

**Zeitschrift:** Cahiers d'archéologie romande  
**Herausgeber:** Bibliothèque Historique Vaudoise  
**Band:** 151 (2014)  
  
**Artikel:** Building a new Iron Age chronology  
**Autor:** Collis, John  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-835698>

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## Building a new Iron Age chronology

John COLLIS

A shared interest between myself and Gilbert Kaenel is the construction of Iron Age chronologies, but we come from very different backgrounds in terms of the data at our disposal. Gilbert is part of a long tradition of studies of mainly funerary sites, as Switzerland has a continuous sequence throughout the Iron Age, though not necessarily from the same region or with the same wealth of grave goods. The Late La Tène, for instance, is marked by the general lack of grave goods, but is supplemented by a rich range of finds from domestic and ritual sites. Münsingen is still the main point of reference for all chronologies of the Second Iron Age in temperate Europe. He follows in the line of earlier chronologists such as Jakob Wiedmer-Stern (1908) and David Viollier (1916), and more recently, Roy Hodson (1968).

In contrast, I come from a British background and an Iron Age largely devoid of burials, and even in the region of Eastern Yorkshire where there are many burials belonging to the 'Arras Culture' dating to the Early and Middle Iron Age, the vast majority have at the most only a single local form of brooch or a simple handmade pot, and graves containing a chariot or weapons are a very small minority of the total. Only in the Late Iron Age in southeast Britain, in the century or so before the Roman conquest, do we have burials with a rich range of pottery vessels and metalwork (Cunliffe 2005). Though John Dent (1982) has managed to tease out chronological (and gender) differences for brooches in the Arras Culture, the majority of brooches, indeed most metalwork, from Britain is without good contexts, and we have to rely on continental chronologies to date them. Likewise my work in France, in the Auvergne, deals with an area where burials are rare and where the archaeology is dominated by settlement finds.

Thus in Britain we have to rely on finds from domestic sites, but even here we are severely hampered. To the west and north of the Fosse Way which runs diagonally across Britain

from Exeter to Lincoln pottery is rare if not totally unknown (there is not a single sherd of Iron Age pottery from Ireland, a problem which some areas of Britain share), and we have to rely on <sup>14</sup>C dating, or, much more rarely, on dendrochronology where wood survives (e.g. the Navan Fort in Northern Ireland). Where pottery is found, as in the Arras Culture, it is not particularly diagnostic, and only in the isolated pocket of the Hebrides, Orkneys and Shetland is there any hope of a pottery chronology. Thus pottery sequences are largely confined to areas such as Sussex and Kent, the Southwest, the East Midlands and East Anglia, the Thames valley and especially Wessex. But in any synthesis we are also inhibited by the very local character and distribution of pottery styles, especially for the earlier phases of the Iron Age.

### Methodological problems

While in general our artefact chronologies, using typology and the evolution of objects (typochronology), are broadly correct, there are problems with definition, nomenclature and application. The major difficulties are:

1. As Kaenel has pointed out (Kaenel 2008) for La Tène D the same nomenclature is used across temperate Europe, but terms such as LT D1a, etc. do not necessarily refer to the same phenomena, and there is a fissure running north-south across central Europe. In Bavaria and to the east La Tène D1a is defined by the appearance of the Nauheim brooch; in Switzerland this brooch defines the start of La Tène D1b, with D1a defined by the appearance of iron brooches of Late La Tène construction with a long spring.
2. The nomenclature is based on what are variously called 'phases', 'periods', 'Stufen', 'étapes', 'horizons', 'ceramic



phases', etc. where a range of more or less contemporary artefacts is used to define them. However, all of us accept that these phases do not really exist as the date range of different artefacts or attributes will be different, and will not all start and end at the same time. Beginnings or ends will naturally be fuzzy, and often terms such as 'transition', 'overlap', 'Übergang', etc. have to be used.

3. There is a limit to how much such chronologies can be refined, and each revision of the chronology requires the complete demolition of the old and a new reconstruction of the phases.
4. Often a pre-conceived chronology will be imposed on sets of data where it does not properly fit. Thus Lisa Brown (1995) noted at Danebury that she could no longer distinguish between Cunliffe's ceramic phases 4 and 5 which had been defined 30 years before but had continued to be used on the site.
5. Refined chronologies will depend on local sequences and types which often only have localised distributions. Finds or attributes with wide distributions will probably only give coarse chronologies.
6. It is difficult to link together regional chronologies. Though the phases in different areas may share artefact types, in one area the artefact type may belong to the start of a defined phase, but to the end in another area, and it is also possible that the date of the inception of a new feature may not be the same in the two areas. Thus these defined phases are unlikely to correlate exactly with one another (e.g. papers in Barral and Fichtl 2012).

## Possible solutions

One way to overcome these problems is to deal only with specific attributes or limited combinations of attributes, and these can be used to mark a 'horizon' (Collis 2008 ; 2009). I use this word in the original sense of the term, that is the arrival or invention of a new trait - *c.f.* Hachmann's (1957) 'hoard horizons' for the Early Bronze Age in Scandinavia – and not in the sense where it is used virtually as synonymous with a 'phase' (e.g. Haffner 1969 ; 1974). The presence of a specific attribute on an artefact or in an associated group of artefacts will always mark a terminus postquem in the same way that numismatists use the date of the minting of a coin in a stratified deposit. However on any particular artefact or in any context the presence of the attribute may be irrelevant, even if it the most common in that particular case, as it is 'trumped' by the presence of a later attribute; thus there will be many attributes on every artefact or in any context which can potentially be used, some of which will be useful, and many that are not. It is founded on the approach of Otto Tischler (1885) who suggested the original division of the Second Iron Age into *Früh-*, *Mittel-* and *Spätlatène* (Early, Middle and Late), a terminology which has survived for over a century. I have discussed elsewhere how to deal with areas like Britain where all these horizons cannot necessarily be differentiated (Collis 2009).

It is preferable if names can be given to each horizon, and especially for the major ones such as the introduction of the potter's wheel, a short and simple phrase to make the horizon memorable. I have tried to make a simple scheme based on the typology of brooches mainly from Switzerland (fig. 1), but using only two or three attributes to define them, attributes that are found over relatively large areas of Europe, rather than using specific brooch types (see Collis 2009 for definitions). As the sequence is fairly well established I have used numbers, with SIA in front standing for the Second Iron Age; I prefer to avoid terms like Hallstatt and La Tène as these can confuse chronological and cultural concepts, and also I suggest for Britain that we should not use LIA (Later Iron Age) as I originally recommended, as this confuses the usage in Britain where the 'Late Iron Age' can be defined as the introduction of the potter's wheel (see below). But generally numbers should be avoided, firstly because attributes may appear in a different order in different regions, and also it allows flexibility, as horizons can be reversed if they are subsequently found to be in the wrong order, and newly defined horizons can be added to allow greater precision or greater relevance than ones previously chosen; all this can be achieved without any re-structuring, re-defining or re-naming as required in more traditional methodologies.

