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POTTERY IN WESTERN *NORICUM* QUESTIONS OF DISTRIBUTION AND GROUP IDENTITY

The following account derives from the author's PhD-thesis-work in progress. The scope offered by a typological examination of so called "Noric pottery" is outlined, without having the possibility to discuss all the arguments in detail, which would be premature.

Differences and commonalities from locally produced pottery of the Roman Provincia *Noricum* were already recognized in the 1940s by A. Schörgendorfer¹. His work on pottery in the Eastern Alps includes some consideration about the distribution of imported and local pottery. Unfortunately his ideas were almost entirely ignored in later publications on the topic of so called "Noric pottery". Although many definitions of what is called "Noric ware"² have been offered, these can be reduced to a kind of ceramic material which is fired in a reducing atmosphere and tempered with lime/marble or quartz. Whether lime or quartz predominates is merely a question of geographic distribution and cannot generally be seen as a chronological criterion. Publications of pottery from different findspots in *Noricum* during the last decades concentrate on the analysis of imported wares more than on a typology of locally and regionally produced pots and bowls. Wherever "Noric" material is presented, all the fragments are displayed and classified. As a result of these classifications, which are designed to present all the material found at a certain place, the so called "typologies" do not allow any chronological or spatial conclusions. In most of the recent research work this is not even a matter of getting any results. In the author's opinion this is mainly a problem of puzzling terminologies and undefined typological criteria. The criteria that are useful for the classification of all the "Noric" pottery from a single findspot can normally not be used for an analysis of types appearing in the whole province or certain parts of it. Most of the classifications consider only the morphology of pottery rims. This is a very useful tool for the classification of material, because walls cannot be distinguished and the same is true for most of the poorly preserved bases. Classes of rim types, on the other hand, seem to allow an assignment of all, even very small fragments. Unquestionably this methodology is very

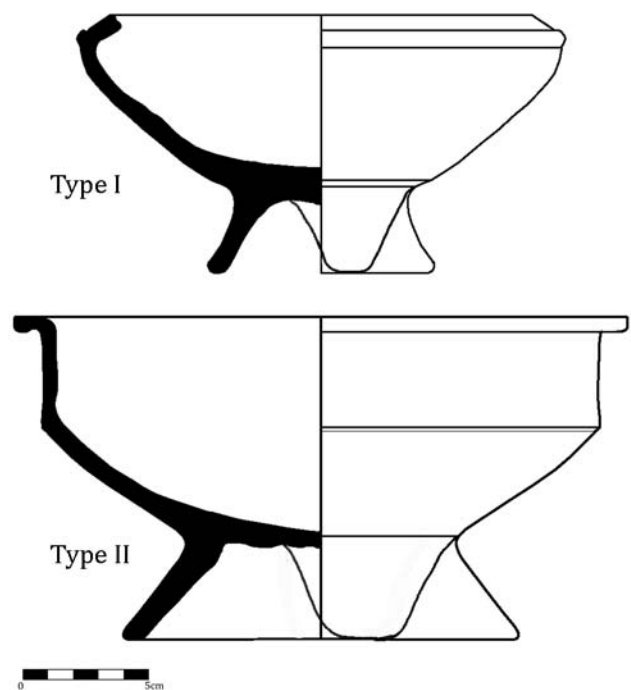


Fig. 1. Types of tripod bowls in *Noricum*. – Scale 1:3.

useful for the organization of great amounts of pottery. At the same time, however, searching for comparable material elsewhere becomes rather unattractive since comparable rim morphologies could be found all around the Roman Empire, but significant data is lacking.

Consequently, a typology of Roman pottery in *Noricum* needs a more precise description of more distinguishing attributes than just the rim morphology. A description of a type should therefore include morphological, technological and stylistic attributes. As a first case study so called "Noric tripod bowls" will be discussed. Generally useful is a separation of bowls with rounded wall and rounded incurving rim (Type I) from bowls with carinated body and angled everted rim (Type II) (fig. 1). Because of their basal form, which is the most important attribute for a functional classification, both vessel types belong to the class of tripods. The second type with everted rim can be found all around the province, but there are certain stylistic attributes which allow the definition of a variant with a restricted regional distribution (Type II,

¹ A. SCHÖRGENDORFER, Die römische Keramik der Ostalpenländer (Wien 1942).

