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e-Forschungsberichte Faszikel 2 (2024) 1–23 (§)

<https://doi.org/10.34780/cd9thw23>

Herausgebende Institution / Publisher:  
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

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## Rome, Italy

The Black-Glazed Pottery from a Republican Context in the Ancient ›Area Capitolina‹. Morphology, Typology, and an Interpretation of Context

Research Carried Out between October 2021 and June 2022

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e-FORSCHUNGSBERICHTE DES DAI **2024** · Faszikel 2

### COOPERATION PARTNER

Sapienza University of Rome; DAI Rome Department; Sovrintendenza Capitolina

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

DAI Research Scholarship 2021–2022

### HEAD OF PROJECT

O. Dally, C. P. Presicce

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### ABSTRACT

This contribution presents the preliminary results of the study of black glazed pottery found on the Capitoline Hill in Rome. Its purpose is to investigate the place of manufacture and chronology of the fragments, with the aim of dating the activity conducted in the formation of the layers in which pottery was discovered. The study was carried out as part of the Kapitول Projekt, currently still ongoing, sponsored by the Capitoline Superintendency in collaboration with the German Archaeological Institute and the Chairs of Professor Massimiliano Papini and Professor F. R. Stasolla of the Sapienza University of Rome. The ceramic fragments come from strata dating to the Republican period, probably from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and were found near the southern slopes of the Capitoline Hill in the area now known as Belvedere Tarpeo.

### KEYWORDS

Black-glazed pottery, ancient Rome, Roman pottery, area capitolina

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Beitrag werden die vorläufigen Ergebnisse der Untersuchung von Keramikfragmenten mit schwarzer Farbe vorgestellt, die auf dem Campidoglio in Rom gefunden wurden. Ziel ist es, die Herstellung und Chronologie der Fragmente zu untersuchen, um die Tätigkeit bei der Bildung der Schichten zu datieren. Die Studie wurde im Rahmen des Kapitool-Projekts durchgeführt, derzeit noch in Arbeit, das von der Kapitoolinischen Superintendentur in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut und dem Lehrstuhl von Professor Massimiliano Papini von der Universität Sapienza in Rom gefördert wurde. Die Keramikfragmente stammen aus Stratigraphien aus republikanischer Zeit, die wahrscheinlich zu Beginn des 2. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. entstanden sind und in der Nähe der südwestlichen Hänge des Kapitoolinischen Hügels in dem heute als Belvedere Tarpeo bekannten Gebiet gefunden wurden.

## SCHLAGWÖRTER

Schwarzglasur-Keramik, antikes Rom, römische Keramik, area capitolina

## Introduction

1 Recent archaeological investigations conducted in the gardens of the former Teutonic Hospital, located on the southern slope of the [Capitoline Hill](#) where the *area capitolina* stood in ancient times, have surprisingly intercepted deposits from the Republican age. The excavation of the stratigraphic units yielded chronologically heterogeneous materials, including architectural terracotta, votive offerings and the black glazed pottery examined in my Master's Degree thesis, whose preliminary results are presented in this article.

2 The analysis of the pottery fragments involved their categorization within the classifications established by Jean-Paul Morel in 1981<sup>1</sup>, using two different approaches: the study of stamped and painted bases and the identification of forms based on the morphology of the rims and bases of the vessels. Whenever

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1 Morel 1981.

