

Knuston Hall to Knuston Hall — Sixteen Years of Pottery Studies in the Low Countries The Ninth Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture

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SUMMARY

This paper reviews the different approaches to pottery studies in the Netherlands and Flanders since 1975. Some of the publications resulting from this work are listed in a 'Select Bibliography', each with an individual number by means of which it is referred to in the text. These publications are discussed under a number of thematic headings which cover chronology, trade, production, technology, the potters, the consumers and the uses to which pottery was put.

It is with great trepidation that I embark on the publication of the ninth Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture of the Medieval Pottery Research Group. There is hardly a greater difference to be found than in the length of Gerald Dunning's list of publications on pottery and mine. With this drawback in mind I will try to give an outline of the development of late-medieval pottery studies in the Low Countries (The Netherlands and Flanders¹) since Hans Janssen did the same thing on this same spot more than sixteen years ago (24). He allowed me to pick his brains extensively for which I am truly grateful.

What happened between Knuston Hall and Knuston Hall in the field of pottery studies in the Low Countries? A lot. Is it enough? No. Has it all been relevant? Partly.

To avoid a boring summing up of authors and titles I will look at different aspects of pottery studies and see what has been achieved. Moreover I have limited the subject to the period between c.AD 1000 and AD 1500 and I will only consider so-called domestic ceramics, leaving out building ceramics and the like, although they were sometimes made on the same site (13).

Dating.

During the last sixteen years efforts have been made to arrive at a dependable chronology of late-medieval pottery used in the Low Countries. In the 1970s J. M. Baart tried — as did Gerald Dunning himself² — to make an overall dating scheme of pottery groups in 25-year periods based on stratified finds from Amsterdam. It appears that he did not succeed, for nothing has appeared in print, at least not for the medieval period.

Amongst the other valiant attempts to come to grips with the exact dating of the ever growing mound of pottery found during excavations stands the '*Corpus of Medieval Pottery from closed contexts in the Low Countries* (44, 45, 67)³. It is a slow-moving project, not only because the amount of work involved is in inverse proportion to the available time of the editors and the amount of money provided, but also because it has become clear that really well-dated assemblages are fairly rare. The Corpus requires unambiguous, external dating evidence.

By applying formalised descriptions, a fixed terminology and a standardized method of drawing, the Corpus hopes to contribute to a greater uniformity to pottery description and representation (see Fig. 1). Care has been taken not to make too many subdivisions which are often meaningless and therefore confusing. For example, colour is not determined by the use of the Munsell Chart and the rule that 'red is always red except when it is orange' has gained some notoriety.

Another approach to the dating of pottery and other archaeological finds — mainly from the 15th century and later — was proposed by Jacobs and Peremans in 1976 (22), who studied a number of Flemish and Dutch paintings in which pottery is represented. In their very systematically written article they are well aware of the many pitfalls that this kind of interdisciplinary research presents. Unfortunately their proposed method has not been put into practice on any large scale. In the very recently published catalogue of the Van Beuningen — de Vrieze collection in Rotterdam a number of their warnings have not been heeded, with ensuing disastrous results (41). The objects depicted in this work and the utensils themselves often bear but a remote resemblance to each other. I still think that the

method proposed by Jacobs and Peremans is a good one for dating late medieval pottery and that it should be used systematically and not incidentally. I am happy to say that the foundation of the *Boymans — van Beuningen Documentation System for Pre-industrial Utensils*, in which, among other things, pictures of any kind representing pre-industrial utensils are collected, will in due course offer the possibility of fruitful research along the lines of Jacobs and Peremans.

There are of course other methods for dating pottery more or less exactly. A small number of vessels (thirty-four) dating from AD 1190 to AD 1566 could be dated because they were used as containers for coin-hoards. They were published by Herbert Sarfatij, who offered a number of valuable cautionary remarks regarding the exactness of dating by coin-hoard (42). The majority of the vessels are stoneware jugs dating from the 15th and 16th centuries.

A sometimes hotly debated issue is the introduction of real Siegburg stoneware in the Netherlands. The final answer to that question has been given by Hans Janssen (28). That is to say, as long as everybody uses the same terminology proposed by him at the Hull Conference on *'Ceramics and Trade'*: proto-stoneware, near-stoneware and real-stoneware (26, page 173). His introduction of near-stoneware as a distinct Siegburg group that occurs in the late 13th and early 14th century separates the proto-stonewares from the real stonewares made at that production centre.

