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## FIFTY YEARS OF ROMAN POTTERY STUDIES

### RCRF presidential address, Cadiz, September 2008

This conference in Cadiz marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the inaugural volume of our Society's *Acta*, in which we published the papers given the previous year at the very first meeting of the Society, held in Switzerland at Baden and Vindonissa in September 1957. The second volume published in 1959, comprised papers from the second RCRF Congress held at Arezzo and Pompeii in 1958. Congresses have since been held every other year, apart from three-year gaps between numbers 3 and 4, from 1958 to 1961, and 11 and 12, from 1977 and 1980. The *Acta* have for the most part been linked to the Congresses (see **table 1**). I was informally a pupil of the founders almost at the beginning of the Society, I have now been President for the last six years, and the end of this Congress marks the end of my term of office. What follows is a personal retrospective of the Fautores' first fifty years.

The founders of the Society were Howard Comfort, sometime President of the American Philological Association, who spent his career teaching Classics and coaching cricket at Haverford College, Pennsylvania, and Elisabeth Ettliger, who lived almost all her life in Zurich and taught at the University of Bern. Both were great authorities on terra sigillata (TS). Howard was the editor of the Oxé-Comfort Catalogue of TS Stamps and author of many articles, and Elisabeth was responsible for the TS from several sites along the Rhine. When I first visited her house in Witikonstrasse she had all the Neuss pottery in boxes around the walls, and I remember a fellow-archaeologist saying that every sherd unearthed at Neuss came to the surface crying out, "Take me to Dr. Ettliger". Physically they were a great contrast, Elisabeth rather small and quick in her movements, Howard very tall and spare, slow of speech and movement, who thee'd and thou'd in Quaker fashion and looked very like a poster image of Yankee Doodle.

Both were immensely kind to me when I was writing my D.Phil. thesis for Oxford University in the early 60s and when subsequently I was turning most of it into what became *The German Policy of Augustus* (Oxford, 1972). I spent the summer of 1963 travelling up the Rhine from Holland to Switzerland, visiting museums and excavations and ending up in Munich, working in the Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, and on the way my thesis supervisor, Prof. Sir Ian Richmond, sent me to see Elisabeth for tutorials on Augustan TS.

The following year I returned to my position at the University of Ottawa, where I taught for 27 years, and it was Elisabeth who suggested that I make contact with Howard

Comfort, whom I recognised when we met by the (MCC) cricket club tie he was wearing. The following summer I drove down from Ottawa with my wife Kate and two children to camp in the garden of the Comforts' summer cottage in Maine, until it rained so hard that the Comforts invited us to move inside. Howard gave me good advice and free access to the proofs of the precious catalogue, while his wife showed my family the local sights. Both Elisabeth and Howard were prodigal of their time and their knowledge. Anything I have ever understood about TS I owe to their initial stimulus.

Howard appears to have been the driving force behind the first volume of the *Acta*, which was cyclostyled and printed at the expense of Haverford College, with a preface in Howard's elegant Latin. The volume had only 37 pages and contained four articles on individual sites (Magdalensberg, Sabratha, Mittelbronn, and Arezzo), seven national or regional reports, one article of just over a page in length on *sigillata estampada paleocristiana*, and four brief notices of less than a page each. The contributors included several of the leading pottery specialists of the day, and the international character of the Fautores was emphasised by the fact that six languages were used, including Latin. It was a private publication: "hic noster libellus non per librarios sed tantum inter socios nostros divulgabitur". It took the Ashmolean Library in Oxford six years to acquire a copy, which bears the acquisition stamp dated 6 May 1964.

Volume 2 followed in 1959 and was typeset but still somewhat amateur in appearance and proof-reading. Another Latin preface records the decision to meet every two or three years in future rather than annually. It is followed by 15 further articles, of which 9 deal with TS and thin-walled Aco-type beakers, and there are 3 national bibliographies, a proposal for standardising the reporting of pottery inventories, an article by Graham Webster on Castor Ware, and the equivalent of a *Communicationes* section, which records the death of Felix Oswald at the age of 92. Of the five languages used the most frequent is German, which was to remain the language most used in Congresses and *Acta* for many years.

Volumes 3 through 8, which appeared from 1961 to 1966, were all edited by Michel Vanderhoeven at Tongres (Tongeren), and start to be strikingly more professional. None was specifically linked to a given Congress, and conversely none of the three Congresses that took place in these years, at Klagenfurt in 1961, Strasbourg in 1963, and on Mallorca in 1965, had its own volume. Despite important articles in vol-

ume 7 by Augusta Bruckner on cooking ware and Jean-Paul Morel on Campanian, these volumes reflect the almost exclusive preoccupation with TS, particularly in northwest Europe, which was characteristic of the fledgling Society. For instance, volume 4 (1962) was exclusively devoted to TS, with important articles by both Comfort and Ettliger on the stamps of the potter Ateius and his associates. Both articles make good use of the Oxé-Comfort catalogue, without which they could not have been written, and both are concerned with where Ateius and his slaves and freedmen actually worked, what Ettliger calls “die Frage nach der Zeit und der Art der Verteilung einiger Produkte aus den Werkstätten des Ateius” (p. 27).

