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THE ROMAN POTTERY DISTRICT IN TRIER

Remarkable findings from kiln No. 5

Trier and its pottery district

Founded in the time of Augustus, Trier quickly developed into an influential pottery centre in the north-western Roman provinces. Already at the time when the primary settlement area of Roman Trier was laid out within the marked limits (**fig. 1**) the existence of pottery workshops at the north-western periphery of the town can be proven¹. Further kilns were added later on approximately 1 km north of the settlement area². Remains of additional pottery workshops of the late 1st to the early 2nd century were found on the other side of the river Mosel³. From those kiln sites mainly Gallo-Belgic ware, flagons and coarse ware have been recovered. Mainly from the middle of the 1st century onwards further pottery workshops came into existence, particularly to the south of the actual settlement where the pottery district of Trier spread out⁴. At the beginning its location was clearly outside the settlement area but the residential zone gradually expanded up to the pottery district.

In the middle of the 2nd century the city wall was established and cut right through the middle of some workshops, dividing the district into two parts. The intramural part is particularly well known for its ceramic finds from the rubbish pit U at the Lintzstraße, which were published by S. Loeschcke⁵. The extramural area with its kilns for terra sigillata production is known as Pacelliufer. I. Huld-Zetsche discussed and published the find-material from this area⁶. The exact boundaries of the pottery district cannot be specified and possibly did not even exist in Roman times. Outside this area the existence of a few other kilns can be shown.

The years that followed saw the development of an industrial quarter of considerable size in Trier. In particular, the production of terra sigillata and fine dark colour-coated ware stands out and gained an outstanding reputation within the north-western provinces.

Following the siege of Trier in 353 the extramural pottery district was abandoned and only within the city wall did the production of pottery continue on a limited scale. This becomes evident in the decrease of the variety of manufactured objects and the quality of the products themselves.

Seven large excavations were carried out in the pottery district from 1893 to 1983, identifying about 100 kilns of different shape, structure and size⁷. The associated ceramics indicate that the kilns were in operation from the Augustan

period until shortly after the beginning of the 5th century. So far, there has been no undertaking to examine either the pottery quarter or any of the excavations as a whole. Existing studies are mostly focused on specific ceramic classes.

Kiln No. 5 excavated in 1983

The most recent excavation took place at the Pacelliufer in 1983⁸. A gravel surface, which connected the river Mosel and the pottery district, 13 kilns and large amounts of fragmented ceramics were unearthed. In addition considerable amounts of fine ware sherds, primarily in a fine dark colour-coated ware, were found.

¹ Frauenstraße: Jahresbericht 1998. *Trierer Zeitschr.* 63, 2000, 424–425. – Feldstraße Inv. 2003,23; unpublished.

² St. Marien: H. CÜPPERS in: *Trier. Führer vor- u. frühgesch. Denkmäler* 32 (Mainz 1977) 81.

³ Aachenerstraße/Martinerfeld: Jahresbericht 1997. *Trierer Zeitschr.* 62, 1999, 373. – In addition: Moselbrücke: Jahresbericht 1912. *Trierer Jahresber.* 6, 1913, 18.

⁴ Töpferstraße 1893: H. LEHNER, *Die römische Stadtbefestigung von Trier*. *Westdt. Zeitschr. Gesch. u. Kunst* 15, 1896, 240–253 Taf. 6–9. – Töpferstraße 1907: E. KRÜGER, *Jahresbericht 1907*. *Trierer Jahresber.* 1, 1908, 19. – Saarbrücker Straße 1911: *Jahresbericht 1911*. *Trierer Jahresber.* 5, 1912, 20; *Jahresbericht 1912*. *Trierer Jahresber.* 6, 1913, 7–8. – Töpferstraße 1920: *Jahresbericht 1920*. *Trierer Jahresber.* 13, 1921/22, 35. – Pacelliufer 1933: *Jahresbericht 1933*. *Trierer Zeitschr.* 9, 1934, 139. – Auf der Steinrausch 8–12: *Jahresbericht 1945/58*. *Trierer Zeitschr.* 24/26, 1956/58, 483–484. – Abteipplatz St. Matthias: *Jahresbericht 1945/58*. *Trierer Zeitschr.* 24/26, 1956/58, 408.

