

References

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Philippe Husi, sous la direction de

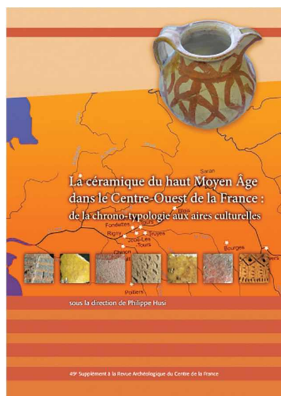
La céramique du haut Moyen Âge dans le Centre-Ouest de la France: de la chrono-typologie aux aires culturelles

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283 pages, 87 figures, 67 plates of drawings

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It is always a pleasure to encounter a new pottery publication from France. Apart from the opportunity to learn more about French ceramics, the production standards are always high, illustrations are usually plentiful and informative and the subject is covered thoroughly and with clarity. This latest offering from Tours is no exception and

what is more, it examines a part of France we do not often look at too closely from Britain. A handy map in the introduction shows what that area is; principally the region around Tours in the Loire Valley, taking in Jublains to the north, Poitiers to the south, travelling westwards from Nevers to Tours, via Orléans and Blois. The introduction also sets out the thematic scope of the text, while also providing a useful breakdown of what to find on the accompanying DVD (a staggering array of photographs of sherds and fabrics, with attendant drawings, tables and descriptive text).

The book itself is divided into three sections. The first is an introduction to the methodology and the extent of the study. Pottery from a total of 27 sites in 14 different towns or cities is represented, covering two ceramic periods; the 6th to 7th centuries and the 8th to early 11th. A grand total of 8,036 individual vessels (not all complete, of course) constitute the size of the pottery assemblage, which does not seem that

much but, considering the geographical extent of the project, is probably more than enough. Sub-sections cover the methods of form and fabric analysis and quantification, as well as discussing the issues around bringing together assemblages from such a dispersed group of sites. Section 2 comprises the biggest part of the book. It includes descriptions of the products from each area; La Touraine, Le Blésois, Saran et Orléans, le Berry et la Nièvre, le Haut-Poitou, aux Marches, La Mayenne et le Limousin. These sub-sections are authored by a range of contributors, too numerous to mention here but adding up to an exhaustive survey and analysis. The study of ceramics, perhaps all archaeology, is the search for similarities and differences and what they might signify, and this work admirably expresses and facilitates such an exercise. The section on La Touraine, for example, includes a number of sub-sections: context and the corpus of study; a chrono-typological synthesis for the 5th and 6th centuries (which includes detailed descriptions of form, decoration *etc*); typological development; conclusions; all supported by drawings and tables. These sub-sections are repeated for the different sites in La Touraine: Tours, Joué-lès-Tours, Fondettes, Neuvy-Le-Roi et Truyes. The approach is logical, clear and consistent, and the result is a very fine piece of work. Many of the pots have a sub-Romano-Gallic appearance, with ovoid or rounded jars a prominent form. Rouletted decoration also appears to be common and painted red slip makes an appearance in the ninth or tenth centuries. This should be of interest to anyone attempting to follow the development of jar forms in early medieval Western Europe. The whiteware products of Stamford, for instance, seem to owe a good deal to their French counterparts and studies such as this one serve to broaden one's perspective on a long and extensive tradition. The same applies to the spouted pitchers that also make an appearance here, versions of which can be seen among mid Saxon assemblages in England. Other forms, less familiar perhaps at this date within these shores, are costrels, small bowls and decorated mortars (characteristic of Jublains, where, later on, they developed into truly extravagant vessels).

Section 3 brings the descriptive content of Section 2 together in a discussion of the value of this evidence in elucidating socio-economic and cultural mechanisms. This commences with a consideration, by Sébastien Jesset, of traditions of decoration, broken down according to decorative technique, such as relief or incised, and also includes glaze (which was introduced in the tenth or eleventh centuries). The conclusion seems to be that in the north of the study area, influence from still further north may be detected, while elsewhere a more specific regional identity can be discerned. Philippe Husi then contributes a discussion of pottery and cultural areas in the centre-west of France, which brings everything together in a marvellously assured consideration of all the evidence.

Economics, chronology, traditions of manufacture, the use of paint and glaze, methods of firing (in terms of reduction and oxidation), the function of various sites, the introduction of certain forms and the validity of characterising the study area as an individual entity; all these are summarised and examined, with supporting tables, diagrams and maps. Some of the methods of presentation are unfamiliar, at least to this reviewer, including density curves for occupation levels and statistical distance charts for areas of production, and this serves to enhance the pleasure of reading this fascinating exploration of a wide range of themes.

