

Stones, Tiles, Temples and Villas. A Social-Economic Transformation of the *civitas Batavorum* (85–120 AD)

Harry van Enckevort

Over five decades after the arrival of its legions in the Lower Rhine area, the Roman army made some drastic alterations in their military strategy. Under Caligula and Claudius, an important change was made in the strategy against the Germans, and a linear defence system of *castella* and watchtowers was constructed on the southern bank of the river Rhine.¹ The pressure that this army's presence in the Dutch eastern river area had on the indigenous communities was great. Several sources have revealed that the Batavians provided thousands of men for the Roman *auxilia*.² However, this recruitment and the supply of regional nourishment, leather, and other goods had hardly any influence on the Batavian settlements; in any case, the archaeological records do not reflect a marked effect in the architecture of the houses in the countryside. The small farming communities retained their own Batavian ('prehistoric') identity, although a limited number of 'Roman' objects, such as wheel-thrown pottery, coins and militaria did turn up in the settlements during excavations.³ It is unclear whether these objects represent contacts with the Romans, or if these are goods that were brought home by the soldiers from the *auxillia*. Only the Batavian capital *Oppidum Batavorum*, which was founded by the Romans at the centre of modern Nijmegen ca. 12 BC, shows a development from a road settlement (*vicus*) towards a real Roman town.⁴ A similar development, albeit on a much smaller scale, can be seen in *vici* like Cuijk, which was founded around 40 AD.⁵ These central places and the *castella* along the Rhine were relatively isolated Roman spots in the hinterland of the limes.

During the Batavian Revolt in 69–70 AD, the rebels set large parts of the limes infrastructure along the Rhine, *Oppidum Batavorum* and the *vicus* of Cuijk, on fire. After the army under the command of Quintus Petillius Cerialis had quashed the revolt, new fortresses were built for *Legio II adiutrix* on the ruins of *Oppidum Batavorum* in 70 AD, and its successor for *Legio X gemina* in the eastern part of Nijmegen in or shortly after 71 AD. In the same period a new capital for the Batavians was founded in the western part of Nijmegen,⁶ and on the bank of the Rhine burned down *castella* were repaired and new ones were built with the help of Tenth Legion, as the distribution map of tiles with stamps of this legion shows (fig. 1). In general, the Tenth Legion aimed to supervise and control the movements of people, and to protect the roads and other lines of communication in the Dutch part of the Lower German limes.

The final decades of the 1st century, and especially the first years of the reign of Trajan, were characterised by several important military and administrative modifications. The incorporation of the Lower Rhine zone into the Empire reached its peak when the military district, which was under the rule of the commander of the Lower Rhine army, was transformed into the new province of *Germania inferior* in 85 AD. The decisive

