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Medieval highly decorated redware from Lund and Roskilde

A comparison

Johansson, Erik; Langkilde, Jesper

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Skärvor ur det förflutna

En vänbok till Mats Roslund

Redaktörer:

Martin Hansson

Torbjörn Ahlström

Johanna Bergqvist Rydén

Peter Carelli

Ingrid Gustin

Anders Håkansson

Jonas Monié Nordin

Boken har tryckts med stöd från:
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Redaktörer

Martin Hansson, Torbjörn Ahlström, Johanna Bergqvist Rydén, Peter Carelli,
Ingrid Gustin, Anders Håkansson, Jonas Monié Nordin

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Medieval highly decorated redware from Lund and Roskilde

A comparison

ERIK JOHANSSON & JESPER LANGKILDE

Among historians and archaeologists, the medieval towns of Roskilde and Lund have been perceived as almost twin towns. Both were founded in the late 10th century, with bishop's seats established in the 11th century. Both quickly rose to become the most politically, economically, and culturally important ecclesiastical centres in southern Scandinavia, with similar urban landscapes dominated by numerous churches and ecclesiastical institutions, generating wealthy, cosmopolitan elite environments. Despite the apparent parallelism between

the two towns, comparative studies of material culture have been very few, and none have been carried out within pottery studies. As a first attempt, this paper aims to compare a distinct and easily recognisable medieval ceramic ware: highly decorated redware jugs with decorative elements in white-firing clay. Based on quantitative and qualitative surveys of selected archaeological assemblages, similarities and differences, as well as the potential for further research, will be discussed.

Definitions

Highly decorated jugs of lead-glazed earthenware constituted a ceramic style that spread rapidly from north-western Europe across the North Sea to the Baltic during the 12th and 13th centuries. Inspired by north French whitewares, potters in Flanders and Brabant adapted the style to local clays and began producing highly decorated redware (hereafter HDRW) from the late 12th century, probably stimulated by new markets created through urbanisation and economic development in the region (Verhaeghe 1989; 1996; Baart 1996; De Groote 2008). HDRW from the Low Countries was distributed across western and northern Europe, and in the 13th century local production was established in Denmark and north-eastern Germany, possibly by immigrant potters, following urbanisation and economic growth in the western Baltic. The European distribution suggests that, while in the Low Countries it occurs in both urban and rural contexts, elsewhere it is primarily an urban commodity.

Franz Verhaeghe argued that HDRW occupied a socio-economic middle ground: not as expensive and luxurious as glass, metal, or stone, yet not as cheap as common ceramics or wooden utensils. Because of its more elaborate production, HDRW was likely reserved for specific uses where ostentation played a social role, such as business meetings (Verhaeghe 1989). HDRW flourished during the 13th century but declined in the next, partly due to the success of German stoneware (Verhaeghe 1989).

HDRW jugs were typically 26–32 cm in height, with a rod handle and usually a thumbled base edge (Fig. 1). Decoration always includes at least two elements: roulet-

ted or stamped patterns, a covering white slip, or applied plastic décor in white- or red-firing clay. The combination of oxidation, white slip, and additives such as copper to the otherwise transparent lead glaze produced a wide colour palette. Double firing (bisque firing) entailed higher production costs in labour and fuel than ordinary earthenware.

Although the term 'highly decorated' is imprecise and could apply to other wares, HDRW has become conventional and is used here. To compare finds from Lund and Roskilde, the survey is restricted to medieval redware with decoration in white-firing clay, either as an applied slip or plastic décor, facilitating identification and avoiding debates over classification.

For Scandinavia, early studies that included HDRW – although the term was not then used – were Barton's paper on medieval glazed earthenware, focusing on Swedish examples (1968), and Bencard's study of medieval glazed jugs with anthropomorphic decoration (1973). The latter dated this variant to 1250–1350, long regarded as the standard dating for HDRW in Denmark. After the 1995 international conference on highly decorated ceramics, Klemensen (1996) surveyed known Danish medieval glazed redware production sites, including less decorated wares.

Several studies now indicate that HDRW arrived in Denmark and north-eastern Germany at some sites, e.g., Ribe and Lübeck, as early as the late 12th century, almost immediately after production began in the Low Countries (Madsen 1988; Madsen & Stilke 2001, p. 599; Biermann 2003, p. 246; Drescher & Drenkhahn 2017). HDRW with decoration in white-firing clay appears in



Fig. 1. Highly decorated redware jug from Brugge, displayed at EHM in Lübeck. Photo: Erik Johansson.

