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A MIDDLE-ROMAN CONTEXT FROM THE PUBLIC CENTER OF BLIESBRÜCK (SARREGUEMINES, DEPARTMENT DE LA MOSELLE, FRANCE)

This article discusses a pottery assemblage found at the yet unnamed Gallo-Roman settlement, which developed in the territories of the small villages of Bliesbrück in Moselle and Reinheim in Saarland, on the border between France and Germany, in the valley of the Blies River, a tributary of the Saar. The wealth of archaeological finds from the surrounding territory witnesses a period of occupation that continues without interruption from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. On the same site, the European Archaeological Park of Bliesbruck-Reinheim was established in the 1990's, thanks to the support of the Moselle Department, the French Ministry of Culture and the Landesdenkmalamt of the Saarland.

The context

The Roman settlement founded during the Claudian period, is a *vicus* which developed along the valley road on the right bank of the river and saw its building peak in the 3rd century AD. Its general layout comprises craft and commercial districts, a public monumental center, and a large villa with an axial plan¹ to the North (figs. 1–2).

The excavations of the public center of the *vicus* have been carried out yearly since 2008, and have seen the cooperation between the Departmental Center for Conservation, under the direction of Jean-Paul Petit, and the University of Parma, and the University of Chieti-Pescara under the direction of Prof. Sara Santoro².

The excavations of the central area have highlighted the main monumental public sector of the settlement which was made up by the *thermae*, dug in the 1990's, as well as a large fountain, which is immediately adjacent to a basilica-plan building on the north side. There is also a wing of shops on the south side, only partially investigated³.

During the 2011 campaign, the excavation of this central space brought to light a rectangular building, the last part of this complex of shops which face the main street of the settlement. Its discovery allowed to frame the layout of the central space on the south side. The excavation has highlighted the second phase of the building, which consists in a structural modification with the addition of a masonry cellar. In the space between its south wall and the wall of another building located in the southern area, there is an *ambitus*, 0.55 to 0.60 cm wide, which appears filled with a single filling of pottery, sealed with a layer of brick fragments and stones, creating a closed context. The canal, about 5 m in length, represents the *terminus post quem* for the renovation of the building (fig. 3).

The full excavation of the context allowed to recover all the pottery fragments and allowed for the reconstitution of whole individuals. The methodology consisted of counting the NMI on the base of the diagnostic fragments (rims, bases, handles and other decorated fragments) crossed with the data coming from the macroscopic analysis of fabrics and coatings⁴.

The pottery

The canal has returned 4349 fragments, for a total of 326 recognisable NMI; it was possible to reconstruct partially the specific type for 235 vessels, whilst almost complete or complete individuals were at least 52. In the Figure 4 can be seen the quantification of the pottery classes founded in the context (fig. 4).

Among the *terra sigillata* 66 NMI, 23 are almost complete. From the typological point of view we have long-lasting types, like the Drag. 27 (fig. 5,8), which was already produced in Flavian age but developed until the age of Trajan-Hadrian, as well as the Drag. 35/36, widespread from the Domitian-Flavian period, here recorded with the Trajan-Hadrian variants. It is important to record the presence of the typical forms of the 2nd century AD: the dish Drag. 31 (fig. 5,3) and the cup Drag. 33 (fig. 5,2), widespread from Trajan to the

¹ J. P. PETIT (ed.), *Bliesbruck-Reinheim. Celtes et Gallo-Romains en Moselle et Sarre* (Paris 2005).

² I would like to thank Prof. Sara Santoro and Jean-Paul Petit for allowing me to study this context, and also for the advice and the help given me during the research. I should note that this research is the result of a team work. I wish to thank, in no particular order, Maria Elena D'Onofrio and Chiara Marchetti (excavation, analysis of the material, drawings, digitisation), Elisabetta Andretti (digitisation), Mattia Bisignani, Simona D'Arcangelo, Carmen Tanga, Alice Dazzi, Abel Debize (analysis of the material). I also thank Sonia Antonelli and Marco Moderato for their support.

³ J.-P. PETIT/S. SANTORO, *La vie publique dans une Petit ville de Gaule Belgique. Le centre monumental de Bliesbruck*. In: J.-P. Petit (ed.),

Bliesbruck-Reinheim. Celtes, Gallo-Romains et Francs en Moselle et en Sarre. Doss. Arch. hors-série 24 (Dijon 2013) 52–59.

⁴ P. ARCELIN/M. TUFFREAU-LIBRE (eds.), *La quantification des céramiques: conditions et protocole. Actes de la table ronde du Centre archéologique européen du mont Beuvray, Glux-en-Glenne, 7–9 avril 1998* (Glux-en-Glenne 1998).