² For a summary see B. TOBER, Untersuchungen auf dem Kaiser-Josef-Platz in Wels 1993 (Wels 2001) 113–117.

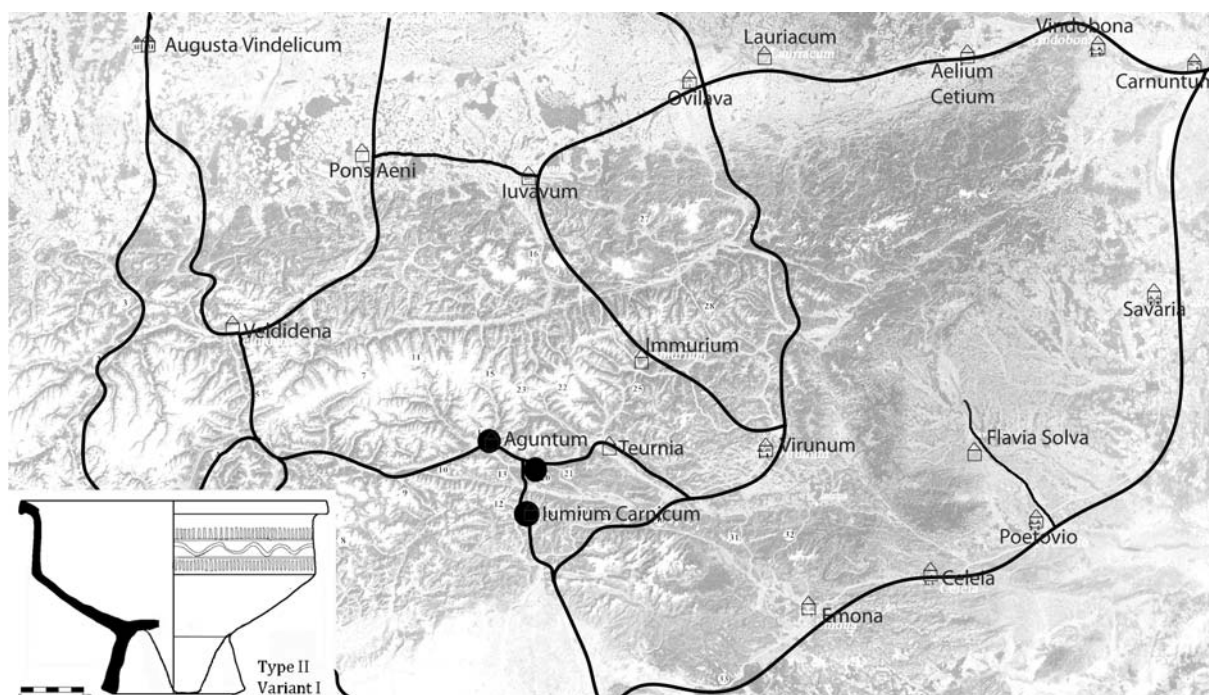


Fig. 2. Distribution of tripod bowl Type II Variant I.

