

***Durocortorum* and the Remi's Territory: Dynamics and Evolution of the Economic Relationships between a Roman Provincial Capital City and its Territory**

Marion Dessaint

In the last fifteen years, the numerous commercial excavations in Champagne-Ardenne have brought new insights into land use in the Remi's territory and its central civitas, the capital of *Gallia Belgica: Durocortorum* (Reims). Today, a comprehensive survey of rural settlements in the area, mainly carried out as part of a PhD project on the Remi's territory between the 3rd century BC and 6th century AD, provides further details on the human and economic relations between town and country. In addition to the spatial approach, faunal and carpological studies of rural settlements allow us to make assumptions about the economic dynamics that spurred both *Durocortorum* and the Remi area. What kind of connections may exist between the provincial capital and the Remi's territory? Can we determine whether products from the Reims area were destined for the city and/or vice versa? Is there a link between the spatial organisation of the territory and the economic relations in the urban/rural system?

The Remi's Territory: Background and Data

The Remi territory extends over the present-day departments of Ardennes, Aisne and Marne in northeastern France (Fig. 1). The first evidence of the presence of the Remi tribe in this area dates back to the mid-2nd century BC. At this time, their territory is organised around seven *oppida*, i.e. fortified settlements.¹ In the 1st century BC, the Remi began to coexist with the Romans, a people who already had some relations with them, especially through trade. The *oppidum* of Reims also dates from this period. Part of its enclosure was discovered in the early 1990s by Agnès Balmelle.² After the Gallic Wars and the later organisation of the Roman Empire, Reims became the capital of *Gallia Belgica* and took the name *Durocortorum*. The city was rebuilt according to typical Roman architecture and organised according to a grid pattern.³ In Late Antiquity, *Gallia Belgica* was divided into two parts and Reims became the capital of the previous province, which was therefore called *Belgica Secunda*. From the Middle Ages onwards (5th century AD), Germanic tribes and "foederati" eventually settled in this latter province, in particular the Franks, who began to administer the province.⁴

In this area, an inventory of all sites discovered either by commercial and archaeological research, or by unexpected finds, allows the study of more than 4000 sites, of which 626 are rural settlements (Fig. 1). The sites studied are presented in two main types of documentation. First, the "Carte Archéologique", literally an archaeological map of Gaul, covering 3302 sites and listing and locating ancient discoveries, unexpected

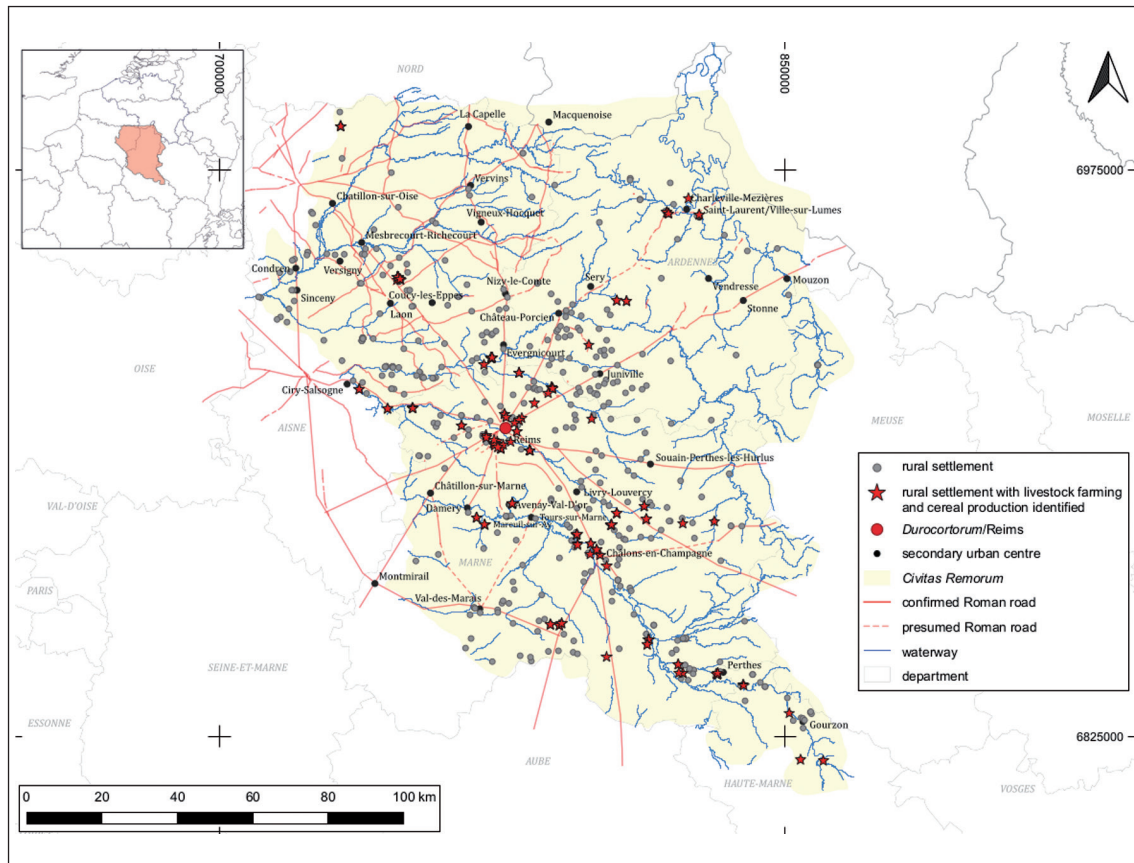


Fig. 1: Rural settlements excavations on the Remi's territory between the c. 3rd B.C. and the c. 6th A.D. (GIS: M. Dessaint).

finds, and most results of aerial archaeology and ground surveys. Second, commercial excavation reports and academic research that provide more detailed information, such as debated dating and specialised studies. There are currently 749 excavations listed in the corresponding database. Moreover, these two documentations are very different but still compatible: the information from the “Carte Archéologique” is not exhaustive but provides details on areas not very well described by commercial excavations, while the information from excavation reports provides precise data on dating, type of site and archaeological material (Dessaint, 2019). Nevertheless, only the rural settlements for which meaningful information is available are considered in this study (Fig. 1). In order to analyse the relations between Reims and its territory, this article presents, on the one hand, carpological studies from storage structure and, on the other hand, zoo-archaeological studies on food habits and livestock breeding.

