

ADRIAAN VERHULST

*The Rise of Cities
in North-West Europe*



CAMBRIDGE

more information - www.cambridge.org/0521464919

This page intentionally left blank

The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe

For more than fifty years, since the works on the rise of cities in north-west Europe by Fernand Vercauteren, François-Louis Ganshof and Hans Van Werveke were published, no synthesis which systematically examines the growth and development of cities in north-west Europe has been written. Adriaan Verhulst takes as his subject the history of urban settlements and towns in the region between the rivers Somme and Meuse from the late Roman period (fourth century) to the end of the twelfth century. This region comprises Flanders and Liège, two of the most urbanized areas not only in the southern Netherlands but in north-west Europe as a whole until the twelfth century. Fifteen towns are studied in all, and Professor Verhulst provides rich details of the impact of political, military and ecclesiastical as well as social and economic factors on the developing towns, as they were transformed from regional markets to centres of industry and international commerce.

ADRIAAN VERHULST is Professor Emeritus at the University of Ghent. He has written many books, including *Rural and Urban Aspects of Early Medieval Northwest Europe* (1992), and has contributed articles to journals such as the *Journal of Medieval History*, *Past and Present* and the *Economic History Review*.

Themes in International Urban History

Series Editors

PETER CLARK

DAVID REEDER

The Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester

This series examines from an international perspective key themes in the historic development of cities and societies. The series is principally, although not exclusively, concerned with the European city, with an emphasis on the early modern and modern periods, and it will consider urban systems, structures and processes. Individual volumes will bring together and present in an accessible form the best work of the wide variety of scholars from different disciplines and nations currently engaged in research on urban history. The series is published by Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in association with the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester. The first volumes in the series include collections of commissioned pieces organized around certain key themes that lend themselves to comparative analysis. They have a substantive introduction by the volume editor/s, making explicit linkages between individual essays and setting out the overall significance and context of the work. *Themes in International Urban History* will interest scholars and students in a variety of sub-disciplines within social and economic history, geography, sociology and urban planning. It rides on the wave of important and exciting new developments in the study of cities and their history, and reflects the growing internationalization of the area of study.

Titles already published

- 1 Edited by Ronald K. Goodenow and William E. Marsden *The City and Education in Four Nations*
- 2 Bernard Lepetit *The Pre-industrial Urban System: France 1740–1840*
- 3 Edited by Peter Clark *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*
- 4 Adriaan Verhulst *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe*

The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe

Adriaan Verhulst



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Maison des Sciences de l'Homme 1999

First published in printed format 1999

ISBN 0-511-03772-4 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN 0-521-46491-9 hardback

ISBN 0-521-46909-0 paperback

Contents

<i>List of maps</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Editor's preface</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 The transformation of the Roman towns	1
2 The nadir of urban life (sixth–seventh centuries)	24
3 New urban beginnings and the Viking raids (eighth–ninth centuries)	44
4 The urbanization of the high Middle Ages (tenth–eleventh centuries)	68
5 Industrialization, commercial expansion and emancipation (eleventh–twelfth centuries)	119
6 Conclusion	149
<i>Bibliography</i>	157
<i>Index</i>	171

Maps

1	Cities and towns between the Somme and the Meuse/Rhine delta up to the twelfth century	xii–xiii
2	Maastricht	4
3	Huy	6
4	Liège	71
5	Ghent	76
6	Arras	80–1
7	Tournai	85
8	Cambrai	87
9	Bruges	89
10	Saint-Omer	93
11	Douai	96
12	Antwerp	99
13	Valenciennes	103
14	Lille	105
15	Ypres	109

