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CREATIVITY OR STATUSSYMBOL? Roman ceramic imitations in the Netherlands

Introduction

As the Roman conquest of the Netherlands takes place in the last decades BC the material culture gradually changes. Where the inhabitants used local handmade pottery before the Roman conquest, after 150 AD it was completely replaced by wheel thrown pottery. This paper will focus specifically on the handmade imitations of wheel thrown and glass vessels, which were made in the 150 years in which the handmade pottery gradually was being replaced.

Theoretical framework

Artefacts, pottery included, are created when they are needed by society as a whole or by certain individuals. Theoretically all artefacts are designed for a specific function and all choices made in the process of their creation, e. g. regarding raw materials and shape, are intended to make the artefact perfectly suited to perform that function. In practice it is not always possible to use the best suited resources and therefore those choices are made within a range of workable solutions.¹ Newly introduced pottery can be seen as just a replacement of higher quality for the pottery which was already in use.²

If raw materials are unavailable or if there is a shortage of artefacts, other solutions are found to 'acquire' those. A good example is the creation of a similar object in more readily available, often local, materials, thereby creating an imitation of the object.³ Imitations can also be made when certain artefacts the ruling elite used, or even commissioned, were not available to the masses, thereby imitating the taste and style of the elite.⁴

Pottery in itself does not play a role in the creation of identity, status and social distinctions, but the way in which that pottery is used, as a means by which social practices, such as feasting, are conveyed or as a container of luxury goods are.⁵ The pottery can, in being used in such ways, be interpreted as a symbol, which signifies the power and the position of its owner.⁶

In the early Roman period the power and position of the local elite was partly determined by their ability to relate to the Romans. Adhering to the broad range of 'Roman' material culture eased their incorporation into the power structure of the Roman Empire.⁷

The introduction of new pottery can be indicative of a new way of preparing, serving and eating (new) food.⁸ Those new eating and drinking habits are reflected in the function of those vessels, and not necessarily the form, origin or fabric.⁹ In the early Roman period vessels with specific function are for example *mortaria*, used to prepare food, the amphorae, used to transport new exotic food, and other vessels like beakers and jugs.¹⁰

With this in mind the aforementioned imitations can also be put into the light of the introduction of new types of food and new ways of eating and drinking those.¹¹ Newly introduced vessels might not have been common to the large masses and therefore imitation was a manner of 'acquiring' those vessels.¹² Those imitations then add a new function or usage to the pottery assemblage already in use.¹³

In the Late Iron Age and the Early Roman period in the Netherlands social foundations changed.¹⁴ Changes in material culture can be related to socio-political developments mentioned above relating to the area. Although the beginning of the Roman period is not a complete cultural break from the previous period, it did not totally occur at the level of the elite groups. After the conquest the Roman frontier policy, tax demands and recruitment affected the social order as well as the settlement and land use patterns.¹⁵

Often advanced as the initiation of the social and political developments is the increase of the Roman trade with Gaul in the 2nd century BC.¹⁶ The access to Mediterranean goods through these trade routes strengthened the power base of the local elite by the introduction of exotic prestige goods.

⁷ HINGLEY 2005, 105.

⁸ Ibid. 114.

⁹ M. PITTS, Regional identities and the social use of ceramics. In: J. Bruhn/B. Croxford/D. Grigoropoulos (eds.), TRAC 2004: Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Durham 2004 (Oxford 2005) 50–64 esp. 51.

¹⁰ HINGLEY 2005, 110.

¹¹ HEGEWISCH 2005, 306.

¹² HINGLEY 2005, 105.

¹³ HEGEWISCH 2005, 310.

¹⁴ GERRITSEN 2003, 249.

¹⁵ Ibid. 250; HASELGROVE 1996, 167.

¹⁶ HASELGROVE 1996, 168.

¹ CAPLE 2009, 8; 12.

² HINGLEY 2005, 45 & 114.

³ CAPLE 2009, 13; HEGEWISCH 2005, 302.

⁴ CAPLE 2009, 17.

⁵ PITTS 2004, 17.

⁶ CAPLE 2009, 9.