⁵ S. LOESCHCKE, *Töpfereiabfall d. J. 259/260 in Trier: Aus einer römischen Grube an der Louis Lintzstraße. Beil. II zum Jahresbericht 1921*. *Trierer Jahresber.* 13, 1921/22, 103–107.

⁶ I. HULD-ZETSCHKE, *Glatte Sigillaten des „Massenfundes“ aus Trier*. *RCRF Acta* 13, 1971, 21–39. – EAD., *Trierer Reliefsigillata Werkstatt I. Mat. Röm.-Germ. Keramik* 9 (Bonn 1972). – EAD., *Trierer Reliefsigillata Werkstatt II. Mat. Röm.-Germ. Keramik* 12 (Bonn 1993).

⁷ K. GOETHERT, *Gewerbebezirke*. In: *Rettet das archäologische Erbe in Trier. Zweite Denkschrift der Archäologischen Trier-Kommission*. *Schriftenr. Rhein. Landesmus. Trier* (Trier 2005) 107–111. – M. LUIK, *Kunsthandwerkliche Produktion im römischen Trier*. In: J.-C. Béal/J.-C. Goyon (eds.), *Les artisans dans la ville antique*. *Coll. Inst. Arch. et Hist. Antiquité* 6 (Lyon 2002) 140–144.

⁸ H. CÜPPERS in: *Trier – Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz. Die Stadt in spätantiker und frühchristlicher Zeit*. *Ausstellungskatalog Trier* (Mainz 1984) 89–91.

