Richard Delage (INRAP): Sigillata, workshops and technology: a review

In the last 50 years, research on sigillata's workshops in Gaul has evolved considerably. Many new workshops have been identified. Those which were already known have been subjected to archaeological investigations which sometimes revealed periods of activity that had not been previously recognized. In addition, laboratory research opened new fields of knowledge. Thus, the history of terra sigillata's craftsmanship is now considerably more complex, even though a large amount of data are not yet published or appear in a wide variety of publications.

This paper provides a synthetic overview of current knowledge and evidence. First, we will try to document the production of terra sigillata in Gaul through seven major phases between the 1st century BC and the 5th AD. The workshops involved, their importance, the phenomena of commercial/economic influence and competition will be discussed to show how this craft evolved within Gallo-Roman society.

Second, we will address a fundamental aspect of current research: the connection between different “qualities” of sigillata ware, technology, and distribution strategies. There appears to be consistency between these different parameters, which can help understand the potters’ choices and contribute to the knowledge of this craft in Gaul.

Penelope Goodman (Department of Classics, University of Leeds): The production centres: settlement patterns and spatial organisation

The settlement context of sigillata-producing workshops in Gaul was surprisingly diverse. Production had centred around major cities in Italy, but in Gaul it could be found from an early period based in settlements as different as the newly-founded colonia and provincial capital at Lyon and the relatively modest vicus at la Graufesenque. The pattern continued throughout the period of Gallic production, so that the north-eastern centres included a flourishing colonia (Trier), a well-appointed spa town (Luxeuil), small hamlets such as Chémery and frontier out-posts such as Rheinzabern.

The size, character and status of the immediate host settlement, then, appear to have had little influence on whether or not sigillata workshops would develop there. Nevertheless, potters appear to have preferred to situate their workshops in an established settlement, however modest; and usually one which was already home to other forms of artisanal production. The industry therefore developed in response to existing settlement patterns, rather than generating new ones in its own right. Once established, though, it can frequently be linked with significant
changes in the character of the host settlement, as at Les Martres-de-Veyre or Lezoux.

Established settlements were of course already associated with land and water transport routes, as well as being able to provide the basic everyday goods needed by the potters themselves. The attractions of particular settlements to immigrant potters can be explained to some extent by the availability of clay, wood and water and the quality of their transport connections. But these are rarely so outstanding as to make their choices obvious, even if an interest in the general area is pre-supposed. How problematic we consider this to be depends on whether we imagine that potters were thinking from the start in terms of large-scale production and long-distance trade, or were simply aiming to satisfy a local market, and enjoyed wider success as a fortuitous secondary consequence of this. Meanwhile the extent of collaboration which clearly occurred in the sigillata industry would have meant that once one workshop was operating from a particular settlement, the attraction of establishing others there, or in neighbouring settlements, would have increased dramatically for both immigrants and locals.

At the production centres, the sigillata workshops generally occur on the periphery of the main settlement nucleus: a pattern also found in Italy at Arretium and Pisa. This can be observed at major cities like Lyon and smaller towns like Vichy or Luxeuil; although too little is known of many of the smallest production settlements to be sure of their spatial organisation. Traditionally, it tends to be regarded in the case of major cities as the result of active local policies intended to separate industrial from residential land use. But this view does not tally with frequent finds of all types of workshops, including potters’ kilns, within urban boundaries in Gaul and elsewhere. Meanwhile, in smaller settlements we might ask who would have the interest or the power to enforce such divisions. It is more likely that the position of the sigillata workshops reflects the character of their relationship with the host settlements. While the settlement’s consumable goods and transport links were important, a need for space and access to the resources of the wider landscape mitigated against complete integration into the settlement nucleus.

Silvia Radbauer (Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna): The Roman Terra Sigillata-production of Westerndorf (South Bavaria, Germany)

