

Imported Ceramics Studies in Britain

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SUMMARY

The first excavated examples of medieval and post-medieval imported ceramics, in the 17th and 18th centuries, were often misdated as Roman, or even Phoenician; it was not until the mid-19th century that imported ceramics began to be regularly reported and more correctly identified. The number of finds expanded greatly after World War II. With the vast increase in excavations; research in the 1960s and 1970s attempted to identify their sources. The social and economic aspects of these imports need more study: it is disappointing that progress in the last twenty-five years has, with a few exceptions, been so limited.

EARLY COLLECTIONS

Most pottery imported into Britain in the medieval and post-medieval periods was imported specifically for use or display purposes, or imported incidentally as containers for other imported goods. Individual souvenirs or gifts are rare. In the medieval period most items displayed on buffets were metal, but by the 15th century tin-glazed Valencian Lustrewares began to take over (Caiger-Smith 1985, 118), as is suggested by the armorial dishes ordered by the Dukes of Burgundy in the first half of the century (Hurst and Neal 1982, 83). By the last quarter of the 15th century the Dukes of Burgundy were collecting Italian and Spanish pottery and glass, which was displayed on shelves (Hurst 1999, 95 and front cover). In the 16th century many of the princely courts of Europe developed *Kunst- or Wunderkammer* (Impey and MacGregor 1985; Adamson 1999); by the early 17th century these Cabinets of Curiosities had percolated down the social hierarchy. One of the most famous collections in England was that of the Tradescants, which formed the basis for the first public museum in England, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in 1683 (MacGregor 1983). This contained many varied objects from all over the world, the pottery including Roman and Saxon wares as well as a far Eastern Martaban (*ibid.*, 76) and a Chinese blue and white storage jar (*ibid.*, 77): these were listed in the 1656 inventory, while from Europe there were Palissy-type polychrome dishes, listed as China dishes (*ibid.*, 275). The 18th century Cabinet of Curiosities of Sir Thomas Wilson at Charlton Park, Greenwich, included more mundane containers: a North Italian

Lion-headed Marbled Costrel and a Seville Olive Jar (Hurst 1991a, 216).

The first record of excavated imported ceramics was of a 16th-century Low Countries moulded brick, from a fireback, which was found 28 ft down in Mark Lane, City of London, in 1670. This was acquired by the recently formed Royal Society for their Museum of Natural and Artificial Rarities at Gresham College; they presented it to the British Museum in 1781 (Caygill and Cherry 1997, 217, note 51). It is very odd that, despite the fact there were surely examples of these firebacks surviving in eastern England, a long discussion ensued suggesting that this brick was Roman (Bagford 1715 and Tovey 1744). This bizarre debate continued throughout the 18th century: it was not resolved until 1825 (Cruden) when it was realised that the bricks often depicted Christian subjects; examples dated to the 1550s were later found to confirm this (Bradbury and Evans 1854). Stuart Piggott suggested (1976) that the sound scientific principles of the 17th century, which lead to the founding of the Royal Society in 1662, were succeeded in the 18th century by a period of dilettante romanticism, which lasted until the geological revolution in the second quarter of the 19th century. Even more incredible were the 18th-century Chinese porcelain seal matrices which came as souvenirs in tea boxes, so again they should have been recognised; most were found in Ireland, and in the mid 19th century it was alleged they were evidence for the Phoenician tin trade. This was not finally resolved until as late as 1900 (Hilton).

