

JELLE PRINS

The 'fortune' of a late Roman officer

A hoard from the Meuse valley (Netherlands) with helmet and gold coins

Early in 1994 the amateur archaeologist A. Verspaandonk informed me that he had found two solidi on a plot of land 'somewhere in the Meuse valley' (the province of Dutch Limburg; Fig. 1)¹. It was his wish – and the owner's – to keep the findspot secret for some time as more gold coins were to be expected. Over time this promise was fulfilled; every two or three months after his first announcement one to three solidi were presented for identification. Finally, early in 1995, a total of ten solidi was reached (Fig. 8). After this date no more coins were recovered from the site. However, in late 1994 A. Verspaandonk showed me some curious fragments, looking like extremely dirty rubbish, on which traces of gold and silver clearly could be recognized (Fig. 2). These particular fragments were recovered during ploughing activities by the owners of the terrain. After cleaning, this rubbish – with due hesitation – was identified as fragments of a late Roman silver-gilded helmet. With this knowledge, new fragments showed up bit by bit. Particular excitement occurred when, during the cleaning process, a silver Chi-Rho badge was discovered. This is one of the earliest indications for a Christian presence in the Netherlands to date. At the same time, the helmet is the latest evidence for a Roman military presence in these regions.

Surveying this specific terrain with a metal detector has proven extremely difficult, as its original character was thoroughly damaged by a bulldozer in the early 1960s. The coins were therefore found widely dispersed over a large area. Before these activities, the terrain consisted of a bog – or at least a very wet depression – at the foot of a smoothly sloping hill. No on-site research has yet been carried out; as a result we have no information about the original circumstances of the deposition of the helmet and the coins. Here, unfortunately, uncertainty reigns. The fragments of the helmet and badge, including the coins, were purchased by the Bonnefanten Museum at Maastricht, where a reconstruction of the helmet with the Chi-Rho badge is exhibited permanently (Fig. 10).

¹ It would not have been possible to write this article without a great deal of help and advice and I should like to thank M. Alkemade, J. Bazelmans, H. Burgers, P. van Dael, G. Depeyrot, C. van Driel-Murray, M. de

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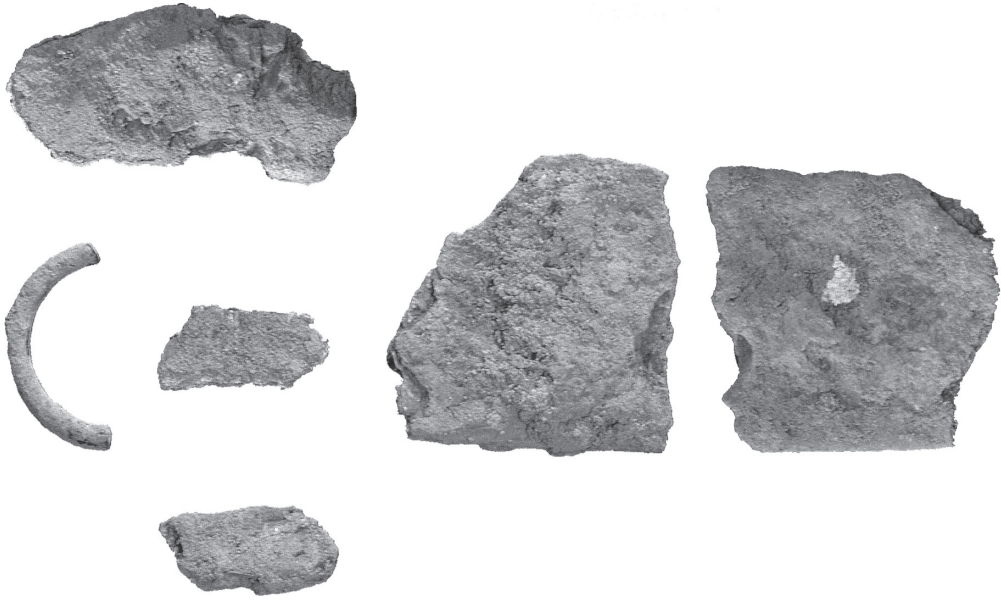


1 Map of Netherlands with the find spot in the Meuse valley.

DESCRIPTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HELMET

So far we have retrieved 15 larger and smaller fragments, together with some very tiny bits and pieces (Fig. 3–4). All these fragments can be classified into three groups: (1) fragments of the helmet bowl, (2) fragments of the crest and (3) fragments of the Chi-Rho badge. Several of these fragments were submitted to EDX analysis, with two objectives: (a) to determine the materials used for the manufacture of the helmet and (b) to examine its construction. In doing this, it was soon discovered that fragments of a nose-piece, cheek-pieces or neck-guard were presumably missing. Furthermore there are no indications for the presence of a *Stirnreif*, an additional band riveted around the inside of the helmet bowl to which the nose-piece, cheek-pieces and neck-guard would have been attached. This implies that this recently found helmet belongs to the category of less complex constructional forms of the Intercisa type. In general our helmet belongs to the so-called Ridge types with bowls consisting of two or more pieces, which were introduced from the second half of the 3rd century AD onwards and were manufactured during the 4th and 5th century AD. This Ridge form replaced the traditional *Heddernheim* and *Buch* types, that is, those with helmet bowl and neck-guard fashioned in one piece².

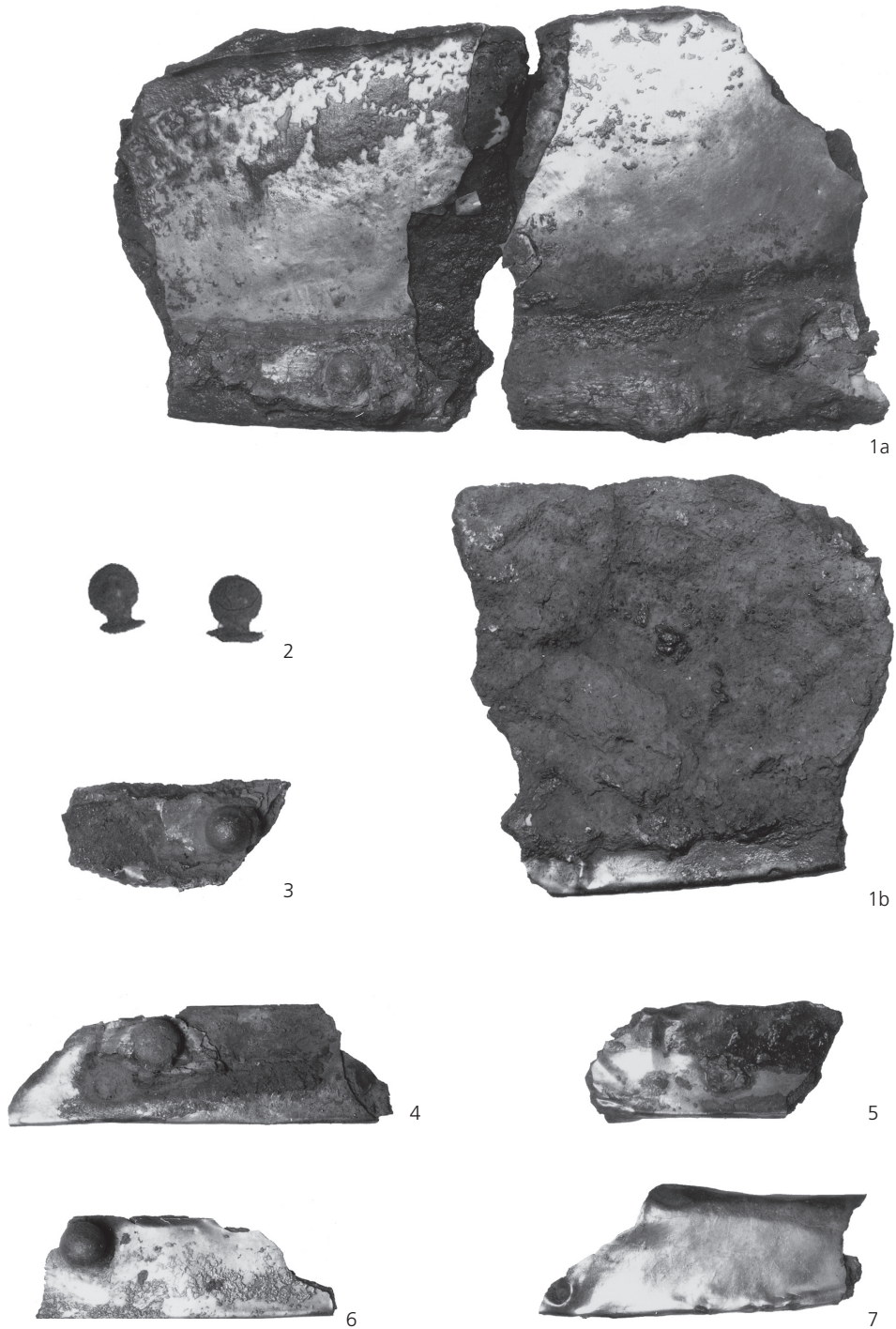
² M. C. BISHOP/J. C. N. COULSTON, *Roman Military Equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome* (London 1994) 167–168.