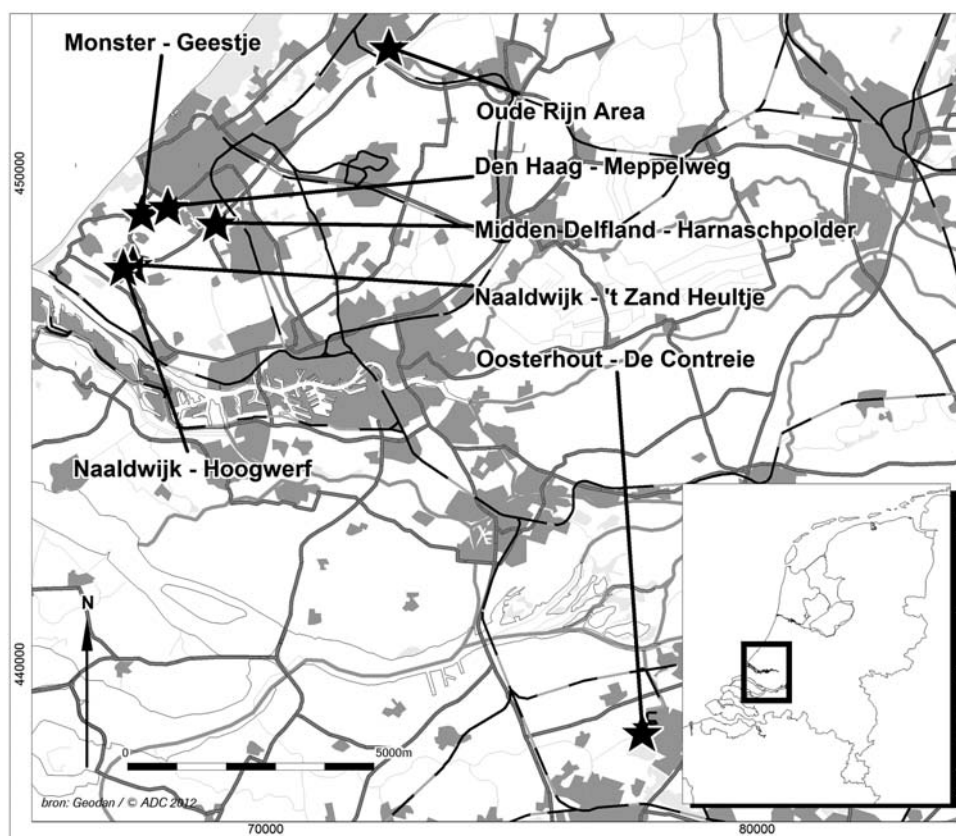


Fig. 1. Location of the sites mentioned in the text (depicted on the present-day topography).

In the 2nd and 1st century BC Italian wine, as well as some Campanian tablewares, were traded to northern France and the Moselle region. Those Italian wines and the drinking equipment can be underrepresented in the archaeological record. Therefore statements about the use and function in societies have their limitations. What is certain, however, are the specific inclusions of those vessels in elite burials in lieu of the local wares and vessels.¹⁷ These societies certainly have the resources to recreate or imitate those vessels, implying that the value of them was not their function but in their perceived connections or even previous owners, thereby symbolising the alliances and contacts of the deceased. A similar trend in the usage of imported pottery has been noted for the Late Iron Age in Britain.¹⁸

A similar trend is to be observed in the late 2nd and 3rd century AD in the northern Netherlands (and thus outside the Roman Empire).¹⁹ The only imported wheel thrown vessels are tablewares, such as terra sigillata bowls and colour coated beakers. Those can be interpreted as the services used by the local elite at feasts. Also brass wine sieves and pans point into this direction. Even though amphorae are not found, it seems clear through these finds that wine was traded to and drunk in those regions.

Summarizing imitations were made when it was impossible, or difficult at the least, to acquire certain vessels. Vessels which were held in high esteem, for their connection to certain eating and drinking habits, are more prone to being imitated than others. These vessels were usually those in use by the ruling elite, be it the local elite or in this case the Romans. In the archaeological record sometimes evidence of this particular practice is unearthed. Two particular case studies will be presented here. The first case study is the settlement of Naaldwijk-'t Zand Heultje and the second the settlement of Oosterhout-De Contreie, both sites are situated in the south-western part of the Netherlands (**fig. 1**).

Naaldwijk-'t Zand Heultje

In 2011 rescue excavations were carried out 800 m east of the *vicus* at Naaldwijk-Hoogwerf.²⁰ The excavation revealed a settlement dating to the Roman period.²¹ This settlement was occupied from the middle of the 1st century AD well into the 3rd century AD. During that period the settlement is characterized by several occupational phases and features consist of ditches and piling or camp shedding. The piling was used to reduce the effect of the sea's erosive force on the high ground on which the settlement was founded.

¹⁷ Ibid. 174–175.

¹⁸ PITTS 2004, 25.

¹⁹ D. A. GERRETS, *Op de grens van land en water. Dynamiek van landschap en samenleving in Frisia gedurende de Romeinse tijd en de Volksverhuizingstijd*. Groningen Arch. Stud. 13 (Groningen 2010) 142.

