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## A DEVIANT TRADITION OF TILE STAMPING IN THE ROMAN NORTH

### The CA/TI stamps on Roman roof tiles from *Gallia Belgica* in a broader context

#### Introduction

As part of an ongoing PhD-research on Roman ceramic building materials at Ghent University, the material of several sites in *Gallia* and *Germania Inferior* is studied in more detail taking into account various aspects of the available material evidence. One of these aspects is the study of the epigraphical evidence present such as brick and tile stamps.

The tradition of stamping these products was introduced by the military in the region with the technique itself. Apart from military production, civil producers were present as well from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards.

Regardless the character of the production, the tradition of stamping was quite uniform. Dyes were used on the (lower part of the) flat upper surface of different products<sup>1</sup> to imprint the producer's name.

To our knowledge only two exceptions are known of stamps that are imprinted on the small front of *tegulae*: the CA/TI group and the GABIN group. The focus in this contribution will be on 1) new evidence concerning the CA/TI group and 2) (trying to) interpret this deviant tradition.

#### The CA/TI-stamp group

Research into these particular stamps began in 1965 with the publication in a local Belgian journal of the first two stamp finds of the CA/TI group in Harelbeke-Stasegem<sup>2</sup>. The best preserved example (fig. 1; 2c) only showed only the first part of the stamp text CA/TI.

A year later its importance was recognized by Mertens, who published it nationally<sup>3</sup> in an overview of Roman finds in the region of Kortrijk. These first authors also focussed the attention on the strange position of the stamp and its

common relation to a 'signature'<sup>4</sup> consisting of two double parallel arcs. These arcs are clearly drawn in the wet clay by using two fingers.

It was not until the early 1980s, with the excavation of the Roman building complex of Soignies<sup>5</sup>, that the stamp was recognized on a different site. Five other examples were found. For the first time, a complete stamp text was preserved (fig. 2a).

Two recent discoveries complete the list of known CA/TI stamps. Both were also discovered in Harelbeke. In 2011, on the Huyzentruyt-site, a fragment depicting the first three letters of the stamp was found<sup>6</sup> (fig. 2b). A last example was found in 2012 during an excavation campaign of the archaeological company GATE on the site Harelbeke-OCMW<sup>7</sup> and consists of only the two last letters of the stamp (fig. 2d).

#### Meaning of the stamp text based on related stamp groups

Despite the complete text, its reading is not without controversy. The ligature between the second and third letter makes at least two readings possible<sup>8</sup>, *in casu* CAVTI (A and V liaison) or CANTI (A and N liaison). For the better understanding of the stamp-text it is essential to note the points visible on the example held at the Broelmuseum<sup>9</sup> (Kortrijk, Belgium), which divide the text as follows: CA VI TI or C AN TI.

First attempts to transcribe the stamp's text were inconclusive but recent studies on similar stamp texts in Northern France make clear that the 'CA VI TI' reading is the most plausible and most likely refers to a roman name, presumably *Caius Avitivs Titica*<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For this common practice on military examples see for instance WARRY 2006, 85–86 or R. KURZMANN, Roman military brick stamps: a comparison of methodology. BAR Internat. Ser. 1543 (Oxford 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For the first example see: J. VIERIN, Jaarverslag 1965. Pro Cortoriaco – Vereniging Bevoord. Oudheidkde. Opzoekingen Kortrijkse (Kortrijk 1965) 1. – A second example was found in the same year but disappeared, only a drawing survived which was first published in: PH. DESPRIET, Romeins Harelbeke. Verslagen en Mededel. Leiegouw 17, 1975, 199.

<sup>3</sup> J. MERTENS, Kortrijk en omgeving: Romeinse vondsten, Archéologie (Brussel 1966) 73.

<sup>4</sup> Signatures are widely spread and are also commonly found on non-stamped bricks and tiles. Terminology based on the work of P. Warry on Roman tegulae from Britannia: WARRY 2006, 3–5 fig. 1, 1.

<sup>5</sup> G. SCHOLL/G. BAVAY, 'CAVTI'. Un sigle de tuilier révélé par les fouilles de Soignies-La Coulbrie (Ier–Ile siècle). Ann. Cercle Arch. Canton de Soignies 30, 1980–1982, 31–39; or most recently DE POORTER/CLAEYS 1989, 34–35.

<sup>6</sup> CLERBAUT in prep.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The first remarks on the double reading of the stamp were made by De Poorter and Claeys in their overview of stamps on ceramic building materials found in Belgium: DE POORTER/CLAEYS 1989, 35–36.