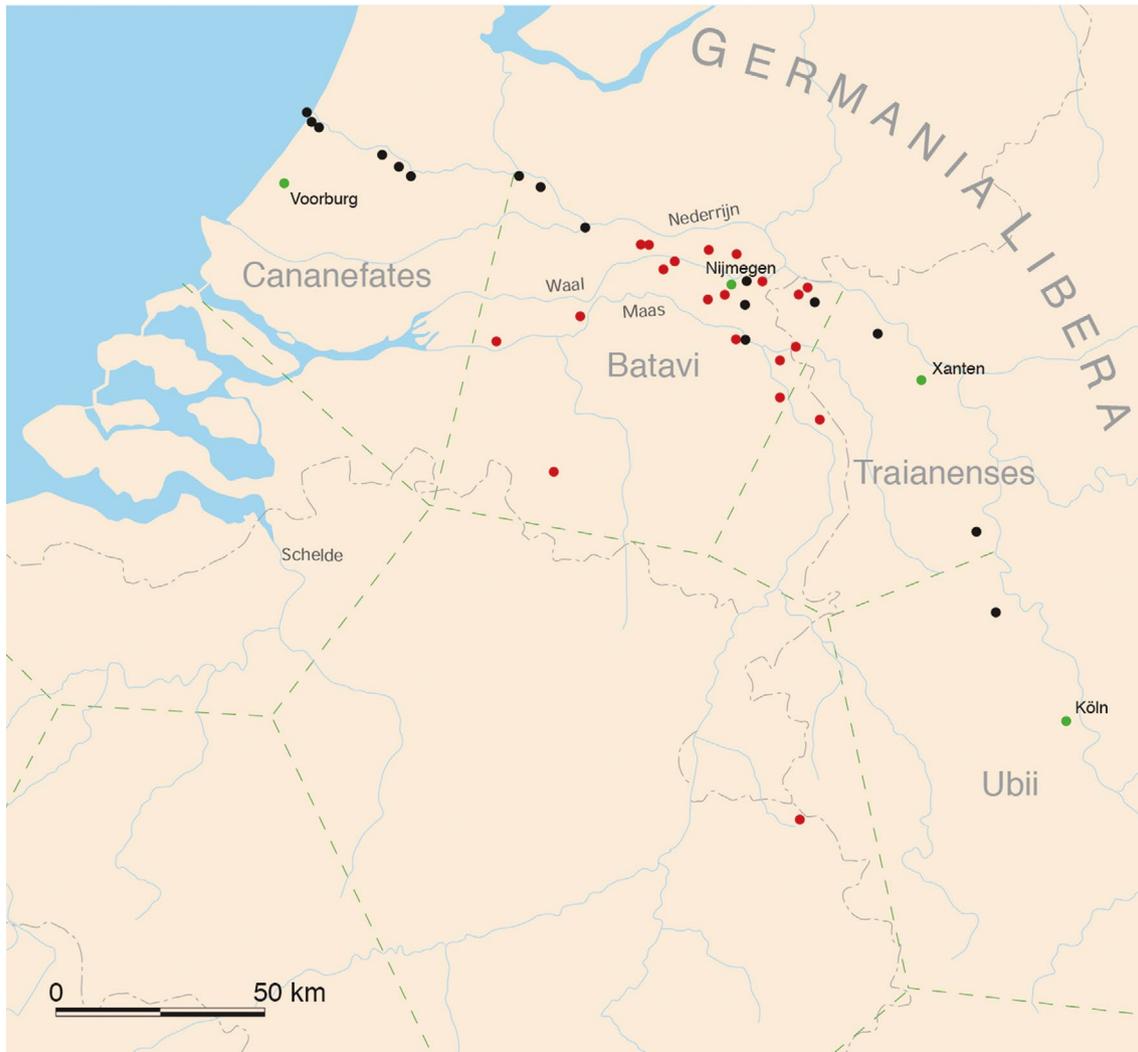


Fig. 1: Distribution map of stamps on roof tiles of the Legio X gemina. green = civitas capital, black = military settlement, red = other settlement.

actions of Trajan, who at the time of his accession of office in 98 AD was in the capital of *Germania inferior* Cologne, accelerated the integration of the frontier *civitates* of the *Batavi* and the *Cananefates*. This is shown, among other things, by the dates of building activities along the limes road in the west of the Netherlands, by the placing of milestones and by the subsequent renovation of the several *castella* during the first years of this emperor's reign.⁷

In that same period, the fortress of the Tenth Legion was rebuilt in stone. The roof tiles were provided by the legion's own tile workshops at De Holdeurn in nearby Berg en Dal. Stone was supplied from further-away quarries, since usable stone did not occur in the Batavian territory. The grauwacke so frequently used in the foundations of buildings

in the fortress was imported via the Rhine from the Koblenz area. The limestone for the furnishing of buildings was obtained from Norroy on the Mosel, near Metz in northeastern France, and tufa was extracted in the Brohltal, in the German Eifel. Altar stones found near the quarries show that soldiers of the Tenth Legion were involved in the extraction of both limestone and tufa.⁸

