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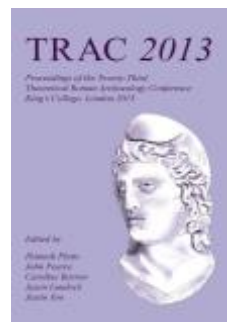
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Pompeian Red Ware in Roman London: Insights on Pottery Consumption in Colonial Environments

Cristina Podavitte

Introduction

This research addresses the study of Roman material culture from a theoretical and methodological perspective. It is specifically concerned with a class of Roman cooking pottery, namely Pompeian red ware, and the possible socio-cultural implications of its selection and use in the context of daily practices. The study aims to evaluate the reciprocal potential inherent in the combination of a material-culture approach with post-colonial paradigms in shedding more light on past social dynamics, i.e. on identity(ies) and consumption(s).

This paper is drawn from a master's dissertation and its scope and nature do not claim to be conclusive or extended. Therefore, it should be regarded as a small but considered effort at analysing material culture through the lens of theory and vice versa. It is hoped that further data and studies will contribute to completing the missing pieces, thus enhancing our understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics that lies behind consumption practices.

Theory and practice: grounding paradigms through material evidence

In recent decades the discipline of archaeology has undergone major developments from both a theoretical and a methodological perspective. However, the impact of these new study approaches has been rather dichotomised and poorly understood in terms of reciprocal feedback. Theory and material studies have generally developed on separate pathways, although their dialogue has recently started to produce new research trajectories and insightful debates on the practice of theory (Grahame 1998; Hawthorne 1998; Lucas 2002; Gardner 2003; Pitts 2004). As far as London is concerned, the fundamental study on samian ware carried out by Monteil (2005) has been a cornerstone and a vital piece in the reconstruction of the economic and socio-cultural development of the city. It has also represented a research model in terms of material culture analysis.

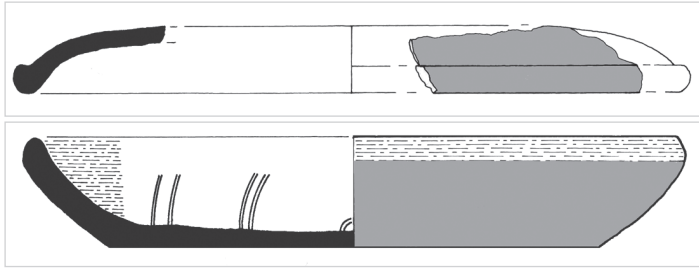


Figure 1: Gaulish Pompeian red ware lid (top) and bowl (bottom) from London. Scale 1:2.

This study is specifically concerned with a single class of Roman pottery within a localised context, i.e. Pompeian red ware in Roman London. The objective of this research is to appraise the potential of pottery analyses in bridging the gap between theory and material culture studies, hence providing a grounding tool for paradigms. Anchoring theory to material culture could provide a powerful tool to evaluate the efficiency and suitability of theoretical constructs in describing past dynamics and processes. Concurrently, the theoretical substratum could provide a guiding framework when developing methods and interpretations of material patterns.

London has represented an ideal research context for different reasons. An increasingly high number of excavations and a consistently high standard of documentation and study resulted in an improved understanding of its development and historical significance in Roman times. Within this specific context, the examination of Pompeian red ware consumption is carried out embracing a holistic definition of the phenomenon. In this paper, consumption is not considered as a mere act of purchase but rather as a system of practices ranging from the selection, purchase, use, maintenance to the disposal of artefacts (Campbell 1995: 102). These processes are analysed in their socio-cultural embeddedness and special focus is addressed to the study of the dynamics of selection and choice as contextually informed variables. This study approach may help in investigating the phenomenon of importation through a consumer-orientated perspective.

Pompeian red ware has been regarded as particularly apt for a study of this kind, as it is an imported ceramic class intrinsically linked to culinary habits, daily practices, and lifestyle. Food preparation and consumption are fundamental socio-cultural, and economic indicators and they may have played a role in the creation, perpetuation and reaffirmation of personal and public identities (Dietler 2010: 184). They represent meaningful practices through which identity-related discourses and negotiations could have been enacted. This is especially relevant when the analysis of the phenomenon of consumption aims at exploring diversity rather than seeking uniformity of experience and response. The contribution of material culture to the theoretical arena may concern the following areas: does product standardisation mean standardisation of use? Did the consumers import an artefact, the content, a practice, or a combination of these elements? Is importation a synonym of active imitation or passive adoption? If not, could we describe the phenomenon through the terms ‘appropriation’ and ‘adaptation’? Most importantly: what are the possible implications of these answers in terms of identity(ies) in colonial contexts?

Towards an integrated approach: the theory and practice of behavioural consumption

This research has been developed within a specific theoretical framework, that is the Romanisation debate, and in particular, the application of post-colonial paradigms to the study of the Roman archaeological world (Webster and Cooper 1996; Barrett 1997; Hawkes 1999; Webster 2001; Fincham 2002; Carr 2003; Mattingly 2004; Ekengren 2009; Mattingly 2011). The significance of this research framework for the analysis of material culture in colonial environments, and specifically for the study of Pompeian red ware consumption, is derived from its focus on the dialectical nature of the process of construction of identity(ies) in a contextualised and multifocal perspective. The shift from a diffusionist model to the recognition of contingent experiences has resulted in a progressive transition from the unifocal point of view of the conquerors to the multiplicity of provincial perceptions. The analysis and interpretation of archaeological artefacts could benefit from such a perspective as it allows for the investigation of the relationship between consumers and objects through a socio-culturally specific approach.

