



CURRENT APPROACHES TO ROMAN FRONTIERS

HARRY **VAN ENCKEVORT**, MARK **DRIESSEN**, ERIK **GRAAFSTAL**,
TOM **HAZENBERG**, TATIANA **IVLEVA** AND CAROL **VAN DRIEL-MURRAY** (EDS)

LIMES XXV VOLUME 1



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LIMES XXV VOLUME 1

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Archeologische Berichten Nijmegen 9

Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden
www.sidestone.com

Lay-out & cover design: Sidestone Press

Photograph cover: Photo by Klaas Doting of 'Het gezicht van Nijmegen' (The Face of Nijmegen), a nearly 6 m high artwork by Andreas Hetfeld.

ISBN 978-94-6426-275-9 (softcover)
ISBN 978-94-6426-276-6 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-94-6426-277-3 (PDF e-book)

DOI: 10.59641/3d278gp



Nijmegen

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A snapshot of two pioneering female archaeologists in Switzerland

Elisabeth Ettlinger and Victorine von Gonzenbach
in *Vindonissa* around 1950

Regine Fellmann Brogli and
Christine Meyer-Freuler

In contrast to other countries, only a small amount of research has been carried on women as archaeologists in Switzerland. In the last few years, we have been trying to fill this gap. In doing so, we have started to realize how important it is to look at both men and women as professionals in order to fully understand the development of the state of research in Provincial Roman Archaeology. For this undertaking, *Vindonissa*, the only fortress in present-day Switzerland makes for a good point of departure, as systematic archaeological research started here as early as 1897.

In the following we would like to present two female pioneers both active at this site around 1950: Elisabeth Ettlinger and Victorine von Gonzenbach. Furthermore, we will address the following questions: How did these women get into contact with *Vindonissa*? What were their special interests? How did they shape the scientific discourse? And finally, were they able to pursue their own research agenda which in turn may have been informed by their own female perspective?

***Vindonissa*. A short look at its history of research between 1897 and 1935**

The fortress of *Vindonissa* was built around 14/17 AD and was occupied by three successive legions (*Legio XIII*, *XXI* and *XI*). *Legio XI* left *Vindonissa* in 101 AD and the fortress was abandoned (Trumm 2015). Scientific interest in the site started in the late 18th century. In 1897 the antiquarian society 'Antiquarische Gesellschaft von Brugg und Umgebung' was founded by a group of local men, all amateurs who worked full-time as a teacher, priest, instruction officer or director of the local psychiatric clinic. Samuel Heuberger (1854-1929), Theodor Eckinger (1864-1936), Victor Jahn (1865-1936), Conrad Fels (1855-1936) and Leopold Frölich (1860-1933) immediately started with systematic excavations in *Vindonissa*. In 1906 they changed the name of the society to 'Gesellschaft Pro

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Figure 2. Elisabeth Lachmann (later Elisabeth Ettlinger) as a student in 1936 in *Vindonissa* together with the excavation crew (Kantonsarchäologie Aargau / Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa, Brugg).

Vindonissa'. The increasing amounts of finds, coming from the excavations, led to the construction of the Vindonissa-Museum in Brugg (CH), which was inaugurated in 1912 (Fellmann Brogli & Wertenschlag 2009, 97-102). During this period, women were only active in the background, as the caretaker of the Vindonissa-Museum, as the wife of the guard of the amphitheater of *Vindonissa*, or as a patron, like Countess Wilhelmina von Hallwyl (1844-1930) from Stockholm (fig. 1).

In Switzerland, it wasn't until the 1930's when women began to emerge as researchers in their own right. One of the earliest examples was Maria Renate Berger (1908-1993). Berger was a student of Hans Dragendorff (1870-1941), professor at the University of Freiburg in Germany and it was on his advice that Berger was to work on the *terra nigra* from *Vindonissa*. The Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa, however, was interested in a more comprehensive study of the pottery of *Vindonissa*. For this reason, Maria Renate Berger's doctoral thesis was never published, and she subsequently disappeared from scientific memory. (Her unpublished thesis is available in the library of the Institut für Archäologische Wissenschaften, Abteilung

für Provinzialrömische Archäologie, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg (D). Information kindly provided by J. Trumm, Kantonsarchäologie Aargau / A. Heising, Universität Freiburg).

Elisabeth Ettlinger's path to *Vindonissa*

In contrast to the case above, Elisabeth Ettlinger (1915-2012) left a substantial legacy and is one of the few Swiss researchers who is mentioned in publications concerning female archaeologists (Rogger 2016, 190-194). In 1936, still as a student, she catalogued the finds from a large-scale excavation in *Vindonissa* (fig. 2). This was only possible with the help of Rudolf Laur-Belart (1898-1972), who had been president of the Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa since 1936, professor at the University of Basel since 1941 and was thus one of the main protagonists of Provincial Roman Archaeology in Switzerland up until 1970.

Ettlinger (née Lachmann) was German of Jewish ancestry and had begun to study Art History, Ancient History and Classical Archaeology in Zürich in 1934. After 1938, her assets were blocked and then later confiscated. Her German citizenship was also revoked.