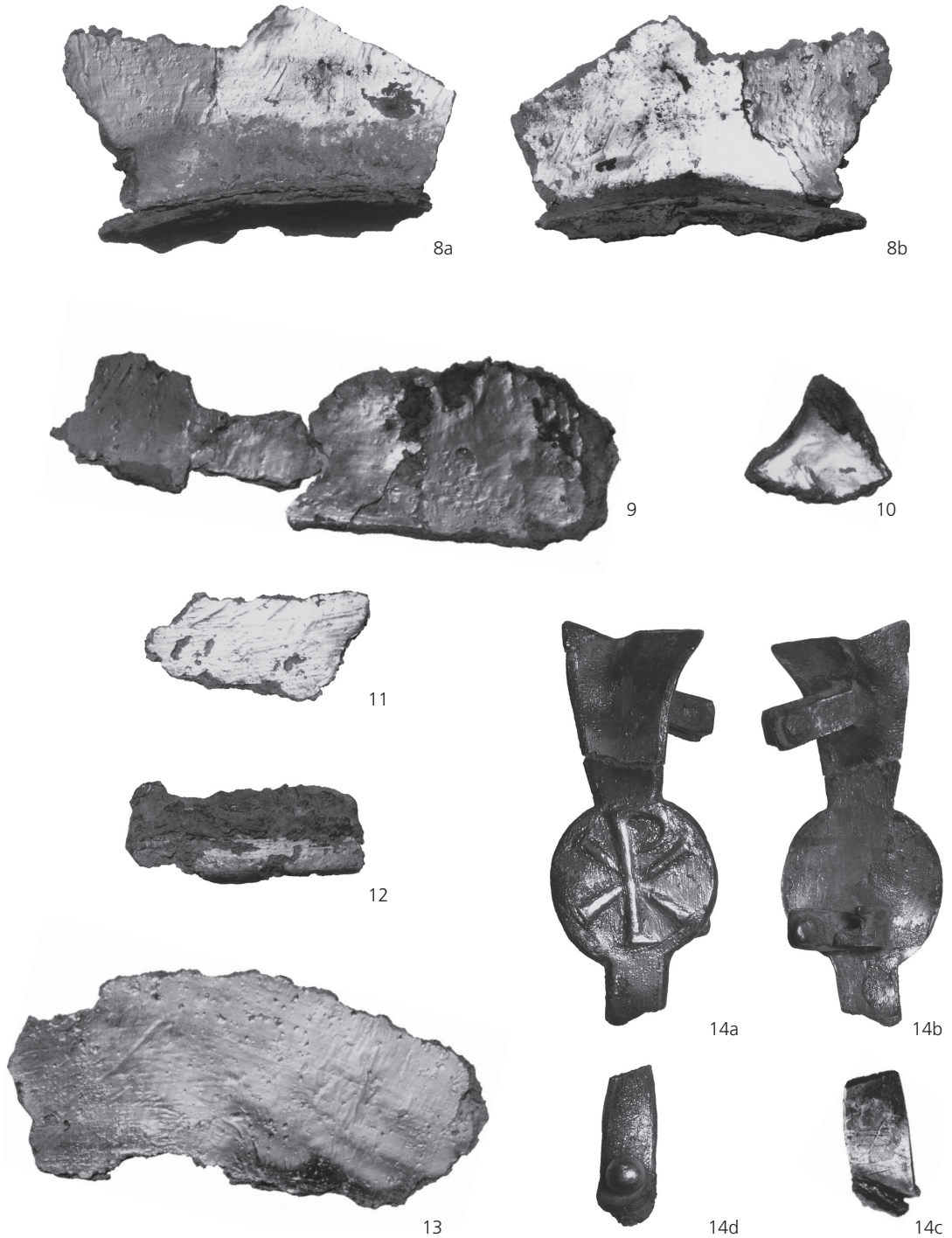
2 Hoard from the Meuse valley. The first 'dirty' fragments of the helmet (before restauration).

The iron helmet bowl outside is covered with silver foil (Fig. 5). Along the outside rim, a thin gold strip is attached with silver-gilded rivets placed at regular intervals. On the inside, the silver foil is folded over the rim of the corroded iron bowl. Some of the smaller rim fragments – without traces of the thin gold strip and holes drilled very near the rim – may have belonged to the neck-guard or cheek-pieces (Fig. 4,10.12). The fragments of a high projecting crest made of a copper core covered with thin gold foil show a complicated technique (Fig. 6). One fragment of the base of the helmet-crest still includes part of the silver-gilded iron helmet bowl (Fig. 4,8a.b). X-ray examination revealed that the iron bowl comprised at least two pieces fitted together along the crest.

Finally fragments of a cast button or badge decorated with the Chi-Rho monogram were recovered from the site (Fig. 4,14a–d). As is established below, this silver-gilded badge had once adorned the crest of the helmet. This particular object is made up of a central disc above a propeller-like form and below (a fragment of) a strip whose round end is riveted. The badge was attached to the crest by means of two pairs of small plates at the reverse (Fig. 4,14b). To our surprise, the badge was cast of silver chloride and afterwards apparently covered with an amalgam, namely of mercury and silver, to give it a 'pure' silver appearance. To the modern eye, silver chloride is a waste product obtained after the purification of gold, a wellknown practice in the Roman period. Up to now the use of this kind of material for fashioning objects was unknown, but this use need not therefore be considered unique. It may rather be assumed that the practice is not yet recognized, since little research has been carried out on the subject. Although silver chloride itself is a material suitable for casting objects, covering these silver chloride objects with amalgam afterwards creates particularly complicated problems. This particular fact raises some important questions. Since the same result could be obtained in a relatively simple manner by casting a copper badge and covering it afterwards with an amalgam, we may conclude that the artist's choice for this particular material in order to fashion this highly venerable object was made intentionally. However, was this choice



3 Hoard from the Meuse valley. The fragments of a late Roman helmet (after restauration): 1a obverses of the two largest rim fragments, 1b reverse of one rim fragment; 2 rivets; 3–7 smaller rim fragments.