The application of this study framework to material culture analysis implies ontological and methodological consequences and, most importantly, it allows for the tendency of labelling and categorising artefacts as identity-transfer media to be overcome. In the past, the need to classify and to organise the archaeological material evidence has often led to the creation of material categories with an ontological footprint attached. Material and ethnic/cultural labels had begun to coincide, producing side effects on the inferential process. Evidence of 'Roman' material culture was interpreted as adoption of 'Roman' cultural traits, implying a process of acquisition of identity (Freeman 1993; Barrett 1997). The bias inherent in this interpretative process concerns primarily the definition of artefacts as identity conveyors rather than objects participating in behavioural and socio-cultural dynamics. Although artefacts may be characterised by specific sets of material and non-material properties, their value, meaning and significance derive from the encounter of the objects' intrinsic characteristics and the socio-cultural instances that constitute their reception milieu. This process of acquisition of meaning and value has an on-going nature as people relate to artefacts in different ways, depending on their backgrounds, preconceptions, categorisations, stereotypes and experiences. The meaning(s) and value(s) of material culture develop in space as well as throughout time. Archaeologists themselves understand and interpret objects in a time and space-specific way.

When analysing the phenomenon of consumption, it is therefore vital to take into account the contingent nature of the relationship between artefacts and consumers. The nature of this relation is substantiated through the process of choice. Selection is determined by the intrinsic properties of the objects, by a socio-culturally established system of practices as well as collective and individual cognitions. Choice can be fully conscious or less deliberate, but it constantly implies the consumers' capacity to act and to interact with the objects. It qualifies consumption as a fundamental behavioural phenomenon rather than a mere commercial praxis. The nature of this study has implied an overall reconsideration of artefacts as objects participating in a behavioural system through practices. It has also concerned the role and agency of consumers in relating to new objects and, therefore to alien cultural elements, as well as in elaborating their identity(ies) within a new political, socio-cultural and economic scenario.

Pompeian red ware as a case study: status quo and emerging issues

Although an appreciable amount of typological, economic and petrographic data and analyses has been produced so far (Goudineau 1970; Peacock 1977), the study of Pompeian red ware has proceeded at different rates in different geographic and research contexts. The relatively wide distribution of this ceramic class, which is currently recorded from sites in Palestine, Cyprus, Greece, North Africa, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Holland and Britain, has captured the interest of some scholars. Unfortunately, due to the inconsistency of fabric descriptions, there is as yet no clear distribution framework for this class of Roman pottery, especially as far as the Gaulish products are concerned (Tyers 1996: 156).

Loeschcke (1942) addressed the issue of the provenance of Pompeian red ware, arguing for the hypothesis of a Belgic production. However, the subsequent discovery of Pompeian red ware sherds in Asia Minor suggested the possibility of a Mediterranean origin. At the beginning of the 1970s, Goudineau (1970) contributed to the classification and material categorisation of a growing collection of Pompeian red ware specimens, developing a detailed typology based on the morphological and dimensional characteristics of a vast sample of bowls, platters and lids. Alongside typologies, German and Italian scholars (Wynia 1979; Grünewald *et al.* 1980; Papi 1994) continued to pursue the provenance issue, and focused their attempts at locating possible manufacturing centres through the analysis of stamps. They eventually argued for an archetypal Campanian production firmly established by the end of the second century B.C. Pucci (1975) used the material evidence combined with the literary sources to shed more light on production areas and functions, arguing for the identification of these vessels with the *cumanae testae*, namely slipped frying pans, cited by some Latin authors. The hypothesis of a production centre based in Cuma has been recently emphasised by Chiosi (1996) on the basis of new archaeological findings in the area of the ancient town.

Significant improvement in the study of the Pompeian red ware production areas and technological characteristics has stemmed from the petrographic analysis of fabrics. The pioneer of this approach, David Peacock (1977), examined various samples from Britain and distinguished seven fabrics that were manufactured in different areas of the Empire. Peacock's fabric one was sourced in the volcanic district between Etruria and Campania, whilst fabric three was described as a Central-Gaulish imitation that particularly flourished during the first and second century A.D. The general picture emerging from the latest studies (Blakely *et al.* 1989; Peña 1990; Morra *et al.* 2013) is of a late Republican production that spread in the Italian peninsula during the first century B.C. and that was soon decentralised with a series of provincial imitations, amongst which the Gaulish products acquired importance, especially in supplying Britain.

Contextual and material studies of the evidence have also contributed to the definition of possible functions and uses of Pompeian red ware vessels. Fabric characteristics, absence of feet, or angular profiles, blackened external surfaces and evidence of burnings would argue for a cooking function. Also, the presence of a slip has been interpreted as a technological expedient to prevent food from sticking to the internal surface of vessels (Boon 1967: 40). On the other hand, the occurrence of scratches has been explained as deriving from the habit of cutting the content directly onto the pot (Kenrick 1985: 320). Finally, major insights concerning the use of Pompeian red ware have been provided by the evidence from Pompeii, where vessels in this fabric were found still containing charred bread (Goudineau 1970: 165).

Notwithstanding a relatively wide range of interest and study, the consumption of Pompeian red ware is far from being fully understood. A lack of data and of analyses concerning

distribution and contextual settings still represents a major obstacle indeed. As far as London is concerned, although some isolated attempts at a comprehensive analysis of this pottery have been carried out recently (Davies *et al.* 1994: 131–136), most of the evidence from the city has been independently treated and reported within the pottery appendices of individual site publications. This preliminary attempt aims to provide new sets of data and analyses useful to compare with different consumption contexts as well as to combine with other categories of material evidence from London.

