

## Trade in Pottery around the North Sea The eleventh Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture

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### SUMMARY

*Following some personal recollections of Gerald Dunning, I then review my work on English pottery exported to Scandinavia. This work suggests that the mid 13th century marked a change in the orientation of English-Scandinavian pottery trade. Before this, the main English centres involved were in the Thames Basin (London-type ware and Shelly-sandy ware) and at Stamford. After this date, the trade appears to be dominated by wares from Yorkshire and Norfolk, reflecting the growth of Hull and King's Lynn. Finally, I make suggestions as to how this study might be progressed.*

### PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF GERALD DUNNING

I first met Gerald Dunning in Bristol City Museum in 1969 when I was 17. I was working for an A level in Archaeology and cataloguing the medieval pottery in the museum for my project work. Gerald was working on a paper on medieval jugs decorated with brooches. We talked about our respective work — I remember asking why he was studying these jugs and being told effectively 'because they're there'. I remember too a tea break where Leslie Grinsell, the curator, and Gerald held court over a pot of tea (always one of Leslie's weaknesses) in a conversation laden with innuendo, most of which went over my head. I was very pleased when Gerald later gave me an offprint of his Rotterdam Papers article on roof furniture (Dunning 1968a) which had just come out (at that time I did not know how difficult it was to off-load these ephemera). We met only once more, in 1973, when I was working on my undergraduate dissertation in the Severn valley and was asked by Ron Shoesmith to take some fragments of medieval stone mortars from sites in Hereford and the surrounding area to Gloucester City Museum, where Gerald was working in the basement. By that time I was more aware of the man's academic reputation, but was still struck by his friendliness, breadth of knowledge and enthusiasm for the study of medieval artefacts. Early in my medieval pottery studies, Martin Jope was more of an influence, since his work overlapped geographically with my own. However, when I moved to London and began to get interested in Anglo-Saxon

pottery and in trade around and across the North Sea, I began to realise that in almost every area of my work I was following in Gerald Dunning's footsteps.

### DUNNING'S WORK ON MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN LONDON

For over 25 years I have been making use of Gerald Dunning's paper on late Anglo-Saxon pottery (Dunning 1959). I was very pleased, when working in the Museum of London in the 1980s, to be able to re-examine and quantify the Dowgate assemblage published as an appendix to the 1959 paper, and to hear from Peter Marsden the details of the discovery of this remarkable group of pottery. I had occasion to study this paper again in some detail recently when re-examining ideas about the introduction of wheel-thrown pottery to 9th-century England. Despite G. D.'s profession to be interested in pottery simply because it's there, his 1959 paper gives this the lie since it is a model of how similarities in pottery in different areas can be interpreted. However, it is Gerald Dunning's work on North Sea trade which I want to examine in this paper, using data collected in a series of visits to Scandinavia and northern Germany which I undertook between 1986 and 1994.

### ENGLISH MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN THE MEDIEVAL KINGDOM OF DENMARK

My interest in the North Sea pottery trade began in the mid-1980s, at the time when Jacqui Pearce,

### East Jutland

I have examined material from several sites in Århus spanning the 10th to the 14th centuries. English wares are present, but in very small quantities (as is the case with Rhenish wares and other imports). Excavations at Horsens have produced sizeable collections of medieval pottery, and I have seen sherds selected by J. Linae as potential imports. Material excavated from various sites in Kolding has not been examined by me personally, but some idea of its character has been given to me by the excavator. English wares have not been noted. Further south, I have re-examined all of the glazed wares from Volker Vogel's excavations at the Schild, Schleswig, together with all of the material from an excavation at Holmen, thought to be the earliest focus of medieval settlement in Schleswig, and a selection of material from Vogel's excavations at the harbour site, which might have been expected to produce a higher quantity or different range of imports from that found at the Schild. The results of this re-examination, in the main, confirm Lüdtke's work (1989), although a few more English imports were identified. In general, English imports form a small element in medieval pottery collections along the Baltic coast of Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein from the late 12th to the 14th centuries.

### Skåne

I have, with Stefan Larsson and David Gaimster, examined about 50% of a vast unpublished archive of medieval pottery from excavations in Lund. Until a few years ago all excavations in Lund were carried out using the spit method, so that pottery can only be related to a specific archaeological horizon if the spit and natural strata are coincidental. A pilot scheme by Stefan Larsson has shown that less than a third of the material recovered from one five-metre square could be related to a single stratum, but even in this worst case a very large stratified assemblage could one day be re-assembled. English wares form a small proportion of the pottery found at Lund. In 1976, following the excavation of the PK-bank site in Lund, an early medieval wheel-thrown glazed ware was discovered which was tentatively identified as being of English origin (Mårtensson 1976). Petrological analysis has disproved this hypothesis and instead suggests that this ware, produced in the early to mid 11th century, is of Danish (*i.e.* Sealand or Skånian) origin (Christensen *et al* 1994). These 11th-century finds having been discounted, the English imports in Lund can now be dated to the later 12th to 14th centuries. Excavations in the market square in 1993 produced one of the few stratified late medieval pottery

sequences in Scandinavia, extending into the 15th century. These late medieval assemblages contain no English imports. A brief search through other medieval pottery collections in Skåne revealed occasional Western European imports, but no English wares.

