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POPPY BEAKERS IN ALSACE

Some points of interest in ceramics research in eastern and north-central France

The dichotomy between fine wares of Gaulish origin and contemporary fine wares from Germany has always seemed important for the study of both imported pottery in Britain and of the influences and origins of fine wares made in Britain. Among this writer's early experiences with Roman-period ceramics was the study of the contents of a large pit or well excavated in the 1976 (SYMONDS ET AL. 1980 fig. 18,12; 22,7) at Towcester, eight miles southwest of Northampton. This large late 2nd century assemblage contained a complete dinner service of central Gaulish sigillata, including six Dr. 31 dishes, six Dr. 33 cups, three large platters, and a Dr. 37 bowl, as well as a series of flagons and cooking pots. It also contained two beakers from central Gaul and the Rhineland, the first being a pedestal beaker with a hunt scene executed in barbotine decoration under the fine metallic coating, and the other was a plain shouldered beaker with three bands of fine rouletting encircling the body. At the time, back in 1976, it was clear that these beakers types came from Gaul and Germany, but there was some lack of clarity about exactly which types came from where, when exactly they began to be widely distributed and what their relationship might be with the production of other fine wares, notably samian ware (see SYMONDS 1992 frontispiece and chapter 1).

This dichotomy between Gaul and Germany as the sources both of imported fine wares and in turn as the inspiration of Romano-British potters obviously began well before the 2nd century AD, the main period of Rhenish-type metallic colour-coated wares. Interest in the 1st century roots of this phenomenon has recently been stimulated by the study of an assemblage of pottery found at a site excavated by INRAP in 2005 at Eckbolsheim, to the west of Strasbourg (fig. 1).

The site at Eckbolsheim lies 7.5 km to the west of the centre of Strasbourg, and the site consisted of an area (fig. 2) with few well-defined structures apart from an early drain that bisects the site, and a series of cellars – it is likely that at some point after the Roman period the site was levelled, and most of the upper features have disappeared, or appear as the bottoms of postholes. But there were two cellars, one of which contained a fair amount of wall plaster, but almost no pottery, and the other of which contained a quite large pottery assemblage, but almost nothing else, except a complete set of weighing scales.

About 80% of the pottery found at the site was found in the second of these two cellars, feature 1046. Figures 3 and 4 show what the cellar looked like after emptying, with a

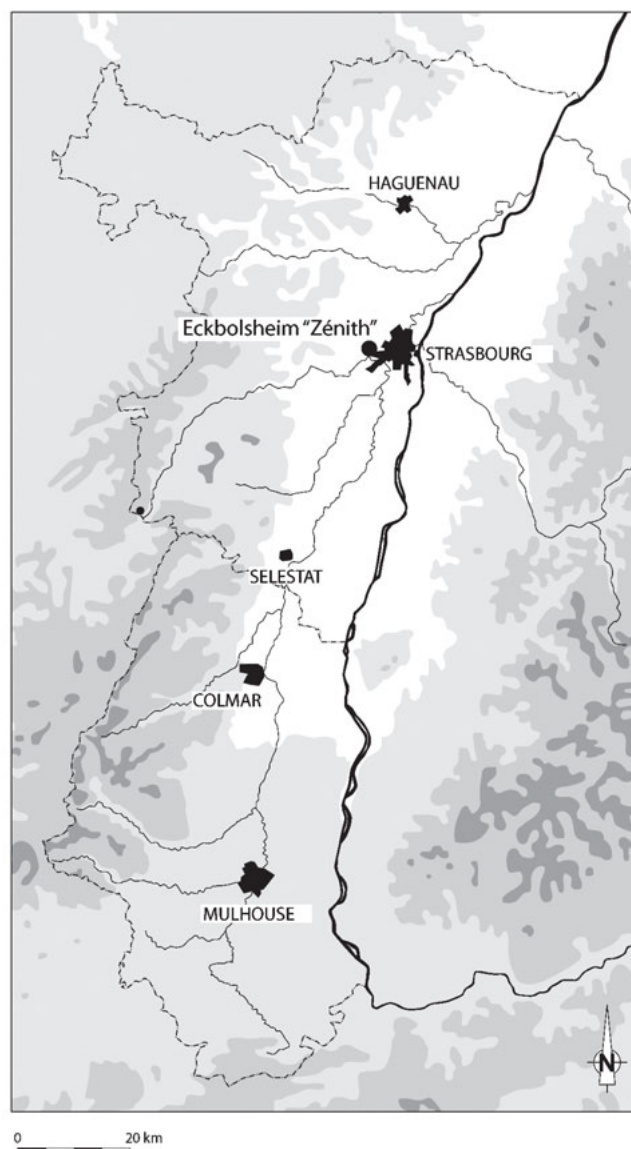


Fig. 1. Map of Alsace showing the location of Eckbolsheim.

nice set of steps descending down to the floor, and figure 5 shows a plan of the cellar.

The contents of this cellar are dated exclusively by the pottery: there were a few small finds, but none dateable more closely than 1st century, and no coins. The date range of the pottery from the site as a whole is shown in figure 6, and