With the re-creation of the Society of Antiquaries

of London in 1717 the minutes of the weekly meetings, from 1718, record objects exhibited, including ceramics, often with a sketch in the margin. For example in 1766 a late 16th-century Continental green-glazed stove tile was exhibited (Owen 1766, 164) and presented to the Antiquaries (Way 1847, 31 and Gaimster 1989). In 1777 one of the 30 Martincamp-type flasks, found in Colchester, Essex, was exhibited (King 1777, 173–4 and 1779, 230–1). The source of neither of these was identified. The stove tile was found, extraordinarily, by sailors digging for a golden image of the Virgin, at St Radigund's Abbey, near Dover, Kent. From 1731 notes on ceramics were published sporadically in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but the first substantial publications were in *Archaeologia* from 1770, although it was not until Alfred Kempe's publication of work at London Bridge in 1832 that the first possible medieval imported pot was published; it was not identified, but the drawing clearly shows a Rouen-type jug or a London copy (Kempe 1832, 199, Pl. xlv, no. 11)

It was not until the middle of the 19th century, with the formation of the various national and local archaeological societies (Levine 1986), that serious pottery studies started (Hurst 1991b). Albert Way catalogued the Society of Antiquaries of London collections in 1847; William Chaffers wrote his seminal article in 1850; the British Museum appointed Augustus Franks in 1851, opened a medieval room in 1852 and purchased, in 1856, the Charles Roach Smith Collection (Roach Smith 1854) which formed the basis of their medieval pottery collections (Caygill and Cherry 1997, Hurst 1991b, 22–3 and Gerrard forthcoming). Until exhibits faded out during World War I the British Archaeological Association and the Archaeological Institute monthly meetings showed ceramics which were described, if not always illustrated, in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* and the *Archaeological Journal*.

In 1845 Albert Way identified early 16th century tiles from Sussex (Turner 1864 and 1866), exhibited at the Archaeological Institute Winchester meeting (Turner 1846), as being made near Neufchâtel in northern France because he had a friend in Rouen who had some of this kind of tile (Turner 1864, 129). Although Elizabeth Eames suggested that they were copies made in Sussex (Eames 1980, I, 97) they are still accepted as being made at Brémontier-Massey near Neufchâtel-en-Bray (Gaimster and Nenck 1997, 184). In 1851 T. H. Turner was aware of Edward I's order for Spanish pottery in 1289 (Childs 1995, 26). The most remarkable identification in this period, however, was that by Henry Seyer Cuming, who, in 1854, correctly identified Merida-type quartz-decorated ware as being made in the Alentejo, Portugal

(Cuming 1855, 376). I was, unfortunately, unaware of this when I identified this pottery as Spanish in the 1960s (Hurst *et al.* 1986, 69). These Victorian polymaths exhibited at meetings a vast range of exotic pots that they were able to identify as they had come across examples on their travels. The Abbé Cochet, in Normandy, was a hundred years ahead of work in Britain: he divided his medieval pottery into groups by fabric and glaze, quantified both sherds and numbers of whole vessels, published colour illustrations and attempted a chronology (Cochet 1857). Sadly, the French never followed this up and it is unfortunate that a recent tour of Northern France by Clare McCutcheon (pers. comm.) revealed little progress in their study of the sources of pottery beyond what was known when I made my first tour forty years ago.

MEDIEVAL IMPORTS

In the middle of the 19th century the study of medieval rural settlement started at the same time as ceramic studies (Hurst 1971, 80), as part of the surge in archaeology consequent on the new ease of travel afforded by the spreading railway network (Hurst 1991b, 10). Inexplicably, this research petered out and little of significance was done on settlement, or pottery studies for nearly one hundred years, with a few exceptions such as Pithay in Bristol in the 1920s (Pritchard 1926, 271–3 and Pls. xii–xiii). Throughout the later 19th century the emphasis in medieval studies was almost entirely ecclesiastical and architectural (Gerrard forthcoming).

As with so many aspects of medieval ceramics, it was Gerard Dunning in 1933 in his classic paper on Saintonge Polychrome, linking it with the Gascon wine trade, who started the modern serious study of medieval pottery imported into Britain. In 1932 there was the first identification of Syrian pottery, from Grosmont Castle, Monmouthshire (O'Neil and Hobson 1932), in which it was suggested that this jar had been brought over personally from the crusades by Edmund Crouchback in 1272. As with medieval rural settlement research, which was also relaunched in the 1930s, mainly by Oxford scholars (Hurst 1971, 77), progress was set back by World War II, but burgeoned most significantly in the 1950s. I had gone up to Cambridge in 1948 to read prehistoric archaeology, but turned to medieval studies in 1950 with my excavations at the medieval manor house at Northolt, Middlesex (Hurst 1961). This introduced me to Gerald Dunning, who was very generous with his advice on the pottery, which was all new to me. Dunning persuaded me to study Saxo-Norman pottery in East Anglia (Hurst 1955, 1956 and 1957), and also to cut a section through the city ditch at St. Benedict's Gate Norwich, with Jack Golsor. This produced large quantities of 17th

pottery from the infill, including numbers of imports (Hurst and Golson 1955, 60–86).