The Ettliger article in particular highlights a question that could not be answered until new evidence came to light, the so-called “Ateius-Frage”. Oxé herself, she points out, suggested that a large proportion of the Ateius ware found north of the Alps came not from Italy but from provincial centres of production “die entweder irgendwo in Gallien oder sogar am Rhein hergestellt wurde”. But no such provincial workshop had ever been found, whereas Ateius wasters and stamps like those seen by the Fautores at Arezzo during their 1958 Congress left no doubt about the presence of Ateius workshops there. The article is a model of clarity, with tables and distribution maps, and Elisabeth’s German is mercifully lucid and precise, easy even for a foreigner to understand, as was her spoken German. The crucial discovery of Ateius workshops at Lyon was still in the future and not to be reported in the *Acta* until volume 13 (1971).

The link between *Acta* and Congresses was restored with volumes 9 (1967) and 10 (1968), both devoted to the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, held in *Aquincum* (Budapest) in 1967. The main focus is still on TS and Aco-Beakers, although other topics do push their way in. There are two articles on votive terracottas and one on lamps, and articles on pottery production, on La Tène influences on provincial Roman pottery, and on Roman influence on early medieval pottery. Volume 11/12, the proceedings of the Speyer Congress in 1969, contains nothing but TS! It has 15 articles in 7 languages, including for the first time Dutch. The Fautores are nothing if not international!

Volume 13 (1971), as already stated, carries the first mention of the discovery in the late 60s of TS workshops at Lyon, which amounted to a revolution in TS studies. As Hugues Vertet reports, “nous sommes maintenant certains que l’on fabriquait dans cette ville (sc. Lyon) des gobelets et de la sigillée lisse et moulée dès l’époque de Tibère, sinon d’Auguste” (p. 92). Even though the full implications have not yet been worked out, the article breathes the excitement of the first discovery, “the divine intoxication of the first league out from land”. Our Honorary Member, Maurice Picon, in the next volume, 14/15 (1972/73), goes further. Speaking of “les productions de la succursale lyonnaise d’ATEIVS” found on sites in eastern Gaul and along the Rhine, whose manufacture at Lyon was established by chemical analysis in Picon’s own laboratory, he tentatively suggests, “elles pourraient même constituer le groupe le plus important sur certains sites, comme celui de Haltern” (p. 130), a conclusion revolutionary at the time but now abundantly confirmed.

We do not hear a great deal more about the implications of the Lyon discoveries in the *Acta*. Much of the discussion that they stimulated appeared instead in local French journals, in *Figlina* or elsewhere. TS in general however continued to be well represented in the *Acta*, including in volume 16 (1976) an amusing palinode by Howard Comfort, retracting false provenances that he had unwittingly promulgated for TS from Lake Nemi and London: “Most of the evidence hitherto accepted as having London ... as provenance has, as we say, a fishy smell” (p. 159).

Volume 17/18 (1977) was devoted to the 1975 Augst Congress, which I remember for its magnificent TS display, and included Siegmund von Schnurbein on pottery from the workshops at Haltern, and my own paper on the dating of Augustan TS, arguing that in the light of Lyon and other recent discoveries we need “a radical reexamination of accepted concepts and cherished terminology” (p. 132). I was in part recanting my acceptance of attempts to date TS too precisely in my book, *The German Policy of Augustus* (Oxford, 1972, but essentially completed in 1969, before I knew about the Lyon discoveries), though I was careful to say, “I still stand by the main lines of my argument and the conclusions reached” (p. 132, n.2). The book includes an appendix on “The Dating Value of TS” that cost me a lot of pain. Has anyone today ever read it?

On the way home from the Augst Congress, I called in at Lyon to see for myself the finds from the Lyon workshops at Loyasse and La Muette, and Jean Lasfargues at the Musée de Civilisation Gallo-Romaine hospitably gave me the run of the storerooms. Excited by what I saw, I phoned to Elisabeth Ettliger in Zurich that evening and said she must come over right away, which she did, I think the next Sunday, driven by her husband Leopold, and we spent several hours together with Lasfargues in the unheated storeroom (it was cold in mid-September). It had once been almost an article of faith that Italian and Gaulish TS could always be told apart just from looking at them. No longer! I vividly remember Elisabeth picking up these Ateius and other sherds made in Lyon and saying, wonderingly, “but you wouldn’t know the difference, you just wouldn’t know the difference!”