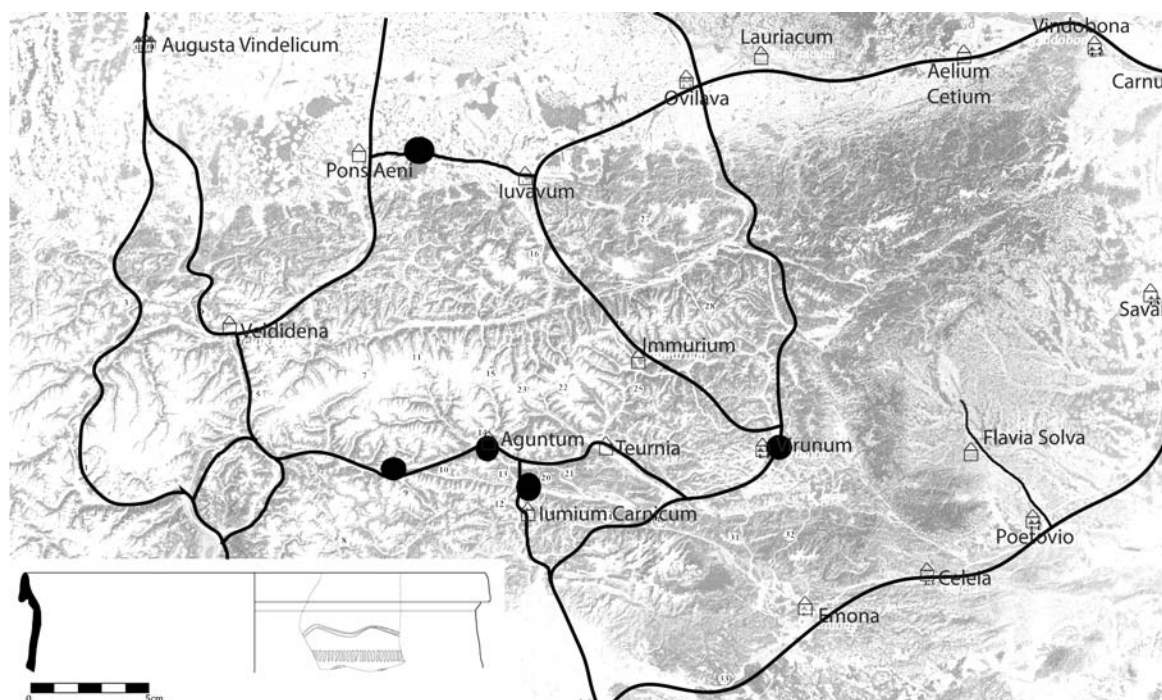


Fig. 3. Distribution of pots with decoration similar to tripod bowl Type II Variant I.

Variant I). The decoration of this variant of Type II tripods, consisting of grooves and wavy lines, is distributionally significant as illustrated in **figure 2**. A similar decoration can be found on so called “Noric” pots (**fig. 3**) which show the same area of circulation as the decorated tripod bowls. Returning to the tripods with incurving rim, four main stylistic variants can be recognized (**fig. 4**). Variant I is present in the whole province and even in parts of Pannonia (**fig. 5**). Other

variants show a more regional distribution and are found especially in the south-eastern and south-western parts of *Noricum* (**fig. 6**). But also the northern part of *Noricum* has its own pottery types. As an example, pots with rounded body, everted rim and accentuated neck, which often carry wavy-line decoration on the shoulder may be mentioned. This type is recognized mainly in the north-western part of *Noricum* (**fig. 7**).