Editor's preface

Written by one of the most distinguished historians of medieval Europe, this volume is important for four reasons. First, it brings together and presents in a coherent, wide-ranging argument a great deal of the recent research on the southern Netherlands by French, Dutch, Belgian and German scholars; some of this work has been hidden in local or regional publications. Secondly, the book mobilizes the discoveries and insights not just of a diversity of historians (political, religious and agrarian as well as urban), but of archaeologists and numismatists. This gives a methodological richness to the study and puts it at the forefront of writing in the field. Thirdly, Professor Verhulst offers a powerful critique of much of the earlier writing on the rise of European cities in the high Middle Ages. In particular, the influential views of Henri Pirenne, a previous professor at Ghent, are finally given a decent funeral. Rather than being the flagship of European long-distance trade, as Pirenne argued, the major towns of the southern Low Countries had a much more complex evolution. Enjoying only limited continuity from the Roman era, their upsurge from the ninth century owed much to the patronage of increasingly buoyant abbeys and churches. In the next century there was the further stimulus provided by the backing of the Count of Flanders and by the breakdown of the manorial system. Growing regional market activity and the drift of industrial crafts to towns provided a springboard for the surge of long-distance trade.

The fourth reason for the importance of this book is that it focuses on one of the two most developed and successful urban networks in medieval Europe – along with that of northern Italy. Though more explicit comparison with the Mediterranean urban system might have been ventured, we get a clear sense of that complex interaction of political, locational, agrarian and other factors which contributed to the virtual invention of a new urban world in the southern Low Countries, one which, unlike in Italy, owed little to the infrastructure and urban design (if more to the urban concepts) of the Roman past. It was a dynamic urban system that

despite regional shifts of power (from Flanders to Brabant) proved amazingly resilient, not only through the upheavals of the late Middle Ages, but over subsequent centuries.

Peter Clark

Preface

This book was prompted by the publication in 1991 of *Towns in the Viking Age* by Helen Clarke and Björn Ambrosiani. The fact that that book scarcely mentions the towns in the southern Low Countries and is chronologically restricted to the Viking Age – however broadly based, from the seventh to the ninth centuries – led to the realization that, apart from a number of valuable contributions in the old (1950) and new (1981/2) *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, there is no recent work which provides a clear view of the urban history of the southern Low Countries from the late Roman period to the first burgeoning of the towns in the twelfth century.

Though they still have the capacity to fascinate, the works of Pirenne in this area are outdated, as is the work of Edith Ennen, *Frühgeschichte der europäischen Stadt* (1953), which deals with the southern Low Countries at some considerable length. Since then, and especially since the major overview in the form of an article by Franz Petri, *Die Anfänge des mittelalterlichen Städtewesens in den Niederlanden und dem angrenzenden Frankreich* (1958), much research has been carried out into the urban history of the whole of the southern Netherlands and into the emergence and earliest history of many individual towns in this area. I recently compiled and reprinted a collection of the most important of these studies in *Anfänge des Städtewesens an Schelde, Maas und Rhein bis zum Jahre 1000*, which appeared in the series *Städteforschung*, vol. A/40, produced by the Institut für vergleichende Städtegeschichte in Münster (1996). It can serve as a sort of reader for the work under consideration here. However, this book is based not purely on the studies dating from 1958–86 which were reprinted in the above-mentioned compilation, but also in particular on studies which have since been published by myself and others, historians and archaeologists, about the history of numerous individual towns or groups of towns between the late Roman period and the end of the twelfth century.

Geographically, I have chosen the area between the River Somme and the River Meuse as a framework because this area comprises both the

county of Flanders, which reached almost to the Somme, and the prince-bishopric of Liège, whose leading medieval cities lay on the banks of the Meuse. The two areas were among the most urbanized regions not only in the southern Netherlands, but in north-west Europe as a whole, until into the twelfth century. The twelfth century has been chosen as the chronological cutoff point because that was when the cities under consideration really flourished for the first time, while in the second half and especially at the end of that century new developments began, from both a socio-economic and a politico-institutional point of view which would come to fruition in the thirteenth century. I have taken the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century as the chronological starting point for the work, i.e. the commencement of the late Roman Empire, which signified a break in the urban history of the Roman period larger and more consequential than the migration of the Germanic peoples and the fall of the Roman Empire. The book has a chronological structure, and each of the five main chapters corresponds, I believe, to a specific period in the urban history of the southern Low Countries.

