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## POTS FOR PAST PEOPLE

### Nine Roman cemeteries in the Dutch eastern river area

From 2005 on the archaeological company ADC ArcheoProjecten has had the opportunity to excavate nine cemeteries of different size in the Dutch eastern river area. Two of them are still under investigation. In this article all of them will be characterised shortly. A few will get more attention in order to find an answer to questions that have risen over the past years.

Gifts of other material than pottery were also given to the dead, like metal objects, glass objects and sometimes objects made of bone or stone. These other gifts will be mentioned only occasionally.

#### Questions

- Can we distinguish any patterns in burial gifts?
- Can a development in burial gifts from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century be distinguished?
- Are there differences or similarities in gifts to men, women and children?
- Are there typical gifts to persons of a certain age or gender?
- Is there a difference in burial gifts in the different locations of the investigated region?

The investigations have not finished yet, so the results up to now should be seen as preliminary. It is therefore not possible to give a definite answer to the questions as mentioned above.

#### Location

The Dutch eastern river area is the region in the Netherlands in which the three large rivers Rhine, Waal and Meuse flow (fig. 1). The Limes was formed at the south bank of the Rhine. Between the rivers Rhine and Waal, an affluent of the Rhine, many larger and smaller settlements like *villae rusticae* and farms have been excavated. Between Waal and Meuse also a lot of similar settlements have existed. **Figure 1** shows the location of the cemeteries and the main rivers in the Netherlands. The cemeteries of Boxmeer and Lomm are strictly speaking not situated in the Dutch eastern river area, but they will be used to compare the results of the other locations with.

#### Characterization

There are both a lot of similarities and a lot of differences between the cemeteries and the circumstances of the excavations. Each of them will be commented on shortly, from East to West (fig. 2). On the most important or significant cemeteries more information is given (fig. 3).

One of the main similarities is that the cemeteries mostly belong to rural settlements like farms or maybe a *villa rustica*. The burial gifts therefore don't have a very rich character. Sometimes graffiti were found on plates, showing the inhabitants were not always illiterate.

The starting date of most of the cemeteries could not be pointed out exactly, because the handmade pottery in the earliest graves cannot be dated with certainty. The gradual change of characteristics on handmade pottery from Iron Age into Roman times makes it difficult to give the exact date. Therefore an approximate date of 0 is given.

Most burials are cremations (CR). From the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onward inhumations (INH) became more popular.

#### IJsselstein 'Over Oudland'

The cemetery is small and lies next to Bronze Age structures. This cemetery proved nevertheless its importance, because there is proof of barrows. In most cemeteries there are ditches that can only suggest the former presence of barrows. IJsselstein is the only place in the Netherlands so far where they have actually been found.<sup>1</sup> As for the pottery the cemetery did not show any specialties.

#### Zaltbommel 'De Wildeman'

The large cemetery is situated in a central place with at least four rural settlements in the immediate surroundings. Settlements were found at a distance of 500–800 metres from the graveyard, which obviously had a common function. Most of the cemetery has been excavated. The 79 graves showed a lot of different pottery gifts. Most of the pottery was heavily burnt and could not be reconstructed. Nevertheless, the remains were merely good enough to determine the form and type of the gifts.

<sup>1</sup> L. P. VERNIERS, Romeinse grafheuvels in IJsselstein. ADC Rapp. 1901 (Amersfoort 2009).



**Fig. 1.** Location of the cemeteries.

Many burial gifts consisted of a plate, beaker and flagon or showed slight varieties, like cups, bowls or other forms that can be related to a meal.<sup>2</sup>

This was the first cemetery to be investigated.

