

THE ARTIST FORMERLY KNOWN AS BATAVUS: A REINTERPRETATION OF A GRAFFITO FROM VELSEN (PROV. NOORD-HOLLAND/NL)

In the early Roman period the territory of the present-day municipality of Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL) housed multiple Roman fortifications (fig. 1)¹. The earliest complex, known as Velsen 1, has been dated to the years between AD 15 and 30-40. It had been built on the left bank of the Oer-IJ, which was once one of the most northerly branches of the Rhine. With its fortified harbour it probably served as a base of operations for the Roman army along the North Sea coast. Velsen 1 has been equated with *castellum Flevum* as mentioned by Tacitus, but so far no epigraphic evidence has been uncovered to support this identification². If the identification as *castellum Flevum* is correct, it may be presumed that not only legionary but also auxiliary soldiers manned this fort, since Tacitus wrote that at *Flevum* a »by no means contemptible unit of citizens and allies presided the Ocean's shores«³.

Graffiti, i. e. incised names and letters, on pottery vessels and metal objects found at Velsen seem to support a mixed garrison of legionary and auxiliary troops. Firstly, so-called *duo nomina* of Roman citizens have been recognised. These are generally to be ascribed to legionary soldiers, but not exclusively. In addition, names that have a specific regional connotation have been identified, which may indicate the presence of auxiliary soldiers. For instance, a graffito CELTI has been linked to a soldier with a Gaulish background, and LVBAECI to one with Iberian roots⁴. Finds of military equipment and weapons from this site also suggest a mixed garrison of legionaries and auxiliaries⁵.



Fig. 1 a location of Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland) within the Netherlands. – b the fortifications of Velsen 1 and Velsen 2 along the Oer-IJ. – (Illustrations M. Polak). – Scale approx. 1:2500.



Fig. 2 Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL). The South-Gaulish terra sigillata dish (RMO inv. no. 2008/6.1976-4082) with the discussed graffito. – (Photos Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden). – No scale.

Further, a graffito read as BATAVI, meaning »(property) of Batavus«, has been discovered at Velsen⁶. Since it has been found on the site of a Roman military installation and since Roman graffiti in general are especially known from military locations⁷, it is highly likely that its author was a soldier. This graffito has a certain reputation, for it has been labelled as »the name of the earliest known Batavian soldier«⁸. I argue that it was not a soldier from the tribe of the Batavians (Batavi⁹) who has left this mark: it does not read BATAVI, but should be reconstructed as BATONIS. Before I put forward my arguments for this reinterpretation, I will present the graffito in more detail.

THE FIRST THREE LETTERS

The graffito in question is placed on the external base of a terra sigillata dish, type Dragendorff 17 (fig. 2). Unfortunately, the graffito is only partially preserved as the last part has broken away. The letters are positioned counter clockwise outside the footing. The dish has a central potter's stamp of Volus from La Graufesenque (dép. Aveyron/F), which allows the vessel to be dated to the second quarter of the 1st century AD¹⁰. The recovered fragment of the vessel was much worn. It was found in 1976 at the site of Velsen 1, and although its precise find context is unknown, it probably came from the so-called Dirty Sands layer in the upper fill of the postholes of the eastern fort gate¹¹.

Several letters have been scratched onto the base of the plate after it had been fired (*post cocturam*). Together they form a name. Analysis of graffiti in the wider Roman world has yielded the insight that most

graffiti express ownership. For this purpose, personal names in the genitive have predominantly been used, although the use of a nominative is not rare. Moreover, most graffiti consist of a single name¹². Whereas Roman citizens traditionally may be recognised by their bipartite or tripartite name, consisting of a *praenomen*, a *nomen gentile* (*gentilicium*) and eventually also a *cognomen*, non-citizens in the Roman world (*peregrini*) only carried a *cognomen*. When a single name is encountered in a graffito, it is most likely a *cognomen*. Family members most of the time had the same *praenomina* as well as *nomina gentilia*, but different *cognomina* made them distinguishable from one another.

