



A new military Roman site along the limes in the Netherlands?

An interpretation of dredging finds from Heteren-Steenoord

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This study is an English version of an article published in the Dutch 'Detector magazine' in March 2019¹ Translation with assistance of Deepl.

Introduction

In 2018 Roman finds were dredged up in the floodplain near the village Heteren in the Netherlands. This was a so far unknown Roman site along the limes. The material was found in heaps of gravel deposited on the side of the dredge pit. The gravel heaps had been dumped there temporarily. In a few weeks the gravel heaps were searched with a metal detector. From the heaps of gravel, no deposits from other periods were found. They were also clean from recent (recreational) waste.



The gravel heaps were searched with a metal detector. The search attracted many interested parties.

Location

In the province of Gelderland almost all Roman castella have been washed out by the meandering Rhine over the centuries. The most Roman sites along the river so far have been discovered by dredging. The site near Heteren has also come to the surface as a result of dredging. And as with the almost all other sites, there are no ground traces of house foundations, graves or anything like that, the finds have to tell the story. Approximately 10 km to the east of the site is the castellum Arnhem-Meinerswijk. The Roman site of Kesteren is located 11 km to the west. Although a castellum in Kesteren has not been proven, this is suspected.



The site Heteren-Steenoord in the Netherlands near the river Rhine. The site is at the former border of the Roman Empire. (PAN 2020)

Finds

Militaria, fibulae, coins, jewellery, fragments of Roman tiles and tuff were found. In addition, pieces of terra sigillata, a fragment of a corkurn, a grindstone and other Roman pottery were found. The shards did not show any trace of movement through the Rhine. This indicates that the material has not been moved far from its original location. The depth from which the finds were dredged is unknown.

PAN

All finds have been placed on the website PAN (Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands). The aim of PAN is to document and publish online antiquities finds in private possession, especially metal finds found using a metal detector, and thus make the information about the finds and their find location available to science, heritage research, museums and all other interested parties. The validated finds in PAN can be found <https://www.portable-antiquities.nl/pan/#/public> by entering the PAN number in the search function. On the website the information about the various finds is more detailed both in text and image. Professionals can use their personal login and, on request, also view the finds that have not yet been validated.

Dating

The pottery dates from the 2/3rd quarter of the 1st century to the end of the 2nd century (report Dr. A. Koster, head of Gelders Archeologisch Centrum G.M. Kam, Nijmegen.) A few well-dated fibulae can be typified as early Roman. The find complex can therefore be dated from the second or third quarter of the first century until at least the end of the second century. The Denarius of Gordian III AD dates from 240. This could indicate that the site was still inhabited on that date. Although the very small numbers of finds leaving room for the unknown. The possible complex(es) could have started around 40/41 A.D. on the basis of some early fibulae. That would fit the shards. That date would be in line with the founding dates in the western Netherlands of the castella Valkenburg, Alphen aan den Rijn, De Meern and probably also Woerden. Indications from recent numismatic and dendrochronological research confirm that these foundations were started by Caligula around 41 A.D. as a result of his aborted British campaign.² But as said before with such small numbers of finds one has to be careful with hard statements.

Type of site

A number of Roman finds show an absence of river patina and are corroded. This suggests that they only ended up in the water much later in time. This may indicate that some of the material was not washed up. For example, because they were on or near the surface. If this site was situated in situ along the river, the other river patina finds may have been part of it, otherwise they will have been two (or more) different complexes.

Although it is not a large number of objects, it gives a very interesting impression of this site. There is an unmistakable military component. Also the terra sigillata fits, just like the tuff and the Roman roof tiles, completely in a picture of military complex(es). A nearby castellum or watch tower is possible due to its location near the Rhine. Roman materials are found along the entire Limes during excavations, so caution is advised, but this potpourri of finds fits in well.

It is to be hoped that cooperation with the dredging contractor can be established. Then this site can yield many interesting finds and give some more certainty about the nature and period of Roman occupation.

