# 4. Everyday Objects. Making and Shaping Medieval Worlds

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It is intuitive to equate everyday matters with the mundane and perfunctory. Everyday objects should be run-of-the-mill, taken for granted and unremarkable. However, far from being banal, the cumulative consequences of everyday objects have a profound effect on what it means to be human at any particular place and time. Not only do the material affordances of ordinary objects dictate the possibilities of the daily round of activities, but alterations in the experience of everyday life over time can also be charted through changing attitudes to objects. These changes provide the framework around which this chapter builds a cultural history of everyday objects. Such a task, by necessity, goes beyond describing what these objects were, how they functioned and how they were made; it is just as important to consider how they shaped and were shaped by medieval worlds.

An 'everyday' object implies something that is not prestigious but common, belonging to 'low' rather than 'high' culture, and not reserved for festive or occasional use. Daily usage implies cyclicity, or a reiterative praxis through which everyday objects might become social agents. The efficacy of everyday objects is often obscured from us, as it lay in their sensory capacities, which are now mainly dormant since these items have become artifacts: the whir and rattle of a spindle whorl, the warmth and aroma of food preparation, the dry, smooth or cold tactility of earthen, wooden or glass vessels in the palm or against the lips, and the glimmer and jingle of metallic jewellery in the flickering light of a lamp. It is the repeated, inexorable and often wearisome immersion of people in these material worlds that lends a surreptitious potency to unremarkable objects.

'Everyday' approaches are attractive because they offer an escape from the more traditional narratives that tend to focus on elite life. They provide a window on lived experience, the focal point of which inevitably tends to be the household. But to approach such contexts in isolation from wider spiritual, political, social, and economic contexts would be a mistake, mainly because the medieval household formed the prevalent unit of consumption as well as production, in an economic, social, spiritual, and even biological sense (Gilchrist 2012: 114). That this more or less held true for the entire period provides a key characterisation of what it meant to live in a 'medieval' society.

It is with such contextualized households in mind that this chapter investigates the significances of everyday objects to those who used them, and how attitudes changed over time, particularly with regard to adapting cycles of production and exchange. A millennium is a long time, so our tour of each period will be brief, but a small number of artifacts will be considered in each of four phases.

The first part considers everyday objects in the mainly localized and rural contexts of the fifth to seventh centuries, which is followed by an exploration of the widening networks within which everyday objects moved during the later seventh to ninth centuries. The third part considers the ninth to eleventh centuries and the emerging urban and productive contexts in which everyday objects circulated. The fourth and final part of the chapter looks at the more radical changes brought by the twelfth to fourteenth centuries in terms of production and consumption.

**Rural life and the early medieval home**

The small clusters of farmsteads that framed most people's lives between the fifth and seventh centuries CE were only minimally differentiated. Their typical lack of specialist functions made for an especially dense entanglement of daily life with more remarkable events including religious and funerary rituals, all operating in the same highly local contexts. It is perhaps no coincidence, therefore, that excavations of both settlements and cemeteries of this period are known especially for their repertoires of quite ordinary objects. The everyday world of the living was not neatly circumscribed by a group of functionally specific items, but leached out into the funerary sphere, with everyday objects, such as knives, pots, and dress objects, drifting quite easily between the household and the grave. While we might assume that most objects in graves had spent some time circulating among the living, there are nevertheless indicators, considered below, that particular objects from this everyday spectrum were specifically selected for funerary interment.

The lack of specialized production sites indicates strongly that ordinary settlements were processing all kinds of materials from iron and bronze to bone and wood. Low-technology objects made locally from non-exotic materials dominated daily life in this period, such as handmade ceramics finished on open bonfires, relatively simple iron tools, woollen and linen textiles, and presumably a host of wooden objects that have left little or no trace. Yet there are notable exceptions: quantities of amber from the Baltic reached graves all over Europe (e.g. Hines 1994; Curta 2007). Perhaps even more surprisingly, elephant ivory purse rings are not unusual finds in cemeteries in the Rhineland, lowland Britain and at least as far north as the urnfields of Schleswig-Holstein (Hills 2001: 132). It is still true, however, that while most of this exotica is regularly found in graves, it is rarely recovered from settlements, suggesting it may well be overrepresented in these ritual assemblages.

Despite these exceptions, most objects used on a daily basis were made locally. The pots in which people prepared and stored their food, the metallic jewellery that adorned their clothing, as well as the clothing itself, were unlikely to have come from unfamiliar worlds. But in their make and form, such items possessed stylistic resonances over considerable distances. For instance, stylistic compatibility

between particular types of brooch regularly encompassed huge ranges, such as between the Crimea and Iberia. Something similar can be claimed for pottery around the North Sea. Although we assume the pots rarely made maritime journeys, the handmade ceramics found at most cremation cemeteries and farmsteads in eastern and southern England would not have looked out of place in Jutland, northern Germany, and the Netherlands (Hills and Lucy 2013: 314-20). These modest everyday objects intersected with grander narratives attesting to supra-regional identities and networks. If these stylistic resonances were actually comprehended, this wider world was regularly integral to domestic spaces.