#### ***Zoelen ‘Scharenburg’***

The large cemetery could not be excavated completely due to the location next to a road. This cemetery must also have had a central function for surrounding settlements, given the number of graves and burial gifts. The many circular and rectangular ring ditches were beautifully preserved. Interesting about this cemetery is an inhumation dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

In this cemetery the pottery was somewhat less burnt than in Zaltbommel and more forms were not burnt at all. In a grave both burnt and not burnt pottery can occur. This

cemetery is special because of the beautiful ring ditches and the inhumations of babies.<sup>3</sup>

Patterns in burial gifts can be distinguished.<sup>4</sup> Some patterns can be mentioned: men get more gifts than women, men get more flat based amphorae and more metal objects. Babies always have small beakers, whilst children don’t.

#### ***Maurik ‘Buitenweg’***

The cemetery could only be partly excavated by trial trenches. We therefore don’t have a complete picture of the size and dating of the graveyard. The pottery found in the graves is comparable to the pottery found in the other cemeteries.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE/VANDERHOEVEN 2010, 133–135.

<sup>3</sup> H. A. P. VELDMAN, Graven in Zoelen. De opgraving van een Romeinse nederzetting en grafveld. ADC Rapp. 2391 (Amersfoort 2011).

<sup>4</sup> REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE/VANDERHOEVEN 2011, 126

<sup>5</sup> W. F. REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE, Romeins aardewerk van het grafveld van Maurik. In: B. A. Corver/M. Berkhout, Bedrijventerrein Doejenburg II, Maurik, Gemeente Buren. B&G Rapp. 1160 (Noordwijk

Site	Date	n Graves	n Pots
IJsselstein	125 -200	6	10
Zaltbommel	0 - 200/225	79	133
Zoelen	100 - 250/275	31	98
Maurik	0 -200	30	64
Valburg	50 - 250/300	37	84
Elst	0 - 200/250	26	62
Huissen	0 - 325/350	*29	*82
Boxmeer	0 - 225/250	93	188
Lomm 2	0/25 -160	7	15
Lomm 3	25 -100	12	20
* last campaign not included			

Fig. 2. Table of information per cemetery.

	Zaltbommel	Zoelen	Elst	Boxmeer	Lomm 2	Lomm 3
Plate	34	31	7	59	3	5
Cup	12	3	1	3	1	
Beaker	28	21	4	31		1
Pot/jar	15	4	12	18	5	12
Bowl	5	5	1	9	1	
Flagon 1 ear	20	14	9	51	2	2
flat based amphora	1	9		6		
Jug	6	6	3	1		
Lid	2		1	2	1	
Mortarium	2	2		1	1	
Chalice		3				
Handmade	8	0	18	7	1	
uncertain			6			
	133	98	62	188	15	20

Fig. 3. Table of Information on selected cemeteries.

**Valburg 'Molenzicht'**

This fairly large cemetery has been solely excavated. Settlements in which people have lived could not be excavated. Although some extraordinary pottery was given to the dead, this cemetery will not get closer attention in this paper. The most special gift is a terra sigillata *kantharos* with white barbotine decoration. On top of this cemetery a village was built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

**Elst 'Park Lingezegen'**

Close to a presumed villacomplex a cemetery has been excavated in the spring of 2014. All of the pottery has been analysed, but the other data are still under investigation.<sup>7</sup> In this cemetery much handmade pottery was found.

**Huissen 'Loovelden'**

During trial trenches traces of settlements were found that could not be classified as military or particularly rich. In December 2012 the trenches revealed ring ditches and graves. A chamber grave with fairly rich burial gifts came to light, containing a bronze washing set (oinochoae and patera), two glass flasks and a glass pot, several dishes in terra sigillata, bronze instruments plus some more ordinary pottery finds. Another important thing was the date of two or three graves at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The finds in these graves did not occur in the other cemeteries that date from the 1<sup>st</sup> until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century continuously.<sup>8</sup>

This location proved to be very special and a second and even third campaign took place in spring and the end of summer of 2014. The results of the excavations have not been completed yet, but the pottery of 95 new grave contexts are analysed and will be commented on shortly.