The measures of Marcus Ulpius Traianus also seem to have been very influential in the Roman town of Nijmegen ca. 100 AD. It is likely that the bestowal of municipal rights in the early years of Trajan's reign was intended to promote the definitive integration of the Batavian tribal territory into the Roman Empire, as a *civitas* on the Roman pattern. The new name for the already existing settlement, *Ulpia Noviomagus*, also stems from this period. The existing municipal settlement was transformed into a fully-fledged, Roman-designed administrative centre of the *civitas Batavorum*. The army had the experts and the manpower to design and build inside and outside the fortress. As is evident from the tiles used, the Tenth Legion was actively involved in the construction of the public baths and the public temples in the Batavian capital. Moreover, grauwacke, the stone that was used in many foundations of buildings in the fortress, was also used in the foundations of both buildings. The changes caused by the municipal rights are also clearly noticeable in the range of pottery in the Roman capital. Previously, most domestic pottery had been produced by local potters. From the beginning of the 2nd century, however, the majority of the pottery with contents (meat, honey etc.) seems to have been imported from elsewhere. With regard to pottery, in any case, the consumer function of the town gained precedence over its productive function.⁹

Beside these urban traces, the integration and romanisation processes that were started by Trajan also left clear marks on the Batavian countryside. The continuous military presence of the Tenth Legion in Nijmegen in the years 71–104/105 AD spawned a complex interrelation between the army and Batavian society. The hinterland of *Ulpia Noviomagus* underwent large-scale changes from the end of the 1st century onwards.

The distribution of stamped roof tiles of the Tenth Legion is not limited to the limes zone and Nijmegen, as figure 1 shows. There are indications that the army was involved in the creation of a villa system within the Batavian territory during the Flavian period and the early years of Trajan's reign. Stone buildings are known to have been lacking in the hinterland of Nijmegen in the period that preceded the Batavian Revolt. Batavians were not used to build in stone, since usable stone did not occur in their territory. Only the (Gallo-)Roman architects employed by the Tenth Legion had the necessary know-how to build in stone. It is certain that the tiles were used on the roofs of the most important buildings in villas. Besides these roof tiles, the introduction of other building materials may be seen at settlement sites in the hinterland of Nijmegen. The use of grauwacke in the foundations of several villa buildings in the direct hinterland of Nijmegen is particularly remarkable. The use of the same kind of stone and tiles of the Tenth Legion in various villas in the same period as the stone building phase of the Nijmegen fortress and the public buildings in *Ulpia Noviomagus* suggests that the army took also part in building



Fig. 2: Plan of the fourth phase of the Druten-Klepperhei villa, mostly timber built, at the beginning of the 2nd century. Features from other phases are not colored. 1 posthole, 2 foundation of gravel or stone, 3 (main) building, 4 portico/colonnade, 5 bathhouse, 6 fence, 7 mausoleum, 8 cellar, 9 well, 10 ditch.

activities in the Batavian countryside. In these settlements, production was organised in a rather more Roman manner than before the Batavian Revolt, which allowed for intensification of the agricultural production, especially horse-breeding. The villa owners were probably members of the municipal elite of magistrates and the *ordo decurionum* of *Ulpia Noviomagus*.¹⁰

The villa of Druten-Klepperhei, ca. 20 km west of Nijmegen, was founded after the Batavian Revolt. Spatial relations between features like postholes of buildings, ditches, fences and wells made it possible to reconstruct the five phases in the development of

this villa. In the fourth phase at the beginning of the 2nd century the main building, at the left side in figure 2, is strongly reminiscent of the rectangular indigenous farmhouses. However, the portico on four sides, the stone cellar, wall paintings and a nearby bathhouse with grauwacke foundations clearly reveals a Gallo-Roman architecture style. This building took a central position inside the western part of the settlement, which was laid out in the shape of a square, in which some porticos are extended as a colonnade. Most of the buildings were positioned around this central open space (*pars urbana*). Various other buildings in the eastern part of the settlement, some of which also had a portico, were situated in at least three rows (*pars rustica*). The reconstructed settlement plan shows that this villa, with buildings with walls that are largely made of wattle and daub, should be attributed to the monumental villas of the Anthée type. Phase 3 and 4 of the settlement show yet another remarkable building. Namely, that the villa contains a circular mausoleum, which is positioned on the highest point of the area and partly constructed from grauwacke. This is the first grave monument of this type that was found in or nearby a settlement from the Roman period in the Netherlands. At about the middle of the 2nd century, in phase 5 the villa was replaced by one of the Rhineland type.¹¹