<sup>9</sup> This object with inventory number MOS 7918 is part of the collection of the Broelmuseum, City of Kortrijk.

<sup>10</sup> HOËT-VAN CAUWENBERGHE 2013, 300–301.



**Fig. 1.** Example of a CA/TI stamp on the front of a *tegula*-fragment linked to a ‘signature’ (collection Broelmuseum, ©Photoeil).

Other less plausible options include trying to link the different text parts of the stamp to (nearby) places<sup>11</sup>. When looking more carefully into the French examples, it becomes clear that other variations (CAVTITITICAE and OF TITITICAE) on the stamp text exist but all of them are found on the flat surface, none of them on the front<sup>12</sup>. Is there an explanation for this deviant position?

### Place and purpose of stamps

When investigating the position of epigraphy on ceramic categories in general, the epigraphy on *amphorae* can be seen as the best studied example.

At least for the Dressel 20-type of *amphorae*, the position of stamps and *tituli picti* on the body of the vessel are well understood as an important source of evidence. When looking at the *tituli picti*, five groups (α to ε) with a specific position and function<sup>13</sup> can be distinguished, linked to different phases of the production and distribution of the container and its product. It is interesting to note that the position of these markings tends to be closely linked with the accessibility of specific parts of the vessel at specific phases.

### Reconsidering the position of the stamp as a determining factor in its interpretation

When linking these insides back to the stamp group discussed here, it can add to a better understanding of the deviant position of the stamp. Stamps presented at the flat surface of the tile can easily have been imprinted during the early phases of production when the tile is still framed and resting on the work bench. At this point, stamping the front of the product would be completely unpractical.

The best accessibility of the front of the tile is achieved during the phase of drying. Especially when the tiles are stacked in rows (**fig. 3**) the front becomes the only available surface. The fact that tally marks<sup>14</sup> are added at the same time on the same position strengthens this argument.

A similar function as the tally marks can be presumed for the stamps as well: a (counting) mark for batches ready for firing. In the case of the stamps, not a number but a name is depicted.

### Conclusion and future prospects

With this contribution, the attention is drawn to a deviant tradition in marking roof tiles by imprinting stamps on the front of the *tegulae* instead of on the flat surface. Hopefully this article adds to a better documentation of this tradition and the recognition of even more stamp finds. At the moment, this tradition was only recognized in the province of *Gallia Belgica* but potentially can be present all over the Empire.

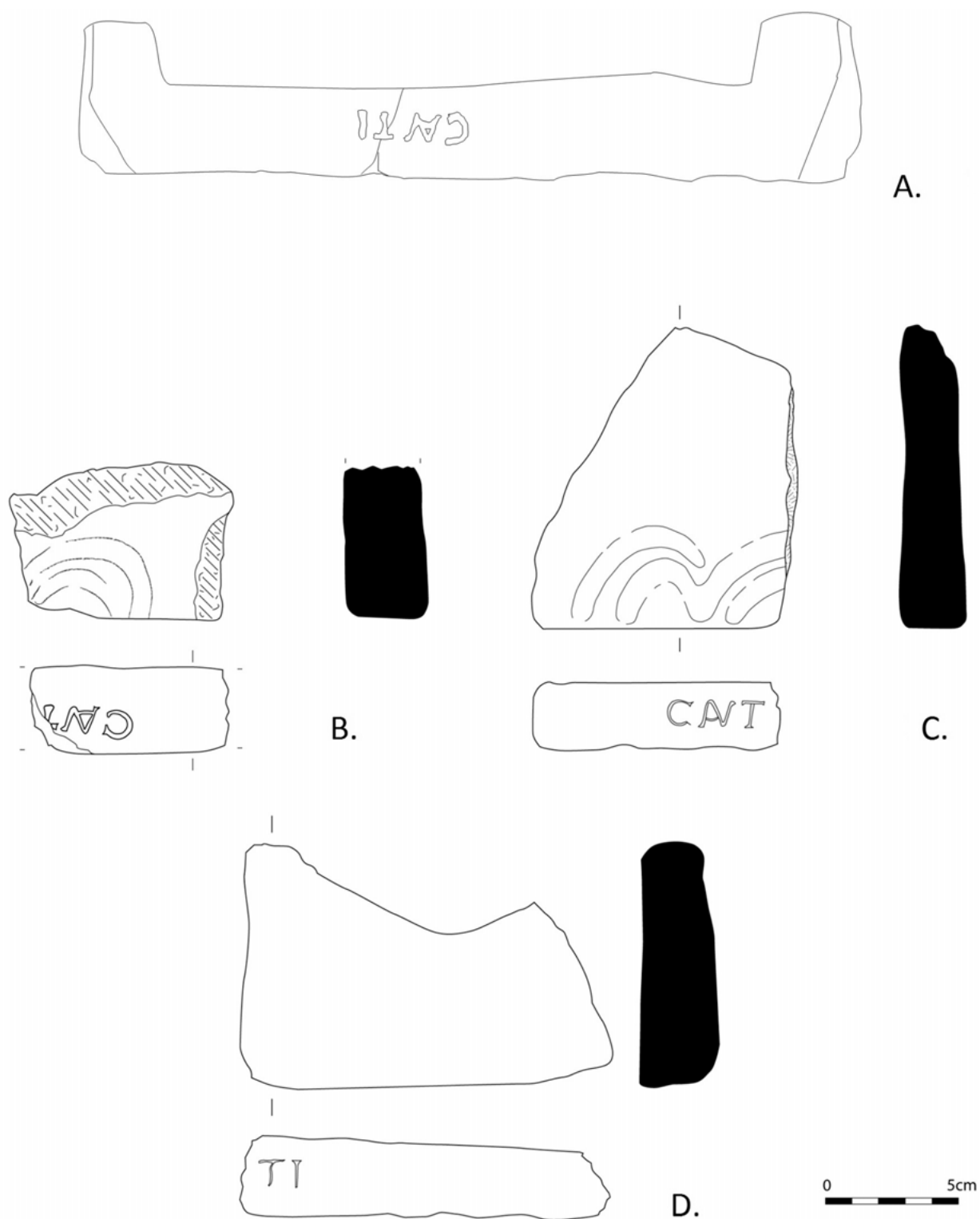
It is argued here that the stamps were added during drying and had an administrative function similar to the tally marks