This is an excellent publication, in all sorts of ways, and well worth seeking out. Pottery studies in France are developing quickly and in exciting directions. It is a long time since a regional study of this breadth and depth has appeared in Britain and Husi and his colleagues have set a marker for anyone in a position to follow them. That's the problem though, who, in Britain, is in a position to take on such a challenge? As the MPRG Research Framework has shown, many of our universities seem reluctant to engage seriously with post-Roman material culture studies, while the commercial imperative that drives much developer-funded archaeology is hindering the development of panoramic, synthetic pottery analyses. This latest in an increasingly impressive body of work from France (and it is not only in France that publications of such weight are being produced to such a high standard), provides much food for thought, in so many different ways.

Duncan H. Brown

Greg Stemm, Sean Kingsley and Ellen Gerth (eds)

Oceans Odyssey 4. Pottery from the Tortugas Shipwreck, Straits of Florida: A Merchant Vessel from Spain's 1622 Tierra Firme Fleet

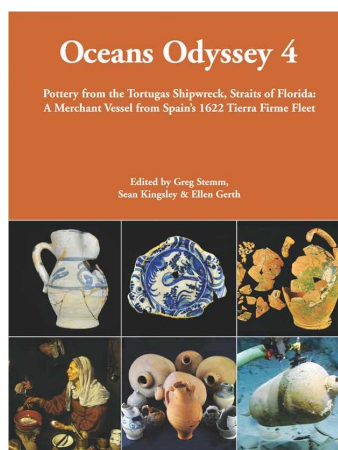
2014. Odyssey Marine Exploration Reports 4.
Oxbow Books

Hardback, 280 pages, 267 figures

ISBN 978 1 78297 710 0

Price £30

Odyssey Marine Exploration is a company that seems to attract a lot of opprobrium. This is mainly because it has a reputation for selling finds from their seabed recovery projects in order to finance their research. Their critics deem this to be unethical and take the view that Odyssey Marine should not be given any publicity, presumably because that could be seen to condone their allegedly piratical practices. Some people, therefore, would probably think that *Medieval Ceramics* should not be carrying this review. It



seems highly unlikely that ignoring this publication will in any way affect the business of Odyssey Marine but it may be possible that offering a critique will benefit future analysis of seabed assemblages. What does seem to be true is that Odyssey Marine are seeking to establish some credibility, as are we all, and although composing a review will not really provide them with that, it is hoped that it will influence future work. If the fact that they sent four books to this reviewer, rather than the anticipated one, is anything to go by, Odyssey Marine are, at the least, embarking on a charm offensive. Very welcome though this generosity may be it is not possible to review all four volumes here, especially as only one of them is specifically about pottery. That said, receiving four hefty tomes affords a wider impression of the publication series as a whole. These books have been produced to a high standard, with hard covers, glossy paper and lots of photographs, and they are presumably subsidised, because the retail price is low. Leaving aside, if you can, the ethical debate, what of the content? This is, after all, how we should measure the success of this research, but this turns out not to be so easy because the preface, by Ivor Noel Hume, is a forceful defence of Odyssey Marine's approach. Entitled 'Archaeological Ethics in Free and Open Debate?', it is out of context with the rest of the text, which has the effect of putting the reader on alert from the outset, leaving them wondering what they are getting themselves into. What follows is either a relief or a disappointment, depending on what you were hoping for, as it is mostly capable reporting supported by comprehensive research. Look away, there is no scandal here.

The Tortugas shipwreck belonged to the Spanish *Tierra Firme* treasure fleet that was wrecked off Florida Keys in September AD 1622. This particular vessel, identified as the *Buen Jesús y Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, was by no means a treasure ship, although amongst the cargo were gold bars, silver coins and over 6,000 pearls. It is the pottery, however, that is the principal subject here. The assemblage comprises 3,862 complete pots and sherds and includes olive jars, tin-glazed, lead-glazed and plain earthenwares, and 'Colonoware' cooking vessels. The text is structured around those categories, with chapters on the table wares, 'Papal Politics and Propaganda' (a discussion of the papal motifs adorning some of the tin-glazed dishes), Spanish olive jars and Afro-Caribbean Colonoware. There are further chapters on chemical analysis and the clay tobacco pipes before