

Dynamics of fineware production and trade: the puzzle of supra-regional exporters

Tamara Lewit

Introduction

Fine tableware of various kinds was produced and traded all around the Roman Empire. Red-slipped fine pottery appears to have been universally popular, being used by many ranks of society (though the richest élite used metalware) and on both civilian and military sites.¹ The techniques and raw materials suitable to produce it were widespread, and a huge number of production centres produced different kinds of red-slip, whether moulded or plain, until the mid-7th c. A.D.

The majority of fineware producers (too numerous to list here) were small-scale potteries variously located on rural estates, in the suburbs of towns, or in *vici*, and they distributed their wares within a limited local area, a situation well summarised by K. E. Carr:²

In whichever corner of the ancient world one works, one finds innumerable locally-produced forms, differing from each other only in small ways

(cf. Table 1, e.g., Ermedàs and Bram).³ Some fineware producers traded their products not only locally but throughout a province, nearby region, or to specific towns or military markets distant from the place of manufacture. Notable regional productions include, for example, South Gaulish *terra sigillata* produced at Montans and Banassac, Central and East Gaulish *terra sigillata*, Çandarlı ware, and Egyptian Red Slip Ware of various kinds⁴ (Table 1).

-
- 1 D. P. S. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman world: an ethnoarchaeological approach* (London 1982) 114-20; For the cultural implications of the adoption of such red-slipped fineware around the empire, see G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: the origins of provincial civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge 1998) 187-205; N. Morley, *Trade in classical antiquity* (Cambridge 2007) 94.
 - 2 K. E. Carr, "Strong local production in Tunisia: supplementing Bonifay from the case of Leptiminus," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Studies on Roman pottery of the provinces of Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena (Tunisia)* (JRA Suppl. 76, 2009) 107.
 - 3 For examples of local pottery industries producing between the 1st and the 6th c. A.D. in *Hispania*, Italy, Britain and Gaul, including Ermedàs and Bram, see M. Passelac, "Bram," in C. Bémont and J.-P. Jacob, *La terre sigillée gallo-romaine. Lieux de production du Haut Empire* (Paris 1986) 48-51, and others in the same volume; V. Revilla, "Production céramique, systèmes agraires et peuplement dans le territoire de Tarraco," in *Tallers ceràmics i producció agrícola. Estudis sobre el món rural d'època romana 2* (Girona 2007) 83-113; S. Fontana, "Le 'imitazioni' della sigillata africana e le ceramiche da mensa italiche tardo-antiche," in L. Saguì (ed.), *Ceramica in Italia: VI-VII secolo* (Florence 1998) 83-100; Y. Rigoir, "Les Dérivées-des-sigillées paléochrétiennes," in Saguì *ibid.* 101-7; H. Fracchia, "Middle to Late Imperial ceramic production and evolution in the southeastern Val di Chiana," in D. Malfitana *et al.* (edd.), *Old pottery in a new century* (Catania 2006) 125-37; P. Tyers, *Roman pottery in Britain* (London 1996) 73-74.
 - 4 In the collection edited by Bémont and Jacob (*supra* n.3), see, e.g., T. Martin, "Montans," 58-71; B. Hofmann, "Banassac," 103-10; P. Bet and H. Vertet, "Centre de production de Lezoux," 138-63 and various East Gaulish centres described on 173-247. See also Tyers (*supra* n.3) 113-14; B. R. Hartley and B. M. Dickinson, *Names on terra sigillata: an index of makers' stamps and signatures on Gallo-Roman terra sigillata (Samian ware)* (London 2008-); V. Romero Carnicero and P. Ruiz Montes, "Los centros de producción de t.s.h. en la zona septentrional de la península ibérica," in M. Roca Roumens and I. Fernández García (edd.), *Introducción al estudio de la cerámica romana: una breve guía de referencia* (Málaga 2005) 185-223; I. Fernández García and M. Roca Roumens, "Producciones de *Terra Sigillata* Hispánica," in D. Bernal Casasola and A. Ribera *i*