

CAROL VAN DRIEL-MURRAY

A late Roman assemblage from Deurne (Netherlands)

Amongst the notable collection of Roman helmets in the possession of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden), the late Roman silver-gilt helmet found in 1910 by a peat cutter in the Peel near Deurne occupies a special position (Fig. 1–2)¹. Redolent of wealth and status, it is, furthermore, surrounded by the mythology of an individual tragedy. The legends of knights with golden swords and shining helmets who disappeared in treacherous bogs, never to be seen again, save in spirit form, current in almost every region with peat bogs from Ireland to Poland, seem here to have proved their foundation in distant historical truth. The local traditions gain in strength and detail², but in the academic world, too, the strength of oral testimony is widely accepted. Following the extensive discussion of the find by W. C. Braat in 1973, the nature of the complex and the presence of the individual items could be neatly explained. A mounted officer of the *Stablesia VI*, travelling through the treacherous bog of the Peel, stumbles into a deep pool from which his companions fail to extricate him. Helmet, sword, fibula, a pair of shoes with a spur, remains of textile clothing, a purse with coins belong to the personal equipment of the soldier, two right shoes were lost by his companions in the bog during the struggle to rescue him, while two bells and several large sheets of leather belong to the officer's horse³.

Although on documentary grounds the reports of human remains, accepted so eagerly by Braat, can be dismissed⁴, the find association itself has never been subjected to systematic analysis. Attention always focused on the helmet and on the coins in so far as they provided a secure date of 320 for the dramatic occurrence⁵. Totally neglected has been the contribution

¹ Many others have contributed to this research and I am particularly grateful to R. Halbertsma (Keeper of Roman Antiquities, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden) and N. Arts (regional archaeologist Eindhoven) for their assistance in tracing archive material, to A. Iriarte (Bilbao) for the experimental stimulus, and B. Donker and M. Ydo (both Amsterdam Archaeological Centre) for production of the illustrations.

² Most post-dating Braat's publication of 1973 (cf. note 3) and culminating in the erection of a memorial stone to the supposed victim in 1998. L. KLUYTMANS, *Witte magie. De Gouden Helm uit de Peel (Deurne [n.d. ca. 1975])*; J. POULS/H. CROMPVOETS, *De roep van de Romein. Heemkundevereniging Medelo (Meijel 1994) 35 ff.*
³ W. C. BRAAT, *Der Fund von Deurne, Holland*. In: H. KLUMBACH (ed.), *Spätromische Gardehelme*. Münchner Beitr. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 15 (München 1973) 55–56.

⁴ W. VAN DER SANDEN, *Mens en moeras (Assen 1990) 47–48*; W. VAN DER SANDEN, *Alfred Dieck und die niederländischen Moorleichen: Einige kritische Randbemerkungen*. *Kunde N.F.* 44, 1993, 127–139; POULS / CROMPVOETS (note 2) 26. Human remains first enter the tale with Dieck's communication but the documentation to which he referred, said to date from 1924, should perhaps be regarded as reminiscences coloured by the experience of the trenches in the First World War.

⁵ M. A. EVELEIN, *Een romeinse helm uit de Peel. Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 5, 1911, 148–9; M. A. EVELEIN, *Ein römischer Helm des Leidener Museums*. *Præhist. Zeitschr.* 3, 1911, 155–156; A. N. ZADOKS-JOSEPHUS-JITTA, *Die Münzen*. In: H. KLUMBACH (ed.), *Spätromische Gardehelme*. Münchner Beitr. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 15 (München 1973) 70–72.



1 Map of Netherlands with the find spot in the Deurne helmet.

of the textiles and the large and varied collection of leather which was found in association with the metal objects. This is typical of the archaeological obsession with metal, for, as will be argued below, in contemporary terms, the textiles may have formed the most valuable item of the entire assemblage. It is perhaps significant that ultimately it is the leather, discarded as worthless by the finder of the helmet, which now, 90 years later, forms the key to the recovery of the structure of the assemblage and thus to the re-interpretation of its nature.

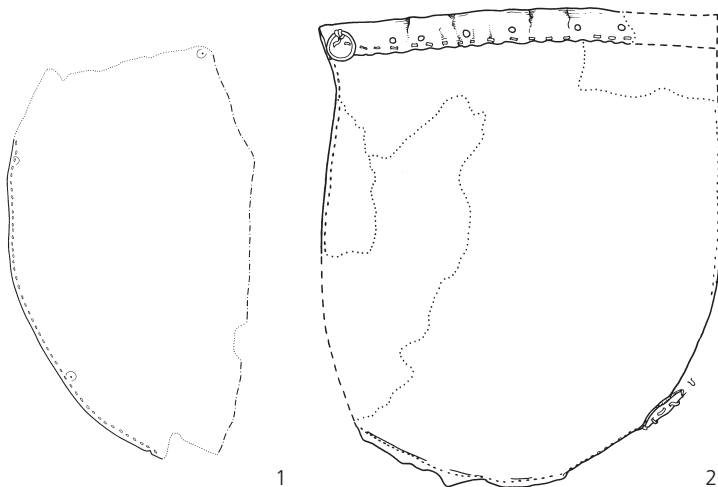
W. C. Braat published the finds from Deurne in the possession of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, in exemplary detail, and though to his credit, he included a description of the leather and a specialist report on the textiles, there was no attempt at analysis⁶. Subsequently, the improved understanding of Roman leatherworking technology and the greater availability of comparative material led to a re-examination of the finds, in the first instance in a project concerning horse gear. Serious doubts as to the nature of the find were raised at this juncture, but the real stimulus to undertake a total re-examination of the leather was the attempt by Aitor Iriarte (Bilbao, Spain) to construct a replica of both the helmet and the associated finds in order to 'equip' an authentic late Roman soldier⁷. The need to solve numerous practical details compelled exceedingly close scrutiny of the leather, while experimentation suggested solutions which could be tested against the finds.

⁶ BRAAT (note 3) 72–80; J. E. LEENE, Analyse der textilen Reste. In: H. KLUMBACH (ed.), Spätromische Gardelhelme. Münchner Beitr. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 15 (München 1973) 80–83.

⁷ A. IRIARTE, Reconstructing the iron core from the Deurne helmet. *Journal Roman Military Equipment Stud.* 7, 1996, 51–57.



