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TWO TILE STAMPS AND A MILITARY COHORT IN ROMAN ANTWERP

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TWO TILE STAMPS AND A MILITARY COHORT IN ROMAN ANTWERP*

1.

The excavations that took place from 1974 to 1977 in Antwerp, in the area between the City Hall (Stadhuis) and the Butchers' Hall (Vleeshuis), during the construction of a public parking space (Stadsparking, now called Grote Markt), were the first to uncover Roman finds *in situ*. Next to a considerable amount of pottery, no fewer than 35 waste pits and six wells yielded three coins, one brace of a *fibula*, some fragments of footwear (one sole of a sandal and pieces of spiked shoes (*caligae*)), the entire skeleton of a horse, and two tile-fragments with stamps that apparently contain the text *PRIMCORS*. All finds are dated to the second half of the second or the first half of the third century.¹ The tiles, made of orange brick, were found in one of the waste pits.

The first and more important tile fragment has a length of 11.7 cm. The quite regular letters are 1.1 cm high, with only a small trace of the letter *P* left and the *S* somewhat faded away, though a close autopsy suggests an *S* rather than a *T*. I read *PRIMCORS*.



Tile fragment from Roman Antwerp, inv. n.: A091/RK16/S1; photo by Sigrid Spinox (TM 851447)

The reading of the second tile, with a length of 7.4 cm and letter height of 0.9 cm (thus a different stamp than the one used for the first tile), could accordingly be *PRIMC[ORS ?]*.



Tile fragment from Roman Antwerp, inv. n.: A091/LV/DPI; photo by Christian Laes (TM 851448)

* It is my true pleasure to mention the rich scholarly exchange that took place on two 'small' items. First and foremost, I thank Tim Bellens (Archeologie Antwerpen). Without the kind services provided by him and the archaeology team of the city of Antwerp, this article could never have been written. Herbert Verreth (Catholic University of Leuven) offered me invaluable advice, relating to both the Trismegistos database TM and an unpublished MA-dissertation. For advice on linguistic matters, I greatly enjoyed exchanges with my colleagues Jim Adams (All Souls College, Oxford), Werner Eck (Universität zu Köln), David Langslow (University of Manchester) and Wilfried Van Rengen (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). All abbreviations of epigraphical publications are according to the *Epigraphik Datenbank Clauss-Slaby*. Literary sources are abbreviated as in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (TLL).

¹ For excellent recent overviews, comprehensively referring to all previous scholarship on the matter, see T. Bellens, *Antwerpen, een archeologische kijk op het ontstaan van de stad* (Antwerp, 2020) and G. Cuyt, *Antwerpen, Romeinse stad of niet?*, in J. M. F. Van Reeth (ed.), *Antwerpen, Romeinse stad?* (Antwerp, 2020) 11–47, spec. 19–22. Useful contributions are also in E. Warmenbol (ed.), *Het ontstaan van Antwerpen. Feiten en fabels* (Antwerp, 1987).

Though hardly spectacular, the finding of the tiles with stamp was remarkable. Until today, they together with six coins² and eight small fragments with potter's marks remain the only written evidence from the city of Antwerp in the Roman period (in the appendix to this article, I offer a full list of this material, based on my own autopsy).³

Be this as it may, Tony Oost, who as a city archaeologist was responsible for the Stadsparking excavations, never bothered to properly publish the tile stamps.⁴ He reportedly asked the advice of Julianus Egidius Bogaers (1926–1996), professor of Roman archaeology at the University of Nijmegen, and of Hubert Devijver (1936–1997), who held the chair of Ancient History at the then Jesuit university of Antwerp (UFSIA = Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius). On the authority of Devijver, the reading *Prim(a Cohors Cors(orum))* is sometimes proposed.⁵ The presence or proximity of a Corsican unit in what was not more than an agricultural settlement (possibly with an industrial area), or maybe a *vicus*, seems now to be taken for granted: both the *communis opinio* (press and blogs on the internet) and recent surveys mention the presence of a Corsican cohort in Roman Antwerp.⁶ In this note, I will demonstrate that the reading *Cors(orum)* must be considered as flawed for at least two reasons. Using parallel texts and finds that have not been noticed before, I will tentatively propose another identification of a military unit.