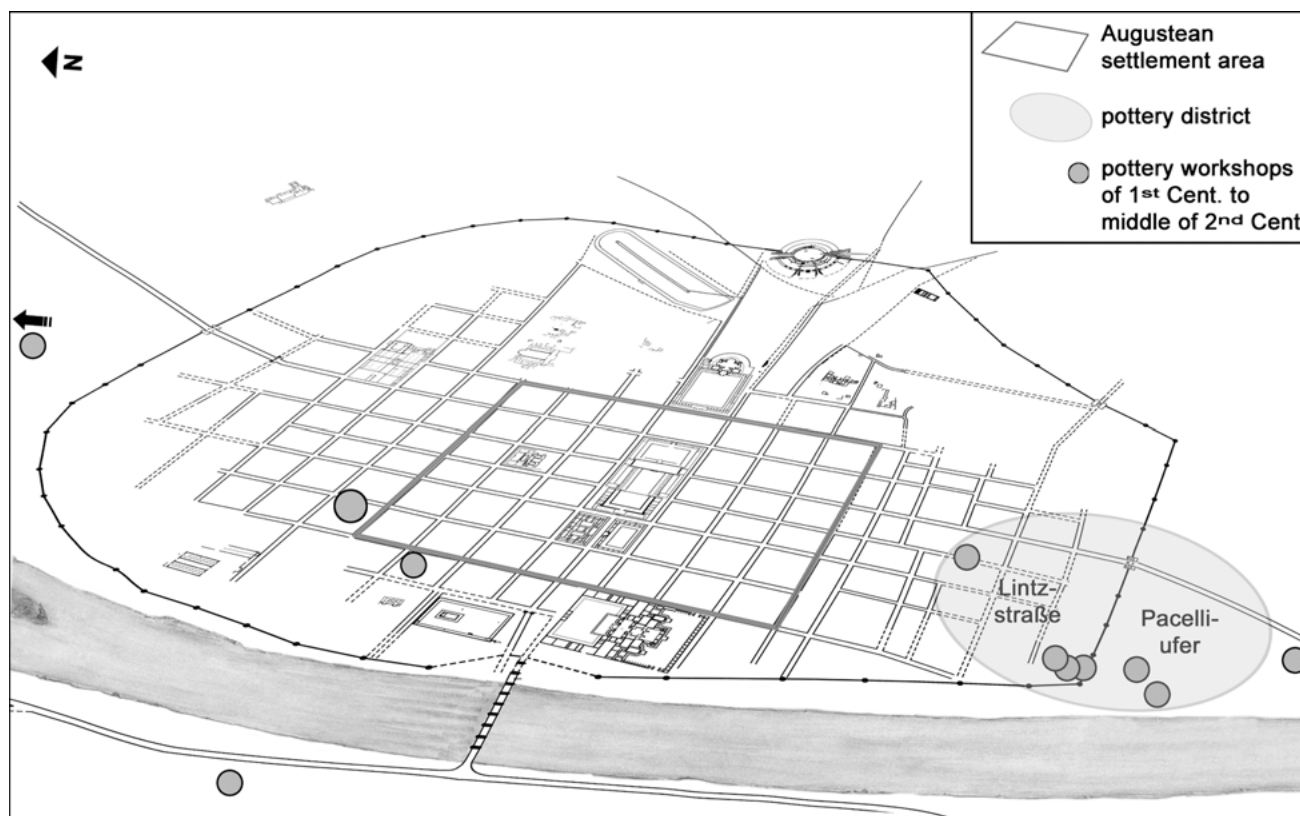


Fig. 1. Trier. Location of pottery workshops and the pottery district.

Kiln No. 5 with its unusual construction, situated in the northwest of the excavation next to kiln No. 4 and No. 4a, is of particular interest for our discussion (**fig. 2a**).

Description of the structural evidence of kiln No. 5

The relatively small kiln No. 5 (**fig. 2b**) reveals a roughly bottle-shaped kiln construction and is orientated to the west. The preserved structure is about 2 m long and 1.55 m wide. The remains found here include the fire tunnel with its destroyed mouth, the combustion chamber and the northern part of the raised oven floor upon which the objects were stacked for firing. The superstructure however is not preserved.

When taking a closer look at the features of the kiln it becomes clear that the combustion chamber did not contain the usual internal pedestal to support the raised oven floor. Instead, the profile a – b through the combustion chamber displays a vaulted arch. Considering also the photographs which provide a view into the inner parts of the combustion chamber (**fig. 2c**), it appears that four parallel arches were positioned crosswise in certain intervals in the interior of the combustion chamber.

The floor of the combustion chamber slopes gently towards the east and the maximum height of the chamber varies between 0.50 and 0.60 m. It is covered with the raised oven floor, approximately 0.10 m thick, perforated with vent-holes and resting on the arches. Along the edges of the kiln wall five holes were pierced lengthways on both

sides and between each arch there is a row of vent-holes. Most likely, five holes existed at the back of the kiln and the adjoining two or three rows, whereas the row next to the fire tunnel was not wide enough for this.

The kiln walls are about 0.20 to 0.27 m thick at the back and the walls of the fire tunnel are thinner than the longitudinal sides of the kiln.

Problems with the interpretation of kiln No. 5

In order to draw conclusions about the kiln site⁹, the associated objects and the context need to be studied. This, however, poses some difficulties, as at the time of the excavation only a single kiln was expected in that part where kilns No. 4 and No. 5 are now located, and therefore the place of discovery was consistently recorded as “kiln No. 4”. Only later did it become clear that both kilns are overlapping, with kiln No. 5 being built over the older kiln No. 4 on the same standing level. This fact accounts for the sometimes incorrect documentation, whereby on some objects “kiln No. 4” instead of kiln No. 5 is incorrectly given as the place of discovery.

Issues of concern are also the rather broadly defined context numbers and the neglected stratification. The numbers were not recorded in either the plans or the sections, and their positions are only verbally described or indicated

⁹ The objects from kiln No. 5 have already been examined by the writer: WEIDNER 2009 chapter II.2.1 d.