**Knives and ironwork**

Supplies of fresh iron in Europe reduced dramatically in the fifth century. In the former Roman provinces, demand was at least partially met by foraging and recycling iron from depopulated urban spaces, attributing new levels of meaning to finished products whose past life in a now crumbling town may have been known (Fleming 2012). However, many places in Europe had ready supplies of naturally occurring iron, including southern Germany and Austria, southwest England, eastern Sweden, northern Poland and eastern central Europe. The critical deficiency appears to have been an infrastructure to extract the raw material, process it and distribute the finished products.

The most ordinary everyday iron objects were knives, found widely in graves in Europe. For instance, of the 149 women, men and children buried at Edix Hill in Cambridgeshire, England, 55 were interred with a knife, usually found at the hip where they were suspended from a belt or girdle. Knives not only traversed age and sex boundaries, but they also climbed the social hierarchy, being regular finds in *fürstengräber*, such as Krefeld-Gellep's grave 1782, in which a knife was found alongside bronze vessels, a gold- and garnet-decorated *spatha*, elaborate saddle ornaments, and a Byzantine silver spoon. As many as four knives were recovered from the famous Mound 1 burial at Sutton Hoo.

Knives served practical needs on a daily basis, and their ubiquity in graves suggests that daily, iterative use contributed to senses of identity, which is particularly vivid in the observation that longer blades tended to be interred with older individuals and males (Härke 1989). But acknowledging the daily rituals in which knives were regularly implicated suggests that there may well be more to knives than an assertion of status (Knox 2016: 257). Grave 61 from Edix Hill was dug for a woman in her late 20s or early 30s, and she was buried with a handful of beads and a knife that appears unremarkable. But that knife may well have been the one with which her adult children remembered her preparing food, or with which she trimmed the threads of her loom. Perhaps she carried this knife daily as an unspoken

declaration of her capability for self-defence and a symbol of independent personhood. Of course we cannot know, but these knives provide a remarkable a window onto the resilient relationship between individuals and their everyday possessions.

**Brooches and jewellery**

In contrast to knives, which could occur in male and female graves and settlement contexts, brooches and jewellery are found almost exclusively in female graves. The fact that up to about 40 percent of some English types were broken, repaired or exhibit some form of secondary alteration (Figure 5.1) suggests that they were cherished and used personal objects (Martin 2012: 56). Where most brooches were made is unknown, and scanty manufacturing evidence (such as a single mould fragment from a pit-house (sunken-featured building) excavated at Mucking in Essex, a handful of miscast or unfinished brooches, and fewer than 20 examples of lead casting models) alongside an artifact type whose known occurrences runs easily into the thousands seems paradoxical. Indeed, we are forced to speculate that their manufacture was sporadic and took place in the open air at ordinary settlements. In eastern Sweden the situation was different, and central places with probable royal links like Helgö left deposits choked with 1,000s of brooch moulds. Production of similar jewellery took place on a more modest scale at central places in Scotland, such as the Mote of Mark. However, these localized examples were exceptions, and such evidence of intensive craft manufacture tends to occur alongside signs of long distance exchange, a sign of things to come, but for the time being restricted to the elite tiers of society.

>>>>Figure 5.1 here

As with knives, layers of biographical significance led to the inclusion of brooches in graves (M. Martin 1987; T. Martin 2015: 129-60). Brooches made the social order, in which complex intersections of gender, age and regional identity were clearly crucial, visually prominent and corporeally tangible (Stoodley 1999). Indeed, specific types of brooch were closely linked with age, with some women still wearing the brooches gained in their adolescence in old age, with all the memories in tow. Grave 30 from Cleatham in Lincolnshire, for instance, contained a woman who had died in her later 20s or 30s, and she was buried in a large woollen cloak fastened on the breast with two large bronze cruciform brooches. Beneath this she wore a second cloak, fastened at the neck with a third cruciform brooch, which might have peeped through the closure of the outer cloak, but may have been hidden. Beneath this garment, certainly unbeknownst to assembled mourners except the very closest intimates who had had dressed her, she wore a *peplos* dress, fastened with two more cruciform brooches on the shoulders, which appear slightly

older in style, as if she had obtained them in her early teens (Martin 2016). A rare example like this permits us to unpick lost biographies, but similar scenarios are likely for most if not all graves of the period.

**Pottery**

We tend to think of early medieval pottery as coarse, poor in terms of its survival and relevant to only certain regions given that substantial parts of Europe were, for a time, aceramic. Accordingly, ideas of curation and longevity, portability, and large-scale production are less familiar topics in discussions of ceramic vessels of this period. Outside Merovingia, pottery was handmade in small volumes, in coarse and local fabrics fired at low temperatures, and probably not distributed at great distances from where it was produced. At the settlement of Mucking in Essex, England, sherds from just fifteen possibly Frankish vessels were identified over an occupation period between the fifth and the eighth centuries, a relatively large amount, and probably from the later phases of the settlement (Hamerow 1993: 22). Storage vessels and tablewares from north Africa and the Mediterranean, however, were reaching western Britain and Ireland in relatively low volumes during these centuries, replaced by Frankish wares in the later sixth and seventh centuries (Campbell 2007: 138-9), but only in modest amounts that could hardly be described as everyday.

