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**MORTARIA IN GRAVES**

*Mortaria* are not found in cemeteries as they did not belong to vessels into which the food for the dead was placed. This view was presented by two Hungarian researchers – L. Barkóczy and E. Bónis<sup>1</sup> – more than half a century ago. Since then the research has progressed and this is the reason why I have decided to follow what kind of changes concerning *mortaria* in graves have occurred in particular regions of the Roman Empire. I have studied the provinces of *Germania*, *Raetia*, *Noricum* and *Pannonia* focusing especially on the territories close to the Roman limes where the *mortaria* occur most frequently (fig. 1). Pannonia is a special case as I have collected *mortaria* from the graves of the whole province. With the exception of the limes area for other provinces I have chosen also the criteria of the size of the burial site – more than 50 graves and the number of *mortaria* – more than five. For this reason I have not taken into account smaller cemeteries with more than five *mortaria* in a grave (e.g. Neuburg an der Donau) or the larger ones with five *mortaria* or less (e.g. Dillingen).

If we are to ask a question why *mortaria* are found in graves, we must study their function in everyday life. I would briefly summarize the issue, which has been appearing occasionally in scientific texts for nearly hundred years. Initially there existed a generally widespread belief that *mortaria* served for grinding grain<sup>2</sup>. However, in 1931 O. Tschumi pointed out the fact that the form with a spout has been preserved until recently in Switzerland, where it was used for the production of butter<sup>3</sup>. Since then various researchers have presented arguments in support of both views. Some tried to differentiate vessels for grinding from those for the production of milk products. As early as in 1944 F. Oswald expressed his view that some *mortaria* have too thin walls to serve for grinding<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand many specimens had worn inside walls apparently caused by grinding. The above-mentioned Hungarian researchers, referring to the antique sources, advocated a more wide-ranging use of *mortaria*, e.g. for the extrusion of juice from fruits or the preparation of medicines<sup>5</sup>. The same view was held by W.

Hilgers who defined four basic types of *mortaria* (fig. 2). He included in them also the so-called flanged bowls (*Kragenschüssel*), which might have been used for dough making<sup>6</sup>. R. C. A. Rottländer considered as *mortaria* in the true sense of the word the thick walled specimens with pebbles or sand on the inside walls while the other ones could have been used also for the making of milk products. The situation is complicated by small bowls with everted rim which show in their inner sides the signs of grinding, although sand is not applied on them and by their profile they differ from standard *mortaria*. These according to R. C. A. Rottländer, served for the extrusion of juice from fruits or salt grinding<sup>7</sup>. D. Baatz connected *mortaria* with a specific Roman kind of food and with their help he supported the romanization of the indigenous people in the provinces north of the Alps<sup>8</sup>.

A new discussion has been recently opened by three British researchers, who analyzed organic residues in *mortaria*. They found in them plant oils and animal fats, which might have been left there after food making, medicines or cosmetics preparations<sup>9</sup>. It seems that according to the present knowledge *mortaria* cannot be defined clearly in terms of their functions. Probably most types had a diverse use, while some could have been used more for grinding, others for the preparation of special foodstuffs or cosmetics. In case *mortaria* were not available other similar vessels could have substituted them functionally. Even in present households various vessels are sometimes used for the preparation of the same meal. Possibly the existence of a spout might have played some role in the use of *mortaria*. Some of these vessels do not have the inner wall covered either by pebbles or sand.

The question which vessels should be considered *mortaria* was raised, when I was working on this paper. There is no unity of opinions in scientific literature, some authors considered also the vessels without sand on the inner walls as *mortaria*, others defined such bowls as flanged bowls, although these have a slightly different profile from *mor-*

<sup>1</sup> BARKÓCZI/BÓNIS 1954, 160.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. PHELPS, The culinary use of *mortaria*. Transact. Lancashire and Cheshire Ant. Soc. 39, 1923, 1–15.

<sup>3</sup> O. TSCHUMI, Bemerkungen zu den sog. Reibschalen. Germania 15, 1931, 179–180.