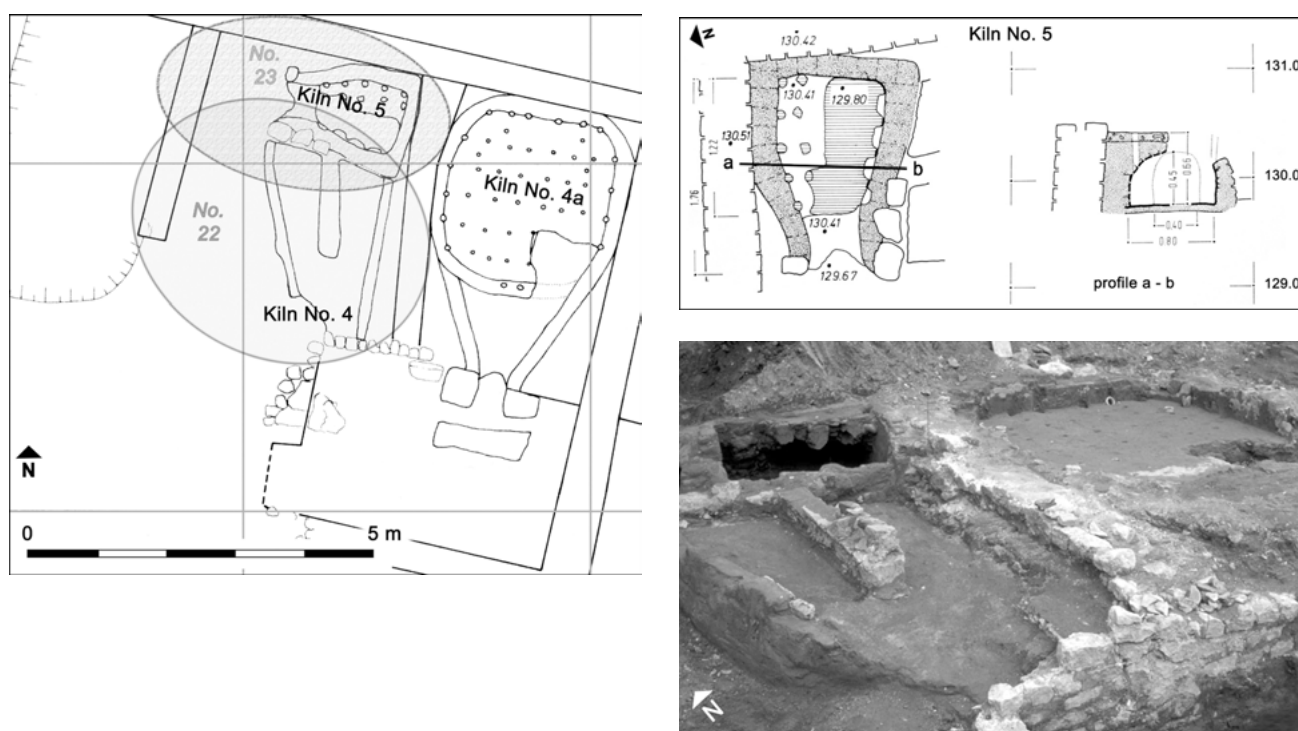


Fig. 2. Trier, Pacelliufer, kiln No. 4, 4a and 5. **a:** Plan with context nos. 22 and 23. – **b:** Plan and section a – b through the combustion chamber of kiln No. 5. – **c:** View from the south.

by references to the 5 × 5 m grid squares. Finally, changes in the record numbering system add some confusion as both old and new context numbers exist simultaneously. Very often, it is not easy to tell whether we are dealing with a number of the old or new numbering system.

Discussion of the context numbers of kiln No. 5

For the interpretation of kiln No. 5, two context numbers, 22 and 23 of the old numbering system, need to be considered (**fig. 2a**): Number 23 covers both the context within the kiln as well as the context outside bordering to the west. It thus comprises the range where kiln No. 5 is orientated to and where the stokehole was located.

However, context 23 clearly overlaps with context 22. Its coverage stretches to the south-west. Most objects were found on the embankment west of both kilns, some within kiln No. 4 itself.

