



Two Rare Late Samian Vessels from Southern England

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers two vessels, one found at Silchester in Hampshire, the other at Flexford, near Guildford in Surrey. Both are products of the samian workshops at Rheinzabern and both owe their design to metal prototypes. Neither has any apparent known parallel for its combination of form and decoration and both are a valuable reminder that even in such a large enterprise as the samian potteries individual forms could be made, perhaps in response to a specific request or as experiments by the potters. They also form an important contribution to our knowledge of late samian ware in Britain and add to previous evidence for the use of samian in ritual contexts.

Keywords: samian; Rheinzabern; barbotine decoration; incised decoration; metal prototypes; ritual use: Silchester; Flexford

LARGE BARBOTINE-DECORATED DISH OR TRAY FROM SILCHESTER (*CALLEVA ATREBATVM*), HAMPSHIRE

The four surviving pieces of the Silchester pot (FIGS 1 and 2, No. 1) were found in two separate excavations around a century apart, but examination of the four sherds together showed that they were part of the same vessel. The two base sherds came from the Society of Antiquaries' excavations of 1890–1909, but unfortunately have no closer provenance; they were recorded in 1997 during the preparation of a catalogue of the samian ware from Silchester held by Reading Museum.¹ The two rim sherds were found in 2000 during the University of Reading excavations directed by Michael Fulford and Amanda Clarke; they came from a fourth-century context associated with Building 8 in Insula IX. Some of the Antiquaries' trenches were traced near by, so it is conceivable that the original findspots of the four sherds lay close together.²

¹ Reading Museum accession nos RDMG.1995.81.1709 and 1712. The catalogue of the samian stamps was prepared by Brenda Dickinson, the decorated ware by the author and the plain ware by Alison Parnum. The excellent but selective account by Thomas May (1916) of the pottery from the Antiquaries' excavations does not include these pieces.

² Site reference A2000.20 (2572) <3707>; the Antiquaries' trenches and their relation to Building 8 are shown on Fulford *et al.* 2006, fig. 44. The finds from the excavations will ultimately be deposited with Hampshire County Museum Service, Chilcomb House, Winchester.

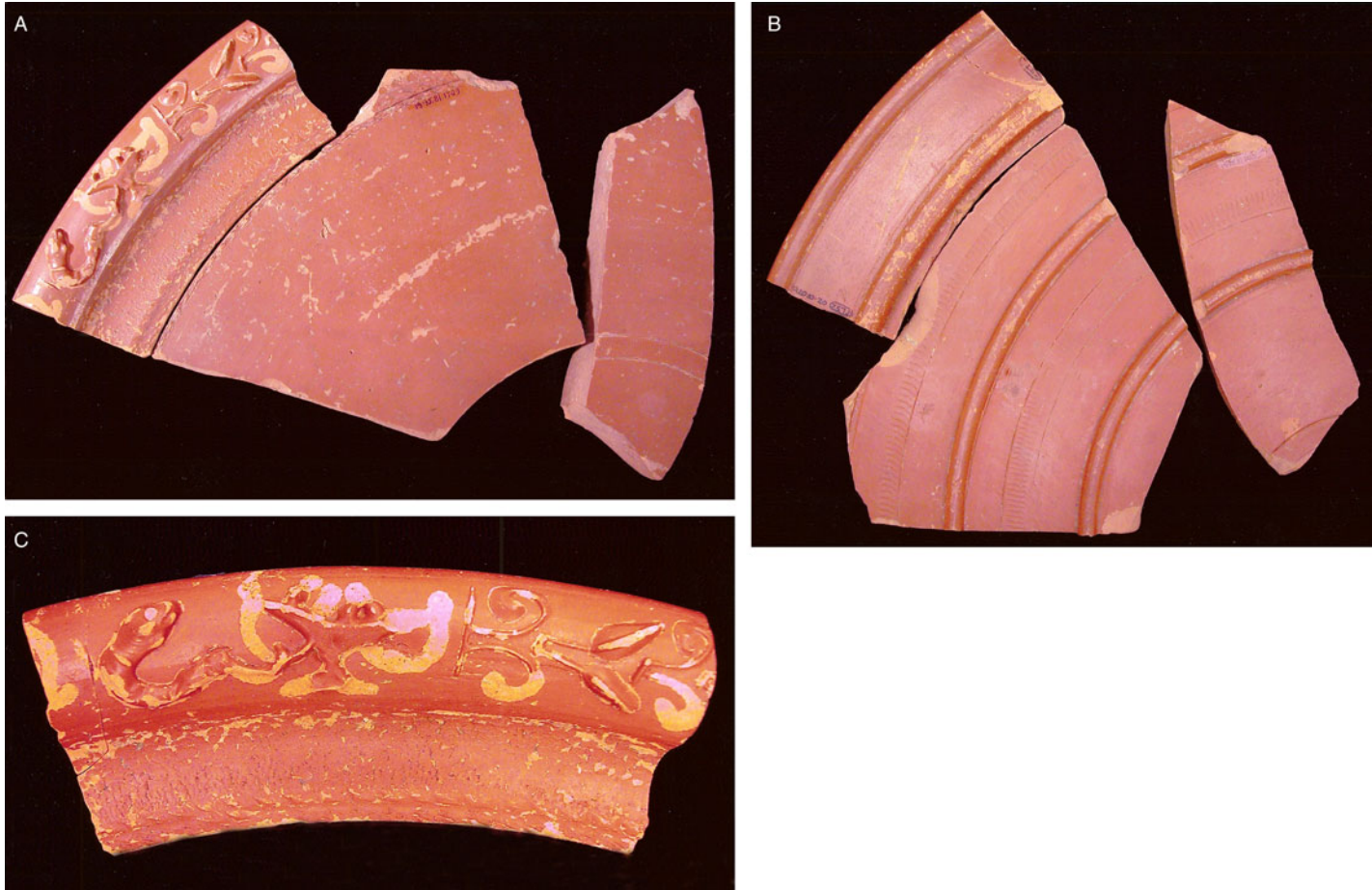


FIG. 1. Samian dish from Silchester: top (A), base (B) and barbotine decoration (C). Diameter 450 mm; for dimensions see FIG. 2, No 1. (Photos: Brian Wood. © University of Reading and Reading Museum)