The many thousands of urns recovered from the cremation cemeteries of eastern England and northern Germany may have had longer biographies leading up to their use as cinerary containers. These are the same wares that were described above as common throughout North Sea communities, where again they are found in both domestic and funerary contexts. Evidence of internal and external wear on a sample of these vessels from a cremation cemetery in eastern England indicated that many had been previously used for other purposes, and the wear patterns were consistent with brewing or buttering (Perry 2011; 2012). Furthermore, cremation urns are regularly found with lead plugs. Presumably, a hole had once been bored into an otherwise intact vessel, perhaps for the purpose of draining fermented beer from its lees, and then subsequently plugged as the vessel was repurposed. The distinguishing feature of vessels recovered from cemeteries is that they more often bear decoration: geometric and pictorial stamps, bosses, humps, and meandering lines. Meanwhile, the sherds from settlements are usually undecorated (Blinkhorn 1997: 117), as much as 98 percent at West Stow in Suffolk (West 1985: 128). Among the vessels arrayed in a household, these strikingly decorated vessels were not the most common, but they probably had specific function that made them suitable for funerary usage The reverse is equally true: knowledge that a particular individual may one day dwell inside one of these pots could have affected the otherwise quotidian activities that circulated around them. These were curated vessels, within

which the worlds of everyday domestic production and funerary preparations were blended, in a way that reveals something crucial about how everyday objects were shot through with a tangible sense of the ancestral or supernatural.

From these three examples, it is difficult to dismiss the dense biographical entanglements between people and everyday objects in the centuries that followed the collapse of Empire. Imperial infrastructures had facilitated the mass production, transport and exchange of everyday objects, and the former Western Empire looked somewhat different in their absence. Explanations for the tenacity of biographical entanglements must lie in the localized spheres of production that typify this period, and perhaps also in the ways that social status was being constructed more explicitly around age, gender and role-based statuses. These emergent means of social organisation involved everyday objects at every level. Such items, otherwise largely unremarkable, had been created and used in highly localized environments, were retained for long periods of time, and that may be why so many of them became densely entangled with everyday lives as well as deaths.

**Economic networks and entrepôts**

Over time the local networks of rural communities changed (see Tys and Dekkers this volume). By the seventh to ninth centuries specialized settlement types had multiplied in western Europe, and although they housed only a very small proportion of the population, their effects were widely felt. New types included small settlements with monumental halls, often with associated ritual enclosures as well as evidence for precious metalworking, and probably associated with emergent petty kings and their entourages (Høilund Nielsen 2014). Ecclesiastical centres also multiplied especially in the case of monastic foundations in northern Frankia, Ireland, and England from the early seventh century (Blair 2005: 8-49). But the most relevant of the new settlement forms to everyday lives may well have been the *emporia*, specialized centres for craft production and trade, located mainly around the North Sea, but with their equivalents around the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Adriatic (Gelichi and Hodges 2012). *Emporia* not only facilitated the dispersal of objects and raw materials over longer distances, but the incipient commodification of objects traded through them inspired new attitudes to the material world and disseminated new forms of knowledge about faraway places and their resources. These hubs of mercantile activity introduced new elements of economic and social choice when it came to the acquirement of not just exotic items, but also relatively mundane ones. In doing so, the *emporia* brought the presence of a much wider world into the daily lives of households. Furthermore, these entrepôts introduced new attitudes toward production and consumption. They attracted raw materials, such as horn and wool, and rendered them into finished products. They also recycled objects, such as glass cullet, and reformed them into new ones. The *emporia* were

therefore hubs for the transformation of materials, to which one might travel to obtain goods, exchange raw materials, or perhaps even partake in these processes of artisanal transformation.

Although the practice of interring everyday objects in graves continued in Scandinavia and around the Baltic, occurrences of ordinary items like brooches and knives declined substantially in graves elsewhere so that by the eighth century, only distinctly non-everyday items such as shrouds and stone structures accompanied the dead. The vast majority of everyday objects from this period therefore come from casual loss or refuse, quite different from the carefully curated funerary assemblages typical of the preceding centuries. On these grounds one might suggest a sea change in the way everyday objects were valued, comprehended and connected to personhood from the later seventh century onwards. An ontological framework distinguishing between alienable and inalienable objects provides a useful instrument for thinking about this change (Weiner 1992). In this period, relatively inalienable household goods, made locally by known individuals, created and redistributed through systems of patronage and gift exchange, and occasionally taken to the grave, began to be displaced by more alienable items obtained from outside, made by unknown individuals, obtained by barter or perhaps even monetary exchanges (see Tys and Dekkers this vol.). Quite what this meant for notions of objecthood is difficult to say, but the application of a value to objects that was more mutable, more transferable, and even transformational, marked a significant point of departure. The macro-economic consequences of this have been extensively explored (Hodges 1982; Wickham 2005; Tys and Dekkers this volume), the everyday and ontological less so.

**Lava quernstones**

Querns made from volcanic basalt from Eifel in the Rhineland represent one of the most unexpected objects to have flowed through long-distance exchange networks into everyday spaces (Parkhouse 1997). These lava stones were for hand-powered rotary querns, the kind of object used for milling the daily grain in any domestic context. Although these basalt lavas were an optimum material, it would certainly have been possible to make functional quernstones from locally available stone. It may well have been their strikingly granular textures and unusual appearance that made them distinctive and sought after in north-western Europe, bringing them in large numbers to *emporia*, where the volcanic basalt was at least sometimes imported as ‘blanks’ for transformation into a finished product, and dispersal into the rural hinterlands of the Netherlands, England, northern Germany, and Jutland (ibid.: 101).