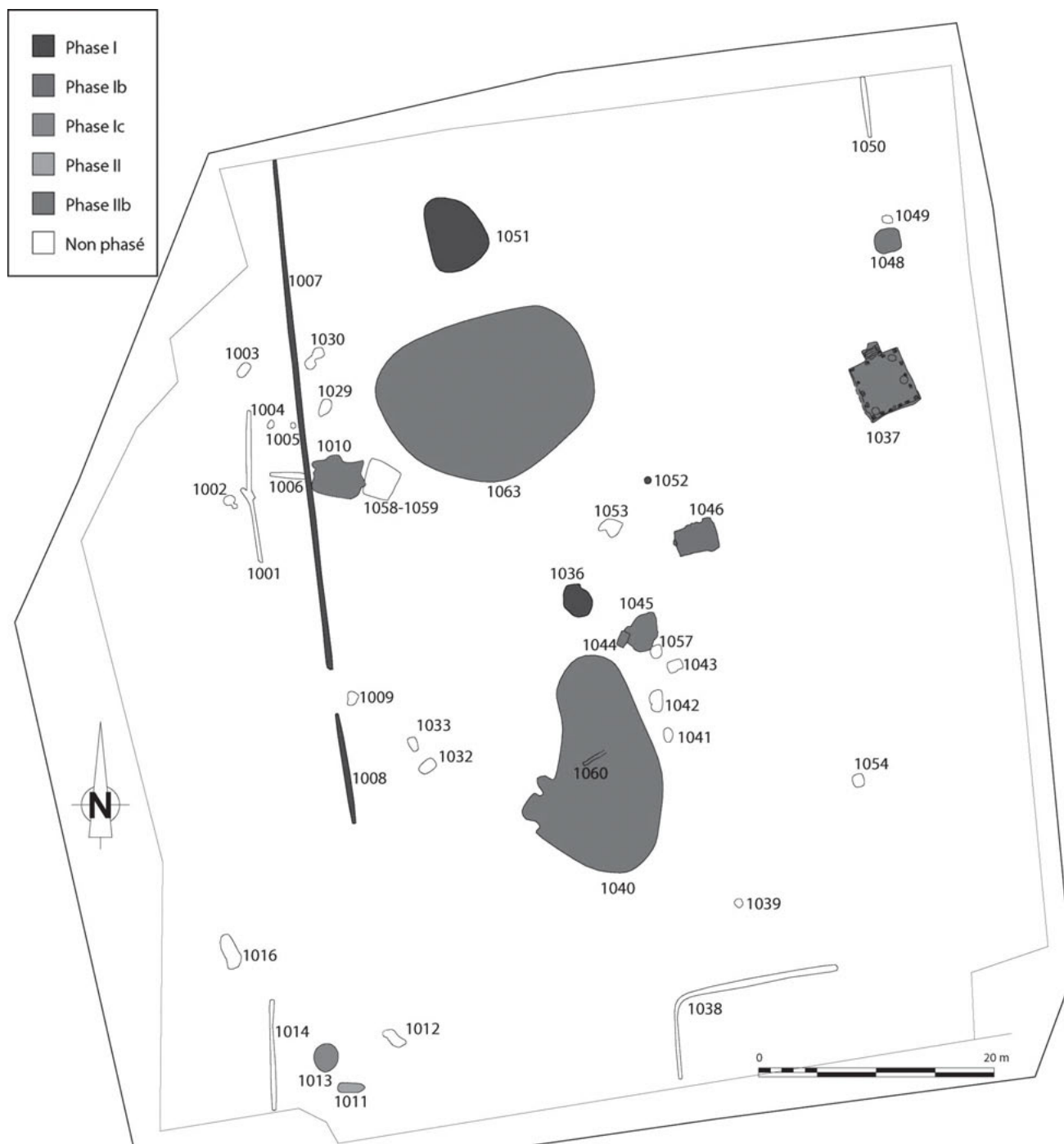


Fig. 2. Plan of the site at Eckbolsheim, with feature 1046 near the centre.

the cellar itself is dated as mid 1st century, probably 45 to 55 AD. The site had the following distribution of fabric types shown in **figure 7**.

The dating evidence rests on a few items in the assemblage, notably the three South Gaulish stamps shown in **figure 8**, respectively by Passienus, Modestus and Bassus i or ii.

There are other obviously contemporary items, such as the decorated forms in **figures 9** and **10** – the Déchelette 67 may have been decorated on the lower body, but there is not enough to be sure.

There are also some imported and local fine wares – note the barbotine ring decoration on one of the two sherds re-

covered of lead-glazed ware from central Gaul (**fig. 11**). That is perhaps the one complicated element in the geography of fine black wares – see the discussion of lead-glazed wares towards the end of this paper. Also worth noting is the presence of an early Mayen ware mortarium, which serves to underline the fact that not only were some Mayen types made and distributed as early as the mid-1st century, but also some examples went southwards, and not only west or north.

Figure 12 illustrates the beginning of what really stands out in this assemblage. Beakers with barbotine ring decoration, and beakers with barbotine dot decoration, probably decorated using a stencil. In fact there was a considerable



Fig. 3. Photo of feature 1046.



Fig. 4. Photo of feature 1046, showing the steps leading into the cellar.

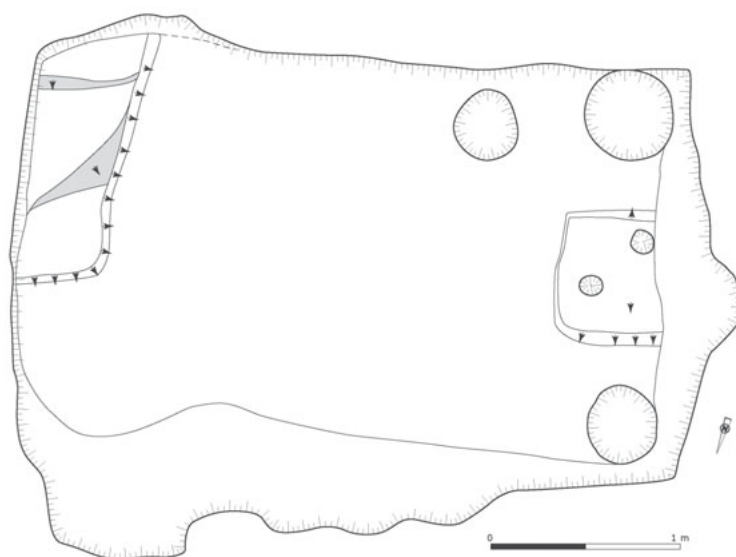


Fig. 5. Plan of feature 1046.

range of fine grey and black wares, a higher overall percentage than at any site in Gaul yet far studied by this writer. They come with a variety of decorative types (fig. 12 & 13), including rouletting, wavy line decoration (perhaps better described as combed wavy line decoration), and (fig. 14) white painted decoration, which has little in common with the white painted decoration also found on some colour-coated or metallic wares. There are also plain bowl and dish forms, some of which are somewhat *terra nigra*-like, but there was no sign of a stamp on any of them. These have quite different from the *terra nigra* types made in Champagne, in the Vesle valley (cf. CHOSSENOT/CHOSSENOT 1987 and DERU 1996 for examples).

Figure 15 shows the poppyhead beakers, with their barbotine dot decoration. While there is some variety in the rim shapes and barbotine styles, there can be little doubt that these have a lot in common with examples found in southern Britain. For the most part these beakers are decorated with dots probably formed through a stencil – here it is done at an angle, while other examples can be more verti-

cally-oriented, or, there are examples of dots arranged in circles or diamond shapes.

Figure 16 shows some other forms in the same fabric type, including plain beakers, bowls and dishes. Again, there are no stamps, although the small cup does bear a resemblance to *Camulodunum* form 56 (HAWKES/HULL 1947), of which some stamped examples found at Colchester are probably Vesle Valley products. One might also suggest that the flanged bowls here are black versions of Ritterling form 12 in *sigillata*, but that is an interpretation probably not worth pushing too far, since there are no spouts, and while there are bowls that are vaguely Dr 37-like in shape, they have not yet evolved into the more closely analogous London-ware versions with incised decoration (cf. MARSH 1978).

Figure 17 shows that there are also decorated coarse wares, with hairpin decoration, with barbotine rings and with rustication. All of these have counterparts here in southern Britain.

