

medieval ceramics **Reviews**

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Relicta Monografieën. Archeologie, Monumenten en Landschapsonderzoek in Vlaanderen

2 volumes (Vol 1 479 pages, Vol 2 246 pages), price €100 plus postage (Belgium €12, Europe €25)

2008 . Brussels

ISBN9789075230277

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For those of us in the MPRG that have had important, close professional relationships with our ceramic colleagues in Flanders for many years this publication is a delight.

The first in the new series of 'Relicta' monographs, Volume 1 is written largely in Flemish but has an excellent four page English summary and is well illustrated with colour photographs and drawings which make it much easier to follow the thread of the authors discussions and arguments. Volume 2 comprises all of the basic data from the analysis of the different sites and fabrics and includes all of the carbon dates, an overview of the technical groups, an overview of the context groups, an inventory of the line drawings of the pottery and finally all of the pottery illustrations.

Based on Koen de Grootte's doctoral thesis it recounts a detailed analysis of medieval pottery from the Oudenaarde region of Eastern Flanders. Koen considers 46,000 sherds from sites in Ename, Oudenaarde-Huis de Lalaing and Petegem Beaulieu. He analyses both local and imported wares from eleven different sites dating between the 10th century and the first half of the 16th century. He begins by detailing his methodology for the detailed documentation and recording of the excavated pottery and establishes a well defined series of parameters for describing the technical characteristics of the fabrics. He then proceeds to reconstruct ceramic development in the area from the late 9th to early 16th centuries, and then describes the important new information that was provided during this exercise. This includes the identification of an hitherto unknown pottery group, a local Red painted ware that is a copy of the imported Pingsdorf wares,



the dating of the shift from hand built pottery to wheel thrown wares in the second half of the 11th century or first half of the 12th century and the dating of the first appearance of a local redware in the middle of the 12th century. Koen also constructs a typo-chronology of more than thirty well defined form types.

There is a very good introduction to the stratigraphy of each site which is backed up with excellent colour photographs and illustrations of plans and sections. For the identified local wares there is a typological description of each of the 69 fabrics with colour photos of the surface finish and section of each type. This is backed up with tables showing the percentage distribution of each fabric by site and a table showing how each type relates to the total amount of local wares in a period. There is an extensive rim typology of 201 forms showing their distribution by date that is coupled with discussions of surface treatment and decoration of each fabric type. Excellent colour photographs are provided of virtually complete reconstructed vessels. All the imported wares are analysed using the same methodology and this suggests that Pingsdorf ware is a more important presence than previously recognised until its decline in the middle of the 12th century. Excavations at the abbey of Ename (see *Med Ceramics Volume 29*) allowed for the assessment of the appearance of Northern French highly decorated wares and a comparison of the development of the locally produced highly decorated wares. The final section is made up of syntheses by period of vessel form and fabric distribution and a final overview of the economic context of the study.

In summary the book concludes that it is only the study of assemblages from a long chronological period within a certain region that allows for the detection of broad developments. It states that pottery research on this scale is not only important to the study of the technical and typological development of ceramics and to detect developments in material culture but can also make important contributions to specific historical questions and discussion.

This book will be of great use to those of us who routinely work on assemblages that contain Low Countries wares particularly groups that contain a mixture of highly decorated wares. One of my only disappointments with this study is that there doesn't seem to have been any chemical sourcing undertaken (ICPS) but this is maybe because the vast percentage of the study was carried out before such analysis became the norm? It strikes me that Koen's results would be well complemented by such analysis of his fabrics. The standard of the photographs is excellent and means that the publication can be used as a working reference guide when parallels for excavated fabric types are being sought. Yet again this publication shows the benefit of ceramic syntheses and is a good example of the sort of publication that can be produced when proper funding is made available. I commend it to you all.

Derek W Hall