

The coin finds from the Augustan legionary fortress at Nijmegen (The Netherlands): Coin circulation in the Lower Rhine area before Drusus' campaigns

1. Introduction*

During large scale excavations in the years 1987-1997 the remains of an Augustan legionary fortress, built in wood, came to light on the Hunerberg at Nijmegen, the Netherlands (fig.1). Given the relatively low amount of finds, it is thought to have been a short-lived fortress. Fortunately the site was not inhabited again until the Flavian period, so as a result Augustan finds and features could be clearly separated. As a consequence there is no doubt as to which coins belonged to the Augustan circulation pool. Furthermore it is important to know that on the basis of the pottery finds, so independent of the coins, an Augustan date for the site had already been established (Haalebos 2002, 406-407).

In this paper I will deal, though briefly, with the coin assemblage and its characteristics and the chronology of the site as can be concluded from the coin finds. Then a hypothesis will be put forward on coin circulation in the North-western empire before 12 BC and what this implies for theories on coin supply in the Augustan period.

Finally it is important to realise that within the city-boundaries of modern Nijmegen, another Augustan site is known, which has yielded numerous coin finds as well. This is the military stronghold on the Kops Plateau (fig.1), which has however been founded later in the Augustan period than the site on the Hunerberg, is much smaller in size, and was inhabited continuously until the Batavian revolt (van Enckevort 1995).

2. The coin finds

The bronze coins belonging to the Augustan circulation pool on the Hunerberg are shown in figure 2. Since the silver coins were all Republican denarii, which do not provide any information on a terminus post or ante quem of the site, they were not taken into

account. A few remarkable features of the Augustan coin assemblage can be observed. In the first place the assemblage is entirely dominated by Republican and imperial bronzes (the Copia and Vienna issues and the Divos Julius coins). Very few Nemausus I coins are present, none of which has been counter-marked. Furthermore only seven moneyers' coins from Rome have been found, the youngest of which was minted in 15 BC. Secondly bronze coins minted in Spain have not been found, in contrast to coin assemblages from Augustan military sites in Germany (García-Bellido 2000, 122). On the other hand a lot of North-Italian coins –the Divos Julius type– have been found, which are otherwise rare in coin assemblages north of the Alps (Heinrichs 2000, 185). South-Gaulish coins are also present in large numbers, not just the coins minted in Lugdunum or Vienna, but also a lot of the Celtic coins found were minted there. Examples are coins from Massalia, the Sequani and the Allobroges. A final remarkable aspect of the Celtic coins found, is that though approximately one third of them belongs to the, more or less local, AVAVCIA-series, the majority of those are of the epigraphic variant of the type, which is unusual.

3. Chronology

Coin lists from Augustan military sites in the North-western provinces of the Roman empire are usually compared to those from either Oberaden or Haltern. Those two sites are of a more or less secure date, derived from both dendrochronological and historical data, and have a very distinctive coin assemblage. In Oberaden –inhabited

* This paper is an abstract of a part of the author's thesis, which deals with the coin finds from the Augustan legionary fortress and Flavian *canabae legionis* in Nijmegen. The thesis, in which a more elaborate discussion of methods, coin types and hypotheses will be presented, will be finished by the end of 2004.

between app. 11 and 8/7 BC (Kühlborn 1992, 123; 128-129)—coins of the first Nemausus series dominate (over 90 percent), a large part of which have been countermarked. The remaining coins are in the majority Copia or Vienna issues (Ilisch 1992, 175). In Haltern—inhabited between app. 5/4 BC (or A.D. 1) and A.D. 9 (or 15) (von Schnurbein 1981, 36; Wolters 2000, 103-108—nearly all coins are of the first altar series of Lyon, or the anepigraphic AVAVCIA coins. Some Nemausus I coins are present, but hardly any imperial bronzes (FMRD VI.4, 56-115).

It should be clear that the coin assemblage of the Hunerberg is not comparable to either of the above described patterns. The complete absence of altar-coins from Lyon indicates that the site had been abandoned before 7 BC, like Oberaden. However the small number of Nemausus I coins, and above all the absence of countermarks on them, indicate that the site is not associated with the campaigns of Drusus from 12/11 BC onwards (Ilisch 1992, 178). The only solution left is that the fortress at Nijmegen had already been abandoned by the time of Drusus' campaigns. When the fortress was founded can not be known for sure, but a starting date around 19/18 BC would coincide with the second governorship of Agrippa in Gaul and large infrastructural works and some campaigning at that time (Wightman 1974, 474-475). Habitation on the site will have lasted long enough for the first Nemausus I and Moneyers' Issues, both minted from 16/15 BC onwards (Burnett e.a. 1992, 152-154; Sutherland 1984, 31-33), to arrive at Nijmegen.

