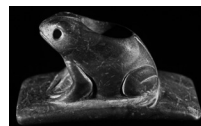


CHAPTER ELEVEN



Objects and Social Change: A Case Study from Saxo-Norman Southampton

Ben Jervis

Within medieval archaeology objects are used as indicators of social change, be this in the form of pottery typologies that reflect changing influences, technologies, or patterns of use (e.g., Vince & Jenner 1991) or of metalwork styles that reflect changing tastes and cultural affiliations (Webster 2011). Medieval archaeologists have begun to consider the active role of objects, for example in the creation of identities (e.g., Smith 2009), but artifacts are typically seen as reflecting, rather than participating in, long-term processes of continuity and change. Ceramics in particular provide a valuable but underutilized resource for understanding these processes. The bulk of work on medieval ceramics has focused on characterization; however, studies are increasingly examining the role of ceramics either as reflections of identity or as having a role in its formation (e.g., Blinkhorn 1997; Gutierrez 2000). Ceramics are generally relegated to a secondary role however, being tools used by (rather than acting on) people in the process of identity formation. This paper presents a fresh perspective, which deviates from conventional approaches by considering the range of interactions between people and objects and exploring how multiple forms of agency emerge through them. By following the relationships formed with ceramic vessels, this chapter will move beyond an anthropocentric view of change to explore how objects were enrolled in processes of continuity and change surrounding the Norman Conquest of England.

Although a major watershed in English history, the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 has not been the focus of sustained archaeological study. Research has typically focused on assessing the visibility of the

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Conquest (e.g., Sykes 2007) and exploring the directional movement of influences (Impey 2000; Sykes 2007) within a framework concerned primarily with a top-down process of “Normanization.” Because of the absence of clear “Norman” material culture in many areas of Britain, the Norman Conquest has not been studied from a ceramic perspective.[1] Within these approaches concepts of change are largely anthropocentric. Yet we can consider that early medieval England was experienced in a multitude of connected but individual ways, determined not just by human intentionality but also by the ways in which people were drawn into a variety of associations with objects, with multiple effects. The approach taken here, grounded in Actor-Network Theory, follows these connections, allowing us to explore the social assemblage of Anglo-Norman Southampton not as a stage in which powerful actors managed change, but (to use an appropriate metaphor) more as a tapestry of tangled strands of action in which the agency for continuity and change was woven and distributed through interactions between humans and the material world. Such an approach is valuable in introducing multivocality into an archaeological interpretation of Normanization and in acknowledging that “the social” of Anglo-Norman England was achieved and maintained through a tangle of courses of action, of which both humans and nonhumans were part.

THE ROLE OF OBJECTS

In order to consider the role of objects in this process we need to define three core concepts:

- Objects are mediators, participating in, rather than reflecting processes of continuity or change;
- Agency is both distributed and temporary;
- “The social” does not guide action but is formed through it; therefore, hierarchical society is brought about by and sustained through action.

Social contexts are sets of associations between human and nonhuman actors, formed and maintained by action (Gregson & Rose 2000, 441); the agency to assemble and make durable a social assemblage (a collection of human and nonhuman “actors”) is distributed and formed through these associations (Latour 2005, 65; Knappett & Malafouris 2008, xi). Within this framework, change can be seen in simple terms as a remapping of these associations (Witmore 2007, 555). The traditional approaches alluded to in the introduction of this chapter see objects as intermediaries in this process (Latour 2005, 39); they act as a medium for messages to be transmitted. I wish instead to consider objects as mediators, their meaning not being inherent in them or stable, but

instead emerging, changing, and dissolving as they are enrolled in action (ibid.); they do not only reflect processes of continuity and change but are part of them. Furthermore, by considering “the social” as formed by connections, and therefore always in flux, we must consider that rather than being inherently structured and hierarchical, medieval society was achieved through action. Social hierarchy was undoubtedly a feature of the medieval “social,” but it was achieved and maintained through action rather than being intrinsic to people. Therefore, we must consider the role of the material world in mediating status relationships and in creating and maintaining social status.

