

The 8th-century pottery industry at La Londe, near Rouen, and its implications for cross-channel trade with Hamwic, Anglo-Saxon Southampton

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ANTIQUITY reported last year the locating of Quentovic, one of the lost trading centres of the early medieval period in northern Europe. The finding of pottery kilns at La Londe, not so far away near Rouen, identifies another source of traded goods, and further explains the pattern of North Sea and Channel traffic.

In Sir Cyril Fox's *Personality of Britain* is a series of diagrams showing the easterly or up-channel shift of the southern trade into Britain in prehistoric times, halting at the Rhine–Thames crossing in the Roman period. The easterly connexions were continued in later Saxon times . . . at first cross-channel and soon culminating in the intense trade with the Rhineland. England now fully participated in the trade which flowed freely round the shores of the North Sea. As a result of the Norman conquest, trade was intensified with Normandy. Thus was started the down-channel shift of trade.

DUNNING 1959: 73

Trading systems in the North Sea zone

In the past 30 years, spurred on by Gerald Dunning's pioneering research, the study of long-distance trade in the early middle ages in the English Channel as well as around the North Sea has made considerable advances. Since Dunning's time, extensive excavations of the *emporia* at Hamwic (Brisbane 1988; Hodges 1989), London (Vince 1990), Ipswich (Wade 1988), York (Hall 1988), Quentovic (Hill *et al.* 1990), Dorestad (Verwers 1988), Medemblik (Besteman 1990), Haithabu (Jankuhn 1986), Ribe (Bencard & Jorgensen 1990; Frandsen & Jensen 1987; 1988) and Åhus (Callmer 1984) have provided an invaluable body of data about the nature of seaborne commerce between the later 7th and 9th centuries (Steuer 1987; Hodges 1990). The archaeology of these trading settlements and the commerce that connected them provides a measurement for a poorly documented epoch of European history. Henri

Pirenne first identified the importance of this trade in the making of medieval Europe; but like many other historians and numismatists he had no means of estimating the scale of commercial activity, let alone its complex configurations in terms of time and space.

In essence, two trading systems operated in the North Sea zone. The northern half of the area was controlled by traders principally handling goods manufactured in the Rhineland, in the heartland of the Frankish kingdom of Austrasia. The traders participating in this system were for the most part Frisians, many based at Dorestad, the great emporium in the Rhine delta zone (Hodges 1982: 74–5). Traders from this system worked as far north as Ribe (*cf.* Bencard & Jorgensen 1990; Jensen 1990). Denmark marked the point where the Austrasian system came into contact with the western Baltic trade network. Through this agency Rhenish goods entered southern and central Scandinavia in small quantities (*cf.* Näsman 1984; 1990). Dark Age trade in the southern half of the North Sea zone, incorporating the English Channel, largely remained an historical enigma until the imported pottery from Hamwic had been studied (*cf.* Dunning 1959; Hodges 1981; Timby 1988). These studies, as well as the subsequent discovery of assemblages of imported wares from London, Ipswich (Hodges 1980), York (Mainman 1990a; 1990b: 477–84) and, now, the proposed site of Quentovic (Hill *et al.* 1990; Coutts & Worthington 1986), indicate that the origin of the trade lay in at least two regions of

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northern France, the western Frankish kingdom of Neustria. Many of the imported pots found in the Anglo-Saxon *emporium* undoubtedly stem from sources in the hinterland of Quentovic. This much has been confirmed by the excavations of the site at Vismarest (Hill *et al.* 1990). But equally many of the imported types do not occur at Vismarest. These types, it was proposed, were mostly made at centres in the Seine and Loire valleys, as well as perhaps as far inland as the upper Moselle valley (*cf.* Hodges 1981). The discovery of a kiln centre at La Londe, near Rouen, which was manufacturing these wares in the 8th century makes it possible to fix the source of many of these unprovenanced types. More significantly, it means that a large *emporium*, the southernmost participating in the North Sea trading zone, lies somewhere close to the mouth of the Seine, serving the needs of Neustria, as Dorestad served those of Austrasia.

The La Londe kilns

The pottery-making centre was discovered in 1987 by the Groupe Archéologique du Val de Seine, following which there have now been three seasons of excavations under the direction of Mme Nathalie Roy, conservatrice aux Musées départementaux de la Seine-Maritime, Rouen (Roy 1990: 126–8). The centre is located in the Forêt de la Londe (Seine-Maritime), 5 km south of the Seine (and the nearest village, La Bouille), and some 30 km south-west of Rouen (FIGURE 1). The site covers a large area alongside a shallow valley, which in turn leads into a deep *falaise*. It is close to a Roman road which runs from the Seine at La Bouille in the direction of Alençon. An abundance of potsherds ranging from Gallo-Roman to High Medieval date drew the Groupe Archéologique to the spot. Documentary research shows that the potters of La Londe are mentioned in *le coutumier* of Hector of Chartres at the beginning of the 15th century; and pottery

