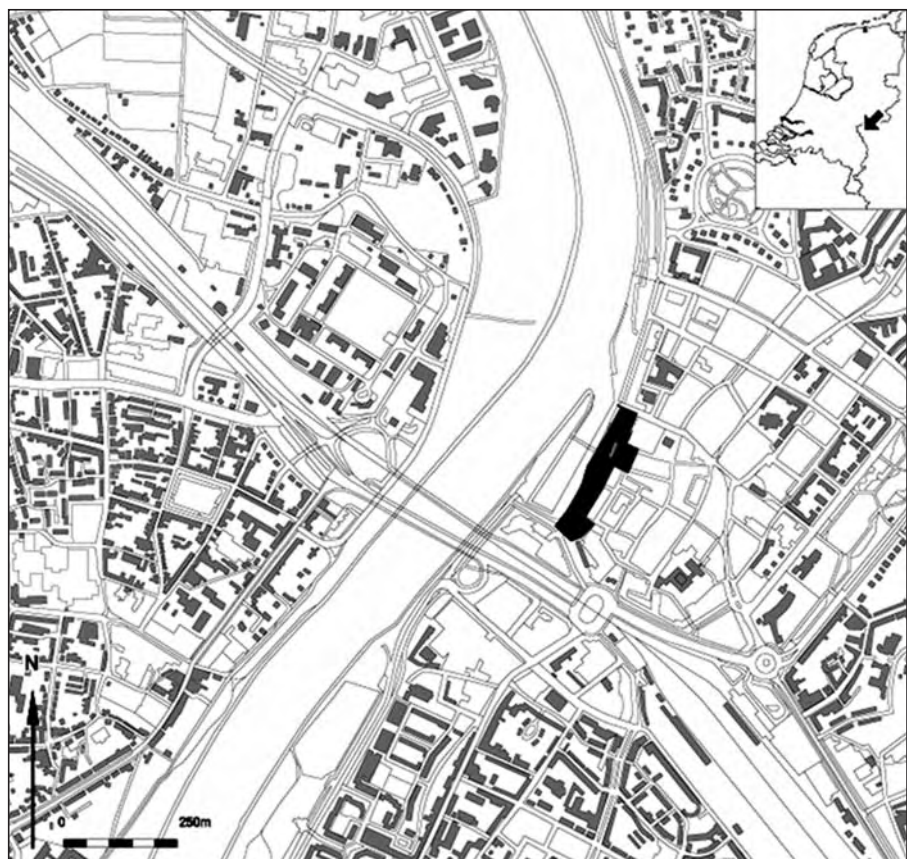


## AN AUGUSTAN SETTLEMENT IN VENLO (PROV. LIMBURG): A MILITARY DISTRIBUTION CENTRE IN THE MEUSE AREA?

From 2002 to 2006 major excavations were carried out in the centre of Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL). During this project almost 50% of the waterfront of the medieval city was unearthed. Foregoing this settlement was a small Roman town (fig. 1). Although archaeologists knew of its existence for over 50 years, this was the first opportunity to study its outline and dating intensively.

It is interesting to note that, although some information on the intervening periods has been acquired on the basis of the results, there is no evidence for the continuation of habitation from the Roman period on into the Middle Ages. The founding of the city of Venlo, which got city rights in 1343, is thought to be in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century (Hermans 1999).

This paper deals with the evolution of the predecessor of this small Roman town, during the reign of Augustus. It will focus on the material found on the site, its function and the role it probably played in the Augustan politics of securing the north-western borders of the Empire, by launching massive military expeditions into the Germanic realm. The other results of the excavation will be dealt with at a later stage (cf. van der Velde et al. 2009).



**Fig. 1** The Maasboulevard excavation as a part of the reconstructed Roman small town of Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL). – (Map A. E. Botman, ADC Archeo-Projecten).

## THE CULTURAL-HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE STUDY AREA

Venlo is situated in the valley of the Meuse. The history of the evolution of this landscape is complex. Various terraces were formed during the Pleistocene as a result of the river shifting its course and incising the flood plain. Aeolian river dunes were deposited against some of these terraces. The study area is located immediately on the present course of the Meuse, on a so-called low terrace. The subsoil consists of coarse sandy and gravelly fluvial deposits covered by a layer of tidal loam. These gravelly deposits were almost continuously water-bearing, and consequently artesian water occurs when this layer is reached (through excavation or drilling). There is a river dune in the north of the studied area which is possibly the onset of the Kwietheuveld, most of which was levelled in recent times. Towards the east there is a terrace edge just on the border of the study area. This marks the transition to a high terrace on which the present-day Jodenstraat and Kwartelenmarkt are situated. Only in the centre of the study area there is a higher-lying section. To the south, the low terrace merges into a stream valley. Nothing is known about the course of the Meuse in the period prior to the Roman occupation. It is probably situated slightly more to the west. After the Roman period, the river shifted its course in an easterly direction and a bend developed at the location of the study area. The position of the bend proved to be a determining factor in the development of a harbour on this spot at some time during the Middle Ages. After the bend was filled in, the Meuse assumed its present course.