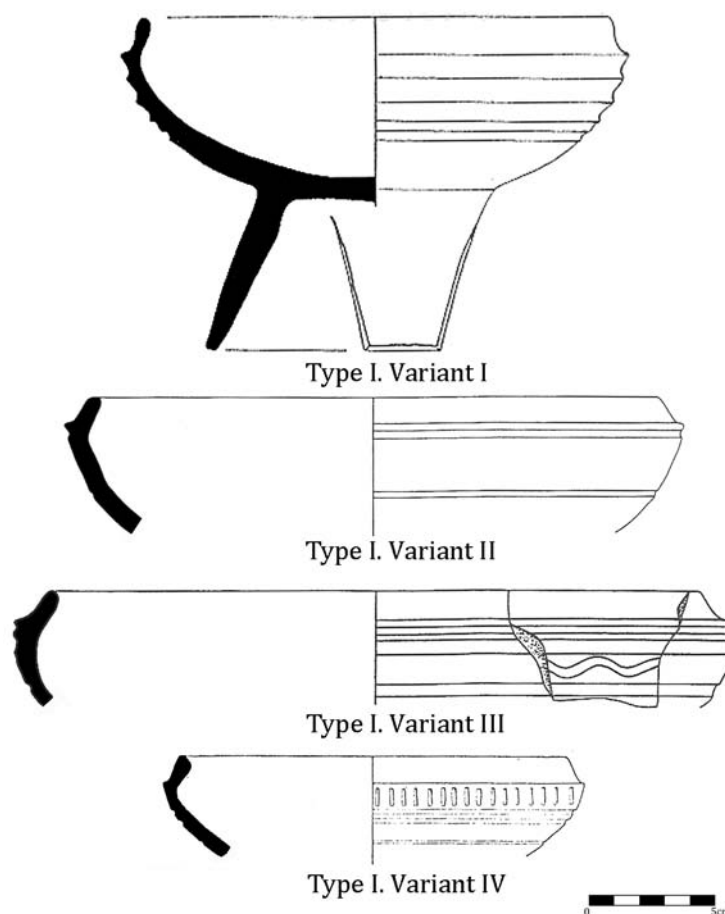


Fig. 4. Stylistic variants of tripod bowl Type I. – Scale 1:3.

By using stylistic and morphological attributes it is possible to define types of distributional significance. Technological attributes have not been used for the case studies shown above, because all the displayed tripod bowls are wheel thrown; the pots are at least finished on the wheel. Another technological attribute which became more important – also for “Noric pottery” – during the last years, is the sherd quality. A macroscopic analysis shows commonalities within most of the types, excepting Variant I of the tripod vessels with incurving rim. These vessels can be tempered with lime or quartz. Quartz-tempering is very common in the eastern parts of *Noricum*, whereas lime tempering is typical for western *Noricum*. In this case, a technological attribute can add another criterion for distinguishing two sub-variants of variant I tripod bowls with inverted rim. Because not all the published material contains enough information about sherd qualities, this distinction, however, remains problematic. A detailed petrographic analysis of all the “Noric pottery” is currently impossible, taking into consideration the financial impact and time needed for such an analysis. As the goal of this study is not to locate different production centers, but to find out about local and regional traditions, such an analysis is not a high priority. There are plenty of ways how pottery types might transfer. It does not always have to be the pot that migrates. Sometimes it might be the potter or simply the idea of how a potter may design his products.

If such ideas of pottery design are found in certain regions, the question of local and regional identity rises. If a certain amount of people in a defined region use the same set of vessels, are they also sharing a kind of cultural identity? This question is difficult to answer. One would need complete data of all the findspots, especially about depositional details, to come near to an answer. Which pottery sets were in use in a single household, which pottery sets were used in graves, in which way did sherds enter the archaeological deposits... None of these questions is easily answered at the current state of research. In addition, all of the material evidence has to be included for a serious investigation of questions on cultural identity. Architecture, clothing and related materials (such as fibulae) as well as artworks contain important information, which has to be connected with data gathered by typological pottery studies. Much of this work has not yet been done, and so this paper is confined to pottery studies alone.

The abovementioned types of “Noric pottery” belong in the first two centuries AD. The evidence for securely dated 3rd century pottery in *Noricum* is extremely poor. For this reason a last case study based on fourth century AD material was chosen. Bowls with vertical rim and groove-decorated cordon represent a type that is very common in the Aguntum region. The tempering consists mainly of lime particles. The distribution of these bowls, which are usually hand-made and finished on the wheel reaches from northern Slovenia to upper