Catalogue

Militair	Dating	PAN
Roman horse gear pendant group A1 (Nicolay, 2007, 396)	1 - 90	PAN-00036249
Decorative Roman horse gear fitting group A9. (Nicolai, 2007, 377)	-12 - 120	PAN-00036250
Decorative Roman horse gear fitting group A9. (Nicolai, 2007, 377)	-12 - 120	PAN-00036251
Shield binding for rectangular or trapezoid shield. (Nabbefeld 2008, 22-23, 51.)	-15 - 250	PAN-00036256



PAN-00036249



PAN-00036250



PAN-00036251



PAN-00036256

Fibulae	Dating	PAN
Arched bow brooch variant A1. Distribution: arched bow brooches are found primarily along the Rhine limes and the immediate hinterland, with outliers into the North-German Rhine-Weser area and into Belgium in the south (Heeren, 2017)	1 - 50	PAN-00036246
Eye brooch variant C2. Distribution: in the Low Countries concentrations in the river area and the Frisian-Groningen coastal area are noteworthy.	5 - 50	PAN-00036247
Knickfibel Almgren 20. Dating arguments: in Augustan camps this brooch is lacking, while it is numerous in the mid-1st century. In the late 1st century small numbers still occur (Heeren & Van der Feijst 2017, 65, with references).	20 - 100	PAN-00036245
Wire brooch with angular bow variant A1. Alternative name: 'LT III derivative' and 'Soldiers brooch'. Dating arguments: by far the most brooches of this variant are dated between AD 60 and 120; the oldest are however already appearing around AD 30, some continue until about AD 150 (Heeren & Van der Feijst 2017, 124-125).	30 - 150	PAN-00036243
Wire brooch with angular bow variant A1. As above.	30 - 150	PAN-00036242

Small fragment of Hod Hill brooch, main group.	40 - 120	PAN-00036248
Roman inlaid plate brooch (cheeks-hinge) group 2. In the Netherlands they are found primarily in the central river area.	70 - 290	PAN-00086817
Wire brooch with stretched semi-circular bow. Alternative name: LT III derivative. Distribution: most often found in the Dutch river area; with smaller numbers in the South of the Netherlands, and the German Rhineland. Scarce in Belgium.	90 - 180	PAN-00036244



PAN-00036246



PAN-00036247



PAN-00036245



PAN-00036243



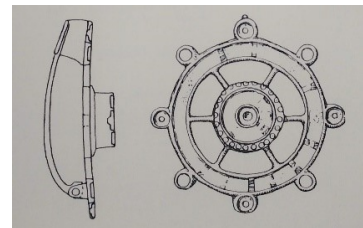
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PAN-00036242



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PAN-00086817

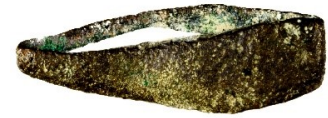
Jewelry	Dating	PAN
Open plain arm ring with single knobbed terminals. (Riha 1990, type 3.11, p. 56) The two fragments of the same armring are bent on purpose to connected them to each other. Connected two pieces of a broken armring is more common.	-15 - 100	PAN-00036254
Piece of an armring curved to form a small (finger?)ring. Part of an open arm ring with slightly widened buffer-shaped terminals. Dating arguments: arm rings with buffer-shaped terminals of limited thickness occur for a very long time. ³ German: Kolbenarmring.	-1500 - 650	PAN-00036253
Roman finger ring with flattened shoulders and flat decorative surface. Dating arguments: Riha (1990, 34) dates this ring shape from the late 2nd to the early 4th century AD. According to Guiraud, there are exceptions as early as the late 1st century AD, but the vast majority of examples dates to the 3rd century AD.	170 - 325	PAN-00036252
Piece of a mirror.	-15 - 450	PAN-00036255



PAN-00036254



PAN-00036253



PAN-00036252



PAN-00036255

Coins	Dating	PAN
Nero 54-68AD AE As (11g) Laureate head right. Rev. Victory alighting left wings spread holding shield inscribed SPQR. RIC 329.	ca. 65	PAN-00036265
Corroded sestertius. Nero? (15,5g)	ca. 65 - 68	PAN-00036258
Gordian III AR Denarius (3,56g) Rome, AD 240. radiate, draped and cuirassed bust right. Rev. emperor, togate and veiled standing left, sacrificing out of patera over altar, holding wand. RIC 68.	240 - 241	PAN-00072098



PAN-00036265



PAN-00072098



PAN-00036258

Miscellaneous	Dating	PAN
pitchfork? / boathook? Le. 140 mm, wi. 90mm.	--	PAN-00047317
Bronze strip with unknown function. Le. 106 mm.	--	PAN-00036257
Roman nails.	--	PAN-00047316
Pottery. (One shard of cork urn ware is dated 1 - 50 AD)	ca. 25 - 200	PAN-00047318
Grindstone with clean round hole, diameter 3 mm. Le. 95 mm.	--	PAN-00047319



PAN-00047316



PAN-00047318



PAN-00047317
00047319



PAN-00036257



PAN-

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¹ Kuijpers 2019, 10-15.

² Graafstal/Willems[†]/Bödecker 2018, 67.

³ Sas/Thoen, 2002.