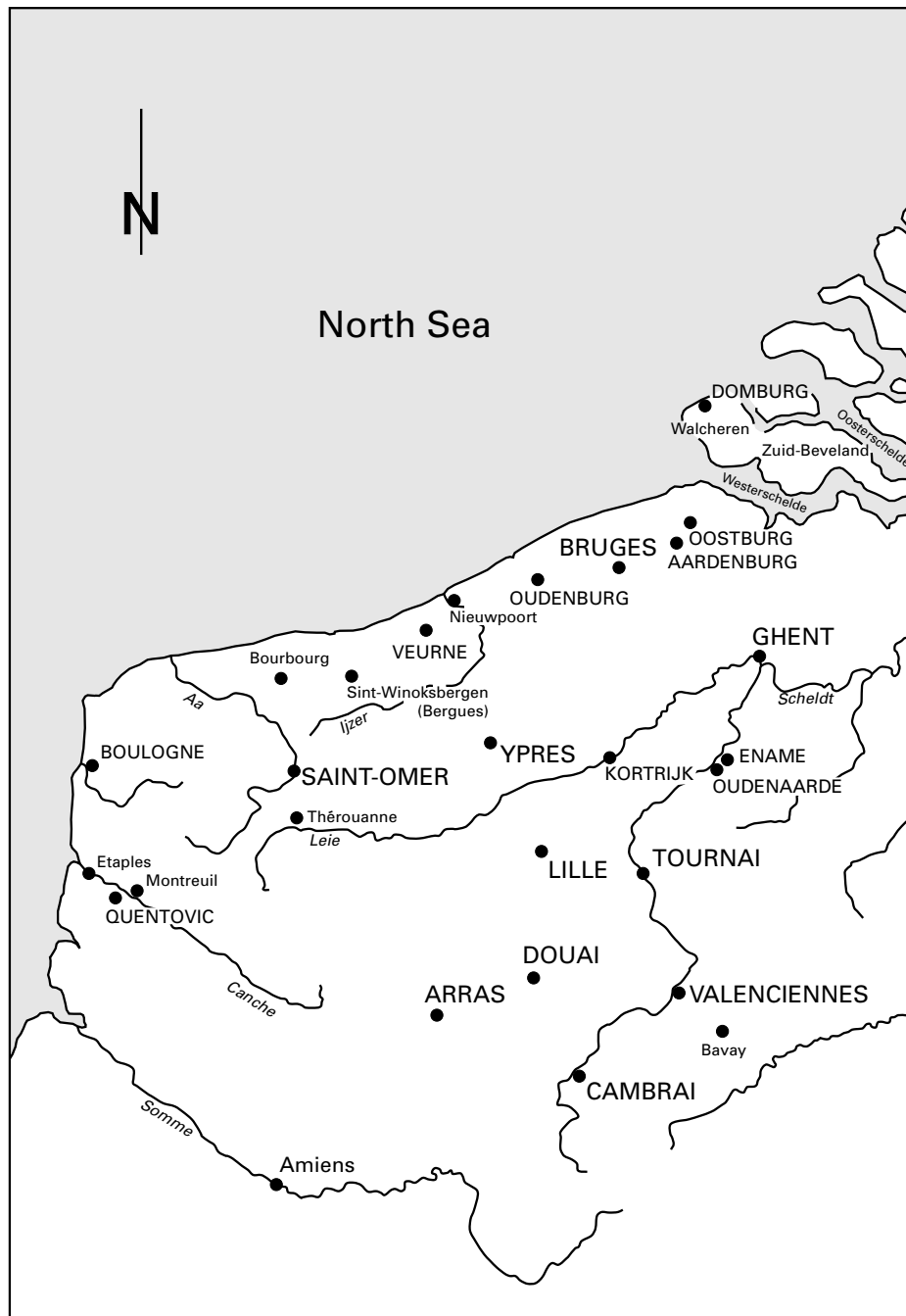
I am greatly indebted to my former collaborators at Ghent University, Dr Frans Verhaeghe and Dr Georges Declercq, now professors at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels, for the help they offered in a number of areas in the preparation of this work. Dr Arent Pol of the Koninklijk Penningkabinet in Leiden provided valuable information about the monetary history of a few places along the Meuse in the sixth–seventh centuries and kindly made corrections to what I thought I knew. I had an interesting and fruitful exchange of ideas on various aspects of the subject with Dr Derek Keene, Director of the Centre for Metropolitan History in London.

