

Pottery Production for the European Market – the Roman and Early Medieval Potter’s Workshops of Mayen

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In the landscape around Mayen in the Moselle and Rhine region clay deposits from the tertiary occur. They formed the basis of the pottery found here. Between the early 1st and the first half of the 4th century AD nearly every larger settlement possessed its own pottery workshops (fig. 1).¹ In the first half of the 4th century AD in Mayen there existed two pottery areas. South of the *vicus* and west of the late antique fortification on the Katzenberg on today’s Polcher Straße a smaller production site of local importance can be found (fig. 2, 1). An extended pottery area was located within the *vicus* of Mayen in an area called “Eich” (fig. 2, 2), where the so called Mayen ware was produced in large numbers serially for the long-distance trade.

Both from coin-dated destruction layers in the settlements as well as through the written tradition we know that in 355 AD the Alemanni came from the south and devastated the Moselle estuary.² The raids most likely also destroyed the export-oriented pottery of Mayen and Weißenthurm. At least since that time, our region was one of the areas of interest of the Alemanni, which led in the second half of the 5th century AD to an Alemannic immigration into this area. After about 360 AD the Caesar Julian secured the Rhine region, only in Karden and Mayen potteries can be observed. All other locations have now been abandoned at the same time. The potter families who fled from Andernach, Weißenthurm, Koblenz, Kobern, Büchel and Mayen-Polcher Straße did not return to their homes. Where did they go?

They may have come to Mayen. Here the potteries in the area called “Eich” (fig. 2, 2) were reused and expanded. In addition, a large pottery area was founded along today’s Siegfriedstraße (fig. 2, 3).³ Very different qualities and in their chemical composition different clays were used at these sites. Mayen seems to have seen a rise in population around 360 AD. It is hard to imagine that such a pooling of a business in one place and its massive expansion took place without state knowledge and coordination. Rather, the state response to a crisis here becomes visible.

According to the historian Elena Köstner the area between the Vinxtbach stream and the river Nahe belonged to the *ager publicus* since early Roman times and thus was directly subordinate to the Roman state and its administrative organization.⁴ In the originally Roman *pagus* of Mayen, which is mentioned in written sources already in 620 and 634 AD, a state-controlled lease system was the basis of economy. This *pagus* stretched between Vinxtbach in the north and Moselle in the south and was coordinated from Mayen. Thus in the *vicus* of Mayen there was – after Köstner – in Roman times and, in administrative succession, probably also in the early Middle Ages, a seat / *officium* of a administrator / *procurator*. It is assumed that trade and goods export by prior arrangement with the administration from the big tenants

