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POTS AND PITS: DRINKING AND DEPOSITION IN LATE IRON AGE SOUTH-EAST BRITAIN

Summary. This paper considers the role of pottery in the Late Iron Age to Roman transition in south-east Britain. Traditional concern with the significance of Continental imports is rejected in favour of a more holistic and bottom-up approach giving equal emphasis to locally made forms and imports in complete assemblages. Several stages of inter-site correspondence analysis are conducted on a range of sites and assemblages in the region. Patterning pertaining to the use and deposition of both imported and local pottery vessels can be seen to contradict simplistic models for 'Romanization before conquest'. The main conclusions include evidence for the selective disposal of drinking vessels and table wares in pits, the likely widespread consumption of beer as opposed to wine, and the implied importance of indigenous social practices such as feasting and communal drinking.

INTRODUCTION

South-east Britain in the Late Iron Age to Roman transition is characterized by the first events of British history – the campaigns of Julius Caesar, the full-scale invasion of Claudius, and the Boudican revolt. Given this historical background of external influence, it is not surprising that the archaeological study of this region has often focused largely on the high visibility of imported commodities and material culture in the Late Iron Age. Indeed, during the latter part of the twentieth century, imports were central players in the context of popular theories involving emphasis on 'prestige goods' and 'core-periphery' models, whereby mass-produced Continental material culture facilitated the creation of higher levels of hierarchy and complexity in native society (e.g. Haselgrove 1987; Cunliffe 1988). Furthermore, the presence of such imports, especially pottery, has even been interpreted as Romanization before conquest (Haselgrove 1984), inevitably providing the '*raw material for Chapter One of the story of the Roman conquest and of Roman Britain*' (Willis 1995, 141). Although these models and perspectives have since been roundly criticized and have fallen out of fashion (e.g. Woolf 1993; Willis 1995), there have been few convincing new studies to explain trajectories of social development in this transitional period. Therefore, a more rounded approach is needed to contextualize such historical constructs with the archaeological record.

It is the aim of this paper to employ archaeological evidence from Late Iron Age south-east Britain in a more holistic manner that reconciles imported artefacts with the larger body of locally produced material culture. The principal medium for study is pottery, an artefact class

which occurs in significant quantities in the study area in both local and imported fabrics. Multiple pottery assemblages from a selection of sites in Essex and Hertfordshire were chosen for analysis. Particular emphasis is given to the role of different vessel forms in the articulation of the everyday social practices of eating and drinking, and the manner of their eventual disposal. However, before moving onto specific case-studies, it is first necessary to assess briefly existing perspectives on the role of pottery in this intensely studied region and period.

POTTERY IN LATE IRON AGE SOUTH-EAST BRITAIN: EXISTING MODELS AND CRITIQUE

Despite a plethora of Late Iron Age pottery studies, the understanding of this particular class of archaeological material has been somewhat hindered by the Late Iron Age to Roman transition lying at the interface of prehistoric and classical studies. A direct consequence of this prehistoric-classical divide concerns the ways in which the pottery itself is recorded and published, which continues to have serious ramifications for the study of ceramic assemblages today. Whereas locally produced vessels are usually studied by a single Late Iron Age pottery specialist, the presence of imports often necessitates splitting up assemblages and sending different components (e.g. Gallo-Belgic wares, samian and amphorae) to Roman pottery specialists. The end result usually comprises a published report with separate sections on local pottery and the various classes of imports, with little integration. This encourages the study of pottery fabrics in isolation, which facilitates the creation of a further conceptual divide between the use of imports and that of indigenous vessels, further encouraging a fragmentary and entirely artificial construction of the past. This situation is felt most acutely in south-east Britain, where attention has been traditionally focused on the quantity and range of imports.

A good example of the over-privileging of imports in this region is that of Mediterranean wine amphorae. The relatively large quantities of wine implicated in a small number of high status graves of this period (e.g. Stead 1967; Foster 1986) prompted countless papers on the wine trade in this period (Peacock 1971; Dannell 1979; Williams 1981; 1989; Fitzpatrick 1985; Carver 2001). The classic example from south-east Britain is that of Haselgrove (1982, 81), who argued that access to prestige goods (including wine) for use on critical occasions and in rites of passage was vital for individuals to gain or maintain social power. Through comparisons with the rest of north-west Europe it later became apparent that the quantity of wine entering Late Iron Age Britain was probably insufficient to support social elites directly (Haselgrove 1996, 168–75; Fitzpatrick 1985, 311). A better alternative is that the imports were being used as luxuries, not being essential for the maintenance of the social hierarchy (Woolf 1993, 18). However, irrespective of these positions, the question of whether imports were prestigious continues to obscure our understanding of Late Iron Age society. In all such overarching models, the role of natively produced pottery is marginalized. There have been few attempts to view amphorae as components in wider depositional contexts, except in the instances of imported ‘drinking kits’ in funerary assemblages (e.g. Stead 1967; Stead and Rigby 1986, 51–61). Hence, this paper will now consider the role of imported eating and drinking vessels in their broader contexts of association and deposition in Late Iron Age south-east Britain.

PUTTING IMPORTS INTO CONTEXT: A MULTIVARIATE APPROACH

Complete ceramic assemblages were selected from a number of sites in the study region of modern day Essex and Hertfordshire, roughly corresponding to the tribal areas of the

Trinovantes and Catuvellauni, and also equating to a large part of the 'core' area of Haselgrove's (1982) core-periphery model for south-east Britain. A chronological span of *c.*50 BC–AD 80 was chosen to account for patterns of pottery use and deposition in the generations immediately preceding and following the Roman conquest in AD 43. The close dating of ceramic assemblages from the different sites permitted this period to be split into three separate sub-phases for analysis (see Table 1). The full list of sites (with references) is provided in Appendix 1. All the assemblages had been quantified by minimum number of vessels (MNV), with the exception of Elms Farm, Heybridge and Head Street, Colchester, which had both been quantified by estimated vessel equivalent (EVE). These values were subsequently converted to percentages to minimize the error in comparing two different quantification measures.

