

It is clear that much consultation took place with other colleagues working in the field, and their collaboration enriches the considerable scholarship of the author. This hugely impressive volume, with copious line drawings, maps, histograms, pie charts, simplified matrices, diagrams of vessel forms and black and white photographs, breathes life into the ceramic material culture and the community who used these vessels throughout the Middle Ages. The local industries continued until the mid 18th century, when the products of Staffordshire and other industrialised potteries overwhelmed the local ceramic industries.

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Maureen Mellor

Alejandra Gutiérrez, *Mediterranean Pottery in Wessex Households (13th to 17th Centuries)*. BAR 306, 2000. 257pp, 119 figs. ISBN 1 84171 150 0. Price: £44.00 paperback.

There has been a long tradition of British archaeologists working in mainland Europe. At worst, this phenomenon reflects little more than the old colonial assumption that less advanced societies require the benefits of our more sophisticated techniques. At best, these travels have been driven by a genuine enthusiasm and curiosity for the past and a desire to expand the horizons of experience and understanding. Within the field of medieval ceramics I count the work of Dunning and Hurst in the latter category. Their pioneering efforts broadened the base for pottery research and inspired many British and continental ceramicists. This traffic, unfortunately, has remained too frequently one way, and it is refreshing, therefore, to find the tables turned by this admirable offering from Alejandra Gutiérrez. She is a Spanish archaeologist who, in 1999, completed a PhD at King Alfred's College, Winchester and this volume is her thesis. Before I commence picking at some of the threads of her argument, I wish to make clear that I consider this to be a very important contribution to English medieval ceramic studies. One reason for this is simply that it does represent a reversal of the trend for British archaeologists to interpret continental archaeology. Secondly, with archaeology in this country in thrall to developer-led projects where time is money and money is everything, this volume provides a welcome antidote. As a freelance pottery specialist it is more than disheartening to be told that the really interesting aspects of ceramic studies are outside the requirements of the project design and I should concentrate on providing more accurate context dates. I sometimes think that archaeology after PPG16 is driving specialist studies backwards and this book is therefore an important reminder that there is more to our discipline than chronology. In this respect, of course, it will probably have little impact, as those people who most need to come under its influence will remain myopically unaware of its existence.

Here are the details. The introduction sets out the aims of the work, the area within which it is based and the theoretical, methodological, social and historical contexts. Part One is a catalogue of the Mediterranean pottery types that occur within the Wessex area. There are separate sections on Spain, Portugal (is Portugal a Mediterranean country?) and Italy, with a few words on the eastern Mediterranean. Part Two discusses the trade and movement of pottery, with sections on contact with the Mediterranean, the archaeological evidence from excavations in Wessex and Mediterranean pottery in medieval and post-medieval Wessex. Part Three considers the use of pottery under the theme

'Consumption and Meaning' before one reaches a brief and pithy conclusion. This line-up should offer something for everyone: the catalogue characterises ceramic types backed up with illustrated examples; Part Two offers data; Part Three is mainly theory. There are also two useful appendices, a list of the medieval and early modern excavations in Wessex up to 1994, and a gazetteer of imported pottery in Wessex. The author's aim is to 'make a solid and rigorous contribution to the identification of particular sherds and to use those data to scrutinise site dating and pottery distributions, [and to encourage] reflection on the meaning of those distributions . . . this book is about people'. My purpose is to consider whether she achieves that.

The first problem for the reader must be one that the author also faced. Doctoral theses are rarely required to be accessible; they are expected instead to be heavyweight demonstrations of the extent and quality of a student's research. The entire thesis is presented here and the result is a volume that would have benefited from rigorous pruning. Gutiérrez, in her preface, writes that 'there has never been any intention of rewriting or converting the original text into a different book: this would have demanded a significant delay in publication as well as changes to the original character and structure of the research'. This is not strictly true. The author herself informs me she did want to publish a different version but the rejections of two other publishers led her to BAR. Anxious to avoid further delay, she offered them her thesis and they took it. Good for BAR, I say, but shame on those others, for they missed a real opportunity. The author's urgency may have been propelled by economic circumstance, but I am not convinced that further delay would not have been beneficial, at least to the work if not to herself. Her haste is in fact, ultimately a shortcoming, and some reconsideration of the text would have benefited the author, the publisher and certainly the reader. The introductory section on the development of archaeological theory, for instance, although probably a necessary inclusion in a thesis, is, in the context of a pottery publication, at best a curiosity, at worst an irrelevance. The central section on medieval and later excavations in Wessex could also have been abbreviated. The author describes and classifies (Castle, Monastery, Town etc) each site in Wessex that has produced Mediterranean pottery and sketches out the level of archaeological investigation carried out thereat. This exercise is necessarily simplistic and useful for little more than to demonstrate that 'overall, the area chosen for study . . . contains a wide [range] of monuments . . . this provides an excellent platform from which to appraise distributions of imported pottery . . .'. In a thesis such self-justification may be necessary; in print it is not. This is no small matter, because £44.00 is a lot of money, and a shorter, cheaper, but no less useful volume would surely have resulted from rigorous editing of the initial thesis. Furthermore, these, and similar, passages slow the reader's progress along the central lines of research that run through this book, although persistence, and re-reading, is rewarded.