2 The helmet from Deurne.



3 The helmet from Deurne. Two sides of the leather helmet cover. – Scale 1 : 6.

THE PURSE

Suspicious concerning the true nature of the Deurne assemblage were aroused immediately the object always referred to as the 'purse' (*Geldbeutel*) was examined. Roman purses are generally about 20–26 cm deep and 8–12 cm wide, with that from Barger-Compascuum a little wider because of the pleating⁸. The sheer size of the Deurne bag makes it highly unlikely that it was a money bag; the handful of *folles* which have always been assumed to have formed the contents would have been impossible to retrieve from its depths. Though with the passage of time now highly unreliable, oral sources do mention that the coins were discovered after the helmet, in a "cavity in a lump of peat"⁹. Going thus against the general tradition, the reports may in this case have some credence.

The bag is made of two pieces of calfskin, still 38 × 35.5 cm in size, and joined by a beaded seam. It is closed at the top by a drawstring passed through holes punched irregularly through the folded edge and secured to at least one bronze ring – probably two originally – at the side. One side is virtually complete while the other, not illustrated by Braat, is cut diagonally across (Fig. 3).

In the conviction that the purse was actually a bag to contain the helmet, new drawings of both remaining pieces were prepared and passed to Aitor Iriarte who had just completed a metal prototype of the helmet. This was shown to fit comfortably into the bag, and the significance of the cut was also immediately apparent (Fig. 4). The damage must have been caused by the spade of the finder and corresponds to the now missing right cheek-piece of the helmet. The helmet had evidently been packed in its carrying bag, and lay on its left side, thus confirming early accounts of both Bos and Van Beurden, that the helmet lay on leather and that leather had also been pulled from the upper surface¹⁰. Significantly, Iriarte noted that the attachment of the wide neck guard by means of buckles was a practical necessity, allowing the guard to be folded inside the helmet bowl. The condition of the helmet at the time of discovery was, therefore, not entirely due to the carelessness of the peat cutter Gabriel Smolenaars, for it had already been partially dismantled in order to fit into its carrying bag.

THE FOOTWEAR

The Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, possesses two complete right shoes, a complete left shoe and fragments of its pair¹¹. According to Braat's rendering of affairs, the pair belonged to the drowned officer and the two loose shoes to companions who attempted to save him from a frightful death in the quagmire. There may have been a fifth shoe, for the family of the finder is said to have kept a fragment of shoe upper and reports of other fragments in a

⁸ K. SCHLABOW, *Der römische Münzschatz von Barger-Compascuum (Drenthe)*. *Palaeohistoria* 5, 1956, 81–87; C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, *Romeinse leervondsten uit Vechten*. *Westerheem* 29, 1980, Afb. 11–12; T.R. BLURTON, *Excavations at Angel Court, Walbrook, 1974*. *Transact. London and Middlesex Archaeolog* 28, 1977, fig. 24 no. 526 (published upside down). The same type carried by Mercury: C. HILL/M. MILLETT/T. BLAGG (eds.), *The Roman Riverside Wall and Monumental Arch in London*. *London and Middlesex Arch. Soc. Special Paper* 3 (London 1980) pl. 41.

⁹ W.A.M. VAN HEUGTEN, *Deurne en de Peel (Boerenbond Deurne 1979)* 9. Other accounts state that the

coins were found separately, lower down than the helmet. 39 coins remain, early accounts consistently mention 41.

¹⁰ BRAAT (note 3) 52. Indeed, the director of the turf-cutting company, Mr. A. Bos, writing to the Museum on 9th December 1911, actually mentions "the little bag from which the helmet had been snatched" (*Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, archive 17.2.1/2*). Unaccountably, Braat ignored this letter in his account.

¹¹ BRAAT (note 3) fig. 12 shoe 1 and 2, Inv. no. 1911/4.11; shoe 3, Inv. no. 1911/4.12; shoe 4, Inv. no. 1911/4.13.

¹² POULS/CROMPVOETS (note 2) 37. These reports could not be verified.



4 The reconstructed cover of the helmet from Deurne in use.

private collection have recently surfaced¹². There is now, unfortunately, no indication to which of the shoes these fragments could have belonged, but it is likely that originally there were indeed three complete pairs of shoes.

All the shoes are severely damaged in the area where the fastenings are to be expected, and the drawings published by Evelein and reproduced by Braat are summary and inaccurate, overlooking much of the essential detail. Re-examination of the shoes, together with traces visible on the earliest photographs, the available comparative material and experiment carried out by Iriarte enable certain suggestions as to the nature of the footwear to be made (Fig. 6,1–6). As is common in Late Roman footwear, the shoes are made from a single piece of cow or calf skin, they are sewn together so that the leather curves up around the foot and the seams are not in contact with the ground. Both of the pair of shoes (Fig. 6,1–2) were severely worn and had been repaired with a rough piece of leather thonged to the outside, which had itself also worn through¹³. These shoes were tied over the instep and possibly at the ankle as well, though comparative material suggest rather that an ankle strap would have been fastened over the surviving decorative loop with a mushroom-headed stud of bone or metal (Fig. 6,7–9). Indeed, some of the bone or metal studs regarded as belt fittings may in fact be shoe fastenings¹⁴.

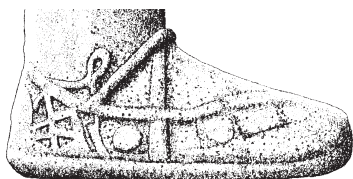
Both right shoes (Fig. 6,3–4) have a markedly asymmetrical cutting pattern which leaves much of the foot bare. The shoes were fastened by means of an integrally cut thong which passed under the foot (the impression is visible on the inside of the shoe), through two slits on either side and crossed to the latchet at the ankle, where it was secured by a stud (Fig. 6, 7–9). This seemingly awkward construction can be discerned on, for instance, the statues of the Tetrarchs at St. Mark's Venice (Fig. 5). Much of the effect of such deeply cut out shoes

¹³ BRAAT (note 3) 73. The description is inaccurate on a number of points: the thick cow hide has delaminated (i. e. split), giving the misleading impression of a 'glued lining'. A fragment of the repair sole has been erroneously stuck inside shoe 1, causing Braat to speak incorrectly

of an insole and an outer sole. All the shoes are single piece construction, without separate soles. The back piece of shoe no. 4 has been lost since Evelein's time.

