Late Iron Age coin hoards with silver rainbow staters from Graetheide (NL) and the mid-1st century BC hoard horizon in the Lower Rhine / Meuse region

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The PAN project and background to the research at Graetheide[1]

Since 2016, archaeologists from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), the Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE), and a series of other parties have joined forces in the Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands project (abbreviated to PAN), funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO)[2]. PAN aims to compile a large-scale inventory of metal detector finds held in the private collections of Dutch amateur archaeologists. Connected to PAN is a programme of small-scale control excavations prompted by find reports of particular significance. These studies investigate the find contexts, explore efficient ways to learn more about them, and reveal the implications for archaeological heritage policy. At the same time, the studies represent a positive investment in relationships with amateur metal detectorists. In line with the new Dutch Heritage Act of 2016, which legalises private metal detection under strict conditions[3], the message being conveyed is that we accept the

[1] This publication is part of the scientific output of the project "Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands" that is funded by the Dutch Research Council. I would like to thank DSM Nederland for permission to conduct excavations on their land at Graetheide. The day-to-day management of the excavation was in the hands of Jan-Willem de Kort (RCE Amersfoort). Bertil van Os (RCE) carried out the XRF measurements of several coins and some other metal objects. Thanks should also go to the province of Limburg and the municipality of Sittard-Geleen for funding the fieldwork. Furthermore, I would like to extend my gratitude to the private discoverers of the three coin hoards, Danny van Krevel, Paul Curfs, Teun Oostenbrug, for reporting the finds to PAN and for their support during the fieldwork in the form of metal detection. Bert Brouwenstijn (VU) provided the cartography for this paper. Finally, I want to thank two anonymous reviewers for their critical comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[2] See www.portable-antiquities.nl.

[3] Metal detectorists should ask permission from the local landowner, can only detect objects from the top soil (maximum depth 30 cm), and are obliged to report their finds to the authorities. They are allowed to keep the objects in private possession, but in case of treasure they have to share the financial value with the landowner. According to our experiences in the PAN project, most metal detectorists from the Netherlands respect the rules of the new heritage law and contribute to Dutch archaeology in a positive way. There is also a small minority, however, that works illegally.

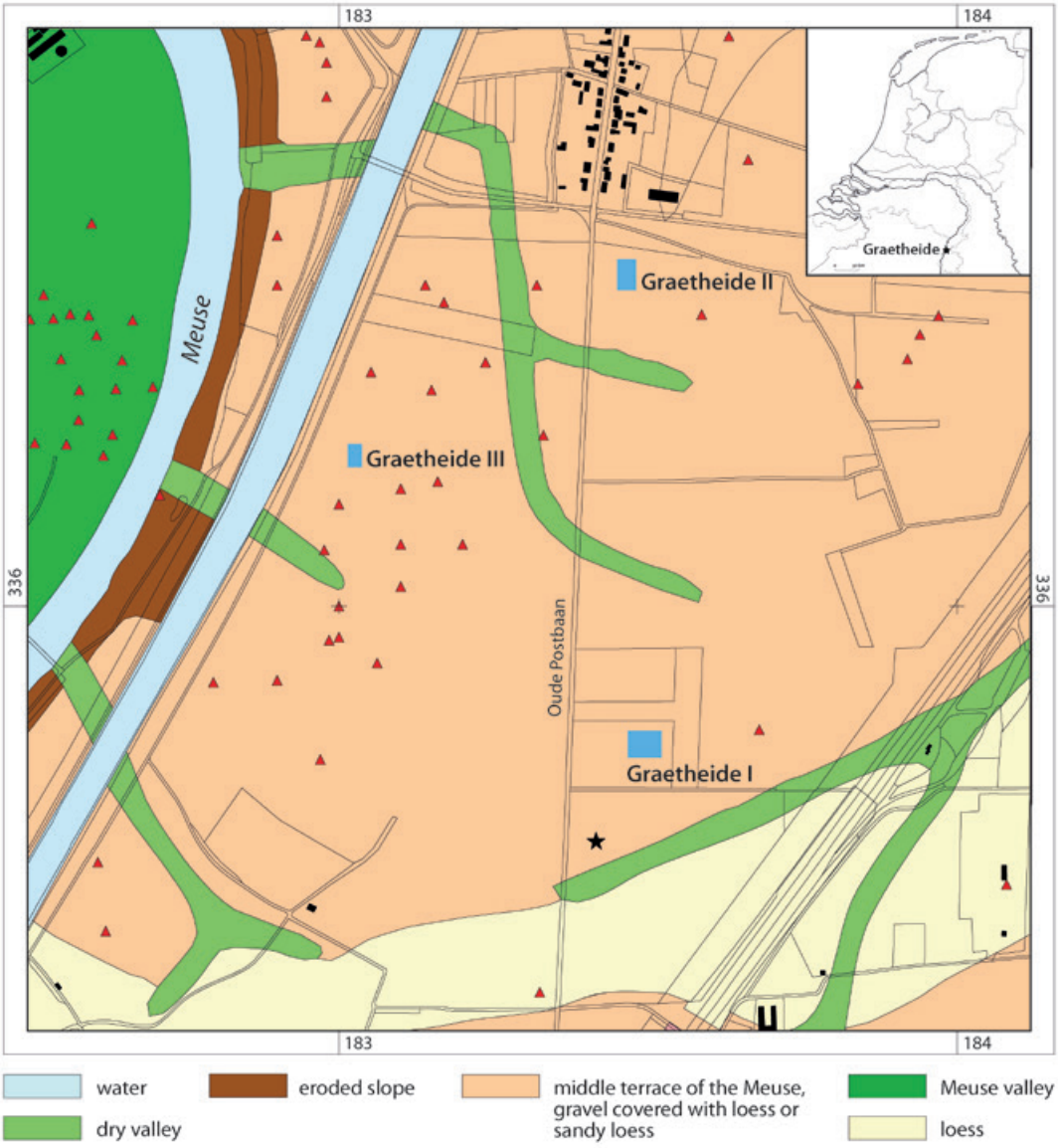

Fig. 1. Simplified geomorphological map of the Graetheide plateau showing the sites of Late Iron Age coin hoards (in blue) and findspots of archaeological material from late prehistory and / or the Roman period (red triangles). * = isolated find of gold stater Scheers 31-II *(Eburones)*.

legality of finds from the top soil and view them as a potential subject of excavation work, in which we regard amateur detectorists as partners.

In 2017 and early 2018, several hobbyist archaeologists from Limburg reported to PAN that they had found a small concentration of Celtic coins in fields at two different locations in Graetheide in the municipality of Sittard-Geleen *(Fig. 1)*. A third concentration was found in 2019. The coins are known in the literature as 'silver rainbow cups of the triquetrum type', in particular the 'Lith type' (see below). Given that the finds were

high-value coins of the same type, we immediately suspected that we were not simply dealing with lost coins but with coin hoards that had been disturbed by ploughing. Celtic coin hoards are rare in the Netherlands and therefore of considerable historical value. Together with the Cultural Heritage Agency, we therefore decided to undertake a small-scale control excavation at the find locations. The aims were: 1. to recover any remaining coins from the arable layer, 2. to see whether it was still possible to identify the original place of burial, and 3. to specify the archaeological context of the coin hoards. Finally, the idea was to place the coin hoards in a broader numismatic and historical context.