Many graves dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century contain terra nigra plates, mostly stamped. There are also a lot of terra nigra pots. In the other cemeteries no stamped terra nigra plates

2012) 23–28; EAD., Aardewerk. In: H. A. P. Veldman, Graven te Maurik Buitenweg (gemeente Buren). ADC Rapp. 3148 (Amersfoort 2012) 18–19.

<sup>6</sup> L. M. B. VAN DER FEIJST/H. A. P. VELDMAN, Graven in het verleden van Valburg. ADC Rapport 2519 (Amersfoort 2011).

<sup>7</sup> REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE in prep. (1).

<sup>8</sup> EAD. in prep. (2).



**Fig. 4.** Huissen Context 35. Extraordinary grave with bronze and glass imitations, mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century, no personal data yet.



**Fig. 5.** 2<sup>nd</sup> century, standard inventory: Zaltbommel INH 2, woman (35–50).

were found. The amount of terra nigra pots is also striking. Another grave with a washing set came to light, this set is made of pottery (**fig. 4**). Finds like this are exceptional in cemeteries in rural regions, so the question rises what kind of people lived in the surrounding settlements. Might they have a military background? On the other hand, the deceased buried in this cemetery are mostly women and children, and even some foetuses. How this should be interpreted is not clear yet.

### **Boxmeer ‘Sterckwijk’**

This very large graveyard lasted for over 1000 years (460 graves!). The oldest graves date from the Bronze Age, but most people were buried during the Iron Age. From Roman times there are still some 93 cremations. Most of the graves were dated to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but there are also 1<sup>st</sup> century graves. Close to this

cemetery a lot of Iron Age buildings were found. Most of the Roman settlements must have been elsewhere, because only a few buildings from Roman times were found.

In this graveyard the number of plates and flagons is nearly the same, whereas in most graveyards dating mainly in the second century the number of plates exceeds (**fig. 3**). Most of the graves from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century had a flagon and sometimes nothing else.<sup>9</sup>

### **Lomm ‘Hoogwatergeul 2’ and ‘Hoogwatergeul 3’**

At two different locations not far from each other two cemeteries have been found. Both cemeteries were situated nearly at the border of the Meuse. At ‘Hoogwatergeul 2’ also a large Iron Age cemetery was excavated. This cemetery appeared to be placed within the boundaries of a sanctuary. The Roman graves were found just outside this sanctuary.<sup>10</sup>

At ‘Hoogwatergeul 3’ a settlement and a small cemetery were found. It did not become clear why people were buried at two different places not far apart. The dating of the sites shows an overlap.<sup>11</sup> Although both cemeteries date from the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the pottery found was mainly wheelthrown.

