

# A study of Central Gaulish coarse wares of the first century BC.

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## 1. The origins of the study

I first encountered the pottery types discussed here when Alain Ferdière gave me an offprint of his 1972 paper entitled *Introduction à l'étude d'un type céramique : les urnes à bord mouluré gallo-romaines précoces*, at the SFECAG conference in Lyon in 1979. His paper described two forms of moulded-rim jar found on early Roman sites in central France. The first (Ferdrière 1972, fig. 1) is a plain round shouldered jar with a slightly out-turned beaded or thickened rim, moulded on the inner face, and a flat base. The second (Ferdrière 1972, figs. 2 and 3) has a heavy triangular rim, moulded on the upper surface -- some of these had a horizontal cordon and a band of incised chevron decoration on the shoulder. The 'typical' fabrics of the forms were described as coarse, grey-brown or black and micaceous. Their distribution in 1972 covered some 30 sites, principally in the *Centre* region, but also further east into the Saône valley and beyond. The apparently similar jars amongst the products of a small kiln excavated in the basement of Besançon museum in 1968 led to the name *le type Besançon*" for the whole group.

During a subsequent study tour I encountered examples of *le type Besançon*" on sites throughout central and eastern France and it seemed that although a range of fabrics were represented (particularly in the later assemblages) a substantial proportion of the early (i.e. 1st cent BC) material was in a single coarse hand-formed grey or grey-brown ware, heavily micaceous and with large feldspar inclusions. Back in Britain, there were vessels apparently identical form and fabric at *Camulodunum* -- where it is form 262 -- and at Silchester.

Some years later the opportunity arose to re-examine the problem of *le type Besançon*" in more detail and collect a number of samples for petrological analysis. It is the results of this study that are briefly described here<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Petrology

The fabric, which for the moment has the working title of *type fabric 1* or TF1, has two striking characteristics 'in the hand': i) the abundant flakes of biotite mica which give a distinct golden-brown or red-brown sheen to the vessels, and ii) the common and large (up to 1cm) feldspar inclusions, prominent in both surface and section. The vessels range in colour from orange- or red-brown through to dark brown, or almost black, but colours towards the middle of the range (red-brown: Munsell 2.5YR 6/6 or dark red-brown: 2.5YR 4/4) are most common. However, there is often a great deal of variation within a single vessel. All the vessels in this ware are hand-formed, and usually burnished or smoothed on the rim and upper body.

Petrological study of TF1, by Dr Alan Vince, suggests that the principal inclusions are derived from the *in situ* weathering of a coarse-grained granite. Amongst the inclusions there are numerous composite rock fragments, but these have usually decomposed into their constituent minerals. Feldspars fragments, commonly with a perthitic texture, are most abundant, and there are also sheaves of biotite crystals and smaller quantities of quartz.

This ware has been identified on some 40 sites, both 'in the hand' and in thin-section. However, many further examples undoubtedly lie disguised in the literature on *le type Besançon*", where there are numerous references to 'micaceous' fabrics with 'large' and/or 'white' inclusions.

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1. I should like to thank Drs Alan Vince and Ian Freestone for their time and patience in unravelling the petrology of these vessels and to the many individuals and organisations who kindly donated sherds for analysis or assisted in other ways. A final report is being prepared for publication in the *Revue Archeologique du Centre*.

### 3. Typology

The majority of vessels in this ware are jars. Three broad classes of jar can be distinguished:

- Class 1 Large jars with heavy triangular-shaped rims, heavily moulded on the upper surface. The shoulder is often delimited by a rounded cordon or groove, and there are usually further mouldings on the inner face of the rim. This class is often decorated with a band of incised decoration below the shoulder.
- Class 2 Jars with a thick, everted or out-turned rim, moulded on the inner face (usually with two or more grooves) and marked with a cordon or groove on the shoulder. Many are decorated with a band of incised decoration on the shoulder.
- Cam.262* Jars with a high rounded shoulder and a short thickened or beaded rim with two or more grooves on the inner face. These vessels are usually thinner and less heavily built than those of class 1 or 2. The form is rarely decorated.

Rarer items in the repertoire include shallow open bowls with moulded rims. *Camulodunum* form 45A, which has a tripod base and a moulded-rim, is in TF1.