¹⁴ M. C. BISHOP / J. C. N. COULSTON, *Roman Military Equipment*. (London 1993) fig. 108, nos. 9–12.

must have been achieved through the use of coloured hose and, perhaps, coloured thread in the decorative stitching such as shoe no. 3 (Fig. 6,3). These flimsy shoes appear quite suddenly in the course of the 3rd century and, in conjunction with both iconographic and literary evidence, M. Speidel has set out a strong case for regarding them as the *campagi militares* of Diocletian's Edict¹⁵. Light shoes which leave a large portion of the foot bare are depicted so frequently on soldiers' grave stones of the 3rd and 4th centuries that these too can be regarded as symbolic of military status.



5 Relief of the Tetrarch in Venice: shoe with lace passing through the upper.

The shoes are significant in another respect, for they emphasize that it is not only metal which was deposited here, but also clothing, including a fine mantle with woven-in coloured decoration and a coarser fabric which may have belonged to leggings¹⁶. The weaving technique of the mantle is paralleled only in the Eastern Empire and though never included in any assessment of the nature of the Deurne assemblage, the entire set of clothing is as essential to the definition and presentation of military identity as is helmet, cross-bow brooch and weaponry.

On discovery, the spur was still attached to one of the shoes, but was ripped off by the finder, who tossed the shoe aside¹⁷. On the outside of shoe 3 (Fig. 6,3), a thong impression which does not line up with the slits belongs to the spur attachment. The bronze spur fits neatly to the back, and its presence not only explains the unusually severe scuffing in this area, but also the off-centre placement of the back seams of the shoe: this shoe was evidently made especially for a rider. Iriarte's experiments indicated that when used with soft, unnailed footwear, the short-armed hook-spur requires straps wound around the instep of the foot as well as across the ankle. The iron prick is corroded, and is set slightly off-centre as is necessary to spare the horse's flanks since the heel naturally turns inwards when riding without stirrups. Though shoes 3 and 4 could have belonged to the same person, the pair (Fig. 6,1–2), is rather smaller and very much more worn. The shoe sizes (with due allowance for shrinkage, 39/40 and 38) are, for this type of footwear and for the Roman period, all adult male¹⁸. The shoes therefore belong to at least two different persons, but as the spur does not belong to the surviving *pair* of shoes, Braat's association between spur, shoes and drowned cavalryman becomes distinctly shaky. Furthermore, the shoes – like all the other leather – must have become waterlogged and enclosed in anaerobic conditions quite rapidly for them to have been preserved at all. As these are the very conditions which result in the preservation of the bog bodies, the suggestion put forward by Braat and Dieck that the legs and torso lay higher up in the bog and had therefore decayed, is untenable¹⁹.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Dr M. P. Speidel (Honolulu) for showing me his unpublished manuscript "Campagus Militaris" and for allowing me to quote from it. *campagi militares* priced at 75 den. in S. LAUFFER, *Diocletians Preisedikt* (Berlin 1971) 9.11. Finds from London and Vindolanda unpublished, from Arbon, Switzerland, H. BREM, *Katalog der römischen Funde aus dem Kastellgraben* 1990. In: *Archäologie im Thurgau* 1. Arbon–Arbon Felix (Frauenfeld 1992) 148 and fig. 106.

¹⁶ LEENE (note 6) 80–83; C. VERHECKEN-LAMMENS, *Textile fragments found together with a late Roman helmet*. *Arch. Textiles Newsletter* 22, 1996, 17–18.

¹⁷ *Letters van Beurden* 20.6. 1910 and *Bos* 9.12. 1911, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, archive, 17.2.1/1; 17.2.1/2.

¹⁸ C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, *A Question of Gender in a Military Context*. *Helinium* 34, 1994 (1998) 342–362, fig. 3.

¹⁹ W. VAN DER SANDEN, *Mens en moeras* (Assen 1990) 47–8.

THE LEATHER SWORD SHEATH AND THE MISSING ELEMENTS

Iron would be severely corroded in the acid environment of the peat bog, but since Evelein²⁰ mentions that some scraps of the iron casque were still present on discovery it is remarkable that not a trace of the far more massive sword remained, despite the additional protection of the thick, cow hide sheath. Braat found his explanation in the local “tradition” concerning the discovery of a golden sword in the neighbourhood long ago, but such traditions are too common to have any credence and in this instance almost certainly developed as a result of the discovery of the helmet. About 21 cm of the sword sheath remains, with a straight cut end which is probably the mouth and parallel sides: it has broken at just about the point where the scabbard slide would be expected. Taking account of a possible internal lining, it would suit a blade about 5–5.5 cm wide (and therefore some 75–80 cm long)²¹. The silver fitting, which was assumed to come from the mouth of a dagger sheath²² is a normal late Roman chape²³ and presumably, therefore, also belongs to the sheath even though the faceting is not continued on the surviving upper portion of the sheath (Fig. 6, 10–11). Bone and ivory cannot withstand the peat acids, so sword or sheath fittings are not to be expected to survive. More significant, however, is the absence of any trace of a leather belt or of metal belt fittings and it may be that only the sheath was included in the assemblage.

Nevertheless, the account, sent to the Museum in 1911 by A. Bos, specifically to “set the record straight” does raise some intriguing possibilities, now unfortunately unverifiable²⁴. On the day after the discovery, he returned to the site, collecting the scattered leather and textiles, as well as several fragments of wood. These he identified as a spear shaft (round section) and a bow (flatter section), an attribution already mentioned in Van Beurden’s account to the Museum, written on Monday 20th June, three days after the discovery. Although remnants of the natural vegetation of the area, which included trees and shrubs (see below) might have been misinterpreted, Bos seems to have been an observant man, and the description needs to be taken seriously. On the smoothed, circular shaft he discerned impressions of metal fittings and, in addition, he noted a block of peat, some 30 cm long bearing the impression of “a sword blade” about 2.5 cm wide, the metal totally decayed and leaving only a “dark blue-grey powder”. This unmistakable description of vivianite is certainly indicative of some iron object, perhaps a spear head, since the imprint is too narrow for the sword. An alternative explanation for the wood is to be seen on military tombstones: the wooden staff of office (Fig. 7). Linen clothing would have decayed in the peat, and most of the woollen fabric was scattered at the time of discovery. Likewise, the missing spur and helmet cheek piece can be attributed to the carelessness of the finders.