In 1958 the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) held a conference at Norwich on Saxon pottery, at which Dunning first set out the main types of Continental Saxon pottery imported into Britain (CBA 1959). This was biased towards the Rhineland, as so much research had been done there on pottery over a period of fifty years (Hurst 1976). Dunning again demonstrated links with the wine trade, with vessels for storage, decanting and drinking. I joined the Ministry of Works, Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, in 1952 helping Dunning, and with the responsibility for organising and inspecting medieval rescue excavations. It was this which enabled me, over a period of twenty years, to see most of the pottery found on an increasing number of excavations at both urban and rural sites. Single imports became common all over the country but it was urban sites like Southampton (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975) where the largest number and range of imports were found.

In April 1964 the Medieval Research Committee of the CBA arranged a conference, and an exhibition, on medieval pottery at the Institute of Archaeology in London. I gave the opening lecture on the dating of medieval pottery, the only paper from the conference to be published at the time, in the much-delayed Hurst 1962–3. The main themes of the conference were regional types of pottery, pottery kilns and workshops, scientific analysis and the idea of a national collection of medieval pottery in the British Museum. Dunning rounded off the conference by lecturing on Trade: Exports and Imports, but it was not until after the 1966 Rotterdam conference that he published his seminal paper on Trade in Medieval Pottery Around the North Sea (Dunning 1968). The 1964 exhibition included German, Low Countries, French, Spanish and Italian imports, while I added Near and Far Eastern imports which were only then becoming recognised (Hurst 1968). Unfortunately, the 1964 conference proceedings were never published, and the only record is the 56 page duplicated unillustrated catalogue of the exhibition (CBA 1964). With Ken Barton's six seminal papers on French medieval pottery (Barton 1963, 1965, 1966, 1969, 1974 and 1977), the 1976 Saxon updated account (Hurst 1976) and the 1980 Hull conference on North Sea Trade (Davey and Hodges 1983), the main sources of Saxon and medieval imported pottery were summarised. Surveys of Near Eastern (Hurst 1968), Spanish (Hurst 1977) and Italian (1991a) imports were published, while more recent surveys of Spanish ceramics (Gerrard *et al.* 1995) and Maiolica in the North (Gaimster 1999) brought information up to date and increasingly included the Continental background as well as the actual imports into Britain.

POST-MEDIEVAL IMPORTS

In parallel with this research on medieval ceramics imports, work progressed on post-medieval imports. In 1960 I visited the Netherlands looking especially at South Netherlands Maiolica (Hurst 1999, 91). Jaap Renuad of the Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek (ROB) introduced me to Hendrik Jan van Beuningen, leading eventually to the book (Hurst *et al.* 1986). In 1961–2 the post-medieval range of imported pottery was greatly extended by the town rubbish dump excavations at Castle Street, Plymouth, Devon (Clark 1979). In 1963 I visited Germany and Northern France and, in 1964, toured France, Spain and Italy with a Leverhulme grant. Sadly, there had been little research or interest in many areas on the pottery sources and it was to take twenty years to track these down. As finds were made, I wrote notes for the excavators on the imports, but these were usually small and difficult to parallel with sherds on the continent. David Neal and I therefore decided that the van Beuningen-de Vriese Collection, with its large numbers of complete pots from Dutch sites, was the ideal base for a textbook on later imported ceramics. Unfortunately this Collection is unique: no other collector in Britain or Europe has been interested in collecting wares in normal use on this scale, though there were, of course, fine art collectors on both sides of the Channel and the North Sea. Regular visits were made over twenty years and 800 pots drawn (Hurst and Neal 2000) culminating in *Pottery Produced and Traded in North-West Europe 1350–1650* (Hurst *et al.* 1986) which used 400 of these drawings and 68 photographs. This was designed as a tool to help researchers identify imports. It was not intended as a final statement but to state the position as it was in the mid-1980s. It concentrated mainly on sources and chronology, thus acting as a springboard for new research, especially on the social and economic aspects, for which there was little evidence before.