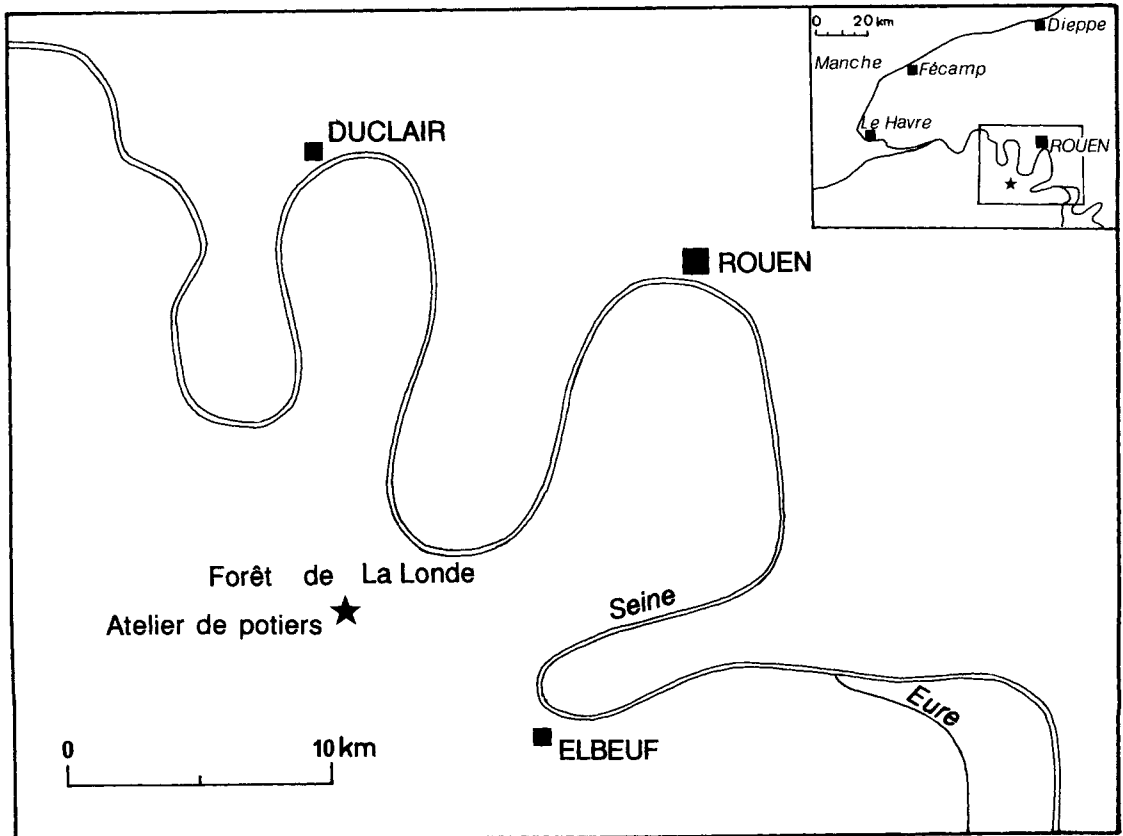


FIGURE 1. The location of the pottery kilns at La Londe, near Rouen. (Drawing courtesy of Rouen Museum.)

production continued here until the 19th century. La Londe, in sum, appears to have been a pottery-making centre for nearly two millennia, much like the better-known communities in the Beauvaisis or the Saintonge.

Since 1987, four single-flue kilns have been excavated, three with simple circular furnaces about 1.5 m in diameter, and one appreciably smaller (Roy 1990: 126). Kilns of this simple Gallo-Roman form are already well known from the Frankish period (e.g. Hodges 1981, figure 7.9; Janssen 1987). A variety of pottery has been found in and associated with the kilns. Most vessels are tall jars with cheese-wired, flat bases, flattened rims and little, if any, roller-applied stamp decoration. The form of the pots as well as their decoration suggests a date in the period after the end of the Merovingian funerary rite and before the inception of the globular forms common in Carolingian times (*cf.* Hodges 1981: 62; Cuisenier 1988: 318–39, especially 324–5). A date for these kilns in the first half of the 8th century is confirmed by the presence of these wares in imported contexts in England. A cursory examination shows that the assemblage of pottery primarily consisted of the following wares hitherto known from their occurrence (as imports) at Hamwic, Saxon Southampton known as class 11 (Hodges 1981: 19–20; Timby 1988: 91), class 12 (Hodges 1981: 20–21; Timby 1988: 128), certain grey wares, types belonging to miscellaneous category known as class 15

