

Bua, Sauro Gelichi and Sergio Nepoti, illustrated with drawings, photographs and tables. The catalogue proper which forms the second part is a list of the buildings and structures which contain the ceramics featured in the exhibition and discussed in the essays, with a final section consisting of 30 pages of colour photographs of the buildings and architectural ceramics discussed in the text. The catalogue is illustrated with drawings and photographs in black and white; entries are by D. Artioli and G. Vigliano, Andrea Breda, Claudio Capelli, Alexandre Gardini, Marino Marini, Otto Mazzucato, Gabriella Pantò, Paolo Peduto and Carlo Varaldo, as well as the authors of the papers.

In the first paper, *Riflessioni sull'Impiego di Laterizi Smaltati ed Invetriati nel Mondo Mediterraneo (IX–XIV secolo)*, Graziella Berti gives an historical and geographical perspective to the use of architectural ceramics in medieval Italy by summarising the evidence for decorative glazed ceramics in the Mediterranean and Middle East. She includes numerous tables, which help to make the information more accessible to those whose Italian is perhaps a little rusty. Although not intended to be exhaustive, her summary presents and discusses dates and references for a range of glazed wall facings, floor tiles, plates, and other architectural elements from the Byzantine and Islamic spheres, the Iberian peninsula, and also from France and Northern Europe; her bibliography too, although selective, is generously sized.

The remaining papers are concerned with Italian material. Gelichi and Nepoti, in *I Laterizi Rivestiti in Italia nel Medioevo (X?–XIV secolo)*, discuss the origins, types and dating of the ceramics in Italy, concluding that, apart from early and untypical appearances in the Sala Capitolare of Santa Scolastica at Subiaco, near Rome, and in the façade of Santa Maria del Popolo at Pavia, they are a phenomenon of the 13th and 14th centuries, and were probably inspired by a number of sources. They suggest that perhaps the biggest impetus to the spread of tin-glazed tiles for decoration was their use in the important Franciscan churches at Assisi and Bologna in the mid 13th century; S. Francesco at Assisi is thought to date from c. 1236–9, and S. Francesco at Bologna was built a few years later. Technical aspects, such as firing and the pigments used for the coloured glazes, are also discussed.

Francesca Bua's paper, *I Laterizi Rivestiti in Italia: La Distribuzione*, in which she looks at the dating and distribution of the material discussed by Gelichi and Nepoti, follows and complements their paper. Bua summarises the data and provides graphs to illustrate the chronological distribution of the material (86% of which dates to the 13th and 14th centuries), the total numbers of structures with architectural ceramics and the relative proportions of brick and tile from each region. This last graph shows some geographical patterning, with bricks, *mattoni*, occurring only in the more northerly regions, and tiles, *mattonelle*, generally more common in the south, although the diversity of practices can be seen, for example, in the high proportion of tiles in Liguria, and the occurrence in Campania of moulded architectural elements only. Her final graph shows the geographical, numerical and chronological distribution of the material from the 10th to the 14th centuries.

The final papers are on more specific topics. Sauro Gelichi's monograph, *I "Bacini" di San Giacomo Maggiore a Bologna*, describes and discusses the assemblage of glazed and decorated dishes, *bacini*, used to decorate the façade of this early 14th-century church. The *bacini* of San Giacomo are unusual in that they include two decorated dishes which relate directly to the history of the church, one depicting the coat of arms of the convent and the other the figure of a monk with the words *Frater Simon* inscribed

above. It is not known whether this is a reference to the Simon who was mentioned in a document of 1318 as head of the convent or to the famous preacher Simon of Todi, who died in 1322 and is buried in the church, or whether they were actually the same person, but the dedications show that the *bacini* must have been made especially for the façade of San Giacomo.

Sergio Nepoti, in the final paper, *L'uso delle Ceramiche nei Mosaici*, looks at the use of *tesserae* made from ceramic plates, many of Islamic manufacture, in the wall mosaics of the 13th century and later. Rarely, as at Monreale and Orvieto, pieces of tile were also used. He illustrates the examples in the cathedral at Genoa and in churches in Campania and Lazio, and reports on recent work on the 13th-century pulpit of San Giovanni del Toro at Ravello, where it has been estimated that the *tesserae* must have come from something like 100 plates. The question of whether ceramic *tesserae* were used because of problems obtaining glass *tesserae* is raised, but Nepoti is of the opinion that they were chosen for the intensity of their colours, particularly the vibrant shades of green and blue.

The catalogue section, which covers about 40 pages, is packed with detailed information on 55 churches and other sites, and illustrated with line drawings, including elevations, and black and white photographs. The final section of over 100 colour plates, most of which are of excellent quality, amply illustrates the beauty and diversity of the subject matter.

