Gerrard J.

The Black Burnished Type 18 Bowl and the Fifth Century.

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Romano-British Pottery in the Fifth Century

James Gerrard

School of History, Classics and Archaeology, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 7RU UK. Email: james.gerrard@newcastle.ac.uk http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3351-7810

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Introduction

In 2012 the Centre for Interdisciplinary Artefacts Studies (part of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology) at Newcastle University hosted a day conference on 'Roman Pottery in the Fifth Century AD'. At this conference some fifty delegates listened to papers given by nine archaeologists drawn from academia, commercial units, museums and freelance specialists. The diverse backgrounds of the contributors as well as the audience underlines why the conference and this edition of Internet Archaeology are needed. Previously there had been no venue that had brought these specialists together in the same forum.

The genesis of the conference and this set of articles actually lies further back still. During my period of doctoral research at the University of York (2002-2005) I investigated the end of the Dorset Black Burnished pottery (BB1) industry in south-western Britain (Gerrard 2005). Part of this research involved reaching out to colleagues who worked with Romano-British pottery and it showed that a surprising number considered they had evidence that Romano-British pottery was being used and/or produced in the 5th century AD. When asked whether their views were published the response was, perhaps unsurprisingly given that many of these individuals worked in commercial archaeology, that they had neither the time nor the resources to disseminate their data and interpretations (Perrin 2011). Extremely interesting material was thus languishing unpublished or was hiding in obscure papers and monographs. The publication of some of this material was
clearly an important step in problematizing how the 'end' of Roman pottery production in Britain was interpreted (Willis 2004, 16-17). It is hoped that this collection of articles will go some way to resolving the lacuna I first observed a decade ago.

Sites mentioned in this issue

![Map of sites mentioned in this issue](image)

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Nomenclature

One of the reasons for choosing to publish this group of articles with Internet Archaeology was to open this important research to as wide an audience as possible. In contrast to a traditional paper monograph, these articles can be found and read by anyone with access to the Internet. Unfortunately, pottery specialists use a variety of codes and terms that can be bewildering to a non-specialist audience. The late Roman tableware known as 'Oxfordshire red colour-coated ware' (Young 1977), is a good example of the problems that can be caused by inconsistent nomenclature. It is known by a variety of labels, of which OXRC, OXF RS, OXRS are, perhaps, the most obvious. To the interested member of the public, student, or non-specialist chancing across this sort of terminology can be bewildering to say the least.
The Study Group for Roman Pottery have been aware of the difficulties caused by a lack of consistency. Indeed, as long ago as 1998 a series of national codes were developed (Tomber and Dore 1998) and these have gained wide acceptance. At the time of writing (2015), the website that hosted these codes and associated images of pottery fabrics has ceased to exist. It is to be hoped that the website will find a new host in the near future. Nevertheless, using the national codes in this publication would not allow the reader to follow a hyperlink to resources that expanded on the sometimes opaque codes. In order to make this research accessible to the widest possible audience the unusual decision has been made to use the fabric codes adopted by Tyers in Roman Pottery in Britain (1996). This has the advantage that the majority of fabric codes used here can be linked to the excellent website Potsherds, which supports the volume. Potsherds includes basic distribution maps, images of fabrics and drawings of common vessel forms that will aid the non-specialist reader in accessing the arguments presented in the following articles. It also includes links to other commonly used fabric codes, including those used by the National Roman Fabric Reference Collection (Tomber and Dore 1998).

The Articles

This publication contains eight articles. Six of these are revised versions of the papers given at the conference. Two are invited contributions. A number of articles were not submitted in time for publication including papers dealing with the north of Britain, and this is unfortunate but symptomatic of many of the difficulties faced by pottery specialists alluded to above.

Walton and Moorhead's discussion of late Roman coins and coin-use may appear a little out of place. The recent changes wrought on our understanding of the role of money in the late 4th and 5th centuries by PAS finds and new statistical methodologies are beginning to cascade through Romano-British studies. That said, numismatists and pottery specialists often occupy their own discrete 'silos' with one rarely reading the other's research. To this end Walton and Moorhead's article presents a useful review of how we think about Roman coins in the decades either side of AD 400. Its location here with a group of articles discussing pottery, but often concerned with coins as dating evidence or proxies for economic systems, will hopefully go some way to crossing disciplinary boundaries.
Lyne, Bidwell and Gerrard all present surveys of our understanding about pottery in southern England during the 5th century. Lyne roams far and wide across the south-east looking at sites, many of which are unpublished or obscurely published, based on his exhaustive work on pottery in the area over many decades. His article offers a fascinating review rich in detail and site-specific information. Bidwell takes a similar approach, examining that most interesting of regions: the south-western peninsula. Here Rome's writ seems to have run weakly for much of the first four centuries AD and trajectories of development not seen elsewhere existed. Recent excavations and their associated assemblages of pottery are also shedding new light on the situation in the 5th century.

Gerrard takes a slightly different approach. Focused on Somerset and Dorset, he has reviewed the distribution and chronology of a particular type of vessel. New discoveries and associations with other types of object (metalwork, Anglo-Saxon pottery) have reinforced the 'lateness' of this vessel form. A similar angle is taken by Fitzpatrick-Matthews who is concerned with the identification of unusual pottery fabrics late in the Roman stratigraphic sequences at a small number of sites over a relatively small region.

Both Lucy and Briscoe tackle the relationship of 'Roman' pottery with the 'Anglo-Saxon' period. Lucy's study of the important Roman and early medieval settlement at Mucking shows how nuanced the evidence for 5th-century activity may be. The recognition of what appears to be the latest Roman pottery in the fills of Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured buildings suggests that early in the life of the Anglo-Saxon settlement its inhabitants had access to late Roman pottery. Briscoe's study, in contrast, looks in detail at the use of stamps to decorate vessels in the Roman and early Anglo-Saxon period. She questions whether any threads of continuity can be distinguished even if broadly similar motifs were being used.

Finally, Duggan takes us to the Atlantic coasts of Europe in the search for imported Mediterranean pottery of 5th- and 6th-century date. This long-distance trade brought western Britain back into contact with the pottery of the Mediterranean and Duggan's research casts new light on the manner by which this material was imported.

Some Themes
These articles offer important new insights into the use of Roman pottery during the 5th century. From the discussions by the various authors a number of themes emerge:

- Was 'Romano-British' pottery produced during the 5th century?
- If 'Romano-British pottery' was produced during the 5th century how can its production be demonstrated?
- Was 'Romano-British' pottery used during the 5th century? If it was, then were the vessels carefully curated heirlooms or fragmentary sherds imbued with some social significance?

Many of these themes were highlighted in a recent review of the state of Roman pottery studies in relation to the end of Roman Britain (Gerrard 2014). This group of articles offers some insights and avenues for future research. It is to be hoped that this research will stimulate more interest in the topic and that this interest will eventually generate some answers to the questions posed above.

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