

## Late Medieval Ceramics in Norway

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### SUMMARY

*This paper presents an overview of the sources of the late medieval ceramics found in Norway. General trends in the occurrence of these imports and variations in their quantities and origins are considered with reference to specific towns. Some possible factors governing the presence/absence of imports from different sources are discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

There are eight medieval towns in Norway: Oslo, Sarpsborg, Hamar, Tønsberg, Skien, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim (Lunde 1985, 121). In addition there were other population nuclei and market centres which had an urban character, the best known being Lusakaupangen, Borgund, Veøy and Vågan (Fig. 1). However, these had all lost their importance by the end of the Middle Ages. In addition to these there are a number of monastic settlements.

Much of the archaeological work in the pre- and post-war period has been carried out in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, but some work was done in Stavanger in the late 1960s, (Lillehammer 1972). During the early 1970s there was a building boom in Norway and excavation offices were established in Oslo, Tønsberg and Trondheim, and slightly later in Bergen. Between 1978 and 1979 some work was done in Skien (Myrvoll 1992) and during the last few years excavations have been carried out on the cathedral ruins in Hamar.

Work on the smaller trading settlements has been limited. Between 1954 and 1975 small-scale excavations were carried out at Borgund (Herteig 1986) and on Veøy (additional work has recently been done on Veøy). During the late 1980s the continuing excavations started at Vågan in the Lofoten Islands.

The mountain of data from these excavations is gradually being processed and published, mainly in Norwegian. The finds have, on the whole, been dealt with only superficially, if at all. In the early years pottery was generally discarded, although the more interesting pieces may have been kept. To a certain extent, this changed with Asbjørn Herteig's excavations at Bryggen in Bergen when international interest in the ceramics was aroused, prompting visits

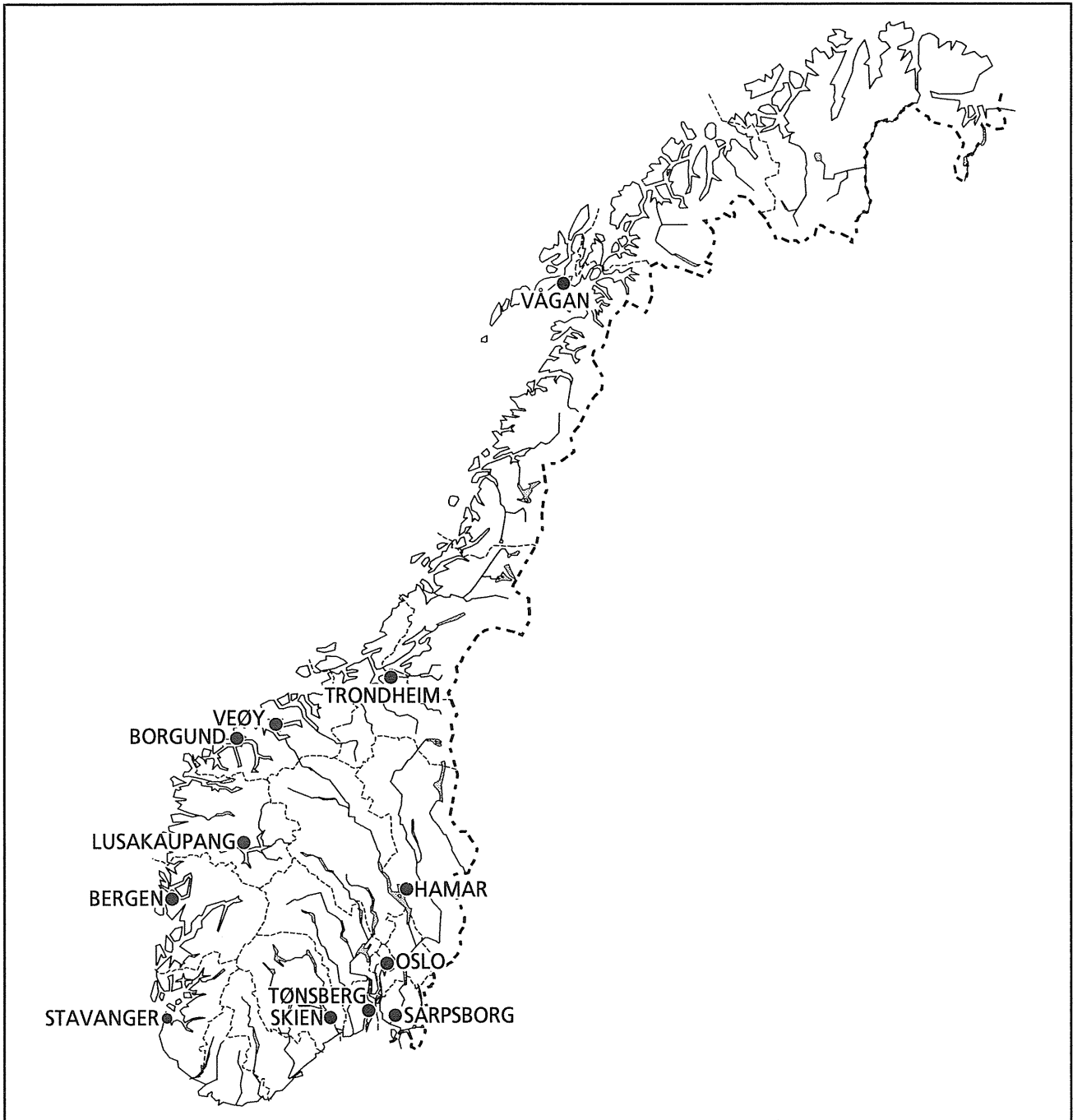
from, amongst others, Gerald Dunning and Ken Barton.

