

Eastern Terra Sigillata Wares – Late Roman Red-slip Wares and their Competitors : filling in the Mediterranean Picture

The subject of this paper is the series of fine wares, excluding Italian and Gaulish *terra sigillata*, found in Roman contexts (late Republican to early Byzantine) throughout the Mediterranean: principally the so-called « Eastern Sigillata » wares, and the later African (*sigillata chiara*) wares and their contemporaries. Little studied until recent years — for most are undecorated — these have now become relatively familiar to excavators, though perhaps less so to university classes. I can recall a time when they were generally ignored, being dismissed with the general appellation « Roman red ware » or *terra sigillata*, as if that was all that need be said of them. In fact, they have been studied, by isolated scholars, for many years, in the (by now) standard ways: typologically, distributionally, etc. One may perhaps speak of three phases of study. First came the isolation and naming of specific wares (on the basis of simple visual inspection), and the creation of typologies. This stage may be said to have concluded with the two volumes of the *Atlante delle forme ceramiche* and my own *Late Roman Pottery*. These, with their varying nomenclatures, described almost all of the standard types and indicated the basic distribution patterns on the basis of rather widely scattered finds. In a second stage, the gaps in the record were filled in by a series of key excavations, conducted according to modern stratigraphical principles, in various parts of the Mediterranean, supplemented by an increasing number of local studies of old collections. A statistical approach was now added; the results for the major sites in Italy and the West may now be seen in the third volume of *Società romana ed impero tardoantico*. Knowledge of and an ability to distinguish the principal wares, even when found far from their home regions, has now become widespread throughout most of the Mediterranean, though, to judge by the published record, there are still regions in the East which lag behind. Finally, in recent years, thanks to the work of

the archaeometrists (such as our colleague Picon, and the Oxford lab.), an interest in clay composition, production centres, and manufacturing techniques has come to the fore. Survey work, by Peacock, Empereur and others, is revealing, in some cases, individual production centres within broader regional traditions.

Knowledge of the wares in question, in terms of both production and consumption, is now being refined down to the local level, whereas previously we had to talk in generalities. Thus a monograph such as my *Late Roman Pottery* becomes unrepeatable, except at a popular, less specialist level: the alternative is a sort of super-*Atlante*, probably ten years out of date by the time that it appears (as in some respects was the *Atlante* itself). One is, for instance, now merely stating the obvious if one remarks that here, in Campania, almost all of the wares under discussion occur on the ancient sites (as has been known in print since the publication of the *Instrumentum domesticum* conference), but we still need the publication of more closed and properly dated deposits in order to plot the changes in the fortunes of these wares over time. And, above all, we need further production sites.

So much for the historical survey; let us return to the wares themselves, which, when compared with northern Roman products, come from relatively few sources. First, the Eastern Sigillata Wares (alias the « Pergamene » and « Samian » of former years — both wrong identifications = to which we may oppose « lokalpergamenisch », « echtpergamenisch », or, now, following Meyer-Schlichtmann, simply « PS »). The broad term « Eastern Sigillata », when used simply in contrast to « Western Sigillata » (that is, the various Italian, Gaulish and Spanish wares) is deceptive: it implies a sort of uniformity in type of clay and decorative treatment, which is *not* the case. In fact we should think of at least three pot-making traditions here: Eastern Sigillata A [henceforth cited as ESA] (representing the Levant), the western Asia Minor wares (Eastern Sigillata B [ESB], the Pergamon series, and probably also the so-called « Pontic » ware), and, less clearly independent, what I continue to term « Cypriot Sigillata ». These wares span a period from about 150 BC to the latter part of the 2nd century AD (I shall return to their dating later).