Figure 18 illustrates the coarse grey wares. As would be the case in a contemporary British assemblage, coarse grey

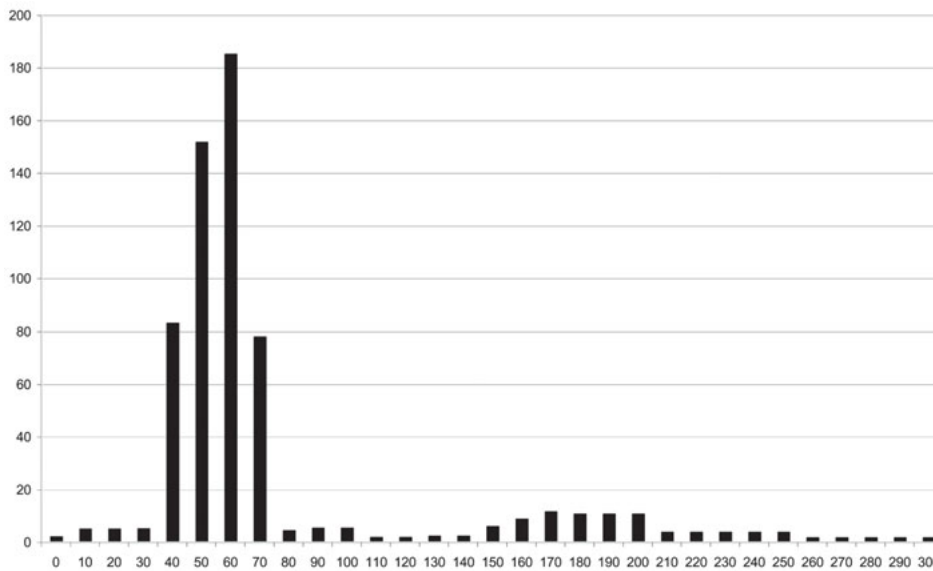


Fig. 6. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Chronological distribution of all pottery, in minimum numbers of vessels (NMI).

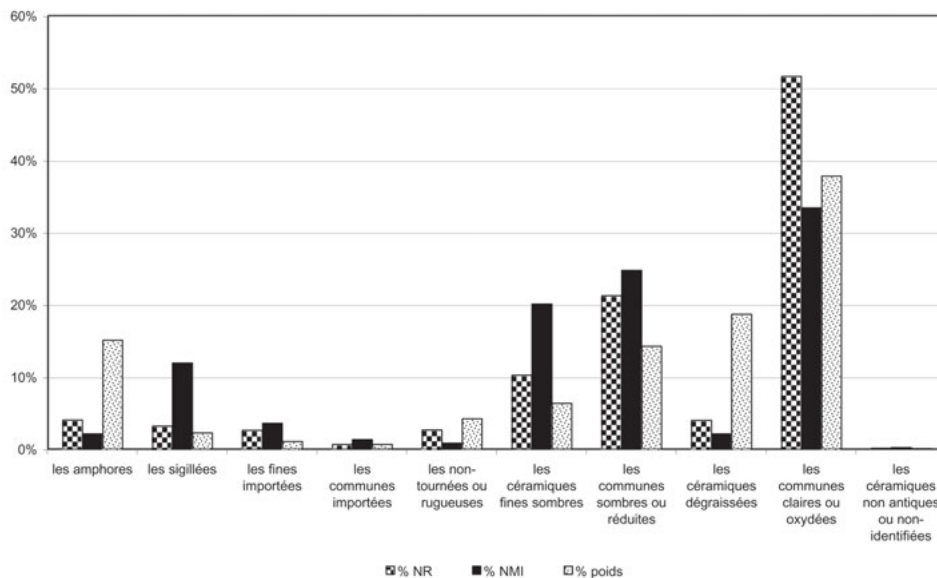


Fig. 7. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, relative distribution of the main fabric types, following a London-style system: in English, the columns represent amphorae, samian, fine imported wares, coarser imported wares, hand-made wares, fine reduced wares, coarse reduced wares, tempered wares, oxidised wares and non-Roman or unidentified fabrics.

ware make up about one-quarter of the pottery – perhaps some of these shapes are not so common in RB assemblages, notably the two bowl with incurving rims. Examples of this type of form are not common at either Colchester or London, but, curiously, it is a very common form not only in Alsace, but also in Burgundy – it has been recorded in profusion at Autun and Mâcon.

Oxidised wares (fig. 19) make up about one-third of the assemblage, including both Hofheim-type and ring-necked flagons, and a wall-sided mortarium, as well as these small amphorae that are also very like small RB amphorae. More of the oxidised wares are cream-slipped pink wares rather than white or buff wares, but that is almost certainly due to a lack of a good white clay in the vicinity of the production area.

Discussion

The study of poppy beakers in London owes a great deal to the work of Paul Tyers on the subject, summarised in his 1978 paper. He looked in some depth at the continental origins of these vessels, illustrating not only British examples (TYERS 1978 fig. 4,4) but also examples from Switzerland and Germany (ibid. fig. 4.10), along with distribution maps for both Britain and the continent (ibid. figs 4,1.8). He did not, however, illustrate any examples from Alsace, although he does mention examples “seen by the author at Bingen and Strasbourg”, and he adds that these are very similar to British examples. He also includes an example from *Vindonissa* with barbotine dots in the form of lozenges (ibid. fig. 4.10.86).

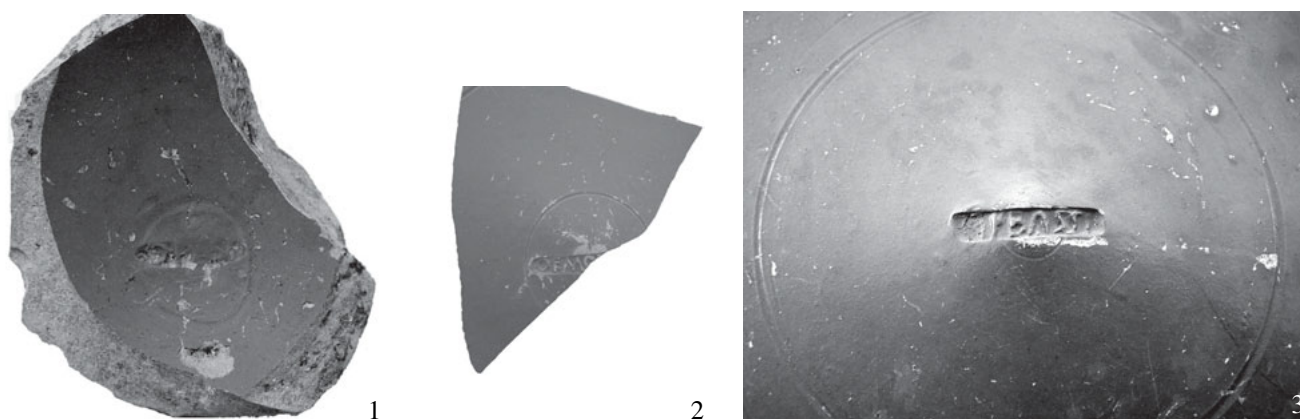


Fig. 8. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. South Gaulish samian stamps: **1** Dr 24/25, O.PASS; **2** Dr 18, OF.MO(DESTVS); **3** Dr 18, OF.BASSI

We can add a few more recently published parallels – the vessels from Aoste (LAROUCHE 1988 pl. 19), a production centre better known for the mortaria of the Atisii located between Lyon and Geneva, do not include poppy beakers, but they do have similarities with some of the vessels published by Paul Tyers, while at Vindonissa (MEYER-FREULER 1999 Abb. 41,5–6) it is interesting to note the presence not just of barbotine dot decoration but also of barbotine rings, albeit not actually present on one and the same vessel. Barbotine dots and the related decorations are present at German sites (HEUKEMES 1964 Taf. 14 for example), although they may not always have been seen as having much significance, given the manner in which they were illustrated.