At Bruges an effort was made to date two kilns by archaeo-magnetism (21). However, the results were not very promising, because the date range was too wide.

Trade.

The late Gerald Clough Dunning was a staunch nationalist⁴ and consequently — I suppose — a great admirer of the British Empire. The latter fell apart but the British obviously have not lost their sense of adventure or their urge to bring civilisation to underdeveloped tribes. This at least is true for British archaeologists of the pottery persuasion: following in the footsteps of Dunning⁵, Ken Barton colonized France and John Hurst roamed through the Netherlands and the Rhineland, followed there by David Gaimster and Mark Redknapp. To bolster up our self-esteem: they were, and are, looking for the origins of the fine pottery the British imported from the Continent! Finds of British pottery exported to the Low Countries are few and far between. They are found mainly in coastal regions, more precisely in ports. But, be that as it may, we all profited from these international contacts which centered around the questions of 'Pottery and Trade', 'Distribution' and 'Provenance'. It will be clear that the trade I have in mind is long-distance trade or transport.

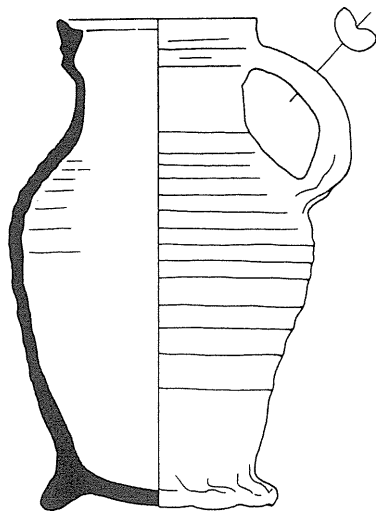
In this respect John Hurst has played a major role in the development of pottery studies in the Low Countries. In 1982 he and David Neal published *The*

late medieval Iberian pottery imported into the Low Countries (19) starting from the large amount of sherds in the Van Beuningen — de Vrieze collection and combining in a true European fashion British scholarship, Spanish industry and the mercantile enterprise of the Low Countries (the historical one and that of Van Beuningen!).

Speaking of the Van Beuningen Collection, the *magnum opus* of John Hurst, *Pottery Produced and Traded in Northwest Europe Between 1350 and 1650* comes to the fore (20) — a remarkable book based on that large private collection from the Netherlands. From the Netherlands? Here we encounter, in my opinion, a rather serious shortcoming in this magnificent work, or rather in the collection on which the book is based. The flaw is already apparent in Fig. 1 of the book, the caption for which reads 'Situation of sites mentioned in the text'. The map of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and surroundings (Antwerp, Cologne!) shows ceramic areas where you would not expect them (Maastricht, Nijmegen, 's-Hertogenbosch, Zwolle, Kampen, Leeuwarden en Groningen). This is a classic example of the limited significance of a distribution map: it often shows the spatial distribution of archaeologists (both professional and amateur) and — in this case — the Van Beuningen hunting grounds. So we will neither learn from this book whether pottery was exported to Britain from Kampen, Nijmegen or Maastricht (all three towns having had a lively trade with Britain in the 14th and 15th centuries), nor gain an insight into 'ceramic regions' in the Low Countries. However, it is — apart from Janssen's article in *Ceramics and Trade* — the first monograph to discuss medieval (and later) Low Countries pottery since Renaud's publication of 1976 (40).

The pottery exports from the Low Countries to Britain are negligible compared to their imports from the Rhineland or France (49, 50, 54, 55)⁶. Hurst's book presents a good survey of those imports in the western part of our country. No other general work on those imports exists (apart from his own article on Iberian Pottery), but for some towns the amount of pottery imports can be gathered from publications about their local archaeology, for example Baart's book on the excavations in Amsterdam (1), Hans Janssen's *Van Bos tot Stad* (27) and Hillewaert's articles on the late-medieval imports in Bruges (14, 15, 16; see also 58 and Fig. 2). In the latter, Hillewaert comes to the conclusion that a lot of the more exotic wares don't even reach Bruges itself, but that they have mainly been lost and found in the ports of that commercial capital. Her suggestion that part of these imports were personal property of sailors seems sensible.