ESA, the earliest to appear, is a yellow-buff ware, with a darker red slip, sometimes glossy, sometimes almost matt. Its buff clay, which serves to distinguish it from most other sigillata wares, is calcitic; a few early examples with a black surface-gloss are remarkably similar to the *Campana B* wares of Etruria — possibly suggesting some transfer of manufacturing techniques in the mid-2nd century, since no other ware of the period from the Levant is of this quality. The Asia Minor wares, in contrast, are red-bodied wares lower in calcium content, with a « softer » feel and more « soapy » gloss appearance. The recent study of the Pergamon wares by Meyer-Schlichtmann documents the gradual change from a black or brown « Hellenistic » gloss

(or twotone treatment) to the orangey-red gloss which finally takes over in the time of Augustus (but scarcely earlier). The rather complex foot-treatment of many of these products, together with the style of potters' stamps, is adopted by the ESB producers; many vessel-shapes are also shared. What is not clear is the relationship between these Pergamon products and Arretine ware and Italian *sigillata* in general: it is possible to argue that the Pergamon products in some cases came first. One might argue that the so-called « Tripolitanian » *sigillata* noted by Kenrick on Libyan sites (for which a Campanian source is now indicated) documents the transition — an eastern-style fabric produced in Italy. Cypriot *Sigillata* is also a low-calcium red-bodied ware, but, along with the Pontic ware which superficially closely resembles it, has a distinctly different visual appearance; its clay composition is conveniently given by Gunneweg (his ETS II). Some, but not all early examples are fired grey-black throughout, and thereafter the clay-colour fluctuates (after the manner of the *early* Pergamon wares). Later technical developments in the Pergamon region are of some interest. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the 2nd century AD. Çandarlı kilns (unlike their 1st century predecessors) produced wares looking very much like the later Italian *sigillata*. Now Picon and Empereur have shown by analysis that a calcitic ware (similar to those of Western products) is involved — a change of clay source or deliberate mixing of raw materials seems documented. A variant ware from the region is in fact buff-bodied. The later regional red-bodied wares — from Phocaea and Grynion — less glossy, might best be termed semi-calcitic (at about 6% CaO).

The manufacturing centres of the Pergamon regional series are now well known, thanks to the finds of kilns or wasters from Pergamon (Kestel — current Turkish excavations), Grynion and Phocaea, to be added to the old Çandarlı finds (of which some can be seen in Mainz). The results of the Kestel excavations have still to be properly published, but a paper on them was read at the Hellenistic pottery conference in Rhodes (1989) by Özyiğit. The Kestel kilns should, in my view, belong to the 1st century BC, but have been assigned a much earlier date (on uncertain grounds).

The places — even regions — of manufacture of the other ES wares remain problematic. A literary allusion (by Pliny) and a potter's stamp may point to the Tralles region as the home of ESB ware — or at least its earlier version (ESB 1), but no kiln-sites are known, and production may have been spread over a wider region — possibly involving sites nearer the coast for the inferior but widely exported ESB2. The massive and long-lived ESA industry is undocumented. Gunneweg points to eastern Cyprus as a possible source region, but the pre-1974 finds from Salamis and similar sites there cannot be said to confirm this. In terms of sheer concentration of finds, Tel Anafa (in the extreme N. of Israel) is way ahead — but the clay body of ESA seems hardly likely to derive from the basaltic region of N. Israel and

Jordan. « [New petrographic / chemical analysis now points to the Iskenderun - Issos region (-1996)] », « Cypriot Sigillata » remains Cypriot in name and density of distribution only — Negev's attempt to locate its centre at Oboda in S. Israel seems misguided, but an actual production centre seems to have eluded us. As far as Pontic Sigillata goes, the continued lack of published reports from the N. coast of Turkey hinders us — though a Crimean source remains equally possible. Given this general lack of documented sources, the study of ES wares has yet to progress beyond my « second » stage of development.

