



IN SEARCH OF THE ROMAN “EL TRUC À BATCHOS”

Quartz diorite porphyry as building material at Roman sites along the river Dender in Geraardsbergen and Lessines (Belgium)

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The (porphyry-)sills¹ in the region of Lessines, Quenast and Bierghes (province of Hainaut, Belgium) were formed when the southern edge of the Brabant Massif was an active volcanic belt during the Upper Ordovician period (488 – 423 Ma). The geochemical composition of the rocks indicates a typical island arc magmatism related to subduction (André *et al.* 1986). Based on macroscopic (phenocrysts in a groundmass of smaller crystals) and petrographic characteristics of the rock, it is called a quartz diorite.

Since the 18th century, the sills of Lessines and Quenast are exploited at industrial scale for numerous (road)building-activities. An 18th century map of the region (Ferraris map) illustrates the randomly executed surface mining strategy nearby the village of Lessines. Nowadays, the mining occurs in very large quarries. The mechanical shiploader - “*el Truc à Batchos*” in popular speech - was built in 1922 on the shore of the river Dender in Lessines to facilitate the loading of porphyry in cargo ships until it fell into abeyance in 1984.



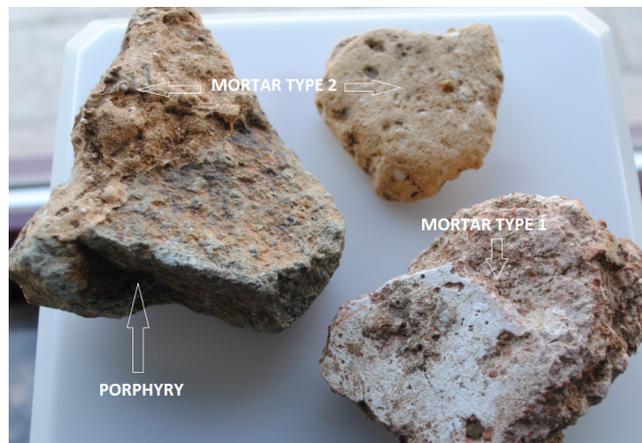
The “*el Truc à Batchos*” in Lessines.

¹¹ Lens-shaped intrusive masses of igneous rocks close to Earth's surface.



Detail of the 18th century Ferraris map illustrating a randomly executed surface mining strategy nearby Lessines.

New archaeological evidence from two surface sites in Deux-Acren (Lessines) and Schendelbeke (Geraardsbergen) points out that quartz diorite was already used in the Roman period as building material. Interestingly enough, the sites in question are situated further downstream along the alluvial plain of the Dender, thus suggesting a transport by water of the stone slabs. Furthermore, there is a striking resemblance between both sites regarding their geomorphological position: up high on the edge of the alluvial plain and overlooking a meander in the river stream. Both locations are characterized by a very high density of artefacts in the ploughsoil-horizon: i.e. (burned) building materials (i.e. lumps of porphyry), ceramics (Dr. 18/31R and Dr. 27 with stamp PATRIV), glass-fragments, coins (i.e. potin "au Rameau A") and at least two types of mortar (Van Liefferinge *et al.* 2009). Of particular interest is the sticking together of mortar and one of the many lumps of quartz diorite in Schendelbeke. Further archaeological research should clarify issues concerning porphyry exploitation and transportation during antiquity in the Dender region.



The sticking together of Roman mortar type 2 and a lump of quartz diorite porphyry.

REFERENCES

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