The introduction to this publication states that it is designed to appeal to the general reader as well as to the specialist, and, with its abundant illustrations, it certainly fulfils that aim. However, as well as being visually exciting, it also contains enough technical detail and authoritative comment to be of use to the more serious ceramicist or art historian.

Susan Pringle

Michiel Bartels [with contributions by Jaap Kottman, Michael Klomp, Hans van der Meulen, Dorien van de Venne and Herbert Sarfatij], *Steden in scherven — Cities in Sherds. Vondsten uit beerputten in Deventer, Dordrecht, Nijmegen en Tiel (1250–1900) — Finds from cesspits in Deventer, Dordrecht, Nijmegen and Tiel (1250–1900)*. Stichting Promotie Archeologie & Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek, Zwolle & Amersfoort, 1999. 2 volumes, 1096 pp., numerous illustrations (photos, drawings, maps, plans and graphs). Dutch text with English summary; captions and catalogue in Dutch and English. ISBN 90 801044 3 4. Price: 165 Dutch Guilders.

Over the past decades, extensive urban excavations in many Dutch towns have uncovered numerous cesspits, wells and other features, which in turn have yielded a nearly unmanageable quantity of finds, particularly pottery and glass vessels, a wide array of smaller metal, wooden and leather objects as well as other information, notably of an environmental nature and/or related to food. The well-known R.O.B.-project, (Rijksobienst voor hit Oudheidkundig Bodemondoorvek) generally referred to as the *Urbanisation of the river-area in the Middle Ages* and which mainly concerned the towns of Deventer, Dordrecht, Nijmegen

and Tiel, was no exception and from 1968 to 1996, some 400 cesspits were excavated. But as is so often the case, the detailed publication of these excavations and evidence was delayed to the point where the sheer mass of data and finds became simply daunting. Part of the *Delta Plan for Cultural Conservation* provided the R.O.B. with the opportunity to identify, list and curate the finds from these pits. This in turn made it possible to prepare a survey of these finds and assess their meaning. The present volumes are basically the result of this work.

There are four parts, the first three of which are found in volume I. The first part — the actual text — includes a brief presentation of the excavation work in the four towns (H. Sartafij, 15–23), followed by a discussion of the management of rubbish, of the formation processes in the pits, of the excavation methods, of the management of the finds and of the dating problems and selection criteria related to cesspits (all of this by M. Bartels, 25–41). Next comes the discussion of the different categories of pottery, from greywares to industrial ceramics (M. Bartels, 43–259) and of glass (M. Kottman, 261–274), metal objects (M. Klomp, 275–309), clay pipes (H. van der Meulen, 311–316) and stove-tiles (D. van de Venne, 317–323). A discussion of those groups which are considered for one reason or another to be important — a total of 22 — concludes this part (M. Bartels & J. Kottman, 325–371). The second part consists of a number of excavation plans and maps (373–407), followed by a general comment on consumption patterns — mainly of pottery (M. Bartels, 409–414). A number of what are called ‘inventory lists’ (425–493) constitutes the third part, which — together with the bibliography (495–510) and acknowledgements for the illustrations — concludes this volume. The second volume is the fourth part of the work and consists of a catalogue of finds, ordered not by group but by category and type of object (different kinds of stonewares, greywares, etc.) and with a brief identification and description following the so-called ‘Deventer-system’ (see below).

Over 400 rubbish pits and cesspits (including a number of re-used wells) have been excavated in the towns concerned, but only 172 of them (pp. 14 and 425, but 176 according to the English summary, p. 422) have been selected and included in the present work. The remainder have been excluded as the chronology of their content covered too long a period (i.e. more than 50 years) and/or because they were too badly excavated. In fact, only some 35% of the complexes, representing only some 20% of the finds, have thus been retained. This not only begs questions in terms of the quality of at least some of the excavations but also in terms of the representativeness of the finds, particularly when the publication tends to create the impression that it offers a more or less complete survey of the pottery in use from c. 1250 to c. 1900 (as suggested by the survey of the changing patterns of pottery consumption, pp. 409–14).

