

## The coin finds from the Roman fort Albaniana (The Netherlands)

### 1. *Introduction*<sup>\*</sup>

The 2001-2002 excavations of the Roman fort at Alphen aan den Rijn (the Netherlands) (fig.1) have yielded a large amount (735 pieces) of Roman coinage. Coin finds of this size are a rarity in the Netherlands. Comparable numbers are known only for the Roman settlements in Nijmegen, Maastricht and Vechten. Not just the sheer volume of the assemblage makes it of considerable scientific interest; but the composition of the assemblage also provides unique possibilities numismatic and for historical research. This paper will deal in brief with the most important aspects of this find and the conclusions based on it, regarding chronology of the site, the presence of a specific countermark and a model for coin supply to the army around AD 43.

Ever since the small excavation campaigns in the 1970's and 1980's, the presence of a Roman fort at Alphen aan den Rijn had been expected. This was finally proven true in a large-scale campaign in 1998 (Haalebos /Franzen 2000). The excavations of 2001 and 2002, which yielded the numerous coin finds, clarified the layout of the fort, which can be identified with the fort Albaniana on the Peutinger map. In the city centre of modern Alphen aan den Rijn, on the bank of the Old Rhine, a Roman infantry fort (*castellum*) was located, which was rebuilt several times in wood and finally in stone (Polak e.a. 2003).

Since a metal detector was used on a regular basis, the number of coin finds (and other metal objects) found during the 2001-2002 excavations, was very high. We can safely assume that the majority of the coins lost in Roman times, have been found. Contrary to coin assemblages excavated before the introduction of the metal detector, there is no bias towards the larger denominations (*sestertii* and precious metal). However, this sometimes makes comparisons with other assemblages quite difficult.

### 2. *The coin assemblage*

Several things can be concluded on the basis of figure 2, in which the number of coins per emperor found in Albaniana are shown. In the first place the majority of the coins found during the 2001-2002 excavations in Alphen aan den Rijn were minted in the pre-Flavian period. The number of coins steadily decreases from the Flavian emperors onwards, leaving only a single coin from the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Among the Julio-Claudian coins Caligulan coins dominate by far, whereas the number of Neronian coins is even smaller than the number of Claudian coins. Bronze coinage minted in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius is difficult to date to the year exactly, but is only present in relatively small numbers. Not shown in the graph are several interesting aspects of the coin assemblage: Approximately one-third of the Caligulan coins bears an early Claudian countermark, if readable always the same (TICLAVIM) (Grünwald 1946, plate XIV, number 97) (fig.3), while hardly any Claudian coins bear a countermark. Furthermore no Republican bronzes have been found, which are present in large numbers on mid-first century sites in Upper Germany (Peter 2001, 42-43). The proportion of Caligulan, but above all Claudian *sestertii* however is very high, a phenomenon that can be observed on other military sites in Lower Germany (Hanel 1995; Chantraine 1982), but not on civilian sites (Peter 2001; van Heesch 1998) or in Upper Germany (FMRD-series). Finally the number of Julio-Claudian copies, in most cases copies of Claudian *Minerva-asses* or Tiberian *Providentia-asses* is very high.

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\* A longer and more elaborate version of this paper, including a discussion of all the coin finds and an extended bibliography will be published in the *Revue Belge de Numismatique* 2004.

### 3. Chronology

On the basis of the coin assemblages of well dated sites (for example Xanten and Neuss) it can be concluded that the number of coins per emperor usually builds up to a peak of coins for a specific emperor, which corresponds to the period in which the site was founded. Since Caligula's reign was very short however, we need supplementary evidence that the fort Albaniana was indeed founded in his reign. An analysis of both historical sources and countermarks on the coins from Albaniana might be of help.

Several historical sources inform us that by senatorial command after his death all Caligulan coins had to be collected and melted down. This act was part of a larger *damnatio memoriae*, including the eradication of the emperor's name from inscriptions and a shattering of his busts. Although it is doubtful whether the population heeded this call, or was even able to, the remarkable fact is that Caligulan coinage indeed appears to disappear out of circulation quite rapidly (Peter 2001, 68). However Caligulan coins are not rare as site finds, so presumably instead of sending the coins back to Rome, they were demonetized. In an area like the Rhine zone, which was not regularly supplied with bronze coinage, this will have caused considerable problems. As a solution one could have resorted to countermarking the Caligulan coins with the name of the new emperor. A probable example of this practice would be the countermarked coins with TICLAVIM in Alphen aan den Rijn.

Regarding the probable demonetization of Caligulan coins, the Caligulan coins without a countermark found in Alphen aan den Rijn, will therefore have been lost in Caligula's lifetime or shortly afterwards. In the reign of Claudius then, and, given the purpose of the countermark, most likely at the beginning of it, the majority of Caligulan coins still in circulation was countermarked. Of course the individual savings of a soldier were probably not subjected, but rather the unit's treasury. Though it is not known how long the countermarked coins remained in circulation, their strong regional distribution pattern (see below) indicates that the coins were already present in the Lower Rhine area before the countermark TICLAVIM was applied.