2.

As explained above, the reading *Cors(orum)* rests on a reported oral communication by Devijver. As an outstanding epigraphist, versed in the study of the Roman army, Devijver would probably not have appreciated his name being used as a means of authorisation, without proper research into the matter having been done.⁷ A first difficulty with this reading is that nowhere near Antwerp is a first cohort of Corsicans otherwise attested. In fact, the auxiliary unit *cohors I Corsorum* is known only from Sardinia (first half of first century) and from the province of Mauretania Caesariensis (up to the first half of the second century, maybe starting as early as in or about AD 42, when the region became Roman territory).⁸ No such unit appears on the *diplomata militaria* of the province of Germania Inferior. Secondly, the abbreviation *Cors(orum)* is only rarely attested, while the form *Corsor(um)* seems more secure.⁹ Admittedly, this second argument is far from a definitive proof, since tile stamps often contain their own abbreviations for the sake of brevity.

² T. Bellens, C. Laes, W. Van Rengen, Coins from Roman Antwerp, *RBN* 158 (2012) 309–312.

³ *CIL* 6.29507, found at St. Michael's Abbey (Sint-Michielsabdij) in 1608, is now commonly regarded as a seventeenth-century import from a Roman collection. See Cuyt (n. 1) 3. For connections of these potters with other parts of the Empire, see A. Gavrielatos, *Names on Gallo-Roman Terra Sigillata (1st – 3rd C. A.D.)* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2012). See also S. Demuyneck, *De Menapii in Gallia Belgica. Onderzoek naar de grenzen van het Menapisch gebied in de keizertijd* (unpublished MA thesis, Catholic University of Leuven, 2020) 169–170. Based on the potters' names, the fragments are dated to the second half of the second century.

⁴ They are represented and commented upon in A. De Poorter, J.-P. Claeys, *Les sigles sur matériaux de construction romains en terre cuite en Belgique* (Leuven, 1989) 149–150. See also T. Oost, De bewoning te Antwerpen tijdens de Gallo-Romeinse periode, in Warmenbol (n. 1) 107–126.

⁵ Cuyt (n. 1) 28 explicitly mentions Devijver for this reading.

⁶ See e.g. the litigious blogs by H. Rombaut [https://www.bloggen.be/julius_caesar_in_belgie/] and the contribution by Cuyt (n. 1) 28. Bellens (n. 1) 55–57 is more cautious and does not mention the Corsican unit.

⁷ His name lives on with publications as H. Devijver, *Prosopographia Militiarum Equestrum*. 5 vol. (Leuven, 1976–1993) and H. Devijver, M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, S. Demougine, *Prosopographia Militiarum Equestrum. Pars Sexta: Laterculi alarum-cohortium-legionum* (Leuven, 2001).

⁸ J. Spaul, *Cohors². The Evidence for and a Short History of the Auxiliary Infantry Units of the Imperial Roman Army* (Oxford, 2000) 49–50.

⁹ The latter abbreviation is attested on four *diplomata militaria* from the Balkans. See *AE* 2006 1841 (AD 153); 1845; 1846 and 1851 (all AD 129) (with *AE* 2006 1847–1850 and 1852 as *diplomata militaria* that have been supplemented based on these four examples). *Cors(orum)* on two military diplomas (AD 144): *AE* 2014 1657 and *AE* 2015 1903, both pertaining to the *cohors II Gemin(a) Ligu(rum) et Cors(orum)*, stationed in Syria.

3.

There are at least three peculiar features in the Antwerp tile stamps. One would expect a formula of the type *COHORS + NUMBER OF THE UNIT + NAME OF THE UNIT IN THE GENITIVE PLURAL IN ABBREVIATED FORM*. This means that at least three details are in need of an explanation: the ordinal number *prima* put before *CORS*, the abbreviation *CORS* itself, and the absence of the name of a people that made up the unit. I will explain the first feature as a local peculiarity in section 4 below. Here I offer an explanation of the two other points.