Schleswig from c. 1200 but rarely after 1280, suggesting it belongs mainly to the 13th century (Lüdtke 1985, p. 56), and in Greifswald in contexts dated c. 1250–1280 (Schäfer 1997). Production declined in the early to mid-14th century (Madsen & Stilke 2001).

In the western Baltic, HDRW with white-firing decoration is documented at kiln sites in Lübeck and possibly Mecklenburg-Vorpommern during the second half of the 13th century (Hoffmann & Schäfer 2005, Abb. 6; Drescher & Drenkhahn 2017). In Denmark, Farum Lillevang in Zealand is the only kiln site yielding HDRW with white-firing decoration, likely dating to the late 13th century (Liebgott 2001). Elsewhere in Scandinavia and the Baltic, no certain production sites are known. Visually, German and Danish HDRW are almost indistinguishable; hence, we use south Scandinavian HDRW as a collective term for western Baltic production.

For Lund, David Gaimster briefly reported on pottery from a town-centre excavation (Gaimster 1996): HDRW appears c. 1200, and, based on its small quantity, Gaimster emphasises that decorated imported table ceramics were luxury items in late 12th-century Scania (Gaimster 1996, p. 87).

For Roskilde, only two papers—published over 40 years ago—specifically addressed medieval pottery finds (Liebgott 1979; Andersen 1985), both concluding that HDRW was rare. Recently, Madsen (2021) published finds from the well of St Hans Kilde, excavated in 1834, including two of the most famous HDRW jugs in Danish archaeology (Fig. 5).

Highly decorated redware in Lund

HDRW occurs in most excavations in Lund (Fig. 4). At Apotekaren 4, close to the main square, only ten rims can be securely identified as HDRW, compared with c. 200 rims of common glazed redware jugs. HDRW rims average 5.5 grams, common redware 12 grams. HDRW is rarer, thinner, and more fragmented than contemporary wares (common glazed redware, hard greyware, proto-stoneware, and late Baltic ware), likely because the fabric was thinner and tempered with uniform sand. Rough approximations, correcting for completeness using rim EVEs (Linaa 2007; Orton & Hughes 2013), suggest that c. 60–70 HDRW jugs were used at Apotekaren 4 over 170 years (compared with over 1,000 common redware jugs).

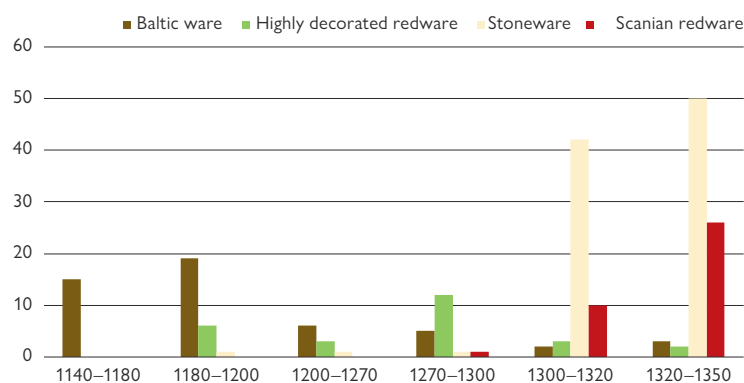


Fig. 2. Diagram of the chronology of HDRW in Lund compared with Baltic ware, stoneware and Scanian redware. The data is based on the number of contexts with a presence of these wares. Baltic ware rapidly declines in the 13th century, while stoneware and Scanian redware are typical 14th century wares.

Earlier studies rarely quantified HDRW in Lund, but exceptions exist (Fig. 3). At Mynter 3–5, Vandrup-Martens identified c. 30 sherds of ‘Aardenburg Brugge’ ware, about 10 percent of medieval redware. At Apotekaren 7, Larsson identified Flemish glazed redware equivalent to nine jugs, and at Tegnér 1 and St Mikael 16 HDRW amounted to 13–15 percent of total redware (Vandrup-Martens 1993; Gaimster 1996; Larsson 2007; Brorsson 2021).

Although not recorded in detail, HDRW body sherds from Apotekaren 4 were noted in Erik Johansson’s PhD project, along with Baltic wares, stonewares, and Scanian redware, to evaluate chronology, phasing, and residuality (Johansson forthcoming; Fig. 2). A few tendencies are visible: HDRW appears c. 1180–1200, peaks at the end of the 13th century, then declines. This may reflect two HDRW types: an earlier from the Low Countries, and a later from Germany or Zealand, produced from the late 13th century (Tab. 1). After this, the Hanse prohibited Flemish merchants from entering the Baltic (Nicholas 1992), cutting off the HDRW supply from Bruges.