An important element in the river at the level of the study area is the island called De Weerd. Nowadays it is no longer an island because the gap between De Weerd and the riverbank was filled up when defences were built in 1725. It is uncertain whether the island already existed in the Roman period. There was for sure reference to a Meuse island in the Late Middle Ages when it provided protection for the harbour of Venlo. From the modern period on, De Weerd was the location where defences were built. A trial trench investigation in 2003 revealed that during these activities the island shifted somewhat in an easterly direction. However, any possible archaeological remains there proved to have been destroyed by recent activities. Venlo is situated at a site on the Meuse, where fluctuations in the current forced bargemen to change vessels. This meant that goods had to be transhipped. Venlo probably owed its position as a (late-) medieval trade centre to this transshipment function. The extent to which this situation also occurred in the Roman period is uncertain.

## FINDS FROM THE AUGUSTAN PERIOD

Although the area around the city is extremely rich in traces of settlements from early and late prehistoric times, few of these were actually identified within the town boundaries of Venlo. Nevertheless, we may assume that parts of the present city centre were also inhabited, for example, the higher parts in the east of the town and the river dunes such as Kwietheuveld and Lichtenberg. It is very likely that much of the archaeological evidence was lost during the many digging activities involved in the expansion (and the constant renovation) of Venlo. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that evidence was not always recognised as such, in the extensive find assemblages of the Roman and medieval periods. During the excavation of the low terraces of the Maasboulevard nothing emerged that predated the Augustan era. For this reason we assume that the Roman phase of settlement was not a continuation of an older Late Iron Age settlement. The only indications that the site was used during the (latter phase of the) Late Iron Age, are the Celtic coin finds recovered during digging activities connected with the Commissaris building and the construction of a car park on Nolensplein. Both sites were located about 400m northeast of the Roman

period settlement. It is not yet entirely clear as to how these finds should be interpreted. Given the size of the complex, it is probably a ritual deposition, maybe linked with a stream valley crossing. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the coins may date from the Roman period. The Augustan phase in particular is characterised by the presence of a large number of Celtic coins.

From the region (the Meuse valley and the south of the Netherlands) a lot of rural settlements are known. Although Roman objects of Augustan date sometimes are represented in the find complexes of these small towns, the numbers and variation of the artefacts are neglectable (cf. Roymans 2009). As will be shown the find complex of Venlo is not representative for a »normal« rural settlement.

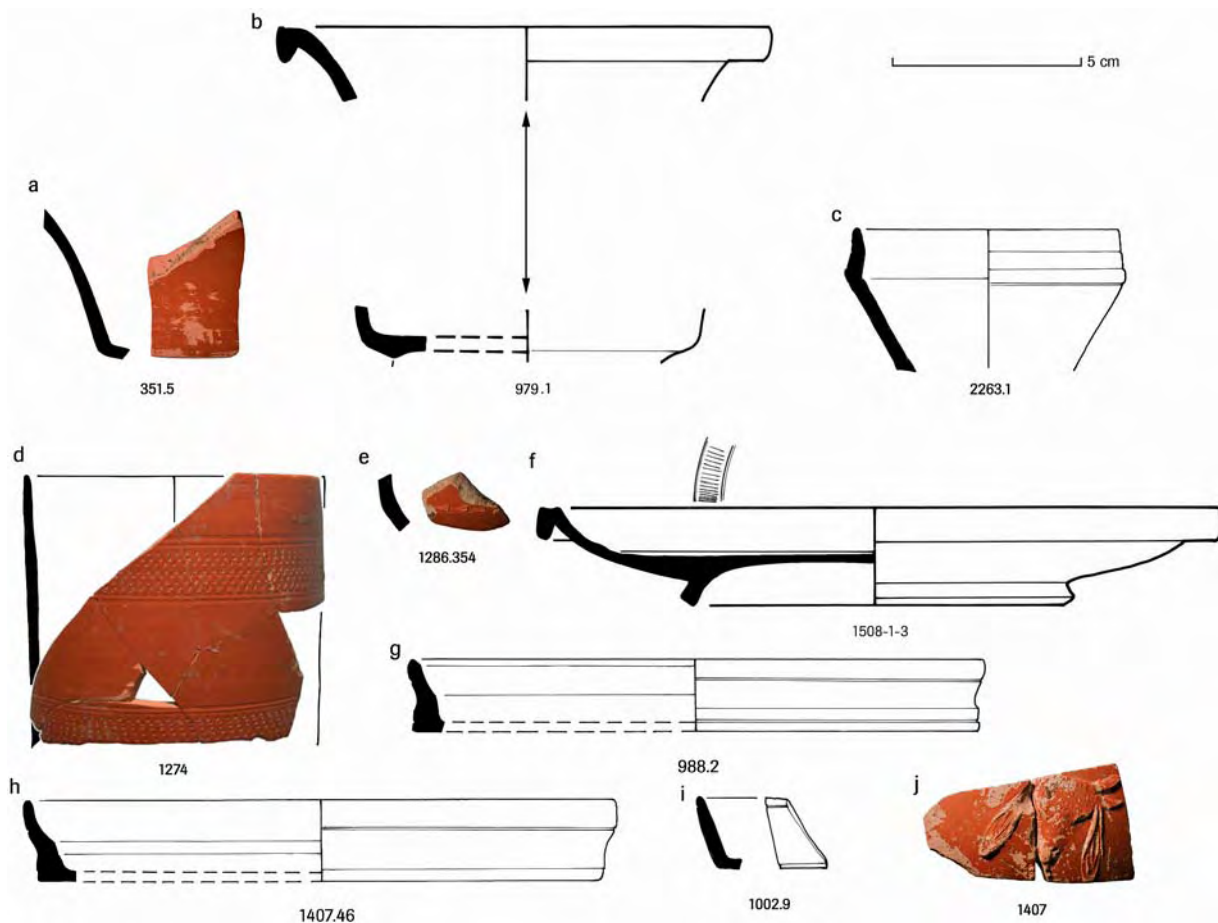
During the rebuilding of the area around the Maasboulevard after the Second World War, several objects were discovered dating from the Augustan period. These specimens have been inventoried by W. Huppertz (1993). On the basis of a number of finds, J. K. Haalebos (1993) has formulated a preliminary interpretation of the importance of the material. In his view, it must have originated from a context connected with the military operations that took place during the Augustan period. This was the starting point prior to the excavation.