This however is only a framework to which local chronologies can be attached, though in the case I am discussing here we do not have data from the site which allows us to relate to this general chronology except in the most general way, and it will require a detailed consideration of associations between brooches and pottery over a wide area (*c.f.* Haselgrove 1997).

## Methodology : the Late Iron Age at Owslebury, Hants

Owslebury is a Middle Iron Age to Late Roman farming settlement near Winchester, occupied from the 4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, and was excavated in the 1960s and early 1970s (Collis 2011). For the Late Iron Age it has what is at present the best sequence and the largest group of Late Iron Age pottery in the region, mainly derived from shallow gullies and ditches, but some from pits and quarries; the Late Iron Age in southeast England is defined by the appearance of wheel-turned pottery, and its relationship with the brooch chronology i.e. the ('Late Second Iron Age') suggested above is at present still unclear. The settlement also has a small cemetery, mainly of cremations burials, dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD mainly within two small enclosures defined by shallow ditches (Collis 1977). The earliest burial is an inhumation with sword, spear, shield and belt-fitting (Collis 1973 ; 1994) ; the shield has parallels on the battlefield of Alesia, but the closest parallels are from a burial at North Bersted in Sussex which also contains a Caesarean period helmet with bronze fittings. The finds from the burials will not be discussed in detail here, but are relevant for the absolute dating of the settlement finds.



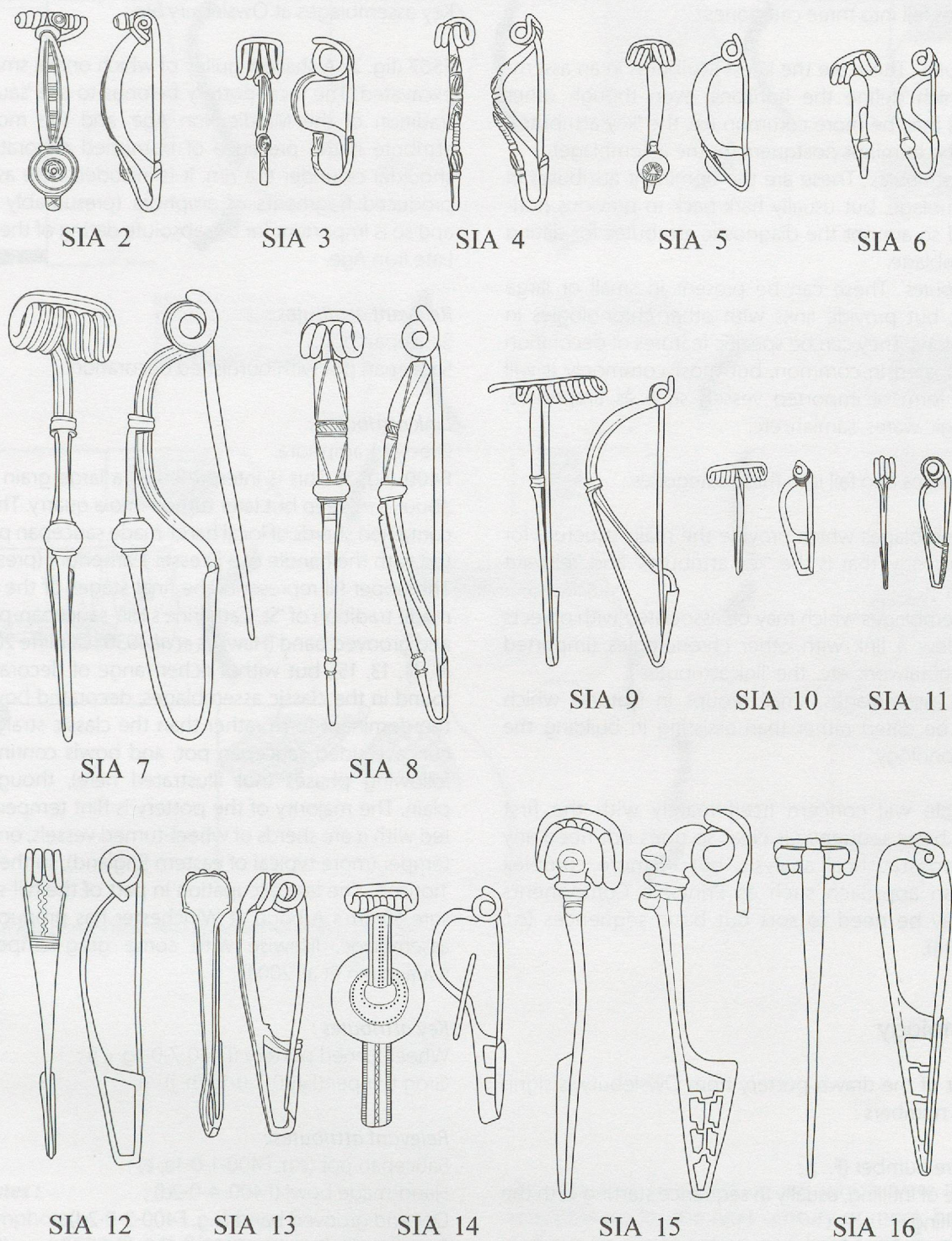


Fig. 1. An attempt at making a pan-European chronology for the Second Iron Age (SIA) for temperate Europe based on Swiss brooches (after Collis 2009).



The attributes fall into three categories :

1. '*Key attributes*'. These are the latest attributes in an assemblage which define the horizons, even though other attributes may be more common (i.e. the 'key attributes' provide the terminus postquem for the assemblage).
2. '*Relevant attributes*'. These are the dominant attributes in the assemblage, but usually hark back to previous horizons, and so are not the diagnostic attributes for dating the assemblage.
3. '*Link attributes*'. These can be present in small or large numbers, but provide links with other chronologies in other regions. They can be specific features of decoration or form shared in common, but most commonly it will take the form of imported vessels such as amphorae, Gallo-Belgic wares, samian, etc.

The assemblages also fall into three categories :

1. Major assemblages which provide the main structure for the chronology, that is the 'key attributes' and 'relevant attributes' ;
2. Minor assemblages which may be associated with objects which allow a link with other chronologies (imported pottery, metalwork, etc., the 'link attributes').
3. Undated assemblages, small groups in features which need to be dated rather than assisting in building the main chronology.

