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ROMAN AMPHORAE IN NEUSS
AUGUSTAN TO JULIO-CLAUDIAN CONTEXTS

Horacio González Cesteros and Piero Berni Millet



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Preface

Strategically situated at the junction of the Erft and a bend of the Rhine, the site of *Novaesium* is undoubtedly one of the major military sites of the frontier in *Germania Inferior*, not least in its initial phases from 16 BC. The advantageous position of the site was later assimilated by the adjacent medieval towns of Neuss and Düsseldorf. Since Constantin Koenen started his extensive excavations of the main legionary fortress in 1887, the site has gradually revealed its rich and complex history. Apart from a civil settlement, no. less than 8 fortresses, and many more occupation phases were brought to light. Fortresses A to F belong to the Augustan-Tiberian period, whereas fortress G, the so-called ‘Koenenlager’ was created for Legio XVI Gallica around the time when Claudius invaded Britain. Shortly after its abandonment in 103 AD the site was re-occupied by a smaller fortress H, lingering to the middle of the 3rd century AD. Partial information on the legions and the auxiliaries that were stationed in these fortresses arises from the ancient sources and the local epigraphy. Neuss at the beginning of the campaigns of Drusus and Tiberius in 12 BC was the stand-place of the *Legiones* XIX and XVII or XVIII which all met their legendary fate in the Teutoburger Wald disaster. *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* found accommodation here before its transfer to Britannia in 43 AD. The site of *Novaesium* yielded numerous notable finds, such as the distinctive tombstone of the cavalry signifer Oclatius originating from the nearby *civitas Tungrorum*. Oclatius belonged to the *Ala Afrorum* which is probably related to the Flavian occupation of fortress G.

Much earlier is the gorgeous Italic terra sigillata cup signed by Perennius of Arezzo. The relief decoration on this high quality Dragendorff 11 type cup of the Augustan period shows an appropriate scene of satyrs trampling winegrapes. no. doubt this precious drinking vessel belonged to an officer who used it to taste the various Mediterranean wines exported to the North.

The Perennius cup brings us to the remarkable collection of amphorae which were retrieved from the excavations of the early fortresses A to F, now studied by our Spanish colleagues. no. doubt these amphorae can be considered the material testimony *par excellence* of an intensive export of Mediterranean foodstuffs to the North. Beside olive-oil and fish products, wines from far-flung locations such as Italy, Iberia, southern Gaul and Greece, made their appearance in the early military settlements of the Rhine region. If the material of *Novaesium* is not overwhelming in quantity, it stands out for its diversity and the presence of some peculiar types. But before discussing the amphorae and their significance, it is useful to turn first to some methodological issues concerning the contexts in which they were found.

The continuous resettlement of troops and the refurbishing of the structures on the site has resulted in the frequent disturbance of previous archaeological levels. Moreover, in the light of the invasion of *Germania*, one should be aware that in this period of continuous military movements, the armies settled and broke up quickly leaving minor traces of structures, reflecting most probably the settlement of different army divisions for short periods. Confronted with these problems of disturbed layers and the invisibility of the settlement structures, and also because a certain amount of amphora material was not recorded within its context at the time of the excavations, the authors made the resolute and wise decision not to try to link the finds to specific contexts. Therefore, the counting system of Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) of the diagnostic fragments seemed the best approach for the quantification. The fine-tuning of the amphora chronology is external and depends on other, well-dated site contexts, or on the information an amphora type itself can provide with the additional epigraphical data of *tituli picti* and stamps. In addition, this amphora research will also serve as a valuable contribution to the refinement of the occupation phases of the different fortress settlements of *Novaesium*, maybe even for the partial reconstruction of several disturbed contexts. Finally, it was also the right decision for the authors to take into consideration the stamps of the Baetican Dressel 20 olive-oil amphoras, even if nearly all of them date from the post-Tiberian period. Indeed, many ended up as intrusions in early layers and they remind us of the dangers when interpreting the chronology of stratigraphical contexts. Apart from this, the examples of *Novaesium* represent an appreciable addition to the corpus of Dressel 20 stamps.