During the excavation, pottery and metal from this period was uncovered. Almost all the Augustan material was found out of context. The sherds and coins came from features that also contained younger material (from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD onwards). Although it is possible that the old finds must in fact be dated to the Augustan period (in which case the younger sherds would then have moved down as a result of soil subsidence), it is more likely that the older sherds are the result of digging activities in the past. Within the excavation area, not a single feature can be dated to the earliest phase of use of the site with any degree of certainty. The Augustan pottery was found together with pottery dating to the mid or the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and even younger. In addition it should be noted that the Augustan and Tiberian objects were smaller than the finds of younger date, possibly indicating that these artefacts can be interpreted as residual finds. This makes it very likely that new building activities took place in the same area where the first settlement was located, probably due to lack of space. The number of and the variation within the finds however, are so large that we may assume that the earliest structures were located there (which were destroyed by digging activities in a later period) or that the structures are to be found in the immediate vicinity of the excavated site. From a physical-geographical perspective, one would not expect to discover the remains of a settlement or military fortification on the low terrace directly bordering the Meuse, but on the higher areas in the vicinity of what is now Jodenstraat and/or Kwartelenmarkt.

It is therefore not possible to draw any conclusions as to the use of the site on the basis of the archaeological features. The analysis of the finds throws more light on this issue.

Almost all the usual categories of pottery are represented in the complex (van der Linden / Reigersman-van Lidth de Jeude 2009, 110). In particular, the relatively large number (n = 96) of fragments of Arretine sigillata and thin walled pottery (n = 80) was remarkable. In combination with the previously discovered pottery fragments it may be concluded that the occupation or use of the site must be placed in a Roman (not an indigenous) context. Much has become clear with regard to the dating of this settlement phase, but much less can be said about the nature of the habitation.

The Arretine sigillata in particular can be rather closely dated on the basis of the composition of various find assemblages from military camps that were only in use for a brief period during the campaigns around the beginning of this era. Based on the discovered objects from the excavation and observations made during the 1950s, J. K. Haalebos assumed that the earliest date for the Venlo complex had to be sought in the so-called Haltern horizon (5 BC to AD 9; Haalebos 1993, 19). Due to the recent finds this date must now be brought back to the so-called Oberaden horizon (12 BC) and probably even earlier (from 16/15 BC). The earliest discovered objects from Venlo coincide with Drusus' campaigns. Most of the fragments date



**Fig. 2** Arretine sigillata ware from Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL): **a-b** cup Conspectus 13/Haltern 7. – **c** bowl Conspectus 22. 1/Haltern 8. – **d** Conspectus 50. 3 (soldiers' cup). – **e** decorated chalice. – **f** plate Conspectus 5. 3. – **g-h** plate Conspectus 18/Haltern 2. – **i** plate Conspectus 20. 1/Haltern 5. – **j** decorated chalice. – (Photos ADC ArchoProjecten; drawings M. Hoppel, ADC ArchoProjecten).

from the Oberaden and Haltern horizons, and only a small part of the complex covers the entire Augustan period (up to AD 14). In addition, some pottery from the Tiberian era (AD 14-37) came to light. **Figure 2** gives an overview of the Arretine ware collected from the excavation. A relatively broad spectrum of Arretine sigillata indicates this site is not of indigenous origin.