This article will concern itself mainly with the first group. The basic sequence is clear so does not need any sophisticated statistical analysis, but in more complex situations an approach such as Principle Components Analysis may be needed to sort out basic sequences (c.f. Gosden 1984).

## The chronology

The context of the drawn pottery from Owslebury is signified by four numbers :

1. The feature number (F...);
2. The phase of infilling, usually in sequence starting with the earliest filling ;
3. The subdivision of features such as ditches and gulleys which were divided into 10-foot (3m) lengths, but for features such as pits which were generally not subdivided this is signified by a 0 ;
4. The bag number - each group of finds assigned a layer (context) number on the site was given a separate bag number.

Finally each drawn sherd was given a letter of the alphabet (or two where there were more than 26 drawings from a single bag) so that each drawn vessel has a unique number.

Key assemblages at Owslebury are :

**F567** (fig. 2). A shallow gully of which only a small part was excavated. The local pottery belongs to the 'saucepan-pot' tradition of the Middle Iron Age, and the most relevant attribute is the presence of burnished decoration on the shoulder or under the rim. It is included here as it has also produced fragments of amphora (presumably Dressel 1a), and so is important for the absolute dating of the start of the Late Iron Age.

### *Relevant attributes :*

Saucepan pot ;  
Saucepan pot with burnished decoration.

### *Link attributes :*

Dressel 1 amphora.

**F400** (fig. 3). This is interpreted as a large grain storage pit about 3 m deep but later turned into a quarry. The lowest fill contained sherds of local hand-made saucepan pots associated with the handle of a Dressel 1 amphora (presumably 1a). The upper fill represents the final stages of the local hand-made tradition of 'St. Catharine's Hill' saucepan-pots, e.g. dot and grooved band (Hawkes *et al.* 1930 ; Cunliffe 2005, fig. A16, n<sup>o</sup>. 11, 13, 15), but with a richer range of decoration than is found in the classic assemblages; decorated bowls are now the dominant form rather than the classic straight-sided or concave-sided saucepan pot, and bowls continue into the following phases (not illustrated here), though normally plain. The majority of the pottery is flint tempered; associated with it are sherds of wheel-turned vessels, one with grog temper (more typical of eastern England), so these mark the 'horizon'. The late occupation in part of the hill-slope enclosure (Oram's Arbour) at Winchester has produced a similar assemblage, likewise with some grog-tempered sherds (Qualmann *et al.* 2004).

### *Key attributes :*

Wheel-turned pottery (F400-7-0-1g, i, j) ;  
Grog temper (F400-7-0-1g, h, j).

### *Relevant attributes :*

Saucepan pot (e.g. F400-1-0-1a, e) ;  
Hand-made bowl (F400-4-0-2d) ;  
Dot and grooved band (e.g. F400-2-0-2d) ;  
Rough trellis burnish (F400-6-0-3e).

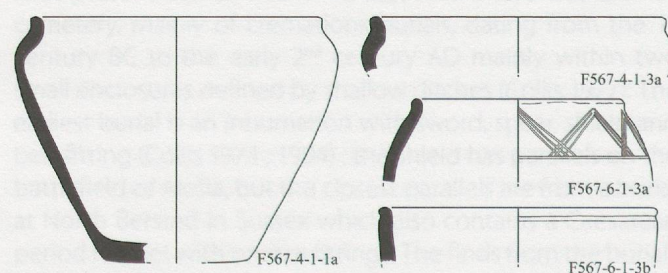


Fig. 2. Middle Iron Age pottery from F567 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.



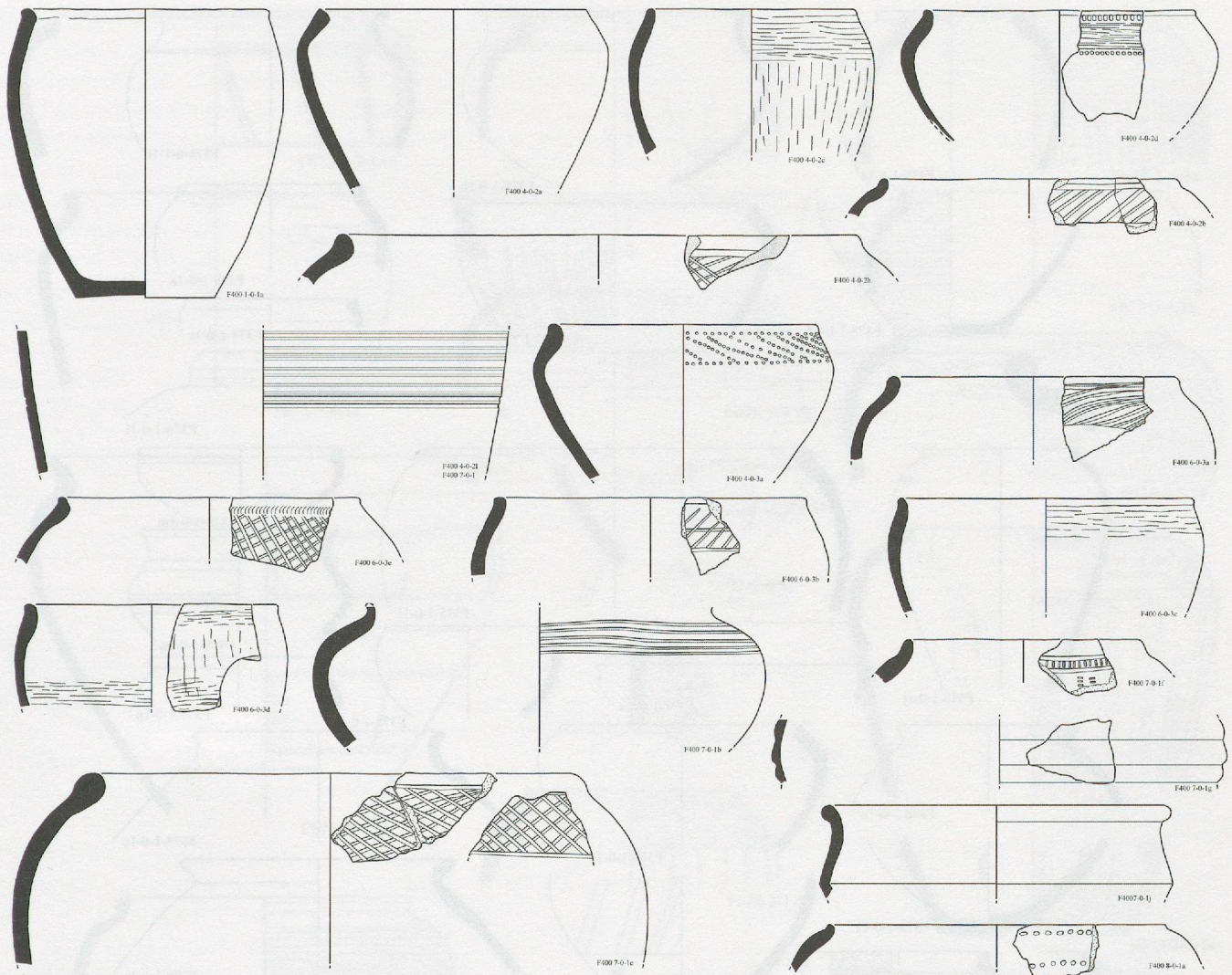


Fig. 3. Late Iron Age pottery from F400 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.