Topography of the findspots

All find locations are situated on the Graetheide plateau, one of the northern-most loess plateaus in the Dutch province of Limburg, situated on the eastern bank of the Meuse. Today, it is an area of arable land, but historical maps show that it was rough heathland before being opened up in the early 19th century[4]. The reason why this land was developed so late was the local soil conditions. Both sites are located on the middle terrace of the Meuse, characterised by coarse gravel deposits with only a thin covering of loess soil. In some parts of the fields the loess layer is so thin that the older gravel deposits are visible on the surface. Today, the research area comprises slightly hilly terrain intersected by several dry valleys that continue westward of the Oude Postbaan road towards the Meuse valley *(Fig. 1)*.

Although finds have been reported on the Graetheide plateau of material from the Neolithic, the Bronze and Iron Ages, and the Roman period, almost all have come from sites west of the Oude Postbaan, where the plateau meets the Meuse valley *(Fig. 1)*[5]. Apart from the coin concentrations discussed here and an isolated gold stater of the S (Scheers) 31-II type, ascribed to the *Eburones*[6], almost no finds are known from the fields east of the Oude Postbaan. It seems that the border zone of the plateau was the most attractive area for habitation in all these periods.

The fieldwork

During a three-week campaign in November 2018, two find concentrations were excavated by a combined team from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the Cultural Heritage Agency[7]. Prior to the excavation, amateur archaeologists had collected a total of 14 coins at the southern location (= Graetheide I), including several fragments, and five at the northern location (= Graetheide II). Thanks to cooperation from the finders, the findspots of the individual coins were measured using a GPS, which resulted in a distribution area of 40 × 30 m at Graetheide I and 45 × 12 m at Graetheide II. The methodology built on earlier experience in excavating Late Iron Age and Roman-period coin hoards in the Netherlands[8]. This involved removing the top soil layer by layer with the aid of an excavator and continually searching the excavation plane with a metal detector. Once the 'readable' excavation plane was reached, any features found there were drawn and further investigated.

[4] Roymans et al. 2020.

[5] Van Wijk 2012.

[6] See PAN-7619. The coin was found by Paul Bänziger at Graetheide-Julianahoeve, about 200 m south of Graetheide I.

[7] For an extensive report of the fieldwork, see Heeren et al. 2020.

[8] Roymans / Dijkman 2011 (Amby); Roymans / Hiddink 2006 (Echt); Roymans / Heeren 2015 (Echt); Roymans / Heeren 2017 (Lienden).

Fig. 2. Aerial views of the excavations at Graetheide I (above) and II (below).

Graetheide I

A zone measuring 40 × 40 m was excavated at the Graetheide I site *(Figs 2–3)*. Under a thin plough layer of only 30 cm, we found a readable excavation plane containing no archaeological features, apart from a few undatable tree holes. During the investigation a silver rainbow cup was discovered at a depth of 30 cm, at the bottom of the arable layer. A second rainbow cup was found on the site after the excavation. This brings the total number of coins found at this findspot to 16 *(Figs 4–5)*; their distribution is shown in *Figure 3*.

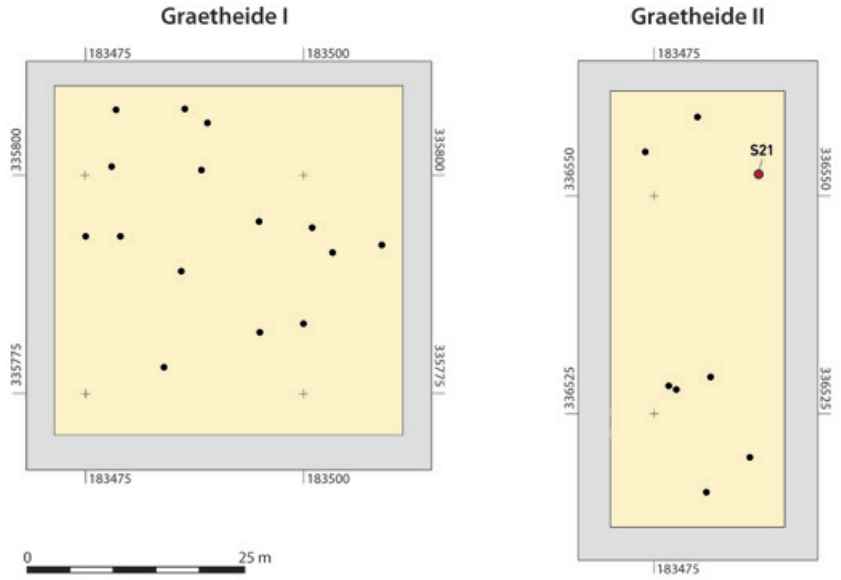

Fig. 3. Excavation maps of Graetheide I and II showing the distribution of silver triquetrum coins, all from the arable top layer. An earthen bowl from the Iron Age came from feature 21.

No trace was found beneath the top soil of an original deposition pit for the coins. Also significant is the scarcity of isolated finds from the Iron Age or Roman period. During the excavation two small fragments of handmade pottery were collected in the topsoil, and prior to the excavation the discoverers of the findspot had found at that location a bead and a ring *(Fig. 6)*, both of silvered bronze and probably dating from the Late Iron Age[9].

Graetheide II

A zone measuring 20 × 50 m was excavated at the Graetheide II site *(Figs 2–3)*. Here too, beneath the plough layer, which was a mere 30 cm thick, we encountered a readable excavation plane containing almost no archaeological features. An exception was a shallow pit that yielded a complete bowl of hand-formed pottery *(Fig. 7)*. Its form is generally known from the Late Iron Age, but a dating to an older phase of the Iron Age is also possible[10]. During the excavation of the plane, a silver rainbow cup was found at the bottom of the arable layer, along with a fragment of a second specimen that fitted a coin fragment found earlier at that spot. This brings the total number of coins from this site to six *(Fig. 5)*; their distribution is shown in *Figure 3*. No further trace was found of an original deposition

[9] The composition of both objects was measured by Bertil van Os (RCE Amersfoort) using a hand-held energy-dispersive XRF. Metal beads are known from the Late Iron Age settlements of Geldermalsen-Hondsgemet (Van Renswoude / Van Kerckhove 2009, 253 fig. 18,2) and Tiel-Medel (Habermehl et al. 2019).

[10] Cf. Martin 2017, 243–246 fig. 307 (form J. II); Van den Broeke 2012, type 22 fig. 3,8; Schönfelder 2002, 132 pl. K1–56.

Fig. 4. Coins from Graetheide I. The numbering corresponds to the numbering used in *Table 1.* – Scale 2 : 1.