Rather than an abbreviation for *Cors(orum)*, *CORS* should simply be understood as “a cohort”. It is usually explained as an abbreviation of *c(oh)ors*, which is in this form exclusively attested on tile stamps.¹⁰ To speakers and writers of Latin, *CORS* may possibly have been understood as a nominative without abbreviation.¹¹ The spelling *c(h)ors*, *c(h)ortis* f. is attested with literary writers too¹² and the variant can easily be understood when we take into account that the letter *h* was hardly pronounced and was often on the way to being lost, while the two syllables could contract to one.¹³ On the other hand, we know that the letter *H* functioned as a distinctive feature in the inscriptions of Germania Inferior, where it is used next to the half \rightarrow , which referred to a sound as the Greek χ in inscriptions for the local goddess Nehallenia.¹⁴

The reading *Prim(a) Cors* or *Prim(a) Co(ho)rs* could mean that “the First Cohort” considered itself so well known – perhaps even unique – in its environment, that it did not need any further specification to its name. This is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. From the site of Porolissum in Dacia we have no less than 512 tile stamps mentioning a *Cohors III*. Although the auxiliary unit *Cohors III Delmatarum equitata* was intended, this did not need to be expressed on the stamp.¹⁵ Beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, in Apsaros (South-West Georgia), two tiles for a *Cohors II* were found. Here, *Cohors II Claudiana* was the cohort referred to.¹⁶ In all, these are rather rare instances, whereas normal usage on tile stamps mentions both the number and the specific name of the unit. *Felix Chors prima*, on a bronze seal from Rome, perhaps comes closest to the Antwerp examples (*CIL* 15.8570).¹⁷

¹⁰ See for tile stamps *IIFDR* 280, 281 and 297; *AE* 1950.75b; *CIL* 3.14216.25 from Dacia; *CIL* 3.11373 and 11456 from Pannonia Superior. TM has seven actual instances of the abbreviation *CORS* for *Co(ho)rs*. Other epigraphical attestations, not tile stamps, of the nominative *cors* relate to the genitive *cortis* (e.g. *CIL* 2.5238; 3.2002; 6.2603 and 2662) or the ablative *corte* (*CIL* 5.896).

¹¹ J. Adams, *Social Variation and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2013) has firmly made the point that we often look at classical Latin as a standard language. However, the spellings found in e.g. our standard text editions often reflect information gleaned from modern grammars.

¹² W. Bannier, art. *cohors*, *TLL* 3 (1907–1912) c. 1549–1559. See especially c. 1550 lines 19–23 for the variant *chors* mentioned as most frequent in inscriptions; lines 23–27 for *cors*. Bannier suggests such readings in e.g. Colum. 2.14.6; Varro *rust.* 1.13.3 (*chorte* – based on a testimony in Non. p. 117 ed. Lindsay); Varro *Men.* 383 (*cortibus*, based on Non. p. 117 ed. Lindsay); Cic. *epist.* 3.6.5, but the standard text editions now all have forms of the word *cohors*, *cohortis* f. See the discussion with grammarians as Velius Longus (Vel. *gramm.* VII.69.1–3) in the second century (*Et cohortes aeque a cooriendo ex eodem loco dictae sunt; sed tamen differentiam quidam esse maluerunt, ut cohortes militum cum adspiratione a mutua hortatione dicantur*) and the collection called *Differentiae* (*Diff.* ed. Beck p. 46, 36: *inter cors et chors: cortes sunt rusticorum, chortes militum castra*, on which see also M. Warren, *On Latin Glossaries, with Especial Reference to the Codex Sangallensis 912*, *TAPA* 15 (1884) 124–228, spec.198) – both suggesting *chors* for the military use of the term, but also testifying to the existence of the form *cors*.

¹³ S. Allen, *Vox Latina. A Guide to the Pronunciation of Classical Latin* (Cambridge, 1965) 43–45.