Let us now turn to the African wares, African Red Slip Ware [here ARS] (= *sigillata africana*) etc. Here there is more to report in terms of recent progress. The most encouraging development here — we might call it a spin-off from the international campaigns at Carthage, is the location of the kilnsites (though not, as far as I know, for the earlier — 2nd century — series). Recent developments in the Carthage region are reported in *CEDAC Carthage Bulletin*; these include the work at el-Mahrine, a centre for the stamped wares of the 4th century (and, apparently, late 5th/6th c.). The corresponding workshops for their rival « Central » and « South » Tunisian series, as I once named them, are currently emerging from joint Tunisian-British work, on which a preliminary report is now published in *JRA*. Both of these are situated deep inland (not in the coastal strip).

Turning to the clay body itself, and the techniques employed, an article by Schuring (1988) examining samples from Rome has clarified the situation. The high quartz component is stressed; its presence allowed for a considerable degree of error in the temperature of firing — hence losses at this stage of were presumably low. There is *no* mica in the clay (my statement in *LRP* to that effect was a mistake). The calcium content is minimal. Clearly, different approaches were adopted from those current among the sigillata-makers; the precedents are to be sought rather in Africa itself.

Some other, more regional Late Roman wares have been documented in recent years. On the periphery are the Nubian wares, now the subject of a massive monograph by Adams. Late derivatives of African and other wares in Jordan, with both stamped and painted motifs, have been designated *Transjordanian Red Slip Ware* by the excavators of Pella. These, like the Nubian wares, stand a good chance of having survived into Umayyad times. I personally have noted another derivative of ARS, of uncertain importance, in 7th century Crete (in the form of finds from a deposit near Knossos, not yet published). In Italy, we have indications of regional fine wares in the 4th to 6th centuries in Apulia and apparently Campania — these, particularly the Apulian wares from S. Giovanni di Ruoti and the Venosa region, show less outside influence in their shapes. There may well be others. In the West, one has the case of some late Iberian TS copying, apparently, *Phocean* shapes

and motifs, as documented at Conimbriga — but the Spanish wares are a subject to themselves. Such late wares may parallel a decline in the availability of the standard Late Roman wares.

From here I would like to turn to dating problems. In fact, the vast amount of new material furnished by recent excavations has not been as helpful as one might have hoped. The initial date for red-gloss wares in the East has, I think, been resolved: the finds from Paphos, Cyprus, and from Tel Anafa, among other places, generally confirm Waagé's results from Antioch, and Kenyon's excessively late dates in the Samaria report may now be abandoned. A date around 150 BC for the initial stage of ESA (black-and red-gloss) now seems established. The middle part of the 1st century BC (between about 70 and 20 BC) remains in a state of flux from the pottery standpoint — the new Pergamon volume is of only limited assistance, requiring considerable interpretation, and the exact date of transition to « Augustan » styles remains open (given the generally late arrival of Arretine ware on Eastern and African sites). After a well-documented period in the Early Empire, the date(s) of the extinction of the various ES wares remains poorly defined. My original suggested terminal date (c. 150) for ESB2 was based heavily on finds from the South Basilica at Corinth — the fill in question is now seen as a rebuilding fill subsequent to an earthquake in the 150s. More recent Corinth finds are now claimed to document use of the ware down to almost AD 200 though I find so large an adjustment of dates difficult to accept. The problem for the whole of the period down to c. 225/230 is a general paucity of associated coins in deposits. The terminal dates of ESA and Cypriot Sigillata are if anything less certain (150+?).

From here we jump to the second half of the 5th and the early 6th century in the West for our next major problem, illustrated documented by the widely divergent statistical results from the various sites at Carthage documented in table form in *Società romana...* III (see my comments in *JRA* I, etc.). Again, the shaky nature of the coin series is largely to blame — to which may be added a diversification of supply sources in Africa (most still to be located). In the eastern Mediterranean, in contrast, no such lacuna exists — hence my original datings in *LRP* for African products of this period were based largely on Eastern finds.

