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## Luxury tableware? Terra sigillata in the coastal region of the northern Netherlands

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# Experiencing the Frontier and the Frontier of Experience

Barbarian perspectives and Roman strategies to  
deal with new threats

edited by

Alexander Rubel and Hans-Ulrich Voß



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## Preface

This volume is the result of a longer collaboration of the two editors, one with another, and within their institutions, the Institute of Archaeology in Iași, Romania and the 'Römisch Germanische Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts' in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Already in 2014 we organized together a session on a related topic at the EAA-Meeting in Istanbul. The proceedings of this conference on 'The Other' in Action. The Barbarization of Rome and the Romanization of the World' just have been published (R.-C. Curcă, A. Rubel, R. Symonds and H.-U. Voß [eds], *Romanisation and Barbaricum. Contributions to the archaeology and history of interaction in European protohistory*, Oxford: Archaeopress 2020). As the interesting features of cultural contact and Roman influence in the *Barbaricum* east of the Rhine as well as north of the Danube still intrigued us very much, we agreed to develop and further foster our collaboration. In this respect, we organized several workshops and roundtable-meetings in Iași, as well as in Frankfurt, inviting colleagues from our countries and from other central European borderlands of the Roman Empire to work together with us on new perspectives of the 'silent service' of Roman diplomacy and the relations between the Romans and Barbarian communities outside the Empire. An official cooperation treaty between our institutions had been signed in 2016 and two major research programs, funded by the Romanian research fund (UEFISCDI, former CNCSIS) helped us to keep up and stay on the track. The last major event of this collaboration had been the organization of another session in the framework of the 2018 meeting of the EAA at Barcelona under the motto 'How to beat the Barbarians? Roman practice to encounter new threats (1st-5th century AD)', which finally led to the publication of this volume. We had been very happy to observe at Barcelona, that another session, organized by Annet Nieuwhof from Groningen, was dealing with a very much related subject (In the shadow of the Roman Empire: Contact, influence and change outside the Roman limes) and many participants of the two sessions managed to attend both events. The volume is in a large part a result of the combination of these two sessions, as Annet Nieuwhof and some of her session-colleagues agreed to publish their papers in this volume. In the light of this, we decided on the actual title of this volume, which includes also aspects, which had been in the focus of the second session. That a Romanian institution could take a lead in an international long-term project of this size, which results also in the publication of this volume, is due to the funding by the Romanian Government (UEFISCDI, project no.: PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0669, with the title: Beyond the fringes of Empire. Roman influence and power north of the Danube and east of the Rhine). For this, the editors are very grateful to their funding institution. We also want to thank David Davison from Archaeopress, Oxford, for his kindness and his support as a publisher. Alexander Rubel wants to dedicate this volume to the memory of his late friend and colleague Octavian N. Bounegru (1956-2019) who had been despite his illness a part of this project.

March 2020

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Oxford

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# Luxury tableware? Terra sigillata in the coastal region of the northern Netherlands

Annet Nieuwhof

## Abstract

With thousands of finds, Roman terra sigillata (TS) is a common find category in terp settlements of the Northern Netherlands. It is traditionally interpreted as luxury tableware of the local elites, who acquired it through their contacts with Romans, or who were able to buy it from traders who came to this area with their merchandise. This paper questions that interpretation. The reason is that the far majority of TS is found as sherds, which, despite their good recognisability, only rarely fit other sherds. Moreover, many of these sherds are worked or used in some way. They were made into pendants, spindle whorls and playing counters, or show traces of deliberate breakage and of use for unknown purposes. Such traces are found on 70–80% of the sherds. The meaning of TS hence seems to have been symbolic rather than functional. Rather than as luxury tableware, TS may have been valued for the sake of the material itself, and may have been imported as sherds rather than as complete vessels. A symbolic value also shows from its long-term use. Used or worked TS sherds from the 2nd and 3rd century AD are often found in finds assemblages that may be interpreted as ritual deposits, not only from the Roman Period but also from the early Middle Ages. There are striking parallels for such use in early modern colonial contexts. TS sherds may have been part of the diplomatic gifts by which the Romans attempted to keep peace north of the limes, or may even have been payments for local products. These sherds might thus be comparable to the trade beads of early-modern European colonial traders.

## Keywords

Northern Netherlands; terra sigillata; Roman colonialism; indigenous people; secondary use; exchange.

## Introduction

The proximity of the expansive Roman Empire must have had an enormous impact on indigenous societies beyond its borders. Roman power and culture undoubtedly aroused curiosity and fascination but also fear and aversion, sometimes resulting in more or less successful resistance. Scholarly discussion and research on changes that occurred in these societies during the Roman period have long been dominated by the perspective of Rome. Roman authors were consequently taken as reliable and unbiased primary sources of information. That Roman colonial discourse emphasised, for instance, the warlike attitude of ‘barbarians’ and the benefits of the Pax Romana. However, reading these historical sources more critically, and taking the archaeological evidence more seriously may lead to different views on the world of indigenous populations that came into contact with Roman colonial power.

One type of archaeological evidence concerns Roman products outside the *limes*: ceramics, bronze statuettes, bronze and silverware, typical beads, weaponry related to the Roman army, and more. These goods usually clearly stand out among the excavated finds, for instance because they are the standardised products of workshops, or because they are decorated in a typically Roman naturalistic style, in contrast to the homemade utensils of the indigenous population. These goods are not spread evenly over different areas outside the Roman Empire.

Some products are found in specific areas more than others. In the coastal area of the northern Netherlands, for instance, bronze and glass vessels hardly occur, while *terra sigillata* (TS; Samian ware in Britain) is common and bronze statuettes are quite numerous, even compared to the part of the Netherlands south of the river Rhine, which was incorporated in the Roman Empire (Veen 2018: 20, Map 1). In Scotland, fragments of TS, Roman coarse ware and glass often occur (Campbell 2011; 2016), and in Scandinavia bronze and glass vessels are quite common, while TS is rare (Lund Hansen 1987).

The traditional view is that goods were traded across the border, that especially the wealthy elites were able to purchase these goods, and that Roman imports are therefore indicative of wealth and status (e.g. Boeles 1951: 145–156), and, at least in indigenous societies within the Empire, also of the degree of Romanisation (Van Es 1981: 260). It is often taken as self-evident that indigenous people liked the Roman goods better than their own homemade utensils because of their better quality or their Roman origin, and that they were quite passive consumers, gratefully accepting whatever Roman products they could lay their hands on. However, that view is fundamentally flawed even within the Empire, as Webster (2001) already pointed out; rather than Romanisation, a process of what she calls *Creolisation* set in after Roman conquest: new identities were negotiated by the indigenous population, by selectively adopting elements of the Roman material culture and combining

