What Do Objects Want?

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This paper develops an argument for the agency of objects, looking at the effects objects have on people. Groups of related objects, such as pots or metal ornaments, create stylistic universes which affect producers and users of new objects, bound by the canons of style. For an object to be socially powerful in a recognized manner, the form of the object lays down certain rules of use which influence the sensory and emotional impacts of the object. Formal properties of artifacts are influenced by the genealogy of the object class, including historical continuities and changes, and also its perceived source. The forms of objects, the historical trajectories of the class of objects and their perceived sources combine to have social effects on people, shaping people as socially effective entities. Britain's incorporation into the Roman Empire between 150 BC and AD 200 provides an excellent case study through which to look at the changing corpora of objects, which had continuities and changes in form, a set of subtle attributions of sources and a complex range of social effects.

My attempt in this article is to explore what might be called an object-centered approach to agency. It is often assumed that society is created and reproduced through the actions of human agents who are shaped and constrained by the broader society in which they live. For the prehistorian, the active human subject is a problematical entity, but artifacts are often abundant, although not totally unproblematical as we shall see. There are a number of strands of thought within archaeology and outside which explore the effects that things have on people and I would like to use these to start thinking about the obligations objects place upon us when they are operating as a group. I shall use the incorporation of Britain into the Roman Empire as a brief case study within which to explore these ideas a little more. Periods of change are important in bringing out the relationships

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between people and their object worlds, looking at that strands of continuities in the requirements objects have of people, as well as the changes. My title attempts to highlight the sets of rules that things impose on people if artifacts are to have social power and efficacy. Ultimately, emphasizing the manner in which things create people is part of a rhetorical strategy to rebalance the relationship between people and things, so that artifacts are not always seen as passive and people as active. This will complicate notions of agency, but allow us to make more of the rich analytical possibilities that artifacts offer.

THE INTER-ARTIFACTUAL DOMAIN

In this section I want to explore the way in which artifacts act *en masse* to effect people. Objects produced within a recognizable set of forms and styles have influences on the ways in which people make and use them. Such ideas take the concept of style and develop it in new directions. A commonplace archaeological thought is that artifacts are made within recognizable and repeatable styles, so that a pot or a metal pin for holding clothing, fit within a corpus of like objects, each similar to many others, but at the same type a unique combination of the characteristics of form and decoration that help define the style as a recognizable entity. Style has been much discussed within archaeology, often in terms of the ethnicity or nature of the social group producing a recognizable style (Sackett, 1977), with well-known critiques of the problems in looking for bounded groups and bounded sets of stylistically distinct objects (Hodder, 1979, 1982). I am looking less at objects as indicators of ethnic groups and their boundaries and more at the ways styles of objects set up universes of their own into which people need to fit. This is an idea that obviously needs some explanation.

Archaeologists have long been aware of the mass power of objects and their subtle interactions with masses of people. David Clarke gave considerable thought to artifacts acting together and was much more inclined to see the locus of social cause existing within objects themselves when working together (Clarke, 1978). Clarke defined a series of levels of artifactual aggregation from the individual attribute and artifact through to the cultural assemblage made up of constantly recurring sets of types of artifacts. At each of these levels he was inclined to give some causal properties to artifacts themselves—artifacts are produced by repeated sets of actions, but then themselves bring about "repeated sets of actions implemented by the type" (Clarke, 1978, p. 153). By channeling and constraining human actions one type can help bring others into being, so that some elements of the object world help bring others into being. Objects use human muscles and skills to bring about their own reproduction. Similarly, populations of artifacts will "exhibit their own specific 'behavioural' characteristics which are more complex than the simple sum of the characteristics of the components and more predictable than that of the individual components" (Clarke, 1978, p. 150). At both levels,

to use Clarke's term, of artifacts and assemblages, things behave in ways which do not derive simply from human intentions and in fact channel those intentions. These larger agglomerations of things have life cycles of their own, well described by the so-called battleship curves which chart the coming into being of a new style, its florescence and gradual decline. Changes in the nature of pottery or metal types take place over many human generations and not under the direct and willed control of individuals or groups.

A similar view of artifacts acting beyond human control has been made by Gell (1998). The inter-artifactual domain is the means he uses for approaching the concept of style, as a set of relations between relations (Gell, 1998, p. 215). Artifacts are decorated with motifs that are transformed one into another by regular and generally small modifications. Indeed, Gell feels that stylistic change occurs by the "principle of least difference"—that is differences occur between motifs through making the least modification that is possible in order to establish something as different. Such a field of tiny differences can only be understood once artifacts are looked at as a corpus from which it can be seen that the constraints governing production are the constraints governing the possibility of transforming a motif or form into a related form. Maori meeting houses exist as an historical corpus of complex objects—new houses being brought into being so as to fit within the universe of existing forms (Fig. 1).
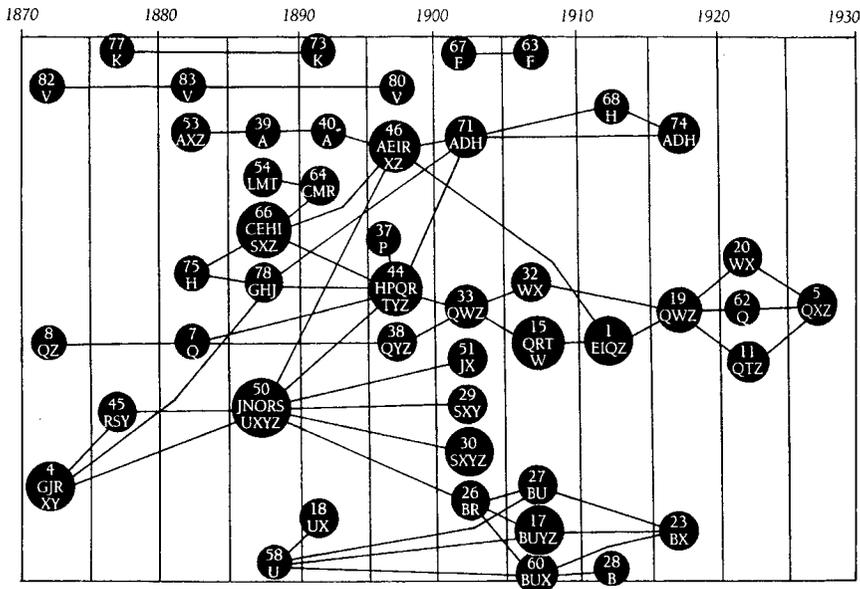