<sup>11</sup> Some possibilities are: *Castrum* (legionary fort), *Castellum* (auxiliary fort) but also more specific toponyms like *Caletum* (Calais, France) or *Cortacum/Cortoriacum* (Kortrijk, Belgium) are possible.

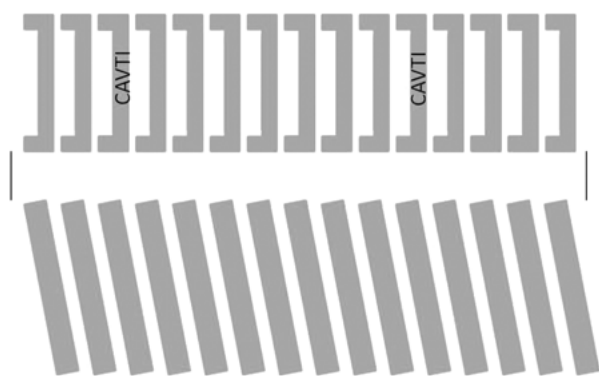
<sup>12</sup> HOËT-VAN CAUWENBERGHE 2013, 295–313.

<sup>13</sup> W. BROEKAERT, Archives for the ancient economic historian: tituli picti on Dr. 20 oil amphorae. In: A. Delattre/E. Dupraz, *Epigraphica Bruxellensia*. Presented at the conference “Épigraphies marginales dans le monde méditerranéen. Journée d’études des Unités de Recherches Philixte et Oikoumene, 15/5/2014, Brussel” (Brussel 2015, forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Terminology based on WARRY 2006, 3–5 fig. 1,1.



**Fig. 2.** Overview of CATI stamp examples: **a.** Soignies (after DE POORTER/CLAEYS 1989: 34); **b.** Harelbeke-Huyzentruyt; **c.** Harelbeke Stasegem (collection Broelmuseum) and **d.** Harelbeke-OCMW. (Drawings b–d: Joris Angenon [UGent]).



**Fig. 3.** Row of stacked roof tiles during drying.

that were usually found at the same position on the tile. Why a name was used instead of a number is still unclear.

For a better understanding of this stamp group, the relation between this group and other stamps referring to the same name found in nowadays Northern France is essential. On-going petrographic analysis by Patrick Quinn (UCL) will try to link the stamped fragments presented in this article to different known production sites<sup>15</sup> in the-region in order to determine its provenance.

<sup>15</sup> These samples were kindly provided by Guillaume Lebrun. For more information: G. LEBRUN/G. FRONTEAU, *Diffusion des tuiles dans le nord de la Gaule: le cas de la région d'Orchies (Nord)*. *Rev. Nord-Arch.* 21, 2014, 249–264.

Together with a chronological comparison of the contexts, this hopefully leads to new insights on the interrelationship of these productions.

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