Despite this perilous situation, as she could have been deported at any time as a stateless person, she continued to study at the University of Basel with Ernst Pfuhl (1876-1940), finishing her doctoral thesis in 1942. ‘Die Keramik der Augster Thermen’ was finally published in 1949 (Ettlinger 1949). In 1951 she was finally given Swiss citizenship along with her husband Leopold Ettlinger (1914-2008) and her two sons.

Victorine von Gonzenbach’s path to *Vindonissa*

Victorine von Gonzenbach’s journey to *Vindonissa* was quite different. Being Swiss and the daughter of a professor of medicine at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, she studied Classical Archaeology, Prehistory and Ancient History at the University of Zurich. In 1946 she graduated with a doctoral thesis in prehistory under Emil Vogt (1909-1974), professor at the University of Zurich (Von Gonzenbach 1949). In 1947 she got into contact with Laur-Belart as his temporary assistant in Basel.

Two years later, in 1949, when Christoph Simonett (1906-1981), curator at the Vindonissa-Museum in Brugg was given leave of absence, Von Gonzenbach was contacted by Laur-Belart to fill the vacant position. She was not Laur-Belart’s first choice, because he simply did not believe a woman would be able to manage all the tasks required, especially the excavations. However, since no male colleague could be found at the time and as Von Gonzenbach had been recommended to Laur-Belart, the choice fell to her. She quickly got started in *Vindonissa* and, despite initial reservations, Laur-Belart allowed her in her first year to direct a large emergency excavation in *Vindonissa* comprising of 40 Late Roman/Early Medieval graves (Von Gonzenbach 1949/1950). The excavation gave her the opportunity to apply her methodological excavation expertise in which she had been trained in during an excavation of a Bronze Age settlement at Cazis (CH) directed by Vogt.

Von Gonzenbach was not a specialist in Provincial Roman Archaeology and had only little practice in the field when she started work in *Vindonissa*. She had however solid basic knowledge at her disposal thanks to her studies in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History. Once she had realized that she was second choice for the curator’s position in *Vindonissa*, she fought with great commitment for acceptance and recognition (fig. 3).

A joint excavation project and the end of Von Gonzenbach’s employment in *Vindonissa*

The next step was for Laur-Belart and the exclusively male board of the Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa to put Von Gonzenbach in charge of the stratigraphic excavation



Figure 3. Victorine von Gonzenbach in the Vindonissa-Museum around 1950 (private collection).

of the so-called ‘Schutthügel’, the large rubbish dump of *Vindonissa* in 1950. Together with Ettlinger, who was in charge of the pottery, and another young German colleague, Elisabeth Schmid (1912-1994), who was charged with sedimentological analyses, the three female researchers were able to test new excavation methods and present interdisciplinary results. This was undoubtedly new at the time. The results were published jointly in three preliminary reports (Ettlinger & Von Gonzenbach 1950/1951; 1951/1952; 1955/1956). A final report, however, never appeared (fig. 4).

At the end of 1951, the Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa had engaged a male colleague as a new curator. We do not know whether Von Gonzenbach was not interested in the permanent position or whether she was not offered the job. However, she did remain friendly with Laur-Belart, the Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa and especially with Ettlinger. To mark her birthday in 1991, Von Gonzenbach was honored by the Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa with an anthology of several of her published articles on *Vindonissa* (Von Gonzenbach 1991). This was most definitely initiated by her friend Elisabeth Ettlinger, as she had been president of the Gesellschaft Pro Vindonissa since 1970.



Figure 4. Victorine von Gonzenbach around 1950 excavating at the 'Schutthügel' in *Vindonissa* (private collection).

Roman pottery. Ettlinger's special interest

Let us now turn to the question concerning the fields of interest of both female scientists and the projects they were pursuing in *Vindonissa* around 1950. After the Second World War, the excavations in *Vindonissa* were interrupted, mainly for financial reasons. The scientific undertakings of the Gesellschaft pro *Vindonissa* concentrated on its upcoming 50th anniversary in 1947. Various activities were planned to mark the occasion, such as the publication of a museum guidebook.

Another important project was the publication of the pottery of the 'Schutthügel' of *Vindonissa*, which had been started by Simonett in the 1930's. It had been somewhat fortuitous that Laur-Belart was able to recruit Ettlinger for this project in 1946, all the more so as she had agreed to 'continue the work in her spare time' due to her obligations as a mother, resulting in a very low income. Using the typological order of the pottery as a point of departure, she established a framework for dating the 'Schutthügel' that was new for the time using statistical methods and distribution maps. Thanks to her previous work on the pottery from *Augusta Raurica*, she noticed that in the case of the Roman Army the supply flow of goods was quite different. With sure instinct, she highlighted the special



Figure 5. Elisabeth Ettlinger in 1952 in her home in Zurich (private collection P. Ettlinger).

characteristics of the so-called pottery of *Legio XI*, a topic which is still controversially discussed today (fig. 5).