To the extent that the graffito from Velsen is preserved, there appears to be no word separation or other punctuation mark, so it may be presumed that at least the preserved letters formed a single name. The first three letters are quite clear: they read BAT (fig. 3). As the range of Roman *praenomina* is limited and none is known to have a B as its first letter, the possibility of the Velsen graffito being a *praenomen* may be ruled out. The graffito could then be either a *nomen gentile* or a *cognomen*, with the knowledge that in general the *cognomina* outnumber the *nomina gentilia*. Although by this time *cognomina* were not yet common in funerary, votive and other public inscriptions on stone, a study of the graffiti from the Augustan fortifications at Haltern (Kr. Recklinghausen/D) has shown that at least a third and perhaps even half of the graffiti consists of a singular *cognomen*¹³. It is therefore likely that the Velsen graffito concerns a *cognomen*. But how does it continue?

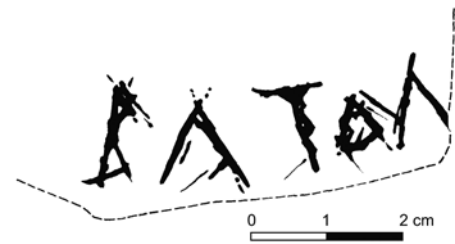


Fig. 3 Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL). Drawing of the graffito at issue, broken away at the right. – (Drawing R. P. Reijnen). – Scale 1:1.

FROM BATAVUS TO BATO

In the past, the graffito has mainly been read as BATAVI or BATAV[I], with either the I positioned obliquely to the V or the I being lost¹⁴. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the whole name was preserved, written in the nominative clause as BATAVVS with the last V linked to the S¹⁵. Either way, this graffito has been reconstructed as the owner's mark of a man called Batavus. If this graffito was meant to distinguish his property from that of the people with whom he lived, it implicates that they were not Batavians. As C. van Driel-Murray already has put forward, an ethnic name like Batavus could hardly be used among compatriots¹⁶. Such an ethnic name scratched on a plate would not be a distinctive mark among fellow tribesmen; rather, it is the opposite. Hence, the presence of one Batavian attested through a graffito would actually mean that there were, at least in the direct environment of the author of the graffito, no other Batavians present. This would negate the suggestion put forward that a Batavian unit might have been stationed at Velsen¹⁷.

I propose taking a closer look at the final letters of the graffito, beginning with the presumed A after the T. This letter differs considerably from the letter earlier in the graffito that has already – and rightly so – been identified as an A. Instead of a small oblique stroke attached to the right stroke of the letter, the two legs of this supposed second A are connected. In several places, the author has had to make extra carvings to readjust the form of the letter. The result is a letter that resembles not the earlier A but much more a small O. Then, following this angular O are the left leg and the downstroke of a letter N. The left leg must be read as separated from the O and thus not as a joined V. Finally, the graffito has broken off on the right leg of this letter N. The remainder of the name should therefore be read as BATON[.