That the majority of the amphora imports are Iberian in origin is no. surprise and shows clearly the importance of that region of the Roman Empire in the economy of supply in the North; but their typological variety is remarkable: 5 from the Baetican Guadalquivir valley, 4 from the Baetican coast and 3 from the province of *Tarraconensis*. Apart from the well-known Dressel 20, there is the striking amount of Tarraconesian wine amphorae (particularly the stamped Oberaden 74); and the high number of Baetican containers for fish-products which probably related to the need for salt in the diet of the soldiers. The crowning-piece is undoubtedly the forerunner of the Baetican Oberaden 83 type for olive-oil, bearing the oldest known *titulus pictus* from that region and assigned to the earliest fortress occupation of *Novaesium*. Special mention should be made of the important presence of the Haltern 70 type for two reasons: As previous research proved, its production reached its peak during the Augustan and Tiberian principates, and points apparently to the fact that the contents were not restricted to olives preserved in *defrutum*, but also other wine-products, as well as fish-based products.

The second main group of amphorae is formed by the Gaulish amphorae produced in three main regions. Although a substantial group consists of Italian and Iberian imitations for the transport of wine- and fish-products, the bulk of the productions of Marseille and the *Narbonensis* are represented by flat-bottomed wine amphorae. These popular types seemed to be designed especially for transport by river boats. The Lyon group is very peculiar. Besides a wide array of Mediterranean imitations, the most commonly occurring amphora type seems to have been the Lyonnaise 3A, carrying fish-products. There is an on-going debate about the origin of the fish-sauce, presumably from southern Gaul, and how it was transported in bulk to the Gaulish capital, where it was put in the locally produced amphorae to be distributed to the northern markets. In light of this, one should consider the importance of wooden caskets as a possible major transport device, an observation most likely also valid for the bulk transport of Mediterranean wines.

In the early phases of the *Novaesium* military installations, the presence of Greek and Italian amphorae is considerable; they constitute respectively 15.9 % and 11.8 % of the recorded imports. Rhodian wines form the lion's share, followed by Koan amphorae (type Dressel 5). One handle fragment of Rhodian origin shows an extremely rare stamp of a woman's head in profile. Very rare also are some fragments of Knidian amphorae, and above all of Chian, known for its quality wines. The recent pacification of the Alpine regions made the imports from Northern Italy and the Adriatic more convenient. *Novaesium* proves to have been one of the sites with the widest range of amphora sources, with additional Adriatic amphorae carrying wine and olive-oil. Of these, different types, such as Dressel 6A, Dressel 6B and the Brindisian Giancola 6 are present, as well as some stamped examples, including the ubiquitous THB stamp. Amongst the Tyrrhenian classic Dressel 1 and Dressel 2-4 types for wine transport, a very strange and exceptional Campanian imitation of a Knidian wine amphora deserves attention. Even though little is known of their production and typology, we also see arise the first groups of regionally made amphorae from *Gallia Belgica* and the Rhineland. Finally, there is the presence of some amphora fragments from the Levant and North Africa, possibly to be considered as casual or exotic imports.

The wide range of amphora forms and associated foodstuffs occurring on this significant military site is impressive. We are indebted to our Spanish colleagues for their sagacious research in sometimes difficult conditions. Their contribution to the knowledge of the dynamics of the military logistics and the economy of the Roman Empire in the Augustan-Tiberian period can hardly be overstated. Apart from the comparison with early sites, such as Haltern and the Kops Plateau at Nijmegen, the publication of the amphorae of *Novaesium* is of vital importance for the coming studies that will bring the complete typo-chronological spectrum of Mediterranean amphorae in *Germania Inferior*, and more specifically in the Rhineland military settlements of the Augustan-Tiberian period.

Patrick Monsieur
Easter 2018
Sint-Lievens-Houtem, Belgium

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Many years have passed since our labours in Meckenheim, which have seen the publication of some preliminary reports. To complete this research work successfully was arduous: it took many hours, much travel and endless discussion, but finally we are here able to present a full account. We hope this study serves as a solid and up-to-date work on which to build the next stage of study into the amphora distribution of early Roman times in northern Europe.

