INTRODUCTION

Pottery constitutes one of the most important sources for the archaeological enquiry into ancient societies. This is not just because ceramic vessels formed part of many contexts of cultural interaction, ranging from activities as different as the everyday consumption of food to the holding of funerals. What makes pottery so special is that, in contrast to almost all of the other artefacts that would have been just as essential to those contexts, it has survived to this day. Unfortunately, the significance of pottery as evidence for ancient cultures is not often realised within Classical scholarship. This is not least the result of many approaches to studying this material, which, at best, are poorly communicated to non-specialists and, at worst, reflect a view of ceramic analysis as an end in itself. By contrast, this book is an exercise in making pottery work as a source for understanding important historical issues. The reason why I claim that black-gloss ceramics from central Italy of the mid-Hellenistic period (third to second centuries BC) can highlight a number of crucial aspects of Romanisation is not their aesthetic appeal for us or their intrinsic value. Far from it: the cultural meaning of these wares is in many ways conditioned by their cheapness and wide use. This is because pottery, like many other aesthetically essentially plain objects of everyday use, acquires meaning by being used in these daily activities. As such, it provides a link between the archaeologist and the human actors of the past who would have deployed ceramic vessels in a way that made sense to them within the particular contexts in which they were used. In this way, the same type of pot can be found in a variety of archaeological contexts and as part of differently composed assemblages. Depending on these contextual associations, the meaning of identical ceramic artefacts varied. In addition, the design of the pots changed over time, sometimes only with regard to seemingly minor elements but still in a potentially meaningful fashion.

Figure 1 Twentieth-century German china: earlier shape of cup with hollow base (photograph: T. R. Volk).

The creation of such meaning in everyday material culture is not, of course, limited to the ancient world. Therefore, a brief look at how such artefacts are imbued with meaning in our own culture might further help to illuminate what has just been said. This procedure may appear unnaturally self-conscious because the place of such objects within the world of our own everyday life tends to appear intuitive, almost natural. But this is precisely the point: it is on account of their forming the object of such routinely applied cultural knowledge that objects like everyday pottery give away information about the subjects, including, as might be the case in the following example, ourselves.

A well-known design of German china has been produced continuously since the 1920s. The design has remained the same: it is, in fact, possible to combine plates made in the first half of the twentieth century with those produced in the early twenty-first century. However, two detailed stylistic changes can be identified. First, wares produced during the Second World War are off-white, as opposed to the usual glossy white finish. Second, cups produced before the 1980s have hollow bases, while those produced after this period are flat (Figures 1 and 2). Both changes are historically

Figure 2 Twentieth-century German china: recent shape of cup with flat base (photograph: T. R. Volk).

significant: they mark changes in the lives of those who used these wares. First, the lower quality of the war-period wares represents a decrease in the resources available to spend on everyday activities. At the same time, it may be indicative of an attempt to mask the negative implications and uncertainty of this crisis, by reproducing the familiar material environment with the means that were available in that situation. Second, the relatively minor post-1980s change in the morphology of cups had a functional reason: the widespread adoption of dishwashers inside which the dishes are placed upside down.[1] The flatter base prevents water from gathering inside, and thus minimises the amount of water left after drying. More significant are the wider societal implications of this change in design: increased affluence allowing many households to buy a dishwasher, resulting in decreasing time spent on domestic tasks, eventually led to an increase in the time available for

[1] The relative sluggishness in responding to change on the part of the manufacturer – dishwashers were of course widespread before the 1980s – may lie in the cost and effort involved in effecting such alterations on an industrial scale. In pre-industrial conditions, as in the cases discussed in this book, such delays would have been much shorter, particularly where more or less immediate interaction between producer and consumer was involved.

other activities. Ultimately, such developments may be relevant to central historical trends such as the changing role of women (predominantly in charge of domestic tasks during that period) within the family and society as a whole.

This contemporary example demonstrates the potential value of everyday material culture as evidence for the impact of wider historical processes. The form of artefacts is not accidental. But it has the potential to represent the practices in which such artefacts are involved, as well as the consumers' attitudes to these practices. In addition, artefactual form may document possible ways in which the decisions of the producer are informed by the discourses involved in the consumption of material culture. This, in turn, may cast some light on the socio-economic realities within which those who use such artefacts operate. However, the example I have given also highlights the importance of studying such objects not only within their context of use, such as the household. In addition, it is also important to take into account any other relevant information that may be available with regard to the society of its users, such as contacts with other cultures or periods of war. For this reason, the study of ancient ceramics, too, should utilise the maximum relevant contextual evidence available, drawing on both archaeological and textual information. Classical archaeology is thus in a good position compared to other archaeological sub-disciplines.