4 Hoard from the Meuse valley. Fragments of a late Roman helmet (after restoration): 8 fragment of the basis of the helmet-crest (obverse and reverse); 9, 11, 13 fragments of the crest; 10, 12 unclear fragments; 14a–d the Chi-Rho badge.

rooted in specific moral traditions valid in metalworking or was it related to religious beliefs? Or should we look for a more prosaic explanation?

Some answers may be found in the Romans' preoccupation with standards of measure and weight. From ancient times onwards, particularly prestigious works of art such as bronze tripods or precious metal vessels and other objects of high value were often provided with their exact weight. In fact, the original character of the material and its weight seemed more important than its manufacture by an artist or an artisan. At least, in terms of the law, the material itself was chosen as the basic consideration. Manufacture by an artist or artisan of the material was subject to judicial control mechanisms, particularly as such actions were irreversible. Any trickery with the weight of the material or its original character had to be avoided. These institutionalized views were meticulously laid down in laws and many cases of jurisprudence have been studied³.

Moreover, two later Roman helmets, those of Berkasovo no. 1 and Deurne have, apart from their owner's name, their weights inscribed on the *Stirnreif*. The mentioning of the weight was clearly seen as an important message. That is, only the weight of the precious metal used for the construction is mentioned; the iron of the bowl was excluded⁴. More symbolic notions concerning measures and weights are found in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus: "For is there anything that lacks measure or transcends weight?"⁵. He continues: "The sands of the sea, the drops of the rain, the shining stars are defined by a calculable quantity. Indeed, to the author of its being, every creature is numbered, and nothing that comes into existence can be separated from that condition"⁶. Evidently, to Cassiodorus and his contemporaries God's divine creation was visualized or comprehended by the order of all beings and things having weight and measure. In addition, ideal objects corresponded to ideal weights or standards which provided them with special divine virtues. All this was not merely numerological superstition but was considered real mathematical science⁷. Objects created by men could then be adjusted to ideal measures and weights in order to enhance their power. In the case of helmets, their adjustment to a certain fixed weight would have strengthened their protective qualities. As for the Berkasovo 1 and Deurne helmets, some numerological 'regularities' or symbolical meanings are perhaps hidden in their weights. According to the inscription, the Berkasovo 1 specimen weighs 21 (KA) unciae and 12 (IB) scripulae⁸, a regularity which is well-hidden. The Deurne helmet offers a better example; it weighs 1 libra (= 12 unciae), 1 uncia (= 1/12 libra) and 1/2 uncia (= 1/24 libra)⁹. Clearly, the number 12 "both marks off what is necessary to human purposes and figuratively implies so many mysteries of nature"¹⁰.

It was the task of the artist to do the job using an exact amount of material which was agreed upon in advance – neither more nor less. A reflection of this notion is found in a passage of Ammianus Marcellinus where an unfortunate artist was cruelly put to death after fiddling the weight of a breastplate; the piece of iron armour had a little less weight than the emperor Valentinian had stipulated¹¹. Although this event was presented as an example of the severe harshness of Valentinianus, it was clear that the artist had made a mistake in this respect. Perhaps the manufacturer of our helmet was confronted with these kinds of problems before he

³ GAIUS inst. 2.2.79.

⁴ M. MANOJLOVIC-MARIJANSKI in: H. KLUMBACH / W. C. BRAAT / M. MANOJLOVIC-MARIJANSKI / K. SKALON / E. THOMAS, Spätromische Gardehelme. Münchner Beitr. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 15 (München 1973) 27–28; W. C. BRAAT in: *ibid.* 60–61.

⁵ CASSIOD. *variae* 1,10,3.

⁶ CASSIOD. *variae* 1,10,4.

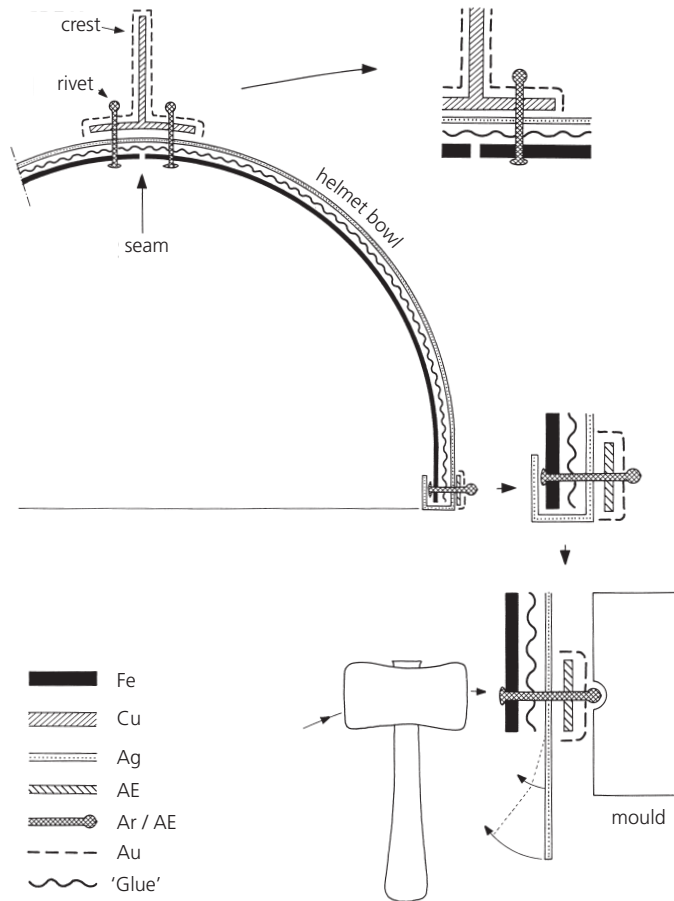
⁷ CASSIOD. *variae* 1,10,3.

⁸ MANOJLOVIC-MARIJANSKI (note 4) 27–28.

⁹ BRAAT (note 4) 60–61.

¹⁰ CASSIOD. *variae* 1,10,6.

¹¹ AMM. 29,3,4.

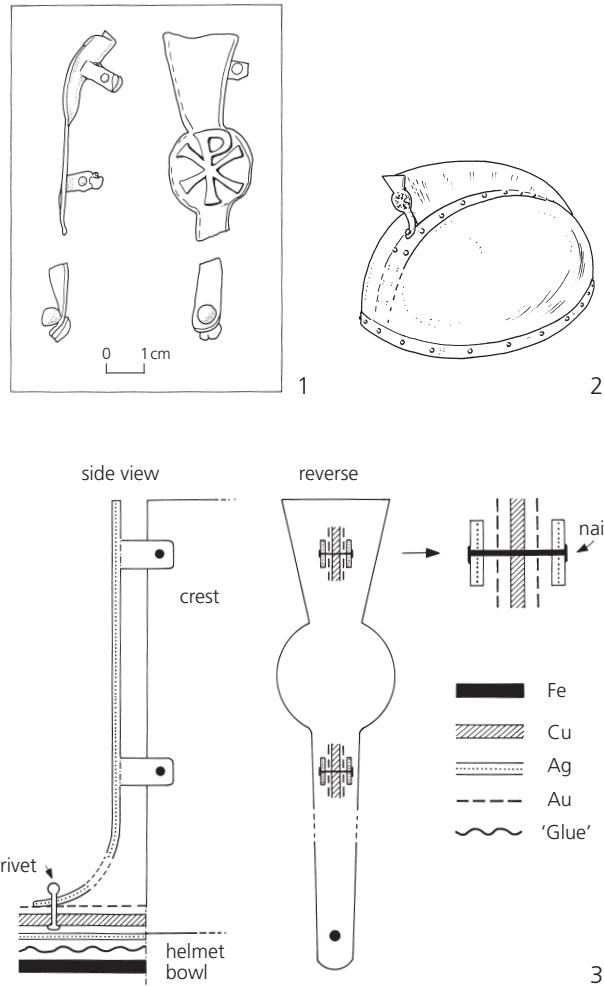


5 Reconstruction of the helmet from the Meuse valley.

turned to this particular complicated solution; he had to do his job with the specific weight of that specific material. It has to be admitted that these suggestions do not entirely solve this intriguing problem in a satisfactory manner. Perhaps there was no problem at all. It can also be argued that our artist, faced with a small shortage of precious metal, dealt with this 'minor' problem by using some material of a lower, but still acceptable, quality. It is not known whether in ancient times silver chloride was also considered a mere waste product.