Analysis was conducted using correspondence analysis, a multivariate statistical technique that provides a quantitative means of summarizing the associations of find-types (in this case pottery) in multiple assemblages (sites and features). Each phase of correspondence analysis produces two plots – one showing find-types by their relative occurrence in different contexts, and the other showing contexts by their composition of find-types. The values that can be read off from correspondence analysis outputs should be regarded as statistical abstractions rather than having any independent quantitative meaning in an archaeological sense. Instead, interpretation is dependent on cross-referencing between the two different plots, with the area of the first plot directly equating to the equivalent area of the second, albeit represented in terms of different variables. For example, the position of a particular pottery type on the first plot will correspond most closely to the position of the context(s) containing the greatest proportion of that pottery type on the second plot, and vice-versa. The use of this method with pottery assemblages has already been successfully applied at both intra-site (Pitts 2002; 2004; forthcoming b) and inter-site resolutions (Pitts forthcoming a; Pitts forthcoming b), and has had further applications in the analysis of small finds assemblages (e.g. Cool, Lloyd-Morgan and Hooley 1995; Lockyear 2000; Cool and Baxter 2002).

Three tiers of inter-site analysis were performed. The first comprised the analysis of vessel form, with extra subdivisions for imported material. This was intended to provide an overview of which sites were receiving imports, and the general combinations of vessels favoured at different locations. The second tier of analysis was similar to the first, albeit without the distinctions for imported vessels. In contrast, the last set of analysis considers the functional composition of pottery assemblages from different classes of excavated feature. This was proposed in order to investigate potential depositional patterning which may relate to the social practices of the preparation, serving and consumption of food and drink. These tiers of analysis are each discussed in turn below.

1. Inter-site analysis: vessel form (with imports)

Prior to analysis, the main jar forms were removed. Jars were present on all sites in this period in such quantity that the correspondence analysis plots would be significantly distorted. However, this material was re-included for the final stage of analysis of depositional traits. Furthermore, amphorae were also removed due to major discrepancies in quantification with the bulk of other pottery vessels (Peacock and Williams 1986, 18–19; Sealey forthcoming). This can be justified on the basis of the differential primary function of amphorae relative to other classes of pottery (i.e. as containers for the bulk transportation of foodstuffs rather than direct involvement in consumption) and their comparative scarcity in the study area (the presence of

amphorae in the assemblages used in this paper is discussed in Pitts forthcoming b). The results of analysis are presented in Figures 1a and 1b. Figure 1a shows the sites (with codes and phases detailed in Table 1) by their relative proportions of different vessel forms, whereas Figure 1b shows the vessel forms by their relative occurrence at the different sites. Points on the first plot can be directly referenced with equivalent areas of the second, and vice-versa.

A number of patterns were apparent after examining both plots. Most striking was the clustering of imported vessels in the upper-left quadrant of Figure 1a. The lower portion of this cluster, largely composed of Gallo-Belgic imports, corresponded to composite assemblages from a number of sites, most notably post-conquest Sheepen and several sub-sites and phases from the Braughing complex. In comparison, the upper portion of the cluster corresponded to Head Street, Colchester, a site located within the pre-Boudican *colonia*. Perhaps not surprisingly, the planted Roman veteran settlement was quite distinct from all the other sites, largely on the basis of high proportions of imported samian and typically 'Roman' serving and preparation vessels such as flagons and mortaria. Such a clear contrast between pottery from the imposed *colonia*

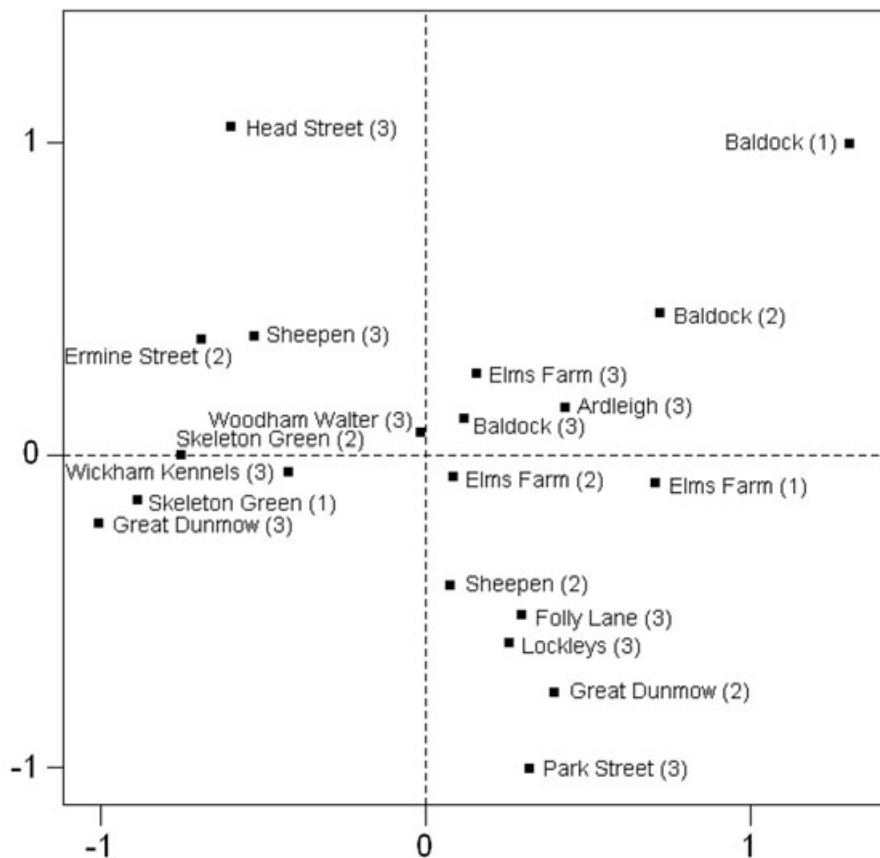


Figure 1a

Correspondence analysis – sites and individual phases plotted by their proportions of different vessel forms.