Fig. 4. (continued).

Fig. 4. (continued).

pit for the coins. Also striking is the scarcity of stray finds from the Iron Age or Roman period, an exception being six small fragments of handmade pottery and the fragment of a bronze fibula with a broad, hammered bow from the late 2nd or 3rd century AD[11].

[11] Cf. Heeren / Van der Feijst 2017, 131 fig. 4,95.

Fig. 5. Coins from Graetheide II. The numbering corresponds to the numbering used in *Table 1*. – Scale 2 : 1.

Fig. 6. Ring and bead of silvered bronze, stray finds from Graetheide I, probably dating from the Iron Age.

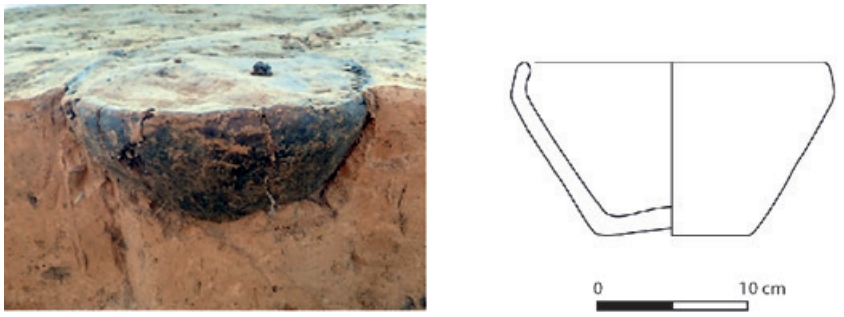

Fig. 7. Hand-made bowl from the Iron Age found at Graetheide II (SIGR 206).

Graetheide III

In the summer of 2019 hobby archaeologists reported the find of a third concentration of five silver rainbow cups *(Fig. 8a)* in an arable field some 600 m west of Graetheide I and II at the border of the plateau near the Meuse valley *(Fig. 1)*. In January 2020 three more specimen were found at the same spot *(Fig. 8b)*. All coins were collected in the arable top soil in a zone of c. 25 × 5 m sloping off from a slight elevation down to a flat terrain. This western zone of the plateau has been intensively surveyed in the past decades which produced find material from the later prehistory and also the Roman period[12]. No control excavation was carried out at the Graetheide III site, but prospective research (including some trial trenches) carried out in 2012 shows that the soil conditions are similar to those at Graetheide I and II.

[12] Van Wijk 2012, site 'Hoogenberg'.

Fig. 8a. Coins from Graetheide III. The finds from 2019. The numbering corresponds with the numbering in *Table 1*. – Scale 2 : 1.

Fig. 8b. Coins from Graetheide III. The finds from 2020. The numbering corresponds with the numbering in *Table 1*. – Scale 2 : 1.

Conclusions about the fieldwork

Despite the well-preserved soil profile at the sites, neither excavation yielded any remains of the original coin hoards preserved *in situ*. The pottery bowl found in a shallow pit at Graetheide II had not been used for the coin deposition. Although hard proof is lacking, the coins from all three locations can best be interpreted as belonging to small hoards that were deliberately buried at a shallow depth and later completely disturbed by ploughing, whereby they became incorporated into the modern topsoil[13]. The number of coins, their high value, and the homogeneous composition of the coin ensembles make an alternative interpretation as accidentally lost coins highly improbable. The fairly wide distribution of the coins across an area with a maximum diameter of 45 m can be explained by small-scale earth-moving activity when the land was cleared in the early 19th century. In an adjacent strip of woodland in Graetheide I, it is still possible to decipher a pattern of shallow ditches *(rabatten)* relating to the clearing of the site. Annual ploughing over the course of the subsequent two centuries would have dispersed the coins still further. This ploughing activity, combined with the effects of moisture and frost, also caused some coins to fragment or flake[14].

[13] Similar small hoards of silver triquetrum staters are known from Echt (21 coins) and Iserlohn (17 coins): Roymans / Hiddink 2006; Zeiler / Jansen 2014.

[14] The breaking-off of small fragments of metal is a common phenomenon among silver rainbow staters that have been in the modern plough soil for a long time. Tiny hairline cracks on the convex side of the coins, created during the minting process, were often the first step in this process. Cf. the coins from the hoards of Amby (Roymans / Dijkman 2012) and Echt (Roymans / Hiddink 2006).

Fig. 9. Cluster of Late Iron Age coins and some Early Roman coins, probably from a disturbed hoard buried at the site of a native farmhouse from the early and middle Augustan period, excavated at Tiel-Medel (NL). a copper rainbow stater, type Bochum; b silver quinar type S57-II; c Early Roman coin.

What can be said about the archaeological context of the Graetheide hoards? It is significant that the three sites appear to have been used as a deposition place on only one occasion, which makes a cult place context unlikely. A cult place is by definition a site where ritual practices occurred regularly[15], usually resulting in a larger variety of metal objects and coins in particular. The sites of Graetheide I and II yielded almost no remains of Late Iron Age habitation in the form of pottery sherds and fragments of glass La Tène armbands[16]. This suggests that both hoards were buried outside the core zone of a settlement[17]. The Graetheide III hoard, however, was discovered in the western border zone of the plateau that has produced much more settlement material *(Fig. 1)*. The Graetheide hoards can best be understood as related to a diffuse pattern of single-phase 'shifting' farmhouses that leave behind few material remains. The presence of a complete bowl, some fragments of handmade pottery, and a couple of bronze objects in Graetheide I and II could point to the presence of an isolated farmhouse in their immediate vicinity. A possible parallel is found at a recently excavated house site at Tiel-Medel in the Dutch river area, dated to between c. 30 and 1 BC *(Fig. 9)*. The house – of which only a rectangular house ditch

[15] Derks 1998, 133.

[16] Cf. the study of the Echt coin hoard: Roymans / Hiddink 2006. See also Roymans / Verniers 2009.

[17] The hoards of Echt and Niederzier were found in a settlement context.

remains – had two opposing entrances in the long sides, a characteristic of native-style byre houses. The top soil around the house site produced a cluster of Late Iron Age and some Early Roman coins, including six bronze rainbow cups of the Bochum-type (see below) and a Lower Rhine silver quinar type S57-II[18]. We may be dealing here with the remains of a hoard originally deposited in or around the farmhouse but which was disturbed and spread by later ploughing.

Description of the coins

All coins found in Graetheide (30 in total) are silver 'rainbow cups' of the triquetrum type with a triskeles or triquetrum surrounded by a laurel wreath on the convex obverse and a pyramidal arrangement of point circles and double circles inside a zigzag line on the concave reverse. This coin type is known in particular from the gold / silver hoard of Amby (below, *Fig. 14*), in which 78 specimens were found. The coin images are identical but a number of variants, identified with a letter code, can be distinguished, based on the presence of small additional marks on the reverse *(Fig. 10)*[19]. Coins with no additional marks are variant a. There are also coins with an additional mark in the form of a ring, a torque or a human head (?). A total of seven variants are known from the Amby hoard: a, b, c, i, k, t, and u. Variants a, b, c, k, and t are represented in Graetheide. Earlier research has shown a clear distinction between these silver triquetrum coins and the predominantly copper coins bearing other additional marks that we know above all from the Bochum hoard. In contrast to the silver coins discussed here, Bochum-type coins are still found regularly in Augustan military camps in the Rhineland, although they seem to have been minted in the decades before 20 BC[20].