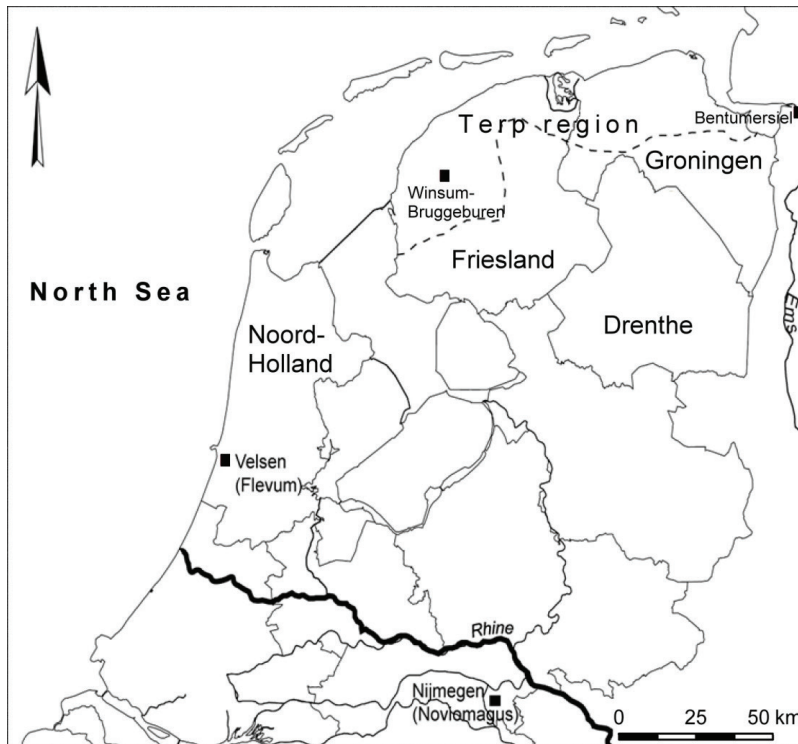


Figure 1. The northern part of the Netherlands, with early-Roman forts and outposts (black rectangles).

them with the indigenous culture. Outside the Empire, the traditional view neither holds up to closer scrutiny of the archaeological evidence (Erdrich 2016). To start with, why are there differences in the most common types of Roman imported goods between regions? Are these differences related to Roman supply, or to indigenous demand? And what can we learn from the material itself?

With thousands of finds, the Roman TS from the coastal area of the northern Netherlands is a suitable find category for further investigation. Habitation in this salt marsh area was necessarily confined to artificial dwelling mounds, known as *terps* (Nieuwhof *et al.* 2019). It was a densely populated area, with about 1500 *terps* from the Roman Period. The habitation history of this area is well-known, owing to a destructive phase that this landscape went through. In the 19th century, it was discovered that these dwelling mounds consisted of highly fertile soil that could successfully be applied to poor inland soils, thus improving harvest yields. That was the incentive to the large-scale destruction of the *terps*. Between c. 1840 and 1940, many *terps* were partially or completely levelled. It also heralded systematic *terp* research and *terp* archaeology. The excavated *terps* yielded many finds, which form the basis of the present archaeological museum collections in the northern provinces. Many of these finds were analysed and dated in modern studies (Knol 1993; Miedema 1983; Taayke 1996). Combined with the results of archaeological excavations, they provide a sound basis for an overview of the habitation history of this area.

TS was a conspicuous category of finds from the beginning of levelling, because of its bright colour compared to the

often greyish-brown and ochre-grey indigenous ware. Workers were even paid for every sherd of TS that they handed in, because the Roman connection was thought interesting. It might therefore be expected that workers broke sherds for profit. However, although TS is certainly overrepresented in collections, fitting sherds and fresh breaks are hardly ever found. Apparently, deliberate breakage by workers did not occur on a large scale (Volkers 1999: 151; contra Erdrich 2001a, 58). Additional TS finds come from archaeological *terp* excavations, providing contextual information. The TS assemblage from this region can thus be considered a reliable material category. In this paper, it serves as a case study, which reveals some interesting aspects of the way in which indigenous people dealt with Roman material culture.

### The northern Netherlands in the Roman Period

In 12 BC, the Roman army under the command of general Drusus started a series of campaigns, aimed at conquering the area between the Rhine and the Elbe, the homeland of *Frisii*, *Chauci* and other tribal groups. The Frisians, who inhabited the coastal regions of the western and northern Netherlands, seem to have surrendered without much opposition (Cassius Dio, Roman History 54.32.2).

This early phase of Roman presence is hardly reflected in the archaeological record. The Romans built a fortified naval base on the western coast in AD 15–16, the *castellum* Flevum, near the present town of Velsen (Bosman 1997). There seem to have been Roman outposts in Friesland, at the *terp* of Winsum-Bruggeburen (Galestin 2000; 2002a; 2002b; Volkers 2002) and at Bentumersiel on the river



Ems, which, according to historical sources, served as the entrance to Chaucian territory (Ulbert 1977; Strahl 2009) (Figure 1). The Roman presence in these outposts is very clear from all kinds of Roman goods dated to this early period, but structures of regular army camps have not been found here. Perhaps these settlements were the residences of Frisians and Chaucians who collaborated with the Romans, or of Roman officials such as tax collectors. Even in the vicinity of these Roman outposts and of Velsen, however, Roman goods are rare (Galestin 2010; Volkens 1991); there are no indications of a lively exchange of goods with the indigenous population (Erdrich 2001a: 88).

We know that the Frisians had to pay taxes in the form of cowhides, because it gave rise to a rebellion in AD 28. Earlier, the Romans had settled for the small cowhides of the Frisian cattle (Tacitus, *Annales* IV: 72–73). In AD 28, however, after 40 years of relatively friendly contacts, a new military administrator, Olennius, decided that the hides were too small, and he demanded larger ones. The Frisians could not meet those requirements and when the Romans increased the pressure, they revolted. The rebellion ended in the death of 1300 Roman soldiers and the destruction of the *castellum* Flevum. Tacitus, who was sympathetic to the rebellion because he considered the demands of Olennius unjustified, writes that the relationships between the Frisians and the Romans cooled after that event (Tacitus, *Annales* XI: 19).

In AD 47, emperor Claudius gave up the Elbe policy and established the river Rhine as the northern *limes*. From that moment, the northern Netherlands no longer belonged to the Roman Empire. Roman imports from the second part of the 1st century and the early 2nd century are not totally absent, but they are scarce (Erdrich 2001a: 93–97; 2001b; Volkens 2016: 238). The number of imports increased from around AD 125. The bulk of imported Roman goods in the northern Netherlands arrived there in the second half of the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century.

Trade as an explanatory model for the Roman imports has moved to the background and other explanations have emerged. Epigraphic sources show that Frisian men served as soldiers in the Roman army, for instance at Hadrian's wall (Galestin 2009). Veterans must have brought Roman items with them when they returned home. Van Es (1981: 265ff) and later Erdrich (2001a) and Roymans (2017) have argued that also Roman diplomacy must be responsible for part of the Roman imports. The Romans probably presented gifts to the leaders of areas bordering the Empire in exchange for a benevolent attitude (Erdrich 2001a: 148; 2001b: 320). That may be reflected in the luxury objects of costly materials and coin hoards from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries (Bazelmans 2003; Van Es 2005), and in a 4th–

5th century horizon of *solidi* (Roymans 2017). Erdrich identified several horizons of Roman imports in the Roman Period, which he relates to crises within the Empire; he therefore concludes that the presence of Roman goods in indigenous settlements north of the *limes* are not the result of commercial trade, but rather of Roman diplomacy in difficult periods when peace at the northern borders was of paramount importance (Erdrich 2001b: 328).

Habitation in the coastal region of the northern Netherlands diminished in the 3rd century and virtually came to an end around AD 300 (Nieuwhof 2011). Problems with drainage are probably the primary cause for the abandonment, but the weakening of the Roman Empire may have been a pull-factor for the population that left the area. Only a few *terp* settlements remained inhabited across the 4th century AD, notably Ezinge in the province of Groningen (Nieuwhof 2013). Roman imports from the 4th and early 5th century in this settlement, including African Red Slip Ware (ARS) that is virtually unknown elsewhere in the Netherlands, show that there were still contacts with the Roman Empire; perhaps there were mercenaries from the north in the Roman Army even in the late Roman Period (Volkens 2014; 2015). Ezinge is also one of the locations where late 4th century Roman *solidi* have been found (Roymans Figure 5 and 6; Knol 2014, 189–190).

