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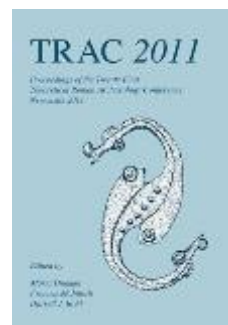
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The Devil is in the (Samian) Detail – Potters’ Stamps on Samian Ware and their Implications for the Roman Provincial Economy

Meike Weber

Introduction

Samian ware (also known as *terra sigillata*: Webster 1996: 1) is a type of Roman fine ware that was produced in numerous workshops in various decorated and plain shapes. An extensive research history, stretching back to the late nineteenth century, has resulted in an accumulation of knowledge on the chronology, typology, production processes and distribution of this high quality pottery (recent summaries in Brulet *et al.* 2010; Bémont & Jacob 1986).

The discovery of production centres in Italy, Gaul and Germany unearthed vast amounts of material, shedding light on internal structures of the workshops such as the assignment of potters to specific kiln sites based on their individual stamps and decorative motifs. Graffiti and other epigraphic sources have been consulted, distribution maps compiled, and discussions on possible trade routes have suggested different possibilities from state to military involvement and private merchants trading samian ware.

So the question really is: can samian research still offer us anything new? Have we not already extracted every bit of knowledge and asked every question this pottery might pose?

Samian and the Roman Economy – a theoretically informed approach

The wide distribution combined with our extensive knowledge of chronological developments and production processes of samian pottery turn this material group into a useful tool for an assessment of economic modelling and market formation throughout the North-Western Roman provinces. We are thus able to illustrate a more detailed picture of the *modus operandi* behind the supply of samian, based on an intra-regional analysis of this fine-ware.

The need for a quantified and detailed analysis of artefactual evidence for the interpretation of the Roman economy has most recently been emphasised by Bowman and Wilson (2009: 3). Moving away from a past ‘primitivist-modernist debate’ of the Roman Economy as a whole (Bowman and Wilson 2009: 7), recent research focuses on a detailed study of the material culture to further our understanding of market development. Moreover, it explores consumer patterns that have, as yet, been disregarded as being economically inefficient and unfathomable.

In terms of samian research we could therefore ask the following questions: could contracts between potters or workshops on the one hand and merchants on the other have bound vessels to specific lines of supply and consequently certain regions? Why, for example, did the Rheinzabern samian workshops not take over the British market when they were in a geographically more convenient location than the Central Gaulish producers to supply the

island (see also King 1984)? Can we possibly tell if the products of some potters were preferably sold to the population of specific areas?

The archaeological evidence—here specifically in the form of potters' stamps on samian ware—will be used to explore such possibilities as individuality in consumption and directed trade influenced by official organizations.

Potters' stamps on samian – the material basis

With the intention of exploring the *modus operandi* of supplying samian wares, this paper takes a closer look at the deciding factors behind different choices of imports based on an assessment of the potters' stamps.

These small details have recently been made more easily accessible by the publication of the monograph series 'Names on *Terra Sigillata*' (NOTS). The monographs are based on Brian Hartley and Brenda Dickinson's extensive collection of potters' stamps on samian ware from all over the Roman Empire and especially the North-Western provinces. The publication of this vast assemblage of more than 200,000 stamps, which Hartley and Dickinson recorded over more than forty years, was begun in 2005 (see Hartley and Dickinson 2008a: ix–xi). Since then, seven monographs of potters' stamps (starting with the letter A all the way up to R) have been published (Hartley and Dickinson 2008a–c; 2009a–b; 2010; 2011).

Parallel to the publication of the monograph series, Dr. A. Mees (Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz/Germany) is creating a database which is currently still under construction (only letters A to I included) but which will incorporate the full set of stamps and be publicly available from 2014 (for further information on the database see: <http://www.rgzm.de/samian>).

A few words of caution have to be said regarding this source: Hartley finished his collection of potters' stamps in the late nineties and no new material has since been added to the corpus. Moreover, based on the availability and accessibility of material some areas were more thoroughly covered than others; the concentrated distribution of collected samian stamps in Britain hence illustrates a certain geographical bias in research. In terms of quantification, the data has to be treated with care as some data sets, especially of important sites such as the German *limes* forts, will have to be reassessed before correct quantities will be available. This also plays an important role when plotting possible concentrations of finds. The publications and database are hence still a work in progress and will in time be updated and improved.

Nonetheless, taking these cautions into account, the corpus offers an immensely useful tool for further analysis of samian ware. The general output of samian workshops has already been the subject of intensive research; instead, my focus is on individual potters and their products. With easy access to thousands of individual potters' stamps we can now take these 'micro-details,' which are of implicit importance to the interpretation of the organization of samian production and analyze patterns of regional and intra-regional distribution and consumption.