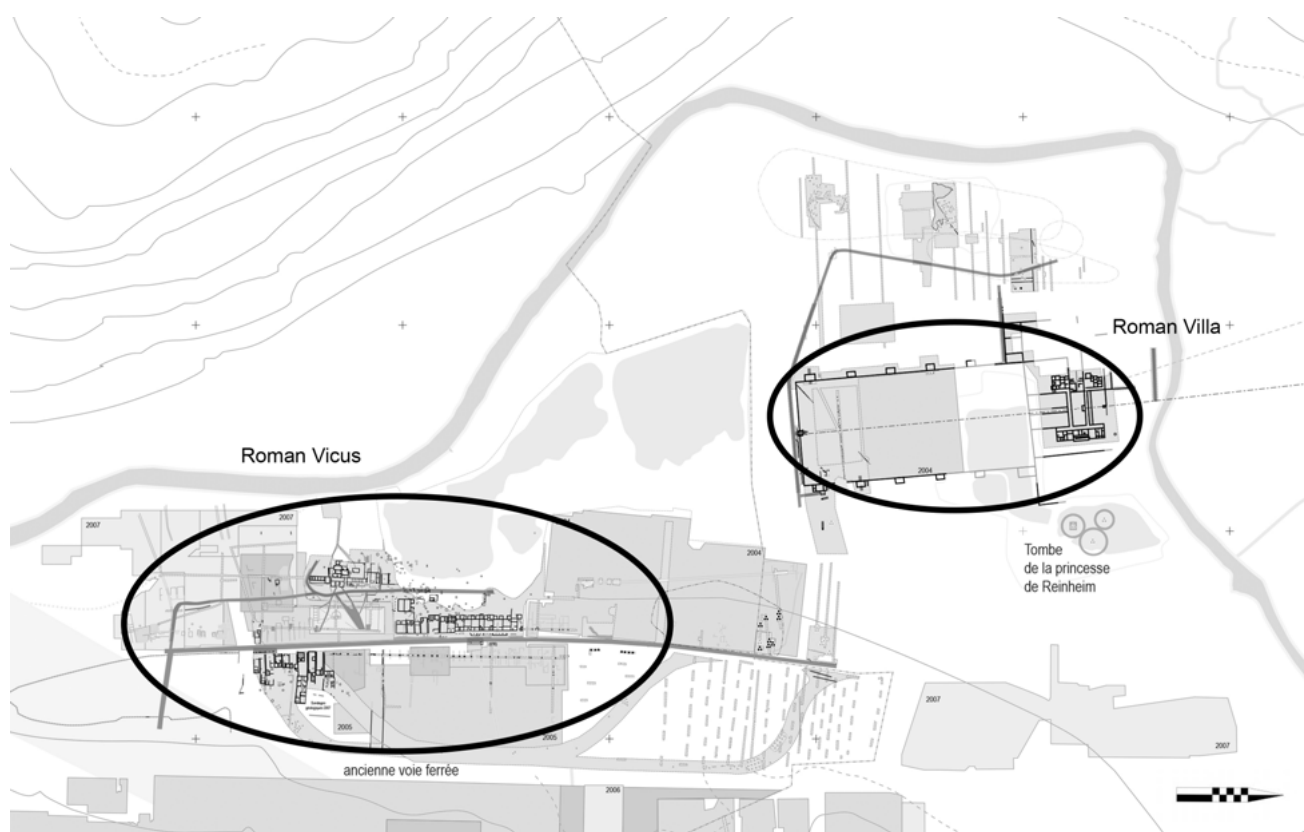


Fig. 1. Plan of the Blies valley (rielaboration after PETIT/SANTORO 2014).



Fig. 2. Plan of the Roman *vicus* with the indication of the shop building (rielaboration after PETIT/SANTORO 2014).

Country	Percentage
SIG	66 %
CC	12 %
RUG	69 %
MOR	3 %
DOR	5 %
TN-DTN	23 %
EN	33 %
FRA	2 %
MET	1 %
VRP	10 %
AMPH	9 %

Fig. 4. Quantification of pottery classes in the context. – SIG *terra sigillata*; CC common wares; RUG coarse wares; MOR mortars; DOR mica dusted ware; DTN derived of the *terra nigra*; EN black color coated wares of the Mosel and the Rhine region; FRA fine regional wares with red coat; MET metallescent ware; VRP local imitation of Campanian red dishes and Campanian red dishes; AMPH amphorae.

Antonine age. However, the most typical types of the second half of the 2nd century AD are the dishes Curle 15 (fig. 5,6), Curle 23 (fig. 5,7) and Drag. 32 (fig. 5,1), the small cups Drag. 40 (fig. 5,4) and Drag. 46 (fig. 5,5) and finally the bowl Drag. 38 (fig. 5,10)⁵. Indeed the Drag. 31, Drag. 32, Curle 23 and Curle 15 dishes, and the Drag. 46, Drag. 33 and Drag. 40 cups are associated in the Niederbieber fort, which was founded in 185 and destroyed in 260 AD⁶.

The analysis of the stamps revealed the presence of potters that were active in North-East Gaul at the middle of the 2nd century AD and a little later: there are 20 stamps in total, 15 of them are not literal. The potters attested are active in the North-East Gaul workshops from Trajan to the end of the Antonine age (fig. 6).

The black color coated wares of the Mosel and the Rhine region are the second most represented group of fine wares (49 NMI, 14%). The forms attested are the Hees 2 (fig. 5,13.16.19.20), 3 and 4 (fig. 5,12) beakers⁷: the Hees 2 type, ovoid beaker with profiled rim, is the most widely used on the North-East Gaul in the 2nd century AD, while the Hees 3 ovoid beaker with simple rim, underlined by a groove, become more frequent from the third quarter of the 2nd century. The globular beaker with everted rim Hees 4 appears towards the middle of the century, as well as the barrel form beaker Hees 9 (fig. 5,11), equally well attested here⁸. All this types are associated in 2nd century contexts in Liberchies⁹. Very few fragments are attributable to the Cologne white fabric production, which is no longer manufactured after the beginning of the 3rd century AD. The most represented decorations are: barbotine motifs (32 %, water flowers, applied flakes, applied *lunulae* associated with vertical bars, sandblasting decorations (28 %, fig. 5,19.20), wheel decoration (20 %, fig. 5,11–13), carved ‘St. Andrew’ crosses (8 %). In 21 % cases these decorations are combined with depressions walls. If the blasting decoration appears to be more typical of the Argonne workshop, the *lunulae* are most common in Trier¹⁰ combined with slipped bars or carved ‘St. Andrew’ crosses, but also in the Alsatian workshops of Horbourg, Bourghem¹¹ and Strasbourg - Koenigshoffen¹², where they appear in mid-late 2nd – early 3rd century contexts (fig. 5,11–13)¹³. Applied

water flowers are typical of the white fabric ware of Cologne production¹⁴.

Very interesting is the presence of the **mica dusted ware**¹⁵ of Deru’s ‘second generation’ (ca. 70–130 AD, 2 %, 6 NMI); they are recorded with the closed forms with simple everted rim type DOR2 18.1 and 18.2¹⁶ and the small cup with everted brimmed rim, variously articulated, DOR2 15.1, also attested in coarser fabric (fig. 5,18).

Among the fine wares, we find the **terra nigra**¹⁷ in its later evolution, characterized by a purified paste with siliceous inclusions, baked in reduced atmosphere (from light grey to dark, sometimes black, fabric). Sometimes it may have a ‘soapy’ coat, gray or black, that could be the result of smoothing¹⁸.

