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## THE IMPLICATIONS OF INDIRECT EVIDENCE REGARDING THE MILITARY POTTERY PRODUCTION IN BUCIUMI (*DACIA POROLISSENSIS*) AND THE QUESTION OF ‘LEGIONARY WARE’

### Introduction

The long-debated issue of supply is crucial for our understanding of the way in which the Roman army functioned as well as for the everyday life of the troops. Supply can be understood as the conjunction of local production and the import of various goods. The problem of military pottery production in Dacia has so far been largely neglected by researchers in Roman archaeology. Indeed, clear connections between production sites associated with military bases, i.e. pottery workshops situated in the *vicus*, and the forts they were meant to supply, are yet to be established. Due to this general shortcoming we are forced to rely to a great extent on ‘indirect evidence’ for the assessment of local military pottery production. The notion of indirect evidence in this case refers mainly to particular categories of the material culture, such as implements and tools used in pottery production, but also wasters and other discarded by-products linked to the process of manufacture. Evidence derived from the analysis of certain traits and patterns in the pottery assemblages which might indicate the parameters of local production are equally significant. The underlying principle behind this approach is based on the assumption that the overwhelming majority of the pottery assemblages were produced in the immediate vicinity of the fort, i.e. in the *vicus*.

The purpose of the paper is to evaluate the pottery production linked with the auxiliary fort of Buciumi in *Dacia Porolissensis*. The question of local pottery production can be addressed only in conjectural terms, as there is no clear archaeological data referring to pottery workshops in connection with the fort, due to the lack of research in the area of the *vicus* so far. The main source for this investigation consists in the pottery assemblages discovered chiefly in the barracks of the fort. The ultimate aim of this investigation is to raise certain questions concerning the character of military pottery production in this region of the Dacian limes, as part of the general phenomenon observed in most of the European frontier provinces and most often discussed under the term ‘legionary ware’.

### The site

The auxiliary fort of Buciumi is situated on the North-Western frontier line of *Dacia Porolissensis* and was extensively researched between 1963 and 1976, although only the results of the first period of campaigns were published (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The fort, established shortly after the second Dacian war in 106 AD had three main construction phases and was the garrison of *cohors II Nervia Brittonum* also accommodating, at times, detachments from other units. The vast and extremely diverse archaeological material resulted from the last few research campaigns in the fort (i.e. between 1971 and 1976) has benefited from a somewhat enhanced registration system of the finds, unlike the material from the monograph catalogue, the majority of the finds can be associated with some kind of spatial information.<sup>2</sup> Four barracks from the *praetentura* were completely excavated, the present research focusing on the ceramic assemblages discovered in barracks B1 and B2, hitherto unpublished (fig. 2).

### The evidence

As mentioned above, the old excavation techniques employed at Buciumi did not produce high resolution contextual data, indeed in most cases the finds can only be loosely placed within the structures and their various phases. Furthermore, because of the fact that the material was not collected in correlation with the stratigraphic sequences observed, the residual and re-deposited material characteristic to barracks due to the frequent refurbishment of the floors, cannot be clearly isolated. The recently undertaken analysis of the pottery finds, has however the potential of enhancing our knowledge regarding the garrison life in this fort. The preliminary character of the results must be repeatedly emphasized due to the limited contextual data available and the lack of archaeometric analysis.

The number of artefacts directly linked with the production process appears to be insignificant, in fact a single *poinçon* used most likely for decorating stamped pottery

<sup>1</sup> CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972; see also GUDEA 1997.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the pottery see D. PETRUȚ, *Habitat și viață cotidiană în castrul auxiliar de la Buciumi (jud. Sălaj) în lumina cercetărilor arheologice* [Aspects of everyday life in the Roman auxiliary fort from Buciumi (Sălaj County) based on the archaeological investigations] (unpublished PhD thesis Cluj-Napoca 2013); PETRUȚ 2014.