The form is a large round shallow dish or tray, 450 mm in diameter and 25 mm high, with a curved everted rim. Although set at a different angle, the rim is closely similar to that used for much smaller dishes of Dragendorff form 36 and, like form 36, it is decorated on the rim in barbotine technique, where soft clay is piped or trailed onto the surface to produce relief ornament. The decoration is, however, much more elaborate than the simple circle of pointed leaves characteristic of form 36. Although some of the barbotine has flaked away, its original position is clearly shown by scars in the slip. The incomplete motif at the left (FIGS 1 and 2, No. 1) survives only as a curved scar and cannot now be identified; a stem of foliage or the tail of an animal are both possible. Next comes a snake, with indentations in the body to suggest its coiling motion and additional barbotine and indentations to define the details of its head: two scars from a pair of horns, prominent eyes, nostrils and a fold or collar at its neck. The head is turned back to face a *cantharus* and the tail is curled on the vase's handle. The *cantharus* itself is a wide shallow bowl with two large handles and a narrow pedestal on a broad foot; there are seven small globular objects at the rim. To the right is a running wreath of alternating scrolls and leaves which probably occupied the greater part of the rim; the spines of the leaves are marked by additional lines of barbotine. Below the rim is a band of complex rouletting across the ridge that marks the junction of wall and floor, with another simpler rouletted circle on the floor and an incised ring round the centre; the very centre is missing. The underside has three shallow concentric footings, the outer one placed at the junction of the wall and base, and three further bands of simple rouletting between the footings and round the centre of the base. The fabric and slip are characteristic of samian made at Rheinzabern, where a number of forms were regularly decorated with barbotine and where some of the potters were particularly skilled in the technique.³ The heavy rim has partially cracked away from the body, probably during the preliminary drying stage, allowing the slip to trickle over the broken edges; for this reason it is impossible to be certain whether the two pairs of sherds originally joined.

Samian versions of shallow dishes or trays with decorated rims are extremely rare. All the examples previously recorded are oval and clearly copy certain contemporary metal forms, both in their shape and in the moulded relief decoration round the rim and on the extended handles; to reproduce these features the pots were made over moulds rather than inside them. One group of such oval dishes was made at Lezoux.⁴ A complete example in the British Museum measures 345 mm in length, while a more fragmentary one comes from Lezoux; both have decoration on the handles and round the rim. A further handle and the handle portion of a mould were also found at Lezoux. On three of these four vessels the handles are flanked by swans' heads.⁵ The pots are not closely dated, but the swan's-head motif on the handles and the overall effect of the surviving rim decoration are very close to a second-century silver dish from Turin.⁶ The British Museum example also has a shallow footing, similar to those on the Silchester dish but following the oval outline of its base.⁷ A similar oval tray from the Trier potteries has no handles but carries a moulded frieze of animals on the rim, with fine incised curlicues on the floor; it is at least 350 mm long, with a flat base and a pair of grooves instead

³ Bird 1993, 5–8; see, for example, Ludowici 1905, 244–54; Hirte 1984; Schulz and Schellenberger 1996, Abbn 41–7, nos 71–5; Thomas 2002.

⁴ A handle thought by Hermet (1934, pl. 5, no. 22) to come from a La Graufesenque version of such a tray has since been shown to be the base of the narrow handle from a deep *paterna* or 'saucepan' (Lauxerois and Vernhet 1977, no. 2).

⁵ British Museum accession no. Towneley GR 1814.7–4, 1548; Walters 1908, fig. 67 and pl. 14, M108; Oswald and Pryce 1920, 198 and pl. 57, nos 1 and 4; Déchelette 1904, vol. 2, pl. 7, nos 5, 7 and 8.

⁶ Strong 1966, 171–2 and pl. 47A.

⁷ None of the published illustrations shows the profile of the tray, but the details of the base and footing were clearly visible in the museum display in 2012.