²⁰ L. M. B. VAN DER FEIJST/J. DE BRUIN/E. BLOM (red.), *De nederzetting te Naaldwijk II. Terug naar de sporen van Holwerda*. Arch. Dientsen Centrum Monogr. 4 (Amersfoort 2008).

²¹ VAN DER FEIJST 2012.



Fig. 2. House NZH-1002 and the surrounding features.

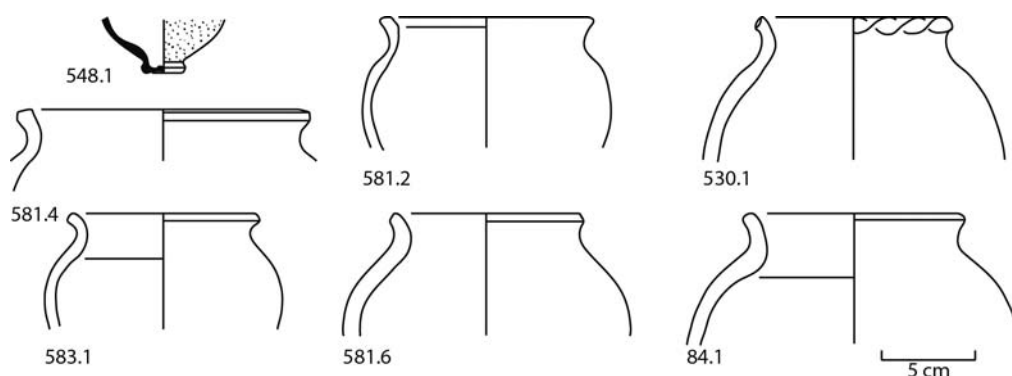


Fig. 3. Colour coated beaker (548.1) and handmade pottery of house NZH-1002.

During the excavations six house plans were excavated.²² In the postholes and ditches of most of those houses pottery was recovered. One of these houses, house NZH-1002, was partly disturbed by a recent ditch (fig. 2).²³ The house consists of several ditches and postholes, with some of the internal subdivisions intact.

In the ditches and postholes of house NZH-1002 a total of 244 sherds were recovered. Most of the pottery was handmade, but there were also nine wheel thrown sherds (3.7%). Those wheel thrown sherds consist of parts of a Dressel 20 amphora, some *terra nigra* vessels, Low Lands Ware vessels and a colour coated beaker (fig. 3). The local handmade pottery is tempered with organic material, as is quite common in the Roman period.²⁴ Other characteristics of the handmade pottery in the 1st century AD are the faceted rims and, al-

though less common, fingertip impressions against the rim. Decoration of the vessels in general is scarce and if present it consists of *Kammstrich* decoration applied to the body of the vessel. Most vessels have three carinations (fig. 3).

One of the fragments of handmade pottery consists of a base with parts of the wall. This pot has a smooth surface and is tempered with organic material. On the wall of the pot vertical ridges are applied (fig. 4; 7a). Due to those ridges the pot shows resemblance to a glass ribbed bowl, more specifically of the type Isings 3b.²⁵ Glass ribbed bowls in the Netherlands are mainly found in the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd century AD.²⁶ Even then, they mainly occur in the military camps and the larger cities.²⁷

Similar locally handmade imitations of ribbed bowls have been found elsewhere.²⁸ Some of them were found several

²² Ibid. §4.3.

²³ Houses of this type (KODDE 2007, type 5A) can be dated to the first century AD but most are datable to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

²⁴ E. TAAYKE, Handmade pottery from a Roman period Settlement at Wijk bij Duurstede-De Horden. Ber. ROB 45, 2002, 189–218 esp. 205.

²⁵ ISINGS 1957, 19–20.

²⁶ Ibid.; VAN LITH 2009, 19; J. PRICE/S. COTTAM, Romano-British glass vessels: a handbook. Practical Handbooks Arch. 14 (York 1998) 44.

²⁷ VAN LITH 2009, 19.

²⁸ It must be noted, however, that in Nijmegen a locally produced colour

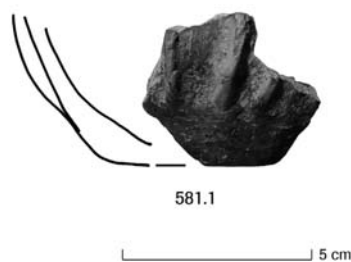


Fig. 4. The pottery imitation of a glass ribbed bowl.

