

ROBERT NOUWEN

ATUATUCA TUNGRORUM, THE FIRST KNOWN MUNICIPIUM OF GALLIA
BELGICA?

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ATUATUCA TUNGRORUM, THE FIRST KNOWN MUNICIPIUM
OF GALLIA BELGICA?

In 1990 a Roman votive altar was found near Rodekruislaan (parcel Section D, 211 p. 6) in Tongeren. It is of particular significance to the history of the civitas Tungrorum and its capital Atuatuca¹. In the first place, this altar, devoted to I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus) and the Genius of the mun(icipium) Tung(rorum), is important because of its mentioning Atuatuca as municipium Tungrorum. Secondly, the discovery of this votive altar offers the chance to examine whether a more convincing argumentation can be formulated with regard to the assignment of the civitas Tungrorum to Gallia Belgica or Germania Inferior. The text of the newly discovered inscription runs as follows.

*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / et Genio / Mun(icipii) Tung(rorum) / Cat(ius?) Drousus / sal(arius,
-inator, -samentarius) Men(apiorum) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*

The monument appears to date from the 2nd half of the 2nd century or maybe from the beginning of the 3rd century. W. Vanvinckenroye and M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier have written a detailed comment.

Until recently there have not been any direct indications of the municipal statute of Atuatuca. So far, the statute of the town has not been mentioned in any source. But there were enough reasons to accept that Atuatuca was more than a vicus and that it had the statute of a municipium. The following facts refer to the municipal statute of the town: the presence of officials; the structure and character of the town; the town walls built with assent of the emperor during the second half of the second century; the military units recruited in the civitas Tungrorum right from the beginning, probably on the basis of a *foedus*. Though they were no factual evidence, these particulars formed an argumentation powerful enough to accept this statute in reasonable probability². Mentioning Atuatuca as municipium Tungrorum the newly discovered votive altar offers the final evidence of the statute of this town.

Can the civitas Tungrorum be assigned to Germania Inferior on the basis of this new votive altar? Can this inscription really settle the discussion whether the civitas Tungrorum should be considered to be part of Gallia Belgica or Germania Inferior? Some texts play an important part in this matter, i.e. Plinius, *Naturalis historiae* XXXI,12 and Ptolemaeus, *Geographica* II,9,4–6. Plinius' text is clear. The Tungri formed a civitas in Gallia Belgica in the first century A.D. but before Domitianus' administrative reform, probably in 90 when the two military districts of the Upper and Lower Rhine assumed the shape of regular provinces³. Especially the text by Ptolemaeus is important because it refers to the administrative division of the area concerned in the 2nd century. Ptolemaeus makes a clear distinction between the provinces Belgica (II,9,1, and the following) and Germania (II,9,8). He locates the Tungri in Gallia Belgica and according to him it is beyond doubt that the civitas Tungrorum belonged to this province. Hyginus⁴ refers to a situation at the end of the first century before Christ but that is beside the point in this discussion.

¹ W. Vanvinckenroye, *Een Romeins votiefaltaar te Tongeren*, in: *Limburg* 73, 1994, 225–237; J. E. Bogaers, in: *Limburg* 73, 1994, 238; M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, *Municipium Tungrorum*, in: *Latomus* 54, 1995, 361–369.

² We tried to elaborate this argumentation in our doctoral dissertation '*De Tungri in het Imperium Romanum tijdens het Principaat*', Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1993, 101 e.v. and 278 (not published).

³ See e.g. M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, *Germania inferior et Germania superior*, in: *Latomus* 32, 1973, 158–161; A. Garzetti, *From Tiberius to the Antonines. A History of the Roman Empire AD 14–192*, 1974, 279; T. Bechert, *De Romeinen tussen Rijn en Maas*, 1983, 39 (= *Römisches Germanien zwischen Rhein und Maas*, 1982).

⁴ Lachmann p. 123 = Thulin p. 86,10

An inscription on the socle of an equestrian statue from Bulla Regia (Africa Proconsularis)⁵ could have solved definitely the assignment of the civitas to a province but the stonedresser had ‘tampered with’ the text. This text runs as follows:

Q(uinto) Domitio L(ucii) f(ilio) Quir(ina) Marsiano / . . . proc(uratori) Aug(usti) ad census in Gallia accipiendos provinc(iarum) Belgicae per / regiones Tungrorum et Frisiavonum et Germania inferioris et Batavorum . . .

This passage causes serious problems and, consequently, different versions have already been put forward⁶. Nevertheless, on the basis of this inscription the various authors conclude that the civitas Tungrorum belonged to the provincia Gallia Belgica. J. E. Bogaers suggests reading the text as follows: *provinc. Belgicae et Germaniae Inferioris per regiones Tungrorum et Fris(i)avonum et Batavorum*. This textual reconstruction can lead to the conclusion that the civitas Tungrorum was part of Germania Inferior.

At last M. P. Speidel has recently given an additional argument – however e silentio – to locate the civitas Tungrorum in Gallia Belgica. He has pointed out that the emperor’s *Germani corporis custodes* and the *equites singulares Augusti* appear to have been recruited exclusively from the Marsaci, the Frisiavones, the Canninefates, the Baetasii and particularly the Batavi and the Ubii, all being tribes in Germania Inferior. The fact that the Tungri, though they were very good horsemen, did not provide soldiers for the *Germani corporis custodes* and the *equites singulares Augusti* suggests – according to M. P. Speidel⁷ – that the civitas Tungrorum is more likely to have belonged to Gallia Belgica than to Germania Inferior.