The typological collection found at the site is common of the 1st–2nd century AD¹⁹: among the open forms we count the dishes, in the types with sloping simple walls and with rounded walls (fig. 5,15)²⁰, the bowls, both with rounded walls and introflexed enlarged rim (fig. 5,14) and the flanged bowls (fig. 5,17)²¹. Among the closed forms we find little and medium²² pots with simple rim, not decorated pots with enlarged everted rim or pots with ‘*stralucido*’ grid decoration on the body, probably with its lid.

Common wares are mainly represented by vessels aimed to contain and to pour liquids (14%, 42 NMI); most of them have a fine siliceous fabric²³, sometimes with microscopic mica inclusions, or argillite or chamotte inclusions in rare cases. Mostly they are closed forms with high narrow neck, simple or biconical, provided with one or two handles, in both small and larger variants (fig. 7,1–3.6.8). All these types are attested in Bliesbruck from the mid-2nd until the first half of the 3rd century²⁴, while in Liberchies they already exist in 1st century AD contexts²⁵.

⁵ For a chrono-typological framework see GOSE 1950; OSWALD/PRYCE 1984; C. BÉMONT/J.-P. JACOB (eds.), *La terre sigillée gallo-romaine. Lieux de production di Haut Empire: implantations, produits, relations* (Paris 1986); P. TYERS, *Roman pottery in Britain* (London 1996); R. DELAGE, *La sigillée de la Moselle*. In: R. Brulet/F. Vilvorder/R. Delage, *La céramique romaine en Gaule du Nord. Dictionnaire de céramiques. La vaisselle à large diffusion* (Turnhout 2010) 134–152; F. VILVORDER, *La sigillée du Nord-Est Gaule*. In: R. Brulet/F. Vilvorder/R. Delage, *La céramique romaine en Gaule du Nord. Dictionnaire de céramiques. La vaisselle à large diffusion* (Turnhout 2010) 168–201.

⁶ OELMANN 1914, 19–23.

⁷ VILVORDER 2010, 312–315.

⁸ Ibid. 313–316.

⁹ F. VILVORDER, *La céramique engobée*. In: R. Brulet/J.-P. Dewert/F. Vilvorder, *Liberchies IV. Vicus gallo-romain. Travail de rivière*, (Louvain-la-Neuve 2001) 181–185 esp. 182, par. the Hees 9 type appears at the middle or at the second half of the 2nd c.

¹⁰ For all these considerations see VILVORDER 2010, 313–316; 328–331.

¹¹ VILVORDER 1999, 92–94.

¹² BAUDOUX/NILLES 2009, 58–59 form A42.

¹³ BONAVENTURA ET AL. 2009, 94–96 figs. 25; 27; 36; SYMONDS/LATRON 2009, 272; 276 fig. 5,24.

¹⁴ VILVORDER 2010, 335; EAD. 1999, 105–110.

¹⁵ It is a fine ware that seems to have a connection with the Belgian pottery tradition and is characterized by the application of a coat rich in mica (biotite): DERU 1995; ID. 1996, 190; ID., *La céramique dorée* (DR2). In: R. Brulet/J.-C. Demanet, *Liberchies III. Vicus gallo-romain. Les thermes et zone d’habitat au nord de la voie antique* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1997) 192–195.

¹⁶ DERU 1995, 81–88.

¹⁷ J.-J. HATT/B. SCHNITZLER, *La céramiques gallo-belge dans l’Est de la France*. In: Y. Burnard/H. Vertet, *Céramiques antique en Gaule. Actes du colloque de Metz 1982* (Nancy 1985) 79–105 esp. 80–81; R. BRULET, *La céramique gallo-belge: problématique*. SFECAG Congrès Tournai 1992 (Marseille 1992) 11–16; DERU 1996. For a recent technological point of view see LEPOT 2012.

¹⁸ The term is used in this text for all the fine siliceous wares obtained through a reduced firing atmosphere. Cf. M. TUFFREAU-LIBRE, *La céramique gallo-belge dans le nord de la France*. SFECAG Congrès Tournai 1992 (Marseille 1992) 33–56 esp. 33.

¹⁹ PETIT 1988 pll. 183; 186; 187; 194; 196; 205.

²⁰ In Liberchies: DERU 1997, 212 fig. 114.1.

²¹ PETIT 1988 pll. 186–187.

²² DERU 1996 P41; at Liberchies we can find them in contexts of VI–VII–VIII horizons (end of 1st–3rd c. AD); DERU 1997.

²³ See LEPOT 2012, 310.

²⁴ PETIT 1988 pl. 207; 209.

²⁵ J. MOULIN, *Les cruches*. In: R. Brulet/J.-C. Demanet, *Liberchies II. Vicus gallo-romain. Sondages. Zone d’habitat au sud de la voie antique* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1993) 40–44 esp. 40–42 fig. 13.