We would like to especially thank Prof Michael Gechter, who has worked for many years on the Roman military camps at Neuss, and for the interest he took in us, as visiting scholars, together with Joost van den Berg and César Carreras in Bonn. This publication was made possible by the dual collaboration between a group of Spanish archaeologists of the Catalan Archaeological Institute (ICAC) and their German colleagues of the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn, namely Dr S. Willer, Prof M. Gechter and the master's student A. Wiegert.¹

Over the course of the project, a large number of archaeologists and academics supported us, giving important advice or sharing their information with us. They are listed here, in alphabetical order: Rui de Almeida, Stephan Altekamp, Darío Bernal Casasola, Tamas Bezeckzy, Michel Bonifay, Carlos Fabião, Enrique García Vargas, Sabine Ladstätter, Fanette Laubenheimer, Elise Marlière, Verónica Martínez Ferreras, Jordi Miró, Patrick Monsieur, Juan Moros, Michaela Reinfeld, Paul Reynolds, Isabel Rodà de Llanza, Joaquín Ruiz de Arbulo, Antonio Sáez Romero, Thomas Schmitz and Bettina Tremmel.

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¹ We are very grateful to our German colleagues for allowing us to review the material of the Museum's stores in Meckenheim (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany), as well as for their useful remarks about the history and historiography of the Neuss archaeological site. We would like to thank in particular Prof M. Gechter who worked for many years on the military camps of Neuss. Within this academic framework, two papers have already been published: Carreras – González Cesteros 2013; Carreras – Berni 2015.

3. Introduction

The Roman presence on the Rhine started at the beginning of the second decade BC, as a result of Agrippa's second command of the Gallic provinces (20-19 BC), after the end of the Cantabrian wars in north Spain. From that moment the oldest dated Roman military settlement on the Rhine, on the Hunerberg hill, is Nijmegen.¹ Archaeological finds establish a wider Roman presence from 16-15 BC after the Roman defeat in the so-called *Clades Lolliana* and the conquest of the Alps and Alpine foothills territory in modern Switzerland. From this moment on, Augustan politics pays more attention to Gallic and Germanic events, as is reflected in the new administrative organisation of *Gallia Comata* and the formation of the *Tres Galliae*, whose capital was to be the colony of *Lugdunum*; but also in the preparations for military campaigns east of the Rhine border, conducted from 12 BC by Augustus' adoptive sons and the recent conquerors of the Alpine regions, Drusus and Tiberius.

After the events of 16-15 BC, Rome reconsidered her Germanic policy. From then on the continuous security problems that affected the Gallic regions near the Rhine were to be solved through punishment and the submission of the aggressive Germanic tribes. Further, the establishment of a support system within Gaulish territory, with connections to the Rhine region and the conquered Alps, made the movement of troops to the border area easier, with the connection of these areas to north Italy via the Alpine passes.

It is at this moment in history when the foundation of the first military settlement at the mouth of the Erf in the Rhine near the town of Neuss, takes place.²

We present here our in-depth study of the amphora evidence retrieved from the different military camps settled in Neuss before the construction of the so-called