The Terra Sigillata Workshop of Westerndorf which is situated near the modern Rosenheim in Southern Bavaria (Germany) is one of the most important production centers of Fine Wares in the late 2nd and 3rd centuries throughout the Danubian Provinces. The new monographic study is based upon the researches achieved by J.v. Stichaner, J.v. Hefner, K. Kiss, H.J. Kellner, G. Streitberg und D. Gabler (Kellner 1981; Gabler & Kellner 1990). An important contribution since the study of H.-J. Kellner was accomplished through the comprehensive investigation of excavation records and material (about 70,000 fragments) with the aid of new specific methods of the survey of fabrics and analysis, partly in interdisciplinary cooperation with geologists, specialists in mineralogy and applied ceramic technology. Important new results were achieved in the interpretation of the find spot near the city centre of Westerndorf. Recent emergency excavations brought to light - instead of the up to now postulated workshop area - the clay deposits used for the production of the pottery. The excavations are therefore interpreted as dumps resulting from the infilling with waste from the pottery workshops of the pits from which the clay was obtained.
The pottery from these deposits was investigated with the help of new, specially
developed methods. The most important achievement was the establishment of a
reference collection both of fabrics and of raw materials, which will allow the
identification of the products of Westerndorf, at the same time, distinguishing
them clearly from and between the pottery produced in the workshops of
Pfaffenhofen, Rheinzabern and Schwabegg. (cf. paper 2; Gassner & Radbauer
2003). This method allows the production of specific classifications of shapes,
name-stamps and series of decoration. The new classification follows an open
system which can be extended. The developed typology and quantification
enables us to recognize both production – specific shapes and the focus of the
production, and potter specific characteristics. In addition new name-stamps and
variants could be added with the help of an explicit provenance analysis. Six
independent working mould-producers could be distinguished through a
thorough study of the relief-fragments and detailed studies of the individual
motives. The studies resulted in a comprehensive catalogue of shapes, decorative
motifs, name stamps and schemes of decoration, which will be the basis for
provenance studies in the different archaeological sites as well as further detailed
studies, for example, the question of the Wandering potters (Hartley 1977). A
second focus of the study concerns the chronology of this production, which is
based upon the analysis of the material of relevant contexts in the Danubian
region. The find spots are summarized in a tabular form and illustrated in a
distribution map (Eschbaumer & Radbauer 2008). Through comparative studies
the relationships between the different workshops of Westerndorf and those of
Lavoye/Argonnen, Helvetien, Rheinzabern and Pfaffenhofen could be determined.
This has led to a revision of the theory of a foundation as an affiliate of
Rheinzabern. The new data enable us to draw a more precise picture of the
export, its chronology and the economic development within the Danubian
region (Gabler 1983).

D. Gabler, Die Westerndorfer Sigillata in Pannonien. Einige Besonderheiten ihrer

D. Gabler - H.J. Kellner, Die Bildstempel von Westerndorf II, Helenius und Onniorix,
Bayerische Vorgeschichtsblätter 58, 1993, 185-270.

P. Eschbaumer - S. Radbauer, Ausgewählte Fundkomplexe aus dem Tempelbezirk der
orientalischen Gottheiten in Carnuntum (Ausgrabungen Mühläcker): Methodische

V. Gassner - S. Radbauer, Produktionszuweisung bei Terra Sigillata durch
Scherbenklassifizierung. Xantener Berichte 13 (Mainz 2003) 43-75.

B.R. Hartley, Some Wandering Potters, in: J. Dore - K. Green (Hrsg.), Roman Pottery Studies
in Britain and Beyond, BAR Suppl. 30 (Oxford 1977) 251-261.

H.-J. Kellner, Die Bildstempel von Westerndorf. Comitialis und Iassus, Bayerische
Theme: Chronology and distribution

Allard Mees (RGZM) and Marinus Polak (Radboud University, Nijmegen): Chronology and distribution

Time and space are two key dimensions of Names on terra sigillata. Space is represented by the sites at which stamped and signed vessels have turned up. Time is represented by the dating of potters’ careers and individual dies, which in their turn depend on so-called ‘dated sites’.

Allard Mees will look into time and space at a global level: the distribution through time of the stamps over the Empire. This will produce insight in general marketing areas and the rise and fall of kiln sites. Marinus Polak’s interest is more geared towards the regional and local level: trying to get to grips with the history of individual sites or regions by looking at how the chronological distribution of their stamps differs from that of other sites or regions.

Exploring space involves exploring time: the chronology of potters’ careers and stamps is an essential factor. There is an element of circular arguing in dating stamps by looking at their occurrences at sites which are (partly, largely, entirely) dated by the stamps occurring there. Flaws in the dates will influence any conclusion in which chronology is a factor. Therefore, it is of extreme importance to test the validity of the dates. It may be possible to shed some light on this by performing a spatial analysis of potters: ordering them on account of their spatial distribution. The resulting arrangement will ideally be chronological, or, more realistically, contain elements of chronology. A second path may be the listing and checking of ‘dated sites’, or rather dated contexts, and inspecting their use (or not) in the dating of potters and stamps.

What might come out of this?

1) A discussion of dated contexts and their implications for the dating of potters and stamps in Names, in its present form, and if that may be improved, how to do that (condition: change the dating systematics only after the appearance of Vol. 9, the entire corpus should be consistent).

