



Reviews

A. J. Mainman, *Anglo-Scandinavian Pottery from Coppergate* The Archaeology of York: The Pottery (AY 16/5). York Archaeological Trust for Excavation and Research 1990. ISBN 0906780 89 6. 166 pp, 187 figures, 11 plate, (3 in colour), Price £22.50.

The ways and means of publishing large amounts of site and finds data from different sites within what is effectively one large site have been tackled in different ways by different archaeological bodies, with varying levels of success. The main failings are to lose the finds in a large amount of stratigraphic information, or to concentrate on aspects of the finds to the detriment of the stratigraphy and an awareness of the association of different objects. The York Archaeological Trust is to be commended for achieving in the Archaeology of York fascicule series a well-balanced integration of site and finds data.

The author of this handsomely produced publication of the 55,000 sherds of 9th- to 11th-century pottery from Coppergate is also to be commended for producing a well-structured, logically organised report which considers not merely the different fabric types, but relates them to their stratigraphic location on the site and interprets the results in a meaningful manner. To this end, the volume contains an introduction to the archaeology of the site, a list of provenances, ware/context concordances, and a list of pits (and fill) numbers, while the figures include not only pottery drawings but numerous distribution plots and serigraphs which support the conclusions drawn from the material. The pottery illustrations, although originally by three different hands, have been skilfully prepared for publication so that they have a consistent style which is neither too simple nor too fussy. The page layouts are well-balanced and visually attractive while the cover and colour plates are excellent.

The introduction to the site by the excavator, Richard Hall, includes a neatly tabulated summary of the chronological sequence of events on the site. After the Roman occupation (Period 1) the site was apparently abandoned (Period 2). The finds under discussion are assigned to three independently-dated periods of activity spanning c.200 years (Periods 3–5). Period 3 (mid/late 9th century to early 10th century) can be closely dated by the results of archaeomagnetic dating and numismatic evidence; Period 5B (c.AD 975 to early 11th century) is dated by dendrochronology. The four properties along the street frontage are identified from west to east as tenements A–D.

The general introduction to the pottery report contains a section on earlier research, together with notes on methodology, terminology, the presentation of the data, and the problems of residual and intrusive pottery; this includes two serigraphs which demonstrate the changing distribution of the different wares during periods 3 to 5c on the Coppergate site. The pottery report itself falls into three parts: an introduction to and discussion of the different wares (presented in approximate chronological order by ware type), an interpretation of the pottery, and a discussion/conclusion.

The few sherds of Middle Saxon, Anglian and handmade wares (c.200 sherds in all) are summarised in six groups: Ipswich/Ipswich-type, Maxey-type, and 'Other' (possibly imported), and various handmade wares. The first three groups contain very little material; the handmade wares comprise some

170 sherds. The distribution of these wares is discussed in the text, and is illustrated for periods 3, 4b and 5c.

The larger groups of later 9th- and 10th-century pottery are treated in a consistent, standardised manner, with sections on previous research, chronological distribution on the site, form and fabric, followed by a discussion which concentrates on the development of the tradition and technology, general distribution and general dating. There are seventy-one illustrations of York ware, thirty-seven illustrations of York 'd' ware, and sixty-five of shelly ware (previously termed St. Neots or St. Neots-type). A major section is devoted to Torksey-type and related wares such as Thetford-type ware. The former retains the accepted name, although it is now thought that the York sherds are from a more local source than Torksey. Some 170 vessels are illustrated. The discussion of Stamford ware vessels (forty-eight illustrations) includes a section on Stamford ware and related crucibles (sixty-three illustrations). The distribution plots of used and unused crucibles show a marked concentration along the street frontage, mainly in tenement D.