In the 5th century, the *terp* region was repopulated. The larger part of the new population consisted of immigrants from the east and north-east, 'Anglo-Saxons', as is indicated by their characteristic material culture. They joined the small remaining population, which had participated in a socio-cultural network that extended far to the east already in the Roman Period, and shared a similar lifestyle (Nieuwhof 2011; 2103).

## Terra sigillata

### Distribution and phases

Most of the imported Roman pottery in the coastal area of the northern Netherlands is TS. Other wares hardly occur. Around 2300 TS fragments are known from the present-day province of Friesland, and 400 from the province of Groningen, where the number of *terps* is also considerably smaller (Volkens 2016; 2017; in prep.).<sup>1</sup> Three phases can be discerned. The first phase is represented by a very small group of sherds that belong to the first period of contact with the Romans, between 12 BC and the middle of the 1st century AD (Figure 2).

<sup>1</sup> We owe it to Ms Tineke Volkens, that we have detailed information on the TS of the northern Netherlands; she has analysed the entire TS assemblage of this area. The material of several settlements (Winsum-Bruggeburen, Ezinge) has been published (2002; 2014), besides a catalogue of the province of Friesland (2016; 2017). A catalogue of the province of Groningen is on its way.

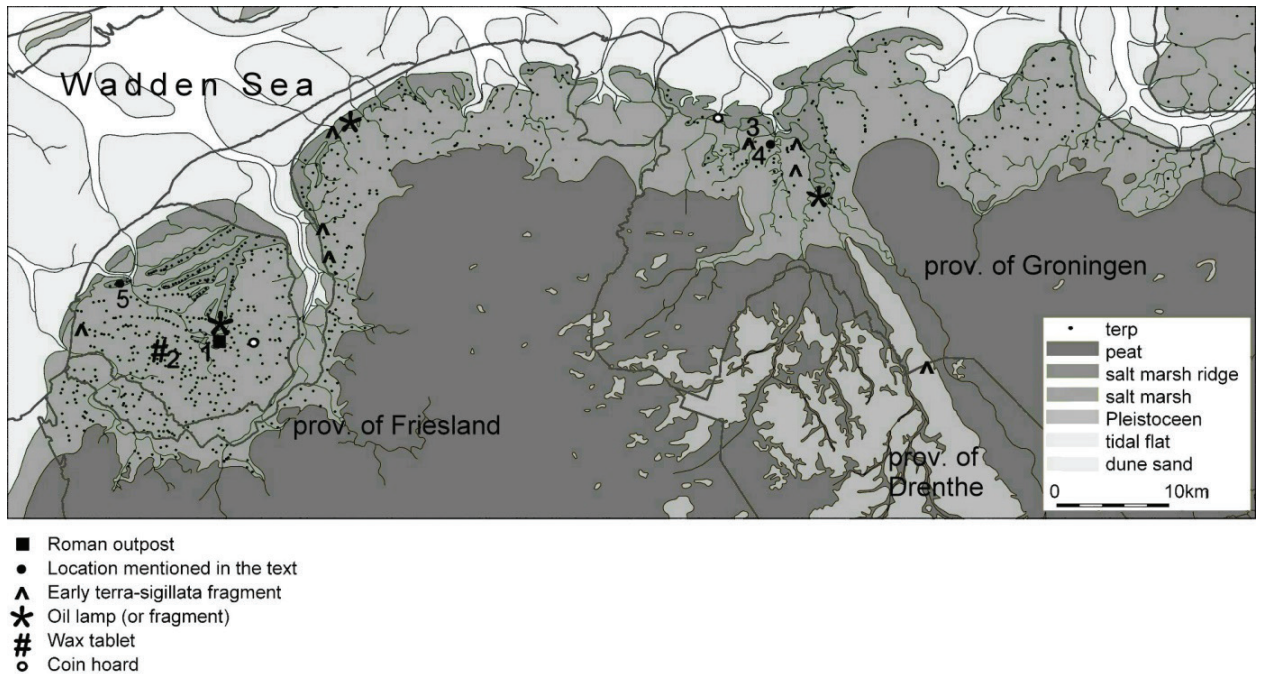


Figure 2. Palaeogeographical map of the situation around AD 100, with Roman imports from the first period of contact, 12 BC-AD 47. 1: Winsum-Bruggeburen; 2: Tolsum; 3: Englum; 4: Ezinge; 5: Wijnaldum. Map A. Nieuwhof, on palaeogeographical map basis from Vos & Knol 2005; finds: Galestin 2010; Volkers 2016; Nieuwhof 2015, 310.

This TS originates in northern Italy and in South and Central Gaul. The largest group of fragments by far belongs to the second phase, the period between c. 125 AD and the middle of the 3rd century AD. Most common is type Drag. 37 (50% or more), followed by Drag. 31, Drag. 33, mortaria, Drag. 32 and Drag. 36 (Volkers 2014, 158). This group comes from production places in Central and Eastern Gaul, especially Lezoux, Trier, Rheinzabern, and Argonne.<sup>2</sup> A small group of TS sherds, including ARS as mentioned in the previous section, belong to later types, from the 4th and early 5th centuries: the third phase. Sherds from this phase have been found in those very few terps where habitation continued across the late Roman Period. Types from this period come from the Argonne, possibly from Britain (Fulford 1977; Morris 2015), and from northern Africa.

The research history makes it hard to assess the completeness of the dataset, but if we rely on the finds that we have, it is clear that TS in the terp region is not distributed evenly over all the terps. In Friesland (Figure 3), most terps have yielded no more than a few or some dozens of TS fragments, while a small group of 13 terps have yielded more than 50 fragments, with two terps near Dronrijp (Hatsum I and II) as winners with 367 and 250 sherds respectively (Volkers 2016: 249,

Tabelle 5 and Beilage 3).<sup>3</sup> In Groningen, both Ezinge and Brillerij have yielded more than 50 fragments. These differences have been associated with social hierarchy: those terps may have been central places (Galestin 1992: 28). The distances between these terps, however, are far from regular, and accessibility may be a more important factor. Most of these terps were situated on the coast at the time. Hatsum, with its exceptional finds (besides a large number of TS, also roof tiles were found here), which was located further from the coast, may have continued the Roman relations of nearby (at a distance of only 3 km) Winsum-Bruggeburen; these terps had a central position in the western part of Friesland and were accessible via the river Boorne then.

In many areas outside the northern Netherlands, the number of finds is considerably smaller (Figure 4). The province of Noord-Holland on the western coast of the Netherlands, where the *castellum* Flevum was situated, has a group of early-phase sherds (Brandt 1983: 138), but the number of sherds from the middle-Roman period is much smaller than in the northern coastal area; most of these are from the second half of the 2nd century (Erdrich 2001a: 50–56; Meffert 1998: 94). That is at least partly related to a smaller number of settlements than in the northern terp region. Also in the province of Drenthe, south of Friesland and Groningen, a smaller number of

<sup>2</sup> For reasons that are yet unknown, a larger percentage of the Frisian TS than of the TS from Groningen and elsewhere in the Netherlands comes from Rheinzabern (Volkers 2014; Polak, in Volkens 2016).

<sup>3</sup> The number of 572 fragments from the terp of Cornjum mentioned by Galestin (1992: 26) is a mistake: 61 TS fragments come from that terp (Volkens 2016: 245, note 7).