was identified.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly no pottery wasters were recorded, which is understandable considering that we are dealing with a consumption site. There are virtually no significant differences between the assemblages pertaining to the two aforementioned barracks, therefore they will be discussed together. The tableware consists of bowls, plates, platters, beakers and cups, while the cookware is composed of cooking pots (mainly so-called *Militärkochtöpfe*),<sup>4</sup> carinated bowls and cooking platters. The proportion of handmade vessels is fairly low, the category consists of cooking pots and platters partly of Norico-Pannonian tradition while some of it (mainly the platters) imitating Roman wheel-thrown forms.<sup>5</sup> A closer look at the tableware reveals potential implications concerning the issue of production, a number of aspects indicating that the pottery assemblage from the fort of Buciumi is consistent with the category termed legionary ware. Although the validity of this category was questioned on some occasions since its conception by E. Ettlinger in her 1951 study on the Vindonissa *Schutthügel* material, it still can account for the differences which set apart the military pottery production from the civilian one in certain periods and regions.<sup>6</sup> Conventionally legionary ware is defined as a heterogeneous group of pottery produced around forts and fortresses of the Rhine and Danube limes as well as Britain, starting from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards, manufactured by potters associated with the military as private contractors, possibly *immunes*.<sup>7</sup> The hallmarks of legionary ware are: a marked preference for red-slip ware drawing on terra sigillata forms (often late Italian sigillata), barbotine and stamped decoration, imitation of metal (most often bronze) and glass vessels and decoration techniques, moulded vessels, high percent of cultic vessels and lamps.<sup>8</sup>

All of the aforementioned indicators can be enumerated in the case of the Buciumi assemblages, although there are evident discrepancies regarding the proportions in which these categories can be reported. This situation is not unusual and similar discrepancies have been noted on a number of sites with legionary ware, indeed in most cases not all criteria are met.<sup>9</sup> First of all it needs to be mentioned that a well-defined group within the tableware fits the definition and description originally given by C. M. Wells to the category of 'terra sigillata imitations'.<sup>10</sup> The intention to emulate the imported terra sigillata is evident from the fabrics, the slip and the choice of

vessel shapes. Although there are no instances of moulded decoration, in some cases simple cut-glass ornamentation was employed to substitute the more sophisticated relief ornaments (**fig. 3,4; 4,15**), a situation reported elsewhere too.<sup>11</sup> Whether this group was indeed produced locally, imported from a production centre within the province, or from one of the neighbouring provinces (Pannonia, Moesia) will be determined by archaeometric analysis at a later stage. Further features reminiscent of glass production technology can be identified by examining the category of cups which draws on shapes used for glass vessels (**fig. 3,11–12**).<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that the number of imported *terra sigillata* is relatively low, amounting to only 52 fragments in total.<sup>13</sup> Taking a general look at the tableware employed for serving food, it is striking that a large proportion of the bowls and the plates show some degree of affinity with different forms of the terra sigillata types. Especially striking is the case of the bowls inspired by the types Dragendorff 44 and 37, the proportion of the two categories adding up to more than half of the bowls registered (**fig. 5**). In similar fashion, the plates derived from the types Curle 15 and Dragendorff 36 make up a considerable percentage of the this category of tableware (**fig. 6**). A comparable composition of the tableware was noted in the case of an assemblage discovered at the legionary base from *Apulum* in *Dacia Superior*.<sup>14</sup> In addition a group of small-sized bowls might point to forms employed by 1<sup>st</sup> century Italian sigillata manufacturers, namely Conspectus 43 (**fig. 3,13**) and possibly other types characteristic for the same period e.g. Ritterling 8 (**fig. 3,9–10**). Pottery with stamped and roulette decoration, although not present in such high numbers as in the nearby large auxiliary base from *Porolissum*, can also be found among the tableware and occasionally the cookware from Buciumi<sup>15</sup> as is lead-glazed ware represented by a small number of fragments (**fig. 3,3**).<sup>16</sup>

The case of the bronze vessel imitations is equally significant. A number of fragments coming from ceramic imitations of saucepans (*Kasserolen*) were published in the monographic study (**fig. 3,1–2**).<sup>17</sup> Similar finds have been reported from various sites linked with the military throughout Dacia, including a reconstructed vessel discovered at *Apulum*, their local production being asserted based on the discovery of handle-moulds.<sup>18</sup> Based on iconographical evidence it was claimed that saucepans were part of the marching equipment of soldiers on campaign.<sup>19</sup> The prototypes of this type of saucepan were made from both bronze and silver,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>3</sup> CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972, 53 Pl. 39.