2) Presentation of (if it produces any sensible results) a spatial analysis of potters (and perhaps stamps) from the viewpoint of building up a chronology without any pre-fabricated date concepts.

3) Analysis of some exemplary regions and sites to acquire insight in the amount of individual variation within the general spatial and chronological patterns, and in the value of Names on terra sigillata for historiography, whether political, social or economic.


At first sight coins would seem to be reliable dating evidence. But all too often the difficulties they present are overlooked; by archaeologists and numismatists alike. For example, the dating of many issues is uncertain or contested; the date of issue does not necessarily correspond to the date a coinage arrived in a particular area; and some Roman coinages could stay in circulation for more than 200 years.
Recently Klaus Kortüm published a theoretical model that employed finds of coins to (re-)date the construction of the Limes in Germany to the reign of Trajan, calling the traditional Domitianic date into question (K. Kortüm, Zur Datierung der römischen Militäranlagen im obergermanisch-rätischen Limesgebiet. Chronologische Untersuchungen anhand der Münzfunde. In: Saalburg Jahrbuch, 1998, 49, 5–65). As a result some specialists are concerned that the accepted chronology for terra sigillata for the late-1st/early-2nd century AD needs to be corrected.

This paper will address three aspects of the use of coins as dating evidence, in particular for the dating of terra sigillata. First of all Kortüm’s work will be examined. It will be shown that while his conclusions may well be correct, they are based on an unproved, theoretical model. Furthermore, there are serious methodological difficulties with the material upon which his study is based, as well as how he applies his model to this material.

A second section will take a more general look at how coins can be used as dating evidence and some concrete examples from the early Empire of the difficulties they present, as well as cases where coins are indeed reliable: in particular the controversy over the date of the abandonment of Haltern and the battlefield site at Kalkriese; the dating of Hofheim; and the withdrawal of the garrisons from the Agricolan forts north of the Firth-Clyde line.

Finally some examples of recent work (e.g. by F. Kemmers, S. Martin, M. Peter) that have combined coins and ceramics as dating evidence will be examined. Far from coins providing a firm foundation for ceramic chronologies, it will be shown that numismatists often have to resort to pottery in order to date (the deposition of) their coins.
Theme: Consumption and distribution

I. Provincial:

Peter Webster (University of Cardiff): Samian, soldiers and civilians in Roman Wales

Who bought samian? What samian did they buy? It has long been clear that less samian was bought by those living on rural sites than by those living in towns. Studies by Stephen Willis have further suggested that there are differences in the proportions of samian to coarse pottery found on military sites, in the civil settlements attached to those sites and in towns. It is unlikely that this is due simply to the amount of money available for purchasing samian (Willis found, for instance, that rich villas used proportionately little more samian than other rural sites). It presumably reflects, therefore, what the occupants of each category of settlement regarded as their samian needs. To try and determine just what those needs were and what the different classes of people were doing with their samian, requires an understanding of the forms in use, their function and changes across time.

This study will use the samian from selected sites within the fortress and civil settlements at Caerleon and the civitas capital of Caerwent to test the variability of samian demand and usage. A preliminary look at the available evidence suggests that the following sites/settlements would provide the chronological and functional range needed for the study:

Caerleon, Prysg Field Barrack F. A fully excavated barrack.
Caerleon Prysg Field Rampart area. An industrial zone.
Caerleon Museum Site. An officer’s house.
Caerleon BT site. A ‘taberna’ or store area.
Caerleon, Bear House Field. The western civil settlement.
Bulmore. A subsidiary settlement within the territorium of the legion.
Caerwent Forum/Basilica
Caerwent, Temple site
Caerwent Shops site.
Caerwent, Courtyard House (Insula I, 28N).

Taken together, these assemblages should enable us to see if there are any distinct differences between the samian in use on the military and civilian sites or between various buildings of different function in either. The basis for discussion for each site will be a complete quantified list of forms found and their area of production. Histograms will show vessel numbers across time. Where possible the more detailed information available only from the stamped vessels will be used to provide a check on chronological variations. Discussion will concentrate on differences between sites, chronological variations and functional inferences.

The overall aim will be to identify the suite of vessels deemed necessary by soldier and civilian and by different types of people within each of those categories.