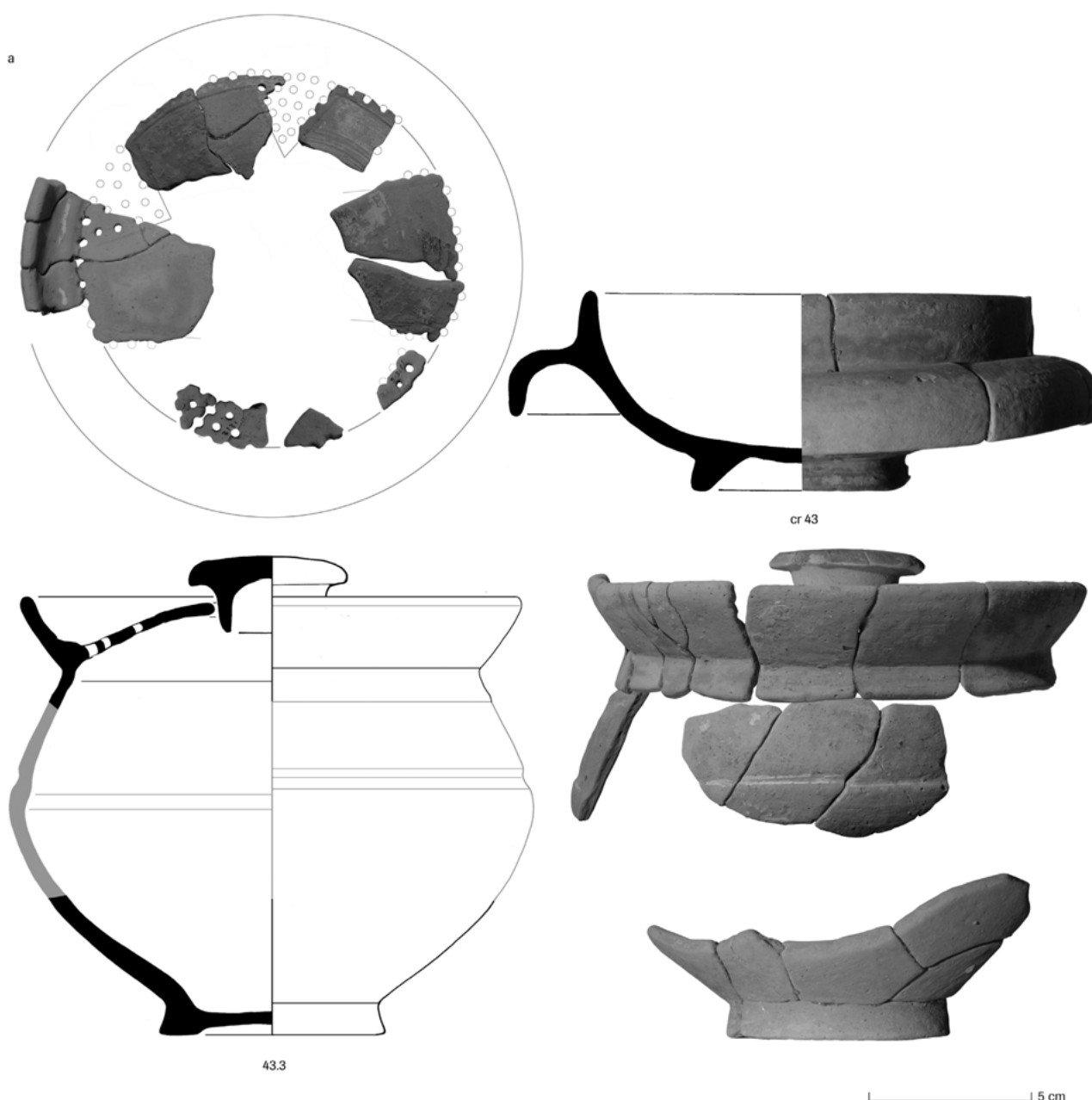
### **Standard inventory**

Bearing in mind that most of the burial gifts represent the pottery used for a meal or a washing set, either for the deceased or for the ones mourning, one should not be surprised that some sort of standard inventory can be defined. Many graves revealed a plate, a beaker and a flagon (**fig. 5; 10d**). Sometimes only two of them were given to the dead; sometimes the plate or the beaker was replaced by a cup or a pot was used

<sup>9</sup> E. BLOM/H. M. VAN DE VELDE (red.), *De archeologie van Boxmeer-Sterckwijk: 4500 jaar wonen, werken en begraven langs de Maas*. ADC Monogr. 18 (Amersfoort 2015); REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE 2015, 426–428.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. GERRETS/R. DE LEEUWE, *Rituelen aan de Maas. Een archeologische opgraving te Lomm Hoogwatergeul fase II*. ADC Rapp. 2333 (Amersfoort 2011).

<sup>11</sup> D. A. GERRETS/G. L. WILLIAMS (red.), *Water en vuur. Archeologisch proefsleuvenonderzoek en opgraving te Lomm Hoogwatergeul fase III*. ADC Rapp. 2703 (Amersfoort 2011).



**Fig. 6.** Milk cooker and terra sigillata cup Drag 38, Zaltbommel CR 43, woman (> 30) and baby (< 3 months).

in stead of a beaker. This sort of inventory was given to men, women and children, although it seems that (small) children have got this inventory slightly more often than adults.