In the Remi area, the activities of the existing rural settlements are mainly concentrated in the production of cereals and livestock; the attached maps show the predominant distribution of species in each location⁵.

The Development of Agropastoral Practices in Reims and Its Environs between the La Tène Period and the Beginning of the Early Middle Ages

La Tène Period

Carpological investigations have shown that hulled barley was the main cereal in the Remi area from the Early Iron Age to the Late Iron Age (Fig. 2). This result confirms the initial observations of V. Zech-Matterne, not only for the Remi area, but also for a large part of the northeast of Gaul.⁶ Moreover, the production of hulled barley in the Reims area is the same as in the rest of the Remi's territory and it does not seem that the Reims hinterland has a production reserved only for the capital. Nevertheless, the lack of data does not allow us to draw conclusions about consumption patterns within the city, even if it is generally known that bread wheat production was developed in northern Gaul at the end of the La Tène period.⁷ Therefore, the data collected for the Remi area in general show a clear difference with the results obtained in the north of Gaul, particularly in Île-de-France.

Zooarchaeological data give us information about the dietary habits during the La Tène period. Thus, since the Early Iron Age, the keeping of caprine animal, mostly sheep, dominated the Remi territory. From the Middle Iron Age and even more so in the Late Iron Age, cattle were the most common animal species, ahead of caprine animal (Fig. 2). The latter were more often used for wool production than for meat production, and even some ancient authors, such as Strabo, mentioned the production of clothing from Belgian livestock exported to Rome.⁸ They also pointed out the importance of livestock in the Belgian cities. The zooarchaeological data studied in the Remi territory and around Reims seem to confirm this specialization in the production of caprine animal, while cattle are less represented. The latter were certainly used mainly for their strength in field work and other products such as milk. Finally, as far as the city of Reims is concerned, there is not much more information on the consumption habits of the inhabitants for this period, which explains why it is impossible to compare the city with all the observations made on the Remi territory and the surrounding countryside.

Roman Period

Much more data is available for this period, especially on consumption habits in the capital of the Roman province: archaeological artefacts and bioarchaeological data found in Reims are documented in a review by Pierre Mathelart, Véronique Zech-Matterne, Ginette Auxiette and Alessio Bandelli.⁹

In the 1st century BC there was a diversification of cereals with the beginning of the cultivation of einkorn wheat at two sites near Charleville-Mezières. In the following centuries, new cereal species appeared such as spelt and gradually, in the 3rd century AD, bread wheat (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, hulled barley is the most common cereal until the beginning of the 3rd century AD. The map of the rural settlements show that this

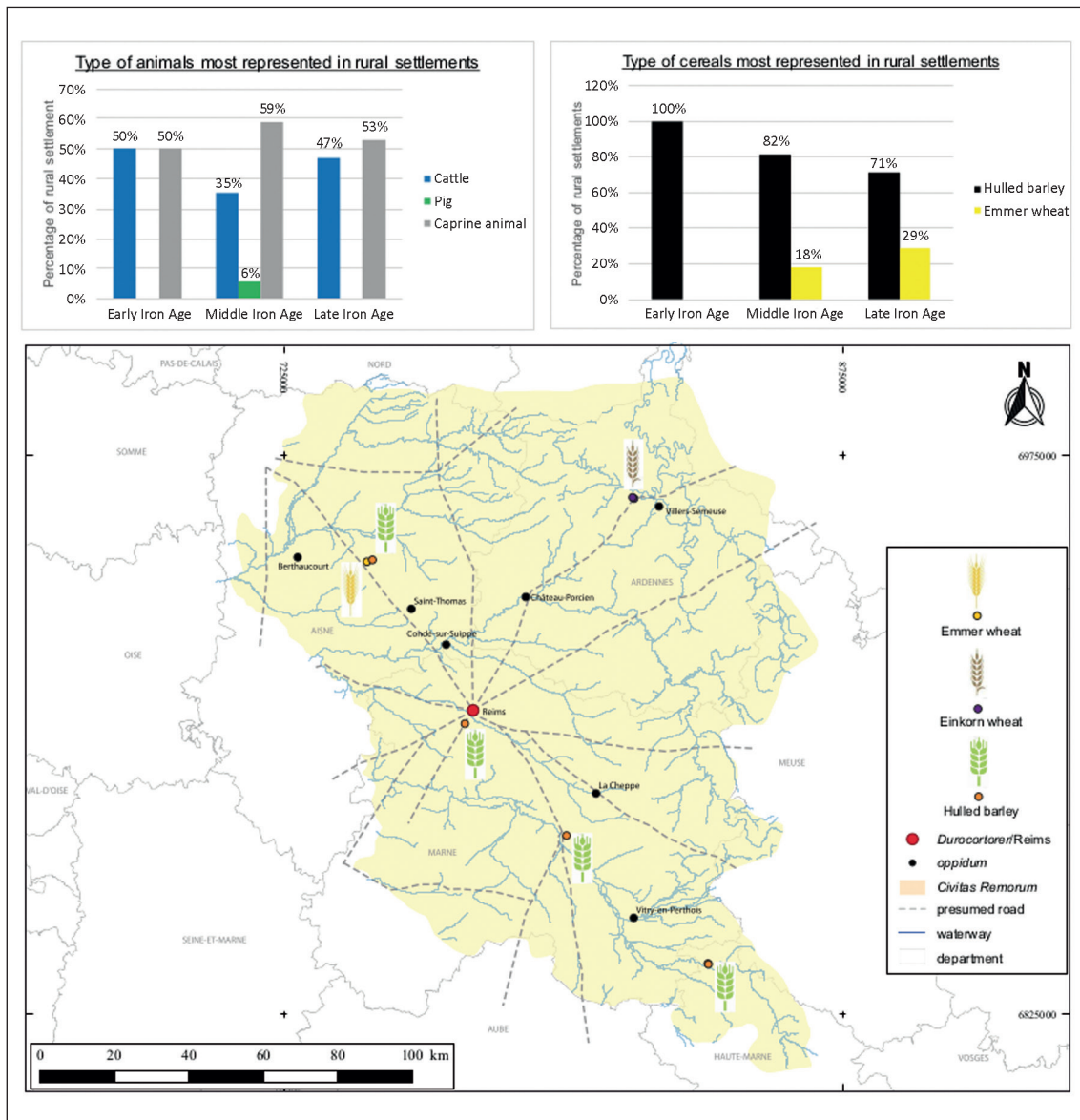


Fig. 2: Changes in cereal and meat productions during the La Tène period and cereal producers' spatial distribution in rural settlements during the Late Iron Age (GIS and CAD: M. Dessaint).

crop was very specific to the “plaine crayeuse” (chalk plain), while the northern part of the Remi area has a greater diversity of species (Fig. 3). The nature of the soils may have an influence on this distribution: for example, the soils in the Marne department are better suited to the cultivation of hulled barley. Moreover, the topography of this area (plain) is more suitable for agricultural and pastoral activities than the Ardennes with its hilly and wooded landscape.

