

# Pottery, Landscape and Trade: What are the sherds telling us?

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to consider how the analysis of pottery assemblages from both field-walked and excavated sites can help us understand more about how people lived in Leicestershire and Rutland during the Roman period. The same analysis could be applied to any period in Leicestershire's ceramic past, and indeed to any part of the country, but the Roman period presents a particularly good case study because both pottery and sites are relatively abundant and the chronology of pottery production and distribution is comparatively well understood. Leicestershire also presents an interesting case-study because its location lies at something of a watershed between more overtly Romanised parts of the province to the south and east and the more conservative area to the north and west beyond the River Trent.

This foundation allows us not only to date our occupation sites more precisely within the period, but also to say something about the economic and social connections their occupants had. Pottery is the one traded item that survives in profusion, reached all sectors of the population, and might therefore act as a guide to the movement of other perishable items as well as the people themselves. It would therefore be interesting to know where these people were doing their shopping and carrying out other social obligations; did they journey into *Ratae* from the countryside, or was the 'Betterware' salesman hard at work on their doorsteps?

Importantly, such analyses can provide ways of assessing how interconnected the landscape and its inhabitants were, and particularly what impact Roman administration and customs had on the everyday lives of the essentially Iron Age *Corieltavian* tribespeople. One way to investigate this issue of 'Romanization' or, as most recently, and less one-sidedly, termed 'Creolization' (Webster 2001), would be to assess to what extent the range of different pottery vessel types that become available during the Roman period were adopted by the inhabitants of *Ratae* and the countryside respectively.

The analysis of our Roman pottery assemblages can also contribute to wider changes in the landscape including not just where people lived but in what way they farmed the surrounding land. Major reorganisations of the landscape tend to have taken place during our chronologically defined periods rather than between them. On the evidence of intensively surveyed parts of the county such as the Medbourne area and the Langtons (Liddle 1994; Bowman 1996), the later Iron Age witnessed an increase in settlement extent, which intensified during the early Roman period, with a subsequent retreat from the margins in the later Roman

period involving the nucleation of activity around the valley-based villas. The dispersed pattern of hamlets we see in the Early Anglo-Saxon period, some of which overlies those Roman villas, is then transformed in the Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon into the more nucleated pattern of villages we are familiar with today. Closer analysis of the chronology of our Roman assemblages may reveal this change at the individual parish level and provide the building blocks for an understanding of whether this pattern is repeated across the county or region as a whole, and how it compares nationally.

The intention of the paper is therefore to demonstrate that there is enormous potential in studying the vast amounts of Roman pottery being systematically retrieved from the fields of Leicestershire by the Group beyond simply saying 'this is a Roman site', and that there is also the opportunity to fit Leicestershire more coherently into the wider picture of Roman Britain.

## A Dependable Friend

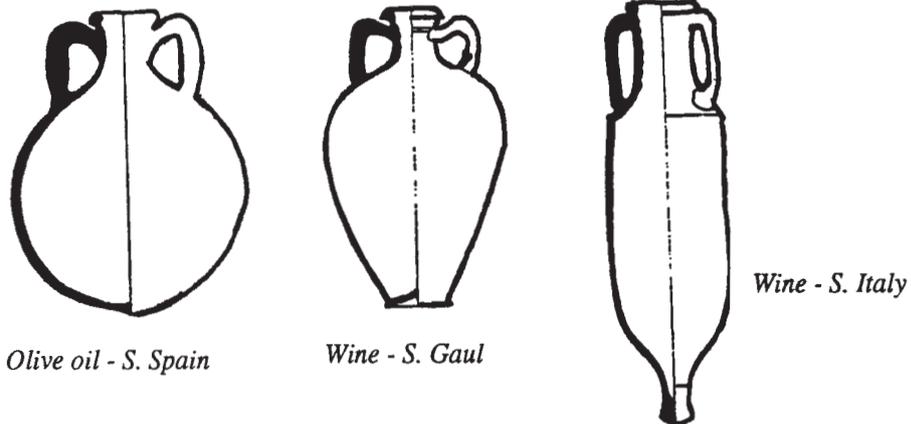
During the preceding Iron Age and succeeding Anglo-Saxon period, pottery is used for a limited range of functions primarily linked to cooking and storage, and vessel shapes are restricted to jars, taller than they are wide and with a relatively narrow opening. They are produced in a limited range of fabrics (clay recipes) across the county and we are only just starting to get to grips with understanding their production and distribution (Marsden 2000; Blinkhorn 2000; Williams and Vince 1997). In contrast our knowledge of Roman pottery production and distribution is quite well advanced because we are dealing with a workshop product made in standard shapes with a standard clay recipe. It's dependable stuff and we therefore have quite a clear idea of what we should broadly expect to find on our sites and how this changes over time. During the Roman period, pottery is used for a wider variety of functions relating to the transport, storage, preparation, and cooking of food and this is related to a wider range of distinctive vessel shapes (see Figs. 1 and 2).

## Doing 'the Knowledge'

First of all it might be useful to give a brief overview of the major wares and vessel types and where they are likely to have been produced when found in Leicestershire assemblages. This will be followed by the consideration of some case studies to illustrate how their occurrence varies over time and across a range of site-types. Figures 1 and 2 present an outline of the major vessel types you are likely to come across in Romano-

### Coarse or Kitchen Wares

Firstly for **transporting** those essential luxuries there were **Amphorae** bringing olive oil, wine, and fish sauce upon an unsuspecting population. These came largely from the olive oil estates of South Spain but also from wine growing areas of Gaul and Italy. They were very heavy, usually tall and thin for efficient stacking on ships, and had large handles and a spiked base to aid lifting.

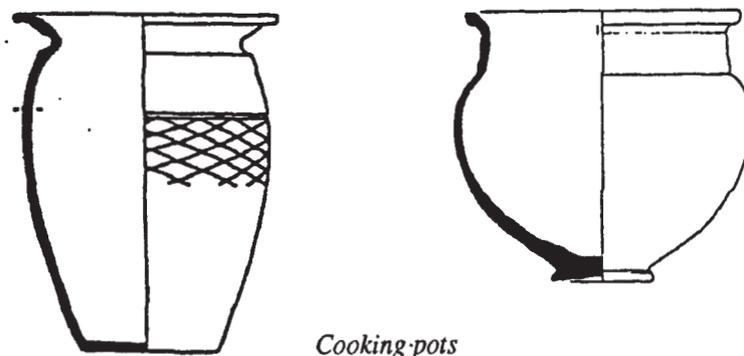


Secondly for **preparing** that special meal the **Mortarium** used for grinding up spices etc was essential, and had a chunky rim and a grit-lined internal surface to aid the process. They were bulky to import and local potters quickly added this type to their growing repertoire.



*Mortaria*

Meanwhile the humble **cooking pot/storage jar** quietly got on with the job. Often made in a coarse grey fabric it was equally at home on the stove or on the shelf and quite ready to sacrifice itself to the archaeological record safe in the knowledge that it could be replaced by nipping down to the local potter's stall in the market.

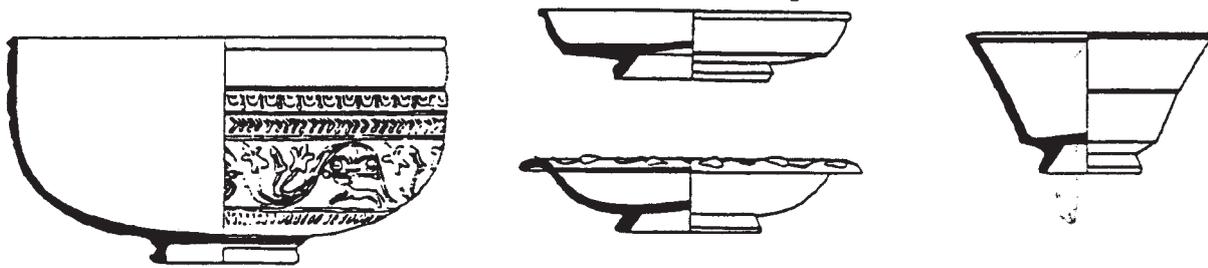


*Cooking pots*

Fig. 1. Range of Roman period kitchen and transport vessels likely to be found on Leicestershire sites

### The Fine or Table Wares

Once prepared, your dinner guests would be impressed by a meal served in **Samian Ware bowls and dishes**. Wheel-thrown into moulds, decorated or plain, these red-slipped vessels were shipped direct from large factories in Gaul, and even graced the tables of the humblest farmstead (on Sundays only!).



