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Between mountains and frontiers: the Roman settlement system in the provinces of Germania Superior, Raetia and Noricum

Pazmany, K.

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Author: Pazmany, K.

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7. Concluding thoughts: A settlement system with different regional patterns

The Roman settlement system consisted of a complex constellation of different kinds of settlements dispersed over many diverse landscapes within the Empire. The study of urbanism has for a very long time been considered one of the key themes necessary for developing an understanding of ancient societies, and this is no different for the Roman period. Exploring the character of the Roman settlement system in the northern Alpine region, focussing on the provinces of Germania Superior, Raetia and Noricum, was one of the central aims of this research. This included further questions regarding the development of this system, the defining elements of a Roman centre, the various ways different kinds of centres emerged and were integrated into the larger economic and political whole.

Research concerning urban development during the Roman period in the northern Alpine region has so far been characterised by a local approach, with the focus being either on one specific archaeological site, or on one specific region. All too often these regions of study have been defined by modern administrative borders. Rarely has this great swathe of territory comprising the rivers draining north of the Alps been approached as one study area. More frequently these three provinces have been considered additions to research focussing on Roman Gaul or *Pannonia*. The demarcation of the northern Alpine region created a unique opportunity to explore the urban developments of the Roman period in this part of the Empire. Perhaps not surprisingly the analysis of the settlement pattern across the three provinces in the Roman period allowed the identification of some clear divisions to be identified within the study area. Regional differences were observable across several categories of evidence concerning the settlements, including municipal status, size, monumentality and the influence of the army on urban development. The patterns observed could often be seen to belong to broader regional trends extending both west and east of the study region. Some of these related to historical differences between these regions that pre-dated the Roman period, such as the attitude of Late Iron Age tribes towards the encroaching power of the Roman Empire. Other regional patterns were either exacerbated or created by administrative structures of the Roman state, and its methods of conquest and governance.

The settlement system of the pre-Roman period not only served as a starting point for this study, it also formed an impetus for further urban developments in the region. The conventional *oppidum* model in which large Late Iron Age defended hilltop sites were interpreted as the largest *foci* of essentially pre-urban societies needs to be replaced. Recent research - not in the least under the guidance of M. Fernandez-Götz - has demonstrated that the settlement system of the Late Iron Age in temperate Europe prior to the Roman conquest was more diverse, responsive and complex. Largely defended or undefended, densely occupied centres developed both on hill tops and on open land without a hierarchical structure *per se*. These places were surrounded by smaller settlements and rural sites. Typical Roman products, such as ceramic wares and amphorae, express the convenience of the contacts between these northern regions and the Mediterranean area at the time. The Norican tribes, united under the Norican kingdom, for example, built a *friendly* relationship with Rome, which resulted in several trading posts being inhabited by Italian traders. The *emporium* at the Magdalensberg is probably the most well-known example. Nevertheless, the overall settlement system in the northern Alpine region around the middle of the 1st century BC underwent a clear change. Many important sites became largely abandoned, such as the site in Manching. This can be attributed to several different causes, including natural processes or rivalries between different tribes. Nevertheless, there are increasing signs that the time of the Roman conquest was

characterised by a higher degree of continuity than was previously assumed. Evidence for this has been found at religious sites, rural settlements and early Roman military posts.