The concept of agency is of importance to us in considering continuity and change. In defining the “performance characteristics” of objects, Schiffer (1999) essentially equates the properties of objects with their agency. He specifies, however, that these characteristics are defined relationally and emerge through action (see also Conneller 2011). Although objects have a material durability that allows them to mediate continuity, this is only brought about if the connections made with them are maintained (Law & Mol 1995, 279). Conversely, human intentionality cannot be directly equated to agency, as it amounts to nothing if humans do not have the materials required to put their intentions into practice (Knappett & Malafouris 2008, ix). We can argue therefore that agency is not inherent in people or objects, but rather is temporary and spun through action (Whatmore 1999). Agency can be defined as distributed through an assemblage, with the process of assembly creating the possibility for a particular effect (or effects) to occur. The associations that construct “the social” at any one moment in time are fragile and fleeting (Latour 2005, 66). A social assemblage is therefore made durable by the maintenance of the associations between humans and nonhumans. Change can be conceptualized as the remapping of associations between human and nonhuman actors, the dissolution of once durable associations and the formation of new ones. The agency for change is therefore formed through a process of assembly; it is created by its initial formation and maintained through the constant remaking of the associations that hold it together. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with employing these ideas to consider the role of objects in the process of Normanization.

A CASE STUDY: POTTERY IN SAXO-NORMAN SOUTHAMPTON

The Norman Conquest is typically analyzed through a study of landscapes, be it changes to town plans (e.g., Palliser et al. 2000), the imposition of castles (Creighton 2002), or the reorganization of rural landscapes

(Sawyer 1985). Naomi Sykes’s (2007) study of the zooarchaeology of the Norman Conquest has added a new perspective, demonstrating that the Conquest had variable impacts upon people’s everyday lives. The relational approach outlined above can allow us to explore further this plurality of experiences of the Conquest. I will focus here on a specific case study, that of Saxo-Norman Southampton.

Late Saxon (c. AD 900–1066) Southampton was a new settlement that replaced the earlier *wic* trading site of Hamwic (see Figure 11.1). Excavations have revealed a dispersed settlement layout with a mixed economy based on trade and craft production (Platt 1973, 6), with some evidence of cultivation within the settlement (Jervis 2011b, 232–33). The town continued to develop after 1066. Domesday Book of 1086 records 96 newcomers in Southampton, the majority of whom were French (Golding 1994, 78). A castle was constructed in the northwest corner of the town, and it is in the western half of the settlement that the impact of the Conquest can be most obviously seen, with a “French quarter” emerging around the waterfront (Brown & Hardy 2011). This appears to have been built upon an existing immigrant community in

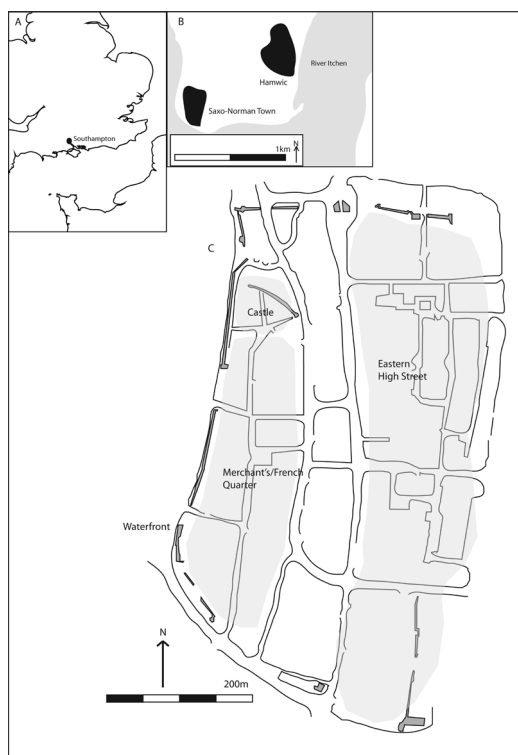


Figure 11.1 Location of sites mentioned in the text

Southampton, and cross-channel contact is clearly demonstrated within the ceramic assemblage (Brown 1994).

I will seek to explore the effect of the interactions between people and pottery in early medieval Southampton. These interactions will first be outlined against the backdrop of Southampton; in the following section, I will consider their role in the emergence of Anglo-Norman Southampton as a social assemblage. In particular, I will focus upon three key areas: exchange, use, and deposition.

EXCHANGE

Analysis of distribution patterns within Southampton and its region has revealed that several exchange mechanisms were in place. Most of Southampton's late Saxon pottery is locally produced Flint-tempered Ware (Brown 1994) (see Figure 11.2). It is probable that several producers were in operation, distributing their wares across Southampton. Regional products were also marketed in Southampton.