I wish to thank Professor Peter Clark of Leicester University for encouraging and making a critical assessment of my initial plans for this book and for introducing my definitive proposal at Cambridge University Press. I would also like to thank Richard Fisher, Publishing Development Director at Cambridge University Press, and his collaborators and referees for their interest in and commitment to the publication of this book, and to thank more especially Frances Brown for her accurate copy editing and her remarks, corrections and suggestions. Alison Mouthaan-Gwillim provided a careful rendering of my Dutch text into English and I am indebted to her for her work. Hans Rombaut was of great help in drawing up the maps. Luc Pareyn, Director of the Liberaal Archief in Ghent, allowed me to use a whole range of facilities that enabled me to prepare my manuscript for publication. I am also most grateful to Nancy Criel, a staff member at the Liberaal Archief, for all her typing work. Finally, my thanks must go to the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research

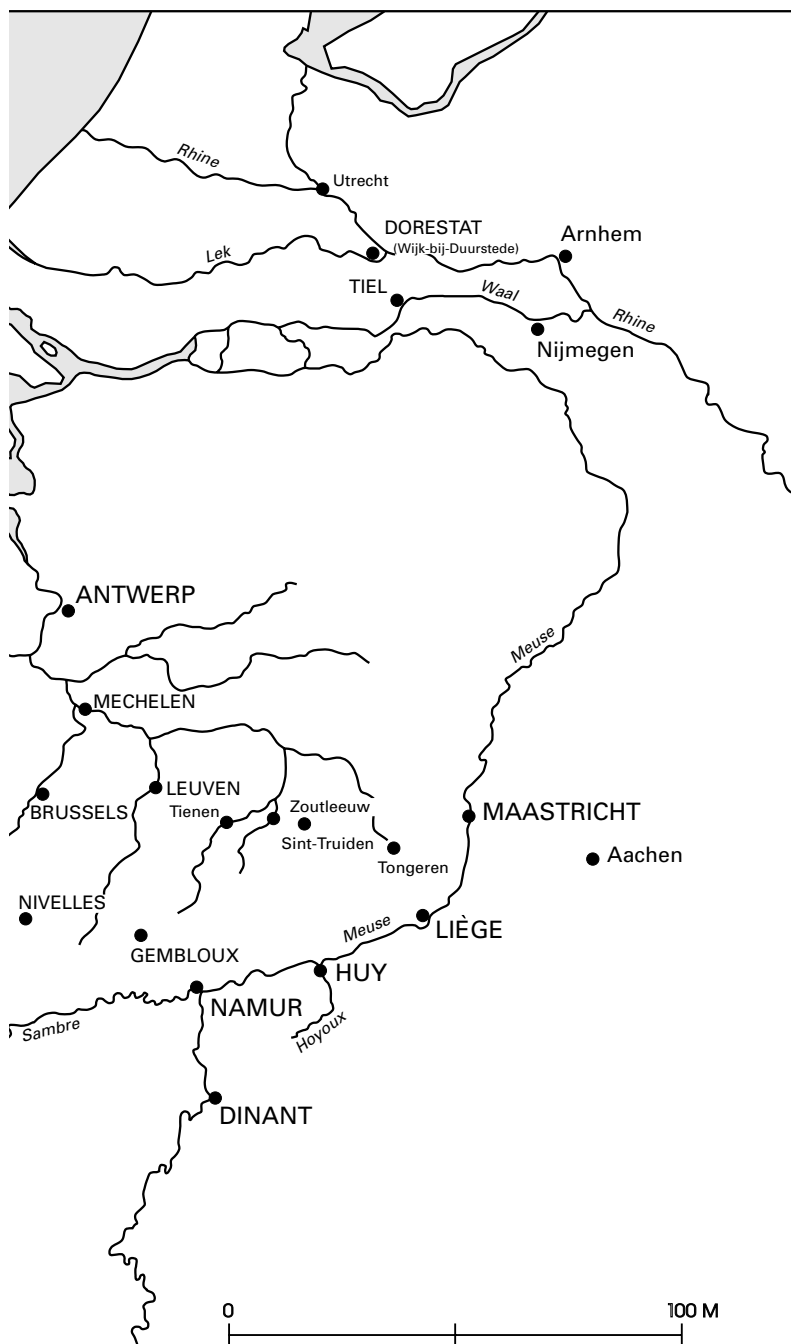
(NFWO, now FWO-Flanders) which awarded us the funds for the project ‘Historical, archaeological and topographical research into the emergence and the earliest development of the Flemish Cities (late Roman period–twelfth century)’, thereby facilitating the realization of this work and making the English version possible.