Although the settlement pattern seems to have been fairly comparable over most of the northern Alpine region at this time, from the conquest of the northern Alpine region onwards, different accents became more and more pronounced. These were often the direct result of deliberate policy making by the Roman emperors. A first determining phase entailed the Gallic war led by Caesar during which the Jura region was incorporated into the Roman territory. This region, which was Gallic in origin, remained different from the rest of the northern Alpine region over the following centuries. Chapter 1 and 4 showed that there was a strong continuing affiliation with Gaul, especially in terms of its administrative organisation and the emergence of large monumental subordinate centres. A second phase can be identified in the last decades of the 1st century BC and the first decades of the 1st century AD, during which the Norican and Raetian tribes were overpowered by Roman troops led by Tiberius. This extended the northern frontier to the banks of the Danube. However, it was not until the first half of the 1st century AD that the Romans started actively administering the region. It was most likely Domitian who established a stable and peaceful situation at the Rhine and created the province of Germania Superior. Awaiting the issuing of administrative power to local communities, several Roman posts were erected in the newly conquered territories, including the later veteran towns of *Augusta Raurica* and *Iulia Equestris* and the sites on the Auerberg and the Magdalensberg. These early posts quickly lost their function after the Romans allowed an active municipalisation policy, in some regions causing a clear alteration in the existing settlement system. Large Roman centres in the southern half of Germania Superior, including the sites in Avenches and Langres, often developed from pre-existing centres. Alterations of a Roman kind to these town plans have generally been dated to the reign of Augustus, and show the influence of the Roman conception of town planning. By contrast, a clear change in the location preference of centres in the province of Noricum could be observed, shifting from settlements located at altitude to centres located in the valleys. The foundations of the earliest chartered towns have been ascribed to Caesar and Augustus and all were situated in the southern parts of the later province of Germania Superior. After Claudius's municipal development of the province of Noricum, the entire northern Alpine region gradually became filled with towns and communities enjoying different administrative freedoms. Defined by a municipal status, or indirectly by the attestation of municipal magistrates, about 30 self-governing towns could be identified across the entire northern Alpine region.

This municipalisation process left the northern Alpine region characterised by several regions with different administrative structures (chapter 2). Firstly, the province of Noricum had eight *municipia*, of which one was titled *colonia* during the Severan period. These chartered towns were situated around the northern and southern borders of the province. It is believed that the mountainous interior regions, which were rich in natural resources, belonged to imperial domains. From a municipal point of view, the province of Germania Superior fell into a northern and a southern half. The southern half was characterised by the highest number of *coloniae* in the entire study area, whilst in the northern half *civitates* predominated, with centres that had often developed from a military post after the pacification of the area. The province of Raetia remained rather empty in terms of chartered towns, with the *municipium Augusta Vindelicum* as the only exception. One imagines that the actual administrative organisation of the province might have been similar to northern Germania Superior with numerous *civitates*. Unfortunately, the epigraphic and archaeological research cannot confirm the existence of such *civitates*, despite the suggestions made for sites such as *Brigantium* or *Curia*. In contrast to the situation in neighbouring regions, the civilian centres that developed in the vicinity of legionary bases in the northern Alpine region remained under military supervision. Although often suggested and stimulated by the discovery of bronze

tablets belonging to a municipal charter near the legionary camp of *Lauriacum*/Enns, no municipal status could be confirmed for any of the legionary centres within the three provinces.

The municipal promotion of the chartered towns went hand in hand with the administrative subordination of many other centres, not all of them small or insignificant. Criticism has arisen over recent decades regarding the high number of studies on Roman urbanism focussing solely on self-governing centres, overlooking the importance of and the interplay with all other intermediate levels of the settlement system including its rural hinterland.⁹⁶³ H. Gräf, among others, has stressed that centres with urban or central functions could be relatively small and even indistinguishable from villages.⁹⁶⁴ For a better understanding of the different elements of the Roman settlement system, the definition of urbanism was broadened from an administrative political vision - based upon the presence of a town charter and the attestation of municipal magistrates - to a more functional understanding of the concept of 'urban'. The broad diversity of subordinate centres and their varied services were discussed extensively in chapter 3. Subordinate centres were often essential stepping stones within the settlement system, allowing people and goods to move from one place to another, not in the least the road stations. Furthermore, some of these subordinate centres took up a very specific place within the wider system, such as that of a regional market, production place, religious or logistical centre. Connections between chartered towns and the development of subordinate centres could be seen in the investments made by the urban elite in sanctuary sites located within a town's territory, for example. The site of *Bedaum*/Seebruck in north-west Noricum was especially enlightening in this regard since epigraphic evidence informed us about the involvement of the *duumviri* of the *municipium Iuvavum*/Salzburg in the organisation of festivities for the local god *Bedaum*.

