Pipeclay figurines are relatively small terracotta statuettes that range in size but are usually between 50-200mm in height. They are made from a pure and malleable type of clay containing very little chalk that turns a yellowish-white colour when fired due to a similarly low iron content (Rouvier-Jeanlin 1975, 95; Higgins 1976, 105). In terms of form, pipeclay figurines mainly depict deities, animals and humans, but shrines (aediculae) and other miscellaneous shapes such as eggs and bales of wool were occasionally produced as well. Although common and apparently relatively low in value, these objects were an integral part of daily religious life for the people living in Britain and Gaul during the Roman period. Prior to this datasheet Colin Wallace usefully summarised the existing literature on the subject in the Roman Finds Group newsletter, volume 10 (1995).

Production
Pipeclay figurines were mass produced from terracotta workshops in Gaul from the first century AD. In Central Gaul major industries were established in the Allier and Loire valleys; possibly as an off-shoot of the terra sigillata industry, while other centres soon developed in Cologne and Trier in the region of the Rhine-Mosel (Moselle). The industry peaked during the second century and declined thereafter, continuing until the third century in Central Gaul and ceasing in the Rhine-Moselle region during the fourth century (Boekel 1987, 216). There is currently no evidence in the form of moulds or wasters that pipeclay figurines were made in Britain. Similar techniques were used to manufacture ceramic lamps in some areas of the province, (for example Eckardt 2002) but pipeclay figurines were entirely imported goods here.

To create a figurine pre-prepared clay or plaster moulds were dusted with silica, clay slip, wood ash or powdered chalk before layers of soft wet clay were pressed into the interior by hand (Rouvier-Jeanlin 1975, 95; Jenkins 1977, 6-7; Boekel 1987, 220). The sides of the clay were then scored, brushed with clay slip and the two halves aligned and secured together using ties (Higgins 1976, 108). After drying, the shrunken leather-hard hollow cast could be removed from the mould while the base and any additional or separately moulded features were attached. A small outlet would then often be cut into the figurine allowing hot air to circulate and escape as the clay expanded during firing which reduced the risk of bursting and abnormalities in the finished product (Higgins 1976, 108) (Fig 1). Once trimmed with a knife and touched up with a spatula or wet cloth to remove blemishes, the final stage was to fire the complete cast at a temperature between 900°
and 1000°C in an oxygen reducing kiln (Jeanlin 1984, 90; Boekel 1987, 220).

After firing, some pipeclay figurines were decorated by hand with various brightly coloured paints. Current evidence indicates that painting figurines was rare but may have been more common in the past as pigments survive very poorly in soil. Other pipeclay objects were sometimes decorated using a green-yellow glaze. The finds from Britain and the continent suggest that this type of glazed decoration was not very common and was only used on small unguent animal flasks produced during the first century by a group of workshops at St. Remy-en-Rollat in the Allier Valley (Jenkins 1977, 12; Boekel 1987, 221).

**Typologies and Distribution**

In 1972 Rouvier-Jeanlin published the first comprehensive systematic typology of pipeclay figurines (1972, 91-405), the basis of which is still used to catalogue new discoveries. Subsequent studies in Europe have since added to the range of known figurine types and evaluated their function and social significance via contextual analysis (eg Boekel 1987; Gonzenbach 1995; Beenhouwer 2005). In the 1950s Jenkins began collating and evaluating the pipeclay figurines found in Britain (eg 1957, 1958) that culminated in his unpublished PhD in 1977. Unfortunately since then their study has failed to keep pace with continental developments. To rectify this my PhD at the University of Reading will produce a complete typological catalogue as well as conduct a full spatial and contextual analysis of all the pipeclay figurines recovered from Britain to date.

In general, identifying a figurine or a fragment can be difficult as incomplete finds sometimes lack diagnostic parts and some different types have similar features. However, where possible, the size, shape and style of a figurine can be assessed and associated with existing examples to make an accurate classification. Of those successfully classified finds, deities are the most numerous type of pipeclay figurine found in Britain and Europe. Out of the wide range of godly depictions Venus is by far the most common, of which there are two prominent types. Type 1 figurines show the goddess with her garment draped over her left wrist (Fig 2), while Type 2 figurines portray the deity holding the drapery by her fingertips. Numerous sub-types of Venus figurines are also defined by variation in garment designs and hairstyles. Another popular depiction, though not to the extent of Venus, is of Dea-Nutrix. These figurines depict a matron seated in a wicker-work chair with the two main types differentiated by whether the goddess nurses one (Type 2) or two infants (Type 1) at the breast (Fig 3).
Other more common deities depicted by pipeclay figurines from the western provinces include Minerva and alternative Mother-Goddesses, while gods like Apollo, Cybele, Epona, Fortuna, Luna/Diana, Hercules, Juno, Jupiter and Mercury appear much less frequently. Shrines (aediculae) in which figurines were sometimes placed were often produced as well. Animals and birds are also frequent subjects in the form of bulls, dogs, horses, monkeys, sheep, rams, cockerels (Fig 4), doves, hens and pigeons, while human depictions in the medium of figurines and busts can depict men, women, children (eg the more common bald headed Risus type), couples, comic figures and gladiators. Interestingly, the range of figurine types found in Britain is much more limited than those recovered from Central and Eastern Gaul, and unsurprisingly features many of the more common deity, animal and human types. However, the collection from Britain does include a number of particularly rare figurine types, such as a dolphin and the unique type of lizard figurine recovered from London; the latter of which is probably closely associated with the eastern god Sabazius (Bird 1996, 121–2). This indicates a distinctly unique pattern of pipeclay figurine consumption in Britain compared with other areas of the western provinces (eg Fittock 2013, 52-4; 2015, 115-119).