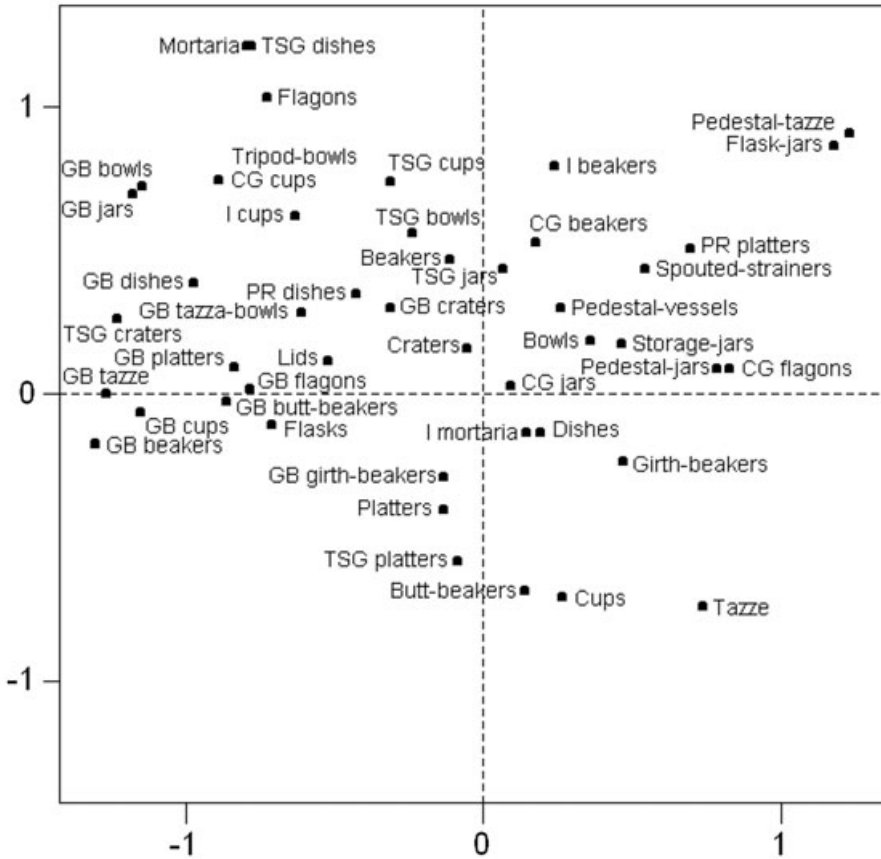


Figure 1b

Correspondence analysis – vessel form classes plotted by their occurrence at selected sites and sub-phases. Prefixes denote imported fabric types (CG = Central Gaulish ware, GB = Gallo-Belgic ware, TSG = samian ware and I = miscellaneous imports).

TABLE 1
Dating of composite assemblages for analysis

Phase	Date-range	Description	Site assemblages
1	c.50–1 BC	Late Iron Age	Baldock (Bdk), Elms Farm (EF), Skeleton Green (SG)
2	c.AD 1–40	Pre-conquest	Baldock (Bdk), Elms Farm (EF), Ermine Street (ES), Great Dunmow (GD), Nazeingbury (Naz), Sheepen (Cam), Skeleton Green (SG)
3	c.AD 40–80	Transitional	Ardleigh (Adl), Baldock (Bdk), Elms Farm (EF), Folly Lane (FL), Great Dunmow (GD), Head Street (HS), Lockleys (Ls), Nazeingbury (Naz), Park Street (PS), Sheepen (Cam), Wickham Kennels (WK), Woodham Walter (WW)

and that of indigenous centres of power (including the nearby Sheepen site) demonstrates the extent to which the occupants of the former may have been an alien entity. This contradicts traditional models in Roman archaeology of *coloniae* as civilizing centres for the Romanization of the province (e.g. Frere 1987, 189). At the most obvious level, a relatively high proportion of mortaria (and to a lesser extent flagons) at Head Street implies fundamentally different social practices of food preparation as opposed to consumption practices at neighbouring Sheepen (and the rest of the region).

More complicated is the relationship between the imported fine wares. Whereas samian ware occurred in larger quantities at the *colonia*, the Gallo-Belgic fine wares (largely comprising *terra rubra* and *terra nigra*) were almost completely absent from the *colonia*, occurring in their highest proportions at Sheepen and Braughing. At a basic level, this seems to imply that the *colonia* was being provisioned separately, probably via official Roman supply systems. However, despite the Gallo-Belgic pottery industry being somewhat dependent on copies of arretine samian (Hawkes and Hull 1947, 202–3), there are fundamental functional differences between the imported samian and Gallo-Belgic vessels turning up in Britain in this period. Whereas both imported fabrics share a number of common vessel forms, including platters, dishes, bowls and cups, only the Gallo-Belgic suite of vessels has substantial provision for larger drinking vessels such as butt-beakers and girth-beakers. The implication here is that indigenous society had a need for large drinking vessels (implying communal drinking), whereas the incoming population at the *colonia* did not.

A continued emphasis on drinking vessels is further evident among the remaining clusters of sites in Figure 1a. In the lower-right quadrant of this plot is a cluster of sites corresponding to a series of drinking vessels in local fabrics – butt-beakers, cups, girth-beakers and tazze. With the benefit of archaeological hindsight, it is possible to see all of these particular site-phases as forerunners to more ‘Romanized’ or ‘Gallo-Romanized’ occupations in following generations. Whereas pre-conquest Sheepen and Great Dunmow were later characterized by higher proportions of Gallo-Belgic imports (see the centre-left cluster discussed above), the Late Iron Age occupations from Lockleys and Park Street were quickly superseded by first century villas. Likewise, the ceremonial site at Folly Lane continued to be used as part of the Roman city of Verulamium (Niblett 1999). The occurrence of relatively high proportions of drinking vessels at these sites, particularly the local copies of Gallo-Roman forms (such as butt-beakers and girth-beakers), suggests a selective diffusion of Continental material culture. That this process favoured material from a Gallo-Roman cultural template is unsurprising, given the supposed ties of kinship on both sides of the Continent (Millett 1990, 9). Moreover, the preference for large drinking vessels probably reflects the importance of communal drinking in indigenous society, particularly evident in the extensive provision of drinking accoutrements in the so-called Aylesford (Whimster 1981, 160) and higher-status Welwyn (Stead 1967) burial traditions.

The final cluster of note in this phase of intra-site analysis was the close association of indigenous sites (Ardleigh, Woodham Walter and the various phases of Baldock and Elms Farm) in the centre to upper-right quadrant of Figure 1a. These sites corresponded to a combination of some of the earlier imports (most notably from central Gaul) and older indigenous forms in grog-tempered wares (Thompson 1982), such as pedestal jars and tazze, and various other jar forms. The relative emphasis on jar forms and first century BC vessel types perhaps indicates that these sites formed the lowest status tier of sites analysed in this study. Nevertheless, a strong theme of Continental contact remains, in addition to the use of drinking vessels. Whereas

pedestal jars have been suggested by J.D. Hill to have been used for alcohol consumption (Hill 2002, 147), a related function has been postulated for the rarer spouted strainer bowls (Sealey 1999; see also below).