The silver rainbow cups found at Graetheide and Amby are also referred to as being of the Lith type, named after the site of the same name in the Dutch river area[21]. The coins are of a silver-copper alloy but their often yellowish lustre indicates the admixture of some gold. This picture is confirmed by metal analyses; Lith-type coins have a silver / gold content of about 60 %, with the remaining part consisting of copper[22]. The composition of three coins from Graetheide was tested using a hand-held energy-dispersive XRF *(Tab. 1)*[23]. This revealed a copper content fluctuating around 10 %, as against high percentages of silver (c. 77 %) and gold (c. 10 %). Given that these are surface analyses, it is often assumed that they give a somewhat distorted picture of the true composition[24]. However, analyses of both the surface and the core of the fragmentary coin 5 from Graetheide II produced virtually the same result[25]. On the other hand, the surfaces of coins 6–8 from Graetheide III show clear traces of gilding.

[18] Habermehl et al. 2019.

[19] Roymans 2004, 72–73 fig. 6,3; Roymans / Hiddink 2006; Roymans / Dijkman 2012. On the possible meaning of the additional marks, see Roymans 2004, 90–91.

[20] Roymans 2004, 78–79; Schulze-Forster 2002, 122–128. On the Bochum hoard, see Forrer 1910.

[21] Roymans / Van der Sanden 1980; Roymans 2004.

[22] Ibid. 73 and tab. 6,2.

[23] XRF measurements of coins from the Amby and Iserlohn hoards produced similar results: Roymans / Dijkman 2012, Appendix 2; Zeiler / Jansen 2014, fig. 4.

[24] Roymans 2004, 70–74; Roymans / Dijkman 2012, 180; Wouters 2012.

[25] Coin core: Au 16 %, Ag 71 %, Cu 13 %. Surface of the coin: Au 19 %, Ag 71 %, Cu 10 %.

Fig. 10. Overview of the additional mark variants of silver triquetrum coins of the Lith type.

The weight of the Graetheide coins *(Tab. 1)* ranges from 4.1 to 6.2 g[26]. That of the coins of the Amby hoard ranges between 5 and 6.4 g[27]. A number of heavier specimens are known from the Dutch river region, while several conspicuously light coins have come from the *oppidum* on the Dünsberg in Hesse in Germany (Lkr. Gießen)[28]. In general, Lith-type coins vary considerably in weight and also silver content, but so far there are no indications that this is chronologically significant.

[26] Incomplete coins or coins with parts of their surface missing have not been included. The relatively low weight of the Graetheide coins can partly be explained by wear and secondary erosion.

[27] Roymans / Dijkman 2012, Appendix 2.

[28] Roymans / Van der Sanden 1980, 205–206 and fig. 10; Roymans / Dijkman 2012, 180; Schulze-Forster 2002, 122. The weight of the coins from the Iserlohn hoard fluctuates around 6 g (Zeiler / Jansen 2014).

No.	variant	weight (g)	collection	metal composition		
Graetheide I						
1	a	4.40	Th. Oostenbrug			
2	c	(4.55)	Th. Oostenbrug			
3	b	(4.37)	Th. Oostenbrug			
4	t	(4.50)	Th. Oostenbrug			
5	a	6.02	P. Curfs			
6	a	4.12	P. Curfs			
7	b	5.17	P. Curfs			
8	a	4.52	P. Curfs			
9	k	(4.77)	P. Curfs			
10	b	4.75	Province of Limburg, SIGR 222	Au 12	Ag 80	Cu 8
11	?	(2.04)	P. Curfs			
12	?	(1.42)	P. Curfs			
13	?	(1.19)	P. Curfs			
14	?	(0.71)	P. Curfs			
15	?	(2.97)	P. Curfs			
16	b	5.14	PAN-65151			
Graetheide II						
1	t	(5.00)	D. van Krevel			
2	b	5.21	D. van Krevel			
3	c	(4.95)	D. van Krevel			
4	a	5.02	D. van Krevel			
5	a	(3.72)	van Krevel / Prov. of Limburg, SIGR 207	Au 19	Ag 71	Cu 10
6	a	5.46	Province of Limburg, SIGR 200	Au 17	Ag 70	Cu 13
Graetheide III						
1	b	(4.90)	PAN-59423			
2	a	5.00	PAN-59425			
3	t	5.01	PAN-59427			
4	t	(2.91)	PAN-59428			
5	a	(4.19)	PAN-61434			
6	b	4.86	PAN-70040			
7	?	(3.52)	PAN-70042			
8	?	(3.94)	PAN-70041			

Tab. 1. Descriptive overview of triquetrum coins from Graetheide I–III. Metal composition in percentages. The numbering of the coins corresponds to the numbering used in *Figures 4, 5* and *8*.

Dating, distribution, and the issue of tribal attribution of the coins

The triquetrum coins were a long-running Rhineland coin series that began in the German Middle Rhine region east of Bonn with the gold staters of the Mardorf group, probably struck in the *oppidum* on the Dünsberg[29]. Together with the *Vogelkopf* staters of type IID with *Strichzeichen* they represent the youngest gold issues of the German series of rainbow

[29] Schulze-Forster 2002, 113; Kappel 1976.