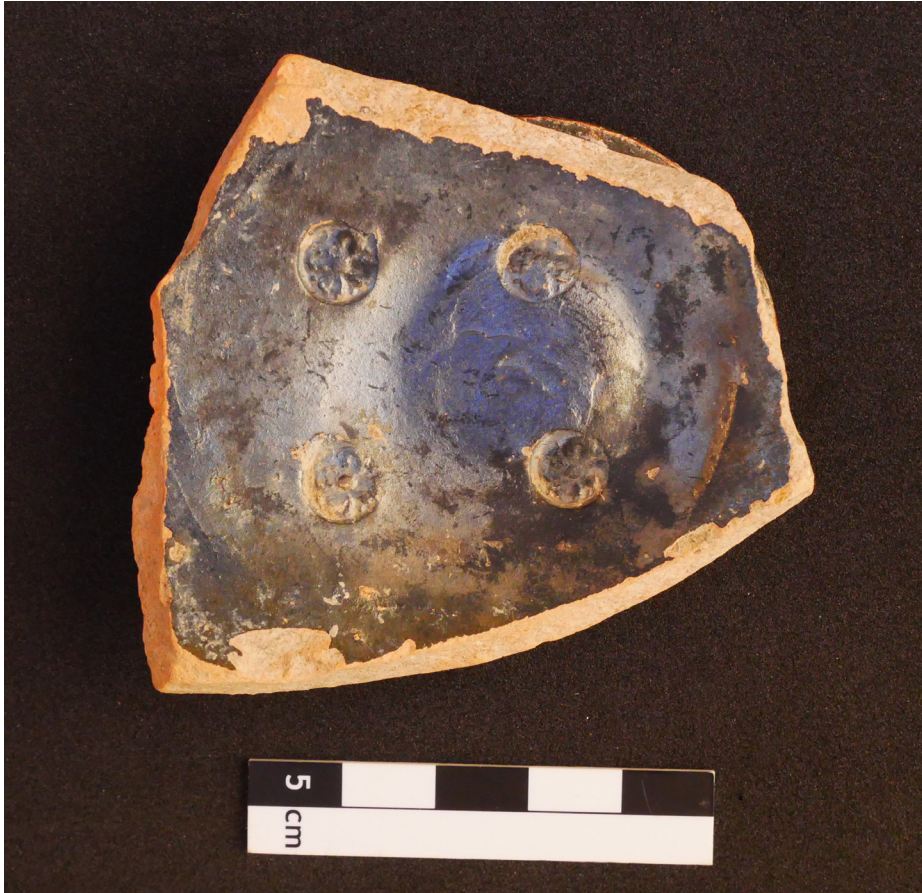


Fig. 1: In the picture, we can see the base of a vessel belonging to the Group of Small Stamps with the inside wall stamped with three palmettes

possible, an attempt was made to determine the exact production area of the vessels, which facilitated the assignment of a chronology to each individual fragment<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the heterogeneous chronology assigned to other classes of material from the same archaeological contexts, these artefacts yielded an approximately homogeneous chronology ranging from c. 280 BC to 240–210 BC, with a greater concentration in the middle years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The aim of the study so far is to propose a chronology for the formation of the layers studied and to hypothesise the type of activity that led to their formation based on the testimony of literary sources and the intended use of the ceramic materials at the time of deposition.

## The Study of Black-glazed Pottery

<sup>4</sup> The ceramic fragments examined sometimes featured decorations or stamps, which were duly considered whilst trying to ascertain production locations. The most frequently represented forms are cups and plates, often found in ancient votive and sacred contexts. Among the cups, Morel types 2783 and 2784, are the most common. They are characterized by a rounded and slightly inwardly curved rim, a curved profile, and a hemispherical basin. The cup diameter proved consistent, with an average of 14 cm. The bases are low with a wide diameter averaging 5 cm, indicating mass production and standardisation, which probably took place in Rome and its surroundings.

<sup>5</sup> The next most common forms, plates and small dishes are represented by Morel types 2254 and 2250, but especially by the Morel plate 1534. The profiles of the fragments reveal a morphologically similar texture, but with different dimensions and a basin that is sometimes straight, sometimes slightly curved.

<sup>6</sup> For the study of stamped bases, a precise comparison was sought in order to propose a dating: it turned out that most specimens are attributable to the *Atelier des petites estampilles*, more recently referred to as the Group of Small Stamps (Fig. 1).

<sup>2</sup> The studies of Antonio F. Ferrandes were fundamental (2006a–b; 2007; 2016; 2017).

