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*Black glass production and consumption as an indication for (inter)regionalism within the Roman Empire during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD*

### Abstract

This paper aims to confront the obtained results from archaeological glass research with the prevailing historical views on the organization of the periphery within the Roman empire in connection with the never-ending discussion topic called "Romanization" (Millett 1990; Hingley 2005; Le Roux 2006; Roth 2007). We focus on the regional heterogeneity of Roman imperial glass production and consumption at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in general and of black glass as a case-study<sup>1</sup>. The research on Roman black glass is not merely data-gathering but intends to provide distribution and consumption patterns of glass consumer goods to result into an interpretative model on the impact of the provincial boundaries and the centralized interference in economical activity as well as on (inter)regional consumers behaviour. Based on regional studies like Martin Millett's 'Romanization of Britain' (1990) Greg Woolf observes that there is no use of studying archaeological artefacts within Roman provinces (Woolf 2004, 423). In contrast to his remark "... it remains to be asked why provinces are regarded as an appropriate unit of analysis. Provinces are, by definition, parts of a larger whole. Roman provinces were administrative entities that rarely corresponded to areas of social, cultural, or ecological homogeneity and were not significantly unified by Roman rule. ... Roman provincial boundaries themselves probably had little impact on the lives or activities of most inhabitants of the empire", the archaeological research on black glass vessels, supported by an archaeometric approach, provides clear evidence of a consumption in Severan times within a large region incorporating the north-western provinces *Gallia Belgica*, *Germania Inferior* and *Germania Superior* whereas the production appears to have been province-bound.

Hence, the main challenge of this paper is to link the obtained results with the prevailing models on the nature of the Roman political economy (Woolf 1992).

### References

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<sup>1</sup> The research project on Roman black glass involves 1) a wide diversity of material – production, vessels, jewellery, architectural decoration, gaming pieces –; 2) a long-lasting production of 5 centuries and; 3) an empire-wide distribution. The main purpose of this project is to pinpoint to the possibilities of an holistic study of a quite marginal segment within the Roman glass production and consumption providing additional information to understand more of the complexity and heterogeneity of the socio-cultural and economical organization of the Roman empire.

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