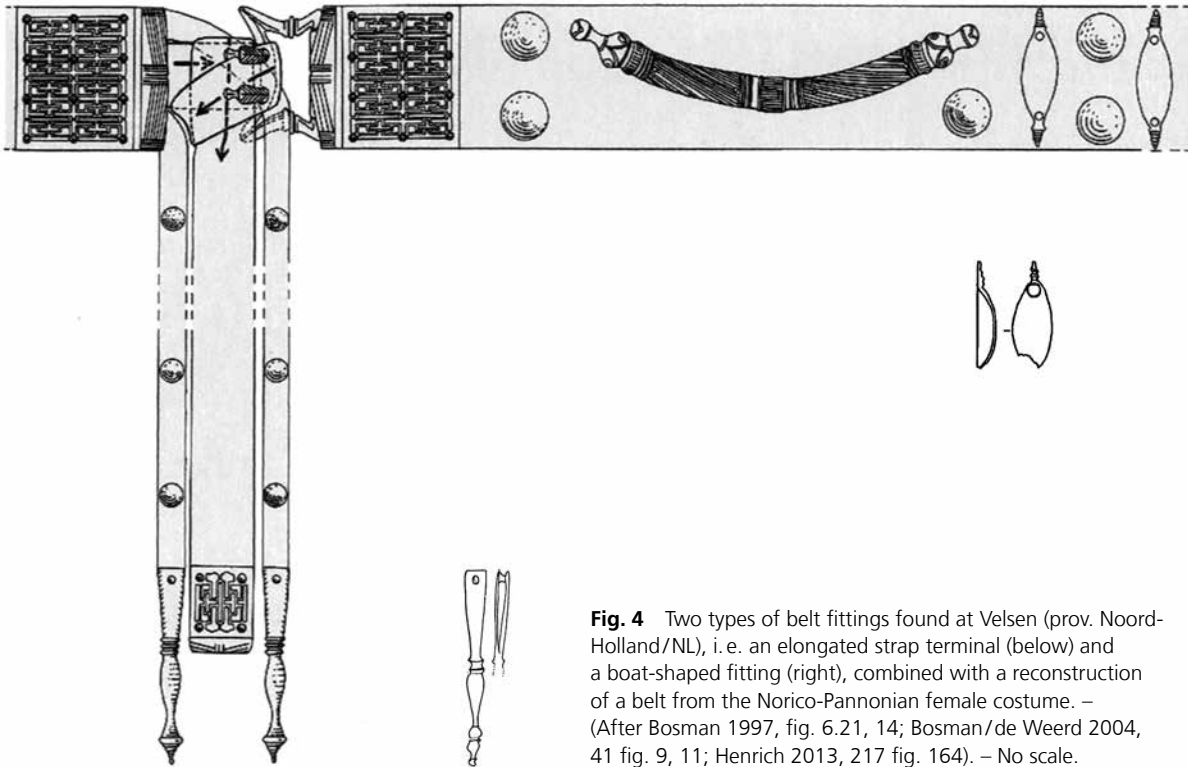


Fig. 4 Two types of belt fittings found at Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL), i.e. an elongated strap terminal (below) and a boat-shaped fitting (right), combined with a reconstruction of a belt from the Norico-Pannonian female costume. – (After Bosman 1997, fig. 6.21, 14; Bosman/de Weerd 2004, 41 fig. 9, 11; Henrich 2013, 217 fig. 164). – No scale.

POPULAR AMONGST THE PANNONIANS

Not many names in the Roman world are known to have started with *Baton-*. A comprehensive corpus of names from the European Roman provinces lists only three: *Bato*, *Batonianus* and *Batonius*¹⁸. The latter two are each attested only once. The *cognomen* *Bato*, however, appears in no less than 28 inscriptions. These appearances are concentrated in the provinces of Dalmatia (11 inscriptions), Pannonia (6 inscriptions) and Dacia (6 inscriptions). According to A. Kakoschke, the name is common in Pannonia and among the Pannonian tribes in Dalmatia¹⁹. In his study of the population of Pannonia, A. Mócsy notes that *Bato* is an Illyrian name²⁰. A. Mayer even states that *Bato* is one of the most well-known and widespread Illyrian names, with 40 attestations of people carrying that name²¹. Literary sources further tell us that the two leaders of the Pannonian revolt of AD 6-9 also shared the name *Bato*; one led the tribe of the *Daesitiates* against the Romans, the other the *Breuci*²².

In several funerary inscriptions dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD an origin is mentioned for soldiers named *Bato* or men whose fathers were called *Bato*. In four inscriptions the origins are designated by tribe name: we encounter an *Eraviscus*, a supposed *Colapianus*, a *Breucus* and a *Ditio*²³. These designations all refer to Pannonian tribes. After the division of the province of *Illyricum* into the provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia the territory of the *Ditiones* fell within Dalmatia. The other tribes were residents of Pannonia, which later was further divided into Pannonia Inferior and Pannonia Superior.

