

Theme 5

Import/Export

POTS AS PACKAGING: FROM THE LEVANT TO ALBION

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Syro-Egyptian alkaline-glazed fritware (or stonepaste) jars were exported to western Europe in the later Middle Ages. In the 14th and 15th centuries they were recorded as spice containers and associated with Damascus. Less well known is that the first examples of so-called ‘Raqqa’ ware have been found in north-west Europe in 13th-century contexts. Re-examination of the British finds of Italian Archaic Maiolica of this period show that they imitate both the form and decoration of the Syrian type and are almost unparalleled in Italy. This is an example of a ceramic substitution made for a foreign market. The small decorated jars found in western Europe suggest that we should consider the packaging and marketing of their contents – rather than just labelling exotic closed forms ‘luxury tableware’ – and the role of types within specific ceramic ‘ecologies’.