Fig. 1. The inter-artifactual domain as illustrated by the historical development of Maori meeting houses (after Gell, 1998, Fig. 9.6).

The Marquesan style of artifacts, for instance, is the "sedimented product of tiny social initiatives taken by Marquesan artists over a long period of historical development" (Gell, 1998, p. 219). Crucially, Gell criticizes the view that culture as whole dictates the practical or symbolic significance of artifacts, saying rather that the inter-artifactual domain is one in which artifacts obey rules set up by the style as a whole in some way removed from and different to the intentions of human makers and users. Although he doesn't explore the conceptual implications of this idea, Gell's view that artifacts form a world with its own logics somewhat independent of human intentions is vital in demonstrating that there might be many cases in which forms of abstract thought and mental representation take the shape suggested by objects, rather than objects simply manifesting pre-existing forms of thought. Decisions taken when making objects may occur without deliberate reflection on meaning, but never without some overall cognizance of the prevailing social context of material forms. One of the mysteries of things is that they take an infinity of forms, but often also have marked resemblances with one another, and the notion of style tries to probe the tension between similarity and difference which maintains and creates both.

Gell's ideas form part of an emerging attempt to take the material world seriously in terms of how it affects human relations. Such attempts are also found in disciplines, such as art history, where links between sociability and objects are eagerly sought, although the dangers of imputing sociability to objects are recognized. In his article (from which I have taken the title of this piece) *What do pictures* really *want?*, Mitchell (1996) feels that we should take the desires of objects seriously at an analytical level, as these are already taken seriously in everyday life. When pornography is seen not as a representation of violence against women, but as an act of violence, or when a painting is discussed in terms of what it does to the viewer, then we are imputing actions and effects to things, which we might otherwise see as inanimate. The simple everyday question "what does it do?" attaches a power or capacity to objects, although not necessarily will or intention. Objects that do things might seem to take us into the realm of fetishism, totemism, animism or idolatory, attitudes to the world acceptable in children or non-Westerners, but dubious for sophisticated post-modernist actors to hold. But if these attitudes do exist, and Mitchell makes a convincing case for their presence in our lives, they demand some form of understanding. Ultimately, his attempt to understand the desires of things is a little disappointing, but Mitchell does point out that objects are an important element in plays of recognition and knowing that pass between social actors all the time in daily life. A building, a pot or a metal ornament has certain characteristics of form which channel human action, provide a range of sensory experiences (but exclude others) and place obligations on us in the ways we relate to objects and other people through these objects. Patterns of exchange or consumption derive partly from the nature of the objects themselves. The independence of the style of objects from human cultural forms, discussed by Gell, allows us to talk about how things themselves create the grounds for our

understanding of them. We know them in their ways, rather than purely on our own terms.

The idea of the independence of style is an important one, which redefines the notion of context. For many, the real context of an objects is in the social realm, so that Hodder's contextual archaeology looked ultimately either to the body of ideas and meanings which people held and developed or to the divisions of society, such as class, gender or age, which provided a matrix of motives influencing how people made and deployed things. By looking at styles and corpora of objects we can see that the crucial context for an object is other objects of the same style. As material culture is relatively long-lasting, people are socialized into particular material worlds which exist prior to their birth. The nature of social being for people will be structured by the education of their senses by the objects surrounding them in childhood, giving them a series of stances and presuppositions towards the world derived from local material culture. People crystallize out in the interstices between objects, taking up the space allowed them by the object world, with our senses and emotions educated by the object world.

If one is interested in how objects shape people and their social relations, then periods in which objects change their forms and types markedly and rapidly should be of considerable interest. Clarke picked out periods, such as the shift from Corded Ware to Beaker assemblages in the final Neolithic and earliest Bronze Age, as examples of the decay of one set of types and assemblages followed by the rise of new forms. An even better understood transition is the apparent replacement of late Iron Age types in various parts of western Europe with those of Roman provenance and this is the example I shall briefly explore, concentrating on material from southern Britain. This is a period of rapid, obvious but also subtle change, which provides an excellent example for working through in a more material fashion how things shape people.

