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Summary

Despite large numbers of pottery fragments occurring on most medieval excavations including many that are classified as 'tableware' the proportion of what could be described as 'eating vessels' is very small. The

predominant forms are jugs, storage and cooking pots. This paper looks at the production, purchase and use of wooden eating and drinking vessels and compares and contrasts this with pottery.

The differential survival rates of pot and wood give us difficulties in estimating proportions of each in use during the medieval period. An individual site can easily yield 30,000 pot sherds and even if there is a waterlogged pit only a few wooden bowls and perhaps one fragmentary pewter vessel. Given this tremendous outnumbering it is easy to overestimate the importance of pot at the time. The truth is that in an age when all cooking was done over an open fire an old damaged fat soaked wooden bowl would be the perfect kindling, the few that were not burnt would rot away unless quickly buried and continually waterlogged. Damaged or outdated pewter vessels would be melted down to make new vessels, compared to this virtually every pot ever made is still there in the ground.

If we look at medieval accounts we find that woodware was purchased in vast quantities, for the wedding of Richard II in 1189 over 12,000 wooden vessels were ordered. The Howard household accounts from 1460–1485 include orders for 2,562 wooden vessels, an average of 100 a year over the 25 year period. In contrast Chris Dyer looking for records of purchases of pots has never seen an individual order for more than 24 pots, the norm being orders for one or two at a time and an average of about 3 pots per household per year.

In 1431–2 the household accounts of John de Vere Earl of Oxford record orders for an unusually large total of 25 pots (11 for the cellar presumably jugs 10 for the kitchen) but in the same year they ordered 96 pewter vessels and 234 wooden cups/bowls. Could three pots a year give rise to the large pottery assemblages commonly found on medieval sites or are the pots not being recorded? Chris Dyer suggests the accounts are pedantic enough to record everything and the wooden vessels which are recorded are no higher value (average two vessels for 1d). Three vessels per year would be 1,500 pots over a 500-year period, if each of these was broken into 20 sherds we would have 30,000 sherds. If the same household was ordering 100 wooden vessels a year then 50,000 wooden vessels would have been used/burnt/disposed of on the same site over the same period.

Were so few pots ordered because they had a very long in use lifespan compared to wood? I would be

interested to know of any work suggesting average lifespans of pots before disposal. The huge numbers of wooden vessels ordered by medieval households suggests that they were replaced regularly yet the vessels that survive commonly show signs of very long use, wear repair and continued use. Perhaps the large households were continually replacing their vessels with new ones and passing them on down the social scale where they had longer useful lives. One example of this may be a record of the butler of Prince Edward (the future Edward V) who was entitled to the 'worn cups' as part of his pay (Woolgar 1999).

It has been suggested that woodware does not vary much over time or regionally though it is becoming clear as more pieces are found that there was as much variation in wood as pot. There is no doubt if we had hundreds of thousands of surviving pieces that it would be possible to identify local styles which changed through time, so far we have in the region of 1,000 wooden vessels surviving from the medieval period in Britain and these form only a small part of a much larger picture. Carole Morris has described it as the tip of a wooden ice berg. For every vessel that has ever been found it is likely that 100,000 were produced used and burnt.

The vessel forms do change through time and they were also used at all levels in society not as just by the poor. Two of the richest ship burials in Europe Sutton Hoo and the Oseberg Ship were well equipped with wooden vessels. From pre-conquest sites in Britain wooden bowls tend to be fairly small (6"–8" diameter) hemispherical in form and most commonly made of alder. Another characteristic pre-conquest form is the globular drinking cup, most commonly made of maple and 3"–4" diameter, examples come from Coppergate York, Winchester and small walnut ones from Sutton Hoo. After the Norman Conquest this form gradually gets replaced by drinking bowls, the practice is commonly seen in medieval illustrations from the Bayeux Tapestry onwards.

Post conquest bowls tend to be of similar hemispherical form but ash becomes the favourite timber (Morris 2000). These vessels are commonly referred

to in medieval accounts as *ciphis fraxini*, often translated as 'ashen cups'; it is not clear if they were primarily eating or drinking vessels or, perhaps most likely, dual purpose. One thing that is clear is that they do not have knife cuts in them so whilst they were probably used for pottage they were not used for meat or anything that required cutting. Some bowls called mazers were turned very thin from maple and reserved as drinking vessels, these sometimes had gilt rim mounts, excellent examples are on display in the Museum of Canterbury and the British Museum.