Both contexts primarily contain fine dark colour-coated ware, the beaker Niederbieber type 33 with its variants a and c being the dominant type¹⁰. The remarkable quality reveals itself in the thinness of the walls and the glossy, sometimes metallic sheen of the colour-coating. Together with the above objects, there are at the same time many casualties of faulty firing showing deformations and a dull and porous surface.

Beakers of the type Niederbieber 32d, characterised by their folded wall¹¹, are also strongly represented together with the cornice-rimmed beakers, some with folds, some with rough-cast, and some showing both. A single example of the

type Niederbieber 29 can be identified within context 23¹².

In very small quantities context 22 also yielded various common wares, whereas only the flagon with funnel-shaped mouth and stepped out mouthpiece rings, similar to the Speicher 1 type 19 dating from the middle of the 2nd century, is represented with several vessels¹³. Moreover, a few sherds of terra-sigillata mortaria, probably to be dated to the late 3rd century, were unearthed.

Within the comparatively much less comprehensive find material from context 23 were also fragments of the so-called Spruchbecherkeramik, also known as motto beakers (**fig. 3**). According to the classification of S. Künzl, the fragments of globular beakers decorated with white barbotine are to be dated to the late 3rd century due to the vessel type and the decoration¹⁴.

A few examples of marbled ware with their rather crude coating can be dated to the late 3rd century. Among those vessels is a special type of flagon with a phallic spout (**fig. 4**)¹⁵. Finally, apart from all those rather late-dating vessels a few shards of mica-gilt pottery were found¹⁶.

¹⁰ OELMANN 1914, 40–41.

¹¹ Ibid. 40.

¹² Ibid. 38.

¹³ S. LOESCHKE in: Jahresbericht 1919. Trierer Jahresber. 12, 1919/20 (1923) Beil., 55 Taf. III.

¹⁴ Comparable vessels are TRI 464, KÖL 41 and „DÜS“ 10, which belong to the groups II and III, see KÜNZL 1997, 56 ff. 147; 157; 245 Taf. 10 b; 21 a–b; 27 a–b.

¹⁵ Similar is Speicher 2 type 17, see S. LOESCHKE in: Jahresbericht 1920. Trierer Jahresber. 13, 1921/22 (1923) 56 Taf. X.

¹⁶ Compare S. LOESCHKE (Hrsg.), Der Tempelbezirk im Altbachtale zu Trier 1 (Berlin 1938) 116 Taf. 29, 14.



Fig. 3. Kiln No. 5. Spruchbecherkeramik.

The excavators, however, interpreted and recorded kiln No. 5 as a kiln which was used for the production of terracotta figurines, since several examples made of white pipe clay such as mother goddesses, gladiators and grotesques were recovered there.

Particularly interesting was the discovery of plaques with appliqués, which were carefully stapled into the flue of the kiln with their front facing the wall. Among almost 20, mostly however strongly fragmented examples, three different series can be identified: one with gladiators (**fig. 5**) and two with grotesques which are combined with either a lion or a leopard. Some of these plaques were also found outside the kiln.

On the label accompanying the flagon with phallic spout (**fig. 4**) it is expressly mentioned that it was recovered “together with the appliquéed plaques”. Furthermore, three fragments of the plaques with appliqués were found together with a calendar (**fig. 6a**) west of kiln No. 5 on the embankment – which was also explicitly recorded on the calendar’s label. Although the supervisor of the excavation confirmed that all plaques with appliqués are to be attributed to context 23 of kiln No. 5 on the label for the calendar and the plates, the record indicated context 22. This illustrates the problem with the documentation of kiln No. 5 caused by the not clearly defined context numbers.

In another pottery workshop at the Pacelliufer in Trier, where the seemingly intact and complete inventory was left behind¹⁷, a mould for the production of such calendars, which can be dated from the first half of the 4th century, was found¹⁸. The calendar of kiln No. 5 is to be considered earlier than the mould¹⁹.