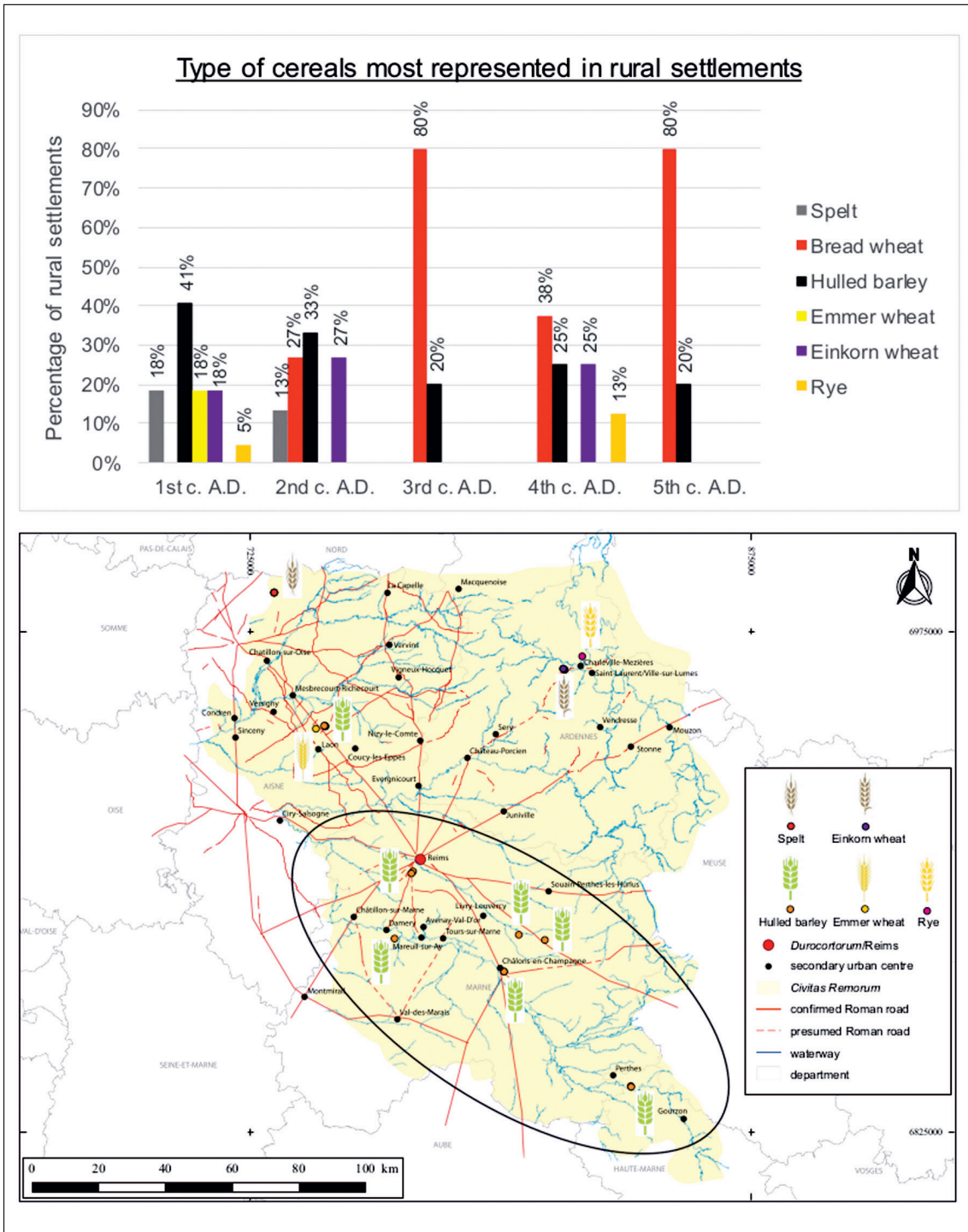


Fig. 3: Most represented cereal type in rural settlements during the Roman Period and spatial distribution of cereal producers in rural settlements during the c. 1st A.D. (GIS and CAD: M. Dessaint).

However, within the capital and in the north-east of Gaul, the situation is different. Indeed, excavations within the city have uncovered stocks of bread wheat and burnt breads, probably imported by river or land routes.¹⁰ Bread suggests the presence of bread wheat crops, which are not observed in the studied area, neither in the rural settlements around Reims nor in the Remi area. In northeastern Gaul, bread wheat (spelt) is also widely cultivated, perhaps to feed the Roman Limes.¹¹

In the 1st century BC, there was a diversification of species that led to an overproduction of cattle and caprine animals at the expense of pig production (Fig. 4). While cattle were generally selected for their strength and secondary products, sheep were probably used for wool production. In addition, there are remains of pigs throughout the period. Studies of slaughter ages show that very young animals, or even piglets, were consumed. So it seems that pigs were bred to produce good quality meat for consumption. In Reims, pigs were more present from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and were associated with city dwellers, as they were mainly found in the wealthy neighbourhoods of the capital.¹² Therefore, we can establish a link between Reims and its hinterland, considering that the latter could have produced pork meat to supply the capital.