Methodology – the usefulness of micro-details

The analysis is based on independently dated, largely contemporary deposits from various different regions in order to reveal any chronological reasons for differences or conformities in the supply of samian, focussing on the Antonine period.

Here, 'independently dated' denotes sites or deposits that have been chronologically assessed with the help of historic and epigraphic sources, stratified numismatic evidence or

dendrochronological dating and ideally a combination of some of these. Any deposits that rely purely on samian finds for dating have been omitted from the analysis to avoid circular arguments.

Unfortunately we have few sites fulfilling these criteria: for Roman Britain, examples would include the Antonine Wall and deposits with numismatic *termini post quos* such as the *Verulamium* Antonine fire deposits (Frere 1972: 89–98), the Castleford pottery shop assemblage (for the full reports see Cool and Philo 1998; Abramson *et al.* 1999; Rush *et al.* 2000) or the Wroxeter gutter group (see especially Bushe-Fox 1913; Atkinson 1942; Barker *et al.* 1997; Ellis 2000; Webster *et al.* 2002).

Roughly contemporary sites on the continent are more difficult to discern and our best equivalent to the aforementioned British sites would be the Inner and subsequent Outer *limes* forts in *Germania Superior* and *Raetia*. Military fortifications along the inner stretch of this frontier were largely built during the later years of Trajan's reign (see Kortüm 1998) and abandoned by the army with the advance of the frontier to the Outer *limes* around A.D. 160.

The aforementioned method builds up a reliable, relative chronology and depiction of supply patterns in and to different regions. Provincial differences in supply with samian should thus become obvious in a comparison of the British and German markets and enable a theoretically informed assessment of the economic decisions that caused these patterns.

The potter's stamps themselves are of utmost importance for this comparison as they allow the exact identification of respective origin of both decorated and plain samian ware. Instead of focusing purely on decorated samian, hence forfeiting large parts of the samian assemblages per site, the stamps are of utmost interest to illustrate more detailed patterns based on individual potters' products.

As it would be impossible to discuss every site in the aforementioned areas on the following pages, I will concentrate on just a few examples from the Antonine period, namely the Castleford pottery shop assemblage and the Wroxeter gutter group. These will be set against the general background of samian supply to Antonine sites in Roman Germany and the Danube provinces. The artefactual evidence will consequently be used to challenge our understanding of the practicalities that influenced samian supplies to different provinces, such as trade networks, consumption or consumer preference.

Roman Britain goes shopping: the assemblages from Castleford and Wroxeter

The development of Roman Wroxeter (Shropshire) from legionary fortress to urban centre has been extensively researched and will not be reiterated here. Instead I will focus on an event that saw large parts of Wroxeter destroyed by fire in the Antonine period.

The destruction layer was exceptionally well preserved in the forum area, where samian was found dumped in a gutter (Atkinson 1942: 127–130). Further material lay, still stacked, on the floors of adjacent rooms (East room 1, 2 and 3 mostly) where goods might have been stocked for future trading (Atkinson 1942: 147). Numismatic evidence, recorded from the destruction layer, offers a *terminus post quem* of A.D. 155 (two issues of Antoninus Pius), which allows us to date the event independently from the samian to the second half of the second century A.D.

Most of the samian from the destruction deposits was imported from Central Gaul, especially the workshops at Lezoux, whilst very small amounts originated from East Gaulish (Chémery) and Upper German (Rheinabern) production centres (Fig. 1).

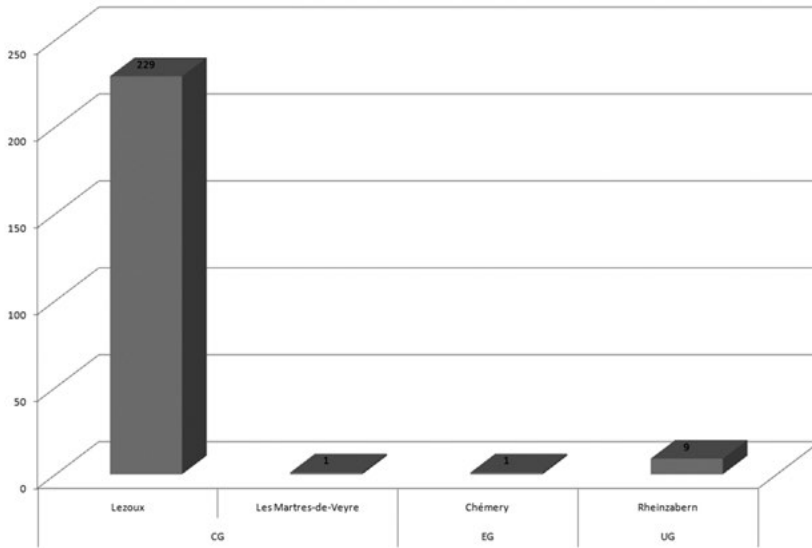


Figure 1: Total quantities (240 ind. examples) of samian in the Wroxeter Gutter group, based on the potters' stamps. CG: Central Gaulish; EG: East Gaulish; UG: Upper German potteries.