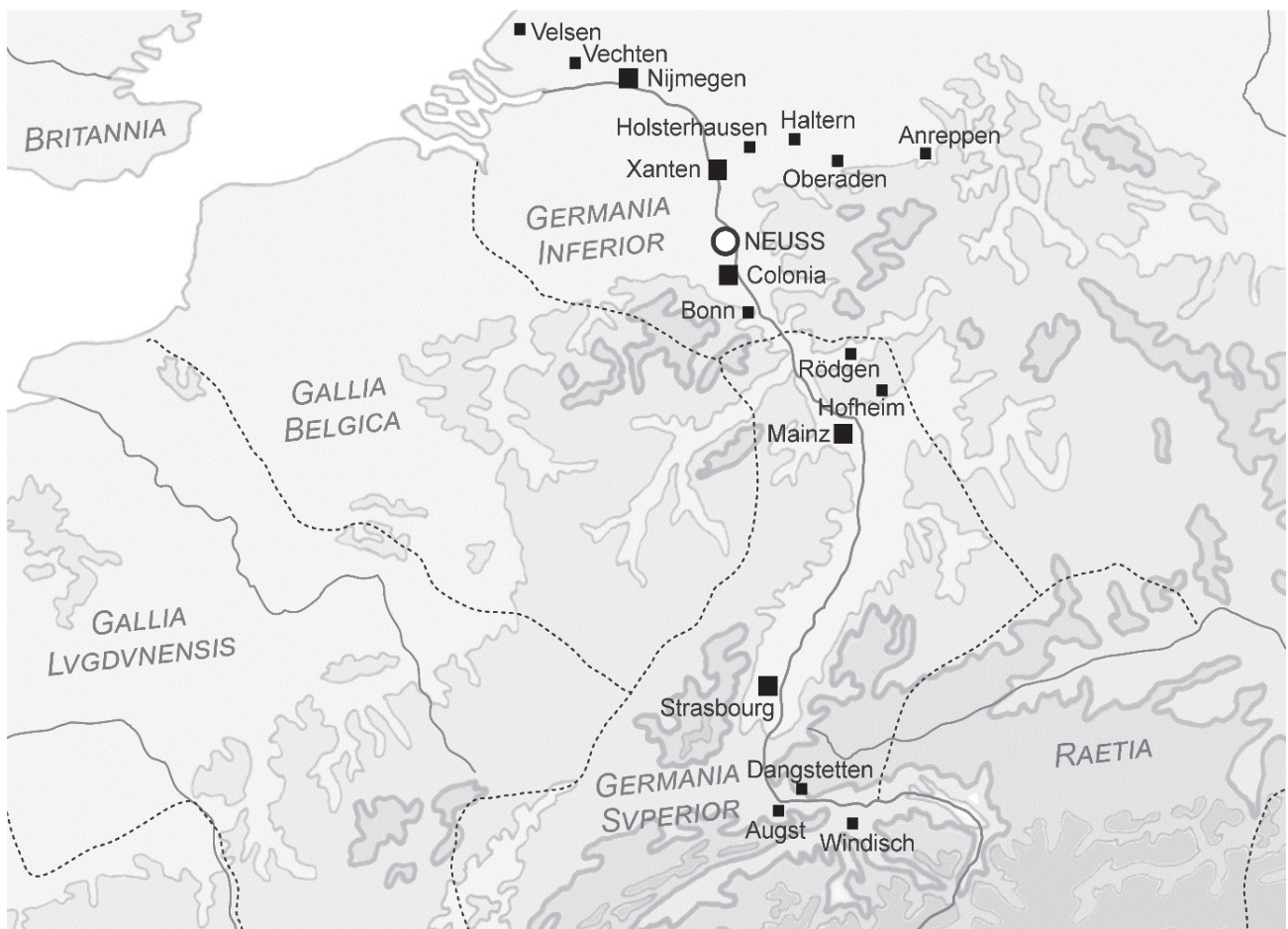


FIGURE 3.1: MAP OF THE GERMAN FRONTIER WITH SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MILITARY SETTLEMENTS OF THE EARLY ROMAN PERIOD

¹ Willems – van Enckevort 2009.

² Gechter 2003; 2010.



FIGURE 3.2: MAP OF THE RHINE FRONTIER WITH SOME OF THE MAIN ROMAN SITES NEAR NEUSS.

‘Koenen’ legionary fort, which was built around 43 AD in the classical ‘playing-card’ format, with some buildings partially of stone.