4. Coin circulation before Drusus' campaigns

This coin assemblage from Nijmegen shows some interesting aspects of coin circulation in the Augustan period prior to 12/11 BC. In the first place it seems that because this period saw no well-planned, large-scale campaigns, new coinage was not available as yet.

The mint at Nemausus was clearly not yet fully in operation, while the mints at Vienne and Lyon (the Copia-issues) had stopped minting nearly two decades earlier (Burnett e.a. 1992, 150-152). As a consequence the soldiers had to do with old, not to say ancient, bronze coins, like the Republican bronzes and the Copia, Vienna and Divos Julius coins. As testified by the proportion of Celtic coins found inside the legionary fortress, those coins played a large part as well.

Secondly the absence of any provincial Spanish coins, thought to be evidence of troop movements from Spain to the lower-Rhine-area (García-Bellido 2000, 121), might indicate that those troops were not involved in the construction of the Augustan fortress at Nijmegen. This is no surprise, since the Cantabrian wars lasted until 19/18 BC. However the presence of the North-Italian coins of the Divos Julius type could be explained by a provenance of —part of— the troops from that region. Further evidence for this might be found in the relatively large amount of Celtic coins from the city of Massalia, and the tribes of the Sequani and Allobroges; coins from areas along the route from Northern Italy to the Rhine-area.

5. Coin supply

Finally it is clear that on the basis of the coin assemblages from Nijmegen-Hunerberg, Oberaden and Haltern the mechanisms of coin supply at the time of Drusus' campaigns can be reconstructed (fig. 3). If we compare the percentage of Nemausus I coins with percentages of earlier and later coin series at the three sites, it is wonderfully illustrated that Nemausus I coins increased from almost nothing to nearly a hundred percent and then decreased to almost nothing again in a span of less than a decade and a half. It looks like this can only be explained by a strong, centrally organised, authority, which had made preparations for a carefully planned campaign.

Bibliography

- Burnett, A.; Amandry, M. and Ripollès, P.P. (1992): *Roman provincial coinage. Volume I, from the death of Caesar to the death of Vitellius (44 BC-AD 69)*, London/Paris.
- Enkevort, H. van (1995): Das Lager auf dem Kops Plateau, in: Kühlborn, J.-S. (ed.): *Germaniam pacavi - Germanien habe ich befriedet. Archäologische Stätten augusteischer Okkupation*, Münster, p. 42-58.
- García-Bellido, M.P. (2000): The historical relevance of secondary material. The case of Augustan Spanish coins in German castra, in: Wiegels, R. (ed.): *Die Fundmünzen von Kalkriese und die frühkaiserzeitliche Münzprägung (Osnabrücker Forschungen zu Altertum und Antike-Rezeption 3)*, Paderborn, p. 121-138.
- Haalebos, J.K. (2002): Die früheste Belegung des Hunerberges in Nijmegen, in: Freeman, Ph.; Bennett, J.; Fiema, Z.T. and Hoffmann, B. (eds.): *Limes XVIII, Proceedings of the XVIIIth international congress of Roman frontier studies held in Amman, Jordan (september 2000)* (BAR International Series 1084), Oxford, p. 403-414.
- Heinrichs, J. (2000): Überlegungen zur Versorgung augusteischer Truppen mit Münzgeld. Ein neues Modell and daraus ableitbare Indizien für einen Wandel in der Konzeption des Germanien-krieges nach Drusus, in: Mooren, L. (ed.): *Politics, administration and society in the Hellenistic and Roman world (Studia Hellenistica 36)*, Leuven, p. 155-214.
- Ilisch, P. (1992): Die Münzen aus den Ausgrabungen im Römerlager Oberaden, in: Kühlborn, J.-S. (ed.): *Das Römerlager in Oberaden III, die Ausgrabungen im nordwestlichen Lagerbereich und weitere Baustellenuntersuchungen der Jahre 1962-1988 (Bodenaltertümer Westfalens 27)*, Münster, p. 175-202.
- Korzus, B. (1971): *Die Fundmünzen der römischen Zeit in Deutschland, Abteilung VI Nordrhein-Westfalen, Band 4 Münster*, Berlin.
- Kühlborn, J.-S. (1992): *Das Römerlager in Oberaden III, die Ausgrabungen im nordwestlichen Lagerbereich und weitere Baustellenuntersuchungen der Jahre 1962-1988 (Bodenaltertümer Westfalens 27)*, Münster.
- Schnurbein, S. Von (1981): Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der römischen Militärlager an der Lippe, *Bericht der römisch-germanischen Kommission 62*, p. 5-102.
- Sutherland, C.H.V. (1984): *The roman imperial coinage, volume I, revised edition, from 31 BC to AD 69*, London.
- Wightman, E.M. (1974): La Gaule chevelue entre César et Auguste, in: Pippidi, D.M. (ed.): *Actes du IX^e congrès international d'études sur les frontières romaines*, Bukarest/Köln, p. 473-483.
- Wolters, R. (2000): Anmerkungen zur Münzdatierung spätaugusteischer Fundplätze, in: Wiegels, R. (ed.): *Die Fundmünze von Kalkriese und die frühkaiserzeitliche Münzprägung (Osnabrücker Forschungen zu Altertum und Antike-Rezeption 3)*, Paderborn, p. 81-118.

