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Money and Market in the Countryside of the Helvetian *civitas*

Caty Schucany

INTRODUCTION

The type and extent of the money economy in Roman times in the rural regions of the *Civitas Helvetiorum* are not easy to determine. For one part, we only know very few sites that have been investigated rather well, let alone broadly. For the other part, these sites have usually yielded a small amount of coins (fig. 1). Thus, their coin series is usually under 20 pieces and does not represent sufficient data for scientific analysis¹. Furthermore, the rural estates differ immensely in their chronological development. Some began as early as the early Tiberian period (i.e. Triengen, Dietikon, Buchs), others only after the middle of the 1st c. AD (Biberist, Langendorf) or in Flavian times (Worb, Meikirch) or only during the 2nd c. AD (Cham-Hagendorn, Urdorf, Stutheien)². The majority were large estates that were destroyed shortly after the middle of the 3rd c. AD and were later, if at all, rebuilt as family farms in the late 3rd and 4th c. AD (i.e. Biberist, Dietikon, Buchs, Seeb, Neftenbach)³. Taking as a threshold for the analysis a minimum of 50 coins up to 260 AD, only the four following villas can be used for the study at hand: Biberist, Dietikon, Seeb and Neftenbach (fig. 2).

In order to compare correctly the coin profiles of rural settlements with those of cities and *vici*, we have to relate the amount of discovered coins to the volume of settlement layers that were actually excavated. We may thus indicate their relative frequency of occurrence (see fig. 3). However, the excavation volume is not easily determined. While the excavated areas are registered rather well with published maps, this is not the case when it comes to the thickness of the strata. Since this information can only be discovered with a very complex method, it is not possible to conduct the study within the limits of this paper. Below, I will reckon, following personal experiences, a thickness of 2 m in the towns, *vici* and the legionary camp of *Vindonissa* (Windisch) and a thickness of only 0,6 m in the rural settlements. The excavation volumes are thus only representing a rough estimation⁴.

1 See also B. Hedinger in Ebnöther 1995, 239-242 with fig. 308. I thank Markus Peter, Augst/Bern, for inspiring discussions and Simone Mayer for the translation.

2 Compare to Ebnöther & Monnier 2002, 140-141 with fig. 131-132; see also Schucany 2011, 279 fig. 3 and 281 fig. 4.

3 Ebnöther & Monnier 2002, 150-154.

4 This is hardly a problem since the thickness of a strata is an inferior measurement compared to the excavation area, for example 10 cm to 100 m² (0,1 %!). See also Deschler-Erb in Schucany 2006, 560 fig. 27/5/1 for *Augusta Raurica*.

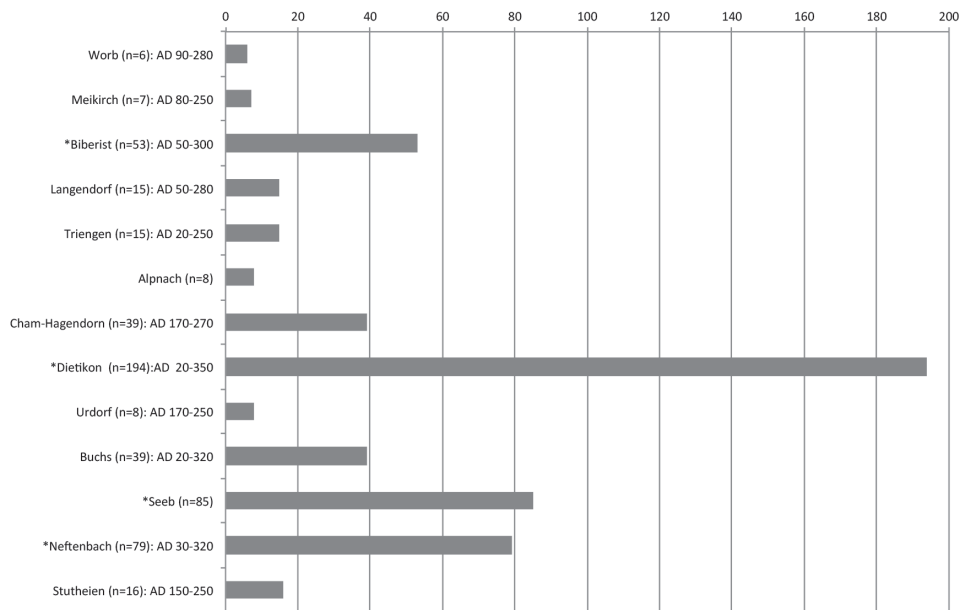


Fig. 1. Amount of coins of some rural settlements in the Civitas Helvetiorum (until 260 AD from west to east).