The way these finds were stacked indicates that the assemblage was possibly part of a pottery shop's stock awaiting sale or, more generally speaking, distribution to the consumer. The same character of assemblage formation has been documented from shipwrecks (see for example Nieto and Puig *et al.* 2001 for Cala Culip) or the well-known samian deposit from Pompeii, where vessels were still packed in a crate (Atkinson 1914).

The Wroxeter gutter group is hence evidence of a samian assemblage at the pre-consumption stage. This theory finds support in the analysis of the potter's stamps. Although most potters in the largely varied group of stamps are represented by a few pieces only, some of them stand out with a high quantity of fragments.

To choose one potter from the Wroxeter gutter group who is also available from the (as yet limited) database, the mid to late Antonine potter Elvillus of Lezoux is noteworthy with 27 examples of his stamp type on dishes Drag. 31 (Fig. 2). Elvillus' products are common in Britain where most of his vessel types have been documented (see Hartley and Dickinson 2008c: 350–351). Although exclusively of one die-type (probably due to the short production span of Elvillus from *c.* A.D. 165–185), it is the quantity and uniformity of his products which indicates one large shipment to Wroxeter. The theory of a shop's trading goods is furthermore emphasized by the quantity of samian stamped by the Lezoux potter Victor. His products must have been acquired as part of the same large consignment that included the vessels of Elvillus.

The character of the Wroxeter assemblage becomes distinctive when compared with occupation deposits of the same date where the wider variety of material without clustering of individual potters' dies can be explained with its supply and consumption over a longer period of time (one such example would be the *Verulamium* Antonine fire deposits; see Frere 1972: 89–98; also Hartley in Frere 1972: 256).

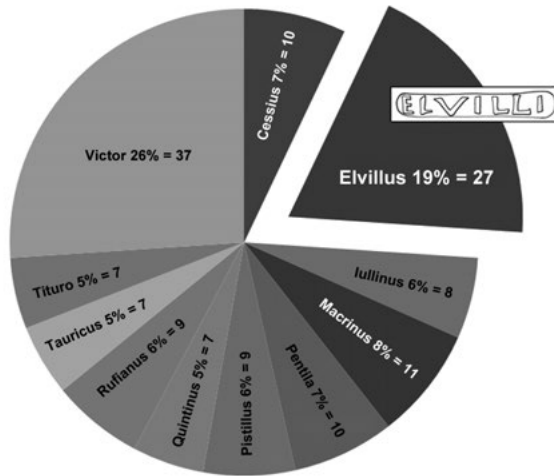


Figure 2: Proportional representation of most prolific potters (including total numbers of stamps) identified in the Wroxeter gutter group.

The second samian assemblage presented here was excavated in the Roman *vicus* at Castleford. This site is situated in West Yorkshire close to the banks of the river Aire. Two successive military forts were probably occupied during the later first century A.D. The adjacent *vicus* survived the abandonment of the forts until around the mid second century when a fire destroyed at least parts of the settlement. This incident created some important finds deposits including the so-called ‘pottery shop’ assemblage (see also Dickinson and Hartley in Rush *et al.* 2000: 55). The latest coins from the same deposit as the almost 600 fragments of samian, plus a multitude of BBI and other coarse ware vessels, were issued by the emperor Hadrian, giving a *tpq* of A.D. 117–138 for the depositing of the group (Cool and Philo 1998, 11; 21 nos. 261, 268); however, taking coin circulation into account, they could indicate a date around the middle of the second century A.D. for the destruction of this area (Cool and Philo 1998: 11, 21 nos. 261, 268). It has to be noted that the assemblage has not been excavated in its entirety (Dickinson and Hartley in Rush *et al.* 2000, 54) but the available quantities and uniformity of the material should allow a general identification of the samian and the character of the deposit as a whole.

The samian assemblage consists almost exclusively of Central Gaulish material (Fig. 3) and the production centre at Lezoux is once again the dominant supplier (Dickinson and Hartley in Rush *et al.* 2000: 56). The range of stamped vessels at Castleford offers a wider variety than the Wroxeter gutter group, which has been explained with subsequent levelling and reuse of the area after the destruction. Most of the potters are only represented by individual or small groups of stamps with limited die variety. However, there are also a few potters who stand out with a large quantity of examples.