In Britain, there is the interesting example of Wherstead, a small probably short-lived production site near Ipswich, where ring-and-dot beakers and barbotine dot decorated beakers were part of the repertoire belonging to the immediate post-Boudican period (GILL ET AL. 2001 fig. 1). The Wherstead vessels are representative of a great many British examples, from all over southern Britain – not just London and Colchester but also Horningsea and the earlier Hadham and Nene Valley productions all made vessels that make use of these styles.

There are also the ring-and-dot beakers from London and *Verulamium* – not either black or grey, but instead normally oxidised (GREEN 1978 figs. 5,1–2), and having a fairly obvious rapport in style with mica-gilt wares (SYMONDS/WAIDE 1999). None of these types are common west of the Vosges mountains that separate Gaul from *Germania superior*, but there are decorative similarities with glazed wares. Since conducting chemical analyses on glazed wares from Colchester (SYMONDS/HATCHER 1989) I have wondered whether some of the pieces illustrated by Paul Arthur (ARTHUR 1978) could be of central Gaulish origin, because the results indicated that was the origin of most of the analysed pieces from Colchester, and the resemblances with central Gaulish decorative styles are obvious.

The vessels with rusticated decoration (fig. 19), compared with examples from Switzerland (MARTIN-KILCHER 1999 no. 51) and Britain (SYMONDS/WAIDE 1999 fabric WC fig. 6.92, no. 56) add one more link to show that the

connexions that seem to stand out between the Eckbolsheim assemblage and a contemporary southern British assemblage are not by any means limited just to poppy beakers or beakers with barbotine dot decoration. There is the whole range of coarse ware shapes, including jars and flagons, and there are jars with rusticated decoration.

Conclusions

Apart from Eckbolsheim, this writer has so far reported on the pottery from one other site in Alsace, a late Roman site at Wiwersheim about twenty kilometers to the northwest of Strasbourg, and he has also given advice on how to process the substantial quantities of pottery that emerged from a mainly Augustan coarseware production site at Dambach-la-Ville, about 50 km to the southwest. So his involvement with reporting on sites in Alsace for INRAP is recent, but developing; he has also recently reported on pottery from a variety of sites in Burgundy, including excavations at Autun, Mâcon, Sens, Bassou (near Auxerre) and Imphy (south of Nevers), as well as some smaller assemblages from sites in Franche-Comté. So far, there have been no barbotine dot decorated beakers at any site west of the Vosges mountains, nor, has there been an assemblage in Burgundy or Franche-Comté that is so similar in general terms with a Romano-British assemblage.

The question that arises obviously from the Eckbolsheim assemblage is why the barbotine dot decorated beakers and the other connected types appear in Switzerland, in Alsace, to a limited extent in Germany and in comparative profusion in Britain. And why these vessels do not seem to appear in Gaul, although there is a connexion to be made with early fine black wares at Aoste in the northeast of *Gallia Narbonensis*.

One could suggest a military explanation, a ‘tribal’ or cultural explanation, or a commercial explanation, and perhaps fourthly an explanation that more or less combines all three of the previous ideas. The military explanation seems, on the surface at least, relatively attractive. The maps of Strasbourg published in the *Carte Archéologique de la Gaule*



Fig. 9. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Mould-decorated South Gaulish sigillata: 4 Déch. 67; 5–7 Dr 29.



Fig. 10. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Mould-decorated South Gaulish sigillata: 8–9 Dr 29; 10–11 Dr 30.

(BAUDOUX ET AL. 2002 fig. 35 for example) show a proposed early fortress of the late Augustan or Tiberian period, with a succession of expansions before the main legionary fortress was constructed about 70 or 80 AD to house the 8th legion. The 8th Legion is known to have come to Strasbourg from Mirebeau, on the eastern border of Burgundy, at about that date. Between the late Augustan period and the Flavian period a series of legions can be associated with Strasbourg, mostly with not-very-strong evidence, including the 4th Macedonian, the 14th Gemina and the 21st. Michel Reddé (REDDÉ 2002, 110), in the same volume that contains this map, notes that the Claudian date attributed to a tile stamp of 14th Gemina is unlikely, since that legion was part of the army that conquered Britain in 43, and he suggests that 21st should not be considered to have constructed the second, Claudian camp at Strasbourg, although it could have temporarily have sent a vexillation from its main base at Vindonissa for this purpose. If we are looking for a military explanation, in other words, we need either to associate

poppy beakers with one or two specific legions, which happen to have traveled from Switzerland and Alsace to Britain in the middle of the 1st century AD – and we do not have the evidence to say which legions or why they happened to like poppy beakers, or we have to say that the potters were simply associated with military movements that brought Roman culture to Britain, and then we are back to the question, why in Switzerland and Alsace, and not in Burgundy or elsewhere in central Gaul?

Colleagues in France often begin a lecture about pottery from sites in Gaul by showing where the site in question lies on a map of tribal cités, such as those of the *Aeduani*, or the *Lingones*, or the *Sequani*, for example. The logic of this idea is fairly obvious – although Gaul was conquered by the Romans by the middle of the 1st century BC, and we find plenty of Dressel 1 wine amphorae indicating Roman influence, to a large extent the real adaptation to the Roman way of life did not take place until the Tiberian period at the earliest, and before that if there is some kind of political