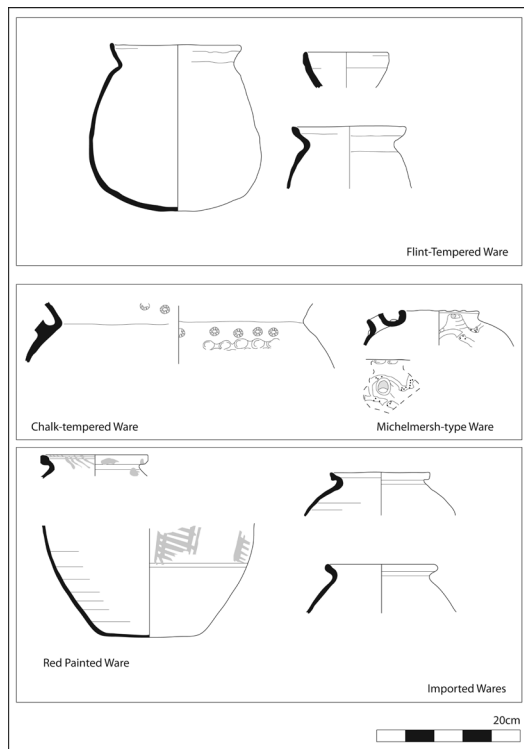


Figure 11.2 Examples of late Saxon pottery from Southampton (redrawn from Brown 1994)

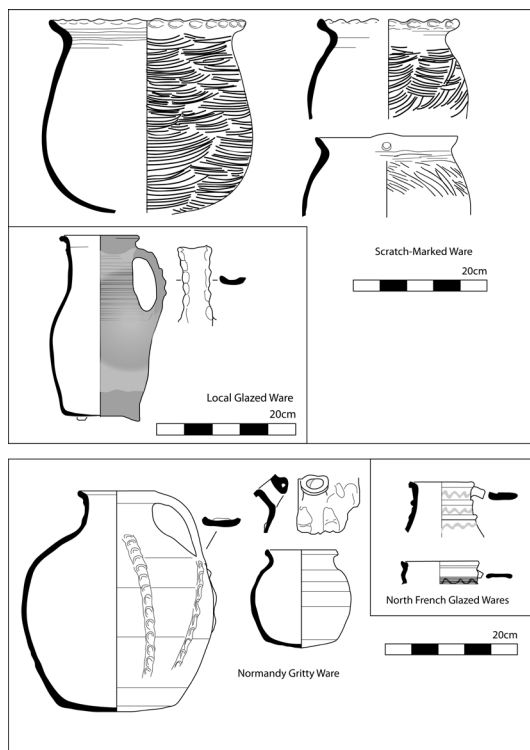


Figure 11.3 Examples of Anglo-Norman pottery from Southampton (redrawn from Brown 2002)

Michelmersh-type Wares produced to the north of Southampton and Chalk-tempered wares produced around Winchester were marketed widely. A market for imported (primarily French) wares also existed in Southampton. The most common wares are similar to those used in Hamwic (Timby 1988; Brown 1994); newer types, particularly north French red-painted wares have a more limited distribution, tending to be recovered from excavations around the waterfront.

The Anglo-Norman period sees the development of Scratch Marked Wares, similar in fabric and form to earlier local wares, but generally larger and characterized by the presence of scratch marking (see Figure 11.3). These were probably produced outside of the town and, although found across Southampton, are particularly abundant in the western, “French,” part of the settlement (see Figure 11.4).

In the east, the supply of late Saxon-type Flint-tempered Wares persists, at least in the years immediately following the Conquest, based on the composition of assemblages from post-Conquest features (Jervis 2011b, 113). The east shows some continuity in supply patterns, and a