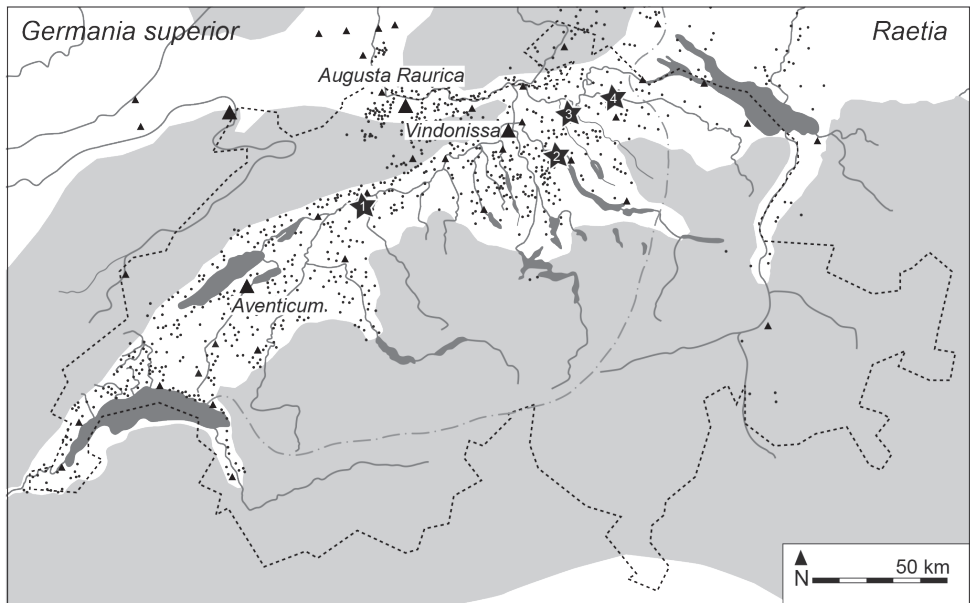


Fig. 2. Situation of the studied villas in the Civitas Helvetiorum (stars): 1. Biberist; 2. Dietikon; 3. Seeb; 4. Neftenbach. Triangles: urban settlements; dots: rural settlements (map C. Schucany).

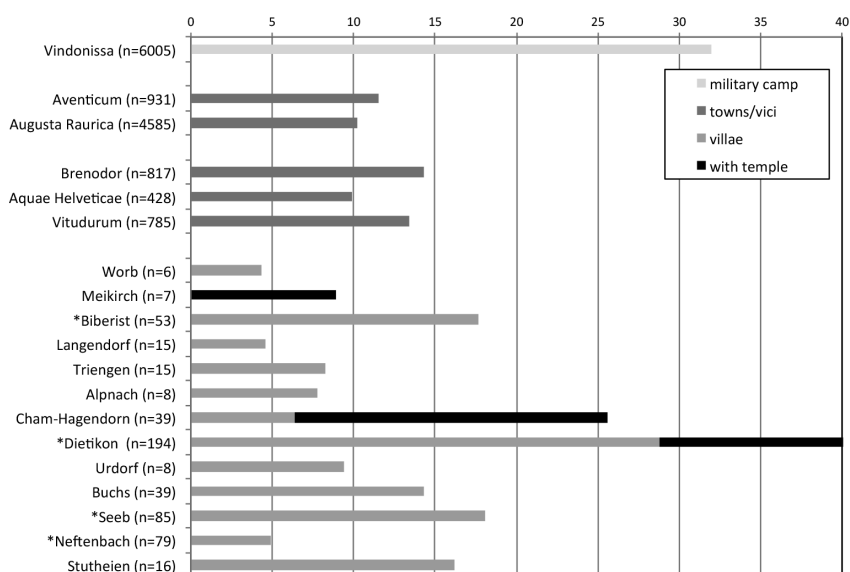


Fig. 3. Amount of coins per 1000 m³ in the Civitas Helvetiorum.

