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Nicholas J. E. Riall

MEDIEVAL EUROPE BRUGGE 1997: AN INSIDE VIEW

The last issue of *Medieval Ceramics* (21, 1997, 116–18) included a report on the Medieval Europe 1997 international conference of medieval and later archaeology, held at Bruges, 1–4 October. Apart from a survey of the sections and lectures – with a particular emphasis on lectures related to medieval and later ceramics — the comments also formulated a few criticisms which as one of the principal organisers I feel deserve a brief reply.

1. Some papers were perhaps not up to standard, outdated or consisted of a repeated version of contributions already presented elsewhere; as the comments in *Medieval Ceramics* suggest, a more rigorous selection of papers is needed. It should not, however, be forgotten that the Medieval Europe conferences are *open* conferences, with an *open* call for papers. The organisers of the York 1992 and the Bruges 1997 conferences have learned that there is often quite a substantial difference between the abstracts sent in by the prospective speakers and the papers actually presented. By the time the programme has been finalised and the conference opens, it is too late to intervene. Indeed, some of the authors of the comments in *Medieval Ceramics* were leading a particular section and must have had the same experience. That quite a few speakers did not ever send in their written text or sent it at a very late date — the last one arrived at the beginning of September — did not help to avoid “accidents”. In short, the professionalism of at least a number of (medieval) archaeologists leaves something to be desired, a point further illustrated by the fact that some proposed speakers never even bothered to reply and/or simply did not turn up, something which the organisers of any conference regret but are powerless to do much about. It is perhaps the price to pay in the case of an open international conference, where one of the basic philosophies is to provide the maximum number of archaeologists with an opportunity to present and discuss their work and to exchange ideas across the boundaries of particular specialist fields.

2. This exchange of ideas is important. Though one can see why the comments in *Medieval Ceramics* focus mainly

on pottery, regrettably other subjects receive less attention. If archaeologists continue to avoid more holistic approaches to the medieval and later material — and therefore also social and economic — world, we should not be surprised that the archaeological evidence is not always taken sufficiently seriously by other disciplines. In this respect, ‘networking and exchanging views across the board’ was and is one of the main reasons to organise this kind of event — as was explicitly emphasised in the opening addresses.

3. Finally, difficulties associated with linguistic obstacles and indeed even with mitigated forms of nationalism still seem to be quite prominent; the comments in *Medieval Ceramics* refer — repeatedly — to the difficulties with languages other than English, emphasising the papers given in English and on UK material while advocating more interaction “between French- and German-speaking delegates and the English-speaking fraternity”. The York and Bruges conferences provided an opportunity for networking across linguistic and geographic as well as subject-related barriers, but delegates could be somewhat more pro-active in this respect — as indeed (and very fortunately) some have been with good prospects for future co-operative ventures. For those less open to that opportunity as well as for the linguistically impaired, the world will always be a more difficult place and so will medieval and later archaeology.

The *Medieval Europe* conferences at York and Bruges can best be seen as starting points, and other forms of such conferences should definitely be considered. Perhaps Basel will provide another approach, which will have its own advantages and possibly also its own drawbacks. But not only the organisers but also the delegates have responsibilities. This is one price of seeking a European approach and a European unity, a process which clearly is not always easy.

Frans Verhaeghe
Free University of Brussels

CORRIGENDUM

Note on **Maureen Mellor**, *Pots and People that have shaped the heritage of medieval and later England*, reviewed in *Medieval Ceramics* 21, 125–6.

In the last *Medieval Ceramics* volume, David Hinton kindly reviewed *Pots and People*. In the penultimate paragraph he wrote:

‘The large pot from Swindon described as without an accession number in the caption to Fig. 30, is actually 1955:496 — the showcase is not so badly lit that the labels are unreadable’.

The accession number he quoted refers to a Thetford greyware; the labels in the showcase do not include the Swindon pot. Found on a property in Wood Street, Swindon, and, with another large vessel, presented to the museum by A. D. Passmore, the Swindon pot in question bears the accession number 1955:405.

Maureen Mellor