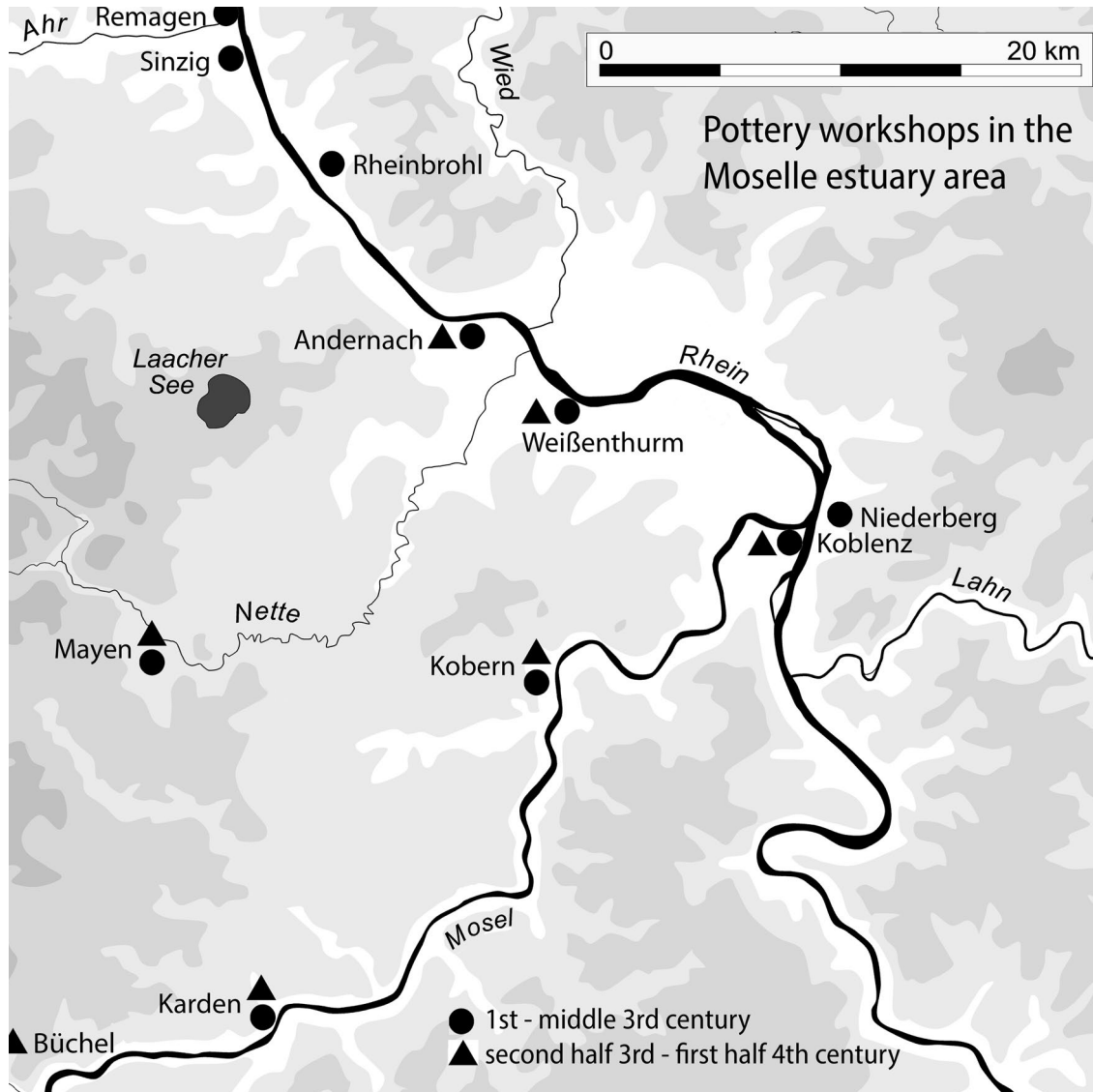


Fig. 1: Landscape around Mayen. Settlements with pottery production. Dots 1st – middle 3rd century. Triangles second half 3rd/first half 4th century.

– for whom the simple potters / *figuli* worked as small tenants – in their role as wholesalers was coordinated and controlled nationwide. Certainly fixed travel routes were used during the export.

Like the millstones made of basalt, the Mayen pottery was transported both over the road network and over the river Nette to the Rhine and then brought to the central shipping port of Antunnacum / Andernach. From here, the Mayen ceramics reached the export regions via the water network. In the export regions, the pottery vessels came to the customer from the central market towns via streams and roads.⁵ One can therefore

