

MEDIEVAL EUROPE 1997: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF MEDIEVAL AND LATER ARCHAEOLOGY: 1st - 4th OCTOBER, 1997, BRUGES.

After five years of preparation, the second Medieval Europe Conference was under way at Bruges, 'the Venice of the North', with most of the eleven keynote speakers squeezed into the first morning! More than 630 delegates from 32 countries attended, with papers presented in four languages, many more having been offered than could be accommodated. Overall, the United Kingdom was well represented but the small numbers of both speakers and delegates from Greece, Spain or Portugal remains a concern.

Academics, museum curators, tutors at departments of continuing education, field-workers and tomorrow's archaeologists (post-graduate students) were there to glean new ideas and expand horizons. There was a bewildering choice of themes, and delegates were encouraged to look beyond the boundaries of their own speciality and dip into sessions away from their specialist interest. The impressive central Belfry in Bruges hosted three of the themes, others were held within a ten-minute walk. The *Environment and Subsistence* theme was centred on a commercial bank whose assets literally hung off the walls, including magnificent Flemish tapestries; while the spill-over from *Material Culture* — a parallel session — was notoriously difficult to find and had poor acoustics to boot. Those who stalwartly sat through sessions of just a single theme probably suffered the most conference fatigue, because the quality of papers was very variable, as was the quality of the chairperson. Fielding and teasing out questions from an international audience was all important; if the chair could not understand the speaker then no discussion ensued!

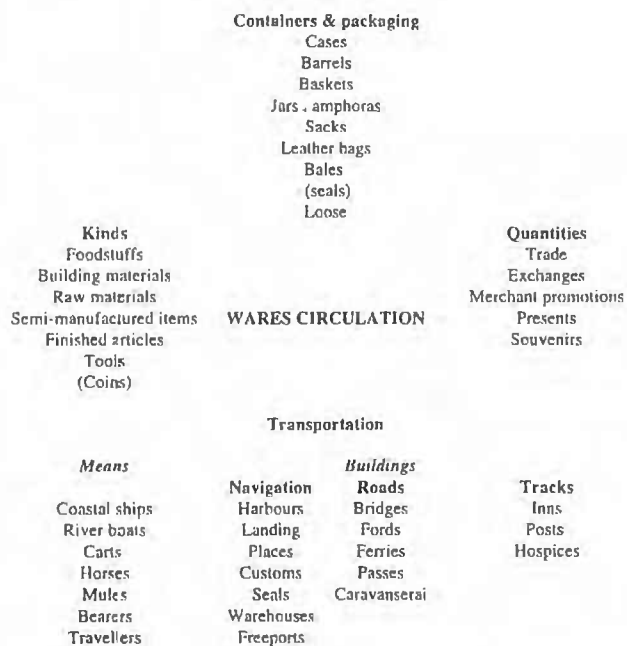
At such an event networking was to the fore, around the poster displays, at the mouth-watering book stalls and during the warm evenings in the very hospitable city, where *moules* and *bière* were consumed in quantity. Each delegate's experience will have been coloured by personal priorities, interests and choices, and this is reflected in the following sketches of some of the papers that caught MPRG delegates' attention. Pottery and material culture studies were included in most of the themes, and the pre-conference papers can be found in an eleven-volume series edited by de Boe and Verhaeghe.

Urbanism and Death and Burial in Medieval Europe

These two themes included many papers which embraced some aspect of ceramic studies particularly dating from the fifth to tenth centuries, a period which seems to have attracted much more attention on the Continent than in the British Isles in recent years. Lyn Blackmore (MOLAS) gave an overview of *Lundenwic*, and argued that if the production of Ipswich Ware was a Frisian initiative, its distribution is likely to have been affected by Frisian trading activities; while under the *aegis* of *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe*, Sam Lucy (Durham) revisited Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, and Chris Scull (English Heritage) reinterpreted Ipswich.