Highly decorated redware in Roskilde

No quantifications of HDRW finds in Roskilde have previously been made. It is clear, however, that – as in Lund – HDRW sherds occur in many excavations, though in small numbers. Material from three recently excavated but unpublished sites – Sortebrødre Plads, Læderstræde 4, and Gråbrødre Skole – can provide preliminary dating and quantification (Fig. 3). Pottery, redware, and HDRW are summarised by simple sherd count (Tab. 2). HDRW is divided into Low Countries HDRW, identified by a

covering white slip, and south Scandinavian HDRW, defined by decorative elements in white-firing clay. Low Countries sherds are generally fine, brick-red, with green, mottled green, or yellowish-green glaze; a few have clear yellow glaze. Decoration appears as rouletted geometric bands; pressed or stamped raspberry or scallop motifs are absent. Three of four jug bases are flat with straight rims without thumbing. Spiral traces of white clay inside the bases indicate that the slip was applied while the jug was still on the potter’s wheel (Fig. 5).

South Scandinavian HDRW features white-slip decoration mostly as yellow, sometimes green, glazed scales, arranged in zones, vertical lines, or as dots or drips, occasionally delimited by dark cordons (Fig. 5). Only one sherd bears a floral motif.

Although stratification and phasing are limited, some chronological indications are apparent. At Sortebrødre Plads, a medieval suburban settlement outside the eastern town gate yielded HDRW from waste pits, wells, ditches, and some paved streets. Nearly half of the HDRW (17 sherds) came from contexts with proto-stoneware and early Siegburg, Langerwehe, or Lower Saxony stoneware, and coins, dating it to c. 1300–1350. Another nine sherds were from a well dendro-dated to 1315 and contexts with coins dated c. 1250–1375; only one sherd came from a context radiocarbon-dated to 1200–1280. Overall, both Low Countries and South Scandinavian HDRW at this site mainly date to c. 1250–1350.

A similar pattern occurs at the other sites. At Læderstræde 4, HDRW was found in contexts with coins and proto- or early stoneware, dating the material to after the mid-13th century. At Gråbrødre Skole, 77 of 82 HDRW sherds came from contexts containing 51 proto-stoneware

Tab. 1. pXRF measurements of HDRW in Lund (illustrated in fig. 3). The Brugge sample is a reference unearthened in Brugge. Note the divergence of sample 259-220. This sherd might not be from the Low Countries.

Sample	Al	Ca	Fe	K	Mg	Mn	Nb	Rb	S	Sr	Ti	Y	Zn	Zr
Brugge	18,895	1,621	6,376	5,264	3,286	0,012	0,005	0,028	5,334	0,015	0,898	0,001	0,015	0,050
844-497	17,736	2,030	6,089	4,772	3,593	0,029	0,003	0,028	1,340	0,017	0,803	0,000	0,014	0,050
259-220	9,906	6,133	5,308	5,121	1,534	0,052	0,007	0,024	9,705	0,031	0,807	0,000	0,023	0,060
481-322	14,790	4,273	5,073	5,166	2,415	0,069	0,004	0,027	3,460	0,018	0,714	0,000	0,019	0,057