Steven Willis (University of Kent): Supply and consumption of samian ware at villas and other rural sites in Britain: an examination of site evidence and general trends
Samian studies were founded on scholarly attention to the large assemblages recovered in the past from military and urban sites. Collections from villa sites were, surprisingly, less well studied. More recently changes in the nature of archaeological work mean that collections of samian from various types of rural site are more often available for study, enabling us to discern patterns in the supply of samian to these sites and to investigate its use in rural milieux. If samian consumption in the countryside was not previously well characterized, can we now see typical villa assemblages? Is there a tiering of supply of samian to rural sites reflecting their status and identity as defined by other attributes (such as size, building material, structural elaboration, other finds, etc.)? What use for samian ware did the people of the farmsteads of Roman Britain have? This paper considers these questions through comparison and attention to the detail of some specific site groups. Economic and social questions follow: what does the supply and use of this fine ware in rural contexts tell us about the market systems, consumer attitudes and practice, and the participation of ‘the countryside’ in the material life of the province.

Dénes Gabler (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) and András Márton (Eötvös University Budapest & Université de Bretagne Occidentale, Brest): Names on terra sigillata and stamps in Pannonia

With the publication of the fifth volume Names on Terra sigillata has reached halfway through the alphabet. It is thus possible to review about 2050 potters stamps recorded from Pannonia and their contexts and offer a new synthesis. While Pannonia does not have a comparable chronology to that constructed from the sequence of military establishments in Britain to provide close dating of the potters stamps, the destruction levels associated with the Marcomannic and Sarmatian wars and the patterns of distribution allow certain problems to be resolved. Thus, in the case of forts well dated by building inscription potters stamps entered into circulation either a little before or during the occupation of the fort in question. Certain assemblages which can be linked to the Marcomannic or Sarmatian wars, such as the deposit from Tác (Gorsium), can provide a fixed point to date potters represented in them. Other deposits uncritically linked to historically documented events, such as that from the civil town of Aquincum, have to be set aside.

The pattern of the circulation of sigillata in Pannonia can make another important contribution. For example, the importation of pottery from Lezoux was completely replaced by the production from Rheinzabern after the Marcomannic and Sarmatian wars. We can therefore hypothesise that all production from Lezoux arrived before AD180. The importation into the province of terra sigillata, as has been convincingly demonstrated through the decorated sigillata from Vindobona, declined considerably after 235. One could use this observation to date Rheinzabern potters well represented in Pannonia.

In the second part of the paper we will try to determine from the potters’ stamps the organisation of the sigillata trade. How many potters have contributed to the trade to Pannonia? Are some potters better represented than others? Can we detect whether certain potters preferred to work with traders active in the Danubian markets, or, alternatively, whether there are very productive potters who are absent from Pannonia?
Macarena Bustamante Álvarez (University of Cadiz): Gallo-Roman sigillata in the Iberian Peninsula: economic and social aspects

In this paper we analyze the Gaulish sigillata trade in the Iberian Peninsula. We will consider the impact of this type of pottery, which was one of the most popular types of tableware in the early empire, both in relation to trade, and also to issues of style and taste in Hispania. Sigillata and its contemporary imitations are also evaluated.

Catarina Viegas (University of Lisbon): Red in West: consumption patterns of Gallo-Roman sigillata in southwest Lusitania (Portugal)

This paper aims to discuss the rhythm of imports and the consumption patterns of Gallo-Roman sigillata in southwest Iberia, mainly in the area of the Portuguese Lusitania.

The studies on the chronological distribution of terra sigillata from different origins (Italian type sigillata, Gallo-Roman, Hispanic, African and Late Phocaean) allowed the analysis of the economic evolution of both rural and urban sites during the Roman Period. Most of the Gallo-Roman sigillata in this province has its origin in the southern Gaul, mainly in La Graufesenque, and the rhythm of imports can be accessed by the chronological information established by the potters’ stamps, the plain as well as the decorated forms. The objective is to present the available data on the patterns of supply and economic trends related to the imports of south Gaulish sigillata and compare with the recent data from the research undertaken in the Roman urban centres in the Algarve. The results are discussed in a broader frame of the provincial interdependence and take into account the imports of amphorae and other products.