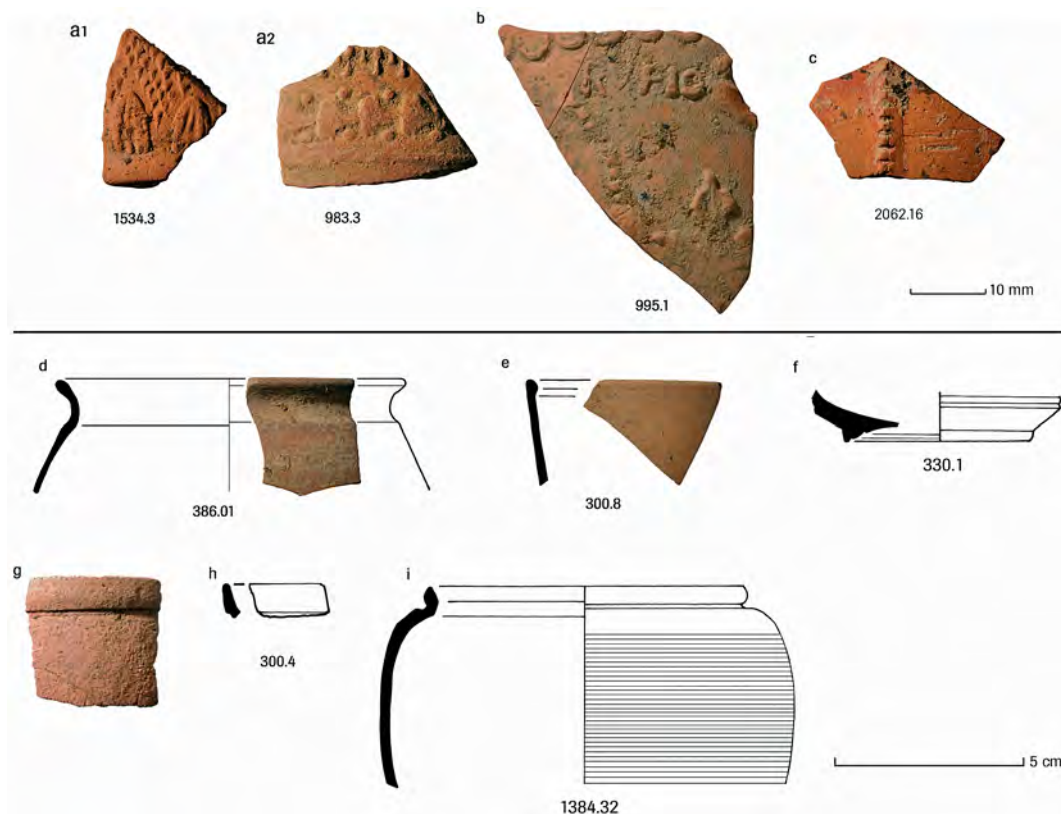
A substantial part of the complex can be dated to the so-called Dangstetten-Oberaden horizon (12-8 BC). This is, for example, indicated by the presence of fragments from two bowls (Conspectus 13/Haltern 7) belonging to service 1a which is not present in Haltern (Kr. Recklinghausen/D; von Schnurbein 1982, 24-26. 37-39; Ettliger / Hedinger / Hoffmann 1990, 46 f.).

A third bowl (Conspectus 14/Haltern 7) is part of service 1b but may be regarded as one of the early examples of this service. Also a dish with a radial stamp of C. Sentius (Conspectus 11. 1/Haltern 1 – service 1c) is dated to the same period (Ettliger / Hedinger / Hoffmann 1990, 70). Radial stamps usually can be dated until 10 BC, as the total numbers in Neuss (Rhein-Kreis Neuss/D), Oberaden (Kr. Unna/D) and the Kops Plateau (prov. Gelderland/NL) seem to suggest (Ettliger 1983, 85 f.; Visser 2005, 19).

Also 13 fragments of a so-called soldiers' cup (Conspectus 50. 3) were found (**fig. 2d**). Few decorated pieces were retrieved. A fragment of a chalice with a decoration of oblong pearls probably has an early dating as well (**fig. 2e**).

An early example of an Arretine plate (Conspectus 5) was found (**fig. 2f**). This form is among the earliest specimens of Arretine ware in Neuss (cf. Ettliger 1983, pl.1, 17; Roth-Rubi 2006, 25). A parallel is found





**Fig. 3** Fine wares from Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL): **a** ACO beakers. – **b** ACO beaker from RVFIO. – **c** *Rippenbecher* (Oberaden 31). – **d** Oberaden 30. – **e** Oberaden 37. – **f** Rödgen 24/Oberaden 39. – **g-h** soldiers' cup. – **i** grey cup. – (Photos ADC ArcheoProjecten; drawings M. Hoppel, ADC ArcheoProjecten).

on the Palatine Hill in Rome (Roth-Rubi 2006, 133 fig. 19). It dates certainly before 11 BC and probably even before 15 BC.

Fragments of two bowls (Conspectus 12. 1. 2) and a plate (Conspectus 12. 2) can probably be dated in the Oberaden horizon, although a later date is also possible. Conspectus 12 (like Conspectus 14) is part of service 1b, which is present in Haltern as well as in Oberaden (Ettlinger / Hedinger / Hoffmann 1990, 76. 82). Fragments of dishes, plates and cups Conspectus 18/Haltern 2, Conspectus 22. 1-3/Haltern 8 and Conspectus 20. 1/Haltern 5, which were also found, can probably be dated somewhat later. Although these pottery types are present in small amounts in Oberaden, they became more popular during the Haltern period and even the first decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Ettlinger / Hedinger / Hoffmann 1990; von Schnurbein 1982, 24; Ettlinger 1983, pl. 23, 21). The fragments of the dishes and cups from Venlo suggest a date during the Haltern period.

The fine wares mainly consist of various types of cups. **Figure 3** illustrates the variation in forms and chronology. Best represented are the so-called ACO beakers (Oberaden 34), cups decorated with relief decoration and signed by the manufacturer. Besides ACO, more manufacturers were active mainly near Lyon (dép. Rhône/F). These cups can be dated until 7-5 BC. They are found in the early fortresses but are not present in Haltern (Vegas 1969/1970, 107 f.).

Although the precise dating of fine wares can be difficult (like Arretine ware), it is interesting that 14 fragments date before the Haltern horizon. Among these earliest finds are, besides the abovementioned ACO beakers, a so-called *Rippenbecher* Oberaden 31 and beakers Oberaden 30 and 37 (fig. 3).