Another personal recollection from the same year reflects once again the predominance of TS and other fine wares, not only in the *Acta*, but in the approach of many pottery specialists and dig directors. It was in 1976 that I began excavating at Carthage as Director of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Team under the auspices of the UNESCO “Save Carthage” project, in which nearly a dozen countries took part. On some sites, not of course all, if pottery in those first years was considered to have any importance at all, it was only fine wares that were studied, while amphora sherds and the like went straight onto the spoil heap. But it was Carthage that first opened my own eyes to the interest, the importance, and the potential of amphora studies. They have since come into their own, but where in 1976 did one go for a basic guide to Roman amphoras? Callender’s *Roman Amphorae* (London, 1965) was still in effect the last word.

The next two Congresses were held in notable centres of TS production, so that it is not surprising if *Acta* 19/20

Vol No.	Date	Congress No	Date	Location	No of articles	No of Pages
1	1958	1	1957	Baden / Vindonissa	17	v + 37
2	1959	2	1958	Arezzo / Pompeii	16	iii + 80
3	1961	see note			8	79
4	1962	see note			5	87
5/6	1963/64	see note			7	80
7	1965	see note			13	122
8	1966	see note			5	65
9	1967	6 (pt. 1)	1967	Budapest	7	61
10	1968	6 (pt. 2)	1967	Budapest	7	61
11/12	1969/70	7	1969	Speyer	15	147
13	1971	see note			9	114
14/15	1972/73	8	1971	Nijmegen	12	148
16	1976	9	1973	Ljubljana	19	181
17/18	1977	10	1975	Augst	19	222
19/20	1979	11	1977	Metz / Nancy	27	305
21/22	1982	12	1980	Millau	17	208
23/24	1984	13	1982	Munich	15	169
25/26	1987	14	1984	Oxford / London	34	537
27/28	1990	15	1986	Worms	18	184
29/30	1991	16	1988	Pleven	28	359
31/32	1992	17	1990	Pavia	40	621
33	1996	19 (sic!)	1994	Timisoara	22	173
34	1995	18 (sic!)	1992	Szekesfehervar	33	287 + pl. 19
35	1997	20	1996	York / Newcastle	35	258
36	2000	21	1998	Ephesus / Pergamum	75	578
37	2001	22	2000	Lyon	37	304
38	2003	23	2002	Rome	49	383
39	2005	24	2004	Namur / Louvain	41	332
40	2008	25	2006	Dürres	60	540

**Table 1.** Table of concordances between *Acta* volumes and congresses.

Volumes 3–8 are annual issues (1961–66) not specifically linked to a Congress. During these years however three Congresses were held, but their proceedings were not separately published. These were nos. 3 (Klagenfurt, 1961), 4 (Strasbourg, 1963), and 5 (Mallorca, 1965). Volume 13 similarly is not linked to a specific Congress, whereas volume 14/15, although it does not say so, from internal evidence clearly contains papers from the 1971 Congress at Nijmegen.

(1979), from the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress at Metz and Nancy in 1977, and 21/22 (1982), from the 12<sup>th</sup> at Millau in 1980, still show themselves predominantly interested in TS. The Congress at Metz and Nancy, organised by Marcel Lutz, sticks in my memory as being gastronomically the finest I ever attended. Lutz had excellent local connections, and the local museums and mayors excelled themselves in hospitality. Nowhere else however have I seen so much ugly grotty pottery as the local productions in the local museum storerooms. Even in volume 23/24 (1984), from the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress at Munich in 1982, 12 out of 15 articles are on TS, although Paul Bürgin

on “Figuli im römischen Recht” opens wider perspectives, and in a sign of things to come Kevin Greene in “A spatial analysis of pottery in the Neronian legionary fortress at Usk, Gwent”, rather daringly admits to using a computer.

With volume 25/26, from the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress, held in Oxford and London in 1984 and organised by Grace Simpson together with our incoming President, Philip Kenrick, the tide begins to turn. Among its 34 articles are discussions of amphoras and of bricks and tile, while a significant number deal with distribution and trade, like Elisabeth Ettlinger asking “How was Arretine Ware sold?” and Elizabeth Lyding

Will discussing amphoras as economic indicators, plus our Honorary Member Anna Marguerite McCann in a 50-page article on the significance of the port of Cosa, Philip Kenrick on trade patterns at Berenice, Kathleen Slane on Italian TS imports at Corinth and many others. This was a wholly laudable attempt to set pottery studies in a much wider social and economic context.