Furthermore, the excavation methods have to be considered as well. Metal detectors have only been implemented in a systematic fashion on excavations during the last couple of years. Since the coin ensembles included were all gathered before 2000, we can assume that the excavation methods were comparable.

Coin finds represent lost money. It can therefore be assumed that large nominals are underrepresented compared to small coins since one would certainly look more thoroughly for a lost coin of precious metal. It is questionable to what extent coin finds represent the actual coins in circulation. Larger transactions might have been settled in precious metal coins, if only because of their lower weight⁵.

Last but not least, the role of the legionary camp of *Vindonissa* must be taken into account. Its influence on the cash flow and coin circulation in the *Civitas Helvetiorum* during its occupation time between AD 15 and 101 should not be underestimated. H. W. Doppler and M. Peter have calculated that about 1,6 to 2 million *denarii* came to *Vindonissa* as pay during the 1st c. AD⁶. Related to the excavated volume, a total of 70 coins per 1000 m³ have been found in *Vindonissa* (fig. 4), whereas – with usually slightly more than 10–20 coins found per 1000 m³ – only a third of this total was found in the *vici* and in the towns of *Aventicum* (Avenches) and *Augusta Raurica* (Augst), the latter lying outside the *Civitas Helvetiorum*. The

⁵ In addition see Doppler & Peter 1998, 48.

⁶ Doppler & Peter 1998, 48. The amount of coin finds in *Vindonissa* until 1998 adds up to a converted value of 900 *denarii*, which corresponds to 0,0005635% of the total!

amount is even lower in rural sites with mostly less than 10 coins per 1000 m³. If we include the settlement period (fig. 4), the dominance of *Vindonissa* is even more impressive with a total amount of over 26 coins per 1000 m³ every year, compared to all the civil settlements with an amount of rarely more than 5 coins.

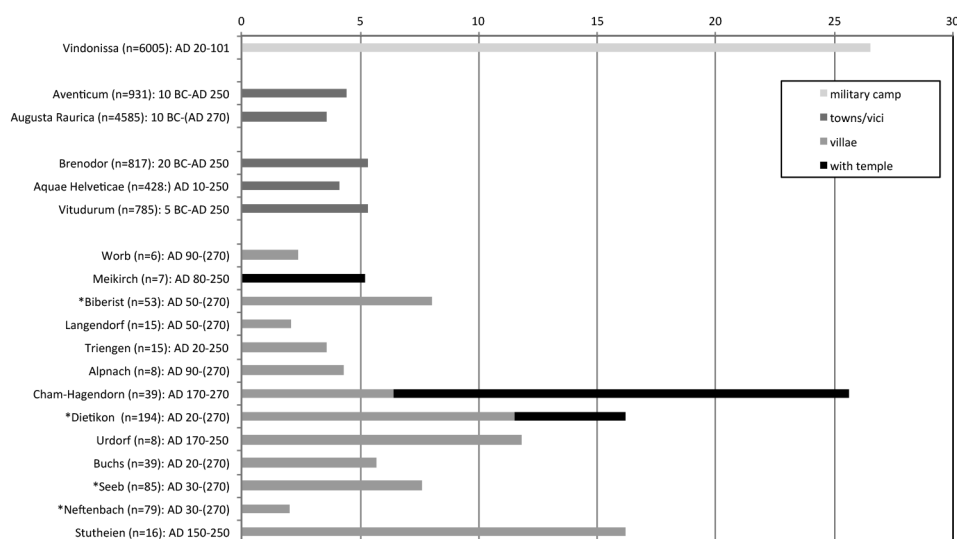


Fig. 4. Amount of coins until 260 AD per year and per 1000 m³ in the Civitas Helvetiorum (Vindonissa, Augusta Raurica and Aventicum: until 1998).