In summary, the approach Gutiérrez takes is to describe where Mediterranean pottery was made and what it looked like (Part One), where in Wessex it has been found and in what quantities (Part Two) and finally, why it arrived there and what it might have meant to those who used it (Part Three). Part One will prove invaluable to many ceramicists, although it is perhaps unsurprising to find Spain given the most detailed treatment (over 59 pages) in comparison with Portugal (five pages) and Italy (twelve pages). Her grip throughout is most sure when she is considering Spanish pottery. This is something she obviously knows a lot about, and her discussion of the various pottery-making centres and their products is invaluable. My only gripe here is that we

cannot yet deconstruct and dispel that ineffably pointless Goggin terminology, although in the context of this volume that is perhaps too much to hope for. The section on Italian pottery is perhaps the weakest and concentrates on sgraffito and maiolica while virtually omitting lead-glazed earthenwares. This imbalance spills over into her discussion of the distribution of pottery. Gutiérrez seems to be at pains to demonstrate, on the basis of vessel numbers, that Spanish pottery was the preferred Mediterranean ceramic of the medieval Wessex consumer, but I am not convinced that she successfully argues her case. She states that there are 914 Spanish vessels in her sample, 450 Portuguese and 380 Italian. Among the Spanish pottery, 580 vessels are coarsewares (olive jars, costrels etc). This is a distinction worth making, because, as the author herself points out, it was the contents, rather than the pots themselves, that interested those who acquired coarseware vessels and it does not follow that a high number of Spanish olive jars indicates a preference for Spanish pottery. One is therefore left with 334 Spanish pots that were imported as a commodity, and an equivalent number is probably representative of Italian tableware. The picture, therefore, has changed, but remains unrecognised.

In Part Two, Gutiérrez is very thorough in her examination of a wide range of sources for the movement of pottery, both into and within Wessex. There are, for instance, excellent tables showing all the Southampton port book references to Mediterranean ceramics. Furthermore, when she finally gets around to discussing how ceramics are distributed among the various types of site in Wessex, the author handles her analysis convincingly, with a healthily realistic outlook on the difficulties of comparing data from excavations conducted over a long period of time. The main problem here, however, is that an overwhelming proportion of the Mediterranean pottery found in Wessex is concentrated in the ports of Southampton and Poole, so although 33 castles have been excavated, tableware was recovered at only six such sites, and only four produced coarsewares. What does this show? That castle excavations do not produce much pottery, or that Mediterranean pottery was not popular in such places? It is hard to be certain, and additional information, such as the size of the total assemblages from these excavations, would have provided a more meaningful perspective. If, for instance, it were shown that Mediterranean wares comprised more than 20% of an assemblage of 20,000 sherds then this analysis would have more meaning. Simply stating that two castles produced three sherds of Mediterranean fineware is telling less than half the story.

This narrowed perspective is, in truth, the author's greatest problem. She has become so focussed on her subject matter that she has failed to appreciate the full context of its use. There are inklings of this in Part Two: she states, for instance, that 'the 15th century saw the peak of Valencian exports, which reached the north of Europe in great quantities. In Wessex alone there are nearly 80 different vessels...'. Eighty vessels do not represent a great quantity, a fraction of a kiln load and even less of a single boatload. She also suggests that 'Italian/South Netherlandish maiolica . . . is

abundant in Wessex and 164 vessels have been found so far'. Well, abundant perhaps in relation to other Mediterranean pottery types but not in comparison with the local wares and indeed some other imported products. She cannot, for example, have failed to learn from her reading of the port books, that in the 15th century German stoneware mugs were being brought into Southampton by the thousand, yet nothing is made of this. This slightly undermines Part Three, which is unfortunate, because Gutiérrez has a genuine interest in, and skill for, putting personality into her analysis of the past. She really wants to understand the people who consumed Mediterranean pottery, but she makes it all the harder for herself, and the reader, by showing little interest in the other ceramic products they were using. Such a task may have been too onerous in the context of a PhD, and goodness knows she has collected a lot of excellent data from a wide variety of variously (in)accessible sources, but once her Doctorate was completed some further research would have been more than beneficial.

Part three is, for all this, excellent and salutary reading. There are sections on 'Pottery and Prices', 'Pottery and Social Identity', 'Wining and Dining', 'Pottery and Gender', 'Pottery and Symbols' and 'Pottery and Ethnic Identity'. Each of these themes is dealt with reasonably thoroughly and imaginatively. The section on prices represents a useful summary of current understanding of this issue. Gutiérrez seems particularly taken with the theme of social identity and incorporates discussion of trickle-down theory and the character-action approach and offers plenty of food for thought. Most importantly, the author has brought her own Mediterranean perspective to these issues, and her instinctive understanding of the significance of Iberian pottery both informs her arguments and prompts the reader to take a fresh view of the application of theory to ceramic studies. It is, in short, a real treat to find a ceramicist so willing to consider every aspect of the relationship between material culture and human beings.

The shortcomings that I have examined are ultimately forgivable in this volume, if only because one should be merciful towards anybody who has recently submitted a doctoral thesis. It remains an important contribution to ceramic studies in England, not just Wessex. I suppose that, together with the fact that it has appeared so soon after the parent thesis was completed is a plus point, but one is left to reflect on how much better it could have been. I am all in favour of publications that, although they may be rough and ready, inspire discussion, engender argument and re-affirm how much fun we can have with pottery, but I don't think we should be paying £44 for them. 'Mediterranean Pottery in Wessex Households' should be half the price, but one has to conclude that there should be more of this sort of thing. There should also be more of Alejandra Gutiérrez. She deserves the chance to write the book she is clearly capable of giving us. I hope those blinkered publishers are reading this.

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