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## THE POTTERY AND GRAFFITI FROM THE VICUS OF OCKENBURGH, THE HAGUE (NL)

### Introduction

In the dunes of Ockenburgh, in the city of The Hague (province of Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands), a small military fort and a much larger *vicus* were located. The site of Ockenburgh is situated south of the end part of the Lower Rhine limes with its auxiliary forts, and in the vicinity of the *municipium Forum Hadriani* (fig. 1b). Nowadays the site is located near the North Sea, but in the Roman period the coastline ran west of the present coastline, hence the site was situated further inland.

In the years 1930–1936, excavations were carried out by the archaeologist J. H. Holwerda after he received information that a Roman road had been found in the dunes of The Hague. He did not find a Roman road, but instead features which he interpreted as a ‘poor, indigenous settlement’.<sup>1</sup> However, the finds from the site – bronze military finds as well as many fragments of Samian ware – did not match this interpretation. The municipal archaeological service of The Hague therefore initiated new excavations in 1993.

Features pointed to the presence of a small military fort, surrounded by a V-shaped ditch and a rampart (fig. 1a).<sup>2</sup> In the centre of these defence structures a U-shaped building existed. A *mortarium* with a graffito showed that the fortlet was used by a *cohors equitata*, probably the sixth *cohors Brittonum*.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, three horse burials that were found just outside the small fort, confirmed this assumption.<sup>4</sup> South of the fortlet the excavations of 1993 exposed features of a large *vicus*. Below the features of the *vicus* another V-shaped ditch was found, belonging to a temporary camp.

### Chronology of the fort and *vicus* based on the pottery analysis

Analysis of the Samian ware and the other fine wares (mostly colour coated beakers) showed that the fortlet must have been built around 150 AD. In figure 2 only those forms and types

of Samian ware were included that could be dated with more accuracy (so-called diagnostic types), in order to analyse the differences between the fortlet and the *vicus*. Dishes and plates of the earlier type Dragendorff 18/31(R) (fig. 2,2) were dominant, while dishes and plates of the later type Dragendorff 31(R) were much less prevalent. The small number of cups Dragendorff 27, dating up to around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century<sup>5</sup>, were an indication of a starting date around 150 AD. *Mortaria* Dragendorff 45 and dishes Dragendorff 32, indicative of the last decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, were hardly present.<sup>6</sup> From this we can conclude that the small fort was abandoned around 180 AD.

The colour coated ware consisted mostly of beakers Stuart 2/Höpkén E20<sup>7</sup> (almost 75%), followed by beakers Stuart 4/Höpkén E23, predominantly in Cologne fabric with a dark brown or black slip (fig. 3,2).<sup>8</sup> These beakers are indicative of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>9</sup> The fact that only a small number of beakers Niederbieber 32<sup>10</sup>/Höpkén E24 were present, almost all of these in Cologne fabric with black slip, indicated that the small fort was abandoned in the last quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, around 180/185 AD.

In the *vicus*, the fine wares showed a very different picture.<sup>11</sup> The presence of several cups Dragendorff 27 indicated that the *vicus* was built around the same time as the small fort. The end date was much later, however. Among the Samian ware in the *vicus*, dishes and plates of the later type Dragen-

<sup>5</sup> M. POLAK, South Gaulish terra sigillata with potters' stamps from Vechten. RCRF Acta Suppl. 9 (Nijmegen 2000) 118–121.

<sup>6</sup> VAN DER LINDEN 2012, 58 table 3,2.

<sup>7</sup> Typology after P. STUART, Gewoon aardewerk uit de Romeinse legerplaats en de bijbehorende grafvelden te Nijmegen. Beschrijving Verzam. Rijksmus. G. M. Kam Nijmegen 6 (Nijmegen 1977); C. HÖPKÉN, Die römische Keramikproduktion in Köln. Kölner Forsch. 8 (Mainz 2005). VAN DER LINDEN 2012, 67 table 3,3.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart 4 is very well represented in contexts from the period 165–180/185 AD in *Forum Hadriani* (M. BINK/P.F.J. FRANZEN, Forum Hadriani, Voorburg. Definitief Archeologisch Onderzoek. BAAC Rapp. A-05.0125 [s Hertogenbosch, Deventer 2009] 143 table 6,13 period 2a). Stuart 2 is usually dated until around 180 AD (J. K. HAALBOS, Het grafveld van Nijmegen-Hatert. Een begraafplaats uit de eerste drie eeuwen na Chr. Op het platteland van Noviomagus Batavorum. Beschrijvingen Verzam. Provinciaal Mus. G. M. Kam Nijmegen 11 [Nijmegen 1990] 141–142), although in some cases this beaker can be found in contexts which are dated up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (personal comment S. Heeren, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). The dark brown slip on many of both types of beakers from the fort of Ockenburgh indicated that these beakers date to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

<sup>10</sup> Typology after F.OELMANN, Die Keramik des Kastells Niederbieber. Mat. Röm.-Germ. Keramik 1 (Frankfurt a. M. 1914).