OBJECTS AND ROMANS

The literature on the coming of the Romans into Britain is large and contains some hot debates, many of which are about agency. In line with post-colonial approaches to colonial forms many people are attempting to replace an older view of colonialism as a form of top-down imposition of the colonizers' values on the colonized with a greater stress on the agency of the natives to create and alter colonial structures. The Romanization debate has taken this turn and the most interesting recent contribution has been Greg Woolf's (1998) book *Becoming Roman in Gaul* in which he argues that there was no such thing as a pre-existing Roman culture spread through the expansion of the empire, but rather that Roman culture was created as the empire was created. All participated in this creation—people in the provinces as well as in the center and that the Romans were Romanized along with everyone else through the expansion of the empire (see Gosden, 2004, for a fuller

account of artifacts and colonial forms). The British evidence for the late Iron Age and Romano-British periods is rich and many of the analytical possibilities of this material are explored in Millett (1990).

In line with the ideas outlined above, my approach to becoming Roman also concerns agency, but is more to do with the agency of things and less concerned with the intentions of people. The Roman invasion of Britain occurred in AD 43, although material of Roman type from nearby Gaul had been traded for at least a century before that. The first century BC saw a series of massive changes in southern Britain, built on and altered in many ways subsequently. Becoming Roman in Britain did not mean a simple and immediate change of one set of types to another, but a series of subtle, but fundamental shifts in the nature of bodily ornament, food and pottery assemblages, public and domestic architecture and media of exchange, such as coins. Although comparatively speaking these shifts are well known and well dated, there are still many questions of detail that need to be resolved before we can gain a full picture of what occurred, where and when.

I shall explore four key issues in looking at how objects affected people. The first of these is the form. The forms that objects take in terms of morphology and decoration are crucial to the influences they have on people and this is where I start. I want to trace form through to effects—the sorts of sensory and emotional responses that objects elicit are the key to their social power. Between form and effect I shall interpose two extra terms—genealogy and source. Much of the debate surrounding Roman Britain concerns which forms of material things were novel and which not, as well as how novelty was introduced and dealt with. In looking at genealogy, I would be tempted to use a term, like descent with modification, if I could strip it of its Darwinian overtones. What I am looking at is the history of objects, in the recognition that their history was often important to their effects. Things in Roman Britain had complex histories, as we shall see, with some forms deriving from complexes of artifacts found within Britain (and adjacent areas) with others bearing a more recognizable Mediterranean style, although often refracted through other stylistic universes, principally those in Gaul. I shall briefly trace the descent lines of some objects and their modifications to think how these might have influenced people in Britain around the turn of the millennia.

The geographical counterpart of the historical notion of genealogy is that of source. Archaeologists of Roman Britain have built up a very impressive knowledge of the places where artifacts were made and the routes by which things were traded. And these knowledges of source and trade are integral to the way in which artifacts are interpreted now. For instance, Samian ware, a red-gloss ceramic common in Roman Britain, we know was made in southern and central Gaul and this is what makes it Roman in our eyes (despite it being Gaulish). The Roman nature of Samian is usually taken for granted and its spread through rural Britain is taken as a marker of the spread of Roman influence and culture. We have to be aware that this was not necessarily the significance it had for people in Roman Britain. The ubiquitous nature of Samian might have meant that it was quickly

internalized as local, rather than foreign. Danny Miller (2002) makes the same point with the title of his article "Coca-Cola: a black sweet drink from Trinidad." The discussion of source is a cautionary tale about the dangers of prejudging what was seen as Roman and what not in Roman Britain, where it is better to start with the nature of distribution of material, rather than project our knowledge of sources onto populations 2000 years ago. The forms of objects have effects on people, but only when modulated through histories of descent and modification and notions of source or provenance. I shall trace a few lineages of objects in Roman Britain.

FORM

A striking feature of the forms of things from the late Iron Age into the Romano-British period is their promiscuity. Objects made from plastic materials, such as pots or metalwork, take on a great plethora of forms under the influence of objects from many different places. Objects in Britain were especially influenced by their cousins in Gaul and this is particularly true of pots and fibulae (metal safety pins used to hold clothing together), and we will look at some of these complex influences in the next section on genealogy. An especially complex arena of formal qualities which affected people was the built environment and landscape. There has been considerable discussion concerning the manner in which new built forms, such as villas, were marks of either Romanization or native resistance, but less concern over the sensory and emotional effects that new types of building in novel landscapes might have had on human subjects.

Smith's (1978, 1987) provocative work on villas looks at the replacement of roundhouses by villas, which seems a dramatic change. However, Smith argues, this masks a continuity of social form through the extended family which becomes visible through a careful analysis of villas. In Smith's view the principles of the Classical canon of architecture are consistently violated to accommodate two or more family units. These principles include a symmetry of elevation and plan, planning the site as a whole through regular geometric figures based on the right angle, a strong emphasis on a central axial approach and a monumental grouping of buildings (Smith, 1978, p. 150). The three wings of the Chedworth villa, which are not aligned at right angles, are marked by a shrine at the boundary between two of the units and picked out further by misaligned entrances indicating three families, one in each wing, enjoying multiple proprietorship. Rather than a look at the social arrangements, which might have generated the form of buildings, let us look at how the forms of buildings might have encouraged either change or continuity in human action.