<sup>4</sup> See MEYER-FREULER 2013, 364.

<sup>5</sup> CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972, 53–54; see also M. NEGRU, *The Native Pottery of Roman Dacia*. BAR Internat. Ser. 1097 (Oxford 2003) 9; 34.

<sup>6</sup> See ETTLINGER 1951, 105. For a critical standpoint on the issue see GREENE 1977, 126; SWAN 2004, 260.

<sup>7</sup> D. J. BREEZE, *The fort at Bearsden and the supply of Pottery to the Roman army*. In: J. Dore/K. Greene (eds.), *Roman Pottery Studies in Britain and Beyond*. BAR Suppl. Ser. 30 (Oxford 1977) 136–137; SWAN 2004, 278; MEYER-FREULER 2013, 373.

<sup>8</sup> See ETTLINGER 1951, 108–110; V. GASSNER/S. JILEK, *Zum Problem der 'Legionsware' und ihrer Verbreitung von Germanien bis Moesien*. In: W. Groeneman-van Waateringe et al. (ed.), *Proceedings of the 18<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Kerkrade, The Netherlands 1995* (Oxford 1997) 303; SWAN 2004, 260–261.

<sup>9</sup> MEYER-FREULER 2013, 367.

<sup>10</sup> C. M. WELLS, 'Imitations' and the spread of sigillata manufacture. In: E. Ettlinger et al., *Conspectus formarum terrae sigillatae Italico modo confectae*. Mat. Röm.-Germ. Keramik 10 (Bonn 1990) 25; see also Gw. MONTEIL, *Samian and consumer choice in Roman London*. In: B.

Croxford et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, University of Leicester* (Oxford 2004) 1–15.

<sup>11</sup> See GREENE 1977, 120 Fig. 8,3; SWAN 2004, 264 Fig. 1,7.

<sup>12</sup> See GREENE 1977, 116 Fig. 8,1.

<sup>13</sup> See D. ISAC, *Terra sigillata din castrul roman de la Buciumi*. Acta Mus. Porolissensis 1, 1977, 155–72. (partially published); see also PETRUT 2014.

<sup>14</sup> CIAUȘESCU 2006, 146.

<sup>15</sup> CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972, 40–41 Pl. 33–36.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 40 Pl. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 52 Pl. 37.

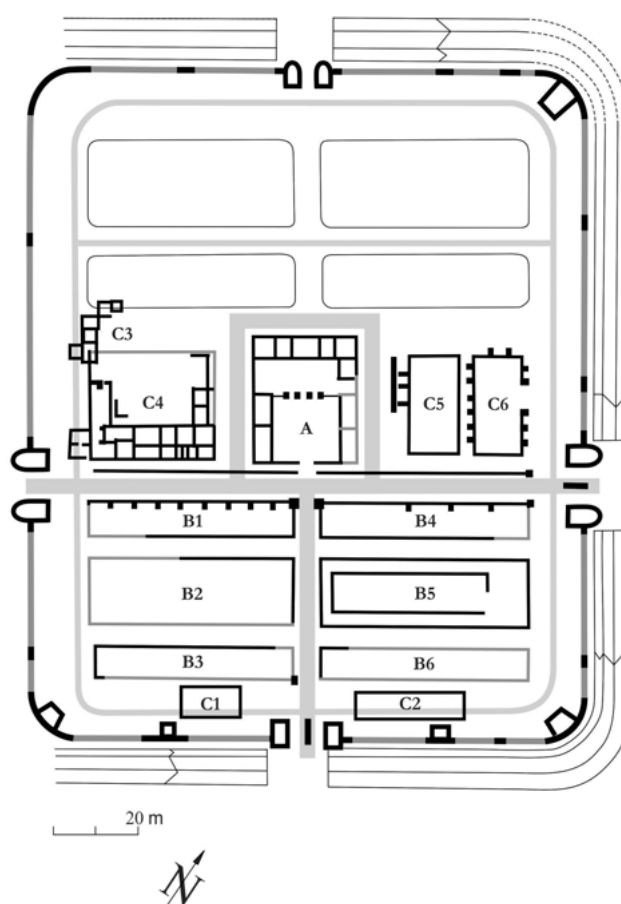
<sup>18</sup> V. RUSU, *Griffe keramische paterae aus dem Römischen Dakien*. Acta Mus. Napocensis 34/1, 1997, 367; 371 Taf. 4; 354–355 Nr. 48 Taf. 8,1–2.