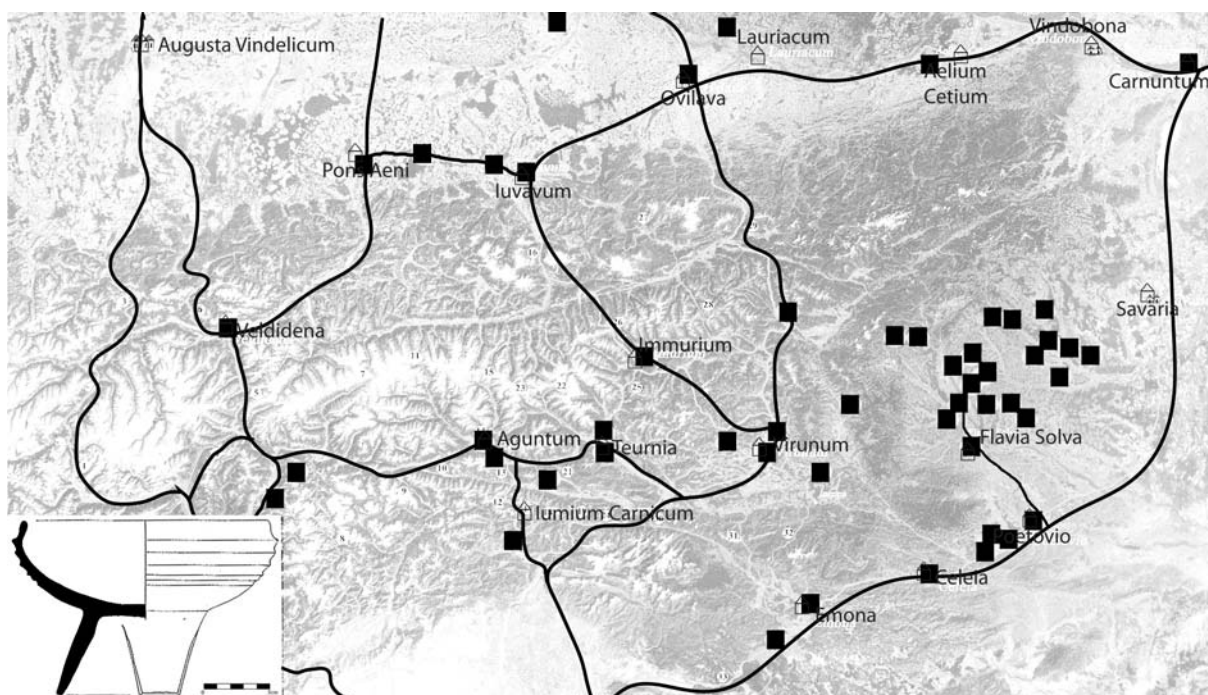


Fig. 5. Distribution of tripod bowls Type I Variant I.