Although various other exotica had been in circulation around Europe for centuries, it tended to be small and often played a role in personal display (e.g. amber, see above). The proliferation of lava querns shows an incipient desire for utilitarian objects that would efficiently accomplish everyday tasks as well as being from an outside world. Despite the long distances these stones traveled, they were hardly exclusive. At the modestly high status rural site of Brandon in Suffolk, decades of accumulated debris yielded more than 52 kilograms of fragmented lava quern (Tester et al. 2014: 276), revealing something of the increasingly disposable and alienable qualities of everyday objects. Obtaining an object like a lava quern had become more of a social and economic choice, presumably not available to everyone, but not restricted to an elite. The new availability of such items, and the fact that they became central to quotidian tasks heralds a modest adjustment in the medieval mindset, drawing new linkages between the mountains of Mayen and, for instance, the downs of west Suffolk. The quern itself would have had a strong sensory presence in the household: the distinctive rasp of its jagged grinding faces, the aroma of freshly milled flour, and the tiresome but necessary expenditure of effort leading to aching limbs. Such everyday experience may well have been largely subconscious, but it nevertheless quite literally brought parts of a much wider world into otherwise unremarkable domestic environments.

**Pottery**

*Emporia* were not just entrepôt; they also produced goods in modest volumes. One innovation of eastern England in the later seventh century was the re-establishment of permanent ceramic industries, the earliest of which was on the outskirts of the *emporium* of Ipswich. Ipswich ware was made on slow wheels rather than by hand, fired in kilns rather than bonfires, and was produced on a scale not seen in Britain since the Roman industries of the fourth century. The ubiquity of Ipswich ware in eastern England, and broader dispersal as far as Yorkshire and Kent, attests to its popularity, while its roughly equal presence at sites up and down the social scale attests to its utility rather than its prestige (Blinkhorn et al. 2012: 70, 99). This more consistent and durable pottery not only represented an economic choice and a form of social display, but its dispersal created links between the domestic routines of preparing, serving and storing food and drink, and the wider world of the Ipswich potters. This pottery summarizes a host of transformations: from clay to vessel, from mart to household, and from raw foodstuff to one cooked, both literally and metaphorically (Lévi-Strauss 1969).

Despite the declining popularity of local coarse wares, which virtually ceased by the end of the ninth century (Hinton 1990: 60), the Ipswich potters imitated its forms, and occasionally even decorated their pots with similar stamped ornament (Blinkhorn et al. 2012: 65). It seems counter-intuitive that these metropolitan potters

would not be dictating fashion, but instead their wares were made to fit around pre-existing tastes, betraying the everyday *habitus* as a force of structuration even on something as fluid as clay on a potter's wheel (Giddens 1991). At the same time, people were made to fit around pots. As much as 18 percent of the ceramic assemblage recovered from Hamwic was imported (Andrews 1988: 90), and spatial analysis of these wares at the *emporia* reveals micro-histories of persistent differences between particular zones, some of which obtained more imported wares than others (Jervis 2011). This distinction is made even more obvious between residents of *emporia* and those of the rural hinterlands, who had access to very little imported pottery. The distinctions seem subtle or even superficial, but we have to immerse our perspective in an everyday world where some pots had a pleasing if alienating machine-made symmetry, while others bore personalities in their bulges and wobbles; some glimmered above a fire in a matt grey-white, while others were the same brown that could be found in the local fields. Some even spoke with a different resonance upon rapping with a wooden spoon (Schiffer and Skibo 1997). In this way the everyday activities that circulated around things as mundane as stewpots created senses of 'home' as well as probably some of the most immediately felt emerging distinctions between urban and rural spaces (Ibid.: 256), even if these distinctions were but a nascent division in Northwest Europe at the time.

**Coinage**

Coins have been discussed in the previous chapter as a type of economic object, but these items, in the fifth to seventh centuries were also frequently worn as objects as well. While the vast majority of coins repurposed in this way were old Roman issues, contemporary continental coins were also being perforated and worn on necklaces and perhaps on clothing. In this way coinage might operate in both personal and economic spaces, and it seems, contribute to the display of female identity in England and in Frankia and beyond.

During the 5th and 6th centuries, numerous mints in Gaul, Spain, and Italy continued to issue late Roman gold currencies (Grierson and Blackburn 1986). Although their use as a form of currency was largely limited to southern Europe, coins such as the *tremissis* occasionally traveled beyond the Rhine and into southeast England, where they were fitted with loops or perforated to be worn as pendants: a behaviour that would stubbornly continue even once a local currency was more firmly established (Scull and Naylor 2016). In 7th-century England small numbers of *thrymsas* (imitations of the Continental *tremissis*) were minted, but these high value coins were never everyday objects. However, by the end of the seventh century in Frankia and beyond, gold coinage was largely replaced by silver *sceattas*, and it is these coins that had a more widely felt effect on everyday life

around the North Sea, being used regularly at the *emporia* with which they were virtually synonymous.