The complexity of the stratigraphical sequence of Neuss, due to the presence of several subsequent military settlements in an area no. larger than one kilometre, makes it very difficult to determine the chronology of material which otherwise can be associated with specific time periods. Recently, Gechter has tried to establish the chronological evolution of the different Roman forts,³ but it is clear that the continuous use and rebuilding at Neuss prevents any secure links between the different stratigraphical layers and the various occupational periods. The complexity of the archaeological stratigraphy is further demonstrated by the presence of material from different periods in one single layer. The evidence and the retrieved finds arguably related to one phase rather than another on the basis of quantities is not always verifiable from the archaeological remains. Thus, in the absence of dendrochronological dates and of closed layers, Neuss does not enjoy

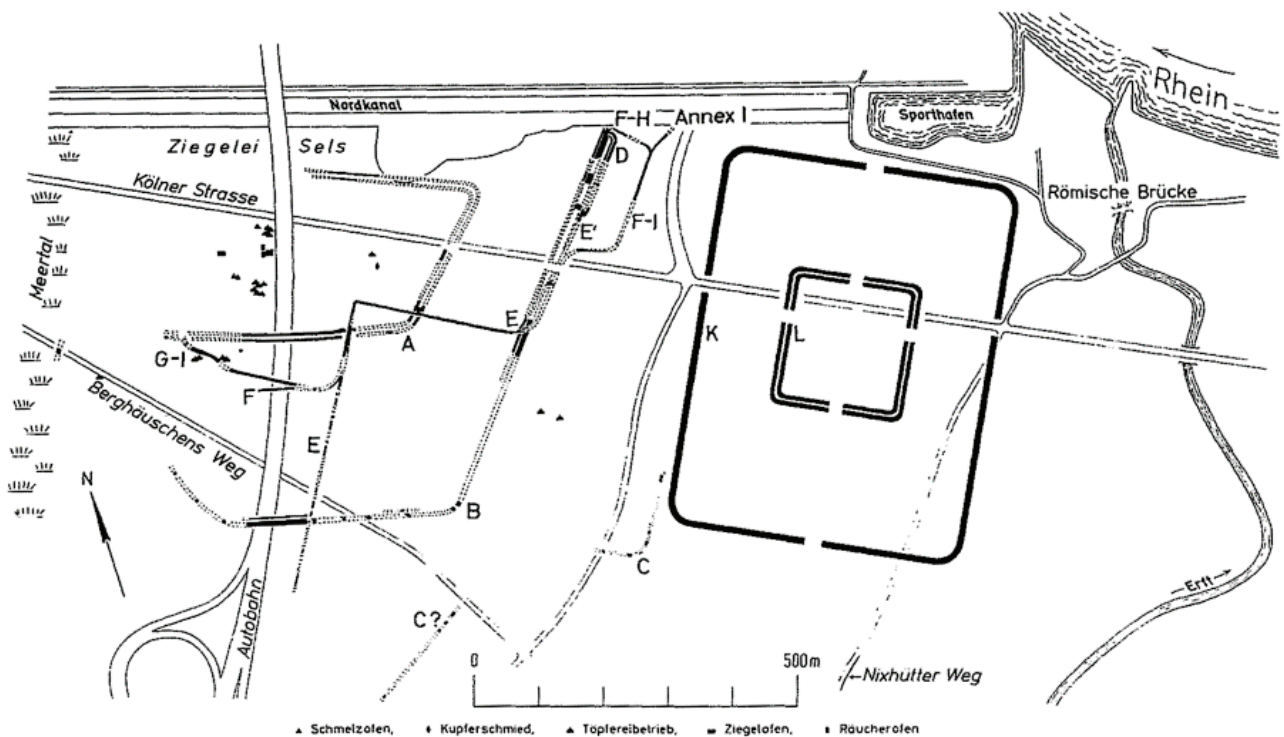


FIGURE 3.3: MAP OF THE ROMAN MILITARY CAMPS OF NEUSS (MÜLLER 1975).

³ Gechter 2010.