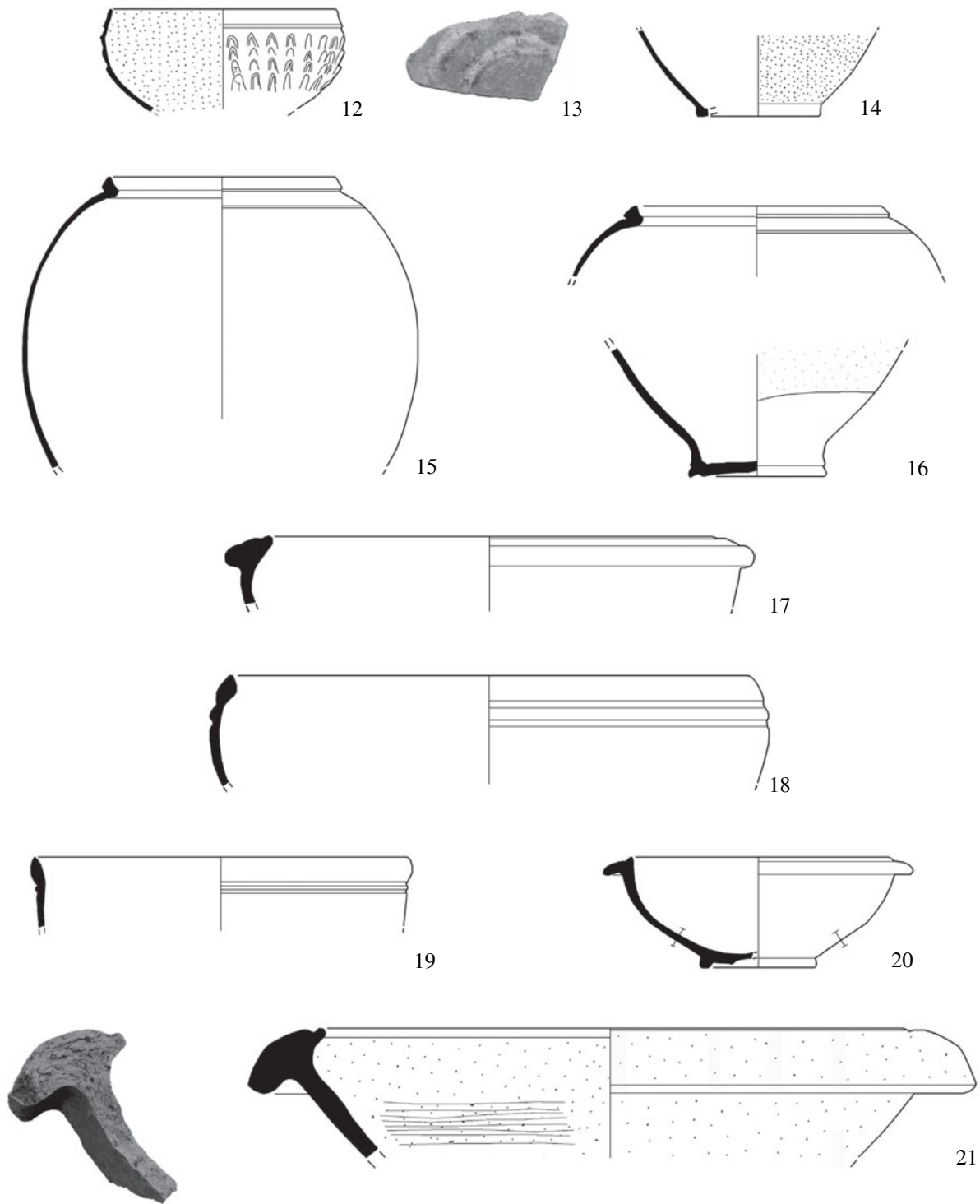


Fig. 11. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Imported and local fine wares: **12** Lyon hemispherical cup; **13** Central Gaulish glazed ware; **14–16** local colour-coated ware; **17–20** red colour-coated wares; **21** Mayen ware Gose form 456 mortarium (imported coarse ware). Scale 1:3.

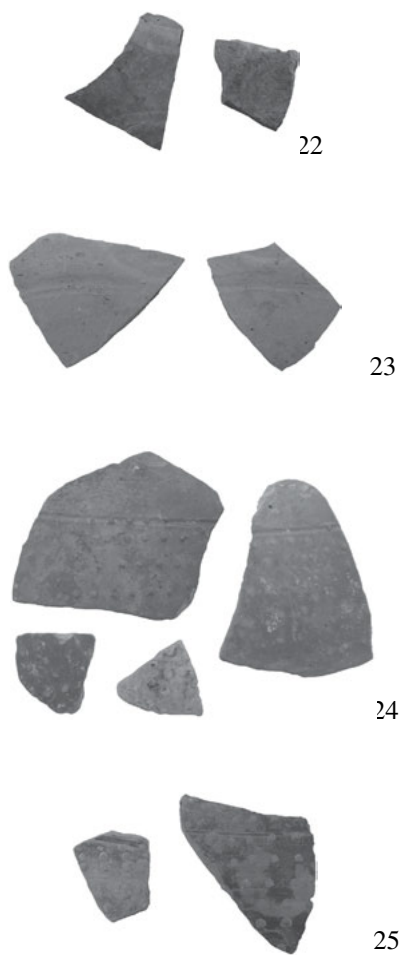


Fig. 12. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. **22–23** fine grey wares with barbotine rings decorations; **24–25** fine grey wares with barbotine dot decoration

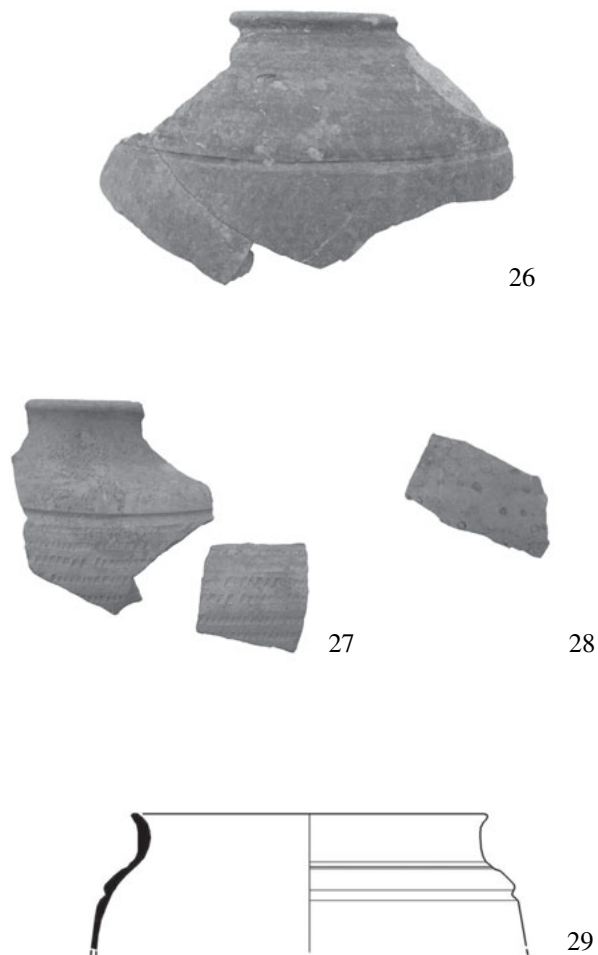


Fig. 13. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Fine grey wares: **26** with wavy line decoration; **27** with rouletting; **28** with barbotine dot decoration; **29** plain, with prominent shoulder.

control influencing the popularity of certain pottery types, then that control was almost certainly not dictated by Romans, but rather by Aeduans, Lingones or Sequani. But in truth this kind of interpretation is not really much more useful than the military one, since in fact it is quite difficult to define what constitutes an Aeduan, a Lingones or a Sequani assemblage. Some elements are common to assemblages found in all these areas, and the boundaries are simply not clearly defined. And, when we reach the mid 1st century AD, at Eckbolsheim, for example, it is very hard to say that any one of the various tribes in the Alsace region might have dictated the presence of poppy beakers, since we have just shown, as Paul Tyers did earlier, that these beakers also have connexions in Switzerland and Germany.

There remains the third explanation, which is that Alsace lies on the Rhine, and it was the motorway of its time, enabling the transport of a large range of goods and people, including potters, to travel from Helvetia towards the north-

west. And when they reached Britain, as well as before that point, there was also a good road system serving the same function. The evidence presented here seems to indicate that all these elements, military, tribal and commercial, played their part in this movement of culture, and there is much more research to be done before we approach a true understanding the complexity of the movements of vessels and styles across such large geographical areas.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Berengère Fort, INRAP, excavator of the site at Eckbolsheim, for providing the location map, the plan and images of the site, and for information concerning the site and its finds. Thanks are also due to Patrick Noguès for preparing the poster, and to my wife Cecilia for artwork and encouragement.