Methodology: qualitative and quantitative analyses of the material evidence

The first stage of the research consisted of collecting the evidence, that is the sites producing Pompeian red ware sherds in London. Two different database platforms were consulted in order to gather the data concerning fabric and form distribution. The first set included all the sites excavated before 1995 by the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London, whilst the second one comprised all the evidence excavated after the creation of the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) in 1995.

The second stage involved plotting the sites on GIS maps showing the overall distribution and the relative frequency of Pompeian red ware fabrics and forms per site. Due to the inconsistency of other quantification methods, comparisons related to Pompeian red ware fabrics and forms were based on the concept of ‘row’, that is the total amount of sherds characterised by a ‘unique combination of form, decoration and fabric’ per context (Symonds and Haynes 2005: 69). This recording system implies that each line within a spreadsheet or each record within a database includes a group of sherds characterised by a specific set of characteristics in terms of fabric, form and decoration and that, therefore, there cannot be two lines or records with the same combination of the above key parameters. For instance, Gaulish Pompeian red ware from context 2780 at Regis House accounts for three rows, namely two records for sherds belonging to bowls characterised by distinctive decoration and rim morphology and one record for un-decorated sherds belonging to a morphologically homogeneous group of lids.

The third stage was focused on the evidence from five potentially interesting and viable case studies. Site sampling implied two criteria, namely absolute quantities of Pompeian red ware and reliability of the stratigraphic sequence. Also, the selection aimed at covering different areas of the city with public and private spaces characterised by different functions, i.e. domestic, commercial and industrial activities, as well as covering a good chronological span, i.e. pre-Boudiccan to post-Hadrianic contexts. Infra-site analyses were focused on context interpretation and phasing. In order to have a good range of comparable data, pottery comparisons were carried out using the row as the main quantification method. When possible, weight, sherd count, and estimated number of vessels were used for infra-context analyses, highlighting discrepancies resulting from the use of different quantification systems. The subsequent step consisted of analysing the contexts bearing the highest quantity of Pompeian red ware from the selected sites and of developing in-depth quantitative analyses of pottery groups. The examination of these assemblages was achieved by dividing pottery into broad categories, primarily imported and Romano-British products. Within these groups, a further division between fine and coarse wares was implemented in order to differentiate the categories of tableware and pottery used for preparing, cooking and storing food. Pompeian red ware was placed within the latter as the material and contextual information gathered so far would argue for a cooking function.

One of the major issues encountered when dealing with quantitative data has stemmed from

the inconsistency of pottery quantification methods. As mentioned above, the only method of quantification regularly recorded within the analysed pottery records was the row. There are major limits inherent in this quantification unit, not least the fact that a category is more likely to be over-represented only because it is more varied in terms of fabric and morphology. Weight, sherd count and estimated number of vessels were also available for some assemblages, especially those excavated after 1995. Some of these contexts have offered the opportunity to evaluate the impact of different quantification methods on the analyses outcome. The results of quantitative analyses of assemblages characterised by heavy sherds such as amphorae together with lighter specimens belonging to thin-walled and smaller vessels were heavily biased when quantified by weight. On the other hand, distinctive breakdown degrees of ceramic classes have affected the analyses based on sherd count (Orton *et al.* 1993: 166–181). Unfortunately, the sporadic calculation of the estimated number of vessels has considerably limited the possibility to use this quantification system for comparative analyses.

Results and discussion: Pompeian red ware consumption analyses in Roman London

The data collected and analysed so far shows that Pompeian red ware sherds are well distributed across the townscape of Roman London. Although the spatial distribution may be biased by the different extent of archaeological work in different areas of the city, especially between the eastern and western districts, it helped in visualising the current state of research and in developing a first set of analyses. A total number of 141 sites in London returned Pompeian red ware sherds for 567 rows overall. Although less represented than other imported pottery, especially fineware products such as samian, good concentrations characterise the port, the forum and the Middle-Upper Walbrook valley. Also, some isolated clusters are to be observed in Southwark, the southern offshoot of the Roman town (Figs. 2–3). Regis House, a waterfront site in the area of the Roman port of the city, returned the highest quantity of Pompeian red ware sherds with 57 rows overall. The majority of contexts bearing Pompeian red ware sherds from this site were interpreted as debris layers associated with the Hadrianic fire. Pre-Boudiccan contexts excavated at the site of One Poultry, along the Walbrook, are also characterised by good quantities of Pompeian red ware, suggesting an early circulation of this pottery in the town. It would be interesting to deepen the study of the contexts in the western area of the city in order to assess whether the link between the port and the Walbrook valley, which was already pointed out for the distribution of samian (Monteil 2005: 241), has a meaning in terms of distributional patterns in the surrounding areas.

When looking at Pompeian red ware fabric distributions and their proportions, the data shows that the Gaulish products are spatially and quantitatively more represented than the prototypes imported from Italy and the Mediterranean. Local imitations are very scarcely attested. The general picture deduced from the fabric distribution map seems to be rather homogeneous as there are no significant spatial differences or clear patterns in Pompeian red ware consumption across the townscape (Fig. 2). However, the analysis of some contexts has also shown that Gaulish Pompeian red ware seems to be less fluctuating from a chronological point of view, coexisting with other fabrics until the end of the first century A.D. and then gradually increasing up until Post-Hadrianic phases. The analysis of two medium/large pottery assemblages from Regis House and One Poultry has revealed that Gaulish Pompeian red ware was probably available and accessible from the Boudiccan period and that its peak of importation occurred at the beginning

of the second century A.D. In this study, the continuity of importation and the preference for the Gaulish variant has been explored pursuing two main research paths, namely the analysis of the technological characteristics of the products and the investigation of their contexts.