2. Inter-site analysis: vessel form (without distinctions for imports)

A second stage of correspondence analysis was conducted with all vessels grouped by form regardless of fabric (see Figures 2a and 2b). Otherwise, the same conditions were applied as in the first stage (removal of jars and amphorae). The results of this phase of analysis strongly echo those outlined above, suggesting that differential access to imported material was also accompanied by similar patterning in the use of general combinations of vessel forms. Occurring as an outlier in the upper-left quadrant is Head Street (corresponding to mortaria and to a lesser extent flagons), again highlighting the palpably distinct consumption practices taking place at the *colonia*. Untangling the crowd of remaining sites is a little more complicated, although the

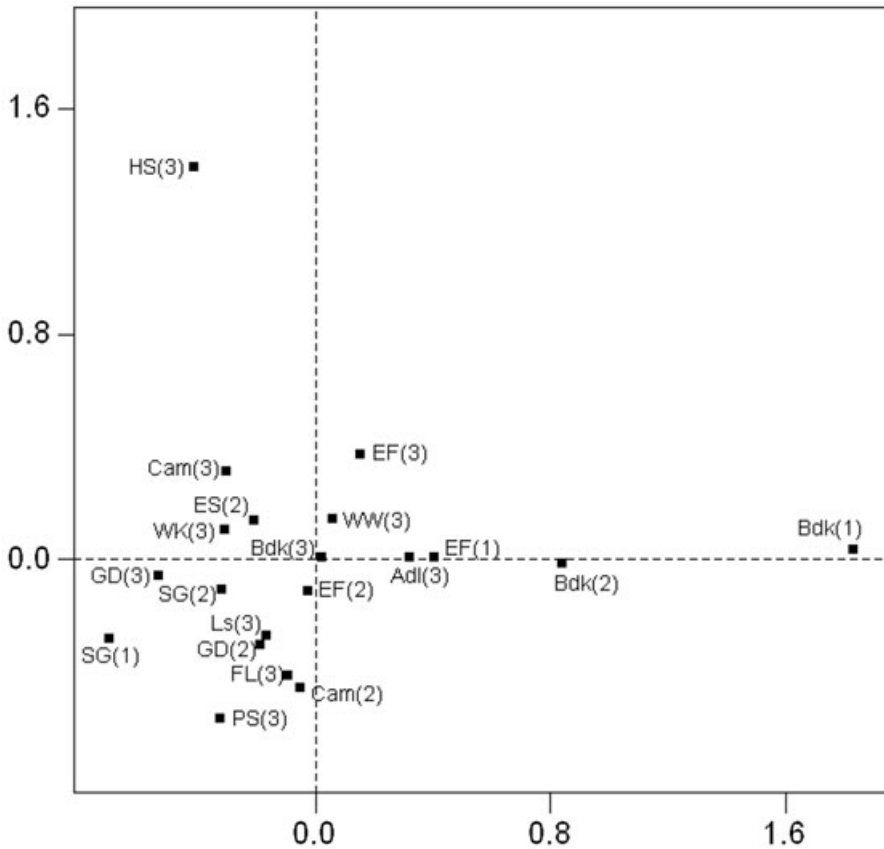


Figure 2a

Correspondence analysis – sites and individual phases plotted by their proportions of different vessel forms (without distinctions for imports).

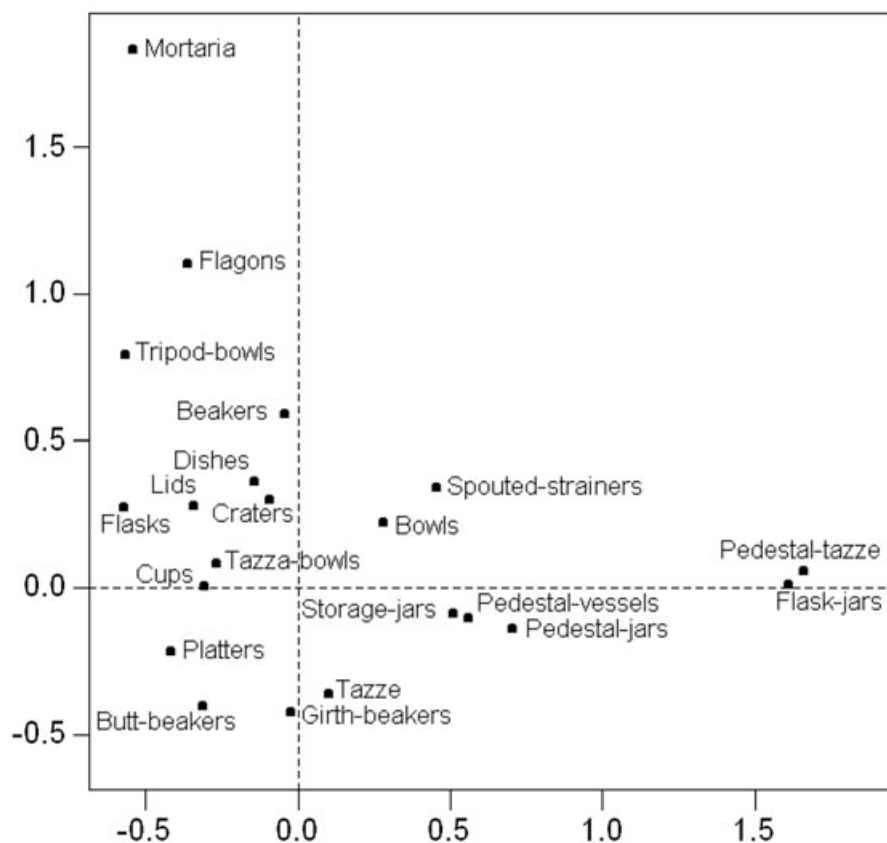


Figure 2b

Correspondence analysis – vessel form classes plotted by their occurrence at selected sites and sub-phases (without distinctions for imports).

same groupings of sites are broadly evident as noted in Figure 1. At the top-left of the main cluster are native centres of importance including the various sites from Braughing and post-conquest Sheepen; below this are the middle range of sites which went on to become more ‘Romanized’ (e.g. the Late Iron Age pre-villa occupations at Park Street and Lockleys), corresponding to Gallo-Roman forms (most notably platters and butt-beakers); and finally, to the right are the sites emphasizing the use of jar variants and older pedestalled forms (e.g. Baldock and Elms Farm).