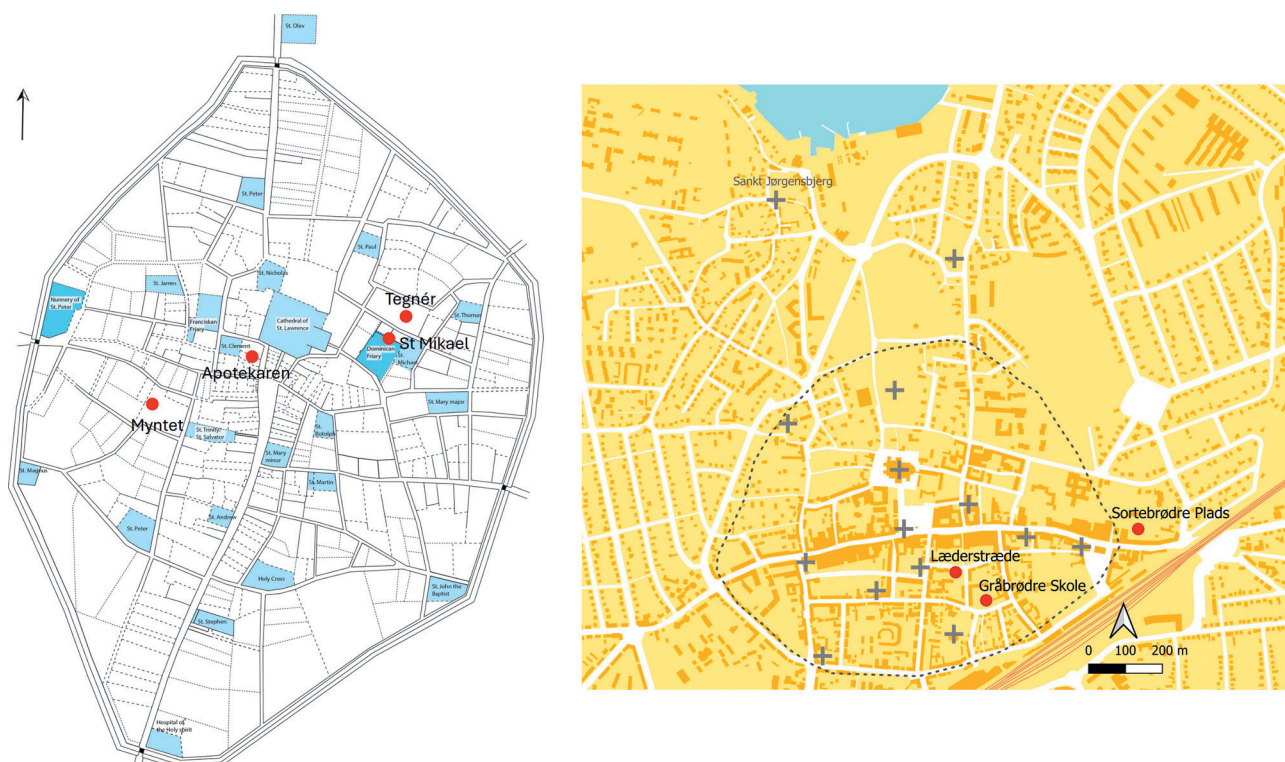


Fig. 3. Maps of Lund (left) and Roskilde (right), with the sites mentioned in the text marked in red. For Lund, blue areas are ecclesiastical sites. Map: Mattias Karlsson after Anders Andrén (1984). For Roskilde with medieval churches (crosses) and rampart (dotted line). Map: ROMU and Jesper Langkilde.

and 36 early stoneware sherds, mostly from Lower Saxony and a few from Siegburg, dating mainly to c. 1275–1350. Only one sherd was tentatively dated to the 12th century.

Medieval glazed redware constitutes a relatively high proportion of the assemblages, averaging 27 percent of total pottery from the 12th–15th centuries. HDRW makes up 9–18 percent of redware and 2.5–3.3 percent of all sherds. There is no marked difference between suburban and town-centre contexts, suggesting that HDRW was not strongly tied to socio-economic status, or that the suburb outside Roskilde's eastern gate also housed high-status residents; historical sources record at least one large brick house there in 1380 (DRB, 4.2.72).

Notably, HDRW appears mainly in contexts dated c. 1250–1350, or more specifically c. 1275–1350, somewhat later than in the Low Countries or elsewhere in the western Baltic. This pattern is supported by evidence near St Jørgensbjerg Church, where a stone cellar, part of an early medieval elite residence, was infilled during the first third of the 13th century. The deposit contained c. 3,000 pottery sherds, yet no HDRW – or even ordinary glazed redware – was present (Andersen & Nielsen 2000, p. 137).

Distribution

There is broad consensus that HDRW jugs were associated with practices primarily carried out by merchants (Verhaeghe 1989; Hillewaert 1993; De Groote 2008), and several scholars have suggested that ceramics were a by-product of trade in other commodities (e.g. Linaa 2016, pp. 183f). Others, however, argue that pottery was traded for its own value (Blake 1980, p. 5; Le Patourel 1983), while some claim that only tin-glazed ceramics were worth long-distance trade (Spufford 2003, p. 271).

Nothing in the material from Lund and Roskilde contradicts the interpretation of HDRW as a trade by-product. As neither town had direct access to the North Sea, small quantities were expected, yet their importance during the 13th century explains its stable presence. The increase in the late 13th century may reflect the start of production in Lübeck, and at Farum Lillevang in Zealand, possibly under the Roskilde bishops (Liebgott 2001).