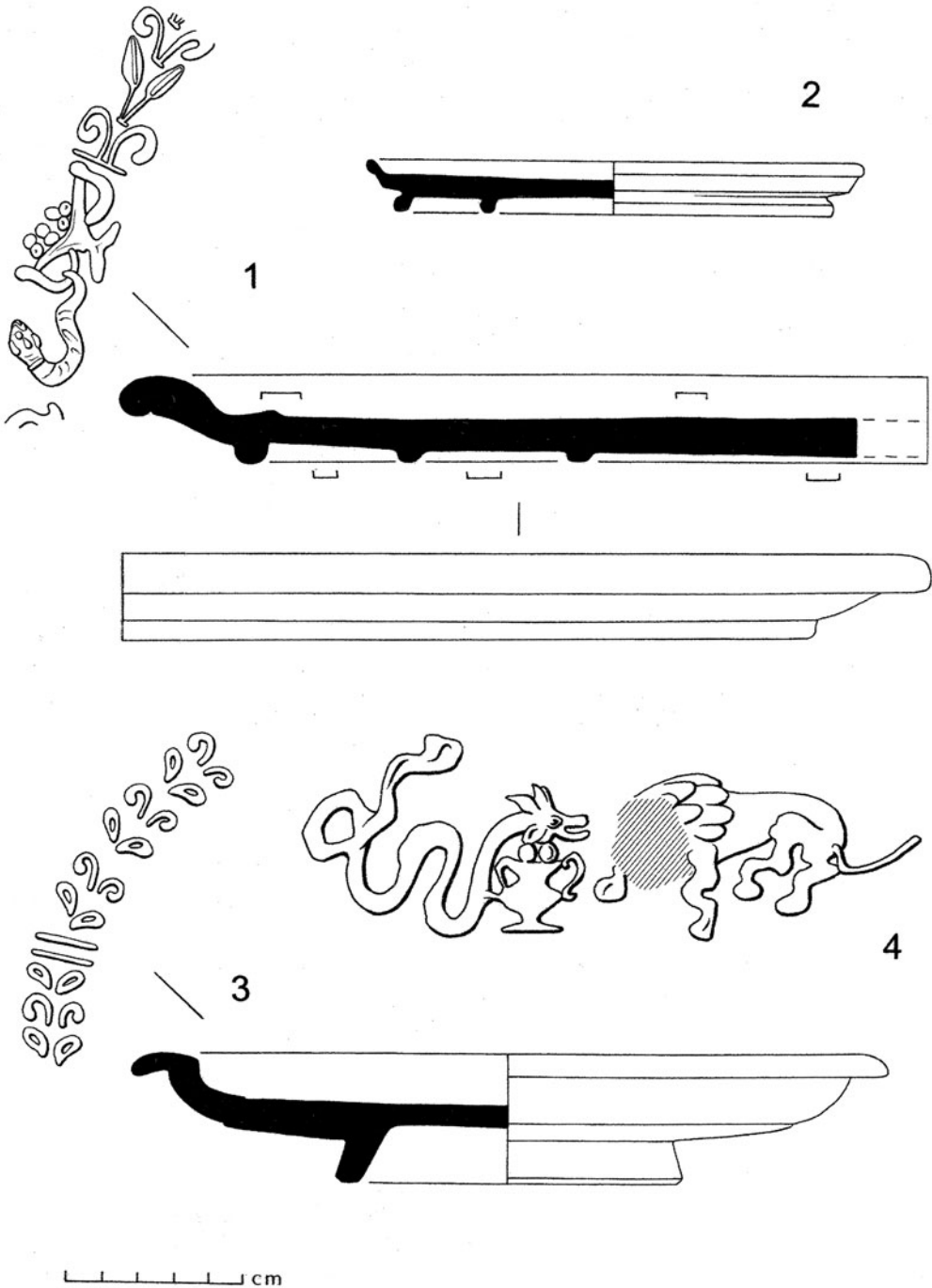


FIG. 2. No. 1: Samian dish from Silchester, showing decoration, profile and side view; the positions of the rouletted bands are indicated by brackets. No. 2: Samian dish from Colchester with two concentric footings. No. 3: Samian dish from Springhead with leaf and scroll decoration. No. 4: Detail of samian jar from the mithraeum at Mühlthal, Bavaria, showing a snake, *cantharus* and lion (after Garbsch 1985). Scale 1:2. (Drawings: author)

of footrings, and is probably of third-century date.⁸ The influence of metalware can also be suggested for the Silchester vessel: a round silver dish from the Berthouville treasure is 350 mm in diameter, with a similar narrow curved rim and a central medallion, both decorated in relief; it dates from the later second to third centuries.⁹

Although the shape of the rim and the style of decoration recall Drag. 36, no comparable dishes have been noted that approach the Silchester vessel in size, while the shallow multiple footrings are quite unlike the angled or rounded single footrings characteristic of form 36 and other standard samian forms.¹⁰ The Rheinzabern potters did, however, experiment with variations on the basic form and there are a small number of third-century examples of vessels that combine the profile of Drag. 36 with the beaded lip of the undecorated dish form Ludowici To'. They carry unusually elaborate scrolls on the rim and where the base survives these are associated with barbotine motifs in the centre of the floor, again suggesting the influence of such metal vessels as the Berthouville dish.¹¹ The centre of the Silchester pot may also have carried a barbotine motif, though a potter's stamp (almost unknown on South and Central Gaulish examples of form 36, but sometimes found in the East Gaulish workshops, including Rheinzabern)¹² or an impressed motif, such as an animal, bird or fish, are other possibilities.¹³ Few parallels have been noted for the low rounded footring and, apart from a small Rheinzabern plate from Colchester which has a pair of concentric footrings (FIG. 2, No. 2), they are all single.¹⁴ The parallels range in date from the middle of the second century to the first half of the third and include a large Central Gaulish dish approximately 400 mm in diameter, probably a variant of form Drag. 15/17 but missing the upper portion, found in London,¹⁵ a heavily modelled shallow bowl from Lezoux,¹⁶ a platter, 312 mm in diameter and 20 mm high, from the potteries at Dinsheim-Heiligenberg,¹⁷ and two shallow plates, both less than 140 mm in diameter, one from Rheinzabern, the other a waster from the Trier potteries. The Rheinzabern pot carries a white-painted dedication to Mithras in the centre, the one from Trier has a moulded frieze of masks and animals on the rim.¹⁸

The style of the barbotine decoration on the rim is apparently unique and even the wreath element has relatively few parallels. A similar arrangement of alternating scrolls and leaves was used on the rim of a hybrid Drag. 36/Walters 79 in Rheinzabern ware from the Pepper Hill cemetery at Springhead in Kent, where the wreath is broken at intervals by pairs of lines,

⁸ Weidner 2009, 180–2 and Abb. 50. Similar incised curlicues occur on the floors of some oval silver dishes with decorated handles (e.g. Wamser 2000, no. 129b, from Manching in Bavaria).

⁹ Strong 1966, 172–3 and pl. 49.

¹⁰ cf. Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. 53, nos 5–7 and 9.

¹¹ Bird 1998, 155 and nos 1, 3 and 10. Two further barbotine motifs on the floors of dishes have since been noted by the author: a cockerel within a rouletted circle from the mithraeum at Königshofen near Strasbourg (Forrer 1915, Taf. 11), and a horse within a rouletted circle from Strasbourg (Manuel Thomas, pers. comm.).

¹² NOTS 1, 8–9. None of the recorded stamps from Silchester in the Reading Museum collection could be matched with this base (Brenda Dickinson, Alison Parnum, pers. comm.).

¹³ Ludowici 1927, 235, M10–11, M18, M27–8, M36–7; Bird 1998, fig. 2, B. A base sherd from Stockstadt has a fragmentary potter's stamp with a head of Pan impressed beside it; the motif may have been repeated round the stamp (Fabricius *et al.* 1914, Taf. 19, no. 156).

¹⁴ The Colchester plate came from a small pit examined during excavation of the former Hyderabad Barracks, south-east of the Roman circus (site reference GAL Area A1 HYD 2011.12, A (257), AF 163); analysis of the finds from the excavation is still in progress (Stephen Benfield, pers. comm.).

¹⁵ Mills 2009, fig. 44, no. 3.

¹⁶ Bet and Delor 2000, fig. 5, type 067.

¹⁷ Pastor 2009, fig. on p. 73.

¹⁸ Thomas 2004, fig. 3; Weidner 2009, 182–3 and Abb. 51. There are similar but slightly larger (undecorated) vessels from Silchester, Colchester and London which have rather more defined footrings (May 1916, pl. 31, no. 26; Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. 66, nos 2 and 4; Stanfield 1929, fig. 11, no. 53); Lud forms Tt' and Tv', both from graves at Rheinzabern, are slightly more dish-like (Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. 69, nos 5 and 6).

perhaps to indicate a binding (FIG. 2, No. 3).¹⁹ The scrolls occur on two of the Drag. 36/Lud. To' variants with barbotine motifs on the floor: one from London has them running in a ring round the rim, with a wreath of overlapping stemless leaves on the floor, and a second, from Rheinzabern, has them placed in a band on the rim, facing inwards round a circle of stemless leaves.²⁰ They are also recorded on rim sherds from Rheinzabern: in a simple ring on another example of the Drag. 36/Lud. To' variant and arranged in pairs separated by beaded lines on Drag. 36.²¹ They appear with plain pointed leaves on a Drag. 44/Lud. SMB bowl from Rheinzabern, while a dish from Rheinzabern, decorated in white barbotine, has paired scrolls alternating with large pointed leaves on its wide flat rim and a circle of dots on the floor.²²