#### Link attributes :

Dressel 1 amphora.

**F378** (fig. 4) and **F673** (fig. 5). These two features are part of the same phase, when the settlement was fundamentally remodelled, with enclosures defined by gullies 0.60 - 0.70m deep, though in some places they had been quarried out to a greater depth (e.g. F378). This sees an extensive series of fundamental changes whose chronological sequence cannot be refined very much at present. Fine sand-tempered wares now appear, gradually replacing the flint-tempered wares, and the majority of the pottery is turned on the fast wheel ; some of the decorated large jars and Neck Cordoned Bowls are of high quality. It sees the appearance of : cordons on the necks of bowls and

jars ; the true bead rim on jars which were to dominate assemblages for the next century or more; bands of burnishing on rim/shoulder and base with burnished lines between them (tripartite burnished vessels), but this can also appear on the inside or outside of open bowls ; ripple burnishing on the shoulder ; bands of burnishing or double fine incised lines with divisions into rectangles (metopes) or with chevron or fine trellis burnished decoration; intertwined internal burnished lines or regular ripple burnishing; ring-foot or low pedestal bases. The incised jars with metopes and the cordoned jars are paralleled at Hengistbury Head (Bushe-Fox 1915, plates XVIII and XXI ; Cunliffe 1987), and an early to mid-1<sup>st</sup> century BC date is likely.



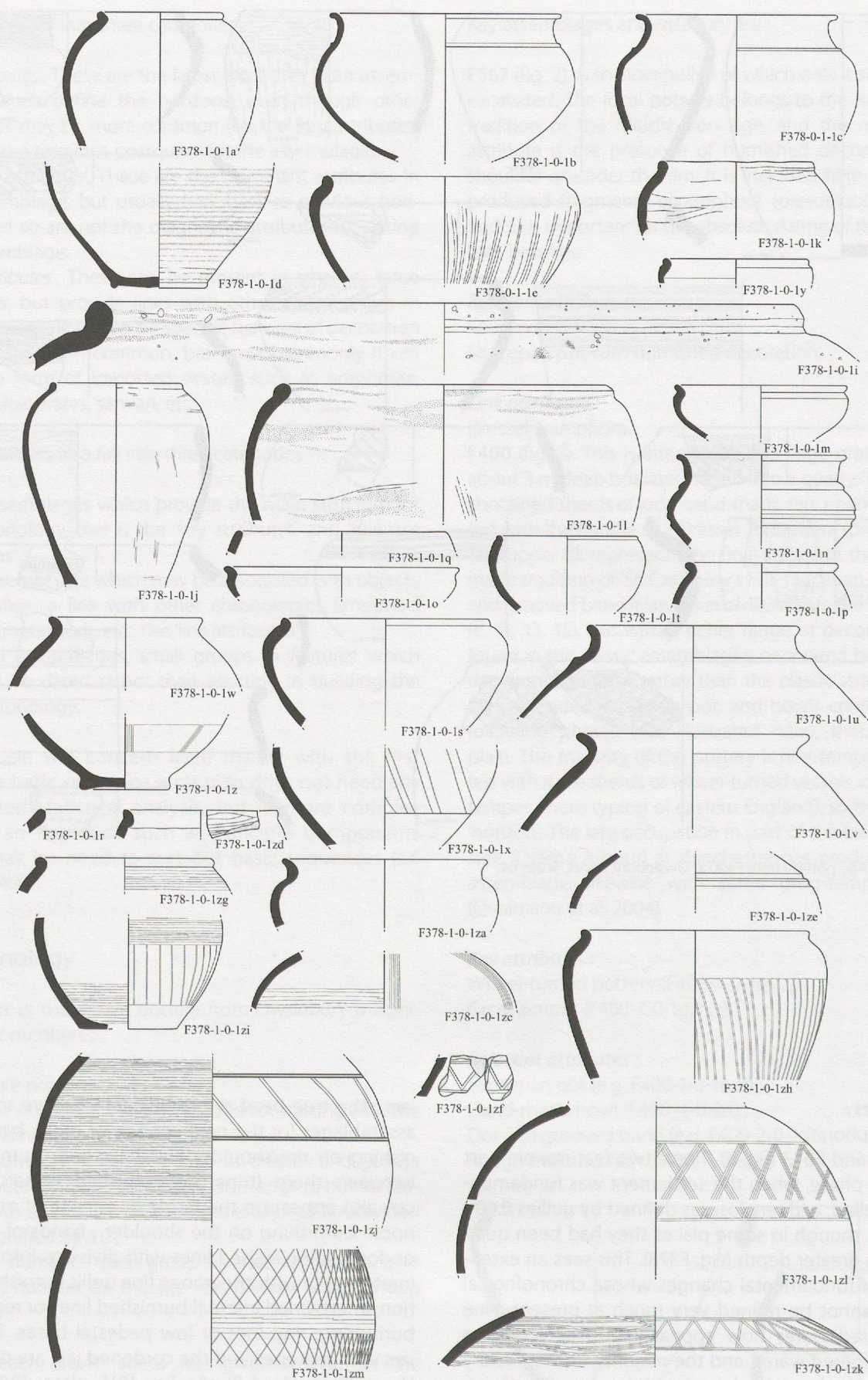


Fig. 4. Late Iron Age pottery from F378 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.