Thus, the picture emerging from the first two phases of analysis is a hierarchy of settlement elaborated on the basis of differential use of imports and combinations of vessels deriving from several distinct cultural templates of pottery production. It must be stressed that such distinctions have been made through emphasizing only the relative differences between pottery assemblages. Although Baldock and Elms Farm have stood out for their comparatively high levels of older pottery forms, both sites received significant proportions of imported vessels before the Roman conquest. Nevertheless, this approach clearly demonstrates the value of

studying Continental imports in their wider contexts of use. It is envisaged that many imports were favoured because they could easily be accommodated within existing practices of consumption, a trend clearly evident in the extensive local copying of butt-beaker and platter forms. Although Creighton's recent study of coin imagery in Late Iron Age south-east Britain seems to resonate strongly with the idea of an indigenous client aristocracy in direct engagement with the ideological development of Augustan Rome (Creighton 2000, 124), the patterning in contemporary ceramic assemblages appears to bear witness to more deep-rooted changes in society. A complex melting-pot of influences emerges which was neither Romanization before conquest, nor a wholesale 'Gallo-Belgicization'.

3. Inter-site analysis: pot function and depositional traits

This stage of analysis considered the depositional traits of the main functional classes of pottery. The same pottery assemblages considered above were categorized according to the feature types they had been found in. Most of the features could be classed as pits or linear (largely ditches and gullies), with a smaller proportion of wells, shafts and other features. In addition, the pottery was reclassified on the basis of perceived function – drinking vessels (e.g. cups, beakers and pedestal jars), jars (universal cooking wares), preparation vessels (e.g. mortaria), serving vessels (e.g. flagons and strainers) and table wares (bowls, platters and dishes).

The results of correspondence analysis on these data are presented in Figures 3a and 3b. The patterning that emerges seems to point towards the consistent selective deposition of different functional classes of pottery in particular feature types. Probably most significant is the strong clustering of linear features on the right-hand side of the plot which corresponds to jar forms, and the clustering of pits (in addition to wells and shafts) on the left-hand side of the plot which corresponds with greatest intensity to drinking vessels and table wares. The main exceptions are the pits from Elms Farm occurring with the mass of linear features. In hindsight, this trend is likely to have been the result of quantification by EVE over-emphasizing jar forms due to the high survival rate of their thick and robust rims (from which EVEs are calculated). Nevertheless, closer inspection of Figure 3a reveals that within every site-phase represented by composite assemblages from both linear and pit features (including three from Elms Farm), the linear features all tended to have higher proportions of jar forms. Thus, it seems likely that linear features were favoured for the deposition of jars, whereas pits, wells and shafts were preferred for the disposal of other functional classes. In particular, the bulk of features on the left side of Figure 3a seemed to correspond closely with drinking vessels and table wares, especially wells and shafts (and to a lesser extent pits). The preference for the deposition of drinking vessels and table wares (together) places particular emphasis on the actual consumption of food and drink (as opposed to preparation and serving). Combined with the association with features traditionally linked to Iron Age ritual deposits such as pits and other vertically defined features (e.g. Hill 1995), it is tempting to interpret such patterning as the deliberate deposition of material involved in feasting and/or communal drinking. This trend is even more apparent in Table 2, which shows pits, wells and shafts across all sites quantified by MNV having tangibly higher proportions of non-jar forms, especially drinking vessels and table wares.

However, in the absence of detailed study of both depositional processes and assemblage condition for each individual feature, caution must be exercised. In compiling these data from various publications and databases it was clear that few features actually contained

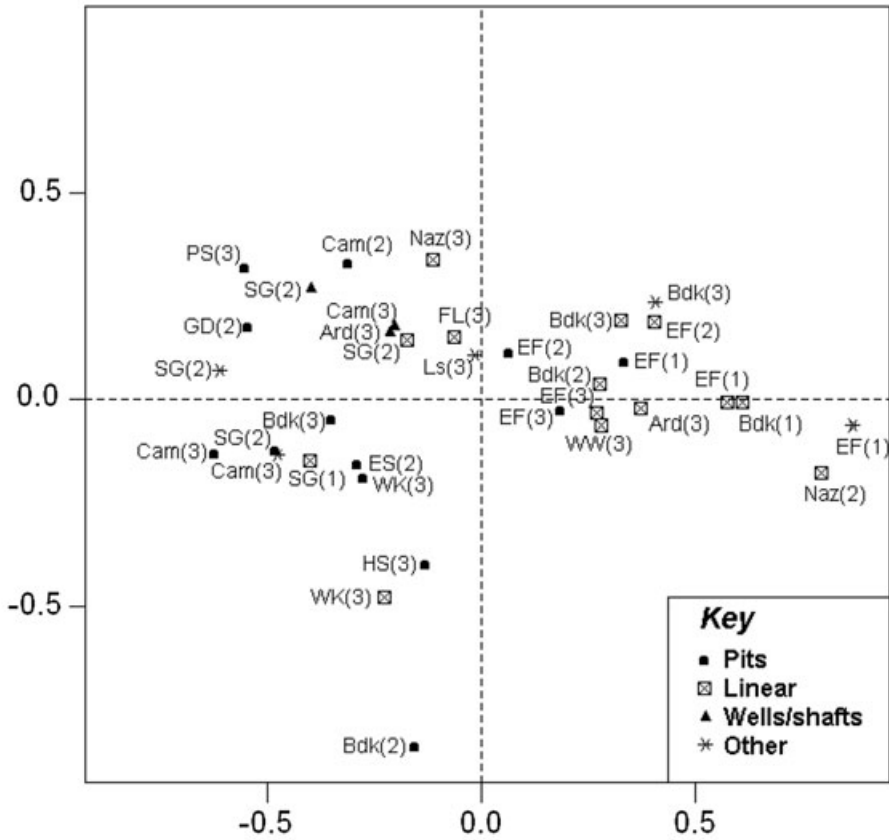


Figure 3a

Correspondence analysis – composite assemblages from different feature types plotted by their proportions of different functional classes of pottery.