¹⁴ J. E. Bogaers, Foreign Affairs, in B. Hartley, J. Wacker (ed.), *Rome and Her Northern Provinces. Papers Presented to Sheppard Frere in Honour of his Retirement from the Chair of Archaeology of the Roman Empire* (Gloucester, 1983) 13–32, spec. 17. According to C. Rüger, *Eine Ubica aemulatio Claudi Caesaris? Beobachtungen zu einem Graphem in Niedergermanien*, *Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia* 24 (1985) 159–166, spec. 159 the *H* and the \rightarrow acted as separate graphemes, while T. Venemann, \rightarrow , *Sprachenwissenschaft* 19 (1994) 235–270, spec. 248–249 believes that both graphemes were used interchangeably in Germania Inferior. See also W. Eck, *Lateinisch, Griechisch, Germanisch ... ? Wie sprach Rom mit seinen Untertanen?*, in L. de Ligt, E. Hemelrijk, H. W. Singor (ed.) *Roman Rule and Civic Life: Local and Regional Perspectives*. (Leiden, 2004) 3–19.

¹⁵ See the collection in *IDR App.* 1.30.1–219; 1.31.1–29 and 1.32.1–264. All these tiles are dated AD 212–217.

¹⁶ *AE* 2002 1489aa and 1489ab (second century). See M. P. Speidel, *The Caucasus Frontier. Second Century Garrisons at Apsarus, Petra and Phasis*, in C. Unz (ed.), *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III, 13. Internationaler Limeskongress* (Stuttgart, 1986) 657–660.

¹⁷ Note that the indices to *CIL* 15 (H. Bloch, *Indices to the Roman Brick-Stamps Published in volume XV, 1 of the C.I.L., and LVI–LVII of the Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, HSPH* 58–59 (1948) 1–104) hardly mention instances of cohorts

All this begs the question as to whether somewhere in the proximity of Antwerp, in the province of Germania Inferior, there were units numbered as First Cohort attested on tile stamps. A search through volume 6 of *CIL* 13 suggests the following possibilities:

<i>CIL</i> 13	Unit	Find spot / station of the unit	Distance from Antwerp
12441	<i>Coh(ors) I F(lavia) Dam(ascenorum)</i>	Cologne / Cologne	181 km
12449–12450	<i>C(ohors) I Fla(via) / Flavi(a)</i> ¹⁸	Xanten / Remagen Vechten / Remagen	150 km / 210 km 107 km / 210 km
12452	<i>Coh(ors) I Raeto(rum)</i>	Remagen / Brittenburg; Katwijk	210 km / 109 km

Table 1. First Cohorts on tile stamps from Germania Inferior

For the sake of completeness, one may add a list of all known First Cohorts in the province of Germania Inferior. The fact that they do not appear on any stamp at first sight makes identification with the First Cohort mentioned on the tiles from Antwerp rather unlikely. However, one has to bear in mind that for many tiles the stamp is simply not visible anymore, and that the majority of the tiles, although possibly produced by military units, were not ever stamped.

Unit	Station of the unit	Distance from Antwerp	Remarks
<i>Cohors I Classica</i>	Vleuten-De Meern	107 km	Spaul (n. 8) 576
<i>Cohors I Germanica</i>	unknown	--	Alföldy (n. 18) 58–59
<i>Cohors I Lato-bicorum et Varcianorum</i>	unknown	--	Alföldy (n. 18) 63–65: in all likelihood present in Germania Inferior up to the third century
<i>Cohors I Lucensium</i>	Roomburg	102 km	Raepsaet, Raepsaet-Charlier (n. 18) 81
<i>Cohors I Thracum</i>	Remagen Bonn Wijk bij Duurstede	210 km 196 km 106 km	First stationed in Remagen, see Raepsaet, Raepsaet-Charlier (n. 18) 97, then in the auxiliary castle of Bonn under Emperor Claudius, see Raepsaet, Raepsaet-Charlier (n. 18) 95 and Alföldy (n. 18) 212 (based on a reading of <i>CIL</i> 13.8099), then perhaps in Wijk bij Duurstede in the years 70–83, see Raepsaet, Raepsaet-Charlier (n. 18) 84.

Table 2. Other First Cohorts from Germania Inferior

4.

There are also parallels to the ordinal number *prima* put before *CORS* on stamps from a clearly military context. Since these fragments are mentioned only here and there in local publications, they went unnoticed in the broader scholarly community (in fact, most of these finds did not even make it into the TM-database).

