

Supplying the Roman fleet: native Belgian, Frisian and Germanic pottery from Cologne

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Introduction

In 1995/96 archaeological excavations were conducted at Cologne on the site known as the Alteburg where the base of the Rhine fleet (*Classis Germanica*) was located.¹ The area investigated was located in the E part of the fort near the river bank (fig. 1). Stratigraphic excavations clarified the chronology of the site, revealing 8 different building phases and a much more complex history than had previously been realised.² In Phases 1 (Tiberian), 2 (Claudian), and 3 (Vespasianic), the barracks of the fort were timber structures. Under Domitian after 90/91, these buildings were demolished (Phase 4), and the area levelled to be replaced in Phase 5 by new barrack blocks with stone socles and a timber superstructure. After a fire around the middle of the 2nd c., rebuilding took place in Phases 6 and 7, the remains of which were poorly preserved. In Phase 8, around 270-280, the fort was abandoned and the riverside ditch backfilled. Evidence also suggests that the site was first occupied under Tiberius by legionary troops, possibly *Legio I* and *XX*, with a contingent of ships, and that it was not until the establishment of the provincial fleet under Claudius³ that the site became the permanent operational base of the fleet.⁴

Fragments of native, handmade Roman pottery were found in the post trenches, layers and pit fills, ranging in date from the early 1st to the mid-2nd c. (figs. 2-3). Since much of this pottery is virtually unknown on the Lower Rhine in Germany, a study of it in this context can make an important contribution to Roman pottery studies. Furthermore, analysis of the pottery allows us to determine the provenances and better understand the interaction between the Roman military and native societies, particularly in regard to the rôle various regions played in supplying the fleet with provisions.

The pottery and its context

A total of 198 sherds were analysed. In Phase 1, native handmade pottery comprised 3.3% of the total assemblage; in phase 2, 4.8% of the pottery was of this type. Native pottery decreased from 2.4% in Phase 3 to 0.9% in Phase 4 and only 0.4% in Phase 5. No handmade pottery associated with contexts in Phases 6, 7 or 8 was found. In Phase 1, all of the pottery under discussion was retrieved from the fills of large, circular refuse pits. Fragments from Phase 2 came from the fills of post trenches of the barrack buildings, and the handmade pottery from Phase 3 was recovered from refuse pits or post trenches in the barrack blocks and centurion's quarters. All pottery from Phase 4 was found in a thick levelling layer. The handmade ceramics from Phase 5 came from the paving and the ditches of the street between the barrack blocks or from cess pits and refuse pits. The pottery may be divided into three main groups, as discussed below.

Group 1

The first group consists of ovoid urns with an inverted rim, a form with Latene origins (fig. 4 nos. 1-7).⁵ The rim, ranging in diameter from 11 to 14 cm, either has a ridged and polished lip (Phase 1 and 3) or is lipless

- 1 M. Carroll-Spillecke, "Neues vom Flottenkastell 'Alteburg'," *Archäologie in Deutschland* (1996) 48; M. Carroll and T. Fischer, "Archäologische Ausgrabungen 1995/96 im Standlager der römischen Flotte (*Classis Germanica*) in Köln-Marienburg," *KJb* 32 (1999) 519-68.
- 2 H. G. Horn, *Die Römer in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (Stuttgart 1987) 517-19.
- 3 D. B. Saddington, "The origin and nature of the German and British fleets," *Britannia* 21 (1990) 229.
- 4 M. Carroll, "New excavations at the base of the *Classis Germanica* in Cologne (Alteburg)," in N. Gudea (ed.), *Roman frontier studies. Proc. XVIIth Int. Congress of Roman Frontier Studies* (Zalau 1999) 317-24.
- 5 A. Cahen-Delhaye, "Seconde campagne de fouilles dans l'éperon barré de Cherain-Brisy," *Archaeologia Belgica* 196 (1977) 33-36; M. Vegas, *Novaesium VI: Die augustische Gebrauchskeramik von Neuss*