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The Roman Limes in the Rhine Delta: A historical perspective on the early developments of the north-western frontier of the Roman Empire

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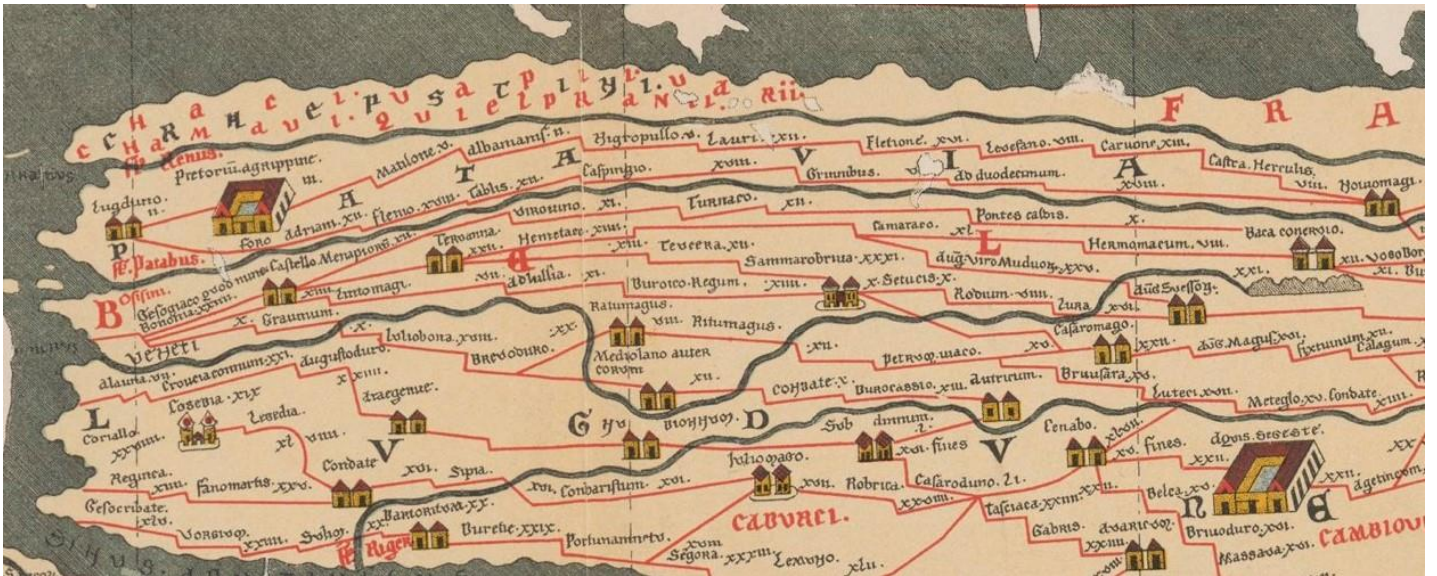
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THE ROMAN LINES IN THE RHINE DELTA

*A historical perspective on the early developments of the north-western frontier
of the Roman Empire*



MA Thesis Ancient History
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04-05-2022



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Front page: detail of the north-western Roman Empire on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. Konrad Miller, Ulrich Harsch Bibliotheca Augustana (1887).

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, Roman history has received renewed attention in the Netherlands and Germany after the Lower German Limes was placed on the world heritage list of the UN organisation UNESCO in July 2021. Other sections of the Roman *limes* have already been placed on this list.¹ For the nomination of the Lower German Limes were several Dutch and German archaeologists involved in the creation of the nomination file for this new world heritage site.² This attention to the Lower German Limes not only led to more scholarly and public interest to this part of the Roman Empire, it has also proved to be a relevant starting point from which scholars stress the relevance and importance of the Roman history of the Netherlands.³ According to the UNESCO, the Lower German Limes display Roman innovation, cultural interchange, imperial policy, water management and military structures. In addition, due to the wetland conditions of the Netherlands, timber and other organic remains have been well preserved in this region which gives an unique insight into Roman construction and supply.⁴ However, most of the *limes* is no longer visible in the current landscape, therefore most of the physical heritage will be carried out through museums.⁵

The keyword in all of this is the word ‘*limes*’, but what is the Roman *limes* actually? The Latin word *limes* itself means: “[a] strip of uncultivated ground to mark the division of land”.⁶ The term is nowadays often used by archaeologists and historians in different ways to express the chain of legionary fortresses, auxiliary forts, watchtowers and other constructions that were related to the frontier of the Roman Empire. However, according to Benjamin Isaac the Romans themselves did not use this word like we do today to describe a ‘defended border’,⁷ during the first and second century AD the word *limes* described the construction of military roads during campaigns to make territories more accessible,⁸ while in other instances it was used to indicate a land boundary, but not in a defensive way.⁹ It was not until the third and fourth century AD that its meaning changed into describing a frontier district, but even

¹ Hadrian’s Wall and the Antonine Wall in Britain and the Upper German-Raetian Limes in Germany were already placed on this list <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/430>>. In 2021 the Western Segment of the Danube Limes also joined this list <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1608>>.

² M. Polak, S. Bödecker, L. Berger, M.J.M. Zandstra and T. Leene, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire – The Lower German Limes. Nomination file for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List* (Bonn 2019).

³ See e.g.: D.J. Breeze, S. Jilek, E.P. Graafstal, W.J.H. Willems and S. Bödecker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire. Grenzen van het Romeinse Rijk. Grenzen des Römischen Reiches. The Lower German Limes. De Nedergermaanse Limes. Der Niedergermanische Limes* (Leiden 2018); S. Mols and R. Polak, ‘De Romeinse Limes in Nederland’, *Lampas* 53:2 (2020) 113-123.

⁴ ‘Frontiers of the Roman Empire – The Lower German Limes’, UNESCO (2021) <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1631>>.

⁵ R. de Bruin, A. Hertog and R. Paardekooper (eds.), *The Roman Frontier Along the River Rhine: The Role of Museums in Revitalizing Cultural Landscapes* (Amsterdam 2018).

⁶ According to the translation of ‘*limes*’ by: J. Morwood (ed.), *Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary: Latin-English* (Oxford 2012) <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/view/10.1093/acref/9780191739583.001.0001/b-la-en-00001-0005845?rskey=HJlZlq&result=5841>> accessed on: 24-02-2021.

⁷ B. Isaac, ‘The Meaning of the Terms Limes and Limitanei’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988) 125.

⁸ Isaac, ‘The Meaning of the Terms Limes and Limitanei’, 126-127. See e.g.: Frontin. *Strat.* 1.3.10; Tac. *Ann.* 1.50; 2.7; Tac. *Germ.* 29.4; Vell. Pat. 2.120.

⁹ Isaac, 128. See e.g.: SHA, *Hadr.* 12; Tac. *Agr.* 41.2.

then it did not refer to defensive fortifications.¹⁰ Currently the word *limes* is almost exclusively used to describe the fortified borders of the Roman Empire. However, if the Romans did not have a specific word to describe the *limes* like we do today as a fortified border, how did the Romans perceive their own borders? First of all, the Romans did not perceive borders like we do today as being separation lines between sovereign states.¹¹ According to Charles Whittaker, the Romans did draw boundaries when it comes to internal control and administration within the Roman *imperium*, but the rest of the world was still “open and accessible to power but not to territorial control.”¹² The Romans barely used terms like *finis* or *limites* to describe the boundaries of their territory because it was never seen as something that could limit expansion.¹³ Rather than being something that divided the Roman Empire from the rest of the world, borders were lines that marked the end of the direct administrative control. However, most scholars agree that even these lines were not thin lines of military installations but were large overlapping frontier zones.¹⁴

Nowadays is the Roman *limes* often perceived in two extremes; either that it was an impenetrable barrier protecting the empire from external dangers or that it was a transitional zone between the regions that were under Rome’s direct rule and those that were not.¹⁵ The real function of the *limes* lies probably somewhere in between as expressed by Maureen Carroll: “the *limes* at all times was a system of interconnected outposts controlling the military road and rivers along the frontier and acting as a line of communications. It was much more a demarcation line than a barrier, and it was never built to withstand serious, largescale attacks from without.”¹⁶ The entire Roman *limes* stretch from the Atlantic coast in the United Kingdom to the Black Sea in Romania along the rivers Rhine and Danube, covering more than 7500 km, making it the largest surviving Roman monument.¹⁷ The Lower German Limes is a relatively small but important section within this large international Roman structure. The Lower German Limes stretched along the river Rhine from the German city of Bonn to the river’s estuary near the Dutch town of Katwijk.

Several scholars have tried to make a reconstruction of the creation of the Lower German Limes, such as Tilmann Bechert and Willem Willems, presenting an overview of this frontier in both German and Dutch.¹⁸ More recently Jona Lendering and Arjen Bosman have given an English overview of the

¹⁰ Isaac, ‘The Meaning of the Terms Limes and Limitanei’, 132-133.

¹¹ E.g. P. Claval, *Espace et pouvoir* (Paris 1978) 109. From: C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore 1994) 16.

¹² Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 18.

¹³ Whittaker, 19. Virgil for example describes that Jupiter gave the Romans an empire without an end (*imperium sine fine dedi*). From: Verg. *Aen.* 1.283.

¹⁴ E.g. E. Hugh, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (London 1996) 4; D.J. Breeze, *Frontiers of Imperial Rome* (Barnsley 2011) 161.

¹⁵ M. Polak and L.I. Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier? The Establishment of the Roman Frontier in the Rhine Delta’, *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 60 (2013) 259.

¹⁶ M. Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans: The German Provinces of Rome* (Gloucestershire 2001) 39.

¹⁷ Breeze, *Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, xviii.

¹⁸ T. Bechert and W.J.H. Willems, *Die römische Reichsgrenze von der Mosel bis zur Nordseeküste* (Stuttgart 1995); T. Bechert and W.J.H. Willems, *De Romeinse Rijksgrens tussen Moezel en Noordzeekust* (Utrecht 1995).

Roman history of the Low Countries, *Edge of Empire: Rome's Frontier on the Lower Rhine*.¹⁹ And in the scope of 'The Sustainable Frontier Project', Marinus Polak and Laura Kooistra have done quite an extensive research on the development of the Dutch Roman *limes*.²⁰ However, most of the research that has been done on the Roman Netherlands is not aimed at the development of the Lower German Limes in its totality, taking into account several different factors that might have contributed or influenced the creation of the *limes*, but they are more centred around discussing a specific aspect of it.²¹ However, as Brian Campbell expresses: "perhaps it is preferable to think in terms of frontier zones, where a complex of social, economic, and cultural factors may have contributed to Roman policy."²² There were likely more factors involved than just political and military factors.²³

Unfortunately relatively little of this research has been done by ancient historians, which is also expressed by Lendering and Bosman stating that "the Roman past of the Netherlands should be studied by both archaeologists *and* historians. [...] Dutch historians do not do any intensive study of the Roman history of their country."²⁴ Therefore this thesis aims to contribute to the recent developments and tries to re-examine the Roman past closer to home from a historian's point of view, to see what the events, processes, causes and reasons were that led up to the creation of the Lower German Limes which eventually also resulted in the consolidation and official incorporation of the region into the province Germania Inferior, by not only looking at the political and military events but also at the economic and social aspects. However, during Roman times the region what we nowadays call the Netherlands was not a demarcated region that stopped at the current borders with Germany and Belgium, it was part of a much larger area that covered most of north-western Europe west of the Rhine. This research will

¹⁹ J. Lendering and A. Bosman, *Edge of Empire: Rome's Frontier on the Lower Rhine* (Rotterdam 2012). However, this work is not primarily, even though the title suggests so, aimed at the development of the Roman frontier or *limes* but rather presents a well done overview of the Roman history in the Netherlands. Nick Hodgson argued that this book is not focussed on 'the archaeology of the Roman army and its fortifications along the Lower Rhine.' From: N. Hodgson, 'Edge of Empire: Rome's Frontier on the Lower Rhine', *Britannia* 48 (2017) 502-503.

²⁰ Polak and Kooistra, 'A Sustainable Frontier?', 355-458.

²¹ See e.g.: M. van Dinter, 'The Roman Limes in the Netherlands: how a delta landscape determined the location of the military structures', *Netherlands Journal Of Geosciences-Geologie en Mijnbouw* 92:1 (2013) 11-32; E. Jansma, K. Haneca and M. Kosian, 'A dendrochronological reassessment of three Roman boats from Utrecht (the Netherlands): evidence of inland navigation between the lower-Scheldt region in Gallia Belgica and the limes of Germania inferior', *Journal of archaeological science* 50 (2014) 484-496; R.M. Visser, 'Imperial timber? Dendrochronological evidence for large-scale road building along the Roman limes in the Netherlands', *Journal of archaeological sciences* 53 (2015) 243-254; M.R. Groenhuijzen and J.W.H.P. Verhagen, 'Comparing network construction techniques in the context of local transport networks in the Dutch part of the Roman limes', *Journal of archaeological science reports* 15 (2017) 235-251.

²² B. Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome* (Chapel Hill 2012) 187.

²³ This is also suggested by for example Elton Hugh for the overall Roman *limes*, see: Hugh, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 2-3.

²⁴ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 171.

therefore be focussing on the Rhine delta;²⁵ where the Rhine bifurcates into the old Rhine and the Waal,²⁶ until it flows into the North Sea.

To see how the Lower German Limes and eventually the province were created, the political and military aspects will be discussed first by chronologically analysing the events that took place in north-western Europe between the moment the Romans first arrived in the Rhine delta in 19 BC, until the region was officially incorporated into the Roman Empire around AD 89. This time frame will be subdivided into chronological timespans starting with a short introduction to Caesar's Gallic Wars which led to the Roman arrival in the Rhine delta between 58 BC and 19 BC. These wars resulted in another series of military campaigns to the north known as the Germanic Wars between 19 BC and AD 16. After the Germanic Wars were put to an end and between AD 16 and AD 47, the Rhine started to become the final border. This gradually evolved into the consolidation and incorporation of the Rhine delta which resulted in the creation of the *limes* and the province Germania Inferior between AD 47 and AD 89. To reconstruct this, we mainly have to rely on the available primary literary sources that describe these political and military events that happened in north-western Europe, whilst integrating some of the secondary scholarly literature and archaeological research. Fortunately most of the ancient sources are centred around Roman politics and military campaigns but are therefore sometimes also written with a political agenda by members of the elite. We also have to bear in mind that some of the sources were written after the events had happened, the authors therefore not only already knew the outcome beforehand but they also had to rely on previously written accounts that are now often lost.²⁷

²⁵ The term 'Rhine delta' will be used to refer to the Netherlands during the Roman era, however, it is sometimes also called the Rhine-Meuse delta or even the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta, but for the sake of this research I will only be calling this region the Rhine delta since most of the attention will be going to this river and its immediate surroundings.

²⁶ Which is near the Dutch town of Lobith. The old Rhine, for which I from now on will be referring to as 'the Rhine', is currently roughly formed by the Nederrijn, Kromme Rijn and Oude Rijn.

²⁷ Some of the classical historians that will be consulted:

-Cassius Dio, a Roman senator of Greek origin from the late second century and early third century AD, who has written an extensive work on the *Historia Romana* that covers (a summary of) the founding of Rome until the early third century AD, however, the work has not survived in its entirety, but our timeframe is well covered. Cassius Dio himself says he had done a lot of research and aims to be as truthful as possible (Cass. Dio. 1.1.2) and is therefore often perceived as such, but his work is written from his own third century's perspective.

- Tacitus, a Roman orator and public official from the late first century and early second century AD. He is probably one of the most praised Roman historians for he (in comparison to his contemporaries) remains fairly objective. He is our main source when it comes to our timeframe and region, covered in his *Annals* and *Histories*. He has even dedicated an entire work to the inhabitants of north-western Europe in his *Germania*. Although he is fairly objective, he often praises the lifestyle of the simple and free Germanics against the decaying Roman moral and decadence in order to establish some sort of self-reflection among the Roman elite. However, this perspective is created during the reign of the notorious emperor Domitian.

-Suetonius, a Roman official and secretary from the late first and early second century AD, who has written biographies on Roman rulers from Julius Caesar until Domitian (*de Vita Caesarum*). In his work, he does not hold back when it comes to their personalities and their private lives, which has (partly) determined their legacies being either competent or incompetent rulers.

-Velleius Paterculus, a Roman general and senator from the early first century AD, who has also written a *Historia Romana* in which he covers some of the events he has witnessed himself during his time in Germania. In his work he often excessively praises the deeds of Emperor Tiberius, probably because he was the ruling emperor when he wrote his work. However, he is not always very precise when it comes to details and chronologies.

Thereafter there will be an analysis of the importance of the Rhine delta within the Roman Empire by first considering if the Rhine was a suitable frontier. This chapter will also consider the other possibilities the Rhine had to offer; such as being an interregional infrastructural network that could be used for different purposes, like transportation and supply, whilst looking at the economical role the Rhine delta fulfilled in this. However, the Roman settlement in the Rhine delta did not went unimpeded since the watery Rhine delta landscape confronted the Romans with a lot of challenges to which they had to adapt in order to build their fortifications and to utilize the infrastructural possibilities. Eventually the Roman settlement resulted in the creation of the *limes* along which several fortifications were connected by a road for which the first steps were already made during the first century AD. However, the primary literary sources only partially, and often indirectly, describe the function of the Rhine and its delta within the Roman Empire, therefore archaeological research must be taken into account, together with the secondary scholarly literature, also because the archaeological finds tend to give a more localised perspective when it comes to: geology, agriculture, supply, trade, construction, engineering, etc.

Lastly, the Roman relationship with the local inhabitants of the Rhine delta will be discussed, most of the time all the scholarly attentions goes to the tribe that would later on play a significant role in the creation of the Dutch cultural identity; the Batavi.²⁸ The Batavi did have a very special relationship with the Roman Empire, which is especially well attested by Tacitus.²⁹ However, the Batavi were not the only tribe that inhabited the Rhine delta, the two other tribes that also lived in the close vicinity of the *limes*: the Frisii and the Cananefates, are sometimes barely discussed in the scholarly literature, especially by historians, even though they have received a decent amount of attention by the ancient writers when it comes to this remote place of the empire.³⁰ Therefore this research will take a look at these three tribes together to consider if their relationship with Rome influenced or contributed to the way the *limes* and the province were eventually formed. For this we will also mainly have to look at the primary literary sources whilst involving the secondary scholarly literature. Unfortunately, when it comes to the relationship between Rome and its subjected tribes, the perspective of the sources is often very one sided and only describes the tribes from a Roman point of view since these tribes did not leave written evidence that tells their side of the story. However, also in this case, archaeological finds help to understand these tribes from a more objective point of view, by analysing the local physical remains they have left.

²⁸ E.g. W.J.H. Willems, *Romans and Batavians: A Regional Study in the Dutch Eastern River Area* (diss. Amsterdam 1986); N. Roymans, *Ethnic identity and Imperial Power: the Batavians in the Early Roman Empire* (Amsterdam 2004); J. Nicolay, *Armed Batavians: Use and Significance of Weaponry and Horse Gear from Non-military Contexts in the Rhine Delta (50 BC to AD 450)* (Amsterdam 2007).

²⁹ Tac. *Agr.*; *Ann.*; *Germ.*; *Hist.*

³⁰ The Frisii are for example mentioned in: Tac. *Ann.*; *Germ.*; Cass. Dio.; Plin. *HN*; Ptol. *Geog.* And the Cananefates in: Tac. *Ann.*; *Hist.*; Plin. *HN*; Vell. Pat.

CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY OPERATIONS IN GERMANIA

The Roman *limes* was first and foremost a military phenomenon which is often emphasised by modern historians.³¹ According to David Breeze, the main function of the Roman frontiers was to secure the Roman Empire.³² However, during the Roman Republic and the early Imperial period there were no defensive military frontiers,³³ the creation of a *limes* was the result of the expanding Roman territory that stopped at a certain time at a certain place. When it comes to eventual creation of the Lower German Limes, we have to go back to the late Roman Republic, Julius Caesar was the first ‘Roman’ to connect (a part of) the Rhine delta to the Roman Republic through military conquests. This all started during his governorship of the Roman provinces Gallia Cisalpina and Gallia Narbonensis where he acted as the ‘saviour’ of his part of the Republic against the ‘dangerous’ situations threatening the Roman state caused by various Celtic and Germanic tribes along the borders.³⁴ Caesar and his troops advanced towards the north, while subduing local tribes as he went along, to the region that was then known as the “furthest of mankind”,³⁵ far away from civilization. It is even speculated by Nico Roymans that Caesar fought the battle against the Usipetes and Tencteri in 55 BC on Dutch soil,³⁶ however, there is still a lot of debate on where this battle took place since hard evidence is missing.³⁷ According to Lendering and Bosman the year 53 BC, in which Caesar undertook retaliation campaigns against insurgent Belgian tribes, would become crucial for the future of the Rhine delta purely because of the military advantage the Romans had over their Belgian opponents and their allies.³⁸ In 49 BC, Caesar left Gaul permanently to focus on the civil war back in Italy, however, he left Gaul completely exhausted after eight years of war, not being able to revolt again, according to Carroll, Caesar’s departure “hindered Rome for years from annexing and reorganising Gaul.”³⁹

After Caesar had left Gaul, little attention was paid to this new Roman territory, ancient sources are quiet when it comes to the situation in Gaul apart from some military actions against rebellious

³¹ E.g. W.S. Hanson, ‘The nature and function of Roman frontiers’, in: J.C. Barrett, A.P. Fitzpatrick and L. Macinnes (eds.), *Barbarians and Romans in North-West Europe* (Oxford 1989) 58. From: Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 2.

³² Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 205.

³³ C.M. Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus: An Examination of The Archaeological Evidence* (Oxford 1972) 246; E.N Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (London 1979) 19; Breeze, 167.

³⁴ Caes. *BGall.* 1.5-28. Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans*, 26.

³⁵ Verg. *Aen.*, 8.727. Translation by: H.R. Fairclough, revised by: G.P. Goold, *Aeneid: Books 7-12. Appendix Vergiliana*, Loeb Classical Library 64 (Cambridge, MA 1918) 111.

³⁶ N. Roymans, ‘Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping: Investigating Caesar’s actions in the Germanic frontier zone’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 32 (2019) 441-3.

³⁷ E.g. T. Buijtendorp, *Caesar in de Lage Landen: de Gallische oorlog langs Rijn en Maas* (Utrecht 2018) 167-170.

³⁸ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 26.

³⁹ Carroll, 28.

Gallic tribes.⁴⁰ However, from 39 BC onward, little steps were taken to incorporate this new territory into the now Roman Empire. Around this time Marcus Agrippa, the right hand of the new Roman ruler Emperor Augustus, was sent to Gaul where he later laid down a large road system to make Gaul more accessible for troops and trade.⁴¹ In 27 BC, Augustus visited the province himself to further improve the local government whilst dividing Gaul into three provinces: Lugdunensis, Aquitania and Belgica (which would include the Rhine delta).⁴² He also made the Rhine frontier more accessible from Italy by the conquest of several Alpine passes.⁴³

1.1 19 BC – AD 16: The Germanic Wars

Augustus' main priority was to fully pacify Gaul in order to consolidate the western Roman Empire. However, after several revolts it was clear that the consolidation of Gaul could not be made possible if the tribes across the Rhine were not brought under control, and diplomacy proved to be insufficient.⁴⁴ This problem with the *Germani transrhenani* was really instigated by the defeat of the governor of Gaul Marcus Lollius, when in 17-16 BC the Sugambri, Usipetes and Tencteri crossed the Rhine to plunder Gaul in which they unexpectedly ran into Lollius, whom they defeated.⁴⁵ The defeat of Lollius was considered to be a huge humiliation for the Romans and could not be tolerated,⁴⁶ and from this moment we see a more aggressive Roman attitude towards the *Germani transrhenani*.⁴⁷ Even though, the invasion was brought to an end, soon hereafter the Romans would start a series of campaigns across the Rhine. However, the Romans had already set up an army base on the Hunerberg in Nijmegen in 19 BC,⁴⁸ giving the implication of a premeditated plan to advance to the north.⁴⁹ The Germanic Wars that followed should probably be seen in the same light as Caesar's previous policy; attacking opponents in order to 'protect' the empire. However, these 'defensive' campaigns also resulted in the expansion of the empire and subjugation of various Germanic tribes, therefore the defeat of Lollius can also have

⁴⁰ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 30.

⁴¹ Cass. Dio. 48.49.2-3; Strab. 4.6.11.

⁴² Cass. Dio. 53.12.5; Cass. Dio. 53.22.5. J.F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul: The Three Provinces, 58 BC-AD 260* (London 1983) 20-21; Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans*, 31; Lendering and Bosman, 33.

⁴³ Cass. Dio. 54.20-24. Carroll, 32. However, according to Erich Gruen, the presumption that the clearance of the Alpine passes was part of a preconceived imperialistic plan to invade Germania and to expand Roman territory is not correct. It would become important later on, but the Alpine conquest was not in prospect of the up following Germanic Wars. The Alpine passes gave quicker access from Italy to the Rhineland and therefore provided greater protection of Gaul, it was rather a case of easier communications than of expansion. From: E.S. Gruen, 'The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus', in: A.K. Bowman, E. Champlin and A. Lintott (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 10 Second edition* (Cambridge 1996) 171.

⁴⁴ Gruen, 'The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus', 178-179.

⁴⁵ Cass. Dio. 54.20.4-5.

⁴⁶ Vell. Pat. 2.97.1. According to Suetonius, this defeat was more humiliating than it was serious. Suet. *Aug.* 23.

⁴⁷ Gruen, 180.

⁴⁸ Based on coin and earthenware finds that show that this location was occupied from 19 BC up to 16 BC. M. Polak, 'The Roman Military Presence in the Rhine Delta in the Period C. AD 40-140' in: A. Morillo, N. Hanel and E. Martín (eds.) *Limes XX: Estudios Sobre La Frontera Romana Roman Frontier Studies Volumen II* (León 2006) 945; van Dinter, 'The Roman Limes in the Netherlands', 14.

⁴⁹ Lendering and Bosman, 36.

been used as a justifiable reason to start a new war. However, when Augustus left Gaul in 13 BC, the task of invading Germania was handed over to his stepson Drusus.⁵⁰ Drusus' campaigns that followed are often seen as the start of the conquest of Germania all the way up to the river Elbe, or even beyond,⁵¹ Florus for example states that Augustus wanted to finish the work of Caesar by making Germania into a province.⁵² It is often stated that from this moment onward the Romans no longer aimed at the Rhine as northern border of the empire, but focused on the Elbe (*Albis*) as the new frontier instead.⁵³ However, this is according to Whittaker a conclusion that is often made by modern historians, claiming that Augustus was searching for a strategic frontier or a shorter line of communication, but that cannot be confirmed by the sources.⁵⁴ Nowadays these campaigns into Germania are seen in the context of Gaul, to suppress the Germanic tribes that have been causing unrest in Gaul.⁵⁵

Drusus began his campaigns in 12 BC, from this moment we see a much more active Roman involvement in the Rhine delta as well. The Rhine delta would be an important piece in the 'pincer movement' the Roman army was creating by invading Germania from the rivers Lippe and Ems, which were efficient waterways for transporting troops and supplies.⁵⁶ Drusus crossed the eastern Rhine delta and sailed down the Rhine to the Wadden Sea (fig. 5), while traveling to northern Germania he made a treaty with the Frisii and invaded the land of the Chauci.⁵⁷ During the following years, Drusus continued to attack the *Germani transrhenani* whilst establishing Roman camps along the rivers Lippe (Oberaden, Haltern) and Werra (Hedemünden).⁵⁸ In 9 BC, he even managed to reach the Elbe where he erected a trophy to commemorate this milestone.⁵⁹ After Drusus' sudden tragic death the same year his brother Tiberius took over his position,⁶⁰ however, his strategy was more based on diplomacy than on military actions.⁶¹ All the Germanic tribes, except from the Sugambri sent envoys for peace negotiations, which Augustus refused to accept, but when the Sugambri did send peace envoys later on they were arrested

⁵⁰ Cass. Dio. 54.25.1; Vell. Pat. 2.97.2.

⁵¹ E.g. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, 8.

⁵² Flor. 2.30.22.

⁵³ W.A. van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland* (Bussum 1972) 29. The formulation of the so called 'Elbe-policy' is most likely the result of Augustus' own words in his *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 26, in which he states that: 'The provinces of the Gauls, the Spains, and Germany, bounded by the ocean from Gades to the mouth of the Elbe, I reduced to a state of peace.' (translation by: F.W. Shipley, *Compendium of Roman History. Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, Loeb Classical Library 152 (Cambridge, MA 1924) 387-389). This gives the implication that it was and should be the river Elbe to function as the frontier of the Roman Empire. However, in my opinion this statement should rather be perceived as one of the achievements of the Roman army, reaching and conquering territories all the way up to the Elbe, rather than as a desirable frontier.

⁵⁴ Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 38.

⁵⁵ E.g. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 22; Gruen, 'The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus', 180.

⁵⁶ van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 30.

⁵⁷ Cass. Dio. 54.32.2; Flor. 2.30.23.

⁵⁸ V.A. Maxfield, 'Mainland Europe', in: J. Wachter (ed.), *The Roman World* (New York 2002) 143; L. Powell, *Eager for Glory: The Untold Story of Drusus the Elder, Conqueror of Germania* (Barnsley 2011) 90-94; Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 40; Polak and Kooistra, 'A Sustainable Frontier?', 406.

⁵⁹ Cass. Dio. 55.1.2-3.

⁶⁰ Cass. Dio. 55.6.1; Vell. Pat. 2.97.4.

⁶¹ Lendering and Bosman, 42.

and deported.⁶² Velleius Paterculus even states that Germania was now subdued and reduced “to almost the status of a tributary province.”⁶³ However, it was still too early to see Germania as an official Roman territory up to the Elbe, Florus states that the Germanics were defeated rather than subdued.⁶⁴ Eventually Augustus decided to make an official province out of Germania and sent Tiberius again to make sure that the power in region was secured.⁶⁵ According to Tiberius’ idolatrous admirer Velleius Paterculus, after Tiberius’ campaign there was nothing more to gain in Germania except from the Marcomanni.⁶⁶ However, Cassius Dio is a bit more pessimistic, stating that Tiberius advanced to the rivers Weser and Elbe but did not accomplish anything that is worth reporting.⁶⁷ However, during this time we also see the first military installation west of Nijmegen in the Rhine delta strategically placed in the vicinity of where the Rhine meets its tributary the Vecht,⁶⁸ which ran north of the Rhine and was most likely also connected to Lake Flevo (IJsselmeer, fig. 3 and 5).⁶⁹ The fort that was built at this location, *Fectio* (Vechten), was built around AD 4,⁷⁰ most likely to provision the military campaigns. However, Polak and Kooistra suggest that it might have also served as an administrative centre for the coastal areas.⁷¹

In AD 5 was Germania almost completely conquered, only the Marcomanni had to be subdued. However, that never happened because Tiberius was called back to suppress the Illyrian Revolt.⁷² In the meantime, the command of Germania was given to governor Quintilius Varus, who had the task of making Germania into governable province. According to Velleius Paterculus, Varus thought he could control the Germanic tribes by law instead of by sword, thinking that Germania was peaceful.⁷³ However, he would soon be proven to be terribly wrong falling into a trap set by Arminius, a Cherusian prince who fought in the Roman army at the equestrian rank. He convinced other Germanic tribal leaders that the Romans could be crushed, designing a plan to eliminate the Roman legions in Germania. However, Segestes, a Germanic that was loyal to Rome, warned Varus for Arminius’ collaboration but he accordingly refused to believe the story.⁷⁴ While Varus was marching through Germania he was informed that a tribe far away was revolting and that he should put the revolt down.⁷⁵ However, on his

⁶² Cass. Dio. 55.6.2-3; Tac. *Ann.* 2.22; 12.39; Suet. *Aug.* 21; Suet. *Tib.* 9. Gruen, ‘The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus’, 182.

⁶³ Vell. Pat. 2.97.4. Translation by: Shipley, *Compendium of Roman History*, Loeb Classical Library 152, p. 253-255.

⁶⁴ Flor. 2.30.30.

⁶⁵ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 44.

⁶⁶ Vell. Pat. 2.108.1.

⁶⁷ Cass. Dio. 55.28.5. Gruen, 183.

⁶⁸ However, according to Marieke van Dinter, this is a commonly believed assumption, however, it is more likely that the fort was built along the (later slit up) Oudwulverbroek meander of the Rhine. From: van Dinter, ‘The Roman Limes in the Netherlands’, 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁰ E.g. V. van den Bos, O. Brinkkemper, I. D. Bull, S. Engels, T. Hakbijl, M. Schepers, M. van Dinter, G. van Reenen and B. van Geel, ‘Roman impact on the landscape near castellum Fectio, The Netherlands’, *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 23:3 (2014) 296.

⁷¹ Polak and Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier?’, 421.

⁷² Cass. Dio. 55.29-30.

⁷³ Vell. Pat. 2.117.3-4.

⁷⁴ Flor. 2.30.33; Tac. *Ann.* 1.55; Vell. Pat. 2.118.2-4.

⁷⁵ Cass. Dio 56.19.3-5; Tac. *Ann.* 1.57.

way to put the ‘made up’ revolt down, his legions were trapped and destroyed in an ambush. This defeat in AD 9 would go down in history as the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, one of Rome’s biggest defeats, wiping out three Roman legions and losing two Roman eagle standards.⁷⁶ This battle most likely took place near modern Kalkriese at a site where various archaeological finds have been found; weapons but also evidence that citizens died at this location and all the coins that were found here can be dated before AD 9.⁷⁷ Florus states that “the result of this disaster was that the empire, which had not stopped on the shores of the Ocean, was checked on the banks of the Rhine.”⁷⁸ The plan to fully incorporate Germania all the way up to the Elbe within the Roman Empire was abandoned,⁷⁹ after the defeat nearly all troops were retreated behind the Rhine.⁸⁰ However, it seems that the defeat was not the only thing that made the Romans retreat behind the Rhine, the Germanic heartland also seems to have been too unsustainable because of the lack of pre-existing social and economic infrastructures which are essential for a successful incorporation.⁸¹ However, it did not withhold Augustus from still interfering on the other side of the Rhine and he was not planning to permanently retreat.⁸² In the end, Florus is according to Lendering and Bosman the only ancient writer who writes about the decisiveness of the battle, long after it had taken place, therefore one can argue that he superimposed events that happened after the battle. Anyhow, the importance of this battle for the Roman policy in Germania is still debatable, most of the archaeological finds in Germany date before AD 9 but that could also mean that conflicting evidence has been left out.⁸³

In AD 11-12, new campaigns were launched into Germania under the command of Tiberius.⁸⁴ Most of the trans-Rhine interferences now consisted of power demonstrations, but those were aggressive and offensive which was probably, according to Erich Gruen, what Augustus wanted to achieve.⁸⁵ In AD 13, the command of Germania was given to the son of Drusus; Germanicus. Germanicus continued the previous policy and resumed the campaigns in Germania, however, according to Tacitus it was rather a retaliation campaign to redeem the loss of Varus than an attempt to extend the empire.⁸⁶ In AD 14, Augustus died and was succeeded by Tiberius, however, he advised his successor that “the empire should be confined within limits.”⁸⁷ Even though it seems that Augustus was telling him to put a hold on further expanding the empire, he actually tells him, according to Whittaker: “that he should not seek

⁷⁶ Flor. 2.30.34-38.

⁷⁷ Bechert and Willems, *De Romeinse rijksgrens tussen Moezel en Noordzeekust*, 54; Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 53. Cassius Dio writes that there were women, children and servants present. Cass. Dio. 56.20.2.

⁷⁸ Flor. 2.30.39. Translation by: E.S. Forster, *Epitome of Roman History*, Loeb Classical Library 231 (Cambridge, MA 1929) 341.

⁷⁹ van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 33; Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, 8.

⁸⁰ Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 167.

⁸¹ Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 23.

⁸² Gruen, ‘The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus’, 185.

⁸³ Lendering and Bosman, 60.

⁸⁴ Vell. Pat. 2.120.3-6.

⁸⁵ Gruen, 185.

⁸⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.

⁸⁷ Cass. Dio. 56.33.5; Tac., *Ann.*, 1.11. Translation from: Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 35.

aggression for aggression's sake."⁸⁸ It was more a temporary advise to urge Tiberius that the provinces were not incorporated enough to allow further expansion of the empire,⁸⁹ which had been the case with Germania. In the end, it did not withhold Tiberius from crossing into Germanic territory. Around AD 15, two other military installations arise in the Rhine delta; one near the river Oer-IJ (Velsen), and one near another tributary of the Rhine, the IJssel (Arnhem-Meinerswijk, fig. 5). Both of these forts seem to have been constructed at strategic locations from where new campaigns could be launched into Germania. However, according to van den Bos *et al.*, the forts were more likely created to provide a safe passage for transportations and to defend against Germanic invasions.⁹⁰

In the end, it does not look like these forts could fulfil their role in providing strategic access points into Germania for further campaigns for too long. In AD 16, Tiberius recalled Germanicus from Germania because, according to Tacitus, the Romans had to focus on the disturbances that were happening in the east.⁹¹ Germanicus expressed his disappointment about the decision while claims were made that the war could be ended with another campaign.⁹² However, the continuous campaigns were costly and demanded a lot from the Gaulic hinterland,⁹³ and from now on the large scale campaigns into Germania were mostly over, although some forts beyond the Rhine were still occupied in the German Main-Wetter region and at Velsen.⁹⁴ Even though there were no more large scale attempts to conquer new territories across the Rhine after AD 16, the Romans still seemed to believe that the Germanic Wars were not over since Tacitus even in AD 98 states that the conquest of Germania is taking a long time.⁹⁵

1.2 AD 16 – AD 47: The Rhine becomes the final border

After the Romans stopped undertaking new campaigns to conquer Germania we do not have a lot of information on what happened in the Rhine delta, apart from the Frisian Revolt in AD 28.⁹⁶ However, when Gaius (better known as Caligula) became emperor in AD 37, being the son of Germanicus and the grandson of Drusus, he could not stay behind when it comes to starting a campaign into Germania. According to Suetonius, Caligula only went to war once after “he was reminded of the necessity of recruiting his body-guard of Batavians”.⁹⁷ During his campaign into Germania in AD 39-40 he travelled down the Rhine, and as Suetonius mockingly writes when he reaches the shore:

⁸⁸ Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 30.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁰ van den Bos *et al.*, ‘Roman impact on the landscape near castellum Fectio’, 278.

⁹¹ Tac. *Ann.* 2.5.

⁹² Tac. *Ann.* 2.26. Gruen, ‘The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus’, 186.

⁹³ Tac. *Ann.* 2.5. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 26-27.

⁹⁴ Maxfield, ‘Mainland Europe’, 143-145.

⁹⁵ Tac. *Germ.* 37. Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 93.

⁹⁶ The Frisian Revolt will be discussed in chapter 3, p. 39 ff.

⁹⁷ Suet. *Calig.* 43. Translation by: J.C. Rolfe, *Lives of the Caesars, Volume I: Julius. Augustus. Tiberius. Gaius. Caligula*, Loeb Classical Library 31 (Cambridge, MA 1914) 483.