The inscription of the soldier called *Bato* and *natione Ditio* is actually one of the few that have been found outside the territory of the Pannonian tribes. It came to light at Bingerbrück (Bingen am Rhein, Lkr. Mainz-Bingen/D) near Mainz, where this *Bato* had served in *cohors IV Dalmatorum*. His funerary monument can be dated to the pre-Flavian period²⁴. There is a possibility that this *Bato* who later was buried at Bingerbrück and other soldiers of *cohors IV Dalmatorum* were previously stationed at Velsen. The early movements of this military unit are unknown, but it presumably was sent to the Rhine directly after it had been raised.

Opinions differ as to when exactly this was: D. J. King takes the view that Caligula may have raised *cohortes I-VII Dalmatorum*²⁵, whereas G. Alföldy argues that Augustus had already created these *cohortes* after the Pannonian revolt (AD 6-9)²⁶. Coincidentally, the two leaders of this Pannonian rebellion shared, as has been mentioned earlier, the same name: Bato.

Based on these findings, I propose reconstructing the graffito from Velsen as an owner's mark of a certain man called Bato. Since the genitive is the most encountered case among names incised after firing on pottery tableware²⁷, it is most likely that the graffito once consisted of the complete genitive case *BATONIS*. This may be translated as »property of Bato«.

SUPPORTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Other archaeological finds from Velsen also hint at some influence from Pannonia²⁸. Firstly, two bronze boat-shaped belt fittings discovered at Velsen 1 have been identified as part of the typical costume worn by women from the provinces Noricum and Pannonia (fig. 4, right)²⁹. In 1965, J. Garbsch defined the so-called *norisch-pannonische Frauentracht* through images on funerary monuments and finds from settlements and graves from both provinces. Characteristic of this style of dress are large brooches worn in a pair on the shoulders and belts adorned with bronze fittings. One type of fitting is the small boat-shaped bronzes, which come in various sizes and with different decorations³⁰.

In addition to the decorative boat-shaped fittings, another part of a belt of this Norico-Pannonian type may have been found at Velsen (fig. 4, below). A strap terminal discovered at the site of Velsen 2 shows a close resemblance to the *Riemenzungen* described by J. Garbsch³¹. It has the same, long but thin shape with a similar construction to fasten the terminal to the belt strap. Both types of belt fittings can be dated to the 1st century AD. These and other elements of the region specific costume are very rare outside of the larger Norico-Pannonian area. The belt fittings found at Velsen may therefore indicate the presence of a woman from this region, as trade in such objects in an area with a different style of dress can be ruled out³².

Secondly, at Velsen, there has been discovered a fibula that seems to have a Pannonian connection as well. The brooch in question is an exceptional piece because it is an imitation of an early Norico-Pannonian double knot fibula (fig. 5). The original type is known as Almgren 236/237³³. The fibula from Velsen 1 displays a remarkable combination of a covered spring with an internal chord and a bow with a double knot. In the original type, the spring has no casing and the chord crosses over the bow instead of under the bow³⁴. The double knot feature is typical of a group of brooches that have also been associated with the attire traditionally worn by women in the Norico-Pannonian region³⁵.

Together with the belt fittings, this fibula suggests that at least one woman with a Norico-Pannonian background was present at early Roman Velsen. E. M. Greene argues that, although the material record is limited and some material sources are ambiguous in nature, there is enough evidence to suggest that women, together with children and other non-combatants, were an integral part of the auxiliary military community from the earliest periods of military occupation in the Roman west³⁶. This case from Velsen may be a further signal that already in the early 1st century AD women accompanied their compatriots on their tour of duty to the Rhineland. Especially in material culture associated with women, traditional elements may be expected. Based on archaeological evidence from other sites, the notion has been put forward that some consciously selected aspects of traditional material culture, adhering to the place of origin, were retained in

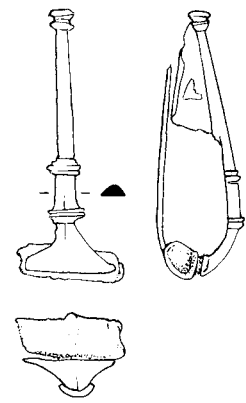


Fig. 5 Imitation of a Norico-Pannonian double knot fibula found at Velsen 1 (prov. Noord-Holland/NL). – (After Haalebos 1986, 79 fig. 33, 4). – Scale 2:3.

the new living environment by women who followed their male kin in service³⁷. The mentioned archaeological objects documenting a non-local female presence thus also support the proposition that soldiers with a non-local, Pannonian background, as the name Bato suggests, were present at Velsen.