The iron helmet bowl (Fig. 5) comprises at least two parts which were probably fitted together along the seam with cramps or staples. Before the iron bowl was covered with one piece of silverplate, a thin layer of bitumen was applied as a kind of glue and to separate the iron from the silver as these two metals strongly 'dislike' each other¹². The crest, placed over the seam of the iron bowl, has a copper core which was covered with a thin gold foil, also a work which demanded great skill. Although there are no indications for this, the crest was presumably attached to the helmet bowl with rivets. It is not known whether this crest ran down as a riveted strip to the rim of the helmet bowl. Just above the rim, a thin horizontal bronze strip covered with thin gold foil was applied. Holes were drilled through this strip, the silver plate

¹² KLUMBACH in: KLUMBACH et al. (note 4) 13: "eine Klebemasse".



6 The helmet from the Meuse valley. Obverse and reverse of the Chi-Rho badge (1), reconstruction (3) and artist's impression (2).

and the iron, through which pearl-shaped, silver-gilded bronze rivets were placed. These rivets were affixed from the inside of the helmet; the rivets were probably placed in a mould in order not to flatten the round endings.

Fortunately the Chi-Rho badge on the crest (Fig. 6) of the helmet, i.e. one pair of the two small slabs at the reverse of the badge still enclosed part of the crest, that is, gold foil/copper/gold foil, which made its proposed position certain. The rivet on the fragment of the small strip had only one piece of gold foil and copper on the reverse. Since this rivet was placed exactly over the seam of the two halves of the bowl, there was evidently no need to drill it through the silver plate and iron. Figure 6 gives also an artist's impression of the reconstructed helmet: in its original state the helmet must have been spectacular, apparently consisting entirely of gold (crest and strip) and silver (bowl, badge and rivets).

RIDGE HELMETS

The later Roman Ridge helmets can be classified into two separate groups: those of a simple and those of a more complex constructional form¹³. These views were previously put forward by Klumbach¹⁴. In general, all helmets in these two groups are decorated; however, those of a more complex constructional form are all richly adorned: these helmets definitely belonged to soldiers of high(er) status. Some of these helmets even have glass-paste settings imitating onyx, chalcedony and emerald¹⁵. Beyond doubt, these richly adorned specimens were 'copying' the helmet of the Roman emperor. Other helmets have less elaborate decorations.

Precious metal smiths, the *barbaricarii*, which were a separate branch of the imperial service independent of the state arms factories of the later Roman Empire (the *fabricae*), were responsible for covering and decorating these helmets with gold and silver foil. These smiths were able to make six helmets a month¹⁶. The workshops of the *barbaricarii* have been found widely distributed over the empire, from Antiochia to Trier, although their presence in *partis Orientis* is sometimes doubted¹⁷. The imperial service then distributed these helmets, that is, gave or sold them, to Roman officers. It may be assumed that officers received specific helmets according to their rank; particular characteristics of the helmets – the crests, for instance – may have served to distinguish different officers or units.

As to the construction, several differences can be noticed between the two groups. First, the simple Ridge helmet consisted of two iron halves fitted together by a ridged strip which formed the crest. The light neck-guard and cheek-pieces were not directly attached to the helmet bowl; a nose-piece, if present, was directly nailed to the bowl¹⁸. The most eloquent examples of this type are those specimens from Intercisa, Augsburg-Pfersee nos. 1 and 2, Worms and Augst. Except for the Augst specimen, all these helmets were once covered with gold or silver plate.

By contrast, those of a more complex constructional form have helmet bowls comprising at least four pieces (except for the Berkasovo no. 2 specimen). These helmets are also characterized by the presence of a *Stirnreif* (see above) to which the nose-piece, the heavy neck-guard and the heavy cheek-pieces, almost covering the whole face and part of the neck, were attached¹⁹. Examples of these richer helmets are the specimens of Berkasovo nos. 1 and 2, Budapest, Deurne, San Giorgio di Nogara (the only specimen not found in the frontier-zone) and Concesti.

A further functional difference between the two groups is given by Klumbach²⁰. As horse-bits, small horse-bells and a spur accompanied the Berkasovo and Deurne finds and, in addition, the Deurne helmet was inscribed STABLESIA VI, the name of a cavalry unit mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, Klumbach proposed that the more complex constructional forms were helmets of cavalry men, whereas the simple Ridge helmets of the Intercisa type were used by infantry. Since, however, the Berkasovo group definitely represents a far more richly adorned helmet-type worn by soldiers of high status, whereas those of the Intercisa/Augsburg-Pfersee group embody a far more simple type, though equally covered with precious metals, the distinction may be considered to be more hierarchical than functional. In fact,

¹³ BISHOP / COULSTON (note 2) 167; 170.

¹⁴ KLUMBACH (note 12) 9.

¹⁵ BISHOP / COULSTON (note 2) 171.

¹⁶ See KLUMBACH (note 12) 12–13; Cod. Theod. 10,22,1.

¹⁷ G. CLEMENTE, La "Notitia Dignitatum". Saggi di Storia e Letteratura 4 (Cagliari 1968) 68–69.

¹⁸ KLUMBACH (note 12) 9; BISHOP / COULSTON (note 2) 168–169.

¹⁹ KLUMBACH (note 12) 9; BISHOP / COULSTON (note 2) 170–171.

²⁰ KLUMBACH (note 12) 9.

particularly in late Roman society, all elements of garb or armour were meticulously prescribed to distinguish administrators, officials or soldiers of distinct rank²¹; the same notions are found in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, where every chapter is preceded by an illustration of the various insignia of the different officials²². Helmets and shields will certainly have functioned as important insignia. Perhaps it can be suggested that more hierarchical helmet types can be recognized within these two groups: (1) helmets with glass-paste settings (Berkasovo 1 [with crest], Budapest [without crest!] etc.), (2) those ‘without’, but with *Stirnreif*, ‘simple’ crest and ‘pearl’ rivets (Berkasovo 2, Deurne, Concesti etc.), (3) ‘simple’ helmets with ‘pearl’ rivets (Augsburg-Pfersee 1 and 2, ‘our’ helmet) and (4) those with ear-cuttings but without ‘pearl’ rivets (Intercisa 1–4, Augst[?], Worms).

Judging from the known fragments, our helmet belongs to the ‘simple group’ of the Intercisa/Augsburg-Pfersee type. Some elements, such as the silver gilded ‘pearl’ rivets, are also found on the helmets of Augsburg-Pfersee, particularly on helmet no. 1, a helmet without ear-cuttings. The high projecting crest which characterizes our helmet, however, is observed on the Intercisa helmet no. 4. Fragments of a similar crested helmet, although different materials were used, are known from Richborough²³. This new helmet from the Meuse valley differs in one important respect: the Chi-Rho badge prominently affixed on the crest gave it a definite Christian appearance.