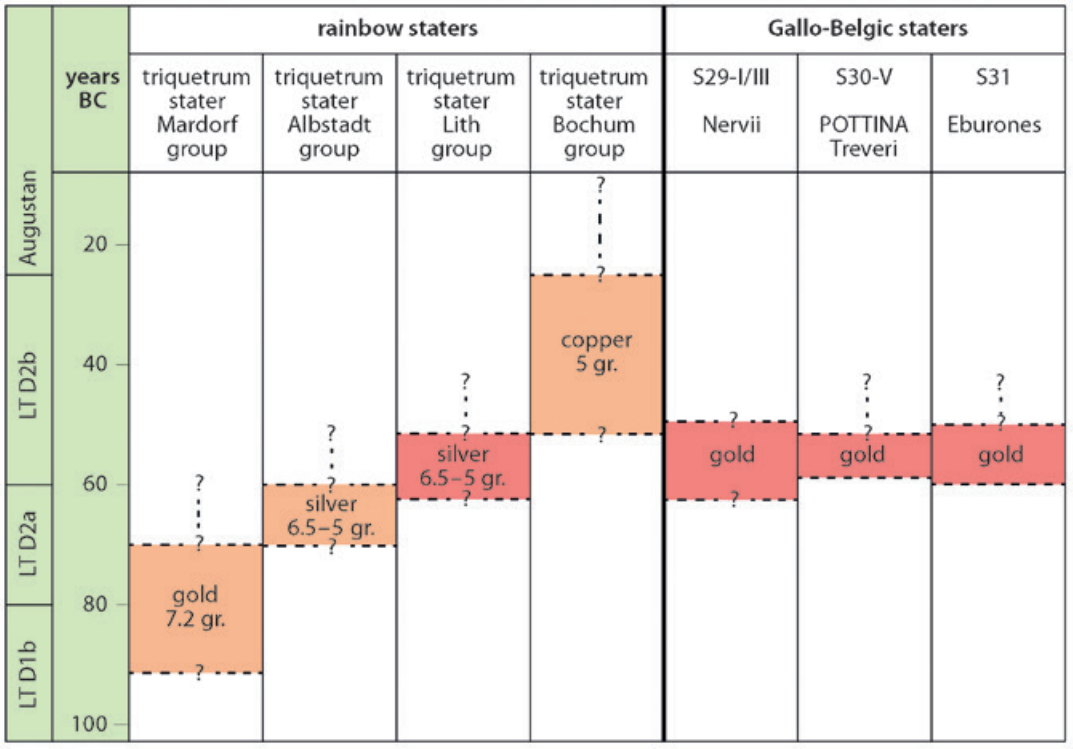

Fig. 11. Diagram showing approximate chronology of the various groups of triquetrum staters and some related Gallo-Belgic staters of the Fraire / Amby horizon. Horizontal dashed line: probable limits of period of minting. Vertical dashed line: probable period of circulation. Red: coin types belonging to the Fraire / Amby horizon.

staters. The silver triquetrum coins discussed here are the successors to this gold emission. The series ends with emissions of copper coins of the Bochum type. Although the relative chronology of these three main groups has been established, it is difficult to link this to absolute datings (see *Fig. 11*). The gold series of the Mardorf group is generally dated to the early 1st century BC[30]. For the younger series we have two important points of reference: silver coins of the Lith type occur in gold hoards of the Fraire / Amby horizon showing that they were in full circulation in the 50s BC (see below), and bronze coins of the Bochum type are still regularly encountered – be it in small numbers – in the Augustan military camps in the Rhineland[31].

The Rhineland triquetrum coins tell us that close social relationships existed between groups on either side of the Lower Rhine in the course of the 1st century BC. The distribution patterns of the different types are significant here. The presence of gold triquetrum staters is still largely confined to the eastern Middle Rhine region. The distribution of Lith-type silver coins displays three different clusters: the *oppidum* on the Dünsberg and the regions around Lith and Maastricht in the south-eastern Netherlands *(Fig. 12)*. Assuming that the gold and silver triquetrum staters were struck on the Dünsberg, this would

[30] Zieghaus 1995, 105–106; Schulze-Forster 2002, 113; Nick 2005, 124–125; Zieghaus 2009, 430.

[31] Roymans 2004, 76–81; Roymans / Dijkman 2012, 184; Schulze-Forster 2002, 113–114.

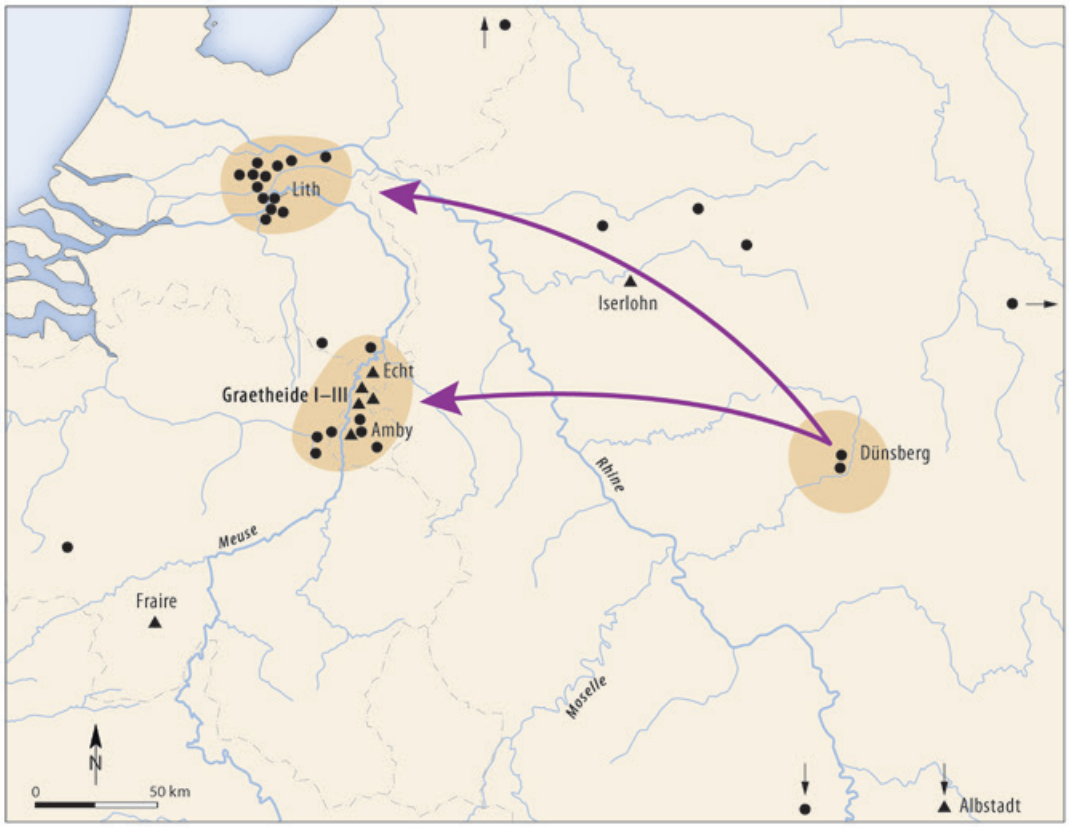

Fig. 12. Distribution of silver triquetrum coins of the Lith group (variants b, c, h, i, t, u) and the presumed shift in production from the *oppidum* at the Dünsberg to the Dutch river delta and the Middle Meuse region. Triangle: hoard find.

suggest a westward flow of coins from the Dünsberg area to the Lower Rhine / Meuse region. However, it is by no means certain that all silver coins of the Lith type were struck on the Dünsberg. An alternative interpretation is that coin production itself shifted westwards. This is supported by the substantial number of silver coins found in the Lith and Maastricht regions and by the presence there of several additional mark variants that are unknown from the Dünsberg[32]. In the future, a systematic study of the coin dies used for each additional mark variant will yield more information about the nature and intensity of the relationships between the regions on either side of the Rhine[33]. For the moment, the most plausible scenario seems to be that Lith-type silver coins were produced in both the Lower Rhine / Meuse region west of the Rhine and the region east of the Rhine.