Geoffrey Dannell: Aspects of the marketing and distribution of samian

This paper discusses aspects of the marketing and distribution of samian, based on the data contained in NOTS Vols 1-4:

The apparent customer preference for marbled samian in the Mediterranean area

The differential routing of exports through the two major ports of Narbonne and Arles

Micro-distribution of samian in discrete geographical areas

The object of these studies is to stimulate new ways of looking at the data, rather than to provide explicit answers to questions, given that the data-set is incomplete. The evidence of the choice of transport routes is related to river and road networks, with some attempt to interpret the decisions made by those in the distribution chain using competing resource allocations, within an overall economic environment.
Martin Pitts (University of Exeter): Global imports in local contexts: comparing Roman samian and Chinese porcelain in NW Europe in the 1st and 17th century AD

Recent research on the Roman transformation of north-west Europe has placed increasing onus on imported ceramics (especially samian ware) in providing insights into the experience of social, economic and cultural change (e.g. Woolf 1998; Wells 1999). In particular, contextual studies have highlighted the role of imported suites of vessels as indicators of changing consumption practices, including the acquisition of Roman styles of consumption, in addition to the possible continuity of elements of pre-conquest foodways (Cool 2006; Pitts 2008). The association of such pottery imports with the arrival of other mass-produced commodities from the Mediterranean world, notably wine and olive oil, has led to several parallels being drawn with 17th century Europe (e.g. Reece 1988; Cool 2006), when a similar trend for the importation of Chinese blue and white porcelain coincided with the spread of tea and tea-drinking. Despite the gulf of over a millennium, there are numerous points of correspondence between the importation and use of ceramics in each historical setting. Not least is the observation that in both contexts, the consumer trend began among the upper echelons of society, with relatively low-cost mass-produced goods being imbued with value and meaning far removed from their original contexts of production and circulation. Similarly, both types of ceramics became much more widely used at all levels of society in later generations, signalling changes in the role of such ‘consumption technology’ as social and cultural indicators in each period.

Consequently, this paper investigates the extent to which the consumption of Chinese porcelain in 17-18th century Europe forms a suitable comparison to inform current interpretations of the social role of samian ware and other imports in Roman NW Europe. Emphasis will be placed on the comparative analysis of changing patterns in the supply and consumption of Chinese export porcelain using a wealth of available evidence, including assemblages excavated from shipwrecks and domestic contexts, and contemporary written accounts.

Cool, H. 2006. Eating and drinking in Roman Britain. CUP.


II. Barbaricum

Klára Kuzmová (Trnava University): The occurrence and context of terra sigillata finds beyond the frontier of Noricum and Pannonia

The intensive contacts between the Romans and the Germanic tribes of Marcomanni and Quadi in the territory north of the Noric-Pannonian frontier (current SW Slovakia, S Moravia and N Lower Austria) are also evidenced by numerous finds of terra sigillata. Their presence in Barbaricum was strongly influenced by contemporary political, economic and cultural conditions. The quantity of terra sigillata indicates that it most frequently crossed the frontier by long-distance and local trade. The trade was conducted through two important transcontinental communications which crossed in the Middle-Danubian region:
the south-north Amber Route and the west-east Limes-Road. These roads were connected with local and regional, overland and probably also water routes. Historical sources as well as archaeological finds and find-circumstances allow us to assume that besides exchange and trade there were other ways in which terra sigillata was coming to the territory outside the Roman Empire (via military and civilian activities, in form of a gift, as subsidies, as plunder, and as part of the equipment of Roman troops). The Danubian border zone and its military forts (particularly Vindobona, Carnuntum, Brigetio and Solva) as well as the presence of the Roman army in the barbarian territory played an important role in the mediation of this tableware. The occurrence of terra sigillata in Barbaricum definitely depended on the military supply to the frontier.

The majority of terra sigillata found in the territory settled by the Marcomanni and Quadi came from the western provinces. It was manufactured in La Graufesenque, Banassac, Lezoux, Rheinzabern, Westerndorf, Pfaffenhofen and Schwabmünchen as well as in Argonne and North-African workshops. From the quantitative point of view, the pottery was mostly imported from Gallia, Germania Superior and Raetia (Lezoux, Rheinzabern, Westerndorf and Pfaffenhofen). Except decorated bowls (Drag. 37) also plain wares – dishes (Drag. 18/31 and 32) and cups (Drag. 33) belonged to the most popular forms. Terra sigillata occurred in the heterogeneous milieu of Barbaricum. It belonged to the equipment of Germanic settlements as well as to the inventory of cemeteries and of cremation and inhumation graves – both the standard ones and those of aristocracy. Besides ordinary barbarian villages it has also been evidenced in areas of the so-called Roman “stations” – civilian settlements, where both Germanic structures and objects and Roman or Roman-style buildings and provincial products have been uncovered. From the chronological point of view, the most intensive pottery trade went on between the middle of the 2nd century and the first third of the 3rd century AD. However, the beginnings of the regular terra sigillata import are datable to the late Flavian Period and the influx came to a close around the middle of the 3rd century AD.