These last three papers are more or less 'old-fashioned' publications in the positive sense of the word. However, new trends and techniques are also coming to the fore in pottery studies. They are mainly practised at the University of Amsterdam, as the work



C.M.A.		1987 04/025
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VINDPLAATS EN VONDSTNUMMER	:	Utrecht Korte Nieuwstr. 1982 KN 986
BEWAARPLAATS EN INVENTARISNR.	:	PGADU, KN 06/02/00/02/ 31
VONDSTOMSTANDIGHEDEN	:	Immunitetssloot
DATERING	:	Ante 1281
PUBLICATIE	:	-
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VORMTECHNIEK	:	gedraaid draairibbels op buik en schouder en aan binnenzijde
VERSCHRALING	grootte	: 0.2-0.7mm uitschieters 2mm en 6mm
	dichtheid	: dicht
	materiaal	: zand, kwartshoudend en hoekig, kleine fracties afgerond
STRUCTUUR	porositeit	: niet poreus
	hardheid	: zeer hard
	bijzonderheden	: niet volledig gesinterd
OPPERVLAKTEBEHANDELING EN		
VERSIERING	:	-
OVENATMOSFEER	:	reducerend
KLEUR	:	bruin met grijze plekken
BIJZONDERHEDEN	:	deuk onder oor en lichte deuk in tegenoverliggende zijde
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SECUNDAIRE VERSCHIJNSELEN	:	zowel aan binnen-als buiten-zijde sporen van aan-koeking waarin dierlijk en plantaardig materiaal
<hr/>		
TOESCHRIJVING	productiecentrum:	Siegburg (Beckmann 1975 Tafel 15)
	datering	: XIIIb (Janssen 1983, afb 3-10/11)
	functie	: kan
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OVERIGE OPMERKINGEN	:	-

Fig. 1. Pottery from one feature: a proto-stoneware pitcher from a well-dated late 13th-century ditch from Utrecht and its description on a standardized sheet of C.M.A. (from Bibliography No. 44, pages 61 and 62).

of Van der Leeuw (33) and Verhoeven (65, 66) shows. The latter uses high-flown models from other disciplines, sophisticated computer-programmes and advanced hardware to make distribution maps of Pingsdorf and Andenne wares in the 12th century, which indicate a very high concentration of Andenne ware in the middle of the North Sea (Fig. 3). This remarkable result is reached by using ceramics from less than 25 sites which happen to have been published in 'readily available' publications. I have nothing against models, computer programmes or hardware, but as long as fundamental principles of statistics are disregarded it is all a dire waste of time and money which could better be used in primary work, *i.e.* to

make more 'readily available' publications from which one can make sensible distribution maps. Moreover, Verhoeven fails to take into account the fact that 'Andenne' is a very general name for a fairly great variety of fabrics from different periods, especially in Brabant.

In a modestly inductive, but in the end more effective way, that has been done in the *Travaux du Groupe de Recherches et d'Études sur la Céramique dans le Nord-Pas-de-Calais*, in which the (possible) imports from Northern France into Bruges and Ghent have been described by Hillewaert (15) and Raveschot (39) respectively. Frans Verhaeghe provided an introductory chapter to this monograph (60).

Production.

The number of kiln sites and concentrations of wasters without remains of a kiln have grown considerably during the last sixteen years. The situation of the early 1980s has been very ably summarized by Hans Janssen for the Netherlands (26) and by Frans Verhaeghe for coastal Flanders (51), but since then more has come to light. However, full publication of most of these sites is still lacking. The Haarlem (34, 43, 46), Bergen op Zoom (11, 12) and Bruges (23) kiln-sites, the Leiden wasters (29) and both Utrecht 'industrial sites' (7, 13, 37, 38) have been described, but not always in readily available reports. It does not seem very sensible to go into detail about these production sites at this moment, and so I will limit myself to a number of general remarks.