TABLE 2

Average functional composition of features from all sites quantified by minimum number of vessels (highest proportions per functional class in **bold**)

Feature type	Jars	Preparation vessels	Serving vessels	Drinking vessels	Table wares
Pits	32.18%	5.01%	6.91%	29.28%	26.63%
Wells	36.65%	3.73%	1.24%	39.13%	19.25%
Shafts	45.83%	4.17%	0.00%	29.17%	20.83%
Linear	64.31%	3.00%	1.63%	19.62%	11.44%

near-complete vessels, the kind of assemblages one would expect from the disposal of feasting remains. Indeed, in the material from Elms Farm, Heybridge, the average estimated vessel equivalent for pits in this period was slightly higher than for ditches (see Table 3), although this patterning was heavily weighted towards the earliest occupation of the site in the mid- to late first century BC. This suggests that pits were also slightly more likely to receive less broken

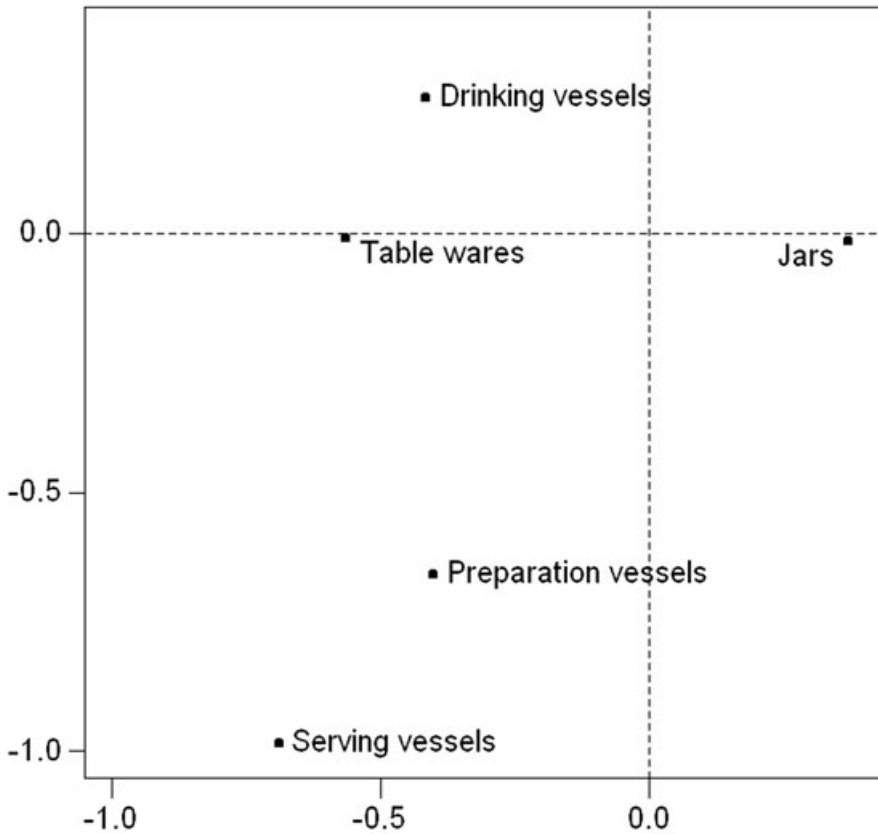


Figure 3b

Correspondence analysis – functional classes of pottery plotted by their deposition in different feature types at selected sites.

TABLE 3
Average estimated vessel equivalents in pits and linear features at Elms Farm, Heybridge

Feature type	Late Iron Age (1)	Pre-conquest (2)	Transitional (3)	Overall mean
Linear	0.10	0.15	0.14	0.13
Pits	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.16
% Difference	Pits + 31%	Pits + 6%	Pits + 3%	Pits + 10%

assemblages than linear features. However, given the relatively low average EVE for vessels in pits at Elms Farm (at 0.16), it is unfeasible to conceptualize the function of these features as 'feasting deposits'. It must be considered that '*different types of feature may have different characteristic pottery assemblages because of the different taphonomic pathways through which their contents passed*' (Hill 1995, 21). The apparent disparity in assemblage composition

between ditches and other features may in part be accounted for by the regular cleaning or recutting of the former (e.g. Chadwick 1999, 163). After all, a ditch can only function effectively as a boundary if it is to some degree open and visible. Nevertheless, it is envisaged that the effect of such activity on the assemblages under scrutiny is minimal, given they were specifically selected for their low-levels of residuality. Another possibility is that the lower proportions of drinking vessels and table wares in ditches could be accounted for by the often liminal nature of linear features, in contrast to the primary locus of consumption within households.

To summarize this stage of analysis, it has been possible to isolate what appears to have been a depositional bias in the treatment of functional classes of pottery probably used for different stages of the consumption process across various sites in Late Iron Age to Roman south-east Britain. Whereas table wares and drinking vessels occurred in higher proportions in pits, wells and shafts, cooking forms (i.e. jars) were predominantly disposed of in linear features. Preliminary consideration of vessel completeness at Elms Farm, Heybridge suggests that pit assemblages were further distinguished from ditch assemblages on the basis of having higher levels of vessel completeness. However, further research into individual deposit and site formation processes is ultimately required to enhance the understanding of such phenomena.

DISCUSSION

Consuming passions in Late Iron Age to Roman south-east Britain

A recurrent theme in the analyses above is an emphasis on consumption in later pre-Roman Iron Age pottery assemblages. A concern with eating and especially drinking vessels is particularly manifest at indigenous sites in both locally produced and imported pottery groups, in a manner quite distinct from that of the first official Roman settlement at Colchester. Moreover, it seems likely that such 'consumption technology' was intentionally deposited in pits, wells and shafts, as opposed to cooking vessels, which were more likely to be disposed of in linear features. The deposition of table wares and drinking vessels in sub-surface domestic features echoes the more explicit social practices evident in contemporary funerary contexts where whole vessels and sometimes meal remains were commonplace. Indeed, Whimster (1981, 155) has noted that a characteristic feature of both richly and poorly furnished cremations was a preference for flat-grave burial in this region and period. The widespread use of pits as the final destination for cremated remains and associated grave-goods suggests that the accompanying ceremony would have taken precedence over the need to create a lasting monumental memorial to the deceased. Thus, if such funerary practice represents a form of ritual which can be defined as the *explicit* reproduction of social structures (Hill 1995, 99), the evidently similar treatment of eating and drinking vessels in domestic contexts would seemingly represent the more *implicit* reproduction of the same social structures through more routine and mundane everyday practice (Hill, *ibid.*).