Part of the success of the administrative structures through which Rome governed was that they allowed and encouraged the participation of local municipal aristocracies, or even village elites. Urban competition created a certain hierarchy within the settlement system, which could furthermore be expressed in the presence of public buildings and infrastructure for example. As has been seen in chapter 4, monumentally built-up hubs, typical for Roman urban places, were not restricted only to the centres that could be identified as self-governing towns. Regularly one, or a few, urban edifices could be attested in subordinate centres, such as a bathhouse or a spectacle building. A weak correlation could be observed between the construction of theatre buildings in civilian centres in the interior and southern parts of the three provinces on the one hand and between the presence of amphitheatres in garrison settlements along the northern frontier on the other. Nevertheless, the number of public buildings in subordinate centres was generally lower and their dimensions were smaller than in chartered towns. The investment in aqueducts turned out to be an example of such a type of public infrastructure that was less well distributed. The water provisions of the majority of Roman centres relied on private wells and cisterns. Despite the fact that many centres and places will have had a market or open square, the archaeological evidence has confirmed that the *forum-basilica* complex remained a type of infrastructure typical of chartered towns or centres with similar services concerning administrative and socio-economic activities. Although the investment of a circuit wall was first limited to the bigger and richer centres in the southern parts of the provinces, defensive structures became more common in the immediate hinterland of the frontier, when, in the late 2nd and 3rd centuries, the unrest along the border increased. Furthermore, chartered towns tended not only to have a more monumental built-up centre, they also tended to grow to a larger size. The chartered towns in the northern Alpine region

⁹⁶³ Bintliff 2002, 240; Horden and Purcell 2000.

⁹⁶⁴ Gräf 1995, 1990.

reached an average size of between 40 ha and 60 ha. Only the legionary sites and *coloniae* tended to reach a size of about 80 ha to 100 ha. Subordinate centres and garrison settlements meanwhile tended to not expand over 40 ha, with the majority of them varying between 5 ha up to about 20 ha. However, it was observed that centres which seemed at first important economic centres, such as specialised production sites, did not develop into large or monumentalised Roman centres. The revenues from this production must have been spent elsewhere. The production centre of Mayen, for example, never developed into a rich Roman centre and stood out from the rich *villa*-sites in its surroundings. It must be concluded that not all subordinate centres can be considered 'towns', and not even 'small towns', but they all belonged to a broader settlement system that was intimately connected.

Many different kind of centres, which all belonged to the Roman settlement system in the northern Alpine region, were discussed over the previous chapters. The analysis of the settlement system in chapter 5 showed that the largest and most urbanized centres (tier 1) took up a rather exceptional position within the constellation of the settlement system, representing only 5 percent of all places. It concerned mainly high ranked self-governing towns as well as legionary bases in southern Germania Superior and along the frontier. The analysis showed also that a relative high percentage of moderate centres (17 %), amongst which *civitas* centres, subordinate centres and larger garrison settlements, fulfilled a middle-ground position. The majority of Roman centres were subordinate centres and garrison settlements which remained modest in size and monumental display. It was furthermore discussed that the settlement system in this particular region was defined by the landscape, but also by existing pre-Roman settlement networks, Roman policy and the development of the frontier.

In large parts of the region the settlement system was well connected, in more fertile areas, such as northern Germania Superior and Raetia or along the frontier, the population density was relatively high and centres were relatively close to each other. Elsewhere, in the more rugged and mountainous areas of the region, such as southern Raetia, central and southern Noricum, the distance between centres was larger and more difficult to overcome. The number of centres and their diversity in these parts of the settlement system was generally lower. The connection between larger centres was in these areas guaranteed by road stations. The distribution of Roman centres furthermore showed a reasonably interconnected settlement pattern, especially when also the lowest ranked and least urbanised centres are included. Even the smallest nuclei, such as the rural sites, seem to have performed important functions, not only in the sense of agricultural production but also in terms of food collection, redistribution and supply, or the provision of lodgings.