During the High Roman Empire, more precisely in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, a third type of production existed in the countryside of Reims: seven sites revealed planting pit in the vicinity of the city. They have been interpreted like orchards.¹³ Nevertheless, it is still impossible to precise the real nature of this structures. Indeed, they did not reveal carpological remains. Their form could correspond to planting pits for orchard or vines. In the city of Reims, many varieties of fruit have been found during excavations (such as

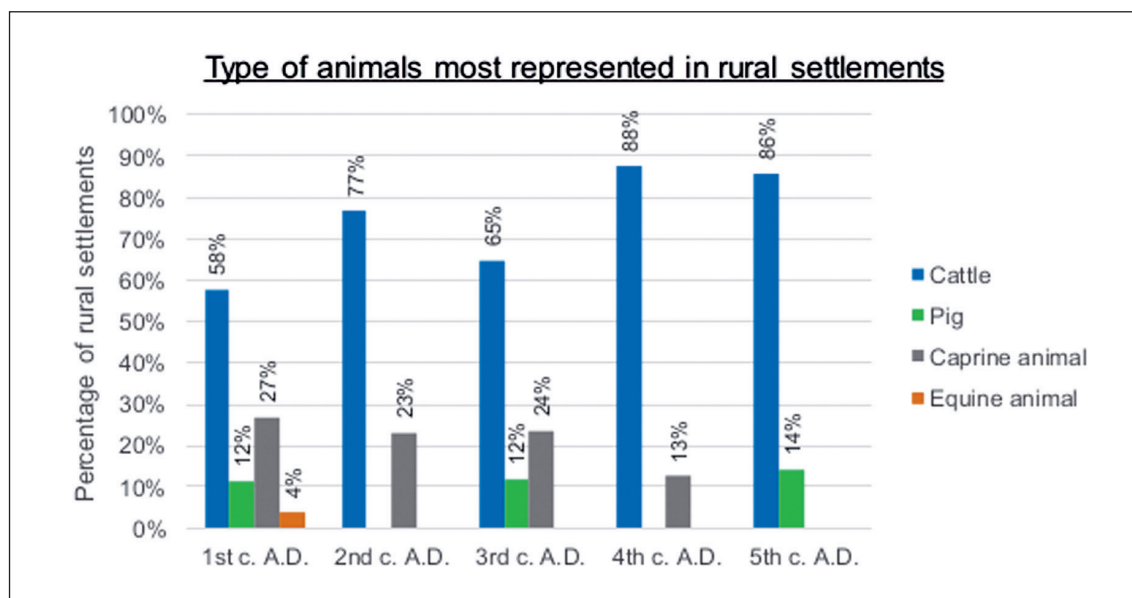


Fig. 4: Most represented type of animal in rural settlements during the Roman Period (CAD: M. Dessaint).

melon, peach or even fig), but they were certainly imported and not grown on the Remi territory. Several varieties such as plum, medlar and blackberry were also identified and could have come from a regional production.¹⁴ No planting pit was found anywhere in the Remi area, so, even if it is impossible to precise the nature of this production, we can assume that it could be a specificity of the production system near Reims.

Finally, during the High Roman Empire we observe a diversification of the species cultivated, both in cereals, with bread wheat, and in animals. Links can be done between the production in the hinterland of Reims and the habits consumption inside the capital.

At the beginning of Late Antiquity, more precisely at the end of the 3rd century AD, the data show a real evolution through a change in agropastoral practises. From the 3rd century AD, the production of hulled barley declined and was replaced by bread wheat, which dominated the *plaine crayeuse*, in particular the valleys of the Marne and the Aisne (Fig. 5). These results are more in line with those found in Reims at this time and during the High Roman Empire. It is quite possible that the localities around Reims adapted their productions to the demand for bread wheat. The late arrival of this cereal

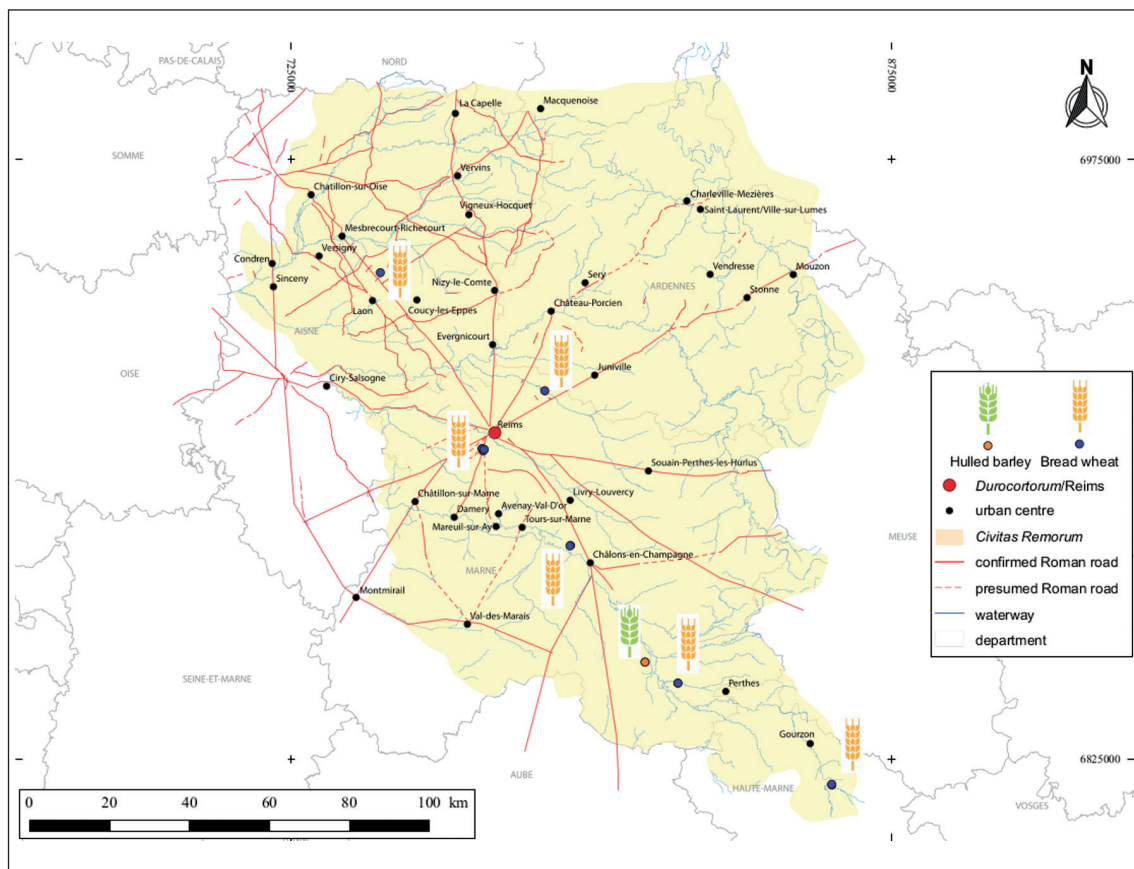


Fig. 5: Cereal producers' distribution in rural settlements during the c. 3rd A.D. (GIS: M. Dessaint).