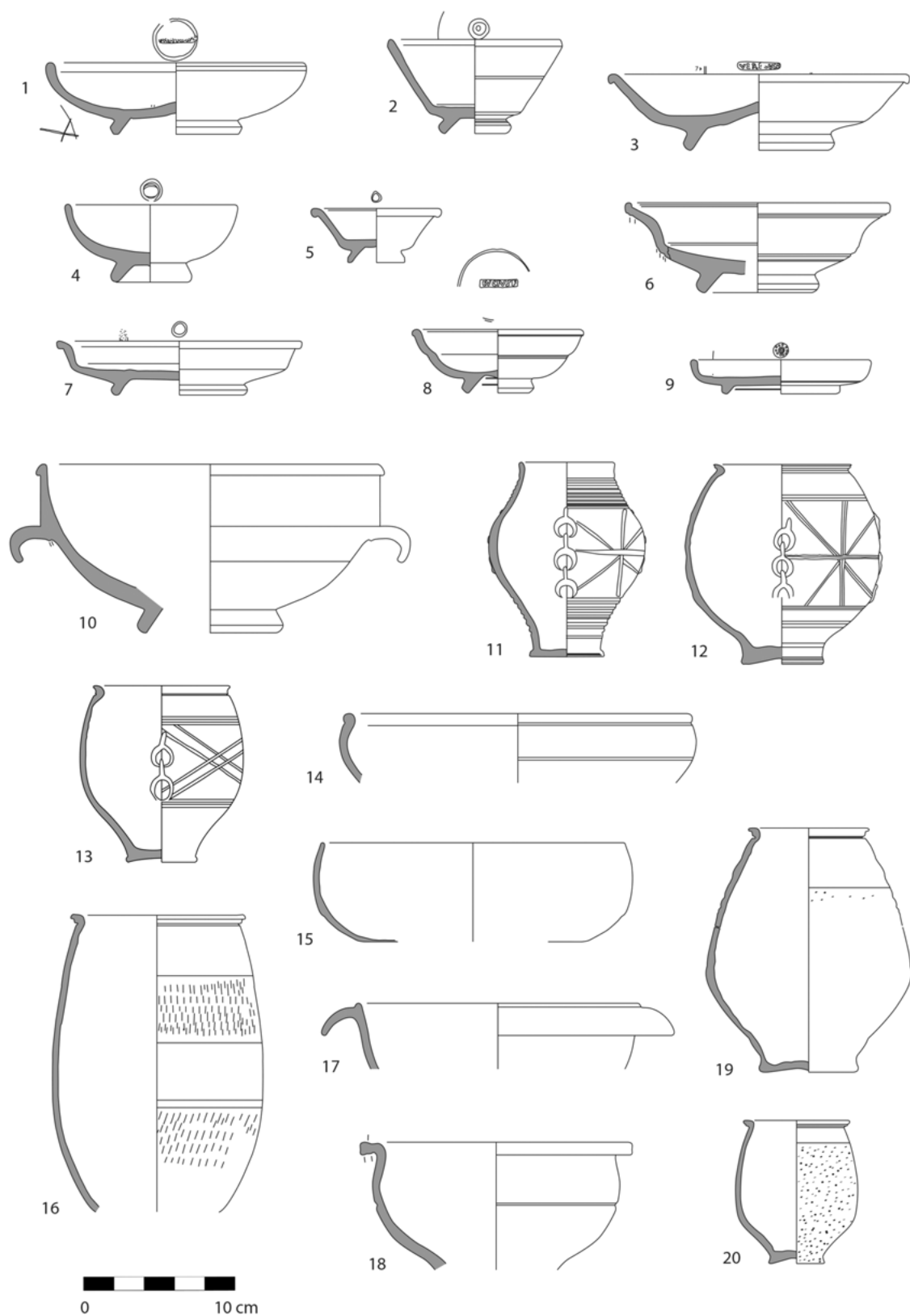


Fig. 5. Fine wares: 1–10 terra sigillata; 11–13. 16. 19–20 black color coated wares of the Mosel and the Rhine region; 14–15, 17 terra nigra; 18 mica dusted ware.


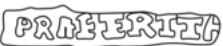


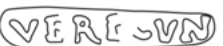

reading	description	pottery	workplace	chronology	bibliography
MAIORE		Maior II - Ia	Blickweiler, Trier	150 - 175 AD	HARTLEY - DICKINSON 2008
PRAETERITA		Praeteritus	Trier	140-165 AD	HARTLEY - DICKINSON 2008
LUCIUS S F		Lucius	Boucheporn, Chémery-Faulquemont	130-155? AD	HARTLEY - DICKINSON 2008
		Saturninus?	Chémery-Faulquemont	Mid II cent. AD	LUTZ 1991, p. 308, pl. 3, 88; FREY 2001, p. 122, tf. 38, n. 34; KLEIN 2000, p. 380, pl. 75, n. 78.
VERECUNDU S		VERECUNDU S	Vindonissa, Heiligenberg, Ittenwiller, Blickweiler, Rheinzabern	Trajan – antonine age	OSWALD 1983, p. 330-331
[.]VIN- ?		?			

Fig. 6. Stamps attested on terra sigillata (dimensions are not respected) (M. LUTZ, *La Moselle Gallo-Romaine* [Sarrebouurg 1991]; M. FREY, *Die Terra Sigillata der gallorömischen Villenanlage bei Borg, Landkreis Merzig-Wadern*. Ber. Staatl. Denkmalpfl. Saarland Beih. 5 [Saarbrücken 2001]; E. KLEIN, *Sigillée lisse*. In: J.-P. Petit (ed.), *Le complexe de thermes de Bliesbruck (Moselle). Un quartier public au coeur d'une agglomération secondaire de la Gaule Belgique* [Paris 2000] 376–386; F. OSWALD, *Index des estampilles sur Sigillée*. Rev. Arch. SITES h.s. 21 [Avignon 1983]).

Among the **coarse wares** (23 %, 78 NMI) we were able to distinguish, thanks to the macroscopic analysis of the fabrics and coats, 5 technological groups. All were produced with caolinitic fabric baked in oxidized atmosphere, in white, light yellow, pink and light brown colors, that could be considered regional/local (Rhenish or Mosellan or Mosan) and were found in 2nd century contexts at Tongres and Bavay²⁶. Mostly

(54.28 %) there are open forms (casseroles, pans, bowls and mortars), while the closed forms (*ollae*/pots) are 45.71 % (= 32 NMI). The casseroles (22.85 %, 16 NMI) have flat everted rims (25 %)²⁷, and, mostly, inverted enlarged rounded rims (75 %, **fig. 8, 1–2**), sometimes framed by one or more external grooves. These are better known as Niederbieber 104 and are