THE RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE *CIVITAS HELVETIORUM*

We currently know of c. 650 rural sites in Roman times in the *Civitas Helvetiorum* between the Lake Geneva and the Lake Constance, the Jura Mountains and the Alps⁷. However they greatly differ in extent, setting and thus finally in the manner of the establishment⁸. On the one hand, large villas with grand residences with more than 60 m in length and a mostly axial arrangement exist. On the other hand, we find estates of a middle size, where several adjoining buildings are arranged irregularly around a main building of about 40 m in length. Furthermore, we have to reckon with smaller estates with one or two buildings that, however, are insufficiently surveyed in our area of investigation. While the number of large villas and probably also that of the middle-sized estates may well correspond to the actual amount in ancient times, since their structures are well recognisable, this is not the case with the small estates. Their number might rise considerably in the future. For the analysis at hand however, this is irrelevant, since these small estates rarely provide a sufficient amount

7 Last-mentioned in Ebnöther & Monnier 2002, 135-177 with fig. 132; see also Drack 1975, 49-72.

8 For the following division see Schucany 1999, 92 with fig. 6-8; see also Augier *et al.* 2001, 64-65.

of coins for evaluation. According to an analysis in the middle Aare valley, the large villas represent one fifth, the middle-sized estates one third of the rural settlements⁹.

The four sites with coin series suitable for the analysis are all villas of the axial type (type 1A after Ferdière *et al.* 2010), the villa of Dietikon being a very large site with 13 ha of enclosed space when compared to Neftenbach (7,5 ha), Seeb (7 ha) and Biberist (5 ha)¹⁰.

The villa of Biberist is situated at the eastern border of the region that was culturally influenced by *Aventicum*, the principal town of the *Civitas Helvetiorum*, a mere 56 km away¹¹. The original small estate, founded around the middle of the 1st c. AD, was reconstructed around AD 70/80 as a large villa of axial type that existed until its demolition shortly after the middle of the 3rd c. AD. It was then rebuilt as a small estate, consisting of a homestead and a storehouse, that did not last long into the 4th c. AD. Approximately one half of the *pars rustica* of the large villa has been investigated, while the *pars urbana* was not affected. The possible impact on the coin series is difficult to estimate.

The villa of Dietikon is situated some 18 km southeast of *Vindonissa* and therefore more closely influenced by the legionary camp¹². Built as a large villa of axial type from the beginning in early Tiberian times, it was occupied until the third quarter of the 3rd c. AD. Following destruction, only the central temple and some areas in the former productive part were reconstructed. Apart from areas of the *pars rustica*, large parts of the *pars urbana* as well as a temple within the courtyard that was enclosed by the *pars rustica* and the *pars urbana* were investigated. This is well represented by the amount of coins. Matching the apparently usual deposit of coins in rural estates of this size, some 11 coins per 1000 m³ were found inside the villa. If the finds from the temple area are included, the number of coins increases to 27 pieces.

The villa of Seeb is situated 30 km east of *Vindonissa*, a one-day-journey in Roman times¹³. Numerous buildings of the *pars urbana* and the *pars rustica* have been excavated. Around the middle of the 1st c. AD, a small estate was reconstructed as a villa of axial type that lasted until the middle of the 3rd c. AD. After destruction, settlement activity is documented in several areas until the late 3rd to the middle of the 4th c. AD.

The villa of Neftenbach is situated 9 km northwest of the *vicus Vitudurum* (Oberwinterthur) and therefore in the more distant area of influence of *Vindonissa*, just as the *vicus*¹⁴. The excavation covered about one third of the enclosed area and affected the *pars rustica* as well as parts of the *pars urbana* that had already been dug in the 18th c. Following a fire around

9 See Schucany 1999, 93.

10 See Ebnöther & Monnier 2002, 147 fig. 146.

11 Schucany 2006, 31 fig. 0/1 (situation), see also Schucany 1999, 88 fig. 1; furthermore Schucany 2006, 251-269 (settlement history); coins: S. Frey-Kupper in Schucany 2006, 307-313.

12 Ebnöther 1990, 207-208 (settlement history) and fig. 295 (situation); coins: B. Hedinger in Ebnöther 1990, 232-244; L. Betrolaccini in Käch 2013, fig. 105-111.