<sup>11</sup> VAN DER LINDEN 2015 table 3,3.

<sup>1</sup> WAASDORP 2012, 14.

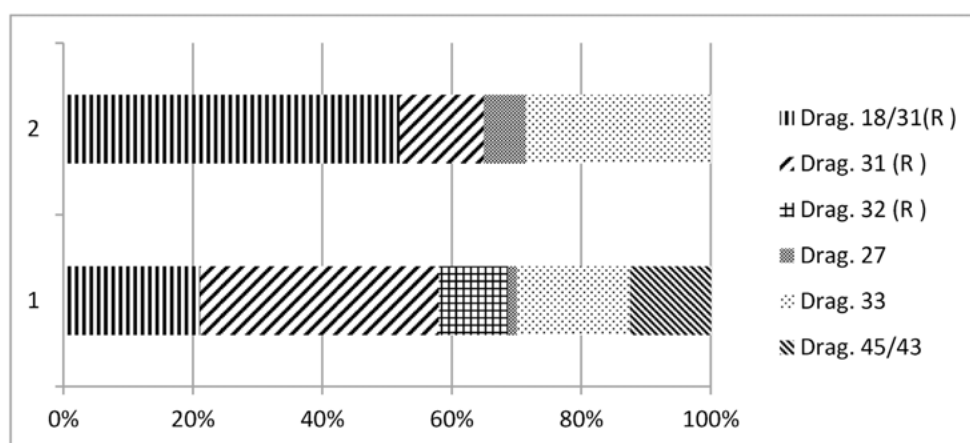
<sup>2</sup> WAASDORP/VAN ZOOLINGEN 2015, 48–54 fig. 5,2.

<sup>3</sup> This graffito reads: [---]VI.BRI. >TINIL CAE[---], which was interpreted as [*cohors*] *sexta Bri(tonum) centuria Tinil(us) Cae[lianus]* (WAASDORP 2012, 131).

<sup>4</sup> P. STORM, Archeozoölogie: strijdwaardige paarden in Romeins Den Haag. In: J. A. Waasdorp (ed.), Den Haag Ockenburgh. Een fortificatie als onderdeel van de Romeinse kustverdediging. Haagse Oudheidkde. Publ. 13 (Den Haag 2012) 91–123.



**Fig. 1.** a Ockenburgh excavated area including a schematic plan of the fortlet, the temporary camp and the *vicus* buildings, wells and cemetery; b The Hague area: Ockenburgh and surrounding (military) sites.



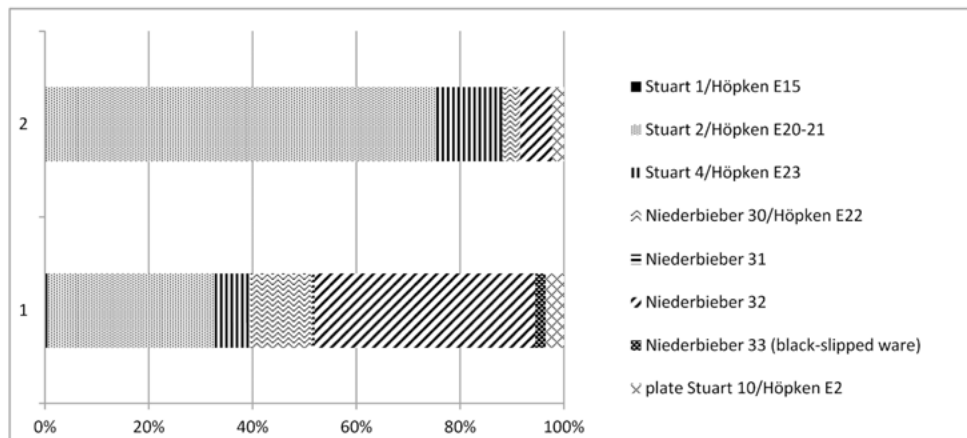
**Fig. 2.** Diagnostic types of Samian ware from Ockenburgh fort (2) and Ockenburgh *vicus* (1), based on the number of rim fragments (fort n=77; *vicus* n=1136).