on the Remi's territory and around the capital could be explained by the nature of the soils, which were not initially favourable for the development of bread wheat, unlike hulled barley. In a review, experts assumed that the presence of bread wheat around the capital was possible thanks to the supply of manure and azote soil conditioner from the latrines city.¹⁵

The zooarchaeological data have not changed much: cattle and caprine animal are still strongly represented, while pigs are found only in the outskirts of Reims. The latter were probably produced for export to the city, proving the close ties between Reims and its surrounding countryside.

For the High Middle Ages, changes in agropastoral practices can be detected, especially in grain production with the end of bread wheat cultivation. In fact, we have information on only two sites and both indicate the cultivation of a new cereal, oats, with no sign of the continuation of hulled barley or wheat production. Animal production shows the end of caprine animal farming in the 5th century AD, and by the 6th century AD only cattle were being raised. These results show a real change in agropastoral practices. However, since there are no finds from this period, no conclusions can be drawn about the production in this area and the agropastoral practices.

A comparison of carpological and zooarchaeological data from rural settlements of the Remi territory and excavations within the city sheds light on some aspects of the existing relations between the capital of a Roman province and its surrounding countryside. Moreover, it is necessary to carry out a spatial analysis of the distribution of rural settlements in this territory. The comparison with the capital allows to understand the influence of the provincial capital on the foundation of rural settlements, which were main actors in the economic relations with *Durocortorum*.

Rural Settlements: Form, Structures and Spatial Distribution during the Roman Period

As we can see from the spatial distribution of the rural settlements, the sites are located near the main water or land routes (Fig. 6). This mention underlines the importance of the rivers Marne and Meuse for the supply management. Indeed, part of the rural settlements are located along these two main valleys and the other part is mainly located near a secondary waterway or land route leading to a main road. In the plain of Reims, most of the rural settlements are located less than 1 km from a main road or a navigable waterway. In addition, numerous amphorae were found in these rural settlements, particularly amphorae carrying wine from Italy (Dressel 1), oil from *Hispania Baetica* (Dressel 20), and amphorae from the province of Narbonne (Fig. 6). These artefacts indicate long-distance trade and probably supplies from Reims itself. It is therefore possible that a part of the production of these rural settlements was exported to the capital or to other urban centres.

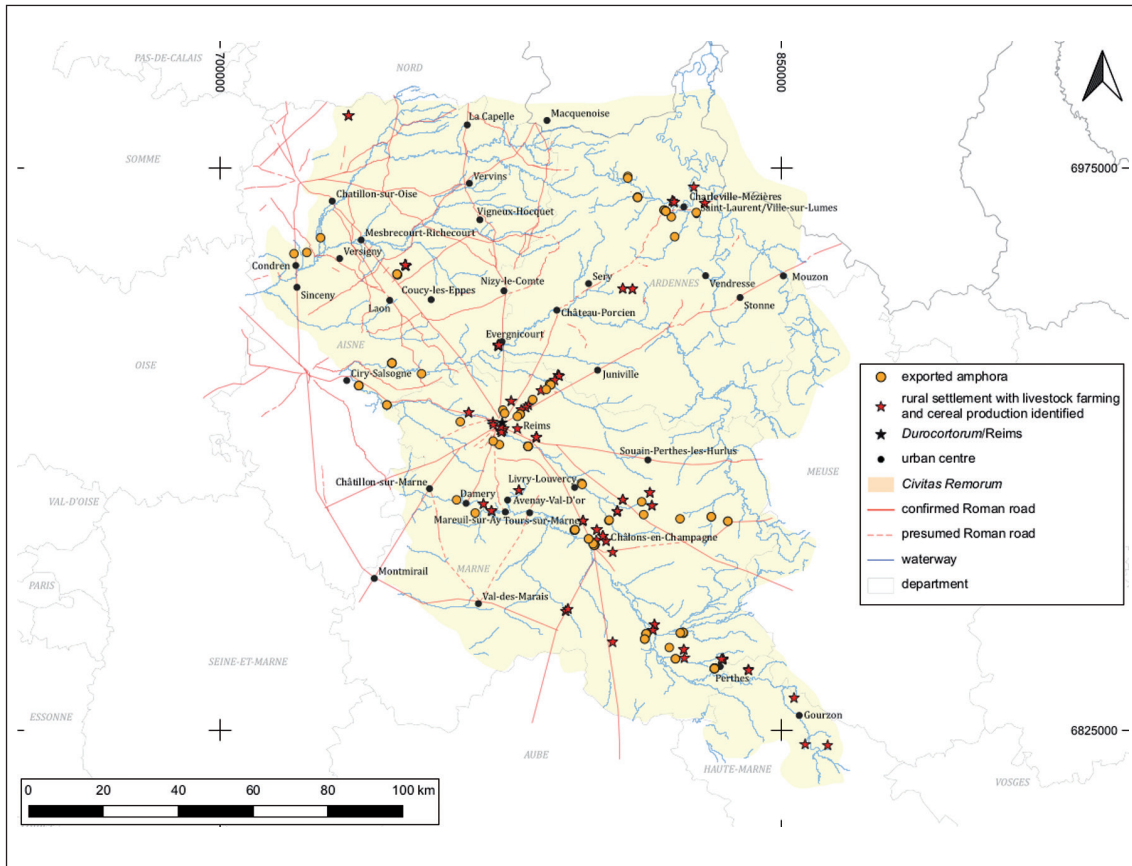


Fig. 6: Rural settlements' distribution including livestock farming and cereal production locations for the Roman Period (GIS and CAD: M. Dessaint).