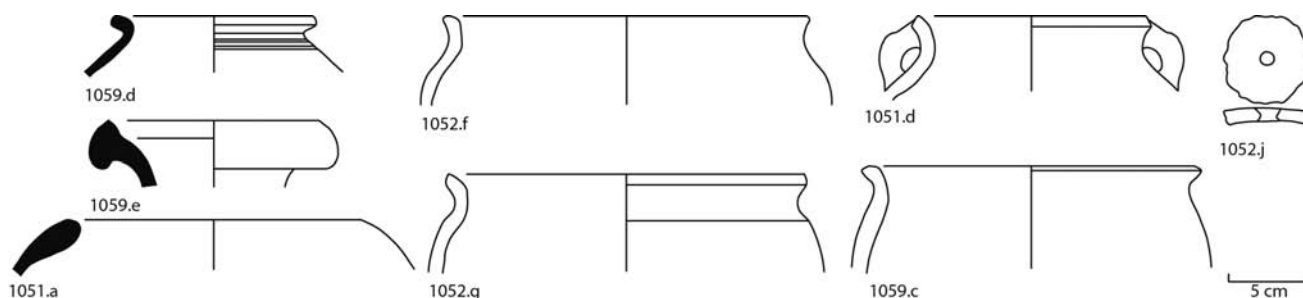


Fig. 5. Selection of rim fragments discovered in the ditch from MiddenDelfland-Harnaschpolder site 12. Amongst the many handmade vessels a coarse ware pot (1059.d), a Scheldt Valley amphora (1059.e) and a Low Lands Ware pot (1051.a).

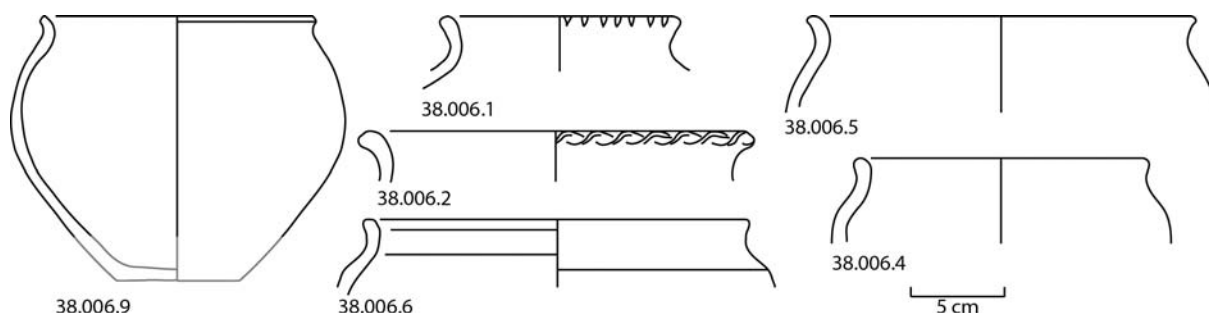


Fig. 6. Selection of handmade pots from the pit at Naaldwijk-Hoogwerf.

decades ago and others more recently. Five examples close to the site of Naaldwijk will be (shortly) discussed below (see also **fig. 1** for their location).

- Den Haag-Meppelweg: At this location several sherds were recovered.²⁹ The fitting ribbed sherds encompass the upper part of a bowl. These show that the ribs stop at the shoulder of the pot (**fig. 7d**). Because of the large amount of handmade pottery amongst which these ribbed sherds have been found and the similarity of the site to the nearby site at the Lozerlaan the proposed date is from the late 1st until the 3rd century AD.
- Midden Delfland-Harnaschpolder site 12: During a rescue excavation a Roman period cult structure was discovered. This cult structure is dated to the first four decades of the 2nd century AD on the basis of finds and stratigraphy

(see **fig. 5** for some of the finds).³⁰ In the western most outer ditch a large pottery dump was situated. Between the hundreds of sherds one rim fragment with a ribbed wall was unearthed (**fig. 7b**).³¹ This rim fragment shows a clear resemblance to ribbed bowls, which have been found on the site.³²

- Monster-Monsters Geestje: During a dig for construction works in the 1960's fragments of pottery have been un-

coated imitation of a ribbed bowl has been found, see J. K. HAALBOS, *Castra und Canabae. Ausgrabungen auf dem Hunerberg in Nijmegen 1987–1994. Libelli Noviomagenses* 3 (Nijmegen 1995) 61–62.

²⁹ STUURMAN 1967, 241.

³⁰ J. P. L. BAKX, „Sporen en structuren. In: J. P. L. Bakx (red.), *Met rituelen omsloten. Opgraving van een inheemse-Romeinse nederzetting langs de Woudselaan in de Harnaschpolder, gemeente Midden-Delfland*. Delftse Arch. Rapp. 107 (Delft 2013) 29–117, esp. 49–54.