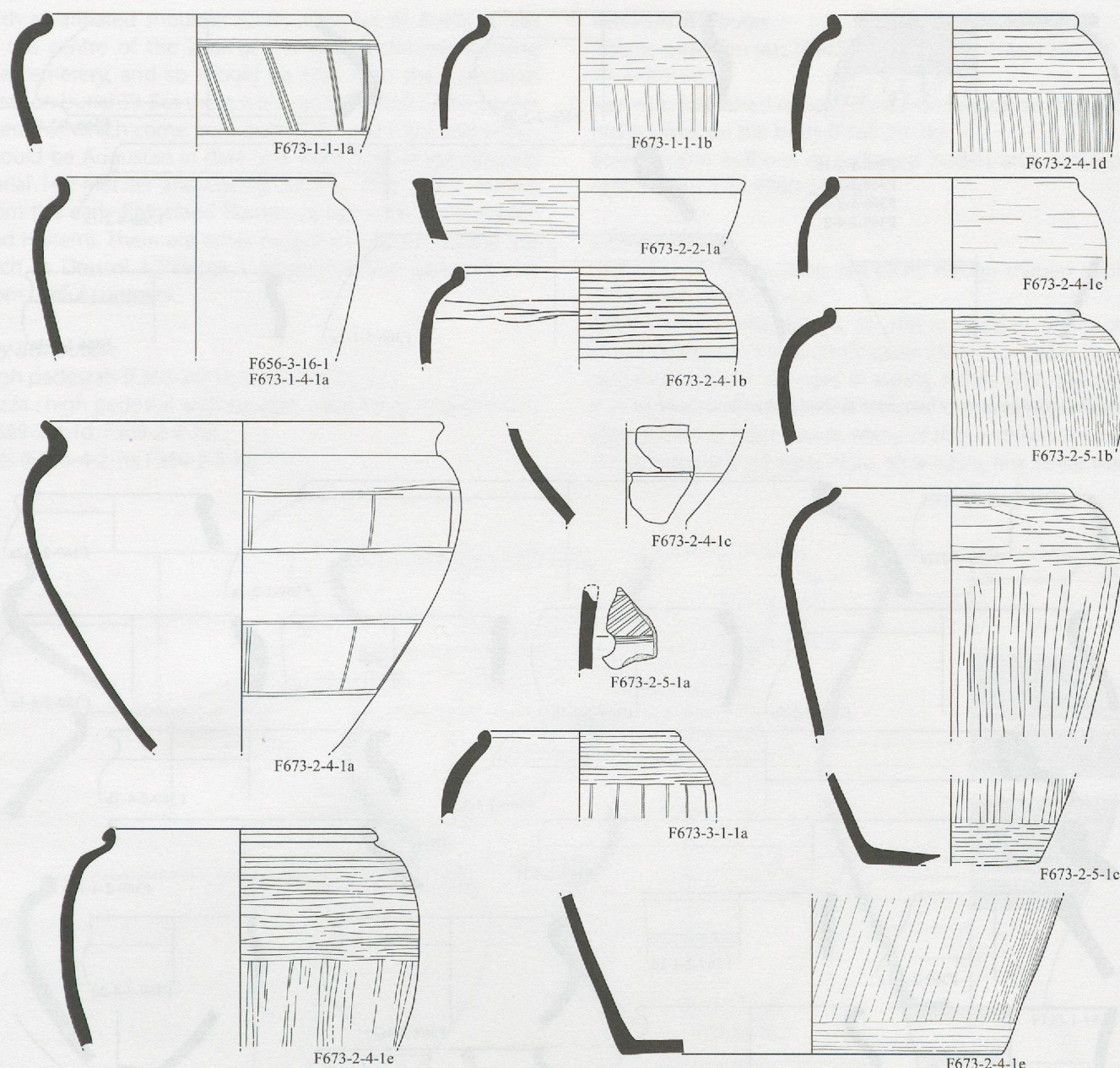


Fig. 5. Late Iron Age pottery from F673 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.

**Key and link attributes :**

Incised metopes (F673-2-4-1a) ;  
 Carefully burnished trellis (F378-1-0-1zm, and chevrons (F378-1-0-1zk, zl) ;  
 Jars with burnished rim and base with vertical or angled burnished lines on the body (F378-1-0-1 e, z, F673-2-4-1b, d) ;  
 Internal irregular burnished lines (F378-1-0-1zk) ;  
 Internal regular ripple burnishing (F378-1-0-1zj) ;  
 Ripple burnishing on the shoulder (F673-2-4-1b) ;  
 Neck Cordon Bowls (F378-1-0-1b, c) ;  
 Simple bead rims (F378-1-0-1a) ;  
 Ring foot and low pedestals (F378-1-0-1d, z).

**Relevant attributes :**

Fast potter's wheel ;  
 Quartz sand temper.

**Link attributes :**

Incised metopes, c.f. Hengistbury Class E (F673-2-4-1a) ;  
 Jars with burnished rim and base with vertical or angled burnished lines on the body (F378-1-0-1 e, z) ;  
 Neck Cordon Bowls (F378-1-0-1b, c).

**F366** (fig. 6), **F368** and **F369** (fig. 7). These three shallow gulleys represent three phases of the same feature, but do not seem far removed in date. The pottery is almost all wheel-turned. The forms of pottery, other than being Late Iron Age is not generally very diagnostic, except for the appearance of the Tazza, and also other examples of high pedestals. There are also beakers with long necks and bulbous or carinated bodies which, on finds elsewhere on the site, also have pedestal bases (Collis 1977, fig. 8 : 1,3). There is also a pedestal bowl/lid with carinated shoulder. Similar vessels appear in Burial 10 along with bead-rim jars



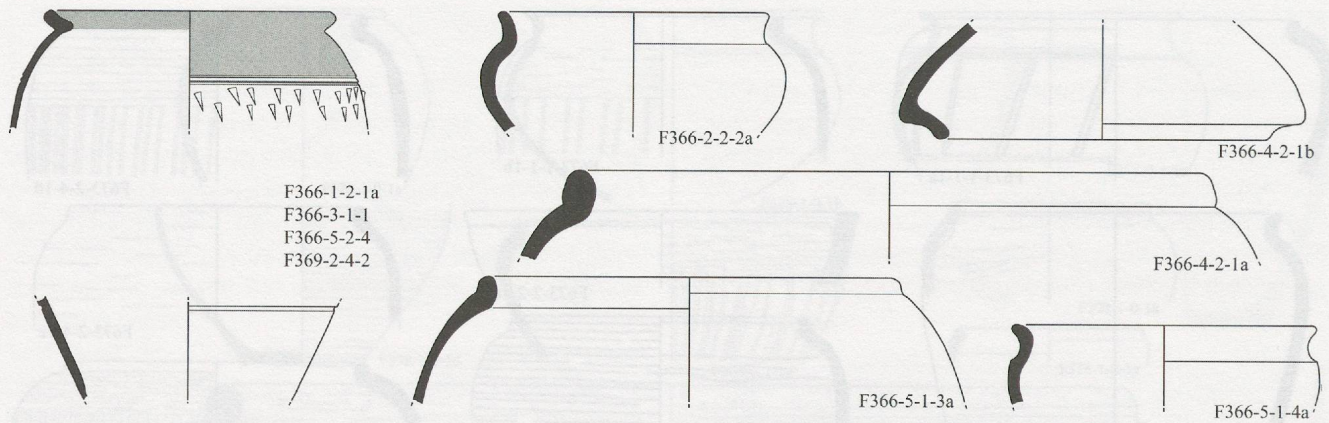


Fig. 6. Late Iron Age pottery from F366 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.