Whilst the meaning of such explicit and implicit associations of consumption and sub-surface features in the Late Iron Age remains uncertain, it is possible that a form of this practice continued into the Roman period. A similar preference for the use of below-ground features may have been incorporated into the design of early Roman houses. In particular, Perring (1989) has noted the extensive occurrence of cellars and sunken rooms (some even containing similar provisions for table wares and drinking vessels) in south-east Britain in the period c.AD 70–155. It is unclear whether this represents a continuity of social practice, although parallel research

into early Roman practices of consumption and deposition in Essex and Hertfordshire reveals similar patterns to those evident in the Late Iron Age (Pitts forthcoming b).

In vino veritas?

Given the relatively small quantities of wine amphorae entering Britain, it is highly unlikely that such imported commodities can account for what appears to be an almost universal emphasis on drinking vessels at a range of site-types and identities in Late Iron Age south-east Britain. Even if wine was being imported in a manner that was largely invisible archaeologically, using barrels alongside amphorae (Fitzpatrick 2003, 23), one would expect much higher levels of accompanying imports, coupled with a more even distribution of the latter to match the provision of locally produced drinking vessels. A more convincing explanation is that indigenous beverages were being consumed in greater quantity, with access to wine being restricted to an elite few. However, the survival of evidence for such local forms of alcohol in Late Iron Age Britain is extremely limited.

Nevertheless, Sealey (1999) has argued that it may be possible to identify pottery vessels specifically used for the serving of locally made 'Celtic beer' in the same region and period. The vessel in question is the Late Iron Age spouted strainer bowl, which roughly resembles a teapot in appearance, with the added inclusion of a strainer panel next to the spout. Although it is found with wine amphorae in some contexts (including a bronze version from the Welwyn Garden City grave, c.25–15 BC) this association would appear to be secondary, as there are no direct parallels in the Roman world (Sealey 1999, 119–24). Clues to the possible use of strainers in the serving of beer have recently been suggested by the finding of wormwood flavouring in a bronze strainer at the Doctor's grave at Stanway, Colchester (Paul Sealey, pers. comm. June 2004). Such flavourings would thus be filtered out by the strainer before pouring the drink into a vessel for subsequent consumption. To investigate this phenomenon, ten stratified assemblages from the study sample featuring bronze and pottery spouted strainers were subjected to correspondence analysis (see Figures 4a and 4b). This included funerary material from Welwyn Garden City and the King Harry Lane cemetery at Verulamium, several assemblages from Sheepen, one from the *colonia* at Colchester (Head Street), assemblages from conquest period Elms Farm and Ardleigh near the Essex coast, and finally, two early second century AD deposits from Roman Colchester and Chelmsford. Where possible, occurrences of amphorae were included to examine the possible association of strainers and wine.

Several patterns are evident in this final set of correspondence analysis. Firstly, the early Roman assemblages from Chelmsford and Colchester occurred as distinct outliers, corresponding with typical 'Roman' forms such as mortaria, flagons and bowls. The peripheral position of these later assemblages suggests they were quite different from the main body of Late Iron Age material. A second, more complicated, cluster comprising the Welwyn Garden City burial and deposits from both Roman (Head Street) and Gallo-Roman (Sheepen) parts of transitional Colchester all corresponded to wine amphorae, cups, platters and pedestal vessels. This relationship seems to be a hybrid of Late Iron Age, Gallo-Roman and Roman-influenced suites, and clearly emphasizes the Roman links implicated generations before the conquest at Welwyn. However, the final relationship is most telling. The spouted strainers have an almost perfect association with butt-beakers, a very common (and large) drinking vessel which was ideal for the consumption of beer. The nearest corresponding sites all date to within a generation of the conquest, reinforcing the idea of importance of drinking in this period. Furthermore, 11

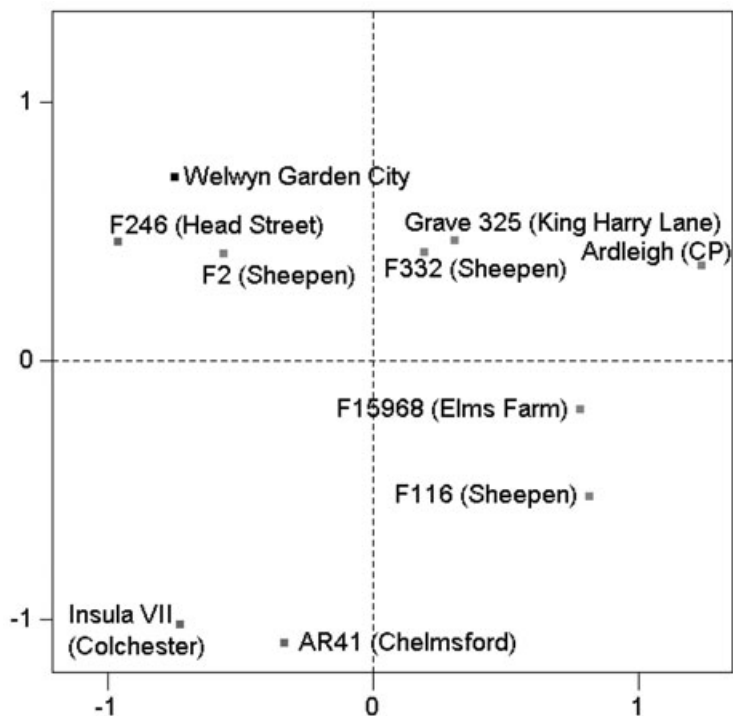


Figure 4a

Correspondence analysis – assemblages containing spouted strainer bowls plotted by their proportions of different vessel forms (without distinctions for imports).

of the 13 spouted strainers under scrutiny occurred in pits, reinforcing the association of drinking vessels with this class of feature. Although this is far from conclusive evidence for the widespread consumption of beer in Late Iron Age south-east Britain, it sits nicely alongside the other trends noted above. Indeed, the strong contextual association of spouted strainers with a common drinking vessel suggests that beer consumption may have been more prevalent and central to Late Iron Age consumption practices than hitherto assumed.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of significant patterns have emerged in the consideration of ceramic assemblages in Late Iron Age south-east Britain, *c.*50 BC–AD 80, and are outlined here:

1. The identification of multiple trajectories of cultural influence (i.e. Roman military, Gallo-Roman and late La Tène) within this transitional period. Most notable was the marked contrast of consumption patterns evident at the Roman colony established at Colchester with other indigenous sites throughout Essex and Hertfordshire. Thus, it is no longer tenable simply to interpret the presence of imports in Late Iron Age society as direct indicators of Romanization.