CONCLUSION

The graffito from Velsen 1 previously interpreted as BATAVI, »(property) of Batavus«, actually reads BATON[IS], meaning »(property) of Bato«. It cannot be considered as referring to a Batavian soldier stationed at Velsen. The name Bato is Illyrian in origin and is common among men from various Pannonian tribes. Inscriptions recording this name are concentrated in the province of Dalmatia. The presence at Velsen of a man called Bato, presumably a soldier, fits the supposed influx of people from the Pannonian region with military units that have been sent from this region to the Rhine area. This is corroborated by findings at Velsen of female dress accessories with an origin in the same region. In this way, the combination of various archaeological indications enhances our knowledge of the composition of the Roman army stationed at Velsen in the early Imperial period.

Notes

- 1) I wish to thank Dr. M. Polak, Dr. S. Mols and Dr. D. Scarlett (all Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen) for their comments and assistance in the preparation of this article.
- 2) Tac. ann. IV.72.3; cf. Bosman 2006, 404.
- 3) Tac. ann. IV.72.3: »[...] et haud spernenda illic civium sociorumque manus litora Oceani praesidebat« (English translation by A. J. Woodman [2004]).
- 4) Bosman 1997, 80f.; 2006, 406.
- 5) Bosman 2006, 406.
- 6) Individually published as AE 1997, 1165a.
- 7) Feugère 2004, 60.
- 8) Erdrich 2009, 109.
- 9) The Batavi or Batavians were a Germanic breakaway group from the Chatti, originating from modern-day Hesse across the Rhine. They were relocated to the Lower Rhine area under supervision of Roman authorities in the late 1st century BC.
- 10) Hartley/Dickinson 2012, Volus, die 6d. M. Polak (2000) advocates an earlier beginning for the production by Volus c. AD 20, whereas B. R. Hartley and B. M. Dickinson (2012) give the more narrow date range of c. AD 35-50. For this particular die, however, M. Polak (2000, V93) suggests a date of c. AD 30-50. Therefore, a dating of the vessel to the second quarter of the 1st century AD seems to be a safe basis for further reasoning.
- 11) Bosman 1997, 79f.
- 12) Feugère 2004, 60.
- 13) Galsterer 1983, 14f.
- 14) Especially Derks 1987, no. 5; Bosman 1997, 79f.; Derks 2009, tab. E no. 12.
- 15) Galestin 2010, 22: »According to R. S. O. Tomlin (Oxford; pers. comm., 2010), there »was enough evidence of being two V's, the second one being linked to the final S«.
- 16) Cf. van Driel-Murray 2012, 119.
- 17) Cf. suggestion in Galestin's concluding remarks (2010, 23).
- 18) Lőrincz 2005.
- 19) Kakoschke 2007, 163f. CN 477.
- 20) Mócsy 1959, 166.
- 21) Mayer 1953, 302.
- 22) Vell. II 90,4-5; Cass. Dio 55,29. – For an overview of the sources, see Domić-Kunić 2012, especially 46-68.
- 23) Respectively CIL III 3325, CIL XIII 4372, CIL XIII 4377 and CIL XIII 7508.
- 24) The date suggested for this monument varies from Tiberian-Claudian (Holder 1980, 306 no. 1382; cf. Boppert 2005, nos 50. 50a) to the second half of the 1st century AD (Kakoschke 2007, 163 CN 477).
- 25) King 1991, 189. – Arguments for this assumption are that the early inscriptions of these cohortes postdate AD 40 and the recorded stipendia are low. Therefore, an Augustan date for the creation of the cohortes Dalmatorum would not be likely. See also Kraft 1951, 23, who reconstructs the first levy of these cohortes at about AD 35.
- 26) Alföldy 1968, 56f.
- 27) Cf. Feugère 2004, 60.
- 28) Polak in print.
- 29) Bosman 1997, 55 fig. 6.21, 14; cf. Henrich 2013 for a boat-shaped belt fitting found at Xanten (Kr. Wesel/D). – Note that U. Rothe (2013, 38) warns of overrating the Pannonian share in this phenomenon.
- 30) Garbsch 1965, 101-104 especially fig. 55.
- 31) Garbsch 1965, 104f. fig. 56 type R2; Bosman/de Weerd 2004, 41f. figs 9. 11. – Note that the strap terminal is identified here as a cavalry fitting.
- 32) Cf. Henrich 2013. See also Garbsch 1965, 127, for a »Norkerlin« in the Roman fort at Rheingönheim (Stadt Ludwigshafen am Rhein/D).