In conclusion, it can be said that the settlement system in the northern Alpine region was heavily characterised by regional differences. Firstly, the geography of the northern Alpine region had a large influence on the urban developments. In particular, the Alpine and Jura formations divided the region into the Alpine foreland in the north and the mountain ridges in the south. The river Rhine created a north-south divide across the province of Germania Superior, whilst the Danube dominated the northern parts of Raetia and Noricum. Equally, contact routes between the different peoples living in that landscape that were established before the Roman period, remained characterizing features within the shaping of the Roman settlement system. This regionalism was furthermore detected in the distribution pattern of Roman centres, which developed from Late Iron Age centres and Roman military bases or which were created *ex novo*. In addition, the different ways in which the provinces of Germania Superior, Raetia and Noricum were administered and divided into communities reflected distinctive patterns for each province. Although the level of monumentality of Roman centres corresponded to a certain extent with their position within the municipal hierarchy,

in which *coloniae* were characterised by the most extensively built-up cores, certain public buildings shed new light upon patterns within the Roman settlement system. The interaction between Roman centres and their hinterland also depended heavily on the regional context, including the available natural resources and administrative bodies and the presence of the Roman army. The Roman settlement system in the northern Alpine region was typified by different regional patterns.

The influence of the Roman army on the urban developments

In every aspect of the Roman settlement system discussed so far, the involvement of the army has been clearly visible, ranging from the construction of all kinds of infrastructure to the upswing of agricultural production and rural life in the northern Alpine region. The army, for example, constructed many roads in the newly conquered territories and erected countless numbers of forts. These projects stimulated both the implementation of road stations on the one hand and the development of accompanying settlements around these military forts on the other. High quantities of building material were required for these constructions. Traces of the production of such materials are found at the garrison settlements themselves, but also in specialised production centres, such as the initial phases of Rheinzabern and later on in Nied. The supervision of this production by the army is evident from the stamps of military units on the ceramic building materials. Thanks to these stamps, the involvement of the army in many constructions can be observed. It was explained earlier that most Roman spas, such as Bad-Göding and Wiesbaden, appear to have been erected with the help of the army. Equally, public baths in civilian settlements were regularly built with bricks labeled with army stamps. This phenomenon might be valid on a much bigger scale, including all kinds of public infrastructure in both smaller centres as well as in self-governing towns. Two gravestones found to the east of Avenches, for example, prove that soldiers of the legions stationed in Mainz were sent to help with the building of the city wall.⁹⁶⁵

Furthermore, soldiers and army relatives may have constituted a relatively large proportion of the population and were certainly responsible for a significant amount of consumption. One can wonder for instance, whether without their presence ceramic production centres such as Rheinzabern, Westerndorf and Waiblingen - to name but a few - would have existed or flourished in the same way, since the highest amounts of their goods appear to have been used in garrison settlements. This population group also formed probably the majority of the consumers of luxury products such as olive oil and wine. It seems that long-distance trade was stimulated by the army, and, according to K. Verboven, the merchants involved in this supply network were often relatives of military staff or veterans.⁹⁶⁶ The case studies concerning rural settlements have pointed out that farming estates in the hinterland of the frontier produced for both the larger centres in their vicinity as well as for the garrison settlements. Furthermore, a percentage of the former inhabitants of these garrison settlements, or their relatives, eventually moved either to the countryside or to the urban places. Additionally, it is striking how many civilian settlements and centres developed from a pre-existing garrison settlement, such as Lensburg, Gross-Gerau and many others.⁹⁶⁷ There also seems to be a correlation between a certain degree of administrative independence and a military origin. Despite the uncertainty of the term, many of the places which could epigraphically be identified as *vici*, were originally garrison settlements. Likewise, a certain number of these fort-survivors even became self-governing towns. Places such as *Arae Flaviae*/Rottweil, *Augusta Vindelicum*/Augsburg, *Lopodunum*/Ladenburg, and *Nida*/Frankfurt-Heddernheim are only a few examples that illustrate this

⁹⁶⁵ M. Flück, presentation at the Römertagung in Erfurt, 15th June 2015.

⁹⁶⁶ Verboven 2007, 304.