The pre-Conquest 'Early Glazed' wares (EG), are the highlight of this first section, since (with the exception of Stamford ware) they have been overlooked by previous researchers, and this report includes much original work. These glazed wares have been classified in five groups. EG Type 1, which used a white-firing clay, is the most common type in all phases (304 sherds); seventy-six examples are illustrated, compared with only twenty-nine for EG types 2–5. The latter groups, which used a red or grey-firing clay, are all very small. The most interesting aspect of these wares is their distribution, and their importance for the study of ceramic technology in the late Saxon/Anglo-Scandinavian period. The distribution, which extends to Ipswich, London, and Winchester indicates that use of glazed wares was not confined to sites within the Danelaw (the possible mechanism for this distribution is not discussed). However, it does not occur in all Danelaw centres: no examples are known from Stamford, Thetford or Norwich, while only one sherd is known from Lincoln. The concentration in York suggests that these early glazed wares were probably produced in or near the city, although white-firing clays are rare in the area and the forms are different from the typical range produced in York ware. The production of glazed wares elsewhere in England, in north-west France, Belgium and the Netherlands is also considered, providing a useful up-date to the various papers produced on this subject in 1969. The conclusion is that 'a number of centres were producing glazed pottery in the 10th century, presumably as high quality luxury items' (although it is observed that in York these wares were available to the artisan class). It is also noted that 'it is probably significant that many of these centres ... also produced evidence of early glass production'. This is perhaps not surprising since these towns all had important churches and most were to become cathedral cities. Mention is made of the early glazed tile production at Winchester, although for some reason the early glazed tile production at York is overlooked.

The penultimate part of the first section covers the foreign wares, which are treated in the same fashion as the above, albeit rather summarily due to the small amount of material. Badorf-type ware is represented by only two sherds from one vessel, while the 103 sherds of Pingsdorf-type ware probably derive from less than ten vessels. Other continental imports include

Tating-type ware and French or Low Countries black-burnished ware, which in London could be considered as dating to pre-AD 850 and probably pre-AD 800. The reason for not including these wares with the other earlier types such as Ipswich ware is not clear, especially as it is noted in the text that these sherds resemble others from contexts provisionally dated to the 8th century at 46–54 Fishergate, York, and that, together with the Badorf-type ware, they are ‘clearly from earlier deposits’. There are also fragments from four red-painted wares for which no provenance is known. Finally there is a brief discussion of the significance of these wares.

The last wares to be considered are Splashed ware and Gritty ware, which appear to be the precursors of the dominant 12th-century types.

The interpretation of the pottery comprises a period by period overview of the ceramic trends, with more detailed discussion of the stratigraphic distribution of the sherds in pits and other features, both in general terms and by tenement; this information is also presented in maps and serigraphs.

The general discussion and conclusion draw together all the above strands of information and present a coherent synthesis of the present state of knowledge of pottery manufacture, use and trade in late 9th-early 11th century York. As the author points out, however, the Coppergate site constitutes only a very small part of the Viking Age city. Only when the pottery from different types of sites in other parts of the town has been examined and compared both internally and with assemblages from contemporary rural sites will it be possible to build up a real picture of the rôle of the different wares at different times. Nonetheless, the study of such a wealth of material from the Coppergate site provides an admirable foundation for such a project, and will undoubtedly become an indispensable reference book.

To conclude, this reviewer can do no better than quote Richard Hall, who in the introduction rightly describes this report as ‘a milestone in late Saxon/Anglo-Scandinavian ceramic studies, for it is the largest well-stratified assemblage of this date excavated in northern England and provides a wealth of data about the technology, commercial links, economy and living patterns of the Anglo-Scandinavian capital of Jorvik’. We look forward to the final synthesis of all the finds data in the volume AY8 which is currently in preparation.

Lyn Blackmore.

L. Adams Gilmour, *Early Medieval Pottery from Flaxengate Lincoln*. CBA, 1988, 127pp., ISBN 0-906780-57-8. Price £18.00

P. Miles, J. Young, J. S. Wachter, *A Late Saxon Kiln Site at Silver Street, Lincoln*. CBA, 1989, 55pp., ISBN 0-906780-85-3. Price £11.95.