²⁶ LEPOT 2012, 300–310; S. WILLEMS, *Roman Pottery in the Tongeren reference collection: mortaria and coarse wares*. VIOE-Rapporten 01 (Brussel 2005) [www.referentiecollectie.nl/rich/tongeren/index.php] 76–78; 92–93; J. VAN KERCKHOVE ET AL., *Understanding consumption patterns in the Civitas Tungrorum through the identification of the 'Noor1' ware*. RCRF Acta 43, 2014, 173–182; VILVORDER 2001b, 319–320, 329; R. BRULET/F. VILVORDER/S. REEK, *La céramique. Méthodologie*. In: R. Brulet/J.-P. Dewert/F. Vilvorder, *Liberchies IV. Vicus gallo-romain. Travail de rivière* (Louvain-la-Neuve 2001) 110–125. – For the pink coarse fabrics a parallel is possible also with the 'Ulpia oxidized ware' produced at Nijmegen in the 2nd c. AD: J. HENDRIKS, *Pottery from Ulpia*

Noviomagus-Nijmegen. First report on the Maasplein production site: kilns 1–2. In: B. Liesen (ed.), *Römische Keramik in Niedergermanien. Produktion – Handel – Gebrauch*. Beiträge zur RCRF-Tagung, 21.–26. September 2014, LVR-RömerMuseum im Archäologischen Park Xanten. Xantener Ber. 27 (Darmstadt 2014) 200–201 fig. 9g–i. – The white and pink coarse fabric, also, can be compared with the B-C-D fabrics product in Heerleen: VAN KERCKHOVE/BOREEL 2014, 245–247. Common in Bliesbruck in late 1st c. AD contexts (PETT 1988 pl. 186, 15), but at Liberchies present in the VIII horizon (110/120–165/175 d.C.), type J4 (VILVORDER 2001, 320 fig. 133 ptc. 15, 18, 20). In Heerleen very similar casseroles are produced from 70 to 200 AD (type CW OX-HEERL-BO1: VAN KERCKHOVE/BOREEL 2014, 263 fig. 7).

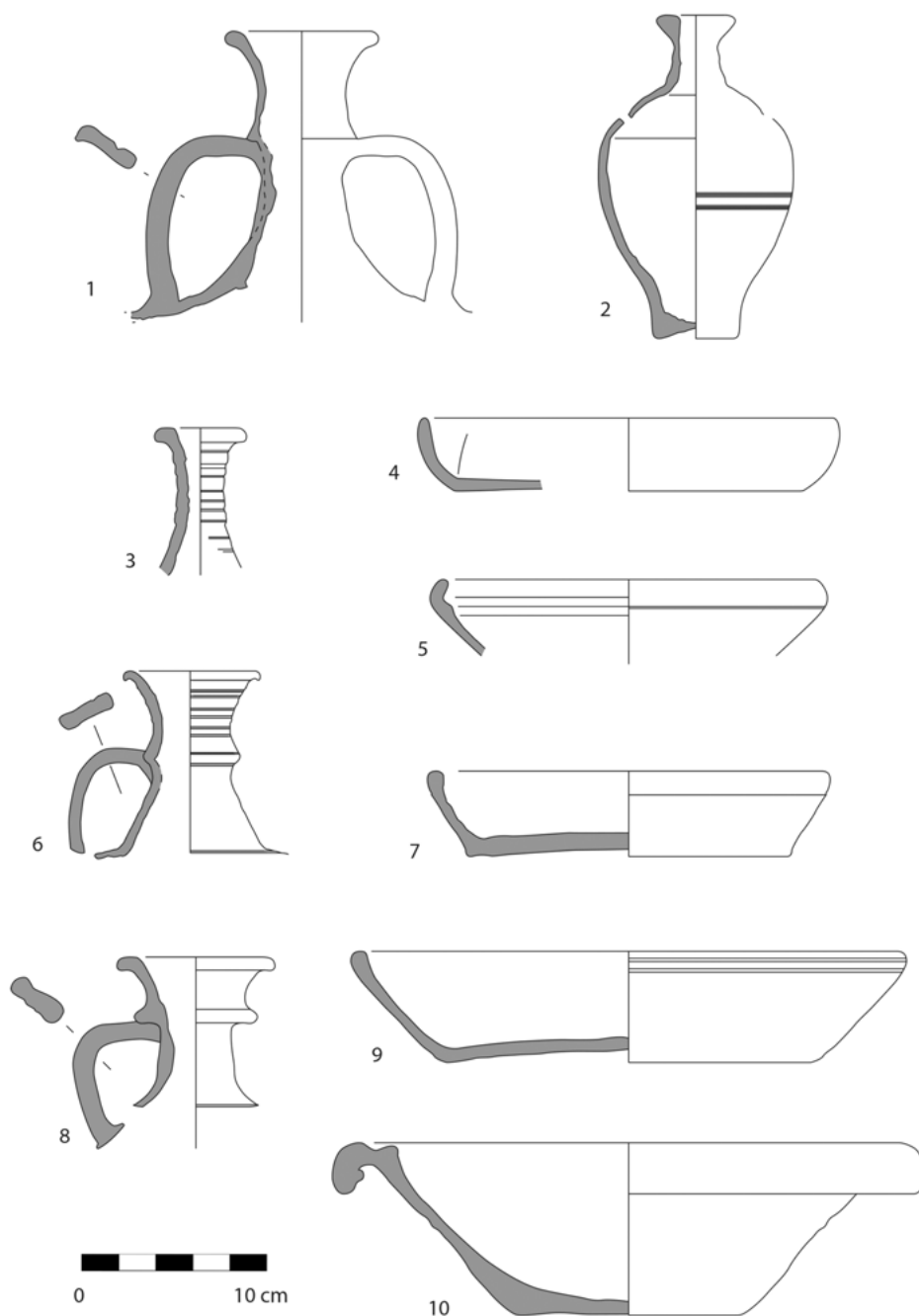


Fig. 7. 1–3. 6. 8 Common wares; 5. 7. 9. 10 coarse wares; 4 local imitation of Campanian red dish.

very common during the 2nd century AD²⁸, here also present in smaller dimension (7,14% = 5 NMI). Among the closed forms, the cooking pot with everted enlarged rim, externally profiled Niederbieber 89 type²⁹, is abundant in 2nd – first half of the 3rd century AD contexts (fig. 8, 3–6)³⁰. The pans (20 %,

14 NMI), could have simple, inverted or enlarged rounded rims (fig. 7, 7, 9)³¹. A pan with an internally profiled rim type Niederbieber 112a is common in Bliesbruck in the late 2nd – first half of the 3rd century AD (fig. 7, 5)³².