7 The clay of the fragments is generally hard and compact, occasionally granular with visible voids even upon autoptic examination, and tends towards grey, pink, hazel, and orange tones; the fracture of the fragments is usually sharp, and, at times, black inclusions can be distinguished<sup>3</sup>. The black glaze is generally of good quality, shiny, compact, and smooth to the touch. Rarely, it appears opaque and can be easily detached on some fragments. The final result is a precious metallic effect created by iridescent reflections tending towards blue-violet and green<sup>4</sup>. The outer foot is almost always spared from the glaze; sometimes enamel drips are present, and there are frequent fingerprints causing a red-orange colouration of the glaze. The same colouration can sometimes be seen on the inner base of the vessels, a result of the imprint of the base of the vessel that lay over our specimen during the firing process, a feature that J.-P. Morel observed in his study dedicated to the *Atelier*.

8 The chronology of the fragments ranges from c. 280 BC to 240–210 BC, with a greater concentration in the middle years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. However, establishing a narrower and stricter chronology is not easy, considering that the forms represented by the Capitoline fragments were widespread throughout the century. Such a result is not surprising. It is evident that the dating of the fragments focuses on the period when Rome, in close contact with the *Magna Graecia* world, was increasing its ceramic production. Conversely, from around 260 BC until the end of the century, the city was involved in a conflict with Carthage, a situation that led not only to a decline in trade but also in production.

## Votive Destination of the Black-glazed Pottery?

9 The total number of diagnostic materials examined amounts to 127 fragments without differentiation between the archaeological layers (US), with the majority (97 fragments) coming from US 132.

3 The Munsell 2000 was used to determine the colour of the clay, although the limitations of autopsy viewing are known. Microscopic laboratory analyses may be conducted in the future to determine the area of production of the pottery more precisely.

4 Morel 1969, 66: »[...] le vernis ne prenant un aspect métallique que sur les produits mal réussis.«



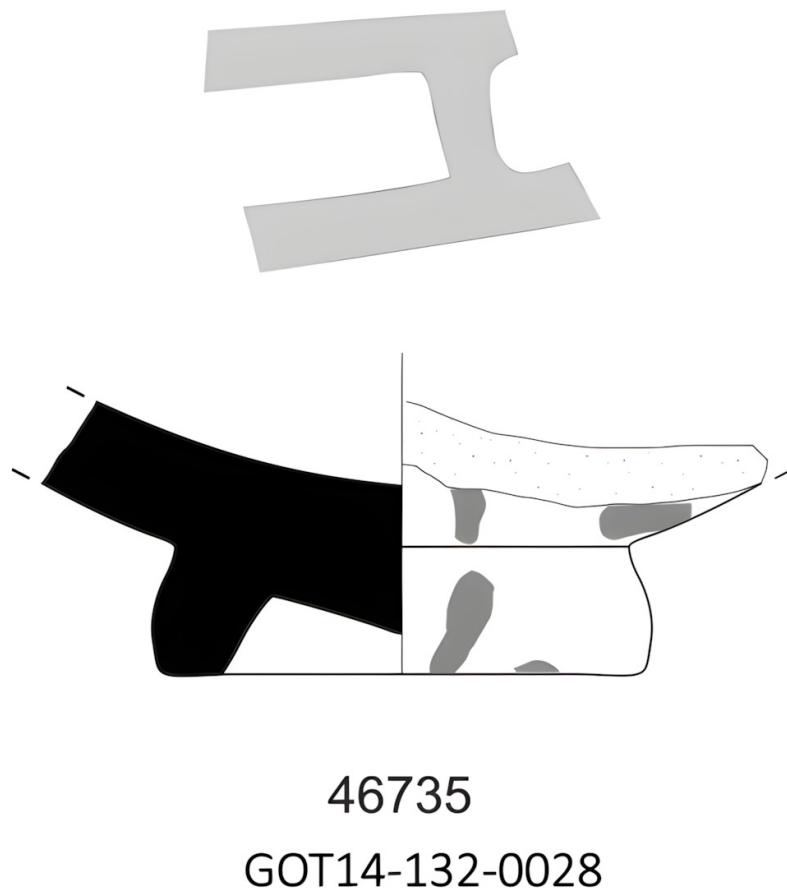


Fig. 2: The drawing depicts the base of a vase belonging to the Overpainted H Group

10 From the analysis of the black-glazed pottery from US 132, there is a concentration that can be dated to the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, with prevalence in the middle years, i. e. – the period between 265 BC and 240 BC. This is supported by a large number of cups, such as Morel 2783, 2784, and 2538, as well as plates of type 1534. The latter materials are frequently found in association with the workshops of the so-called Small Stamped Group, the *Heraklesschalen*, and the Overpainted H Group, which are all productions that appear in our layers. US 143 yielded ceramic materials that can be dated to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, with a greater concentration in the decades between 265 and 240 BC. The material from US 323, on the other hand, yielded a date that lies between the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the last years of the century.