THE HELMET OF CONSTANTINE I

The edict of Diocletianus prescribes the use of garb decorated with gold and precious stones as one of the insignia of the emperor²⁴. Accordingly, it was also the prerogative of the emperor to wear a helmet with authentic precious stones: a *galea auro lapillis distincta*²⁵. Such highly decorated helmets had become a mark of the Roman Emperor from the later 3rd century AD onwards, a practice which found its roots in royal Persian and Sassanid traditions. Probably due to their competition, the emperors Gallienus (whose father had been captured and humiliated by Sapor) and Postumus propagated their martial virtues by wearing Corinthian helmets on their coins²⁶. Before this period, Roman emperors were never portrayed with helmets; these objects were not considered a mark of a Roman emperor. In the 1st century AD Germanicus had to take off his helmet in order to be recognized by his men, whereas in the 4th century AD Valentinianus, having drifted into a dangerous situation during battle, did exactly the same in order *not* to be recognized²⁷.

The practice of portraying emperors wearing helmets on coins was continued by successive emperors, such as Aurelianus and Probus. During the tetrarchy the helmet had become a powerful imperial symbol, which was also maintained by Constantine I, although with important modifications. His favourite helmet was not the Corinthian type, characteristic of the pagan gods(?), but the richly adorned Ridge type, in fact a combination of diadem and

²¹ See R. DELBRUECK, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler*. Stud. Spätant. Kunstgesch. 2 (Berlin, Leipzig 1929) 32–66; TH. KLAUSER, *Der Ursprung der bischöflichen Insignien und Ehrenrechte*. Bonner Akademische Reden 1 (Krefeld 1948) 5–6; 9–22.

²² CLEMENTE (note 17) 25/27–31.

²³ M. LYNE, *Late Roman helmet fragments from Richborough*. In: C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY (ed.), *Military equipment in context*. Proceedings of the ninth international

military equipment Conference, Leiden 1994. *Journal Roman Military Equipment Stud.* 5, 1994, 97–99.

²⁴ cf. MANOJLOVIC-MARIJANSKI (note 4) 34.

²⁵ K. KRAFT, *Der Helm des römischen Kaisers*. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte der mittelalterlichen Herrscherinsignien. In: E. BOEHRINGER (ed.), *Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen des deutschen Numismatikertages in Göttingen* (Göttingen 1951) 50; cf. AMM. 27,10,11.

²⁶ KRAFT (note 25) 54–55.

²⁷ *ibid.* 49–50.

helmet which, for a long period, had been the royal symbol of Sassanid kings²⁸. The new power of Constantinian iconography is magnificently embodied by the silver *multiplum* from the *officina* of Ticinum issued at AD 315 to celebrate the emperor's decennalia; such medallions then were distributed as donatives. It represents Constantine I as the defender of Roman civilization and the Christian faith. On the obverse he is wearing a cuirass and helmet and is holding the reins of a horse in his right hand and a shield and a T-shaped sceptre with a globe in his left; the reverse shows Constantine at an *adlocutio* scene. The Chi-Rho badge as a symbol of his victory ("Hoc signo victor eris") is prominently placed on the top of the helmet, just under the crest. Meanwhile the ancient totems of Rome were not forgotten: Romulus and Remus suckling the she-wolf are depicted on his shield. The tradition of portraying emperors with helmets modified by Constantine I was continued by his successors. At the end of the fourth century AD the helmeted *en face* portrait of the emperor became the standard for the obverse of solidi.

Eusebius tells us that it was Constantine's own initiative to affix the Chi-Rho monogram to his helmet, after its adoption on the *labarum*²⁹. Apart from the Chi-Rho badge on the *multiplum*, coins from Siscia and the present article, definite proof for the existence of such helmets has never been given. The Meuse valley helmet may therefore be considered to be a direct but far more simple descendant from Constantine's *galea auro lapillis distincta*.

THE CHI-RHO BADGE ON THE HELMET FROM THE MEUSE VALLEY

The particular form of the Chi-Rho badge – that is, a disc with Chi-Rho and a kind of triangular propeller-like feature above and ending in a thin strip below – creates some problems. Three other specimens of these characteristically shaped badges were initially known to me. The first, of copper-alloy foil, was found in a ditch fill within the late Roman shore fort at Richborough during the 1922–1938 excavation campaigns³⁰. This ditch fill, like other related deposits, has been dated to the early years of the 5th century AD, the period of occupation of Constantine III's garrison³¹. In close proximity to the badge, a gilt copper-alloy sheathing, possibly a fragment of a ridge of a helmet of the Deurne/Concesti type³², was also found; these two objects may have belonged to the same helmet³³. In this case, another example of a Chi-Rho badge can be associated with a helmet.

Two other specimens, however, one from Alsóhetény (Pannonia Prima/Hungary) and a second with a drilled hole from Southwest Pannonia, once in the Zagreb Museum but now lost, cannot be associated with helmets. As the badge of gilded copper from Alsóhetény was recovered from a tomb in a rich mausoleum outside the ancient city of Iovia, these badges are considered "zur Liturgie gebrauchte Gewandnadeln"³⁴, that is, these objects may have served as priestly insignia during the performance of a liturgy.

A comparable use of Chi-Rho badges as suggested by Tóth may be gathered from the objects from the Water Newton hoard³⁵. In this hoard, probably buried by Christians to protect their 'church-treasures' from damage by members of other cults³⁶, Chi-Rho monograms on

²⁸ B. OVERBECK, Numismatische Zeugnisse zu den spätrömische Gardehelmen. Stud. Vor- u. Frühgesch. Arch. 1 [Festschr. J. Werner] (München 1974) 218.

²⁹ F. CABROL / H. LECLERCQ (ed.), Dictionnaire d'Archeologie chrétienne 3,2 (1914) 2670; EUS. vita Const. I 1,131.

³⁰ LYNE (note 23) 100/fig. 2,7, p. 104.

³¹ *ibid.* 104–105.

³² *ibid.* 102/fig. 3,4.

³³ *ibid.* 104.

³⁴ E. TÓTH, Az Alsóhetényi 4. Századi erőd és temető kutatása, 1981–1986. Arch. Ért. 114–115, 1987–1988, 58–59.

³⁵ K. S. PAINTER, The Water Newton Early Christian Silver (London 1977).

³⁶ *ibid.* 20.



7 Florence, Uffizi Museum. Diptych of Basilius (detail).

a disc and triangular plaques also appear³⁷. Particularly the triangular form and the ‘leaf’ or ‘feather’ pattern suggest that these appliqués were looked upon as stylized palm-leaves or branches – or perhaps even stylized helmet-crests. The specific combination of the Chi-Rho monogram and the palm-branch may then have strengthened the element of victory.

Although the Chi-Rho badge with the triangular ‘propeller’ lacks the palm-branch pattern found on the triangular Chi-Rho appliqués from the Water Newton hoard, it may be argued that these two objects share common features. As a consequence the Chi-Rho badge may have served as an independent form, which was not especially designed for a helmet. By contrast, the crest adorning the helmet of the goddess Roma on the ivory diptych of Basilius (Fig. 7), dated around AD 480, shows exactly the same disc and triangular ‘propeller’ as is represented by our Chi-Rho badge³⁸. It is clear, however, that with the present state of knowledge more definite answers must await further research.