The **mortars** (but without bottom inclusions! 2 NMI), in flanged types, are very common in the 2nd – early 3rd century

²⁸ OELMANN 1914, 76. In Bliesbruck from mid-2nd c. contexts (PETIT 1988 pl. 188, 16–17), at Liberchies type J8 (VILVORDER 2001, 320 fig. 133, 25–29).

²⁹ OELMANN 1914, 72 type 89.

³⁰ Bliesbruck: PETIT 1988 pl. 200–201. – Liberchies: they come from the destruction layers of VIII horizon (110/120–165/175 d.C.), Marmites type M4 and type M5. VILVORDER 2001, 320–322 fig. 132, 6–13. – Braives: MASSART 1986, 186 fig. 79; 38–43. – Heerlen: type CW OX-HEERL-JA2a. VAN KERCKHOVE/BOREEL 2014, 261–263 fig. 7. – In

Wiwersheim present in Speicher fabric in contexts dated from 140 to 250 AD: SYMONDS/LATRON 2009, 272–273; 275–276.

³¹ From 2nd c. contexts in Liberchies, type PL1 and type PL3: VILVORDER 2001, 320 fig. 133, 30–31.

³² OELMANN 1914, 78; PETIT 1988, 147 pl. 184, 20–24.

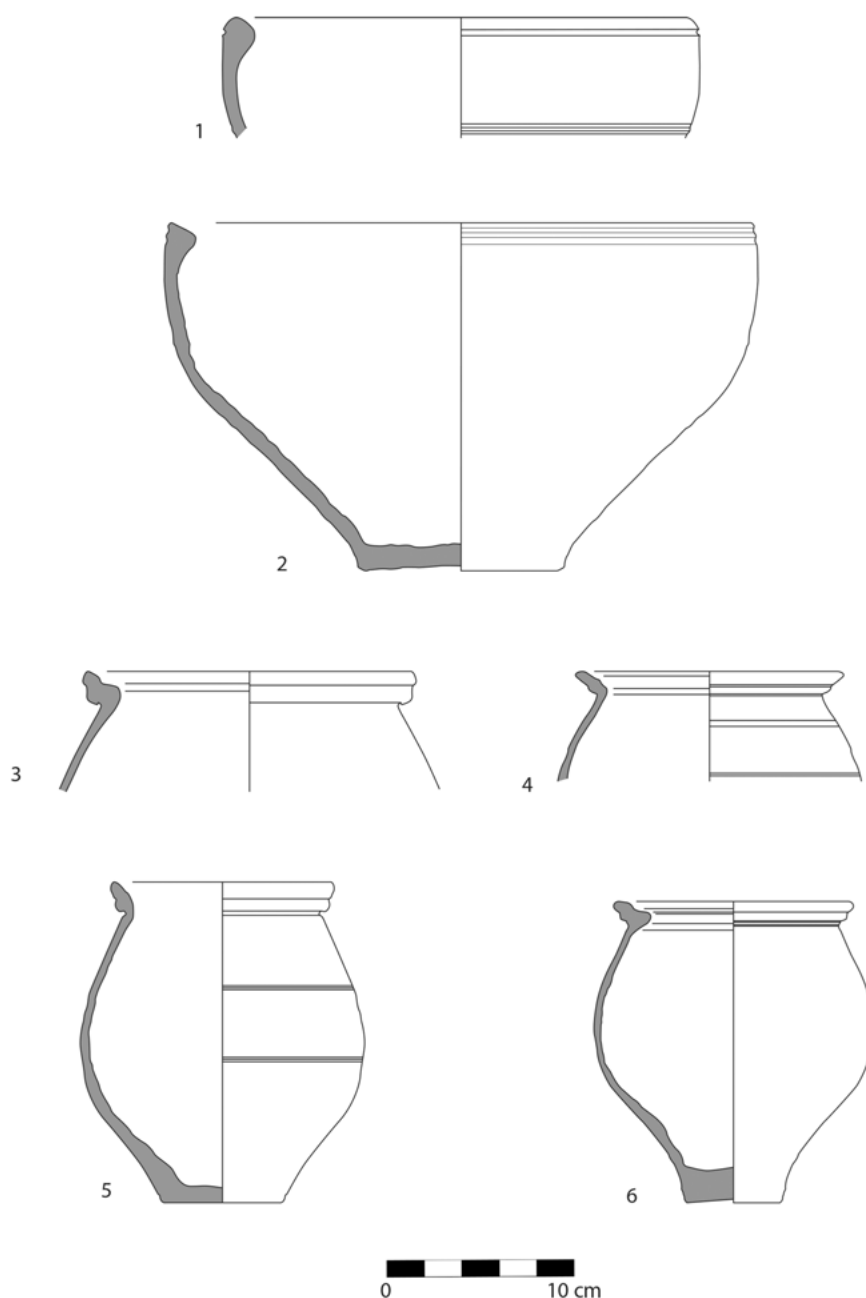


Fig. 8. Coarse ware.

AD: one resembles the Gose 459 type³³, the other the Gose 461³⁴/Stuart 149³⁵ and has a parallel with a mortar product in Heerlen (fig. 7,10)³⁶.

Among the cooking ware, local productions **imitating the Campanian red dishes** (3 %), are attested from the 1st to

the 4th century AD in Northern Gaul³⁷ and are considered evidence of the desire of acquisition of the Mediterranean dietary habits³⁸. The pottery has a siliceous quite fine light brown fabric with only internal red or orange clay coat³⁹

³³ That the author places in the third quarter of the 2nd century AD (Gose 1976, 39).

³⁴ PETIT 1988 pll. 203; 204; GOSE 1976, 39–40.

³⁵ Common at Liberchies in VII horizon (110/120–165/175 AD): A. VANDERHOEVEN/F. VILVORDER, Les mortiers. In: R. Brulet/J.-P. Dewert/F. Vilvorder, Liberchies IV. Vicus galloromain. Travail de rivière (Louvain-la-Neuve 2001) 270–288 esp. 271–272 fig. 116–119.