### Fünen

My examination of a small sample of pottery from Odense, the main medieval town on Fünen since the 10th century (Christensen 1988), showed that imports were present, although rare and including no English wares. A more exhaustive study of the pottery from excavations in Svendborg, a 12th-century foundation on the southern coast of Fünen, failed to find any English imports, and very few of western European origin. The Svendborg survey excluded any finds from the Bishop's Castle, but included material from a variety of sites in the town and can probably be taken as good negative evidence (Jansen 1986).

### Zealand

Until the growth of Copenhagen in the 13th century, Roskilde was both the main town and the main port on the island of Zealand (Christensen 1988). Excavations have been carried out on a number of sites in the town, at its core around the main market square, and close to Roskilde Fjord. The pottery from these sites has been studied by their excavator, Michael Andersen, and a few imports are present, mainly Rhenish and Low Countries in origin (Andersen 1992). Pottery from an excavation at St. Jorgensborg, a church situated by the Fjord, and from two sites in the town centre, was examined by me, and a small quantity of English and other imported pottery identified. Selected pottery from other excavations and stray finds were also examined and a few other imports noted. There is the potential from these sites to gain quantified information, but for now it is possible only to say that English pottery is present in the later 12th and early 13th centuries, and even then in very small quantities. Excavations carried out by Tom Christensen at Lejre, a high status rural settlement to the south of Roskilde, have produced more examples of the early to mid 11th-century glazed ware noted from Lund, but no western European pottery imports at all (Christensen 1991).

### Central Sweden

Pottery from three sites in central Sweden has been examined. The glazed wares from *c.* 20 years excavations in Uppsala, which is being studied by Magnus Elfwendahl, has been viewed by Frans Verhaeghe

and myself, and contains no English wares at all (but up to 50% Flemish imports). Sherds from Sigtuna, selected by Mats Roslund as potential western European imports, have been examined and include a few English imports. Lastly, a small selection of the pottery from Helgeandsholmen, Stockholm, was examined, but none is of English origin. Geographically, these three sites lie in a line, with Uppsala being furthest from the coast and Stockholm closest. The presence of English wares at Sigtuna is not therefore due to its proximity to the Baltic. However, the Sigtuna imports are, yet again, of late 12th- to early 13th-century date and may therefore be absent from Uppsala and Stockholm simply because the majority of pottery from these two sites is of later date.

### DISCUSSION

Gerald Dunning's study of the North Sea pottery trade emphasised the contribution of later 13th- and 14th-century pottery from eastern English sources in Scandinavian ports (Dunning 1968b). Grimston-type ware, Scarborough ware, York whitewares and the like were identified and, on the basis of the Bryggen data, were thought to occur in large quantities.

There is certainly a lot more medieval pottery available for study in Scandinavia now than there was when Dunning was carrying out his fieldwork, but to what extent does this new material actually change the established view of the North Sea trade in pottery? The first point to note is that the vast quantities of English imports found at Bergen and Trondheim are not typical of the rest of Scandinavia. Not only do these sites have more English pottery, as a proportion of all pottery found, but they also have earlier wares than are found elsewhere (Stamford ware and shelly wares from the East Midlands are found at Trondheim), even where 11th-century pottery has been found in some quantity (as at Lund, Århus, Schleswig and, to a lesser extent, Ribe). To judge from the pottery evidence alone, it would seem that the major connection across the North Sea was between Norway and England. Within England the points of contact seem to have changed with time. The earliest and most persistent contact was with the Fenland (and in particular Stamford), famed at that time for its cloth production. London, however, appears to have been at least as important for a short period spanning the later 12th and first half of the 13th centuries. In the later 13th century the first detailed documentary evidence for Norwegian/English trade is found. This clearly shows that the trade connections were with the major east coast ports, which at that time were Hull, Boston, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth. Whilst not necessarily being in

total agreement with the ceramic evidence, there is at least some similarity between the two, since the main sources of later 13th- and 14th-century English wares in Norway appear to be light-firing wares from Yorkshire and Grimston-type ware (which undoubtedly includes a number of different sources, and would repay detailed study). The absence of Humber ware from the Norwegian sites may be partly a matter of identification, but also a matter of date, since it seems clear that the relative frequency of English wares declined sharply during the later medieval period.

The remaining English-Scandinavian trade can be considered under two headings: the west Jutland trade (including Hollingsted) and the Baltic. The west Jutland trade with England, as represented by pottery finds, is dominated by London. Hollingsted appears to have both a higher proportion of English wares than others and a wider range of London products, including Shelly-sandy cooking pots. Since at present the pottery from this site is known only from a very small collection, it may be premature to make much of any differences. It is, however, much clearer that Ribe's English pottery has a London bias, although it must be pointed out that there is probably more London-area pottery from a single five-metre square at the Bryggen in Bergen than there is from 20 years of excavating in Ribe. It may also be significant that north-western French wares are much more common at Ribe than they are at Bergen. Madsen has suggested that one possible explanation for the pattern of imports at Ribe would be that the Ribe merchants were operating a triangular trade, sailing across to East Anglia, down to London, across to north-west France and thence back to Ribe via the Low Countries. At least one element in this trade was the horse, since Ribe merchants are recorded at Great Yarmouth selling horses.

