

'Dutch' Batavians more Roman than thought

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The Batavians, who lived in the Netherlands at the start of the Christian era were far more Roman than was previously thought. After just a few decades of Roman occupation, the Batavians had become so integrated that they cooked, built and bathed in a Roman manner. Dutch researcher Stijn Heeren discovered this during archaeological research.

Heeren studied excavated artefacts and traces of settlements and burial fields in the neighbourhood of Tiel. In Dutch history, the Batavians are often presented as a brave people who resisted a cruel oppressor. But Stijn Heeren has now demonstrated that these 'simple people' also adopted a lot of Roman customs. According to him the small farming communities changed into villages where Roman practices made their entrance.

Roman food and bathing

By studying the chronology of the excavation site and by analysing several specific categories of finds, Heeren could show how and when the locals started to participate in the economic, military and cultural structures of the [Roman Empire](#). The archaeologist discovered that within a few decades of Roman occupation, the Batavians used Roman ingredients in their cooking, that the farmers used makeup and oil in the same way as the Romans in their baths and that they built their farms according to the Roman style.

Money and war

Heeren believes that two important facts fuelled the Batavian integration. The Roman army camps were an important source of income for the Batavians. The Batavian farmers produced food for the Roman soldiers and in so doing could acquire Roman utensils as well. The Batavian economy therefore became dependent on that of the Romans. Yet the role played by the Batavians in the Roman army was possibly even more important for their integration. Many young men did 25 years of service in the Roman army and brought Roman objects and customs with them after completing their service.

Although Heeren's study is limited to the rural community of Tiel-Passewaaij, these communities could serve as a model for rural communities elsewhere in the Batavian world.

Heeren's research is part of the research programme 'Rural communities in the civitas Batavorum and their integration into the [Roman](#) Empire', led by Prof. Nico Roymans. This research programme is part of 'The Harvest of Malta', a series of research programmes funded by NWO (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research).

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