Even rarer are the motifs of the snake and the *cantharus*. In the earlier South and Central Gaulish potteries the use of barbotine decoration had been restricted to a small number of forms, but the Rheinzabern potters extended it to a much wider range, including bowls and mortaria, dishes and a series of beakers and jars, as well as occasional jugs and flagons.²³ The decoration consists primarily of ivy-leaf scrolls, but animals, birds and fish are frequently shown, sometimes in hunting scenes with human figures and more rarely gladiatorial and mythological scenes. No snakes, however, have apparently been recorded.²⁴ Although the *cantharus* is a form (Drag. 53) made at Rheinzabern,²⁵ it seems to be recorded as a barbotine motif only on a Drag. 44/Lud. SMC bowl, where it is placed among animals (probably a dog on the surviving sherd) and ivy leaves. Here the *cantharus* is round-bodied and finely fluted, with small arched handles and a narrow pedestal and foot (FIG. 3).²⁶

The combined images of the snake and *cantharus* suggest a link with the Mystery religions and it is likely that this large vessel was designed for use as a tray for offerings or for display in a shrine. There is one known example of a samian pot showing both a snake and a *cantharus*, made not at Rheinzabern but at the branch potteries at Westerndorf; it was found in the mithraeum at Mühlthal (*Pons Aeni*) in Bavaria. This is a jar of form Drag. 54 which carries a dedication to Mithras by one Ma[rt]inus; the inscription was incised round the rim before the slip was applied, indicating that the pot was specially commissioned as an offering.²⁷ The surviving face of the pot is decorated in barbotine with a tauroctony scene of Mithras slaying the bull; below is an image of a *cantharus* flanked by a snake and a lion (FIG. 2, No. 4), a triad which appears on a number of tauroctony reliefs and on a small group of Mithraic pots in samian and other wares, with a distribution centred on the Rhineland.²⁸ The snake is larger and its body more serpentine, but it shares prominent eyes and a pair of horns with the Silchester snake; its jaws are open and there are wattles at its throat. The *cantharus* has a wide mouth and narrow neck on a biconical body, S-shaped handles and a wide foot; it also has two globular objects at the rim, similar to those on the Silchester pot. These objects may be an attempt to represent incense, an important feature of Mithraic ritual, in the difficult barbotine technique: the *cantharus* on the tauroctony relief from Mithraeum III at Hedderheim is filled with a granular substance for which incense would seem the best explanation.²⁹

¹⁹ Bird 2006, 72.

²⁰ Bird 1998, figs 1 and 4.

²¹ Ludowici 1905, figs 25 and 36.

²² Schulz and Schellenberger 1996, Abb. 47; Roller 1965, Abb. 11.

²³ Bird 1993, 6–8.

²⁴ See references under note 3.

²⁵ For Drag. 53 and related forms see Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. 81.

²⁶ The unprovenanced sherd is in a private collection in Mainz; Manuel Thomas, pers. comm.

²⁷ Garbsch 1985, Taf. B and Abbn 8–9; Gordon 2004, fig. 8. Recent analysis has confirmed that the pot was made at Westerndorf (Silvia Radbauer, pers. comm.).

²⁸ Bird 2004, 196.

²⁹ Huld-Zetsche 2004, 220 and fig. 13; Bird 2004, 196 and fig. 3, B.



FIG. 3. Cordoned samian bowl, Dragendorff 44/Ludowici SMc, with barbotine images of an animal, fluted *cantharus* and foliage. Scale in cm. Private collection, Mainz. (Photo: Manuel Thomas)

While a specifically Mithraic association can clearly not be suggested for the Silchester dish without supporting evidence,³⁰ a pot found within the mithraeum at Friedberg in Hessen provides a parallel for a probable offering vessel with a snake on the rim (FIG. 4). This is a thick-walled dish 386 mm in diameter, in a coarse buff fabric; the rounded rim sits on an angular moulding and the footring is cut out from the underside of the base. Over a quarter of the rim was recovered, with the applied head and partial body of a snake on one side and the partial body and tail of a snake on the other, but insufficient survives to be certain whether there was originally one snake or more. The winding body is made from a simple roll of clay, tapering at one end and modelled to form the head at the other. The head has two stumps where a pair of horns has broken away, the eyes are marked by simple stabbed holes and the mouth, from which the front is lost, by an incised slit; seven transverse notches run down the body from behind the head. A further applied motif 20 mm high, described as resembling a hazel-nut, sits between the snake's head and tail.³¹ This probably represents a cone of the Stone Pine, *Pinus pinea*, a source of incense in Mithraic and other ritual and a symbol of

³⁰ Boon (1974, 159) suggests, on the basis of its plan, that the poorly preserved Building 2 in Insula XIX at Silchester may have been a mithraeum serving 'immigrant traders and others', but there is at present no artefactual or epigraphic evidence to support this.

³¹ The sherds of the Friedberg pot are in two museums, the Hessisches Museum Darmstadt (accession no. IV E.b. β.990) and the Wetteraumuseum Friedberg (accession no. 782). I am indebted to Ingeborg Huld-Zetsche for photographs and a detailed description of the bowl. The rim sherd with the snake's tail and the probable pine-cone could not be located when she visited the museums in 2005 but is described by Goldmann, with a photograph (1899, 293–4 and Taf. 1, no. 4) which is reproduced by Korn (1998, Abbn 66–7).

regeneration found in religious, healing and funerary contexts.³² An altar to Aesculapius from Rome, for example, shows a round bronze altar standing on low feet, probably with an integral dish on the top; it carries an offering of eggs and small fruit placed round a large pine-cone, with a pair of snakes approaching from each side to feed.³³ Despite the coarse fabric, the snake's horns have been emphasised with dark red paint and there are remains of orange-red paint on the exterior and over the rim onto the interior, with white paint on the rest of the interior and a circle of orange-red round the floor. The presence of the paint, together with the applied ornament, argues against a culinary use for the dish, while traces of burning on one sherd are not matched across the break, indicating secondary damage rather than use as an incense burner.