Issues of *sceattas* were often highly localized, among which the so-called 'porcupine' series found all around the North Sea is exceptional (Grierson and Blackburn 1986: 149-50). More typical are the local series associated with East Anglia, Northumbria, Sussex, and Wessex another centred on the Danish *emporia* at Ribe (Metcalf 1993: 275-9; 1994). Although these regional tendencies may well have contributed to senses of identity or belonging, very few of these early coins bore the names of mints, let alone kings, and we are faced instead with a bizarre range of icons that include pecking birds, twisted serpents with claws and jaws, glaring moustachioed faces, and a plethora of indecipherable shapes and symbols (Figure 5.2). In fact, upon close examination, Christian emblems dominate, making *sceattas* instruments of conversion, or even "sermons in miniature", not through complex intertextual exegesis demanding a literate audience, but through familiar images such as birds nesting in vines, that had both a biblical and everyday significance (Gannon 2003: 182-8; 2009). Coins would put these sermons in the hands and purses of everyday people, forging new senses of identity bound up with the Church and sometimes the king and other moneyers.

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These examples show how the flourishing of the *emporia* wrought far-reaching transformations by changing the perceptions and uses of existing object-types, introducing new kinds of objects and with them the resonances of new places, into everyday contexts. One could also argue that it was an awareness of these objects and demand for access to the wider world that led to the success of *emporia.* These new sites, and the traders and craftspeople that moved through them, caused a modest shift in how domestic spaces were read, and how the objects within them related to external worlds, some well known and regularly visited, others foreign and exotic. However, it was still true in most places that the majority of everyday objects were not manufactured in *emporia* nor obtained via their trade networks. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, coastal and maritime networks of local and regional exchange and trade provided the backdrop for these larger entrepôt and ports of trade (see Tys and Dekkers this vol.).

**Objects, towns and markets**

The later ninth to eleventh centuries in Northwest Europe witnessed the growth of towns beyond the size and complexity of the *emporia*, requiring mounting agricultural surplus and other raw materials, which could only be gained by maximising rural production. Though this would have altered and intensified the daily rounds of rural populations, archaeologically speaking there are no dramatic

differences between the kinds of everyday objects recovered from rural and urban contexts. Nevertheless, during these centuries towns came to monopolize certain aspects of everyday life, becoming the central places for regional production, exchange and bureaucracy (Loveluck 2013: 328-30). The overall similarity between urban and rural assemblages, therefore, was a result of the intrusion of urban products into everyday rural spaces, increasingly supplanting the role of domestic craft production.

In terms of everyday activities, the later ninth to eleventh centuries were probably characterized by a shift from homogenous everyday lives for a population formerly engaged only in subsistence agriculture, towards specialized communities of practice (Wenger 1998), specific to the various industries that took place in and around towns. Growing specificity is reflected in the products of these industrious communities: everyday objects, increasingly made by specialists in urban settings, catered for a demand for items with fewer but more precise functions. This is most obviously seen among an emergent range of vessel forms specific to particular modes of food preparation, storage and consumption, all newly available from urban markets. This new range of vessel forms (described below) transformed methods of preparing and consuming food into more complex and materially codified rituals. Whole architectures and settlement structures were altered by these new arrivals, as they heralded the advent of kitchens, with food preparation no longer always taking place at the centre of the single-roomed living spaces typical of the previous centuries, but now occasionally having its own set-apart space. It is difficult to tell how far down the social hierarchy such distinguished practices traveled, but sites like Faccombe Netherton in Hampshire came equipped with an ancillary building housing three hearths, allowing for the preparation of complex meals, no doubt to be served in the appropriate array of vessels inspired by the latest Carolingian fashions. The arrival of such meals may well have been presaged by sumptuous aromas elevated by more complex culinary methods than the broils and broths of previous centuries (Gautier 2012). Meanwhile, the occasional urban deposit choked with the bones of cattle and sheep indicates that urban centres like Oxford hosted specialist commercial butcheries: a practical consequence of pasturage becoming increasingly distant from the town (Dodd et al. 2003: 45). Furthermore, it is no coincidence that this period was the first in which insular fermentations were flavoured with bittering and aromatic hops, a more exotic import doubtlessly available at urban markets (Fenwick 1978). Senses of taste in this period therefore took on a more literal meaning, but they were also expressed through the growing economic and social choices provided by everyday objects and their newly urban contexts of their production and exchange (Hinton 2005: 162).