We must remember that any building form is an amalgam of a series of elements, some of which may have stronger imperatives than others. Round to rectangular appear quite different built forms, but there may have been systematic transpositions in the use of space, as is explored by those discussing the shift from the round house to the rectangular aisled hall. Both forms have an open central
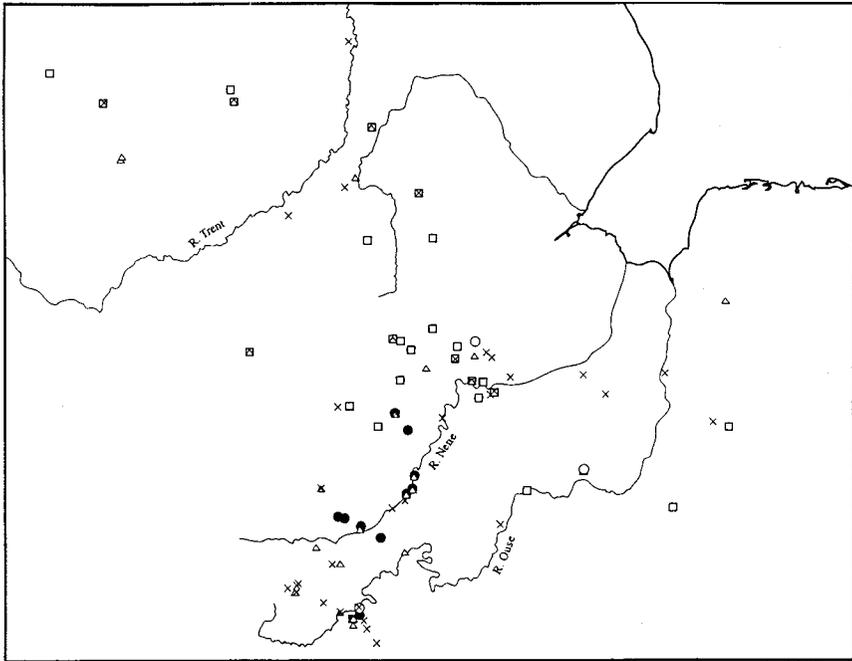
Fig. 2. The distribution of later Romano-British architectural traditions in the East Midlands of England (□ = aisled buildings, ● = stone-built round houses, ○ = timber-built round houses, △ = row-type stone buildings, × = other timber building forms) (after Taylor, 2001, Fig. 13).

space (many divisions in aisled halls are late in the history of the structure), with more private areas behind the roof supports around the perimeter (Millett, 1990, p. 201). Taylor (2001) has looked at the East Midlands of England, where there is a variety of domestic structures between the first and the fourth centuries AD (Fig. 2). In the south and west of this region are round houses built either of timber (in an apparently Iron Age style) or with stone foundations (a novelty of the Romano-British period). These existed alongside aisled houses, built out of "Roman" materials, such as stone and tile, with a series of pillars supporting the roof which helped differentiate a central communal area from more peripheral domestic areas. In the northeast of the area there was a continuity of timber round houses until the start of the second century when these were complemented by aisled buildings. In the later third and fourth centuries these aisled halls were re-ordered through the creation of separate rooms for different activities, echoing in their decorations, flooring and heating arrangements the villas that also existed in the area. The thread of continuity for all buildings other than villas was the centrality of the hearth in the central space (Fig. 3), as is the combination of craft and agricultural activities carried out under one roof. One could say that the

S = Surface
H = Hearth
F = Furnace
C = Corn Drier
P = Pit
Hy = Hypocaust
B = Bath
M = Mosaic
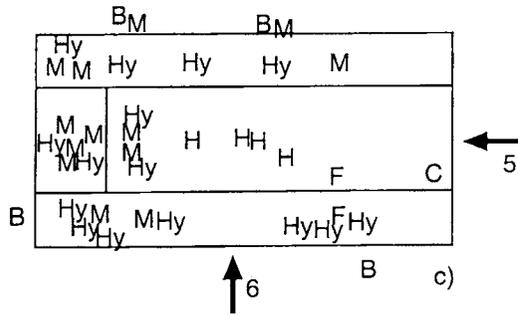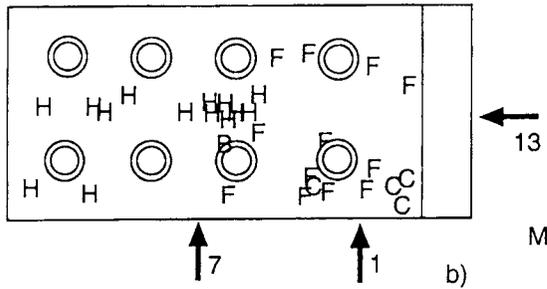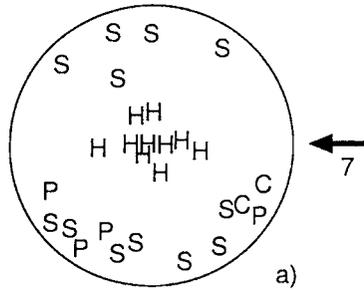
Fig. 3. Schematic diagram of the location of architectural features with (a) late Iron Age to early Romano-British buildings, (b) second to third century aisled buildings, and (c) third to fourth century "developed" aisled buildings (after Taylor, 2001, Fig. 14).

demands of the hearth and the obligations that it imposed upon people continued through this period, forming a central point around which architectural forms were constructed and used. The aisled hall preserved the dominance of the hearth and the division between central public and perimeter private spaces, despite the most apparent change from round to orthogonal.