Pipeclay figurines were distributed widely across the western provinces with large numbers found in the modern countries of France (Rouvier-Jeanlin 1972), Belgium (Beenhouwer 2005), the Netherlands (Boekel 1987, 869-70) and Switzerland (Gonzenbach 1986, 1995). Many finds come from refuse pits, ditches, foundation deposits and water contexts like wells in settlements, but they are also common in graves and tombs in Gaul (Boekel 1987, 870-75; Burleigh et al 2006, 286). Pipeclay figurines have been found across much of Britain with the densest concentration in the south-east (see Boekel 1993, 249 fig 110 for a general distribution map). As in Europe, most finds come from rubbish pits, ditches, foundation deposits, drains and wells in small settlements, towns and large urban settlements like London, Colchester and
Verulamium, while a small number also come from rural sites and villas. In the north, most pipeclay figurines come from military sites like Benwell, South Shields and Vindolanda, though in most cases these finds come from the accompanying civilian vicus rather than the forts themselves. A number of figurines have additionally been found on shrine and temple sites, including Springhead in Essex and Vichy in Gaul (Penn 1958, 89, fig 10.4; Green 1986, 95, 165), but unlike on the continent these statuettes are only rarely recovered from graves in Britain (eg Taylor 1993, 194-201).

**Style and Inscriptions as Indicators of Provenance**

Pipeclay figurines from Central and Eastern Gaul vary considerably in style indicating that some types were produced exclusively in certain regions. For instance, Dea-Nutrix figurines made in the Allier Valley are visibly distinctive from the 'bonnet-style' design of those produced farther east in Bonn and Cologne (Jenkins 1977, 209; Green 1993, 194-6, fig 3.1). Production locations are often indicated by the distribution of figurine moulds and wasters. This has shown, for example, that figurines like the 'thorn-puller' type were only produced in Central Gaulish workshops like Toulon-sur-Allier in France, while depictions of Bacchus were exclusive to workshops in the Rhineland. In a similar manner, the manufacture of seated mother-goddess figurines was apparently limited to the workshops of the Rhine-Mosel region (Jenkins 1977, 157, 209, 212; 1978, 157).

A number of pipeclay figurines and moulds are stamped or inscribed with the name of craftsmen that tells us more about exactly who made them and where they were made. Most of the finds marked in this way are from the continent where modellers like Ioppillo, Nattvs and Sacrillos worked from the Allier Valley (Jenkins 1977, 67-86), while others such as Alfius, Vindex and Servandus operated from workshops (officinae) in Cologne (Boekel 1987, 207-10). In comparison, very few figurines found in Britain feature inscriptions, where the current evidence includes a Dea Nutrix from Canterbury stamped ‘SILI’ on the underside of the base that probably represents the work of the modeller Pistillius who operated from a workshop in Autun, Central Gaul (Vertet and Vuillemot 1973). Other finds from the province include two mother-goddess figurines from Colchester and Lancaster that were made and marked by the modeller Servandus who was based in Cologne in the mid-second century (Jenkins 1977, 106-15, 162, 299-300). However, it must be remembered that some modellers produced similar signed figurines at various different workshops during their careers and that some craftsmen often reproduced originals by copying existing designs (eg Jenkins 1977, 71-4).

One way to better identify the provenance of the pipeclay figurines found in Britain would be to analyse their fabric. Some continental studies have successfully carried out chemical and x-ray fluorescence analyses to identify elemental differences in clay composition and broadly link certain figurine types with regional clay pits and workshop groups, albeit with rather mixed results (eg Rabeisen and Vertet 1986, 201-10; Lahanier and Revel 1993, 254-65). Unfortunately though, neither of these techniques have been systematically applied to the collection of figurines recovered from Britain.

**Function**

The traditional view is that pipeclay figurines were closely linked with the Sigillaria festival and were used as toys for children, although their fragility and presence in adult burials in Europe makes this unlikely (Boekel 1987, 240-1; Eckardt 1999, 60). On the other hand, contextualised finds indicate that these small figures were probably used for daily religious practice in the domestic setting, possibly as substitutes for more expensive metal figurines (see Durham 2012). Some scholars have even stated that the female iconography of pipeclay figurines indicates that they were
mainly used by women (Rouvier-Jeanlin 1972, 63; Boekel 1987, 238). At the same time, pipeclay statuettes had an additional role as special votive objects at temples and shrines. It is also possible that figurines, alongside other objects recovered from wells, drains and deposits near rivers and streams such as the Walbrook in London, might be linked with water-orienteated ritual practices, while finds from refuse pits and ditches could represent some sort of ‘sacred rubbish’ (Merrifield 1978, 37-9; 1995, 38). Moreover, pipeclay figurines were often used as grave goods for men, women and children across much of the continent but clearly had a much more specific significance in Britain where they are only found in high status graves of infants at sites like Arrington (Taylor 1993) and Colchester (Eckardt 1999, 60-68). These may have been heirlooms, or to protect the deceased in the underworld (eg Crummy 2010, 69). Finally, other than whole specimens in burials, it is significant that most pipeclay figurines are broken (eg Fig 5). Building on Jenkins’ idea that they were ex votos (1958, 61), it is possible that some of these may have been intentionally broken up into separate body parts for use during healing or magical rituals, much like other metal, stone and wooden figurines (eg Croxford 2003; Ferris 2012, 61-4). This practice appears to have varied greatly between different provincial regions (Fittock 2015, 125-130).

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