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## The Roman Limes

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47 AD - circa 400 AD

## The Roman Limes

### On the frontiers of the Roman world

Two thousand years ago, one of the frontiers of the immense Roman Empire ran through the Low Countries. The River Rhine that flowed from Nijmegen via Utrecht and Alphen aan den Rijn to the sea at Katwijk, formed part of the Roman *Limes*, the Latin word for frontier. In the eyes of the Romans, the uncivilised world began north of the river. That was where Germanic and Celtic tribes lived, including the Frisians and the Canninefates. The Rhine was, however, not just a frontier. It was also a major transport channel for the Romans. Supplies were brought in and exported by ship.

The Romans built watchtowers and army camps at regular intervals along the Rhine to defend their territory against enemy attacks from the north. Most of the encampments could house several hundred soldiers, but close to Nijmegen a camp arose that could accommodate two legions of six thousand men. The presence of these well-trained soldiers in their tunics, with their shiny

helmets, shields and swords, must have made quite an impression on the local population. Moreover, the surrounding areas changed dramatically with the introduction of Roman architecture.

South of the frontier – in Roman territory – lived, among others, the Batavians. They lived in peace with the Romans and many Batavians served in the Roman army. However, in 69 A.D. they rose up against the Romans, profiting from the unrest that had broken out across the entire Roman Empire following the death of the Emperor Nero. The Batavians were led by Julius Civilis, a Batavian who had already served twenty-five years in the Roman army. For a short time it seemed as if the rebellion would be successful, but after a few months the Romans defeated the Batavians. Julius Civilis had achieved nothing. Nonetheless, he was honoured as a true hero centuries later. Sixteenth century scholars claimed that the Batavians had rebelled for love of freedom

and that they should therefore be regarded as the true forefathers of the Dutch. This says more about the scholars than it does about the Batavians.

In the fourth century AD, more and more Germanic tribes invaded Roman territory. As a result, the Romans ultimately withdrew to behind the Alps.

Various places along the Rhine in the Netherlands have their origins in Roman times, as you can see on a medieval copy of an ancient Roman map. Finds are still being made at new archaeological excavations. For example, a watchtower and two ships were unearthed when the new Leidsche Rijn district was being built near Utrecht.



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## Sub-topics

### Primary education sector

The conquests of Julius Caesar  
Nijmegen in Roman times  
The river as a frontier and transport channel

### Secondary education sector

The Batavian rebellion  
Trade and cities in Roman times  
Frontier cultures: the confrontation between the  
Germanic and Roman cultures  
Roman writers on the Germanic tribes  
How the Roman Empire was organised

### Past and Present

Roman remains in the Netherlands  
Archaeology in the Netherlands  
Are there similarities between ancient Rome and  
the modern United States as a super power?

### In the Treasure Chest

Roman helmet

## References

### Places to Go

Alphen aan den Rijn: Archeon  
Nijmegen: Valkhof Museum  
Xanten: "Römerroute"  
Lelystad: Batavia Shipyard, where a Roman ship  
discovered at Leidsche Rijn is on show

### Books for young people

Thijs Goverde, *Het bloed van de verraders* (9+)  
Martine Letterie, *Het jaar van de Bataafse opstand* (9+)  
Jan Ploeger, *Het lage huis* (12+)

### Background literature

Hans Teitler, *De opstand der "Batavieren"*,  
(Verloren Verleden 1), Hilversum 1998.  
Bernard Colenbrander (ed.), *Limes Atlas*, Rotterdam  
2005.

### Websites

[www.limes.nl](http://www.limes.nl)  
[www.cultuurwijzer.nl/cultuurwijzer.nl/i000437.html](http://www.cultuurwijzer.nl/cultuurwijzer.nl/i000437.html) (medieval copy of a map of the  
Roman world at the time of Emperor Augustus)  
[www.museumvalkhof.nl/index2.html](http://www.museumvalkhof.nl/index2.html)  
(computer animation of the headquarters of  
the Roman army encampment near Nijmegen)  
[www.roemerroute.de](http://www.roemerroute.de)  
[www.belvedere.nu](http://www.belvedere.nu)  
[www.archfonds.nl](http://www.archfonds.nl)