Exchange and Trade in Medieval Europe

In the pre-conference papers Tiziano Mannoni (University of Genoa) presented (in French) a general review of various kinds of portable and fixed material residues of trade, 'The Archaeology of Exchange and Commerce: old and new approaches'. He noted that what survives of portable trade residues in domestic refuse does not necessarily reflect what mattered to the medieval consumer. Food remains of the same species cannot be shown to be localised. Construction



material is rarely imported over any distance, and reuse of Roman materials presents a dating problem. Large scale production of raw materials took place near the fuel source, for example the preparation of metal into ingots. Semi-finished products were traded.

Mannoni stressed the need to research the objects and structures related to trade - rather than simply the items traded - and to research general trade rather than particular sites or categories. He drew attention to structures along major land routes, stimulated by the bi-millenary focus on pilgrim routes in Italy. His printed paper finished with a three-page bibliographical 'orientation'.

The paper which Mannoni read (in Italian) was illustrated by the diagram above, *Wares Circulation*, which lists along each side: kinds of wares, containers/packing, quantities, transportation means (extended to buildings related to navigation), roads and tracks. He used research undertaken in Liguria and the Alps to illustrate the various aspects of the diagram.

The wide range of published papers include much that will interest MPRG members, especially Christopherson's Marxist summary of the trade session.

Religion and Belief in Medieval Europe

This theme included only casual references to tile and pottery. Pierre-Jean Trombetta (Ile-de-France) illustrated the considerable industry which was associated with offerings made to a deity in thanks for a favour. Widespread across Europe, such objects could be made of silver or wax, and included images of jewels, belts, gold rings and brooches, as well as lances, swords, sabres and knives.

Art and Symbolism in Medieval Europe

This theme drew many enthusiasts of pilgrim badges, of which some 5,000 have been found in the Low Countries alone. Professor Koldewey (Nijmegen) has studied mass-produced badges, and he indicated the enormous potential they would have had for the dissemination of visual images, which were available to all levels of society from the late twelfth to the sixteenth century.

Rural Settlement in Medieval Europe

David Austin (Lampeter) kicked off this session with a characteristic broad-side at a conference which was apparently able to separate 'theory' from the rest of the themes. He railed against 'empirical collection' and asked us to be reflective of our methodologies (so may we have a book on site-formation processes in historical archaeology, please?); to be conscious of our own voices; and finally to address our problems more directly.

There was much nodding of heads, but this session was, perhaps more than most, richly thick with description and methodology and somewhat flaky on theory. There were solid presentations from Terry Barry (Trinity College, Dublin), from John Bintliff (Durham) on Greece and from Neil Price (Uppsala), all complemented by Chris Dyer's (Birmingham) discussion of the latest MSRG policy document (why, we wonder, was there no similar discussion for MPRG in the Material Culture session? [Ed.: The policy was to have representatives at all themes, rather than concentrate on one]). We skipped about Europe from Slovakia to Sweden, but evidently much of the methodological development on landscape investigation is derived from north-western Europe (cf. Shapwick - see Gerrard, this volume), and some other nationalities were extremely narrow in the scope of their presentations. On Friday afternoon there were only six people present: *moule-fatigue* had set in.

Material Culture in Medieval Europe

In the session on *Basic Data Gathering: Ceramics*, a study by Rainer Atzback (Bamberg) on material from excavations at the Damme, Hannover, reported an exceptionally good correlation between ceramics and status (as determined by a study of the documentary sources). Almost all of the pottery had been obtained within the region, but the use of stonewares was much greater in the higher-status properties.

Bob Will (Glasgow) outlined the 'Scottish White Gritty ware problem', namely that wares with white bodies and coarse sand temper are found all over central and southern Scotland, with kiln sites known in three areas of eastern Scotland, but that little is known for certain of the date, origins or distribution of examples. Estimates of the date of a particularly large assemblage from Kelso ranged from 12th to 14th centuries, for example. The ware is particularly significant since it seems that it is the only Scottish-made pottery to be found outside Scotland, for example at Trondheim.