Excavations in the surroundings of the Helinium, where western branches of the rivers Scheldt (Striene) and Rhine (Waal) flow into the sea, and excavations close to the Fossa Corbulonis, which connected the river Maas with the Rhine *limes*, have revealed finds that relate to the *Classis Germanica Pia Fidelis* fleet, to *Legio*

on Roman brick-stamps, and no other on which the name of the unit is not mentioned. This should not come as a surprise, since *CIL* 15 only deals with Rome and its environment.

¹⁸ This unit was stationed in Remagen during the course of the second century, and attested for the first time there in AD 195 as *Cohors I Flavia Hispanorum*. See G. Alföldy, *Die Hilfstruppen der römischen Provinz Germania Inferior* (Düsseldorf, 1968) 206; M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier and G. Raepsaet, *Gallia Belgica et Germania Inferior. Vingt-cinq années de recherches historiques et archéologiques*, *ANRW* II, 4 (1975) 3–299, spec. 97 and Spaul (n. 8) 116–117. The unit is also known to have been stationed in Grimlinghausen.

X Gemina and to *Legio XXX*.¹⁹ A fragment of a tile found at Hoogwerf in present-day Naaldwijk (87 km from Antwerp), the settlement from which the Fossa Corbulonis ran in a northerly direction, was read by Bogaers as --- *PRIMCORS*. Bogaers acknowledged a military context.²⁰ About 10 km to the north-east, in Voorburg-Arentsburg (Forum Hadriani; 95 km from Antwerp), a tile with the stamp *PRIMACORT* is now read as *Prima Co(ho)r(s) T(hracum)*.²¹ *COR* as an abbreviation for *co(ho)r(s)* is indeed attested on tile stamps.²²

About 100 km inland to the east, at the confluence of the Rhine and the Lek, excavations in the Carolingian town of Dorestad (now Wijk bij Duurstede, 106 km from Antwerp) unearthed another *Prima Co(ho)r(s) T(hracum)* tile fragment.²³ Also the *Legio XXX* is attested on this spot.²⁴

Three other tile fragments bring us more to the South, to Aardenburg (66 km from Antwerp) in the present-day Dutch province of Zeeland. A fragment of tile, read by Bogaers as *PRIM* ---, is probably another parallel to our two Antwerp tiles.²⁵ Moreover, excavations in June 1974 in the centre of this town unearthed two square tiles belonging to the hypocaustum, both of which bore the stamp *PRIMCORT*, understood as *Prim(a) Co(ho)r(s) T(hracum)*.²⁶ Here, the letter T indeed makes it most plausible that a nominative of *Cohors* followed by an abbreviated genitive was meant, though the reading *Prim(ae) Co(ho)rt(is)* cannot entirely be excluded.²⁷ This brings the total of tiles belonging to the *Prima Cohors Thracum* possibly to four: one in Voorburg-Arentsburg, one in Wijk bij Duurstede, and two in Aardenburg. While Bogaers had carefully calculated the presence of this Thracian unit at the Rhine *limes* in the period 70–83, the dating of the Aardenburg finds by Trimpe Burger between AD 175 and 225 led Bogaers to admit that his first-century dating for this unit was anything but certain.²⁸ More recent research on the *castellum* of Aardenburg

¹⁹ On the Helinium, see Plin. *nat.* 4.101 and Tac. *ann.* 2.6. On the Fossa Corbulonis, built in AD 47 with a length of 34 km, see Tac. *ann.* 11.20 and Cass. Dio 60.30.6. See J. E. Bogaers, Romeinse militairen aan het Helinium, *Westerheem: Tweemaandelijks Orgaan van de Archaeologische Werkgemeenschap voor Westelijk Nederland* 23, 1 (1974) 70–78 and J. E. Bogaers, Thracische hulp troepen in Germania Inferior, *MROL* 55 (1974) 198–220 [= Troupes auxiliaires thraces dans la partie néerlandaise de la Germania Inferior, in D. M. Pipidi (ed.), *Actes du IX congrès international d'études sur les frontières romaines. Mamaia 6–13 septembre 1972* (Bucharest, 1974) 445–463], with useful maps of the *limes* of Germania Inferior from West to East. On the presence of *Legio XXX*, see Bogaers, Helinium (n. 19) 75 and L. van der Feijst, *De vicus te Naaldwijk* (unpublished MA dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2007) 15 and 75–76.