Christopher Dyer notes that French wine merchants presented Saintonge jugs together with wine to clients (Dyer 2025). Could the same have occurred in Lund

Tab. 2. Site dating and total amount of sherds at the three sites in Roskilde. HDRW is divided into Low Countries (FLEM HDRW) and South Scandinavian (SCAN HDRW).

Site	Site dating	Total	Redware	FLEM HDRW	SCAN HDRW
Sortebrødre Plads	12th–15th C	1,150	422	11	25
Læderstræde 4	13th–15th C	450	81	12	3
Gråbrødre Skole	12th–15th C	3,240	836	51	31
Total		4,840	1,339	74	59

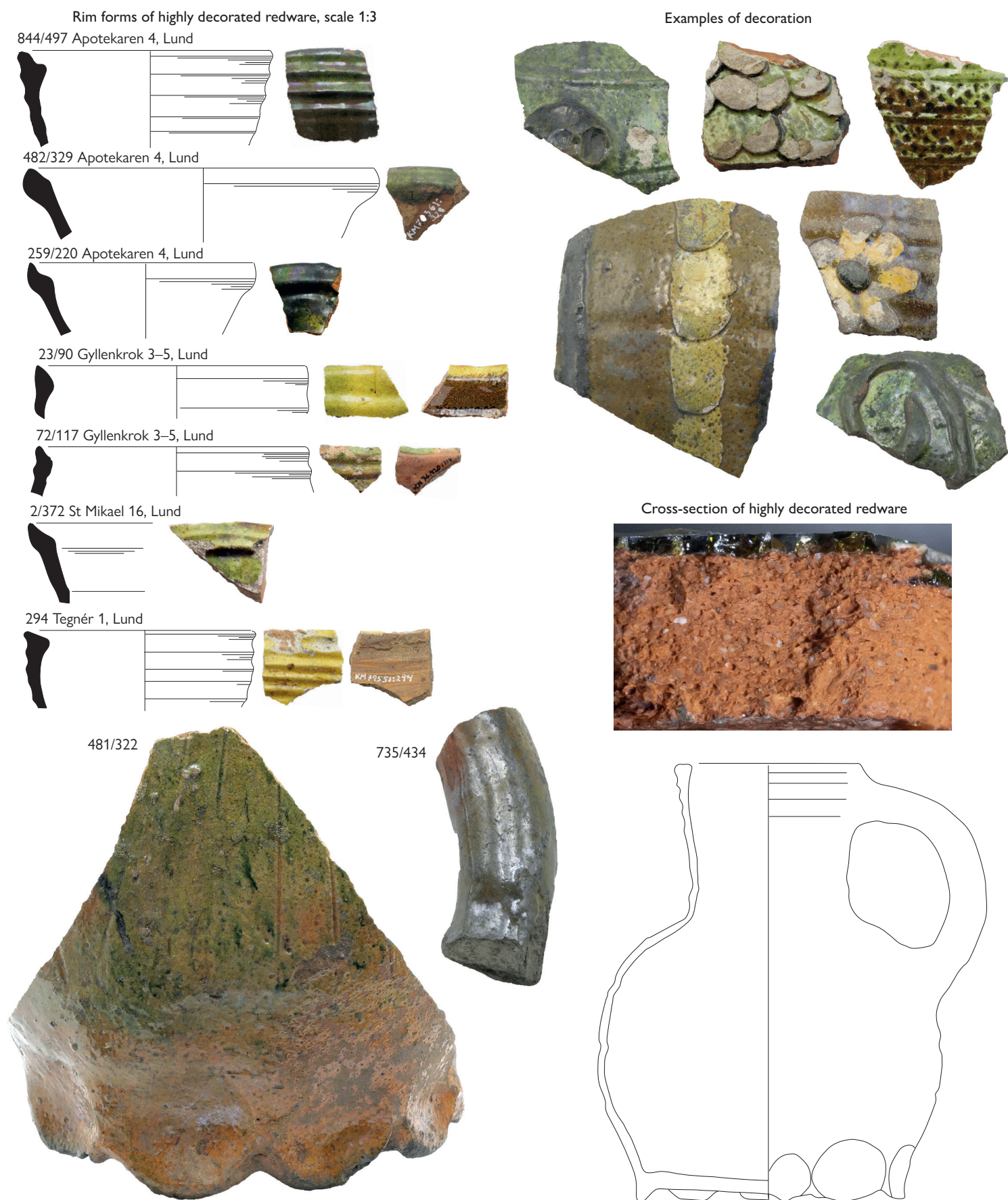


Fig. 4. A selection of HDRW sherds unearthed in Lund. Note that the cross-section shows Low Countries HDRW. The spiral vines of the highly decorated specimen have a direct parallel in for example South Holland (Lüdtke & Schietzel 2001, pp. 1797f), Schleswig (Lüdtke 1985, Tafel 30:11) and Oudenaarde (De Groote 2008, p. 189). The provenance is likely the Low Countries, and it provides a clear picture of the distribution of these types of vessels, ending up in different towns and ports. Illustration: Erik Johansson.