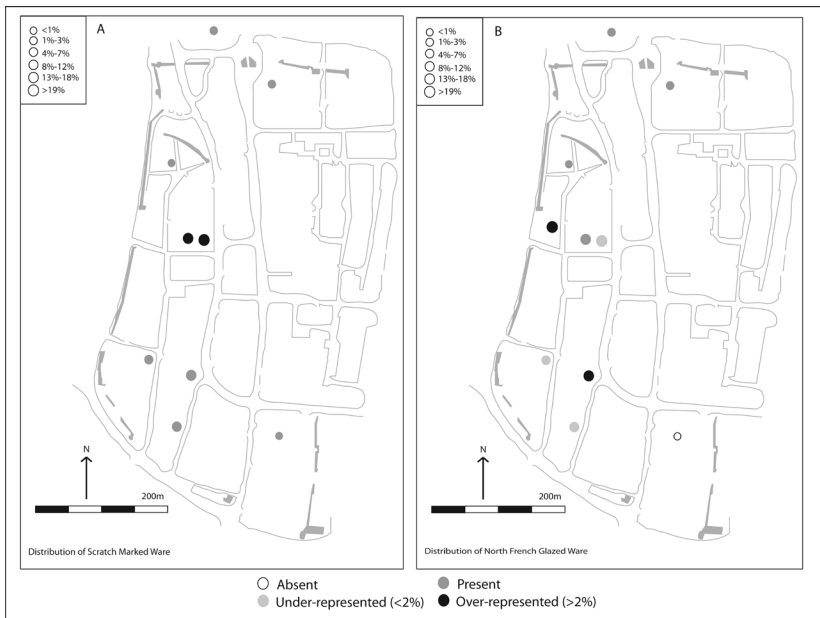


Figure 11.4 Distribution of Anglo-Norman pottery in Southampton: a) Scratch Marked Ware; b) North French Glazed Ware

market developed to supply the French quarter with a particular type of pottery. A market for regionally produced and imported pottery also continued to expand. The primary imported ware was Normandy Gritty Ware, a development of the typical late Saxon imported wares that was exchanged and used widely across Southampton. Locally produced glazed wares were exchanged in Southampton and filled a gap in the market for serving vessels, not catered for by the local industries (Brown 2002, 10–11). Other imports, particularly glazed wares from northern France, are rare outside of the French quarter; they appear to signal an ongoing importation of goods not available on the open market for the benefit of particular members of Southampton's population (Figure 11.4b).

USE

A program of use-wear analysis (the study of sooting patterns and indicators of physical and chemical attrition; see Skibo 1992) has further added to this picture of continuity and change (Jervis, in press). An analysis of cooking practices, based on sooting patterns, reveals major differences between the English and French quarters of Southampton (see Figure 11.5).

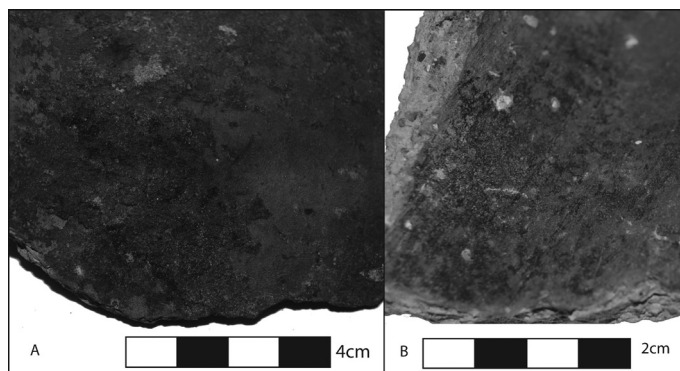


Figure 11.5. a) Black carbonised sooting on a late Saxon vessel; b) Glossy black sooting on a Scratch Marked Ware vessel

In the late Saxon period thick, carbonized sooty deposits are common, indicating that vessels were placed in, or close to, the fire. A similar cooking method was also common in the later phases of occupation at Hamwic (Jervis 2011a, 252). A small number of vessels recovered from the waterfront area, however, have a different sooting pattern. These are characterized by the presence of thinner, glossy sooty deposits, which suggest that the vessels were suspended over the fire. Among the Anglo-Norman Scratch Marked Ware this sooting pattern dominates. It appears that immigrants living around the waterfront used local cooking pots in a distinct way, favoring slower cooking, which would perhaps result in more tender meat. Contemporary north French vessels often have suspension holes built into them, suggesting that they were designed for suspension (e.g., Routier 2006), and a small number of Scratch Marked Ware vessels have been recovered with similar suspension holes (see Figure 11.3 above).

Storage vessels are present in both phases but increase in size following the Conquest, perhaps due to an increase in household size or to a changing relationship with the hinterland, which meant that more foodstuffs were available for storage in towns. A final function of pottery to be considered is serving. Late Saxon serving vessels are present in Southampton, but their provision increases during the Anglo-Norman period. These newer types were most commonly used around the French quarter (Jervis 2011b, 213).