In looking at the built environment one can easily see the sorts of obligations things placed upon people, creating environments into which children were born and socialized, internalizing a set of spatial and social rules, whose power lay in the fact that they were unconsciously obeyed, rather than being formally taught. Taylor (2001, p. 52) also makes the point that we need to look in more detail at the landscapes in which these various buildings sat, so as to understand the full range of continuity and change, as well as the key sets of obligations placed upon people by the material world in which their daily lives were lived. This complicates Gell's notion of the inter-artifactual domain in an interesting manner—some of the less obvious elements of form may have continuing and important effects.

Starting in the first century BC and accelerating in the following century is a plethora of new spatial and social arrangements. The final century BC witnessed the emergence of oppida in Britain, themselves very imperfectly known, but bringing about new accumulations and arrangements of people. Silchester (which became the Roman *civitas* capital of Calleva Atrebatum) was founded between 20 and 21 BC prior to the Claudian invasion and had both rectangular buildings and an orthogonal ground plan from the start, features that were previously only thought to arrive with the Roman invasion. The widespread nature of these novel forms of architecture is hinted at by similar plans at Heybridge and possibly also Abingdon. Claudian Silchester was laid out on an east–west axis, some 45° from the late Iron Age southeast–northwest axis (Creighton, 2000). From the first century AD the existing variety of arrangements saw the addition of military camps, towns of varying sizes and roles, large ritual sites, and villas. In any one region there was a great variety of settlement and house types, round and rectangular, although excavations have concentrated on the most obviously "Roman" of these.

Nor should we dwell overly much on two dimensions, thinking of the organization of space in terms of plan. Novel building materials of stone, brick and tile gradually spread during the first century AD, creating a different sensory universe. The smell, sounds and appearance of buildings shifted creating previously unknown sensory worlds, helping to create human subjects of new types and attaching unforeseen values to the older materials of wood, thatch and daub. The temporal rhythms of life also played out differently, with buildings in brick or stone requiring more labor initially, but having greater durability thereafter.

Late Iron Age and early Romano-British built environments created new compartmentalizations, as some spaces were divided up more finely than before in new villa houses and urban spaces. Sight and movement were more directed by roads and architectural forms, although these directions could be subverted in various ways (Laurence, 1999). The total set of transformations of space are of interest, as is the logic of moving from one form to another, such as that between the round house and the aisled hall. The temporal cycles involved in transforming earth into brick and brick into building and eventually back again can be compared and contrasted with the temporality of earlier forms of building. We need to understand the total universe of spaces composing the domestic environment,

round or orthogonal, timber or stone and the complex interactions of form, so as to gain a sense of the full range of effects created by novelty and continuity.

GENEALOGY

As mentioned above, the notion of genealogy allows us to explore two questions—how did history matter and what aspects of continuity are we looking at; how are things of different origins and histories put together to form a way of life with some logic and coherence? We shall look at the genealogy of individual objects, but also the practices they encouraged and allowed. Let us start with metal objects.

The early and middle Iron Ages saw the production and use of large virtuoso objects, such as torcs, swords and shields, which were directly attached to the body of a powerful individual. Many of these metal items were richly decorated with motifs known collectively as "Celtic" art (Jope, 2000). From around 100 BC the nature of personal ornament changes, with a decline in the large striking objects and greatly increased production and deposition of smaller personal items, such as fibulae, used for holding together clothing. Fibulae had been found in Britain since the late Bronze Age, so by the end of the Iron Age these were ancient and well-known objects, albeit well known for their ability to change over time. The marked increase in fibulae from 100 BC has been termed the "fibula event horizon" (Hill, 1995, 1997) and is found across all classes of site, from small rural settlements, such as Gussage All Saints, to large agglomerated settlements (Bagendon) or shrines (Hayling Island). Fibulae were used for holding clothing together, but also, like coins, they were very useful small items to be used for deliberate deposition. Fibulae have a series of lineages tracing their stylistic developments changing in a manner which is in tune with Gell's (1998, p. 218) idea of the principle of least difference whereby each new form is created by steps involving the smallest modification possible from previous exemplars but consistent with the establishment of a difference between them.

Fibulae have complex lineages (Fig. 4). Many brooch types were shared with the continent and had an origin there. Imports into Britain often had the effect of creating new local types in imitation of the continental forms. Britain, indeed, goes through an alternation of periods of local production (for instance, the period AD 69–96) or mass importation (third century AD) (Bayley and Butcher, 2004). Materials changed and varied, with brass being introduced in the Roman period to complement bronze, so that the basic appearance of the brooch would have varied due to the material from which it was made, effects enhanced by a range of decoration, such as enameling. Nevertheless, behind all these variations we can see some regional differences with the north and east producing fancier brooches, using brass more commonly, as opposed to simpler forms in bronze in the south and west (Bayley and Butcher, 2004, p. 207). Objects, like coins, which often had the head and name of a ruler from the late Iron Age onward, are seen as political

500 BC   Type L   Hallstatt
                                                                          D2-3

                                          Type 1A   La Tène
                                                                            A

400 BC   ———

                                          Type 1B

                                                                          La Tène
                                                                            B

300 BC   Type 1C

Penannular   Type 2A   ———
Type Aa

200 BC   La Tène
                                          Type 2Ca   C

Type 2Cb

                                          Type 3B   ———

            Nauheim   La Tène
                                                                            D1