It seems that three types of pottery production have existed in the Low Countries during the late Middle Ages. Firstly the town-based industries such as that at Bergen op Zoom (11, 12, 68), which served not only the town itself but also the adjacent region and sometimes a much wider area. Secondly the export industries in rural areas, notably those in South Limburg and the Meuse valley⁷ and thirdly the local rural production, for example Ijlst in Friesland⁸. It has not been proven that pottery was made at private houses before AD 1300, although Baart claims the existence of domestic industry in Amsterdam on the basis of, among other things, the occurrence of female fingerprints on pottery of that time (2, 5). I will return to this subject later on.

An attempt should be made to define the distribution of local wares of known kiln sites that did not produce wares especially for large-scale export (*e.g.* Pingsdorf, Andenne, Rhenish Stoneware). As has been said by Hans Janssen (26), there seem to have been a number of ceramic regions in the Low Countries. However, to substantiate this hypothesis would take several years of uninterrupted work, sifting archaeological collections from excavations and from museum reserves. Statistically valid results will only be reached when thousands of pots have been studied in a combination of typological comparison and technological research. And this brings me to the next subject.

Technology.

The discoveries of kiln sites and wasters noted above have given rise to numerous technological and petrological studies. Of the latter, the study of Janssen and De Paepe from 1976 is an early example (25; see also 35 and 36). In this work an attempt was made to differentiate between the products of the Rhenish kilns and those of South Limburg. It was found, however, that petrological differences (the shape and size of the grains in the tempering) were noticeable only during the phases before the middle of the 13th century.

Following in the footsteps of Bruijn's work on the

South Limburg potteries⁹, Brongers did extensive research into the wasters of one of these sites: Schinveld (6). He identified the clays that were used by the potters by testing the technical properties of the clays of the region and comparing them to those of the wasters of Schinveld. He focused his attention on porosity, firing temperature and shrinkage.

Starting from the opposite side, *i.e.* from the various types of pottery found and used in Amsterdam from the 13th to 18th century, Robert van Wageningen tried to find out from which production centres they originated (68). He used the methods of petrological and chemical analysis, which, I trust, he did competently for in that case a lot of very useful information has become available. However, I have my doubts as to whether the application of these data can stand scrutiny, since the conclusions drawn do not take into account the fact that the number of known production sites is still very limited. Therefore his observations on pottery imported into Amsterdam should be treated with circumspection.

Sander van der Leeuw, now of Cambridge University, applied a technological model to the 14th-century wasters found in the early seventies in Haarlem and published it three times (30, 31, 32). As often is the case with models, they are very stimulating, but they do not always fit reality, because they tend to disregard possibilities outside the model. However, his use of a professional potter to get a better grasp of technical possibilities and impossibilities is very sensible. In this context mention should be made of the work of Rob van Zijl de Jong, who, as an archaeologist, learned the potter's trade and now makes very good replicas of, among other things, medieval pottery. As far as I know he did not publish his experiments on how to reach these remarkable results.

On a modest and limited scale some technological work has been done in Utrecht on a great number of wasters from 14th-century globular pots (17, 37, 38). Amongst other things a strong relationship was statistically ascertained between the diameter of the mouth on the one hand and the capacity of the pots on the other. From this the capacity of the pots could be deduced from rim/neck fragments as long as more than 90° of their circumference was extant.

Social and economic functions

So far I have dealt with pottery *per se*, touching only here and there on economic aspects such as trade. To understand the place pottery had in medieval society is, I think, the ultimate aim of pottery studies: it is the superstructure on top of the substructure which the above mentioned subjects should provide (3, 4). As the substructure is still very shakey, nearly all superstructural work can only have the weight of hypotheses. This is a recurrent theme in many of the publications by Frans Verhaeghe (*e.g.* 56). Time and time again he wants to do more with those 'darned'