Therefore both the Caligulan coins with and without countermark found in Alphen aan den Rijn indicate that habitation on the site will have started in Caligula's reign or shortly afterwards.

### 4. Historical framework

An explanation for a starting date of the fort Albaniana in Caligula's reign might be found in the military events of this period, which have until now however not been situated on the Lower Rhine. A most likely candidate might be the failed conquest of Britain in 40, when Caligula assembled his troops, marched to the coast, but instead of crossing the Channel, ordered his men to collect shells (Winterling 2003, 104-109). Though this episode has often been regarded as evidence for the emperors' reputed madness, large numbers of his coins not only in Alphen aan den Rijn, but in forts like Valkenburg (de Weerd 1977, 268-9) and Vechten (Tymann 1994) as well, might be an indication of a serious campaign—and thus an urgent need for money—, ridiculed by contemporary authors. On the basis of the coin finds alone, this conclusion would perhaps not stand, but further evidence is available. In both Vechten and Valkenburg staves of a wine barrel have been found with the stamp C CAE AVG GER / IVLIOR BALON (Wynia 1999, 145). The first line is obviously the official name of Caligula, the second refers to the imperial vineyards. Stamps on wine barrels are thought to refer to the owner of the wine and/or the vineyards. Wine produced in the imperial vineyards was meant only for the emperor himself (Bogaers 1978, 10-11). Such wine barrels on two different locations along the Lower Rhine do seem to indicate the presence of the emperor in person. The newly erected fort at Alphen aan den Rijn might have been used either to control the supply of goods and soldiers or as a forage base, or both.

### 5. The countermark TICLAVIM and the fort Albaniana

A link between Caligula's failed conquest of Britain and the foundation of the fort Albaniana seems justified, but this still does not explain the remarkably high proportion of countermarked Caligulan coins found in Alphen aan den Rijn. As shown above this countermark, which is abundant in Alphen aan den Rijn and also present in Valkenburg, was applied in the early Claudian period, most likely in order to revalidate the demonetized coins of Caligula. An investigation revealed that the distribution of TICLAVIM is almost completely restricted to Lower Germany and in particular Alphen aan den Rijn. Other early Claudian countermarks are known (for example TICA and TIAV), but their distribution is mostly confined to Upper Germany or the area around Trier (Kraay 1956, 127-128; FMRL-series).

Already in 1956 Kraay noted the almost mutually exclusive distribution areas of countermarks. This led him to two conclusions: a) that a countermark had most likely been applied in the area where it was most abundant and b) that the circulation of bronze coinage is almost always a strictly regional affair. Reasoning along this line, the countermark TICLAVIM was applied in the western Dutch river delta, either in Alphen aan den Rijn or Valkenburg. The actual number of coins countermarked with TICLAVIM is much higher in Alphen aan den Rijn, but the ratios are comparable –one should bear in mind that the fort in Valkenburg had been excavated before the metal detector was introduced.

If TICLAVIM was indeed applied in Alphen aan den Rijn or in its surroundings, then this implies some interesting observations. In the first place it indicates the presence of a person with enough authority and standing, who could give the order to countermark coins. Apparently the Dutch river delta was at that time more important than for example Nijmegen or Vechten, where there is no evidence for the application of specific countermarks. Secondly it implies that a large amount of money was needed immediately. If this need had not been felt, they would have simply discarded the Caligulan coinage and awaited new supplies from Rome. Both the importance of the small fort in Alphen aan den Rijn and the urgent need for coinage are in my opinion evidence for an involvement of the Dutch river delta in the Britannia campaigns of Claudius, not as participants in the battles, but as guardians of the supply lines. The presence of only a single coin with the countermark TICLAVIM in Verulamium (Reece 1984, 4), one of the earliest Roman settlements in Britain, confirms this theory.

### 6. *Coin supply in a time of financial crisis*

This practice of applying countermarks in large quantities on the eve of a large scale campaign raises questions on how coin supply in general in this period was organised. It is known that in Claudius' reign both bronze coinage and precious metal were only minted

in small quantities and on an irregular basis (Sutherland 1984, 114-120; von Kaenel 1986).