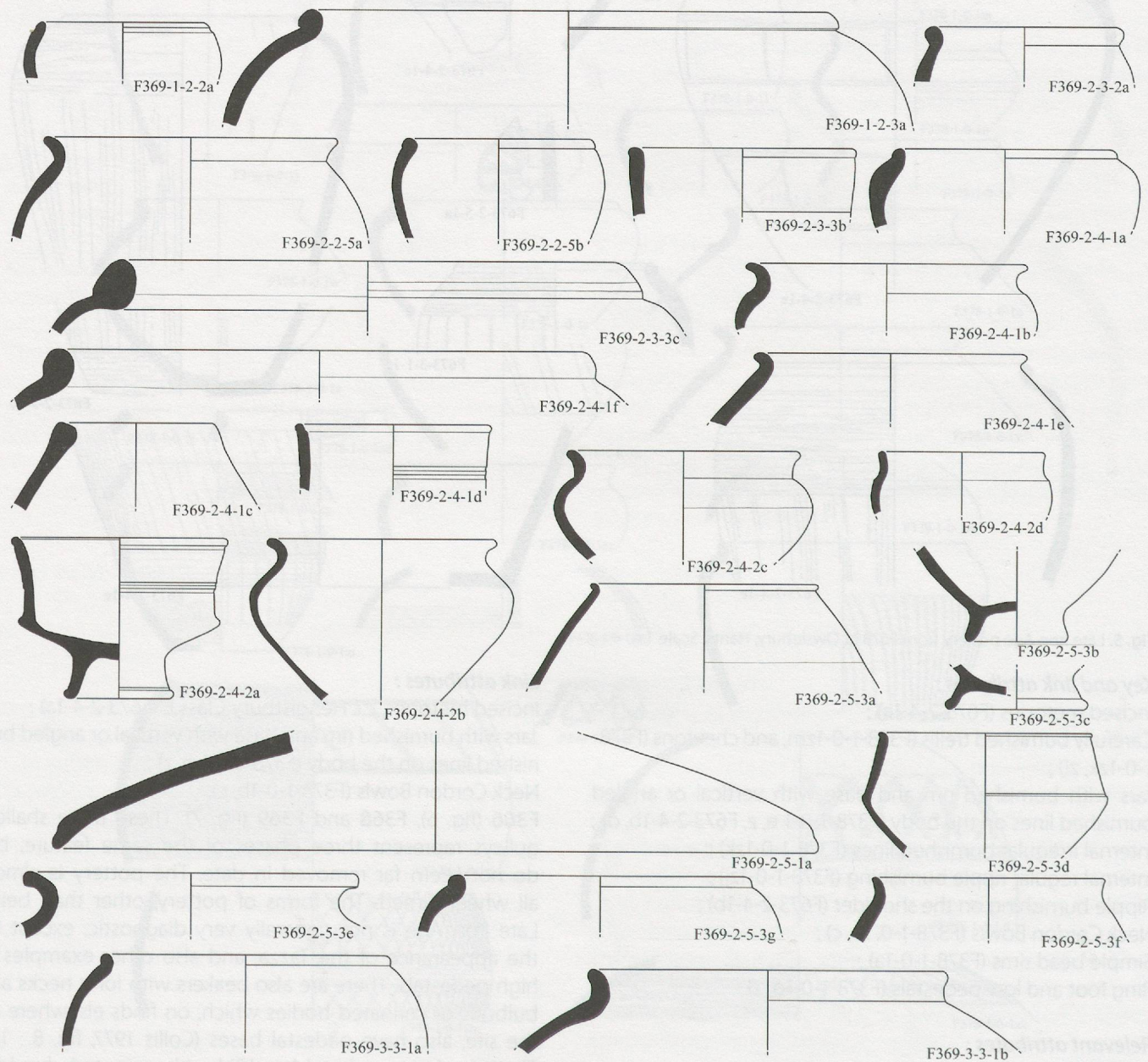


Fig. 7. Late Iron Age pottery from F369 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.



with a carinated shoulder (Collis 1977, fig. 6); Burial 10 lies at the centre of the later of the two enclosures forming the cemetery, and so should be later than the Caesarean weapon burial 39. But there is also an imported *Grätenbecher* sherds of which come from both F366 and F369, and which should be Augustan in date (e.g. from Goeblange-Nospelt, Burial 14 : Metzler and Gaeng 2009 p. 435), and is known from the early Rhineland Roman camps such as Oberaden and Haltern). There are other Augustan imports on the site such as Dressel 1/Pascual 1 amphorae, but generally not from useful contexts.

#### Key attributes :

High pedestals (F368-2-2-1b, F369-2-5-3b, c) ;  
Tazza : high pedestal with straight-sided body with cordons (F369-2-4-1d, F369-2-4-2a) ;  
Lids (F366-4-2-1b, F369-2-5-1a).

#### Relevant attributes :

Simple bead rim jars (F366-4-2-1a, F366-3-1-3a, F369-2-5-3g, F369-3-3-1a) ;

Jars with burnished rim and base with vertical or angled burnished lines on the body (F368-2-1-1b) ;

Beakers with bulbous or carinated bodies and constricted rims (F368-2-1-1a, F369-2-5-3a).

#### Link attributes :

*Grätenbecher* white fabric, red paint, wedge-shaped applied decoration (F366-1-2-1a).

F133, primary infill (figs. 8, 9). This is another moment of major change in the pottery assemblage, probably indicating fundamental changes in eating habits with the adoption of plates and platters of various sort, and large beakers presumably to hold liquids. Many of these vessels are made in imported fabrics: terra nigra, terra rubra, fine white wares.

