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ATUATUCA TUNGRORUM, THE FIRST KNOWN MUNICIPIUM OF GALLIA BELGICA?


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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 Tungorum and its capital Atuatuca. In the first place, this altar, devoted to I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus) and the Genius of the mun(icipium) Tung(orum), is important because of its mentioning Atuatuca as municipium Tungorum. 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 Tungorum to Gallia Belgica or Germania Inferior. The text of the newly discovered inscription runs as follows.

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

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 Tungorum 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 probability. Mentioning Atuatuca as municipium Tungorum the newly discovered votive altar offers the final evidence of the statute of this town.

Can the civitas Tungorum be assigned to Germania Inferior on the basis of this new votive altar? Can this inscription really settle the discussion whether the civitas Tungorum 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 provinces. 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 Tungorum belonged to this province. Hyginus refers to a situation at the end of the first century before Christ but that is beside the point in this discussion.

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).
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:

\[
Q(uinto)\ D(omitio)\ L(ucii)\ f(ilio)\ Quir(ina)\ Marsiano / \ldots\ proc(uratori)\ Aug(usti)\ ad\ census\ in\ Gallia\ accipiendos\ provinc(iarum)\ Belgicae\ per\ /\ regiones\ Tungrorum\ et\ Frisianum\ et\ Germaniae\ inferioris\ et\ Batavorum\ \ldots
\]

This passage causes serious problems and, consequently, different versions have already been put forward\(^6\). 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 Frisianum 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 Cannefates, the Baetae, 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. Speidel\(^7\) – 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 Inferior\(^8\). 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

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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, particulary
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 context.

The fact that this analysis is in strong contradiction to the above-stated sources remains a problem
because Plinius and particulary 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 priviliges 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

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Comp. also H. Wolff, Kriterien für latinische und römische Städte in Gallien und Germanien und die ‘Verfassung’ der galli-