13 Drack 1990, 11 (situation) and 259-271 (settlement history); coins: D. Dettwiler-Braun in Drack 1990, 219-222.

14 Rychener 1999, 35 (situation) and 511-513 (settlement history); coins: D. Schmutz in Rychener 1999, 482-486.

the middle of the 1st c. AD, an older estate was reconstructed as a villa of axial type that lasted until the middle of the 3rd c. The observed activities of the late 3rd and early 4th c. took place in single buildings in the *pars rustica* that were arranged similar to a village.

MARKET AND MONETARY ECONOMY IN THE *CIVITAS HELVETIORUM*

The rural sites usually contain less coins than the urban settlements (fig. 3), even though the two villas of axial type of Seeb and Biberist, unlike the villa of Neftenbach, reach similar amounts of coins. The number of finds in the large villa of Dietikon even surpasses the amount of coins in urban areas. But if a villa is connected to a sanctuary, the number of coins increases considerably – thanks to additional coins – as the examples of Dietikon, Cham-Hagendorn and Meikirch show. This reveals the importance of coins as sacrificial offerings. Indeed these coins were withdrawn from the normal circulation of money.

H. W. Doppler and M. Peter have compared the coins of *Vindonissa* with those of some neighbouring urban settlements in a very interesting study (fig. 5)¹⁵: the two *vici Aquae Helveticae* (Baden) and *Vitudurum* are situated 6 and 48 km east of *Vindonissa*. Therefore, they were located in the sphere of influence of the legionary camp and thus strongly affected by the latter's money inflow. Coins of Iulian to Claudian times dominate, while the coins of the 2nd and early to middle 3rd c. only play a small role. The authors interpret this as a strong influence of the supply from *Vindonissa*. Other settlements show a completely different picture: *Aventicum*, in the west of the *Civitas Helvetiorum* and the vicus *Brenodor* (Bern-Enge) (only 35 km further east) and the colony of *Augusta Raurica* north of the Jura Mountains. The coin series of these three urban settlements hold significantly more coins from the 2nd c., even if coinage from the Iulian to Claudian times remain dominant. The authors believe that for those settlements additional supplies were relevant.

If we extend this comparison to the four villas (fig. 6), an astonishing finding can be observed: the villas offer a similar spectrum with a dominance of coinages of the 2nd c. Thereby they distance themselves from the coins in circulation from the urban settlements, where coins from the 1st c. AD always remain the most common coinage. Considering their position, a correspondence between Dietikon and *Aquae Helveticae*, only 12 km away, would be expected. The same applies to Neftenbach and *Vitudurum* (only 9 km away), as well as Seeb, halfway between *Aquae Helveticae* and *Vitudurum*, and Biberist, situed 56 km from *Aventicum* and 37 km from *Brenodor*. However, this is not the case! The discrepancy of the three villas of Dietikon, Seeb and Neftenbach compared to the directly neighbouring *vici Aquae Helveticae* and *Vitudurum* is remarkable. This is all the more striking given that all these sites were established in the Tiberian period and continued to be occupied during almost the whole time of occupation of the legionary camp of *Vindonissa*. How can we explain this?

¹⁵ Doppler & Peter 1998, 51-52 with fig. 6.