²⁰ Bogaers, Helinium (n. 19) 74 (photo) and 77. The tile is kept in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, inv. n. h 1937/1.18, and was unearthed by Holwerda in 1936. Based on the photo, the tile fragment has a length of 10 cm, with letter height 1.5 cm. Bogaers called the fragment “mysterious” (“onverklaarbaar” and “raadselachtig” in the Dutch original). He tentatively proposes readings as [*Cohors*] *Prim(a) Cors(orom)*, *Prim(a) Co(ho)rs (... ?)* or *Prima Co(ho)rs S(unucorum ?)*.

²¹ *CIL* 13.12936 still reads *PRIMV CORT*---, but see Bogaers, Thracische hulp troepen (n. 19) 198 and pl. XXV (photo 1).

²² For Dacia *CIL* 3.8074, 19g; *IDR App.* 1.55.1–6 and 1.57 are eight tile stamps belonging to the *co(ho)r(s) II(H)isp(anorum)*; for Pannonia Superior *CIL* 3.11373.1a–c we have three tile stamps pertaining to the *co(ho)r(s) I A(elia)*, while *CIL* 3.14360.6 has a *co(ho)r(s) eq(uitata) sagittariorum*; for Raetia *AE* 1900 210 = *IBR* 505 mentions a *co(ho)r(s) p(ia) f(idelis) R(a)et(orom)*. TM lists seven attestations for *COR* as *Co(ho)r(s)*.

²³ Bogaers, Thracische hulp troepen (n. 19) 198 and pl. XXV (photo 2). Finds from the Roman period constitute not more than one percent of the archaeological heritage of Dorestad, which mainly flourished from the Carolingian Middle Ages on. See W. Verwers, Romeinse vondsten uit Dorestad, *Spiegel Historiae* 13, 4 (1978) 313–314 for a general overview. On Wijk bij Duurstede as a Roman *castellum*, see Raepsaet, Raepsaet-Charlier (n. 18) 84 who refer to Levefanum as the name of the settlement, where the *Cohors I Thracum* was indeed stationed. For the history of Dorestad, the website by Luit van der Tuuk, *Dorestad onthuld* [www.dorestadonthuld.nl/] is a true treasury.

²⁴ *CIL* 13.12401. Other units mentioned are *Legio I* (*CIL* 13.12132), *Numerus Ursariensium* (*CIL* 13.12507) and *Vex(illarii) ex(ercitus) Ger(manici) (in) f(erioris)* (*CIL* 13.12554) all on tile fragments.

²⁵ Bogaers, Helinium (n. 19) 74 and 77. The fragment has a length of 6.5 cm and letters' height of 1.5 cm. It is kept in Gemeentelijk Museum, Aardenburg, inv. n. 62-Ovl. 121.

²⁶ No photos or dimensions of these stones have been mentioned by Bogaers, Thracische hulp troepen (n. 19) 216. The two tiles appear as *AE* 1975 640 (TM 208874).

²⁷ I consider this reading implausible. Though TM lists 44 cases of *PRIM* as an abbreviation for *primae*, and two cases of *CORT* for *cohortis*, there are no instances of the combination *PRIM CORT*.

²⁸ Bogaers, Thracische hulp troepen (n. 19) 198–201 for the dating AD 70–83, with the postscriptum on p. 216. For the Roman settlement and fortress of Aardenburg (possibly Rodanum), where also a *Cohors II A(ntoniniana) Treverorum(?)* (TM 851443) and a *Cohors II S(everiana) Treverorum(?)* (TM 85144) are known, see Demuyne (n. 3) 93–96 and J. Lendering, Aardenburg [https://www.livius.org/articles/place/aardenburg/].

(Rodanum) has pointed to its heyday in the late second century and the third century.²⁹ So, we must either accept the presence of the *Cohors I Thracum* at a much later date, or interpret the inscription as referring to *Cohors I Tungrorum* – a less likely possibility, since this unit is known only from Roman Britain.

5.