THE SHEET LEATHER

From the start, although there was never any mention of the discovery of human remains, it was assumed that the Deurne assemblage was the tangible evidence of a ‘mishap’ befalling an officer of the Roman army²⁵. One of the inscriptions on the helmet indicates that the owner

²⁰ M. A. EVELEIN, Een romeinse helm uit de Peel. Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden 5, 1911, 132; 136; M. A. EVELEIN, Ein römischer Helm des Leidener Museums. *Præhist. Zeitschr.* 3, 1911, 147–148.

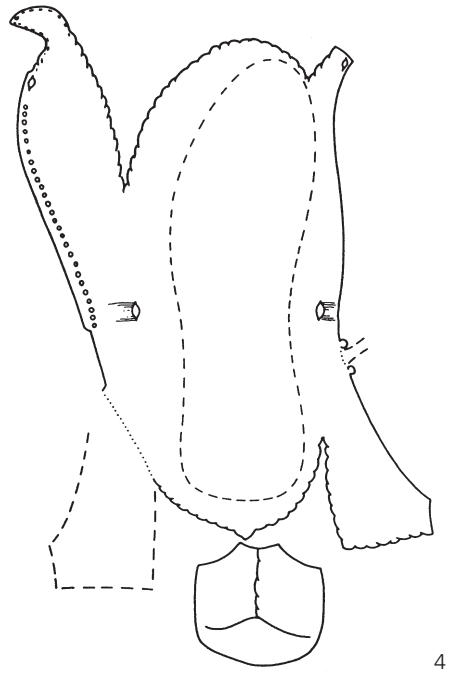
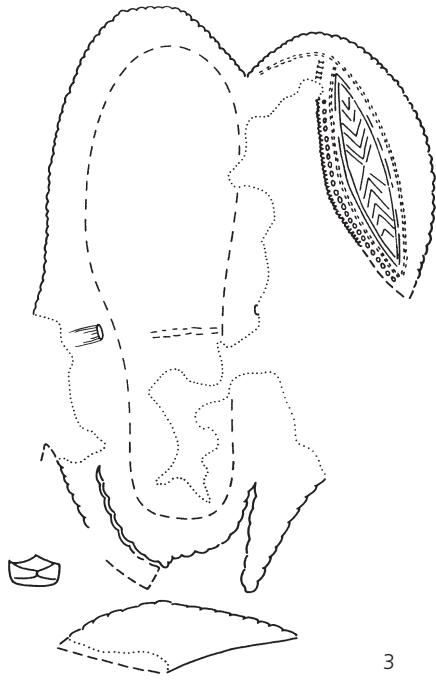
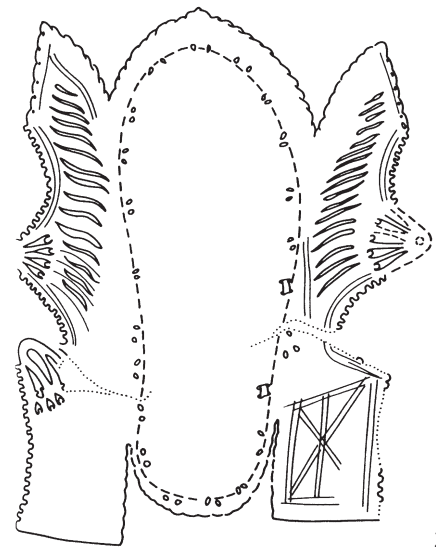
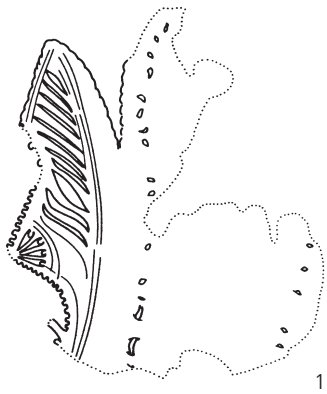
²¹ BISHOP/COULSTON (note 14) fig. 116.

²² BRAAT (note 3) 62, pl. 22.2.

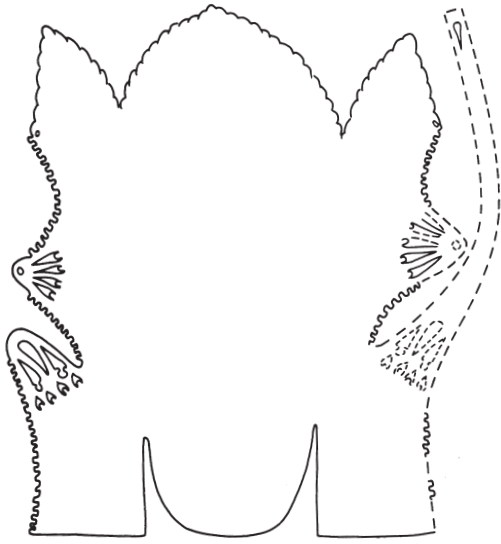
²³ BISHOP/COULSTON (note 14) fig. 116 nos. 2–3; fig. 117.

²⁴ *cf.* note 17.

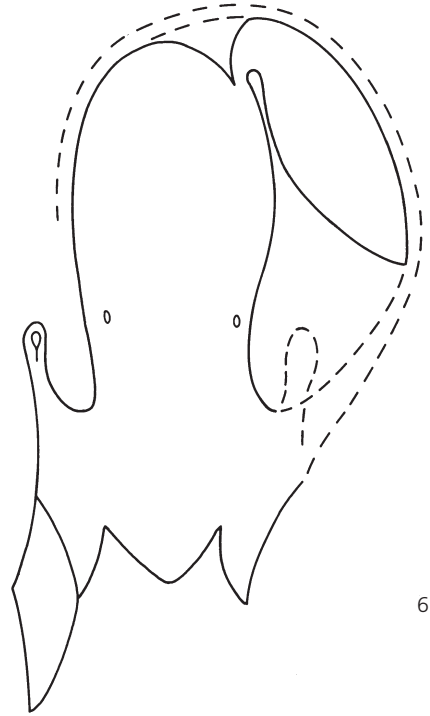
²⁵ M. A. EVELEIN, Ein römischer Helm des Leidener Museums. *Præhist. Zeitschr.* 3, 1911, 144.