**Pottery**

From the tenth century onwards, urban markets became the main suppliers of pottery to both town and country dwellers, and this wrought significant changes again to what it meant to obtain a set of vessels as well as to eat or drink food from them. There were several major urban pottery industries in the northern Midlands of England, though one way or another, the technology for this kind of industrial production came from the Carolingian world (Dunning et al. 1959). New urban markets made novel forms of pottery available with much more specific forms linked to their function, including cooking pots, bowls, and dishes, but also spouted pitchers and jugs, spouted and socketed bowls, costrels, and other kinds of bottle, alongside large and various storage vessels. Being relatively low-value products, these ceramics had localized distributions around their centre of manufacture, generally of only about 30 miles (Hinton 1990: 84). Stamford ware, however, was an exception, and has been found throughout ninth- to thirteenth-century England, if concentrated in Lincolnshire and the East Midlands (Kilmurry 1980: 155-6). Just one part of its popularity was the suitability of its fabric for refractory purposes, which also made it an apposite product for domestic lamps (Figure 5.3). The reappearance of domestic lamps should not be underestimated, as they not only hint at rarely considered aspects of material comfort, but they also allude to alterations of nocturnal routines. Three such lamps recovered from a tenth- to eleventh-century smithy in Berkeley, Gloucestershire reveal how the availability of not just lamps but also their fuel (in this case an animal-derived lard) enabled new production regimes (Blinkhorn et al. 2017). We can muse on how different arrays of textiles, pottery, and metal tools must have looked at night in the steady glow of an oil lamp as opposed to a dancing open fire, and how less smoky and acrid some such settings may have been as a result of this new household technology. Many Stamford ware vessels had a glossy lead glaze, creating an arrestingly shiny impression against the earthen matt backdrop of most domestic vessels, textiles, wood, and plasterwork, changing what had been a material associated with the earth into something cleaner and almost metallic or glassy. Such pots allowed some of the glamour of the Carolingian world to permeate even the dampest, coldest and drabbest domestic spaces of rural England.

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**Decorative metalwork and jewellery**

Following the relative paucity of decorative metalwork in the eighth century, the ninth to eleventh centuries brought in a wide range of dress accessories including brooches, strap-ends, pins, and horse gear. In particular, the rise of relatively new materials for the manufacture of everyday dress objects is instructive. For instance, the much more frequent use of colourful enamel cell-work on brooches brought shimmering splashes of green, blue, red, and yellow to dress, popular throughout the eleventh-century Ottoman Empire, and the dispersal of these fashions beyond to

England shows a resurgent taste for international fashions, echoing those international tendencies of earlier periods (Buckton 1986; Weetch 2014: 102-116).

On the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, the innovative mass production of brooches in softer, cheaper, greyer lead alloys tells a different story. These cheap and relatively crude disc brooches, particularly popular, for instance, among the residents of eleventh-century London, could be decorated with designs borrowed from coins (Weetch 2017). While coins had been a perennial feature of dress in medieval worlds since the fifth century (see above), their imitation in lead leads us to question whether these were necessarily symbolic of wealth, or whether the iconography of beading, pellets, and a host of crosses, were the actual currency, symbolic of belonging to a much larger Christian world, exploited by both coinage and dress objects. Like the enameled brooches, lead-alloy disc brooches embody the metropolitan nature of eleventh-century fashions. They also reveal the intensification of a supply and demand economy and its impact on everyday dress as an affordable, mass-produced media rapidly met the obvious demand for international fashions in a manner that would not have been possible in earlier periods. These brooches did not necessarily ape whatever the elites of eleventh-century London were wearing, but instead represented a cutting-edge and democratized urban fashion in their own right (Ibid.: 274). They represent changing definitions of taste and choice at the turn of the millennium, which are hard to discern in earlier periods. Moreover, their occurrence in urban rubbish deposits betrays a disposability that was worlds away from the carefully curated, beaten up and repaired brooches placed in graves five centuries earlier.

**Rural and urban: daily life and play**

Continuing urban development across the twelfth to fourteenth centuries resulted in dramatic change. The rise of a bureaucratic infrastructure was led by rapid developments in the spread of literacy (see Jervis and Semple this vol.), which may well have began to displace the role of everyday objects as the primary and authoritative repositories of memory and the past (Clancy 2013; Jervis and Semple this volume). Expansion, centralisation and the continued diversification of productive industries meant that the range and absolute quantity of everyday objects bourgeoned, a development intimated by the incipient commercial products of the previous period. Towns became central to flows of raw materials and products as well as people, who regularly left their rural homes in their adolescence to find work in cities. Due to the proliferation of urban environments and the regularity of travel to local markets, the circulation of everyday objects, perhaps counter intuitively, became more localized (Hinton 1990: 138-9). In terms of the places in which everyday objects were created, premiums on urban space along with the growing scale and mechanisation of production caused some industries to leave

towns, again altering the pathways and values of their products, and creating much more complex and dynamic entanglements of places, objects and people as raw materials were brought to industry, the products of industry were brought to urban markets, which drew in increasingly large flows of people. One might therefore predict that these new trajectories of everyday objects contributed to the creation of distinctly urban as opposed to rural assemblages, but the rate of travel was such that their respective assemblages continued to show surprisingly few differences (Egan 2005; Standley 2013: 17-26). Indeed, the quantity and range of material known from rural Meols, a maritime settlement on the Wirral in northwest England, virtually matches that recovered from London (Griffiths 2007; Gilchrist 2012: 29-30; see also Tys and Dekkers this volume on the opportunities for coastal and maritime communities to access commodities).