The altar, devoted to I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus) and the Genius of the mun(icipium) Tungrorum) was a possible additional argument for W. Vanvinckenroye and M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier to locate the civitas Tungrorum in Germania Inferior⁸. Indeed, until recently not even one caput civitatis with the statute of a municipium has been known in Gallia Belgica contrary to Germania Inferior and Germania Superior. As far as this is concerned, the question arises whether the Roman authorities pursued a different policy regarding the granting of municipal rights in both parts of Germania and Gallia Belgica. A positive answer means that municipia were set up only in the German provinces. In

⁵ See M. Boulouednine, in: *Fasti Archaeologici* 13, 1960, 285–286; *AE* 1962, 183; H. G. Pflaum, in: *Gnomon* 37, 1965, 396; idem, *Une lettre de promotion de l’empereur Marc Aurèle pour un procureur ducénaire de Gaule Narbonnaise*, in: *BJ* 171, 1971, 349–366; *AE* 1971, 491.

⁶ *provinc. Belgicae per regiones Tungrorum et Fris(i)avonum et Germaniae inferioris Batavorum (sc. per regionum)*: C. B. Rüger, *Germania Inferior. Untersuchungen zur Territorial- und Verwaltungsgeschichte Niedergermaniens in der Prinzipatszeit*, *Beih. BJ* 1968, 38–41.

- *provinc. Belgicae per regiones Tungrorum et Fris(i)avonum et Germaniae inferioris [per regiones Canninefatium (exempli gratia!)] et Batavorum*: H. von Petrikovits, *Bemerkungen zur Westgrenze der römischen Provinz Niedergermanien*, in: *Studien zur europäischen Vor- und Frühgeschichte*, 1968, 115–119; G. Alföldy, *Die Legionslegaten der römischen Rheinarmeen (ES, 3)* 1967, 39 n. 211 and H. G. Pflaum, see supra note 5.

- *provinc. Belgicae et Germaniae Inferioris per regiones Tungrorum et Fris(i)avonum et Batavorum*: J. E. Bogaers, *Germania Inferior, Gallia Belgica en de civitates van de Frisiavones en de Tungri*, in: *Helinium* 11, 1971, 228–237; idem, *Civitates und Civitas-Hauptorte in der nördlichen Germania Inferior*, in: *BJ* 172, 1972, 310–330. Comp. also J. E. Bogaers, *Enige opmerkingen over het Nederlands gedeelte van de limes van Germania Inferior (Germania Secunda)*, in: *BROB* 17, 1967, 99–114, especially 101 sqq; C. B. Rüger, *Germania Inferior*, 39. E. M. Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, 1985, 54 places the Frisiavones in Germania Inferior. A concise status quaestionis about the civitas Tungrorum offers J. Slofstra, in: *Images of the Past* 1991, 168, n. 98.

⁷ M. P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar. The Roman Emperors’ Horse Guards*, 1994, 38 sqq. Concerning the *Germani corporis custodes*, see especially M. P. Speidel, *Germani Corporis Custodes*, in: *Germania* 62, 1984, 31–45 (= *Roman Army Studies II - Mavors VIII*, 1992, 105–190).

⁸ See also M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, *Epigraphie et municipalisation en Gaule du Nord*, in: *Colloque. Archéologie gallo-romaine en Belgique*, 9 décembre 1995, *Pré-actes*, Namur 1995, 23–25.

this case the civitas Tungrorum has to be located in Germania Inferior. Otherwise Atuatuca is the only town in Gallia Belgica of which the municipal statute is attested at this moment. In this way the votive inscription of Tongeren appears to add an element to the discussion. Moreover, M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier points out that these towns were obviously part of a policy in the 2nd century, particularly during the reign of the Antonine emperors, to assign the municipal statute to civitas principal towns in both Germaniae, that were organised only at the end of the 1st century A.D. According to M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier the assignment of the municipal statute to Atuatuca is logical in this context⁹.

The fact that this analysis is in strong contradiction to the above-stated sources remains a problem because Plinius and particularly Ptolemaeus clearly locate Atuatuca and the civitas Tungrorum in Gallia Belgica and the inscription of Bulla Regia leads to the same conclusion, if the text is respected. After a critical evaluation of all the arguments it should be clear that this new inscription has not enough evidential value to locate the civitas Tungrorum in Germania Inferior during the early Roman Empire. Indeed, the statute of other important towns in Gallia Belgica, e.g. Bavay, is not attested. Consequently, conclusions with regard to the policy of privileges by the Roman authorities on the basis of the statute of the principal towns of the civitates insofar as they are known, cannot be drawn. In our opinion it is also impossible to conclude – on the basis of this votive altar – that Gallia Belgica had the same system of municipia as Germania Inferior and Superior. So the definite assignment of the civitas Tungrorum to Gallia Belgica or Germania Inferior remains to be proved. With the inscription of Bulla Regia in mind, we, nevertheless, prefer to locate the municipium Tungrorum in Gallia Belgica.

Tongeren

Robert Nouwen

⁹ Comp. W. Vanvinckenroye, in: *Limburg* 73, 1994, 232; M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, in: *Latomus* 54, 1995, 366–369. Comp. also H. Wolff, *Kriterien für latinische und römische Städte in Gallien und Germanien und die 'Verfassung' der gallischen Stammesgemeinden*, in: *BJ* 176, 1976, 55.