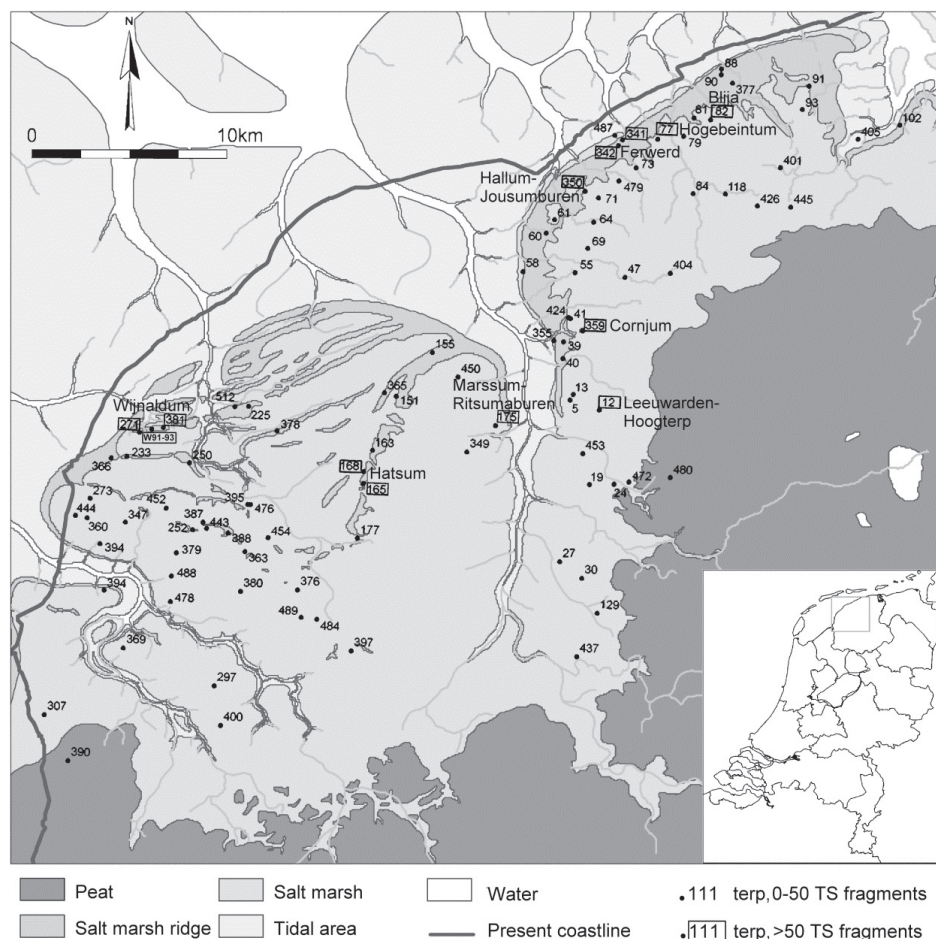


Figure 3. Distribution of TS sherds in the terp region of the present province of Friesland on the palaeogeographical map c. 100 AD. Number are terp numbers from Volkers 2016. Map A. Nieuwhof, based on the latest palaeogeographical map by P.C. Vos and S. de Vries, Deltares.

TS probably reflects a smaller number of settlements (Glasbergen 1945). TS is common in adjacent coastal areas of Niedersachsen and Schleswig-Holstein (Gerrets 2010: 142). For instance, 230 TS sherds were collected from the completely excavated terp of Feddersen Wierde (Erdrich 2001a: 18; Erdrich and Teegen 2002: 123–129). In Scandinavia, however, the number of TS finds is very low and certainly does not reflect a low number of settlements: some 150 sherds in the entire area, and a small number of complete vessels, mostly from cemeteries (Lund Hansen 1987: 182–183). In Central and Eastern Europe, areas with many and few TS finds, each with its own Roman-period history, alternate (Figure 4).

There is some doubt as to the period that TS was imported into the northern Netherlands. We have no context information about the majority of sherds, because they come from the period of commercial quarrying of the terps. Fortunately, modern excavations do provide that information. An important excavation was carried out between 1991 and 1993 in the terp of Wijnaldum-Tjitsma (Besteman *et al.* 1999), a terp settlement where habitation began in the 2nd century AD. TS finds include 61 fragments of 2nd–3rd century TS and two of the 4th–5th century. The virtual lack of this latter category is undoubtedly caused by the hiatus in habitation here between c. AD 325 and 425. When analysing the TS finds

from this excavation, Volkers (1999) noted that only nine out of 61 2nd–3rd century TS fragments came from Roman-Period contexts, though usually younger than the production date of the vessels. The other fragments came either from undated contexts, or from early-medieval contexts (n=20). Other Roman imports, such as glass fragments (Sablerolles 1999), coins (Van der Vin 1999), metal finds (Erdrich 1999), and Roman wheel-thrown pottery (Galestin 1999) show the same pattern, or only occur in post-Roman contexts. In other terp settlements, TS fragments also often occur in early-medieval contexts. That has been taken as an indication that most TS and other Roman products were only imported after the Roman Period ended, probably from deserted Roman settlements in the Rhineland (Erdrich 2016: 44; Gerrets 2010: 137; Volkers 1999: 153). Roman objects such as reused building materials and TS pendants in the present province of Zuid-Holland near Oegstgeest, within the former Empire, were interpreted in the same way, as *spolia* and pick-ups from nearby deserted Roman military settlements such as De Woerd and Valkenburg. The considerable wear of the pendants was interpreted as a sign of the special meaning of these ‘antiquities’ for their users (De Bruin 2018: 22). Reusing Roman building materials was probably common throughout a large part of the Middle Ages. In the province of Noord-Holland, they are found in medieval ecclesiastical buildings, and

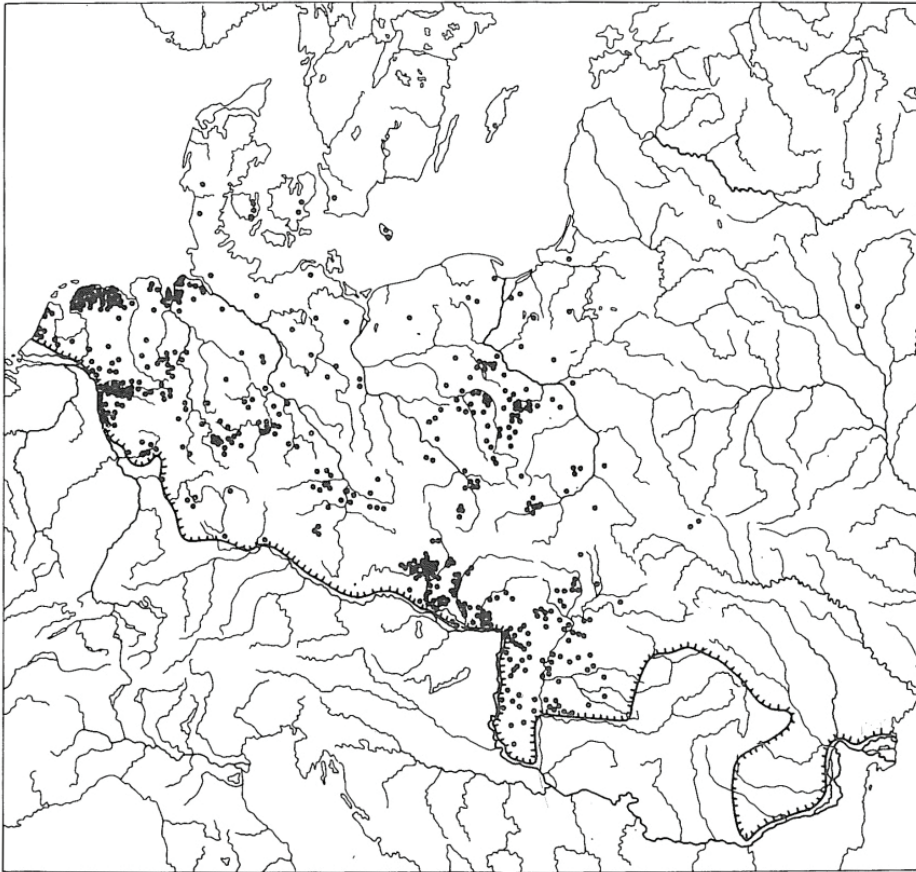


Figure 4. The distribution of TS north of the Roman Empire. Finds from after 1987 are not included. Map from Lund Hansen 1987, fig. 127. Reproduced with permission.

are thought to be taken there by ship from the former *castella* along the Rhine (Meffert 1998: 95).