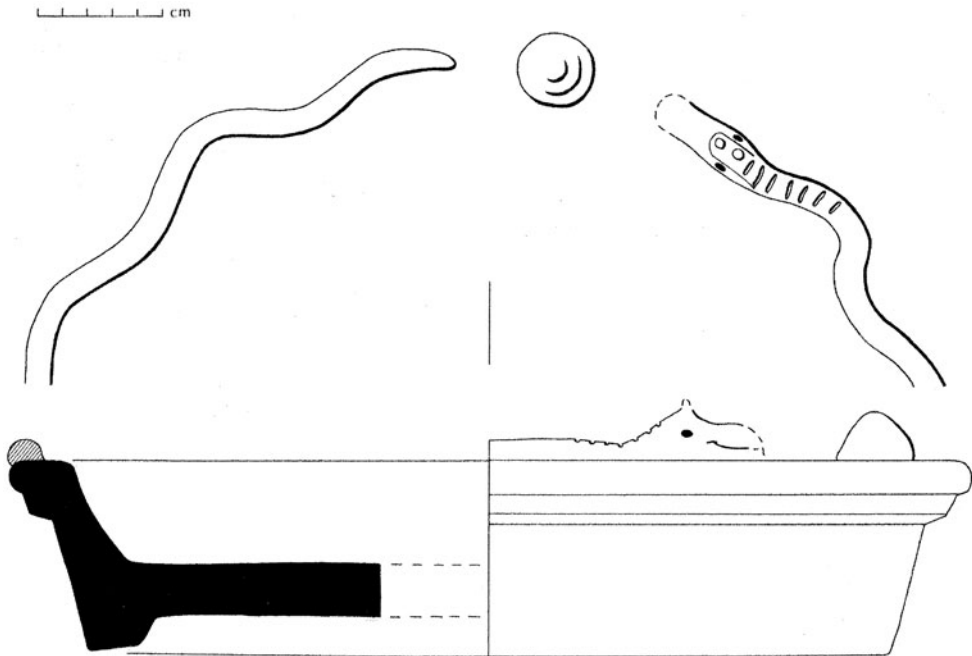


FIG. 4. Coarseware dish from the mithraeum at Friedberg, Hessen, with applied snake and pine-cone (reconstructed after Korn 1998, Goldmann 1899 and photos by Ingeborg Huld-Zetsche). Scale 1:3. (Drawing: author)

Such a rare vessel as the Silchester dish cannot be dated closely without external evidence. Such evidence as there is indicates manufacture in the first half of the third century and probably well within the second quarter; the multiple bands of rouletting prefigure the finer bands found on later Rheinzabern pots such as the Flexford dish (see below). The context in which the rim sherds were found is dated to the fourth century, but contained third-century pottery and was sealed by a layer of yellow clay, possibly a floor, which also contained third-century pottery, suggesting a considerable amount of redeposited material in the area.³⁴ The Drag. 36/Lud. To' dishes noted above include one from the London waterfront at Billingsgate that probably originated in the

³² Vermaeren 1956/1960, vol. 2, no. 1060; Bird 2004, 196–7.

³³ Wigand 1912, Abb. 10 (=CIL VI.1, no. 8); for the bronze altar type, see Taf. 5, no. 5.

³⁴ For details of context (2572) see Fulford *et al.* 2006, 67 and fig. 50.

large deposit of unused Trier and Rheinzabern samian, dated *c.* A.D. 235–45, from the adjacent quay at St Magnus House, and a second from an area of kilns and workshops at Rheinzabern which is dated generally to the first half of the third century.³⁵ There is other third-century Rheinzabern ware from Silchester in the Reading Museum collection and the mould-decorated bowls include eight attributed to potters — the Iulius viii-Iulianus iii group, Pervincus, Primitivus i and Victorinus ii — who were active into the decade *c.* A.D. 250–60.³⁶ There are also around 20 vessels with barbotine decoration, mainly beakers and jars but including the deep rim of a moulded Drag. 37 bowl, a dish with an incomplete motif (possibly a bird) on the floor and four beakers/jars with incised decoration; these probably all date within the first half of the third century.³⁷ Large-scale production at Rheinzabern ceased after the Alemannic incursions across the Rhine in A.D. 259/60, which disrupted both the workshops and their distribution network.³⁸

SMALL DISH WITH INCISED HANDLES FOUND AT FLEXFORD, NEAR GUILDFORD, SURREY

The Flexford dish has been restored from a number of sherds and is now almost complete (FIGS 5–6). The three end sherds of one handle (on the right on the illustrations) were clearly older breaks, probably made during ploughing in the post-medieval period, and were found separately a short distance away. The other breaks are all clean and sharp and are likely to have been made when the deposit containing the pot was first discovered. The find was initially made by the landowner and reported to archaeologists from Surrey Archaeological Society, who are currently working in the area under the direction of David Calow. They were subsequently able to excavate the site, recover more of the dish and related finds and retrieve information concerning its deposition.³⁹ It is most likely to have formed part of a disturbed votive deposit associated with a copper-alloy bowl with a rivetted repair to the base; this was set in a pit which had been carefully cut to fit it. Apart from the dish, the contents of the bowl seem to have included four pieces from small pewter bowls, three broken glass vessels, sherds of colour-coated beakers and flagons and over 800 pieces of what appears to be tin alloy. Further excavations are continuing to produce more evidence of settlement and of ritual and funerary activity on what is clearly a complex site.⁴⁰

The dish is small, 102 mm in diameter, with a wide handle at each end, giving an overall length of 188 mm; the height varies between 32 and 37 mm. It was initially thrown as a dish with a very wide flat rim and then decorated at the leather-hard stage with concentric bands of rouletting. The upper surface has narrow rings of rouletting on the floor and round the rim, with a wider band immediately outside the rim and two more at the ends of the handles; the under surface has three bands on the handles and bowl and an incised line round the base. The bands are mainly composed of single diagonal notches but in places there are two shorter notches together; these

³⁵ Bird 1998, 155; the third-century St Magnus House deposit is discussed in Bird 1986, 142–5. The Rheinzabern dish came from context Rhz. 79/142 (Fridolin Reutti, pers. comm.); for the general plan of the area see Reutti 1983, Beilage 3.

³⁶ Reading Museum catalogue RDMG.1995.80 and RDMG.1995.81, *passim*. Late bowls illustrated in May 1916 are on pl. 26, no. 49, pl. 28, nos 94 and 111, and pl. 29, no. 136.

³⁷ Reading Museum catalogue RDMG.1995.81, *passim*. Some of the barbotine pots are illustrated in May 1916: pl. 36, nos 3, 5–11 and 13–15; for the dish, Bird 1998, fig. 2, no. 9. The incised vessels are on May 1916, pl. 37, nos 2–5.

³⁸ Bernhard 1990, 537.

³⁹ Guildford Museum accession no. AG 24247 and site references CFF10.103, FLE11.24 (016) and FLE11-2 (2401) <6>; the dish has been restored by David Bird. Evidence for ploughing on the site includes the pendant from a fly-terret horse-brass, dated after the mid-nineteenth century.

⁴⁰ Booth 2012, 350; 2013, 341–2. Not all the material from the votive deposit has yet been fully analysed. The final report on the excavations will be prepared by David Calow for *Surrey Archaeological Collections*.