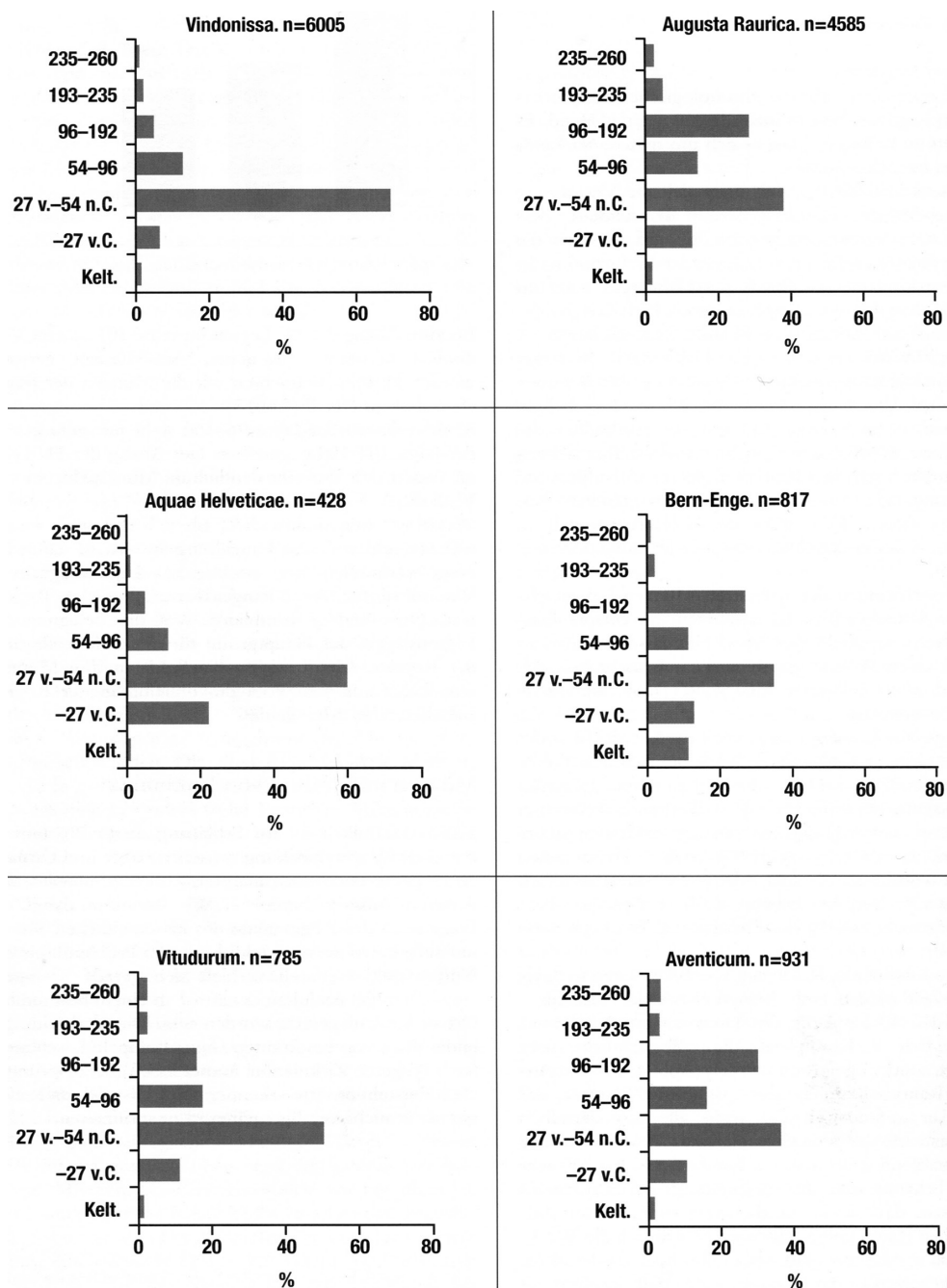


Fig. 5. Coins of different Swiss sites in comparison (until 260 AD) (after Doppler & Peter 1998, fig. 6).