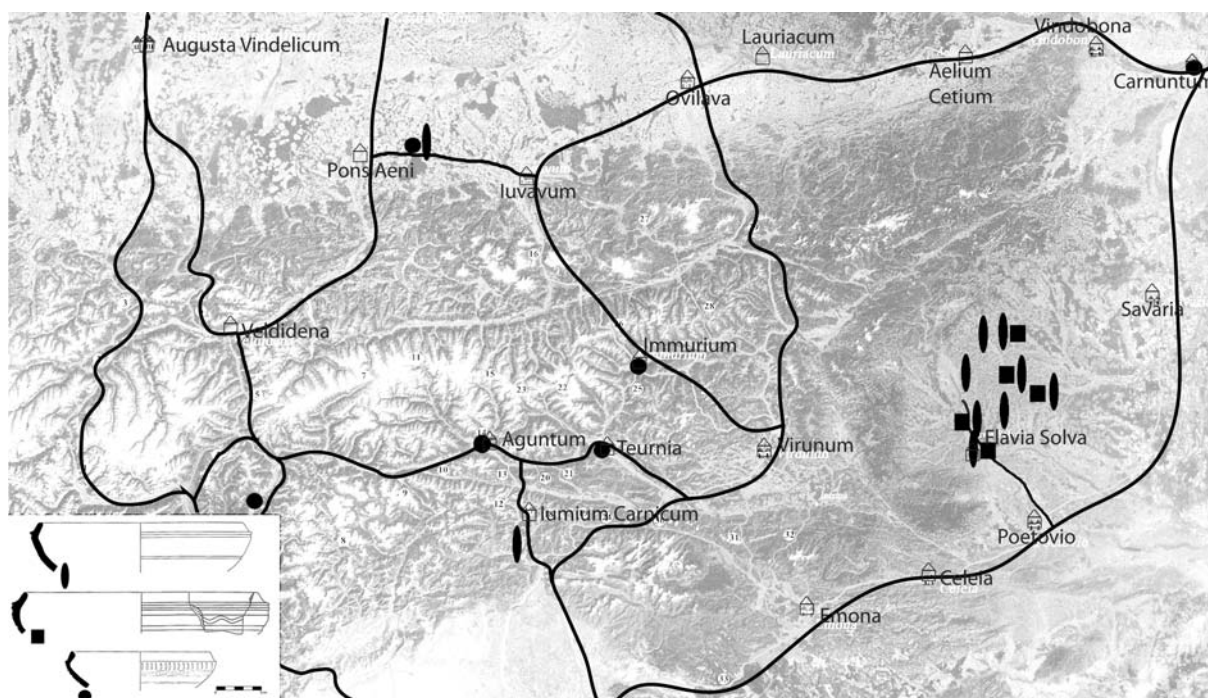


Fig. 6. Distribution of tripod bowls Type I Variants II-IV.

Italy, including the south-western parts of Austria³ (fig. 8). The distribution of this pottery type is again concentrated in a region in the Southern Alps, which has nothing in common with estimated provincial borders, but is maybe a hint for an

area which can be seen as a zone of intense intercommunion of wares and ideas, where a sense of community may have been present.

This briefly presented study on a typological approach to “Noric pottery” is to be seen as a preliminary report on ongoing studies. The essential point is that studies on locally and regionally produced pottery clearly need defined attri-

³ See B. KAINRATH, Die Spuren der Römer auf dem Kirchbichl von Lavant. Fiktion und Wirklichkeit. In: G. Grabherr/B. Kainrath (Hrsg.), Die spätantike Höhensiedlung auf dem Kirchbichl von Lavant. Ikarus 5 (Innsbruck 2011) 13–438 esp. 159.

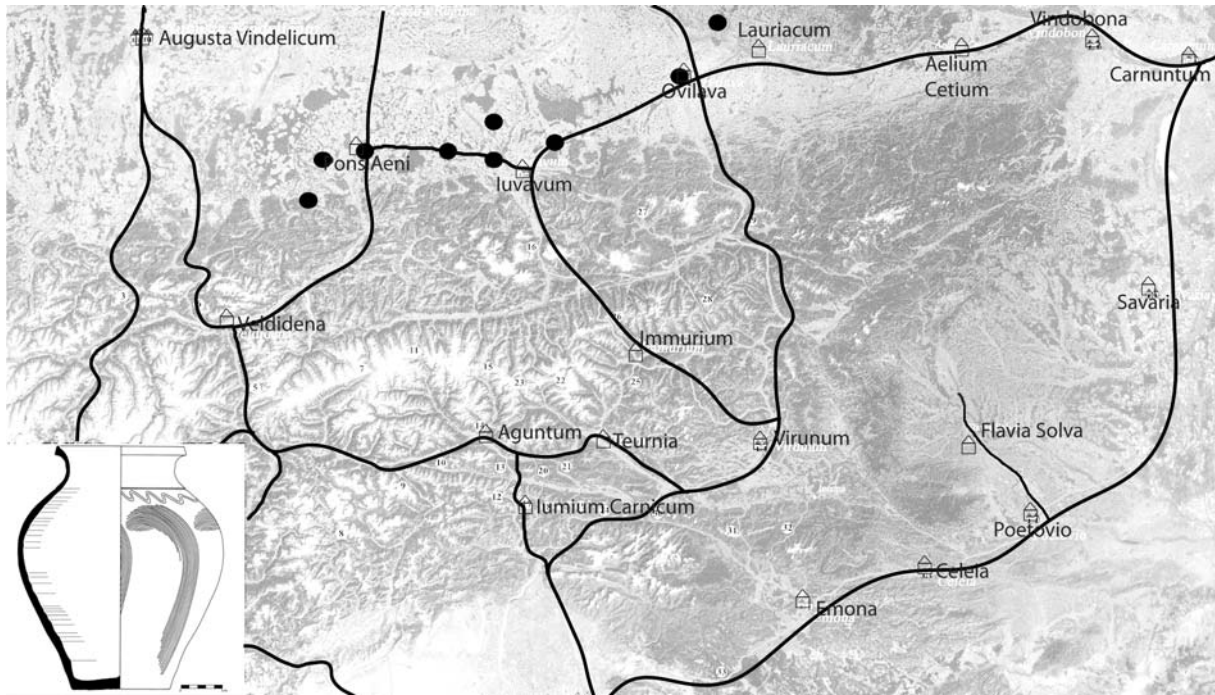


Fig. 7. Distribution of the so called narrow-mouthed jar.