Compared to other military sites like Oberaden, Rödgen (Wetteraukreis/D), Xanten (Kr. Wesel/D), Nijmegen (prov. Gelderland/NL) and Dangstetten (Lkr. Waldshut/D), the Venlo complex is varied, even though the absolute number of finds is low. This is probably due to the lack of excavations on the main site, which is possibly situated slightly east of the riverfront excavations at the Maasboulevard (see above). It suggests that the Roman army took a firm grip on the settlement.

A number of terra rubra and terra nigra finds can also be dated into the Augustan period. A complete cup Deru C2, several fragments of pots with fishbone decoration (*Grätenschmuck*) and plates Deru A1 are examples of this early phase. These types have been produced up to AD 20, but can be regarded as the earliest pottery in this region according to the finds at Nijmegen and Tongeren (prov. Limburg/B; Deru 1996, 113; Holwerda 1941, 17; Vanvinckenroye 1991, 10; Vanvinckenroye 1994).

Finally a large amount of coarse wares, like dolia and cork urns were recovered. Although this kind of pottery is hard to date, it is suggested that some of it can also be attributed to the Augustan era. Other types of coarse ware such as a soldiers' cup and cooking pots of different sizes do date from that earliest period.

There were insufficient metal finds to support a conclusion about the character of the settlement during the Augustan era. The discovery of an Aucissa fibula, a fragment of a *lorica segmentata* (in the form of hacked bronze) and a Weisenau-type cheek piece lead one to suspect some form of military activity (although these finds must be dated later, to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), but they do not constitute convincing evidence. Moreover, the closer analysis of militaria from settlement contexts in the riverine area of the Central Netherlands showed that this group is amply represented in the category of metal objects (Nicolay 2007).

Striking is the relative large number of coins that can be attributed to this period. Of the total of 170 coins excavated, the majority date to the Augustan era. Although one should be cautious about dating older coins in particular (since they may have had a long period of circulation), this amount of Augustan coins is striking. The Augustan era represents 30 years of occupation at the most, while the *vicus* period covered at least 160 and possibly even 200 years.

Based on the composition of the Augustan find assemblage, conclusions may be drawn as to the date and nature of the occupation. On the basis of the discovered coins, the site appears to fit in somewhere between Oberaden and Haltern. A relatively large number of AVAVCIA coins are known from Venlo (Kemmers 2009). The percentage of Nemausus asses exceeds the number of Lyon-I altar asses, although not very much. The AVAVCIA coins are close to the asses from Lyon as far as dates are concerned, and reach the peak of their circulation around the beginning of the era (Aarts / Roymans 2009). The coin finds belonging to the earliest phase (from c. 10 BC, whether or not continuously, to c. AD 15/20) are clearly military in character. The Nemausus asses and the Copia/Vienna emissions are hardly ever discovered in indigenous settlements and certainly not in such quantities. There, the remaining Augustan coins are frequently found, but, again, not in such high quantities. The Celtic coins are very specific to military sites along the Rhine and the Lippe. AVAVCIA coins do occur in indigenous settlements in the riverine area or in the immediate vicinity of Tongeren, but not in combination with Roman emissions. The same applies to the Germanus Indutilli L coins, found around Trier in indigenous settlements but beyond the tribal territory of the *Treveri* only in military sites (Burnett / Amandry / Ripollès 1992, 149). The Venlo-Maasboulevard settlement was clearly connected to the military coin supply channels in its earliest period.

Summarising the results we come to the following conclusions:

1. In the modern city centre of Venlo objects from the Augustan era come to light while finds from the Late Iron Age are lacking. If we are willing to conclude from these finds the existence of a settlement, this small town is likely to have been founded in the Augustan period.