The macroscopic analysis of fabrics, morphology, colour, diameter, thickness, surface treatment, and decoration of sherds from a sample of sites (Regis House, One Poultry, Borough Hill, Fenchurch Street and General Post Office) has revealed discrepancies and similarities between different Pompeian red ware products. On the one hand, the slip as well as the limited and standardised morphological and decorative repertoire may be considered as direct inheritors of the Campanian technological and stylistic tradition (Di Giovanni 1996: 65); on the other, some characteristics seem partly to differentiate the Gaulish fabric, suggesting a possible development independent of the previous Italic tradition. The frequent presence of tiny foot rings and roughened bases, as well as a greater degree of clay refinement and surface finishing with accurate smoothing and washing, are particular to the Gaulish group. The first set of characteristics was possibly aimed at maintaining the performance standards of Pompeian red ware vessels when in contact with fire. Raised feet would have allowed better control of thermal differential, whilst uneven outer surfaces would have improved heat conduction with a more widely distributed area of absorption (Rice 1987: 232, 242). The need to modify the original prototype was probably due to the use of different raw materials that were less rich in volcanic inclusions and, therefore, less effective in enhancing the ceramic's thermal behaviour (Bragantini 1996: 175, n. 8). This apparent disadvantage allowed for an improvement of the quality of the fabric and of the finishing, making the Gaulish products more desirable from an aesthetic point of view. The predominance of Gaulish imitations might, therefore, indicate the preference for a specific kind of product and practice, suggesting a possible use of Pompeian red ware for cooking and directly serving some kind of specialties at the table. Merging utility and visual appeal, this class of cooking pots might have been selected according to context-specific uses and practices.

Unfortunately, the analysis of contexts and of distributional patterns has not provided convincing evidence as far as function is concerned. Despite the intriguing coincidence that large assemblages of Pompeian red ware in London were recorded in the area of a possible bakery or mill excavated at the site of One Poultry and that this pottery was also found containing loaves at Pompeii (Goudineau 1970: 165), there is no conclusive evidence proving its exclusive use in bread-making. According to Scatozza Hörich (1996: 130–131) Pompeian red ware lids found at Herculaneum still contained vegetables, demonstrating that they could have played a flexible role as covers and dishes. It is worth noticing that amongst the analysed Pompeian red ware sherds, lids are always characterised by a flat centre, sometimes recessed and encircled by a tiny ring that could have served as a foot stand. Also, the absence of knobs may be explained in this perspective. It is imperative to highlight that, although in London bowls/dishes are spatially and quantitatively better represented than lids (Fig. 3), the analysis of rim diameter ranges and decoration patterns has proved that it is likely that bowls and lids occurred together as they are dimensionally and stylistically compatible. The data concerning form proportions and their distribution should be interpreted cautiously as they could be biased by the fact that Pompeian red ware lids do not usually present the main characteristic feature of this class of Roman pottery, i.e. the internal red slip, making them more difficult to identify when macroscopically examined.

More analyses of the contextual data from the sample of sites mentioned above have also provided insightful overviews on the artefact-scape in which this class of Roman pottery was placed, with particular focus on ceramics. The quantitative study of four pottery assemblages

selected on the basis of their Pompeian red ware amounts have shown that contexts characterised by larger and more diverse spectra of imported pottery returned the highest quantities of Pompeian-red ware sherds and rows. Contexts 2780 and 9038, from Regis House and One Poultry respectively, are characterised by medium/large pottery assemblages with over 70% and 60% of rows occupied by fine imports, mainly samian wares but also minor quantities of other fineware fabrics. Imported coarse pottery consists of Pompeian red ware sherds only. Although represented by three rows, Gaulish Pompeian red ware is the third most important ceramic class by sherd count. It is important to remember that these analyses have been carried out using the row as the main pottery quantification method and that therefore Pompeian red ware runs the risk of being under-represented as it is characterised by a lower degree of internal variability when compared with samian and other groups of Romano-British coarse pottery. Within these contexts, the combination of forms and decorations are more varied for samian rather than for Pompeian red ware and, on an equal amount of rows, Pompeian red ware might be under-represented with respect to the other classes as it is proved by the relative percentage of sherds and weight recorded for each group (Fig. 4).



Figure 2: The distribution of Pompeian red ware fabrics in Roman London by rows; GPO 75: General Post Office, ONE94: One Poultry, KWS94: Regis House, FEN83: Fenchurch Street, BGH95: Borough Hill (the ceramic and spatial data have kindly been provided by MoLAS. The layout is reproduced courtesy of Prof. Tim Williams, UCL).