One of the basic characteristics of the publication is its use of the so-called ‘Deventer system’, which can be summed up as a ‘thesaurus-type’ system developed for use in a ‘normalised’ computerised database: a series of codes refer to the general type of ware (e.g. s1 and s2 stand for fully developed stonewares), the (main) type of object (e.g. *bek* stands for *beker* or beaker and *vst* for *vuurklok* or curfew) and a number (occasionally with a letter) for a specific type (and occasionally for some additional features or characteristics). The Deventer-system was first developed in 1991 and was later adapted for more general use. It is now applied by many Dutch archaeologists, but others are still waiting for a detailed explanation of the system and the codes (which still appears to be in preparation; see note 2 on p. 427). In the ‘inventory lists’ and in the catalogue, the

reader finds, for example, ‘r -tes-18’ which is actually a redware ‘fire pan’, probably of a specific type. It took me some time to follow the system, as the explanation of some parts of the code is somewhat scattered over different parts of the publication, but those who read Dutch eventually get there . . . (though not in the case of the specific type of object). The Deventer-system has advantages, particularly in terms of quick registration and retrieval. I understand that numbers denoting the specific type can also be added to the system. But even so, I feel there remains a serious degree of danger: the system does tend to ‘freeze’ types and thus to generate a typology which can perhaps be expanded (although it is not clear to what degree) but which is difficult to adapt, let alone change. In addition, there is the feeling that the system is intended to lead to a typology for the whole of the Netherlands (or even the Low Countries?). Experience shows that archaeologists at least occasionally tend to go for quick and easy identifications, a phenomenon not necessarily on its way out in this day and age of rapid, cost-conscious archaeology. Combined with the Deventer-system, this could lead to problems. Of course, they say, the system should be used diligently, carefully and with a well-developed sense of criticism: the danger is not the system itself but the way it is used. Similar reasoning is often heard in discussions on gun-control . . . Furthermore, are we — at this point in medieval and later pottery studies — confident that we know all the specific types and their many regional and even local variants, very essential points if we are to study distribution patterns and commercialisation systems? And how representative is what is known so far? Judging from the altogether limited numbers of production sites known, let alone investigated in some detail, the question remains open. Possibly, part of this problem can be circumvented through adding to the codes. But how far can or should this go? In some respects, the basic problem seems to be that the Deventer-system started out as a practical and relatively simple tool and was gradually converted into something much more ambitious, even an end in itself. This may not be what the developers of the system wanted. In fact, Bartels mentions a few drawbacks of the Deventer-system (on p. 409!), but the advantages in terms of speed and publication possibilities outweigh these considerations. So the present situation is still one of a certain danger that precision and depth of interpretation may well be partly sacrificed on the altar of expediency.

Combined with the catalogue, the ‘inventory lists’ offer some clues as to how the different groups and types were associated, but it takes a lot of work by the reader to find this out with limited results as there are relatively few cross-references between the text, the ‘inventory lists’ and the catalogue. Cross-indexes would have been a useful addition. Interestingly, no statistical work has been included in the publication (because of the lack of time; see note 1 on p. 414), even though some quantitative indications are given in the ‘inventory lists’.

Another major feature of the present publication is of course the chronology of the finds, particularly the pottery and to a lesser extent the glass vessels. Cesspits and rubbish pits can present serious problems when it comes to dating, particularly when they have gone through sometimes repeated processes of curation. Michiel Bartels discusses — rather succinctly as a matter of fact — the formation processes in the pits, the ways in which the pits were excavated and the finds management situation (and its evolution) in order to arrive at the few rules which guided the dating of the groups and the criteria for their selection. He makes a distinction between the dating of the group, during which all the objects may have been in existence and in use at the same time, the dating of production of a

type of pottery (both the ware such as greywares and the form such as jugs or dishes), and the object-dates, i.e. dates or other chronological indications on the objects themselves or *termini* associated with the group. The reader has to go to chapter 16 (pp. 325–371) to find out how this is used to date the groups, and will perhaps be surprised first to find that in this chapter only 22 groups (of the 172 selected) are commented on in any detail. I am still trying to find out why the remaining 150 groups are not discussed in the same way, but I may have overlooked a note or comment elsewhere in the text. Whatever the case, the chronology of those groups discussed is more often than not based on the pottery itself, sometimes in combination with the glass and in a few instances also with other associated finds. Very often, the absence of one or more particular types of pottery and glass objects is used to date the group. But the *argumentum ex nihilo* is always rather risky in archaeological contexts and this is certainly true in the case of the infilling of cesspits: it presupposes that such groups are coherent and representative collections of rubbish of single-period households — which remains to be proven in each individual case — and that these households had a representative range of most if not all of the categories and kinds of objects available during a particular period — which again remains to be proven. The absence of particular types of objects is *potentially* interesting (notably in terms of social and economic interpretation) but in the present stage of pottery and glass research, I doubt if it should be used as a major dating tool, let alone consistently. In combination with what is currently known (or unknown) about the chronotypological evolution of different kinds of pottery types, it can easily become a recipe for circular reasoning. An example is provided by the discussion of the date of group 210 from Nijmegen (p. 341–342); there are others.