Building activities did not remain restricted to the rural settlements, however; traces of construction activities by the Tenth Legion were also found in a number of temple locations, such as Elst-Westeraam, Elst-Centrum and Cuijk. In the summer of 2002, in the course of a rescue excavation on the Westeraam housing development estate to the east of Elst, and 10 km north of Nijmegen, the remains of a temple complex were investigated, which can be dated between 40 and 170 AD. The features, again, can be attributed to five different building phases. In the fourth phase, the wooden temple was replaced by a Gallo-Roman temple of tufa and limestone, with a grauwacke foundation (fig. 3). The use of this latter stone indicates the involvement of the Tenth Legion in the construction of this building, which must have taken place around the year 100.¹²

On the other side of the river, in the centre of the *vicus* Elst, stood a larger monumental, classicised Gallo-Roman temple, which has already been researched extensively by Bogaers in 1955.¹³ Its distance to the temple at Elst-Westeraam is about 560 metres. Grauwacke was used in both the first and the second building phase of the temple. The use of this kind of stone in the first phase probably implies that this temple was erected in the Neronian period, over 20 years later than was supposed by Bogaers. In those years grauwacke was used in the fortress on the Fürstenberg in Xanten and in *Oppidum Batavorum*. Bogaers dated the second building phase of the temple at Elst-Centrum immediately after the Batavian Revolt. However, dendrochronological research carried out by archaeologists of the VU University Amsterdam revealed that this temple was not built until ca. 100 AD.¹⁴

Two fragments of a building inscription show that in the years 98–102 AD, Trajan himself had an indirect hand in the construction or repair of an important building in the *vicus* of Cuijk (15 km south of Nijmegen), as can be deduced from a building inscription.¹⁵ In that same period, a gravelled path was laid close to where this inscription



Fig. 3: Plan of the Elst-Westeraam temple with a stone foundation (brown) inside the foundation ditch of a wooden palisade (blue) at the beginning of the 2nd century. 1 small wooden building, 2 well, 3 palisade of pointed, 6–8 centimeters thick stakes rammed into the ground.

was discovered, on both sides of which remains of two Gallo-Roman temples were found. That the Tenth Legion was involved in building activities at Cuijk is also proven by various stamps on roof tiles.¹⁶

As is evident from the altar stones mentioned before, the extraction of the stone needed for the building activities in the Batavian area seems to have been in the hands of the Tenth Legion. In view of the necessary degree of organisation and infrastructure during the Flavian and early Trajanic period, it is reasonable to assume that the river transport could only have been set up by the army as well. On the basis of this, the excavators of the monumental classicised Gallo-Roman temple of Empel near Hertogenbosch, have concluded that the army, and possibly even the Tenth Legion, was involved in the construction of the building. A votive inscription on a bronze plaque found on site of a veteran of the Tenth Legion, may be a symbol of this connection.¹⁷

It is remarkable that the hand of Trajan can be spotted, either directly or indirectly, in the construction of public buildings in *Ulpia Noviomagus* and in villas and temples on the



Fig. 4: Front and back of a fragment of a bronze tabella (54 by 47 cm) that was found during the excavations of *Ulpia Noviomagus* on the Weurtseweg.