“Finally, as if he intended to bring the war to an end, he drew up a line of battle on the shore of the Ocean, arranging his ballistas and other artillery; and when no one knew or could imagine what he was going to do, he suddenly bade them gather shells and fill their helmets and folds of their clothes, calling them ‘spoils from the Ocean, due to the Capitol and Palatine.’” As a monument of his victory he erected a lofty tower, from which lights were to shine at night to guide the course of ships, as from the Pharos.”⁹⁸

However, there is still a lot of debate going on about this notorious passage on Caligula’s ‘battle against the Ocean’, on why it took place, where it took place and if he did indeed ordered his soldiers to gather shells.⁹⁹ Caligula’s presence at the shore of the ocean was probably a part of a plan to invade Britannia after Adminius, the son of Cynobellinus the Britannic king of the Catuvellauni,¹⁰⁰ surrendered to Caligula after he was banned by his father, which is according to Suetonius is the only thing he had accomplished during this campaign.¹⁰¹ According to Robert Davies, the arrival of Adminius could be the reason for the sudden change from wanting to campaign Germania to trying to invade Britannia, as it does not seem that there was a preconceived plan.¹⁰² In fact, Cassius Dio also describes that Caligula suddenly ‘attempted’ to start a campaign against Britannia.¹⁰³

Generally it is assumed that this event took place near *Gesoriacum* (Boulogne-Sur-Mer, fig. 2), being the most likely location as it is the closest point of continental Europe to Britannia.¹⁰⁴ This was probably the same region from where Caesar departed when he crossed the sea to explore Britannia.¹⁰⁵ However, Caligula was campaigning in Germania and it would therefore, according to Oliver Hekster, seem unlikely that he travelled all the way to the Gaulic coast.¹⁰⁶ So there is also the possibility that this

⁹⁸ Suet. *Calig.* 46. Translation from: Rolfe, *Life of the Caesars*, Loeb Classical Library 31, p. 487.

⁹⁹ E.g. J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *The Emperor Gaius (Caligula)* (Oxford 1934) 88-95; D. Woods, ‘Caligula’s sea-shells’, *Greece and Rome* 47 (2000) 80-7; S.J.V. Malloch, ‘Gaius on the Channel Coast’, *The Classical Quarterly* (2002) 551-555.

¹⁰⁰ Who Suetonius calls the ‘king of the Britons’, suggesting that he was an important figure on the British isles. Suet. *Calig.* 44.

¹⁰¹ Suet. *Calig.* 44. Olivier Hekster, ‘De slag tegen de schelpen aan het strand van Katwijk (40 n.Chr.)’, in: H. van Dolen, O. Hekster and F. Meijer (eds.), *Te Wapen! Acht spraakmakende slagen uit de oudheid* (Amsterdam 2015) 41.

¹⁰² R.W. Davies, ‘The ‘Abortive Invasion’ of Britain by Gaius’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 15 (1966) 126.

¹⁰³ Cass. Dio. 59.21.3.

¹⁰⁴ Hekster, ‘De slag tegen de schelpen aan het strand van Katwijk’, 48. Strabo also writes that ‘the people who put to sea from the regions that are near the Rhenus make the voyage, not from the mouths themselves, but from the coast of those Morini who have a common boundary with the Menapii.’ Strab. 4.5.2. Translation by: H.L. Jones, *Geography, Volume II: Books 3-5*, Loeb Classical Library 50 (Cambridge, MA 1923) 253.

¹⁰⁵ Caes. *BGall.* 4.21.

¹⁰⁶ Hekster, 49.

event took place near the estuary of the Rhine, in the vicinity of *Lugdunum*¹⁰⁷ (Katwijk).¹⁰⁸ Archaeological research has in fact shown that earliest stage of the military base at *Praetorium Agrippinae*¹⁰⁹ (Valkenburg) dates around the same time as this expedition.¹¹⁰ Other military bases in the Rhine delta date around the time as well, such as: *Laurium* (Woerden), *Albaniana* (Alphen aan den Rijn) and De Meern Utrecht (fig. 4),¹¹¹ these can be interpreted as being intentional reinforcements on the lower Rhine to launch a campaign to Britannia. However, some scholars have opted that these were preparations to relaunch a new campaign to northern Germania,¹¹² or that they marked the beginning of the development of a controlled frontier line on the Rhine.¹¹³ However, there are other indications that Caligula was likely present in the Rhine delta such as the pieces of wine barrel with the initials of Emperor Caligula, indicating that it were wine barrels from his personal stock, that have been found in Valkenburg and Vechten (fig. 1).¹¹⁴ Another indication could be the ‘lighthouse’ as mentioned by Suetonius, and there is indeed a Roman lighthouse found near Boulogne (*Tour D’Ordre*), but there was also a tower known near Katwijk, known as the ‘tower of Kalla’, probably referring to Caligula. However, nowadays there is no archaeological evidence for this tower, which is probably due to the heavy erosion of the site that now lays somewhere in the North Sea (fig. 4), there are only references to the tower on sixteenth and seventeenth century drawings.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ ‘*Lugduno*’ is mentioned on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Peutinger map, see front page) a thirteenth century copy of what is believed to be a Roman map, where it is located on the coast of the Rhine delta, south of the Rhine and west of Valkenburg. Ptolemy also mentions a ‘*Lugdunum Batavorum*’ along the coast of north-western Europe between the ‘mouth of the river Meuse’ and the ‘western mouth of the Rhine’. Ptol. *Geog.* 2.8.

¹⁰⁸ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 85; Hekster, ‘De slag tegen de schelpen aan het strand van Katwijk’, 42; W. Vos, E. Blom, B. Cornelisse, L. van der Feijst, J. Loopik and A. Tol, ‘De castra van Valkenburg (Zuid-Holland): Een onverwacht legioenskamp uit de vroeg-Romeinse tijd’, *Archeologie in Nederland* 4 (2020).

¹⁰⁹ According to the Peutinger map, this military base near Valkenburg was known as *Praetorium Agrippinae* (see front page). This could be a reference to Caligula’s mother, Agrippina, but could also be a reference to her daughter who bears the same name, she married Caligula’s successor Claudius. From: E. van Ginkel and W. Vos, *Grens van het Romeinse Rijk: De limes in Zuid-Holland* (Utrecht 2018) 62.

¹¹⁰ As a result of dendrochronological research it is dated in AD 39. From: Vos et al., ‘De castra van Valkenburg (Zuid-Holland)’, 9.

¹¹¹ Dendrochronological research on timbers from Alphen aan den Rijn has shown that the fort can be dated in the autumn of AD 40 or winter of AD 40-41. Caligulan coin finds also seem to confirm this dating. Apart from Valkenburg, the forts at De Meern and Woerden also suggest a similar dating, based on some of the coin finds. From: Polak, ‘The roman military presence in the rhine delta’, 948; M. Polak, R. Niemeijer, E. van der Linden and D. Bird, ‘Alphen aan den Rijn-Albaniana and the dating of the Roman forts in the Rhine delta’, in: D. Bird (ed.), *Dating and Interpreting the Past in the Western Roman Empire* (Oxford 2012) 268; 271.

¹¹² Polak, 949. Lendering and Bosman, 85.

¹¹³ Maxfield, ‘Mainland Europe’, 145.

¹¹⁴ Vos et al., 3.

¹¹⁵ Hekster, 50; Vos et al., 3.



Fig. 1: Piece of wine-barrel from Vechten with the an inscription stamp that reads: C(ai) Cae[s(aris) A]jug(usti) Ger(manici).¹¹⁶

However, it is difficult to prove whether this ‘battle’ took place in the Rhine delta or not, but there are certainly signs that there were military activities in the Rhine delta during the reign of Caligula, these could be related to his attempt to invade Britannia, but it can also not be ruled out that these reinforcements were related to other military campaigns in Germania. In AD 41, we read in Cassius Dio’s account that the legate of the lower Germanic region, Aulus Gabinius Secundus, undertook a campaign against the northern Chauci, which he accordingly conquered.¹¹⁷ This victory caused Gabinius to obtain the surname ‘*Cauchius*’ as a result of the conquest of this Germanic tribe.¹¹⁸ However, whether or not Caligula was indeed planning to invade Britannia from the Rhine delta he made some useful preparations for his successor Emperor Claudius, who is known for successfully invading Britannia. Around AD 43, Britannia was accordingly in a state of rebellion because several deserters were not returned (among which likely also Adminius), a situation from which the Romans could profit.¹¹⁹ During that same year, Britannia was invaded with four Roman legions under the command of Aulus Plautius. However, Cassius Dio does not mention from where they departed from the European continent, but

¹¹⁶ Photo from: Emmelie Huntink, taken at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden (06-06-2020). Inscription: AE 1999, 1100. Transcription from: M. Clauss, A. Kolb, W.A. Slaby and B. Woitas, ‘EDCS Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby’ <<http://www.manfredclauss.de/>> accessed on: 21-04-2022.

¹¹⁷ Cass. Dio. 60.8.7.

¹¹⁸ Suet. *Claud.* 24.3.

¹¹⁹ Suet. *Claud.* 17.1. As mentioned previously, in: Suet. *Calig.* 44. And Cassius Dio also mentions a certain Bericus who was driven out of Britannia after a revolt and had ‘persuaded’ Claudius to send his army to Britain. Cass. Dio. 60.19.1.

Suetonius does mention that the Roman army went to *Gesoriacum* and crossed the sea to Britannia.¹²⁰ Again being the most likely location to cross the sea to Britannia, but archaeological evidence has shown that this was not the only route between the Continent and Britannia. According to David Peacock, the Rhine route was already a well-established trading route after Caesar's Gallic conquests, now known as the 'Hook-Harwich route' across the North Sea.¹²¹ However, it is therefore also suggested that the previously discussed fortifications on the lower Rhine were related to Claudius' invasion of Britannia in AD 43. They could have been used as preparation camps from where the Roman army travelled to *Gesoriacum* to cross the English Channel, or to depart from the Rhine's estuary to Britannia, creating a pincer movement by invading the island from two departure locations. However, just like the possibility of being used for Caligula's 'invasion', the fortifications on the lower Rhine could also be linked to Gabinius' attack on the Chauci in AD 41, or Corbulo's campaign against the Frisii and Chauci in AD 47.¹²² This campaign was also tied in with Claudius' plan to invade Britannia, because even after Gabinius' campaign in AD 41, the Chauci kept harassing the Romans by plundering the Germanic and Gaulic coasts. Tacitus writes that their leader, Gannascus, started to ravage the rich coastal areas of Gaul with light ships.¹²³ These raids came at a very unfortunate moment since Claudius was preparing to invade Britannia.¹²⁴ Therefore, this problem had to be tackled first and this task was handed over to general Domitius Corbulo around AD 47.¹²⁵ When he arrived in the Rhine delta he sent triremes down the Rhine, the canals and the estuaries to attack the Chauci, after which Gannascus fled.¹²⁶ Corbulo also attacked the Frisii, who had according to Tacitus become untrustworthy and hostile, especially because they revolted almost twenty years earlier.¹²⁷ Afterwards he attacked the Chauci again to force them into submission and to plot against Gannascus. However, Tacitus states that after Gannascus' death, tensions began to rise back in Rome and not everyone approved Corbulo's actions, fearing that he might start another aggressive war in Germania, and Corbulo was suddenly ordered to withdraw behind the Rhine by Claudius.¹²⁸ According to Cassius Dio, Corbulo was pulled back from northern Germania because Claudius did not permit Corbulo to become too powerful, which Corbulo claimed was the result of jealousy.¹²⁹ In either case was continuing to campaign north of the Rhine not worth it for Claudius, from now on we see that the river Rhine started to become a clear territorial line and demarcation, Claudius decided to choose a defensive rather than an offensive strategy against the *Germani transrhenani*.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ Cass. Dio. 60.21.3; Suet. *Claud.* 17.2.

¹²¹ Graham Webster, *The Roman Invasion of Britain* (London 1999) 53.

¹²² Vos et al., 'De castra van Valkenburg (Zuid-Holland)', 10.

¹²³ Tac. *Ann.* 11.18.

¹²⁴ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 85.

¹²⁵ However, there is some discussion when it comes to the year in which Corbulo's campaign started, according to Simon Malloch his campaign against Gannascus should be no later than AD 46. From: S.J.V. Malloch, 'The Date of Corbulo's Campaign in lower Germany', *Museum Helveticum* 62 (2005) 76-83.

¹²⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 11.18. Cassius Dio also writes that Corbulo attacked the Chauci. Cass. Dio. 61.30.4.

¹²⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 11.19.

¹²⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 11.19-20.

¹²⁹ Cass. Dio. 61.30.5.

¹³⁰ Lendering and Bosman, 87.

This also led to the abandonment of the only known military fort in the northern Rhine delta; Velsen. However, at the same time the fortifications along the lower Rhine increased. Previously, most of the forts in the Rhine delta were assumed to have been built around or after AD 47,¹³¹ and are therefore often called the ‘Corbulo forts’,¹³² but, as we have seen, some of the forts can be dated to the time of Caligula. However, the earliest stages of the forts: *Matilo* (Leiden-Roomburg), Bodegraven, *Nigrum Pullum* (Zwammerdam) and *Traiectum* (Utrecht, fig. 4) are dated in the late AD 40’s.¹³³ These forts can therefore be related to Corbulo’s campaign,¹³⁴ or, as some have suggests, be part of the early developments of the *limes* in the Rhine delta.¹³⁵

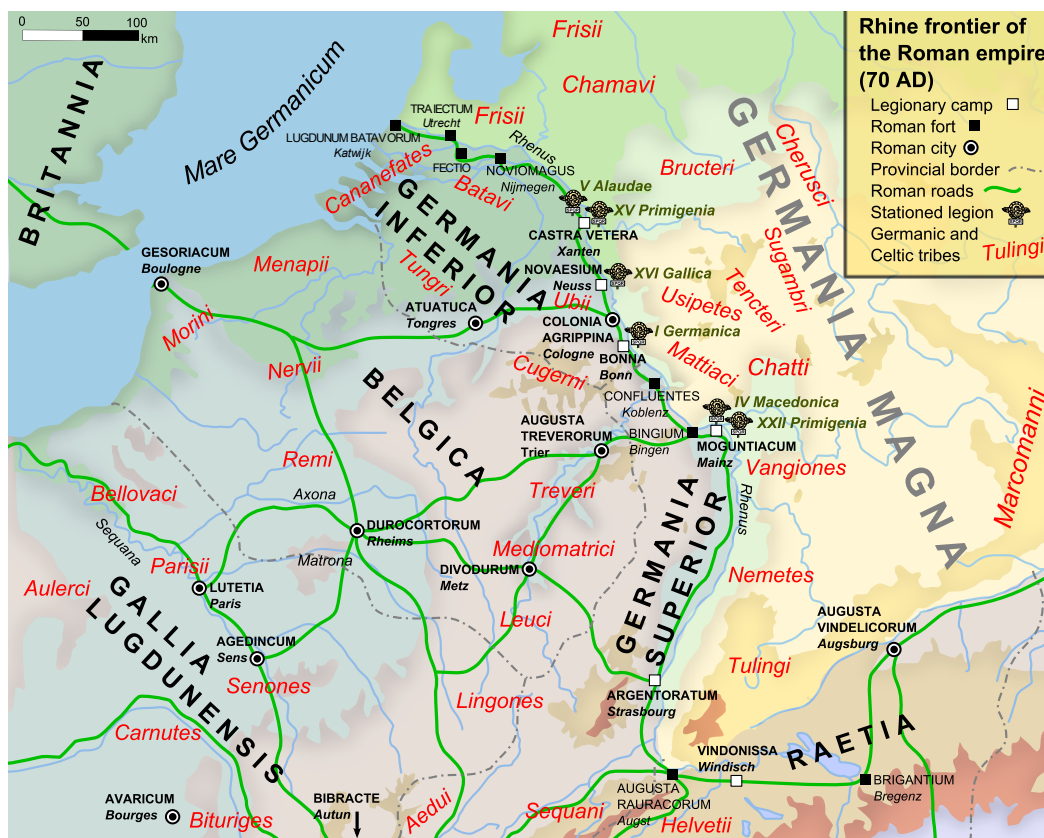


Fig. 2: Map of the north-western frontier of the Roman Empire, AD 70.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Polak et al., ‘Alpen aan den Rijn-Albaniana’, 271.

¹³² E.g. van Ginkel and Vos, *Grens van het Romeinse Rijk*, 61.

¹³³ *Matilo* (Leiden-Roomburg) does not have a clear starting date and is often assumed to have been established around the same as the canal that Corbulo constructed during this time (Tac. *Ann.* 11.20). Bechert and Willems, *De Romeinse Rijksgrens*, 83-85; 90-93; Polak, ‘The Roman Military Presence in the Rhine Delta’, 945; Polak et al., 271-274.

¹³⁴ van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 82.

¹³⁵ E.g. J.E. Bogaers, ‘Militaire en burgerlijke nederzettingen in Romeins Nederland’, *Antiquity and Survival: an International Review of Traditional Art and Culture* 2 (1959) 146.

¹³⁶ Image from: Wikimedia Commons <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/Germania_70.svg> accessed on: 18-04-2022. Permission granted.

1.3 AD 47 – AD 89: The first steps towards the creation of the limes and Germania Inferior

After Emperor Claudius had ordered Corbulo to retreat behind the Rhine we do not see a lot of Roman interactions in the Rhine delta apart from some disputes with migrating Frisians in AD 58. However, in AD 69 tensions began to rise between the Romans and the local population in the Rhine delta, which resulted in a revolt known as the Batavian Revolt, which will be discussed in the third chapter.

The *limes* in the Rhine delta was officially established in the Flavian era, in which we see an increase in the process of changing from an offensive policy against the *Germani transrhenani* towards a defensive policy.¹³⁷ The first steps for this were taken by Emperor Vespasian, whose military interventions into Germania were not attempts to further expand Roman territory but to create a defensive line in southern Germania (*Agri Decumates*¹³⁸) to improve communications between the Rhine and the Danube.¹³⁹ However, around AD 82, his son, and emperor, Domitian presumably visited Gaul to conduct a census but he suddenly crossed the Rhine to attack the Chatti,¹⁴⁰ starting the last offensive campaign across the Rhine.¹⁴¹ According to Frontinus, who was a Roman general during the time, it was not an accident because Domitian wanted a surprise attack on the Chatti so that they would not be able to prepare for a counter attack, therefore Domitian pretended to conduct a census in Gaul so that he could suddenly attack the Chatti, who were crushed.¹⁴² There is not a lot known about this campaign but it is assumed that it was just for his own personal gains to have a military victory,¹⁴³ Suetonius even calls this campaign something that was ‘uncalled for’,¹⁴⁴ while Tacitus says that it was a ‘mock-triumph’.¹⁴⁵ However, after this ‘victory’ he took on the title ‘*Germanicus*’ to emphasize his achievements in Germania.¹⁴⁶ He even claimed that he advanced all the way down the Rhine to where the river divides into two branches,¹⁴⁷ which must have been in the Rhine delta. It is stated that this was a turning point for the Roman Germanic regions, the victory against the Chatti was presented as the ‘final victory’ over the Germanics and thus ending the long Germanic Wars that had started nearly a century earlier.¹⁴⁸ However, it seems that the Chatti were not conquered or suppressed because tensions soon started to rise and in AD 89 the governor of the higher Rhine, Antonius Saturninus, started to revolt with the help of the Chatti. However, the ancient sources do not give a lot of information about this event.¹⁴⁹ According to Brian Jones, the reason for this revolt had probably something to do with the

¹³⁷ van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 38.

¹³⁸ Tac. *Germ.* 29.

¹³⁹ CIL XIII, 9082. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 58; A. King, *Roman Gaul and Germany* (London 1990) 166-167.

¹⁴⁰ Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London 1992) 128.

¹⁴¹ King, *Roman Gaul*, 167.

¹⁴² Frontin. *Str.* 1.1.8.

¹⁴³ Suet. *Dom.* 2.1. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 58; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 131.

¹⁴⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 2.1; 6.1.

¹⁴⁵ Tac. *Agr.* 39.

¹⁴⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 13.3. Jones, 129; M. Griffin, ‘The Flavians’, in: A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* 11 (2000) 63.

¹⁴⁷ CIL VI, 1207. Lendering and Bosman, 111.

¹⁴⁸ Polak et al., *Frontiers of the Roman Empire – The Lower German Limes*, 83.