- 33) According to E. Riha (1994, type 2.10), this long-lived type of fibula came into use in the early Imperial period and was still in fashion during the 2nd century AD.
- 34) Haalebos 1986, 83 fig. 33, 4. – Bosman 1997, 55. 142.
- 35) Garbsch 1965, 26-49.
- 36) Greene 2011, 257-263.
- 37) Cf. van Driel-Murray 2009. – See also Bosman 1997, 55.

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Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

The Artist Formerly Known as Batavus: zur Neuinterpretation eines Graffito aus Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL)

Ein Graffito auf einer Terra Sigillata-Scherbe, die von dem römischen Militärplatz in Velsen stammt, wurde bisher als Besitzernamen BATAVI, »(Eigentum) des Batavus« gelesen. Hier wird eine andere Interpretation vorgeschlagen: Es wird dargelegt, dass der Graffito vielmehr als BATONIS, »(Eigentum) des Bato«, zu lesen ist. Bato ist ein Eigenname illyrischer Herkunft, der besonders häufig bei Männern aus pannonischen Stämmen war. Die vermutete Anwesenheit eines Soldaten aus dieser Region in Velsen wird zudem durch andere archäologische Funde gestützt, da aus Velsen auch verschiedene Bestandteile norisch-pannonischer Frauentracht stammen.

The Artist Formerly Known as Batavus: a Reinterpretation of a Graffito from Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL)

A graffito on a terra sigillata sherd found at the Roman military site of Velsen has until now been read as the owner's mark BATAVI, »(property) of Batavus«. This article offers a different interpretation. It argues that the graffito is better read as BATONIS, »(property) of Bato«. Bato is a proper name of Illyrian origin which was especially popular among men of the Pannonian tribes. The presumed presence of a soldier from this region at Velsen serving in the Roman army is supported by other archaeological finds, for at Velsen there have also been found various parts of female attire typical for the Norico-Pannonian region.

The Artist Formerly Known as Batavus: réinterprétation d'un graffito en provenance de Velsen (prov. Noord-Holland/NL)

Une inscription sur un tesson de sigillée en provenance de Velsen était jusqu'alors interprété comme une marque de propriété: BATAVI, »(propriété) de Batavus«. Une autre interprétation est proposée ici, il est proposé que l'inscription serait plutôt à comprendre comme: BATONIS, »(propriété) de Bato«. Bato est un nom propre d'origine Illyrienne, fréquent chez les hommes des tribus pannoniques. La présence supposée d'un soldat de cette région à Velsen est également renforcée par la présence d'autres artefacts dans la mesure où plusieurs éléments de parure féminine de Norique et de Pannonie ont été mis au jour à Velsen.

Traduction: L. Bernard

Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots clés

Niederlande / römische Kaiserzeit / Bataver / Inschrift / Epigraphik
The Netherlands / Roman Principate / Batavians / inscription / epigraphy
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