The excavations in the terp settlements of Ezinge in Groningen and of the Feddersen Wierde in Niedersachsen, however, demonstrate that TS and other Roman objects were certainly already imported in the Roman Period. Habitation at the Feddersen Wierde ended in the course of the 5th century (Schmid 2006), so there is no question of early-medieval importation of any of the 230 TS sherds that were found there. Of the large terp of Ezinge, where habitation began around 500 BC, about 10% was excavated between 1923 and 1934. The analysis of the finds and contexts only started in 2011 (Nieuwhof 2014a; 2015). TS finds include 137 fragments of second-phase TS and 35 fragments of third-phase TS (Late Argonne, a fragment of Oxfordshire ware, and 25 fragments of ARS), a total of 172 fragments (Volkers 2014). A large part of these fragments were found in contemporaneous contexts, that is: second-phase fragments in second-phase contexts, and third-phase fragments in third-phase contexts (Table 1). Within these phases, fragments often come from somewhat younger contexts than the sherds themselves. These data give no reason to assume that early-medieval importation of TS played a significant role. TS in much younger contexts may well be explained by accidental digging up of older objects at the time, a common phenomenon in terps, or by long-term preservation of heirlooms in families. It will be

argued below that the latter possibility is not so unlikely as it may seem. In Wijndaldum, the TS fragments from early-medieval contexts may also have been heirlooms, but in that case they must have been the heirlooms of immigrant families from the Elbe-Weser area that reoccupied this terp from c. AD 425 (Gerrets and de Koning 1999; Nieuwhof 2011). However, at Wijndaldum too, TS fragments may have been dug up from deeper terp layers (Nieuwhof et al. 2020, 246, footnote 16).

### Characteristics

Nearly all TS finds in the northern Netherlands come from settlement contexts; graves are very rare in the area, and if they occur, usually do not include grave goods.<sup>4</sup> Only one inhumation grave in the terp of Blija had a TS plate as a grave gift (Nieuwhof 2015: 366, 13b). It is one of a very small number of more or less complete TS vessels in this area;<sup>5</sup> the large majority of TS is found as sherds. There are hardly any fitting sherds, although this material is easily recognisable. That is in clear contrast with the handmade pottery, which is found in large numbers in terp excavations,

<sup>4</sup> Isolated inhumation graves and single human bones do occur, pointing to a mixed practice of mortuary rites related to family identity, including inhumation and especially excarnation (Nieuwhof 2015).

<sup>5</sup> See Boeles 1951: Plate 22; Glasbergen 1944: Joeswerd 3, Garnwerd 10, Eenum 2; Feerwerd 7, all surviving half to two third.

Table 1. Production and context dates of TS from Ezinge.

Date												
Context	2nd-3rd cen.		3rd-4th cen.		4th-5th cen.		6th-9th cen.		unknown		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2nd-3rd cen. TS	51	37.2	1	0.7	34	24.8	8	5.8	43	31.4	137	100
4th-5th cen. TS					11	31.4	3	8.6	21	60.0	35	100
Total											172	

including many fitting fragments. Fitting TS sherds from different terps have not been identified either, despite careful comparison.<sup>6</sup> The relative lack of fitting TS fragments implies that the number of pottery individuals is also very large compared to the number of sherds. For instance at Ezinge, 137 TS fragments from the 2nd and 3rd centuries belong to as many as 121 pottery individuals (Nieuwhof and Volkers 2015: 6).

The few TS sherds from the first phase belong to a horizon of finds that are concentrated in the early-Roman *castellum* Flevum and the outpost Winsum-Bruggeburen. Around 500 early-phase Roman pottery fragments are known from Winsum-Bruggeburen, including 21 early TS (Volkers 2016: 238). In the northern provinces outside Winsum-Bruggeburen, no more than 12–15 sherds from this period are known from indigenous settlements (Figure 2). One of these comes from an excavation in the terp of Englum in 2000 (Nieuwhof 2008: 70–71; 2015: 146–147, 311). It is a small rim fragment of a plate of Arretine ware of type *Conspectus* 11, dated 20 BC–0.<sup>7</sup> The fragment has smoothed edges and a hole in one of the corners and was probably worn as a pendant (Figure 5). Other TS sherds from this phase show traces of use such as smoothing and cutting. Sherds from Winsum-Bruggeburen itself, however, do not show such traces (Volkers 2016: 241).

In the second phase, as many as 70–80% of the fragments show traces of processing or reuse.<sup>8</sup> Part of these fragments are made into identifiable objects such as pendants, playing counters, beads or small spindle whorls (Figure 6). Many others are just simple shapes with rounded edges, or show traces of use wear.

Fragments of the same vessel, if these occur, were often used in different ways. For instance, three out of seven sherds, together forming one third of a Drag. 37 bowl from the Groningen terp of Oostum (Figure 7), were made into round and rectangular counters (Glasbergen 1944: 331).

Traces of use indicate deliberate breakage, cutting, chopping, pecking, abrading, or rounding. Many sherds are worn along the edges, as if they were often held and handled (Figure 8). Such traces occur on all types of TS, including *mortaria*. Although part of these fragments is decorated, the decoration seems to be meaningless for this secondary use; pendants and other objects may cut right through figures and other types of decoration.

Other types of imported Roman pottery never show such traces. Traces of processing and use are also virtually absent on sherds from the third phase. Only two late-Argonne sherds, one from Witmarsum (131/50, Volkens 2017: 52) and one from Brillerij (Glasbergen 1944: 336), have perforations. A small percentage of indigenous handmade pottery was used for various applications, such as grog for tempering clay, or spindle whorls and playing counters made of wall sherds (e.g.



Figure 5. Pendant made of a rim fragment of an Arretine plate (type *Conspectus* 11 (Haltern 1b/Service 1a)) and dated to late 1st century BC. Found in the terp of Englum, prov. of Groningen, in a 1st-century AD context. Photo A. Nieuwhof.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication ms. Tineke Volkens; there are some sherds from possibly the same vessel found on different terps (e.g. Volkens 2016: Cat. nos. 394 and 398, from Blija and Wijnaldum; Glasbergen 1944: 328–329: no. 8 from Joeswerd and no. 10 from Wierum).

<sup>7</sup> I thank Dr M. Polak (Radboud University, Nijmegen) for this identification.

<sup>8</sup> In the terp settlement of Ezinge, 72% of second-phase TS shows such traces (Volkens 2014: 156); in the province of Friesland, this percentage is 77% (Volkens 2016: 240).