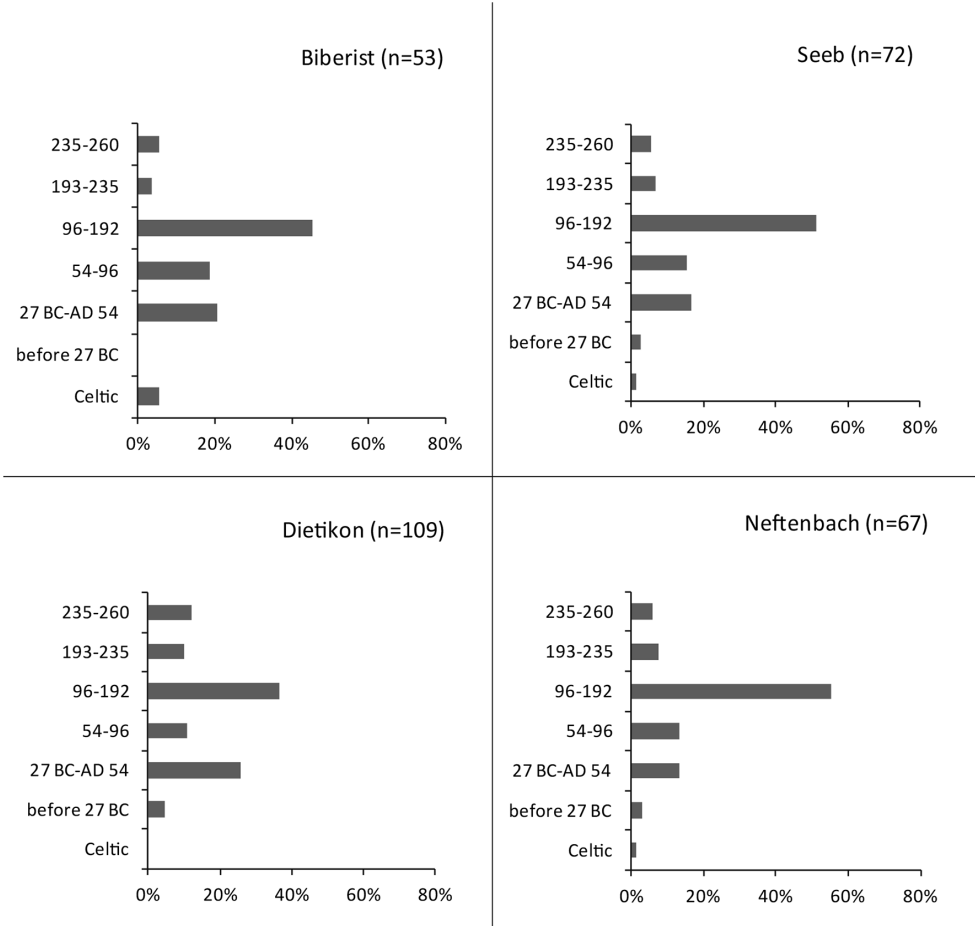


Fig. 6. Coins of the discussed villas in comparison (until 260 AD; Dietikon without sanctuary).

One possible explanation might look as following: during the 1st c. AD the rural settlements of the *Civitas Helvetiorum* differed greatly from the urban settlements (the *civitas* capital, colony and *vici*) in their way of supplying the day-to-day goods. Small coins were used for trading on the local markets of urban settlements already in the 1st c. AD. The goods of the daily life were sold and bought there. Meanwhile, a comparable market life obviously did not take place on the countryside. During all of the 1st c., the money flow of the *Civitas Helvetiorum* was dictated by the pay from the legionary camp of *Vindonissa*. This applies mainly to the *vici* in the east, *Aquae Helveticae* and *Vitudurum*, particularly closely connected with *Vindonissa*. Their money flow barely differs from the one of the legionary camp that was abandoned by the troops in 101. In later periods, different ways of supply and money inflows – as can be observed in the larger and smaller towns in the west and north – seem to have reached those *vici* far less.

The situation of the rural settlements gradually underwent change, as can be seen in their coin series that are dominated by coinages of the 2nd c. Obviously, small coin was by then also exchanged for goods within the villas. It is possible that this reflects an increasing differentiation between the estates. During the 2nd and 3rd c. we can in fact observe a certain specialisation of the different buildings owned by the farm workers. Thus, in individual buildings, relatively elaborate installations were built for the processing of food (meat, corn, legumes). This indicates a certain surplus in the production. The goods could also be sold inside the estate, especially to those who had no such installations. Maybe the latter had earned the money needed with metal working, textile or leather production¹⁶. Within the estates, a proper domestic economy seems to have developed.

CONCLUSION

The small coin represented in the coin series of the estates indicates that, as opposed to the cities and *vici*, in the rural regions of the *Civitas Helvetiorum* no market life took in the 1st c. AD. This changed during the 2nd c. AD, probably due to the specialisation of farm workers which can be observed in the archaeological record. The goods for daily use were now also bought and sold in the villas and estates.

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16 Ebnöther 1995, 223-224 and fig. 297 (Dietikon); Schucany 2006, 290 with fig. 18/18 (Biberist).

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