A question that has sparked considerable discussion to this day concerns the attribution of the triquetrum emissions to a historically documented ethnic group or tribe. This has proven problematical for the Lower Rhine region because of the complex ethnic dynamics

[32] Especially the u and h variants. For the latter, see Roymans 2004, fig. 6,13.

[33] For example, the reverse on coins 82–85 of variant b from Amby (Roymans / Dijkman 2012, pl. 9) is a die match with a coin from the Fraire hoard (Scheers / Creemers 2012a, no. 8) and one from Lith (Roymans 2004, 191 no. 147), whereas no examples are yet known from the eastern Rhine region.

in the wake of Caesar's conquests and our new understanding about the dating and distribution of Lith-type silver triquetrum coins. In their 1980 study, Roymans and Van der Sanden linked the concentration of these coins in the Lith region to Tacitus' account of the Batavian migration from the Hesse region to the Dutch river delta at some time in the post-Caesarean period[34]. It later emerged that the coins also occur frequently in the Maastricht region, and that they should be dated earlier than initially assumed: the Amby hoard shows that they were already in full circulation in the Caesarean period. Today, based on current distribution maps, we can say that silver and bronze triquetrum coins were widely distributed across the entire Lower Rhine region, where they were used and probably also minted by various Germanic groups (including the *Eburones* and later the *Batavi*).

Caesar's conquest and the mid-1st century BC hoard horizon in the Lower Rhine / Meuse area

Our information about the absolute dating of the Late Iron Age gold coinages in Belgic Gaul is still poor. The reason is that – in contrast to base metal coins – gold hoards and single gold coins are rarely found in excavations, meaning that we have little information about their associations with other find categories. While it is agreed that inscribed gold coinages first appear in the period of the Gallic Wars and that – in contrast to the situation in Britain – both the production and circulation of gold coins more or less cease in the mid-1st century BC[35], the chronological position of the late uninscribed gold series remains contested. There are adherents of a short chronology, basically following Scheers' typological scheme which places all coin series *'de type belge'* in the period of the Roman conquest and interprets them as war-time coinage[36]. Others have criticised this historical-numismatic dating scheme and point at the risk of circular reasoning[37]. Haselgrove argues for an independent chronological arrangement of coin types based exclusively on archaeological evidence. He presents an extended chronology for the late Gallo-Belgic gold series in which the uninscribed emissions are generally placed in LT D2a (90–60 BC) and considered pre-conquest issues[38].

This renewed archaeological dating scheme is an important step forward from a methodological point of view. Archaeological dating, however, can be problematic as well, especially when the limited number of stratified coins makes it difficult to build up robust trends and to expose intrusive or misdated outliers[39]. The best practice is to use a combination of both archaeological and numismatic dating evidence. Future research should focus on refining the absolute chronology of the individual uninscribed series. Until now the late uninscribed gold series have been treated too much as a homogenous entity with too little attention for dating differences between the series[40]. For certain coin series – in particular the type S24 'uniface' staters and the S30 'eye' series – an extended chronology seems most plausible, but for others a short chronology is more convincing. Specifically for the gold emissions of the Lower Rhine / Meuse region in the far north of Gaul there are firm indications in favour of a short chronology corresponding with the mid-1st century BC. As this

[34] Roymans / Van der Sanden 1980, 205–212.

[35] Roymans 1990, 127; Doyen 2014; Haselgrove 2019, 255.

[36] Cf. Scheers 1977; Haselgrove 1984; Roymans 1990, 117–145; Sills 2013.

[37] Haselgrove 1999; Haselgrove 2019. Sceptical about historical interpretations is also Hornung 2016, 295.

[38] Haselgrove 1999.

[39] Haselgrove 2019, 255–256; Sills 2017, 706–707.

[40] Cf., however, the chronological scheme presented by Sillon 2014, fig. 400, reproduced in Haselgrove 2019, fig. 13,5.

Fig. 13. POTTINA staters of the *Treveri* from the Amby (left) and Heers (right) hoards. – Scale 2 : 1.

dating is directly relevant for the silver rainbow staters discussed here, I will summarise the arguments for this (cf. *Fig. 11*).

My point of departure is the composition of a closely related group of gold hoards from the southern Netherlands and central Belgium indicated as the 'Fraire-Amby horizon' *(Tab. 2)*[41]. These hoards are dominated by locally produced staters of the S29 (classes I–II) and S31 (class I) types, ascribed to the *Nervii* and the *Eburones* respectively[42]. A key factor in their absolute dating is the presence in the Heers and Amby hoards of a *Treveri* stater of the S30-V type bearing the legend POTTINA *(Fig. 13)*[43]. Gallo-Belgic inscribed gold staters are generally dated to an advanced stage of the Gallic Wars; the presence of a POTTINA stater in 'Camp C' at *Alesia* gives a *terminus ante quem* of their production of 52 BC[44]. The absence of coins of the latest gold emissions of the *Eburones* (S31, class II) and the *Nervii* (S29, class III–IV) in the hoards of Amby and Heers suggests that they were buried in the late 50s BC, which means that both the S31 and S29 series were still in full production at that time. The production may already have started in the pre-conquest period in the 60s BC, but the relatively small volume of both coin emissions makes

[41] Roymans / Scheers 2012.

[42] For the ascription of the S29 staters to the *Nervii*, see Deru 2009; Sillon 2014. About the ascription of the S31 coins to the *Eburones*, see Roymans / Scheers 2012, 12–14; Sillon 2014.

[43] The POTTINA stater of Amby was found shortly after the excavation and could not be included in the publication of Roymans / Dijkman 2012. The coin is in the collection of the municipality of Maastricht. Heers hoard: Scheers / Creemers 2012b.

[44] Roymans / Scheers 2012, 184; Fischer 2001, 38 no. 678. On the dating and distribution of POTTINA staters, see Loscheider 1998, 136–137; 145–150; Hornung 2016, 266 fig. 217. See also Doyen 2014, II, 31.

[45] On the reconstructed volumes of the coin emissions, see Haselgrove 1984, tab. 2; Roymans / Scheers 2012, 16–17; Sills 2013, 177 fig. 1.

Fig. 14. The Amby hoard, containing 41 gold coins of the S31-I type *(Eburones)*, 78 silver rainbow staters, and one POTTINA stater type S30-V.