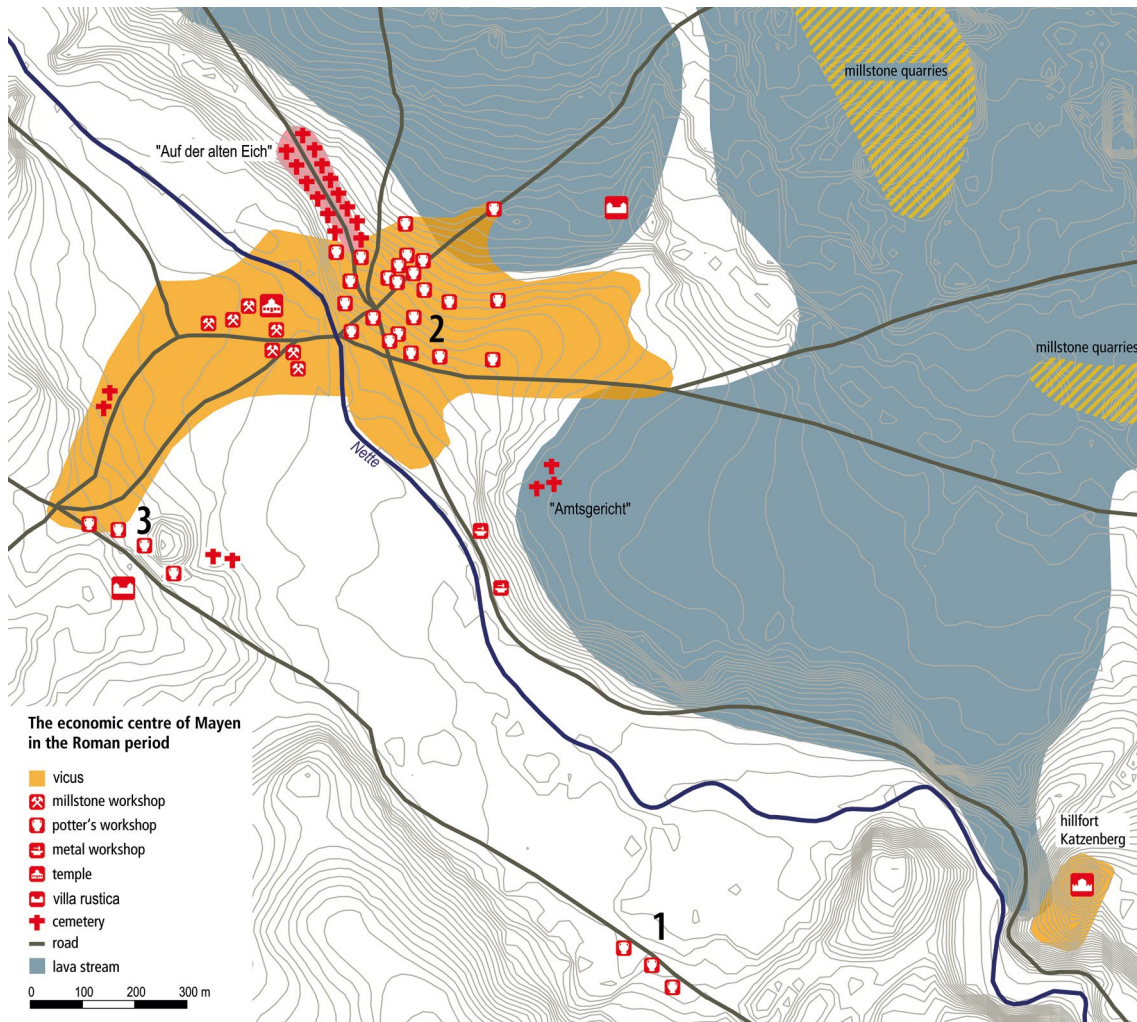


Fig. 2: Map of the roman vicus of Mayen. Ceramic production areas: 1 = Polcher Straße. 2 = Eich. 3 = Siegfriedstraße.

imagine that Mayen vessels reached the French territory from Cologne via the Tongern – Bavay – Cambrai highway.

A new distribution map to late antique Mayen pottery shows that the image has not only condensed, but the export area has also expanded massively, for example to Belgium and France up to the Champagne (fig. 3). But also in the east, for example on the Ruhr and Lippe rivers and on the Main and Neckar rivers, the number of sites has significantly increased. Empty areas on the lower reaches of the Meuse north of Maastricht or between Trier and Karden on the Moselle should be research gaps. In addition, in certain regions Mayen goods were imitated in late antiquity. Such “Mayen imitations” especially occur in the more distant export regions like the Paris basin in the west.⁶