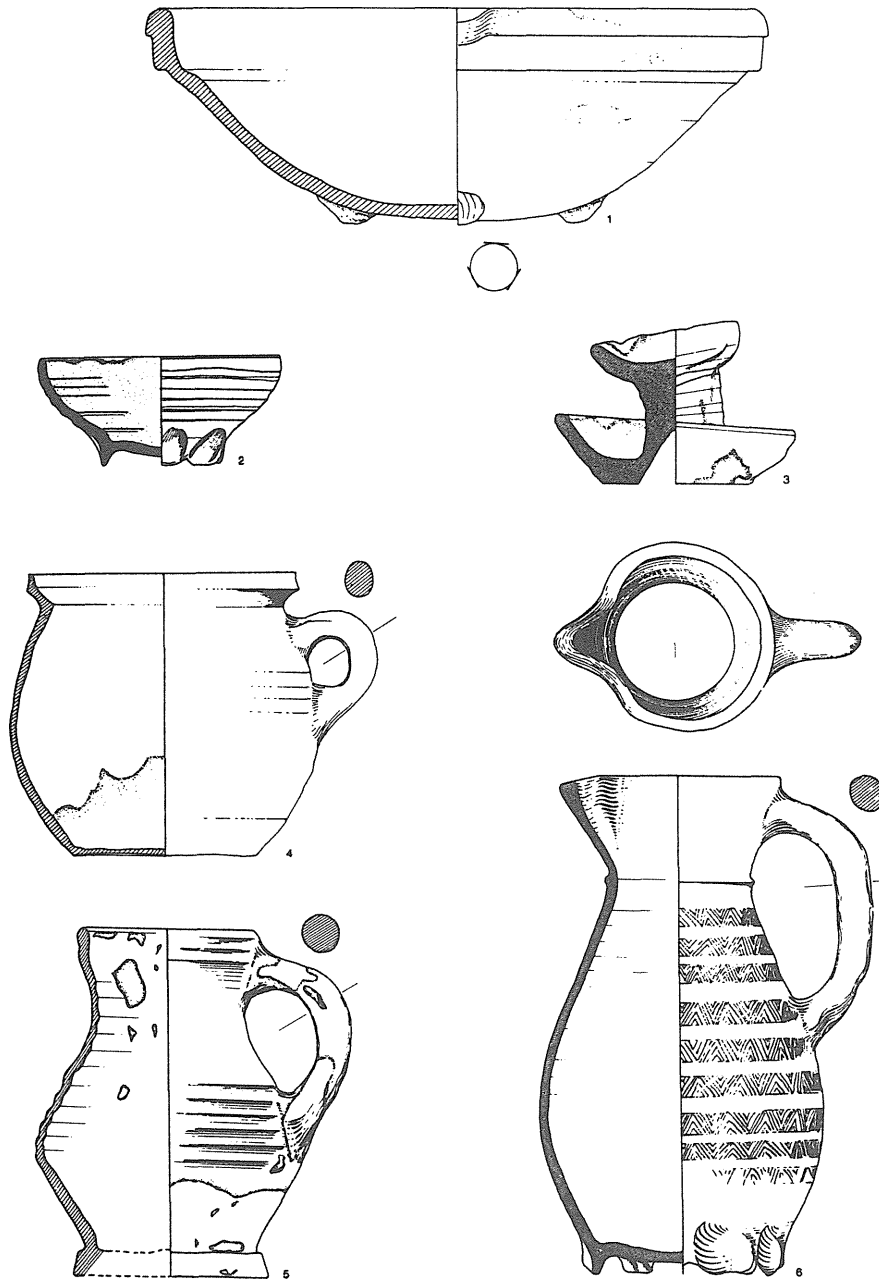


Fig. 2. Pottery on a local level: finds from Bruges in the 13th — early 15th centuries (from Bibliography No. 58, page 95).

sherds, but he has to admit every time that the basic material is still insufficient.

One of his more daring enterprises is his article in which he tackles the *Late medieval crisis in the Low Countries* (52). On the basis of — among other things — the increase of imports of luxury wares like Spanish majolica and the diversification in function of the indigenous pottery utensils his hypothesis is that — on the basis of pottery evidence only — there has not been a severe economic crisis in the Low Countries during the 14th and 15th centuries. The question remains whether pottery is a suitable indicator for economic growth or decline (see also below).

In his article in the *Proceedings of the First International Congress on Medieval Archaeology* (53) he raises fundamental questions about certain mechanisms of material culture, even to the extent of cautiously using anthropological models. Among other things he stipulates that the popularization of the famous highly decorated wares of the late 13th and early 14th centuries (48, 59) leads to degradation, *i.e.* to simple slip decoration.