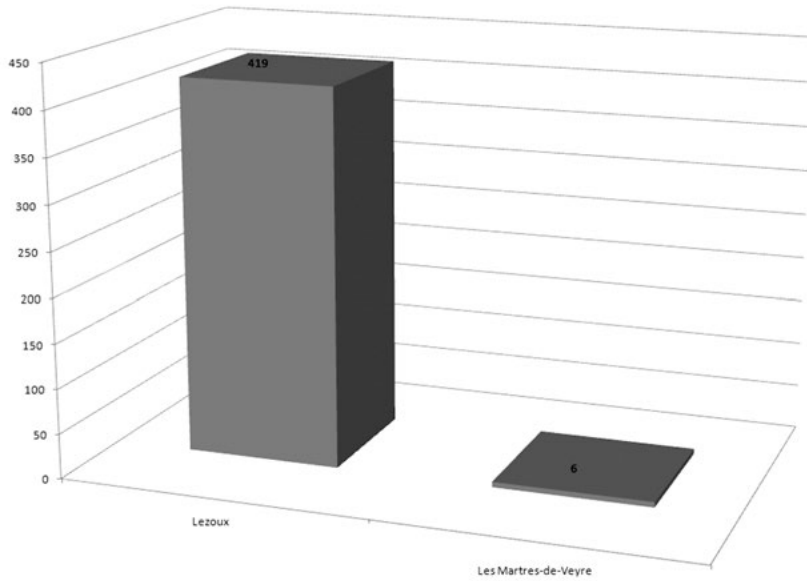


Figure 3: Total quantities (425 ind. examples) of samian in the Castleford pottery shop assemblage, based on the potters' stamps.

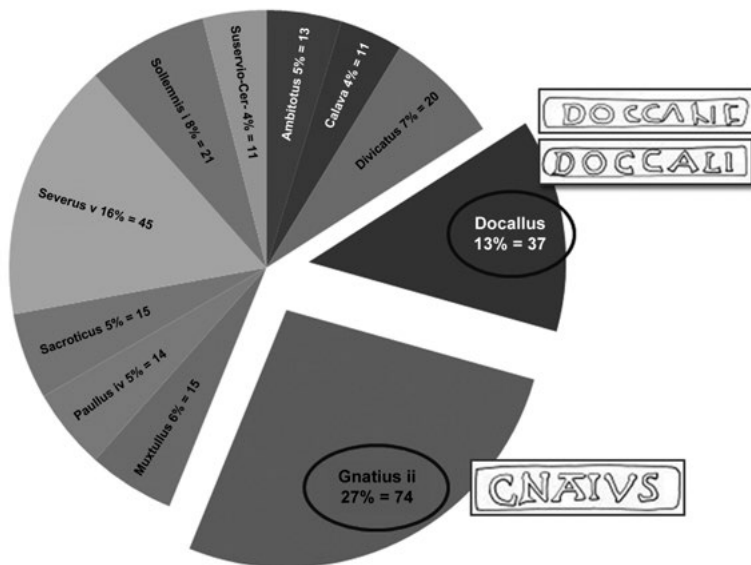


Figure 4: Proportional representation of most prolific potters identified in the Castleford pottery shop assemblage, based on the potters' stamps.

Eleven potters can be highlighted in particular (Fig. 4). Of these, the most prolific was undoubtedly the Lezoux potter Gnatus ii with 73 examples of his die type 4a on plain cups of type Drag. 27 (24) and 33 (49). Another example would be Doccalus who is represented by 37 examples of his stamps in two different die varieties (4a and 5c). The quite limited variety of forms and die types of Lezoux potters indicate, once again, the acquisition of one large, contemporary shipment of pottery that was supplied to Castleford. Whoever traded the material must have brought it to Castleford where it was awaiting further sale or distribution when a fire destroyed the *vicus*.

The Castleford and Wroxeter assemblages are hence very similar in character and—albeit with slightly different *termini post quos*—can both be dated to the Antonine period, Castleford to the earlier and Wroxeter to the later phase.

Samian fashion advice: who decided what was desirable?

I now turn back to the initial question of the organization of supplying samian to Roman Britain.

From a modern economic point of view, consumers are used to having a surplus supply of goods on offer, leaving the choice of which article to buy up to them. The individual customer can consequently not only display his preference of certain items, but he/she can directly order goods and thus influence supplies.

However, the nature of markets during the Roman period was surely of a very different kind. Who decided what was desirable? Moreover, can we possibly identify these patterns on the basis of the archaeological evidence?

During the Antonine period Roman Britain was largely supplied with the products of the samian workshops at Lezoux in Central Gaul. This has been indicated by the analysis of the aforementioned assemblages and is even more profoundly visible on a map depicting the general distribution of second century Lezoux samian (Fig. 5). The two-pronged distribution