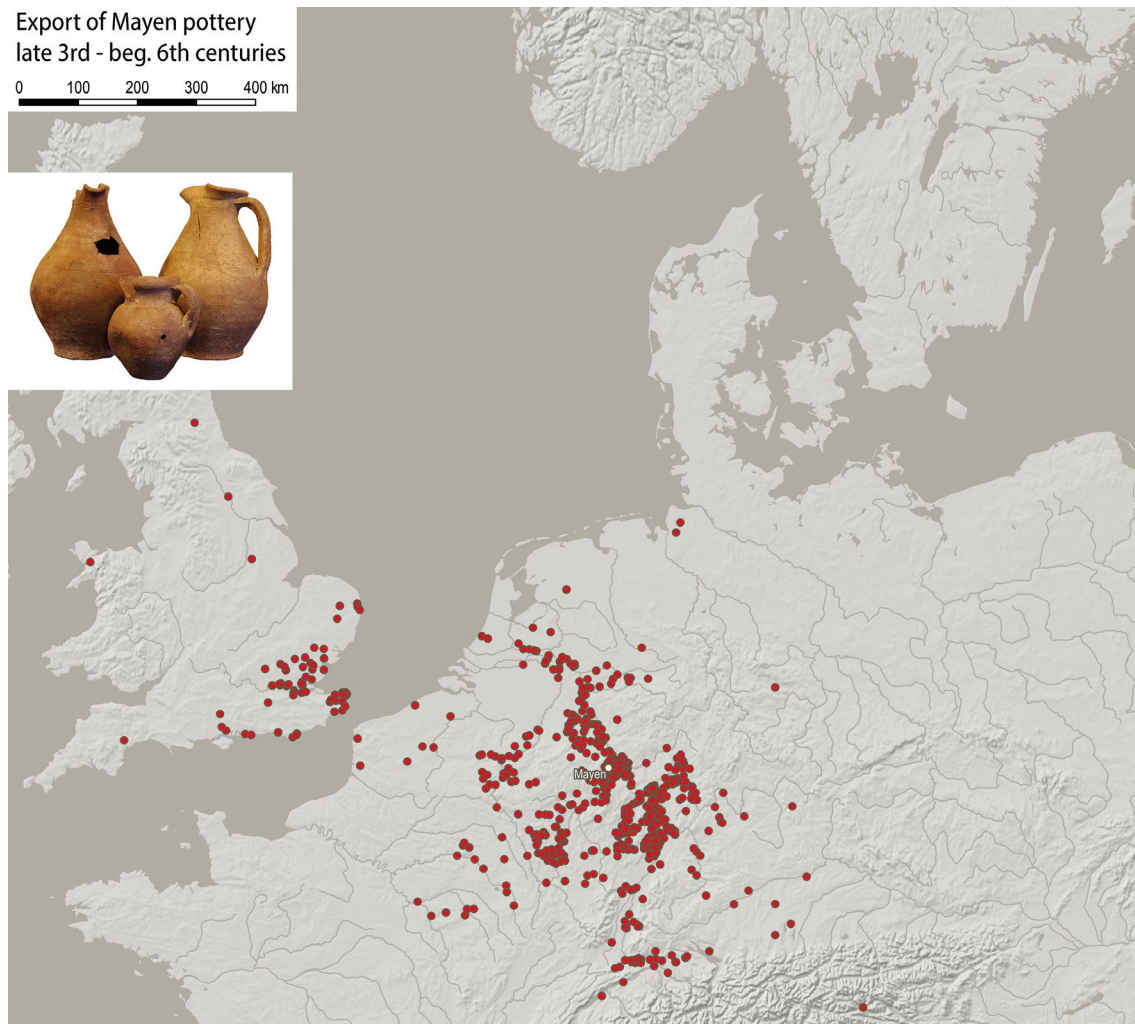


Fig. 3: Distribution map of the late antique Mayen pottery (late 3rd – beginning 6th century).

Like the pottery of Mayen, the workshops of the Argonne with their Samian ware in late antiquity shaped large parts of the Roman export market. This also affects the Moselle estuary region. The surroundings of Mayen were supplied with Argonne Samian ware until the second quarter of the 5th century. After the middle of the 5th century, this import broke off in the Moselle estuary area as in most parts of the Rhine region. Do we notice here the effects of the Hun's destruction of the year 451 AD?

It appears to be so. The supply with Argonne Samian ware went down severely in the Germanic provinces of the Roman Empire after 451 AD. But the import did not stop completely. For example two sherds of the second half of the 5th century were found in Andernach. In addition, according to the well-founded studies of the INRAP-pottery-science-group in Metz⁷, the share of imported Mayen ceramics in Lorraine in the third