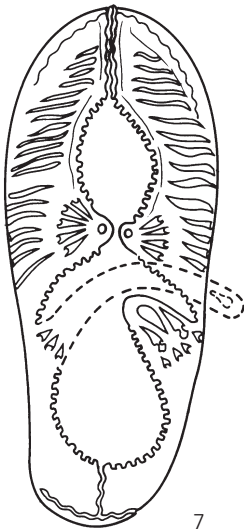
6 The shoes from Deurne (part 1). From the grain side. – Scale 1:6.



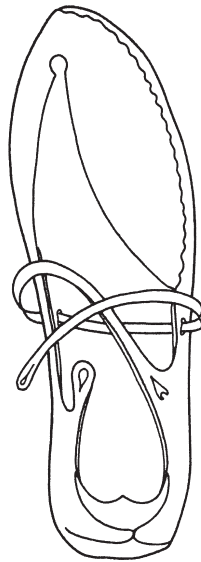
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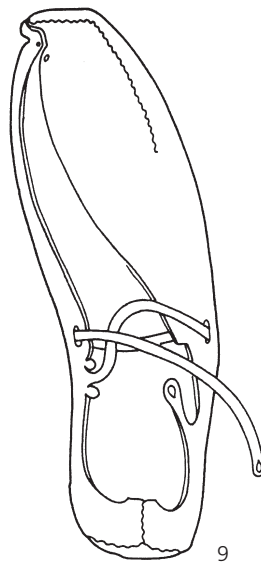
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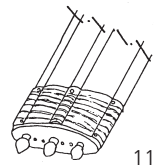
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6 The shoes from Deurne (part 2). 5, 6 reconstructed cutting patterns; 7–9 suggested fastenings; 10 remains of the leather scabbard; 11 Iriarte's reconstruction of the chape. – 5–6, 10 scale 1:6.



7 Tombstone of Flavius Augustalis from Aquileia.

was a member of the *Stablesiani VI*, and the associated spur and horse bells nicely confirmed the presence of the steed²⁶. Both Evelein and Braat therefore concluded that a quantity of sheet leather belonged to the saddle or some kind of barding (according to Evelein, the holes in panels A and C were to allow the passage of ‘the stirrups’), but recent research on Roman cavalry saddles precludes this possibility entirely²⁷.

Re-assembly of the surviving panels and analysis of the various hems and seams revealed that the drawings and descriptions presented by Braat required correction (several pieces were incorrectly mounted), but for ease of comparison his designations have been retained on Figs. 8 and 9. The rectangular panels (72 × 52 cm) of goat skin are joined with a variant of the waterproof seam well known from earlier leather complexes, and all except C2 are edged with a straight bound hem, reinforced at the joins²⁸. The internal logic of the seams permits the identification of adjoining panels and also, in combination with criteria such as leather quality, creasing and grain direction, indicates the relative positions of the panels. The resulting sheet is minimally three panels long and four wide, but was probably rather longer²⁹. The two corner fragments (B1 and E) have a reinforced position through which some kind of fastening – probably a loop and toggle arrangement – was inserted. The fragments thus belong to a rectangular sheet ca. 208 × 216 or 285 cm (depending on whether three or four sheets are

²⁶ BRAAT (note 3) 60, pl. 22.

²⁷ M. A. EVELEIN, Een romeinsche helm uit de Peel. Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden 5, 1911, 150. cf. C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY / P. CONNOLLY, The Roman cavalry saddle. *Britannia* 22, 1991, 33–50.

²⁸ C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, New light on old tents. *Journal Roman Military Equipment Stud.* 1, 1990, 109–137, figs. 1, 4.

²⁹ Panels D1 and B1 cannot belong to the same sheet, nor, on seam logic can the group D1, C1, C3 and G be transposed to any other location.

used). Sheeting of similar dimensions occurs amongst the military leatherwork at sites such as Vindolanda, Newstead and Valkenburg (all unpublished), in all cases sharing many of the characteristics of leather used for the *contubernium* tents. Though other functions can be suggested, these sheets probably form one-man bivouac tents. Ties at the four corners would enable the sheets to be joined together to form a larger shelter if more men travelled together, in the manner of modern army expeditionary tents. The leather sheeting is water and wind proof and could be propped up with odd pieces of wood, or even suspended over a rope slung between two spears, as seems to be indicated by the creasing across the central panel of an extremely well-preserved association from Vindolanda. Such bivouac tents are typical for small, highly mobile units such as the *Stablesiani*, as field army vexillations, must have been³⁰.

The extensive damage to the central section is not fortuitous, but relates to the structure of the assemblage as a whole. The consistency in the damage to certain areas while other areas were well preserved, reveals that the assemblage had been carefully packed with the tent serving as the final wrapping. The helmet, packed in its carrying bag, must have lain on the corner sheets A-B-D, thus protecting them, with the opposite corner E folded over, and fragment G and the missing corner interleaving. At the discovery, the top of the bundle was cut away unnoticed, removing the central swathe of leather sheeting, severing the top of the bag and ripping off the right cheek piece. All of this was tossed aside before the gleam of metal caught the eye of Gabriel Smolenaars and the helmet was lifted from its bed of enclosing leather. The analysis of the form and function of the leather allows a reconstruction of the find circumstances to be put forward which is quite at variance with the accepted view of this find as the equipment of a drowned officer. The metal objects can be shown to have been carefully packed and the helmet from Deurne is most likely a deliberate deposition.

ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

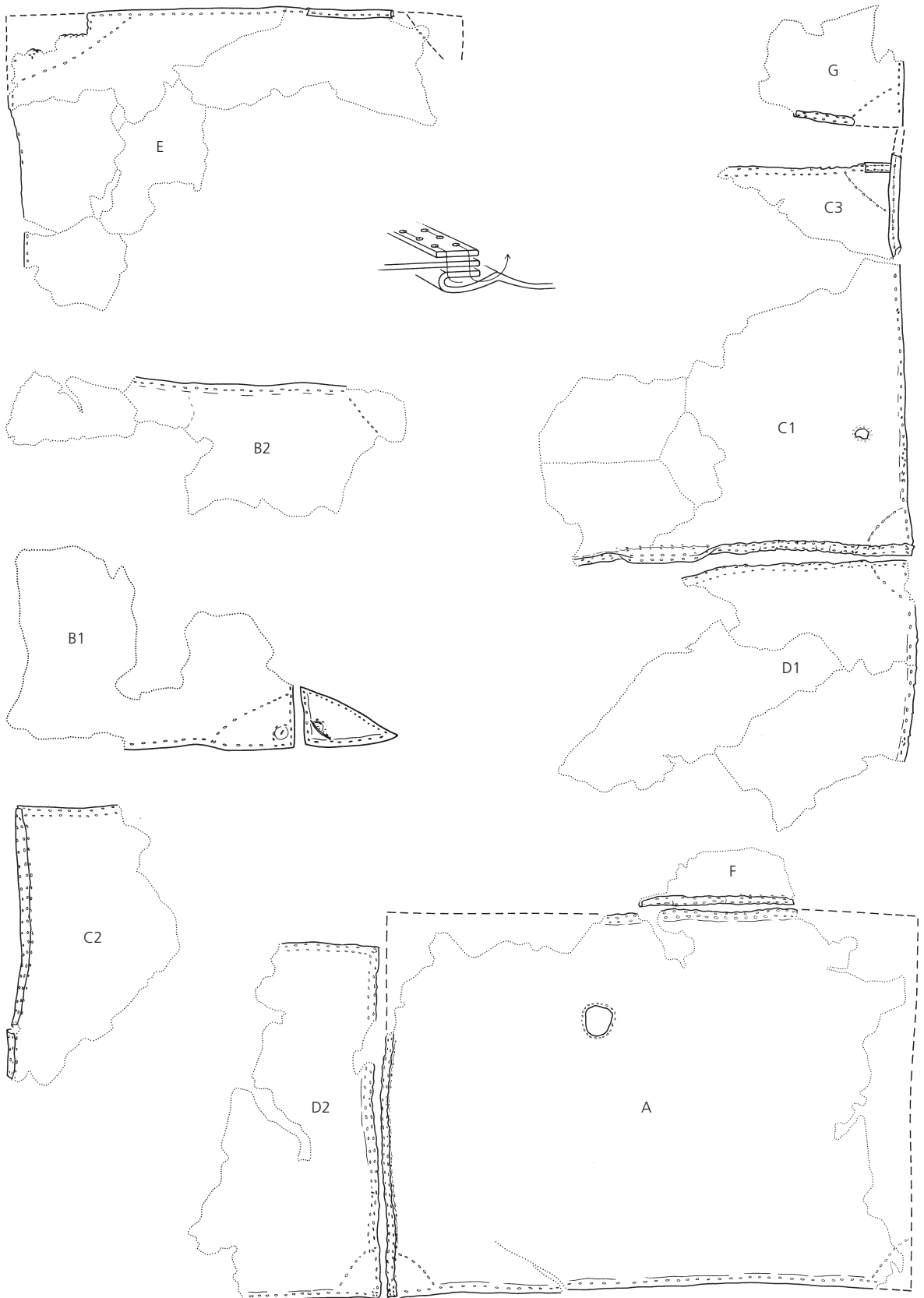
According to early 19th century travellers and local tradition, the Peel was an extensive, isolated and, in places, still treacherous bog. In the reconstruction of the events of the summer of 1910, it is important to note that it took Van Beurden, who alerted the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, to the find, four hours to reach Meyel from Roermond. Such recent memories clearly coloured the perception of past conditions, but this view is certainly not supported by recent pollen analysis from the area.

Samples of peat taken from the leather itself are currently being analysed by Dr. H. Joosten to obtain a better insight into the micro-environment surrounding the finds³¹, and to clarify the conditions in the immediate area in the early 4th century AD, but earlier cores already indicate that the peat was only just beginning to develop in this period. In the Roman period this was not a landscape of bottomless pools and clinging mosses in which man and horse could disappear for ever, but an area of damp hollows and rather rapidly encroaching moss, with beech and hazel scrub³². The mass of rootlets still adhering to the sheet leather (which Braat described as sewing twine) had from the outset raised suspicions that the leather had not been sunk very deeply in the bog: for some time after deposition it must have been water-

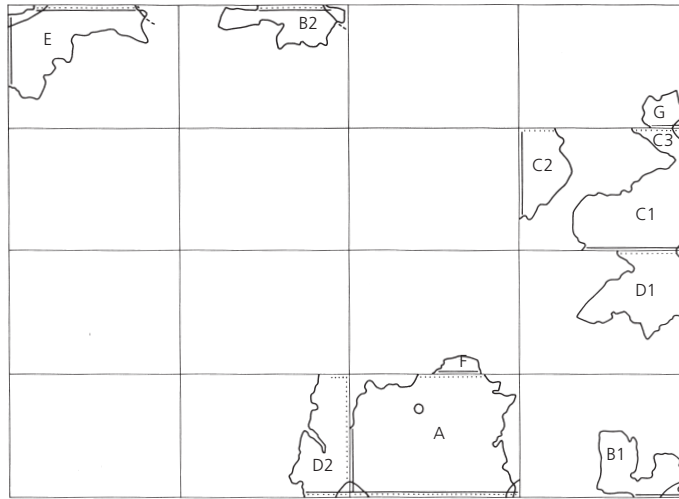
³⁰ M. P. SPEIDEL, *Stablesiani. The raising of new cavalry units during the crisis of the Roman Empire*. *Chiron* 4, 1974, 541–546 and pers. commentary 1997.

³¹ Botanisches Institut, Ernst Moritz Arndt Universität, Greifswald, Germany, research still in progress.

³² H. JOOSTEN, *De gouden helm*. *Jaarverslag Werkgroep Behoud De Peel*, 1994, 17–19 and pers. commentary.



8 The sheet leather from Deurne, from the flesh side. – Scale 1:8.



9 Reconstruction of the complete sheet from Deurne. – Scale ca. 1:32.

logged but still within reach of living vegetation. That the bundle could have been lost by some unfortunate traveller is therefore equally improbable, for it could easily have been retrieved from the 30–60 cm of spongy moss which Joosten envisages at the spot. Preliminary results of samples taken from the tent leather and the helmet cover reveal that the bundle containing the helmet was deposited in a wet depression in *Sphagnum cuspidatum* peat, with alder carr in the neighbourhood³³.