Interpretation of kilns No. 4 and 5

If one considers the concentration of fine dark colour-coated ware within the area of context 22 and the yet small quantity of objects found within context 23, which, however, contain the characteristic figural objects and the Spruchbecherkeramik, the two kilns can be interpreted as follows: Kiln No. 4 was probably used for the production of fine dark colour-coated ware. Since, however, the fine dark

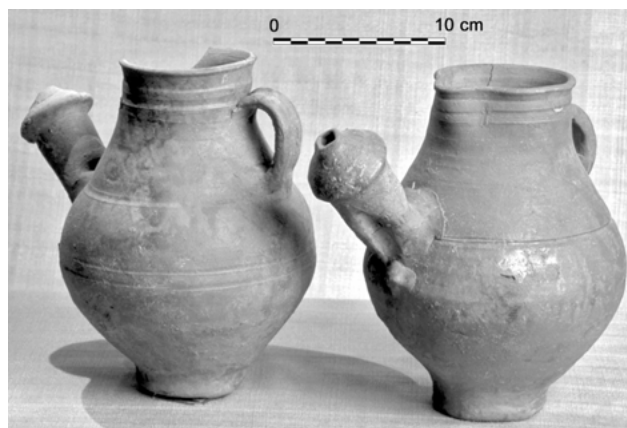


Fig. 4. Kiln No. 5. Marbled ware, flagons with phallic spout.

colour-coated ware is represented in large quantity, showing varying quality and covering quite a long period, the question arises, whether the entire material comes from the same kiln or whether also material from another kiln, such as the neighbouring kiln No. 4a, is included²⁰.

After kiln No. 4 went out of use, kiln No. 5 was built no later than the last quarter of the 3rd century. It served not only for the production of the name-giving terracotta figurines, but also of other figural objects, for example the plaques with appliqués and the calendar as well as the flagons with phallic spout and the Spruchbecherkeramik. Those items can be summarized as objects which are mould-made and which are mostly decorated with painting or white barbotine.

Analysis of some selected objects

Additional interesting information concerning kiln No. 5 can be obtained from closer study of the following objects, of which the calendar is a key object. On its back, a partially preserved potter stamp can be seen showing the letters “STR[]” (**fig. 6b**), leading to the reconstruction of the potter’s name as “STRAMBVS” with the help of other pieces of evidence found in Trier. STRAMBVS probably dedicated himself primarily to the production of various terracotta figurines. So far, his stamp can be identified on five examples from Trier²¹, amongst which the fragment of a terracotta figurine from the northern cemetery is of particular interest here²². Its base shows on the back the same stamp as on the calendar (**fig. 7**), this time completely preserved.

¹⁷ S. LOESCHKE, Jahresbericht 1933. *Trierer Zeitschr.* 9, 1934, 138. – WEIDNER 2009 chapter II.1.1; II.2.1 c.

¹⁸ Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, Inv. ST 1476. – L. SCHWINDEN in: DEMANDT/ENGEMANN 2007 CD-ROM I.13.73.

¹⁹ As to the dating of the calendar, see WEIDNER 2009 chapter IV.2.2.2.1 c).

²⁰ Here, I would like to cordially thank Fabienne Vilvorder and Robin P. Symonds for their valuable comments as how to interpret the fine dark colour-coated ware.

²¹ Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, Inv. ST 11483 and ST 11496 out of a well at the Oewiger Straße as well as Inv. ST 11995a and ST 12009 from the temple district Altbachtal.

²² Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, Inv. 5259.

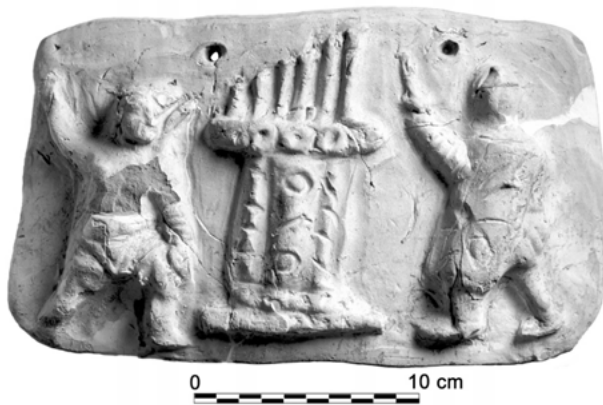


Fig. 5. Kiln No. 5. Plaque with gladiator appliqués.