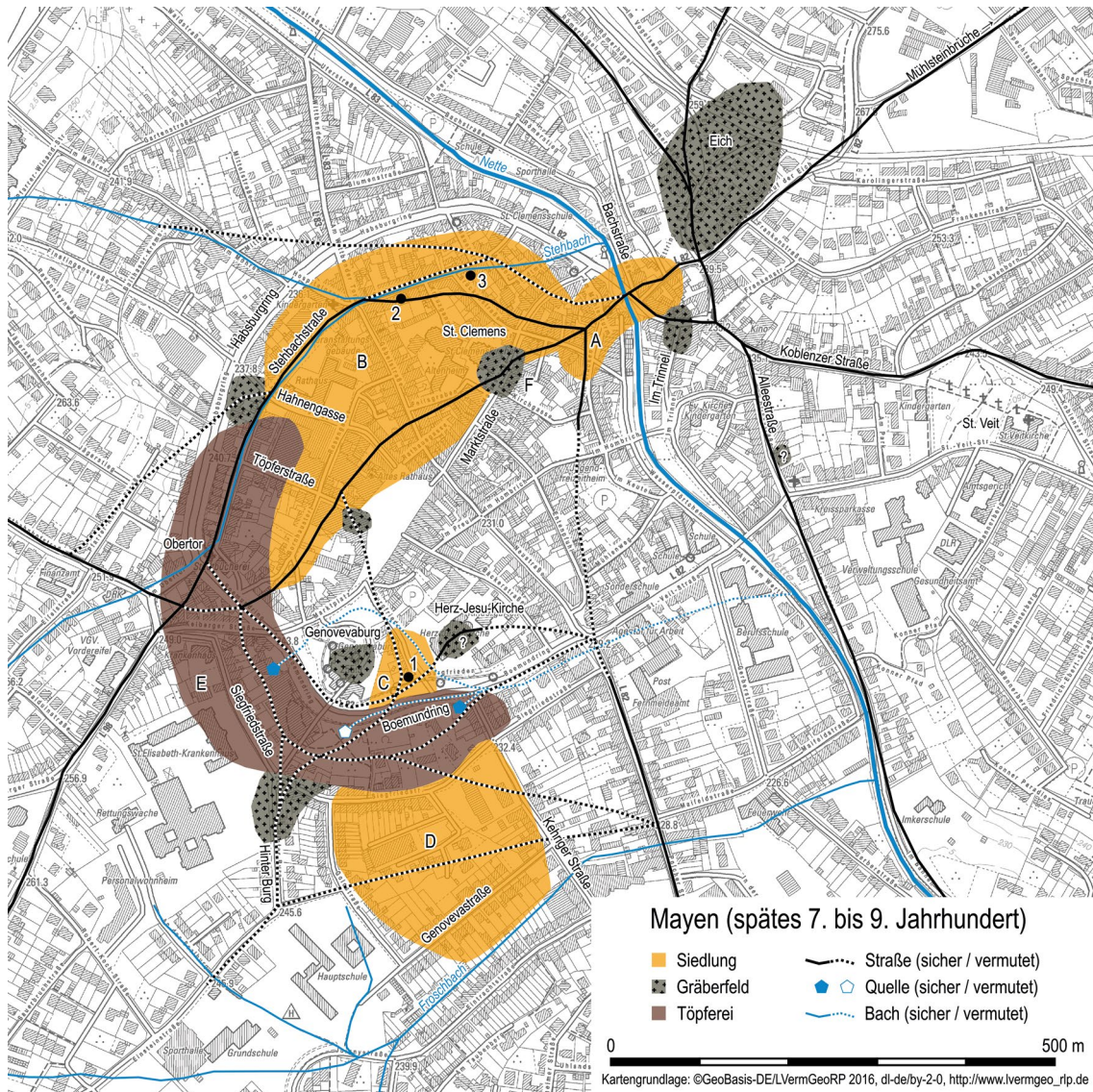


Fig. 4: Map of Mayen (late 7th–9th century). A–D population centres; 1–3 early courts; brown = potteries; grey = graveyards.

quarter of the 5th century is more than 30% of settlement ceramics and is still on a high level in the beginning of the 6th century. Thus the trade relations did not collapse. But the production of the Argonne ware seems to have declined dramatically. Perhaps the absence of the Argonne Samian ware in the Mayen area also indicates a change of power relations. Between 450/460 and 496/497 AD (battle of Zülpich) our region – like large parts of the Rhineland – probably belonged to the Alemannic dominion. Perhaps the new rulers promoted the production of red engobed ceramics in Mayen and by that prevented the importation of Argonne ware in the Alemannic area.



Fig. 5: Examples of the red engobed Mayen ware MA (left) and Mayen ware MD/ME (right).