DEPOSITION

The late Saxon period sees continuity in depositional practice from Hamwic, with waste typically building up onto middens before redeposition. A key difference however is the undertaking of horticulture

within the settlement, which leads to a more dispersed settlement layout (Platt 1973, 6; Jervis 2011b, 232–36). This period also sees an increase in secondary deposition into disused pits, which increases further in the Anglo-Norman period, particularly in the French quarter (Jervis 2011b, 223–26). These changes can be closely related to issues of class structure and urban topography (see below), and are perhaps amongst the clearest ways in which objects can be shown to be agents of change.

CONSIDERING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

So far I have mapped the associations between people and pottery in early medieval Southampton. We must now follow the courses of action formed by these associations, to explore how pottery came to be engaged in the processes through which the social assemblage of early medieval Southampton was shaped and maintained. In order to do so, we need to discuss two related themes: maintaining the social and building identities.

MAINTAINING THE SOCIAL

Towns can be considered as social assemblages, formed and constantly remade by the continued assembly of actors (Thrift 2008, 201). Pottery was one such actor, and continued engagements with it both brought continuity to Saxo-Norman Southampton, as well as mediating change. Objects act in two key ways to build durability into a social assemblage. Rather than being a property of an object, the agency to build durability emerges through action and therefore it can reform through repeated engagements with the same object or a string of similar objects (Jones 2007, 79). This agency is very much spun in the moment, the object fleetingly becoming a mediator before retiring, perhaps only temporarily, to an intermediary role. The second way in which objects build durability relies upon the ever-present material permanence of objects, which can continue to act for long periods even though the nature of this action may change over time (Law & Mol 1995, 279). In the case of pottery, a durable but portable artifact, this variation in the nature of agency is a matter of biography, with some engagements being short-lived and leading to the creation of fleeting agency, whereas the constant repetition of action with the same or similar vessels caused this agency to be constantly reformed and therefore to persist. Importantly, the agency to create multiple effects can be distributed through a given object at any one time, meaning that a pot can act in multiple and unpredictable ways depending upon the web of associations that have been formed with it.

Exchange activity is one set of associations through which towns were formed and maintained as social assemblages, with pottery playing a

clear role in mediating change in, but also ensuring the durability of, the associations formed through this activity. The agency for Southampton to function as a port was (and still is) distributed through a number of nonhuman actors: its strategic location, maritime technology, legislation, and the objects of trade. Therefore pottery, as part of the trade, played a role in making the market in late Saxon Southampton durable. Pottery did not possess the agency to remake Southampton. This emerged through the relationships formed with pottery as it was transported to the market and entered into exchange. Just as this agency emerged through exchange, so it disappeared following the transaction, being lost until it was formed again, with a new vessel, in the next moment of exchange. Exchange must be conceptualized as a process of assembly, the coming together of human intentionality and objects which is neither human- or object-led and which has implications for the durability of the place (or social assemblage) in which it occurs. A vessel only plays an intermediary role after the exchange, except perhaps in the case of a prototype that influences future exchanges or if the object breaks, forcing a new exchange to occur. The market's durability came to be mediated through multiple exchange events in which the agency for continuity and change was repeatedly spun. For example, at the beginning of the period the continued exchange of locally produced pottery had the effect of translating exchange mechanisms from Hamwic into the new town, remaking ties and translating elements of Hamwic's sociality into a new physical environment. A similar process was at work in relation to the market for imported pottery. Again, there appears to be a near direct translation of the port role from Hamwic to Southampton, although the intensity of trade was probably lower (Hall 2000). International trade was seasonal, but repeated trade and memory of this trade, cued by continued engagements with imported products, maintained Southampton's role as a port.

The exchange of local and imported products created continuity after the Norman Conquest. However, as new sources of pottery emerged, these ties slowly began to break. The formation of relationships with these products through exchange contributed to the emergence of a process of change that altered the economic landscape of Southampton, distributing the reach and certain functions of the town into the wider hinterland. Associations had always existed between Southampton and its hinterland, as proven by the exchange of Michelmersh-type and Chalk-tempered Wares in the late Saxon period, but as Scratch Marked Ware gained currency, associations between consumers and producers were remapped. Ties with local producers were cut and tighter bonds with the hinterland were formed, perhaps in part due to the reallocation of rural estates following the Conquest (Golding 1994, 68). It was here,

then, that we can locate some agency for change—in the flashes of action that constitute the exchange of these regional products.