³¹ J. DE BRUIN, *Aardewerk uit de Romeinse tijd. In: J. P. L. Bakx (red.), Met rituelen omsloten. Opgraving van een inheemse-Romeinse nederzetting langs de Woudselaan in de Harnaschpolder, gemeente Midden-Delfland*. Delftse Arch. Rapp. 107 (Delft 2013) 119–143, esp. 135.

³² J. P. L. BAKX, *Glas. In: J. P. L. Bakx (red.), Met rituelen omsloten. Opgraving van een inheemse-Romeinse nederzetting langs de Woudselaan in de Harnaschpolder, gemeente Midden-Delfland*. Delftse Arch. Rapp. 107 (Delft 2013) 185–189, esp. 187–188.

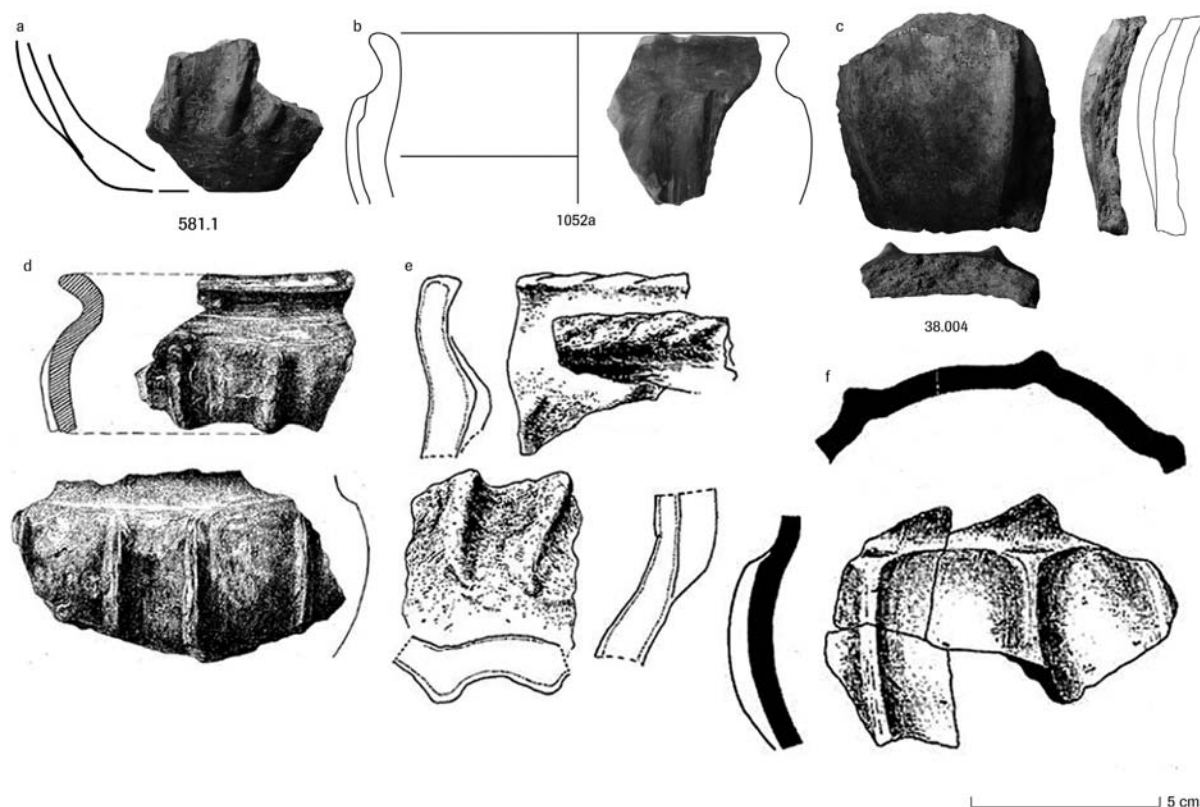


Fig. 7. All six imitations of ribbed bowls mentioned in the text: **a.** Naaldwijk-‘t Zand Heultje; **b.** Midden Delfland-Harnaspolder site 12; **c.** Naaldwijk-Hoogwerf; **d.** Den Haag-Meppelweg (after STUURMAN 1967); **e.** Monster-Monsters Geestje (after MEZGER 1968); **f.** Oude Rijn area (after DE RAAF 1954).

earthed.³³ Three fragments, probably from the same vessel, show the characteristic ribs (**fig. 7e**). These sherds are tempered with organic material. Unfortunately the exact context is unknown. The sherds can probably be dated to the Late Iron Age but more likely to the Early Roman period.