We may also point out the distribution of the sites around Reims. From the Middle Iron Age onwards, the number of rural settlements within 5 km of the city increased steadily (Fig. 7). Of course, this distribution is distorted due to the location of the excavations. However, it shows the development of the city and the need for food, which was met by importing products from the countryside surrounding Reims.¹⁶ In Charleville-Mézières, we can observe the same distribution from the end of the La Tène period. Indeed, from the Late Iron Age onwards, we can assume that many rural settlements were built on the outskirts of Reims to supply the city with cereals and livestock. This “nourishing belt” around Reims was present until the end of the Roman period, supplying the capital as well as other important towns such as Charleville-Mézières.

However, the question arises as to the methods of storing these foods, especially cereals. In the vicinity of Reims there are a large number of rural settlements devoted to agricultural activity, but in comparison with the rest of the Remi area they are all of modest size. This is true for most sites within 10 km of the Roman capital.¹⁷ They were organised around a courtyard and did not have comfortable structures such as baths.

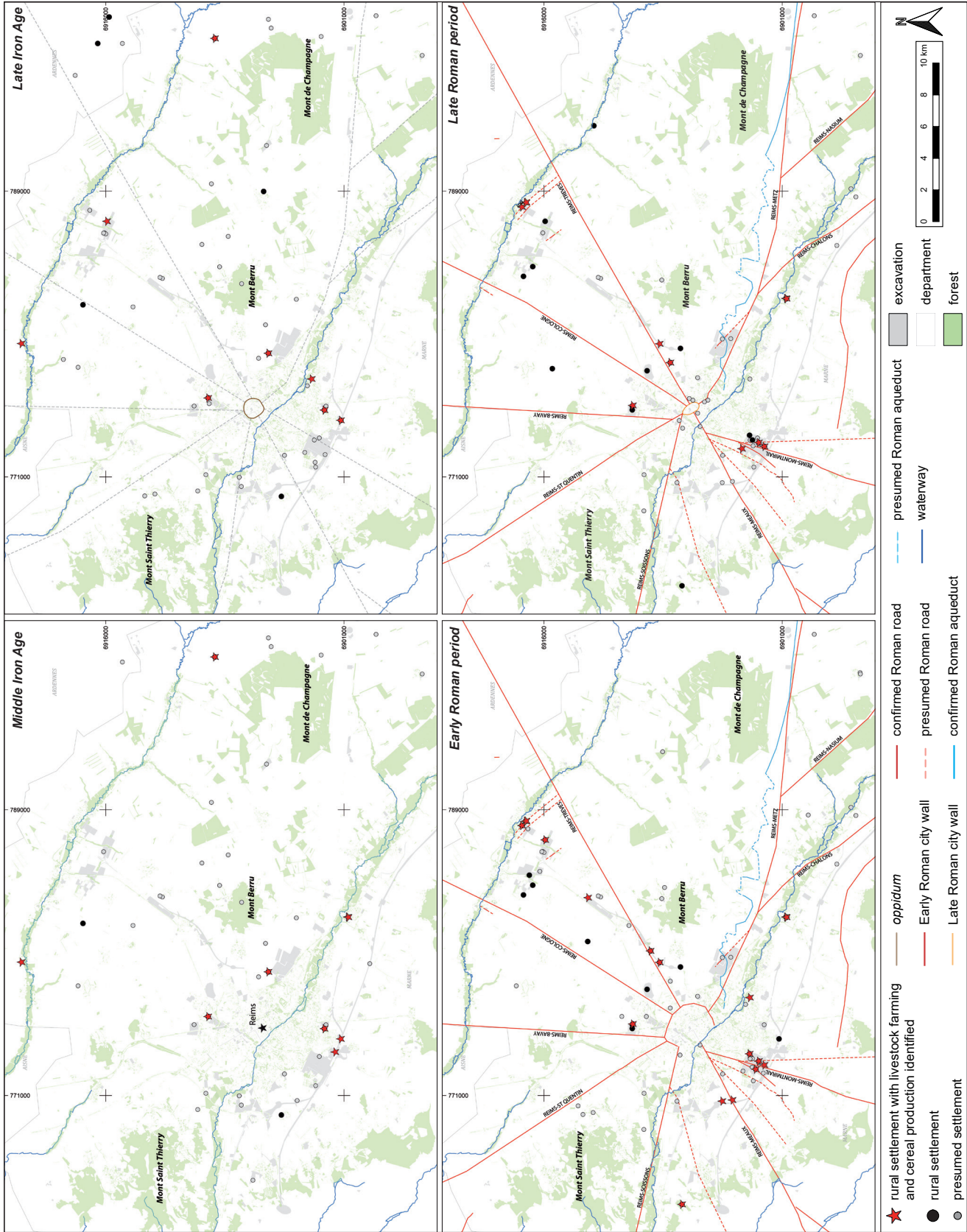


Fig. 7: Changes in rural settlements' distribution around Reims between the Middle Iron Age and the Late Antiquity (GIS and CAD: M. Dessaint)

Moreover, in the vicinity of Reims, only few sites could be considered as *villa*. For example, we can mention the rural settlement found at Bétheny “sous les Vignes”¹⁸ or that of Cernay-lès-Reims “Les Petits Didris”.¹⁹ This organisation has also been observed around other capitals of Gaul, such as Metz in the northeast or even Nîmes in southern France, whose excavations in the near vicinity have revealed mainly modest rural settlements.²⁰ Large rural settlements *villae* can only be observed in a distant area, far from the capital and could indicate that the suburban area of Reims was controlled by the city, with a specific organisation.

Modest rural settlements have mainly small storage structures such as cellars and granaries. These observations raise the question of how produce could have been stored in the Reims area, given the size and number of storage structures per site. In Reims, a *horreum* was excavated on the Maucroix street. It was a linear structure built first on posts, then on stone foundations, and has been interpreted as a massive food storage site, but without any indication of its nature. It is believed that food from the capital and rural settlements was collected here. Archaeologists point out that this *horreum* was located less than 500 m from the city wall and close to a road that led directly out of the capital.²¹ Moreover, in the same excavation, but also in other excavations in Reims, grinding tools such as “Pompeii” type grinding wheels were found.²² This type of tool testifies to grain processing within the Roman capital and the “Pompeii types” in particular indicate an application beyond domestic use.

The sites only with planting pits also illustrate the relationship between Reims and its surrounding countryside, as they are all located within 15 km of Reims (Fig. 8). Furthermore, they are all located near main roads, communication with the local capital was facilitated. Their geographical distribution could indicate a possible link with the market of Reims.