THE NATURE OF THE ASSEMBLAGE

Thus on environmental evidence as well as the internal structure of the find, the Deurne helmet can be re-classified as one of the many deliberate depositions of military equipment, familiar from earlier periods, as indeed can, to all probability, the other helmets of this type discussed by Klumbach³⁴. If, however, it is accepted that this is a deliberate deposition, then there is, in view of the uncertainties surrounding the actual find circumstances, no compelling reason to regard it as a single association. Consequently, the coin-supported date of the assemblage need no longer stand and the way lies open for reconsideration of the dating of the individual items in the deposit. Though most items seem to fit quite comfortably in the earlier 4th century, the shoes, on present evidence, might be rather later. Footwear in late 3rd and early 4th Century complexes is still predominantly of nailed construction and on depictions, such as on the relief of the Tetrarchs in Venice, the separate, thick soles can be clearly distinguished (Fig. 5). However, close parallels for the Deurne shoes are now (2003) being found at Cuijk in levels dating to the first half of the 4th century.

³³ Amongst the leather from Deurne stored in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, are some unrelated fragments which are quite different in character and appearance. *Fagopyrum* in the two samples taken from the fragments confirm a medieval date. These unrelated

pieces may have been collected later, giving rise to local accounts of leather 'flapping around the Peel for weeks after the discovery of the helmet'.

³⁴ H. KLUMBACH (ed.), *Spätromische Gardehelme*. Münchner Beitr. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 15 (München 1973).

Furthermore, all the items in the assemblage themselves fulfil independent roles in deliberate depositions in watery places. Helmets, swords, coins, fibulae are all regular offerings in rivers, temples or ritual shafts, but shoes also form part of the ritual activity associated with bogs and wells³⁵. Thus shoes belonging to two or perhaps three individuals might represent deposition on different occasions. As a recent bog, the Peel is not as rich in offerings as the bogs of Drenthe, but the recent finds from the Maas Valley reveal that Deurne is not an entirely isolated phenomenon regionally³⁶. The late Iron Age Helden disc, for instance, was found only a few kilometres to the south³⁷. Both locations are near to the sand ridge which in Roman times formed a natural route between the valleys of the Maas (starting at Blerick) and the Astense Aa, and if the peat encroachment in the early 4th century was as rapid as Joosten envisages, these offerings may have been intended to avert a very real threat to communications³⁸.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps pushing coincidence too far to suggest that the items are the result of a sudden spate of individual depositions in a very restricted area in a relatively short space of time, and the internal logic of the assemblage does also support the conclusion that the group forms a single deposit. The deposit can be reconstructed as follows: The partially dismantled helmet, packed in its carrying bag, perhaps also enclosing shoes and spurs, were wrapped together with hose, more shoes, coins and horse bells in a fine cloak which was secured by a cross-bow brooch. The bundle was placed on a leather bivouac tent and was rolled up together with a sword sheath, a spear and possibly a staff, and was placed in a shallow pool. The pair of smaller shoes are in a more questionable relationship, but a cavalryman of rank would be expected to have a groom, and it is to him that these might belong³⁹.

VALUE

The actual value of the deposition needs to be put into perspective. Spur and fibula are bronze and far removed from the Imperial gifts of gold⁴⁰. The shoes are competently made, but the decoration is rapid and careless, the effect relying on colour rather than on workmanship. Iriarte noted the same while reconstructing the helmet: it is made of simple elements riveted together, from a distance spectacular, but on closer inspection the lack of attention to detail becomes apparent. The value of the 41 folles is negligible, and, if deposited intentionally, their symbolism must be sought elsewhere, marking by date or by mint significant moments in a career, or mementos of a homeward journey: starting in the Balkans in 315 AD then via Rome to Trier⁴¹. In this case, the closing date may not be entirely relevant for the date of the deposition of the assemblage: it should also be noted that the coins are worn.

The helmet is an Imperial issue, the amount of precious metal being recorded on the outside in the careful grading of Imperial largess in strict accordance with rank: 368/9 grams of silver with a small amount of gilding⁴². In comparison with some of the gifts of silver vessels this is

³⁵ C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, And did those feet in ancient time... Feet and shoes as a material projection of the self. In: P. BAKER/C. FORCEY/S. JUNDI/R. WITCHER, TRAC 98. Proceedings of the eighth annual theoretical Roman archaeology conference, Leicester 1998 (Oxford 1999) 131–140.

³⁶ cf. below pp. 309 ff. J. PRINS, The 'Fortune' of a late Roman officer.

³⁷ M. DE GROOTH, De sierschijf van Helden Limburg.

Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden 67, 1987, 67–77.

³⁸ JOOSTEN (note 32) 19.

³⁹ M. P. SPEIDEL, The Soldiers' Servants. *Ancient Soc.* 20, 1989, 239–248.

⁴⁰ R. NOLL, Ein goldene "Kaiserfibel" aus Niederemmel vom Jahre 316. *Bonner Jahrb.* 174, 1974, 221–44.

⁴¹ ZADOKS-JOSEPHUS-JITTA (note 5) 72.

⁴² BRAAT (note 3) 61.

a very modest amount⁴³. Depending on the nature of the weave, the cloak could have been equally, if not more, valuable: military cloaks (*fibulatorium*) in the damaged and incomplete section of Diocletian's Edict vary between 4000 den (basic soldier's mantle) to 12000 den, with substantial additions for patterning and dyeing⁴⁴. To judge from comparable textiles from Dura Europos and Palmyra, the Deurne cloak is an exceptionally fine Eastern fabric which, with its patterned weave and coloured decoration is probably also an Imperial issue and equally a badge of military rank and status⁴⁵. Here one of the many oral traditions surrounding the discovery of the helmet takes on a new significance. Although the "mass of coarse hair" Mrs Smolenaars remembered extracting from the helmet as she washed the inside was probably the inner felt lining of the helmet, the possibility needs to be considered that this was the remains of the cylindrical cap or *pilleus Pannonicus* made of lambskin⁴⁶. Cross-bow fibulae can be regarded as symbols of military status, and here forms a set with the spur. The distinctive footwear is part of the same conscious, military assemblage displayed on late Roman tombstones. It should be noted that shoes like 3 and 4 are rather awkward to walk in (in contrast to nos. 1 and 2), but on horseback, the feet, without stirrups as support, hang down, displaying the decorated vamp to maximum advantage. With a spear or staff, the resemblance to the assemblage depicted on the Aquileia tombstone is almost complete (Fig. 3).