<sup>4</sup> F. OSWALD, The *Mortaria* of Margidunum and their Development from AD 50 to 400. Ant. Journal 24, 1944, 45.

<sup>5</sup> BARKÓCZI/BÓNIS 1954, 160.

<sup>6</sup> W. HILGERS, Lateinische Gefäßnamen. Bezeichnungen, Funktion und Form römischer Gefäße nach den antiken Schriftquellen. Bonner Jahrb. Beih. 31 (Düsseldorf 1969) 68–70.

<sup>7</sup> R. C. A. RÖTTLÄNDER, Milchsatten oder Reibschüsseln? Kölner Jahrb. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 13, 1972/73, 137–138.

<sup>8</sup> D. BAATZ, Reibschüssel und Romanisierung. RCRF Acta 17/18, 1977, 147–158.

<sup>9</sup> L. J. E. CRAMP/R. P. EVERSLED/H. ECKHARDT, What was a *mortarium* used for? Organic residues and cultural change in Iron Age and Roman Britain. Antiquity 85, 2011, 1340.

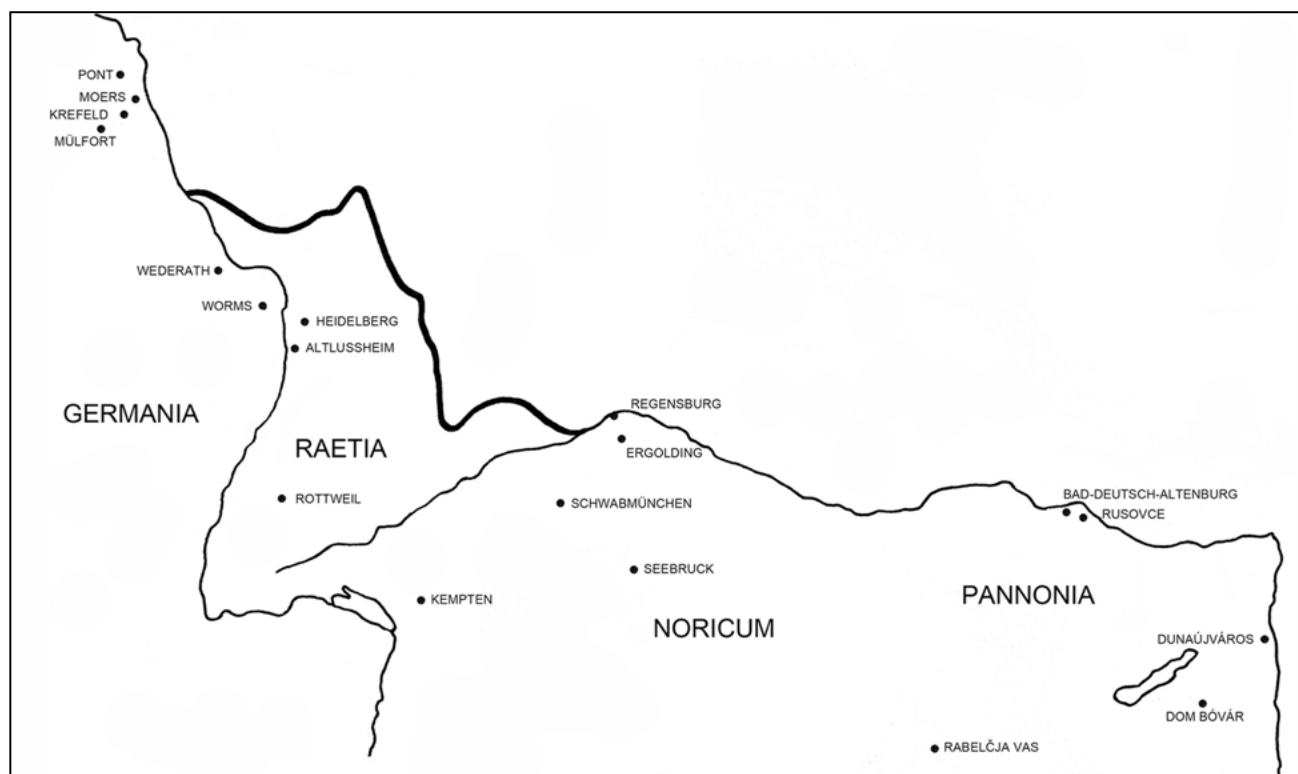


Fig. 1. Map of investigated cemeteries.