The first systematically processed pottery group was from Oslo, published by Petter Molaug (Molaug 1977). He sorted the pottery using a derivative of the system established by Dagmar Selling in 1955. The material was divided into three groups (A, B and C wares); these groups were based on firing temperature, and were further subdivided according to colour (Selling 1976, IX). Only a vague attempt was made in 1977 to provenance the wares but later works by the same author have gone further in attempting to identify sources (Molaug 1979 and Molaug 1987). The objectivity of this system has meant that other scholars have processed their pottery in this way and indeed it is generally used in the whole of Scandinavia. As a result, the potential of relatively large quantities of the pottery data published in Norway and the rest of Scandinavia cannot be applied by researchers wishing to study pottery from specific sources or ask other questions of it.

The statistics used in the following paper are derived from material from excavations on three sites in Oslo (Molaug 1979a, Molaug 1987), Bergen (Dunlop 1982a:45–53, Dunlop 1982b:30–38, Marstrander 1983), Trondheim (Reed 1986, Reed 1990, Reed in prep.) and Tønsberg (Reed 1992a).

### THE POTTERY

There appears to have been some form of ceramic industry in Norway in the period from the 4th century to the 7th century, and it is also possible that there may have been some sporadic production of pottery during the following centuries (Bøe 1931). For the medieval period, however, no production sites have so far been identified, and the earliest



*Fig. 1. Location of the eight medieval towns and other settlements referred to in the text.*

documentary evidence for a potter is from Trondheim in 1606 (Reed 1982a, 33). Norway appears therefore to be in the unique situation of not having any indigenous pottery in the medieval period, with the consequence that everything used was imported.

The identified medieval imports derived not only from many of the major production centres but also from a number of smaller ones. The identified sources of the medieval pottery found in Trondheim are illustrated in Fig. 2. The material from the other towns comes from many of the same sources but

the proportions vary from town to town.

We shall now look briefly at some of the main types of late medieval imports and a few exotic imports.

### **England**

It is safe to say that nearly all excavated medieval sites have produced at least one sherd of Grimston ware, even in the very north of Norway (Jennings and Rogerson 1994). In Trondheim this is the largest single group of pottery and represents 57% of the total English medieval imports. In addition to



Fig. 2. The sources of medieval pottery found in Trondheim.

the Grimston products there are also quantities of 14th century Toynton-All-Saints ware (Healey 1984) and Lincoln wares (Adams 1977, 45). There is also a handful of sherds of Lyveden ware from Bergen and Trondheim.

#### South Scandinavia

South Scandinavian redwares are generally dated to the period 1250–1350. A number of sources for

them have been identified (Madsen 1986), of which the most productive seems to have been Farum, NW of Copenhagen (Nielsen 1955). Two types of redware products are known, of which the second appears to be a deliberate over-firing of the first, giving a very hard dark or purplish red fabric. In addition, the kiln also produced greyware cooking vessels. The redwares appear to have been the most exported, and have been found in varying quanti-

ties on most sites as far north as Trondenes in Troms.

South Scandinavian – North German late-medieval redwares have long been recognised in late 16th and 17th century contexts, but in recent years it has become clear that they originate in the 15th century. A well-stratified group of these vessels has recently been excavated in the precinct of the Archbishop's Palace in Trondheim; a pilot study of these wares and their origins is in progress (Blackmore in prep.).