- Naaldwijk-Hoogwerf: The latest campaign of rescue excavations at Naaldwijk-Hoogwerf revealed parts of the settlement in between the areas previously excavated.³⁴ In one of the pits 100 sherds of pottery were found (see **fig. 6** for a selection of the pottery). One of the sherds was from a wheel thrown jug and one of the handmade fragments shows two applied vertical ribs (**fig. 7c**).
- Oude Rijn area: In the article the exact location of these finds is kept secret and it is only stated that they were found on the slope of a polder ditch.³⁵ Several hundreds of sherds were recovered, most of which were handmade. The only fragment with ribs on the wall was interpreted as an early Medieval Anglo-Saxon sherd (**fig. 7f**). But as the ribbed sherd is tempered with organic material and could also be dated to the Roman period, it is feasible to argue that the entire context is Roman in date. A more specific date can be acquired by the samian base from this context. On the base a stamp of Primus iii is visible, and

reads: OFPRIMI. Primus iii worked at La Graufesenque between 40 and 80.³⁶ Therefore the entire context can be dated to the second half of the 1st century AD.

Locally made imitations of ribbed bowls are also found elsewhere in- and outside the Roman Empire. A complete overview is outside the scope of this article. Only one other example of a ribbed bowl from the Netherlands and a study of these vessels in Barbaricum will be discussed below.

In 1994 and 1995 excavations were carried out at Weert-Molenakker.³⁷ On the border of the settlement six wells were excavated. At the bottom of one of those wells (well A) a wooden imitation of a ribbed bowl was discovered (**fig. 8**). The well is dated from AD 175 until 250. The seriation of all contexts shows that this well has a close resemblance to well D, which is dated from AD 1 to 100.³⁸

³³ MEZGER 1968, 24–25.

³⁴ L. M. B. VAN DER FEIJST, *De nederzetting te Naaldwijk III. Bewoningssporen uit de Romeinse tijd en de Middeleeuwen. De veldcampagne 2011. ADC rapport* (Amersfoort in prep.).

³⁵ DE RAAF 1954, 28–29.

³⁶ B. R. HARTLEY/B. M. DICKINSON, *Names on terra sigillata. An index of makers' stamps & signatures on Gallo-Roman terra sigillata (Samian Ware) 7 (P to RXEAD)*. *Bull. Inst. Class. Stud. Suppl.* 102-07 (London 2011) 222–248.

³⁷ N. G. A. M. ROYMANS (red.), *Opgravingen in de Molenakker te Weert. Campagne 1994. Zuidnederlandse Arch. Rapp.* 1 (Amsterdam 1995); Id./A. TOL, *Opgravingen in Kampershoek en de Molenakker te Weert. Campagne 1995. Ibid.* 4 (Amsterdam 1996).

³⁸ H. L. H. VAN ENCKEVORT/M. HUISMAN, *Romeins aardewerk van de nederzetting aan de Laarderweg*. In: N. G. A. M. Roymans (red.), *Opgravingen in de Molenakker te Weert. Campagne 1994. Zuidnederlandse Archeologische Rapporten 1* (Amsterdam 1995) 29–40 esp. 31 table 1.



Fig. 8. Photograph of the wooden ribbed bowl from well A at Weert-Molenakker (after ROESSINGH 2003 fig. 4.4.1).

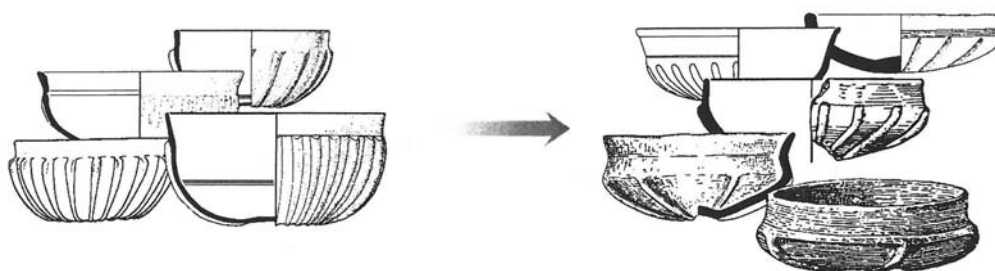


Fig. 9. Some examples of glass ribbed bowls (left) and their imitations (right) in Eastern Europe (after HEGEWISCH 2005, 308).

In Eastern Germany and Poland many imitations of ribbed bowls have been found (**fig. 9**).³⁹ Because of the abundance of those vessels a typo chronology has been set up. This shows that even when the glass ribbed bowls were out of production, the imitations were still being made.