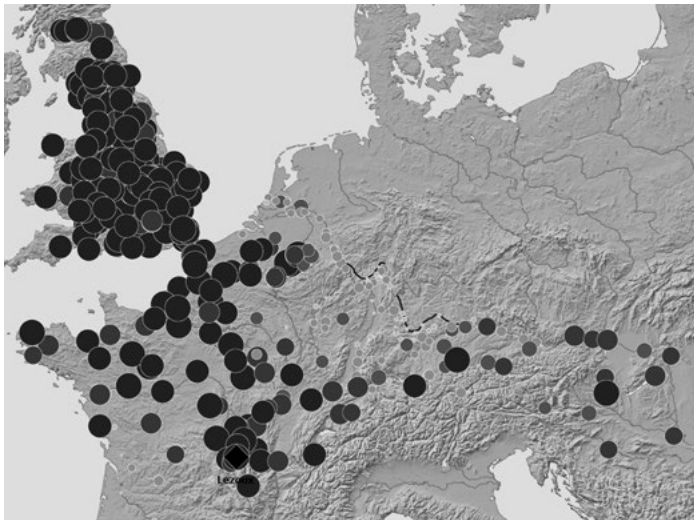


Figure 5: Distribution of stamped samian from the workshops at Lezoux; sample of letters A to I based on entries in the 'Names on Terra Sigillata' (NOTS) database, RGZM Mainz/University of Reading.

pattern from the workshops at Lezoux northwards and into the Danube provinces depicts the main export markets in Britain, *Raetia*, *Noricum* and *Pannonia*. However, it also begs the question of how *Germania Superior* was supplied with samian, as Lezoux was apparently not ‘popular’ in this area.

The analysis of the potters’ stamps from the two British sites, Castleford and Wroxeter, has highlighted the pre-eminent occurrence of three potters: Elvillus in the Wroxeter group, and Gnatus ii and Docalus in the Castleford assemblage (the potters Victor in the Wroxeter and Severus v in the Castleford assemblage are also disproportionately over-represented but have been omitted here due to the current limited availability of potters’ stamps [letters A–I] on the data base). Were their vessels traded to Britain by chance or choice, based on availability or general production output?

Questions of consumer preference based on the archaeological evidence are difficult to answer; however, could the distribution patterns of the previously mentioned potters’ products indicate a certain favouritism of export to the British market?

The marked bias to Britain might also be explained by a superior record of documenting samian finds from this province as compared to other areas. The evidence of Central Gaulish potters from sites in Roman Britain is hence possibly extensively out of proportion to the rest of the continent where Hartley’s collection activity of potters’ stamps was less intense. Consequently—and as an example—we can use the geographical distribution of the aforementioned three potters and ask if these depict the reality of samian supply or rather modern collection methods. The comparison will be based on the distribution pattern of all their known stamped vessels that are available on the NOTS database (see Figs. 6–8).

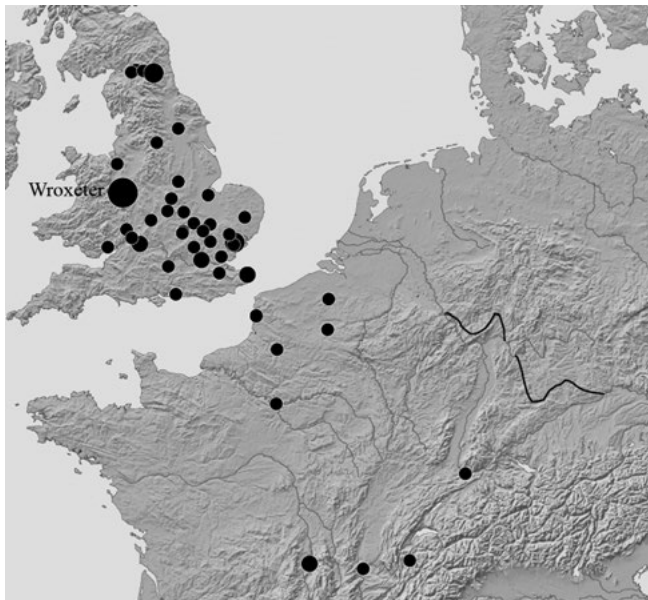


Figure 6: Distribution of samian stamped by the Lezoux potter Elvillus; based on entries in the NOTS database, RGZM Mainz/University of Reading.

For example, samian stamped by the small workshop of the mid to late Antonine potter Elvillus is largely unknown outside Britain (Fig. 6). Were his products marketed exclusively towards consumers in Roman Britain? Hartley and Dickinson (2008c: 350–51) documented a distinctive spread of products by Elvillus across mainland Britain—more than 90% of his known products have been found here—and a virtual lack of finds on the continent. However, could this be a realistic depiction of directed trade towards Britain or a biased picture based on the issues of small workshop output and modern research activity?

The Antonine potter Gnatus ii worked at more than just one workshop and moved (or his moulds were passed on) from Les Martres-de-Veyre to Lezoux shortly before the middle of the second century A.D. (Hartley and Dickinson 2009a: 214). Whilst the products of Gnatus ii are mainly known from Roman Britain, there is also sparse evidence from the continent and especially along the German *limites*, the Netherlands and France (Fig. 7). Once again, we have to ask if the scarceness of continental evidence for Gnatus ii is to be explained with differences in the modern collection activity and documentation or if we are looking at the actual overall distribution pattern of his products.