¹⁴⁹ Jones, 144.

growing dissatisfaction of Domitian's Germanic policy amongst the senatorial officers in Germania, in which there was little space for military victories.¹⁵⁰ Regardless, the Chatti were prevented from participating in the revolt because they wanted to cross the then frozen Rhine but were withheld by a thaw.¹⁵¹ The rebellion was quickly crushed with the help of the commander of the lower Rhine, Lappius Maximus.¹⁵² Subsequently, the last double legionary fortress was broken up to prevent such an event from happening again, which ended the political predominance of the legions along the Rhine.¹⁵³ This, according to Breeze, also gave the impetus to develop a *limes* since interventions across the Rhine were from now on no longer a part of the Roman policy.¹⁵⁴

During the reign of Domitian we also see a change in the government of the Rhine region; from a military zone into an administrative civil district. The Rhine region was now separated into two official Roman provinces: Germania Inferior (which included the Rhine delta) and Germania Superior (fig. 2), they were divided by the small river Vinxt that just runs below *Bonna* (Bonn). Christoph Rüger states that successful attempts for the consolidation of the region were already made by Emperor Vespasian but were completed by his sons, which led to the creation of the two official provinces around AD 85.¹⁵⁵ However, the exact date cannot be given according to Bechert, because there is not enough epigraphical material, but it would probably have been around AD 83.¹⁵⁶ Jones gives a wider timeframe, between AD 82 and 90, when the commanders of the two separate armies became regular provincial governors. The region was previously governed by the legate of Gallia Belgica but was now transferred to the new governors of Germania Inferior and Superior, however, the financial administration probably remained in the hands of the procurator in *Augusta Treverorum* (Trier).¹⁵⁷ The exact date might be disputable, the creation of the separate provinces was clearly a part of Domitian's consolidating policy in the Rhineland. However, it is reasonable enough to assume that after the revolt of Saturninus in AD 89 the region could be, and was, integrated into a province. After the consolidation of the Rhine region, the imperial attention shifted towards the Danube, which became the new frontier focal point for the Roman emperors.¹⁵⁸ And with consolidation also comes the creation of borders, during the reign of Domitian we see the first developments towards the creation of a visible frontier.¹⁵⁹ In fact, it is claimed that Domitian was the emperor who contributed the most to the construction of the Danube and Rhine *limes*.¹⁶⁰ However, there

¹⁵⁰ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 145.

¹⁵¹ Suet. *Dom.* 6.2. Griffin, 'The Flavians', 65-66.

¹⁵² Cass. Dio. 67.11.1. Jones, 144.

¹⁵³ Jones, 149.

¹⁵⁴ Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 94.

¹⁵⁵ C. Rüger, 'Roman Germany', in: A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* 11 (2000) 528.

¹⁵⁶ T. Bechert, *Germania Inferior: Eine Provinz an der Nordgrenze des Römischen Reiches* (Mainz 2007) 27.

¹⁵⁷ Jones, 149.

¹⁵⁸ Polak and Kooistra, 'A Sustainable Frontier?', 364.

¹⁵⁹ Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 59; Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 47.

¹⁶⁰ G.E.F. Chilver, 'Domitian Roman emperor', *Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Domitian>> accessed on: 14-06-2021.

is no extensive evidence for this, but Domitian clearly laid some foundations.¹⁶¹ The *limes* was during this time according to Olwen Brogan: “a broad clearing, mostly through forest land, guarded by frequent watch-towers, and, at intervals, by small earth forts whence the patrols could be sent out to their stations.”¹⁶² Most of this *limes* was created in the Germania Superior, in the Taunus and Wetterau region, to control the tribes east of the Rhine and to establish a faster line of communication between the rivers Mainz and Danube.¹⁶³ Frontinus writes that Domitian advanced “the frontier of the empire along a stretch of one hundred and twenty miles [180 km], [this] not only changed the nature of the war, but brought his enemies beneath his sway, by uncovering their hiding-places.”¹⁶⁴ This line is often interpreted in two ways: that Domitian constructed a military road into Germanic territory or that he constructed a fortified boundary.¹⁶⁵ It is probably too early to interpret this as the creation of a fortified boundary, but the foundation for this was certainly laid. When it comes to Germania Inferior, and therefore the Rhine delta, the ancient sources fall short so we do not know what happened to the frontier in that region. However, it is likely that the Rhine delta region was further consolidated and according to Lendering and Bosman: “it is certain that a road was constructed along the river during his [Domitian’s] reign.”¹⁶⁶ The first steps towards the creation of a permanent fortified frontier were taken and the *limes* would only be reinforced further during following centuries.

¹⁶¹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 127.

¹⁶² O. Brogan, ‘An Introduction to the Roman Land Frontier in Germany’, *Greece and Rome* 3 (1933) 24.

¹⁶³ Jones, 131.

¹⁶⁴ Frontin. *Str.* 1.3.10. Translation by: C.E. Bennett and M.B. McElwain, *Stratagems. Aqueducts of Rome*, Loeb Classical Library 174 (1925) 27.

¹⁶⁵ Jones, 130.

¹⁶⁶ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 111.

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RHINE AND THE RHINE DELTA

2.1 *The importance of the river Rhine as a frontier*

The previous chapter discussed the political processes and military events that led up to the (partial) incorporation of the Rhine delta within the Roman Empire, the most important demarcation of this Roman territory was formed by the river Rhine that divided the Roman provinces from *Germania Libera* (Free Germania). Julius Caesar was one of the first Romans to not only describe the course of the river,¹⁶⁷ but also to assign a function to the Rhine; as the demarcation between the Germanics east of the river and the Celts west of the river.¹⁶⁸ During the Gallic Wars, Caesar decided to cross the river, making him the first Roman general to ever do so, to attack the Germanics on their home ground.¹⁶⁹ According to Campbell, Caesar's decision to cross the river was "partly influenced by the fact that he did not want it to become a kind of official or psychological barrier to Roman activities."¹⁷⁰ However when he had crossed the river he was accordingly told by the Germanics that it was this river that marked the limit of the Roman domain and that he had no right to cross it.¹⁷¹ Whether or not this was indeed the case, Caesar's description almost forced the Rhine into a position of functioning as a border between Roman and barbaric territory long before any Roman frontiers were created in north-western Europe. However, the decision of Caesar to mark the Rhine as the boundary is most likely the result of his own shortcomings, as to why his own conquests stopped at the river. The other side of the river belonged to dangerous Germanic barbarians, creating an illustrious line that was difficult to cross, and in Caesar's opinion, the Rhine was a perfect natural border that could function as a buffer to prevent the dangerous Germanic tribes from entering Gaul.¹⁷²

After Caesar other ancient writers continue this narrative that describes the Rhine as a border. Strabo describes the Rhine as the common boundary between the Celts and the Germanics,¹⁷³ Claudius Ptolemy that it formed the western border of Germania,¹⁷⁴ and Cassius Dio says that this river was always considered to be the boundary between the Gauls and the Germanics, even down to the time when he wrote the *Historia Romana*.¹⁷⁵ However, in reality the Rhine was not a harsh line that divided the Celts from the Germanics, according to the archaeological finds, it was more a transitional zone

¹⁶⁷ Caes. *BGall.* 4.10.

¹⁶⁸ Caes. *BGall.* 1.1.

¹⁶⁹ Cass. Dio. 39.50.1.

¹⁷⁰ Campbell, *Rivers and the Power Of Ancient Rome*, 56.

¹⁷¹ Caes. *BGall.* 4.16.

¹⁷² Buijtendorp, *Caesar in de Lage Landen*, 110.

¹⁷³ Strab. 4.4.2.

¹⁷⁴ Ptol. *Geog.* 2.10.

¹⁷⁵ Cass. Dio. 39.49. The Roman History was written during the late second century AD and the early third century AD.

between these two cultures.¹⁷⁶ Caesar himself even describes that the Belgae descended from the Germanics and that there were mutual connections between the different tribes living on both sides of the Rhine.¹⁷⁷ However, ancient descriptions of the Rhine were not limited by calling it a boundary or a line that divided the Germanics from the Celts, in Flavius Josephus' account on the speech of Agrippa he says that the impetuous Germanics were bounded by the Rhine.¹⁷⁸ Seneca the Younger states that it was not only a boundary but implies that the river also functioned as an obstacle to hold the belligerent Germanics back.¹⁷⁹ Tacitus writes a similar thing, calling the rivers "the ancient defences of our empire".¹⁸⁰ These descriptions suggest that rivers, or in our case the Rhine, were not just landmarks that were used as an easy visible boundary, but also had defensive purposes. However, in another instance, Tacitus writes that the Rhine did little to prevent tribes living on both sides from crossing into new territory.¹⁸¹ Therefore, it seems that the Rhine did provide some defence but not enough to completely withhold mobility. This dualistic view on rivers is also implied in Augustus' *Res Gestae* in which he states that it was the river Elbe that marked the end of the Roman peace in Germania,¹⁸² and that he extended the Roman frontier to the banks of the Danube. However, when the Dacians crossed the Danube, the Roman army crossed the river to force the Dacians into submission.¹⁸³ Therefore, Augustus describes rivers as something that divided the Roman territory from the rest but also as something that could be crossed. In this case, a river served as a control or resource line from which further campaigns could be launched.¹⁸⁴

However, nowadays the role of rivers during the ancient times as frontiers or defence mechanisms is part of a large scholarly discussion. Some modern scholars have argued that rivers do not make good frontiers, Colin Wells states that "they join rather than separate, and serve more readily as highways than as barriers."¹⁸⁵ According to C.J. Mann rivers, like the Rhine, were nothing more than a bureaucratic choice, serving as a clear demarcation.¹⁸⁶ These arguments are supported by Valerie Maxfield who adds that because of their uniting nature rivers are difficult to protect.¹⁸⁷ Even Whittaker argues that rivers were transitional zones, logistical and administrative lines rather than defence mechanisms.¹⁸⁸ However, on the other hand, there are also scholars that state that rivers are good frontiers.¹⁸⁹ One of the scholars that denounces the underrating role of rivers as defence mechanisms is

¹⁷⁶ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Caes. *BGall.* 2.3-4. Campbell, *Rivers and the Power Of Ancient Rome*, 280.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph. *BJ.* 2.377.

¹⁷⁹ Sen. *QNat.* 6.7.1.

¹⁸⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4.26.

¹⁸¹ Tac. *Germ.* 28.

¹⁸² Aug. *RG.* 26.

¹⁸³ Aug. *RG.* 30.

¹⁸⁴ Campbell, 188.

¹⁸⁵ Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus*, 24.

¹⁸⁶ C.J. Mann, 'The Frontiers of the Principate', in: H. Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg unter Niedergang der römischen Welt II. Principat 1* (Berlin 1974) 513.

¹⁸⁷ Maxfield, 'Mainland Europe', 139.

¹⁸⁸ Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 60-62.

¹⁸⁹ E.g. Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 92.

Boris Rankov, who argues that, just because rivers are now assumed to be weak defensive lines, we should not think that the Romans thought the same. According to Rankov, rivers were often described as the edges of the empire and seen as defensive by the Romans,¹⁹⁰ the fact that the Roman forts were located behind rivers and that the Romans did not maintain bridges are indications that rivers were seen as obstacles with a defensive advantage.¹⁹¹

Rivers are also often considered to be the ‘highways’ of the ancient world, enabling safer and faster transportations of troops and supplies, and to ease communication.¹⁹² They could therefore also be considered to be desirable frontiers, however, when it comes to the defensive or barrier role of rivers, opinions are mixed. However, it seems that since the time of Caesar (or maybe even before) the Rhine was considered to be the border between the ‘civilised’ Celts and the ‘barbaric’ Germanics, this makes the river more than just a ‘bureaucratic choice’ or a ‘clear demarcation’. Even though the Rhine was not as a harsh line as some ancient writers have stated, it would become and remain the border of the north-western Roman Empire for centuries. However, rivers, including the Rhine, were not impenetrable barriers, rivers can be and were crossed. Suetonius reports that in AD 89 the Rhine froze, which almost led the way for an easy passage for the Chatti to cross the river during the Revolt of Saturninus but eventually they were prevented from doing so because of a thaw.¹⁹³ Another flaw of the Rhine is mentioned by Tacitus during the Batavian Revolt in AD 69, reporting low water levels in the river as a result of drought, causing difficulties in reprovisioning the frontier and causing troops to be posted along the bank of the river to prevent the Germanics from crossing it.¹⁹⁴ And also the other way around, rivers and other ‘natural obstacles’ did not prevent Rome from interfering with opponents on the other side of these landmarks.¹⁹⁵

2.2 The importance of the river Rhine as transporter

Besides functioning as the border of the north-western Roman Empire, the Rhine also offered other possibilities. One of the reasons, if not the main reason, for the Roman military settlement in the Rhine delta is the presence of the many waterways that could function as important infrastructural networks.¹⁹⁶ According to Lendering and Bosman, the decision to make the Rhine the north-western border of the empire “had more to do with logistics than with tactics.”¹⁹⁷ Rivers were especially useful during the

¹⁹⁰ B. Rankov, ‘Do Rivers Make Good Frontiers?’, in: Z. Vísy (ed.), *Limes XIX: Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Pécs* (Pécs 2005) 176.

¹⁹¹ Rankov, ‘Do Rivers Make Good Frontiers?’, 178.

¹⁹² E.g. Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus*, 24; Maxfield, ‘Mainland Europe’, 139; Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 87. However, the river seems to have been only faster than other types of transportation if the ships sailed downstream. From: van Dinter, ‘The Roman Limes in the Netherlands’, 25.

¹⁹³ Suet. *Dom.* 6.2.

¹⁹⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 4.26.

¹⁹⁵ Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome*, 374.

¹⁹⁶ J. de Bruin, ‘Connectivity in the south-western part of the Netherlands during the Roman period (AD 0-350)’, *Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia* 43/44 (2012) 153.

¹⁹⁷ Lendering and Bosman, 87.

beginning of the Roman occupation period in the Rhine delta, since the river network was probably the only way of transportation.¹⁹⁸ The fact that even after the Roman settlement it would take up to the end of the first century AD before a real road system was constructed along the Rhine shows that the river was and remained the most important transport system in the Rhine delta.¹⁹⁹

However, in order to determine whether or not the Rhine was a useful transportation route, navigability must be taken into consideration. According to Caesar was the Rhine a broad, rapid and deep river,²⁰⁰ which makes it seem like a quite suitable river for riverine transportation. Strabo also describes it as a navigable river,²⁰¹ it was a fast flowing river but also a river that descends gradually due to its even slope.²⁰² According to Strabo, the rivers in the north-western empire were so well positioned that they naturally enabled transportation between the rivers and the sea, only a little bit of the transportation (between the rivers) had to go via land.²⁰³ However, Cicero also mentions a less positive aspect of the Rhine, describing it as a flooding and foaming river.²⁰⁴ And, like previously mentioned by Suetonius and Tacitus, the Rhine could freeze and water levels could drop.²⁰⁵ Therefore, it seems that the Rhine was generally quite navigable but it was also prone to weather and seasonal circumstances.

The Rhine, being one of the largest rivers in Europe, was probably one of the most important rivers in the Roman Empire.²⁰⁶ More than other Roman frontiers, the Rhine delta was an important transit zone that enabled all kinds of transportation opportunities between the European continent and the British Isles.²⁰⁷ Since the Gallic Wars there was already a well-established route created between the two, known as the 'Hook-Harwick route' across the North Sea.²⁰⁸ Strabo also mentions that people did use the Rhine as a connector between the Continent and Britannia, however, he adds that they did not cross the sea from the estuary of the river but from the *Gesoriacum* region.²⁰⁹ Departure from this Roman settlement in the region of the Morini was according to Pliny the Elder the shortest passage to Britannia.²¹⁰ However, the Rhine did not only connect the different parts of Gaul, Germania and Britannia with each other, it is also suggested that the Rhine transportation was connected to the Danube.²¹¹ Probably more importantly, the Rhine could also be reached from the Mediterranean through the Rhône-

¹⁹⁸ E.P. Graafstal, 'Logistiek, communicatie en watermanagement: Over de uitrusting van de Romeinse rijksgrens in Nederland', *Westerheem* 51:1 (2002) 6.

¹⁹⁹ van Dinter, 'The Roman Limes in the Netherlands', 25.

²⁰⁰ Caes. *BGall.* 4.17.

²⁰¹ Strab. 7.1.3.

²⁰² Strab. 4.3.

²⁰³ Strab. 4.2.1.

²⁰⁴ Cic. *Pis.* 81. Based on: Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome*, 280-281.

²⁰⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 6.2.; Tac. *Hist.* 4.26.

²⁰⁶ T.V. Franconi, *The Economic Development of the Rhine River Basin in the Roman Period 30 BC – AD 406* (diss. University of Oxford 2014) 34.

²⁰⁷ Graafstal, 'Logistiek, communicatie en watermanagement', 3.

²⁰⁸ Webster, *The Invasion of Britain*, 53.

²⁰⁹ Strab. 4.5.2.

²¹⁰ Plin. *HN.* 4.102.

²¹¹ Campbell, 281.

Saône-Moselle corridor,²¹² or via the Rhône and Lake Geneva.²¹³ However, just like Strabo already mentioned, the connections between these rivers were not seamless because the route between the Rhône and the Rhine had to be bridged by land. It is therefore also debatable whether these routes were also the most lucrative ways of transportation, according to Paul van der Heijden, recent research on the transport of olive oil from southern Spain to Xanten has shown that there were two possibilities of transportation: inland via rivers or via the sea, and it seems that the sea route was much faster and cheaper than the inland route, being less circuitous by not having to travel overland between the Rhône and the Rhine.²¹⁴

In the north-western empire it was the river Rhine that mainly determined the Roman fortifications and settlements that eventually formed the *limes*. According to Campbell, Roman expansion generally ended when (new) territories were not economically profitable or suitable for provisioning.²¹⁵ The Rhine delta itself does not seem to have been economically profitable but the presence of the Rhine (and other important rivers) proved to be important for the transportation network of the Roman Empire. The reason for the creation of the Roman forts along the Rhine was not primarily to defend the north-western part of the Roman Empire but to control the river according to Polak.²¹⁶ Kooistra *et al.* state that the main purpose of the forts was to protect the Rhine shipping.²¹⁷ This shows that the river was more than a demarcation, it was a valuable river that was worth protecting. The forts that were created along the southern bank would have patrolled along the river, while the river itself was presumably patrolled by the *classis Germanica*.²¹⁸ The *classis Germanica* was a Roman fleet that was stationed on the Rhine, the fleet was initially deployed to support the military campaigns during the Germanic Wars.²¹⁹ However, the fleet also performed other tasks such as: “the supply of garrisons and larger armies, the movement of troops and animals, and surveillance and scouting.”²²⁰ This touches upon another important aspect; supplying the Roman army. In order for the army to function properly, a safe and steady supply route was vital, which is also expressed by Tacitus who writes that during the Batavian revolt that “nothing distressed our troops so much as the lack of provisions. [...] for the enemy [the Batavians] controlled the river [Rhine].”²²¹ It is often assumed that the Rhine delta was unable to support the military installations which has led to the conclusion that most of the supplies were imported via the

²¹² Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome*, 270-271.

²¹³ Franconi, *The Economic Development of the Rhine River Basin*, 64.

²¹⁴ P. van der Heijden, *Romeinen langs Rijn en Noordzee: De Limes in Nederland* (Utrecht 2020) 54.

²¹⁵ Campbell, 187.

²¹⁶ Polak, ‘The Roman Military Presence In The Rhine Delta’, 949.

²¹⁷ L.I. Kooistra, M. van Dinter, M.K. Dütting, P. van Rijn and C. Cavallo, ‘Could the local population of the Lower Rhine delta supply the Roman army?: Part 1: The archaeological and historical framework’, *Journal of Archaeology in the Low Countries* 4:2 (2013) 5.

²¹⁸ Maxfield, ‘Mainland Europe’, 146.

²¹⁹ Campbell, 183.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

²²¹ Tac. *Hist.* 4.35. Translation by: C.H. Moore and J. Jackson, *Histories: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249 (Cambridge, MA 1931) 67.