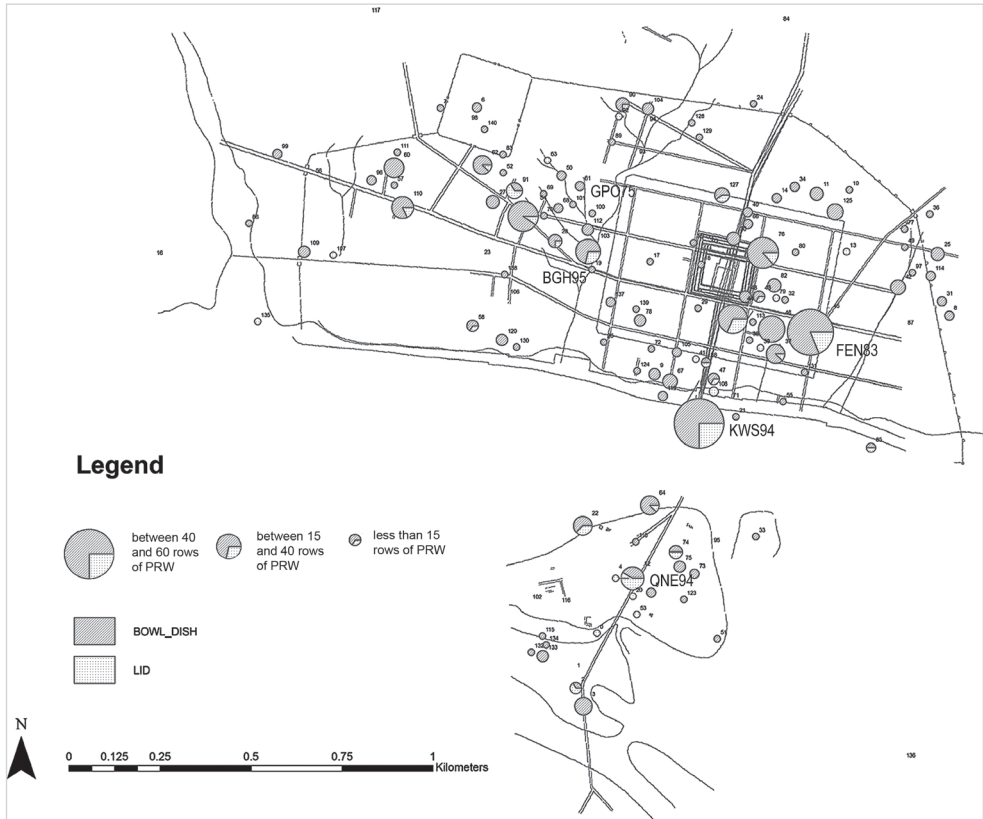


Figure 3: The distribution of Pompeian red ware forms in Roman London by rows; GPO 75: General Post Office, ONE94: One Poultry, KWS94: Regis House, FEN83: Fenchurch Street, BGH95: Borough Hill (the ceramic and spatial data have kindly been provided by MoLAS. The layout is reproduced courtesy of Prof. Tim Williams, UCL).

On the other hand, the analysis of the contexts selected from Borough Hill, Fenchurch Street and General Post Office illustrate a completely different artefactual scenario. Pompeian red ware from these assemblages is far less abundant when calculated by sherd count. The higher relative percentage recorded for Pompeian red ware from context 1942 at Fenchurch Street, is biased by the fact that this assemblage is characterised by a very low degree of internal variability for each fabric group and by the fact that sherd count was not consistently recorded within the assemblage. Overall, these pottery groups are chiefly characterised by Romano-British coarse wares, a group that accounts for up to 38% of the total rows at Borough Hill (Fig. 5). This category is the most varied in terms of fabric and it is also the most important in terms of quantity when calculated by row and sherd count. Moreover, the percentage of Romano-British fine wares within these contexts is slightly more pronounced than those recorded in assemblages characterised by larger imports such as those discussed above. Conversely, within these contexts, imports represent a minority both in terms of fine and coarse fabrics, with the exception of amphorae at Fenchurch Street. However, this latter category has been treated as a separate group as it tends to reflect the trading of contents rather than that of containers.