RECENT GENERAL SURVEYS

Between January and March 1964 I had given my first University of London extra-mural course, of ten lectures and two visits, at Goldsmith's College, on medieval archaeology; this became a regular annual event for eighteen years. In 1964 there was one lecture on pottery and in 1965 three. 1966 was my first full course on pottery, and in 1969 and 1970 I gave courses on the medieval and post-medieval pottery of Europe. These were repeated in 1974–5 and 1980–1, each course bringing up to date the advances of knowledge about types and sources of imports, with, in the intervening years, general descriptions of the current position on medieval archaeology and British ceramics. These

courses were attended by most of the excavators and museum curators who were working on medieval, pottery in south-east England; they were very much a two-way process, as excavators brought in their material which was discussed each week in relation to the latest information on imported pottery. Further summaries were given in my first two Presidential addresses to the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society in 1982 and 1983. My final updated account was a course of 24 lectures at the Museum of London on imported pottery in 1988–9, after I had retired and was about to leave London to live in the country. This completed twenty-five years of lecturing on pottery in London.

From the late 1970s pottery reports from major urban excavations added the detail to the general surveys of imports. Amongst these the most important are (anticlockwise) Waterford, Ireland (Gahan and McCutcheon 1997 and Meenan 1997), Plymouth (Clark 1979), Exeter (Allan 1984a), Poole (Horsey 1992), Southampton (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975), London (Vince 1985 and Blackmore 1994), Colchester (Cotter 2000), Norwich (Jennings 1981) King's Lynn (Clarke and Carter 1977), Hull (Watkins 1987) and a series of reports on sites in north-east England published in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, e.g. Newcastle (Ellison 1981 and 1983), with Perth (MacAskill 1987) and Aberdeen (Murray 1982) in Scotland.

Besides the regional surveys of imports given at the 1980 Hull conference, comprising the Irish Sea Province, southern and eastern Britain (Davey and Hodges 1983), there have been only a few syntheses, including the Isle of Man (Davey 1999), Ireland (Hurst 1988), south-west England (Allan 1994), Wessex (Gutiérrez 2000), Sussex (Hurst 1980) and Lincolnshire (Hurst 1991c). The most recent general survey of imports was at the 1993 Southampton conference, papers from which have been published in *Medieval Ceramics* 17 (1993), 18 (1994) and 19 (1995).

Thus was established a detailed background to the chronology, the sources and the distribution in Britain and Ireland. Following the formation of the Medieval Pottery Research Group in 1975 it was hoped that the last quarter of the 20th century would see major advances in the study of imported ceramics. *Medieval Ceramics* has indeed included many relevant papers, but there is still a tremendous amount to be done. It is disappointing how many important excavations remain to be published and very few of Stephen Moorhouses's suggestions for the many things pottery can tell us have been followed up (Moorhouse 1986). It is worrying that the 1990 Department of the Environment PPG16 has resulted in many small evaluations by outside contractors with no experience of the local pottery fabrics and sequence, so much so that in London,

for example, it is no longer possible to keep track of events. It is not clear if, or when, there will be new assemblages of pottery to which modern methods, as listed in the next section, can be applied.