### The Low Countries

Low Countries highly decorated wares are mainly of the type identified as products of the kilns in Brugge and are represented in most assemblages in the larger towns but never in large quantities. The fiddler's jug from Tønsberg is apparently unique in having two panels of figures (Molaug 1979b). An interesting point is the context in which this vessel was found: it was discovered on the remains of a flight of stairs in the wall in the north-west corner of the nave of St. Peter's church and was sealed by the debris from the destruction of the church in 1536. This seemingly suggests that the jug may have been kept safe for 200 years.

During the 15th century plain Low Countries red wares seem to be the most common import from this area. A few slipwares and a few sgraffito wares (Hurst *et al* 1986, 146-153) have been identified in Trondheim, but no sherds have been identified or published from the rest of Norway (and I have not identified any amongst the material I have examined).

### Germany

One of the more unusual groups of German imports consists of the miniature vessels from the Coppingrave. These occur in a variety of forms, small jars, rattles and figures, during the late 13th and early 14th centuries.

Siegburg products are well represented, with all types present, from proto-stoneware to stoneware; in addition, several green-glazed sherds have been found in Oslo (Molaug 1987, 289) and Trondheim (Reed 1986, 42). Possibly the best assemblage of these wares is that from Bergen where these wares appear to dominate the German imports.

The iron-washed stonewares are not necessarily all Langerwehe products. It is possible that some of them may indeed come from the Duingen/Coppingrave area (Stephan 1981, 39-42). Due to the fragmentary nature of the material no attempt has been made to distinguish between them. What is clear is that these iron-washed wares seem to have been imported to Trondheim in larger quantities than the Siegburg wares.

Apart from the ubiquitous late 15th-century Raeren jugs, the most common vessel type is the

miniature standing costrel. Two such vessels are known to have been used as reliquaries; of these, one had a piece of parchment attached to it dating its deposition to 1476 (Reed 1992b, 72).

### The Mediterranean

Mediterranean wares are rare in Norway, but those which occur derive from many different sources. Spanish wares are, not surprisingly, the most common. Small quantities of lustrewares (Andalusian, Mature Valencian and Late Valencian) have been identified in Trondheim (Reed 1982b and Reed 1990, 71) and Bergen (Herteig 1982, 200), while there is a single vessel from Tønsberg (Reed 1992a, 85).

Iberian coarse wares are also found, but the bulk of these appear to be of post-medieval date (Reed 1982b, 194-196 and Reed 1990, 71-72).

Italian wares are very rare, the most frequent being the Ligurian *berettino* which has been identified on four sites in Trondheim; several sherds found in Oslo may be of N. Italian origin (Molaug 1987, 283). The earliest Italian import is a single fragment of Pisan Archaic maiolica found on the Library Site in Trondheim (Reed 1990, 72).

Fragments of one vessel of Montelupo *alla porcellana* (Milanese 1993, 32) were found in pre-Reformation (pre-1537) deposits during excavations at the Archbishop's Palace in Trondheim.

## QUANTITIES FROM THE VARIOUS SOURCES

As mentioned previously, the quantities of these different wares vary from town to town. The percentages of the different types within each town may not be entirely representative as on the whole late 14th- and 15th-century deposits are either poorly represented or totally absent. Similarly, certain sites may give the wrong impression of the relationship between different types. For example, the context for much of the Siegburg stoneware found during the excavations at Bryggen, Bergen seems to suggest that it had been broken during shipment to Bergen and had simply been dumped overboard during the unloading and is thus over represented here. Bearing these factors in mind we shall now look at the proportional distribution of the pottery from the different countries of origin (Fig. 3).

The material is presented as a total for the period 1250 to 1500. If this period were to be sub-divided a clearer picture of the pattern of imports might emerge, but due either to the nature of the stratigraphy or the method of presentation of the published material this has not been possible.