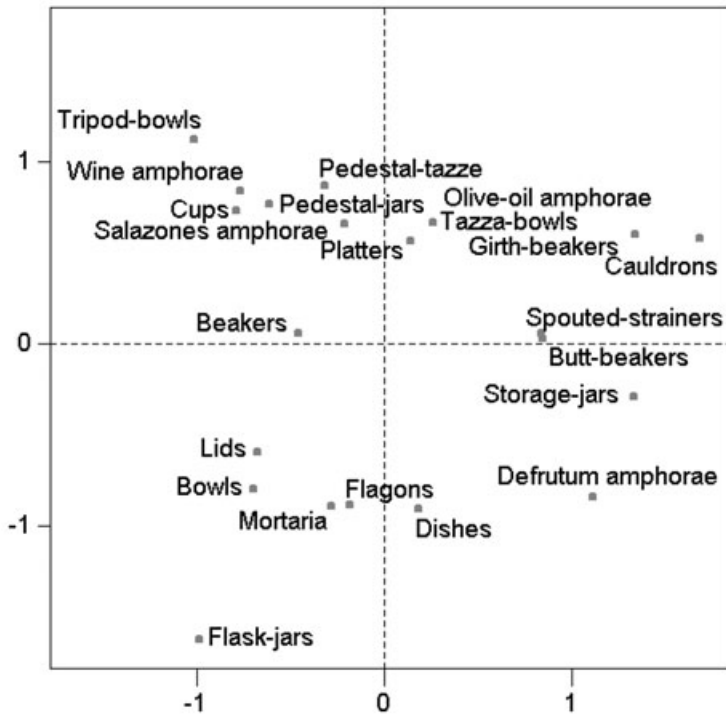


Figure 4b

Correspondence analysis – vessel form classes plotted by their occurrence in assemblages containing spouted strainer bowls (without distinctions for imports).

2. The use and copying of a selection of imports by Late Iron Age society, especially Gallo-Belgic drinking vessels (i.e. butt-beakers), suggest that such artefacts were chosen for their ability to fit into existing indigenous social practices of feasting and communal drinking. This is supported by circumstantial evidence for the consumption of native beer in the contextual associations of such drinking vessels with a pottery type (spouted strainer bowls) thought to have functioned specifically for the serving of this beverage (Sealey 1999).
3. Further verification of the social importance of drinking and eating in this period was provided by the tendency of ceramic consumption refuse (i.e. drinking vessels and table wares) to be deposited together in pits, wells and shafts (as opposed to the disposal of cooking wares in linear features). This trend appears to represent a day-to-day equivalent of the more ostentatious contemporary mortuary practice of placing feasting remains in cremation pits.

A recurrent theme of this paper has been the important role of commensal practices (e.g. Dietler 1999) such as feasting in Late Iron Age society. From this perspective, it is now possible to suggest an alternative model for the consumption of imports, especially wine, in this period. Instead of viewing the imports as prestige goods which generated social distinctions in their own right, it is increasingly likely that the wine was entering a society which was already using communal drinking and feasts for the empowerment of individuals and groups. In this

context, wine would undoubtedly have offered a few individuals the chance for greater prestige, but at the same time would not have altered one of the potential mechanisms for maintaining power, the capacity to dispense largesse through feasting. This is evidenced in the increasing emphasis on drinking vessels in the period, and particularly in the vast majority of accompanied cremation burials which occurred with large drinking vessels but no wine amphorae. Indeed, the importance of alcohol in this period may have been enough for one of the major personalities of this period (Cunobelin) to inscribe his gold coinage with ears of barley. Frere (1987, 31) has argued that this signified native beer, and was a form of propaganda against the pro-Roman Verica who had vine-leaves on his gold coins. However, in the context of this paper, the meaning of such symbolism may have had more deeply rooted significance. Perhaps it was not the imported goods themselves which were empowering, but rather the dynamic social practices in which they were implicated. Therefore, the available evidence seems to suggest that the importance of feasting and communal drinking is better understood through a model of prestige practice than through a model of prestige goods.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Joyce Compton (Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit), Philip Crummy and Howard Brooks (Colchester Archaeological Trust), and Jane Timby for providing unpublished material for the analyses conducted here. I thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding my doctoral research, without which this paper would not have been possible. Some aspects of this paper were originally aired at the Iron Age Research Student Seminar 2004 (York) and a research forum at the Department of Archaeology, University of York. Last but not least, I am further indebted to Dom Perring and Steve Roskams for supervising my research (and to the latter for commenting on this paper), and to Paul Sealey (Colchester and Essex Museum) for his correspondence on Late Iron Age alcohol.

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APPENDIX 1

Ardleigh – Brown 1999; *Baldock* – Stead and Rigby 1986; *Colchester (Insula 7)* – Hull 1958; *Chelmsford* – Going 1987; *Elms Farm* – Atkinson and Preston, forthcoming; *Ermine Street* – Potter and Trow 1988; *Folly Lane* – Niblett 1999; *Great Dunmow* – Lavender 1997; *Head Street* – unpublished information from Jane Timby and Howard Brooks; *King Harry Lane* – Stead and Rigby 1989; *Lockleys* – Ward-Perkins 1938; *Nazeingbury* – Huggins 1978; *Park Street* – O'Neill 1945; *Sheepen* – Niblett 1985; *Skeleton Green* – Partridge 1981; *Welwyn Garden City* – Stead 1967; *Wickham Kennels* – Partridge 1982; *Woodham Walter* – Buckley and Hedges 1987.

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