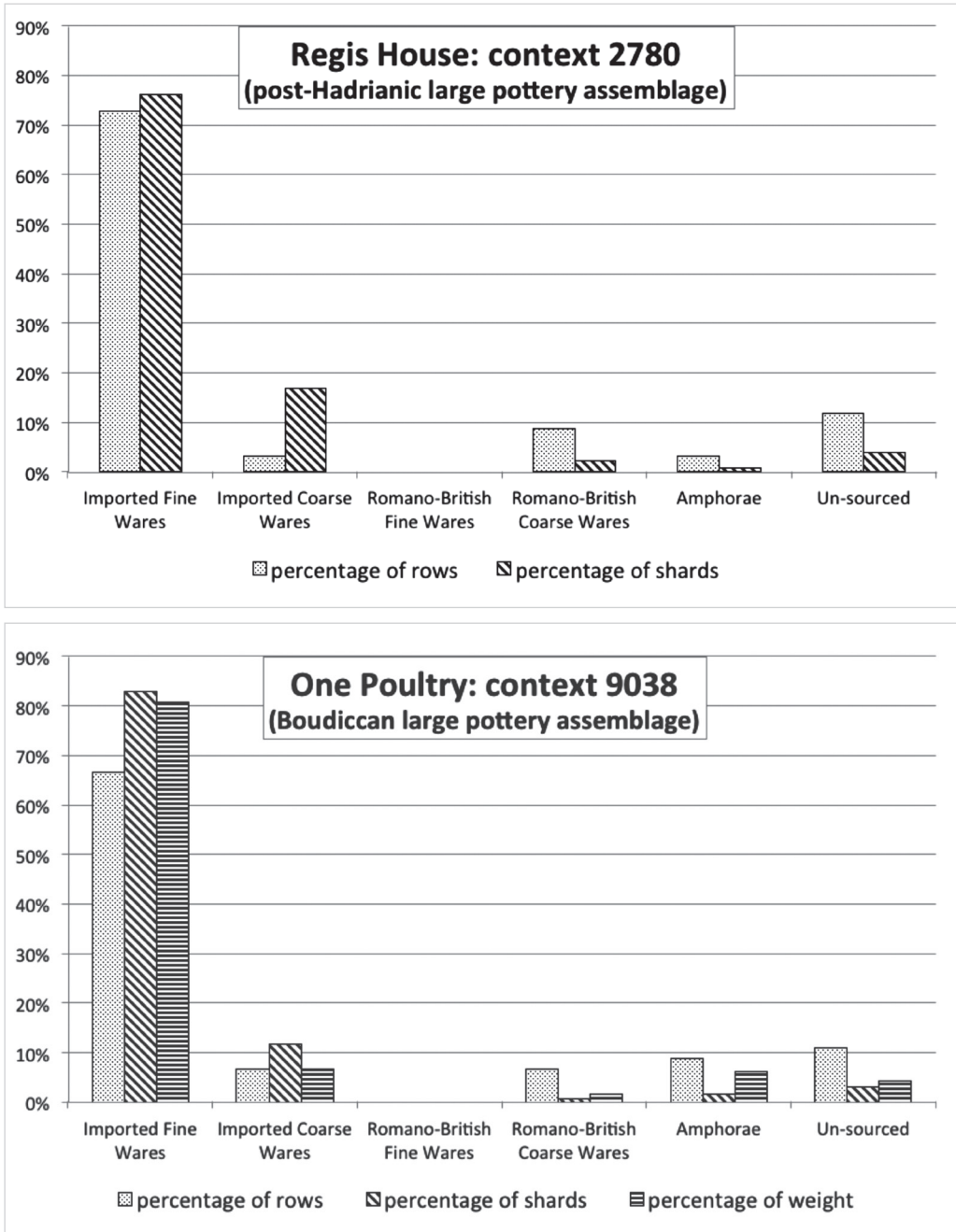


Figure 4: Analysis of fabric proportions by the percentage of rows, sherds and weight; KWS94: Regis House, ONE94: One Poultry (the ceramic data has kindly been provided by MoLAS).

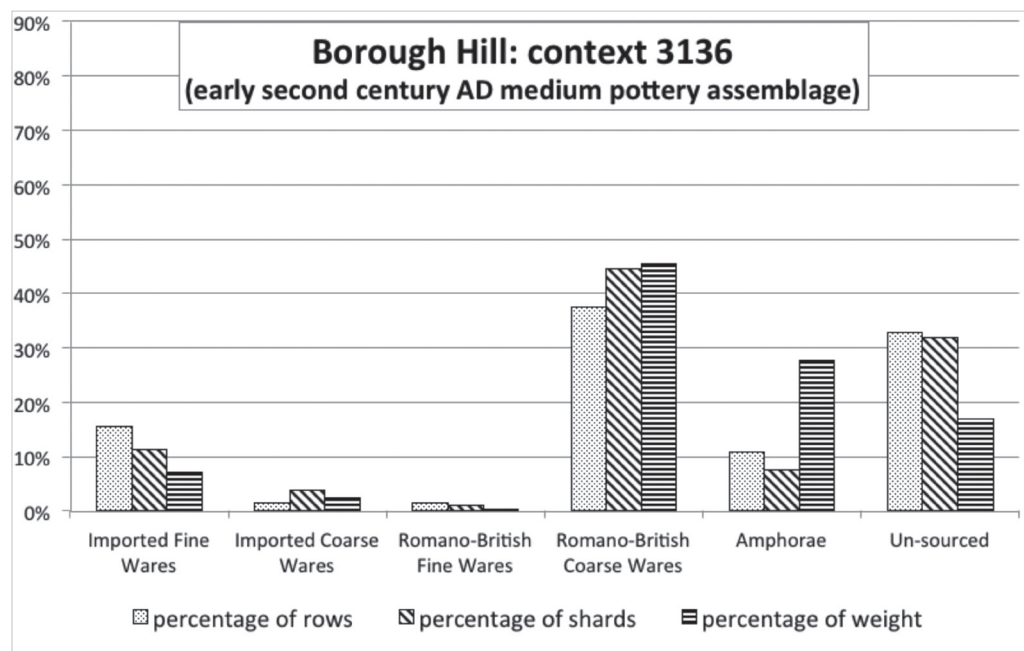


Figure 5: Analysis of fabric proportions by the percentage of rows, sherds and weight; BGH95: Borough Hill (the ceramic data has kindly been provided by MoLAS).

When analysing the frequency of different forms within the categories of imported and Romano-British fine and coarse pottery, the data from the aforementioned contexts shows that bowls, cups, dishes and beakers were chiefly imported in fine fabrics whilst coarseware imports include dishes, lids and mortaria. On the other hand, Romano-British fine products are mainly represented by beakers, flagons and dishes/bowls, whilst jars, bowls and lids account for the majority of the local coarse wares. This data suggests that dishes were mainly imported in fine fabrics, bowls were locally produced in fine and less fine fabrics as well as imported in fine fabrics and lids were both imported and locally manufactured, but in the latter case they were produced in coarse fabrics almost exclusively (Fig. 6). This picture would suggest that Pompeian red ware bowls, dishes, and lids were imported because of their unique technological and utilitarian properties as the external and internal markets were probably able to meet the demand for these specific forms that were supplied both in local and imported fabrics.

Conclusion: artefacts, practices and identities in a cross-cultural perspective

The analysis of Pompeian red ware consumption would benefit from large datasets from different consumption environments that could highlight discrepant perceptions and consumption practices specific to each context. Since practices are fundamental vehicles of expression and objectification of identities, comparative studies of consumption patterns and contexts might provide important insights on the process of construction and negotiation of identity within the Roman Empire. Although the study of Pompeian red ware represents just one piece in the puzzle, it was believed worthwhile to start from this preliminary material and to formulate some hypotheses that might prompt new research trajectories in the future.