100 BC   Filiform

                                                                          ———

            Boss-
            on-Bow   La Tène
            Types   D2

                                          Early
                                          Strip
                                          Bow   ———

            Colchester   Aucissa   Thistle   Early
BC/AD   Roman
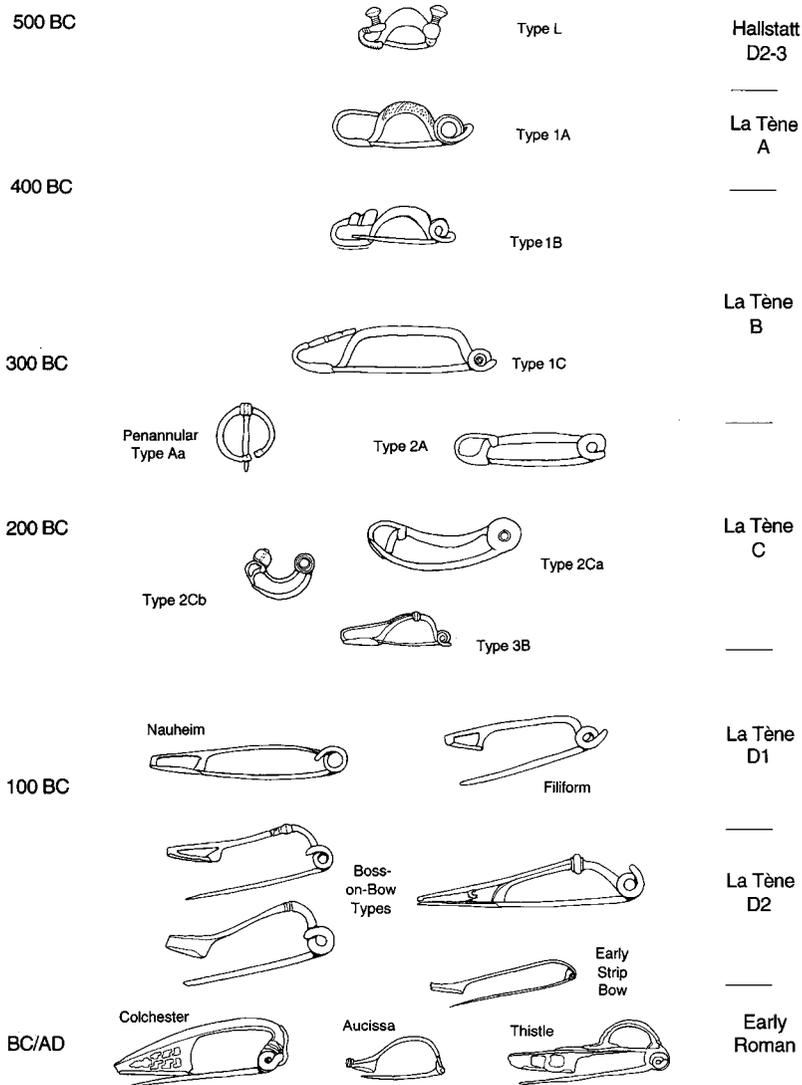
Fig. 4. An historical development of British fibulae from the early Iron Age to the Romano-
British periods (after Haselgrove, 1997, Fig. 8.1).

items, helping create and define polities. It may also be that the regionality of
brooches had similar although less defined effects, creating people as members of
groups, a membership that they wore on their chests.

Many other classes of small metal objects had complex and long-lived ge-
neaologies, such as toiletry kits (ear scoops, nail cleaners and tweezers) elements

of which are found from the late Bronze Age onwards. These are found in large numbers after the first century BC, with marked regional variants and they betoken a greater concern with outward appearance, which was presumably connected with issues of identity and gender (Hill, 1997). To further complicate things, within the Roman period new types of artifacts appeared, making a link to older techniques and forms. Famously, the Dragonesque brooches, appearing in the Flavian period (AD 69–96) make use of enameling and a form (the broken-backed scroll) which derives from late Iron Age forms of decoration. These were large brooches also making political statements and playing a part in forms of resistance in northern Britain (their center of gravity) to expanding Roman rule (Jundi and Hill, 1998). Fitting them within a broader spectrum of brooch types and materials might throw light on these subtle and ambiguous objects, the effects of which would have been complicated and contextual.

The nature of deposition of these small items indicates a series of small deposits by individuals or family groups. This is in contrast to the large midden deposits of the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age where huge amounts of bone (animal and human), pottery and metal were deposited in sites like Potterne, East Chisenbury and All Cannings Cross (Lawson, 2000; Needham and Spence, 1997). Such large deposits were occasionally found in the Romano-British period, but much more common from the late Iron Age onwards are sites with many coins, brooches, toilet kits and other small finds. Gary Lock and I have been digging one such site at Frilford/Marcham, where there is an evidence of Iron Age enclosures and large circular structures followed by a Romano-British temple, amphitheatre and other large public buildings which have produced large numbers of coins, fibulae and toilet kits from all periods between the first and the fourth centuries BC (Gosden and Lock, 2003). Such large religious complexes are found in a number of regions, such as Hayling Island in Hampshire or Gosbecks in the Colchester complex. However, this should not distract from the fact that large amounts of deliberate deposition of animals and small objects took place in towns, such as Silchester or London, or forts like Newstead in Scotland (Fulford, 2001). As Fulford makes clear, Romano-British deposition represents a clear continuity with late (and possibly even early) Iron Age practices. Greater amounts of material and higher rates of deposition characterize sites of all types from the late Iron Age into the Romano-British period and once again this pattern of deposition needs to be appreciated as a whole rather than dividing the ritual sites off from the more domestic ones.