With the next three volumes of the *Acta*, however, we are back to the predominance of TS: these are volumes 27/28 (1990), from the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress at Worms in 1986, with our Honorary Member Gerwulf Schneider reporting on the chemical analysis of pottery from the middle Rhine; 29/30 (1991), from the 16<sup>th</sup> at Pleven; and 31/32 (1992), from the 17<sup>th</sup> at Pavia in 1990. Worms (1986) was the Congresses at which the project of a new *Conspectus* of sigillata types was discussed, Pavia (1990) where the resulting publication was unveiled. For those of us who worked on it in the intervening years, it was a wonderful collegial experience. Elisabeth was our leader, Howard present on occasion in the background, available for consultation. As for the Pavia Congress, the *Acta* contain a substantial article by me on "Pottery manufacture and military supply north of the Alps", but I have no recollection of the Congress and I am sure I have never even been to Pavia! I assume that someone read it for me, as happened at the Ephesus/Pergamum Congress, or that it was not actually given at the Congress, but still included in the proceedings.

Henceforth TS is destined to play a lesser role in our proceedings. The next Congress was the 18<sup>th</sup>, at Szekesfehervar in 1992, but the *Acta* were delayed and appeared as volume 34 (1995), while conversely volume 33 (1996) contained the papers from the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress at Timisoara. Volume 33 was the first produced by a new editor, Susanne Zabehlicky-Scheffenecker, who continued in office until volume 39 and achieved a professional standard for which we are all grateful. The volumes took on the larger format with which we are familiar. Volume 33 comprised 22 articles, of which 6 were on lamps, 1 on amphoras, and only 2 specifically on TS. An innovation was the list of 15 papers given at the Congress but for one or another reason not included in the *Acta*. The main themes of the Congress are defined as provincial centres of production, lamps, mortaria, and interdisciplinary research on pottery. Volume 34, edited and published in Hungary, devotes 16 out of 33 articles to lead-glazed wares and only 6 to TS. An article by Vivien Swan deducing the presence of soldiers from Africa in garrison with the *legio VI victrix* at York in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century from the shape of their cooking pots is a model of observation and deduction. As for TS, are its problems thought to have been largely solved after nearly 40 years in the forefront of pottery research, or has a new generation of *Fautores* simply broadened its interests?

Succeeding volumes from 35 onwards reinforce this new pattern. Volume 35 for instance, from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress at York and Newcastle, contains 35 articles divided into five sections: pottery and the Roman army (9 articles), cooking ware (8), pottery manufacturing sites (6), sigillata and fine wares (8), and various (4). The first three of these were defined as the principal themes of the Congress. There were another 27 papers or poster sessions not published. The long reign of TS appears to be over, and a detailed analysis of the contents of the subsequent *Acta* would confirm it. Of particular interest is the 21<sup>st</sup> Congress at Ephesus and Pergamum, the only one so far held outside Europe, which emphasised the Eastern provinces and East-West exchanges, a total of 39 articles, with a further 11 on the Danube and the Balkans, whereas there were only 5 on Italian TS. I still deeply regret having had to miss this Congress because it clashed with my teaching duties in Texas. *Fautores* teaching in North America, where the university year generally starts in August or September, often have this problem.

Two years later, for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress at Lyon, as one might expect, the West comes back to prominence. A dozen articles on Gaulish sites or productions include an invaluable *mise-au-point* by Armand Desbat on the Lyon workshops, culminating in a bibliography of 79 items. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress at Rome produced, naturally enough, 20 papers on Rome and Italy. The 24<sup>th</sup> at Namur and Louvain had as its major theme Late Antiquity and the 25<sup>th</sup> at Dürres the pottery of the *Via Egnatia*. Dürres was notable for the magnificent job of organisation that our Albanian colleagues did in sometimes difficult circumstances, and for the number of younger scholars participating.

It now seems to be accepted that an emphasis on the pottery of the region where the Congress is being held is natural and appropriate, and what is to be seen in local sites and museums may suggest other specific themes, just as the present Congress at Cadiz has for its main theme kiln sites and pottery manufacture, a topic that, as far as my memory goes, has not had much prominence since the 1977 Congress at Metz and Nancy, when we visited Rheinzabern. The next Congress will be in Belgrade, and provisional invitations for subsequent years look like taking us to other countries where we have never met before. We cannot however go anywhere unless invited, and there is no immediate prospect of meeting again outside Europe, where we have met only once in a half century. It is particularly regrettable that we have never met in North Africa, despite the role that that area played in the ceramic history of the Roman Empire. One would scarcely think that Africa produced any pottery, to judge the pitiful scarcity of papers in the *Acta* on sites and productions in Africa over the years.