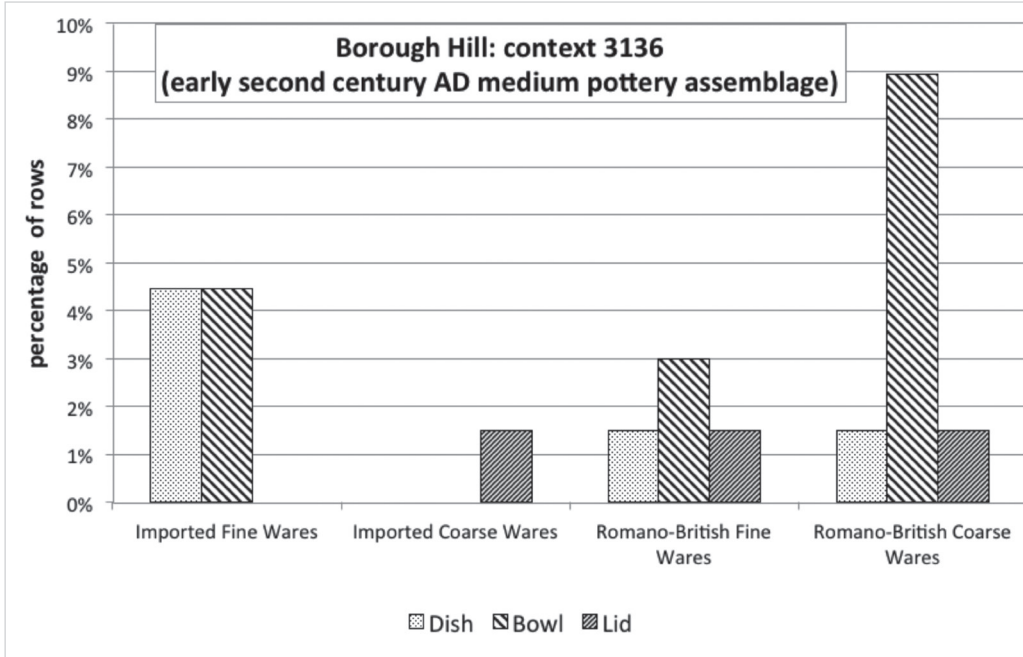
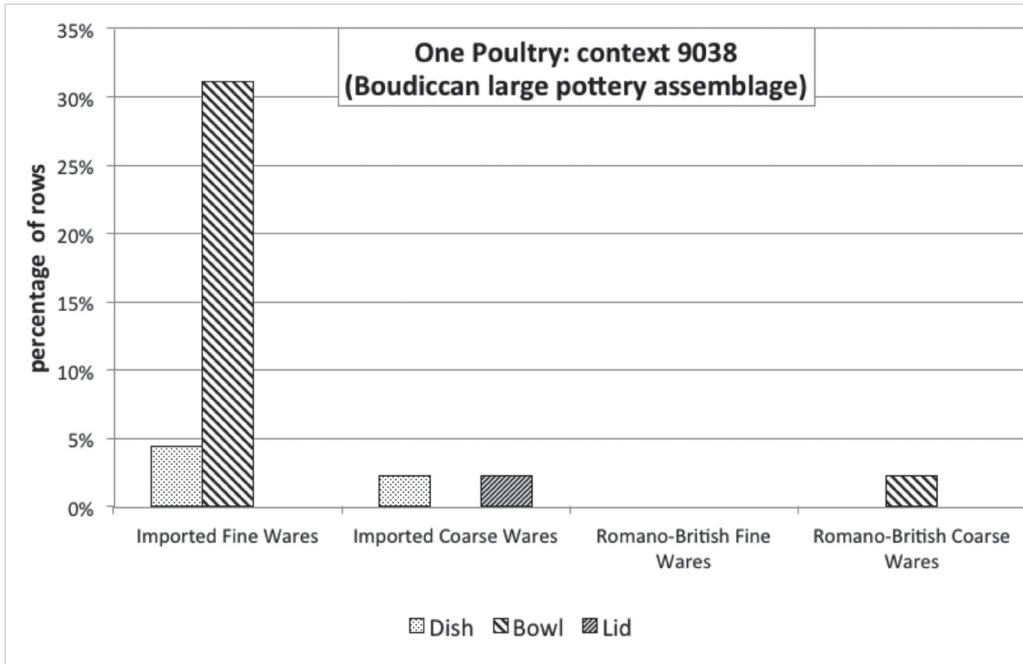


Figure 6: Analysis of form frequencies by the percentage of rows; ONE94: One Poultry, BGH95: Borough Hill (the ceramic data has kindly been provided by MoLAS).

As highlighted by the analysis of some contexts, Londinium seems to have a privileged relationship with Gaul that has to be understood considering the relational dynamics between this area and South-Eastern England, which were established before the invasion of Britain and progressively reinforced when the city on the Thames was founded. In the context of these early contacts and exchanges, the spread of Mediterranean Pompeian red ware alongside other products of Campanian and more generally of Italic origin, should perhaps be included. Notably, evidence for pre-conquest imports of Pompeian red ware has been recorded at St Catherine's Point, on the Isle of Wight (Trott and Tomalin 2003: 159). Also, the rapid blooming of the Gaulish ceramic industry might have promoted the importation of Gaulish Pompeian red ware towards Britain along with other products manufactured in Central Gaul as well as imported from the Mediterranean.

The analysis of the evidence from London has revealed that both Gaulish and Italic Pompeian-red ware were imported to the city from the Boudiccan period onwards. When comparing the data concerning fabric consumption in Britain, it is important to observe that there is no clear pattern or single trend, although the Italic variant has been described as the most widely spread category (Peacock 1977: 150–151). Londinium, however, has also shown that Pompeian red ware from Gaul was consumed to an equal if not greater degree from the early phases onwards. The reasons behind this phenomenon may be various and difficult to infer from the analysis of pottery distribution patterns and contexts, especially when dealing with different documentation extents. Since Pompeian red ware belongs to the category of imported pottery, it might be tempting to start with economic and opportunistic criteria. From this point of view, the predominance of Gaulish Pompeian red ware could be explained in terms of the product's effectiveness, quality, availability, accessibility, cost and therefore competitiveness in the market. Also, the trading of other goods, especially food and fine ceramics with respect to which kitchenware behaved as 'parasite' commodities, might have affected its import in London.

