



## Reviews

**M. G. Fulford, and K. Huddleston, *The Current State of Romano-British Pottery Studies*, English Heritage Occasional Paper No. 1, London 1991. 59 pp A4. ISBN 1-85074-340-1.**

It is not often, particularly in a time of constant change such as today, that the chance comes to stand back from a subject to review recent advances and to set the agenda for the next decade or so. This is what Fulford and Huddleston set out to do and, although the detail of their report will lie outside the field of immediate concern for readers of this journal, it is worth looking at the generalities of the volume in order to see areas of common interest.

Section 1 sets out to review the published literature of the last two decades. This, in itself, provides a most useful summary and bibliography of recent work. The section also includes a series of tables based on a cross-section of recent reports. It is perhaps unfair to dwell only on the negative aspects of the statistics produced, but this reviewer, nevertheless, found it astonishing that 17% of the 74 reports examined made no use of pottery to date their sites, 62% made no use of pottery in discussing the character of their sites and 43% contained no discussion of the links between the site and pottery producing areas. Whether any site appeared in all three of these categories was not revealed. There seems, at the very least, to have been a failure on the part of pottery reporters to bring out, in particular, the social and economic aspects of their work and a failure on the part of site directors to understand what pottery can and should tell them about their sites. As, in the Unit system, the director of a Roman site today, may well be the excavator of a Medieval one tomorrow, this is clearly a problem unlikely to be period-specific.

The second section is based upon the answers to a questionnaire sent out to a range of organisations nationwide (though mainly England as the report was commissioned by HBMC). The result is an overview of how pottery is reported on and shows wide variations in approach. Running through it is a secondary theme which will strike a chord with readers. Pottery assistants are poorly paid, have a near non-existent career structure and show a tendency to migrate from unit to unit. If pottery reports are to be improved then clearly Unit managers will have to be convinced that their pottery assistant is a major and permanent part of their team.

Section 3 looks at work either completed or in progress in a selection of towns, other settlements and regions, and has behind it Fulford and Huddleston's major thesis, that the aim of pottery publication should be the production of a series of regional theses. This leads on directly to the report's recommendations and conclusions. These can be summarised briefly as: a) the need for pottery to be more fully integrated into the excavation research design; b) a three-tier approach to pottery analysis: key groups from specific sites, local (*e.g.* specific town) syntheses, regional syntheses; c) a more consistent approach to quantification; d) the establishment of reference collections and manuals dealing with specific wares; e) more

training for 'professional staff' and (although regrettably omitted from the summary of recommendations) better career structure and pay for pottery staff.

This is not the place to dispute or qualify the report's more detailed recommendations on specific classes of Roman pottery. There are, however, a number of general points which are worrying. The report makes it clear that university-based pottery research has declined. Quite a few of the works cited in the first section originated in university theses, but most are products of the 1960s and 1970s. Regional syntheses have on occasion been possible under the Unit system (one thinks, for instance of the London Medieval Pottery type-series) but, in general this has not been the case and the situation is unlikely to improve in the brave new world of competitive tendering and developer funding (could the London publications have been conceived in the 1990s, one wonders?). Who then is to produce the regional syntheses which form the top (and most important) tier of the Fulford-Huddleston pyramid?

Another worrying trend not fully addressed by the report is the status of pottery workers. Admittedly this is a situation made worse by the Romanist's love of the 'cottage industry' specialist, the person, often working on their own, who deals with a particular class of pottery only (and thus earns higher status than the Unit pottery assistant in return for even less financial security). However, it remains generally true that Units give the impression that they regard expertise in excavation as being more important than expertise in artifacts and further their employees' careers accordingly. It remains difficult (with honourable exceptions such as the late DUA in London) to build a research reputation in artifacts within a Unit. This situation has already persisted long enough to affect the career choices of archaeology graduates. It is more than time that the problem was addressed by both funding bodies and archaeology as a whole if a generation of specialists is not to be lost.

One further tenet of the report may be questioned. It is assumed that once regional syntheses are available, the level of pottery published from individual sites within that region can be reduced. It is an attractive proposition, but is it correct? As the report tacitly acknowledges in its plea for an updating of Gillam's northern synthesis (page 37), even such well accepted work eventually needs updating. If site reports in the intervening period have published pottery in a summary fashion, the basic raw material for updating will not be readily available. The generation which reveres Pitt-Rivers should not need telling that ultimately it is basic information, not opinions based on it which survives.

This then is an important report which gives us an opportunity to question the direction in which we are going. Its specifics lie in another field but in general it makes assumptions and points to directions which may well have a more general impact on archaeological thinking, particularly among those concerned with funding policies. Readers of this journal would do well to read both on and between its lines.

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