Rim forms of highly decorated redware, scale 1:3

Examples of decoration, scale 1:2

ROM 3649 X188:1



ROM 3649 X143:3



ROM 3649 X248:2



ROM 3649 X179:2



ROM 2982 X494



Jugs from St Hans Kilde, scale 1:3



Jug from Skomagergade, well II, scale 1:3

Fig. 5. A selection of HDRW sherds from the three sites in Roskilde (photo: Jesper Langkilde) and three almost complete jugs; two from the St Hans kilde well (photo: Nationalmuseet) and one from a well in Skomagergade (photo: Jesper Langkilde).

and Roskilde? From the perspective of assemblage and social practice theory, HDRW jugs are closely linked to their intended contents – wine and beer – suggesting a connection with trade in these commodities, which flourished in the High Middle Ages (Enemark 1976, pp. 124ff; Spufford 2003, pp. 293f).

Economic historian Jessica Dijkman argues that wine and other fresh commodities largely bypassed fairs in Holland (Dijkman 2011, p. 35). If similarly in Denmark, wine would have moved directly from producer via merchants to towns rather than through major markets around the Sound. Records of wine imports to Skanör date from the 14th century, yet from c. 1200 written sources mention *wijnkoop* and *lijfkoop* in Dutch, *Weinkauf* and *Leitkauf* in German, and *lidkøb* in Danish (sale-wine, testimony wine). These terms appear in town laws on trade agreements, marking business celebrations through drinking in the presence of witnesses (Vestergaard 1965, p. 538; Andrén 1985, p. 90; Dijkman 2011, p. 259), and by the witnesses themselves (Ibbetson 1992, p. 7). Ibbetson notes that *Weinkauf* dates to the 12th century, appearing in Latin charters as *vinum testimoniale* (witness-wine), and stresses that while beer or water could serve the ritual, wine carried ‘obvious sacral symbolism with overtones of unity and concord’ (Ibbetson 1992, p. 7). This practice spread mainly north- and eastwards through legal codes modelled on Lübeck law in the early 13th century.

Status

What of the socio-economic status of HDRW jugs? As noted in the introduction, Verhaeghe proposes that HDRW occupied a socio-economic middle ground – between metal and glass on one hand, and wood and common pottery on the other. In Lund and Roskilde, the seemingly even distribution of HDRW throughout the towns suggests that these jugs were not an exclusive high-status commodity, but were present across the social topography, albeit in small numbers. Nevertheless, compared with rural consumers, urban dwellers would generally have held higher socio-economic status in medieval society (e.g., Dahlström 2019, pp. 243ff).

If HDRW jugs were primarily used by merchants as wine vessels in business transactions, they could be regarded as a profane luxury. However, assessing their true socio-economic significance requires the analysis of a complete assemblage. The absence of metals such as silver, copper, tin, and pewter – which either do not preserve well in the soil or were removed, inherited, or otherwise not discarded – risks overestimating the importance of pottery in medieval practices. Metal vessels, by contrast, are often mentioned in medieval testaments, where pottery is omitted (Erslev 1901; Mosler-Christoph 1998). Thus, written sources and archaeological evidence offer two quite different perspectives on urban material culture.

Future Research

This preliminary comparison of HDRW finds from selected sites in Lund and Roskilde has revealed similarities in overall types, quantities, and distribution. The most significant and interesting difference concerns chronology, as HDRW appears considerably later in Roskilde than in Lund, where it seems to appear in the late 12th century, consistent with other late 12th-century finds in, for example, Lübeck, Ribe, and the Low Countries. This will be an important question for future research, to be tested in well-dated contexts in Roskilde. Was Lund more closely and earlier connected to North Sea trade and merchants than Roskilde, or do we simply lack the appropriate dating for Roskilde?

A related question concerns provenance. Here lies significant potential for studies of HDRW using XRF or ICP analysis to investigate the origins of these wares – how much came from the Low Countries, northern Germany, and southern Scandinavia, and did this change over time?

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