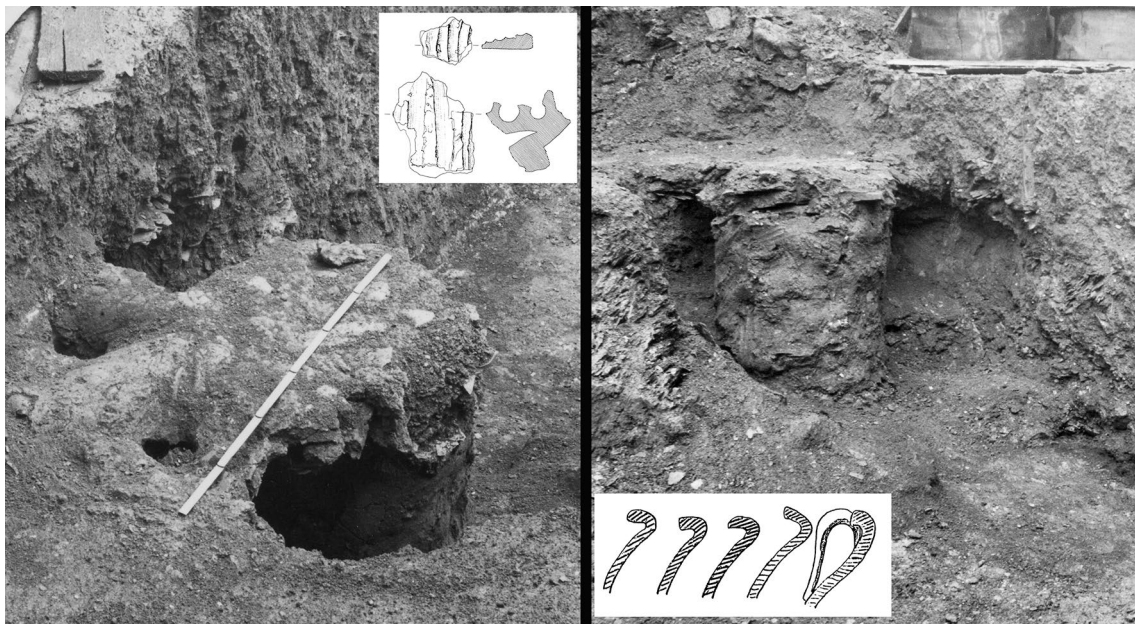


Fig. 6: Updraft kiln found 1953 at the property Siegfriedstraße 6–8. In this kiln ball pots of the Mayen ware ME had been produced.

At the latest around 480 AD, in Mayen the pottery area 2 “Eich” as well as the fortification on the Katzenberg were abandoned and the pottery area 3 “Siegfriedstraße” expanded (fig. 2, 3). Due to the pottery kiln fillings in Mayen continuity into the early Middle Ages can be proven. Between the late 7th and 9th centuries, Mayen’s pottery area expanded immensely, especially to the north (fig. 4).⁸ This expansion was accompanied by a significant increase of production. The Mayen potters acted very traditionally and

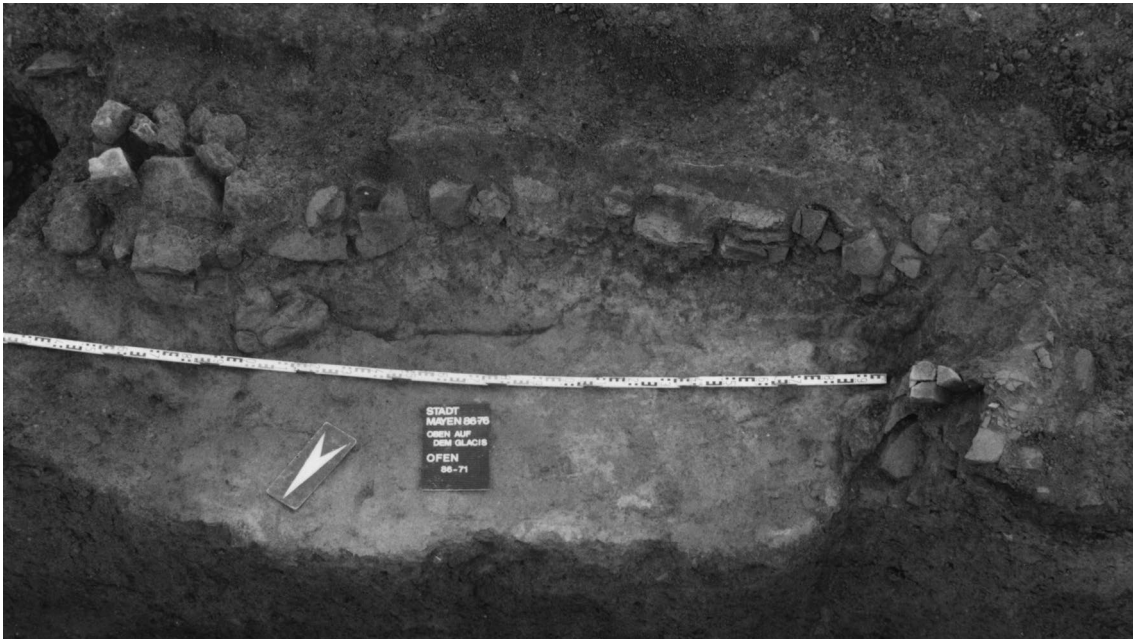


Fig. 7: Lying pottery kiln 9 found 1986 in the production area Siegfriedstraße.