Fig. 7. Trier. Base of terracotta figurine with stamp of STRAMBVS, back.

In comparison with other terracotta figurines (fig. 8)²³ the legs can be attributed to a *retiarius*. At least two rather severely fragmented examples of the same type of *retiarius* were found at the 1983 excavation area, one of which for certain was at kiln No. 5²⁴.

The gladiator couple with a suspension hole (fig. 9)²⁵, which was found together with two of the terracotta figurines stamped by STRAMBVS, depicts the same type of *retiarius*, this time combined with a *secutor*. Numerous terracotta figurines of this type of *secutor* can be identified from kiln No. 5.

Of particular interest is the fact that the gladiator appliqués on the plaques (fig. 6) show the same figure-types as the terracotta figurines. The only difference is the right arm of both figures revealing a different pose. In comparison to the terracotta figurines the appliqués allow for the positioning of the arms detached from the body, giving a more dynamic expression. Obviously, the moulds of the terracotta figurines were also used for producing the appliqués on the plates. It can thus be assumed that, as well as the calendar, the production of the plaques with appliqués and the production of terracotta figurines from kiln No. 5 can be attributed to STRAMBVS.

Thanks to the completely preserved yet heavily abraded mould for calendars mentioned above²⁶, the calendar of kiln No. 5 can be reconstructed. Considering the modern

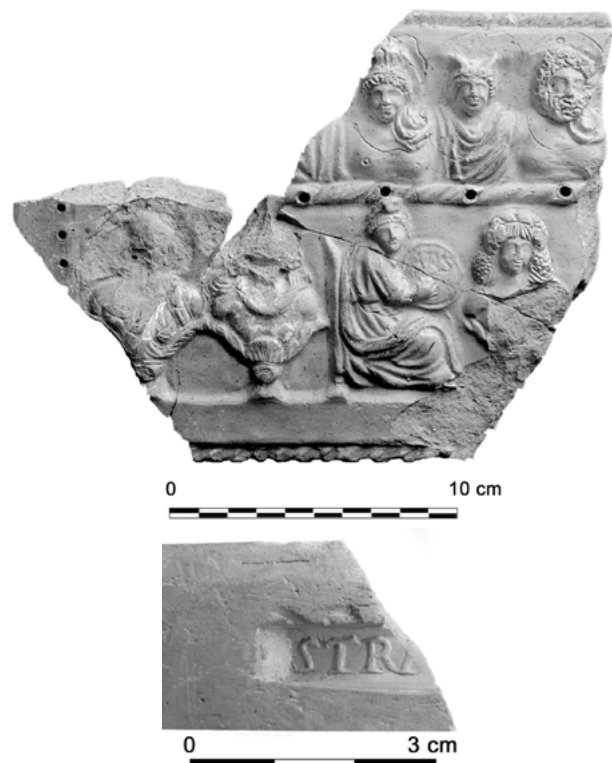


Fig. 6. Kiln No. 5. Calendar with stamp of STRAMBVS.
a: Front. – b: Back.

moulded calendar, the planetary gods in the upper line with the seasons as well as the goddess below can be identified.

Furthermore, a small fragment of an additional calendar was found in the forum of Trier²⁷. It has the same size and shows the same outstanding quality as the calendar from STRAMBVS with traces of red, black and white colour and seems to show the same fabric. Little clay balls reveal that both calendars were made from plaster moulds. Because of the similarity of the two calendars, it is to be considered whether the small calendar fragment was also produced in the workshop of kiln No. 5, possibly even using the same mould.

The calendar examples prove a connection with the production line of the Spruchbecherkeramik²⁸. On the carafe with the appliqués of the Four Seasons (fig. 10), which orig-

²³ The photograph shows an example from the northern cemetery, Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, Inv. 5331, on the left side, see Jahresbericht 1936. Trierer Zeitschr. 12, 1937, 281 Abb. 18; all details of the example on the right side are unknown.