The value of ancient pottery

One particular contextual issue regarding the meaning of ancient ceramics is that of value. The analysis of everyday material culture such as black-gloss pottery is taken to provide archaeologists with a unique means of approaching non-elite groups of ancient societies, on whom textual and many other archaeological sources contain little or no information. However, this assumption should neither be considered a given, nor should it be left unqualified. First, although mass-produced and widely distributed goods were available to and used by wealthy elites as well as by the less privileged sectors of any ancient society, elite use can have accounted for only a very small proportion of the material. This is because, in most societies,

such wealthy elites by definition only account for a small minority of the entire population. Therefore, the overwhelming proportion of any broadly representative ceramic assemblage may be taken as relating to non-elite activities. Somewhat more complicated – and particularly relevant in the context of survey archaeology – are those cases in which the status of a context is partly judged by the ceramics it contains. The classic examples are here Roman 'villa' sites: in Italy, these have often been defined, at least to some degree, by the presence of fine-wares such as *terra sigillata* or, indeed, fine black-gloss wares.[2] It is, however, worth questioning whether or not this equation of fine wares and elite activity can be safely accepted in all cases.

A partial answer may be provided by the recent works of a number of scholars on the issue of skeuomorphism.[3] This refers to the theory that most types of ancient ceramics were more or less generic imitations of metal vessels which only the wealthier groups of ancient societies could afford. As a result, the use of pottery – an intrinsically cheap material to which no or very little value was added through a type of craftsmanship held in low regard – was largely confined to poorer sectors of ancient populations, or to specific elite contexts such as tombs. Even though several aspects of this 'metal-replacement theory' might have been taken too far, it now seems indisputable that metals, not pottery, would have been the preferred materials for the production of drinking vessels in both the Greek and the Roman worlds. If the use of pottery by the elites cannot be fully ruled out, it renders the equation between ceramic fine wares and high status, as described above, questionable, and even leaves open the question whether the normal presence of pottery on high-status sites might not be related to such non-elite activities as may have taken place there, such as not only the preparation of food but also its consumption by, for example, servants.

However, despite their low intrinsic value and low regard by the elites, ceramic fine wares would still have represented the best type of tablewares to which the majority of ancient populations could

[2] E.g., Potter 1979; cf. Witcher forthcoming.
[3] Vickers and Gill 1994; contributions to Vickers 1985; cf. also Miller 1985.

possibly have had access.[4] Therefore, the relative scale determining the value of pottery depended on both economic value and social factors. In addition, there were probably aceramic groups in every ancient society. Whether by choice or, more probably, as a result of socio-economic constraints, these groups would not have used pottery, and are therefore archaeologically invisible.[5] Even dramatic diachronic fluctuations in the pottery count of a given study area may be explained not by correspondingly increasing or decreasing population sizes, but by variations in the access to either particular types of ceramics or this entire class of material. The explanations for such patterns may vary from case to case; however, both social and economic factors are most likely to have played certain roles. Such potential aceramicity calls for caution when it comes to equating pottery-use with non-elite activity in general. Although it is difficult to qualify this further, the possibility that only certain sectors of ancient non-elite populations – presumably, the economically privileged – might be represented by any 'broadly representative' ceramic assemblage seriously needs to be taken into account. Therefore, this book deals with non-elite groups of people more privileged than those invisible others, and more privileged than the quality of the pottery to be studied here may *a priori* suggest to the modern observer.

Pottery and the cultural history of Roman Italy

This study is concerned with cultural – including social and economic – change at the non-elite level. The spread of black-gloss wares, as well as their supposedly increasing standardisation, has been the subject of a number of studies focusing on the cultural effects of the military and political expansion of Rome (see further Chapter 2). Thus, survey archaeology, on the basis of this material, tends to refer to this as the 'Roman period'.[6] The increasing scholarly interest in cultural heterogeneity within Roman Italy and

[4] Fulford 1985.
[5] But it is sometimes possible, as Millett (e.g., 1991, 2000) has shown, to demonstrate their probable existence negatively in the context of multi-period field-surveys.
[6] E.g., Potter 1979; cf. Di Giuseppe 2005; Patterson *et al.* 2003, 2004.

the Roman world as a whole on the one hand (see Chapter 1), and a growing awareness of variability within this supposedly neatly defined class of material on the other,[7] call for new approaches. These need to go beyond establishing such variability as an object in itself, and must address possible reasons why those patterns of heterogeneity so manifestly co-occurred at a specific point in the history of Italy. The best way towards this is, in my view, the comparative analysis of regional case studies within a broader heuristic framework of Romanisation, as I am going to demonstrate through my focus on the chronologically parallel cases of Capena and Volterra. The principal objective of operating at and integrating the micro- and the macro-levels in this way is to avoid the pitfalls of creating an excessively generalising narrative of Romanisation or lapsing into the anecdotal. The aim of this study is not to formulate a comprehensively new approach towards black-gloss pottery as an entire artefactual class. What I wish to explore in particular is pottery of regional production and distribution. These black-gloss wares of poor to mediocre technical quality appear across Tyrrhenian central Italy at the beginning of the second century BC. This phenomenon combines aspects of homogeneity (similar material processes operating simultaneously across a wide geographical region) and heterogeneity (developments of essentially regional to local significance). This tension provides the point of departure for this book which aims to examine it with a view to whether and how the micro-scale of regional, non-elite life was affected by wider cultural processes.

