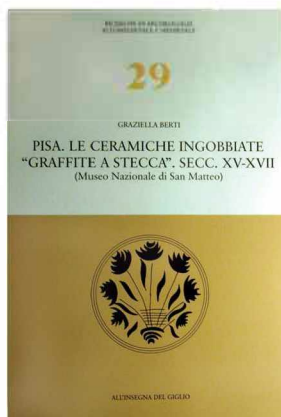


Graziella Berti

Le ceramiche ingobbiate 'graffite a stecca'. secc. XV–XVII (Museo Nazionale di San Matteo), Pisa
 [Deeply-incised slipware. 15th–17th centuries (San Matteo National Museum), Pisa]
 2005 . All'Insegna del Giglio . Firenze

For those interested in Italian Renaissance and post-medieval pottery, most of all for those keen on slip-ware, this book has been greatly anticipated. The author does not disappoint the reader, providing, an excellent and extremely well presented synthesis on this production. The assemblages analysed are those displayed and stored in the 'Museo Nazionale di San Matteo' in Pisa; all coming from sites located in the town centre or in its environs.



Starting with a presentation of the sites and archaeological contexts where the sherds were found (part I), the work focus immediately on technological devices, giving the readers all the information needed to understand what follows (part II). The core of this work is an extremely detailed classification and description of forms and decorations, pointing out the combination of the two, an aspect to which are dedicated special tables. Forms are grouped by diameter and height ranges, considering the ratio between the two as well. The 3rd part of the book is dedicated to written evidence referring to potters' workshops between 14th and 17th centuries. Different aspects of their activities are taken into account, showing how workshops were concentrated in one area of the town and how only a few ones were opened for a few decades, while the 'average' was a few years. Information about members of the family, goods and the accounts of tax payment are given for each potter, all these data being clearly organised in tables. Emphasis is put as well on how different kind of products or objects realised with a different degree of accuracy are described in contemporary sources. All the material is presented by production phases.

Presenting the tables and charts not at the end of the book but balancing it with the text, helps the reader in focusing on changes occurring during the period considered and on the association between decorations with forms. The last part (part IV) concludes this rigorous work by talking about the circulation of this class not only in a regional perspective, but considering all of Italy and the Mediterranean area as well. Comparisons are made with similar objects from other Italian production centres.

Marta Caroscio

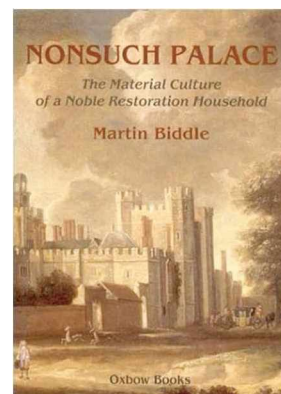
Martin Biddle

Nonsuch Palace: the material culture of a noble Restoration household
 2005 . Oxbow Books
 Hardback, 544 pages, 229 line and halftone figures, 12 full colour plates, price £60.00
 ISBN | 900188 34 |

The name Nonsuch immediately conjures up images of an impressive palace erected in Surrey by Henry VIII from 1538 to 1546, and this volume is certainly about the finds recovered from that palace and its associated banqueting hall in 1959 and 1960. These finds, however, mostly relate to the very last phase of occupation partly coinciding with demolition in the years from 1682 to 1690. Many of them are from copious latrine pits with which the palace was well provided. The excavations were undertaken by Martin Biddle, then an under-graduate, to elicit more information for the series then in preparation on *The History of the King's Works*,¹ and it is good to see that the results of this important excavation are finally being published. A second volume² on the actual excavations has still to appear but enough information is provided in the present one for the context and significance of the finds to be understood. Its text was completed in 1994 with a limited amount of revision in 2002. This means that, in the case of ceramics, it has not fully taken into account Gaimster's work on stoneware³ or Pearce's book on Border Wares.⁴

A small group of finds, including sherds of local pottery ranging in date from the 11th to the early 16th century, are associated with the church and manor house of Cuddington removed to make way for the palace. The majority of the finds are reckoned to relate to the occupation of part of the palace by the family of its keeper, George, 1st Earl of Berkeley, in the years from c1670 to 1688. This interpretation supersedes that given in an early interim report that they belonged to 1665–66 when the palace was temporarily fitted out for use as offices for the Receipt of the Exchequer and Tally Office.⁵

This revised dating is not without difficulties. A significant proportion of the finds were deemed by the relevant experts to be of earlier date and Biddle has to wrestle with such problems as residuality, the relevance of the contexts to phases of occupation and the reliability of existing knowledge on artefact dating. He argues his case carefully and convincingly. An aspect of his approach is to treat the archaeology separately from the documentary evidence before comparing the two and demonstrating how they can be reconciled.