FIG. 5. Samian dish with incised and rouletted decoration from Flexford, Surrey: top, side and base. Maximum length 188 mm; for dimensions see FIG. 6. (Photos: author. Courtesy of David Calow, Surrey Archaeological Society)

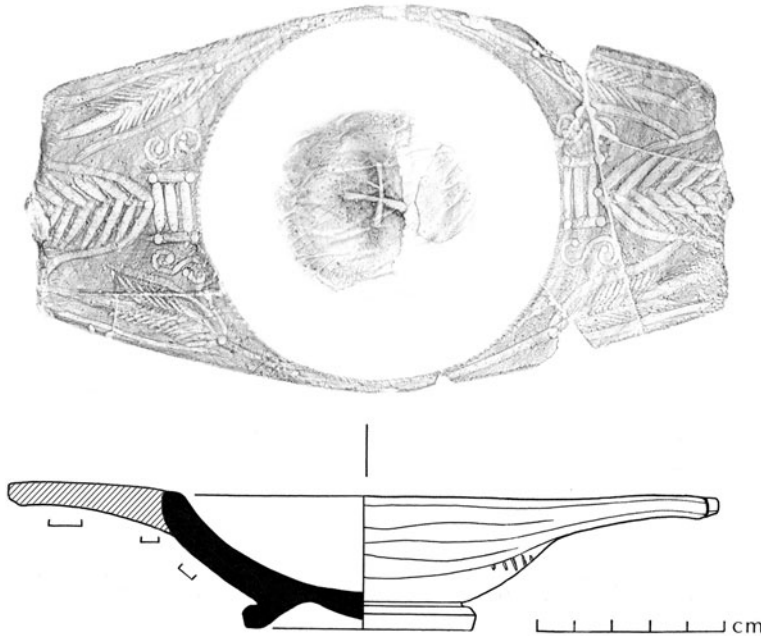


FIG. 6. Samian dish with incised and rouletted decoration from Flexford, Surrey. The position of the rouletting on the underside is indicated by brackets. Scale 1:2. (*Rubbing: David Bird; drawing: author*)

probably indicate where the rouletting tool jumped while it was held against the surface of the pot, which would have been rotating on a slow wheel. The rim was then cut away at the sides to form the handles and the scalloped ends carved out; the bands of rouletting have been partially removed at the sides and their diameters match across the missing portions, confirming that the cutting came later. The fact that the rim was cut when the pot was nearly dry probably accounts for the unusually crude finishing along the sides, since a pot at this stage can be very vulnerable to cracking. The incised decoration on the handles was almost certainly done subsequently, as it overlies the rouletting and fills the available space so neatly, while the letterless stamp was impressed twice in a cross arrangement on the floor. The fabric and slip are more orange in colour than those of the Silchester dish, but still fall within the range of Rheinzabern wares. A further feature is the untidy finish of the slip round the footring, which shows the potter's fingerprints; the impressions of nails or partial fingerprints are not uncommon round the footrings of samian ware, where the vessel would have been held while it was dipped in the slip, but these rather messy and more prominent marks seem to be particularly common at Rheinzabern. The footring itself shows signs of wear, especially on the outer edge, but the pot is likely to have been complete when placed in the deposit.

The decoration on the handles has been incised using narrow round-ended tools of at least two thicknesses; striations visible on the broader lines indicate the use of a wooden or bone implement. The cutting is less fine than the usual 'cut-glass' decoration of incised samian.⁴¹ In the centre is a broad pinnate leaf held in a calyx, above a three-barred motif which perhaps represents a box or tub. The box is flanked by S-scrolls, while a narrower pinnate leaf, again held in a calyx, sits at each

⁴¹ e.g. Oswald and Pryce 1920, pls 77–8 and 80, nos 3–4; Ludowici 1905, figs 49–53 and 61–7.

side, its long stalk running along the rim of the bowl. Dots terminate the scrolls, the box, the lower ends of the leaves and the stalks. The stamp in the base carries no letters and belongs to a series of anepigraphic slot-like stamps, *Strichstempel*, which are well known on Rheinzabern products and were probably introduced during the second quarter of the third century. There were, for example, 183 such stamps, some of them crossed as on the Flexford dish, in a large group of wasters dated c. A.D. 235–45 from the fill of Kiln 17c at Rheinzabern; they are also recorded from third-century assemblages in Britain, including the deposit of c. A.D. 235–45 from the St Magnus House quay in London.⁴² Some Rheinzabern potters such as Primanus iv (active c. A.D. 160–260) occasionally impressed their name-stamps in a cross and there is even a joint signature of Severianus ii and Gemellus iii (active c. A.D. 190–240) inscribed in a cross in the base of a Drag. 37 mould.⁴³

No closely comparable samian form has apparently been recorded. The nearest parallel is the dish form Drag. 39/Lud. Oa which has a pair of flat handles; in this case the handles are usually so elaborately and finely shaped that they were probably made separately and applied to the vessel, rather than cut out from it as with the Flexford dish.⁴⁴ It is an uncommon form (there are only four in the large St Magnus House assemblage, for example)⁴⁵ and varies considerably in size, with overall lengths between 95 and 300 mm. It was sometimes but not invariably stamped and was made at Rheinzabern and at the branch potteries at Westerdorf during the first half of the third century. The handles are either left plain or decorated with barbotine, while a variety of barbotine designs has been recorded: ivy-leaves predominate, accompanied by tendrils, bunches of grapes or birds, but there are also elegant scrolls and groups of overlapping scales.⁴⁶ As with the Lezoux trays noted above, it is probable that the inspiration for both Drag. 39/Lud. Oa and the Flexford dish came from oval metal dishes with long decorated handles, the round form of the samian versions being dictated by the impossibility of throwing an oval pot on the wheel. While no examples of Drag. 39/Lud. Oa have been noted with incised decoration, there are oval dishes of later second- to third-century date in silver and bronze where the handles carry incised ornament in a similar manner to the Flexford pot.⁴⁷

The idiosyncratic style of ornament links the Flexford *patera* with three other vessels that were surely decorated by the same hand (FIG. 7, Nos 1–3). Nos 1 and 2 were found complete in 1866–7 in the cemetery at Speyer, placed in a niche beside a sarcophagus; No. 3 is more fragmentary and was found in a round tile-built feature (described by Ludowici as a ‘Zysterne’) in the cemetery area at Rheinzabern.⁴⁸ They are rather heavily potted, like the Flexford dish, but are clearly based on flat silver dishes which carry incised decoration on the floor. They have similar bands of rouletting on the exterior and underlying the incised decoration of the floor; the latter feature is also seen on a

⁴² Reutti 1983, 54–6 and table 1 (the fill of kiln 17c has the site reference Rhz. 79/657); Bird 1993, 3, and Museum of London Archaeology archive report SM75.

⁴³ NOTS 7, 200 (Primanus iv, die 1a); NOTS 8, 247 (Severianus ii, MS1).

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Brenda Dickinson for discussing this point.