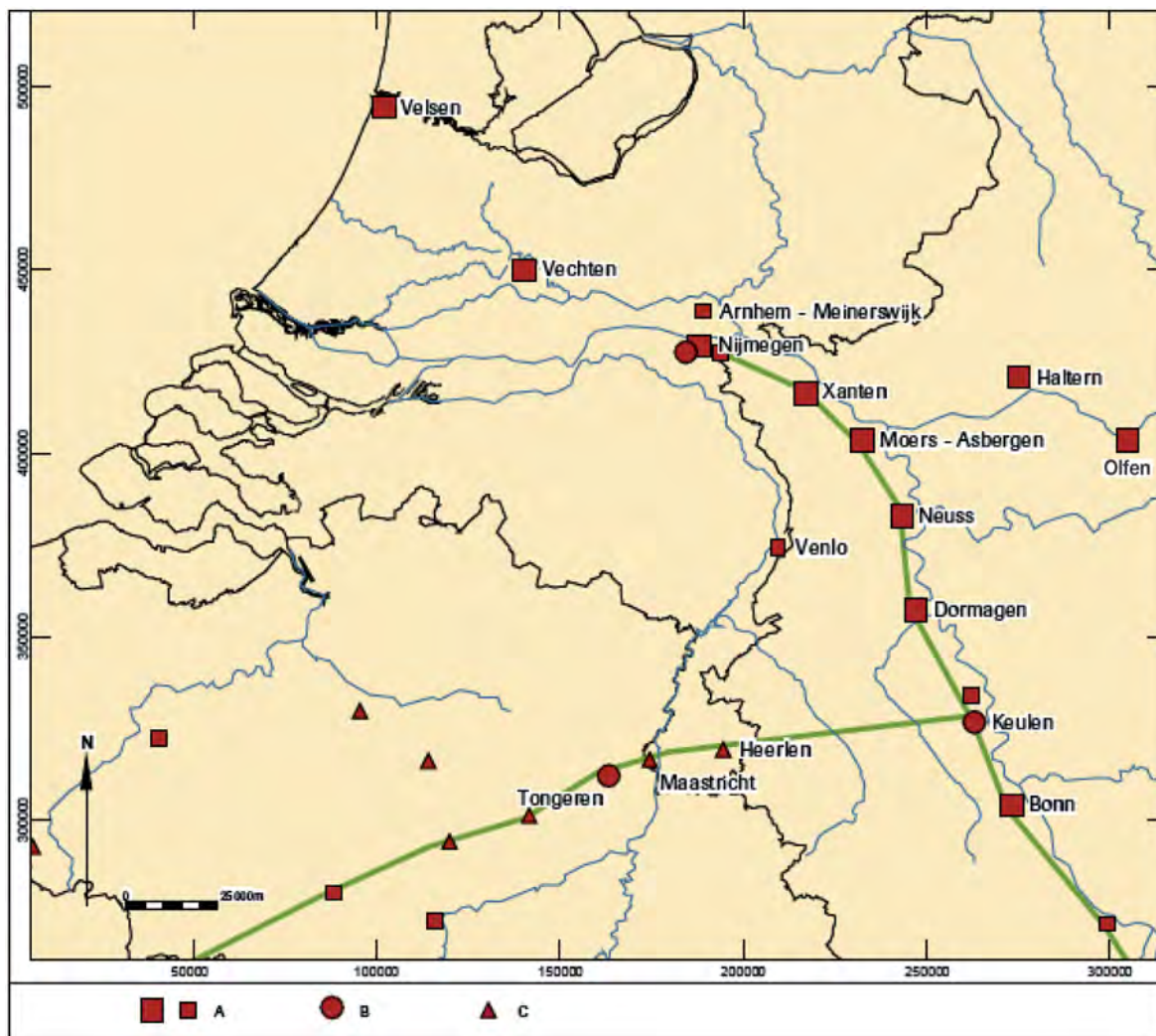
2. The numbers and variation of the find complex are not matched by rural settlements that are known from the region of Venlo. Instead, the nature of the complex suggests a military connection as, for example, can be seen from the number of AVAUCIA coins and the lacking of fine wares in rural settlement complexes.
3. Settlement features are lacking from the record but the find complex most likely points towards the existence of a settlement in the modern city centre of Venlo.

Because of these arguments we assume that the finds belong to one or more sites from the Augustan period of which probably one is of a military character. These settlements may be expected in the immediate surroundings of the Maasboulevard excavation. Since no remains were found, nothing can be said about the exact nature and size of the site(s). It is quite possible that there was a small military fortification in the form of a fortlet or a mini *castellum*. One would also expect a (small) military *vicus* to develop near it. Future investigation, particularly just east of the Maasboulevard area may throw more light on this issue. Nor is it clear as to how the military presence is to be explained. Also in Trier and Tongeren finds dating from the Augustan period have been discovered in considerable quantities (Vanderhoeven 2003; Morscheiser-Niebergall 2009). A. Vanderhoeven concluded that, although there is evidence for military involvement into the design and construction of the later Roman town in present-day Tongeren, it is unlikely to suppose the presence of a military fortification from that era. J. Morscheiser-Niebergall came for Trier more or less to the same conclusion. Both sites were intended to play a central role into the administration of newly pacified territories. The development of Tongeren can also be studied in relation to the building of a Roman road from Cologne to Bavay (dép. Nord/F). In several rural centres along that road finds from Augustan date have been reported (e. g. Heerlen and Maastricht [both prov. Limburg/NL]) although in small quantities (see below). These developments fit into a building phase of an administration. For Venlo one can argue that the small town did not play a major role into the »grand« design of newly pacified *civitates*, at least not in later times (van der Velde et al. 2009). In fact, the settlement is situated in the immediate hinterland of the militarised zone along the Rhine. Not only some specific finds studied in their regional context (e. g. the Germanic Indutilli L coins) hint at a military presence; also the location of Venlo can have been of strategic importance for the military command. It is therefore that we propose a military presence in Venlo during Augustan times. An attempt to sketch this strategic importance and the probable role of the settlement in Venlo into the military infrastructure (fig. 4) is outlined below.

### **ROMAN SOLDIERS IN VENLO: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEUSE FOR AUGUSTUS' MILITARY CAMPAIGNS**

The first Roman military presence in the environs of Venlo must be dated to around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. On his campaigns of conquest through Gaul, Caesar reached the Rhine several times. His skirmishes with various tribes, notably the *Eburones*, had significant consequences for the regional power relations in the Rhineland and the present Southern Netherlands. Caesar himself did not manage to pacify the conquered areas in the north. The arrival of various tribes (such as the *Batavi* and the *Ubi*) in the former territory of the *Eburones* is regarded as an attempt on the part of the Romans to keep a hold on this part of the Empire by means of treaties (Gechter 2003).

Only after the civil wars Augustus (27 BC to AD 14) was able to incorporate the diverse (previously) conquered areas into the Roman Empire. Securing the Gallic provinces by establishing a well-protected border zone was an important motive (Gechter 2003, 149).



**Fig. 4** Military infrastructure in the Rhine/Meuse region during the reign of Augustus. – **A** *castella* and fortlets. – **B** *civitates capitales*. – **C** *vici* (small towns). – (Map A. E. Botman, ADC ArcheoProjecten).