produced ceramics rooting in Roman wares – such as the red engobed Mayen ware MA (fig. 5, left side) – up to the 9th century. During the Carolingian period, they continued to produce all the ceramic goods which were common in the Merovingian period⁹. This sense of tradition is also evident in the vessel shapes.

Generally one can note that so-called Wölbwandtöpfe (fig. 5, right side) and late, shallow shamrock jugs with ever more spherical vessel bodies are characteristic of Mayen-made ceramics of the 8th century. They are usually made of the product type MD / ME which is typical for the period around 700 AD to around 800 AD. This means a proto-stoneware, which lies between the coarse product type MD and the nearly-stoneware type ME.

At this time standing, circular firing systems in updraft kilns of late Roman origin still remained in use.¹⁰ A good example of this was discovered in 1953 on the property Siegfriedstraße 6–8 in the expansion of the timber shop Orth. Here, classical Carolingian ball pots, a type emerging around 800 AD, had been burnt in the then arising Mayen ware ME (fig. 6). The established forms in late antique / Merovingian tradition were pushed out of the production in the course of the 9th century.

However, in the 9th century, also new kiln types appeared in Mayen. So the kiln principle of the horizontal furnace was introduced. An example of this construction principle is kiln 9 which was documented 1986, unfortunately detected unobserved by a trench section (fig. 7). Built of rubble and clay, this unit, used in the first half / middle of the 9th century, can be assigned to the lying pottery kilns. Its content includes mostly reducing burnt vessels of Carolingian nearly-stoneware ME and oxidizing burnt earthenware (fig. 8).