<sup>19</sup> See M. JUNKELMANN, *Panis militaris: die Ernährung des römischen Soldaten oder der Grundstoff der Macht* (Mainz 1997) 88–89 Abb. 37.

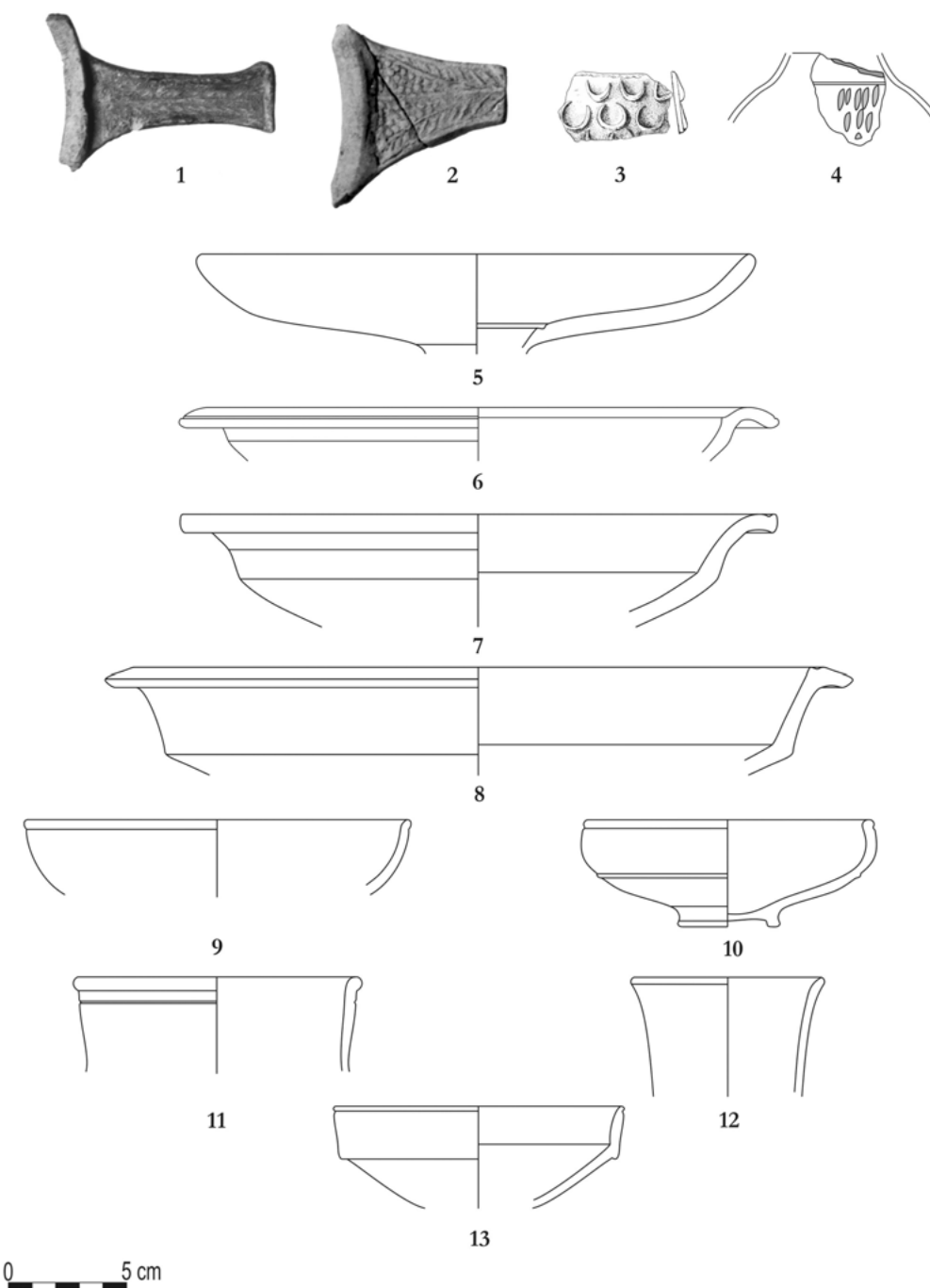
<sup>20</sup> PETROVSKY 1993, 85–88.