Reims maintained special relations with the territory of the Remi, and especially with the adjacent country. This relationship developed over time: at the end of the La Tène period, rural settlements multiplied around Reims, then, in the Roman period, a “nourishing belt” emerged that remained until the end of Late Antiquity. In the Remi area, the location of the settlements seems to be directly linked to supply and export. Since Roman times, proximity to the main roads was one of the decisive criteria for the choice of location. The development of production in this area highlights the specific characteristics of the Remi area and the links between rural and urban centers. Indeed, it seems that some local productions (e.g. hulled barley) were not necessarily destined only for urban consumption and that, from Late Antiquity onwards, surrounding production may have been absorbed and processed by urban markets to be exported or consumed locally. The presence of planting pits in the vicinity of Reims attests to both the export and consumption of fresh produce from the city's hinterland.

Specific meat and grain productions illustrate exchanges between rural areas and the provincial capital, as well as economic relations with areas outside Remi territory. Differences in production in more or less distant rural settlements testify to a specific

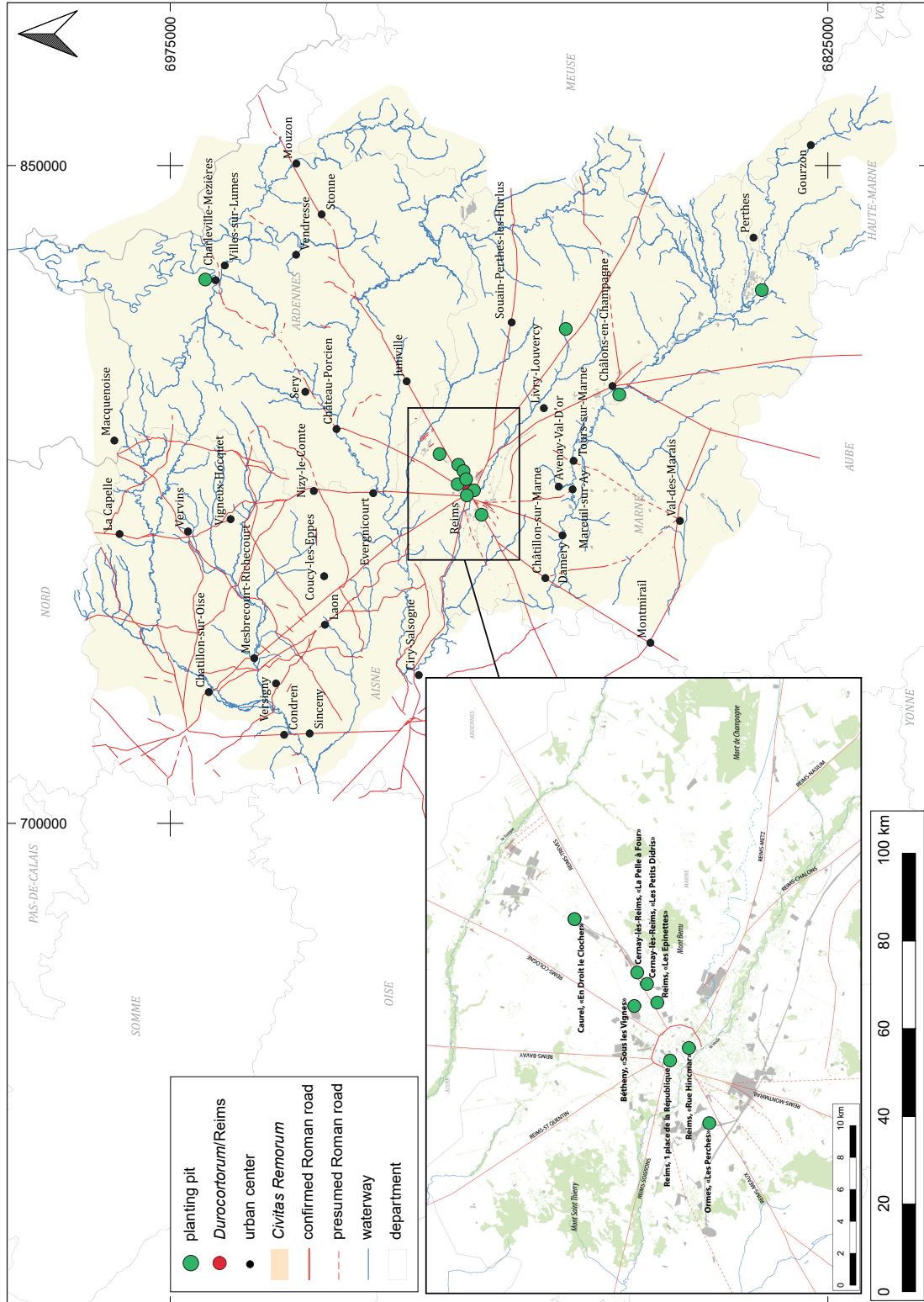


Fig. 8: Orchards location in the Remi's territory and Reims outskirts (GIS and CAD: M. Dessaint)

economic organisation between a capital and its neighbouring area. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to understand where these products ultimately went: were they destined for export or for local consumption? Grains could be easily stored and exported, while meat was more difficult to preserve. A specific study of product quantities might give us some more clarity on this question. For now, the proximity between rural settlements and main roads might suggest that surplus production could be exported.

Notes

¹ Lambot – Casagrande 1996, 16.

² Neiss et al. 2015, 167.

³ Neiss et al. 2015, 173.

⁴ Desportes 1983.

⁵ The classification of animal and cereal species has been carried out in number of remains.

⁶ Zech-Matterne 2014.

⁷ Zech-Matterne 2014.

⁸ González Villaescusa 2010.

⁹ Mathelart et al. 2014.

¹⁰ Sindonino 2016; Zech-Matterne 2014, 37.

¹¹ Zech-Matterne 2014, 37.

¹² Toulemonde et al. 2017; Auxiette 2010.

¹³ Bündgen 2019; Koehler 2033.

¹⁴ Zech-Matterne 2016, 649.

¹⁵ Toulemonde et al. 2017, 95.

¹⁶ Achard-Corompt et al. 2017, 523.

¹⁷ Achard-Corompt et al. 2017, 523.

¹⁸ Rabasté 2008.