dorff 31(R) were dominant (fig. 2,1). Dishes Dragendorff 32 and *mortaria* in Samian ware were well represented. The colour coated ware (fig. 3,1) consisted mostly of beakers Niederbieber 32/Höpkén E24, both in Cologne fabric with black slip and in Argonne ware (red fabric with black slip). The presence of beakers Niederbieber 33 in black-slipped ware as well as some coarse ware, such as plates Niederbieber

113, indicated that the *vicus* was still in use in the second part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and even in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> Fragments of 4<sup>th</sup> century glass confirmed this later dating.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. table 3,6.

<sup>13</sup> T. VERHOEVEN, Glas. In: J. A. Waasdorp/R. J. van Zoolingen (eds.), Den Haag Ockenburgh II. Een Romeinse vicus vlakbij de kust. Haagse Oudheidkde. Publ. 18 (Den Haag 2015) table 3,18.



**Fig. 3.** Colour coated and black-slipped ware from Ockenburgh fort (2) and Ockenburgh *vicus* (1), based on the number of rim fragments (fort n=178; *vicus* n=200).



**Fig. 4.** Flat-bottomed amphora with graffito [---C?]OMVNE.VAS[---]/[---]MNEBVS. – Scale 1:2.

#### Character of the *vicus* after the abandonment of the fort

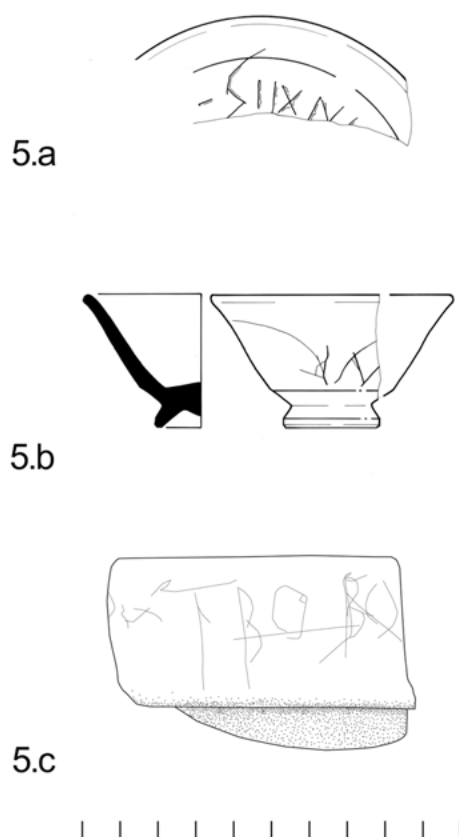
One of the research questions was whether the *vicus* changed its character after the small fort was abandoned around 180 AD. Clearly the inhabitants of the *vicus* did not leave together with the soldiers of the *cohors equitata* of the fortlet. Did they change their way of living and start economic relations with their civilian neighbours? Or did the military character of the *vicus* continue?

The graffiti found in the *vicus* were used to answer this question. On a substantial number of fragments of fine ware from the *vicus* – predominantly Samian ware – graffiti were applied. However, graffiti were found not just on fine wares but on some coarse ware vessels as well, such as a graffito on a flat-bottomed amphora (fig. 4), reading [---C?]OMVNE.VAS[---]/[---]MNEBVS (...communal vessel.../...for or by all...).<sup>14</sup>

A large number of graffiti is considered to be typical for military sites.<sup>15</sup> The graffiti on the Samian ware (102 graffiti) from the Ockenburgh *vicus* consisted mostly of names and other owners' marks (fig. 5). These graffiti were applied to Samian ware from the period when the small fort was in use, as well as the period when the fortlet of Ockenburgh was already abandoned.

<sup>14</sup> The text probably ends after [---]MNEBVS, since there is a lot of space after this. Two more small fragments read [---]VS[---] and [---]XS? It is not clear where exactly these fragments should be positioned. This text could have a ritual meaning, but could also simply mean that this vessel was of common use (E. van der Linden/J.A. Waasdorp, Graffiti op aardewerk. In: J. A. Waasdorp/R. J. van Zoelingen [eds.], Den Haag Ockenburgh II. Een Romeinse vicus vlakbij de kust. Haagse Oudheidkde. Publ. 18 [Den Haag 2015] 205 fig. 3,45).