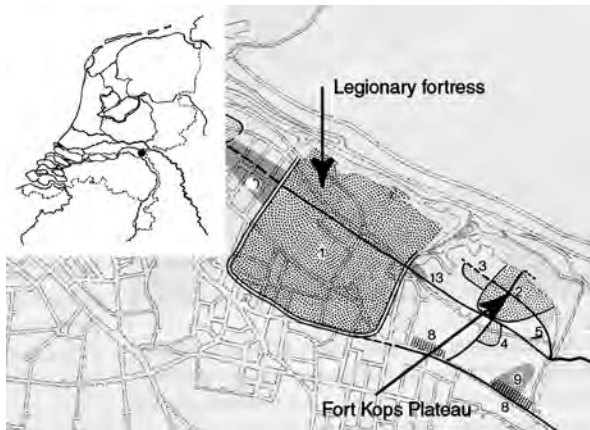


Fig. 1. The location of Nijmegen and the fortress on the Hunerberg and the stronghold on the Kops Plateau.

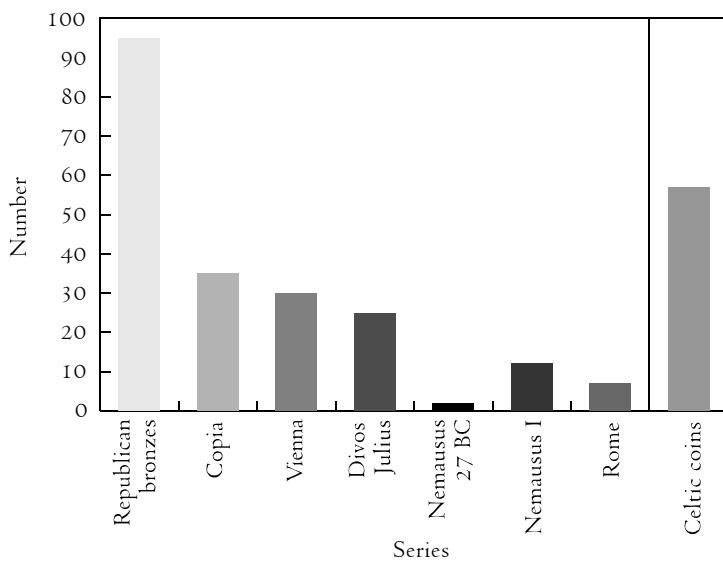


Fig. 2. The number of bronze coins found in the Augustan legionary fortress at Nijmegen, grouped by series.

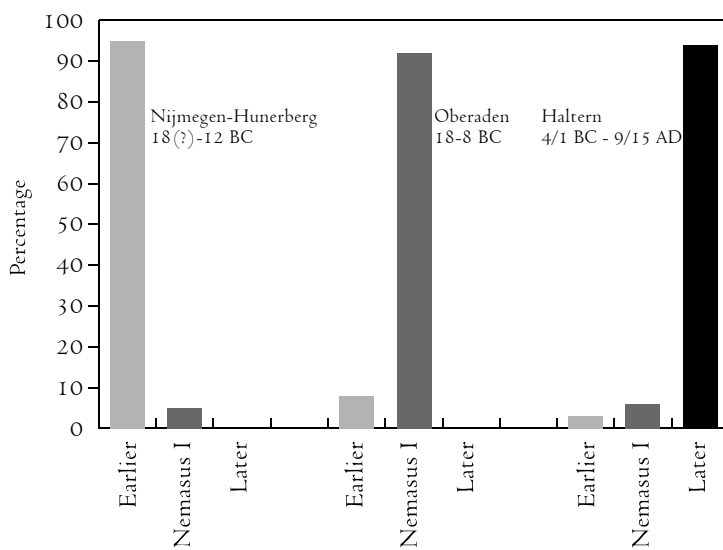


Fig. 3. The percentage of Nemausus I coins compared to those of earlier and later issues at Nijmegen-Hunerberg, Oberaden and Haltern.