What is quite clear from these figures is that French imports have, along with the Mediterranean

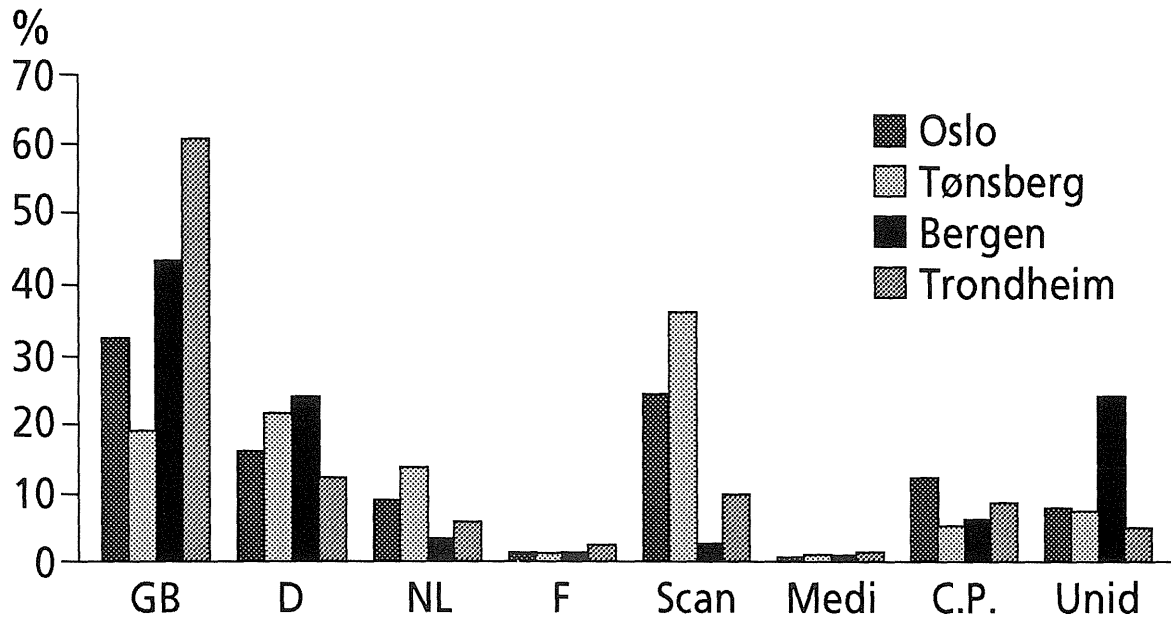


Fig. 3. The proportional distribution of the pottery by country of origin: GB=United Kingdom, D=Germany, NL=Low Countries, F=France, Scan=Scandinavia, Medi=Mediterranean, C.P.=cooking pots, Unid=unidentified.

wares, comprised very limited luxury imports with percentages of 1% or less.

With the exception of Tønsberg, English imports dominate the picture, which is particularly interesting as they appear to be concentrated in the first 100 years of the period. Grimston ware represents from 25% to 57% of these imports.

The German imports, which tend to replace the English imports in the 14th century, show an unsurprising concentration in Bergen, a Hanse Kontor, with slightly lesser amounts in Tønsberg and Oslo, which were Hanse factories.

Dutch imports show a concentration on the Oslo Fiord with a lesser amount in Trondheim and even less in Bergen. The bulk of the wares included in this survey are concentrated in the late 13th and early 14th centuries.

The highly decorated south-Scandinavian redwares which are at their peak in the first quarter of the 14th century show a noticeable concentration in the Oslo Fiord area, with much smaller quantities in Bergen and Trondheim. The 15th-century redwares are unfortunately absent from the figures presented here as they have generally been regarded as post-medieval.

## DISCUSSION

Within Norway there are two clearly defined areas of importance with respect to late medieval pottery imports: the first is the area around the Oslo Fiord, and the second is the west coast, including Bergen and Trondheim. What clearly distinguishes between

these two areas is primarily the emphasis on different source areas, and secondly the fact that the assemblages from Bergen and Trondheim are much more diverse. It is relatively easy to explain these variations on the basis of different trade contacts, but is it really as simple as that?

The large quantities of English pottery may well be explained by the various trade agreements which both the King of Norway and the Archbishop of Trondheim entered into between 1209 and 1284 (Søholt 1980, 56-57). Furthermore the large amount of Grimston ware probably reflects the frequent visits to Kings Lynn by boats from Norway.

During the first ten to twenty years of the 14th century the Hanseatic merchants in Bergen managed to monopolise all Norwegian foreign trade and put an effective stop to foreigners sailing to Norway (Rafto 1981, 208). Already in 1294 they had managed to get legislation stopping foreigners sailing north of Bergen. This was one of the main reasons why Bergen later surpassed Trondheim in importance.

One question arising out of this concerns the quantities of Toynton-All-Saints ware which occur in Trondheim in the beginning of the 14th century. At this point the Hanseatic merchants in Bergen had gained a monopoly on the trade with England. Boston, through which the Toynton wares were exported, was established as an under-office of Bergen and became the main contact point for Hanseatic trade between Norway and England. Does the occurrence of these and the other 14th century Lincolnshire products reflect Hanseatic trade?