In various regions, contingents of troops were stationed in the immediate vicinity of existing (indigenous) settlements, near Trier, for example. At the same time, many troops were deployed to build central settlements and to protect communication routes. The origin of Cologne (first *oppidum Ubiorum*, and later *Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium*) dates back to the last decades BC. Particularly the building of an altar (*Ara Ubiorum*) can be seen as a symbolic act. A similar event took place in Lyon in 27 BC. In addition, there was a legion there. Around 12/10 BC, Tongeren was established as a sizeable civilian settlement (Vanderhoeven 2003, 129). The oldest finds from Heerlen and Maastricht date from the Augustan period, the time in which the east-west route from Cologne to Boulogne-sur-Mer (dép. Pas-de-Calais/F) was built. The oldest military camps along the Rhine were Nijmegen (19 BC) and Neuss, probably built around 16/15 BC (Kemmers 2006; von Schnurbein 2011). The army camp on the Kops Plateau is assumed to have been the headquarter from which Drusus coordinated his military operations for some time (van Enckevort / Haalebos 1995, 48). Unlike the case in more southerly parts, the immediate hinterland of the two legionary camps was not geared to supporting such large numbers of soldiers. The organisation of an infrastructure in the hinterland of the Rhine frontier must mainly have consisted of creating transport routes for the transfer of troops and their supply. Various classical authors have made reference to the importance



attached by Roman army leaders to the provisioning of troops (Whittaker 1994, 98 ff.). The location of the troops along the river Rhine and that of the »new« legionary camps along the Lippe emphasise the strategic importance attributed in this respect to the waterways. The road from Cologne to Boulogne-sur-Mer, but also the river Meuse must have been major transport routes. They were probably so vital to operations that the army command protected them, as was possibly the case at Liberchies and Tournai (both prov. Hainaut/B).

The Roman presence in Venlo must also be understood within this context. We have already indicated that the Meuse changed its rate of flow near the present town of Venlo. Therefore, Venlo holds a strategic position. Also near Venlo, an old land route in the direction of the Rhine was once located. In the last decades BC, a road connecting Neuss and the Meuse (near Venlo) appears to have been built (Gechter 2003, 151). On the basis of this evidence we must conclude that Venlo held a strategic position from the point of view of logistics, and this location therefore required protection.

No conclusions can be drawn regarding the precise appearance and function of this military presence. It is quite feasible that there were possibilities at the location where transshipment took place from the Meuse valley so that provisions from the ships could be transported to the troops using routes by land. The proportion of transport vessels and corked urns could support this hypothesis. However, because this pottery cannot be precisely dated and well dating Augustan pottery (e.g. Arretine ware) has been shown to be residual, caution is advisable (especially for the Augustan period).

The military finds therefore date mainly from the Augustan era. After this time, the numbers rapidly drop. Nevertheless, there are various indications (terra sigillata, coins) that suggest that the site was not abandoned, but that there was some form of continuity in the period between the Augustan military presence and the expansion phase of the *vicus* at the time of Claudius (AD 41-56). Based on this, it might be assumed that there was a fortlet as well as a military *vicus* in operation during Augustus' military campaigns. The troops would have withdrawn from Venlo in the first decade of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. It would appear that part of the *vicus* continued to function and that the civilian *vicus* developed from it.

## MILITARY CAMPS ALONG THE MEUSE

Venlo is probably not the only site of military origin along the Meuse. Already the importance of the infrastructure for Roman military operations has been stressed. It was Agrippa himself who built the road from Cologne to Boulogne-sur-Mer. The earliest features of the *vici* of Heerlen and Maastricht can be dated to this period (Bogaers 1957; Panhuysen 1996). Although indications for a military presence from the Augustan era onwards in Cuijk (north of Venlo on the western border of the Meuse; prov. Noord-Brabant/NL) have not been stated, it has been assumed that the origin of this *vicus* also goes back to a military start (Haalebos 2002).

Further upwards the Meuse we find indications only in Namur for Augustan (if not military?) occupation (Raepsaet-Charlier / Raepsaet-Charlier 1994). When researching the Augustan military campaigns into Germania, the strategic importance of the Meuse is seldom stressed. When we consider the establishment of major settlements like Tongeren (with help of the military) around 10 BC (Vanderhoeven 2003), it seems likely that the Roman troops from 20 BC onwards acted in a territory which lacked a fully developed infrastructure to secure the provisioning of the legions. In this respect the extreme importance of the Meuse for the military infrastructure during this period can be emphasised. It connected the Rhine frontier, with the already developed Roman province of Gaul, especially the rich fields in the north (like the Picardy region) with the rich harvests necessary to feed the legions (cf. Derreumaux et al. 2008). Also the possibilities of

shipping bulk material like pottery and other utensils from an already »romanised« province must have been an important prerogative.

A literary source mentioned the existence of strongholds along the Meuse: *Praeterea in tutelam provinciae praesidia atque custodias oblique disposuit per Mosam flumen, per Albin, per Visurgim* (Flor. epit. II, 30). May we assume that the fortlet in Venlo was one of these *custodiae*? The number and variation of finds together with its strategic position makes it a plausible hypothesis. The site is strategically situated both in distance between Nijmegen and Maastricht and in its possibilities offered in reaching the Rhine by land. The series of *custodiae* were part of the military tactics of Drusus and Tiberius in securing the deliveries towards the legions aiming to seize control of the Germania lands outside the Rhine. Presumably the military presence had to secure a stock market from where goods could be transported towards the military camps like Neuss.