A changing relationship with the hinterland, relating to the increased burden placed by landlords on rural producers, the growth of urban markets, and the strengthening of tenurial links (Golding 1994, 180; Dyer 2002, 74, 99; Sykes 2007, 37), can also be observed in the increased number of storage vessels present in Southampton. At a basic level, the material properties of pottery as containers allowed to distribute the agency for processes of exchange and storage; these processes could not be achieved by humans alone. The mediatory role of these vessels is more profound, since by acting as containers they permitted the reproduction of a provisioning system, or the formation and reformation of particular relationships (see also Knappett 2011, 87), which in turn engaged these vessels in the process of change. This is an important subtlety that demonstrates the varying nature of agency as the material durability of these vessels comes into play. Placing these observations into a wider context, we can begin to see how the agency for changing relationships between town and country in the post-Conquest period was not purely the possession of elites. Instead, it was formed in the assembly of a cast of actors, a process that formed and sustained the associations that not only comprised the provisioning systems but also allowed wealth and power to be generated and sustained.

Changing relationships between Southampton and its hinterland can also be explored through a study of waste disposal. In late Saxon Southampton, waste simultaneously acted to mediate continuity and change; the building up of middens directly cited and reproduced engagements with waste in Hamwic, whereas its redeposition onto garden plots introduced a major difference. This change in practice suggests a change in the mechanism of food supply, although the degree to which a tributary system was in place to supply urban populations remains unclear (Dyer 2002, 51; Astill 2006, 250). In the late Saxon period, waste, along with processing vessels,[2] came to be one of a number of material actors through which the agency for this changing relationship with the hinterland was located, as the settlement seemingly became more self-sufficient. Waste is an interesting actor. On the one hand, sensory experiences of waste mediated continuity, with the smell in particular likely cuing memory and familiarity. On the other, waste came to be a mediator of significant changes in the economy of the town, as it was drawn into a process of changing associations between townspeople, their rural counterparts, and their produce.

Further shifts in this relationship are demonstrated by the increase in secondary waste disposal in certain areas of the town around the Norman Conquest. Here waste did not afford production and was instead disposed

of, as these households were drawn into tighter provisioning relationships with Southampton's hinterland. Interactions with waste mediated status relationships, forming contrasts between groups who needed to practice horticulture and those who did not. The agency of waste emerged through interactions with it at the household scale, leading to the emergence of multiple conceptualizations of waste and engaging it in multiple trajectories of continuity and change.[3] A number of agents, including pottery, came together to cause change to flow through provisioning mechanisms. These changes overflowed (Callon 1999, 188), creating wealth in the town and causing changes in the treatment of waste, which in turn acted on the urban landscape and the townspeople, introducing difference and stimulating physical changes to the townscape.

From a ceramic perspective the period is notable for the emergence of jugs and tripod pitchers, used as serving and transport vessels. These vessels can be considered a product of the emergence of the Anglo-Norman household, which was in turn reproduced through their use. The post-Conquest period saw an increased division of the territory, which implied that the associations that supported the presence of large late Saxon pitcher forms (e.g., Jervis 2009, 69) dissolved and were replaced by a need for portable vessels. The agency for the emergence of these forms was distributed through the context of use, and continued engagements with these vessels made these new contexts durable. A new household network was created, the result of overflowing associations that created wealth and power and resulted in the formation of a distinctly urban Anglo-Norman social structure, formed as old associations dissolved and new ones emerged. Not only were these vessels the result of these processes, but they also contributed to the formation and maintenance of hierarchical relationships, creating a medium through which social relationships could be negotiated at the table. For example, within the context of Southampton Castle these vessels were likely used only on specific occasions, such as royal visits (Platt 1973, 13), when a series of actors were assembled who used these vessels to reinforce hierarchy through the order in which drinks were taken and the formation of relationships between servants and their masters. The agency to reinforce hierarchical relationships was not inherent in people but was distributed, emerging in the act of serving and in the interaction between humans, wine, and the physical context of the formal dining hall. For a fleeting moment the actors required for this process were assembled by the physical act of serving; jugs became involved in this process, their agency emerging and dissolving in an instant. Jugs therefore do not reflect high-status households but were rather involved, through temporary but repeated serving activities, in a process of social distinction. Distinction was also introduced through the exclusion of the majority of the population from these events.