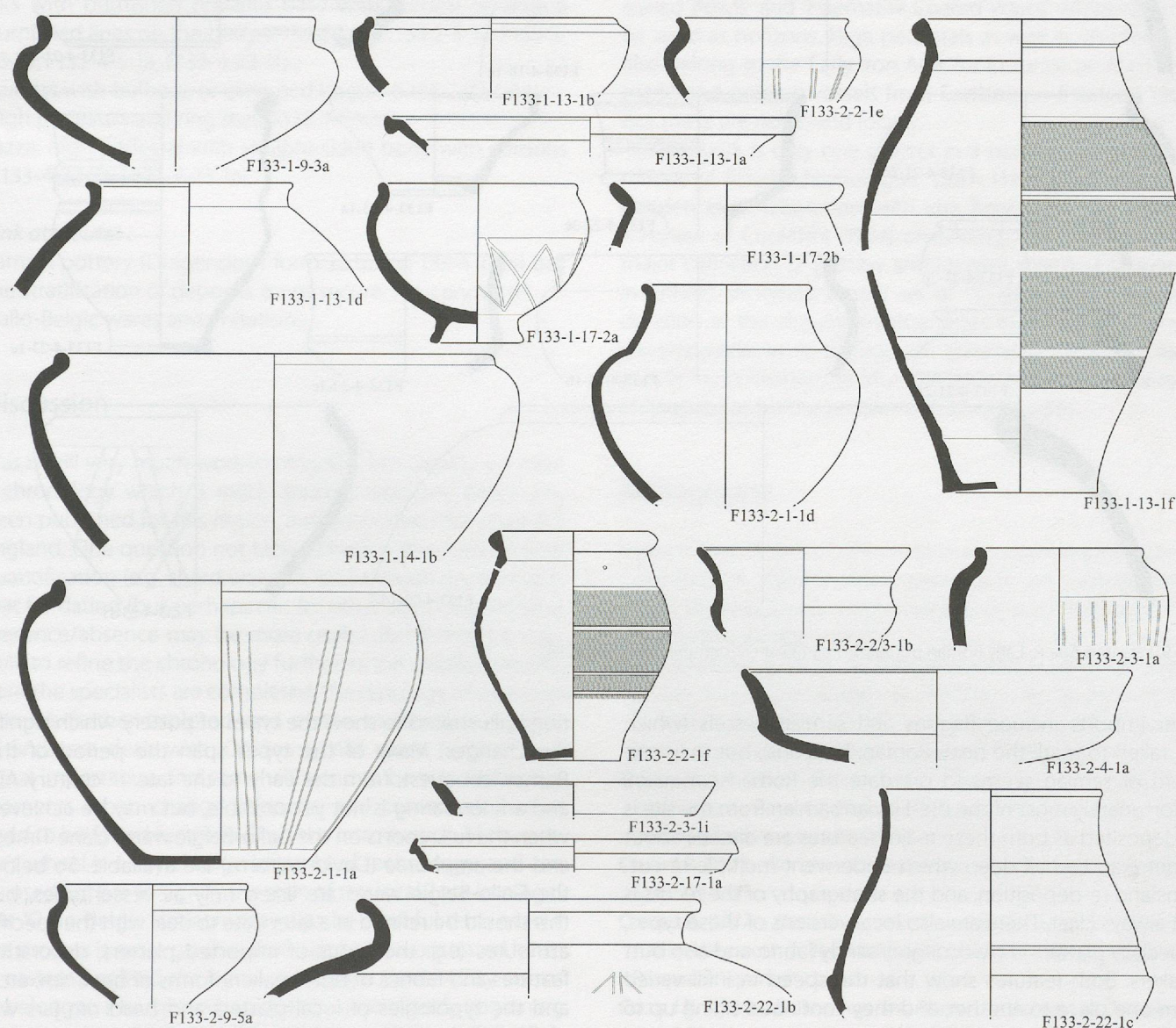


Fig. 8. Late Iron Age to Early Roman pottery from F133 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.