*taria*. On the other hand the vessels with a typical profile of a flanged bowl had on their inner walls also sand, therefore functionally they can be considered as *mortaria*. Some types of vessels are found among the glazed types from the former province *Moesia Superior* (fig. 3) which by their profile do not look like *mortaria* – T. Cvjetičanin, however, considers them as *mortaria*. On the other hand she defines other shapes of vessels as “... bowl in a form of *mortarium* and with possible function as one”<sup>10</sup>. To make the case more complex, some authors use the terms *mortarium* and flanged bowl as synonyms of each other. In my opinion as long as any vessels contain sand or pebbles inside they can be considered as *mortaria* in the true sense of the word regardless of their profile. The others could have been *mortaria* from a functional view.

From the map we can read that larger burial sites with a significant number of *mortaria* are clustered in *Germania*, concentrating around Köln in *Germania inferior* and Mainz in *Germania superior*. Important locations can be found also in *Raetia*, farther to the east; however, the number of *mortaria* in graves decreases and a similar situation is in the Lower Danube region where almost no *mortaria* were deposited in graves. However, in settlements (military camps, towns etc.) *mortaria* can be found in great amounts. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century in *Pannonia* and *Moesia* they even belonged to the most widely-distributed shapes within glazed pottery. Glazed specimens were found in *Pannonia* in the burial sites of Deutsch Alten-

burg/*Carnuntum*<sup>11</sup>, Dunaújváros/*Intercisa*<sup>12</sup> and Dombóvár<sup>13</sup>. In this province only the burial site in *Carnuntum* could compare with western locations – 194 graves containing five *mortaria* were found here<sup>14</sup>. In a neighbouring cemetery in Rusovce/*Gerulata* with 248 graves two *mortaria* were found – one of them almost unbroken had a strangely shaped rim (fig. 4)<sup>15</sup>. It is interesting to note that in one of the largest burial sites in *Pannonia* (*Poetovio* with almost 800 graves) no *mortarium* was found, although Iustinianus, a famous producer of these vessels, had worked here. In that region only one grave with *mortarium* is known – Rabelčja Vas<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore we cannot say that the larger the cemetery is the more *mortaria* occur in it. We can rather observe the signs of the opposite tendency: in the two largest burial sites, Krefeld<sup>17</sup> and Wederath,<sup>18</sup> *mortaria* are found in less than 1 % of graves.

<sup>11</sup> ERTEL ET AL., 1999, 184, 187.

<sup>12</sup> F. TEICHNER, Die Gräberfelder von Intercisa 2. Die Altfunde der Museumssammlungen in Berlin, Mainz und Wien. Mus. Vor- u. Frühgesch. Berlin Bestandskat. 11 (Berlin 2012) 210.

<sup>13</sup> M. AIBEKER, Késő római temető Dombóváron. Arch. Ért. 105, 1978, 66; 68.

<sup>14</sup> ERTEL ET AL., 1999.

<sup>15</sup> M. PICHLEROVÁ, Gerulata-Rusovce. Rímske pohrebisko 2. Inst. Arch. Mus. Nat. Slovaci Bratislava Fontes 5 (Bratislava 1981) 309.

<sup>16</sup> M. VOMER-GOJKOVIČ, Grobišče pri Dijaškem domu v Rabelčji Vasi na Ptuj. Ptujski Zbornik 6, 1996, 272.

<sup>17</sup> R. PIRLING ET AL., Das römisch-fränkische Gräberfeld von Krefeld-Gellep 1–7. Germ. Denkm. Völkerwanderungszeit B2; B8; B10; B13; B17–19 (Berlin 1966, 1974, 1979; Stuttgart 1989, 1997, 2000, 2003); R. PIRLING/M. SIEPEN, Die Funde aus den römischen Gräbern von Krefeld-Gellep. Germ. Denkm. Völkerwanderungszeit B20 (Stuttgart 2006).