**Fig. 1.** The auxiliary fort from Buciumi within the province of Dacia.



**Fig. 2.** Plan of the fort (based on GUDEA 1997).



**Fig. 3.** Tableware categories from Buciumi assigned to legionary ware (photos of saucepan handles [1–2] after CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972 Pl. 37,3.5; drawing of the glazed ware fragment after CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972 Pl. 32,7).

while their most likely functionality was that of wine-mixing recipient.<sup>21</sup> In addition to this, a hemispherical basin with loop handles (*Waschbecken*) could be identified,<sup>22</sup> clearly drawing on bronze prototypes conventionally linked with bathing activities, probably hand-washing (fig. 4,16).<sup>23</sup> This type of basin occurs on a number of military sites across the

European sectors of the limes, on the Danube, the Rhine and Britain.<sup>24</sup> There is some degree of morphological variation however, in some cases the handles are attached to the vessel body, while in others they are projecting away from the vessel in similar fashion as their bronze prototypes.<sup>25</sup> Most of the occurrences can be linked with the presence of either the main body or detachments of the *legio XI Claudia* especially

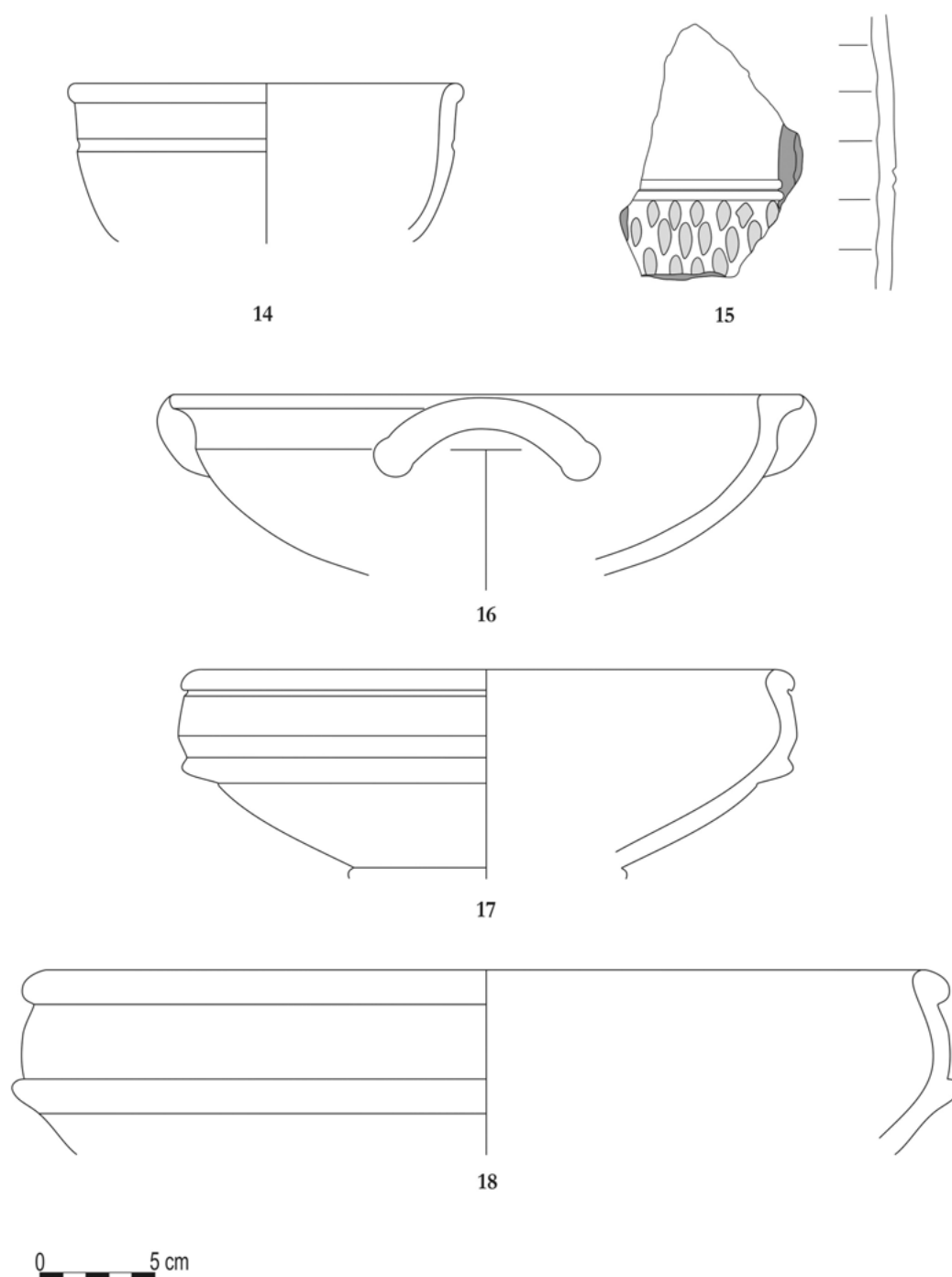
<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.* 34–35.

<sup>22</sup> The fabric is semi fine, with hardly any temper incorporated (moderate mica and occasional calcite), light brick-red in colour, unslipped. Diameter: 270 mm, height (partially kept) 93 mm, wall thickness: 9 mm.

