

A NOTE ON ROMANO-BRITISH BB1¹ POTTERY FROM THORPLANDS, NORTHAMPTON

A heavy mineral analysis was undertaken on sherds from six late BB1 vessels from Thorplands, site no. R29: two cooking-pots (Gillam 147/148²), two flanged bowls (Gillam 228) and two plain-rimmed dishes (Gillam 329). The predominant colour of the sherds is black throughout, each containing a high amount of quartz sand temper. All the samples produced assemblages characterized by a high tourmaline content, and agreed well with analyses on BB1 vessels shown to have been made in the Wareham-Poole Harbour area of Dorset (Williams, 1977, Group I). A similar origin for the Thorplands samples is likely.

Dorset BB1 has also been recognized by the writer at Brixworth villa, situated some six miles to the north of the Thorplands site. A heavy mineral analysis of a BB1 flanged bowl from Brixworth (Woods, 1970, fig. 11, no. 40) also produced a tourmaline rich suite characteristic of the Dorset centre (Williams, 1977, Group I). A macroscopic examination of another flanged bowl (Woods, 1970, fig. 11, no. 44) and three plain-rimmed

dishes (ibid., fig.9,nos.18-20) from Brixworth revealed that all four were in an identical fabric to no. 40, and so there seems no reason to doubt that these too originated from Dorset.

All five of the above mentioned vessels from Brixworth were included in a group described by Woods as being wheel-turned, and in order to distinguish them from similar handmade black-burnished types were called by him 'burnished black ware' (ibid.,11,note 5). Farrar has already pointed out the inadequacy of this term given that BB2³ is itself wheel-turned (1973,84,note 10). Moreover, these particular five vessels are undoubtedly handmade and in everyway identical in the hand specimen to Dorset BB1 types, as the result of the analysis on no. 40 shows. They should therefore be included within the normal range of BB1 products. They are clearly of a different fabric to the wheel-turned undecorated varieties of dishes and bowls from the nearby kiln at Ecton (Johnston,1969), which produced a form of incipient flanged bowl with which no. 40 was compared (Woods, 1970,13). This view is confirmed by a heavy mineral analysis of the bowl from Ecton referred to by Woods (Johnston,1969,fig.7,no.48),

which yielded a suite of minerals quite different from that associated with no. 40 from Brixworth and with Dorset BB1, in which the characteristic feature was an exceptionally large percentage of garnet (Williams, 1977, Group XI).

Taken as a whole, the BB1 from Thorplands suggests a date late in the third century or during the early part of the fourth century. The cooking-pots Gillam 147 and 148 and the flanged bowl Gillam 228 start appearing at the close of the third century and last through most of the fourth century, while the decorated plain-rimmed dish Gillam 329 does not seem to have been in use after c. A.D. 340 (Gillam, 1970). A date within the bracket A.D. 390-340 would therefore fit the group. At Brixworth, which lacked the late BB1 cooking-pots, the BB1 bowls and dishes were found in deposits dated late third century or first half of fourth century (Woods, 1970).

Significantly, Johnston has suggested a contraction of the pottery industry situated around the Upper Nene by the latter part of the third century and its virtual disappearance during the early fourth century (Johnston, 1969, 76). Despite

the successful production of wheel-turned grey-ware imitations of early BB1 cooking-pots which seem to have excluded the BB1 types from the region (Woods, 1967, 11, and Johnston, 1969, fig. 6, no. 42 from Mears Ashby), no attempt appears to have been made to copy the late form of BB1 cooking-pot with oversailing rim and obtuse angled lattice decoration (Gillam 147 and 148) or the fully developed flanged bowl (Gillam 228). Instead, the evidence from Thorplands and Brixworth suggests that at this time Dorset BB1 cooking-pots, bowls and dishes had captured a large part of the local market for basic cooking vessels. It is difficult to say at present whether Dorset BB1 was merely taking over from a drastically declining local industry suffering severe competition from the colour-coated wares of the Lower Nene kilns (Johnston, 1969, 77), or whether it directly contributed to that decline. Certainly by this date the large Dorset BB1 factory had gained a virtual monopoly of BB1 production and was exporting its late forms to many parts of the eastern half of the country where the earlier forms had been scarce (Williams, 1977).

1. Black-burnished Category 1 (Gillam, 1960, 126-127).
2. Refers to Gillam's Types paper (1957).
3. Black-burnished Category 2 (Gillam, 1960, 126-127).

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