Lubomira Tyszler (University of Lodz): Terra sigillata in Poland: workshops, context and chronology of importation

Identified vessels mostly come from workshops of Central Gaul, from Rheinzabern, Westerndorf and Pfaffenhofen. Vessels from Italian, south Gaulish and Argonian workshops arrived in small numbers or single. The time of influx covers the 2nd half of the 1st century and especially the 2nd half of the 2nd century and the 1st half of the 3rd century or the 2nd tertia of the 3rd century.

This pottery was found at over 173 sites of several cultural units. The community of the Przeworsk Culture, occupying southern, south-western and central Poland, was most important in the use of terra sigillata vessels (85% of sites, c. 93% of estimated general number of vessels). In the Przeworsk Culture vessels are mostly found as equipment of the dead (78.5%) in different burials, less frequently are found in settlements (19.3%). In its original function of tableware terra sigillata was used especially in the upper Vistula in Little Poland, where it first of all occurs in settlements. This situation was mostly influenced by the neighbourhood of south-western Slovakia inhabited by the Quadi.

Terra sigillata vessels found as “graveware” were put into the graves as a whole, mostly in pieces (burnt through or partly burnt) in cremation graves (pit, layered, and other places). In case of cremation, they were put more or less incomplete, according to the pars pro toto rule. Provincional-Roman contacts with barbarian communities were conditioned by political events and socio-economic processes.
taking place in the Roman Empire, as well as in Barbaricum. For the areas to the north of the middle Danube most important were successive stages of strengthening the limes, long-lasting clash between the Romans and barbarian tribes, so-called Marcomannic wars and years of economic prosperity under the Severus dynasty. What should be emphasized is that dynamics of influx of decorated vessels (especially Drag. 37) in the 2nd half of the 2nd century and the 2nd half/ 2nd tertia of the 3rd century into the areas of Moravia and south-western Slovakia inhabited by the Marcomanni and Quadi, and into the areas to the north of the Carpathians and the Sudetes was very similar. However, in Poland, in the closing stage of terra sigillata supplies a considerable predominance of vessels from Pfaffenhofen workshops is marked out.

On the areas northwards of the middle Danube an influx of so-called plain tableware (Drag. 18/31, 32, 38, 54 and others) was different. In south-western Slovakia the percentage of these vessels, coming from workshops of central Gaul, Rheinzabern, Westerndorf and Pfaffenhofen is c. 30-36%. In Moravia it reaches 14.7%, and in Poland barely 3% of total number of vessels from all the centres (including southern Gaul).

Dispersion of imported vessels on the areas to the north of the Carpathian and the Sudetes indicates their influx through communication arteries of widely understood amber route joining the Danubian areas with the Baltic coast. However, it should be emphasized that pottery of terra sigillata type generally was not connected with far-reaching amber trade. These vessels, but in small number, reached the areas of northern Poland and the Baltic coast. Well-organized network of local communication routes was of considerable importance in the wide distribution of terra sigillata, especially on the area of the Przeworsk Culture.

Mariana Egri (Institute of Archaeology and History of Art, Cluj Napoca): Sigillata in Barbaricum: comparative models of consumption

The study brings into discussion the ways in which sigillata tableware, mostly of Italic origin, arrived and was used by some indigenous communities from the region between the Sava and middle Danube basins before and immediately after the Roman conquest. The analysed assemblages or single finds come from a variety of settlements, cemeteries and cult places, dated between the Late Republican and the early Claudian times.

The aim is to propose and compare some models of early sigillata consumption in Barbaricum, which may contribute to a wider analysis concerning the impact of Roman material culture over the indigenous populations during the period of rapid expansion in the mentioned region.

Not only the quantity and the range of forms varied significantly from a population to another, but also the mechanisms through which such objects were distributed and then adopted by local consumers. All these aspects were influenced by a series of factors like the access to production centres and main routes of distribution or the level of contacts with the Romans. In certain cases even the morphological characteristics played a role, so a few forms probably were preferred because of their apparent similarity to some indigenous vessels. The question is whether the arrival of sigillata tableware led to the adoption of Roman dining practices or these vessels were fully integrated into the local ones.
Gwladys Monteil (University of Nottingham): Sizes in production, sizes in consumption

1. Dining with samian - samian sets and services

The following contribution proposes to give a brief overview of samian forms and terminology and explore the idea of samian sets and services for each samian industry. The existence of samian services and the presence of discrete vessel sizes have long been recognised. Particular groups of samian vessels have been termed ‘services’ by several samian specialists (Loeschcke 1909, Vernhet 1976, Webster 1996, Polak 2000). Some pairs or groups of samian forms have been found in equal quantities in warehouse assemblages from London and seem to have been imported as ‘sets’.