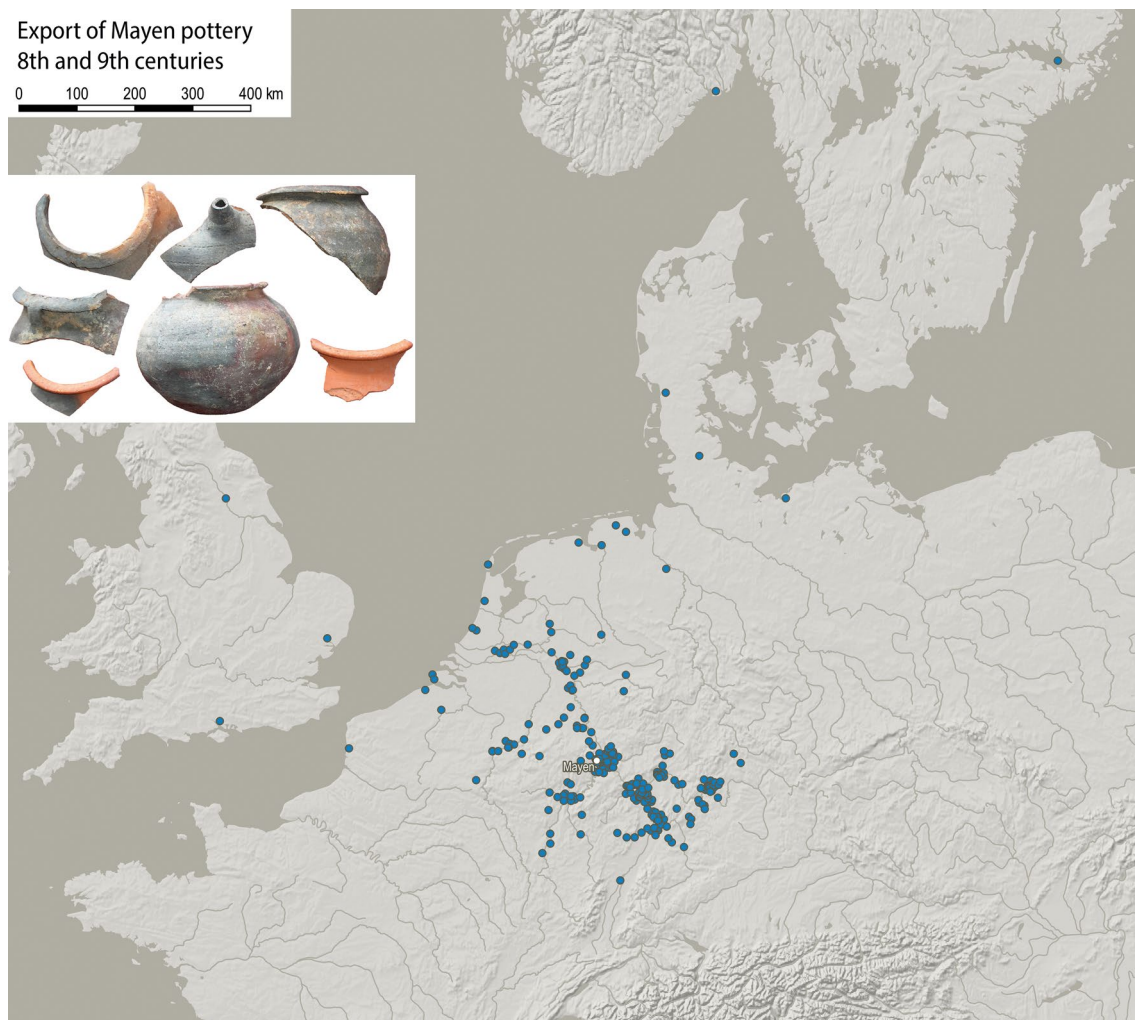


Fig. 8: Distribution map of the Mayen pottery from the 8th/9th century.

Also for the Mayen ceramics of the 8th and 9th century the author created a new distribution map (fig. 8). Compared to 1999's mapping by Mark Redknapp¹¹, there is not only a consolidation of evidence, but also an extension of the sales area both to the west to Belgium and France as well as to the east, for example into the Main-Neckar region.

In research, the distribution of the Mayen pottery in the 8th and 9th centuries was associated with the possessions of the Eifel monastery of Prüm. In the core zone of the possessions of the Prüm monastery between Euskirchen and Trier, however, hardly any Mayen ceramics can be detected until today. A distribution of Mayen vessels on the possessions of the Prüm monastery does not seem to have been substantial. However, if one adds to the distribution map the settlement areas of the Frisians and other evidence for Frisians – for example Frisian coins (sceattas), Frisian trading posts, graves or found objects – they correspond well to the dissemination image of Mayen ceramics. It is very

probable that in the 8th and 9th centuries the Mayen vessels were distributed by Frisian merchants. Whether they acted on behalf of the Carolingian authorities, thus acting as agents who had to pay taxes in the state budget, remains to be clarified in the future.

Notes

- ¹ Grunwald 2012b, 111–112 fig. 1; Grunwald 2019.
² Grunwald 2016, 345–345 fig. 1.
³ Grunwald 2016, 347–349.
⁴ Köstner 2012; Köstner 2013; Köstner 2015.
⁵ Compare: Grunwald 2015; Grunwald 2019.
⁶ Petit 1975.
⁷ Bressoud et al. 2015a; Bressoud et al. 2015b.
⁸ Grunwald 2018.
⁹ Grunwald 2012a, 150–153.
¹⁰ Hanning et al. 2016; Hanning et al. 2019; Döhner – Grunwald 2018.
¹¹ Redknap 1999, 351 fig. 102 B.

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Fig. 1: Graphic: Author; base map: O. Jöris, RGZM. – Fig. 2: Graphic: B. Streubel, RGZM. – Fig. 3: Graphik: B. Streubel, RGZM; Photo: Author. – Fig. 4: Graphik: B. Streubel, RGZM. – Fig. 5: Photo left side: M. Neumann, Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, Direktion Landesarchäologie, Außenstelle Koblenz; photo right side: B. Streubel, RGZM. – Fig. 6: Photos: Archiv Geschichts- und Altertumsverein für Mayen und Umgebung e.V. Drawings after: Redknap 1999, 175 fig. 24 Fundstelle 29, Ofen 24. 335 fig. 98,10–11. – Fig. 7: Photo: Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, Landesdirektion Archäologie, Außenstelle Koblenz. – Fig. 8: Graphic: B. Streubel, RGZM; Photo: Author.

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