The assemblage is therefore not simply a collection of valuable material offered as a votive to appease a deity, but seems to represent a very deliberate laying aside of a set of attributes intimately connected with the expression of Roman military service. In this, the assemblage may be linked to the earlier deposits of military equipment in rivers or temples, like that of Empel (Netherlands), which appear to be connected to rituals marking the end of military careers⁴⁷. At Empel, it was only the violent destruction of the building that led to the preservation of a late 2nd century helmet which had evidently been hung up on a wall together with at least two barbarian shields. Here too, there was the suspicion that in the earlier weapon votives, sword sheaths had been offered as a *pars pro toto*, a practice also known elsewhere⁴⁸. In the 2nd century the practice of depositing helmets and other equipment in watery contexts seems to have been superseded by the above-ground display of votives as well as the erection of altars, though outside the Roman empire, bog deposition continued on a grand scale. The re-emergence of watery locations as sites for depositions in the 4th century may then be connected with the influx of Germanic mercenaries in newly raised formations such as the Stablesian guard⁴⁹.

As in earlier periods, the weapons may have been returned to military stores, but equally they might have been retained, for it is significant that these are the items of equipment which could be most easily adapted to barbarian usage. As S. James argues, military identities were becoming increasingly distinct during the 3rd century with tombstones in particular empha-

⁴³ For instance, R. LAUR-BELART, *Der spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst/Aargau* (Augst 1967), two plates of 15 pounds, and silver ingots marked as 3 pounds = c. 950 gr.

⁴⁴ LAUFFER (note 15) sect. XIX, XXIV.

⁴⁵ R. PEISTER / L. BELLINGER, *The Textiles. The Excavations at Dura Europos, Final Report IV, part II* (New Haven 1945) textile no. 36, p. 22, pl. XIII; A. SCHMIDT-COLINET / A. STAUFFER / K. AL-AS'AD, *Die Textilien aus Palmyra. Neue und alte Funde* (Mainz 2000) textile cat. no. 271 suggested as from a cloak, p. 42, note 154.

⁴⁶ POULS / CROMPVOETS (note 2) 46–47; M. P. J. VAN DEN BRAND, *Lief en Leed in en over de Oude Peel* (Venray

1982) 20; H. UBL, *Pilleus Pannonicus, die Feldmütze des spätrömischen Heeres*. In: H. MITSCHA-MÄRHEIM / H. FRIESINGER / H. KERCHLER (eds.), *Festschr. Richard Pittioni. Arch. Austriaca Beih.* 14 (Wien 1976) 214–241.

⁴⁷ C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, *Wapentuig voor Hercules*. In: N. ROYMANS / T. DERKS (eds.), *De tempel van Empel. Een Hercules heiligdom in het woongebied van de Bataven* ('s Hertogenbosch 1994) 92–107.

⁴⁸ For Spanish deposits, pers. commentary A. Iriarte.

⁴⁹ M. MARTIN, *Wealth and treasure in the west, 4th–7th century*. In: L. WEBSTER / M. BROWN (eds.), *The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400–900* (London 1997) 48–66.

sisung the role of belts, fibulae and mantles in defining this identity⁵⁰. To these can now be added shoes, probably hose, perhaps the cylindrical cap and possibly also metal horse bells. It is, therefore, the specifically *Roman* elements that are shed.

What a member of the Stablesian guard was doing here is another question. The poor sandy soils of Brabant were virtually abandoned by the mid of the 3rd century, and the earliest, ephemeral, phase of resettlement dates to well over a hundred years later⁵¹. To judge from the clustering of later Frankish settlements around the long-abandoned villae, the units of ownership continued to be maintained in recognisable form and these may have formed the basis of land grants to barbarian settlers: the land was abandoned and useless, so it cost the Roman authorities nothing⁵². We can only speculate that the complete set of military attributes deposited in the Peel were offered by one of the first to be given a retirement grant of land in this area. That the gift was not only infertile but – unexpectedly – also subject to peat encroachment may have been an additional stimulus for the recipient to reject the entire Roman past.

By tidying away a fictitious corpse and destroying a romantic illusion the way may now be open for a reassessment of the date of the assemblage. But whatever explanation is now offered, it lacks the neat finality of the drowned officer, and, it must be recognised, is even more subjectively rooted in current perceptions of the past than were the dramatic events so vividly described by Braat.

⁵⁰ S. JAMES, The community of soldiers. In: P. BAKER / C. FORCEY / S. JUNDI / R. WITCHER, TRAC 98. Proceedings of the eighth annual theoretical Roman archaeology conference, Leicester 1998 (Oxford 1999) 14–25.

⁵¹ F. THEUWS / H. A. HIDDINK, Der Kontakt zu Rom. In: W. MENGHIN / P. PÉRIN / K. VON WELCK / A. WIECZOREK (eds.), Die Franken. Wegbereiter Europas. Cat. Mannheim (Mainz 1996) 75–76.

⁵² W. A. VAN ES, Van Maastricht naar Rhenen: een wandeling in de laat romeinse tijd. 13^{de} Kroon-Voordracht (Amsterdam 1991) 10, 20 for Voerendaal and Neer-

haren. C. H. WHITTAKER, Agri deserti. In: M. I. FINLEY (ed.), Studies in Roman Property (Cambridge 1976) 137–165.

ABBILDUNGSNACHWEIS: 1, 3, 6, 8, 9 Zeichnungen B. Donker / Amsterdam Archaeological Centre. – 2 Photo Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden. – 4 Photo A. Iriarte. – 5, 7 Zeichnung M. C. Bishop. – WISA Frankfurt a. M. (V. Hassenkamp, TRH); Datenübernahme, Einbindung in die Druckvorstufe, Überarbeitung 1; Montage 3, 6, 8; Typographie, Nordpfeile, Maßstab.