The existence of samian services suggests a highly formalized and complex idea of dining. Yet this idea requires further investigation particularly on consumption sites. A detailed survey of samian vessels, their ratios and size will highlight the complexity of dining arrangements in a range of sites in Britain and Gaul.

2. Sizes in the different industries

While size information is available for first century South Gaulish vessels (Tyers 1993, Polak 2000), such data on second century samian from Central and East Gaul are still lacking. Particular attention needs to be paid to these later groups since they hold the key to understanding the chronological changes in sizes and eating habits (Hawthorne 1997, 1998). Progress towards gathering information on sizes for Central and East Gaulish vessels has been made (Monteil forthcoming) but more work is needed. Two main sizes of Central Gaulish cups seem to exist and they are larger than their South Gaulish counterparts. While this could point towards an increase in the sizes of samian cups produced through time, East Gaulish cups are closer to South Gaulish examples in terms of diameters than contemporary Central Gaulish examples. East Gaulish Dr33 examples are noticeably smaller than Central Gaulish ones. By using stamped material from London, Colchester, the Oswald Collection in Nottingham and elsewhere, the analysis will enable a greater understanding of chronological changes in forms and sizes.

Datasets:

- London-several groups have EVEs, rim diameters and potters stamps ID
- Colchester-CAR10 catalogue has EVEs, rim diameters and potters stamps ID
- Oswald Collection from Nottingham has rim and base diameter, EVEs, stamps ID, height.

3. Testing the notion of service in samian assemblages in Britain and Gaul - the consumer point of view

While standardization of samian vessels is often seen as a consequence of the rationalization of a semi-industrial production, the issue of sizes in consumption groups and their implication remains relatively understudied. Sizes ultimately relates to function, use and eating habits.

Data from a range of site- and context-types in Britain and Gaul: farmsteads, larger rural sites, towns, military, vici and cemeteries will be exploited to explore consumer choices and the chronological changes in samian forms ratios, vessels sizes and eating habits.
The view that culture evolves is not new. Charles Darwin alluded to the evolutionary mechanism of cultural change, but it was not until the publication in 1976 of Richard Dawkins’ The Selfish Gene that the connection between culture and Darwinian evolution was made explicit. Cultural information is transmitted through communication or other media and spreads by being copied or imitated. A variation in that information, if favoured or selected, results in the evolution of an aspect of culture. Dawkins called these bits of information memes. Analogous to genes, the units of natural selection, memes are units of cultural selection.

Romanists have largely remained untouched by memetics, yet cultural selection provides an elegant mechanism for the emergence, persistence and evolution of traditions in the Roman world. Pottery is an ideal material with which to test the theory, dealing with types and traits that can so easily be equated with species and adaptations. Samian is particularly useful, comprising a range of types that had currency over a long period within the samian industries and were imitated by potters outside them, including British potters. This paper examines typological changes in samian through a Darwinian mechanism. We can recognise evidence for gradual, imperceptible, changes in vessel shapes, identify how information was transmitted down and across generations of potters, and suggest that the emergence of British imitations was a form of speciation, which allowed imitations to develop along their own trajectories without further reference to the prototypes.
Alex Mullen (University of Cambridge): Names on terra sigillata

Introduction

Onomastics is an essential component for the wider understanding of the names on terra sigillata. Names are linguistic entities, though onomastics is often marginalized from mainstream linguistics, partly due to the complex issues surrounding naming practices. Cross-culturally names are markers of identity and onomastics of ancient societies is most successful when an interdisciplinary approach is adopted. Samian ware has long been the preserve of archaeologists and this project presents an opportunity for cross-disciplinary co-operation.

Origins of names: continuity and change

The corpus of over 5,000 entries allows us to study a large number of names from a defined context. On a basic level it may be possible to assign origins to the names and to map continuity and change in choices between Latin and Celtic names. Though it is often impossible to assign exact origins to potters, broad analyses of the nomenclature at production sites over time may indicate regional preferences. Particularly important in this regard is the persistence of Celtic names at certain sites, e.g. Lezoux, and the interpretation of this phenomenon within the wider linguistic landscape. The La Graufesenque graffiti provide excellent material to illustrate the negotiations of names and identities which may have been part of the daily routine of other sites. Several potters appear to have two names, one Celtic, one Latin, and the choice of adopted names and the contexts for their use are important.