Finally, pottery had extraordinarily complex forms of genealogy. Gallo-Belgic wares of the first century BC were derived from a mixture of influences both local to Gaul and from the Mediterranean. Gallo-Belgic plates, cups and beakers were quickly imitated in Britain in local grog-tempered fabrics and local colors of orange and red (Fig. 5). At the same time the influence of bronze flagons and jugs on pottery and shale vessels were echoed in the pedestal vases found in Hertfordshire. "Thus we can see the willingness of British potters to take, adapt
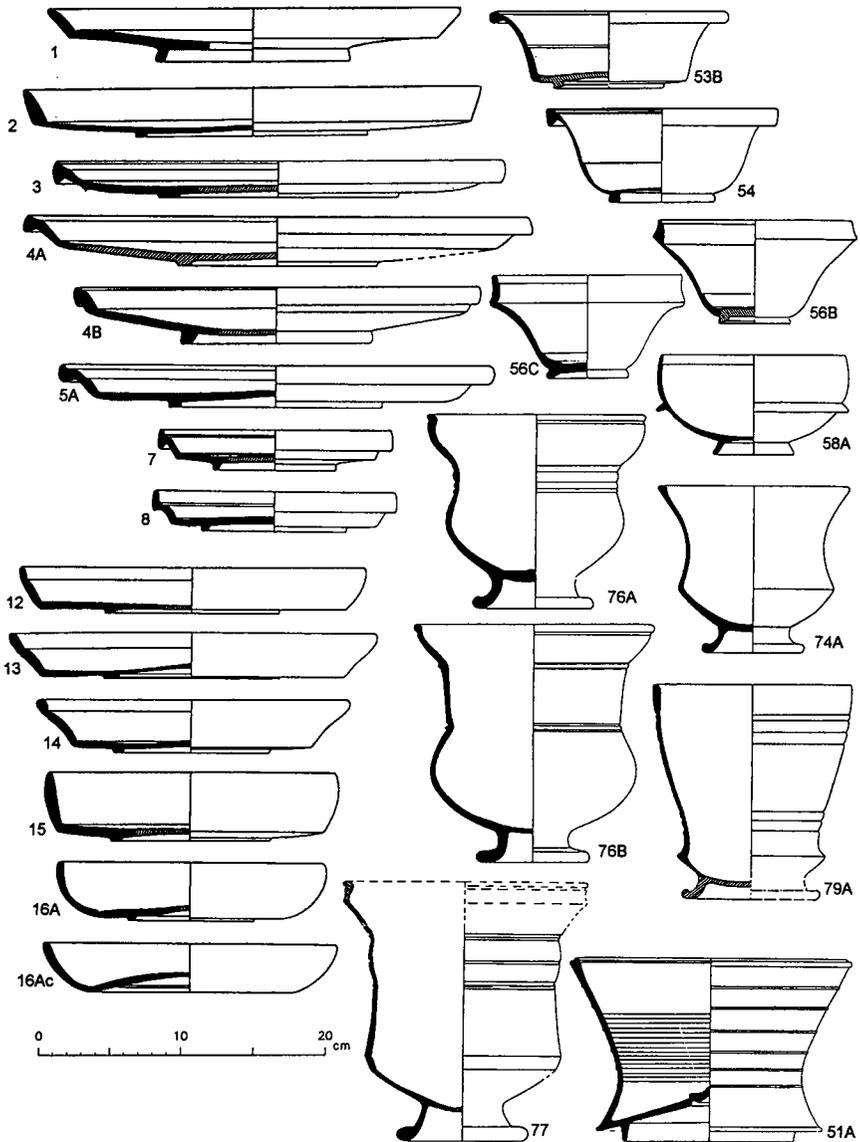
Fig. 5. Gallo-Belgic wares. Scale 1:4 (after Tyers, 1996, Fig. 198).

and blend shapes and techniques from many sources—a process that continues vigorously into the Roman period" (Tyers, 1996, p. 55). The ability of different materials, shapes and finishes to impose themselves on people shows the true promiscuity of pottery which acted as a nexus for influences coming from many

parts of the object world, transmuting some of the effects of shale, metal, and possibly, wood into clay.

Genealogies of objects and practices are extraordinarily complex from the first century BC onwards, even when one considers individual classes of object, let alone trying to think of the links between objects and how they came together.

SOURCE

There has been much assumed about the category of "Roman" objects when looking at Britain. We have no idea whether the inhabitants of Britain used such a category for some forms of material culture and which forms fell within the category, if it did exist. Our current knowledge of sources might paradoxically obscure the local significance of things and their impacts. A key example here is Samian.