³⁶ Types MOR-HEERL-M10 and MOR-HEERL-M9, dated from 130 to 200 AD: VAN KERCKHOVE/BOREEL 2014, 267 fig. 8.

³⁷ GOSE 1976, 21 Taf. 17.

³⁸ X. DERU, La céramique et les habitudes alimentaire dans le nord de la Gaule. Essai à partir des mortiers, de plats à vernis rouge pompéien et des bouilloires. In: Ph. Marinval (ed.), Boire, manger, cuisiner: exemples de la Préhistoire à l'Antiquité (Fontenay-Le-Comte 2008) 99–111; G. FLORENT/X. DERU, La céramique à Reims de César à Clovis. Analyse fonctionnelle. In: C. Batigne Vallet (ed.), Les Céramiques communes dans leur contexte régional. Faciès de consommation et mode d'approvisionnement. Actes de la table ronde à Lyon, 2 et 3 février 2009 (Lyon 2012) 259–293.

³⁹ F. THUILLIER, Découverte d'un atelier de 'verniss rouge-pompéien' provincial sur la commune des Rues-Des-Vignes (Nord). SFECAG Congrès Versailles 1993 (Marseille 1993) 213–224 esp. 221.

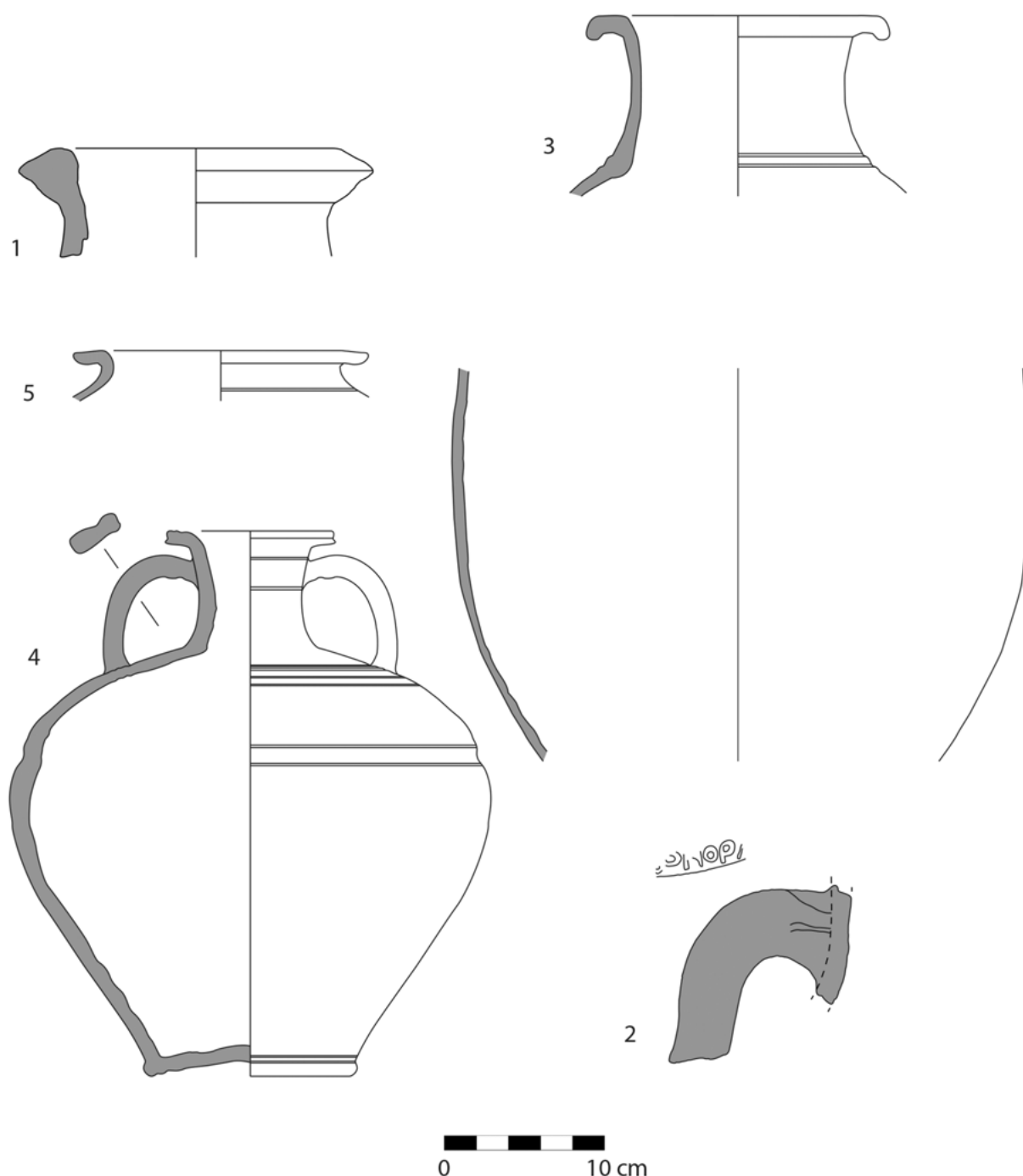


Fig. 9. Amphorae.

and it could be compared to the Peacock 2 fabric, probably produced in Britain or Central Gaul⁴⁰. They are all pans with flat bottom and simple rim Niederbieber 53a type (fig. 7,4)⁴¹, very common in this region in the 2nd century⁴².

The 3 % of all this pottery are **amphorae**: a DR20, with flattened stretched outward rim of the late 2nd century

(fig. 9,1)⁴³, and a handle with a partially visible stamp (fig. 9,2)⁴⁴. Other 4 NMI are attributable to amphorae produced in the Rhine region in 2nd and 3rd century Rhenish type 3 (fig. 9,3), type 5 (fig. 9,5), type 7 (fig. 9,4)⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ D. P. S. PEACOCK, Pompeian red ware. In: D. P. S. Peacock (ed.), Pottery and early commerce. Characterization and trade in Roman and later ceramics (London 1977) 147–162 esp. 154.