Rhine.²²² Archaeologists have stated that the Rhine delta landscape was insufficient for the production of food,²²³ only a limited part of the landscape, such as the stream ridges and the river levees, was suitable for agriculture other parts of the delta were only used for livestock (fig. 3 and 4).²²⁴ One of the most consumed foods by the Roman army were cereals,²²⁵ most of which were imported from the fertile southern loess areas in Belgium, France and the higher Rhineland.²²⁶ Even though most supplies were imported, it is according to Polak and Kooistra not unlikely that at least a part of the cereals consumed by the army were obtained locally,²²⁷ they argue that relatively large parts of the delta were indeed used for agriculture since the Iron Age.²²⁸ However, even if the local population of the Rhine delta could produce some cereal, it seems that the local rural settlements in the Rhine delta, due to their small size, were not able to produce a substantial surplus production during the early Roman settlement, the Romans therefore still had to rely on the importation of supplies via the Rhine.²²⁹

The presence of the military on the north-western frontier of the empire played a key role in the creation of a transportation system since the army needed to be supplied.²³⁰ This also caused other economic possibilities, because around the forts civil settlements (*canabae*) developed that could benefit not only from the supplies that were shipped to the forts but also the commercial trading opportunities that were created, from which the local population likely profited.²³¹ However, it is difficult to determine the commercial economic value of the Rhine, especially during the early stages of the Roman military occupation in the Rhine delta. It is reasonable to assume that there was an economic significance but, according to Campbell: “it is difficult to trace in detail the nature and extent of its role.”²³² The Rhine had initially more a military purpose than it had a commercial.²³³ The (archaeological) sources seem to confirm this, evidence that supports a commercial trading role for the Rhine mainly dates from the mid-second century AD to the mid-third century AD. Epigraphical evidence such as the existence of *nautae*

²²² Polak and Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier?’, 362.

²²³ C. Cavallo, L.I. Kooistra and M.K. Dütting, ‘Food supply to the Roman army in the Rhine delta in the first century A.D.’, in: S. Stallibrass and R. Thomas (eds.), *Feeding the Roman Army: The Archaeology of Production and Supply in NW Europe* (Oxford 2008) 70.

²²⁴ M. Groot, ‘Surplus production of animal products for the Roman army in a rural settlement in the Dutch River Area’, in: S. Stallibrass and R. Thomas (eds.) *Feeding the Roman Army: the Archaeology of Production and Supply in NW Europe* (Oxford 2008) 85.

²²⁵ Archaeological and historical research has shown that the most consumed foods by the Roman army were: ‘bread, biscuits, porridge, fruits, beer, wine and olive oil.’ From: Cavallo, Kooistra and Dütting, ‘Food supply to the Roman army in the Rhine delta’, 70.

²²⁶ E.g. Groot, ‘Surplus production of animal products for the Roman army’, 85.

²²⁷ Polak and Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier?’, 400. When we look at the archaeological evidence, botanical remains found in the early military settlements show the presence of: hulled barley, emmer wheat, oat and common millet, these cereals could have been produced locally but the local farms were during that time most likely only self-supporting. From: Cavallo et al., 72-73.

²²⁸ Polak and Kooistra, 373.

²²⁹ Cavallo et al., 74-75.

²³⁰ de Bruin, ‘Connectivity in the south-western part of the Netherlands’, 146.

²³¹ Campbell, *River and the Power of Ancient Rome*, 172.

²³² *Ibid.*, 281.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 280.

(sailors or mariners) at Vechten,²³⁴ a *negotiator frumentarius* (grain merchant) at Nijmegen,²³⁵ and the numerous votive dedications by *negotiatores* (business men or merchants) to the goddess Nehalennia at the Colijnsplaat and Domburg who sailed between the European continent and Britannia,²³⁶ all seem to confirm that the Rhine would become an important commercial transportation route. However, the lack of similar evidence for the first century AD is likely an indication that the region was not secured enough to enable such trading possibilities, an archaeological excavation at a non-military Roman settlement at Goedereede seems to support this. Excavations at this site reveal that there was a small harbour and storage houses that can be dated around AD 85,²³⁷ which is around the same time the region was consolidated with the creation of the *limes* and the province Germania Inferior.

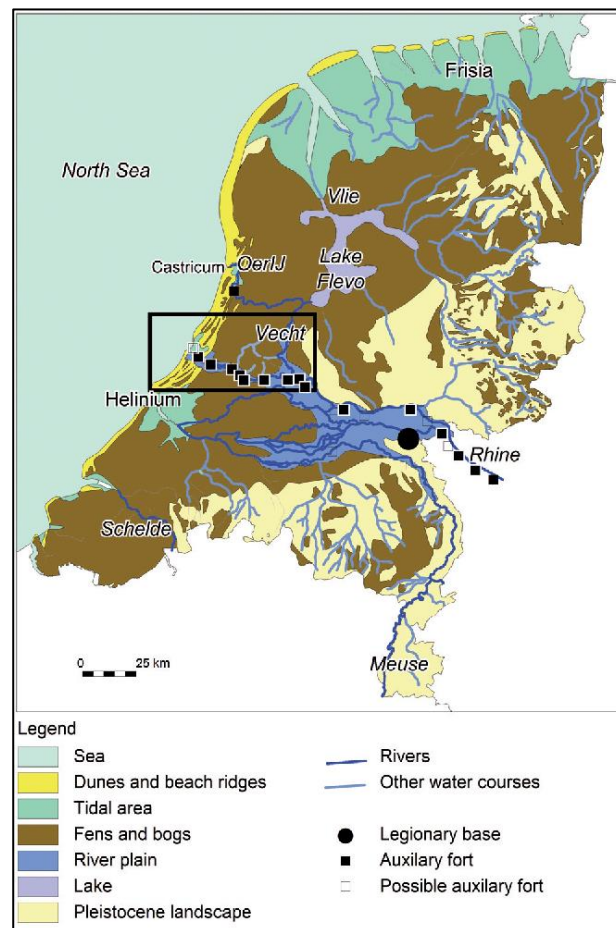


Fig. 3: Paleogeographic map of the Netherlands, 1st century AD. See for a detail of the western Rhine delta (black square) fig. 4 below. Reproduced from: van Dinter, 13.²³⁸

²³⁴ CIL XIII, 8815.

²³⁵ CIL XIII, 8725.

²³⁶ P. Stuart and J.E. Bogaers, *Nehalennia: römische Steindenkmäler aus der Oosterschelde bei Colijnsplaat* (Leiden 2001) A: 1, 6, 9, 11, 26, 34, 39, 49, 53 and B: 1, 10, 14, 44.

²³⁷ de Bruin, 'Connectivity in the south-western part of the Netherlands', 151.

²³⁸ Image from: M. van Dinter 'The Roman Limes in the Netherlands: how a delta landscape determined the location of the military structures', *Semantic Scholar* <<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Roman-Limes-in-the-Netherlands%3A-how-a-delta-the-Dinter/76e045ca35bf775e0cc98b039785629fcf59994b/figure/2>> accessed on: 18-04-2022. Permission granted for reuse in a Master's Thesis.

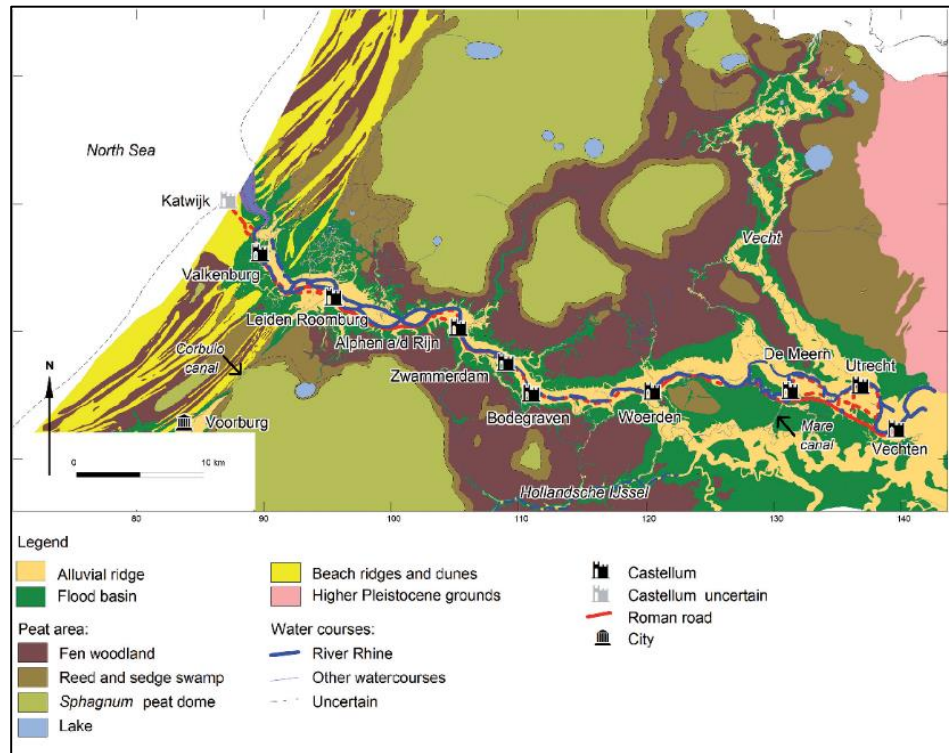


Fig. 4: Paleogeographic map of the western Rhine delta. Reproduced from: van Dinter, 16.²³⁹

2.3 The importance of adapting to the landscape and waterworks in the Rhine delta

Even though it seems that the Rhine was a perfect pre-existing infrastructural ‘water-highway’, in reality it was not that straight forward. Scholars have often stated that rivers stimulated the economic development and trade in the Roman Empire, but this is according to Koenraad Verboven and Wim de Clercq not an unproblematic view, because just like other forms of infrastructure, rivers needed “investment, regulation and control”, therefore they needed adaptations in order to be reasonably accessible, which would include “tow-paths, canals, locks, connecting roads, ports and warehouses.”²⁴⁰ The Rhine was without doubt very important for the Roman settlement in the Rhine delta but it needed several adaptations in order to function properly. The Rhine delta, which the name already suggests, was a delta region that was mainly formed by the presence of many rivers that created elevated levees by the deposit of sediments close to the rivers, while in the low flood basins a clay soil was created further away from the rivers (fig. 3 and 4).²⁴¹ Most of the Rhine delta can be characterized as being a

²³⁹ Image from: M. van Dinter ‘The Roman Limes in the Netherlands: how a delta landscape determined the location of the military structures’, *Semantic Scholar* <<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Roman-Limes-in-the-Netherlands%3A-how-a-delta-the-Dinter/76e045ca35bf775e0cc98b039785629fcf59994b/figure/4>> accessed on: 19-04-2022. Permission granted for reuse in a Master’s Thesis.

²⁴⁰ K. Verboven and W. de Clercq, ‘Inland Waterways in the Roman Transport Network of the Gallic and Germanic Provinces (c. 50 BC – c. AD 400)’, *Universiteit Gent: Roman Society Research Center* <<https://www.rsrc.ugent.be/waterways>> accessed on: 16-10-2021. Also see: Franconi, *The Economic Development of the Rhine River Basin*, 32.

²⁴¹ van Dinter, ‘The Roman Limes in the Netherlands’, 13.

wetland, with: “sandy ridges along the coast, clay areas along the rivers and a large peat bog in the interior.”²⁴² However, the Rhine delta was fairly inaccessible, especially the western part of it, because of its swampy nature.²⁴³ Therefore only a limited amount of land was suitable for settlement, agricultural production and natural resources.²⁴⁴

The auxiliary military forts (*castella*) that were built on the southern bank of the Rhine had to be adapted to these wetlands. According to the writer of the *De Munitionibus Castrorum*, a three to two ratio was ideal when it comes to the rectangular ground plan of a *castellum*.²⁴⁵ However, most of the *castella* in the Rhine delta were smaller.²⁴⁶ The forts that have been excavated in the Rhine delta have their long side parallel to the river and they consisted of two instead of the usual three zones, because the *retentura* (rear zone) was omitted,²⁴⁷ probably because of the limited amount of space on the river levees. What is also remarkable is the fact that the forts are built as close to the river as possible, archaeological research has shown that waterfront installations like “revetments, simple quays or mooring stages” were often very close to the fort (10-15 meters),²⁴⁸ which indicates that the forts were built very close to the river. This would certainly be something the writer of the *De Munitionibus Castrorum* would disapprove of, stating that: “nor should the camp be near a fast-flowing river which might flood and overwhelm the camp in a sudden storm.”²⁴⁹ As Cicero already described, the Rhine could be a flooding river and according to Marieke van Dinter, Rhine floods probably increased during the Roman period which is likely caused by the human deforestation of the upper Rhine and agriculture.²⁵⁰ However, the reason for these unhandy locations for the forts is not clear, according to Evert van Ginkel and Wouter Vos, it could be to have a better view of the river in order to protect it against unwanted visitors or because of the inexperience the Roman engineers had with the delta landscape.²⁵¹ However, it seems that, even if there were better options available, the Romans choose a location that was very close to the Rhine to not only built their forts but also their watchtowers,²⁵² which according to Polak leads to the assumption that the military installations in the Rhine delta were mainly used to keep an eye on the Rhine rather than to control the surrounding territory.²⁵³ Another thing that is remarkable is the distance between the forts, the forts are closer together in the western part of the Rhine delta than usual, which had probably also something to do with the landscape because almost all

²⁴² de Bruin, ‘Connectivity in the south-western part of the Netherlands’, 146.

²⁴³ Polak and Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier?’, 372; van Dinter, ‘The Roman Limes in the Netherlands’, 12.

²⁴⁴ Graafstal, ‘Logistiek, communicatie en watermanagement’, 3.

²⁴⁵ DMC, 21. van Ginkel and Vos, *Grens van het Romeinse Rijk*, 92.

²⁴⁶ This is the case for the *castella* at Arnhem-Meinerswijk, Utrecht, De Meern, Zwammerdam and Valkenburg, and was also likely the case for Woerden and Leiden-Roomburg.

²⁴⁷ Polak, ‘The Roman Military Presence in the Rhine Delta’, 946.

²⁴⁸ van Dinter, 20.

²⁴⁹ DMC, 57. Translation from: C.M. Gilliver, *The Roman Art of War: Theory and Practice: A Study of the Roman Military Writers* (diss. University of London 1993) 245.

²⁵⁰ van Dinter, 13-14.

²⁵¹ van Ginkel and Vos, 97-98.

²⁵² E.g. van Dinter, 22-23.

²⁵³ Polak, 949.

the forts were built close to a (small) bifurcation of the Rhine or near the mouth of a peat brook (fig. 4).²⁵⁴ The reason for this could have been related to the observation of transportations over these bifurcations, whether it were possible threats of hostile invasions or logistic reasons, this was especially important during a time when almost all the transportations took place over rivers.²⁵⁵ According to van Dinter: “only entry points through which military trade and expeditions to the north could be performed were watched over”, and since the rest of the Rhine delta mainly consisted of inaccessible wetlands the only real hostile threats would come from these (small) rivers.²⁵⁶ However, the placement of the forts near bifurcations could also have had a more practical reason, since tributaries have a less strong current making these locations more suitable for the construction of harbours.²⁵⁷ The forts that were not located nearby a small river or stream were also placed at convenient locations in the landscape. The De Meern fort was built at the location where two alluvial ridges join each other,²⁵⁸ the Valkenburg fort on the highest part of the estuary of the Rhine, and the now lost fort near Katwijk was most likely built on sand dunes. However, according to van Dinter, contrary to previous claims, not all the forts were built on the highest point to prevent flooding, some forts were built very close to the river even when there were higher locations in the landscape nearby, making them vulnerable to flooding.²⁵⁹ Therefore it seems that a close observation was more important than to avoid flooding.

²⁵⁴ The *castellum* at: Utrecht was built near the Vecht, Woerden near the Grecht, Bodegraven near the Oude Bodegraven, Zwammerdam near the Meije, Alphen aan den Rijn near the Aar and Leiden-Roomburg near the Vliet. From: van Dinter, ‘The Roman Limes in the Netherlands’, 20.

²⁵⁵ Campbell, *Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome*, 172; van der Heijden, *Romeinen langs Rijn en Noordzee*, 26-27.

²⁵⁶ van Dinter, 25.

²⁵⁷ Breeze, *The Frontiers of Imperial Rome*, 94.

²⁵⁸ The Old Rhine and the Heldam ridge.

²⁵⁹ van Dinter, 20.



Fig. 5: Map with the Corbulo canal (green), Drusus dam (purple arrow) and possible locations for the Drusus canal(s) (red). Top right map is the route of Drusus' Germanic campaign in 12 BC. Reproduced from: Verhagen, *et al.*, 44.²⁶⁰

Besides these constructional built adaptations to the landscape, the Romans also built several hydraulic engineering works to increase the accessibility and mobility of the Rhine delta. Like Verboven and de Clercq have stated, just like other forms of infrastructure rivers also needed to be adapted and maintained. Probably the first waterwork that was constructed in the Rhine delta was a canal that was constructed by Drusus during the Germanic Wars in 12 BC.²⁶¹ This canal is mentioned by Tacitus who calls it the '*fossa Drusiana*',²⁶² and by Suetonius who states that Drusus constructed huge canals that were named after him,²⁶³ implying that there was more than one canal. However, there are no archaeological remains found yet, and there is still a debate going on whether Drusus constructed one or more canals.²⁶⁴ There is also an ongoing debate on where the *fossa Drusiana* was constructed (assuming that it was just one canal with that name), the oldest, and probably also the most popular, option is that the canal was constructed between the Rhine and the river IJssel to establish a direct

²⁶⁰ Image from: J.G.M. Verhagen, S.J. Kluiving and H. Kars, 'The option of Roman canal construction by Drusus in the Vecht river area (the Netherlands): a geoarchaeological approach', *Netherlands Journal of Geosciences*, published by Cambridge University Press (21-02-2022) <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/netherlands-journal-of-geosciences/article/option-of-roman-canal-construction-by-drusus-in-the-vecht-river-area-the-netherlands-a-geoarchaeological-approach/DA9681CD8C68E40B952B93AAC4DAB55C>> accessed on: 20-04-2022. Permission granted for reuse in a Master's Thesis.

²⁶¹ Franconi, *The Economic Development of the Rhine River Basin*, 42.

²⁶² Tac. *Ann.* 2.8.

²⁶³ Suet. *Claud.* 1.2.

²⁶⁴ E.g. Franconi, 42.

connection from the Rhine to Lake Flevo (fig. 5 R3).²⁶⁵ The other is that the canal was built between the Rhine and Lake Flevo on the location of the river Vecht, near Vechten (fig. 5 R1).²⁶⁶ And even a third option has been suggested, which is that the canal was built between the Rhine and Lake Flevo in the Gelderse Vallei, connected to the river Eem (fig. 5 R2).²⁶⁷ Hard archaeological evidence for the exact location of the canal(s) is missing,²⁶⁸ however, all the options aim at a canal that was built to make Lake Flevo accessible from the Rhine. The main reason for the construction of the canal was most likely to avoid the more dangerous route via the sea, with its changing currents, to northern Germania to create an efficient route for transporting and supplying the army during Drusus' campaigns.²⁶⁹ Besides this canal there is also another waterwork constructed by Drusus, which is the so-called Drusus 'moles'. This 'dam' was most likely built at the bifurcation of the Rhine and the Waal, to divert more water that was flowing into the Waal to the Rhine (fig. 5).²⁷⁰ A gravestone found at Herwen that mentions a soldier named Marcus Mallius seems to confirm that there was likely a dam near this bifurcation, a part of the inscription reads: *carvio ad molem sepultus est*, which means that he was buried near a dam at Carvium (fig. 6). Apparently the dam was not finished right away since Tacitus mentions that sixty-three years later other Roman troops finished the construction.²⁷¹ However, not long thereafter during the Batavian Revolt in AD 69, the dam was demolished, which led according to Tacitus the Rhine to "pour in full flow into Gaul along an unencumbered channel."²⁷² Resulting in an increased water flow into the Waal and a decreased water flow into the Rhine, which led to an extremely low water level in the Rhine.²⁷³ Therefore it seems that this dam was a very important structure in the landscape to control the water flow of the delta and the navigability of the Rhine.

²⁶⁵ Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus*, 111. Based on: Tac. *Ann.* 2.8, where he describes that the canal was connected to the 'lakes', most likely referring to Lake Flevo. E.g. Franconi, *The Economic Development of the Rhine River Basin*, 42; B. Makaske, G.J. Maas and D.G. van Smeerdijk, 'The age and origin of the Gelderse IJssel', *Netherlands Journal of Geosciences – Geologie en Mijnbouw* 87:4 (2008) 327; J.G.M. Verhagen, S.J. Kluiving and H. Kars, 'The option of Roman canal construction by Drusus in the Vecht river area (the Netherlands): a geoarchaeological approach', *Netherlands Journal of Geosciences* 101 (2022) 42.