With the two publications 'Die Keramik der Augster Thermen' published in 1949 (Ettlinger 1949), and 'Römische Keramik aus dem Schutthügel von Vindonissa', published in 1952 (Ettlinger & Simonett 1952), Ettlinger became an outstanding specialist in Roman pottery due to her new methodological approaches. She soon attracted wide recognition in Switzerland and abroad due to her fundamental research on Italic Sigillata and the foundation of the *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautores* together with the Classical Archaeologist and Philologist Howard Comfort (1904-1993) in Brugg in 1957, just after the 3rd Limes Congress in Rheinfelden and Basel (CH). As early as 1956 she was elected a full member of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI). In 1977, in honour of her 60th birthday, all of her published essays were united in a volume of the *Fautores Acta* (Berger *et al.* 1977).

Roman hairpins and the question of women and the Roman army. Von Gonzenbach's special interest

Von Gonzenbach was particularly interested in small finds and selected a group of figuratively decorated hairpins from *Vindonissa* for her first material study (Von Gonzenbach 1950/1951). While discussing these objects Von Gonzenbach was very much aware of the questions regarding the presence of women in *Vindonissa*. Might we therefore assume, that she had, as one of the earliest researchers, a female perspective on this topic? To answer this question, we first must look at how the question of 'women and the Roman army' was discussed in *Vindonissa* up to 1950. The scope of this paper does not allow for too detailed a discussion, but we can acknowledge that there was a very interesting discussion taking place. During previous excavations of the 'Schutthügel', various objects

had been recovered pointing to the presence of women within the fortress (for the current state of research on this topic see Trumm & Fellmann Brogli 2008).

In 1922, a bronze plaque with the inscription *Marti v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) / Fidelis Frontonis liberta* (for Mars, Fidelis, freedwoman of Fronto, has gladly fulfilled the vow) was identified (Eckinger 1922). Oskar Bohn (1853-1927) concluded that Fidelis was a freedwoman of a soldier but must have resided outside the fortress (Bohn 1926, 1-2). In 1928, a writing tablet with the inscription *dabis Belic(a)e / con{c}t{o}ra balneu(m)* (give (this letter) to Belica, opposite the baths) came to light. Laur-Belart believed that Belica, as a woman could only have lived outside the fortress and the bath mentioned on the writing tablet must therefore be looked for *extra muros* (Laur-Belart 1929, 182). Only shortly afterwards, after having identified the legionary baths in the centre of the fortress in 1929/1930, Laur-Belart changed his opinion. He now thought of the possibility of soldiers being allowed to have female slaves within the fortress (Laur-Belart 1931, 232). In 1942 the question of the presence of women and children in the fortress resurfaced when a couple of women's and children's shoes were discovered in the 'Schutthügel' (Gansser-Burckhardt 1942, 67).

In 1947 Simonett (37, 61 and 69) summarized the then-prevailing opinion in the new guidebook to the Vindonissa-Museum. He admitted that Belica must have been living within the fortress, but for him her presence was absolute exception. He also mentioned the women's and children's shoes without going into detail of what this could mean for the fortress. Finally, he interpreted the hairpins, themselves decorated with miniature women's heads as love gifts for soldiers. Against this background, it seems quite possible that Von Gonzenbach's article on hairpins may be understood as a reaction against Simonett's opinions. She was the first to point out that the presence of women in a fortress is a distinct possibility, at least temporarily, and that this question must be discussed in a larger context.

Ettlinger and Von Gonzenbach. Factors for a successful career

Both Ettlinger and Von Gonzenbach made profitable use of the opportunities offered to them by their engagement in *Vindonissa*. It is particularly noteworthy that Ettlinger and Von Gonzenbach were entrusted with excavations. However, this was only possible because they were supported by male archaeologists in key positions, such as Laur-Belart and Vogt, despite their initial reservations. Ettlinger and Von Gonzenbach realized that they had to make themselves visible with publications. In Switzerland, where voting rights for women were not introduced until 1971 and the perception of gender roles changed only slowly, it was anything but a matter of course for women to pursue an academic career. For Ettlinger, who in 1946 was

already a mother of two sons, this would hardly have been possible without the support of her husband Leopold, a professor of microbiology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich. Von Gonzenbach was a single woman during her time in *Vindonissa* and therefore depended on earning a living. She fought repeatedly for increases in salary, while Ettlinger, as a married woman, received a very modest remuneration for her engagement.

This paper has aimed to call attention to some aspects of the careers of two outstanding personalities: Elisabeth Ettlinger and Victorine von Gonzenbach. However, this discussion must take place without diminishing the work and achievements of their contemporary male colleagues, as well as acknowledging the underlying conditions surrounding them – as is still the case today.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on a joint research project conducted by R. Fellmann Brogli & Ch. Meyer-Freuler (Fellmann Brogli & Meyer-Freuler in press). Full references will be given in the forthcoming publication. We would like to thank A. Lawrence for his help in translating the text into English.

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