This brings us to the question to what extent excavated pottery can be used as an indicator of wealth of their former owners. I have my doubts on that matter. Relatively speaking I think one can detect

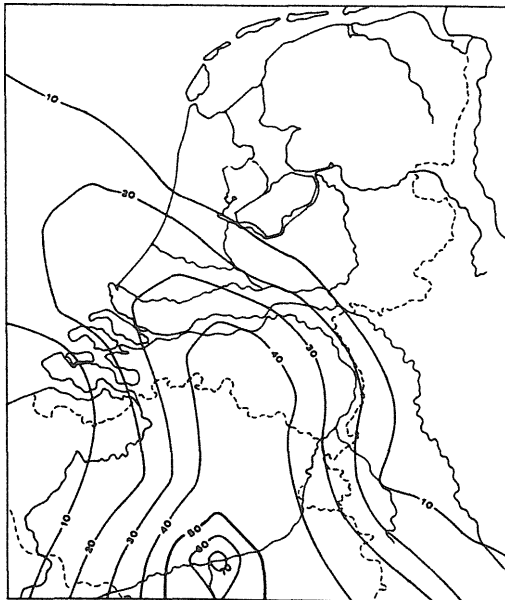


Fig. 4 Contour-map of the density of Andenne pottery in the mid-12th century.

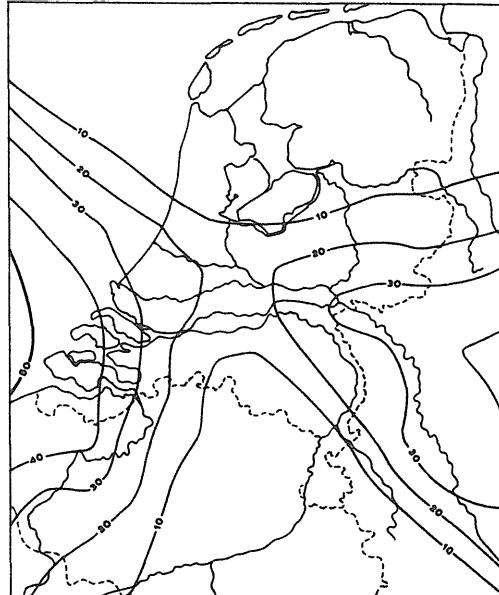


Fig. 5 Contour-map of the density of Pingsdorf pottery in the 12th century.

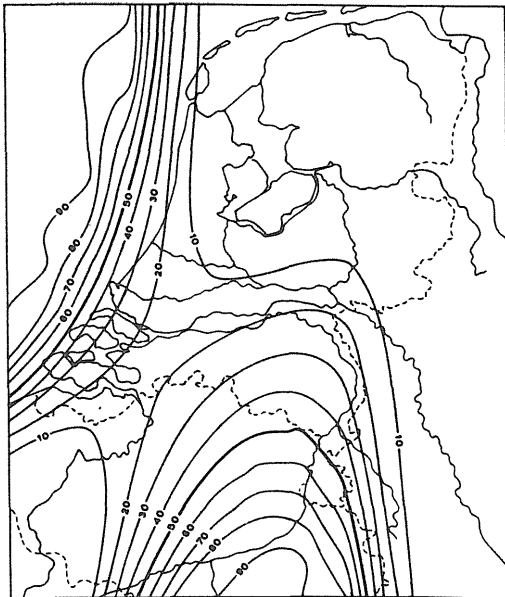


Fig. 6 Third degree trend surface of Andenne pottery in the mid-12th century.

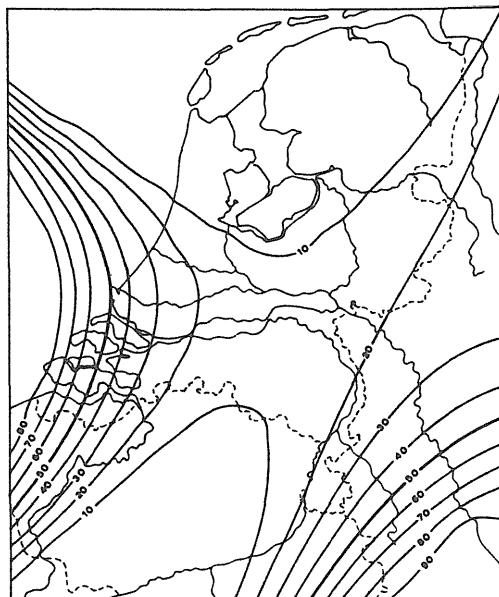


Fig. 7 Third degree trend surface of Pingsdorf pottery in the 12th century.