**Textiles and dress**

Following the relatively subdued dress of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, thanks to urban markets and mass production, dress accessories became more abundant and widely available in the centuries that followed (Hinton 1982; Lightbown 1992). Indeed, by the end of the fourteenth century dress had changed quite dramatically incorporating a much larger number of metal accessories, including buttons, pins, lace tags and brooches, re-making the medieval body with a new and provocative sexuality (Standley 2013: 60-1). Young men had shortened their tunics to reveal more of their legs, and lengthened their shoes into absurd *crackowes*: both somewhat unsubtle statements of uncontainable virility (Gilchrist 2012: 99). Even more crudely, ballock daggers – knives with overtly phallic hilts, hung at waist level – reduced metaphor to simulacrum and became regular accessories (Nøttveit 2006). More soberly, an entirely new category of dress item emerged in the form of badges, sewn to the clothing and indicative of service to a lord in the case of livery badges, or piety in the case of those picked up at holy shrines and other pilgrim destinations (Spencer 2010). This rise in the importance of personal display, the wider availability of jewellery, and the social opportunities and anxieties to which this gave rise, are all betrayed by the simultaneous emergence of sumptuary laws throughout Europe during the thirteenth century, dictating what materials, colours, and styles of dress were appropriate to specific ranks (Hunt 1996). Everyday as well as courtly dress therefore was not just a symbol of the increasing social hierarchy in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, it was a crucial medium for the everyday corporeal enactment and even attainment of rank (Hinton 2005: 217-8).

The daily rounds of activities in rural households changed considerably during this period, most obviously as a result of the increasing power of landlords and their interest in maximising agricultural production on their estates. In England, attempts to force the peasantry into using a lord's mechanized mills led to a ban on hand

querns. The removal of these simple rotary stones from households epitomize the ruthlessness with which elites exerted their dominance over everyday lives, excising the centuries-old domestic routine of grinding grain and all its labours, noises, and associated debris from the domestic habitus (Hinton 1990: 154). Another victim of the pursuit of profit was the household loom, a ubiquitous inhabitant of the medieval homestead, this time since the fifth century. The disappearance of loomweights from archaeological sites throughout Europe from the eleventh century onward is therefore a striking indication of the dominance of industrial-scale horizontal looms (Pritchard 1984: 67). These looms required greater skill and more space and along with the mechanisation of fulling processes with water-driven mills this meant that the textile industry also vacated urban environments to increase the efficiency of the process in rural ones (Hinton 1990: 141).

This watershed moment ended the household's ability to furnish its walls and beds with textiles, as well as clothe its inhabitants, who now relied on urban markets. Newly alienated from their domestic productive contexts by mass production, the everyday significance of clothing changed accordingly. It is estimated that just one year was now the normal length of time for which a garment was kept, and this is indirectly attested by the huge numbers of dumped leather shows recovered from London (1,500) and York (220, Gilchrist 2012: 82, 237). Some garments or textiles, however, were still kept for long durations, occurring in wills as heirlooms. However, they tended to be those invested with significance through secular or religious ritual, such as wedding girdles exchanged in marriage, or the special items of bedding or furniture brought into a household through dowry, or else were exotic or valuable items such as silk hairnets (Ibid.: 248). In other words, special and non-everyday ritual performance now created resilient bonds between people and textiles, whereas previously such inalienable bonds may have been built by their context of production as part of everyday household labour.

Nevertheless, some aspects of textile production remained a domestic concern. Although loomweights and pin beaters disappear from the archaeological record, spindle whorls remain common, indicating that the basis of this industry – the production of yarn from raw wool – was dispersed among many thousands of households (Standley 2016: 273), taking place both rurally and in towns, with sites such as Coppergate in York yielding as many as 75 spindle whorls (Ottaway and Rogers 2002: 2986). Spindle whorls were idiosyncratic objects, often made opportunistically from bone, stone, and recycled or purpose-made ceramics (Egan 1998: 255-61). The lead spindle whorls of the medieval period are relatively rare thanks to the more complex processes behind their production, but those of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries are interesting for their decoration and particularly their frequently blundered inscriptions, featuring incantations, specifically references to the Virgin Mary (Standley 2016: 282-3). In contemporary literature and art, the act

of making yarn is quite explicitly linked with Mary, the thread symbolising the life of the Christ Child. These spindle whorls therefore provide a remarkable example of the link between everyday tasks and small acts of everyday devotion. The fact that these spindle whorls occasionally turn up in graves of the period only heightens their intimate associations with the home and with particular individuals (Gilchrist 2008: 132-3).

**Toys and games**

There is also growing evidence for the extensive production of toys. Though this may have something to do with the fact they were now frequently cast in cheap metal alloys rather than organic materials, it may also mark a significant change in how childhood was conceived. From the age of seven children began to partake in gendered labour, including textile and ceramic production and military training (Gilchrist 2012: 146). But up to this age, children were regularly involved in play. Somewhat alarmingly, up to about 60 percent of individuals that died below the age of six according to English coroner's rolls, died during 'play' (Ibid.). While this raises questions as to precisely what many of these games involved, historically and archaeologically attested toys are relatively innocuous. Spinning tops are known from the eleventh century onwards (Orme 1995: 51-3), and a surprisingly large quantity of 'buzz bones', whirring discs spun between tensile thread, have been found in some quantity at rural and urban sites in England (Gilchrist 2012: 149). Some of the most intriguing items known from France, the Low Countries and England from the thirteenth century onwards, however, are base-metal miniaturisations of everyday objects and base-metal figurines (Forsyth and Egan 2005).