<sup>18</sup> A. HAFNER, Das keltisch-römische Gräberfeld von Wederath-Belginum 1–3. Trierer Grabungen u. Forsch. 6, 1–3 (Mainz 1971; 1974; 1978); R. CORDIE-HACKENBERG/A. HAFNER, Das keltisch-römische Gräberfeld von

<sup>10</sup> T. CVJETIČANIN, Late Roman Glazed Pottery. Glazed Pottery from Moesia Prima, Dacia Ripensis, Dacia Mediterranea and Dardania (Belgrade 2006) 31.

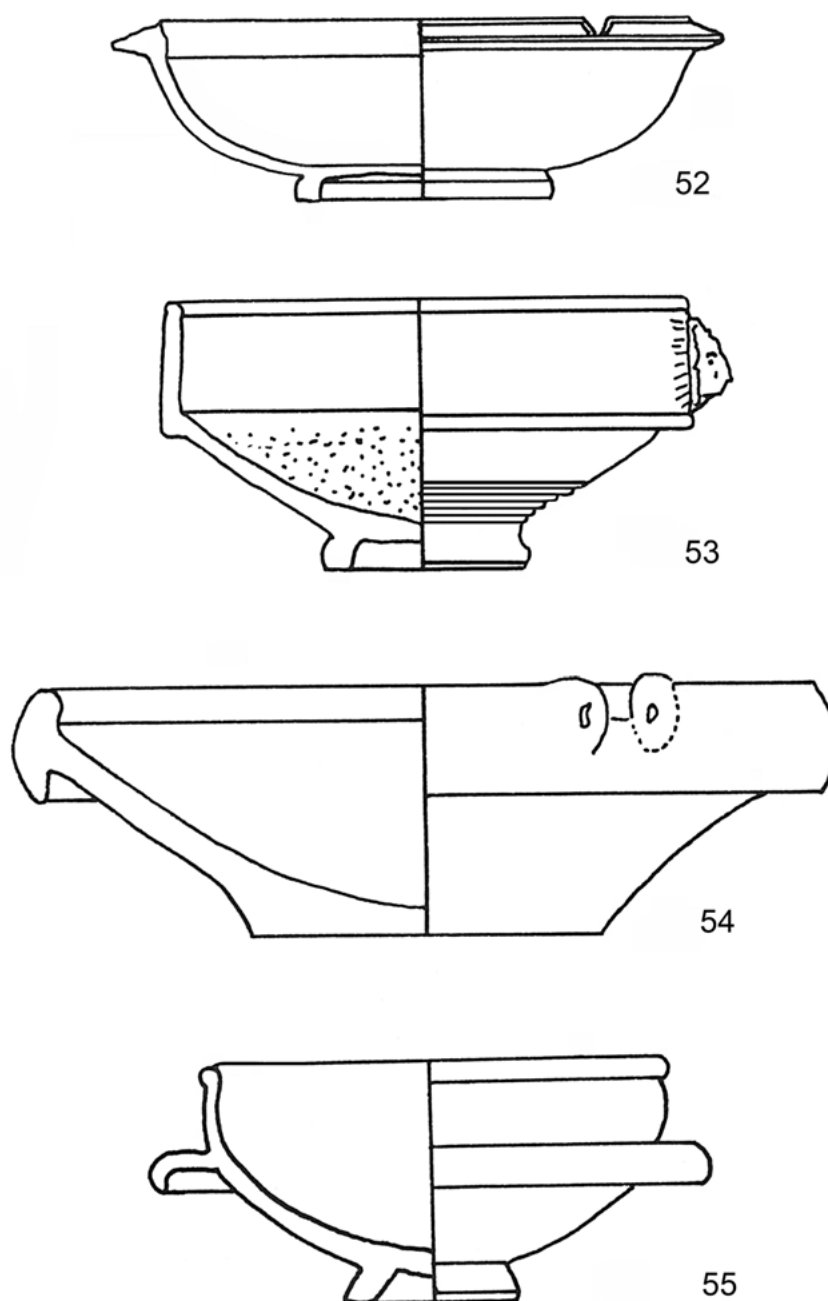


Fig. 2. *Mortaria* types after Hilgers.