RESEARCH TOPICS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Sourcing

The way forward is clearly with chemical provenancing; Mike Hughes's Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA) programme, at the British Museum (BM), has produced remarkable results for Spanish (Hughes 1995), Italian (Hughes *et al.* 1997) and Low Countries (Hughes and Gaimster 1999) pottery, but it is expensive. The cheaper Inductively Coupled Plasma — Atomic Emission Spectrometry (ICP — AES) method (Thompson and Walsh 1989 and Pollard and Heron 1996) has promise for a second round of determinations, and a new project on Italian and Low Countries pottery is planned. With sampling of producer, consumer and collected items this will provide an opportunity to undertake a more systematic and universal project, building on the important but incomplete outcome of the BM's NAA research.

Quantification

Quantification is another major need. This was not possible for earlier work but it is disappointing that we have not had more in the past 25 years. Imports are more difficult than local or regional wares since, on many sites, there are too few examples and it is often only with sites like Sandal Castle, Yorkshire (Moorhouse 1983), where a large part of the site has been excavated, that significant results can be obtained. For urban sites important work is in progress and we eagerly await Duncan Brown's pottery in Medieval Southampton report (Brown forthcoming) to make more sense of the simple lists in Platt and Coleman-Smith (1975), but see the important summaries (Brown 1993 and 1997a and b). Lyn Blackmore's two recent syntheses of 25 years research on London pottery (Blackmore 1999a and b) are a landmark in showing what might be achieved for many sites and areas in the country when more work is possible.

Distribution

Many maps were produced for imports in the 1960s, but they are now out of favour since it has become clear that, with exotic imports, these do not necessarily show patterns of trade. Dunning's North Sea maps (Dunning 1968), show the extensive trade

round the North Sea but are deceptive over detail. Trade was much more complex than straight from one port to another. Alan Vince has suggested that trade could be polygonal with several legs, not all of which would include pottery (Vince 1995, 8). It is likely that Spanish medieval imports came to Southampton, London and Bruges, in Genoese ships, whence they were then trans-shipped (Childs 1995). John Allan has drawn attention to the triangular trade from south-west England to the Newfoundland fisheries, to Spain and then back to Britain (Allan 1999, 287). Allan has also shown that much of the pottery in the south-west, and more specifically later Rhenish stoneware, was trans-shipped from London and did not come direct (Allan 1984b). But this is not necessarily always the case: when I was shown Saintonge pottery from Dumbarton in south-west Scotland, I suggested that it might have been trans-shipped from Waterford, Bristol or Chester, but Eric Talbot pointed out to me that documents demonstrate that Saintonge ships did go direct to Dumbarton, so the picture within Britain is very complex and a great deal more research is needed on trade networks.

Internal Distribution

The internal distribution of imports is very hard to resolve in view of the small quantities found: many excavations on rural sites often yield only single sherds as so little of a site has been excavated. It is likely that many individual pots were acquired from London, or other major ports, rather than from local markets (Hurst 1999, 91), as well as being carried about by their owners as they moved from estate to estate (Moorhouse 1983, 129–32). Major research is at last in progress in understanding the dissemination of pottery from ports, with John Allan's corpora of Netherlands (Allan 1999), Spanish (Allan 1995) and Italian (Allan in preparation) imports in south-west England, and Alejandra Gutiérrez's survey of Mediterranean imports in the Wessex region (Gutiérrez 1997 and 2000).

Chronology

Chronology is always difficult, and is made more so by the problems of residuality (Moorhouse 1986) and, from the later medieval period onwards, curation of pottery (Gaimster 1997, 131–3). London has been a most important site, with its dendro-chronology from waterlogged waterfronts (Vince 1985). In only a few other cases, like Bristol (Ponsford 1991), has similar work been possible to clarify disputed dates.

Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence has been successfully used at towns like Southampton (Childs 1993), but customs accounts and port books are so numerous and voluminous, and some of the interpretations contentious, that it is hard to make proper use of them (Le Patourel 1983). John Allan at Exeter (1983 and 1984a) has made most successful links between documents and archaeology. Most importantly, only four Andalusian Lustreware vessels have been found in Exeter and it might be supposed that these came in over a long period as souvenirs or gifts: but the documents suggest that perhaps 5000 Andalusian pots may have been imported to Exeter during the 13th and 14th centuries (Allan 1995, 304). This demonstrates the small proportion of imported pots which are ever found, because such a small proportion of any town is ever excavated (Allan 1999, 286) or they may have been disseminated into the countryside more than excavation would suggest. The same applies to Rhenish stonewares, of which well over one million and a quarter pots were imported into Exeter, between 1500 and 1750, with only about 1150 found on 35 sites (Allan 1984b, 125). It is most important that both these recovery rates are very similar and less than 0.1%. So only one thousandth of the pots imported have been found. For adequate analysis of such statistics, it is necessary that excavators should publish the exact areas of their excavations, and the percentage dug to, say, sub-medieval and to natural, while publications of multi-site projects should summate these figures. These factors are all crucial for any study of quantification and its possible implications.

Trade

Until the post-medieval period, pottery was always a minor item of trade and is therefore often not mentioned in cargo lists. Rhenish, Normandy and Saintonge pottery seems to be closely linked with the wine trade. For some time Dunning's ideas of Saintonge jugs coming in with the Gascon wine went out of fashion, but they are now coming into favour again (Deroux and Dufornier 1991). Wool must clearly have been a major factor, with ships bringing pottery to this country on their way to collect wool. There were complex trade patterns which are difficult to work out from the archaeological evidence, with the lack of relevant documents and so many traded goods being perishable.

Social

Most important of all, we also need far more research on the social side, such as David Gaimster

has done for stoneware (Gaimster 1997), but this is very complex too. In Southampton, Saintonge pottery seems by no means limited to the French quarter; it occurs also in poorer households, though it is a pity that it was only possible to excavate a few of these (Brown 1993). Likewise in Exeter, imports are spread widely amongst both rich and poor households (Allan 1999, 286), though there were more in the wealthier parts of the town. Pottery was not imported only in the course of trade. In East Anglia it is clear that the large quantities of Low Countries pottery, and other pottery readily available in the Netherlands, like German Werra and Weser slipware, were brought in with, or imported specifically (in preference to pottery from other countries) by the many immigrant Strangers in the early post-medieval period (Gaimster and Nenck 1997, 172).

As our studies of imported pottery progress, the factors involved, always complex, seem to become more and more entangled, exposing new gaps in our knowledge. The origins of types was often difficult to work out, and there are still problems with many identifications, but the next stage is turning out to be even more so. It is not massive town rubbish dumps like Plymouth, Castle Street — however fruitful — that are needed, but large groups of imports from well-stratified datable deposits; unless such sites can be found the complexities of this next stage may take many years to resolve.

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Résumé

Les premiers exemples fouillés de céramique importées datant de l'époque médiévale et post-médiévale, au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, étaient souvent faussement datés comme étant Romains, ou même Phéniciens. Ce n'est qu'au milieu du XIXe siècle que les céramiques importées ont commencé à être rapportées régulièrement et à être identifiées plus correctement. Le nombre des trouvailles a beaucoup accru après La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. Avec la grande augmentation des fouilles; la recherche dans les années 1960 et 1970 a tenté d'identifier la source des ces trouvailles. Les aspects économiques et sociaux de ces importations demandent à être plus étudiés: il est décevant que les progrès depuis les dernières vingt-cinq années aient été, avec quelques exceptions, si limités.

Zusammenfassung

Die ersten im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert ausgegrabenen Stücke mittelalterlicher und nachmittelalterlicher Keramiken wurden oft als von römischer oder sogar phönizischer Herkunft mißdeutet. Erst von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts an wurde regelmäßig über importierte Keramik berichtet und sie wurde besser identifiziert. Nach dem 2. Weltkrieg stieg die Anzahl der Funde stark an. Mit der gewaltigen Zunahme der Ausgrabungen in den 60er und 70er Jahren konzentrierten sich die Untersuchungen auf die Identifizierung der Quellen. Die sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Aspekte dieser Importe müssen mehr untersucht werden. Es enttäuscht, daß der Fortschritt in den letzten 25 Jahren mit wenigen Ausnahmen doch sehr begrenzt ist.