According to the typo chronology from Germany and Poland the example from Naaldwijk-‘t Zand Heultje can be related to groups 2 or 4, hemispherical bowls. A better classification cannot be made without the complete base and rim. On the other hand the decoration is similar to those of decoration group 1, radial ribs from the centre of the base (like the wooden ribbed bowl, **fig. 8**). In that area these ribbed bowls are dated from the late 1st century AD onwards,⁴⁰ a date which also fits most of the described examples in the region of Naaldwijk.

Oosterhout-De Contreie

The excavation at Oosterhout was also carried out in 2011.⁴¹ Although remains from a number of periods were excavated, this paper will focus only on the Roman settlement in the north-western part of the excavated area (**fig. 10**).

The rural settlement at Oosterhout was in use from the early 1st century until the second half of the 2nd century. During that period seventeen houses have been constructed, belonging to several phases of habitation. In between the

houses and the even more numerous granaries one sunken hut was discovered (the arrow on **fig. 10** points at the location).

The sunken hut is, as the name implies, a large dug pit. This pit was then covered with a roof and walls along the four sides. Usually the walls and roof rested on several posts. Because of the objects found inside sunken huts, it is presumed that they were solely used for artisanal activities, such as weaving, forging and grinding.⁴²

The sunken hut from Oosterhout measures $2.9 \times 2.4 \times 0.3$ m (**fig. 11**).⁴³ During the excavation all the fillings were dry-sieved. Beside 653 sherds (see below) the sieving also unearthed one glass bead and several fragments of grinding stones.

Of the 653 sherds from the sunken hut, only 40 were wheel thrown (6.1%). Those wheel thrown sherds consist of wall fragments of amphorae and a jar of the type Hofheim 62 (**fig. 12** pot 144.1).⁴⁴ The handmade pottery consists of (sharply) carinated vessels. Similar vessels with three carinations and outward turned rims are dated to the Claudian-Neronean period (AD 40–70).⁴⁵ A ¹⁴C-date of charcoal from the sunken hut produced a date between 170 BC–AD 17.⁴⁶

³⁹ HEGEWISCH 2005.

⁴⁰ HEGEWISCH 2005, 210.

⁴¹ W. ROESSINGH/E. BLOM, *Graven op De Contreie. Bewoningsgeschiedenis van de Houtse Akkers te Oosterhout, van de Bronstijd tot en met de Slag om het Markkanaal*. Arch. Diensten Centrum Monogr. 14 (Amersfoort 2012).

⁴² A. KOSTER, *Kruukskes met as. Een nederzetting met bijbehorend grafveld op het Hessenveld te Wehl, eind tweede tot eind vierde eeuw na Christus*. Hist. en Arch. Stichting 5 (Dremp 1997) 28–29.

⁴³ WEEKERS-HENDRIKX ET AL. 2012, 160–162.

⁴⁴ Type name after: E. RITTERLING, *Das Frühromische Lager bei Hofheim im Taunus*. Ann. Ver. Nassau. Altde. 40, 1912.

⁴⁵ VAN KERCKHOVE 2006, 112–116; 137; ID., *Aardewerk*. In: S. Heeren (red.), *Opgravingen bij Tiel-Passewaaij 1. De nederzetting aan de Passewaaijse Hogeweg*. Zuidnederlandse Arch. Rapp. 29 (Amsterdam 2006) 91–144; ID., *Aardewerk*. In: J. van Renswoude/J. Van Kerckhove (red.), *Opgravingen in Geldermalsen-Hondsgemet. Een inheemse nederzetting uit de Late IJzertijd en Romeinse tijd*. Ibid. 35 (Amsterdam 2009) 115–192.

⁴⁶ WEEKERS-HENDRIKX ET AL. 2012, 161. Because it is uncertain whether

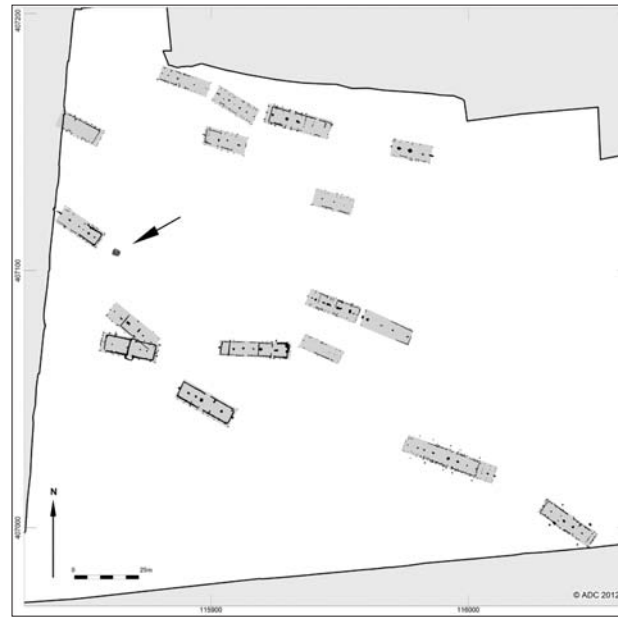


Fig. 10. The Roman settlement at Oosterhout-De Contreie, the arrow indicates the location of the sunken hut.