Figure 6. Worked TS fragments from the Groningen terp of Ezinge. Photos from Volkers 2014; Reproduced with permission.

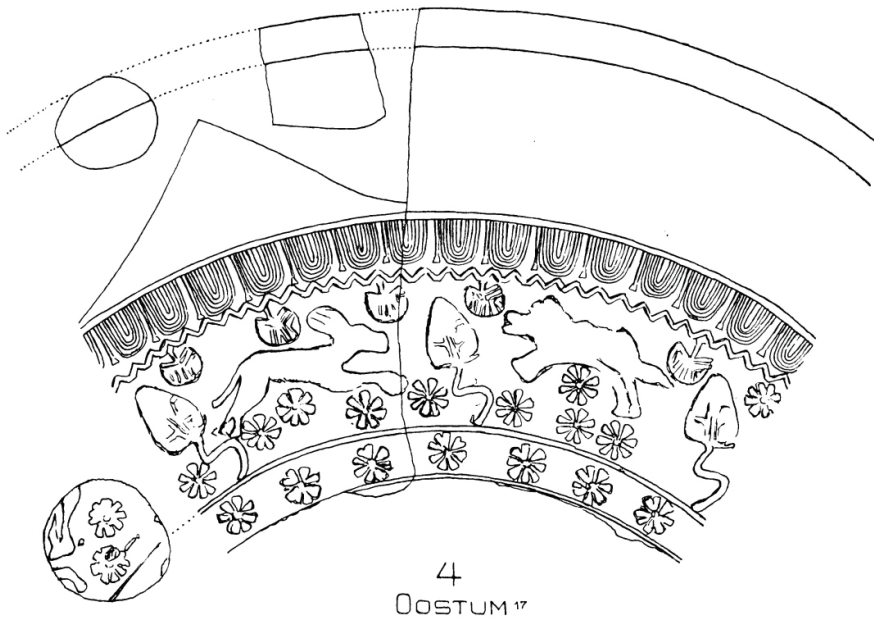


Figure 7. Sherds from one Dr. 37 bowl, from the terp of Oostum in the province of Groningen. Three sherds were worked, two of them into playing counters. From Glasbergen 1944.

Nieuwhof 2008: 66–67; 2014b: 97, 112). The secondary use as pendants, however, is unknown.

The northern Netherlands are not unique in the secondary use of TS. Pendants, playing counters and beads are known from many other places; the identification of other traces of secondary use is less common. The relatively small number of fragments in Denmark and southern Sweden include several perforated fragments and spindle whorls (Lund Hansen 1987: 182). In Traprain Law in Scotland, several sherds were converted into spindle whorls and playing counters and 10% of the 100 fragments were cut into rectangular pieces, but there are also many abraded sherds or sherds that were re-cut into other geometric shapes (Campbell 2011: 333–342; Erdrich *et al.* 2000: 449).

In Scotland in general, a substantial part of Roman-ware fragments (TS and to a lesser extent coarse ware) were abraded or worked into objects. Campbell argues that TS sherds in Scotland were possibly reused as colourants, abrasives or polishers in metalworking activities, for medicinal purposes, or possibly as talismans. TS also played a role in ritual-deposition practices in Scotland (Campbell 2011: 224–227; 2016: 229).

#### *Contexts and depositional practice*

The reuse of TS sherds, especially in ritual practice, may point to a symbolic meaning that was ascribed to this material. The terp of Ezinge served as a case study in this author's research of ritual practice in the



Figure 8. Selection of TS sherds from the province of Friesland, showing traces of use and working; a. partly smoothed break; b. smoothed all around; c. the coating is worn along the break; d. impact damage from a tool; e. notches on the break line; f. pockmarked damage; g. chopped; h. perforated; i. playing counter. From Volkers 2016; photos H. Faber Bulthuis. Reproduced with permission.

Table 2. Deposits including 2nd-3rd century TS fragments in Ezinge. MNI: Minimum number of individuals. Small amounts of handmade potsherds are not mentioned. \* With traces of use or manipulation. 28: not available. Second phase data from Nieuwhof 2015, 345-347.

find no.		TS fragments (n)	Other objects
<i>2nd-3rd century contexts</i>			
28, 30*, 38*, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 340*, 772*, 798*, 979, 986, 991, 1080, 1293*	in and outside houses	1	
269 (2*), 964*, 1298 (2*)	resp. in outhouse, settlement layer and ditch around field	2 (MNI of 269 and 964 =2; MNI of 1298 =1)	
248 (3*)	sunken hut	3 (MNI=3, incl. 2 pendants)	
957 (3*)	outside wall	4 ts (MNI=4)	
958 (6*)	outside wall	6 playing counters (6*) (MNI=1)	
25*	hearth in house	1 playing counter	dog skull, handmade pot
34*	outside house	1	handmade miniature pot
150*	unclear	1	bone spindle whorl
168*	in house	1	ceramic loom weight, whetstone
250	sunken hut	1	ceramic spindle whorl, 'Roman glass'(not preserved)
251*	outside sunken hut	1	2 bronze hairpins
735	in house platform	1	6 sherds of a small handmade pot
764	near house wall	1	bronze ring, Neolithic flint flake
973*	outside sunken hut	1	ceramic loom weight, 8.1 kg handmade potsherds, 2 burnt stones
1091*		1	ceramic lid, bronze bead, whetstone
<i>3rd-4th century context</i>			
679*	outside sunken hut	1	3 used-up whetstones.

northern Netherlands (Nieuwhof 2015). From that study it is clear that TS played a role in ritual practice during and probably also after the Roman period. Ritual practice in this case includes religious and non-religious depositional practice, as well as the use of a variety of materials as amulets and other protective measures. Deposits that were identified as ritual deposits according to previously defined criteria (see Nieuwhof 2015, Ch. 9), often included materials and objects such as unworked flint, which is not naturally found in this landscape; gaming pieces made of foot bones of cattle and horse; playing counters made of fragments of handmade pottery or TS; and also other, often manipulated or reused TS fragments. Such items can be interpreted as protective or luck-bringing materials: flint possibly because it can be sharp and may be used in lighting fire, gaming pieces and counters because they are associated with good fortune, and TS because its reddish colour, that may have been associated with blood and life, and possibly with warmth and protection (Nieuwhof 2015:210–211). That quality of TS may also explain its use as pendants or rather as amulets. It must have been the colour rather than the Roman connection that gave this material its

symbolic meaning, since other Roman potsherds were not used in this way.

Table 2 shows deposits from Ezinge dated to the Roman Period that include second-phase TS fragments. Since TS is part of so many clearly ritual deposits, single TS fragments are also considered as such. Table 3 shows finds assemblages with second- and third-phase TS fragments in contexts from the 4th/5th century and the early Middle Ages.

TS fragments often occur in second-phase deposits that were associated with houses (Table 2). Two conspicuous examples, both from the 3rd century AD, are illustrative. The first is a partially excavated house; numerous objects that often occur in ritual deposits were found in its backyard; many of these can be interpreted as luck-bringing materials and objects (Table 2, nos. 36–47; Nieuwhof 2015: 320). The finds include a set of six gaming pieces, consisting of cattle astragali (one filled with iron) and a worked horse phalanx; the inner shell of a cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*); a whetstone; a miniature bowl; a ceramic loom weight; and seven different TS



Table 3. Deposits including second- and third-phase TS fragments in Ezinge, all from settlement contexts. MNI: Minimum number of individuals. Small amounts of handmade potsherds are not mentioned. \* With traces of use or manipulation.