⁴⁵ Bird 1986, fig. 85; they are all fragmentary, and all probably in fact from Rheinzabern. A rare find of two undecorated Drag. 39 dishes, stamped by Favvo and Iuvenis ii respectively, came from a cremation burial at Sompthing, Sussex, which also contained a coin of Geta dated A.D. 198–209 (Ainsworth and Ratcliffe-Densham 1974, 312 and fig. 2, nos 4 and 5).

⁴⁶ For the undecorated version and a range of handle shapes, see Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. 57, nos 3, 5 and 6; Roller 1965, Abb. 17; Schulz and Schellenberger 1996, Abbn 50–1; Stanfield 1929, fig. 4, no. 18; Hirte 1984, Abb. 22 bottom. Barbotine-decorated versions include Oswald and Pryce 1920, pl. 57, no. 2; Hirte 1984, Abbn 20–3; Kamitsch 1960, Taf. 14, no. 1; Charleston 1955, pl. 12B. The potters recorded as stamping this form were active between the end of the second century and the middle of the third.

⁴⁷ Strong notes a silver example from Saulzoir near Bavai, which is probably of third-century date; the handles carry engraved swans' heads and pelta ornament (1966, 172). For bronze examples, see Tassinari 1975, 51 and pls 23–4, nos 103–6 (no. 104 has a chi-rho monogram in the base, impressed using punched dots and probably added at a later date).

⁴⁸ Martin-Kilcher 1999, 198–200 and Abbn 15–17; Ludowici 1912, 148 and Abb. 28. There are also unpublished sherds in similar style in the site collections from Rheinzabern (Manuel Thomas, pers. comm.).

silver dish from Augst-Kastelen, where the central motif of two overlapping squares overlies rouletted circles.⁴⁹ The distinctive elements on the Flexford pot all appear on these dishes: the large leaf and calyx on all three; the narrower leaf and calyx on Nos 1 and 2; and the box on Nos 1 (without the side bars) and 2. No. 3 has single scrolls, rather than S-scrolls, arranged alternately round the edge, and varying numbers of dots are on all three. The largest, No. 1, also has lozenges composed of four lines and eight-pointed rosettes. The dishes carry diagonal fluting (Nos 1 and 2) or more upright fluting in two zones (No. 3), reflecting the fluted walls of some of the silver dishes and perhaps also the fluted decoration found on other silver dishes of fourth-century date.⁵⁰

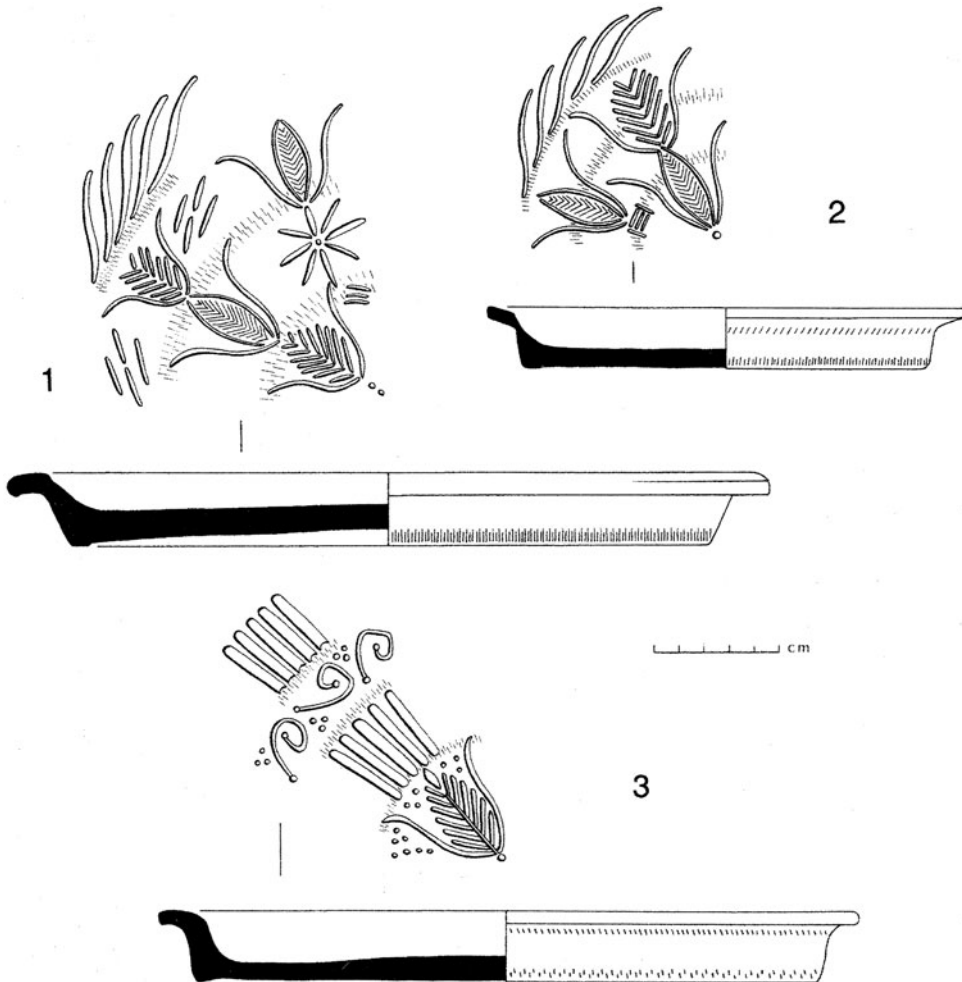


FIG. 7. Samian dishes with incised and rouletted decoration from Speyer (Nos 1 and 2) and Rheinzabern (No. 3). The fluting, scroll and rouletting are continuous, while the decoration in the centre is repeated four times on each pot (after Martin-Kilcher 1999). Scale in cm (1:3). (Drawings: author)

⁴⁹ Martin-Kilcher 1999, Abb. 2.

⁵⁰ Martin-Kilcher 1999, Abbn 5 and 6; Strong 1966, fig. 38 and pl. 58A and 58B.

The dating evidence for the Flexford dish indicates that it is considerably later than other East Gaulish products found in Britain. While the main phase of production at Rheinzabern ended with the Alemannic incursions of A.D. 259/60, there was some resumption of pottery-making in the late third century which lasted until around A.D. 350. This was on a much smaller scale than previously, with no known use of potters' stamps or manufacture of mould-decorated bowls, and the distribution of the wares is very much more localised.⁵¹ One of the characteristics of this late production is the use of rows of narrow rouletted bands, as on the Flexford pot and its related dishes. These occur on a range of stylistically late Rheinzabern bowls and dishes from sites dating to the late third or first half of the fourth century, such as the Kindsbach *Höhensiedlung*.⁵² Such a date would accord with the other evidence from the probable votive deposit at Flexford, which includes an unusual facet-cut glass bowl of late third- to fourth-century date⁵³ as well as sherds of fourth-century colour-coat wares.