On the other hand some relatively small cemeteries show rather great number of *mortaria* – at Ergolding<sup>19</sup> 29,1 %, at Pont<sup>20</sup> 11,6 % (**table 1**).

Most probably this is connected with the fact that these burial sites have not been excavated completely, thus the numbers may be distorted. Heidelberg<sup>21</sup> is the only cemetery

having more than 1000 graves, where a greater number of *mortaria* was found.

A special position is held by the cemetery in Schwabmünchen<sup>22</sup> where *mortaria* were found in 44 graves (6 %), while in some graves even several examples were found. From 112 graves with *mortaria* in as many as 39 graves more than two specimens were found. In one case (grave 190) there were even seven *mortaria* discovered. Greater numbers of *mortaria* can be related to the fact that in many cases 2–3 persons might have been buried in a grave.

Altogether 200 *mortaria* were found at this burial site. In most cases these were not complete vessels, but only their

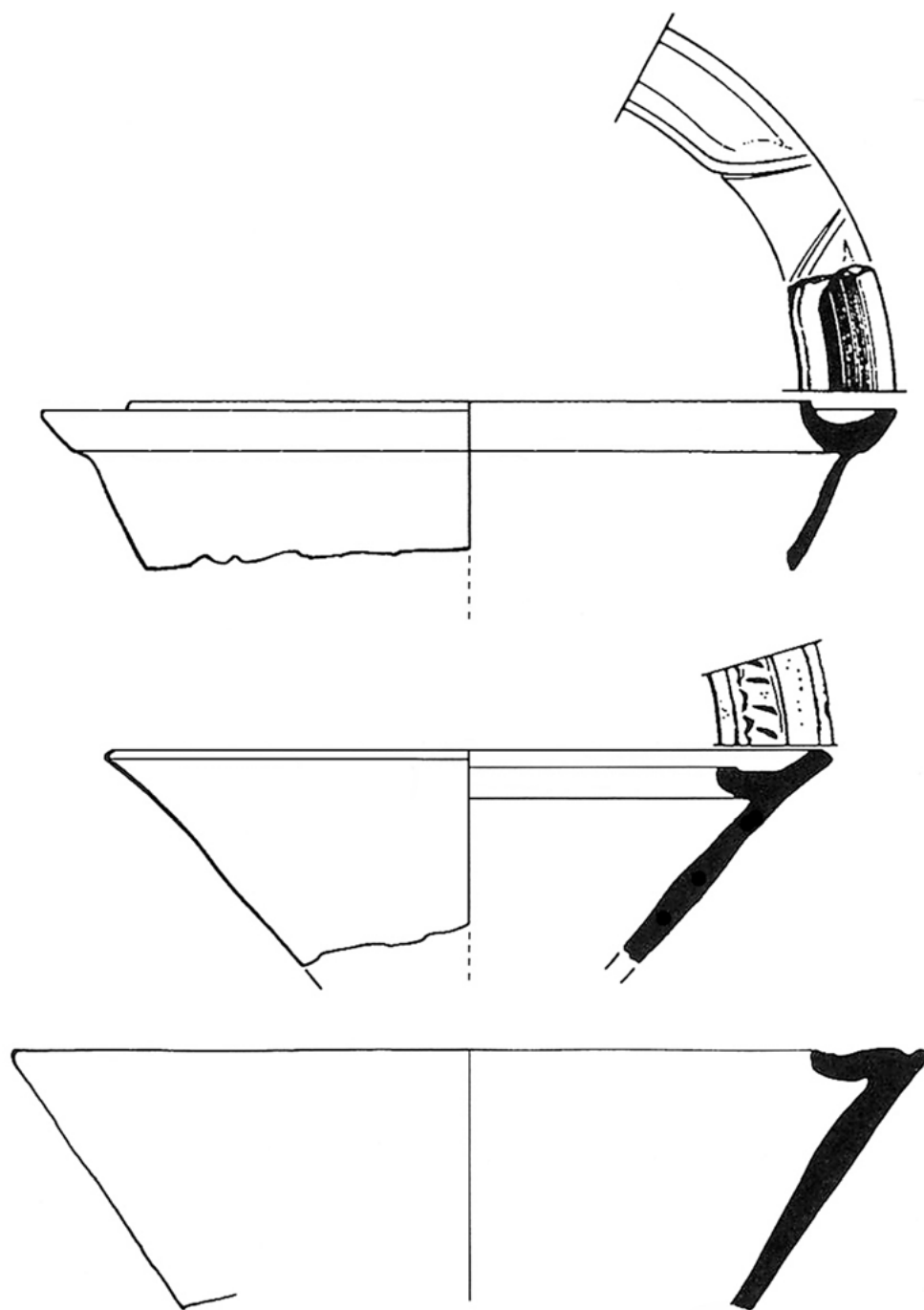
Wederath-Belginum 4–5. Trierer Grabungen u. Forsch. 6,4–5 (Mainz 1991; 1997).