If we combine a survey of early Roman sites in Britain (Crummy 1987; Reece 1984; Walker 1988) and sites in the Dutch river area (Aarts 2000; Rabouw 1996) and the Upper Rhine region (Schönberger 1978; Ulbert 1969; FMRD-series) a model may be presented (fig. 4). Bronze coinage of Claudius' predecessors is rare on British sites –perhaps because of propagandistic reasons– but republican *denarii*, and above all legionary *denarii*, are present in considerable numbers. Claudian bronze coinage consists largely of copies. Though the official mint in Rome had not minted them, a semi-official mint in Gaul might have issued them (King 1996, 245-6). Since the coin supplies were not sufficient to provide the troops along the Upper and Lower Rhine with the same kind of coins as those in Britain, a different solution had to be found. In the Lower Rhine delta the amount of Caligulan coins still present was apparently large enough to suffice most needs, though these coins had to be countermarked. Though Caligulan coinage was countermarked in the Upper Rhine area as well, it was only available in much smaller numbers than along the Lower Rhine. Therefore republican bronzes were sent to this region. Those bronzes were supplemented with locally produced copies (Wigg 1996, 430-1). In the Dutch river delta the copies were needed as well, but they were most likely not produced by the native population, given the absence of a native minting tradition. The copies therefore were either retrieved from further upstream or made by the auxiliaries. Finally, military sites in this region received a large amount of Claudian *sestertii*. This might be explained by the fact that the bulk of Claudian precious metal was being sent to Britain. To pay the stipendium of the troops the authorities might have resorted to the next biggest denomination available.

This model, over-simplified though it may be, shows both the regionalized supply of coinage as well as the regional character of bronze coin circulation in this period.

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Fig. 1

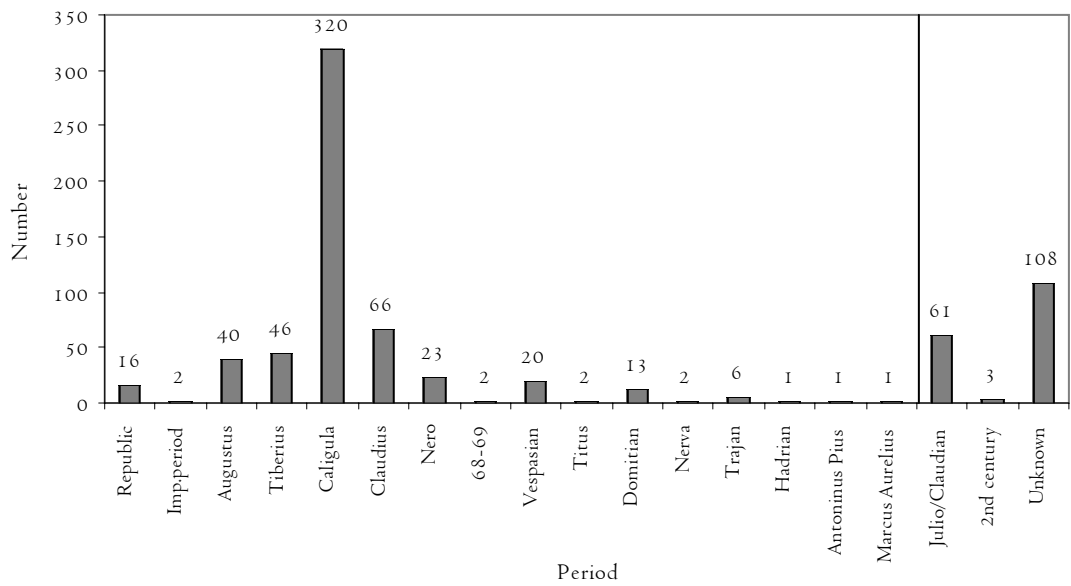


Fig. 2

Fig.1: A map of the Dutch river delta showing the location of the Roman fort Albaniana and several other important Roman sites in the Rhine zone

Fig.2: A graph showing the number of coins per emperor found in Albaniana



Fig. 3

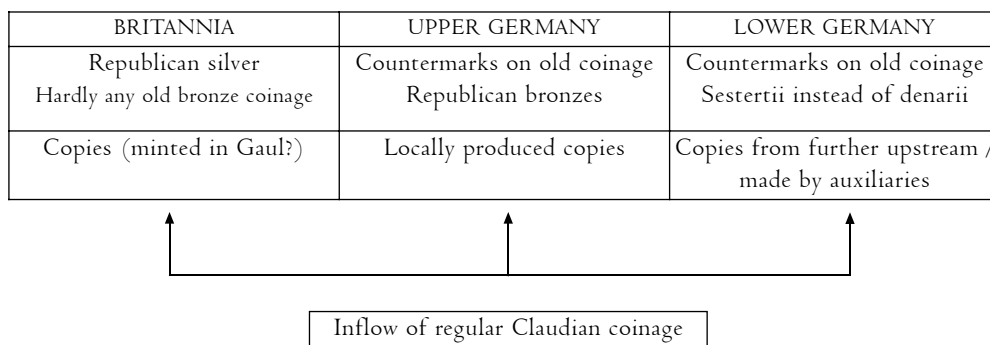


Fig. 4

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- Fig.3:* The obverse of a Caligulan coin found in Alphen, showing the princes Nero and Drusus and the countermark TICLAVIM (upside down)
- Fig.4:* A model for the supply of coinage to different regions in the period around A.D. 43