(Hodges 1981: 25–8), class 16 (Hodges 1981: 28–9; Timby 1988: 99–100), class 17 (Hodges 1981: 29; Timby 1988: 100) and class 25 (Hodges 1981: 31; Timby 1988: 100–101). Black wares, an especially common category of 8th-century pottery, found at Hamwic and elsewhere in England, are absent. Furthermore, no evidence has been found of any production of red-painted pottery. Excluding the grey wares, which will need to be classified using petrological techniques, classes 11, 12, 16, 17, and 25 represented some 29% of the imported vessels found in the SARC (Southampton Archaeological Research Committee) excavation-areas I, IV, V, VI, VII, XI, XIV, XV and XX (Hodges 1981: 38). It is likely, therefore, as grey wares form the greater part of the production of these kilns, that between 40% and 50% of the imported pottery found in 8th-century Hamwic was made at La Londe.

Already it had been proposed that the source for class 11, commonly a scorched jar, lay somewhere in the upper Seine valley (Hodges 1981: 19); likewise that distinctive, quartz-tempered class 25 stemmed from a production centre in this region (Hodges 1981: 31). But, with some reservations, class 12 had been ascribed to the Trier region, and classes 16 and 17 to a source in the Loire Valley.

The Hamwic imported classes throw light upon pottery production at La Londe. Class 11 occurs not only at Hamwic, but also in 11th-

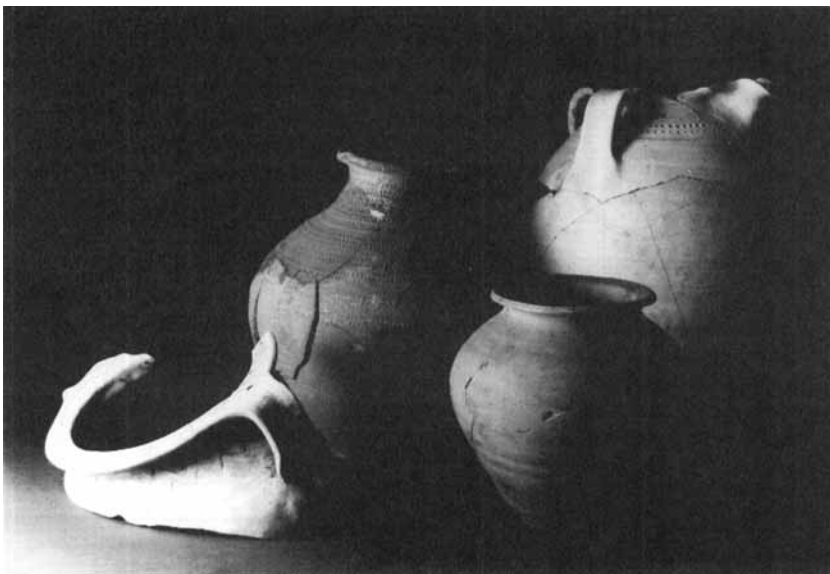


FIGURE 2. A selection of early Carolingian pots from the kilns at La Londe. (Photo François Dugué, courtesy of Rouen Museum.)

century contexts in Exeter, Southampton and Wareham (Hodges & Mainman 1984: 13–14). Production of classes 12, 16, 17 and 25, by contrast, like the grey wares appears to have ceased by the 11th century. Classes 12 and 25 are notable because a few vessels decorated with red paint occur at Hamwic. These belong to the last phase of Hamwic, between the end of the 8th century and the second quarter of the 9th century. One sherd of class 25 was associated with a penny of King Offa (757–96) (Addyman & Hill 1969: 92). Different types of ornamentation are used: class 12 wares are merely decorated with splashes of red paint, whereas, in common with the red-painted wares of the Beauvaisis, class 25 was decorated using a fine brush (cf. Hodges 1981: 64).

Gerald Dunning identified a class 17 (pottery) mortar from Rue de la Vicomte, Rouen (cf. Hodges 1981: 29; figure 3.9.2). This is a typical illustration of a category of ceramic wares made in various Neustrian pottery centres in late Merovingian and early Carolingian times (cf. Hodges 1981: 27–8), pre-figuring the adoption of stone mortars in this region (Dunning 1965–66). (Stone mortars were made in the Rhineland as early as the 8th century: see Kars & Broekman 1981.) Another aspect of the kilns appears to be the differential distribution of the different wares. Class 11 occurs at Fécamp (Renoux 1985: 415; Hodges 1981: 19) as well as in the Channel Islands, and southern English ports such as Southampton, Wareham and Exeter (Hodges & Mainman 1984: 13–14). Class 12 occurs at Ipswich (Hodges 1980), but classes 16 and 17 have not been recorded in England. Class 25, with its distinctive granular fabric, has been identified in many different places: at Paris from 19th-century excavations at St Germain-des-Prés (Hodges 1981:31; Perin 1985: 576–80) and from beneath the pavement forecourt of Notre Dame (De Bouard & Guibert in Hurst 1969: 113; Perin 1985: 573); at the 7th-century village of Chalton (Hants.) (Hodges 1981: 31); at Covent Garden, London (Timby 1988: 100–101); and at Ipswich (Hodges 1980).