⁴¹ OELMANN 1914, 54.

⁴² At Bourghem (BONAVENTURA ET AL. 2009, 94 fig. 25) and Strasbourg (BAUDOUX/NILLES 2009, 54).

⁴³ BAUDOUX 1993, 21 fig. 1,4; L. F. LAUBENHEIMER/E. MARLIÈRE, Échanges et vie économique dans le Nord-Ouest des Gaules. Le témoignage des amphores du II^e siècle av. J.-C. au IV^e siècle après J.-C. 2 (Besançon 2010) 62–68.

⁴⁴ Maybe ORO(P)[...] = [SC]ORO[BRE(n)S(is)]?, already found in Bliesbruck and attested in Northern Gaul between the end of the 1st c. and the Trajan age (BAUDOUX 1993, 34 fig. 8,25).

⁴⁵ BAUDOUX 1993, 29 fig. 3,8; 30 fig. 4,1–3; 30 fig. 5,8–13.

Functional Category	NMI	%
Vessels to drink, to contain and to pour liquids	57	24,66
Vessels to consum food	81	35,06
Vessels to prepare and cook food	78	33,76
Containers for foodstuffs	15	6,49
tot.	231	

Fig. 10. Quantification of pottery by functions.

The chronology

The main elements that enable us to establish the chronology are primarily fine wares, first the terra sigillata repertory, with types produced during the 2nd century AD and stamps which show potters active in North-East Gaul between the Trajan and the Antonine age. Moreover, the absence of Drag. 45 mortar, which generally appears at the end of the 2nd century AD and is widespread in the 3rd⁴⁶, allows to maintain the chronology into the last quarter of the 2nd century AD. Three major features can confirm the hypothesis that the context was formed at the end of the 2nd century AD: the massive presence of black coated wares of the Mosel and the Rhine region of 2nd century AD types and the presence of less than 1 % of fragments attributable to the production called ‘met-allescent’, which appears after 150 AD and achieved great success in Northern Gaul consumer sites in the 3rd century AD⁴⁷, as well as the only two Niederbieber 32, widespread from the end of the 2nd century and especially in the next century⁴⁸.

The significance of this context consists not only in its limited chronology, documenting a period not very visible at the site, but mostly in its composition, in which all classes of pottery, which constituted the whole home ware of the period, are represented (**fig. 10**). Assuming as a concrete hypothesis that this pottery came from a single household, something that we cannot be certain of, we see that most of the wares were used to prepare and serve food, whereas vessels for serving and drinking liquids are less attested; their dating was certainly influenced by the presence of glass, not considered here.

On the table, the food was served exclusively on individual plates (such as Drag. 31, Drag. 32, Curle 23), probably always accompanied by small bowls (for dips?, Drag. 46, Drag. 33 and Drag. 40). The functions of the flanged bowl Drag. 38, in my opinion wrongly called ‘mortar’ because it has not includes on the internal base, is still uncertain.

The beakers could be small (300 cc, individual ones) but also very big (ca. 1 litre), and it is highly unlikely that they were used exclusively for the individual libation! The bottles were of small sizes (ca. 1 litre), while in the larger versions they reach up to 2 or 3 liters. It might be preferable to suggest that the latter were used mainly to store drinks, whereas beakers and the small bottles were used to serve them.

The types of cooking most commonly used were boiling, mainly vegetables, in small cooking coarse ware pots, simmering of meats in big coarse ware casseroles, frying, vegetables and meats in large coarse ware pans, baking, pains and baking in large common ware dishes or pans with internal red coat⁴⁹.

The absence of inclusions on the bottom of the mortars, typical for the later Drag. 45 sigillata mortar very widespread in 3rd century AD, is a very interesting topic that supports the versatility of this container. Clear signs of circular and concentric wearing, which made the bottom very smooth, can be seen on the bottom of both. This practice could be connected to the grinding of herbs or other elements not too resistant, which perhaps needed to add a liquid component (which would explain the constant presence of spouts).

However, it is very interesting to note that at Bliesbruck at the turn of the 3rd century AD the entire pottery repertory refers almost entirely to local types, influenced by traditions from the North of Europe. Also the types considered to be of Mediterranean tradition are affected by intense revisions, probably to better adapt them to local traditions.

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⁴⁶ OSWALD/PRYCE 1984, 168; P. H. MITARD, Le mufles de lion sur Drag. 45. In: J.-P. Petit (ed.), Le complexe de thermes de Bliesbruck (Moselle). Un quartier public au coeur d’une agglomération secondaire de la Gaule Belgique (Paris 2000) 387–390; PH. BET/L. SEVERIS/F. VILVORDER, La terre sigillée. In: R. Brulet/J.-P. Dewert/F. Vilvorder, Liberchies IV. Vicus gallo-romain. Travail de rivière (Louvain-la-Neuve 2001) 125–181 esp. 134. – The Drag. 45 mortar is the most numerous type in the abandon layers (end of 3rd c. AD) in Liberchies’ roman bath: PH. BET ET AL., La terre sigillée. In: R. Brulet/J.-C. Demanet, Liberchies III. Vicus gallo-romain. Les thermes et zone d’habitat au nord de la voie antique (Louvain-la-Neuve 1997) 155–179 esp. 159–160.

⁴⁷ SYMONDS/LATRON 2009, 272; F. VILVORDER, La céramique métallescente. In: R. Brulet/J.-C. Demanet, Liberchies III. Vicus gallo-romain. Les thermes et zone d’habitat au nord de la voie antique (Louvain-la-Neuve 1997) 186–189 esp. 188.

⁴⁸ VILVORDER 2010, 313–316; 328–331.

⁴⁹ C. BATIGNE-VALLET, Approche de l’alimentation cuite en Gaule romaine à travers l’étude des céramiques à feu. In: Ph. Marinval (ed.), Boire, manger, cuisiner: exemples de la Préhistoire à l’Antiquité (Fontenay-Le-Comte 2008) 113–143.

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