*Samian ware from Gaul*

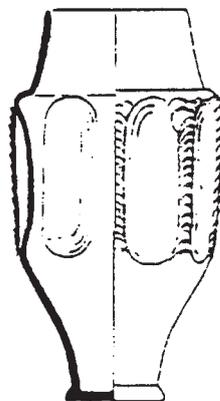
For the accompanying beverages you needed **beakers**, continental ones from Gaul or the Rhineland were always guaranteed to please, beautifully decorated and just right for wine; the **British imitations** could be a touch shoddy, often on the large size, and arousing rumours of communal drinking. Jugs or flagons provided the temporary storage facility on the table, and were narrow mouthed and bulbous.



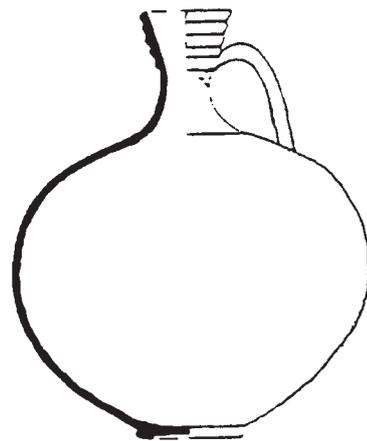
*Beaker - Rhineland*



*Beaker - Gaul*



*Beaker - Nene Valley*



*Flagon - Britain*

Fig. 2. Range of Roman period table wares likely to be found on Leicestershire sites

British assemblages. Of course, with field-walked assemblages especially, it is often difficult to ascertain vessel form from small sherds, but the identification of general fabric or ware category will often be enough to indicate broad vessel function and these are considered below. For those seeking a more detailed introduction to Roman pottery the best starting point is Guy de la Bedoyere's *Shire Archaeology* guide (2000) followed by Paul Tyers' *Roman Pottery in Britain* (1996) the key reference work, which is also available as a web resource [www.potsherd.uklinux.net](http://www.potsherd.uklinux.net), and has a useful link to the *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies*. As a guide to identifying fabrics yourself, the best introduction is the *National Roman Fabric Collection handbook* (Tomber and Dore 1998) although it should be noted that this only deals with regionally significant wares and will not include many of the locally produced wares which you will come across. These publications will provide the necessary grounding for consulting the more detailed appraisal of what has been found locally, which is published in a series of monographs by the County Museum Service (e.g. Clay and Pollard 1994) or the University of Leicester (e.g. Connor and Buckley 1999 and Cooper 2000). However, these publications should be seen as a supplement to receiving some initial training in the identification of the material at first hand from expertise within the Fieldworker's Group or the County Museum Service.

### **The ones to watch out for!**

#### **The grey matter**

Within any assemblage, the majority of sherds will be in grey fabrics, prepared by adding sand to the clay rather than crushed shell (which may naturally occur in the clay), or grog (crushed pottery), the use of which is gradually, though not entirely, eclipsed during the later first and second centuries AD. These grey wares were used primarily to produce jars used mainly for cooking and storage (although bowls, dishes and beakers were also produced), and are essentially continuing the functions performed by pottery during the Iron Age. The majority of this pottery will be produced locally (within 15 miles of the site), and although it is difficult to pin down the specific origin of much of the material, production is known from Ravenstone and kilns around Leicester Forest as well as the regional production centres at Mancetter-Hartshill and the Lower Nene Valley (see Fig.3 and Swan 1984). Additionally there will be smaller amounts of other sand tempered fabrics, which are orange or white and will also have been used to make more specialised vessel forms such as flagons, jugs or beakers for use at the table.

#### **Exceptions to the rule**

Three notable exceptions to this general rule concerning the utilitarian grey (or reduced) wares are worth mentioning, as they will distinguish assemblages of a

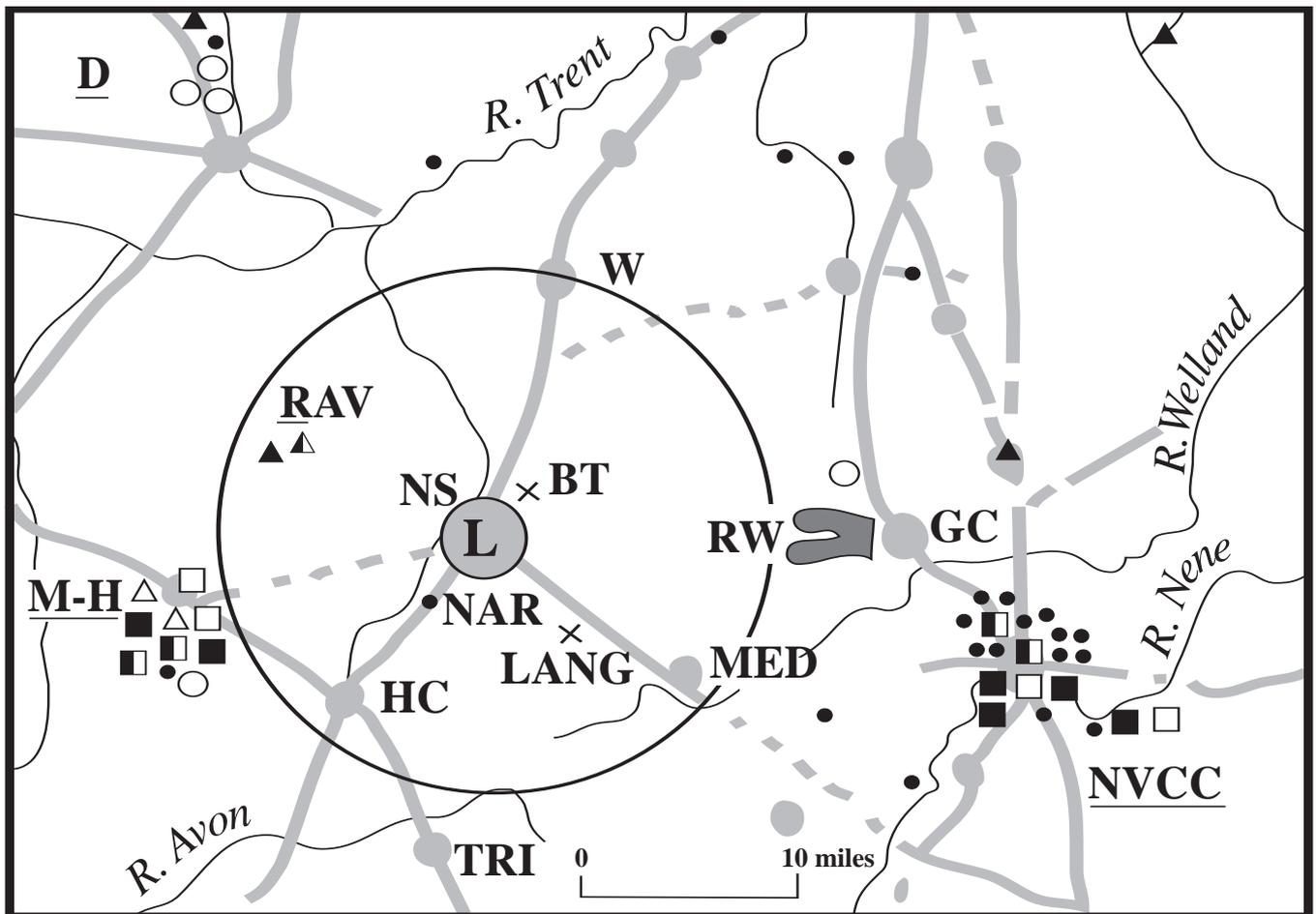
particular date or location within the county and involve distinctive wares from outside the local market. The most significant of these is black-burnished ware category 1 (BB1) from South-east Dorset (Tyers 1996, 182) a distinctively hard, quartz-tempered, handmade fabric which is widely distributed across much of Britain from the second to the fourth century and produced in a narrow range of cooking pots, bowls and dishes. The ware is notable because it appears to be targeted specifically at urban and military markets (Allen and Fulford 1996) where it can make up between 10% and 40 % of an assemblage (see figures for Cirencester and Leicester below), but is comparatively rare on rural sites particularly to the east of Leicester. An appreciation of how it is distributed across the county would help to understand to what extent the rural population used *Ratae* as a market. The second fabric is South Midlands shell-tempered ware (Tyers 1996, 192), which despite being produced throughout the Roman period only achieves wide distribution during the second half of the fourth century when jars, in particular, will occur on Leicestershire sites. The last fabric to mention is Derbyshire ware (Tyers 1996, 190); a very hard (almost stoneware) fabric with a distinctive pimply surface, likened to petrified gooseflesh and easily confused with unglazed sherds of Late Medieval Midland Purple. The most common vessel form is a jar with a lid-seated (bell-like) rim, very common in Derbyshire in the second and third centuries and as well as getting to the northern frontier, it is clear from fieldwork in north west Leicestershire that it is also occurring commonly there (S. Saunders *pers. comm.*).