11 In view of the lack of typical indicators for the late Republican period, the specimens that are of decisive importance for the chronology of the deposits and thus represent the *terminus post quem* are the following:

- The fragment belonging to the so-called thin profile Group.
- The two artefacts belonging to the group of overpainted letters »H« (Fig. 2).
- The plates of Morel 2233 are datable to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.
- The miniature piece dated to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.
- The numerous pottery walls engraved with cogs, which frequently appear from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.
- The Morel 2572 beaker from the period between the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, which is a characteristic type of the later production of *Lucus Feroniae*<sup>5</sup>.

12 At the centre of the debate is the nature of the context of the findings. An attempt must be made to determine whether the black-glazed pottery is at least material belonging to a mound containing sacred objects of various origins (hypothesis 1), or a »votive deposit«, which presupposes the existence of a ritual (hypothesis 2)<sup>6</sup>:

5 Stanco 2004.

6 On the concept of ritual see Bonghi Jovino 2005, 32.

1. The hypothesis put forward so far<sup>7</sup> is that it is material from a closed deposit that was later reused for the creation of layers during one of the renovations of the *area capitolina* site, perhaps in connection with the information reported by Livy (Liv., 40, 51.3) about the year 179 BC, when the levelling of the square in front of the Temple of Jupiter took place. The architectural terracottas and other architectural decorative materials, dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, come from an original deposit nearby, which was later disturbed and re-exposed during the construction activity mentioned above.
2. If we are dealing with a ›votive deposit‹, the investigation of the structural characteristics of the vessels as indicators of a ritual dynamic should be tackled. The numerous containers could have had the function of sacrificial vessels, as the numerous osteological and faunal finds in all layers prove. Unfortunately, in the case of the pottery from the *area capitolina*, not a single intact vase was found. There are various explanations for this:
  - They could have been broken by the pressure exerted by the subsequent drains to which the area was subjected over the centuries.
  - They were deposited already fragmented, having been moved to another location together with the soil that contained them.
  - They were deliberately broken according to precise rules.

13 To support the idea that it is a ›votive deposit‹, it would be useful to understand whether the ceramic material was deliberately arranged on depositional levels, an indication that cannot be ascertained from the known documentation<sup>8</sup>.

7 Galluccio 2016, 254.

8 The votive deposit located between the Temple of Concordia and the Temple of Vespasian and Titus is well known. It contained offerings consisting essentially of small or miniature vases, manufactured from the beginning to be votive objects, associated with anthropomorphic figurines cut out of bronze foil. This material was laid down with great care and arranged on the roofs of actual deposition levels, with the most delicate parts of each vase protected with duly arranged tuff flakes. Bonghi Jovino 2005, 35.

14 There is another explanation that allows the two hypotheses to be linked. During the archaeological campaigns carried out in 2014 and 2018 by the Capitoline Superintendence and the German Archaeological Institute, several fragments of votive figurines were found in the same layers as the black-glazed pottery. The votive figurines have the same chronology as the black glazed pottery (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) and could testify to a ritual deposition of these objects, to which a sacred meaning was attributed in antiquity. It is possible that the pottery was used to contain the ›first fruits‹ and thus the remains of animal bones and ashes found in the layers. Later, the pottery and figurines were covered by a drain containing materials with a different chronology, either from other contexts or from previously formed deposits containing sacred materials that were no longer usable<sup>9</sup>. This scenario could explain the lack of connections between pottery sherds from different layers, as the ritual deposits may have been made at the same time in different locations (in the form of pits?) in close proximity to each other.