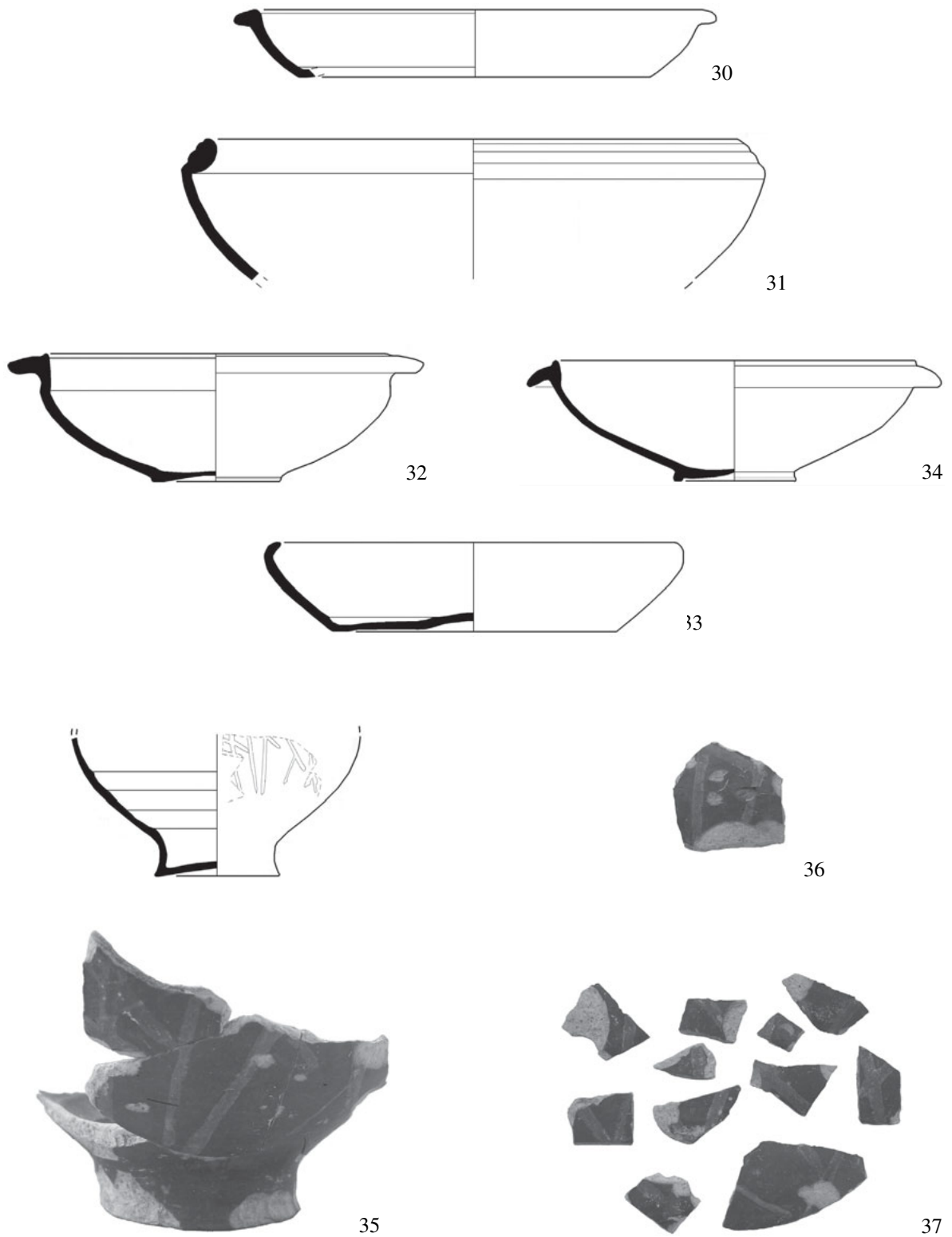


Fig. 14. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Fine grey wares: **30–34** plain bowls and dishes; **35–37** beakers with white painted decoration. Scale 1:3.

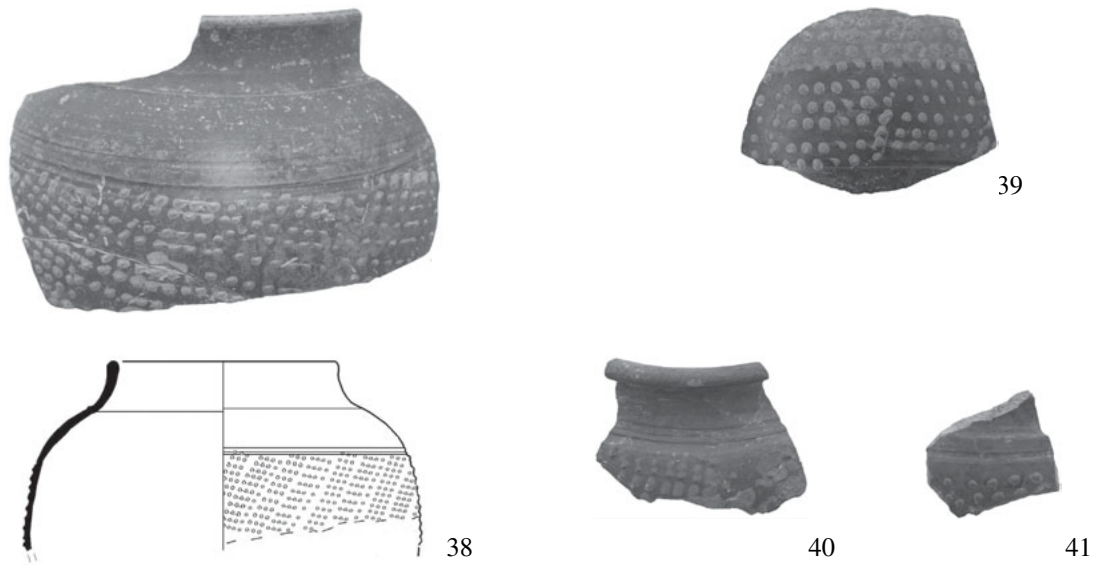


Fig. 15. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046: **38–41** fine black wares with barbotine dot decoration. Scale 1:3.