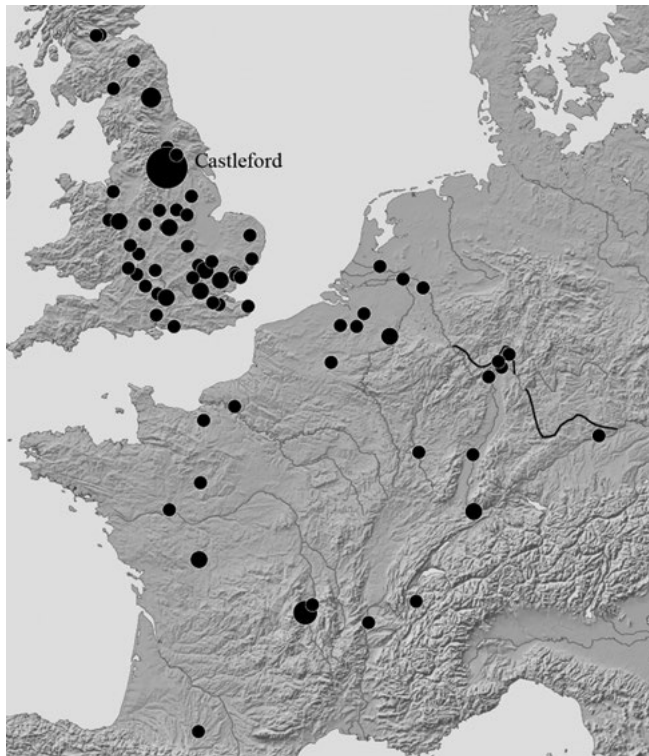


Figure 7: Distribution of samian stamped by Gnatus ii; based on entries in the NOTS database, RGZM Mainz/University of Reading.

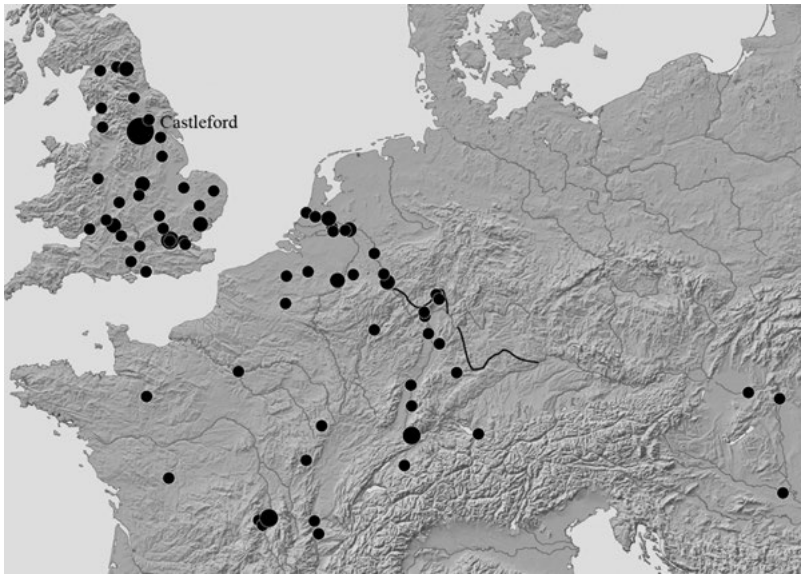


Figure 8: Distribution of samian stamped by Doccalus; based on entries in the NOTS database, RGZM Mainz/University of Reading.

Last but not least, the evidence for samian stamped by the contemporary potter Doccalus indicates a mostly north and eastwards orientated export of his products. Initially at Les Martres-de-Veyre where he probably started work very late in the Hadrianic period, he or his moulds must have moved to Lezoux fairly early during his career (Hartley and Dickinson 2008c: 290). Most of his products originate from Lezoux and were probably in use until around A.D. 160. His stamps are also known from sites in the Rhine basin and all along the German *limes*, especially in the Wetterau (Fig. 8). The distribution of Doccalus' products resembles that of the aforementioned two potters, but a possibly larger output meant that his products are found on other markets such as the German Rhine frontier.

The importance of representative quantities: now you can see it, now you can't

A look at the distribution of one of the most prolific Central Gaulish potters, Cinnamus ii, underlines the geographically limited evidence for stamps of Elvillus, Gnatus ii and to a certain degree even Doccalus (Fig. 9).

The works of Cinnamus ii, whose workshops or moulds were used to produce samian from the early Antonine period (possibly as early as A.D. 135) until around A.D. 180, are represented in the assemblages from almost every site within the general distribution area of Central Gaulish samian. This comes as no surprise as his moulds are known to have been in use over roughly half a century at four different Central Gaulish workshops at least!