A focus on a single class of object restricts the scope of any discussion. We can begin to show, however, that the changes observed in the ceramic record are not the result of a newly imposed social order. Instead, engagements with pottery worked to bring about both continuity and change. They created the agency through which associations with the hinterland were renegotiated and power and wealth could be created and flow. Therefore, throughout their usage life (and beyond), ceramic vessels had a direct impact on the materialization of the social assemblage of Southampton's urban landscape.

CREATING IDENTITIES

We have already considered how engagements with pottery were bound up in processes of identity creation in relation to status. A key area for investigation must also be the role of pottery in the creation of new identities, defined as the way in which people relate themselves to their surroundings. No single concept of a "Norman" identity existed (Johnson 2005, 86); we should think instead in terms of a "Normanized" identity, whereby people came to feel in some way aligned with a conceptualized Norman identity. Ceramic use, like exchange, happens in a fleeting moment; however, cooking practices in particular are commonly repeated, meaning that the associations built in the kitchen constantly contributed to the creation and maintenance of identities.

The continuity in cooking practices from Hamwic to late Saxon Southampton suggests that the repetition of domestic practices, particularly the recreation of sensory experiences, mediated continuity despite the settlement's shifting location. The practicing of different techniques around the waterfront, as well as a greater use of imported pottery, suggests that for some individuals (probably immigrants) the use of locally produced vessels mediated continuity by creating durable identities in a foreign location. Cooking was more than a mode of identity expression. The familiarity bred through the replication of experience is central to the maintenance of a sense of self (Sutton 2001, 74) and a sense of home, which emerged through engagements with utensils, foodstuffs, and spaces in the house.

In eastern Southampton this process of continuity appears to have extended into the earlier part of the post-Conquest period, with vessels perhaps facilitating an element of resistance, as well as continuity. Noticeably the vessels used are still closely related to late Saxon types, suggesting a tension between households in relation to the role of these vessels in generating feelings of familiarity and difference: on the one hand French households brought continuity through practice, and on the other English households mediated continuity through the use of familiar vessels. Processes of adaptation and adoption led to the

emergence of hybrid Anglo-Norman identities through domestic practice in Southampton, as engagements with ceramics mediated experiences of both continuity and change, which varied in relation to an individual's background (see Jervis, in press, for a more detailed analysis).[4]

When coupled with the changes discussed above, we can see that associations both within Southampton and between Southampton and its hinterland led to the formation of new structures of power and wealth materialized through differences in the topography of the town (including those related to waste disposal). Through the remapping of these associations, English practices and thus English identities came to be marginalized (see also Lilley 2009, 147). The agency for this marginalization was not possessed by inherently powerful individuals, but rather emerged through interactions between people and the material world, including the humble cooking pot.

CONCLUSION: THE NATURE OF CHANGE

This analysis has demonstrated that objects do more than reflect continuity and change; they are active in these processes. I have only scratched the surface in demonstrating the complexity of these processes, and further work, focusing on a broader range of actors, is clearly required. Close study can also inform us about the nature of change. Change is not a uniform phenomena; it occurs at different rates and generates multiple narratives. In relation to Saxo-Norman Southampton, for example, engagements with cooking vessels led to varying responses to the Norman Conquest, causing Anglo-Norman identities to develop at different rates. Similarly, changes to the market were the result of a slow remapping of associations rather than a fracturing of the existing "social." Objects contributed something distinct to the agency for change: on the one hand they were fleeting actors, causing change to occur in a single moment or contributing to a more gradual development; on the other, their durability gave them a special role in mediating changing relationships between Southampton and its hinterland throughout the early medieval period, as we have seen in relation to waste and storage vessels. Only by considering how the agency for change emerges through relationships between humans and nonhumans, rather than residing within individuals, can we begin to understand this process rather than simply acknowledge it.

NOTES

1. See Kyle (2012), however, on the Anglo-Norman Conquest of Ireland.
2. Use-wear analysis has identified distinct groups of late Saxon processing vessels. Similar vessels are not present in the Anglo-Norman assemblage (Jervis 2011b, 206).

3. Treatment of waste in this way can also be related to the expansion of the town, since waste needed to be treated in a way that was spatially efficient.
4. Contemporary historical sources confirm a level of interaction between English and French households and a relatively rapid process of assimilation (Golding 1994, 182).

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