With the ending of the military campaigns north of the Rhine the military importance of Venlo also seemed to diminish and the troops left. Although the geographical location of Venlo stayed fundamental for the existence of the (later) Roman *vicus*, during the next centuries the Rhine delta became more important. Interestingly enough it was during the Late Roman period when the Venlo region again achieved some military relevance. Probably because of the ongoing threat from the northeast, a new settlement (Blariacum) was founded on the western border of the Meuse opposite of the former Augustan military camp and settlement.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although no settlement features (either military or civilian in character) dating from the Augustan era were discovered during a major excavation in the city centre of present-day Venlo, the finds suggest the existence of a settlement nearby. Considering the chronology and nature of these objects, which consist of pottery and metal ware including coins, we may conclude that the site is not of native origin. The similarity of the find complex with military sites probably suggests a military character of the site, a fortlet and possibly a *custodia* as mentioned in the sources. Most likely a civilian settlement (*vicus*) was situated nearby. The fortlet and *vicus* date from the period of one of the earliest military campaigns into Germania (from 16/15 BC onwards). It was probably used for securing the provision of the troops alongside the Rhine due to its strategic geographical location. These finds stress the strategic importance of the river Meuse during the Augustan period, as a connection between the well developed north of Gaul and the regions (to be developed) bordering the Rhine.

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**Augusteische Besiedlung in Venlo (prov. Limburg): ein militärisches Verteilungszentrum im Maasgebiet?**

Thema dieses Artikels sind die augusteischen Funde (Münzen, Keramik und Metallgegenstände) aus der Zeit ab 16/15 v. Chr. von Ausgrabungen in Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL). Die Fundstelle liegt im Maastal; derartiges Fundmaterial ist hier hinsichtlich Anzahl und Charakter in ländlichen Siedlungen unbekannt. Obwohl Siedlungsspuren fehlen, deuten diese Funde auf eine militärische Anwesenheit im heutigen Stadtzentrum hin. Ihre Existenz lässt den römischen Willen, die Nachschubkette für die Germanienfeldzüge abzusichern, erkennen. Die militärische Fundstelle von Venlo diente vermutlich als Verteilungszentrum, bei dem Waren aus dem Maastal für die Garnisonen entlang des Rheins umgeschlagen wurden.

**An Augustan settlement in Venlo (prov. Limburg): a military distribution centre in the Meuse area?**

Finds (coins, pottery and metal ware) dating to the Augustan period from 16/15 BC onwards from excavations carried out in Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL), are the subject of this article. Venlo is situated along the Meuse; the total amount and nature of these finds from rural sites are not known there. Although settlement traces were lacking, the finds may point towards military occupation in the present city centre. Their existence suggests the Roman willingness to secure their supply chains during the campaigns in Germania. The military site of Venlo probably served as a distribution centre, from which goods from the Meuse valley found their way to the garrisons along the Rhine.

**Un habitat augustéen à Venlo (prov. Limburg): un centre de distribution militaire dans la vallée de la Meuse?**

Cet article a pour thème les découvertes augustéennes (monnaies, céramiques et objets métalliques) de la période 16/15 av. J.-C. en provenance des fouilles de Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL). Le site de Venlo se situe dans la vallée de la Meuse, les autres établissements agricoles de cette vallée ne livrent aucun mobilier comparable. Bien que les traces d'habitat manquent à ce jour, ces objets indiquent une présence militaire dans le centre de la ville actuelle. L'existence de ces objets suggère la volonté des Romains d'assurer le ravitaillement durant les campagnes de Germanie. Le site militaire de Venlo a probablement joué le rôle de centre de distribution afin de répartir des marchandises en provenance de la Meuse vers les autres garnisons de la vallée du Rhin.

Traduction: L. Bernard

**Een nederzetting uit de Augusteïsche periode: een militair distributiecentrum?**

In dit artikel worden de vondsten uit Venlo (prov. Limburg/NL) beschreven die dateren uit de Augusteïsche periode. Tijdens de opgravingen kwamen munten, metalen voorwerpen en aardewerk in relatief grote hoeveelheden tevoorschijn. In het Maasdal wordt een dergelijk rijk en gevarieerd vondstcomplex niet aangetroffen in vindplaatsen met een ruraal karakter. Ondanks dat grondsporen niet gevonden werden, lijken de vondsten te wijzen op de aanwezigheid van een nederzetting met een militair karakter, die gedurende de Augusteïsche periode onder het huidige centrum van Venlo gesitueerd wordt. De vondsten suggereren een aanvangsdatering van deze nederzetting vanaf 16/15 v. Chr. De ligging van de nederzetting kan verband houden met de wens van het Romeinse leger om haar aanvoerkanalen veilig te stellen gedurende de campagnes die in Germania werden ondernomen. De militaire nederzetting lag dan ook op een strategisch punt langs de Maas en functioneerde mogelijk als een distributiecentrum voor de legioenen langs de Rijn.

*Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots clés / Sleutelwoorden*

Niederlande / römische Kaiserzeit / Militärsiedlungen / augusteische Funde

The Netherlands / Roman period / military *vici* / Augustan finds

Pays-Bas / période impériale romaine / campement militaire / objets augustéens

Nederland / Romeinse tijd / militaire *vici* / Augusteïsche vondsten

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