#### **Something for the weekend?**

The utilitarian portion described above may comprise eighty or more percent of any Romano-British pottery assemblage. In addition to the exceptions outlined above, the remaining (up to) twenty percent, comprising the fine and specialist wares, will help to define the character of the assemblage. Typically these will comprise vessels introduced to the Late Iron Age–Early Roman repertoire to cater for new functions involving the transport, preparation and consumption of food and drink at table, and will be produced at regionally important potteries or be imported from the Continent.

#### **Amphorae**

Amphorae are large, thick-bodied vessels specially designed for transporting liquids such as wine and olive oil. Those used for olive oil from southern Spain and wine from southern Gaul (Fig. 1) are common finds from early Roman Leicester, but are more rarely found on rural sites. This may not necessarily mean that rural folk did not use these products, but that instead the contents of the amphorae were decanted into smaller vessels such as flagons, once they reached the town. Re-use of the particularly robust olive oil amphorae may account for their occasional occurrence in fieldwalked assemblages.



**Fig. 3. Roman Pottery production sites supplying Leicestershire and Rutland and location of consumer sites mentioned in the text (adapted by D. Miles-Williams from V.G. Swan 1984 *The Pottery Kilns of Roman Britain*, RCHM, HMSO).**

*Key to symbols and abbreviations:* Filled and unfilled, circles, triangles and squares are the locations of kilns (refer to Swan 1984 for detail). Pottery production centres discussed as follows: NVCC, Lower Nene Valley (colour-coated ware) industry;

M-H, Mancetter-Hartshill (*mortaria* and other wares); D, Derbyshire Ware; RAV, Ravenstone (with Normanton-le-Heath nearby). Roman Towns: L, Leicester; MED, Medbourne (with Drayton II villa nearby); TRI, *Tripontium*; HC, Highcross; W, Willoughby; GC, Great Casterton. Other survey areas and sites: RW, Rutland Water; LANG, The Langtons; BT, Barkby Thorpe (Humberstone Farm nearby); NS, Norfolk Street Villa; NAR, Narborough Villa.

### Mortaria

The mortarium is the second new vessel type to enter the repertoire, a wide, heavy bowl with a grit-lined internal surface to aid the grinding of foodstuffs during the preparation of meals. Whether their use indicates either the adoption of Roman-style cuisine or their adaptation to existing British recipes is unclear, but they do occur on both urban and rural sites. The three main sources for such vessels in Leicestershire will be Mancetter-Hartshill on the Warwickshire border, the Lower Nene Valley around Peterborough and the Oxfordshire industry (Tyers 1996, 123-129). Almost all mortararia will be in fine, white or buff 'pipe clay' fabrics and in the absence of a distinctive rim form, the internal grits will be the identifying factor. Mancetter-Hartshill products, which will be common in the south and west of the county, have red and black stone grits, whilst those from the Lower Nene supplying the east of the county and Rutland have only black grits of iron tap slag. The

products of Oxfordshire (which may include red colour-coated examples) make inroads into the county in the late Roman period and are distinguished by their rounded, rose-coloured quartz grits.

### Table ware

The character of the assemblage will be defined most clearly by the proportion of fine table ware used for the serving, and consumption of food and beverages (Fig. 2). During the later first and second century these will include samian, the distinctive red gloss table ware produced in industrial quantities in Gaul (Tyers 1996, 105). The supply of this ware fluctuated wildly over time but during the middle of the second century, the products of the Lezoux workshops of central Gaul were widespread, and found their way into every household, however humble. If your site was occupied at this time then you should expect to see some samian in your assemblage, if only in small amounts. Samian products

did not include drinking beakers; these were supplied separately, occasionally from the continent but more commonly in colour-coated wares from the Lower Nene Valley during the later second and third centuries (Tyers 1996, 173; Howe, Perrin and Mackreth 1980). With its distinctive white fabric and dark colour-coating, Nene Valley becomes the most distinctive fabric across the county in the Late Roman period. To an extent it appears to fill the role left vacant by samian ware, and indeed some of its most common products are copies of the latest samian forms, but the most significant factor dictating its ubiquity is that during the later third and fourth century, the industry begins to produce its entire utilitarian grey ware repertoire as colour-coated ware thus providing a universal oven-to-table ware. The products are produced in thick-bodied fabrics, which contrast with the thin-walled beakers characteristic of the second and third century. This distinction allows us to estimate the likely date of a field walked assemblage, using the thickness of the Nene Valley sherds, even when their condition is poor and precise vessel forms cannot be determined. The only other colour-coated fine ware, which is likely to turn up in Leicestershire assemblages, is Oxfordshire red colour-coated ware (Tyers 1996, 178), which can be confused with samian ware but is characteristic of late Roman assemblages only.

### Assemblage in the City: Leicester (*Ratae Corieltavorum*) and Cirencester (*Corinsum Dobonnarum*)

Having established the range of vessel forms and fabrics likely to occur on sites across the county it is necessary to look in detail at specific examples of pottery assemblages from the city and county and see if any differences are apparent. The analysis and publication of the Roman pottery from the excavations at Causeway Lane (Clark 1999) has provided a quantified chronological overview of the supply and use of vessels across the Roman period in *Ratae*. Data from Clark's report have been simplified into a series of pie charts (Fig. 4) displaying how the proportion of wares from different sources changes over time, with each assemblage representing one of six ceramic phases from the mid-late first century (LP1) to the mid-late fourth century (LP6). The sources are grouped into 'local' wares (produced within 15 miles), 'non-local British' wares, and imported wares from the Continent. Alongside are the comparable analyses for assemblages from Cirencester over the same period (Fig. 5).

The Leicester study joins a growing number from Roman urban centres in Britain including Cirencester (Cooper 1998), London (Davies, Richardson and