A direct comparison between Cinnamus ii and Elvillus consequently confirms the differences in their documented output and distribution. The workshops of Cinnamus ii obviously operated on a far larger scale, working not only for an extensively longer period than Elvillus, but also producing both decorated and plain wares as opposed to Elvillus, who seems

to have produced only the latter. However, both potters are known to have worked well into the second half of the second century A.D. (until around A.D. 180/190; Hartley and Dickinson 2008c: 30, 351) and their contemporary products could have thus been partially traded to similar sites.

Nonetheless it seems that the Danube provinces, where Cinnamus ii was popular, did not receive any of Elvillus' products. A similar picture is illustrated along the Rhine, where stamped wares especially of Cinnamus ii, but also Gnatus ii and Doccalus are present in small amounts whilst Elvillus does not feature at all. Could this be explained by different quantities of produced vessels, consumer preference, a different system of supply, chronological reasons or is it simply a pattern created by modern collection activity?

These possible reasons pose a problem for the interpretation of distribution maps that venture further than a mere documentation of presence or absence of individual potters at different sites. The discrepancies between large scale potters such as Cinnamus ii and small producers such as Elvillus mean that Cinnamus ii is statistically over-represented on the markets. The chances of finding products by Elvillus are less likely due to his small overall production numbers. To enable any detailed comparison between those two particular potters, each probably on the extreme end of respective production output, future research in this area will be directed towards a statistical approach to moderate the differences of the quantitative representation (cf. for example Mees 2007).

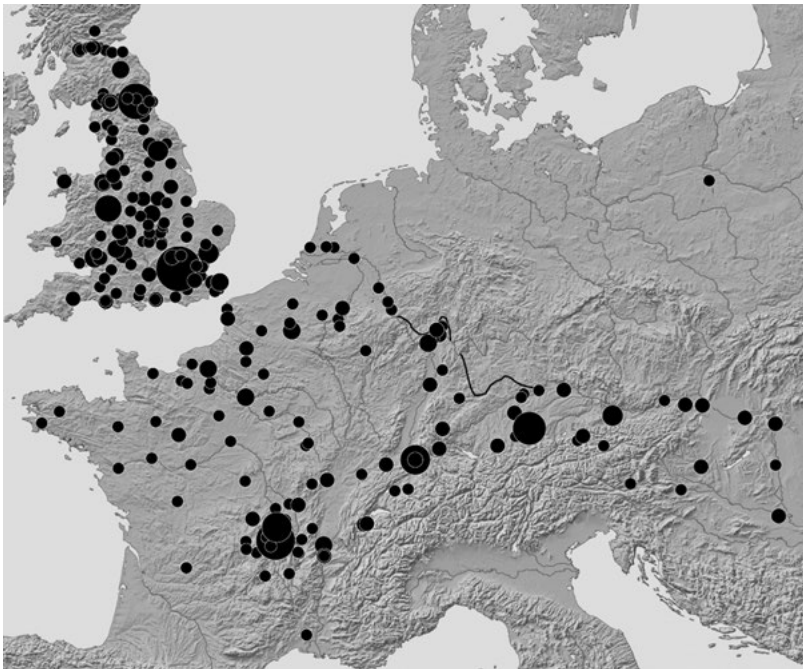


Figure 9: Distribution of samian stamped by Cinnamus ii; based on entries in the NOTS database, RGZM Mainz/University of Reading.

However, the virtual absence of Gnatus ii and Doccalus from the Roman frontier on the middle and lower Danube could have other explanations than mere differences in the personal accumulation of material. Antonine samian assemblages from this area date mainly to the period of the Marcomannic wars between A.D. 166 and 180. Neither Gnatus ii nor Doccalus seem to have produced samian vessels after A.D. 160, hence giving a chronological reason for their absence. Secondly, Central Gaulish supply of samian to the Danube was largely disrupted by the Marcomannic Wars (Gabler 1994: 359). Large workshops such as Cinnamus ii with their enormous quantitative output of samian are still evident in the material (see for example Gabler 1994: 356, 358; Kuzmová 1994: 246) in spite of the adverse conditions and quite possibly due to military supply contracts or probably ‘piggy-backing’ these supplies.

More interesting, however, is the question why the potter Elvillus has not been documented from sites in *Germania Superior* and especially along the Rhine frontier. Gnatus ii and Doccalus are known from this area in small quantities and Central Gaulish products are present on sites on the Inner *limes* (see for example *Aquileia*/Heidenheim; Scholz 2009: 241–287) and in smaller numbers even on the Outer *limes* (see for example Jagsthausen; Thiel 2005: 287, 307 no. 42). So why did Elvillus or the respective merchants trading his vessels not exploit this market?

