies that jugs and other products of glazed pottery were known in Ribe by the second part of the 12th century, perhaps only in small quantities. Although it cannot be concluded that the production of glazed pottery in South Scandinavia started at this time, it seems that the knowledge of glazed wares and the necessary inspiration to start such a production was at hand in South Western Denmark. The earliest dendrochronological dating of glazed pottery in Lfbeck places this ware before 1173, which corresponds almost exactly with the dating from Ribe (personal information from Mr W. Erdmann during the fourth symposium of Medieval Ceramics in Slesvig, November 1985; the dates will be published in Erdmann 1985. Cf. Erdmann 1982, 551 and 1984, 110). In the church of Nr. Løgum in Northern Slesvig c. 40 kilometres south of Ribe is a decorative frieze on top of the side walls of the romanesque nave and aisle, consisting of slender columns and arches in brick, glazed with a thick, green, lead glaze (Danmarks Kirker, Tønder Amt, 1525). Timber from the preserved, original roof construction of the church has been dated by dendrochronology, indicating that the church was built in 1188±1 year (dating by the National Museum in Copenhagen, personal information from Mrs Elna Møller). On Zealand the production of glazed tiles seems to start already in the late 12th century (Als Hansen 1982), whereas the firing of glazed pottery in Farum Lillevang in North Zealand may have taken place before 1250 (Madsen 1983). The oldest glazed pottery which has so far been found in medieval Denmark are from Lund. They consist of sherds of probably English origin, related to Winchester Ware, and dated to the first half of the 11th century (Martensson 1976, 267). Obviously these imports have had no influence on the production of glazed pottery later in the Middle Ages.

Many finds of glazed pottery in Denmark from the past ten years have been dated according to the standard dating of highly-decorated pottery (c. 1250-1350), which was first introduced in Denmark by Bencard in 1973. The finds from Ribe and elsewhere points to a much more differentiated development and testify to the occurrence of glazed pottery in South Scandinavia well before 1250. On the other hand it ought to be stressed that the dated finds from Ribe are not universal, and that they should not be used uncritically when dating other finds, including waste material from kilns, found elsewhere.

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