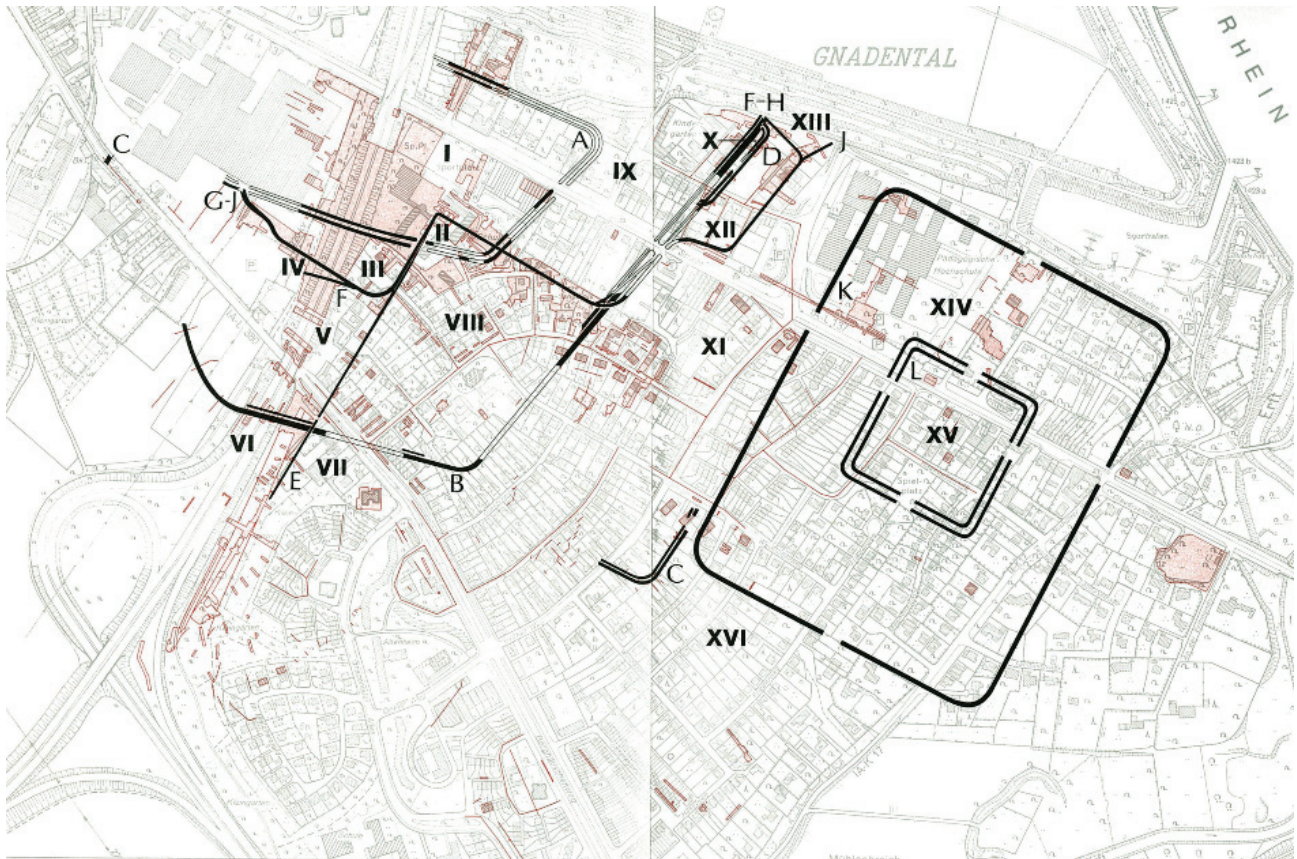


FIGURE 3.4: MAP OF THE ROMAN MILITARY CAMPS OF NEUSS (CHANTRAINE 1985)

Camp 1	16-12 BC
Camp 2	12-8 BC
Camp 3	8-4 BC
Camp 4	4 BC-16 AD
Camp 5	16-28 AD
Aux. Camp 6	16-28 AD

TABLE 1: CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF THE AUGUSTAN AND TIBERIAN MILITARY SETTLEMENTS OF NEUSS (AFTER GECHTER 2007; 2010).

the same chronological precision as do other military settlements on the Main and the Lippe. However, it is possible to establish a linear occupational sequence of several phases, in theory linked to the quick restructuring and changes of the tumultuous Augustan and Tiberian period in the Rhine area.⁴ These circumstances are certainly reflected in the amphorae; though we must be cautious in (or even simply forget about) promoting any direct association between them and the different occupational