²⁶⁶ Wells, 111; Verhagen, Kluiving and Kars, 'The option of Roman canal construction by Drusus in the Vecht river area', 1-21.

²⁶⁷ Verhagen et al., 2.

²⁶⁸ For the IJssel option: archaeological finds at Arnhem-Meinerswijk have not resulted in a dating around Drusus' campaigns. As well as new sedimentation samples from the IJssel rule out the existence of a connection between the Rhine and the IJssel before AD 600. From: Polak and Kooistra, 'A Sustainable Frontier?', 403-404.

-For the Vecht option: archaeological finds at Vechten do not support a dating that goes back to Drusus' military campaigns either, and there is also no sign that the navigability of the Vecht needed to be improved during the Roman era. From: Polak and Kooistra, 402.

-For the Eem option: paleogeographic data does not show that there was any connection between the Rhine and the Eem. From: Verhagen et al., 3.

²⁶⁹ Polak and Kooistra, 414.

²⁷⁰ Wells, 111-112; Polak and Kooistra, 402; Franconi, 42; J.G.M. Verhagen, S.J. Kluiving, E. Anker, L. van Leeuwen, M.A. Prins, 'Geoarchaeological prospection for Roman waterworks near the late Holocene Rhine-Waal delta bifurcation, the Netherlands', *Catena* 149 (2017) 462.

²⁷¹ Tac. *Ann.* 13.53.

²⁷² Tac. *Hist.* 5.19. Translation by: Moore and Jackson, *Histories: Books 4-5*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 209.

²⁷³ Wells, 112-113.



Fig. 6: Gravestone stone of Marcus Mallius from Herwen, AD 1-50, with an inscription that reads: M(arcus) Mallius / M(arci) f(ilius) G(aleria) G(enua) / mile(s) leg(ionis) I | (centuria) Rusonis / anno(rum) XXXV stip(endiorum) XVI / Carvio ad molem / sepultus est tes(tamento) / heredes duo f(aciendum) c(uraverunt).²⁷⁴

The waterworks by Drusus were constructed during the Germanic Wars, however, after the campaigns across the Rhine were largely over, there was another canal built in the Rhine delta by Corbulo, the '*fossa Corbulonis*'. This canal was constructed after Claudius had ordered Corbulo to retreat behind the Rhine in AD 47.²⁷⁵ The canal that was built ran parallel to the North Sea from the Rhine near *Matilo* (Leiden-Roomburg) to the estuary of the Waal and Meuse, which the Romans called *Helinium* or *Os Immensum* (near Naaldwijk, fig. 5).²⁷⁶ This canal was according to Tacitus built to provide a useful inland route to also avoid the dangerous route via the sea.²⁷⁷ Cassius Dio also mentions another function of the canal, which was to regulate water levels to prevent inundation during the high tides of the sea,²⁷⁸ which can be confirmed by the archaeological evidence.²⁷⁹ However, contrary to

²⁷⁴ Photo: Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen. From: J. Lendering, 'Het graf van Marcus Mallius', *Mainzer Beobachter* (23-01-2020) <<https://mainzerbeobachter.com/2020/01/23/het-graf-van-marcus-mallius/>> accessed on: 22-04-2022. Inscription: W.J.H. Willems and H. van Enkevort (eds.), *Vlpiā Noviomagus Roman Nijmegen: the Batavian Capital at the Imperial Frontier* (Portsmouth 2009) 83, fig. 25. Transcription from: M. Clauss, A. Kolb, W.A. Slaby and B. Woitas, 'EDCS Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby' <<http://www.manfredclauss.de/>> accessed on: 22-04-2022.

²⁷⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 11.20. This can also be confirmed by dendrochronological research on some of the timber that was used, which is dated between AD 46 and 50. From: J. de Kort and Y. Raczynski-Henk, 'The Fossa Corbulonis between the Rhine and Meuse estuaries in the Western Netherlands', *Water History* 6:1 (2014) 63.

²⁷⁶ Plin. *HN.* 4.101; Tac. *Ann.* 2.6. de Kort and Raczynski-Henk, 'The Fossa Corbulonis between the Rhine and Meuse estuaries', 53.

²⁷⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 11.20.

²⁷⁸ Cass. Dio. 61.30.6.

²⁷⁹ During the construction of the canal were the natural existing streams, like the Vliet and the Gantel, connected to each other to create one continuous connection that had at least two dams or locks to keep the water at the right level between the Rhine and the Meuse. Franconi, *The Economic Development of the Rhine River Basin*, 43; de Kort and Raczynski-Henk, 63.

Drusus' canal, which was most likely built to improve the military connectivity between the Rhine and Lake Flevo to provide access to northern Germania, Corbulo's canal did not primarily have a military purpose but also a commercial purpose.²⁸⁰ The Rhine was no longer a vehicle from which military campaigns were launched into Germania, the Rhine now marked the consolidation of the Roman frontier, which gave the opportunity to use the Rhine for commercial purposes.



Fig. 7: Map with the old course of the Rhine (blue line) and *limes* road (red line) near Utrecht. Small red squares indicate the *castella*, from left to right: De Meern, *Traiectum* (Utrecht) and *Fectio* (Vechten).²⁸¹

2.4 The first steps towards the creation of the *limes* road

The Rhine played a major, if not the biggest, role in the creation of an infrastructure in the Rhine delta, however, the Roman infrastructure along the *limes* consisted not only of this river, it also comprised of man-made infrastructures which included: “roads, bridges, harbours, etc.”²⁸² However, the *limes* road is probably the most characteristic element of the Roman *limes* that connected all the military installations along the bank of the Rhine with each other. When looking at the *limes* road in the Rhine delta it is difficult to find archaeological evidence that supports a construction of a road before AD 125, but this does not mean that there was not a path or road prior to this date.²⁸³ In fact, it is likely that the earliest road dates around the same period as the construction of the watchtowers and the forts along the south bank of the Rhine, which would have been in the AD 40's.²⁸⁴ The first signs of a road are found at De

²⁸⁰ K. Verboven and W. de Clercq, ‘Inland Waterways in the Roman Transport Network of the Gallic and Germanic Provinces (c. 50 BC – c. AD 400)’, *Universiteit Gent: Roman Society Research Center* <<https://www.rsrc.ugent.be/waterways>> accessed on: 16-10-2021.

²⁸¹ Image from: ‘Romeinse weg Leidsche Rijn te zien’, *Romeinen.nl* (06-09-2018) <<https://www.romeinen.nl/weten/nieuws/romeinse-weg-leidsche-rijn-te-zien>> accessed on: 20-04-2022.

²⁸² Polak and Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier?’, 359.

²⁸³ E. Graafstal and A. den Braven, ‘Weg boven water: WTL01: inventarisatie limesweg Waterland (werkput 2 en 3) ten behoeve van de rijksbescherming van het terrein ‘Veldhuizen’ (Utrecht)’, *Basisrapportage Archeologie* 51 (2020) 63.

²⁸⁴ According to Annemarie Luksen-IJtsma there are two archaeological excavations that can be dated around AD 40. In the vicinity of the De Meern fort there were *vicus* houses found that were presumably oriented towards the road of the fort. Based on coin finds, this part of the potential first *limes* road can be dated in the Claudian era. Next to the *vicus* houses, archaeologists have found a ditch of 2 meters wide with an empty archaeological space

Meern, where an archaeological excavation revealed several wooden poles that were likely used as a campshed. Dendrochronological research on one of the poles has shown that the oak tree was cut down in the year AD 89,²⁸⁵ making this the oldest archaeological object to be related to the *limes* road. This is also an indication that during the year AD 89, in which the province Germania Inferior was created, steps were taken to consolidate the frontier. There are even stratigraphic signs that suggest that the first construction dates shortly before AD 89.²⁸⁶

Generally the *limes* road was founded on a thin layer of riparian deposits on the alluvial ridge of the river, connecting the southern meanders of the river to form a fairly straight road parallel to the Rhine (fig. 7). However, the road was also adapted to the different terrains it crossed, being a simple gravel path with ditches on both sides on the higher parts of the landscape which were closer to the river and being built on a simple artificial dike (*agger*) on the lower parts of its course. On softer soils was the road supported by a campshed of wooden poles.²⁸⁷ According to Erik Graafstal, just because the road was so close to the river it needed a lot of maintenance and repairments to protect it against the overflowing water with the help of campsheds and quays.²⁸⁸ However, most of these improvements and adaptations would have taken place after AD 89.²⁸⁹ Remarkable is the fact that, just like the forts and the watchtowers, the *limes* road was also constructed very close to the river, which made it more vulnerable to flooding, however, just like the other Roman constructions along the Rhine; the pro's would likely have outweighed the con's. It seems that the Rhine was so important and worth protecting that the floods were taken for granted.

of at least 7,5 meters. This space has been interpreted as a part of the *limes* road of which the ditch was probably the western verge ditch. The other excavation, at *Laurium* (Woerden), indicates the presence of an early road next to the *porta principalis sinistra*, which was likely constructed at the same time as the fort around AD 47. However, both of these early archaeological road signs can only be dated within the context of the concerned fort and not with the overall *limes* road. From: A. Luksen-IJtsma, 'De limesweg in West-Nederland: Inventarisatie, analyse en synthese van archeologisch onderzoek naar de Romeinse weg tussen Vechten en Katwijk', *Basisrapportage Archeologie* 40 (2010) 76-77.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 77.

²⁸⁶ Graafstal and den Braven. 'Weg boven water', 63. According to Luksen-IJtsma there is also another indication for an early date of the road found in the vicinity of the excavations at De Meern, on the southern part of this excavation archaeologists stumbled upon a small cemetery where most of the burial pits were dug into the slope of the *limes* road. The oldest grave dates between AD 70 and AD 85, which led to the conclusion that the earliest phase of the *limes* road near De Meern dates around the same period. From: Luksen-IJtsma, 'De limesweg in West-Nederland', 77.

²⁸⁷ Graafstal, 'Logistiek, communicatie en watermanagement', 6.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁸⁹ There are usually two construction periods identified: the first one was around AD 91-99/100 and the second one around AD 123-125.

CHAPTER 3: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INHABITANTS OF THE RHINE DELTA AND ROME

3.1 *The Romans and the Frisii*

Besides the challenges the landscape brought, the Romans also had to deal with another aspect in the Rhine delta and that were the local inhabitants.²⁹⁰ After all it were according to Cassius Dio the Germanics that lived in this region that influenced the naming of the Germanic provinces.²⁹¹ One of the tribes that already inhabited the Rhine delta before the Roman arrival were the Frisii. The Frisii lived in the northern Rhine delta (fig. 2), Tacitus distinguishes two types of Frisii: the ‘Greater’ and the ‘Lesser’ Frisii, their difference related to their strength.²⁹² The first interaction the Romans had with the Frisii was during Drusus’ campaigns in 12 BC, when he sailed across Lake Flevo and “won over the Frisians”,²⁹³ however, there is no indication that this went violently since the Roman encounter with the Frisians led to some of the Frisii being incorporated into the Roman army as auxiliaries during the following campaigns.²⁹⁴ When Drusus later on invaded the land of the Chauci, his ships got into trouble because the Romans were not used to the changing sea tides and the ships got stuck (probably somewhere in the Wadden Sea). However, it were the Frisians that had joined Drusus during his campaign that saved the Romans.²⁹⁵ Therefore it seems that the first contact the Romans had with this northern tribe went quite well. Even during the revolts that happened elsewhere in Germania under the command of Arminius, they remained loyal to Rome.²⁹⁶ Pliny also notes that the Frisii were a loyal tribe, and that there was a Roman camp in their territory.²⁹⁷ Tacitus mentions a fort called ‘*Flevum*’ in the Frisian territory that was close to the coast of the North Sea.²⁹⁸ Ptolemy also mentions a settlement in northern Germania called ‘*Phleum*’,²⁹⁹ but it is uncertain whether this is the same settlement. This fort *Flevum* is often identified with the archaeological excavations at Velsen. The fort was likely established during the campaigns of Germanicus around AD 15, based on some archaeological finds such as terra sigillata pottery and coins.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁰ Since a lot of tribes in the Rhine region were (re)located by or with the supervision of the Romans, I will call these tribes the ‘local inhabitants’ rather than the native or indigenous peoples.

²⁹¹ Cass. Dio. 53.12.6.

²⁹² Tac. *Germ.* 34.

²⁹³ Cass. Dio. 54.32.2. Translation by: E. Cary and H.B. Foster, *Roman History, Volume VI: Books 51-55*, Loeb Classical Library 83 (Cambridge, MA 1917) 365.

²⁹⁴ Powell, *Eager for Glory*, 74.

²⁹⁵ Cass. Dio. 54.32.2-3.

²⁹⁶ L.A. Springer, ‘Rome’s Contact with the Frisians’, *The Classical Journal* 48:4 (1953) 109.

²⁹⁷ Plin. *HN.* 25.21.

²⁹⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 4.72.

²⁹⁹ Ptol. *Geog.* 2.10.

³⁰⁰ A.V.A.J. Bosman, *Het culturele vondstmateriaal van de vroeg-Romeinse versterking Velsen 1* (diss. University of Amsterdam 1997) 24.

Even though initially the Roman relationship with the Frisii seemed to be quite good, their relationship took a turn in AD 28 when the Frisii started to revolt. According to Tacitus, who is our only source for this revolt, was the reason for the revolt not because of their submission to Rome but because they had enough of the Roman covetousness.³⁰¹ The high Roman demand for tribute on the tribe resulted in more and more resistance, which eventually escalated into a revolt.³⁰² However, in the end the battles that followed were indecisive, and even afterwards Tiberius made no efforts to punish the Frisians.³⁰³ According to Alan Bowman *et al.*, Tacitus was trying to conceal the impact of the losses for the Romans but the revolt was intense enough to put an end to the Roman occupation in the area for a while.³⁰⁴ Archaeological research in the former Frisian territory shows that the revolt most likely took place near *Flevum*. On the excavation site at Velsen, archaeologists have found over five-hundred-and-twenty *glandes* (sling-bullets),³⁰⁵ which made them able to reconstruct the course of the siege that probably happened during the revolt,³⁰⁶ resulting in the conclusion that the Frisians were very close to winning the battle. According to Lendering and Bosman, this evidence shows that the revolt was more than an unforeseen reaction to the higher tribute demand, it was likely a well prepared attack.³⁰⁷ However, according to Polak and Kooistra, Velsen is not the only candidate for the location of this revolt because Tacitus writes that estuaries were crossed,³⁰⁸ which makes it more likely that it all happened a bit further north.³⁰⁹ Tacitus does not report what happened after the revolt other than that the Frisians received a lot of praise from other Germanics.³¹⁰ Archaeological finds seem to provide some answers on what happened afterwards, dendrochronological research shows that the Romans reoccupied *Flevum* after the siege.³¹¹ Even though archaeological research shows that the Romans did not completely abandon this fort after the revolt in AD 28, it would not take long before they decided to completely leave this fort (known as Velsen 1).³¹² According to Bowman *et al.*, a wooden *stilus* tablet with a financial transaction inscribed on it was found in Tolsum and is dated to AD 29. This creates the expectation that there was still a military presence in the region, which can indicate that the Romans remained in Frisian territory after the revolt or that the revolt lasted longer than one year.³¹³

³⁰¹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.72.

³⁰² Since the time of Drusus, the Frisians had to pay a moderate tribute in the form of ox hides to the Roman army, until centurion Olennius was appointed to govern the Frisii. Olennius did not want to receive the smaller ox hides, he wanted the bigger hides of aurochs, which were hard to meet for the Frisii. However, the Roman demand grew, and according to Tacitus, the Frisii gave away their cattle, their lands and eventually their wives and children. Tac. *Ann.* 4.72.

³⁰³ Springer, 'Rome's Contact with the Frisians', 109-110.

³⁰⁴ A.K. Bowman, R.S.O. Tomlin and K.A. Worp, 'Emptio Bovis Frisica: the 'Frisian Ox Sale' Reconsidered', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009) 167.

³⁰⁵ Bosman, *Het culturele vondstmateriaal van de vroege-Romeinse versterking Velsen 1*, 51.

³⁰⁶ Based on: Tac. *Ann.* 4.73.

³⁰⁷ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 74.

³⁰⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 4.73.

³⁰⁹ Polak and Kooistra, 'A Sustainable Frontier?', 438.

³¹⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.74.

³¹¹ Bosman, 53; Lendering and Bosman, 75.

³¹² A.V.A.J. Bosman, *Rome aan de Noordzee: burgers en barbaren te Velsen* (Leiden 2016) 52.

³¹³ Bowman *et al.*, 'Emptio Bovis Frisica', 166-167.

After the revolt the Frisii were mostly left alone until around AD 47 when Corbulo started a campaign against the Chauci. According to Tacitus, the Frisians “gave hostages and settled in the reservation marked out by Corbulo: who also imposed on them a senate, a magistracy, and laws.”³¹⁴ And to see if the Frisians executed his orders, Corbulo also built a fortification in their territory.³¹⁵ It remains unclear which fortification Tacitus is talking about, but Velsen is again a possible option. However, assuming that it is Velsen, this time the Romans built a new fort just 600 meters away from the old fort known amongst archaeologists as Velsen 2. The construction of this new fort correlates with the other military activities in the Rhine delta to prepare for the invasion of Britannia that had already started during the reign of Caligula. In AD 41 and 47 two Roman generals, Gabinius and Corbulo, were sent to the north of the delta to quell the coastal harassments of the Chaucian pirates to clear the way to Britannia. Archaeological research has shown that there was wood used in *Flevum* (Velsen 2) that was felled during the winter of AD 42-43,³¹⁶ which can be linked to Claudius’ invasion of Britannia. However, Bosman argues, that it is likely that the construction of the second *Flevum* fort already begun in AD 39 during the reign of Caligula,³¹⁷ which is earlier than the fortification that Tacitus mentions that was built under the command of Corbulo. According to Bosman, Corbulo likely only adjusted the existing Velsen 2.³¹⁸ However, it seems that Corbulo tried to incorporate the Frisians into the Roman Empire, this time there seems to have been no resistance against these Roman measures, according to Wim van Es they probably enjoyed the Roman protection against the Chauci as well.³¹⁹ However, this Roman reoccupation did not last a long time because shortly afterwards Corbulo was compelled by Claudius to retreat behind the Rhine, this marked the end of the (direct) Roman interference with the Frisii. After the abandonment there were no more attempts to control the Frisians in their own territory.³²⁰ It is difficult to say what the direct cause of this decision was, maybe the Frisian resistance that escalated during the revolt had a deeper impact on the Romans than they were willing to admit, but Claudius’ sudden order to retreat behind the Rhine and to leave the Frisian territory had probably mostly to do with his decision to focus on Britannia which meant that there was no longer the need to interfere on the other side of the Rhine.

After the retreat we hear little of the Frisii apart from an incident in AD 58 when the Frisians migrated under the command of Verritus and Malorix to an area on the Rhine bank that was according to Tacitus: “reserved for the use of the troops”,³²¹ where they were later forcefully driven out by the

³¹⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 11.19. Translation by: J. Jackson, *Annals: Books 4-6, 11-12*, Loeb Classical Library 312 (Cambridge, MA 1937) 279.

³¹⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 11.19.

³¹⁶ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 86.

³¹⁷ Bosman, *Rome aan de Noordzee*, 69.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

³¹⁹ van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 37.

³²⁰ Springer, ‘Rome’s Contact with the Frisians’, 110.

³²¹ Tac. *Ann.* 13.54. Translation by: J. Jackson, *Annals: Books 13-16*, Loeb Classical Library 322 (Cambridge, MA 1937) 93.