### 4. Chronology and distribution

TF1 has been identified on some 40 sites Class 1 and 2 jars are the earliest of the series. On a number of sites in the upper Loire and the Saône valley they are associated with Dressel 1a amphoras and Campanian A ware, and can probably be dated to the half-century or so before the Gallic wars (perhaps c.150-100 BC). There is some evidence of 'export' at this period for the jars appear in small numbers at the Basel-Gasfabrik, and there are sporadic examples from early first century BC assemblages in northern Gaul.

The less massive *Cam.262* form develops towards the end of the first cent. BC. This type is common during the decades that follow in the middle Loire valley (in particular the Orléans region) and reaches as far west as Alet on the north Brittany coast. It is to this period that the British examples from Colchester and Silchester may be assigned. There are a few vessels from the Rhineland fortresses of Haltern and Neuss which would seem to be in this fabric. TF1 probably disappears in the period c.AD 20-40, although jars of the *Cam.262* shape continues to circulate in some parts of Gaul in a range of other wares, now largely wheel-made, until at least the end of the first century AD, and perhaps beyond.

### 5. Source

Despite its very wide distribution, TF1 is not a major contributor to the assemblage on most of the sites where it is found. The source undoubtedly lies in southern Bourgogne, between the Loire and the Saône, for here lie both the earliest and largest groups, and the widest range of forms. Particular attention should be given to Mont Beauvray (*Bibracte*), where TF1 seems to be a major contributor to the coarse ware assemblage. The material from the recent series of excavations at this key *oppidum* has not been made available; however jars of class 1, 2 and *Cam.262* and a number of bowls, all in TF1, are a significant element of the coarse ware assemblage in the extant material from the 1867-1907 excavations of Bulliot and Déchelette held in museums at Roanne, Autun and Paris. We should also note the early occurrences of TF1 from Roanne and Feurs, some 100km or so to the south, although in neither of these cases does TF1 form the majority of the coarse ware assemblage. At Roanne the 'majority' fabric is, like TF1, derived from a granite, but the inclusions are far more heavily weathered and the typology of these vessels is quite different.

Bibracte -- the capital of the Aedui -- lies in the heart of the Morvan, a region of granite massifs and the most northerly extension of the Massif Central. To test the hypothesis that TF1 originates in this region a number of rock samples have been collected and compared in thin-section with the granites in the fabric of the ceramics. We are searching for a biotite-rich granite so particular attention was focussed on the series described as *granites à biotite*. These formations outcrop in large areas of the Morvan and extensively further south in the main Massif. Some of these samples include feldspars with the perthitic texture of those in TF1, but most include muscovite as well as biotite, so are unlikely candidates for the source of our fabric.

Further hints as to the source of TF1 come from Tournus, an important late La Tène site in the Saône valley, between Chalon s.Saône and Mâcon. The assemblage includes two large jars of our class 1 in TF1 but the remainder of the coarse ware assemblage is in a different fabric. Many of the typological details of these vessels, their ubiquitous combed decoration and the lack of the distinctive highly micaceous finish marks them out clearly from TF1. They belong to a separate but contemporary tradition. In thin-section, however, they share very similar granitic inclusions, particularly feldspars of perthitic texture.

Although the source of coarse wares at Tournus is not known, their distribution covers the Saône valley from at least Chalon in the north to Mâcon, and they are likely to have been made somewhere in this region. Perhaps the similarity with the Tournus fabric suggest that we should focus initially on the geology of the southern Morvan in any continuing search for the source of TF1.

## 6. Conclusions

TF1 can be added to that growing list of hand-made wares with extensive distributions, already well-known from Britain and the Mediterranean but rather poorly studied in Gaul. The long-distance movement of these jars throughout the first century BC holds out the possibility of using them as 'markers' to correlate the sequences from different regions. We should also consider whether they are not being traded as cooking wares *per se* but rather as a container for some other product. If their source lies in the high Morvan then all manner of 'forest' products might be potential candidates -- resins, waxes, honey, cheeses *etc.* (see Strabo *Geography*, IV.6.9 on the exchanges between the Celts of the forests and the valleys). More directly, there is at least one jar in TF1 from Basel which is recorded as containing the bones from a joint of pork, and perhaps another from a site near Avallon in the northern Morvan. Clearly more work on this aspect of the material is required, but it may not be entirely fanciful to imagine that someone at *Camulodunum* once sat down with slices of Gaulish ham on his plate.