After the publication in 1998 of the helmet and badge from the Meuse valley in a Dutch popular archaeological magazine, another amateur archaeologist found out that he had recovered a similar badge with Chi-Rho “somewhere in the Betuwe”, that is, the central Dutch river area. At a first look, this badge, measuring only 4 cm, has a gilt copper core. This specimen was reported by Carol van Driel³⁹. Before her note, Branka Migotti had published four sim-

³⁷ *ibid.* 17–19; nos. 11–22.

³⁸ DELBRUECK (note 21) 100–103, N 6.

³⁹ C. VAN DRIEL, *Instrumentum* 11, 2000, 22.

ilar badges or 'liturgical(?) brooches' from Pannonia⁴⁰. Two of these, one from Sisak (now lost) and one from Alsóhéteny, were described above. Two other specimens mentioned by her, a second specimen from Sisak and one from Szombathely (former Savaria) were unknown to me. So a total of seven badges or 'liturgical brooches' is now known: Richborough, Betuwe, Limburg, Sisak (two specimens), Alsóhetény and Szombathely. The distribution and use of these objects seems to have been limited to the north-western frontier zone of the later Roman Empire.

THE SOLIDI

In recent years ten solidi (Fig. 8) have been found, covering the period from Valens/Valentinianus to Constantine III (Table 1, nos. 1–10; AD 463/467–411). All these coins are *prägefrisch* except for the solidus of Valentinianus I which is slightly worn (Table 1, no. 2). Note the identical weights of coins no. 5 and no. 6, two solidi of Honorius of the same type and struck in the same officina of Mediolanum, which do not share common obverse and reverse dies, however. Furthermore, two coins, nos. 8 and 9, are bent, a phenomenon which will be discussed below. Earlier coin finds are known from the same findspot: many solidi have been reported, five of them of Valens, Theodosius, Arcadius, Honorius and Constantine III; three other coins from the terrain could be described with certainty (Table 1, earlier finds.). It is important to note that these 13 coins in table 1, being part of an unknown total, may not be representative.

The latest coin yet known is an issue of Constantine III from AD 408–411 (Table 1, no. 10), actually a later solidus from Trier of relatively good style with a broad and heavy rosette-adorned bust and 'Y' banner⁴¹. Surprisingly, before this latest coin, only issues from the mint of Constantinople of AD 397–403 are represented (Table 1, nos. 7–9). Between these issues of Constantinople and the solidus of Constantine III is a small gap, as no coins from the mints of Ravenna or Rome are reported. Nevertheless, this recent hoard clearly belongs to the group of gold hoards from the early 5th century AD. The gold hoards of this period fall into two major categories; the first contains only or virtually only solidi of Honorius or Arcadius and Honorius, the second also includes earlier issues of Valentinianus I and Valens⁴². Some deposits of this second category start with issues of Valentinianus I and/or Valens and end with those of Constantine III: Mainz, Menzelen (without restitutor but including Attalus and Jovinus), St-Denis-Westrem, Groß Bodungen (including Magnentius) and Dortmund (starting with Constantine I and including later imitation siliquae). Two corresponding hoards from the same period are Chapipi, starting with Theodosius I, and Wiesbaden-Kastel with solidi of Valentinianus I to Honorius from circa AD 410 and including silver⁴³.

For the purposes of comparison with the recent Limburg hoard, a few western hoards, Mainz, Menzelen, Groß Bodungen, Chapipi and Wiesbaden (only the solidi), are used. In Figure 9 the percentages are shown divided according to western, Italian, eastern and Yugoslavian mints. Remarkably, the Limburg hoard differs strongly from the comparable deposits. Whereas other hoards show a high percentage of Italian issues and much lower percentages of those of western and eastern mints, the recent Limburg hoard demonstrates the opposite. It contains a very high percentage of issues of eastern mints and a very low percentage of Italian issues; four pieces of western, two of Italian and seven of eastern mints are

⁴⁰ B. MIGNOTTI, *Instrumentum* 10, 1999, 14.

⁴¹ RIC vol. X, p. 147.

⁴² RIC vol. X, LXXXII–III.

⁴³ RIC vol. X, LXXXVIII–CLXXVII.

EMPEROR	DATE	MINT	RIC	TYPE	GMS/DIE
EARLIER FINDS					
Valens	364–367 AD	Tr	RIC 2d	Restitutor	
Valentinianus I	367–375 AD	Ant	RIC 17b	Victoria Augg	
Arcadius	397–402 AD	Con	RIC 7	Concordia Augg	
RECENT FINDS 1993–1996 (FIG. 8)					
1 Valens	364–367 AD	Tr	RIC 1c	Restitutor	4.292/↓
2 Valentinianus I	364–367 AD	Ar	RIC 1a	Restitutor	4.446/↓
3 Theodosius I	378–383 AD	Con	RIC 47a	Concordia Auggg	4.506/↑
4 Arcadius	388–393 AD	Thes	RIC 64d	Concordia Auggg	4.454/↓
5 Honorius	394–395 AD	Med	RIC 35c	Victoria Auggg	4.447/↓
6 Honorius	394–395 AD	Med	RIC 35c	Victoria Auggg	4.448/↓
7 Honorius	397–402 AD	Con	RIC 8	Concordia Augg	4.452/↓
8 Eudoxia	397–402 AD	Con	RIC 15	Salus Rei Pub	4.363/↓
9 Theodosius II	402–403 AD	Con	RIC 25	Concordia Auggg	4.343/↓
10 Constantinus III	408–411 AD	Tr	RIC 1515	Victoria Augg	4.489/↑

Table 1 Finds of Solidi from Limburg (Netherlands). Nos. 5 and 6 from the same officina have almost identical weight; rev. no. 5: die with sitting captive, worn rev. no. 6: die with reclining captive. Solidi nos. 8 and 9 with ancient corrosion are bent.

present. Firstly, this new hoard from Limburg is characterized by the strong presence of four eastern issues from AD 397–403, which, except for the solidus of Constantine III, form the latest coins in this deposit. Secondly, there is a remarkable absence (so far) of coins of Ravenna, Rome and Aquileia, issued between AD 402 and 408. The Limburg hoard is incompatible with the group of comparable hoards in both these respects. By contrast, these hoards do include the later Italian solidi of Ravenna, Rome and Aquileia. Furthermore, eastern issues from AD 397–403 are not represented in these comparable deposits, except for the Spanish Chapipi hoard, which includes one solidus of Honorius from Constantinople.

It might be suggested that the nucleus of this hoard was first collected in the east c. AD 404–407 and then transported to the north-west, where it was supplemented with the western issues of Valens, Valentinianus I and Constantine III. This implies that the date of its concealment was perhaps during or shortly after Constantine III's reign, that is, before the issues from Ravenna, Rome and Aquileia became available in the north-west. Due to the uncomplete character of this particular hoard, however, further speculation is fruitless.