In conclusion, what does all this tell us about the two tile stamps from Roman Antwerp?

* The text *PRIMCORS* is indeed almost unique with only one certain and exact parallel, on a stamp from Naaldwijk – so far, this resemblance had never been noted.

* Since the position of the ordinal numeral *prima* before the word *cohors* is rare, six possible other instances of tiles related to military units in Germania Inferior make it most likely that this was a local fashion, and that the Antwerp tiles too refer to a military unit.³⁰ In the absence of laboratory analysis, it seems most likely that the provenance of the tiles is the military pottery of Groesbeek-Holdeurn (123 km from Antwerp) – a factory that functioned between ca. AD 120 and 260. This would fit both the dating of the finds of the Stadspark excavations and that of the Aardenburg finds.³¹

* It is possible to read the stamps as *Prim(a) Co(ho)rs* or *Prima Cors* (see my remarks on Latin orthography). In this case, not mentioning the name of the unit means that for one reason or another it was not considered important to specify this name (parallels for this exist all over the Roman Empire). The most likely candidates as the intended cohort are units of Damasceni, Hispani, or Raeti (see table 1) – each of these is attested as *Cohors I* on tile stamps from Germania Inferior, though also the other units listed in table 2 should be taken into account. Another possibility is that the *Prima Cohors* was not an auxiliary unit but a cohort belonging to a legion. In this case, *Legio XXX*, stationed in Xanten, is the most likely candidate.

* Following the four possible cases of *Prim(a) Co(ho)r(s) T(hracum)*, it is tempting to look for a name behind the letter S on the Antwerp tiles. Unfortunately, there is not one attestation of a *Cohors I S(...)* in Germania Inferior. One could, of course, adventurously point to units in neighbouring provinces: *Cohors I Sunucorum* in Britannia,³² *Cohors I Sagittariorum*, *Cohors I Septimia Belgarum* or *Cohors I Sequanorum et Rauracorum*, all active in Germania Superior. But this is mere speculation, just like the reading of the faded S as a T, which would make the Antwerp examples further instances of *Cohors I Thracum*, the attestation of which is again not a certainty at all.

Situated close to the Bavay-Asse-Rumst-Kontich road that runs further North to Mortsel, probably connected to Roman settlements including Bruges and Aardenburg,³³ not far from a road that ran East in the direction of Turnhout and on to present-day Germany, and with some connections (and at least similar tiles) further North up to the Rhine *limes* in the Netherlands, the modest settlement or *vicus* at the river Scheldt that later became Antwerp was anything but an important place in Roman times.³⁴ Yet, it was not that

²⁹ See G. P. A. Bessuijen, *Rodanum. A Study of the Roman Settlement at Aardenburg and its Metal Finds* (Unpublished MA-Thesis, Leiden University, 2008) 52 (suggesting the *Cohors I Tungrorum*); R. M. van Dierendonck, W. K. Vos, *De Romeinse agglomeratie Aardenburg. Onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling, structuur en datering van de Romeinse castella en hun omgeving, opgegraven in de periode 1955-heden* (Middelburg, 2013) 321–342 suggests the dating AD 170–185/190 for *castellum I* and *Ia*; 185/19–240/245 for *castellum II* and *Ila*; 260–285/290 for *castellum III*. The general context of the fortress of Aardenburg and other Roman defences is aptly summarised in J. Lendering, A. Bosman, *De rand van het Rijk. De Romeinen en de Lage Landen* (Amsterdam, 2010) 222; 232; 236 and 280. On *Cohors I Tungrorum*, see Spaul (n. 8) 207–208; 225–227. Demuyne (n. 3) 95 tentatively proposes *Cohors I Treverorum*, but this unit is only known from Zugmantel in Germania Superior (CCID 493).

³⁰ I see no reason to doubt the military origin of the stamps, though Bogaers reportedly did so at a later stage. See De Poorter, Claeys (n. 4) 150: “Dans une lettre récente (11/4/88) il pense plutôt à une origine civile, et ceci jusqu’à nouvel ordre, comme le sigle n’a encore jamais été trouvé dans un contexte militaire.”

