

### Tin-glazed pottery waste from Buiten de Kerkpoort

After a fire in 1663, this pottery moved from the Kerkbuurt (Church district) of Harlingen to a plot south of the city, Buiten de Kerkpoort (Outside the Church Gate) and continued in production until it closed in 1933. Apart from kiln furniture, roughly similar to that at Raamstraat, six types of fabric are represented: red earthenware, white earthenware, maiolica (5%), maiolica biscuit (61%), faience (1%) and faience biscuit (c 20%). Generally the fabric is yellowish, softer and sometimes powdery compared with that at Raamstraat. Here again, chemical analysis would have been helpful in establishing the origin of the clay.

An interesting vessel which may have been a melting pot for glaze or pigments is described. The range of morphological products here is much less than at Raamstraat, the majority being plates in maiolica biscuit. The plate profiles at Buiten de Kerkpoort include examples with a sharp angular transformation from a flat centre to an everted rim, unlike those seen in Raamstraat. A few of the bowls show flat bases with protruding flanges, again unlike those found at Raamstraat.

Much of the tile and tableware decoration here is in monochrome blue but the strong Italian influence seen in the Raamstraat designs is less obvious. Dutch, Turkish and Chinese influences are now found together with fruit baskets containing stylised pears and grapes. Ninety six wall tile biscuit shards were found, measuring 12.8–12.9 cm and 0.8–1.0 cm thick. They are decorated with blue and white tulip trios and enclosed in a double outlined shield design which lacks the usual corner decoration. One tile shard stuck together with others does, however, show a meander corner design. Other tile biscuit designs show part of a human figure, landscapes, or are undecorated white. One marbled tile fragment again suggests a northern Italian influence.

Some illustrations (Figs 134, 135, 139, 140 and 142) suggest to your reviewer the possibility that cobalt decoration had been painted directly onto the biscuit and then the tin glaze applied before the second firing. Although contrary to the generally accepted method of tin glazed manufacture, there are precedents for this less common method of manufacture (2, 3). However, in response to your reviewer's question, the author replied that she had found no evidence of this less common technique among these maiolica shards.

Overall, this delightfully illustrated book gives a detailed insight into the produce of two northern Netherlands tin glaze potteries, starting respectively in the early 17th century and in the mid-17th century. The influence of Italian maiolica designs is particularly noted in the earlier decoration at Raamstraat. A data-base is available for more detailed analysis but the decorations found have already been carefully correlated with standard works like Dingeman Korf's *Nederlandse*

*Majolica*. Dr Jaspers' book makes a very valuable contribution to our understanding of 17th-century pottery production in the northern Netherlands.

I am most grateful to my good friend, Krijn van der Hoofd, of Amstelveen, for his painstaking translation.

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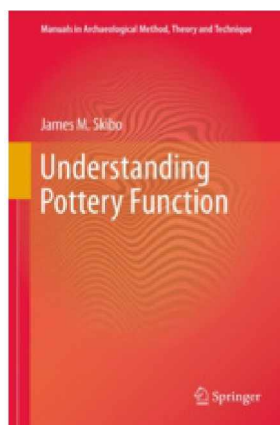
Jim Gray,

Volunteer on the Shard Project, National Museums Scotland

### James M Skibo with Mary Malainey Understanding pottery function

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The function of pottery has long been neglected by medieval pottery specialists. The Medieval Pottery research Group's *Guide to the Classification of Ceramic Forms* has, in part at least, been successful in removing generic 'functional' names such as 'cooking pot' from our vocabulary, but we have been less successful at identifying the variation in

patterns of ceramic use which can be inferred from close analysis. As long ago as 1986 Stephen Moorhouse demonstrated the value of studying sooting patterns, but it is only recently that studies have begun to explore the potential of the study of indicators of attrition (Perry 2012) and sooting (Jervis 2013) for enhancing our understanding of the role of pottery in medieval life, with promising results. Both of these recent studies draw on the precursor to this book, Skibo's (1992) *Pottery Function: A Use Alteration Perspective*. This book, published 20 years after its predecessor is, in some ways, depressing as it is clear that functional analysis

is still rarely undertaken, however it also provides an impetus for future studies, by supplementing ethnoarchaeological research with archaeological case studies. The book begins with a summary of theoretical approaches which provided the stimulus for the work presented. In particular this draws upon the now familiar theme of biographical or 'life history' approaches to ceramics, which demand us to consider pottery beyond production, but also to consider the linkage between production and use, through a consideration of what Skibo terms 'performance characteristics'. The second chapter challenges the simple correlations (of which we are all guilty of drawing) between form and function, arguing that variation in form, fabric and firing may relate to differences in intended function, whilst demonstrating that use is not the only factor influencing technology and that vessels may not always be utilised in their intended manner. The meat of the book focusses on how to reconstruct the actual use of pottery.

This is divided into three sections; the first focuses on the evidence for sooting, the second on that for attrition indicators and the third on residue analysis.

As in Skibo's 1992 book, the bulk of the work presented is ethnoarchaeological in character, drawing particularly on the results of the Kalinga ethnoarchaeological project, undertaken in the Philippines from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Whilst ethnoarchaeology provides the principles, these sections expand beyond their equivalents in the 1992 book in two ways. Firstly, they introduce archaeological case studies to demonstrate how these principles can be translated into archaeological interpretation. Secondly, they provide practical advice on how to undertake such analysis, which will be invaluable in expanding the body of work undertaken in this field. The final section on residue analysis includes a technical section by Mary Malainey, which is an invaluable introduction to the topic for those of us with a limited knowledge of chemistry!

Despite covering technical subject matter this book is very accessible, being written in a relatively informal style, in which the technical material is interspersed with musings and anecdotes which illustrate both how particularly ideas came about and the versatility of their application. The book is well illustrated with photographs (several in colour) throughout, and diagrams to illustrate technical points. Each section

concludes with a bibliography, meaning that reading relevant to specific sections can be referred to quickly. For the British reader there will be an element of unfamiliarity, all of the archaeological case studies are drawn from North America, however despite dealing with unfamiliar material they explore familiar questions and this focus does not detract from the utility of this volume. That said, medieval pottery, particularly from urban assemblages, poses particular problems – glazed pottery for example is not covered in the book and the techniques are limited to assemblages in relatively good condition. It will therefore be necessary to take the principles presented and adapt the methods to suit the needs of our material; I have found that fragmented assemblages demand us to generalise, although Gareth Perry's recent work shows what is achievable in the occasional circumstances where we have complete or near complete vessels available to analyse.

The predecessor of this book has taken 20 years to make an impact in medieval ceramic studies, not least due to the problems posed by the need to characterise and date backlog assemblages. The time is now ripe to build on this work by asking new questions of our material, and this book provides both the methodological and interpretive insights needed to explore not only how pottery was made, but how it functioned – which, after all, is the point at which the majority of people will have come into contact with it. This book will be required reading for anyone seeking to go beyond cataloguing their sherds and who seek to address that most fundamental of questions – 'what was it used for?' – if it is embraced then the landscape of pottery studies will be both different and more relevant 20 years from now.

#### References

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Ben Jervis