On the other hand there have also been extraordinary gifts, like the milk cooker in Zaltbommel (**fig. 6**). How a specialty like this in a double grave of a woman and (her?) baby should be interpreted is not clear.

In Zoelen the men were given more large forms like the small flat based amphorae and large storage pots and also metal objects (**fig. 7**). The women got less pottery than the men.<sup>12</sup> They may have got baskets or wooden gifts, but there is no evidence. Tendencies for men and women like

this could not be as easily distinguished in the cemeteries of Zaltbommel and Boxmeer.

Graves of adolescents also have something in common. Many of them have a gift that is not part of the standard inventory, but may represent something that is not quite clear. A completely worn off mortarium and a jug are examples of gifts to adolescents.

In all cemeteries small beakers were given to babies and sometimes to small children (**fig. 8**). These beakers are less than 9 cm height. In Zoelen it seemed that (small) children got more often the standard inventory as defined above than adults.<sup>13</sup> In the other cemeteries this is not the case.

<sup>12</sup> REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE/VANDERHOEVEN 2011, 125–126.

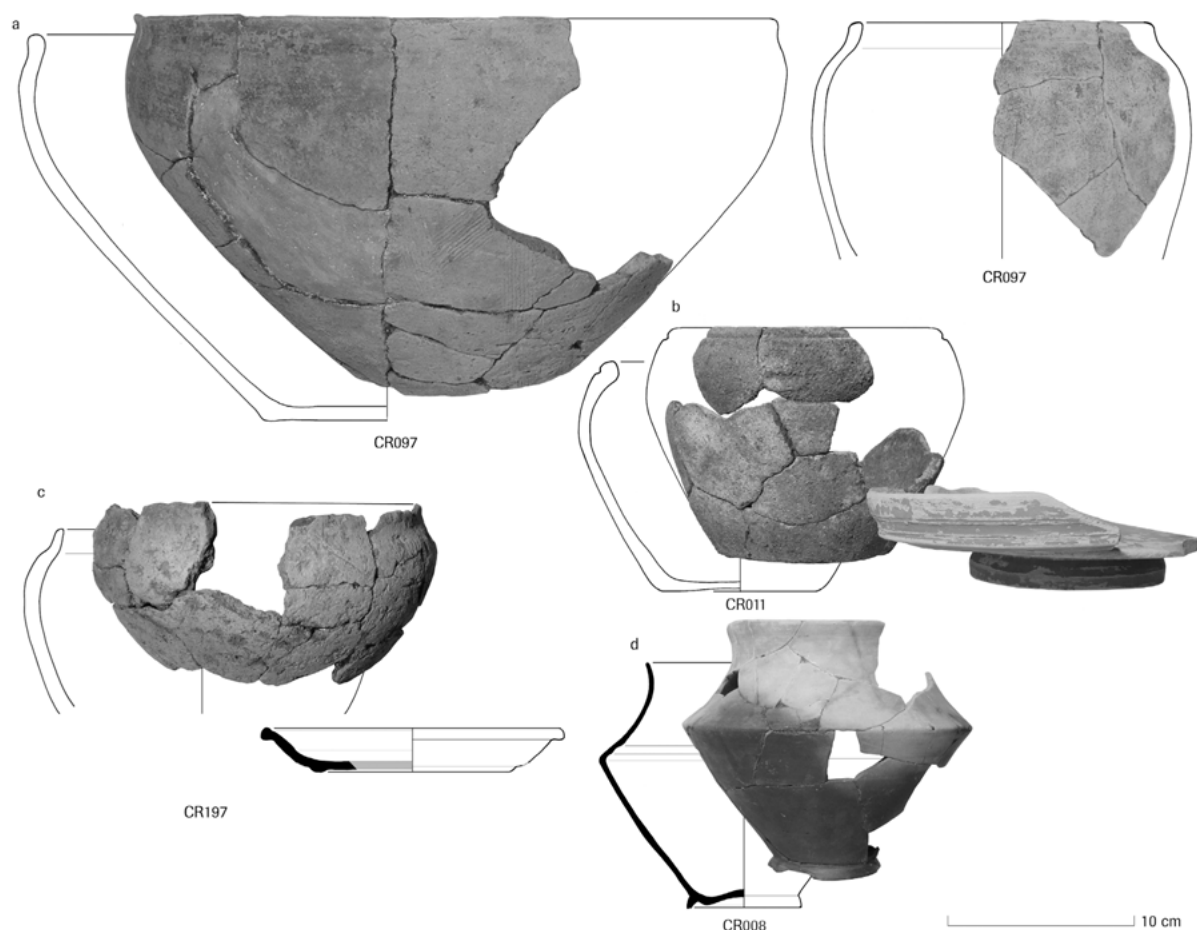
<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 127.