The catalogue of finds includes coins, jettons and tokens; clay pipes, probably mostly associated with the palace's destruction; ten pewter vessels and two pewter spoons; spurs, copper alloy objects, a wooden pocket sundial, leather and worked bone and ivory. The lead and iron objects include pieces which are clearly from the structure of the building although other architectural elements like plaster, slate and tile are held over to volume two. There are also reports on the animal bones and mollusca.

The most important reports – at least to readers of this journal – are those on the glass and ceramics. There is a particularly rich assemblage of fine vessel glass, including Venetian and English, and the late Robert Charleston builds what amounts to a history of this genre on to his detailed catalogue. Biddle with Jane Webster, contributes the report on green glass bottles and Biddle himself on wine-bottle seals. These contain much detailed information and there are appendices on all known English dated bottles and bottle seals from c1650 to 1700. This was an important area of research for Biddle since he hoped to refine our understanding of the dating of these to support his hypothesis on the date of occupation of the palace represented by the excavated finds. This is an essential piece of reading for all experts in this field.

The report on the tin-glaze ware, with 146 catalogued items, is contributed by Michael Archer, and a catalogue of 100 stoneware items – Frechen, Cologne and English – by Robin Hildyard. The earthenware is dealt with by Biddle. The assemblage includes imported Martincamp flasks, Beauvais ware, N Italian sgraffito and N Holland slipware. The majority of the material is locally derived including Cheam and Border wares, but also two named from Nonsuch as NONA and NONB which have not yet been identified from other sites. When Biddle was working on this assemblage comparisons with other groups would at best indicate a date range from the middle to the second half of the 17th century. Indeed for much of this material only general parallels could be found, often suggesting a 16th century date. Biddle considered the possibility that much of the Nonsuch pot might be residual, or else old pottery brought out of store for reuse after a period of abandonment. He inclined to the view that the length of time some forms remained in use has been underestimated. That view has since been backed up for Border wares by Jacqueline Pearce's monograph on the subject.

Biddle's careful study of the earthenware highlights an on-going problem for ceramics experts. It is still not possible in many instances to date material to a particular century never mind distinguish whether a group belongs to the 1680s as distinct from the 1660s. Perhaps that is the nature of the material.

Any work of such complexity will have its inconsistencies and errors. No doubt its author will be mortified to realise that on the very first page he states that the

deposit of the greater part of the material described took place in 1665–6, and then a few lines later in the 1670s and 1680s, the latter position being consistently argued through the rest of the book. While it is distracting for the reader to face such a challenge to comprehension at the very beginning the rest of the text reads well and contains much of great interest to anyone with an interest in Post-medieval archaeology and also to the methodology of interpreting excavation assemblages. The ceramics reports are essential reading for all specialists in this field. Biddle should be congratulated for his perseverance and dedication in bringing this volume to fruition.

David H Caldwell

Endnotes

- 1 Colvin, H. M. 1982 (gen. ed.) *The History of the King's Works*, iv, 1485–1660, Pt II. London
- 2 Biddle, M. forthcoming *Nonsuch Palace: the Architecture*. English Heritage Archaeological Report, London.
- 3 Gaimster, David R. M. 1997 *German Stoneware, 1200–1900: Archaeology and Cultural History*. British Museum Press.
- 4 Pearce, Jacqueline. 1992 *Post-Medieval Pottery in London, 1500–1700 Border Wares*. London.
- 5 Biddle, M. 1961 'Nonsuch Palace 1959–60: an interim report', *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 58, 1–20.

Andrzej Buko

Archaeologia Polski Wczesnośredniowiecznej

[The Archaeology of Early Medieval Poland]

2005 . Warszawa . Trio

446 pages, 41 plates, many figures, bibliography, index, price unknown

ISBN 83 7436 023 2

The subtitle of this book, *Discoveries – hypotheses – interpretations*, gives a clue that it is intended as a 'popular' book for wide readership among people interested in the Early Middle Ages. As such, I am told it is selling well. English-speaking readers will focus on the translated Summary (pp. 407–36) and the plates and figures to which it cross-refers.

The first two chapters describe the historical development of the subject, and the nature of archaeological sources, and are followed by chapters on questions or