However, it is equally vital to consider that the main agents behind the phenomenon, i.e. the consumers and their relationship with producers and distributors, might not have been influenced or prompted purely by the convenience and availability of products. Mediterranean Pompeian red ware seems to be equally available and accessible when compared to its Gaulish counterpart, at least in the early phases. When considering that Pompeian red ware from Gaul had the same techno-functional properties, thus a reasonable degree of efficiency, it is possible that it was selected because of its unique characteristic, i.e. utility combined with visual appeal. This in turn implies that Pompeian red ware in London might not have been used as a mere cooking device, but gained a place at the table alongside other fine pottery, perhaps as a variant or complement of samian ware. The analysis of the sample of contexts from Borough Hill, Regis House, Fenchurch Street, One Poultry and General Post Office have shown that there exists a correlation between samian and Pompeian red ware quantities. The large stored pottery assemblages excavated at Regis House seem to suggest that Pompeian red ware was imported along with Central Gaulish fine fabrics and, especially, samian pottery. On the other hand, the association of Pompeian red ware and samian fabrics was also recorded within a commercial-domestic area excavated at One Poultry, implying a certain degree of similarity in terms of consumption.

The preference for Gaulish Pompeian red ware in London might therefore indicate uses and practices that are specific to the city. In terms of consumption, this would imply that product and use selection were implemented when interacting with foreign material culture and that different socio-cultural contexts played a role in determining either integration or rejection of the alien. The hypothesis of a London distinctive micro-system of Pompeian red ware consumption is

particularly intriguing and, most importantly, it allows artefacts to be examined in their socio-cultural embeddedness. This is particularly noticeable when the cultural boundaries between 'system of provision' (Fine 1995: 142) and 'system(s) of reception' are crossed. The phenomenon of importation most likely concerned the artefacts' material and technological characteristics and properties rather than the practices in which they were implemented. Each consumption context, being characterised by a different world of practices and by an interconnected and socio-culturally specific series of elements such as routines, know-how, tastes, meanings and material universes, acted as a filtering agent. This implies that new items as well as innovations were integrated and appropriated in order to fit within established systems of meanings and practices (Reckwitz 2002: 249).

Consumption choices were therefore the result of a complex combination of factors that epitomised identity as a dynamic conception and as an expression of individual and collective attributes. This process did not develop in a vacuum as it was determined by the encounter of the consumers as individual and societal actors with the object's tangible and abstract properties. The selection was partly achieved through conscious reasoning and it implied an evaluation of the object's technological properties according to criteria shared within the same socio-cultural context. Product choice was also determined by a less-deliberately-applied argument that mainly concerned the perceived correspondence between a pre-existent world of practices and the object, in terms of its suitability and capacity to be adapted within it. Also, individual components and preferences might have played a role in determining different choice outcomes. The dynamics of selection and choice did not apply to products only, but equally concerned their usage and function. Although Pompeian red ware is particularly suitable for cooking and evidence of this use has been recorded in Pompeii and, to a lesser extent, in London, it is here suggested that vessels in this fabric could have been used for a variety of domestic purposes ranging from the preparation to the display of food.

The micro-consumption perspective can greatly contribute to the analysis of boundary dynamics in terms of agency(ies) and identity(ies) within different provincial settings. The process of appropriation of the alien and re-contextualisation within the self was necessary as practices are socio-culturally embedded and, as such, they contributed to the shaping and to the expression of identity(ies) (Grahame 1998: 1–10; Gardner 2003: 1–13). 'Consumption involves the incorporation of the consumed item into the personal and social identity of the consumer' (Gell 1986: 112) and therefore the relationship between identity and artefacts is of a constitutive nature and practices are the fundamental medium through which agency and identity are enacted. The result of such dynamics is the social and cultural structuring of new identities, practices and objects which cannot be defined as Roman or provincial, but original in themselves (Freeman 1993: 438–445; Hitchner 2000: 611–614). The concepts of 'Roman' and 'Provincial' lie on a simplified level of abstraction that cannot be considered useful to the analysis of context-specific dynamics (Barrett 1997: 51–64; Hingley 1997: 81–100; Lucas 2002: 51).

In conclusion, the analysis of Pompeian red ware consumption in London has shown that the study of material culture can potentially contribute to the theoretical debate on identity and cultural interaction in colonial environments. The analysis of consumer response to Pompeian red ware and, more generally, to alien material culture can provide insightful overviews of the dynamics of construction and negotiation of identity(ies) and it may help in evaluating the contribution of provincial agencies to the notion of 'Roman-ness'. At the same time, theoretical constructs represent vital study frameworks and analytical tools necessary to contextualise a set of otherwise sterile data. It is worth emphasising that Pompeian red ware represents a small, yet

essential piece of a larger picture and that comparative studies are vital in order to develop micro-consumption analyses. The historical process of reconstruction of the identity(ies) of Londoners within the wider socio-cultural, economic and political Roman scenario may benefit from such a perspective as it would help to ground experiences within specific contexts of development. This does not mean reducing the phenomenon to a dimension of absolute relativism we cannot find any interpretative key for, but rather recognising the complexity of variables, mechanisms and agents involved in the shaping of the Roman Empire and its society.

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