<sup>15</sup> L. Bakker/B. Galsterer-Kröll, Graffiti auf römischer Keramik im Rheinischen Landesmuseum Bonn. Epigr. Stud. 10 (Keulen 1975) 9–10.



**Fig. 5.** Some examples of graffiti on three of the diagnostic types of Samian ware from the Ockenburgh *vicus*. **a** Dragendorff 18/31, graffiti [---] - SIIX IVL[---] or [---] IN XIIS- [---] (OCK93.714.1); **b** Dragendorff 33, graffiti AVR (OCK93.2105.2); **c** Dragendorff 45, graffiti [---P?] T. BOBO[---] (OCK93.7507.1). – Scale 1:2.

**Figure 6** shows the same diagnostic types of Samian ware from the fort (**fig. 6,3**) and the *vicus* (**fig. 6,2**) as was shown in **figure 2**. In this graph however, a bar was added (**fig. 6,1**) to show the graffiti applied to those diagnostic types of Samian ware (54 of the total of 102 graffiti on Samian ware). The ratio

between the diagnostic types in the Ockenburgh fort bore little resemblance to the proportions of these types applied with graffiti in the *vicus*. However, the ratio between the diagnostic types with graffiti was quite similar to the general proportions between the diagnostic types in the *vicus*. This means that graffiti were applied during the whole occupation period of the *vicus*, and not just during the occupation period of the fortlet. The large number of graffiti, as well as the fact that many of the graffiti on Samian ware date after 180 AD, is an indication of a continuing military character of the *vicus*, even after the Ockenburgh fortlet had been abandoned.

## Conclusion

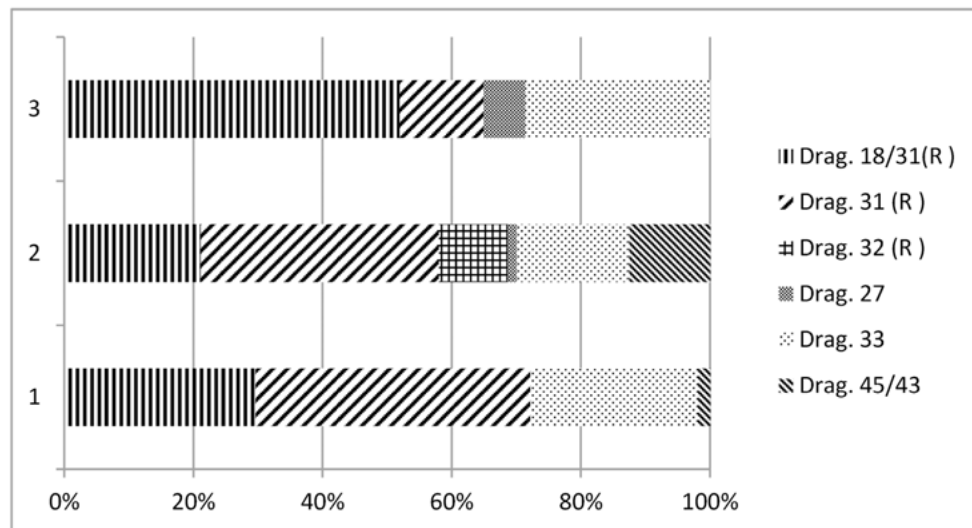
The differences in the pottery from the fort and *vicus* showed that the occupation of the *vicus* lasted much longer than the occupation of the small fort of Ockenburgh. The graffiti on the pottery – predominantly Samian ware – proved that the military character of the *vicus* continued even after the abandonment of the fortlet in 180 AD. This means that the *raison d'être* of the *vicus* was not just for the small fort of Ockenburgh; the presence of the large temporary camp indicates that a wider system of military installations in the coastal area south of the Lower Germanic limes was constructed around 150 AD. The *vicus* of Ockenburgh is likely to be a central *vicus*, that supplied services to several military forts or installations. Most of these forts and fortlets have not yet been located, or alternatively have been swallowed by the sea when the coastline shifted inland after the Roman period.<sup>16</sup>

## Acknowledgements

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<sup>16</sup> WAASDORP/VAN ZOOLINGEN 2015, 428–430 fig. 5,8.



**Fig. 6.** Diagnostic types of Samian ware with graffiti (1) from Ockenburgh *vicus* (54 individual vessels), compared to the same diagnostic types of Samian ware from Ockenburgh fort (3) and Ockenburgh *vicus* (2), based on the number of rim fragments (fort n=77; *vicus* n=1136).

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