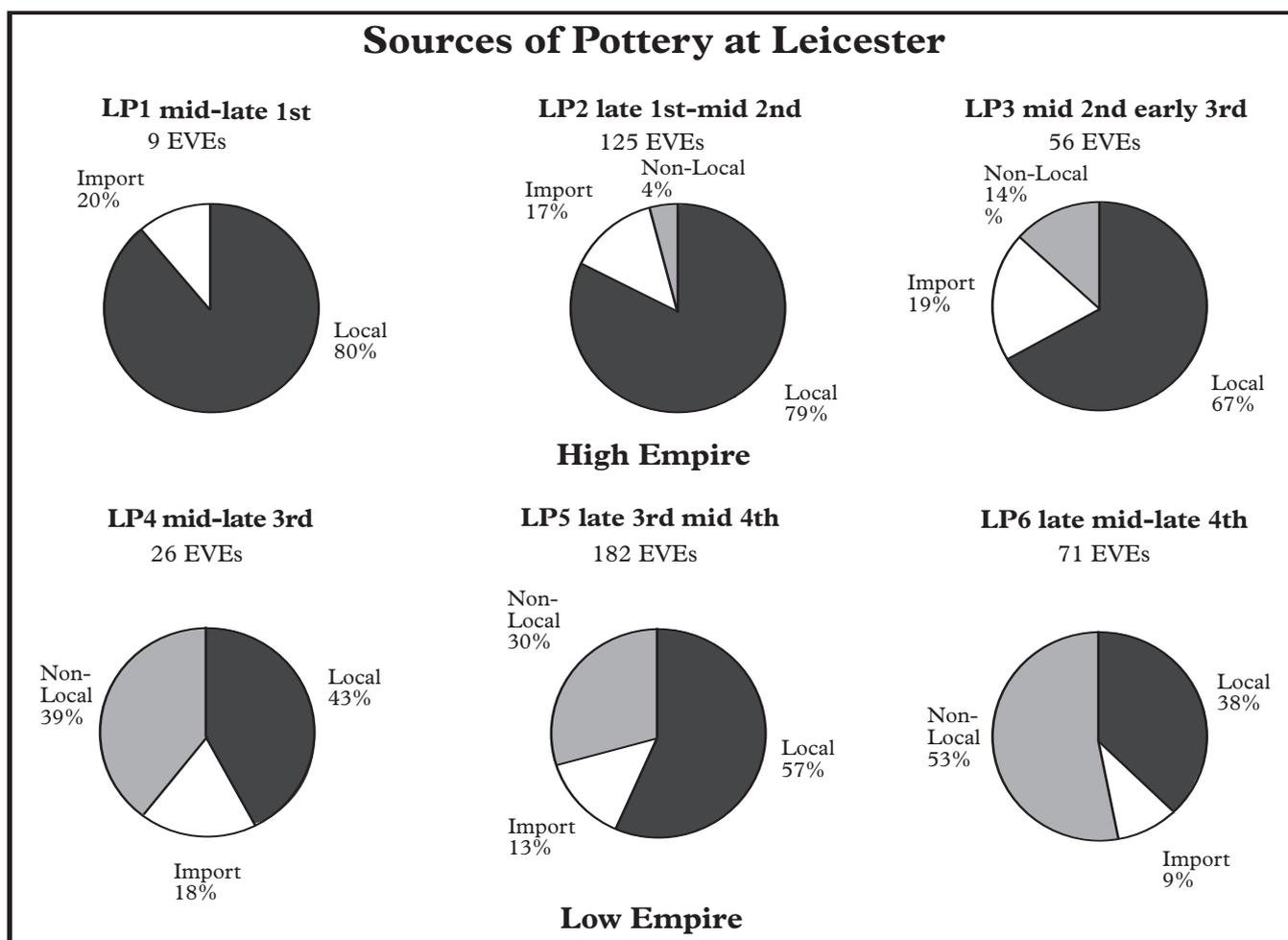


Fig. 4. Pottery supply to Roman Leicester (*Ratae Corieltavorum*).

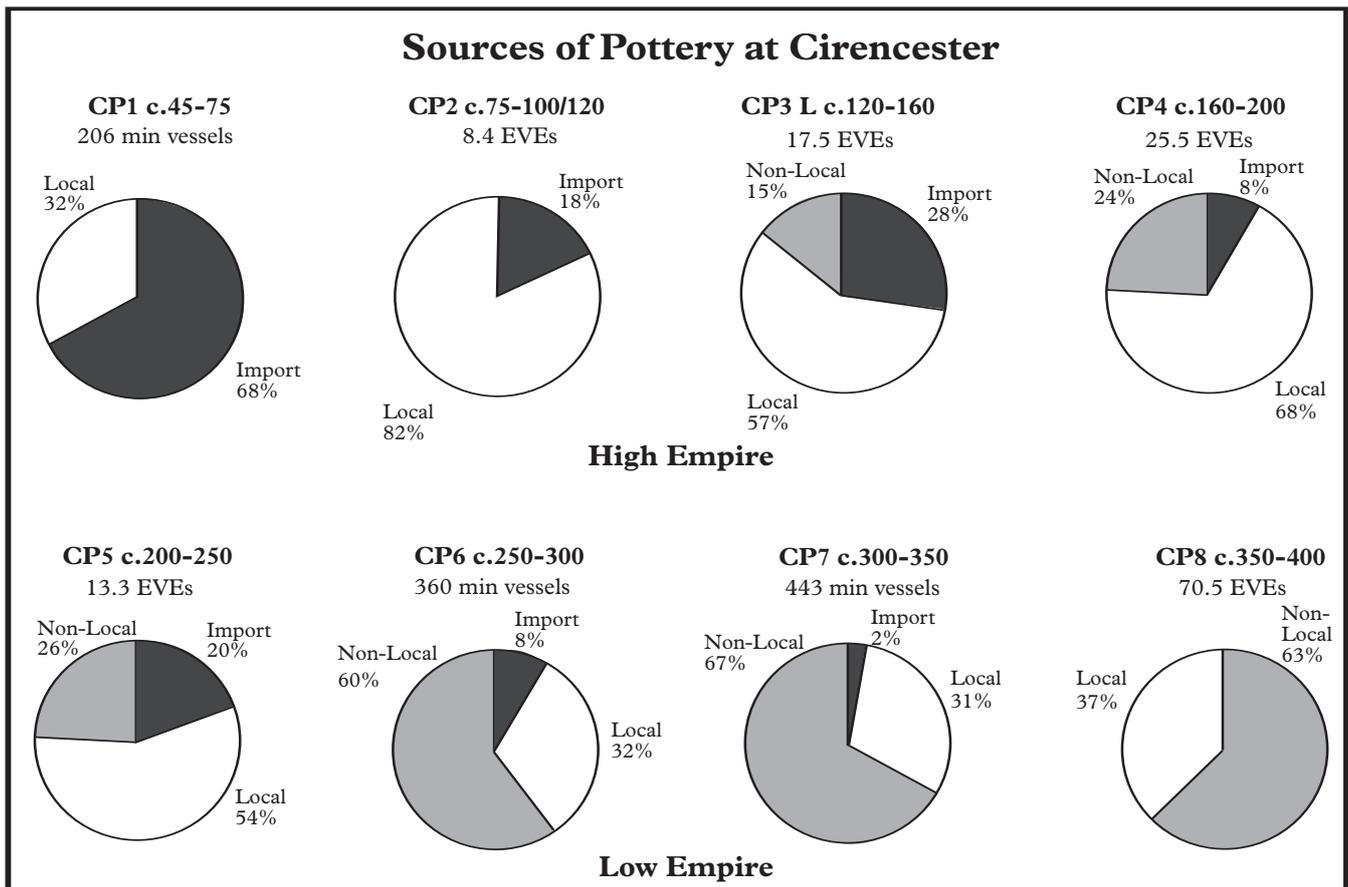


Fig. 5. Pottery supply to Roman Cirencester (*Corinium Dobunnorum*)

Tomber 1994) and Chelmsford (Going 1987), which exhibit a common pattern and reflect what we know of the changing nature of production in Britain and trade with the continent between the High Empire (to c. AD 250) and the Low Empire (c. AD 250 to 400). The Early Roman period or High Empire was characterised by close commercial links with the continent supplying fine and specialist wares, coupled with local production of kitchen wares geared to specific military and urban consumers. The progression to the Low Empire saw a decline in contacts with the continent and a growing self-sufficiency within Britain with the development of large regional pottery industries in the countryside with comprehensive repertoires and wide distribution networks, against which many local concerns could not compete. Amongst the most important of these industries were those of Oxfordshire, the Lower Nene Valley and Southeast Dorset BB1, all of which had an impact on supply to *Ratae*.

The supply pattern to Leicester is clearly similar in many ways to that at Cirencester, although it lacks the cosmopolitan military phase (CP1). Leicester Phase 1 and Ceramic Phase 2 at Cirencester display an identical 80% / 20% split between local wares and imports, whilst Phase 2 is very similar to the early part of CP 3 where the first non-local products are beginning to appear (namely BB1) but imports remain at around 20%. Phase 3 again resembles the later part of CP3 with the introduction of

non-local wares other than BB1 (namely mortaria from Mancetter Hartshill and colour-coats from the Lower Nene Valley), the total figure rising to 14% in both cases. The imported fine ware levels are also nearly identical at this time at around 18% with Cirencester however, maintaining its importation of mortaria and amphorae. Phase 4 echoes the developments across Ceramic Phases 5 and 6 at Cirencester with the ascendancy of BB1 to levels of over 25% and the non-local total probably reaching over 50% (unfortunately the published data for Causeway Lane do not allow an assessment of the amount of non-local grey wares from the lower Nene Valley). During Phases 5 and 6 at Leicester, the broad pattern of Ceramic Phases 7 and 8 at Cirencester is followed (the continued, though declining, import levels are exaggerated by the presence of residual samian ware from earlier phases, disturbed and redeposited in late Roman levels). However, the location of Leicester means that it lies close to the boundaries of the Oxfordshire and Lower Nene Valley distributions and is dominated by neither (Cooper 1999b), the combined figure for non-local fine wares being 14% in Phase 6. The levels for BB1 are however maintained at between 20-30% in both cases, keeping the total non-local figures at around 50% or more.