15 The votive character of the materials is confirmed by the precise comparison that has been made in the study of materials with other sacred contexts in Rome. Furthermore, another indicator for linking the pottery to the votive sphere is the intended use of the pottery and its small dimensions: no traces of use were found on the fragments, indicating that they were made for votive use and not for utilitarian use.

## Final Considerations and Interpretation of the Context

16 The black-glazed pottery can be assigned to a sacral context. Firstly, its find context is significant, as it was discovered alongside typical indicators of a cult site, including architectural terracottas, coins, terracotta statuettes, votive

9 It has already been pointed out that it is not possible to determine the precise position of the black glazed pottery sherds. However, from the orthophotos reported in our work, it appears that the first materials to emerge from the US are the pottery sherds, which, as proposed, could constitute the last cast to seal the deposit.

offerings, and osteological remains. Secondly, the use and functionality of the pottery correlate with a votive sphere. Moreover, the votive nature of the pottery is underpinned by two specific production groups associated with the worship of Hercules (or Hera?), which are rarely found in Rome and always in contexts associated with the sacred.

17 Furthermore, there is a direct correspondence between a sacred structure – the concrete platform found during the archaeological excavations of the Capitoline Superintendence in 2008 that cut one of the layers examined (US 132) – and the inherently sacred site, the *area capitolina*, which in antiquity was considered *sacer* as property of the gods<sup>10</sup>. This suggests the possibility that it was a deposit for the foundation or obliteration of sacred structures. Another observation in favour of this hypothesis is the high number of adjacent walls or fragments that can be recognised as belonging to the same vessel (from the same archaeological layer), with almost identical and modular fragment sizes. This suggests a ritual purpose for the material, possibly related to the deliberate fragmentation of vessels sacrificed to the gods, with only part of the ritual gesture (*pars pro toto*) preserved and part of the vessel used in the rites probably buried in pits. A similar practice is attested in the Iguvine Tables, in which the ritual offering is described, and is documented in various contemporary archaeological contexts<sup>11</sup>. The chronological heterogeneity of the materials could be explained through the burial of ›out-of-use‹ votive material obliterated in the deposit in order not to lose the sacredness of the object, i. e. that concept of *sanctitas* also linked to objects. In such a picture, the black-glazed pottery would indicate the remains of a ritual banquet or a particular foundation rite<sup>12</sup>.

18 The chronological framework for the layers is provided by the pottery, which is supported by comparisons with similar contexts in urban areas from the same period. In addition, a coin from US 132, together with the chronology of

the pottery, serves as a terminus post quem for the formation of the layers. This coin, which shows Janus on the obverse and the prow of a ship with the legend ROMA on the reverse, is only known in votive contexts. Recent studies on the find, function and chronology place it between 217 and 215 BC, during the Second Punic War<sup>13</sup>.

19 Indeed, our context could be linked to the Second Punic War. Ancient literary sources, in particular a passage from Livy (Liv., 22, 9, 7) dated to 217 BC, tell of great games, gifts, sacrifices and lectisternia organized to counteract Hannibal's rise<sup>14</sup>. On this occasion, *Titus Otacilius Crassus* consecrated the temple of *Mens*, while *Quintus Fabius Maximus* dedicated the one in honour of *Venus Erycina*. Both, Livy continues, were erected on the Capitolium, and the proximity of these temples, which were only separated by a water channel, is emphasised<sup>15</sup>. The dedication of the two temples took place in public in 215 BC. The temple dedicated to Venus is often associated with the *Venus Victrix*, which is documented in the *Fasti fratres arvales* dating between 30 BC and 20 CE<sup>16</sup>.

20 The *aedes Mentis*, which was also vowed and consecrated in the same way as the temple of *Venus Erycina*, is consistently located in the Capitol. According to Cicero (Cic. *nat. deor.* 2, 23, 61) and Plutarch (Plut. *mor.* 318 E; 322 C), it was rebuilt and rededicated in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Its cult originated in Eryx in western Sicily, a city that was important in the Punic Wars.