Christian Bis-Worch (National Museum of History and Art, Luxembourg) and Lina Moens (Ghent) contributed papers on the 'Carolingian' pottery workshops at Autelbas (Belgium). This ware was traded over eastern Belgium and Luxembourg west of the Moselle valley, where a rival ware is found. Thermoluminescence dating (TL) of waster sherds and the clay walls of two kilns, carried out at the University of Gent, showed the potsherds consistently a couple of centuries later in date than the kilns in which they were found. Discussion of the possible reasons for this concentrated on establishing how likely this result was to be real (rather than an artefact of sample preparation) and led to an interesting discussion on the use of TL, and on the use of scientific dating methods in archaeological projects in general.

The conference heard six papers on medieval and later glass. Judith Stevenson (Museum of London) presented an account of the rich evidence for glass working at San Vincenzo al Volturno (Italy) in the ninth century, and Georg Haggren (Helsinki) described the wide variety of late medieval glass from Turku, Finland. Two papers dealt with different aspects of *façon de Venise* glass in Western Europe: the first by De Raedt, Janssens and Veeckman (Antwerp),

discussed the chemical composition of 15th- to 17th-century glass found in Antwerp, while Hugh Willmott (Durham) discussed 16th- and 17th-century glass vessels in their social context. In a paper with a very wide chronological span, Gheorge Manueu-Adamesteanu and Ingrid Poll (Museum of History and Art, Bucharest) described glass bracelets from Romania. Finally Jan Kock (University of Aarhus) presented an ethnoarchaeological study of traditional glass making in India.

Travel, Technology and Organisation in Medieval Europe

The keynote speech of this theme, by Professor de Boer (Groningen), stressed that the conference should be a kind of stock-taking, set in an archaeological and historical framework. Was it possible to arrive at a new starting point? In what directions do we have to look for a better, more up-to-date and realistic picture of the subjects of interest? Medieval people were to the fore, with some stimulating papers relevant to material culture. Paolo Squatriti (Michigan) in his written contribution reminded us that transportation, trade and communication are closely tied to human development, and that the ecological dimension, such as the replacement of earthenware containers by wooden barrels (which impacts on the visibility of trade) was part of the environmental context in which people lived.

Environment and Subsistence in Medieval Europe

Bruges 1997 saw the introduction of this theme for the first time. The keynote speech was delivered by Professor Morales (Madrid) who undertook to 'fill the pot' (i.e. set out the aim of environmental archaeology), and recreate a pork goulash with a fish sauce! He reminded us that science is moved by questions, and that interesting questions are usually devised by cooperative effort - a multidisciplinary approach - that cannot be tackled by one scholar alone. In his quest for goulash he drew on databases from the Iberian Peninsula and Anglo-Scandinavian Coppergate, and demonstrated how filling the pot and contextualising it is a 'cooperative quest'.

Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology

Some of the most relevant presentations for pot-people were to be found lurking under the banner of 'Method and Theory', though it has to be said that we had heard versions of some of these papers before. David Gaimster (British Museum) spoke on late medieval panel paintings and the evidence they provide for ceramics in use, while Keith Dobney, Clive Orton and Jess Tipper (respectively York; Institute of Archaeology, London; Cambridge) provided useful case studies of taphonomy and site formation processes for bone, pot and other artefacts, examining for example the relationship between type of site and find categories (cf. *Winchester Studies*). Duncan Brown, Alan Chalmers and Ann McNamara (Southampton and Bristol) on 'Light and the culture of colour in medieval pottery' clearly need further resources to underpin their work, but theirs was a stimulating presentation to a very full room. Sadly, some of the other presentations were poor or outdated. One paper was so nauseating in its obvious enthusiasm for the less savoury sides of medieval life that a previous speaker left the room to be sick (or was this the *moules'* revenge?).

Conclusion

The overall impression was that in England, the Universities of York and Durham were dynamic centres for post-Roman studies: an impressive number of post-graduates at Durham