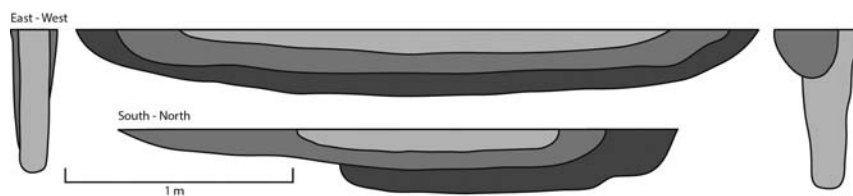


Fig. 11. The dimensions of the sunken hut and both postholes.

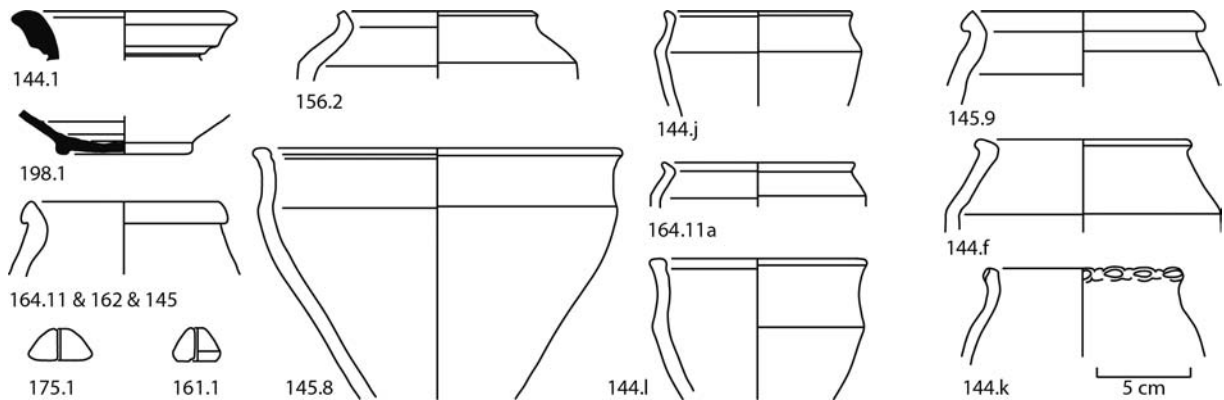


Fig. 12. The pottery from the sunken hut.



Fig. 13. The handmade Dragendorff 18 imitation.

The most intriguing vessel is a handmade plate which has been tempered with broken quartz. This plate shows a resemblance to samian vessels of the type Drag. 18 (fig. 13).⁴⁷ Both vessels have a footring and carinated wall.⁴⁸ Plates Drag. 18 plates are dated from AD 40 to 80, so dating this handmade imitation to the same period seems to be reasonable. A date which coincides with the dating of the other handmade vessels and the Hofheim 62 jar.

Conclusion

Both case studies support the view that in the early Roman period in the Netherlands wheel made tablewares, being associated with the elite, were regarded as symbols of status.

As stated artefacts are prone to being imitated as their scarcity increases and are highly sought after. In this case the vessels are sought after because they relate to newly introduced eating and drinking habits. The increase in wheel thrown and glass vessels and the accompanying food from

the Mediterranean stimulated these changes. Where at first the ruling elite adapts to these changes, in order to appear similar to the Romans and thereby strengthening their power base. Later on the masses follow and mimic the ruling elite by acquiring the same products or imitating them.

In short both imitations have presumably been made in order to adhere to the new eating and drinking habits and thereby increasing ones status within society. In both contexts it is clearly visible that those imitations are accompanied by drinking equipment, a colour coated beaker in Naaldwijk and fragments of a jar and amphorae at Oosterhout. Those imitations, and the accompanying finds, makes those contexts stand out from the others at the sites. These contexts can be related to the changes which took place after the Roman conquest of the Netherlands.

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the charcoal belongs to the core or outer tree-rings of the tree, the given date can be several decades off.

⁴⁷ Type name after: H. DRAGENDORFF, *Terra sigillata: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen und römischen Keramik*. Bonner Jahrb. 96–97, 1895, 18–155.

⁴⁸ My thanks go to the various pottery specialists at the Study Group for Roman Pottery 2011 Conference in Amsterdam, who almost unanimously supported this identification.

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