²⁴ One from the excavation itself, Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, EV. 1983,35; another one as a stray find later on, Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, EV. 1989,62.

²⁵ Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, Inv. ST 11476 found also in the well at the Olewiger Straße, see E. KRÜGER/P. STEINER/S. LOESCHKE/E. VORREHN, Jahresbericht 1929. Trierer Zeitschr. 5, 1930, 173 Taf. 6,4.

²⁶ See note 18.

²⁷ Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, EV 1996,103. – L. SCHWINDEN in: DEMANDT/ENGEMANN 2007 CD-ROM I.13.75. – WEIDNER 2009 chapter IV.2.2.2.1 c); VI [100].

²⁸ WEIDNER 2009 chapter VI.1.4.2.2 a).



Fig. 8. Trier. Terracotta figurines, *retiarii*.



Fig. 9. Trier. Terracotta figurine, *retiarius* and *secutor*.



Fig. 10. Trier. Spruchbecherkeramik, carafe with appliqué of the Four Seasons.

inates from the southern cemetery²⁹, we see the same types of representations of the Seasons as on the calendar. The appliqué were moulded and then cut into shape. Perhaps even a mould for calendars was used in that process.

At least, it can be speculated whether the carafe with Season appliqué comes from the same workshop as the mould for calendars mentioned here. The similarity to the cantharus with applied planetary gods³⁰ supports this assumption. It originates from this workshop and was made in a similar way with moulded, then cut off and painted motifs³¹.

Summary

Kiln No. 5 which came into use at the latest in the last quarter of the 3rd century presents a remarkable production set. The calendar, the terracotta figurines and the plaques with appliqué unearthed at the kiln can all be attributed to the potter STRAMBVS. So far, STRAMBVS is the only known potter who can be linked with the workshop of kiln No. 5. The finds lead to the assumption that he was specialized in the production of mould-made ware of various kinds. But there is no indication whether the moulds were produced at the same or rather at a different workshop.

It is worth pointing out the extreme quality difference within the range of STRAMBVS' products, which should be kept in mind when assessing other interpretations. Neither the differences in quality nor the range of product classes are necessarily an indication as to whether we are dealing with different potters or one and the same. Different product classes and qualitative features can rather be the result of a specific demand-and-supply situation.

A comparable production program, consisting of objects as different as terracotta figurines and Spruchbecherkeramik, can also be proven for the pottery workshop from which the mould for the calendar originates. A characteris-

²⁹ Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, 1904, 431a. – KÜNZL 1997, 85–87; 106; 227 TRI 136. – SYMONDS 1992, 56–57 no. 702 pl. 43. – M. WEIDNER in: DEMANDT/ENGEMANN 2007 CD-ROM I.13.52.

³⁰ Rhein. Landesmus. Trier, Inv. 1933, 513. – KÜNZL 1997, 65–69; 87; 104–107; 246 TRI 491. – SYMONDS 1992, 61–62 no. 785 pl. 49–50. – L. SCHWINDEN in: DEMANDT/ENGEMANN 2007 CD-ROM I.13.11.

³¹ See WEIDNER 2009 chapter IV.1.4.2.2 b).

tic feature for all those objects is the mould-made production process. Apparently, for the potter it did not make a big difference which objects he moulded, as the technique fundamentally was the same whether lamps, terracotta figurines, appliqués or plaques were made.

The obvious conclusion regarding the Spruchbecherkeramik is, that, during the manufacturing process, there came to be a separation in the work routine, which can be described as follows: the vessels were probably turned by a potter specialized in that ceramic class, while the decoration was done by a specialist in that field. With respect to

our study, this means that the fine dark colour-coated ware was probably turned in one of the neighbouring workshops, whereas in the workshop of kiln No. 5 the vessels were decorated while in the leather-hard state.

Another parallel to the above-mentioned pottery workshop is the fact that the intact inventory was left behind. This indicates that the owners of the potteries were expecting to continue operations when the riots of the 4th century came to an end. But, following the siege in 353, the extra-mural pottery district of Trier was completely abandoned. At this point, at the latest, kiln No. 5 was also given up.

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