A correspondingly diverse range of vessel types matches the wide range of sources for the wares used in Roman Leicester (Fig. 6). Even during the first century

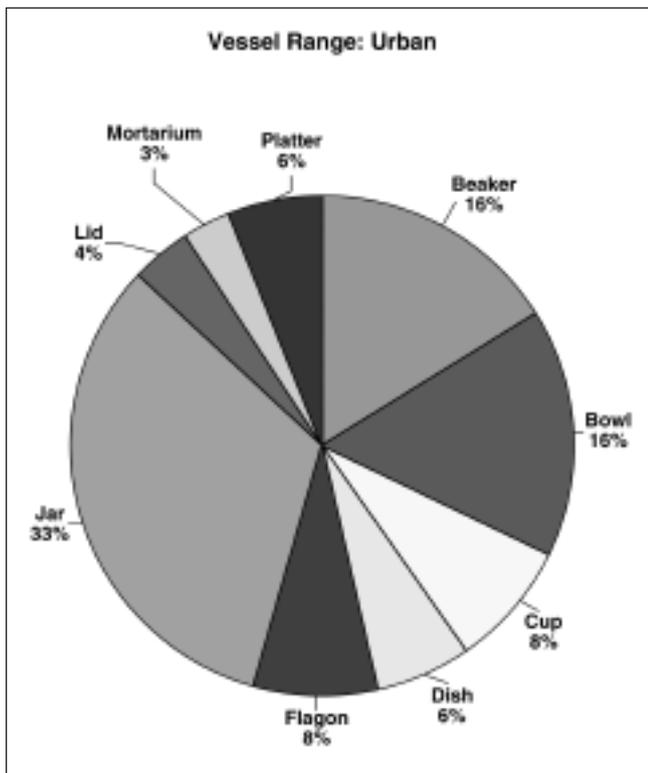


Fig.6. Typical Range of Romano-British vessel types from Leicester: Causeway Lane (data from Clark 1999, Table 15, Phase 3 early-mid 2nd century)

the jar-dominated assemblage is quickly augmented by vessels used at the table, which together make up over fifty percent. In the later first century, other specialist vessel types such as amphorae and mortaria are added and this range is maintained throughout the succeeding phases. The trend to note is that the vessel combination of jar, bowl and dish comes gradually to dominate the assemblage (over 70 % in the fourth century), with drinking vessels becoming less common.

### Rural Assemblages: Rutland Water and Wing to Whatborough

However, to what extent does the urban pattern of supply also hold true for rural sites in Leicestershire and Rutland? If we extend the comparison to include evidence from a group of Roman rural sites in Rutland, about 20 miles east of Leicester, distinct differences can be detected over time. Excavations at Empingham in the early 1970s, in advance of the construction of Rutland Water reservoir, revealed a sequence of Romano-British farmsteads spanning the first to fourth centuries (Cooper 2000). The quantification of five assemblages is summarised in the following series of pie charts, according to origin (Fig.7).

In Phase 1 during the mid-late first century, all pottery appears to be locally produced in a range of shell-tempered and grog-tempered fabrics with only 2% in Romanised grey ware fabrics. By the mid second century, (Phase 2), 97% of the assemblage still appears to be of local origin with just 3 % accounted for by

imported fine ware, most of which is Samian belonging to the main exporting period of Lezoux in Central Gaul

Phase 3 belonging to the later third century sees a dramatic shift in supply whereby over 70% of pottery comes from a single, non-local source, the Lower Nene Valley with 50% being grey ware products, 21% colour-coated wares and 1% mortaria. Of the shell-tempered coarse wares making up the rest of the assemblage 13% appear to be from another non-local source, Harrold in Bedfordshire. The non-local total is therefore 85%, and this is maintained through the two fourth century assemblages (Phases 4 and 5) with 91% and 80% respectively. Phase 4 includes 2% Oxford red colour-coated ware but 74% Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware. While the last figure is probably exaggerated by small sample size, with 40%-50% being more realistic, the dominance of the Lower Nene Valley as the major rural nucleated industry of the region is still emphatic, supplying 53% of all pottery (including all mortaria) to the Phase 5 group. It is also interesting to note the almost complete lack of BB1 from these rural groups, contributing just 1% to the Phase 5 group when it was contributing over 25% of all pottery to Leicester just 20 miles to the west. This finding would appear to be in keeping with the trends detected in the recent study of BB1 distribution (Allen and Fulford 1996) whereby the ware is channelled along major route ways.

Comparable vessel data are not available for the Rutland Water sites, but the assemblages retrieved from Roman rural sites along the Wing to Whatborough pipeline in Rutland, are similar in character, although the sites lack evidence for masonry structures (Cooper unpublished; Beamish 1997). The range of vessel types and the proportion they contribute to the assemblage is illustrated in Fig. 8. The earliest phase of activity on Site 3, dating to the later first century AD, produced an assemblage comprising only jars save for a single

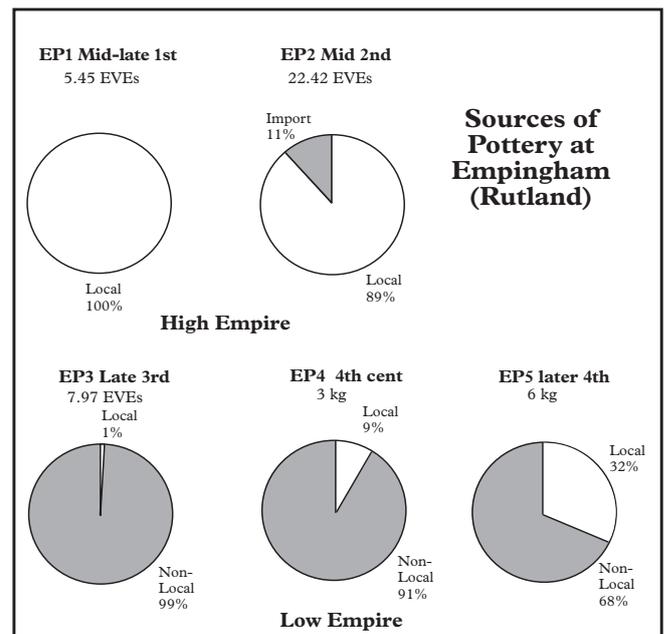
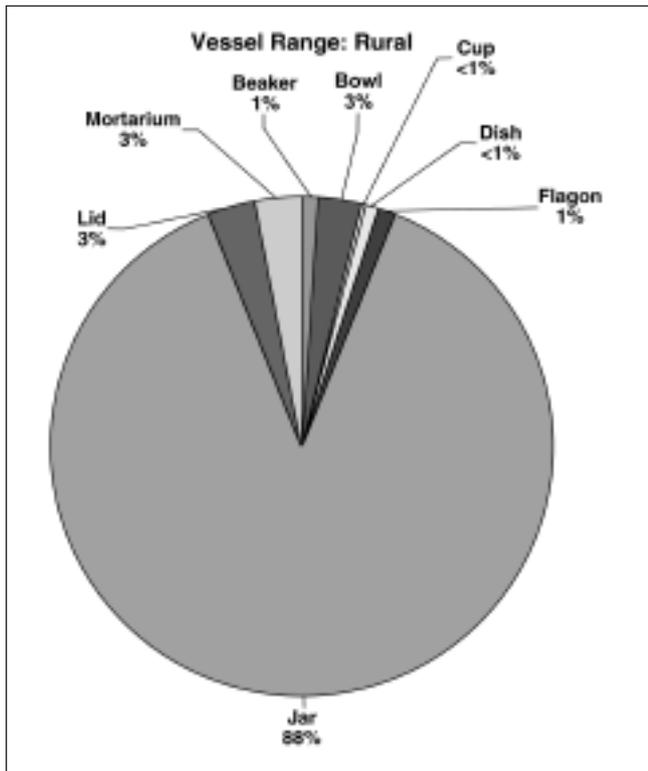


Fig. 7. Pottery supply to Empingham near Rutland Water (Rutland).