	Rhineland triquetrum coins of the Lith group									North-Gallic gold staters		
variant	a	b	c	t	u	i	k	m	d	S 31-I	S 30-V	S 29-I/II
Albstadt	>14	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Fraire	3	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4	–	86
Thuin 1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	73
Thuin 2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	52
Thuin 3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	20
Philippeville	–	–	—	–	–	–	–	–		4	–	6
Heers	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	38	1	116
Amby	24	24	9	8	3	4	1	–	–	39	1	–
Graetheide I	4	4	1	1	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–
Graetheide II	3	1	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Graetheide III	1	2	–	2	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–
Iserlohn	10	3	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Echt	4	–	1	1	–	2	1	2	8	–	–	–

Tab. 2. Composition according to additional mark variant of the coin hoards with silver triquetrum staters of the Lith group and associated gold staters in the Lower Rhine / Meuse region.

this less probable[45]. It is clear that the bulk of the emissions occurred in the 50s BC. This conclusion is also relevant for the dating of the silver rainbow staters with additional marks, since these are linked to the S29 and S31 coinages in the hoards of Fraire and Amby *(Tab. 2; Fig. 14)*[46]. In the Graetheide hoards we encounter exactly the same variety of additional marks as in the Amby hoard. The series continues with the emission of more cupriferous variants with different additional marks as represented in the Echt hoard, which

[46] Fraire hoard: Scheers / Creemers 2012a.

marks the transition to the bronze emissions of the Bochum type from the second half of the 1st century BC[47]. It is uncertain when the production of the silver triquetrum staters begins. One can hypothesise that the series starts with coins without additional marks as the successor to the gold series of the Mardorf group, which also lacks additional marks. In that case, the hoard find of Albstadt (Baden-Württemberg, Germany)[48], containing silver rainbow staters without additional marks, could be placed in between the gold series and the silver series of the Lith group *(Fig. 11)*. There is no doubt, however, that the production and circulation of Lith group coins is concentrated in the mid-1st century BC.

The modified dating of the silver triquetrum staters with additional marks and the link with the gold hoards of the Fraire-Amby group reveals a brief period of intensive coin deposition in the Lower Rhine / Meuse region, corresponding to the middle of the 1st century and in particular the 50s BC[49]. This pattern is reinforced by the discovery of the three new coin hoards at Graetheide *(Fig. 15)*. This brings us to our last theme: the relationship to Caesar's Gallic Wars and in particular his extremely violent campaigns against Germanic groups in Gaul's northern periphery, most notably the *Eburones* and *Aduatuci*. If we agree that the S29 and S31 coinages as well as the silver rainbow staters with additional marks are essentially mid-1st century BC emissions, then it is legitimate to connect them with the Roman conquest. We can also connect regional patterns in hoarding with specific Roman military campaigns in these same regions, provided that we realise that such inferences are hypothetical. The concurrence of a clear hoard horizon with the phase of the Roman conquest suggests that this hoard peak was crisis-related and reflected the extreme circumstances of war – with its genocidal connotations – that Caesar describes for precisely this region[50]. The combination of a close seriation of coin dies from the hoards[51] and absolute datings of coin types even suggests a chronological differentiation in the coin depositions from the 50s BC that would allow us to establish a link with specific campaigns by Caesar[52]. The hoards of Thuin 1–3, Fraire, and Philippeville, deposited in the early 50s, can point to a connection with Caesar's mass enslavement of the *Aduatuci* in this region in 57 BC. The Heers and Amby hoards date to the late 50s, suggesting a link with Caesar's first punitive expedition against the *Eburones* in 53 BC. The three Graetheide hoards tie in perfectly with the hoard of Amby.

A historical link with the Caesarian campaigns of 53 or 51 BC may also explain the presence of three contemporary coin hoards on the Graetheide plateau within an area of just one square kilometre. The Meuse valley, being a major communication route, made the indigenous settlements on both river banks an easy target for a passing Roman army. The finds of Graetheide I–III all belong to the category of small hoards, which seem underrepresented in the archaeological record and were probably much more numerous than the large or middle-sized hoards like those from Amby and Heers. The Graetheide

[47] Echt hoard: Roymans / Hiddink 2006.

[48] Albstadt hoard: Kellner 1990, 218–220 nos 2292–2309 pl. 60. It contained at least 14 silver triquetrum coins, all of variant a, and some silver *quinarii* type Scheers 57-I / Forrer 351a ("tanzendes Männlein") and Forrer 352 ("Nauheim type"), both circulating in LT D2a. However, the exact composition of the hoard is unknown.

[49] We know only two older coin hoards from our study area: Beringen (mid-2nd century BC; Van Impe et al. 1997/98) and Niederzier (early 1st century BC; Göbel et al. 1991). For their dating, see Haselgrove 1999.

[50] Cf. Caes. Gall. 6,34–35; 6,43; 8,24–25. Following Van Wees 2010 I also consider Caesar's mass enslavement of the *Aduatuci* in 57 BC as an act of genocide.

[51] See Roymans / Scheers 2012, appendix 1 (S32-I) and 2 (S29-I/II).

[52] Roymans / Scheers 2012, 7–12; 20.

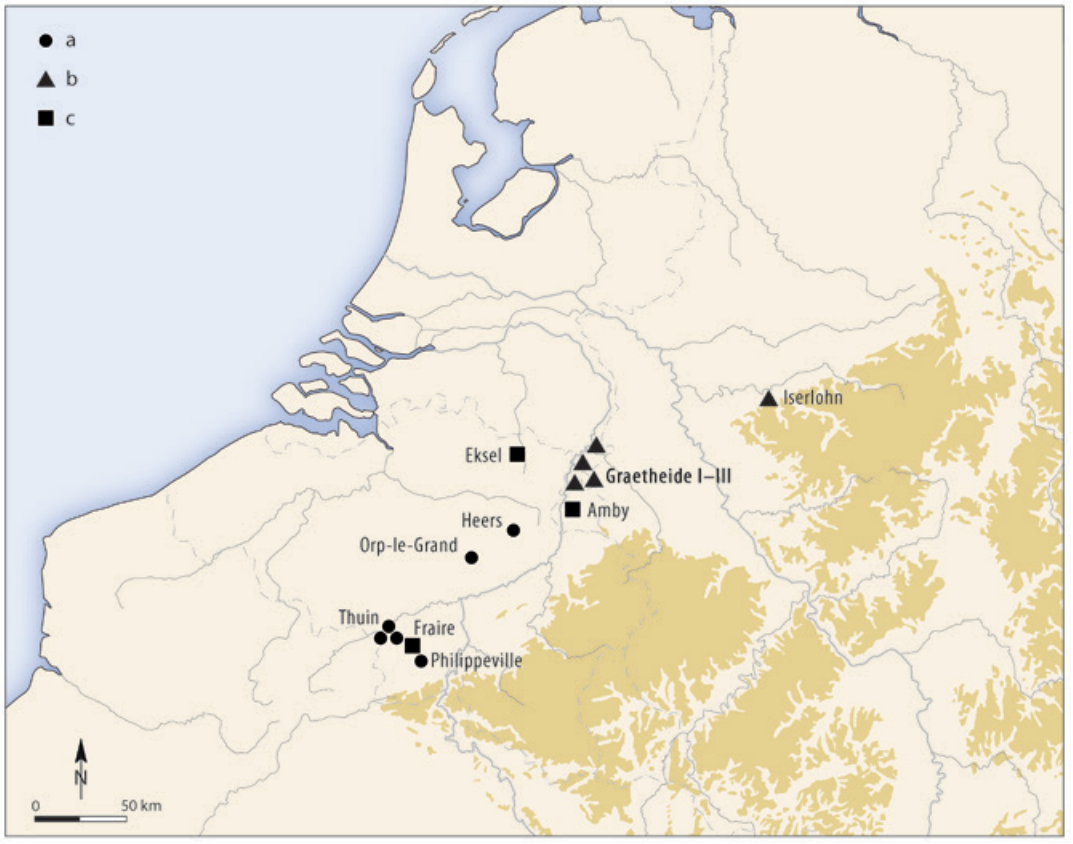

Fig. 15. Distribution of gold hoards of the Fraire-Amby horizon and hoards with silver triquetrum coins from the mid-1st century BC. a hoard with Gallo-Belgic gold staters; b hoard with silver rainbow staters; c mixed hoard of Rhineland rainbow staters and Gallo-Belgic staters.

mini-hoards may reflect the property of lower ranked warriors in Eburonean society in a situation of crisis.