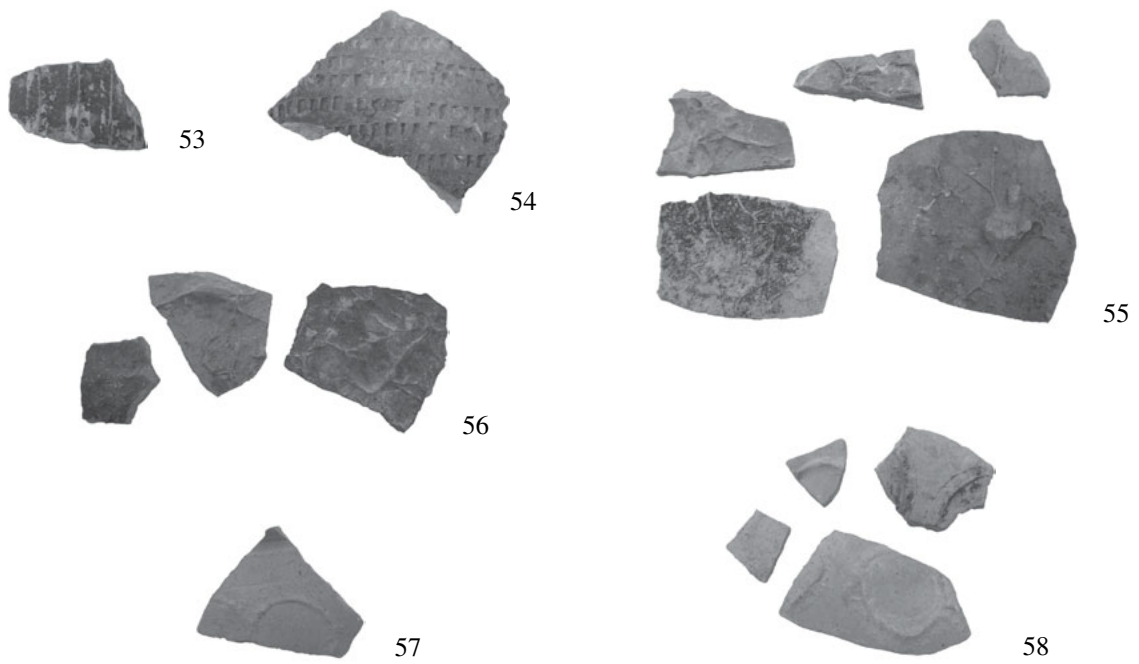


Fig. 17. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Decorated coarse wares: **53** jar/beaker with hairpin decoration; **54** jar/beaker with rouletting; **55–56** jars/beakers with rusticated decoration; **57–58** beakers with barbotine ring decoration.

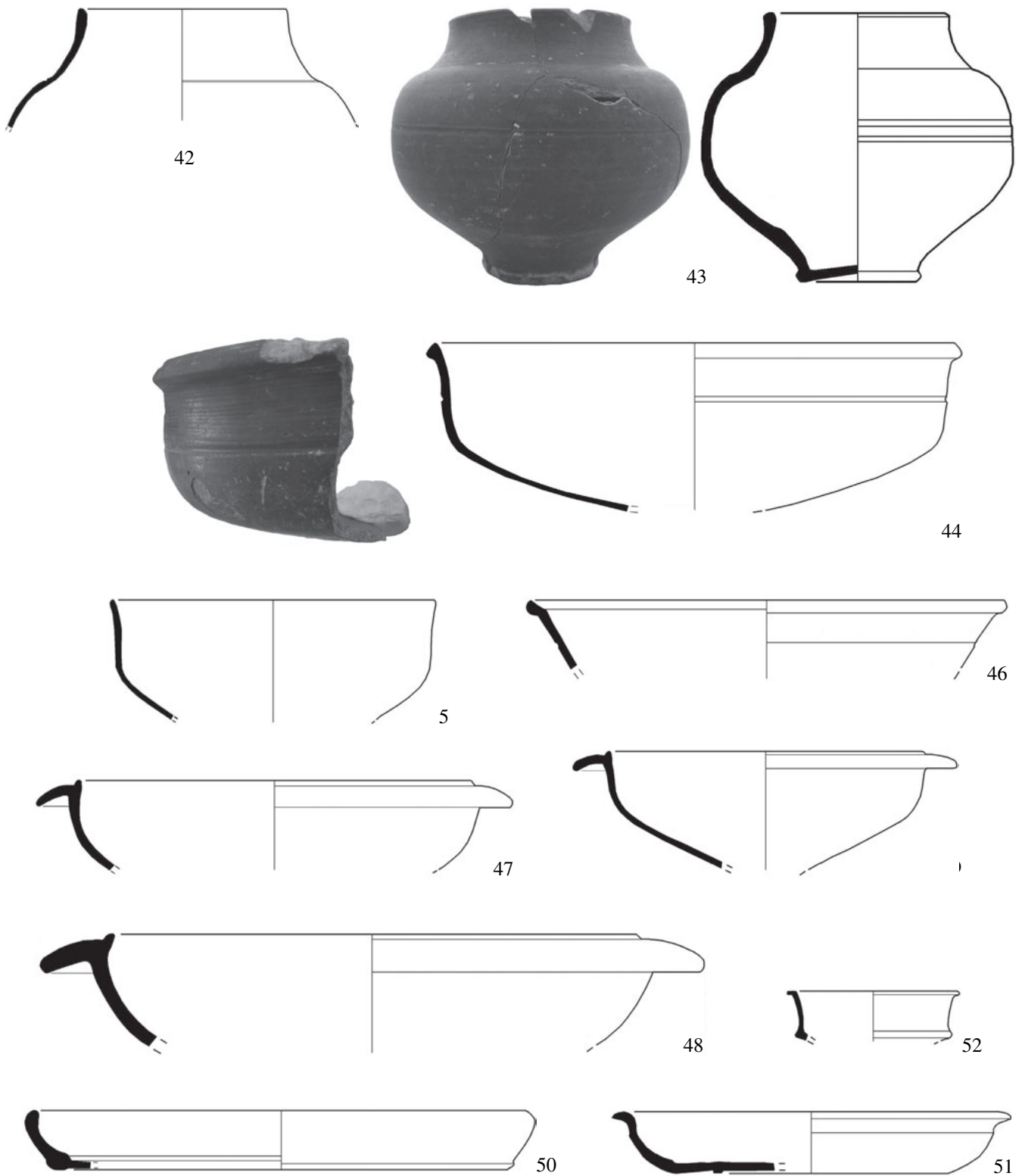


Fig. 16. Eckbolsheim "Le Zénith", Context 1046: 42–52 fine black wares, plain beakers, bowls, dishes and a cup. Scale 1:3.