**Fig. 8. Typical range of Romano-British vessel forms from rural Leicestershire (data from excavations along the Wing to Whatborough pipeline, 1996 (Beamish 1997).**

example of a samian ware dish. By phase 2, dating to first half of the second century, the repertoire had expanded to include beakers, bowls, and dishes but with jars still comprising 86%. Even the assemblage from the nearby Site 5, dating across the Roman period, could only boast a marginally wider repertoire of vessel types including also mortaria, lids, flagons and a possible cup, with jars still making up 88% of the assemblage.

The Rutland Water study echoes trends detected in other studies of low status rural settlements (e.g. Marney 1989, Table 1; Booth 1991), with the initial domination of local wares, a lack of imported specialist wares such as amphorae, and low levels of imported fine wares often restricted to Central Gaulish samian. The Low Empire sees much small scale local production extinguished by the nearest rural nucleated industry which in this case is actually just within the local market area just 14 miles down Ermine Street to the south east. This Low Empire trend of course matches that for Cirencester for which the Oxfordshire industry, located just 25 miles to the east, is again almost a local concern.

**Establishing a Pattern for the County**

It should be clear by now that although Roman pottery does get everywhere and that all vessel types could potentially turn up at any site, assemblages from urban and rural sites will differ markedly in the proportions of the various wares, their origin and the vessel types represented. However, is it possible to refine this basic division further to incorporate a wider range of site types

**Leicestershire Sites: Roman key wares by percentage sherd count (Keegan 1995)**

Site	Type	Samian	Amphora	Colour-coats	Black-Burn1	Other
Causeway Lane	Urban	12	4	7	10	67
Bonners Lane	Suburb	14	3	8	6	69
Narborough	Villa	3	3	3	14	77
Norfolk St	Villa	5	4	2	20	69
Drayton II	Villa	2	<1	15	3	69
Medbourne	Smalltown	3	1	25	2	69
Ravenstone	Smalltown	2	1	4	3	90
Normanton	Farmstead	1	0	1	10	88
Humberstone	Farmstead	3	0	4	2	91

**Table 1 The occurrence of key Roman period wares at sites of different type across Leicestershire (data compiled from Keegan 1995 and Hancocks 1996)**

from the county? The relative proportions of key wares at a variety of sites are presented above (Table 1). The site types comprise: urban (Causeway Lane) suburban (Bonner's Lane), small towns (Ravenstone and Medbourne), villas (Norfolk St, Narborough and Drayton II), and farmsteads (Humberstone Farm and Normanton-le-Heath). Analysis of the figures indicates that further refinement of the hierarchy is possible.

In terms of continental imports, the urban and suburban sites of Causeway Lane and Bonner's Lane stand out and have correspondingly high levels of samian and amphorae, although interestingly the villa site at Norfolk Street, just outside the west gate of Leicester, is not far behind and, in fact, has a greater proportion of amphorae. Whilst the other villa site at Narborough, on the line of the Fosse Way, has lower levels of imports, it still has more than the small town and farmstead sites, the levels from Ravenstone and Normanton-le-Heath being under 2% and 1% respectively. The proportion of non-local (regional) wares also demonstrates some trends (Fig. 9). The highest level is shown by the small town of Medbourne, due to its proximity to the major regional centre of production in the Lower Nene Valley a fact confirmed by the high levels of colour-coated ware, its primary product. The levels of regional wares do not appear to vary according to site type in the same way as imports, but are more likely affected by proximity to a major producer or the date of occupation. The figures for South east Dorset BB1 are interesting in this respect since two of the villas actually have higher proportions of the ware than sites in the centre of Leicester. Whilst this probably due to the predominantly later date of the villa assemblages, it does demonstrate that their inhabitants were using *Ratae* as a market. The otherwise low levels of BB1 at the small towns and farmsteads would support the idea of the ware being targeted at markets along specific routeways, the Fosse Way being a major one, but the relatively high levels at Normanton-le-Heath, might encourage further investigation. The small town of Ravenstone and the farmstead at Humberstone both have noticeably low proportions of regional wares coupled with correspondingly higher levels of local wares. In the former case this is almost certainly due to the presence of the pottery industry within Ravenstone itself. Three or four

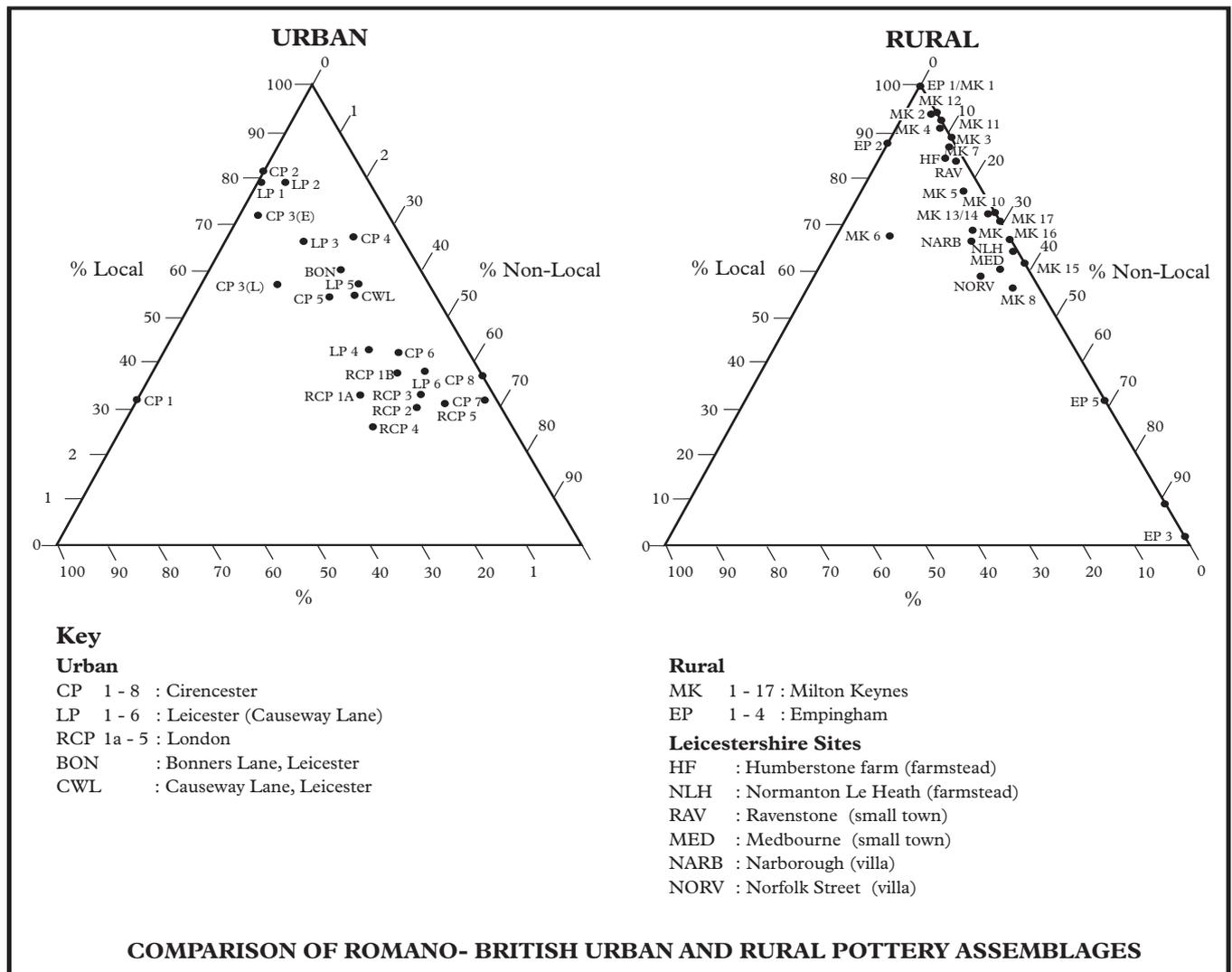


Fig. 9. A comparison of Romano-British urban and rural pottery assemblages.

characteristic assemblages are therefore detectable; the urban at one extreme and the farmstead at the other. The villas have more in common with the towns whilst the small towns have more in common with the farmsteads.

