
'DOES HE DRINK SMALL BEER FROM A SILVER JUG? OR A BOWL? OR A GLASS? OR A CUP? OR A MUG?'

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The following is a summary of a joint presentation, compiled on behalf of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, the Study Group for Roman Pottery and the Medieval Pottery Research Group. The paper was presented in the 'Akond of Swat' session at the April 2013 Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) conference (hence the title!) 'Making waves; designing and demonstrating impact in archaeology and heritage' held in Birmingham and represents a development of a joint paper that was presented at the 'Insights through Innovation' conference, held in Southampton the previous October in honour of David Peacock. One of the key objectives of the paper was to emphasise shared ambitions and methodologies, and in particular to ensure that appropriate standards of analysis are maintained in the face of increasing commercial pressures.

There is increasing concern amongst ceramic specialists of all periods that pressures upon excavation budgets are impacting negatively upon standards of recording, analysis and reporting, forcing undue emphasis upon basic questions of dating to the exclusion of other, no less significant, themes. This is especially the case where additional expenses might be incurred by further petrographic, chemical and other scientific analyses to pursue

crucial research issues such as ceramic production and distribution.

To address this problem, members of the ceramic study groups are currently liaising to explore the options for preparing a 'best practice' guidance document that may be applied across the period divisions. This would supplement rather than replace the variety of existing documents prepared by the period groups, which would remain essential for describing the specific methodologies required in the analysis, of prehistoric, Roman and later pottery. It is intended that this single document, endorsed by the three ceramic groups and linked to both the IfA's Standard and Guidance documents and appropriate English Heritage guidelines, would:

- provide a single document for pottery of all periods, emphasising best practice and acting as an entry point to relevant period guidance;
- ensure that ceramics are taken fully into account during the preparation of project designs, empowering planning archaeologists in negotiations with developers and consultants to insist upon strategies highlighted by the ceramic community as of fundamental concern;
- ensure that ceramic studies are more closely integrated with archaeological fieldwork, encouraging a closer involvement of ceramic specialists during the development of schemes of treatment, so they can influence excavation strategies and the use of scientific techniques.

The document would aim to encourage the production of high quality and readily accessible archives of long-term research value by:

- strengthening efforts to guarantee high standards in the recording and analysis of ceramic artefacts;
- ensuring comparability between datasets;
- facilitating the development of consistent approaches to museum archiving;
- encouraging engagement with the developing research agendas and strategies of the ceramic period groups.

With regard to research, various issues could be addressed with the aims of ensuring;

- appropriate reference to existing regional and period-based ceramic type-series (fabric and form), and development of these where gaps are identified;
- joined-up research across period divides (e.g. Iron Age-Roman transition, fabric continuity);
- enhanced liaison between the period groups.

The key elements of such a document should be the subject of discussion and continuing feedback from ceramic specialists, both to maximize engagement with colleagues and to spread the workload. Our current thoughts are that the document should follow the project path from initial project design through to deposition of the material and documentary archive and dissemination of the report. Issues to consider, therefore, would include:

- definition of the subjects to be considered during the preparation of initial project briefs, including sampling methodologies, provisions for scientific dating, sampling of local clays and on-site spot-dating procedures;
- the definition of an appropriate format for ceramic assessments as part of a post-fieldwork Updated Project Design, building, we would suggest, upon current MoRPHE guidelines (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/morphe-project-managers-guide/>);
- specification of the range of methods to be employed during post-excavation processing, recording and analysis, including recommendations specific, for example, to poorly fired prehistoric coarse wares, mass-produced Roman fine wares or tiles and post-medieval kiln groups;
- recommendations for scientific dating (including, for example, Bayesian analyses of radiocarbon dates) and specialised scientific analyses (including petrographic and chemical analyses of pottery fabrics and residue analysis);
- recommendations for long-term storage and curation of the material and documentary archive, including the vexed issue of finds selection strategies;
- methods of report dissemination and publication;

- proposals for the development of on-line ceramic type series, by period, regionally and nationally, together with the compilation of a guide to current type-series.

Looking at this realistically, in terms of the resources available to each period group, we suggest the following sequence of tasks:

- preparation by a working group, comprising members of each of the period groups, of a concise draft document, trimmed to its essentials to ensure maximum impact;
- widespread circulation of this document, via the web, for comment from PCRG, SGRP and MPRG members and by other interested individuals;
- incorporation of comments and preparation of a final document for posting on the websites of the period groups, followed by promotion of the guidance document via the IfA, English Heritage, ALGAO and other relevant bodies;
- liaison with the IfA Finds Group and other IfA colleagues to revise current Standards and Guidance Documents, ensuring that these incorporate specific references to the analysis of pottery and other ceramic artefacts;
- regular updates to take account of the impact of new scientific techniques, evolving digital technologies and changing research priorities.