¹⁹ Koehler 2004.

²⁰ Reddé et al. 2018, 540; Pomarèdes et al. 2012, 307.

²¹ Rollet 2011.

²² Rollet 2011.

Image Credits

Fig. 1–8: by author

References

Achard-Corompt et al. 2017

N. Achard-Corompt – A. Audebert – M. Dessaint – R. Durost – V. Le Quellec, Les modes d'occupation du sol chez les Rèmes, in: M. Reddé (ed.), *Gallia Rustica 1*, Les campagnes du nord-est de la Gaule, de la fin de l'âge du Fer à l'Antiquité tardive (Bordeaux 2017) 495–553.

Auxiette 2010

G. Auxiette, La consommation carnée du I^{er} au IV^e siècle, in: R. Chossenot – A. Estéban – R. Neiss (eds.), *Carte Archéologique de la Gaule*, Reims, 51/2 (Paris 2010) 103–104.

Bündgen 2019

S. Bündgen, Reims, “les Epinettes” (Marne): de nouvelles données sur l'arboriculture antique autour de Durocortorum. Le verger du Haut-Empire et l'occupation domestique et artisanale du Bas-Empire, *Société Archéologique Champenoise*, coll. *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique Champenoise*, t. 103, n^o 9 (Reims 2019).

Casagrande – Lambot 1996

P. Casagrande – B. Lambot, Les Rèmes à la veille de la romanisation. Le Porcien au I^{er} s. av. J.-C., *Revue Archéologique de Picardie* 11, 1996, 13–38.

Desportes 1983

P. Desportes, *Histoire de Reims* (Paris 1983).

Dessaint 2019

M. Dessaint, Variabilité des sources et biais scientifiques: le cas du territoire des Rèmes, in: E. Caron-Laviolette – N. Matomou-Adzo – C. Millot-Richard, *Biais, hiatus et absences en archéologie*, Journée Doctorale de l'Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne – Paris (Paris 2019).

González Villaescusa 2010

R. González Villaescusa, “Problématique archéologique sur la production de laine et d'étoffes en Gaule Belgique”, in: L. Pons Pujol (ed.), *Hispania et Gallia: dos provincias del occidente romano*, *Hispania et Gallia: dos provincias del occidente romano*, Universitat de Barcelona, coll. “Instrumenta” (Barcelone 2010) 125–144.

Goujard 1975

R. Goujard, Caton, *De Agricultura* (Paris 1975).

Koehler 2003

A. Koehler, Vergers antiques dans les campagnes péri-urbaines: le cas de Reims, *Revue Archéologique de Picardie* 1/2, 37–46.

Koehler 2004

A. Koehler, Cernay-lès-Reims (Marne), “Les Petits Didris”, Villa gallo-romaine, rapport de fouille (Reims 2004).

Mathelart et al. 2014

P. Mathelart – V. Zech-Matterne – G. Auxiette – A. Bandelli, Cuisiner et manger dans la capitale des Rèmes de l'époque augustéenne au IV^e siècle de notre ère: approche croisée des données céramologiques, archéozoologiques et carpologiques, in: S. Costamagno (ed.), *Actes du 138^e congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques – Rennes 2013* (Paris 2014) 287–312.

Neiss et al. 2015

R. Neiss – F. Berthelot – J.-M. Doyen – Ph. Rollet, Reims/*Durocortorum*, cité des Rèmes. Les Principales étapes de la formation urbaine, Gallia 72-1, 2015, 161-176.

Pomarèdes et al. 2012

H. Pomarèdes – V. Bel – J.-Y. Breuil – M. Célié – M. Monteuil – P. Séjalon – L. Vidal, Le paysage périurbain à Nîmes (Gard, France) de la protohistoire au Haut-Empire (VI^e av. n.è.–II^e de n.è.), in: M. Carme Belarte – R. Plana-Mallart (eds.), Le paysage périurbain en Méditerranée occidentale pendant la Protohistoire et l'Antiquité: actes du colloque international, Institut Catalan d'Archéologie Classique, Tarragone 6-8 mai 2009 (Tarragone 2012).

Rabasté 2008

Y. Rabasté, Bétheny (Marne), Sous les Vignes, rapport de diagnostic archéologique (Metz 2008).

Reddé et al. 2018

M. Reddé – N. Bernigaud – S. Lepetz – V. Zech-Matterne, Chapitre 11, Les conditions du développement économique, Les marchés, in: M. Reddé (ed.), Gallia Rustica 2, Les campagnes du nord-est de la Gaule de la fin de l'âge du Fer à l'Antiquité tardive (Bordeaux 2018).

Rollet et al. 2011

Ph. Rollet – F. Berthelot – G. Florent – E. Jouhet, *Durocortorum*: rue Maucroix, un quartier excentré d'une capitale de province romaine (fin du I^{er} s. av. J.-C./début du IV^e s.). Bulletin de la Société Archéologique Champenoise (Reims 2011).

Sindonino et al. 2016

S. Sindonino – D. Bayard – V. Brunet-Gaston – H. Cabart, Reims (Marne), Rue Saint-Symphorien, rapport de fouilles archéologiques (Metz 2016).

Toulemonde et al. 2017

F. Toulemonde – V. Zech-Matterne – A. Bandelli, Diversité des productions végétales et animales dans les campagnes champenoises et leur capitale de cité: études archéobotaniques et archéozoologiques récentes à et autour de Reims/*Durocortorum*, Archéologie des Plantes et des Animaux 05, 2017, 91-102.

Zech-Matterne et al. 2014

V. Zech-Matterne – J. Wiethold – B. Pradat, L'essor des blés nus en France septentrionale: systèmes de culture et commerce céréalier autour de la conquête césarienne et dans les siècles qui suivent, in: X. Deru – R. Goncalvez Villascuza, Actes du X^e Congrès de l'Association AGER – Lille 2012 (Lille 2014) 23-50.

Zech-Matterne 2016

V. Zech-Matterne, Etude carpologique du site de la ZAC du vieux port, Boulevard Henrot (Reims, Marne), in: Ph. Rollet (ed.) – Reims (Marne), Zac du Vieux Port, Boulevard Henrot. Aménagements antiques et médiévaux en bord de Vesle (I^e-V^e s. et XIV^e-XV^e s.) (Metz 2016) 639-662.