⁹⁶⁷ The conference and associated publication *Der Übergang vom Militärlager zur Zivilsiedlung* held in Innsbruck from 23-25th of October 2014, was entirely dedicated to the influence of the Roman army in the urban development of the northwestern provinces (Grabherr *et al.* 2016).

phenomenon. The army thus contributed in a number of different ways to the urban developments taking place during the Roman period in the northern Alpine region; as constructor of infrastructure; as stimulating factor for artisanal and agrarian activity, and as founder of the administrative organisation. Moreover, studies on the Late Antique period too have shown a strong correlation between Late Roman military posts (*castra*) and Early Medieval centres. The *Castrum Raurecense*, for example, was one of the most important centres in the Jura-Rhine region between the 3rd and the 7th centuries AD.⁹⁶⁸

The present and future of Roman urbanism

Research into Roman urbanism has often been inspired by the relatively large number of remains of the settlement system that survived and is still in a certain way present today. Generally, these physical remains stimulate academic research, but at the same time are considered heritage. It is therefore important to reflect on the social significance of these remnants from an academic point of view. The analysis in chapter 6 showed that these ancient remains are often managed as monuments, as archaeological sites, or are integrated into an archaeological park or exhibited in museums. Museums are generally considered important places where meaning can be given to the often vague archaeological traces of the past. An overview of the different themes that shape the presentations on the Roman remains in these museums shows a wide variation, although the topic of everyday life was most common. In addition, the analysis indicated that most remnants do not fulfil any active or integrated role in their current context. This passive role often attributed to these remains is an important point of criticism within the current heritage debate. Different ways to experience heritage or to reuse and repurpose these structures should form leading objectives within future heritage management. Such achievements would more easily be fulfilled when the heritage is 'given back to the public'. The Critical Heritage Studies observed that heritage professionals have positioned themselves all too often as the only caretakers of these remains, which has largely excluded the participation of the public, discouraged the public's interest and let many opportunities for the creation and experiencing of heritage slip away. Recognised heritage sites, such as the Frontiers of the Roman Empire, are an *exemplum* of this so-called 'Authoritative Heritage Discourse'. However, locally-orientated projects have shown how heritage can be managed differently, with the input of the local community, from excavation to presentation. Providing information about heritage does not always have to stand for educating the public, *a fortiori* the challenge lies in how to allow them their own creation of heritage and their own presentation of the past.

Finally, despite the effort made in this study to collect all of the relevant information about the Roman settlement system, many more opportunities for future investigations remain. Although excavations reveal more and more indications of continuity between the settlement system of the Late Iron Age and the early Roman period, both are generally approached as two completely separate eras. Future research may shed more light on the gradual transition of the settlement system. Likewise, the societal changes of the Late Antique period changed the Roman settlement pattern, but this transformation fell outside the scope of this thesis. Although the Roman frontier is no longer considered a physical border, but rather a membrane through which people exchanged goods and culture, research concerning the Roman period almost never looks beyond the Empire's edges. Nevertheless, just as time periods function as set frames, the borders of the Empire were also an artificial division. Life, settlements and history continued far beyond it. It was not possible within the scope of this research to investigate how the settlement system continued outside the borders of the Roman Empire. The recent discoveries of Roman *villae* beyond the frontiers will certainly

⁹⁶⁸ Schwarz 2011, 307-349.

encourage future research to investigate the settlement system on the other side of the frontier in the light of the developments within the Empire⁹⁶⁹

Furthermore, the research presented has approached the settlement system mainly from a top-down perspective, in which the administrative organisation and physical appearance have been dominant elements. A more detailed understanding of Roman urbanism would however be gained with studies based on the movement of people and goods. This may generate even more valuable insights into the interconnectedness of the different types of settlements and their environment. Promising results have already been achieved with studies such as A. Vanderhoeven's, *Town-Country relations from the perspective of Roman Tongeren*⁹⁷⁰ or L. I. Kooistra *et al.*'s, 'Could the local population of the Lower Rhine delta Supply the Roman Army'⁹⁷¹, but synthesising works for and comparisons with larger and different parts of the Empire remain a real challenge. There is thus certainly a promising future ahead regarding Roman urbanism, both in terms of academic research and in strengthening the relationship between the remaining enigma of Roman towns and the contemporary societies who live within the borders of that Empire of yesteryear.

⁹⁶⁹ Flügel and Valenta 2017, 54-56.l

⁹⁷⁰ Vanderhoeven 2015.

⁹⁷¹ Kooistra *et al.* 2013.