<sup>19</sup> M. STRUCK, Römische Grabfunde und Siedlungen im Isartal bei Ergolding, Landkreis Landshut. Materialh. Bayer. Vorgesch. A71 (Kallmünz 1995).

<sup>20</sup> H. CÜPPERS, Zwei kaiserzeitliche Brandgräberfelder im Kreise Geldern. Bonner Jahrb. 162, 1962, 295 ff.

<sup>21</sup> A. HENSEN, Das römische Brand- und Körpergräberfeld von Heidelberg 1. Forsch. u. Ber. Vor- u. Frühgesch. Baden-Württemberg 108 (Stuttgart 2009).

<sup>22</sup> D. EBNER, Das römische Gräberfeld von Schwabmünchen, Landkreis Augsburg. Materialh. Bayer. Vorgesch. A73 (Kallmünz 1997).



**Fig. 3.** Glazed *mortaria* from *Moesia Superior* (after Cvjetičanin).

fragments. Twice a *mortarium* was used as an urn and in seven graves an urn was covered by a *mortarium* (fig. 5); these are also unique phenomena. It seems that Schwabmünchen/*Rapis*, an important pottery center, besides terra sigillata specialized also for *mortaria* production. At this cemetery also terra sigillata *mortaria* were found. Such vessels were found also in the cemeteries at Deutsch Altenburg, Krefeld, Regensburg<sup>23</sup> and Worms<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> S. v. SCHNURBEIN, Das römische Gräberfeld von Regensburg. Materialh. Bayer. Vorgesch. A31 (Kallmünz 1977).

<sup>24</sup> M. GRÜNEWALD, Der römische Nordfriedhof in Worms. Funde von der Mainzer Straße (Worms 1990).

*Mortaria* were not limited to any gender as they were found in the graves of men and women, and children as well, while the graves of women prevailed slightly in numbers. However, the numbers are small due to the problem of gender identification in the case of cremation graves. Anthropological analyses are missing in older discoveries. Similarly it cannot be confirmed that *mortaria* were only found in more richly furnished graves—although there were such cases, they were also found in graves otherwise poor in finds. As I mentioned above only rarely unbroken vessels were found and in most cases we speak about the *pars pro toto* phenomenon. Intact graves with the finds of small fragments of *mortaria*

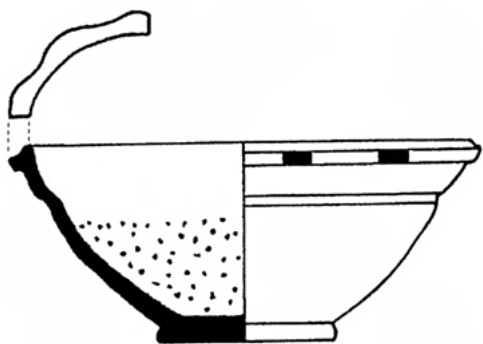


Fig. 4. Mortarium from Rusovce/Gerulata.