Roman army.³²² However, according to van Es, this incident might have ignited some fury,³²³ that later on resulted in the Frisian participation in the Batavian Revolt.³²⁴

3.2 *The Romans and the Cananefates*

The tribe that lived south of the Frisii in the western part of the Rhine delta were the Cananefates.³²⁵ According to Pliny and Tacitus, the Cananefates inhabited an island in the Rhine together with the Batavi.³²⁶ Their territory roughly comprised of the region that is nowadays known as South Holland, between the estuaries of the rivers Rhine and the Meuse (fig. 2). Tacitus states that they were “in origin, speech, and courage” equal to the Batavi, but they were smaller in numbers.³²⁷ Velleius Paterculus also mentions the Cananefates, but he mentions them during Tiberius’ Germanic campaigns when they were subjected to Roman rule together with the Chattuarii and Bructeri,³²⁸ who lived north of the Rhine in the eastern Rhine delta. Therefore some scholars have drawn the conclusion that that the Cananefates (originally) came from the eastern Rhine delta north of the river IJssel.³²⁹ However, it would be a bit circuitous to assume that they were originally a part of the Chatti just like the Batavi, then moved to the eastern Rhine delta and then moved again to the western Rhine delta.³³⁰ Therefore it is more likely that Velleius Paterculus made a mistake in his account, or that some (Medieval) transcriber made a copy mistake. Generally, scholars have followed Tacitus’ account and stated that they migrated around the same time as the Batavi to the western Rhine delta; between 50 BC and 12 BC.³³¹ However, according to Jasper de Bruin, there is actually no archaeological evidence that confirms their lineage from the Batavi, in fact it actually seems that they were more related to the coastal people of the delta.³³² It is argued that they originated from the Frisii based on the Frisian-style pottery that has been found in the Cananefatian region,³³³ or from the Chauci.³³⁴ However, in the end, the name ‘Cananefates’ should rather be seen as a Roman construct, comprising of more than one specific ethnicity, than one

³²² Tac. *Ann.* 13.54.

³²³ van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 38.

³²⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 4.15.

³²⁵ In this research I will be referring to this tribe as the ‘Cananefates’ but other forms of spelling for this tribes include: Canninefates, Caninefates, Cannenefates, Canenenfatae.

³²⁶ Plin. *HN.* 4.101; Tac. *Hist.* 4.15.

³²⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 4.15. Translation by: Moore, *Histories: Books 4-5, Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 27.

³²⁸ Vell. Pat. 2.105.

³²⁹ E.g. Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, maps on p. 41.

³³⁰ This argument is also supported by: Polak and Kooistra, ‘A Sustainable Frontier?’, 416.

³³¹ E.g. J. van Roemburg, *Unarmed Cananefates? Roman military equipment and horse gear form non military context in the civitas Cananefatium* (diss. Leiden University 2011) 15.

³³² J. de Bruin, *Border Communities at the Edge of the Roman Empire: Processes of Change in the Civitas Cananefatium* (Amsterdam 2019) 154-155.

³³³ Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial power*, 205.

³³⁴ This is based on the account that the Chaucian pirate leader Gannascus, who raided the Roman coasts, was a Cananefate. From: N. Roymans, T. Derks and S. Heeren, ‘Roman Imperialism and the Transformation of Rural Society in a Frontier Province: Diversifying the Narrative’, *Britannia* 51 (2020) 273. Based on: Tac. *Ann.* 11.18.

homogeneous group.³³⁵ In fact, before the Cananefates received their own *civitas* they were according to Roymans grouped in the same district as the Batavi.³³⁶ This could also explain why Tacitus linked them directly to the Batavians.

Whatever their exact origin might have been, it is certain that the Cananefates were mainly migrants that settled in the western Rhine delta under the supervision of the Romans. According to de Bruin, there is no archaeological evidence for a continued habitation in the western Rhine delta from the late Iron Age, in fact, the area was largely uninhabited during the time of the Roman arrival.³³⁷ This contributes to the presumption that the Cananefates were one of the many (Germanic) tribes that were relocated along the, by the Romans reorganized, Rhine frontier.³³⁸ Archaeological research shows that the oldest Cananefatian settlement can be dated around AD 50,³³⁹ which is not entirely coincidental the same time the Romans started to construct a series of forts along the lower Rhine. De Bruin therefore states that “due to the presence of existing Roman fortifications along the Lower Rhine, these migrations could not have taken place without the permission of the Roman army. It is not inconceivable that there was a conscious Roman policy of repopulation of a previously empty border area.”³⁴⁰ The Cananefates probably had the same job as other tribes that were relocated by the Romans:³⁴¹ to populate the region to prevent unwanted settlement from Germanic tribes across the Rhine.³⁴² It also made sure that the area was cultivated,³⁴³ and created a recruitment ground from which auxiliaries for the Roman army could be levied.³⁴⁴ This in turn could also promote the integration of the region into the Roman Empire, by incorporating and introducing them to the Roman culture, which according to Lendering and Bosman, would prevent the local tribes from planning coordinated attacks on the Roman state.³⁴⁵ This policy is according to Roymans *et al.* in line with the “long tradition of rearranging both land and people in newly conquered areas.”³⁴⁶ However, most of the archaeological evidence for the Cananefatian habitation in the area dates from the Flavian period, this is according to de Bruin not the result of a natural increase in population, but rather an indication for a slow colonisation rate.³⁴⁷ Even though the Cananefates settled in the western Rhine delta under the watchful eye of the Roman army it did not automatically

³³⁵ de Bruin, *Border Communities at the Edge of the Roman Empire*, 224.

³³⁶ Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and imperial power*, 208.

³³⁷ de Bruin, 3.

³³⁸ E.g. Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans*, 29-31; Roymans, Derks and Heeren, ‘Roman Imperialism and the Transformation of Rural Society’, 271.

³³⁹ The only settlement that can be dated around AD 50 with certainty is the archaeological excavation site at Rijswijk-De Bult. From: de Bruin, 169.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

³⁴¹ Under Agrippa’s governorship for example the Germanic Ubii, an ally of Rome, migrated to the west bank of the Rhine. Strab. 4.3.4.; Tac. *Ann.* 12.27.

³⁴² E.g. Tac. *Germ.* 28.

³⁴³ van der Heijden, *Romeinen langs de Rijn en Noordzee*, 27-28.

³⁴⁴ Roymans *et al.*, 274-276.

³⁴⁵ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 33.

³⁴⁶ Roymans *et al.*, 274.

³⁴⁷ de Bruin, 149.

lead to an appropriation of the Roman culture by the Cananefates. According to de Bruin, the Cananefates did not become “‘Roman’, but developed a provincial or even local identity”.³⁴⁸

One of the first times we actually hear of the Cananefates interacting with the Romans is during the Frisian Revolt in AD 28, when Tacitus mentions a Cananefatian cavalry unit that served in the Roman army.³⁴⁹ The Cananefates were regularly recruited to serve as auxiliaries in the Roman army.³⁵⁰ However, there is no pre-Flavian evidence for the existence of a Cananefatian military unit,³⁵¹ before they received their own *civitas* they were probably a “part of the Batavian recruitment pool”.³⁵² This can also explain why Tacitus decided to call them ‘the same’ as the Batavi in terms of courage, referring to them as being recruited amongst the Batavi into the Roman army because of their similar fighting qualities.³⁵³ Tacitus briefly mentions the father of Brinno, a Cananefatian leader who took part in the Batavian Revolt, whose name is unknown to us but he “had dared to commit many hostile acts and had shown his scorn for Gaius’ absurd expeditions without suffering for it.”³⁵⁴ This suggests that he was in some way involved or was aware of Caligula’s attempt to invade Britannia, which could be a sign that the ‘battle against the Ocean’ did indeed took place in the Rhine delta. Also worth noticing is the fact that despite the hostilities and the scorn the father of Brinno had for Caligula’s expedition he was not, according to Tacitus, punished by the Romans for this, this shows that the Romans might have tolerated quite a bit from their new subjects. However, the Cananefates, even though they settled in the western Rhine delta under the supervision of the Romans, did not shy away from rebellion. According to Tacitus, when the Chaucian pirates were ravishing the Germanic and Gaulic coasts in the AD 40’s they were commanded by a Cananefatian deserter named Gannascus.³⁵⁵ Gannascus was one of the Cananefates that had served as an auxiliary in the Roman army, however, he deserted for reasons unknown to us, but he was certainly willing to lead the Chaucian pirates against his former ally. Also the fact that the Chauci were commanded by a Cananefate is quite remarkable in itself, this could be the result of an alliance or another form of family or linguistic ties according to de Bruin.³⁵⁶ However, in the end, Gannascus’ success did not last long because he was later on defeated and killed by Corbulo.³⁵⁷ Gannascus’ death unleashed anger among the Chauci and they were about to start a rebellion. After this news had reached Rome it raised some eyebrows among the Romans, who were afraid that Corbulo was starting a new war with the Chauci, which caused Claudius eventually to call him back and to withdraw behind the

³⁴⁸ de Bruin, *Border Communities at the Edge of the Roman Empire*, 8.

³⁴⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.73.

³⁵⁰ This is also reflected in the epigraphical evidence, most of the inscriptions that mention a Cananefatian ethnicity are related to the Roman army. From: de Bruin, 2.

³⁵¹ Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*, 207; van Roemburg, *Unarmed Batavians*, 26.

³⁵² van Roemburg, 10-11.

³⁵³ Tac. *Hist.* 4.15. Tacitus also mentions a Roman cohort that included both the Batavi and the Cananefates in one unit. Tac. *Hist.* 4.19.

³⁵⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 4.15. Translation by: Moore, *Histories: Books 4-5, Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 27-29.

³⁵⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 11.18.

³⁵⁶ de Bruin, 150.

³⁵⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 11.18-19.

Rhine.³⁵⁸ It is probably a bit exaggerated to say that Gannascus' death was the direct reason for Claudius to retreat behind the Rhine, a moment which can be seen as the starting point for the creation of the *limes*, but it could have been the final straw for Claudius in realising that campaigning north of the Rhine was not worth it anymore and that all the attention needed to go to Britannia.

However, the main Cananefatian insurgency took place during the Batavian Revolt in AD 69. In fact, it were the Cananefates that begun the biggest revolt in the Rhine delta, at least they were the ones to first start the attacks. According to Tacitus, the Cananefates were asked to join the insurrection by the Batavians under the command of Brinno, who Tacitus calls a "man of brute courage", and also because he was the son of the rebellious father we saw earlier he was a favourable candidate for the revolt.³⁵⁹ And if the Cananefates, as Roymans suggests, were a part of the Batavian clientage,³⁶⁰ it indicates that their call for assistance "illustrates a clear concern for securing support".³⁶¹ However, some argue that it were the Cananefates that actually started the revolt before the Batavians were planning to do so, in this case that would mean that there was quite a competitive environment in the Rhine delta against Rome but also each other.³⁶² The Cananefates started to attack the nearest Roman winter camps together with the Frisii,³⁶³ archaeological research has indeed shown that the forts at Valkenburg and Utrecht (among others) were burnt down.³⁶⁴ During the Batavian Revolt we hear of the Cananefatian participation several times,³⁶⁵ at one point they actually managed to defeat a Roman fleet and one of Rome's auxiliaries.³⁶⁶ However, when the revolt was suppressed in AD 70, the Cananefates still kept active ties with the Romans. They were still serving in the Roman army and received their own auxiliary unit, the *Ala I Cananefatium*, which is attested on several *diplomata* found in Germania Superior that date between AD 74 and 90.³⁶⁷ Eventually, when the Roman power was restored and the province Germania Inferior was created they received their own administrative district, the *civitas Cananefatium*.³⁶⁸

³⁵⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 11.19.

³⁵⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 4.15. Translation by: Moore and Jackson, *Histories: Books 4-5. Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 27

³⁶⁰ Strabo states that the Germanics were kinsmen to one another. Strab. 4.4.2.

³⁶¹ B. Turner, 'From Batavian Revolt to Rhenish Insurgency', in: B. Turner, L.L. Brice and T. Howe (eds.) *Brill's Companion to Insurgency and Terrorism in the Ancient Mediterranean Vol. 1* (Leiden 2016) 289. Based on: Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*, 92 and 205-7.

³⁶² Turner, 'From Batavian Revolt to Rhenish Insurgency', 289.

³⁶³ The two camps that were the nearest were likely Katwijk and Valkenburg. Tac. *Hist.* 4.15. According to de Bruin, the reason why the Cananefates asked for the help of the Frisii is because during the AD 70's the Cananefates were probably still quite an inconsiderable tribe in the Rhine delta. From: de Bruin, *Border Communities at the Edge of the Roman Empire*, 224-225.

³⁶⁴ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 96. There are also burn layers found at the excavation of the forts: Leiden, Alphen aan den Rijn, Woerden and Vechten. The fort at Bodegraven was not rebuilt afterwards. During an excavation at Utrecht, archaeologists have also found 50 gold pieces under the burn layer, which was probably buried during the attacks to save it.

³⁶⁵ See: Tac. *Hist.* 4.16; 4.19; 4.56.

³⁶⁶ Tac. *Hist.* 4.79.

³⁶⁷ de Bruin, 151.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

3.3 The Romans and the Batavi

East of the Cananefates lived the Batavi (fig. 2), however, it is difficult to mark the exact border between their territories but archaeological finds seem to indicate that the boundary between the two laid somewhere on the ‘Woerden-Gorinchem line’.³⁶⁹ The ‘Batavians islands’ were for the first time mentioned by Caesar.³⁷⁰ According to Tacitus, the Batavians originally belonged to the Germanic Chatti,³⁷¹ they were once at war with the Suebi and therefore sought new lands to settle on.³⁷² Tacitus also states that the Batavi migrated towards, what he calls, an uninhabited region on the edge of Gaul to the islands of the Rhine.³⁷³ However, archaeological research in Dutch Betuwe, to which they migrated, tells a different story. Based on the archaeological finds it does not seem that the Batavians migrated to an empty land but rather formed a multi-ethnic population with the people that already lived in the area, such as the Eburonians, forming a new tribe that received the name Batavi.³⁷⁴

Just like the Cananefates, the Batavi likely also settled in the Rhine delta under the supervision of the Roman army as a part of the Roman frontier policy.³⁷⁵ Their migration to the region is estimated between Caesar’s departure around 50 BC and Drusus’ arrival in 12 BC.³⁷⁶ However, it seems that the Batavians had a favourable relationship with the Roman Empire, which according to Carroll suggests that they showed little resistance to move to the Betuwe and that they may have even sought incorporation into the empire themselves.³⁷⁷ This favourable relationship is also attested by Tacitus, who writes that:

“Their distinction persists and the emblem of their ancient alliance with us: they are not insulted, that is, with the exaction of tribute, and there is no tax-farmer to oppress them: immune from

³⁶⁹ Nicolay, *Armed Batavians*, 3-4. Based on the distribution of *triquetrum* coins.

³⁷⁰ Caes. *BGall.* 4.10. However, Caesar’s account in this case questionable, the mentioning of the Batavians is probably a later addition to the text. See e.g.: A.W. Byvanck, *Excerpta Romana* (The Hague 1931) 46; Willems, *Romans and Batavians*, 23.

³⁷¹ A Germanic tribe that lived in modern day Hesse Germany (fig. 2). The Batavian connection to the Chatti is also proved by the archaeological finds, coin finds suggest that the Batavi used the same coins as the Chatti. From: Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 33.

³⁷² Tac. *Germ.* 29. Also likely implicated in: Strab. 4.3.4.

³⁷³ Tac. *Hist.* 4.12.

³⁷⁴ Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*, 55. Numismatic research supports this and shows that the Batavi tribe not only consisted of migrated Chatti but also of Eburonians that eventually blended together. From: J. Slofstra, ‘Batavians and Romans on the Lower Rhine. The Romanisation of a frontier area’, *Archaeological Dialogues* 9:1 (2002), 24. Based on: N. Roymans, ‘The Lower Rhine *Triquetrum* Coinages and the Ethnogenesis of the Batavi’, in: T. Grünewald and H.J. Schalles (eds.), *Germania Inferior. Besiedlung, Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft an der Grenze der römisch-germanischen Welt* (Berlin 2001) 93-145.

³⁷⁵ Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*, 55. Based on: W.J.H. Willems, ‘Romans and Batavians: a regional study in the Dutch Eastern River Area II’, *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundige Bodemonderzoek* 34 (1984) 207-207.

³⁷⁶ E.g. van Es, *De Romeinen in Nederland*, 28; Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*, 55; Roymans et al., ‘Roman Imperialism and the Transformation of Rural Society in a Frontier Province’, 272-273. However, according Jan Slofstra it was shortly after the Gallic Wars between 50 and 40 BC. From: Slofstra, ‘Batavians and Romans on the Lower Rhine’, 24.

³⁷⁷ Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans*, 31.

burdens and contributions, and set apart for fighting purposes only, they are reserved for war, to be, as it were, arms and weapons.”³⁷⁸

A special treaty in which they did not have to pay tribute and only had to deliver soldiers was quite uncommon according to Tacitus, since he calls it “a thing which is rare in alliance with a stronger people.”³⁷⁹ According to Roymans, the treaty suggests that they “operated as an independent group and were accepted as a political partner.”³⁸⁰ He adds that this treaty likely dates back to the days of Caesar, when a pro-Roman faction probably broke away from the Chatti with whom the Romans had previous alliances.³⁸¹

Tacitus also mentions that the Batavians main role was to supply military manpower, they were in fact the most recruited ethnicity amongst auxiliary soldiers,³⁸² which can also be confirmed by the epigraphical evidence.³⁸³ They were one of the most wanted soldiers, Tacitus even calls them the most manly of all races. According to Ton Derks, the name Batavi “became almost synonymous in army circles with military virtues such as ‘manliness’, ‘bravery’, and ‘marticality.’”³⁸⁴ They were praised for their good fighting skills, such as the ability to swim while wearing their full military gear,³⁸⁵ even while riding a horse.³⁸⁶ Because of this they were highly sought after, it has been calculated that before the Flavian era 5000 to 5500 Batavi served in the Roman army, which would have come down to having at least one man from an average Batavian family serving in the military.³⁸⁷ This would have had quite a large impact on such a relatively small society, according to Derks, the tribe was probably too small to meet these high demands for recruits therefore were soldiers probably also recruited from other tribes in the region who were also called ‘Batavi’,³⁸⁸ such as the Cananefates. There are more than eight *cohors Batavorum* known to us,³⁸⁹ there was also a cavalry unit the *ala Batavorum* in the Roman army, which

³⁷⁸ Tac. *Germ.* 29. Translation by: M. Hutton and R.M. Ogilvie, *Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on Oratory*, Loeb Classical Library 35 (Cambridge, MA 1914) 175-177.

³⁷⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 4.12. Translation by: Moore, *Histories: Books 4-5, Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 21-23.

³⁸⁰ Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power*, 58.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

³⁸² At least in the pre-Flavian era. From: N. Roymans, ‘Ethnic recruitment, returning veterans and the diffusion of Roman culture among rural populations in the Rhineland frontier zone’, in: N.G.A.M. Roymans and T. Derks (eds.), *Villa Landscapes in the Roman North. Economy, Culture and Lifestyles* (Amsterdam 2011) 140.

³⁸³ Most of the inscriptions that mention a Batavian ethnicity are related to the military. From: T. Derks, ‘Ethnic identity in the Roman frontier. The epigraphy of Batavi and other Lower Rhine tribes’, in: A.M.J. Derks and N.G.A.M. Roymans (eds.), *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity. The Role of Power and Tradition* (Amsterdam 2009) 263.

³⁸⁴ Derks, ‘Ethnic identity in the Roman frontier’, 264.

³⁸⁵ See e.g.: Tac. *Ann.* 2.8; Tac. *Hist.* 4.66.

³⁸⁶ See e.g.: Cass. Dio. 69.9.6; Tac. *Agr.* 18.

³⁸⁷ Willems, *Romans and Batavians*, 235; J.H.F. Bloemers, ‘Lower Germany: plura consilio quam vi: Proto-urban settlement developments and the integration of native society’, in: T. Blagg and M. Millett (eds.) *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (Oxford 1990) 80; Nicolay, *Armed Batavians*, 7.

³⁸⁸ Derks, 243.