<sup>23</sup> MEYER-FREULER 2013, 365.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.* 368 Fig. 315.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.* 365 Fig. 314,1.



**Fig. 4.** Tableware and utilitarian ware categories from Buciumi assigned to legionary ware.

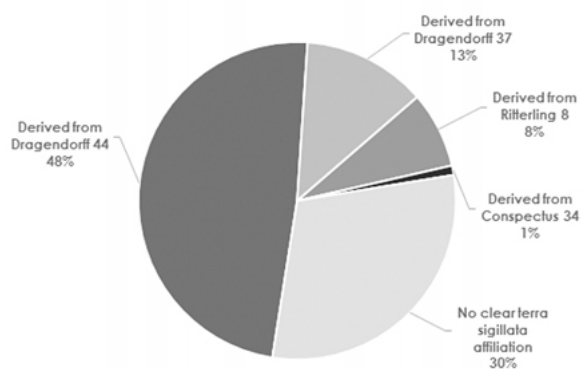
at *Vindonissa* as well as the Middle and Lower Danube.<sup>26</sup> Outside this area, the vessel also emerged at the legionary base from Nijmegen and a series of mainly legionary sites from Britain beginning with the period of Hadrian's rule.<sup>27</sup> According to our current knowledge a relation between the

fort at Buciumi and the abovementioned legion cannot be asserted, the presence of the basin can only be explained as a typical component of legionary ware.

The observations outlined above were mainly based on the analysis of the tableware and to a limited extent on that of certain categories of utilitarian ware (i.e. the 'washing basin'). More recent approaches to the issue of legionary ware have stressed the relevancy of cookwares to this problem, especially the so-called '*Militärkochtöpfe*' which presumably rely on a Mediterranean tradition and are typical for the mil-

<sup>26</sup> The list of sites includes: Rottweil (Kastell I), Mirebau, Brigetio (Pan-  
nonia) and Dražna de Sus (Moesia Inferior), see MEYER-FREULER 2013,  
365–366 Fig. 314; 374 Fig. 318.