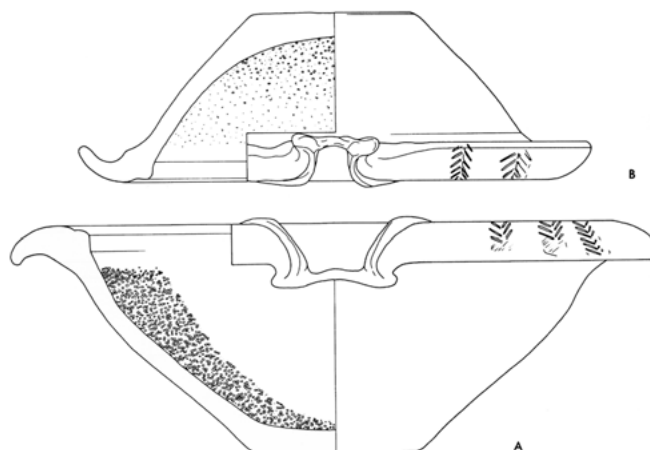


Fig. 5. Schwabmünchen, grave 23 (after Ebner).

	Number of graves	Graves with mortaria	%	Men	Women	Children
Pont	121	14	11,6	—	—	—
Moers <sup>25</sup>	107	13	12,1	4	3	1
Krefeld	6361	28	0,4	—	—	—
Mülfort <sup>26</sup>	563	33	5,9	2	1	1
Wederath	2472	8	0,3	—	—	1
Worms	96	7	7,3	1	1	1
Heidelberg	1388	168	12,1	26	32	11
Altlußheim <sup>27</sup>	146	8	5,5	1	4	—
Rottweil <sup>28</sup>	498	11	2,2	2	6	1
Kempten <sup>29</sup>	411	5	1,2	—	1	—
Schwabmünchen	251	112	44,6	32	44	5
Ergolding	79	23	29,1	3	10	1
Regensburg	1130	26	2,3	—	—	—
Seebruck <sup>30</sup>	258	13	5	1	2	—
Deutsch Altenburg	194	5	2,6	—	2	—

Table 1. Investigated cemeteries.

give evidence of this. In Heidelberg even in two cases the sherds of the same vessel were found in two graves. As far as dating is concerned most finds come from the period from 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century. Several pieces can be dated back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and glazed specimens, found in *Pannonia*, date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

It is hard to answer clearly the question why *mortaria* are found in graves. The food for the dead might have been stored in them, however, in the case of fragments (*pars pro toto*) this opinion can be dismissed. It is sure that they can be found in greater amounts only at the burial sites in Germania and Raetia, the fact we cannot explain yet.

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<sup>25</sup> G. RASBACH, Römerzeitliche Gräber aus Moers-Asberg, Kr. Wesel. Funde Asciburgium 12 (Duisburg 1997).

<sup>26</sup> CHR. ERKELENZ, Die römischen Nekropolen des Vicus Mönchengladbach Rheydt-Mülfort. Kölner Stud. Arch. Röm. Provinzen 11 (Rahden 2012).

<sup>27</sup> G. DREIBUSCH, Das römische Gräberfeld von Altlußheim-Hubwald (Rhein-Neckar-Kreis). Materialh. Arch. Baden-Württemberg 24 (Stuttgart 1994).

<sup>28</sup> R. FECHER/E. BURGER-HEINRICH, Arae Flaviae VII: Die römischen Gräberfelder von Rottweil und das römische Gräberfeld »Kapellenösch«, die anthropologischen Befunde. Forsch. u. Ber. Vor- u. Frühgesch. Bden-Württemberg 115 (Stuttgart 2010).

<sup>29</sup> M. MACKENSEN, Das römische Gräberfeld auf der Keckwiese in Kempten. Cambodunumforschungen 4/Materialh. Bayer. Vorgesch. A34 (Kallmünz 1978).

<sup>30</sup> P. FASOLD, Das römisch-norische Gräberfeld von Seebruck-Bedaum. Materialh. Bayer. Vorgesch. A64 (Kallmünz 1993).

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