Fig. 3. Pottery in a wide context: the density of Pingsdorf and Andenne ware in the Low Countries in the 12th century (from Bibliography No. 66, page 272).

differences in wealth from pottery assemblages, *e.g.* from the number of exotic imports. However, a single sherd of Spanish lustreware found in the contents of a cesspit doesn't indicate anything. One highly decorated jug can be found in a middle class household. The real indicators of affluence are metal utensils and perhaps expensive glass. Verhaeghe comes to the same conclusions by comparing Low Countries ewers and their metal prototypes (61, 62). This and other work on ceramic copies of metal objects (64) suggests that at least some potters looked at a specific section of a 'middle class' market for quality goods.

From this it will be clear that I view publications about rich and poor households based on the pottery found in their debris with some reservation. Dr Hemmy Clevis, town archaeologist of Zwolle, is currently editing a series of publications mainly based on the contents of cesspits, which in the Low Countries are often very rich in near-complete finds, mainly pottery (8, 9 and also 47). I welcome these publications because a lot of interesting material is made available for further study, though not in a readily accessible way. It will strengthen the substructure I mentioned. However, I think he overestimates the possibilities of

these complexes — considering them too much as complete inventories of households — and thus drawing too many conclusions from them. In his recent book on finds from the town of Kampen, which he produced in cooperation with Mieke Smit, he is already less outspoken in this respect (9). But the main point is that the pots are presented in print and the interpretations may vary.

People behind pottery.

According to Baart it is possible to detect the transition from household economy to industrial economy in Amsterdam through changes in pottery production (2, 5). In the early 13th century globular pots were handmade by women in each household: they showed female fingerprints and, so we are told, the very simple decoration of the pots differed from house to house. Later in the 13th century this method of production stopped and was replaced by small industries, for — lo and behold — there are not only male fingerprints but also those of children who carried the unfired pots from the potter to the drying sheds. The fingerprints have been authenticated by the Amsterdam police. Again, the observations are obviously correct and interesting, but the conclusions perhaps a bit too rash. As you may have guessed, Baart places his observations within the wider field of gender studies.

Now we know who made the pots, it would be interesting to know what they were used for. Functional analysis is tricky in a number of cases, as I learned from Bruijn when working on the publication of the first Utrecht kiln and its wasters (7). He invited me to go into the kitchen and catalogue the use of the crockery. The outcome was more than once: multifunctional! Nevertheless it should be tried time and time again to find out what excavated objects were used for, or what the potter and consumer originally intended them to be used for (63).

That has been done on a large scale in the book which Alma Ruempol and Sandra van Dongen edited recently (41). It is a catalogue of hundreds of objects of pottery, glass, metal and so on, mainly from the Van Beuningen — de Vrieze Collection. As I mentioned before, this means that the objects were nearly all found in the western parts of the Netherlands and in the Rhineland. Three other shortcomings of the book have to be dealt with here: terminology, dating and description of fabric.

To start with the last one (which is particularly irritating): all Siegburg proto-stoneware and near stoneware are lumped together as near stoneware; the same terminology has also been used for non-Siegburg products, for which it is not applicable. It will be clear that Hans Janssen, who has been consulted on other aspects of the book, was not very happy that his proposed terminology (26, 28) was disregarded with no explanation why. If we go on like this, confusion in the

matter of terminology will never stop (18). As a whole, the description of fabrics in the book is very superficial or even totally lacking: in a number of cases it is not even clear whether a pot is red or grey!

Secondly, giving names to utensils that have long lost their function is a tricky business, but when it is done it should be done consistently. To call two nearly identical objects, which are moreover depicted and described on the same page, a plate at one point and a dish at another, or to call a simple redware cooking pot a cauldron, is not very careful.