<i>4th-5th century contexts</i>		
find no.	TS fragments (n)	Other objects
171	1 2nd-3rd;	ceramic spindle whorl
239	2 2nd-3rd (1*) (MNI=2)	
240	1 ARS	
331	1 ARS	Anglo-Saxon style sherd
544	5 2nd-3rd (3*) (MNI = 4); 1 late-Argonne	Roman onyx cameo
805	1* 2nd-3rd; 1 late TS; 1 ARS	piece of flint
864	3 2nd-3rd (2*)(MNI=2); 4 late TS (MNI=3)	
1077/1079 (sunken hut)	1* 2nd-3rd; 5 ARS (MNI=3)	miniature pot; glass fragment; 10 led rings (loom weights?); bone needle; two-pointed (weaving?) implement
1793	3 2nd-3rd (3*)(MNI=3)	one and a half late-Iron Age glass bead
<i>early-medieval contexts</i>		
4	1 2nd-3rd; 1 late TS	
624	1 2nd-3rd (fitting a sherd (no. 494) in a second-phase layer)	
749	1* 2nd-3rd	
750	1 late TS	

fragments, four of which are still available, all showing traces of processing or use. It seems that nothing was left to chance by the inhabitants of this house.

Houses were often rebuilt for generations on the same spot on terps, separated by a heightening layer. The second example is from a cluster of such overlapping houses from the second phase, which are difficult to disentangle (Nieuwhof 2015: 317). Right to the west of this cluster, so outside the west wall of one of the houses, two TS deposits were excavated (nos. 957 and 958). No. 957 consist of four different TS sherds, three of which show traces of processing or use. No. 958 consists of six playing counters, made out of the same, thick-walled TS vessel (Figure 6, top left).<sup>9</sup>

Second-phase TS sherds are also found in third-phase and, to a lesser degree, in early-medieval contexts (Table 3). Despite the difficulties with identification of higher, dehydrated features in the terp, it is clear that second- and third phase TS fragments are often found together in these later contexts. Second-phase TS is often worked or used, but 3rd-phase TS is not. Some of these finds assemblages (e.g., 544; 1077/1079; 1793) can be identified as ritual deposits. This evidence suggests that second-phase TS was not discarded after the Roman period. That is also supported by a TS sherd in

an early-medieval context that fits a sherd in a second-phase context (nos. 624 and 494). Fragments must have been kept, possibly as family heirlooms, for a long time, even for centuries, before they were finally deposited. Although third-phase TS was no longer processed or reused in similar ways as second-phase TS, these fragments also ended up in ritual deposits.

### Acquirement

The evidence from the northern Netherlands does not point in the direction of import of TS as luxury tableware, or even of TS vessels. In that case, a larger percentage of large fragments and more fitting sherds might be expected. Moreover, if TS had only utility value, the majority would come from contemporaneous contexts, just like indigenous handmade pottery, rather than from younger contexts. So what was the role of TS in the material culture of this area, and how did it get there?

Nieuwhof and Volkers (2015: 31–32) have argued that most of the TS in the terp region arrived there as raw material, in the form of sherds, rather than as luxury tableware. If we assume, on the basis of the evidence from Ezinge, that most of the TS came to this area during the Roman Period rather than in the early Middle Ages, there are several ways in which the population of the terp region may have acquired TS, either as sherds or as complete pottery: as merchandise; via down-the-line

<sup>9</sup> Fig. 6 shows only five playing counters. The sixth one was recently retrieved.

exchange; as pick-ups; as gifts or belongings taken by veterans; or as diplomatic gifts.

If most of the TS arrived here as sherds, it does not seem likely that this material was normal merchandise, taken to this area by Roman merchants who traded it with the local population. Nevertheless, if we assume that barter was the normal way of trading in this period outside the Roman Empire, TS sherds may have been exchanged for dairy products, wool and other products that the local population may have produced on a small scale for the Roman market. If a surplus was indeed produced for the Roman market, the distance makes it likely that Roman merchants came to the area by boat once in a while, rather than the inhabitants from the north visited markets at the *limes* severally. The small size and the abrasion of first-phase TS sherds in indigenous settlements outside the naval base of Velsen led Brandt (1983: 139ff) to the similar hypothesis that these sherds were actually ‘primitive valuables’, used by the Roman military to pay for indigenous products; the Frisians accepted this currency because they valued the ‘supernatural character’ of this red and shiny material (Brandt 1983: 140).

This idea has met with opposition because TS sherds in indigenous settlements are not all small and abraded so there does not seem to be a standard unit, and there are no indications that the indigenous population used TS as currency among themselves. Moreover, the Frisians must have known from their contacts with the Romans about the value of Roman currency and would therefore not have accepted small sherds as payment for goods and services (Vons and Bosman 1988; Bosman and Groenewoudt 1997: 93). Secondly, the hypothesis has been refuted ‘as a reductionist and rudimentary interpretation of material culture’ (Campbell 2011: 225). Campbell prefers the explanation of the use of TS that is mentioned above, as colourants, abrasives or polishers in metalworking activities, for medicinal purposes, or possibly as talismans (Campbell 2011:225).

Another possibility is that TS was acquired via down-the-line exchange, from communities closer to the *limes*. In that case products would have been exchanged, possibly as gifts, that were meaningful to those communities, rather than products that were needed by the Roman population at the *limes*. Alternatively, TS vessels may have been broken deliberately and handed down along the same lines, in ritualised social exchange, thus establishing enchainment by fragmentation (Chapman 2000: 27; Campbell 2011: 237–238). However, these options do not explain why TS is rare in the areas between the *limes* and the northern Netherlands. Within the terp region, the virtual lack of fitting fragments from different terps makes the practice of fragmentation

and enchainment unlikely as an explanation of the considerable fragmentation of TS.

Pick-ups and looting have been assumed for the early-medieval imports mentioned earlier, and are certain for the first phase of contact. TS sherds from the naval base of Velsen were proved to belong to the same vessels as sherds in indigenous settlements in this area (Vons and Bosman 1988). That means that these sherds were probably picked up in the abandoned forts Velsen I and II, and that they arrived in the indigenous settlements only after the Romans left the area, rather than by exchange with the Roman military. Besides TS sherds, also a variety of Roman glass sherds is found in the Velsen area, a material category that is extremely rare in the terp region. The few first-phase TS sherds in the northern terp region might in theory be pick-ups from Winsum-Bruggeburen, but there is no evidence for that. In the second phase, the nearest Roman settlements were at the *limes*.

Soldiers in the Roman army who returned home after their service ended, must have taken Roman objects home, as equipment, gifts and other possessions. TS ware may have been part of their equipment, and if they knew that this material was valued by their relatives, they may even have taken TS fragments with them. We know that quite some Frisian soldiers served in the Roman army, but how many veterans actually returned home is hard to assess. Galestin (2010: 81) argues that veterans were in an ideal position to ‘initiate and maintain long-term trade relations’, but whether they actually did so is unknown. And, as stated above, trade does not account for the fragmentation and the large number of pottery individuals compared to the number of sherds.

Lastly, it is possible that TS came to the terp region in the form of diplomatic gifts by the Romans for local leaders, in the pursuit of peace at the frontier. Complete TS vessels may seem the most obvious choice in that case, and complete vessels may have been broken afterwards by the recipients and redistributed to the people who then used the sherds for various purposes (Campbell 2011: 240, Figure 8.16). That would account for the concentrations of TS sherds in some terps. As Galestin (1992) argued, these terps must in that case have been the residence of regional leaders. It does, however, not account for the lack of fitting sherds even within those terps. These are only understandable if we assume that TS sherds themselves were among the gifts of the Romans (Van Es 1981: 265; Volkers 2016: 242). We can in that case compare these TS sherds to the beads of modern colonial states, which were used as currency in colonial trade.