A lost emporium

The significance of the La Londe discovery reaches well beyond the history of pottery production. Some 86% of the many different types of imported pottery found in Hamwic are tablewares (Hodges 1981: 38). Very few of these

types have been found outside the *emporia* of Hamwic, London and Ipswich. The reason for this variety, as well as the concentration of imported pots in the *emporia*, it has been contended, is that the jars were brought by Frankish traders because they found the poorly made local (Middle Saxon) cooking-pots unsuitable. Thus, to some extent, the imported pottery found in Hamwic and other Anglo-Saxon *emporia* provides an approximate indication of the pottery types available to the Frankish traders, that is, an indication of the places and regions from which the Frankish traders set out for England. Hence, contrary to expectation, very little of the imported pottery found at Hamwic derives from Rhenish sources. It is unlikely, therefore, that Frisians or Austrasian merchants visited the port in any significant numbers. Now, following the discovery of the kilns at La Londe, it is clear that a little under half the imported pottery emanates from sources in the region served by Quentovic, and much the same amount stems from the La Londe kilns. A closer analysis may be possible when the pottery from Vismarest and La Londe has been analysed.

This leads to one final point. The traders from the upper Seine almost certainly were based in an emporium which would have ranked alongside Quentovic and Dorestad as a major urban centre of 8th-century Europe. Where was this? The discovery of the potting community at La Londe leads to two alternatives. The emporium was situated either at Rouen or alternatively, near La Londe, beside the Seine. The former seems more likely. Several 8th-century texts refer to Rouen; according to the life of St Willibald, written about 778, the English monk set out from Hamwic in 720 on his way to the Holy Land and supposedly disembarked near Rouen; a diploma of 779 exempts the abbey of St Germain-des-Prés from the payment of certain tolls, and cites Rouen as the first toll-station; the chronicler Nithard describes how 28 merchants were blown off course in 841 and sought refuge at Rouen (Gauthier 1989: 18; see also Lebecq 1985; Verhulst 1985). Yet virtually no evidence of 8th-century activity has been discovered beneath the present city (Gauthier 1989). This has perplexed archaeologists because Rouen had been a Gallo-Roman port of some size (Perin 1985: 341–2), and prospered as a Channel port throughout the High and Late Middle Ages.

Furthermore, Rouen boasted a major church – St Ouen (Perin 1989). Two points are worth bearing in mind. First, excavations have shown *emporium* to be abundantly rich in material culture and most conspicuous, even when encountered by chance. Second, the 10th–11th-century town of Rouen, much like Hamwic and Southampton, Lundenwic and Lundenburg, and Eoforwic and Jorvik, is not likely to be situated in precisely the same place as the Early Medieval *emporium* which Willibald visited in 720. The pattern suggested by the history of English *emporium* (and indeed by the history of Quentovic, Dorestad, Haithabu, Birka etc.) is that close to the well-known medieval town there should lie the remains of a port covering tens of hectares, where Neustrian merchants, handling the limited trade in prestige commodities from manors and abbeys around the Seine valley, set out to engage in seasonal trade with their West Saxon counterparts at Hamwic, and

to a lesser extent with Mercians at Lundenwic and East Anglians at Ipswich. This *emporium*, where the products of the La Londe potteries were readily available, marked the southern point of the North Sea trading systems. From this place, to return to Dunning's remarks made 30 years ago, started the down-channel trade which became such an important feature of trade with England after AD 1000. What these discoveries finally indicate is that the High Medieval trade between the Seine valley and England was well established three centuries before the arrival of the Normans.

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Prehistoric sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) from Mangaia Island, Central Polynesia

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The early history of the sweet potato in the Pacific is important, for its large subsistence rôle. It is also peculiar, from its American origin, and it is also recalcitrant, because vegetables with tubers are so much less visible archaeologically than are grains and seeds. Here is an important identification of sweet potato in the prehistory of Polynesia.

The sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas* [L.] Lam.), a dominant crop in the indigenous cultivation systems of eastern Polynesia (especially Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island) and of the New Guinea highlands, has been the subject of much debate regarding the antiquity and

routes of its distribution into the Pacific (e.g. Dixon 1932; Merrill 1954). By exhaustive field and laboratory research, Yen (1963; 1971; 1974) confirmed the South American origin of *Ipomoea batatas*, and advanced a 'tripartite hypothesis' for its spread into Oceania. In Yen's

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