CONCLUSIONS

The two pots discussed above demonstrate the continuing influence of metal prototypes on the design of samian ware in the latest phases of the Gaulish and German potteries. This influence dates from the very beginning of the industry with the earliest production of relief-decorated ware, as Déchelette recognised in his 1904 work and as Oswald and Pryce illustrated more fully in their publication of 1920. The particular interest of the Flexford dish lies in showing perhaps the latest stage in a small-scale but persistent demand for shallow pottery vessels with wide decorated handles which copied the long oval dishes made in more expensive silver and bronze. The second-century Lezoux copies are noted above, but similar vessels are found in other samian fabrics, including Late Italian sigillata,⁵⁴ Spanish sigillata⁵⁵ and Pontic sigillata.⁵⁶ Among the vessels with elaborately shaped rims, often decorated with applied motifs, which were produced by the African Red Slip Ware potters, is a large shallow dish with flat fretted handles, Hayes form 42, dated to the second quarter of the third century.⁵⁷ Similar forms were made in other finewares, including red-slipped Wetterau ware,⁵⁸ glazed wares⁵⁹ and

⁵¹ Bernhard 1990, 537. Brenda Dickinson (pers. comm.) confirmed the absence of potters' name-stamps at this period.

⁵² Bernhard 1987, nos 2, 6–10 and 14.

⁵³ Denise Allen, pers. comm.

⁵⁴ A shallow dish with elaborate but undecorated handles, apparently without parallel in Italian sigillata, was found near the villa at Torre di Pordenone. It came from a deposit dating broadly from the turn of the first/second centuries to at least the end of the third/first half of the fourth century (Ventura 2012, 250 and Tav. 1, no. 1).

⁵⁵ The Spanish versions are similar to Drag. 39 and the handles are mould-decorated, usually with vines and grapes, rosettes, vases and occasionally figures; at least one is stamped (Mayet 1984, vol. 1, 74–5; vol. 2, pl. 71, nos 181–3, 185, 187–90).

⁵⁶ The products of the Pontic workshops include oval and rectangular dishes with moulded decoration, including foliage, *cantharus* and bird motifs, on the handles and sometimes on the rims. They date from the second century into the third (Zhuravlev 2011, 6–7 and figs 6–7).

⁵⁷ Hayes 1972, 60–1 and fig. 10; cf. Garbsch 1982, 98, no. 21.

⁵⁸ Rupp 1987, Tafn 28–33, shows a range of round, oval and rectangular dishes with shallow footings and moulded or barbotine decoration on the handles; the handles are often flanked by birds' heads, similar to those on the oval dishes from Lezoux and the silver dish from Turin noted above. Taf. 31, H13.1 has plain handles, elaborately shaped and pierced, and incised curlicues on the floor similar to those on the samian dish from Trier.

⁵⁹ e.g. Behn 1910, 181, no. 1212, an oval plate in a white fabric with green glaze; the handles are decorated with half-rosettes in relief.

Nijmegen-Holdeurn ware.⁶⁰ An intermediate stage between metal and fine pottery, in terms of probable costliness, is represented by versions made in glass.⁶¹

The Silchester dish may have served for offerings or display in a shrine. Its decoration links it to a ritual function, probably connected with one of the Mystery cults, while the round objects held in the *cantharus* were perhaps intended to represent incense. Despite the crack between rim and floor on the surviving sherds, it would still have been a rare and prestigious item and may have been valued for several decades before its eventual deposition in a fourth-century context. While there is evidence that samian pots such as the Mühlthal jar could be commissioned specifically as votive offerings,⁶² it is also likely that pottery with a religious theme was made for general sale: at Alésia, for example, fragments of two red-slipped dishes with Mithraic scenes, one applied, the other in barbotine, were recovered from a gutter and probably originated in a nearby shop.⁶³ The primary use of the Flexford dish is not so clear: it may have been used ritually to make offerings, but it could equally well have been used at the dining table. Whatever its original purpose, it would seem that it was considered special enough to be ultimately deposited as part of a votive offering while the fertility connotations of its foliage decoration may have been seen as particularly appropriate.

The evidence for the Silchester dish suggests that it was made towards the middle of the third century, a time when samian imports were beginning to meet competition from local fineware industries, notably red-slipped Oxfordshire wares. However, the group from St Magnus House and the presence of contemporary samian from both cities and military sites indicate that imports from Rheinzabern, and also from Trier, probably continued until the disruption of the industry and its marketing network in A.D. 259/60.⁶⁴ The Flexford dish, on the other hand, is one of only two Rheinzabern vessels of the late third to mid-fourth century so far noted from Britain. The other is a jug found in a burial at Margate; its form is characteristic of fourth-century jugs and flagons recorded in samian and other red-slipped finewares in Germany and, like the Flexford dish, it is decorated on the body with narrow bands of rouletting. It is possible that these two pieces of late samian came into Britain among personal baggage, but there were imports of other German pottery, notably Lower Rhineland Marbled Ware and Mayen/Eifel coarse wares, so it is conceivable that the occasional piece of late samian found its way into Britain via this route.⁶⁵

The two vessels provide a valuable reminder that samian pots were not always mass-produced to standard specifications or in large quantities and it is unfortunately possible that other unique and interesting forms are overlooked when big groups of pottery are processed. Both show that new or variant types could be introduced when required and both demonstrate lively and innovative use of their respective decorative methods. Although the stamp gives no indication of the potter's name, the Flexford pot and the three related dishes enable us to recognise the work of a very distinctive craftsman, active at a time when no literate potters' stamps have been recorded.

⁶⁰ The evidence includes a handle mould in fine pipeclay with delicate scroll decoration, probably cast directly from a metal vessel (Haalebos 1995, 62–3 and Abb. 39).

⁶¹ The glass versions were cast in moulds; they include dishes with shaped and pierced handles but no other decoration (Poppelreuter 1906, fig. 253, e), and others, dated to the late second to third centuries, with shaped and pierced handles and faceted and chevron decoration on the underside (Rütti 1991, vol. 1, 43 and Formentaf. 1, type AR26; vol. 2, 42 and Taf. 40, no. 836; for a complete facet-decorated example see Mariacher 1970, pl. 20).

⁶² Bird 2013, 326–9.

⁶³ Gordon 2004, 268; Walters 1974, 151–3 and pls 22–4.

⁶⁴ Bird 2011, 73–4.

⁶⁵ Bird 2009; 2014.

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