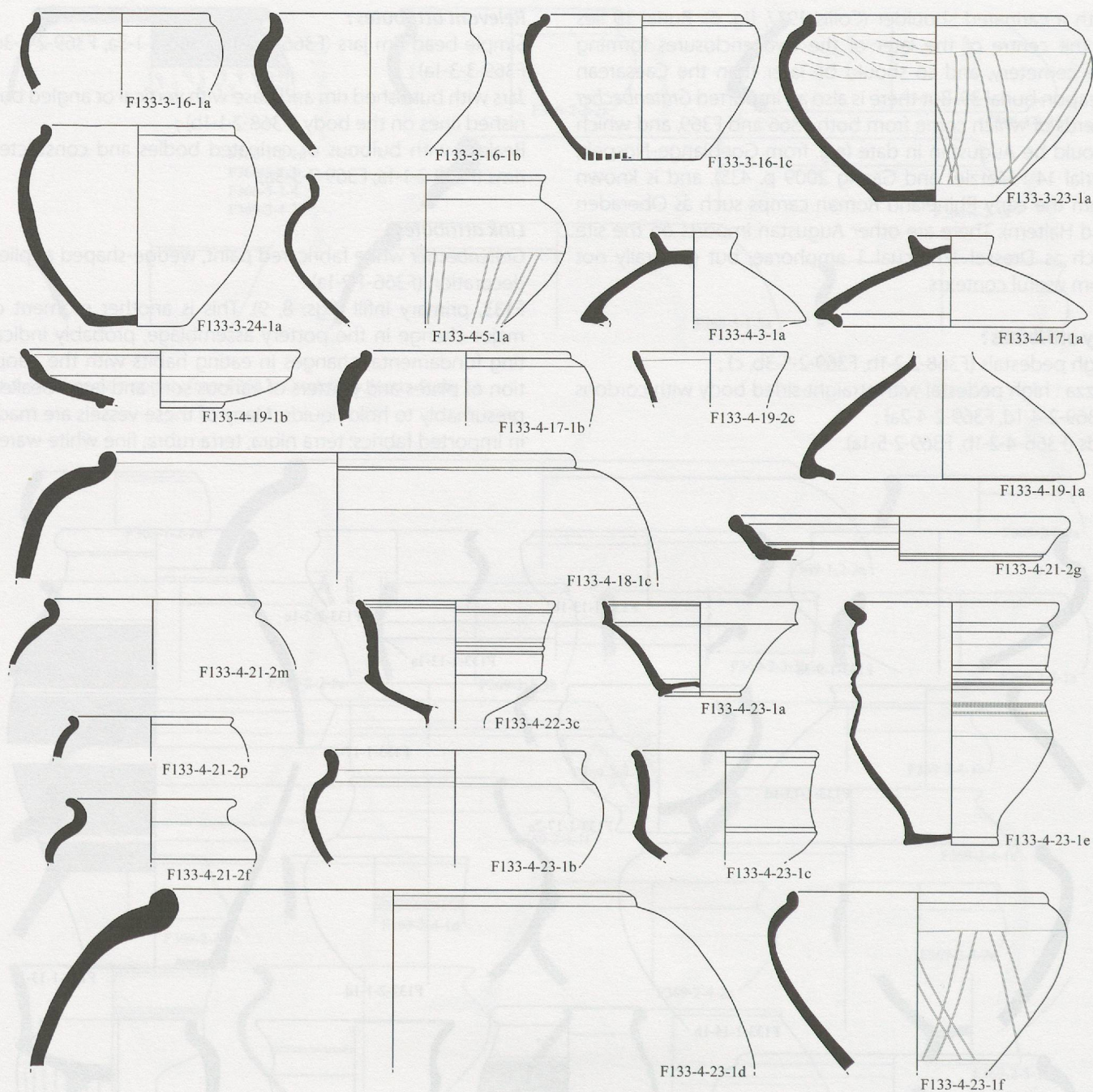


Fig. 9. Late Iron Age to Early Roman pottery from F133 at Owslebury, Hants. Scale 1:4.

Later imports include flagons and samian vessels (which are taken to mark the next, Roman, horizons), but only one sherd of samian seems to pre-date the Roman conquest; unfortunately most of the pre-Flavian samian from the site is re-deposited as both these major features are ditches about a metre and a half deep which underwent multiple re-cuttings and re-deposition, and the stratigraphy of the recuts is not always clear. There are also local versions of these types, especially platters in black or grey sandy fabric, and also butt beakers. Both features show that the speed in infill varied from one place to another, and they continued silting up to as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. This material is not published here as the stratified groups are quite large; rather a selec-

tion is illustrated to show the types of pottery which signify the changes. Many of the types span the period of the Roman conquest, from the early to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and a finer dating is not yet possible, but may be achieved when the full reports on the Gallo-Belgic wares (Jane Timby) and the amphorae (David Williams) are available. So below the Gallo-Belgic wares are listed only as vessel types, but this should be refined at a later date to deal with the specific attributes (e.g. the forms of imported platters, decorative features and fabrics of butt beakers, forms of bead rim, etc.), and the typologies of local platters and bead rim jars will need to be looked at in greater detail in the final report. This group of finds can also be linked in with the general brooch



horizons as in one feature a Colchester brooch with elaborate fretwork foot was found, but there are many such associations in Britain and Gaul, so it adds little to our knowledge.

#### Key attributes :

Terra nigra ;  
Terra rubra (F133-4-23-1a) ;  
Fine white fabrics: Haltern flasks, butt-beakers ;  
Platters (F133-2-22-1a, F133-4-21-2g, F642-1-8-2a, F642 1-17-1c) ;  
Cups (F133-13-1a) ;  
Butt beakers (F133-1-13-1f, F642-1-11-2a) ;  
Girth beakers (F133-4-23-1a) ;  
Fine rouletting (on butt beakers, girth beakers, etc.).

#### Relevant attributes :

Simple bead rim jars (F133-2-2+3-1c, F133-3-23-1a, F133-3-24-1a) ;  
Lids (F133-4-14-2b, F133-4-17-1a) ;  
Jars with burnished rim and base with vertical or angled burnished lines on the body (F133-2-1-1a, F133-2-3-1a, F133-3-23-1a, F133-4-5-1a, F133-4-23-1f) ;  
Beakers with bulbous or carinated bodies (F133-2-22-1c) ;  
High pedestals and ring feet (F133-1-17-2a) ;  
Tazza: high pedestal with straight-sided body with cordons (F133-4-22-3a, F133-4-23-1a).

#### Link attributes :

Samian pottery (Dragendorff form 17 from F133-4-10-4) but the stratification of deposits is not secure. Pre-conquest? Gallo-Belgic wares and imitations.

## Discussion

This is still very much work in progress, but already we have a chronology which is more detailed than any which has been published for this region, indeed perhaps for southern England. One question not tackled here is the usefulness of quantification (e.g. sherd weights, etc.) though my feeling is that for dating (but perhaps not for other sorts of questions) presence/absence may be more useful. But it may be possible to refine the chronology further as the detailed reports from the specialists are completed, the typology of common forms is further explored, and as the smaller assemblages of finds are dealt with. Obviously not every horizon is of equal importance, and some will need to be selected as key moments when change happens, and convenient names need to be found for them. Thus the introduction of the potter's wheel is a key change in terms of technology, and can be used as here to signify the start of the local 'Late Iron Age'. The 'Gallo-Belgic Horizon' may also be a useful term even if the process is more gradual than can be demonstrated here ; in eastern England the burial at Welwyn Garden City seems to belong to a horizon when platters were already beginning to appear, but pre-dating the general adoption of Gallo-Belgic wares, and it relates to the 'Tazza Horizon' (Stead 1967).

These horizons can be related to attributes which are of wide distribution, and this must be an important criterion in picking out the main horizons. We have no good distribution maps of some of the attributes. Ones such as the incised metopes are important for demonstrating links, but in fact are of rare occurrence, and perhaps limited to parts of southern Hampshire and Dorset (Owslebury and Hengistbury Head), whereas the wheel-turned 'Neck Cordon Bowl' occurs more extensively in Wessex, including Somerset, Wiltshire and Hampshire. The jars and bowls with burnished rim and base with vertical or angled burnishing on the body ('Tripartite Burnished Vessels') are also found widely in Hampshire and East Sussex and formed part of Cunliffe's 'Southern Atrebat' style (Cunliffe 2005, fig. A34) ; in various forms they are long-lived in the 1st centuries BC and AD. But care is needed in choosing names. Thus 'Decorated Cordoned Bowls' can be used to designate bowls belonging to the Early Iron Age of Wessex from sites such as All Cannings Cross and Danebury (Cunliffe 2005, fig. A8, nos. 9 and 10), along with 'Furrowed Bowls' and 'Haematite Coated Wares' which can also be used as horizons. High pedestals as well as ring feet can also belong to the Early Iron Age, for instance on the hand-made and painted vessels from Eastbourne (Hodson 1962), but these are not found locally.

This work is only one project in a number of reconsiderations of British chronologies. Colin Haselgrove and Chris Gosden in collaboration with Lisa Brown are just starting a review of Cunliffe's (1984) chronology for Danebury (the major collection of pottery and longest stratified sequence in Britain), including a new set of <sup>14</sup>C dates and a reconsideration of the already existing dates in the light of recent developments in <sup>14</sup>C dating. I am grateful to them, to Gilbert and to my colleagues at Mont Beuvray and in the Auvergne for discussion on the problems of chronologies.

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