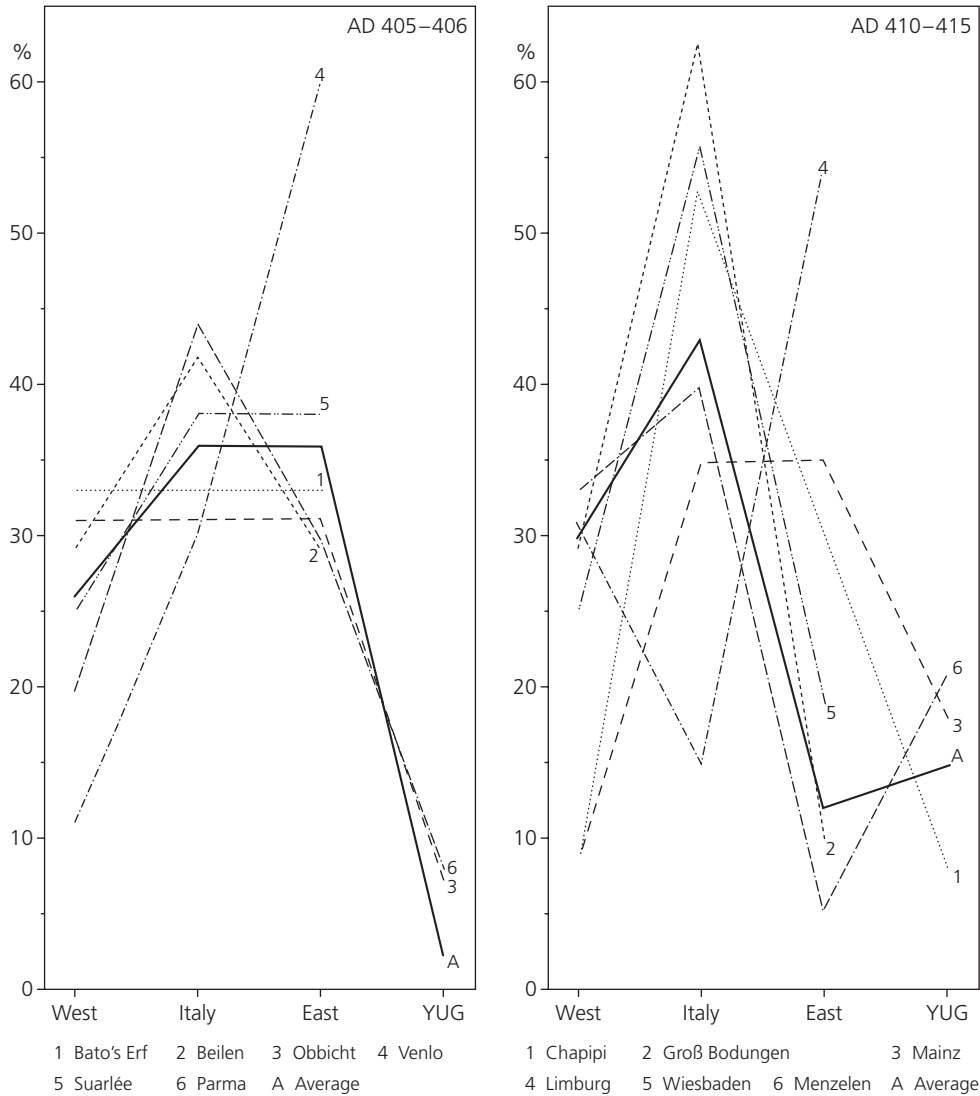
As a whole this group of hoards ending with issues of AD 410–415 is incompatible with the group ending with issues dated AD 405/406 (Bato's Erf, Beilen, Obbicht, Venlo, Suarlée, Parma). This somewhat earlier-dated group, which shares common features, such as more or less equal percentages of Italian and Eastern issues, include much lower percentages of Italian coins when compared to the later group (Fig. 8). The later Italian solidi from Rome, Ravenna and Aquileia are mainly responsible for this difference, and these appear in large quantities in this group with issues running up to AD 410–415. Of these later Italian solidi, only three are present in the Obbicht, Venlo and Suarlée hoards⁴⁴. Surprisingly, two eastern solidi minted between AD 397–402 do occur in the Obbicht and Venlo hoards⁴⁵. Last but not least, the hoards of the later group more often contain not only coins, but also other objects of precious metal as medallions, necklaces, finger rings, ingots or scrap metal. This tendency was continued in later hoards, such as Velp. Given these differences between the earlier and the later group, it seems unlikely that these two groups form a single category of deposits "locat-

⁴⁴ J. P. A. VAN DER VIN, Late fourth century hoards in the Netherlands. *Riv. Italiana Num. e Scien. Affini* 90, 1988, 270; 273; RIC vol. X, CXII.

⁴⁵ VAN DER VIN (note 44) 270; 273.



8 Hoard of gold coins from the Meuse valley. Ten solidi (obverses and reverses; cf. table 1).



9 Percentages of hoards AD 405-406 and AD 410-415.

ed both chronologically and geographically within a clearly defined zone, apparently dating from the same period”, as is stated by Martin⁴⁶. Although his proposal to consider this category of deposits as belonging to a single geographical zone populated by Frankish tribes seems conclusive, the views which relate these deposits to Roman retaliatory measures in AD 425-430 or the campaigns of the commander Aetius in AD 436 are not compelling⁴⁷. In fact, his associating of the majority of deposits with “a sequence of different catastrophes” is open to doubt⁴⁸. As is demonstrated above, the earlier group of hoards, namely those ending with coins from AD 400-406, can clearly be separated from the later group which conclude with coins issued AD 410-415. These two groups of hoards were buried in different periods

⁴⁶ M. MARTIN, *Wealth and treasure in the West, 4th-7th century*. In: L. WEBSTER/M. BROWN (eds.), *The Transformation of the Roman world AD 400-900* (London 1997) 54.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 54; 55.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 54.

of time, so different reasons must be sought for their concealment. Moreover, hoards deposited in definitely wet or almost inaccessible places – rivers, bogs, or moors – can be considered only with great difficulty to be hidden treasure. Moreover, some regions (Gaul is a good example) which suffered from severe periods of stress and catastrophes after the invasion of AD 406–7 “barely show the archaeological traces of these dramatic events”⁴⁹. This region would seem to be particularly short of the expected hidden treasure.

However, Martin’s appeal for the mere existence of hidden treasure in the first half of the 5th century AD is not in dispute. On the other hand, there is certainly no need to interpret all deposits from this period as religious votive deposits. Without any doubt, such dichotomy brings out unsatisfactory results. Both types of deposits, hidden treasure and religious offerings, exist side by side. Treasure, like the hoards from Augst or Wiesbaden-Kastel, was hidden during periods of stress; ritual offerings, like Deurne or Velp, were made to favour the gods. Very clearly, it is of great importance to obtain knowledge of the context of the deposition of a specific hoard. Unfortunately the find-contexts of most hoards are insufficiently documented.

THE DEPOSIT FROM THE MEUSE VALLEY AS A RITUAL OFFERING

Very clearly this new find from the Meuse valley is characterized by a combination of a helmet (reconstruction fig. 10) and gold coins. Compared to other later Roman deposits – hoards of gold coins and jewellery or precious scrap metal and helmets with or without other objects – this new find stands out as a singular phenomenon. Of all these helmet finds, only the Deurne deposit contained some coins, that is, just small copper aes. Until now, no helmets were associated with solidi, or vice versa. There remains, then, the intriguing question of whether the composition of this find is of any special significance. Due to its uniqueness, however, speculation on this point does not lead to any satisfactory results.

On the other hand, several arguments can be put forward to support the view that the find is not mere hidden treasure consisting of gold coins and scrap metal. Although the terrain where it was concealed has not yet undergone any type of excavational research, old aerial photographs of the plot of land show a definite wet depression or bog at the very spot. In fact the existence of this wet depression which hindered agricultural activities (and still does) brought about the levelling of the terrain in the early 1960s. Furthermore, helmets in particular have a long tradition as ritual offerings. From the Late Latène Age onwards until the 3rd century AD, helmets and other kinds of armour were deposited in selected wet places such as rivers, lakes, bogs, moors, etc.⁵⁰

With regard to late Roman silver-gilded helmets, a continuity of this tradition is highly plausible as most of these helmets, sometimes together with other militaria, were also found in definitely wet find circumstances. Chiefly due to these find circumstances, these particular finds can no longer be interpreted as the results of accidental losses. Firstly, the Deurne find recovered from the Peel bog⁵¹ is now seen as a votive deposit. Secondly, the helmets of Berkasovo⁵² and Augsburg-Pfersee⁵³, which were found in two pairs, were discovered at the bottom of a small dried-up river valley and in a gravel pit (that is, a former river-bed) respec-

⁴⁹ *ibid.* 55.