<sup>27</sup> See J. K. HAALBOS, *Italische Töpfer in Nijmegen (Niederlande)?* RCRF  
Acta 31/32, 1992, 369–370 Abb. 2 (Nijmegen); SWAN 2004, 269, Fig.  
3,45 (York); 266 Fig. 2,36; 264 Fig. 1,9 (Holt); 266 Fig. 2,36 (Caerleon);  
277 Fig. 7,100 (London).

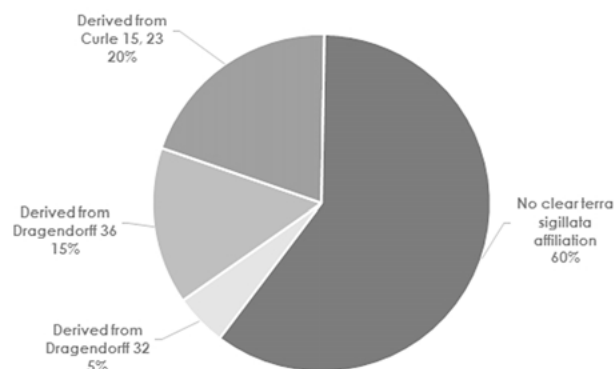


**Fig. 5.** Proportion of bowls derived from *terra sigillata* types.

itary production starting with the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>28</sup> Because cooking pots make up a considerable proportion of Roman pottery assemblages from civilian and military sites alike in Dacia, at this stage of research the unequivocal and large scale distinction between the two types would be highly conjectural. A similar problem arises in the case of the lamps and cultic vessels, as their occurrence on civilian sites suggests similar patterns of supply and use.<sup>29</sup> Among the cultic vessels, only the case of the so-called face-pots can be linked to a military predilection, although this category is not usually listed among the legionary wares.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusions

Two main aspects should be discussed here. First of all the possibility of viewing legionary ware in terms of functionality and manner of use should be considered. The lifestyle, the communal military identity and the social environment of the Roman military base certainly determined to a great extent the choice of material culture and its manner of use. Introducing these aspects may help better understand legionary ware. The popularity of the bowls based on the Dragendorff 44, generally large vessels with a wide opening, may have been influenced by the practice of communal eating in the contubernia of the barracks. Furthermore, the imitation of bronze vessels linked with washing and bathing activities such as the 'washing basin' (*Waschbecken*) and the hand-washing set, the so-called '*Kanne und Griffschale*' may be indeed related with the pronounced propensity for hygiene of the Roman army.



**Fig. 6.** Proportion of plates and platters derived from *terra sigillata* types.

A second issue worth mentioning concerns the basic question whether indeed we are dealing with legionary ware notwithstanding the marked similarities with assemblages from civilian environments in Dacia. A satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon is impossible to put forward at this stage without a thorough comparative analysis of the military and civilian pottery production. The situation noted at *Apulum* could be indicative however of a more widespread tendency potentially applicable at provincial level.<sup>31</sup> As shown in the case of the abovementioned legionary fortress, the production was established immediately after the foundation of the base and was aimed mainly towards the military employing probably civilian potters who had accompanied the legion.<sup>32</sup> Not least because of the presumably low competitiveness of the pre-existing local ceramic traditions, the military pottery manufacture rapidly spread into the civilian environment. Similarly the potters who engaged in this production in Buciumi probably followed the *cohors II Nervia Brittonum* during its transfer from Pannonia as indicated by the similarities with the Norico-Pannonian production, a feature which was noted at *Apulum* as well.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> MEYER-FREULER 2013, 368.

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.* 367.

<sup>30</sup> See CHIRILĂ ET AL. 1972, 41–42 Pl. 51–55.

<sup>31</sup> See CIAUȘESCU 2006, 144–147.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 144

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 147.

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