Samian is a distinctive red-gloss ware produced in southern and central Gaul (following inspiration from northern Italian Arretine industries). Decorated items were made in a mould in a range of forms from bowls to jugs. In Britain Samian is found in small amounts on rural sites, but fairly ubiquitously, with a high proportion of decorated vessels. It seems especially well represented on sites which were important in the Iron Age and maintain centrality after the Conquest. Samian enjoyed a complex relationship with other early imported types, such as Gallo-Belgic wares, including platters, jars and flagons, with Samian taking over some of the roles of the early types (Willis, 1997, 1998). More broadly, these imported wares became part of a repertoire of wheel-turned pottery made in Britain, the potter's wheel being introduced before 100 BC in some parts of eastern England, spreading in a complex fashion over the next 150 years or so. In some regions middle Iron Age forms stay in use until the Conquest, making the late Iron Age hard to spot archaeologically, but in others pots change rapidly and early. We have tended to compartmentalize our consideration of pottery assemblages, considering Samian in isolation from other types, both imported and locally produced. The total effects of the colors, shapes and textures of pots, together with their varying abilities as containers cannot be apprehended fully in this manner. We have to appreciate that the sensory properties of pottery (particularly color) linked pots to other elements of the landscape and built environment. Potentially, there might also be links between the iconography employed on decorated Samian and that on coins, either relations of emulation or of contrast. We have no reason to believe that wares we know to be imported were viewed similarly by contemporary users— Samian may have been quickly assimilated as a local element of life moving through well-known local exchange networks which obscured its ultimate origins. The use of new foods and preparation techniques was linked to the forms of pottery, with new types, such as the mortarium, a gritted grinding dish, were mainly found on urban sites only becoming common in rural areas in the third century AD

(Rush, 1997, p. 60). This is a "Roman" form but its distribution has a center of gravity in western Europe and may be connected with regional forms of food preparation.

EFFECT

At the very end of prehistory the material world imposed a series of new demands on people in Britain. Those who embraced new forms found themselves over time created as social beings with new sensibilities and forms of relatedness. A great variety of reactions must have taken place to create the huge variability we see archaeologically in material culture and the built environment. At the heart of my argument is a series of methodological questions: How far do individual classes of objects (for instance, fibulae or pots) represent stylistic universes in which each object is a minor variant of an overall style? How far did people obey the dictates of these objects in producing and using them in tune with the formal qualities of the objects themselves? How far can we trace transformations in form in obvious cases with clear genealogical connections (between the Dragonesque brooches and earlier forms) or where some formal change partly masks a deeper resemblance (between the Iron Age round house and the aisled hall)? If there are clear transformations that can be traced and understood can we follow broader fields of connectivity—do areas where wheel-turned pottery arrived late have other aspects of their archaeological record in common? There may be links through the sensory and emotional effects of objects that cut across our categories of objects— the color of brooches, pottery and wall plaster in the Romano-British period might be worth looking at.

One categorical division which is definitely unhelpful is that between Roman and Native, as others have pointed out (Woolf, 1997). There is a general excitation of the object world from at least 100 BC onwards which owes something to trends emanating from the Mediterranean which ripple out through areas north and west. In a place like Britain these have complex effects that start well before AD 43 in the production of pottery on the wheel, the higher levels of fibulae and other small metal objects, the growth of large settlements and new burial rites to name but a few. Again our categories of objects are suspect. A Samian bowl or an amphora are definitely Roman for us, but not necessarily for all who owned and used them—for those on rural settlements they may have had broader exotic connotations coming from over some far horizon, but not of necessity from anywhere connected with Rome. In any case as Thomas (1991) has said, it is not what objects were made to be that counts but what they can be made to become: the ability of objects to reorder their effects should not be underestimated. Once again my argument is that we should not concentrate, in the first instance at least, on the meanings of objects, but rather on their effects and how those effects emanated in a complicated fashion from things *en masse*. Whether things were Roman or not

in either our eyes or those of local people is a difficult question, as it brings us up against our prejudices and makes us realize again that we don't know what people felt.

Overall, cultural forms always have two conflicting elements: they are often made up of bits and pieces taken from many places on the one hand, but these are quickly formed into a coherent whole on the other. Contemporary British culture has many elements originally from elsewhere—potatoes, tea or tobacco, to take some obvious examples. But all these elements have become British and none are now marked out as foreign. We should not spend time trying to identify the original elements of a bipartite Romano-British culture, but rather look at the logics by which the pieces were combined. Some apparently Roman aspects were introduced before the Conquest, such as the layout of Silchester, and many 'British' things continued after AD 43. Indeed, quite a number of things in 'British' styles, like the Dragonesque brooches *started* in the post-Conquest period. The 'inter-artifactual' domain and the styles of objects within it gives us a means of understanding the internal logic of objects and the built environment, even though practically there is much analytical work to be done. The internal logic of Romano-British culture was not one of gentle harmony and smoothness, but contained tensions, created through material things. An understanding of the topological space created through the formal qualities of things is not an argument against the importance of context, so that the formal qualities of things needs to be appreciated through a deep knowledge of how objects were deposited, together with an acknowledgment of the regional and temporal variability in depositional practice. But the connections between form and deposition have not yet been systematically probed.

An overwhelming impression one gains form the artifactual evidence from the turn of the millennia is one of variety, fluidity and regional difference. In such a fluid world one is drawn to concentrate on transformations, how one set of forms becomes another. A more useful word might be transubstantiation, which can look at how substances, such as stone, bone, metal or clay, take on forms and qualities which transgress the boundaries between types of substance. Of even greater is interest is that basic alchemy of human being, whereby other substances effect the flesh and blood object of the human body, thereby transmuting a series of objective qualities into subjective ones. The world changes not just in its forms but in its feelings and we can acknowledge that these two dimensions are always linked. The end of prehistory in Britain provides a privileged insight into the complexity of remaking forms and feelings rendering in the process new types of people.

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