As the chronology of the complexes is based on internal criteria, and more particularly on the current knowledge of the dating of pottery and glass, the pottery constitutes the bulk of the material studied and therefore also of the text in volume I. Basically, we are offered a series of chapters and paragraphs on specific categories of ceramic objects, starting with the stonewares, greywares and redwares, followed by the white-fired products, the Werra, Weser and 'other kinds of German' wares, porcelain, tin-glazed wares and what is called 'industrial ceramics' is in fact industrially produced pottery. For each of the main categories and production centres, Bartels offers a survey of the (known) production centres and their history, followed by a brief discussion of the different main object-types. This leads to an often equally brief comment on the significance of the category of pottery in the cesspits studied. Understandably, a lot of this is based on the literature, but the author regularly also uses evidence from the cesspit groups to complement the survey, thus compounding the dangers of circular reasoning. Given the space available and the size of the subject, the surveys are of course somewhat limited and occasionally even somewhat superficial. There are also a few surprises. Thus, for instance, Bartels comments briefly on the greyware production in Flanders (p. 97), pointing to two production centres, Aardenburg and Oudenaarde. None of the others — Bruges, Kortrijk, Ghent, Antwerp, Sint-Kwintens-Lennik, and others — are even mentioned, although it has now long been suggested that most if not all of the medieval Flemish towns had kilns which produced grey wares (mainly if not exclusively for local consumption). There are other surprises, among them that no highly decorated products seem to be present (perhaps I missed them); but the author does not comment on these wares or their absence. But mentioning all of these queries would take too long. Let me say instead that the whole seems to be a valiant effort to provide a survey of medieval and early

modern pottery in the Netherlands. It also includes some interesting information on a few groups which have been somewhat neglected hitherto. Together with the evidence from the cesspits, all this leads to a number of general interpretative considerations concerning the evolution of the consumption patterns (mainly of pottery) (pp. 409–14). And here too, many questions remain . . .

The chapters on the glass, the pipes, the stove-tiles and the metal objects are clearly somewhat less ambitious. They do provide a general context for the finds from the cesspits studied and offer some useful information.

On the whole, the volumes are well-produced, notwithstanding a number of typographical errors (including even a few incorrectly-spelled names) and the occasional omission of a figure number (as with fig. 3.19 on p. 33). The illustrations are generally very adequate but one does wonder why some of them have been included. This is certainly the case with a few figures related to particular sites; prizes go to the very general view of the Meuse near Namur (fig. 7.8 on p. 157) and to the view of one of the towers of the town-wall of Dieburg (fig. 7.5 on p. 154), neither of which has any informative value. More efforts could perhaps have been spent usefully on the plans and legends in chapter 17, pp. 373–407). But all this concerns details of rather limited importance.

It is very difficult to assess these volumes satisfactorily, mainly because to do so touches upon so many problems, some of them related to excavation techniques, others to archaeological management, still others to interpretation and dating issues, and still others to pottery. Discussing all this in sufficient detail would amount to writing another book. But a very general, overall assessment is not impossible. Two points have to be stressed here. The first is that, notwithstanding its bulk and the mass of material and information handled, the publication nevertheless leaves the impression of a certain kind of superficiality, a feeling that more was possible and that expediency has been favoured at the expense of depth. This may seem a rather harsh criticism, considering the efforts spent. And it may indeed simply be that I wanted or expected more, in which case the comment is not totally fair.

The second point concerns the overall nature of the publication. The preface calls these volumes a 'manual' and the back cover talks of a 'standard work on material culture'. Hyperbolic expressions are not unheard of in such a context, but in this case, they are definitely off the mark; the publication is neither. The reduction of the notion 'material culture' to pottery and glass already constitutes a problem: the leather, skeletal and wooden objects are not included; neither is the evidence related to food or environment. But far more dangerous is the notion that this is a reference work allowing for the quick and easy retrieval of trustworthy comparative material and chronological information, particularly for specific types of ceramic and glass objects. The volumes have too many gaps to live up to that claim and the problems with the dating of the groups — and therefore of the object-types — remain a concern. Furthermore, too many questions pertaining to the chronology and interpretation of these kinds of contexts and groups remain open. In fact, too many of those questions are not even asked. This means that the volumes are useful but have to be used with caution. They should certainly not replace the painstaking, detailed work on finds and complexes which we clearly remain in need of if we are to achieve fundamental progress with the study of medieval and early modern pottery. If prospective readers have this advice in mind, the volumes are well worth having.

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