The present study is the first to address in a systematic fashion the emergence of regional black-gloss wares as a phenomenon of wider historical importance.[8] Methodologically, its particular contention is that the standard approach to these ceramics within a heuristic framework developed for black-gloss wares of inter-regional and, indeed, Mediterranean distribution potentially obscures certain aspects of formal variability. But these are precisely the aspects that may be meaningful with regard to cultural change (Chapter 2). The particular challenge, therefore, lies in establishing, first, how

[7] E.g., Cibecchini and Principal 2004; contributions to Frontini and Grassi 1998.
[8] Cf. de Marinis 1985 for several apposite yet more or less cursory observations.

such potential variability can be measured. Second, once established this variability needs to be interpreted in a culturally meaningful fashion: this applies to both some general principles underpinning human interaction with the material world and to the context of the historically specific case under study (Chapter 3). On such a basis, it should, then, be possible to interpret black-gloss pottery as a source for some of the societal processes unfolding as part of the Romanisation of Italy. This should, in turn, offer a unique historical insight at the level of non-elite life (Chapters 4–6).

1

ROMANISATION

This chapter contextualises the present study within the debate over the Romanisation of Italy. It is evident that the vast amount of literature produced on this topic over the last 150 or so years cannot be discussed within this limited space. Nor do I intend to offer a comprehensive review of the works produced within an arbitrarily defined, shorter period. My objective in the pages that follow will be to provide a panoramic view of the themes dominating the study of socio-cultural and, to some extent, political change in Italy during the last three centuries BC. Topics such as this naturally lend themselves to different approaches. As I hope that the following discussion will show, such differences exist with regard to both the sources perused and the scholarly traditions involved. In addition – and this is particularly acute within Roman studies – alternative angles may be provided by approaches to related questions in different geographical areas and periods. All of this, in my opinion, makes it important for a relatively defined field like ceramic studies to be located within the context of a wider debate. Far from amounting to methodological eclecticism, this contextualisation will demonstrate the relevance of this book to more than one scholarly audience. It will also prepare the ground for the more detailed review of ceramic approaches to the Romanisation of Italy in Chapter 2.

The appeal to a wider audience calls for a preliminary clarification of the terminology employed in this book. Throughout, the term 'Romanisation' will be used in its 'weakest' sense. By this I mean a convenient way of summarising the processes that contributed to the creation of Roman Italy or, for that matter, to the integration of the provinces into the Roman Empire. The specific forms of those historical developments were vastly different across the scales of time, place and society. As I shall argue below, Roman culture may by now be regarded to have been less uniform than

has often been assumed. It has even been argued by some scholars that Roman culture remains a rather ill-defined concept. Therefore, many archaeologists and historians now reject the use of the term Romanisation as heuristically linked with an outdated view of that culture.[1] On the other hand, the heterogeneous processes of cultural change considered in this book took place within a broader historical dimension. This is constituted by Rome's increasing hegemony, first in Italy and, subsequently, across the Mediterranean and beyond. Archaeology should be viewed as a historical discipline.[2] For this reason, the archaeological study of processes on the micro-scale, as presented in this book, will be trivial unless they are placed within a wider historical framework. Romanisation represents a convenient term to refer to the particular historical framework addressed here. In fact, it appears to be the most neutral term which can be used in this context – paradoxically – just because its original implications are now so widely rejected. Romanisation should, therefore, be used as an 'umbrella term' to refer to the creation of Roman Italy and of the Empire beyond the peninsula, and I shall follow this convention here.[3]

Roman Italy

Just like the processes that led to its creation, the concept of Roman Italy is inevitably a problematic one, and has been a controversial subject ever since Roman history first became the subject of academic discourse. This is not the place to offer a detailed chronological account of this debate; but it may be worthwhile highlighting some of the fundamental issues that have dominated it from the outset. According to the view of Theodor Mommsen, for example, Roman history is really the history of Italy. This, he argued, was not because Rome had subjected the rest of the peninsula and in this way forced its peoples to become part of her history. By

[1] E.g., Barrett 1997; Freeman 1993, 1996; Grahame 1998; Hingley 1996; Woolf 1997, 1998: chapter 1.
[2] E.g., Hodder 1982b; Morris 2000.
[3] E.g., Keay and Terrenato 2001b: x; also see Terrenato 1998a; Webster 1996: 15, with note 8; similarly, Harris 1979: 4, on 'imperialism'; but cf. Freeman 1993, 1996; Grahame 1998; Hingley 1996; Woolf 1997, 1998: chapter 1.