Finally, there is the question of the terminal dates of all the « Late Roman » wares in the 7th century, a question aggravated by, on the one hand, a Byzantine coin-series which grows weak after Constans II, and on the other, the question of residuality of pottery finds from the topmost levels of abandoned ancient city-sites, etc. The site of Emporio in Chios, recently published in full, provides precious information. Here, as in Cyprus (Paphos, Kourion), and perhaps Constantinople itself, the mid 7th century seems to show a certain rise in the quantity of African imports — perhaps a last

spurt partly occasioned by Constans II's temporary stay in the West. The latest Carthage red wares seem not to have travelled far; however, the Cypriot finds suggest a rather later continuation of trade in fine red wares there.

These last remarks raise the question of the mechanics of distribution. Previous work has mapped the general areas in which wares circulated, but some surprises are still to be noted on the fringes, especially in terms of the westward penetration of the « Eastern » wares. One may now distinguish major marketing areas, in which, wherever one turns, a particular fine ware is dominant, or common on the ground — in practice this means the coastlands of the whole or part of the Mediterranean, with some inland extensions. Areas of secondary distribution comprise those where the ware is regularly present in small to moderate quantities, as in the case of the African wares over much of the Iberian peninsula, or the late 5th and 6th century pattern in rural Italy, where redistribution through a villa system rather than urban marketing seems to be the best explanation — e.g., at S. Vincenzo al Volturno. Finally, there are the sporadic finds of these wares in distant lands, the result of long-distance trade contacts or the movement of individuals: for example, the finds from Aksum in Ethiopia, the occurrence of Eastern Sigillata A sherds at Cartagena, or the African wares from graves at Köln. Two Mediterranean wares of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD seem to contradict this pattern: the Knidian plastic vases and the small relief-ware bowls from the Corinth region. These appear in small numbers only all over the Mediterranean — possibly owing to special contents, perhaps medicinal.

I shall now look at some recent additions to our knowledge of the distribution of specific wares. Some examples of the Eastern Sigillata wares have long been known from Tripolitania (western Libya), but it is the recent work on the finds from Sabratha that has revealed the true pattern of importation. In 1988 I presented a paper at Strasbourg on this subject (now published), which I here summarize. The finds from Kathleen Kenyon's stratigraphical excavations in 1948-51 (now published), include about 1000 inventoried pieces (rims, bases and profiles), of Eastern Sigillata A ware — a total rivalling that of Italian T.S. wares. Some 80-85% of these are of types current between 50 BC and AD 25, and in Augustan contexts on the site the ware is commoner than the Italian wares, which only become frequent here in late Augustan and Tiberian versions. For the rest of the 1st century AD the eastern ware is still present, but in reduced numbers; importation continued into the early 2nd century. Only a few scraps of *early* ESA, matching, say, the finds from Delos, are present — here as elsewhere in the West. Of particular interest, from the period of maximum importation, are several scraps of closed vessels and of the poor-quality relief-ware bowls, shapes not normally found outside the production region in the Levant. What were the trade routes that brought this material to Sabratha? The ware is

very common in Cyrenaica to the East, but perhaps we should *not* consider the Sabratha finds as an extension of the Cyrenaican pattern. Fulford's article in the 1989 issue of *Libyan Studies* maps in detail the pattern of sea-currents and summer winds in the region. These maps show graphically why the « Syrtes » had a bad reputation in antiquity: the prevailing winds tend to force sailing ships into the region, with its dangerous offshore reefs. Thus, although *some* ships coming from the East no doubt made direct voyages from Cyrenaica westwards, it seems likely that most would have arrived at Sabratha *via* a northern route, from Sicily. We now need more material of Augustan date published from southern Sicily to fill in the picture. A few finds of the ware are known from here and from Malta, but the so-called « Tripolitanian » ware may have predominated in the northern parts of the island, to judge by finds from, say, Morgantina.