The earlier Antonine products of Gnatus ii and Doccalus were traded to this area before A.D. 160 and consequently only competed with the comparably smaller East Gaulish samian workshops such as Heiligenberg, Blickweiler or La Madeleine (for the general distribution of samian from the Heiligenberg workshops see Delage and Mees 2009; also Biegert and Lauber 1995 for a general overview of potter stamps from the Outer and Western Raetian Limes sites). However, they preceded the large scale production of the samian workshops at Rheinzabern, which mass-produced and exported their vessels from A.D. 150/160 onwards (Kortüm and Mees 1998), and also Trier, which mostly supplied sites to the East of the workshops and northwards into *Germania Inferior* and beyond (see for example Huld-Zetsche 1972 and 1993). Gnatus ii and Doccalus hence belonged to a group of Lezoux potters whose products managed to reach the Upper German and Raetian *limes* at a time when samian was acquired mostly, but not exclusively locally (see also South Gaulish Banassac samian from the Inner *limes* and *Raetia*, Mees 1994).

This changed with the onset of large-scale production at Rheinzabern around A.D. 160, which made it increasingly difficult for Central and East Gaulish samian to exploit the German markets. Samian assemblages from forts and *vici* on the Outer *limes*, established at the same time that saw the rise of the Rheinzabern production centre, are proof of the overpowering influence of these workshops (see for example Thiel 2005: 285–313). Rheinzabern did not take over all regional Upper German markets at the same time and to the same effect (one example would be the Wetterau, where the earliest Rheinzabern material is underrepresented; see Mees 2002: 165 on regionalized markets), but merchants trading goods to the German *limes* started to acquire their stock from the regional workshops in the Rhine provinces instead of making the effort to import samian from as far away as Central Gaul.

However, the Rheinzabern workshops were less able to break into the British market, albeit conveniently located close to the Rhine and hence on a suitable transport link to Britain (see for example the epigraphic evidence of merchants trading with Roman Britain from the Colijnsplaat/Netherlands in Stuart and Bogaers 1971). For obvious reasons, these potteries concentrated on the middle Rhine and Upper Danubian provinces (see Mees 2002: 149–67 for a chronological assessment of distribution patterns of Rheinzabern exports to different areas),

where they found large existing markets as well as quite possibly being linked to military supplies, which helped them push into a previously mainly Central Gaulish trading area.

Imports to Britain, on the other hand, still largely originated from the same well-known samian production centres: Central Gaulish ware dominated the market until at least the early third century A.D. Elvillus was only one of many late Antonine potters at Lezoux whose products continued to be traded to the island (Brulet *et al.* 2010: 125).

Summary

So could consumer choice and preference have been part of the decision of what type of samian was supplied to Britain? Unfortunately, it seems that Elvillus produced only plain samian ware. If one were to consider consumer preference of certain potters' products then this would have surely been true only of decorated wares with the depiction of popular motifs. Plain wares, however, looked fairly much the same no matter which potter produced them and were only chosen because of their function. This theory finds support in Willis' (2005) observation of regional preferences of certain samian vessel types in Britain.

Nonetheless, some important conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. With the publication of the *Names on Terra Sigillata* monographs the identification of stamps and respective assignment to individual workshops enables deeper analysis of the material as a whole. Instead of reducing samian research to chronological and typological assessments (which I may add are still necessary and in need of reassessment!), we can now extend our analysis to individual potters and even die types and their geographical distributions.

The different processes and decisions involved in trading samian pottery from the production centre to the consumer are very much open to interpretation. The material basis enables us to analyse large-scale patterns of presence versus absence and the interpretation of trading routes and find spots, but more detailed issues such as personal choice or consumer preference are to a certain degree beyond our grasp.

Nonetheless, we are able to identify the economic and archaeological reasons for the differences in trade and consumption patterns. Elvillus, for example, produced at a time when bigger fish in the form of the Upper German potteries at Rheinzabern had taken over most of the regional markets on the German *limes* and the Marcomannic wars were causing havoc in the Danube provinces.

However, would this be a true depiction of Elvillus' market representation? The effect of different levels of documentation and modern collection activity on geographical distribution patterns cannot be overemphasized and cause a general issue for the interpretation of market shares of different potter's products. We consequently have to ask how accurate the alleged geographical limitation of the marketing of Elvillus' products is. Was Roman Britain the only market where his products were sold or have we simply not found his products more frequently on the continent due to his small production numbers and thus a high statistical chance of missing the evidence?

From the viewpoint of Roman Britain, it seems rather obvious to argue that the local citizens would certainly not have preferred a product stamped by Elvillus because they liked his name (if they were literate at all!). As most of his stamps are found on plain samian ware, the buyer obviously chose the vessel because of its functional characteristics and availability.

If personal preference played a role, it would have been way back at the production centre—based on the sheer availability of material, but possibly also to a certain degree on the merchant's choice of what he took on. Merchants were most likely able to choose what

products they would buy and consequently sell. However, once the samian left the production centre, the merchants and customers probably never took a second glance at the potter's stamp. More choices were made along the way with each merchant responsible for trading the products. Known regional habits and social practices might have consequently influenced the local British merchant's choice of purchases from ships arriving in Roman London. Based on function and intended use of the vessel, the final consumer chose his intended object of purchase, quite possibly even without even knowing who the producer was.

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