### Fitting the County into the national pattern.

The threefold division of the assemblage into local (within 15 miles), non-local British, and imported supply categories, represents a simple way of highlighting trends in assemblages, and enables us to summarise data from a large number of sites on to a triaxial scattergram. The two plots simply portray urban and rural sites respectively in terms of these three variables, and the position within the triangle, indicates the character of the assemblage. The closer the site is to the top of the triangle, the higher the proportion of local wares; the closer it is to the bottom left hand corner, the greater the proportion of imports, whilst the closer it is to the bottom right hand corner, the higher the proportion of non-local wares in the assemblage.

### The urban pattern

Figure 9 summarises data from a range of urban and rural sites across the Roman period. Considering the urban data first, the assemblages tend to cluster either side of the 20% import level line but vary more considerably in terms of their local and non-local supply levels. Where chronological ceramic phase data is available; from Cirencester (Cooper 1998), Leicester (Clark 1999), and London (Davies, Richardson and Tomber 1994), assemblages progress from the top left of the diagram (e.g. CP2 and LP1 and 2) towards bottom right (e.g. LP6, RCP5, CP7 and 8). The early assemblages are typified by a two-tier import and local supply pattern (with military period CP1 representing the extreme), and later assemblages display declining import and local supply levels coupled with an increasing non-local contribution. The pattern outlined earlier for Cirencester is therefore followed by another tribal capital, Leicester and a similar situation is found at other urban sites such as Chelmsford (Going 1987) and Gloucester (Ireland 1983). London as both mercantile and provincial capital

during the High Empire however, produces a slightly different picture. Ceramic phases (RCP1-5) span the Early Roman period only c. AD50-AD160 and yet maintain a non-local supply contribution of around 50%, and generally high import levels throughout.

### The rural pattern

The figures for rural sites comprising farmsteads, villas and small towns, tell a different story. The assemblages cluster along the right hand axis with very low import levels and generally very high local contributions. Trends over time for Milton Keynes (Marney 1989) and Empingham, Rutland (Cooper 2000) show a general progression in line with urban sites with the earliest assemblages (e.g. EP1 and MK1) being entirely local in origin and the later assemblages having much higher proportion of non-local pottery (e.g. MK 15-17 and EP3-5). However, the trend for non-local supply is not as clear-cut as it is on the urban sites, and depends much more perhaps on the status of the site and in particular, its proximity to the major late Roman regional scale suppliers such as Dorset Black Burnished ware, Oxfordshire and the Lower Nene Valley. The later assemblages from Empingham (EP3-5) illustrate this point well, being almost entirely dominated by the Lower Nene Valley industry. The greatest proportion of pottery supplied to rural sites throughout time is therefore seen to be of local origin.

### Reasons for change

Having established that distinct urban and rural patterns of pottery supply exist and that certain trends are detectable over time it is necessary to explore what factors might be responsible. At the provincial level, the trends detectable over time have been used to support broad models of economic change developed by Fulford (1977 and 1984), whereby evidence of pottery is used to demonstrate Britain's economic dependence on the Continent during the High Empire, giving way to greater self-sufficiency in the Low Empire. Subsequently, Millett has used the same early and late division to provide the basis for his model of the decentralisation of economic activity away from the major urban centres in the later Roman period which linked the changing location of pottery production to the changing economic and social roles of *civitas* (tribal) capitals and small towns (Millett 1990, 148, Table 6.3).

Both these models provide very useful foundations but it is clear from the rural pattern of pottery supply that the heavy dependence on imported fine and specialist wares (and presumably the organic products forming the bulk of the cargo) seen as fundamental to the High Empire picture painted by Fulford (1984) is really only of relevance to urban centres and in particular London during the High Empire where the figures might be assumed to reflect the pulling power of its market and the correspondingly cosmopolitan tastes and aspirations of (at least some of) its population. If pottery is to be taken as an index of trade in other goods then it would appear in

contrast, that rural folk obtained most of their needs, and probably discharged their social obligations, locally.

Can the differences be explained purely in economic terms or are we seeing an expression of a different social practice? In a world of perpetual shortage as portrayed by Monaghan (1997, 854 and *contra* above) was it simply a question of availability which denied rural folk access to the full range of wares because marketing mechanisms did not take them into their locality, whilst local wares were supplied direct, or were they consciously rejecting certain aspects of the Roman 'package' as irrelevant to their essentially Iron Age lifestyles?

### Size Doesn't Matter

The above analyses are based upon urban assemblages of many thousands of sherds or excavated rural assemblages of perhaps a few thousand at most, whilst field-walking scatters will comprise as little as a hundred sherds. Can we therefore apply the same criteria and interpretations to such small sample sizes? Work by Jerry Evans on many assemblages in the north of England, indicates that samples as small as fifty sherds will still give a consistent impression of assemblage character (Evans 1991). Obviously the larger the assemblage and the better stratified it is, the more reliable the information that it will yield. Most field-walked assemblages of Roman pottery will present an amalgam of four hundred years of activity, but because we are only seeking to identify broad trends in our data, their analysis is still very worthwhile.

As an example we might take three Roman assemblages from the field survey project at Barkby Thorpe undertaken by staff and students from the University of Leicester during the 1990s. A grid walk survey of the Hamilton villa site (field BT 17), lying close to the deserted medieval village of Hamilton, produced an assemblage of just eighty sherds, alongside huge amounts of Roman tile from the building itself. Analysis of the assemblage by ware category is presented below and is similar in make up to other villas discussed above. The occurrence of imported samian and amphora would support occupation in the early Roman period, which would concur with the high proportion of local wares although both BB1 and Lower Nene Valley colour-coat are present. Closer analysis of the colour-coated sherds however, indicates that they are all potentially from second or third century vessel forms and that the thicker-bodied fourth century forms are lacking. We could therefore suggest that the site was not occupied into the fourth century, a point that was also noted about the assemblage from the excavations undertaken at the site in 1976, where the majority of the pottery was identified as first and second century in date (McWhirr 1976, 58). Significantly the field-walked assemblage did not contain any Early Anglo-Saxon pottery, although a single sherd did come from the adjacent field.

For comparison, we could consider the evidence from the two other Roman sites within the parish (fields BT5

and BT31), both of which coincide with substantial Early Anglo-Saxon pottery scatters, the latter partly overlain by the hamlet of Barkby Thorpe itself. Ostensibly they are not dissimilar to BT17, but there is less samian, no amphorae and the levels of local wares are higher. This may be indicative of lower status sites and is supported by the lack of Roman tile, which might have roofed masonry buildings. In addition, a closer look at the Lower Nene Valley colour-coats, reveals that, though not numerous, the late Roman vessel forms are present, and interestingly, BT5 includes mortaria not present in the other two. The domination by regional wares in the Late Roman period that we saw so clearly in Rutland, is absent here, due to the lack of proximity to the Nene Valley, and again supports the contention that the supply network to these rural sites is essentially local. It would appear then that BT5 and BT31 are occupied right through the Roman period and presumably into the Early Anglo-Saxon period. It is therefore interesting to note that in this case it is the lower status sites that are seen to continue on through rather than the villa; a situation which contrasts with that from the Welland Valley, outlined below.

Site	BT17	BT5	BT31	
Ware	Origin	% Sherds	% Sherds	% Sherds
Amphora	Import	1		
Samian	Import	5	3	3
BB1	Region	5	<1	
L. Nene V C-C	Region	8	3	5
White ware	Region	2	2	
Oxford RCC	Region		<1	
Mortaria	Region		4	5
Derbyshire	Region		1	
L. Nene V Grey	Region			3
Grey ware	Local	67	70	81
Orange ware	Local	4	6	3
Shelly ware	Local	8	11	
<b>Sample Size</b>		<b>80</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Summary</b>				
	Imports	6%	3%	3%
	Region	15%	10%	13%
	Local	79%	87%	84%

**Table 2 Roman Scatters from Barkby Thorpe Fieldwalking Survey**

### Vale and Wold: Using pottery to detect Landscape Change

The other major area that analysis of our Roman pottery assemblages can contribute to is the detection of landscape change. Medieval landscape historians have defined two distinct landscapes: vale (river valley or 'champion'), the lowland farmed landscape characterised by nucleated villages and field systems and the wold characterised by a more dispersed settlement pattern in a countryside formerly dominated by wood-pasture rather than ploughlands (Fox 2000, 51). A generalised outline of how the county might be divided up into these

agricultural sub-regions was compiled by Phythian-Adams (1986, 35, Fig.16). The county is divided up by the valleys of the Soar and Wreake, with the Trent bordering the north and the Welland defining the southeastern border with Northamptonshire. The watersheds between these major valleys therefore represent the more marginal upland areas defining the wold landscape, although it should be stressed the character of these areas varied depending on local conditions.