⁵⁰ N. ROYMANS, The sword or the plough. Regional dynamics in the romanisation of Belgic Gaul and the Rhineland area. In: N. ROYMANS (ed.), *From the Sword*

to the Plough. Amsterdam Arch. Stud. 1 (Amsterdam 1996) 18–20/28–37.

⁵¹ BRAAT (note 4) 52–56.

⁵² MANOJLOVIC-MARIJANSKI (note 4) 15–16.

⁵³ KLUMBACH (note 12) 95.



10 Reconstruction of the helmet with Chi-Rho badge from the hoard of the Meuse valley.

tively. Finally, the helmets from Budapest, found in the Donau just at the foot of the Roman castra⁵⁴ and the cheek-pieces and neck-guard of San Giorgio Nogara from a former channel can also be regarded as ritual offerings⁵⁵. Other helmet finds do not fit into this scheme. The specimen of Concesti comes from a tomb⁵⁶. The Intercisa fragments were found during excavations of a building, probably a storehouse, within a Roman castra⁵⁷. Unfortunately the find circumstances of the Worms specimen were not satisfactorily documented⁵⁸. Finally, the helmet from Augst was literally hit upon during the excavation of the destruction layer of Insula 20⁵⁹.

To these helmets, all of which came from the northwestern European frontier zone of the Roman Empire (except for the Nogara cheek-pieces and neck-guard), the new find from the Meuse valley can now be added. Besides its provenance from a wet place, some other elements of the Meuse find also produce indications of a ritual offering. Firstly, it was considered a remarkable fact that two solidi (Table 1, nos. 8 and 9; Fig. 8,8.9) seemed intentionally bent in a similar, one third/two thirds, manner. Very importantly, it was found that the lines of fracture at the rims of both coins showed 'heavy' corrosion, which demonstrated that both

⁵⁴ E. THOMAS in: KLUMBACH et. al. (note 4) 39–42.

⁵⁵ KLUMBACH (note 12) 85–86.

⁵⁶ K. SKALON in: KLUMBACH et. al. (note 4) 91–92.

⁵⁷ THOMAS (note 54) 103–105.

⁵⁸ KLUMBACH (note 12) 111.

⁵⁹ KLUMBACH (note 12) 115.

were bent in antiquity. In addition, both portraits of the emperor and empress were bent inwards. In my view, these aspects are not a mere coincidence, that is, they are not the result of post-depositional circumstances. On the contrary, it seems very probable that both (perhaps at that moment rather unknown) *solidi* of eastern emperors were selected for bending. In doing so, the coins were symbolically demonetized, a phenomenon which, as a long-established tradition, is well-attested for objects from cult places or votive deposits.

As for the helmet, there are also indications that it was intentionally dismantled before depositing. If we turn our attention to the reverse of the thin strip with the silver-gilded pearl rivet, which ends the Chi-Rho badge (Fig. 4,14d), we see several remarkable and ancient scratches, which suggest that some kind of sharp object was used to disconnect the badge from the helmet. Moreover, all the bends present in the different fragments of the badge can also be explained as the result of deliberate dismantling. A sharp object was forced between the strip and the helmet bowl and then used as a lever to tear the badge from the bowl. As a result only the small strip with its rivet was torn loose from the bowl, in addition to which the strip broke from the rest of the badge consisting of the disc and the propeller. Then, the way the rest of the badge was removed from the crest clearly demonstrates that force was exercised from below. Probably one hand rested on the helmet bowl while the other was used to lift the badge from below. In doing so the lower slabs at the reverse of the disc – on which most force was exercised – were torn apart (see Fig. 4,14b), whereas the upper slabs at the reverse of the propeller were broken more gently from the crest, allowing a very tiny part to be preserved between these slabs (Figs. 4,14b; 6,3). Consequently, the disc was also broken from the propeller. Unfortunately, no indications are present as to the dismantling of the whole helmet. Perhaps only its most prominent feature, the Chi-Rho badge, was chosen for destruction. Finally, as all these fragments were recovered, these actions were probably performed on the spot. So far there are two indications which strongly suggest that the coins as well as the helmet were intentionally demolished in a symbolic way by those who made the ritual offering.

At first sight, the arguments presented above create an intriguing problem. To the modern eye, the use of a definitely Christian object for a pagan religious practice seems contradictory. However, several authors have indicated the persistence or incorporation of pagan customs within the Christian religion⁶⁰. Although literary sources mention a more or less complete acceptance of Christian beliefs, archaeological evidence often points to the contrary⁶¹. Unfortunately, the archaeological data available do not automatically lead to unanimous interpretations. For instance, is the presence in a tomb of a glass bowl of the 5th century decorated with a christogram evidence for a Christian burial? What if no 'Christian objects' occur⁶²? How firmly was Christianity rooted in these regions in the early 5th century AD? We have knowledge about different notions of Christianity, particularly of those which were active in the east. Very clearly Christianity had not yet established a definite, uniform system of values. In other words, particularly in those days there was no 'one Christianity' – as there was never 'one paganism'⁶³. As a consequence, people from a world which was still reigned by pagan values and customs may have accepted a more or less utilitarian attitude towards

⁶⁰ L. MILIS, *De Heidense Middeleeuwen: een contradictio in terminis?* In: L. MILIS (ed.), *De Heidense Middeleeuwen* (Bruxelles, Rome 1991) 5–17; M. DE REU, *De missionering: het eerste contact van heidendom en christendom*. In: *ibid.* 19–46; A. DIERKENS, *Het getuigenis van de Archeologie*. In: *ibid.* 47–66; M.

MOSTERT, *De kerstening van Holland (zevende tot twaalfde eeuw)*. Een bijdrage aan de middeleeuwse religieuze geschiedenis. *Holland* 25, 1993, 125–155.

⁶¹ MILIS (note 60) 15; DIERKENS (note 60) 47–48.

⁶² DIERKENS (note 60) 57.

⁶³ MILIS (note 60) 12.

Christian beliefs⁶⁴. In this view, the newly introduced gods were venerated simply because they had conferred demonstrably more power in battle or had brought more prosaic advantages than had the old ones. These notions preclude the possibility of a *contradictio in terminis* simply because it was never experienced as such⁶⁵. Only later, when the Christian religion had obtained a firmer footing, were dubious pagan practices countered by vigorous Christian commandments⁶⁶.

All this starts from the assumption that the owner of the helmet was a local chief of Germanic origin who had close relations with the Roman military authorities, and who might even have settled in that area. However, we should not exclude the possibility that the bearer of the helmet was a regular Roman officer who fell as a victim, perhaps during the troubles caused by the last campaigns of Constantine III in these regions. His most prominent personal belongings then may have been offered as booty to the gods by his pagan adversaries, who might even have understood the significance of the badge. Nevertheless, whoever the owner of such an eye-catching helmet was, it can be argued that he was a serious and conscious adherent of the Christian faith in a world still dominated by pagan *mores*. In other words, though we have been given a glimpse of this helmet-bearer's earthly fortune, we can only hypothesize about his fortunes.

⁶⁴ DIERKENS (note 60) 58.

⁶⁵ MILIS (note 60) 15.

⁶⁶ DE REU (note 60) 21.

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