Contact between the Baltic and England, by contrast (as reflected in pottery finds), is dominated by Stamford, with London a poor second. A few plain lead-glazed Stamford ware pieces are known from Lund and Schleswig, but the majority of Stamford wares from both these towns, and all the English wares from Roskilde, are of green-glazed Developed Stamford ware. Both the wider range and higher quantity of English pottery at Lund suggest that the main route for this pottery into the Baltic was via the Øre Sund. Even Schleswig, less than 20km from Hollingsted across the Jutland peninsula, was obtaining the majority of its English wares from this direction since they are predominantly from Stamford rather than London. Århus and Svendborg produced no sherds of Stamford or London wares, and at this period both ports seem not to have been taking part in this North Sea trade. Later on, however, both ports produced sherds of

north-west French green-glazed and slip-decorated wares, of the type made known by another ceramic pioneer, Kenneth Barton, through his papers on the pottery from Rouen and Paris. These wares are, however, common on both sides of the Jutland peninsula, as well as on inland sites such as Logumkloster. Clearly, the organisation of the pottery import trade at this time was different from that of the 12th and early 13th centuries.

#### ERECTING AND TESTING HYPOTHESES

I think that views on the status of these pottery imports may have changed slightly since Dunning's day. No one would claim that ships plied the North Sea filled solely with pottery, but the regularity with which these pots occur suggests that they were not curios and keepsakes in the same way that Alkaline Glazed and Mediterranean Maiolica ceramics may have been (Hurst 1968). It is more likely that pottery was a minor part of mixed cargoes, perhaps filling up a hold for the return journey when the main flow of goods was from Scandinavia to England.

Clearly, one key to understanding the significance of this pottery trade is to look at assemblages of pottery which are sufficiently large and cover a long enough time period to ensure that statements about relative and absolute frequency of the English wares present, or their absence, can be justified. Furthermore, this paper has been peppered with statements such as 'a lot', 'a little' or 'uncommon'. To take this study further we need to replace such terms with proportions and quantities, and these percentages and quantities need to be calculated on the same basis at each site.

A second key will be to see to what extent different settlement types received imported pottery. What little we know so far suggests that there was little trade beyond the ports, but there again, rural sites have rarely been excavated on the same scale as urban ones. It would also be informative to consider a single settlement with a distinctive imported ceramic assemblage, such as Ribe and to see how quickly the frequency of these imports drops off with distance from the port.

Perhaps the major need, however, is to examine the trade in pottery in its context. We know from later medieval documentation that North Sea commerce was complex. Ships would leave the Baltic with one cargo, deliver that at one port, pick up another cargo and deliver that and then return to the Baltic from quite a different port. Such triangular, or polygonal trade patterns would leave quite different archaeological traces from a simple cross-sea exchange. In some cases, legs of this trade may be marked by the transport of pottery, whilst in others it may be different goods entirely, perhaps, as

with the Jutish horses in Yarmouth, goods for which we cannot yet hope to find any archaeological evidence. To extend this picture back into the 12th and 13th centuries, for which we have much less documentary evidence, requires a multi-disciplinary, multi-national, collaborative approach and it is in this direction that I hope for and expect developments.

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### Résumé

A la suite de quelques souvenirs personnels de Gerald Dunning, je passe en revue mon étude au sujet de la céramique anglaise exportée en Scandinavie. Cette étude propose que le milieu du 13ème siècle marqua un changement dans l'orientation du commerce anglo-scandinave. Avant cela, les principaux centres anglais concernés furent dans le bassin de la Tamise (Types de Londres et 'Shelly-sandy') et à Stamford. Après cette date, le commerce semble être dominé par les céramiques du Yorkshire et du Norfolk, un reflet de la croissance de Hull et de King's Lynn. En conclusion, je propose des moyens de faire progresser la situation.

### Zusammenfassung

Nach ein paar persönlichen Erinnerungen an Gerald Dunning gebe ich einen Überblick zu meiner Arbeit über englische Töpferware, die nach Skandinavien exportiert wurde. Darin wird vorgeschlagen, daß sich der Handel mit Töpferware in der Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts umorientierte. Bis zu diesem Zeitpunkt waren hauptsächlich das Themse-Becken (Londoner Typus und Muschel-Sand Ware) und Stamford die Herkunftsorte. Danach erscheint der Handel von Ware aus Yorkshire und Norfolk beherrscht, ein Spiegelbild des Wachstum von Hull und King's Lynn. Zum Schluß mache ich Vorschläge, wie diese Studien weitergeführt werden könnten.

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