In Leicestershire, it is possible to see these two landscapes working side by side, and the southeastern part of the county between the Welland and the Soar presents particularly good evidence for this. Paul Bowman's work (1996 and this volume) has shown that whilst documentary evidence can be used to trace these landscapes in the medieval period, we have to rely on the artefacts alone to push their recognition back into the Early Anglo-Saxon and Roman Periods. Both the Medbourne Area Survey (Liddle 1994 and 1996) and the Langton Hundred Survey (Bowman 1996) suggest that the vale lands remain continuously settled throughout the Roman period, whilst the wold seems to undergo a period of settlement contraction in the late Roman period.

In the Medbourne survey area, villa sites like Drayton II, located in the vale (refer to Liddle 1996, Fig. 1a), yield assemblages containing the full range of wares across the period, including samian, late colour-coated ware and, significantly, both Iron Age and Early Anglo-Saxon pottery as well (figures compiled from Hancocks 1996).

Ware	Origin	%Sherds
Amphora	Import	<1
Samian	Import	2
BB1	Region	3
L.Nene V Colour-coat	Region	15
White ware	Region	7
Mortaria	Region	1
Grey ware	Local	45
Oxidised	Local	3
Misc Coarse	Local	11
Calcite Gritted (shelly)	Local	10
Grog Tempered	Local	2
<b>Sample Size</b>		<b>5700</b>
<b>Summary</b>		
	Imports	3%
	Regional	26%
	Local	71%

**Table 3 Drayton II Roman Villa (Hancocks 1996)**

In contrast, settlements on higher ground, in the northern part of the survey area, yield scatters containing only Early Roman pottery and none of the distinctive late colour-coated vessel forms which we might expect to see in this part of the county (P. Liddle, *pers. comm.* based on identifications by Richard Pollard). Not only do the sites disappear but also the manuring scatters around them, suggesting a change in farming regime from arable to either pastoral or woodland.

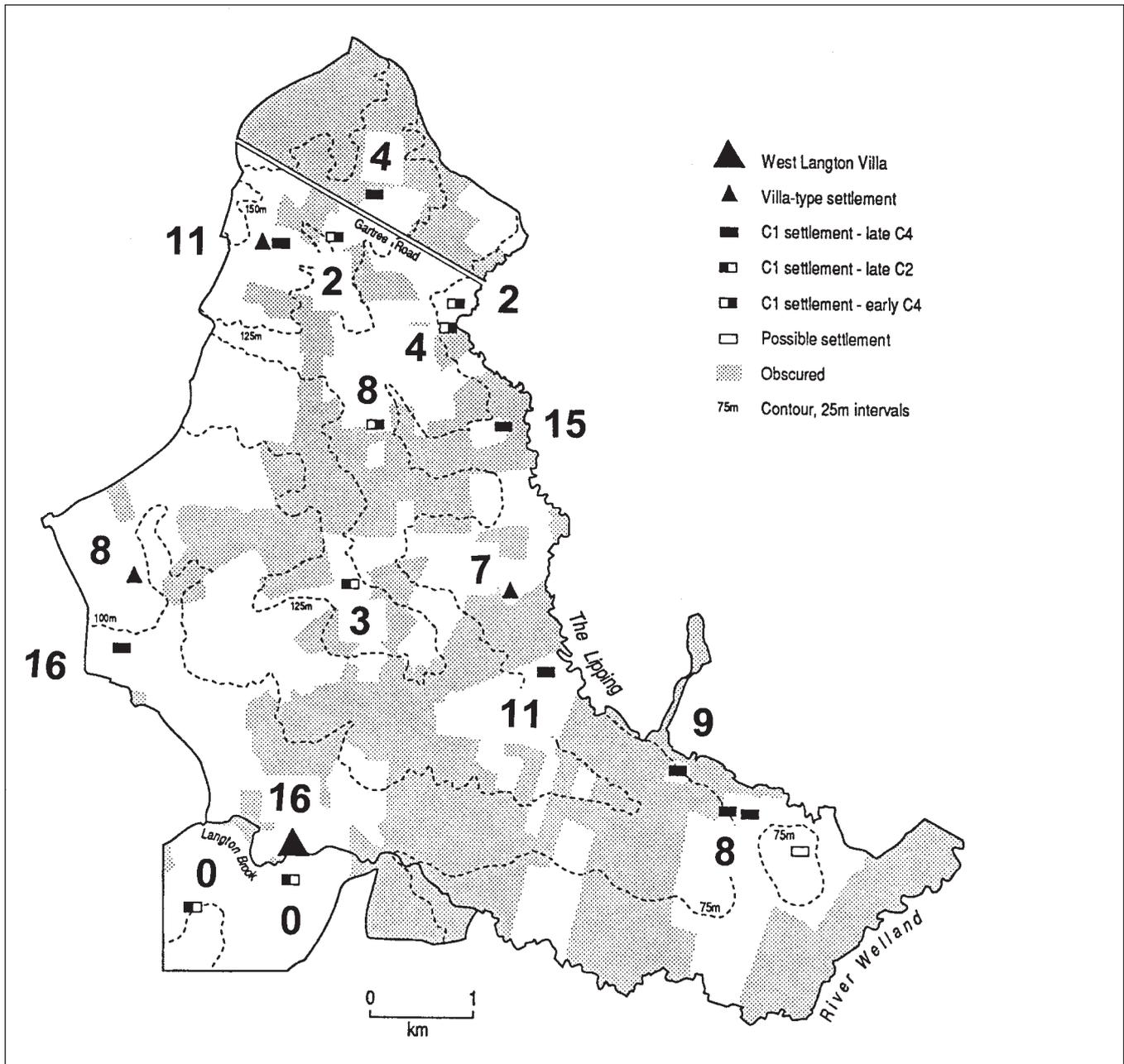


Fig. 10. Roman period sites in the Langtons, showing percentage of Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware within each field walked assemblage (after Bowman 1996).

In the Langtons there are over twenty Roman sites concentrating in the vale of the Lipping and Langton Brook, five of which are on the central high ground (refer to Bowman 1996 Fig.2 and Fig. 10 below). Four sites could be called villas and all show occupation into the late fourth century. All sites are occupied in first and second centuries and manuring suggests extensive cultivation. Two broad phases of settlement change are apparent. Four sites are deserted by the mid third century, two of which are peripheral to the West Langton villa and may indicate some form of estate reorganisation in the later Roman period (Bowman 1996, 126). The estimation of date for these scatters is based on the presence and absence of a variety of wares but the most diagnostic of these is Lower Nene valley colour-coated

ware. Estimating the percentage contribution of this ware to each assemblage can provide an indication of how far into the Roman period the site is occupied. Fig. 10 summarises this information and I am grateful to Paul Bowman for supplying these figures from his doctoral thesis research.

### Future Directions: Go forth and divide, then multiply by a hundred.

As we have seen, even within the small area of Leicestershire and Rutland, Romano-British society and the landscape it inhabited, was far more complex than previously thought, and was gradually evolving throughout the period. There is huge potential for the Fieldwork Group

to develop our understanding of this landscape through local fieldwork, and certainly no shortage of material out there waiting to be found. As well as investigating new areas, there is an urgent need to synthesise and publish the results of the extensive fieldwork already undertaken, so that an expected pattern of variation can be established, and new material compared against it. This may entail some reappraisal of pottery assemblages along the lines suggested here, in order to bring out the subtleties of dating and character between early or late sites, and ones which run right through. The importance of establishing the nature of late Roman settlement pattern across the county is that it opens the gateway to understanding the transition to the Early Anglo-Saxon period. A simple plotting of where Late Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery scatters occur across the county (both singly and together) is the logical first step to establishing the degree of continuity or dislocation in the overall settlement and one crucial step closer to understanding the process of nucleation which created the modern settlement pattern.

To conclude, the message from this paper is hopefully clear: that Roman pottery is a relatively easy material to identify and understand and that fairly straightforward quantification of wares can reveal a wealth of information about site character, date, and landscape context. I hope therefore that workers will be encouraged to go forth and multiply by one hundred! However, first they need to collect the material, sort it by fabric, count how many of each they have and then divide each by the total number of sherds in the assemblage; easy really!

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