A Note on place-names

Names of Flemish cities are given in their official Dutch form and names of French and French-speaking cities in their French form, except where a generally accepted English form exists, e.g., Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, Brussels.



Map 1 Cities and towns between the Somme and the Meuse/Rhine delta up to the twelfth century. *Legend:* big capitals – cities individually treated at length; small capitals – cities treated briefly; big roman – geographical reference only; small roman – cities and places mentioned briefly



1 The transformation of the Roman towns

A history of the origin of the medieval cities between the Meuse, the Somme and the North Sea must begin in Roman times, even though there is no immediately apparent direct link between the emergence of urban centres in the eighth–ninth centuries and possible Roman antecedents.

The Romans did indeed introduce the city as a geographical phenomenon in the area under consideration here.¹ The real question we must ask, however, is whether the location of the Roman urban agglomerations determined the location of important medieval cities, and first and foremost of the oldest group of cities in the area in question, namely those which emerged in the eighth–ninth centuries. This does not necessarily mean, in our opinion, that the existence of an urban agglomeration in Roman times had any influence on or significance for the topography of most of these cities. This is only the case – and then still to a limited extent – further south than the area under consideration here, to the south of the Somme and Seine and even to the south of the Loire. In the regions between the Meuse, the Somme and the North Sea, probably only the location of the Roman city or agglomeration – and then usually not even in a micro-topographical, but in a general-geographical sense – affected the location of the oldest group of medieval cities.

On the other hand, medieval cities did not always emerge as early as in the eighth–ninth centuries on or near the place where a Roman city or agglomeration had existed. Sometimes this happened much later, in the eleventh–twelfth centuries, as for example in Tongeren, Kortrijk and Aardenburg; sometimes it did not happen at all, as in Oudenburg and Bavay. Moreover four phases are distinguishable in urban development in our area during the four to five centuries of Roman domination, and of these only the last, that of the Late Empire (260/84 to mid-fifth century), is of importance in the limited sense that we have indicated. A few cities, like Cassel and Bavay, which had been administrative capitals of the

¹ E. M. Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, London, 1985, pp. 75–100.

civitas Menapiorum and the *civitas Nerviorum* respectively, lost this status at the beginning of the Late Empire, and with it their importance, to the advantage of earlier *vici* such as Tournai (*civitas Turnacensium*) and Cambrai (*civitas Cameracensium*).² Located on a waterway, the Scheldt, and no longer on a land route, in the ninth–tenth centuries these earlier *vici* – unlike Cassel and Bavay – would become centres not only of ecclesiastical administration but also of trade and industry. Above all, however, walls were built around large and small urban agglomerations at the end of the third century, enclosing a much smaller expanse than the earlier urban area (Amiens: 25 ha; Tournai: 13 ha; Bavay and Maastricht: 2 ha).³ The walled centre was made into a sort of fortified citadel, which in some cities, such as Cambrai, would play the role of pre-urban nucleus in the emergence of the medieval city.