At one time it seemed a good idea to review these two volumes together. They should after all be complementary in presenting, from Flaxengate, an extensive range of early medieval ceramics and from Silver Street a contemporary kiln site. The reason why they do not complement each other is that the latter has re-worked Gilmour’s analysis, thereby rendering it more confusing to read than it is already. Such a re-working was undoubtedly necessary, for the Flaxengate volume employs a reference system which seems cumbersome and is certainly unsympathetic to the reader.

The Flaxengate publication is 127 pages long. There are perhaps thirty-eight pages of text, the remainder consisting of tables, drawings and captions. The work is therefore highly

descriptive. Quantification is presented dutifully, through a variety of charts, graphs and tables. Interpretation is cursory and certainly not the main emphasis of the volume.

The excavation is summarised neatly and we are presented quickly with an ‘Introduction to the Pottery’, which precedes the extremely detailed ceramic catalogue. This introduction contains a surprisingly deep exploration of the methodology, accompanied by an idiosyncratic diagram showing the criteria for classifying inclusions. It is this which sounds the first warning. As the reader proceeds into the catalogue it becomes apparent that the classification of fabric types has been carried out with almost fanatical zeal, expressed in a system of Ware Types, Sub-groups and Fabric Codes. It would appear that ‘Lincoln Sandy Ware sub-group 1’ has six different fabric codes (Q/6/m/1 to Q/8/m/2), but the significance of these distinctions is never made clear. Imports are similarly treated. ‘Andenne-type *Low Countries 12th-century glazed ware*’ is present in seven fabric codes. There are nine vessels of this type in total. The tabular presentation of the quantification of these types, shown through 14 phases, is not pretty.

No discernible attempt has been made to classify forms to the same level. Rim forms are not coded, nor even decorative techniques or motifs. Forms are presented as Vessel Types, of which there are fifteen Classes, and thirty-seven Forms. Undiagnostic body sherds are not given any form identity. Most sherds have been placed into Class 4, called ‘Pot’ (cooking pot/jar and spouted and/or handled pots), a group which seems to cover a variety of vessel types and functions. Forms are chiefly presented in pages of most competent drawings, but these are simply descriptive. Specific examples are rarely referred to in the text.

The method of quantification, which presents vessel numbers as opposed to sherd weight or numbers of EVEs, seems commendable, even if it might also be worth knowing how many sherds represent each vessel. Furthermore one does wonder how long it took, and whether the patterns it has revealed would be any less apparent if more speedy methods had been adopted. Both this, and the level of fabric analysis may account for the time it has taken to produce this report.

Quantification is biased towards fabric, and there are some unhelpful tables which seem to serve no interpretative purpose at all. A different set of charts is presented when some interpretation is attempted, five pages from the end. Here some sensible points are made, which do no more than lead us to reflect on what might have been. With scarcely any attempt to place this assemblage into some social and economic context, let alone a wider ceramic, archaeological one, this reviewer was left to wonder whether it was all worth the obvious effort that has gone into it. More pertinently perhaps, is it worth the eighteen pounds you have to pay for it? I suspect that you would have to have an enormous interest in local Lincoln pottery to think so.

That question is made even more valid when one sees how the work on the Silver Street material has led to an almost immediate revision of the Flaxengate system. Fabrics have been reclassified into wares which are sub-divided into types such as Lincoln Late Shelly Ware Fabric E. For this reader this is an altogether more comprehensible system. A concordance of the new classification of the Lincoln wares with that presented in the Flaxengate report is in the accompanying microfiche.

As this is really a single-fabric assemblage, work has concentrated far more, and far more profitably, on vessel form. Rim types and method of decoration are classified and illustrated. The vessel type classification of the Flaxengate report has also been re-worked into a more sensible system which thankfully no longer includes the dreadful ‘Pot’ class. The pottery is quantified by sherd number instead of vessel number, which is something of a relief also.

In a fairly slim volume (55 pages) a clear analysis of a significant assemblage is achieved, together with an examination