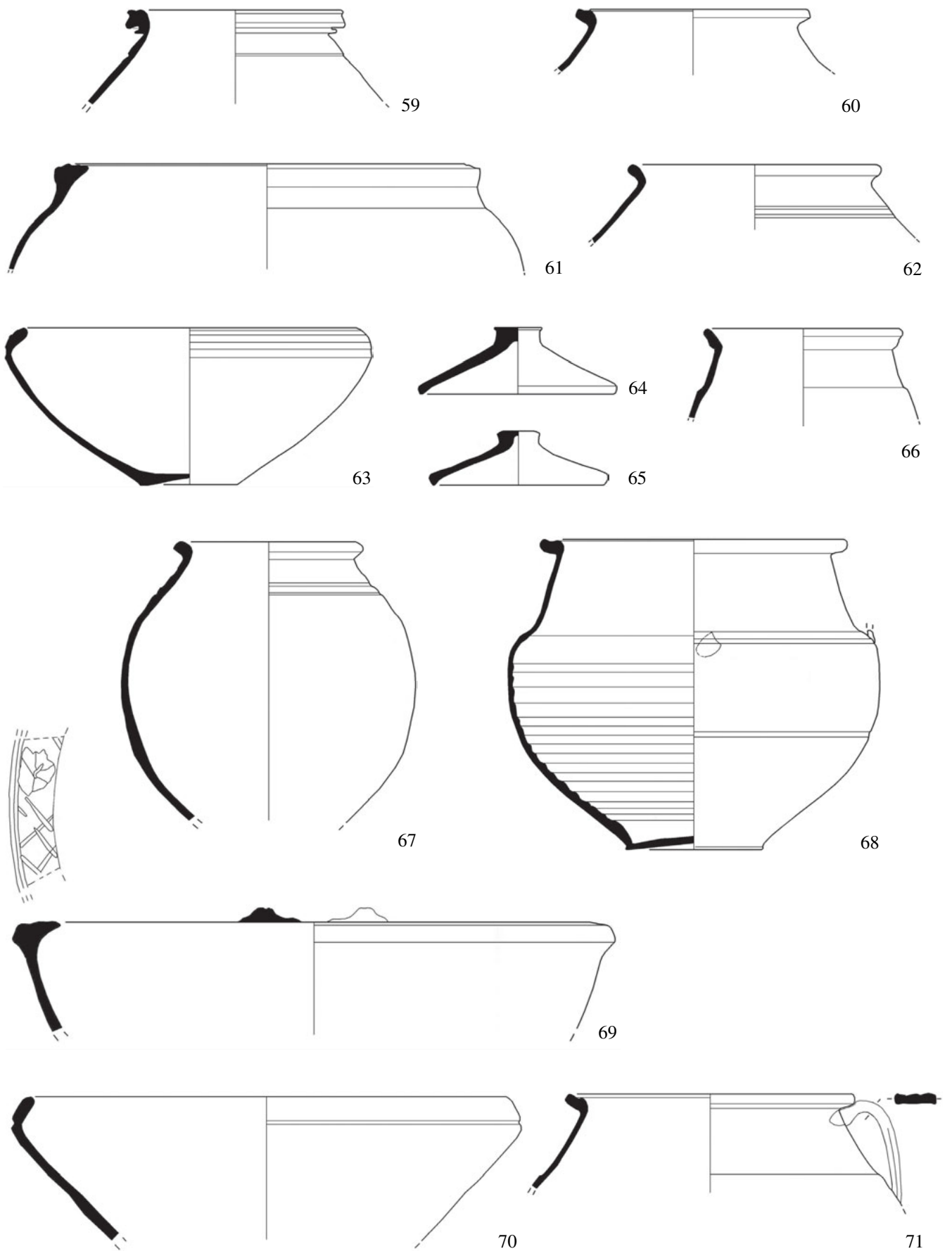


Fig. 18. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Coarse grey wares: **59–65** fabric 1, relatively fine sandy ware; **66–70** fabric 2, relatively coarse sandy ware; **71** fabric 7, with white or pale grey core. Scale 1:3.

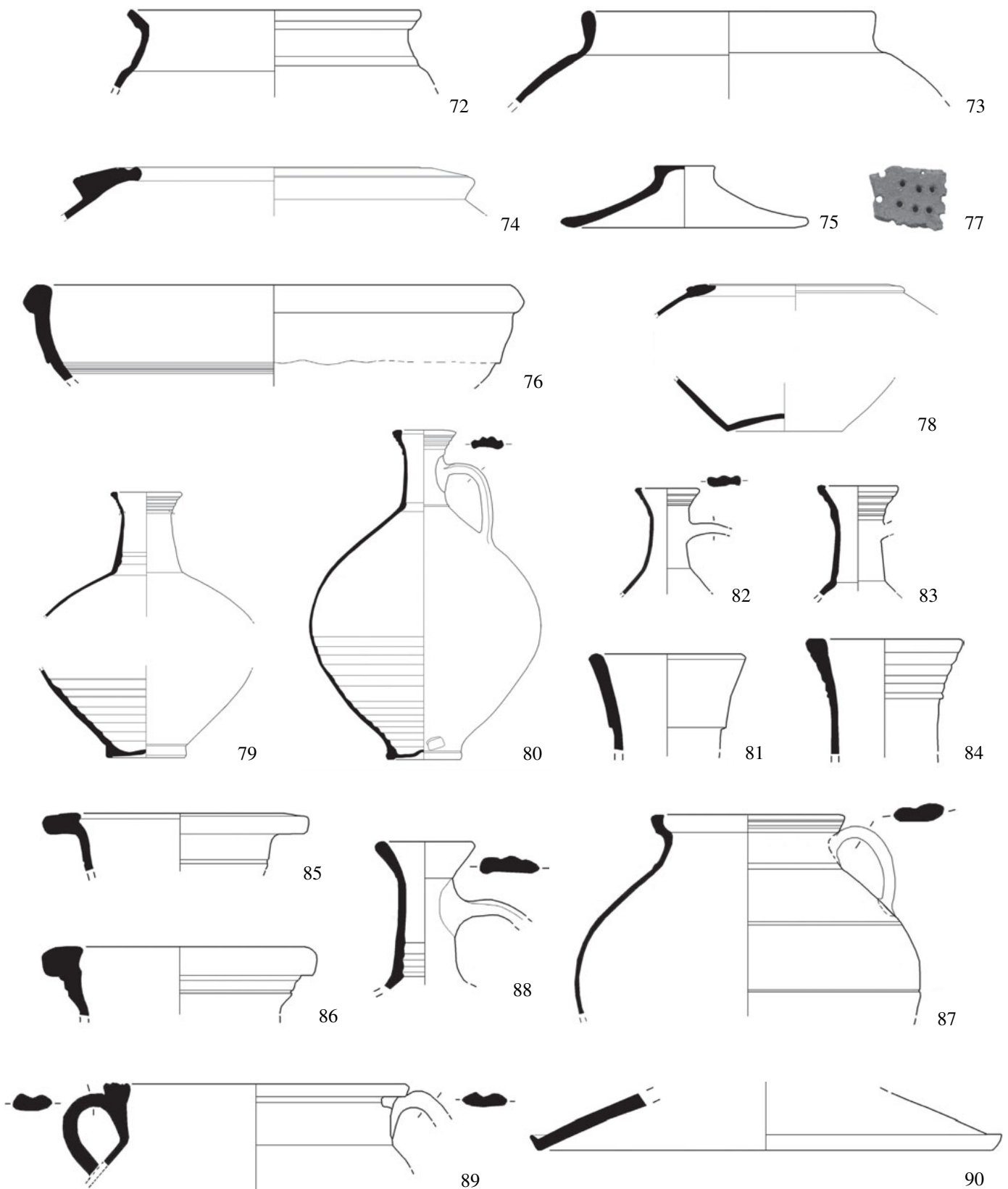


Fig. 19. Eckbolsheim “Le Zénith”, Context 1046. Tempered wares and oxidised wares: **72–73** calcite-gritted ware; **74** dolium; **75** white ware; **76** early wall-sided mortarium; **77** sieve; **78** miniature dolium in brown granular oxidised ware; **79–87** closed forms in local oxidised cream-coated ware; **88–90** various forms in local orange-pink oxidised ware. Scale 1:3.

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