The Hanseatic League was established not only in Bergen, where the merchants came from Lübeck. They were also based in the Oslo Fiord area and had control in Oslo and Tønsberg. These merchants came mainly from Rostock, but also from Wismar (Rafto 1981, 208). Hanseatic activity in the Oslo Fiord, which was never as dominant as that in Bergen, was based largely on the herring fisheries. Although there is no definite evidence, it is tempting to see the large quantities of south Scandinavian redwares in Oslo and Tønsberg resulting from these Hanseatic activities. It is almost indisputable that the quantities of German stonewares in these three towns are the result of Hanseatic interests.

As mentioned previously, Trondheim became in many ways isolated from the rest of Europe. In order to compensate for this the archbishop established an office for his commercial agent in Bergen. Gradually merchants began to disregard the ban on sailing north of Bergen, and complaints are recorded of boats from Hamburg, Bremen, the Netherlands and even Lübeck sailing to Trondheim. During the late 15th century and early 16th century the archbishop actively encouraged these Hanseatic outsiders and in particular made contact with the Netherlands, who were not only enemies of Lübeck but also opponents of the Danish king Frederick. This probably provides sufficient explanation for the occurrence of the late medieval Low Countries wares in Trondheim.

The evidence from the larger towns which are known to have had international trade is well documented in the written sources, but what about the other towns? Although Skien and Stavanger are known to have had a merchant class it is not likely that they participated in international trade. Excavations in Stavanger have produced ceramic assemblages which closely resemble those of Bergen and Trondheim. Since it had nothing of interest to offer to the Hanseatic merchants, Stavanger was left alone, although it did have dairy and other farm products which were important to the town of Bergen. It is therefore highly probable that most of the pottery used in Stavanger was bought in Bergen and reflects what was available there.

With regard to the trading settlements along the west coast, only Vågan is a fairly clear-cut case. Its existence was based on the cod fisheries and the production of stockfish. The Hanseatic League monopolised this, and the fishermen were forced to take their wares to Bergen where they were paid, or more commonly, given wares in exchange. This is reflected in the ceramics which have the same basic components as other assemblages, but also a large percentage of stoneware.

The two settlements of Borgund and Veøy have the typical Bergen/Trondheim diversity in their composition but as no material is published from these

two settlements it is difficult to say whether they have the typical Bergen bias.

## CONCLUSIONS

The potential of the ceramic assemblages of all periods from Norway is of indisputable international importance. However, it is painfully obvious that with the present rate of analysis and publication it will be many years before the material is accessible to other researchers.

In studying the trade in the pottery occurring in the different towns in Norway it is essential to compare the quantities of particular types found in the various towns in order to reveal trade routes and trans-shipment points. The latter, in particular, is worth stressing because it means that the occurrence of particular pottery types does not necessarily indicate direct contact with the country of origin, but merely contact with one of the trans-shipment ports. This is easily recognised in an assemblage with Spanish pottery types which were probably trans-shipped from one of the Low Countries ports. We do not, however, need to look so far afield; Bergen certainly acted as a trans-shipment point for ceramics found in many of the smaller west coast settlements and possibly also for Trondheim. This can only be resolved by a comparative study of material from Trondheim, Bergen and other relevant sites along the west coast.

Another question is to what extent certain types of pottery may have been produced with the Norwegian market in mind, i.e. produced specially for export to Norway. This question has certainly been raised in connection with the large quantities of Grimston ware found in Norway. We will probably never know whether this was the case or not, but it certainly adds an interesting new dimension to ceramic studies.

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#### Résumé

Ce papier présente un tableau général des origines de la poterie médiévale tardive trouvée en Norvège. Ces importations sont examinées à travers quelques aspects tels que leurs variations de quantité et d'origine en faisant référence à certaines particulières. Ce papier discute aussi quelques facteurs possibles qui déterminent la présence/absence d'importations venant de différentes origines.

#### Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie bietet eine Übersicht über die Herkunft spätmittelalterlicher Keramik in Norwegen. Allgemeine Trends in ihrem Vorkommen und in den Variationen nach Menge und Herkunft werden mit bestimmten Städten in Bezug gesetzt. Ebenfalls werden einige der Ursachen erörtert, warum Importwaren bestimmter Herkunft entweder vorhanden oder eben nicht vorhanden waren.