In the past two decades archaeologists have paid serious attention to forms of coin deposition that were religiously or ritually motivated[53]. The interpretation proposed here – that most coin hoards from the Lower Rhine / Meuse region were in fact crisis hoards – is not intended as a criticism but as a desire to emphasise the need to allow room for a more traditional interpretation of hoards as emergency concealments *(Versteckhorte)*. In our case, there are several good arguments to support this: 1. There was a short-lived regional peak in the burial of high-value coins; 2. The peak overlaps with a historically documented period of intense warfare and demographic regression; 3. The coin hoards reflect the regional coin circulation and therefore appear to have been buried by local people; 4. The coin hoards involved shallow burials and in principle were therefore easily retrievable by their owners. Finally, we can say that ritual and profane interpretations of coin hoarding by no

[53] Cf. the series of papers in Haselgrove / Wigg-Wolf 2005.

means rule one another out, since concealments of mobile wealth at a time of crisis may have had a ritual dimension[54].

Postscript

In December 2019 a new Late Iron Age gold hoard was reported to me by Mr. Luc van Ravels (Spijkenisse, NL), discovered a decade ago at Eksel in the Belgian province of Limburg by a metal detectorist (see *Fig. 15*). The find, which will be published in the near future, consists of seven Scheers 31-I gold staters and one silver rainbow stater of the Lith type and can accordingly be added to the hoards of the Fraire-Amby horizon.

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Abstract: Late Iron Age coin hoards with silver rainbow staters from Graetheide (NL) and the mid-1st century BC hoard horizon in the Lower Rhine / Meuse region.

In 2018 and 2019 amateur metal detectorists reported the find of Late Iron Age silver coins at three locations in Graetheide in the Dutch province of Limburg. In November 2018 archaeologists from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands carried out small-scale control excavations at two sites. The investigations show that we are dealing with small coin hoards of silver 'rainbow staters', a coin type that circulated in the Lower Rhine / Meuse region in the mid-1st century BC. The new finds confirm that there was a significant regional peak in the hoarding of precious metal coins during this period. The peak can be dated to the 50s BC, suggesting a link with Caesar's military campaigns. In his *De Bello Gallico*, the Roman general describes at length how – in 53 and again in 51 BC – his legions plundered and burned the territory of the *Eburones* with the aim of totally annihilating the tribe. The gold and silver hoards can be regarded as silent testimony to a dramatic episode in the history of the Roman empire's Lower Germanic frontier zone.

Zusammenfassung: Späteisenzeitliche Münzhorte mit silbernen „Regenbogenschüsselchen" aus Graetheide (NL) und der Horthorizont der Mitte des 1. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. an Niederrhein und Maas

In den Jahren 2018 und 2019 meldeten Metallsondengänger Funde von späteisenzeitlichen Silbermünzen von drei Stellen in Graetheide in der niederländischen Provinz Limburg. An zwei der Fundstellen führten Archäologen der Freien Universität Amsterdam und des Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed im November 2018 kleine Kontrollgrabungen durch. Die Untersuchungen zeigen, dass wir es mit kleinen Münzhorten von silbernen Stateren („Regenbogenschüsselchen") zu tun haben – einem Münztyp, der in der Mitte des 1. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. in der Region Niederrhein-Maas zirkulierte. Die neuen Funde bestätigen, dass es einen signifikanten regionalen Anstieg in der Deponierung von Edelmetallmünzen in dieser Zeit gab. Der Höhepunkt kann in die 50er Jahre v. Chr. datiert werden, was einen Zusammenhang mit Caesars militärischen Aktionen nahelegt. In seinem *De Bello Gallico* beschreibt der römische General ausführlich, wie in den Jahren 53 und erneut 51 v. Chr. seine Legionen das Gebiet der Eburonen plünderten und niederbrannten, mit dem Ziel diesen Stamm vollständig auszulöschen. Die Horte mit Gold und Silber können als stumme Zeugen einer dramatischen Episode in der Geschichte der niedergermanischen Grenzzone des Römischen Reiches betrachtet werden.

Résumé: Trésors monétaires de la fin de l'âge du Fer avec statères « à arc-en-ciel » en argent de Graetheide (NL) et l'horizon des dépôts du milieu du 1er siècle av. J.-C. sur le Rhin inférieur et la Meuse

En 2018 et 2019, des prospecteurs amateurs annoncèrent la découverte de monnaies en argent du second âge du Fer à trois endroits de Graetheide dans la province du Limbourg aux Pays-Bas. Des archéologues de la Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam et du Rijkdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE) entreprirent de petites fouilles de vérification à deux endroits en novembre 2018. Ces investigations ont révélé qu'il s'agit de petits trésors monétaires composés de « statères à arc-en-cie » en argent, un type monétaire qui circulait dans la région Rhin inférieur-Meuse au milieu du 1er siècle av. J.-C. Ces nouvelles trouvailles confirment le dépôt particulièrement fréquent de monnaies en métal précieux à cette époque. On peut dater cette concentration des années 50 av. J.-C., qui n'est donc pas sans lien avec les campagnes de César. Dans son *De Bello Gallico*, le général romain décrit avec beaucoup de détails comment ses légions ont pillé le territoire des *Eburons* en 53 et 51 av. J.-C. dans le but de les exterminer. Les dépôts d'or et d'argent peuvent être considérés comme un témoignage muet de cet épisode dramatique de l'histoire du Rhin inférieur à la frontière de l'Empire romain.

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Figs 1; 3–6; 11; 15: author. – *Figs 2; 7:* RCE, Amersfoort. – *Fig. 8:* PAN. – *Fig. 9:* author after data in Habermehl et al. 2019. – *Fig. 10*: after Roymans / Dijkman 2012 fig. 9. – *Fig. 12:* after Roymans / Scheers 2012 fig. 11 (with additions). – *Fig. 13:* after Scheers / Creemers 2012 fig. 5 (left) and photo Municipality of Maastricht (right). – *Fig. 14:* after Roymans / Dijkman 2012 fig. 1. – *Tab. 1:* author; graphics K. Ruppel (RGK). – *Tab. 2:* after Roymans / Scheers 2012 Tab. 1 and Roymans / Dijkman 2012 Tab. 4 (with additions).