**Fig. 7.** Zoelen CR24, end of 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century, grave of a man (30–50) with bronze razor and iron scissors.



**Fig. 8.** Zoelen INH06, 3<sup>rd</sup> century burial gift to baby (<2 months).



**Fig. 9.** Gifts in the 1<sup>st</sup> century: **a** Boxmeer, CR 97, adult (20–40); **b** Lomm 3, CR011, no person; **c** Boxmeer, CR197, person (15–40); **d** Lomm 3 CR008, man ?

## Chronology

In Zaltbommel and Zoelen these standard inventories with their small varieties seemed quite common. Only the earliest phase in Zaltbommel had handmade pottery as a gift. After the investigations of the cemeteries of Zaltbommel and Zoelen the two cemeteries of Lomm showed a very different pattern. The cemeteries could both be dated mainly in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Only one grave at ‘Hoogwatergeul 2’ could be dated as 2<sup>nd</sup> century. These graves had mainly terra nigra pots, coarse ware pots or colour coated beakers. The earliest graves had only handmade pots. Plates and flagons were rare, but occurred in combination with a pot or beaker. In the earliest phases of the cemetery of Nijmegen Hatert the same combination of gifts was found.<sup>14</sup> Thus a chronological development in sort and amount of burial gifts in rural settlements seemed to have established itself.

## 1<sup>st</sup> century

The earliest burials show the Iron Age traditions: one or more handmade pots or smaller bowls. The pots can have different

sizes (**fig. 9a**). In the cemeteries of Zaltbommel, Elst and Boxmeer a lot of graves had only handmade pottery (**fig. 3**).

Gradually wheelthrown pottery was given in the graves from the second quarter or middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century onward. The examples in **fig. 9b–c** show combinations with a terra sigillata and a terra nigra plate, but combinations with terra nigra or coarse ware pots, colour coated beakers or even mica dusted beakers occur even more often. This came to light during the recent analysis of the burial gifts from both Elst and Huissen.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that in the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century handmade pottery became less popular and wheelthrown pots became the new standard. They could be in terra nigra: carinated pots Holwerda 26 (**fig. 9d**) or more beaker-like pots with or without barbotine decoration (Holwerda 28 or 31).<sup>16</sup> There were also coarse ware pots (Stuart 201A or 201C) and colour coated pots (Stuart 1 and 2).<sup>17</sup>

All of these pots whether they are in fine or coarse ware, have approximately the same form with a more or less glob-

<sup>14</sup> J. K. HAALBOS, Het grafveld van Nijmegen-Hatert. Een begraafplaats uit de eerste drie eeuwen na Chr. op het platteland van Noviomagus Batavorum. Beschrijv. Verzameling. Provinciaal Mus. G.M. Kam Nijmegen 11 (Nijmegen 1990).

<sup>15</sup> REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDÉ in prep (1); EAD. in prep (2).