Another area of recent activity has been the Adriatic region. It might be thought that this was always a logical extension of Italy; this can no longer be automatically assumed. Recent finds from the whole length of the eastern (former Yugoslav) coast — especially underwater finds — attest to wholesale importation of ES wares in E. Imperial times, along with cooking-wares of Aegean type. These compete with N. Italian products, in a region which did not produce any fine wares itself, and which was cut off by its mountain barrier from inland production centres. Wrecks show a proliferation of « cheap » ESB2 types — now recorded in Trieste, also. The arrival of ARS in these parts seems hardly to antedate later Antonine times (i.e. mainly the African A2 wares) — a situation which seems to match that on the west coast of Greece.

A particularly rich haul of these Early Imperial imports is in process of publication by Brusić from the harbour site of Zator (N. of Zadar) — some of the best pieces are on display in a holiday camp there! These, mostly of late 1st and 2nd century date, include a bowl of the mottled version of Eastern Sigillata A that we saw at Sabratha, and large amounts of Eastern Sigillata B2, along with a few African bowls and examples of North Italian wares. Makjanić has published similar examples from elsewhere. My own experience of survey work on the island of Hvar confirms the later picture, with African Red Slip ware dominant from the late 2nd century until the 6th. At times during the 5th and 6th centuries AD Eastern wares, namely Phocian RS, again appear in some quantity in the region: one may note the recently published finds from Invillino (Friuli), in the foothills of the Alps, which mark the effective limit of exportation of the ware.

Our colleague Gabler has now documented an extension of this Adriatic pattern during the mid/late 3rd and 4th centuries AD, when a few examples of African wares appear on sites throughout Pannonia. The situation here — secondary distribution, by uncertain means — perhaps parallels that in

say Lyon or Geneva, not that on the Rhineland, where the known finds are rarities.

Another region where our understanding of the later Mediterranean imports has improved is the Iberian peninsula — where the Conimbriga publication seems to have acted as a stimulus. The Mediterranean coast, as far as Baelo, has long been known as part of the major market for African RS Ware and for some associated coarse wares until the 6th or early 7th century AD. A result of this has been the recognition of scraps of similar ware in the inland regions of Spain, mixed in with the dominant late Iberian sigillata wares, plain, relief-decorated and stamped — the last of these clearly influenced by the repertoire of the stamped African wares. The detailed publication of the finds from a site such as Complutum, on the outskirts of Madrid, reveals a pattern of African imports similar to that seen in Pannonia — mainly later 3rd and 4th century types. Such overland imports break off in Visigothic times. New finds of this later period from Catalunya are, however, important, and the occurrence of a little Mediterranean fine ware (along with African amphorae) at Bordeaux provides another tenuous link in the chain which links western Britain to the Mediterranean.

Now, finally, I would like to turn from distribution patterns to the question of actual shipping of these wares, and for a little light relief, will show you the results of a little game with a photocopier. Italian T.S. vessels, as is well known, tend to occur in very standard sizes, to which Auguste Oxe and others have applied Latin terms — the *catinus pedalis*, *catinus bessalis*, etc. In contrast, Eastern Sigillata shapes tend to exhibit ranges in size: for instance, a larger one of say 20-28 cm and a smaller one from 11-16 cm. Do these represent changes in size over time, or something else? Complete vessels from shipwrecks here are useful. Recently I saw the finds (unpublished in detail) from the Palmizana wreck off Hvar in the Adriatic. This includes numerous ESB2 vessels of relatively few shapes, occurring in four or five sizes, each separated by only 1-2 cm in diameter. They are now displayed in « nested » stacks — and presumably were shipped this way. I understand that similar finds exist at Millau from the Gaulish sigillata factories of La Graufesenque. Could this economy in space help to explain the wide distribution of ESB2 — an otherwise poor-quality product — in the 2nd century? The photocopies appearing on the screen show the results of progressive reductions of about 7% — a slightly greater reduction might in fact be more effective. Italian T.S., with its high feet, takes up rather a lot of space, and making a series of vessels of diminishing sizes adds little advantage — but with ESB2 the economy in terms of space can be dramatic.

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