³⁸⁹ T. Derks and H. Teitler, ‘Batavi in the Roman Army of the Principate’, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 218 (2018) 57. See e.g.: Tac. *Agr.* 36; *Ann.* 14.38; *Hist.* 2.27; 4.15.

we see for the first time during the Batavian Revolt.³⁹⁰ However, the Batavians not only served in the *auxilia*,³⁹¹ they were also found in other military positions; such as being rowers in the Roman fleet,³⁹² occasionally in the legions,³⁹³ and even as praetorians.³⁹⁴ However, one of their most prominent roles was serving as bodyguards for the Julio-Claudian dynasty. These imperial horse guards were called the '*Germani corporis custodes*', the name suggests that these horsemen were not necessarily Batavians but Germanics in general.³⁹⁵ However, the Batavians must have had a very prominent role in this which is also attested by Suetonius, Cassius Dio and in the epigraphical evidence.³⁹⁶ Even though it seems that the Batavi had intense contacts with the Romans in terms of the military, it did not automatically lead to an appropriation of the Roman culture and they largely remained their own rural culture.³⁹⁷ Probably because pre-existing social and economic infrastructures were missing in the Rhine delta, which are essential for a successful incorporation.³⁹⁸ This for example can be noticed by the fact that there were very few Roman style villa's built in the Rhine delta, instead they remained their traditional byre house structure.³⁹⁹

However, the high military demand on the Batavi eventually started to take its toll and things started to deteriorate, which contributed to the biggest rebellion in the Rhine delta: the Batavian Revolt. Several ancient writers mention this insurgency, Josephus calls it an attempt made by several Germanics and Gauls to deliberate themselves from the Roman domination, which was according to him partly caused by their own disposition and their hatred towards the Romans, who were the only ones who have ever put the Batavi into servitude, and in AD 69 the perfect opportunity arose for a revolt when a civil war for the imperial throne broke out.⁴⁰⁰ Cassius Dio also mentions that there was a revolt in Germania, but emphasises that it was not worth reporting by him.⁴⁰¹ Therefore most of our information on this insurrection has to come from Tacitus, who gives quite an elaborate description of this event.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4.18.

³⁹¹ However, it is not sure whether they only served in the Roman army as auxiliaries since Tacitus also mentions an instance in which the Batavians were mentioned separately from the other auxiliaries (Tac. *Ann.* 2.8), maybe they also operated separately. However, there is also the possibility that Tacitus mentions them separately because he wanted to emphasize their special position within the *auxilia*.

³⁹² Tac. *Hist.* 4.16.

³⁹³ E.g. CIL XIII, 1847; CIL XIII, 7577; CIL III, 14403a.

³⁹⁴ CIL VI, 2548. From: Derks and Teitler, 'Batavi in the Roman army', 64-65.

³⁹⁵ However, in ancient literature these names were often intertwined with each other, Batavi became kind of a synonym for Germanics.

³⁹⁶ Suet. *Cal.* 43; Cass. Dio. 55.24.7. There are at least ten inscriptions from Rome that mention Batavians as *Germani corporis custodes* (CIL VI, 8802; CIL VI, 8803; CIL VI, 8804; CIL VI, 8806; CIL VI, 8807; AE 1952, 146; AE 1952, 148; AE 1952, 149; AE 1983, 58) From: Derks and Teitler, 59-60.

³⁹⁷ E.g. Slofstra, 'Batavians and Romans on the Lower Rhine', 30; King, *Roman Gaul and Germany*, 156.

³⁹⁸ W. Groenman-van Waateringe, 'Urbanization and the north-western frontier of the Roman Empire', in: W.S. Hanson and L.J.F. Keppie (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies, part iii BAR International Series 71* (Oxford 1979) 1037; Bloemers, 'Lower Germany', 72; M. Millett, 'Romanization: historical issues and archaeological interpretation', in: T.F. Blagg and C.M. Millett (eds.), *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (2002) 39.

³⁹⁹ Nicolay, *Armed Batavians*, 7; Roymans, 'Ethnic recruitment', 154.

⁴⁰⁰ Joseph. *BJ*, 7.75-80.

⁴⁰¹ Cass. Dio. 65.3.1.

⁴⁰² Tacitus was well informed on this revolt because his father was the procurator of Belgica and it has also been suggested that Tacitus was at one point the governor of Germania Superior, which gives him profound knowledge

However, there is not one single reason for the outbreak of this revolt, it was a combination of multiple factors. During the civil war in AD 69 that had broken out after the death of Nero, the new Emperor Galba mercilessly dismissed the Batavian bodyguards without giving them their expected reward for their service.⁴⁰³ And things started to escalate even more when the Rhine legions proclaimed their commander Aulus Vitellius emperor,⁴⁰⁴ who took his troops with him to fight his opponents in Italy leaving the Rhine frontier largely unguarded. However, Vitellius started to demand more reinforcements to fight his new opponent Vespasian and ordered a levy among the Batavi. This order hit the Batavi hard, they were already delivering so many recruits but the discontent was even more aggravated because the ones who carried out the order were, according to Tacitus, hunting down the old and the weak for ransom while satisfying their lusts on the youths.⁴⁰⁵ This was the final straw for the man that led the Batavi into the insurrection: Julius Civilis. Civilis had, according to Tacitus, a royal Batavian heritage just like his brother Julius Paulus,⁴⁰⁶ and like his nomenclature already suggests, he had received Roman citizenship by someone of the Julio-Claudian dynasty for his service as an officer in the *auxilia*. However, Civilis had already developed an aversion against the Romans after he and his brother were accused of partaking in a revolt, causing Paulus to be executed.⁴⁰⁷ This was according to Jan Slofstra not the only reason for Civilis to be unsatisfied, after Civilis was acquitted he probably did not have any political or military power in the Batavian homeland, and on top of that, after the death of Nero, the *gens Iulia*, his *patronus*, was no longer in charge.⁴⁰⁸ According to Brian Turner, Tacitus also prompts that the instability of the empire, or what the insurgents thought was a crumbling empire, played a role in the starting of the revolt.⁴⁰⁹ Anyhow, Civilis called together the Batavian leaders who had enough of the levy burden and the Roman misdemeanours and they swore loyalty to Civilis.⁴¹⁰ Now the perfect opportunity arose to begin the attack since Vitellius had brought a large part of the Rhine legions with him to fight in the civil war, leaving the military bases at the Rhine almost empty.⁴¹¹ However, openly revolting would have been too dangerous, Civilis' therefore decided to pretend to choose sides

on this region of the empire. It is also suggested that he used the works of Pliny the Elder, who commanded a cavalry unit during the first century AD in this region. From: Hugh, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 44-45.

⁴⁰³ Suet. *Gal.* 12. Galba probably mistrusted the Batavians because they had previously helped to put down the revolt of Julius Vindex, a Gallic senator and governor, under the command of Verginius Rufus, who had favoured Galba for the imperial throne.

⁴⁰⁴ Cass. Dio. 63.4.

⁴⁰⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 4.14.

⁴⁰⁶ Tac. *Hist.* 4.13. According to Slofstra, this *stirps regia* has been assumed to date back to the Chattian time, however, it is more convincing to assume that this was introduced during the establishment of the treaty with Rome, to bind the local elites to Rome. From: Slofstra, 'Batavians and Romans', 25.

⁴⁰⁷ Civilis and his brother Paulus were accused of partaking in Vindex' revolt in AD 68, Paulus was killed while Civilis was later on acquitted by Galba. Tac. *Hist.* 4.13. And see footnote 5 in: Moore, *Histories: Books 4-5, Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 23.

⁴⁰⁸ Slofstra, 31.

⁴⁰⁹ Turner, 'From Batavian Revolt', 293-294. Based on the circulating beliefs that the empire was crumbling. Tac. *Hist.* 4.54-55.

⁴¹⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4.14-15.

⁴¹¹ Tac. *Hist.* 2.57.

with Vitellius' opponent Vespasian.⁴¹² The Cananefates started the attacks together with the Frisii. In the beginning, Civilis acted like he wanted to aid the Romans by putting the revolt of the Cananefates and the Frisii down so that they did not have to bring out more troops, but they did fall for his treachery.⁴¹³ It resulted in a battle between the Civilis and the Romans,⁴¹⁴ which Civilis won, also because some of the auxiliary troops that were fighting on the Roman side defected.⁴¹⁵ This was the first time the Romans were driven out of the Rhine delta by the local inhabitants.⁴¹⁶ However, eventually the news that Vitellius was defeated hit the Rhine frontier, now Civilis' cover of fighting on the side of Vespasian was gone, but he kept revolting. Eventually, things took a turn and the tide slowly began to turn in favour of the Romans and, under the command of Petillius Cerialis, a large army was sent to the north to put an end to the revolt.⁴¹⁷ Now things were not looking good for Civilis and his last hope was to retreat to the Betuwe, hoping to be protected by the Waal after the Drusus dam was demolished.⁴¹⁸ However, Tacitus' report does not describe what happened next other than that Civilis surrendered a few days later, while in the meantime he negotiated with the Romans.⁴¹⁹

In AD 70, the Batavian Revolt was over, however, the revolt did not go without any consequences. The restoration of the Rhine frontier was one of Vespasian's main priorities.⁴²⁰ Josephus states that, whether Cerialis defeated Civilis or not, the Batavians would have been punished for their actions.⁴²¹ There were also measures taken to prevent repetition in the future, such as preventing auxiliary soldiers from serving in their homelands under their own officers.⁴²² The Batavian capital, *oppidum Batavorum* (Nijmegen), was destroyed and rebuilt downstream, and a Roman legion was now stationed in the region to keep an eye on the Batavi.⁴²³ Not long thereafter was the region transformed from a military frontier zone into an integrated civil region, resulting in the creation of the *civitas Batavorum*.⁴²⁴ However, according to John Drinkwater, there were not just measures taken to restore the Rhine frontier, from now on the Rhine was accepted as the border of the empire, which cleared the way for the creation of the *limes*.⁴²⁵

⁴¹² In fact, Civilis had received a letter from Vespasian's supporter Marcus Primus Antonius to 'hold back the legions on the pretext of a German revolt.' Tac, *Hist.* 4.13. Translation by: Moore, *Histories: Books 4-5, Annals: Books 1-3*, Loeb Classical Library 249, p. 25.

⁴¹³ Tac. *Hist.* 4.16.

⁴¹⁴ Which probably took place in the vicinity of Nijmegen. From: Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 97.

⁴¹⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 4.16.

⁴¹⁶ Tac. *Hist.* 4.17. Lendering and Bosman, 97.

⁴¹⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 4.68.

⁴¹⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 5.19.

⁴¹⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 5.24-26. The Medieval copy of Tacitus' *Histories* (*codex Laurentianus*) ends at books 5.26. From: Derks and Teitler, 'Batavi and the Roman army', 58.

⁴²⁰ Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul*, 57.

⁴²¹ Joseph. *BJ*, 7.87-88.

⁴²² E.g. Drinkwater, 57; King, *Roman Gaul and Germany*, 166; Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans*, 103.

⁴²³ Lendering and Bosman, 105. First Legio II Adiutrix, which was in AD 71 replaced by Legio X Gemina.

⁴²⁴ Slofstra, 'Batavians and Romans', 34.

⁴²⁵ Drinkwater, 57.

The Batavian Revolt, or rather the ‘Rhine delta revolt’,⁴²⁶ has been interpreted in several different ways; ancient historians often see it as an episode in the context of the civil war, while others see it as a typical native revolt.⁴²⁷ Traditionally it has been interpreted as a call for independence.⁴²⁸ This call for freedom by the Batavians is probably mainly based on Tacitus’ take on it. However, Tacitus, as we have seen earlier with the Frisii, has a weakness for the portrayal of the Germanics as noble freedom fighters against the decadent Romans, and according to Lendering and Bosman: “the barbarians *always* fight for freedom” in the eyes of the Romans.⁴²⁹ Other scholars have stated that it was an attempt to restore the special position the Batavians had within the empire, which came under pressure by strict recruitment requirements and the growing Roman interference.⁴³⁰ Whatever the exact reason for the revolt might have been, it did not, hinder or change the Roman policy in the Rhine delta. After the revolt was suppressed the region actually became more consolidated resulting in the start of the *limes* and integration into the province Germania Inferior.

⁴²⁶ A more appropriate designation for the Batavian revolt according to Turner, which he calls a ‘Rhenish insurgency’. From: Turner, ‘From Batavian Revolt’, 286.

⁴²⁷ Slofstra, ‘Batavians and Romans’, 31.

⁴²⁸ Turner, 284.

⁴²⁹ Lendering and Bosman, *Edge of Empire*, 94-95.

⁴³⁰ Turner, 284.

CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to the creation of the Lower German Limes it seems to have been the result of a concatenation of military campaigns that had already started with Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars. After Caesar's death, his heir Augustus was burdened with a new Gallic territory that still needed to be secured and organized in order to be incorporated into the Roman Empire. However, he would soon find out that in order to consolidate Gaul, the harassing *Germani transrhenani* had to be brought under control. Whether this was a continuation of Caesar's strategy or that he was just finding a 'justified reason' to start another war, it resulted in a series of campaigns that seem to have not only been aimed at suppressing the Germanic tribes, but also to annex new territories. However, after the defeat at the Teutoburg Forest in AD 9 the Germanic policy took a turn and the Roman army retreated behind the Rhine, but this did not withhold the Romans from still interfering on the other side of it. After all, the defeat does not seem to have been the only reason to abandon the idea of incorporating Germania into the empire, the lack of the essential pre-existing social and economic infrastructures likely also played a part in this decision. In this case the Rhine proved to be the landmark that was worth retaining. During this time the Rhine delta only played a small role, the forts that were strategically placed along important waterways enabled the military campaigns during the Germanic Wars in terms of access and provisioning. However, in the AD 40's the Rhine delta started to become more militarized. Along the lower Rhine several new forts were established, this time the attention seem to not have been on military interventions across the Rhine, but to enable campaigns towards Britannia. The earliest stages of some forts in the Rhine delta can be dated around Caligula's sudden unsuccessful attempt to invade Britannia. A few years later, his successor Claudius successfully invaded Britannia in which the Rhine delta forts were likely also put to use. Even though there was already an oversea connection from the Rhine to Britannia, most of the departures from the Continent were from *Gesoriacum*. However, Britannia was not the only campaign in which the Rhine delta was probably involved, there were also campaigns launched towards the northern Rhine delta by Gabinius and Corbulo to suppress the harassing northern tribes, but in AD 47 Claudius suddenly ordered Corbulo to retreat behind the Rhine and from this moment the Rhine (unintentionally) started to develop into a *limes*. There were still some interferences across the Rhine but this attention was largely exchanged for other frontiers. During the reign of Vespasian, military interventions into Germania were limited to creation of a defensive frontier instead of pushing the boundaries further. This policy was continued by his son Domitian, even though he did launch an offensive campaign against Chatti, after the revolt of Saturninus was suppressed in AD 89 the Rhine region became (partly) demilitarized. This led to the transformation of the Rhine frontier from a military zone into a civil district, which was completed by the creation of the two separate provinces Germania Inferior and Germania Superior. From now on was the Rhine frontier consolidated and the first steps towards the creation of the *limes* (road) were made, a process that only would be further extended and reinforced in the following centuries.

Before the consolidation of the region and the creation of the province, the forts in the Rhine delta were not intentionally built to create a defensive fortification line, but if they were not built to create a *limes* what was their purpose? For this we will need to look at the role of the Rhine in north-western Europe. First of all, since the time of Caesar, the Rhine was considered to be the landmark that divided the Celts from the Germanics, therefore forcing the river into a position of functioning as a border long before any *limes* was created. Even though there were plenty of military campaigns across the Rhine into Germania after Caesar, it was this river the Romans pulled back to when they retreated. One can argue that the river had a defensive purpose, functioning as a natural obstacle that did not prevent movements but could hamper invasions. However, it was probably more than that, the Rhine provided access to many different regions in Germania and Gaul through its tributaries but also to Britannia, the Danube, and was even accessible (via land corridors) from the Mediterranean. The Rhine delta itself does not seem to have been economically profitable but the river proved to be an important link in the Roman infrastructural network. Especially during the beginning, the river was the only sufficient way to transport not only troops but also the necessary supplies that they needed. Therefore the early fortifications along the Rhine were not primarily meant to protect the empire but rather to protect and control this important river. Initially the Rhine had primarily a militaristic function, it was not until the region became consolidated before the (commercial) economic trading possibilities of the Rhine could be put to use. However, settling in the Rhine delta proved to be quite a challenge for the Romans because of its swampy nature it was hardly accessible, therefore the Romans had to adapt to the region in several ways, such as the smaller forts that were created in order to fit on the limited amount of available space on the river levee. The forts and other constructions, such as the *limes* road and watchtowers, were also very close to the river despite the risk of flooding. This leads to the assumption that a close observation of the Rhine would have been very important, not only to keep an eye on transport but also to watch out for unwanted visitors that wanted to enter Roman territory. The waterways in the Rhine delta were also improved to increase the accessibility and mobility of the Rhine delta. Drusus constructed a canal to improve accessibility from the Rhine to northern Germania via Lake Flevo and a dam to increase the navigability of the Rhine. Corbulo also constructed a canal in the western Rhine delta to avoid the more dangerous sea route and to regulate water levels.

In the end it is safe to say that the Rhine was worth protecting, despite all the extra efforts and adaptation the Rhine delta required in order to function properly. However, besides the difficulties the landscape brought, there was also another aspect the Romans had to deal with in the Rhine delta and that were the local inhabitants. One of the tribes that already lived in the Rhine delta were the Frisii. However, the (direct) interaction the Romans had with the Frisii was for a relatively short period of time. During the early days of the Germanic campaigns were the Frisians part of the subjected tribes and the relationship the Romans had with the tribe was initially quite peaceful. However, over time things took a turn and the direct control over the Frisian territory was given up. It is difficult to say whether the Frisian Revolt directly contributed to this decision, but it had probably more impact on the Roman

control over the region than the Romans were willing to admit. Even though there was a renewed attempt by Corbulo to subject the tribe to Roman rule, the direct interference was abruptly ended when Claudius decided to give up the territory north of the Rhine. When it comes to the relationship with the Cananefates, it seems that the Romans did not have to deal with the already present local inhabitants but rather with people that were relocated under Roman command, giving the Romans a lot of control over region and its inhabitants from the start. However, this did not automatically lead to a successful integration into the Roman Empire, the Cananefates largely remained their own rural culture and the direct contact they had with the Romans was limited to their enlistment in the *auxilia*. However, they did not shy away from rebellion, and when the Cananefatian pirate leader Gannascus was killed by Corbulo, Claudius ordered Corbulo to withdraw behind the Rhine. It is difficult to say whether this event contributed to the creation of the *limes* but it could have been the final straw for Claudius to decide that the campaigns north of the Rhine were not worth it anymore. The Batavians were just like the Cananefates a (partly) relocated Germanic tribe that settled in the eastern Rhine delta under the watchful eye of the Roman army. They had a special relationship with the Romans, fixed in a treaty in which they did not have to pay tribute but solely had to deliver man power. The Batavi were renowned for their fighting skills, demanding large amounts of recruits which pressed hard on this relatively small society. This was probably one of the many reasons why in AD 69 the local inhabitants in the Rhine delta revolted under the command of the Batavi. However, there is still some discussion on how we should interpret this insurrection, some say it should be seen in the context of the civil war, while others say that it was a typical native revolt. It was probably a combination of both, Civilis profited from the disarray that the civil war had caused to fight for his own motives, while others were probably motivated to alleviate themselves from the high Roman demands. Eventually, after Vespasian won the civil war, the revolt was suppressed and measures were taken to prevent repetition. The insurrection did not seem to have hindered or changed the Roman policy in the Rhine delta, it was 'just' another local rebellion that needed to be put down. However, the revolt might have evoked a more restoring and consolidating policy, since shortly thereafter the region was incorporated into Germania Inferior, with each tribe having its own administrative district.

Epilogue

On a final note, when it comes to the scholarly debate regarding the Roman Netherlands, historians are barely involved causing the debate to be dominated by archaeologists. The primary literary sources on this part of the Roman Empire are not abundant, therefore most new insights will need to come from archaeological research. This often leads to research based on the archaeological finds instead of the historical context. Even though archaeological research is indispensable, including research that is based on a historical point of view (also when it comes to interpreting the archaeological finds) will eventually lead to a more interesting and diverse debate. Therefore this thesis hopes to have contributed to the recent developments regarding the Roman Netherlands by presenting a historical analyses of some of the different aspects that have contributed to the creation of the *limes* and Germania Inferior. Hopefully, more historical research will be done to this part of the Roman Empire in the future, which can be achieved by encouraging historians to participate in the scholarly debate regarding the Roman history of the Netherlands.

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