Batavian countryside. One's sense of his involvement increases as the building activities in the Batavian area are seen in a broader context. This concerns the renovation of the limes road in the west of the Netherlands, the milestones, the subsequent renovation and building of several *castellas* and the reconstruction in stone of the Nijmegen fortress. The building activities that were initiated by Trajan so quickly after his coronation to emperor suggest that there may have been blueprints for these projects already under his predecessor Domitian. This meant that the Batavian civitas was developed to form a strong part of the buffer zone between the rich provinces of Gaul and the Germanic tribes north of the Rhine. Around 104 AD when it appeared that the Tenth Legion could be better deployed in Pannonia, the legion was withdrawn from Nijmegen and directed to Aquincum (Budapest) on the Danube. But the integration of the *civitas Batavorum* did not stop with the departure of the Tenth Legion. Until 122 AD the *vexillatio Britannica* continued the development of the *civitas Batavorum*.¹⁸

If nowhere else, the continuing romanisation and the resulting integration of the Batavian area in the Roman Empire certainly led to psychological, social and cultural changes among the Batavian aristocracy. These changes are reflected by a fragment of a bronze *tabella* that mentions the name M. Ulpus [- - - at least four times (fig. 4). On the basis of the names of the consuls Servianus and Sura on the back of this *tabella*, the

inscription may be dated to January or February of the year 102 AD. The document was signed by a number of Batavian men from the highest social strata. As is clearly shown by the romanised names, these men seem to have been given civil rights by the emperor between the year 98, when Trajan became emperor, and the signing date of the *tabella* in question. Some of the members of this urban upperclass were buried in rich graves near the town. The combination of shield, weapons, *strigili* and writing utensils in one of the graves reflects the Romano-Batavian background of the deceased person.¹⁹

The use of building materials such as grauwacke and stamped tiles show that, at the beginning of the 2nd century, the army was also involved in the construction of both public buildings in Nijmegen and villas and temples in the Batavian countryside. The construction of these buildings seem rather to have been intended to help expand the infrastructural and administrative structure of the *civitas Batavorum* on the Roman model. In combination with archaeological data about the use of pottery and the aforementioned *tabella* this suggests an important social-economic transformation of the *civitas Batavorum* during a period of almost less than a generation, between 85 and 122 AD. The reorganisation from a military district on the Lower Rhine into the province of *Germania inferior*, the grant of municipal status and the imperial name to the town, the construction of villas and temples, as well as the substitution of hand-made by wheel thrown pottery, are important signs of this development. Other signs stem from the archaeozoological and archaeobotanical research, such as the decline of sheep farming and the rise of horse breeding and changes in arable farming.²⁰ This illustrates how the social and economic development of the Batavian community could be bound up with the Roman army and the career of Trajan. It is striking that this process started decades after the Rhine was established as the northwestern frontier of the Empire and even 120 years after the arrival of the Romans.

Notes

¹ Willems 1984, 226–240.

² Roymans 2004; 2011.

³ E. g. Nicolay 2007.

⁴ Van Enckevort – Heirbaut 2015a, 285–290.

⁵ Van Enckevort 2012, 180–186.

⁶ Willems – Van Enckevort 2009; Van Enckevort – Heirbaut 2015a, 291–298; 2015b.

⁷ Haalebos – Willems 1999; Hessing 1999; Graafstal 2002

⁸ Bogaers – Haalebos 1977, 106 f.

⁹ Van Enckevort 2012, 269–273; Van Enckevort – Heirbaut 2015a, 291–298.

¹⁰ Van Enckevort 2012, 277–281.

¹¹ Van Enckevort 2012, 232–245.

¹² Van Enckevort 2012, 197–215.

- ¹³ Bogaers 1955.
¹⁴ Derks et al. 2008; Van Enckevort 2012, 274.
¹⁵ Haalebos 2002.
¹⁶ Van Enckevort 2012, 274.
¹⁷ Roymans et al. 1994, 42–47; Roymans – Derks 1994, 22. 26.
¹⁸ Van Enckevort 2012, 223. 269.
¹⁹ Van Enckevort – Thijssen 2001, 208.
²⁰ Groot 2008; Groot et al. 2009; Kooistra 2012.

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Fig. 1–3: Rob Mols, municipality of Nijmegen. – Fig. 4: André Simons, municipality of Nijmegen.

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