³¹ Bogaers, Helinium (n. 19) 75. See H. Holwerda, *Het in de pottenbakkerij van de Holdeurn gefabriceerde aardewerk uit de Nijmeegsche grafvelden* (Leiden, 1944); S. Weiß-König, *Neue Untersuchungen zur Feinkeramik von De Holdeurn*, in B. Liesen (ed.), *Römische Keramik in Niedergermanien. Produktion – Handel – Gebrauch* (Darmstadt, 2014) 137–174.

³² Suggestion by Bogaers, Helinium (n. 19) 77.

³³ Dierendonck, Vos (n. 29) 336 have designed such network of roads in the West of Flanders and Zeeland.

³⁴ Recent works that focus on the socio-economic, institutional and cultural history of Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior include R. Nouwen, *De Romeinen in België (31 v.C. – 476 n.C.)* (Leuven, 2006), see spec. 55–60 for networks of roads; R. Nou-

remote in that it was untouched by material elements of Roman culture including a hypocaust and ceramics.³⁵ As a relatively thriving agricultural settlement, conveniently located at a bend of the river Scheldt, it saw soldiers of the Roman army passing by or being involved in works such as the construction of roads or public buildings, the digging of ditches or the setting of boundary markers.³⁶ For such tasks, the technical know-how of soldiers was called on. The fortress workshop or *fabrica* was a brick factory. Before the earth was baked, a mark with the name of the unit active there was stamped on the brick.³⁷

Be this as it may, in the light of this study of a series of inscriptions, the presence of a cohort of Corsicans in Roman Antwerp must be considered as belonging to the realm of (epigraphical) fables.

Appendix: Potter's stamps from the Roman city of Antwerp

n.	TM	inv. n.	letters h.	text	commentary
1.	851446	A091/RK10/1	0.3	<i>Mellissus</i> + graffito A	I read double l as in <i>AE</i> 1957 149, from Gallia Belgica. Gavrielatos (n. 3) 188 and 197 on <i>Melissus</i> in Argonne.
2.	851449	A091/RK6/4	0.4	<i>Primus</i>	Gavrielatos (n. 3) 188 and 197 on <i>Primus</i> in Argonne.
3.	851450	A091/G12/1	0.4	<i>Primus</i>	See n. 2.
4.	851452–851454	A091/RK6/2	--	illegible	
5.	851452–851454	A091/LV/16	--	illegible, with a very little sign IV	
6.	851452–851454	A091/RK1.11	--	illegible	
7.	--	A091/RK31/1	0.4	--- <i>ERASF</i>	Probably <i>Verus</i> . Gavrielatos (n. 3) 188 and 197 on <i>Verus</i> in Rheinzabern.
8.	--	A243/JK13/19	0.4	<i>Aelianum</i>	Gavrielatos (n. 3) 243 on <i>Aelianus</i> i and ii, respectively from Les Martres-de-Veyre, Lezoux? (110–140) and from Lezoux (155–180).

The three illegible fragments on *terra sigillata* are TM 851452–851454, though it is not possible to make out which one is which. I have not been able to identify one of these three as *Tri(b)oc(us)*, a reading proposed by Oost (see Oost (n. 4) 121; Gavrielatos (n. 3) 188 and 197 on *Tribocus* in Heiligenberg, see also TM 851451).

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wen, *Keizer Augustus en de Lage Landen* (Leuven, 2009); Lendering, Bosman (n. 29); R. Nouwen, *De onderdanen van de keizer. 35 uitzonderlijke verhalen van unieke mensen* (Leuven, 2014). Also Cuyt (n. 1) 39 offers interesting details on networks of roads.

³⁵ Bellens (n. 1) 65–67 on the hypocaustum.

³⁶ In 2018, two inscriptions on stamped wood belonging to the *Coh(ors) II C(ivium) R(omanorum)* were found in Katwijk. They belonged to the construction of a road. See <https://archeologieonline.nl/nieuws/romeinse-inscriptie-gevonden-in-valkenburg> (seen 2 February 2021).

³⁷ See Y. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (London, New York, 2000) 110–111 for further examples of building activities and the army. See also R. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh, 1989) 64–65: “in Lower Germany tiles, tufa (...) were provided by the military for civil buildings.”