This suggestion has been refuted, with the same argument that was implicitly used against the hypothesis of the primitive valuables by Brandt mentioned above: that the Germanic people are portrayed as primitive barbarians this way (Gerrets 2010: 144; against Brandt: Bosman and Groenewoudt 1997: 93; Campbell 2011: 225; Vons and Bosman 1988). These authors rightly do not wish to portray the indigenous populations as primitive people. By denying the possibility that TS sherds represented a certain value to these people, however, an undoubtedly unintended effect is achieved: this denial implicitly portrays the non-western populations of the early-modern colonial period as more primitive, because these did accept mirrors and beads as payment.

It is the perspective of the colonial side that is chosen if we claim that only primitive people would accept such payments. However, if we take the perspective of the indigenous societies as point of departure, we may be able to recognise that also the value that we ascribe to our money, which is no more than pieces of metal or even paper or digital accounts, is based on agreements. There is no reason why other materials could not be as valuable to other people, and there are many examples from ethnography that prove that point. Moreover, different materials may not only have value as currency, but also symbolical value that is related to other social, spiritual and personal spheres. That implies that the northern populations, who valued TS as protective or luck-bringing material, may have welcomed the Romans when they took TS sherds as gifts, even though the Romans may have laughed at them for accepting rubbish as payment.

The absence of traces of use on 3rd-phase TS shows that the meaning of TS changed in and after the late Roman Period, although its use in ritual deposits shows that it still had symbolic value. The red material may have kept its attraction and meaning over the centuries, but new meanings may have been added. The relationship between the indigenous populations and the Roman Empire had certainly changed considerably, and the Germanic *foederati* now received payments of gold *solidi* and jewellery for their support (Roymans 2017). We may safely assume that TS sherds did not play a role in such transactions in this phase, and the few TS finds from this phase may be attributed to mercenaries who had served in the Roman army. These mercenaries may have belonged to the small remaining population, in particular at Ezinge, but also to the new population that arrived in the terp region in the 5th century from the east. *Solidi* from the early-5th century phase of payments as defined by Roymans (2017, 64) were found in the repopulated western part of Friesland; from this latter area, several mid-5th century *solidi* are also known (Roymans 2017, 65). Diplomatic contacts with the Romans thus seem to have been common also in

this late phase, but the indigenous populations now valued gold, rather than less costly materials.

### Lessons from ethnography: one man's trash...

The Roman colonial power can be compared with early-modern colonial powers. Descriptions of first-contact situations and the use of the material culture of early-modern colonial powers by indigenous populations may increase our understanding of similar events and processes during the Roman Period. Ethnographic studies and reports by explorers, tradesmen and missionaries are available for colonial encounters in, for instance, New Guinea, America and Australia (summarised by Verhart 2000). None of these situations forms an exact parallel for the Roman expansion. Indigenous societies may react in many different ways to a dominant, expansive culture. However, one thing is clear: the material culture of the colonial power is never simply accepted as it is, at least not during the first phase of contact.

Firstly, only a selection of the objects of the colonial power is found interesting by the indigenous population. These are often not the practical items, since people were used to their own materials and utensils, and could manage well with these. Secondly, these objects are often not used as they were meant to, but adapted, processed and used for completely different applications. These applications are often of a symbolic or ceremonial nature, and objects are chosen for their colour or texture. They may look like indigenous materials that are hard to come by. In highland societies in New Guinea, for instance, the large, white shells in ceremonial headdresses were sometimes replaced by European white porcelain saucers (Verhart 2000: 22). Only later, even much later, the utensils of the colonial power are used as they are intended to, first by the people who live at a short distance of the colonists, and later as distance increases.

A striking parallel for the TS pendants in the Netherlands are pendants made of Delft faience by native Americans of the Seneca-Iroquois nation, who in the 17th century came into contact with Dutch fur traders in New Amsterdam, and picked these sherds up from the waste heaps of the Dutch (Van Dongen 1995, 109–110). Only later, Delft-ware cups appeared in graves, but probably still had a symbolic meaning that differed from their original meaning. The native Americans who were in direct contact with the Dutch traders were the first to adopt and use complete objects. Further from the Dutch settlement, where foreign goods were acquired by exchange, Delft-ware sherds were in use much longer. This use of Delft ware was described in the catalogue of an exhibition with the revealing title *One man's trash is another man's treasure* (Van Dongen 1995).

These parallel situations and uses show how the Roman material culture may have been adopted by indigenous populations. These chose just what they thought worthwhile, which was not necessarily what the Romans thought to be of value or use. The differences in kind and numbers of Roman objects in regions outside the limes must be related to particular preferences of these different societies. Moreover, it is clear that the Roman goods were not used as they were intended. The reuse of TS fragments proves this point. This material was chosen for the symbolic meaning that was ascribed to it by the indigenous population, rather than for its functional use or as a status symbol of the elite. TS did not serve as luxury tableware in this society, and that probably remained so until the end of the Roman Period.

These general patterns indicate that also other popular Roman objects were probably chosen for different reasons than their intended purpose. In the northern Netherlands, for instance, the popular bronze statuettes of Roman gods, goddesses and mortals probably did not have the same meaning as within the Roman empire. Although they are sometimes envisaged as a focus of worship for comparable indigenous deities, that use is far from certain.

## Conclusion

The study of the different uses of Roman material culture in societies who came into contact with the Roman empire reveals something of the processes that took place in these societies upon first contact with this expansive colonial power, especially when these are compared to similar processes in early-modern societies. The material culture of the dominant culture was only adopted selectively, and different societies had different preferences and uses for the selected objects and materials. Symbolic meaning is often important in the choice of materials.

In the northern Netherlands, *terra sigillata* is by far the most common imported Roman material. Its high degree of fragmentation and the common use of fragments for different applications indicates that it was not imported as luxury tableware, but rather as a raw material that was valued for its symbolic meaning. TS may sometimes have been imported as complete pots, but it is likely that a substantial part of the finds came to the area in the form of fragments. These may have been taken home as gifts by veterans, or were part of the diplomatic gifts by which the Romans attempted to keep peace north of the limes. They may even have been payments for local products. These sherds might thus be comparable to the trade beads of early-modern European colonial traders. That changed only in the late-Roman Period. In that period, diplomatic gifts

consisted of gold, and the meaning of TS probably changed. TS from this phase hardly ever shows traces of wear or processing, but its use in depositional practice indicates that it had not lost all of its symbolic meaning. In the late Roman Period and the early Middle Ages, the Roman Empire more and more became something of the past, and memories of events and relationships must have been added to the biographies of the TS fragments that were still circulating.

The symbolic meaning of TS must have been related to its reddish colour. Other Roman wares were not used in the same way, nor was indigenous pottery. The decoration did not play a role in this use. The symbolic meaning of this material also shows from its frequent use in ritual deposits. Its use as pendants suggest that a protective and luck-bringing meaning was ascribed to it: the pendants probably were amulets. This use of TS remained the same throughout the Roman Period. There is no gradual development towards a more 'normal' use of TS. The people of the northern Netherlands kept using their own handmade pottery and other homemade utensils, and only rarely made use of Roman imported objects. Even though men sometimes enlisted in the Roman army, a distance remained, not only geographically but also culturally. A process of Romanisation or even of creolisation does not seem to have occurred among the indigenous populations of this area.

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