Formulae and filiation

Since traditional Celtic naming practices differ from those of Latin, the naming formulae and filiation employed with the names can be revealing. The stamps offer less scope for such analysis than lapidary material as the majority of the names are presented individually. Nevertheless some more complex formulations are found, though their interpretation should be approached with caution.

Linguistic information

The non-onomastic elements of stamp legends are largely restricted to formulaic phrases, and it is notable that these never employ Celtic terms such as au(u)ot. The names themselves can provide linguistic information, however. For instance, features such as the distribution and frequency of Celtic versus Latin desinences may be a clue to persistence of Celtic identities, if not Celtic languages.

Final remarks

Linguists are often reluctant to treat inscriptions on objects which are regarded as specialized archaeological material. These publications are an invaluable resource to which linguists should be encouraged to add their interpretations.
Theme: Iconography

Joanna Bird (Guildford): Samian in religious and funerary deposits: a study in choice

Samian ware circulated widely in the north-western provinces, and it is a reasonable assumption that virtually everyone would have had access to it, even if only at a seasonal fair or market. However, only a few shops that sold samian have been identified, and it is at present impossible to assess how much choice was available to the consumer at the point of purchase. It is equally impossible to show that particular vessels were bought with their ultimate deposition definitely in mind, but I would like to consider to what extent certain kinds of ritual activity provide evidence for the deliberate selection of samian, whether as a new purchase or from stock already owned. A small amount of evidence for the commissioning of specific pieces for religious use will also be examined. The available evidence is likely, by its very nature, to be patchy and inconsistent, and there may well be local and regional variation, but it is hoped that an attempt to understand the selection of samian for ritual purposes may illuminate some of the ways in which samian, and particularly its iconography, were perceived by its users, as well as increasing our understanding of why certain objects were chosen for votive deposition.

'Religious sites' is a term that covers a wide range of structures and features, ranging from formal temples of the Olympian, oriental and Romano-Celtic gods to private offerings aimed at safeguarding a boundary or ensuring a return to health. With the exception of some of the oriental cults, the temples themselves are unlikely to retain much evidence for votive activity, but their enclosures and associated features such as wells or pits are frequently rich in offerings. The traditional Roman household also held a shrine honouring the domestic gods and the family ancestors, and the surviving evidence for offerings here and in workplace shrines is also relevant. Other related contexts include ritual pits and shafts, some of which indicate a considerable expenditure of time and effort from the local community; natural features such as springs and streams; wells and more utilitarian pits, which often show a ritual element in their deliberate infilling; and boundary and foundation deposits. Offerings left with the dead, whether cremated or inhumed, were clearly also of a religious character, reflecting views on the afterlife and on the deities to be placated in the interests of the deceased. While mould-decorated bowls seem to have been relatively uncommon in graves, there is apparently an emphasis on certain plain forms, particularly those decorated with simple foliage wreaths in barbotine which are probably connected both with ideas of regeneration and with the actual wreaths used in funerals.

Janet and Peter Webster (University of Cardiff): Classical figures in a provincial landscape: a study in the iconography of samian

It is often stated that samian decoration changed from period to period and from one production centre to another. But what is it that changed? Was it simply the style of decoration or was it the subject matter portrayed.

Work already undertaken (Webster & Webster forthcoming – Brenda Dickinson Festschrift) suggests that the motifs used on samian remained solidly classical in origin throughout the exporting period, regardless of source or date. Despite the assumed local or, at least, provincial origin of the potters themselves, their
products purveyed *romanitas*, not some Gallo-Roman or Germano-Roman hybrid culture. In this respect, samian contrasts with many other provincial products – sculpture, for instance, being a prime example.

So what is it within the classical repertoire which appealed either to the potters or to their customers? Our study will make a broad survey of themes within the output of three major production areas (La Graufesenque, Lezoux and Rheinzabern) but concentrate on a small number of potters from each area whose work can be isolated through the occurrence of name stamps inserted in the mould and whose period of production can be ascertained with the aid of the Stamps Index. We will look at the figured motifs used, their origins in classical literature and mythology, where apparent, and try to ascertain what they may have meant to the potters themselves. The use of figures in combination on specific pots will be used to try to determine whether the choice of figures was random or whether it sought to tell a specific story. Further, we shall seek to explore how far the subject matter of earlier decorated pottery and metal vessels influenced the motifs and designs used in the samian industry.

Our overall aim is to ascertain if these essentially classical objects imply a degree of understanding of classical mythology or whether they are simply conveying a deliberate but superficial veneer.