The Meuse Valley

Tongeren (Tongres), with a second, smaller wall – but 2,650 m in length nevertheless – dating from the late third century, and still one of the largest cities in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire at that time, is an exception to this, even if here too the surface area was reduced from 72 to 43 ha.⁴ But it was Tongeren that was to founder as a city in the fifth–sixth centuries. It did not play an urban role again until the twelfth century, long after the episcopal see, which had been based there since the middle of the fourth century, was eventually transferred at the beginning of the sixth century to Maastricht where the first bishop of Tongeren, Servaas (d. 384), was buried.⁵ Also interesting in this respect is the shift of a centre served exclusively by land routes, like Tongeren, to a place on a river, like Maastricht on the Meuse, though in this case at a later time and in a context different from the shift from Cassel to Tournai and from Bavay to Cambrai.

In **Maastricht**, as in many other places, the nature of the settlement in the fourth century is completely different from that before its destruction during one of the great invasions by Germanic tribes in the seventies of the third century.⁶ A fortification was built on the ruins of the earlier *vicus* in the fourth century, around 333, a small fort measuring 170 by 90 m, the longest side being the one running along the (western) left bank of the

² *Ibid.*, pp. 204–5. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 222–7.

⁴ J. Mertens, 'La destinée des centres urbains gallo-romains à la lumière de l'archéologie et des textes', in *La genèse et les premiers siècles des villes médiévales dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux*, Brussels, 1990 (Crédit Communal, Collection Histoire in-8°, no. 83), pp. 68–9.

⁵ T. Panhuysen and P. H. Leupen, 'Maastricht in het eerste millennium', in *La genèse et les premiers siècles*, pp. 429–30, 432–3. ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 411–49.

Meuse (Map 2). Like many similarly small fortified settlements, it is usually called *castellum* or *castrum*, though this word does not appear to have been used with reference to Maastricht in the Roman period.

The walls were probably provided with ten round turrets and two massive rectangular gatehouses. A wide moat was dug around the walls. The old bridge over the Meuse must have been repaired at about the time the fortification was built. The road from Cologne to Tongeren ran over the bridge and straight through the *castellum* in an east–west direction. Within the fortification there was a 30 × 15 m grain store or *horreum*, which was wrongly thought to have been the oldest bishop's church and the forerunner of the nearby Church of Our Lady. Another storehouse or barracks, built on the ruins of a former temple, stood against the inside of the bulwark near the west gate. So far insufficient archaeological proof has been found to ascribe a purely military function or population to the *castellum* of Maastricht, even though it is obvious that the fortification was built for military and strategic purposes. The development of a large cemetery on the road to Tongeren, 400 to 500 m to the west of the fortification near the later Vrijthof, gave the settlement an added dimension. This could be an indication of population growth during the fourth century. The first bishop of Tongeren, St Servaas (d. 384) was buried here. Later, shortly after 550, a cemeterial church was built over his grave. This church and the grave were both archaeologically identified under the crossing of the actual Church of St Servaas.⁷ Under the successors of St Servaas, in the fifth or at the latest at the beginning of the sixth century, Maastricht became the centre of the bishopric, ousting Tongeren from that position. It is far from certain whether the bishop of Maastricht took up residence in the *castellum*, for no layers of waste dating from the sixth and seventh centuries have been found in the southern part. Traces of habitation from the fourth and fifth centuries have been found outside the walls of the *castellum*. They indicate the presence of a predominantly Roman population. Many typical fifth-century shards have been found, often with Christian motifs, while graves from the fifth century, unaccompanied by gifts and so undoubtedly Christian, have been found in the western cemetery near and under the Church of St Servaas. These signs of growth in Maastricht between the middle of the fourth and the end of the fifth centuries cannot be dissociated from the decline of Tongeren, perhaps as early as the fifth century. Indeed, finds from that century and later are extremely rare in Tongeren.

So, unlike Tongeren, in Maastricht there is clearly continuity through

⁷ T. Panhuysen, 'Wat weten we over de continuïteit van Maastricht?', in C. G. De Dijn (ed.), *Sint-Servatius, Bisschop van Tongeren-Maastricht: het vroegste christendom in het Maasland*. Borgloon and Rijkel, 1986, pp. 125–46.