<sup>16</sup> Holwerda = J. H. HOLWERDA, De Belgische waar in Nijmegen (‘s-Gravenhage). Beschrijv. Verzameling. Provinciaal Mus. G.M. Kam Nijmegen 2 (Nijmegen 1941).

<sup>17</sup> Stuart = P. J. J. STUART, Gewoon aardewerk uit de Romeinse legerplaats en de bijbehorende grafvelden te Nijmegen. Beschrijv. Verzameling. Provinciaal Mus. G.M. Kam Nijmegen 6 (Nijmegen 1977).



**Fig. 10.** Flavian or 2<sup>nd</sup> century gifts: **a** Boxmeer, CR100, adult (20–30); **b** Elst, CR06, no personal data yet; **c** Boxmeer, CR116, adult (20–40); **d** Zoelen, CR37, woman (30–50).

ular body, a small neck and a small outward rolled, curved or otherwise everted rim.

The use of pots like this can be seen as a natural successor of the handmade pot.

In the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the flagon also appeared more often as a burial gift. In the Flavian time the combination with a pot or beaker, a plate and a flagon or two of them became more common.

### *Flavian–2<sup>nd</sup> century*

In Flavian times still a lot of terra nigra pots are given to the dead, either with or without barbotine decoration. Gradually colour coated beakers take over their place. Flagons became more and more important. In Boxmeer a lot of graves even have only a single flagon.<sup>18</sup> Many plates are of terra sigillata. Coarse ware and colour coated plates are also found frequently (fig. 10). Terra nigra plates were mainly used in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Very rarely a late type of Holwerda 81 occurs. The plate becomes the most important gift and the beaker or pot less important.

### *Second half/end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century and 3<sup>rd</sup> century*

In the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century a greater variety of gifts becomes popular. Plates, beakers and flagons remain the most important gifts, but more coarse ware – cooking or storage pots, mortaria, flat based amphorae, lids etc. – were found in the graves. Flagons become more and more popular. Sometimes they are replaced by a flat based amphora or a coarse ware jug. From this period on differences become distinct. It seems the rules or rituals become less strict or leave room for more variety. The grave of a man (fig. 7) dates from this period.

### **Conclusion**

At this stage of the investigations the following conclusions can be made. There are obvious similarities and differences between the cemeteries presented. They are not only due to differences in dates of the graveyards, but also the age and gender influenced the choice of burial gifts. Moreover every group of people that buried their dead in a particular cemetery

<sup>18</sup> REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE 2015, 427–428.

seems to have had habits of their own. The large amount of flagons in Boxmeer, but also the heavy burning of the gifts in Zaltbommel can be seen as an example.

The choice of gifts is influenced by the region the people lived. The graves close to the Meuse and the Rhine could be gifted with wheelthrown pottery from an early stage. The graves that lie more in the centre of the river area like the ones in Zaltbommel and Zoelen could only be gifted with wheelthrown pottery when the people got in touch with it through some kind of trade or exchange. The local elite would have had it earlier than the inhabitants of rural settlements. Since the investigated cemeteries belong mostly to rural settlements it should not surprise that wheelthrown pottery was not given to the dead before Flavian times.

There is an obvious development in burial gifts from the Early Roman period in the Dutch Eastern river area until the end

of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. At first the old Iron Age tradition continues, but in the course of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the handmade pots are complemented or replaced by wheelthrown pots. Other forms like plates and flagons are introduced as burial gifts, influenced by the new Roman military elite. This change in forms continues in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to become a new standard. Later on in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the graves can be complemented with other pottery like large storage pots, flat based amphorae and mortaria. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the same kind of pottery was given to the dead and more attention was paid to babies and children.

Of all the patterns in burial gifts to men, women and children, the most obvious is the small beaker or small pot to small children. All small beakers proved to belong to the graves of babies or children.

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in prep. (1)

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REIGERSMAN-VAN LIDTH DE JEUDE  
in prep. (2)

EAD., Aardewerk van het grafveld van Huissen “Loovelden” (in prep.).