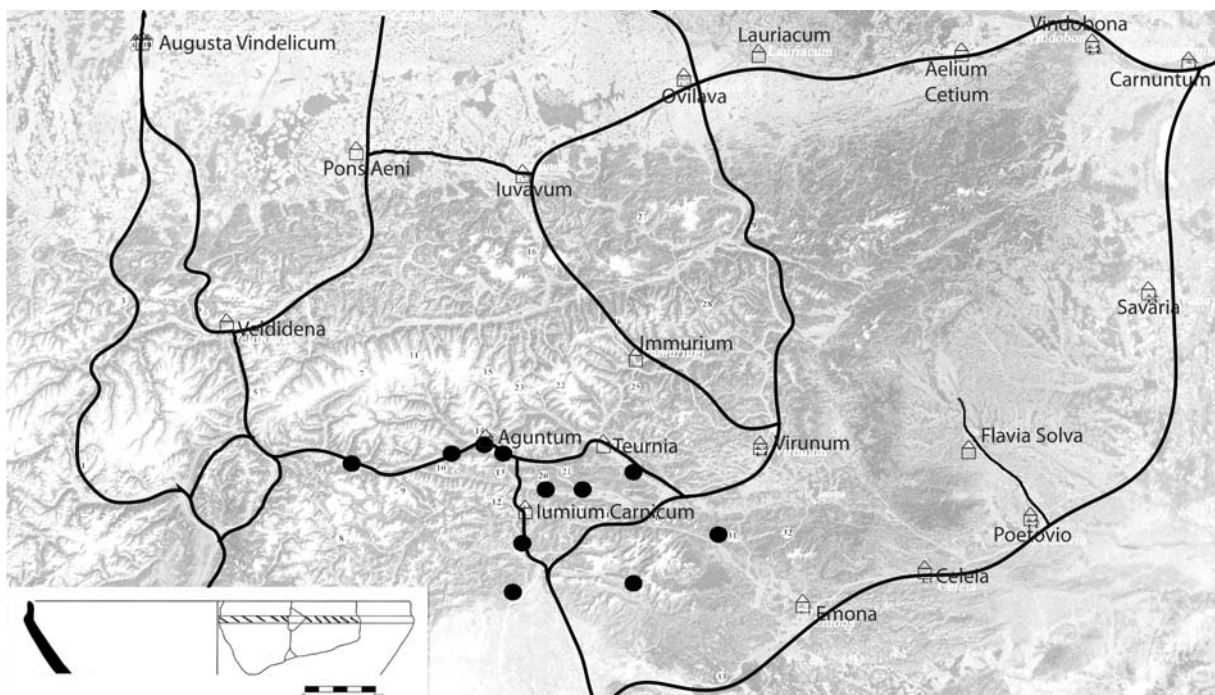


Fig. 8. Distribution of bowls with groove-decorated cordon.

butes that specify a type. If a sherd, even a rim sherd is too fragmentary to show all the attributes, it cannot be assigned to a certain type, but classified only as a rim sherd of certain morphology. The point is that classes of pottery cannot be analyzed spatially or chronologically. Types, on the other

hand, can⁴. Therefore types of “Noric pottery” can be significant to distribution and chronology – but only, if accurate tools of analysis are used when asking these questions.

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⁴ As recently shown also by H. SEDLMAYER, “Fremde Heimat“ – Autochthones und Allochthones in Ostnoricum während der flavisch-trajanischen Zeit. *Arh. Vestnik* 61, 2010, 203–228.

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