Most examples of such toys fall into two clear categories: mounted nights and household vessels. The knights are consistent and dated by their dress styles. The various miniature vessels are dated similarly, as they mimic the latest fashions, including tripod ewers and baluster jugs from the twelfth century onwards, followed by pear-shaped jugs and cauldrons in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Figure 5.4). From England, the vast majority of these items have been gathered from the Thames foreshore, indicative perhaps of the kinds of peripheral locations in which children played (Egan 1998). If the soldiers were meant for boys and the vessels for girls, then their educative nature is manifested as instruments for the schooling of medieval gender-normative behaviour. However, we lack contextual evidence to support this assumption, despite what we suppose to know about medieval gender roles. Regardless of their potential gendered associations, the specific vessels that were mimicked are revealing, being mostly jugs and ewers, the centrepieces of medieval tables, and vessels that were also status symbols (Ibid.: 63). Such items represented the identity of the household itself, as they could often be kept for

exceptionally long durations of time, sometimes even outliving its residents of any one time (Gilchrist 2012: 151). Furthermore, domestic vessels were the everyday objects around which domestic rituals revolved: the household was partially defined and drawn together by daily routines of food sharing as well as seasonal feasts. The miniature vessels with which grubby little hands mimed the pouring and supping of ale and wine imitated those that were set on the table, and it was this surreptitiously potent connection between the miniature and its model that guided the child's mind in the imitation of, and education in, adult responsibilities.

>>>>Figure 5.4 here

Mass or bulk-production resulted in new ranges of everyday objects, and with them new senses of value and social behaviours including strategies of presenting rank, demonstrating loyalty to a cause or lord, and expressing piety. Objects were the causes of these cultural shifts, as much as they were results of them, and this becomes all the more clear when one considers the agency with some objects in particular were attributed. The ability of objects to affect change is most obvious in the case of objects inscribed with prayers, but children's bodies and minds were also trained by toys, just as masculine sexuality could be enhanced by cuts of garment. Despite the mounting commodification of everyday objects, their resilience as social apparatus is remarkable, and this is partly due to the powerful rituals of marriage exchanges and Christian observances in which they were entangled. The powers of objects may well have been exploited and manipulated in new ways, but as the examples from earlier centuries have shown, these everyday powers of mundane items were by no means new.

**Conclusion**

The difficulty with everyday objects is that they are easily transported into extraordinary contexts, and it is from such contexts that objects are usually recovered: preservation in archaeological strata or museum collections is not an ordinary outcome. Because our evidence comprises an incongruous mixture of the lost, broken, curated, and sacred, biographical trajectories are preeminent in any consideration of everyday objects (e.g. Smith and Watson 2016). Consequently, *everyday contexts* and the objects that happen to flow through them have provided the connecting threads between the material cultures that have populated this account. This miscellany of medieval objects has also been held together by a narrative about the changing settings of production and exchange, the implications of which have been principally biographical: when and where an object was made, and how different scales of knowledge and familiarity with these places impacted on the meanings and agencies of everyday objects and their settings (see Gilchrist 2012: 242-51). For instance, one of the principal themes has been how the various objects

that flowed through medieval domestic settings inspired changing conceptions of local and wider worlds. In this sense, everyday objects encapsulated a form of knowledge about the world, as well as a physical medium through which thought and practice could be articulated.

It would be tempting to surmise that this process was linear, and suggest that the story medieval everyday objects have to tell is all about a widening world whose growing interconnectivity permitted resources and products to flow with greater ease through domestic settings, leading to the construction of Europe as a conceptual entity and the consumerist revolution of modernity itself. However, presupposing that both of these things existed in some inchoate form to emerge in the Early Modern period would be teleological and unnecessarily linear. As the above account has shown, the ebb and flow of exotic materials into domestic spaces varied in a non-linear manner over these centuries, and a consideration of these processes requires delineation between several different kinds of foreign objects: from ones produced outside the household, to those made in towns, to those imported from known or unknown locations much further afield. Instead of a narrative of change therefore, perhaps it would be more accurate to reflect on the persistence of the everyday space and the roles, meanings, and values of the objects that populated it. With that in mind, one can see, for instance, very little meaningful difference between a fifth-century pot used daily for churning butter that later became a cinerary urn in pre-Christian cemetery, and a fourteenth-century spindle whorl used daily for spinning yarn that ended its life as a grave good in a churchyard. Both attained very special and ritual if, not specifically religious, meanings through everyday, quotidian use in domestic settings. Certainly, this was partially impacted upon by factors regarding where the pot was made, or who inscribed the whorl with a magical charm, but in the end both of these objects fulfilled a similar role in making the domestic space a home, and guiding their users along certain pathways of thinking about that home and its inhabitants, whether they were material or human.

Is there then, somewhere in this material cacophony of everyday medieval objects, a pattern that reveals a stubbornly medieval attitude to the world and its everyday grind? There are, at least, some recurrent themes or contexts. One of those, as stated in the introduction, is the persistence of the medieval household as a singular unit of consumption, production and reproduction. If the household provides the crux of meaning and value to everyday objects and the actions that animated them, it would appear that this only started to dissolve in the later medieval period, when the flourishing of productive industries caused domestic spaces to become populated largely by imports from external sources. Such goods changed households because they displaced domestic products and changed daily cycles of domestic labour. While by this point many everyday objects came from local markets, their manufacture had formerly populated domestic interiors with

sounds, smells, aches and pains, the gratification and pride of a task accomplished, and lessons learned from failure.