⁴ In a previous article (Carreras – González Cesteros 2012, 749) we underlined what we thought then was the excellent chronological frame of Neuss. After studying the stratigraphical background of Neuss, we have to acknowledge that this advantage does not exist in fact; the stratigraphical problems that were observed from the first archaeological excavations in Neuss at the end of the 19th century continue to this day.

phases. Further, another serious problem in asserting a chronology is the lack of any stratigraphical references for around 40% of the material stored in Meckenheim.

Nevertheless, despite the several chronological disadvantages, we are firmly convinced that a profitable study of the Roman amphorae found in Neuss can be of great relevance for the understanding of the import dynamics, involving the arrival Mediterranean foodstuffs into the Rhine in the early years of the Roman occupation. Further, it will provide a valuable comparative point in the establishment of a well-grounded developmental sequence for the amphora imports into Germania Inferior that is to come.

From 16/15 BC to 43 AD, ten different military settlements were sited at Neuss, six of them supposedly of the Augustan-Tiberian period (Figure 1). The external *fossae* of the diverse camps confirm the establishment of these settlements, but in our opinion, even if it were to prove possible to stipulate which are earlier than which, the absence of a good closed stratigraphy makes it nigh impossible to determine the time each was active. This factor makes us hesitant to attempt separate studies, each concerning the material supposedly linked with one single camp. Rather we believe that the only sensible and defendable way to manage this material is to develop a

general study of all the amphora fragments, and to refrain from establishing any temporary subdivisions.⁵

Most of the forts at Neuss have left no traces of internal structures to house the soldiers, such as barracks or houses for the tribunes. In fact, the first surviving building, made of wood and associated with some porticoed courtyards and postholes, appears to belong to the fifth camp which is said to date from 16 AD to 28 AD.⁶ The absence of building evidence for the accommodation leads us to think that most of the camps relied on leather or canvas tents. Furthermore, we should also think about the degree of continuity and manner of occupation of these military forts, to ensure as accurate a calibration and evaluation of the amphora quantities of Neuss as possible.

According to Gechter, the practical absence of buildings in the earlier camps is also reflected in other military emplacements in the Rhine area. This pattern likely has to do with the continuous mobility of the Roman army during the expansion, consolidation and reorganization of the German border, which demanded plentiful and fast troop movements.⁷ We must take into the account the tasks carried out by the military other than the scouting expeditions and raids, namely those related to the construction of infrastructure to connect the new territories with central Gaul and to insert them into the administrative framework of the Roman Empire. In this context, it is quite

probable that the early camps of Neuss housed a series of different military units, but always for short periods. Thus, it was not considered necessary, or even possible, to put up permanent buildings.

To a degree, the existence of some artisanal or production areas, characterised by the presence of pottery kilns and metalworking workshops, is to be expected. They served to supply and/or repair the soldiers' equipment once they had returned from expeditions. In Neuss large quantities of archaeological material, especially pottery, have been found, which is something that can also argue in support of continuous troop movements, a consequence of which would be the constant breaking and abandonment of unwanted artefacts when on the move.⁸

Lastly, one must emphasize that the first evidence of accommodation in buildings is supposed to date to the Tiberian period, which could reflect the changes in the German policy, implemented once Germanicus' campaigns had ended in 16 AD. The abandonment of any desire to expand into the territories east of the Rhine changed the perspective on the military positions on the western bank of the river, which then tended to become consolidated, as happened in Neuss and other important places. The continuation of this process is visible during the Claudian phase when the first permanent forts built with stone, or at least with stone foundations, appear.

⁵ An illustrative example of the serious difficulties faced in carrying out a correct chronological division is the presence of pieces clearly linked with different epochs within the material of the same fort, alongside fragments that clearly belong in the late Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods.

⁶ Gechter 2010; Von Petrikovits 1961.

⁷ Gechter 2003, 150.

⁸ Gechter 2010, 156.