Thirdly, the book is divided into six sections, each — apart from the first one — spanning exactly one century. Of course, one should be aware of the fact that identical types of pottery can and do occur in more than one section, e.g. late 14th-/early 15th-century wares are to be found in two separate sections, though they might have formed part of the same kiln load. Although I appreciate the difficulties in devising periods, I think that this classification in whole centuries is rather unfortunate.

Two more volumes are in preparation, one about production centres, another about six kiln sites in the Netherlands and in the Rhineland. Perhaps in one of them a bibliography could be added, because a great many objects described in the book have been published, e.g. by Anton Bruijn, John Hurst and others.

Can slip decorated pottery be a bearer of spiritual messages¹⁰? Mrs Garthoff-Zwaan thinks that the simple arcading and criss-crossing on plain pots and pitchers are symbols serving either to assure fertility or to avert evil (10). Of course these symbols are thought to originate from a dark Germanic past, even from the runic alphabet, and then to appear all of a sudden on a limited number of pots in the late middle ages. The inevitable conclusion is that only a few people at that time needed fertility or were afraid of the devil, and that those living before or after that time had no need for apotropaic protection.

Conclusion.

Pottery studies in the Low Countries in the last sixteen years have been many-sided. Has there been done a lot of work between Knuston Hall and Knuston Hall? Yes. Was it enough? No. Has it all been relevant? Mostly. The most difficult question is — where do we go next?

Footnotes

1. For work done in Flanders in 1987–88 see Verhaeghe (57). For a general bibliography on recent medieval archaeology in the Netherlands see E. E. Smink, 'Bibliography of Dutch medieval and post-medieval archaeology, 1976–87' in J. C. Besteman, J. M. Bos and H. A. Heidinga, *Medieval Archaeology in the Netherlands: Studies Presented to H. H. van Regteren Altena*. Assen 1990, 325–61.
2. Evison V. I. and Hurst J. G. 'Preface' in V. I. Evison, H. Hodges and J. G. Hurst, *Medieval Pottery from Excavations. Studies presented to Gerald Clough Dunning, with a bibliography of his works*. London 1974, 14.

3. Three more volumes appeared containing post-medieval material.
4. Hurst J. G. 'Gerald Dunning and his Contribution to Medieval Archaeology. The First Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture', *Medieval Ceramics* 6 (1982), 9.
5. *Ibidem*, 6.
6. For a survey see: P. Davey and R. Hodges (eds), 1983, *Ceramics and Trade. The production and distribution of later medieval pottery in north-west Europe. Sheffield Part Three: Imported Pottery in Britain and Ireland.*
7. See the well-known publications by A. Bruijn on the South Limburg industries in the *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, volumes 9–16 (1959–66); these are fully listed in the Bibliography in *Ceramics and Trade* (see note 6); for the Meuse Valley and Andenne see R. Borremans and R. Warginaire, 1966, *La Céramique d'Andenne. Recherches de 1956–65*, Rotterdam.
8. Not (yet) published but see (68) in the Select Bibliography.
9. See note 7.
10. For a more cautious approach to this question see: J. Cherry 'Sex, Magic and Dr Gerald Dunning. The Fourth Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture', *Medieval Ceramics* 9 (1985), 5–20.

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- 7) **Bruijn, A.** 1979, *Pottersvuren langs de Vecht. Aardewerk rond 1400 uit Utrecht*, Rotterdam Papers III. Rotterdam.
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Résumé

Cet article passe en revue les différentes approches faites à l'étude de la céramique dans les Pays Bas et en Flandre depuis 1975. Une liste des quelques publications résultant de ces études est présentée, chacune ayant un numéro de référence utilisé dans le texte. Ces publications sont discutées par thèmes couvrant ainsi l'étude chronologique, le commerce, la production, la technologie, les potiers, les consommateurs et les différentes utilisations faites des céramiques.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel werden die verschiedenen Fragestellungen besprochen, unter denen Keramikfunde in den Niederlanden und in Flandern seit 1975 erforscht wurden. Einige Publikationen aus diesem Arbeitsbereich sind in der 'Select Bibliography' aufgeführt, jeweils mit einer Nummer, auf die im Text verwiesen wird. Diese Publikationen werden unter verschiedenen thematischen Stichwörtern, wie Chronologie, Handel, Herstellung, Technik, Töpfer, Verbraucher und Verwendungsweisen für Keramik diskutiert.