21 Finally, the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC is steeped in archaic cultural legacies based on the practice of ›pagan‹ cults, in which the main gens could decide to pay more attention to one deity than another, even on public occasions: the presence of a coin with a prow referring to the Second Punic War and the large number of vases probably dedicated to Heracles suggests once again the figure of *Quintus Fabius Maximus*, who, according to Pliny the Elder (Plin. *nat.*, 34, 7, 40), he brought one

10 On the concepts of *sacer*, *sanctus* and *religiosus* see Rüpke 2004, 9–11.

11 Di Giuseppe 2009, 210 and especially footnote 61 for contemporary contexts; see also Cherubini 2004, 36.

12 A similar case of a ritual pit was found on the northern slopes of the Palatine Hill, specifically at Regis Sacrorum. Cherubini 2004. Furthermore, the study of the bones could provide indications as to the deity to whom the ritual was performed: the sacrifice of female animals to female deities, for instance, is an element in the gender definition of the gods. On this subject, see Rüpke 2004, 112.

13 Burnett – Crawford, 2014, 252–253; Danti – Presicce 2016, 235 n. 3; Jaia – Molinari 2020.

14 Lugli 1969.

15 On the location, the proximity of the two temples and their separation by a water channel see also Liv. 23, 32, 20 and Varro, *Serv. Aen. georg.* 4, 265. It is interesting to note the presence of a coin, which, as already mentioned, was usually deposited in water-related contexts. The location of the two temples in the *area capitolina* is generally accepted see Coarelli 1999, 114 for the Temple of Venus and Reusser 1996, 240–241 for the Temple of Mens.

16 Schilling 1979, 244 n. 1. 263. 298; Palombi 1999, 119–120.



of Lysippus' greatest works, the Tarentine Hercules, to the Capitol in 209 BC and contributed significantly to the defeat of the naval power in the Mediterranean that had Heracles-Melqart as its patron deity: Carthage.

22 The concrete platform could, therefore be identified with the temple of Mens, which was possibly renovated in the late Republican period, as Cicero indicates<sup>17</sup>. The coin provides a precise chronological mark corresponding to the vows and dedications of the two temples. The dating and the nature of the black-glazed pottery confirm the period of origin of the layers. The heterogeneous material, which may have a ritual significance, was used in the levelling of the foundations of the two temples, creating a deposit known in other urban areas with similar materials.

## Future Perspectives

23 The study of black glazed ceramics from the *area capitolina* is not yet finished as several fragments await study. Future research should also consider the black glazed pottery fragments found in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the excavations of Antonio Maria Colini, in order to provide further comparisons of material from a topographically close context to the area of our interest. Moreover, the autopsy view of the fragments is not sufficient for a precise understanding of the place of production. Therefore, we hope for an archaeometric study of the fragments aimed at understanding the place of origin of the clays used in the production of the pottery.

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17 A phase of the platform has been dated to the late Republican period based on the building technique.

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## ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Fig. 1: Emanuela Bruno

Fig. 2: Emanuela Bruno

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ROR ID: <https://ror.org/02be6w209>

## METADATA

Titel/*Title*: Rome, Italy. The Black-Glazed Pottery from a Republican Context in the Ancient ›Area Capitolina‹. Morphology, Typology, and an Interpretation of Context. Research Carried Out between October 2021 and June 2022

Band/*Issue*: e-Forschungsberichte 2024-2

Bitte zitieren Sie diesen Beitrag folgenderweise/*Please cite the article as follows*:

E. Bruno, Rome, Italy. The Black-Glazed Pottery from a Republican Context in the Ancient ›Area Capitolina‹. Morphology, Typology, and an Interpretation of Context. Research Carried Out between October 2021 and June 2022, eDAI-F 2024-2, § 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.34780/cd9thw23>

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Online veröffentlicht am/*Online published on*: 19.12.2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34780/cd9thw23>

Schlagworte/*Keywords*: Black-glazed pottery, ancient Rome, Roman pottery, area capitolina

Bibliographischer Datensatz/*Bibliographic reference*: <https://zenon.dainst.org/Record/003083365>