The wooden bowl as the universal drinking vessel went into decline in the 15th century with the introduction of pottery drinking jugs and the last large collection of wooden drinking bowls are from the Mary Rose 1545. Through the 16th century the wooden dish became more common, up to this point over 95% of eating vessels had been bowls which work well for hand holding and eating pottage. Perhaps the change toward dishes and latter plates was diet related as all dishes

have knife cuts indicating people were now eating meat from individual vessels, or perhaps it has more to do with sitting at a table to eat a practice which became much more common for ordinary people during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The second half of 17th Century saw a vast increase in the amount of pottery vessels which I would class as eating vessels, bowls, dishes and plates. This was the period when pottery replaced wood as the standard eating vessel for normal peoples everyday use. It is interesting that it was also the period when turned parts became commonplace in furniture and there was a great increase in furniture production and use, the turners who for 1,000 years had produced tableware found a new market in chair legs.

Reference

Woolgar, C M 1999, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England*.

Résumé

En dépit du grand nombre de tessons de poterie retrouvés sur les fouilles de sites du Moyen Age, en particulier les fragments de poterie classifiée comme vaisselle de table, le pourcentage de céramique que l'on peut décrire comme vaisselle 'pour manger' est faible. Les formes prédominantes sont les cruches, la céramique culinaire et les jattes. Cet article examine et compare la production, la consommation et l'utilisation des vaisselles de table en bois à celles en céramique.

Zusammenfassung

Trotz der großen Anzahl an Töpferscherven, die bei mittelalterlichen Ausgrabungen vorkommen inklusive derjenigen, die als Tafelware bezeichnet werden, bleibt der Anteil dessen, was man als Eßgefäße beschreiben könnte, gering. Die überwiegenden Formen sind Krüge, Vorrats- und Kochtöpfe. Die vorliegende Arbeit betrachtet die Herstellung, den Kauf und die Benutzung hölzerner Eß- und Trinkgefäße und vergleicht sie mit Töpferware und stellt sie dieser gegenüber.

Table 1

fabric	12th century	Late 12th to 13th century	Later 13th to 15th centuries
gritty	NYGW (Easingwold)	none	none
sandy		York Glazed (Byland)	Gritty Brandsby-type (Clarence Street)
untempered			Brandsby-type (Brandsby, Stearsby)
fine white			Hambleton (Castle Howard)

References

Hurst, J G, Neal, D S, and van Beuningen, H J E (1986) *Pottery Produced and Traded in North-West Europe 1350–1650*. Rotterdam Papers VI Rotterdam, Museum Boymans–van Beuningen.

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Appendix 1

TSNO	Al ₂ O ₃	Fe ₂ O ₃	MgO	CaO	Na ₂ O	K ₂ O	TiO ₂	P ₂ O ₅	MnO
V4510	23.51	3.42	1.04	0.52	0.25	2.35	1.25	0.26	0.015

Appendix 2

TSNO	Ba	Cr	Cu	Li	Ni	Sc	Sr	V	Y	Zr*	La	Ce	Nd	Sm	Eu	Dy	Yb	Pb	Zn	Co
V4510	398	107	44	115	54	23	95	189	45	102	72	119	75	16	4	8	4	6,184	83	22

Résumé

Des fouilles entreprises à Clarence Street, York par Anthony Dickson en 2006 ont révélé une céramique inhabituelle du Bas Moyen-Age sans équivalent en matière de forme ou de pâte. Une analyse plus poussée de cette céramique a été demandée et les résultats en sont présentés ici. Cette céramique provient des centres de production de North Yorkshire Whiteware situés sur les contreforts ouest de Hambleton Hills et semble être une copie de types des Pays Bas du Bas Moyen-Age.

Zusammenfassung

Ausgrabungen in 44 Clarence Street, York, unter der Leitung von Antony Dixon im Jahre 2006 brachten ein ungewöhnliches, spätmittelalterliches Gefäß zutage, für das keine genauen Parallelen in Form und Material vorlagen. Es wurde empfohlen, dieses Gefäß zu untersuchen und die vorliegende Arbeit zeigt das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung.

Das Gefäß wurde als Erzeugnis der Nord-Yorkshire Weißwaren Töpfereien identifiziert, die in den westlichen Ausläufern der Hambleton Hills liegen und scheint eine Kopie der spät-mittelalterlichen, niederländischen Art zu sein.