CHAPTER FOUR
THE RHINE PROVINCES

Germania superior and inferior

1) Short Historical Survey

Caesar’s campaigns in Gaul, apart from population displacements and decimations, resulted in a transfer of the Roman border to the Rhine (Rhenus). Augustus tried to extend the German frontier from the Rhine to the Elbe (Albus) but Drusus’ death in 9 BCE temporarily stopped the advance. Then Augustus sent Tiberius to secure Germania for Rome and in 4 CE the area between the Rhine, the Elbe, the North Sea and the European highlands (Erzgebirge) was thought a province in the phase of occupation. Arminius’ devastating strike against the Romans in 9 CE brought about the elimination of three legions, six auxiliary cohorts, and three alae under the command of P. Quinctilius Varus. It depleted Roman combat effectiveness but did not break the Roman willingness to venture further into the area west of the Rhine.

Drusus’ son Germanicus set out against the various Germanic tribes in 14 and 15 CE. Again, Arminius inflicted heavy losses on the Romans. Germanicus’ offensive in 16 CE was more successful. He defeated his German nemesis, Arminius, twice, but the Roman fleet, with which the Roman troops were transported from the Lower Rhine to the operational area, suffered considerable storm damage on its return. At this point, the emperor Tiberius recalled Germanicus, stopped the campaign and with it, the Augustan policy of conquest. Germanicus received a triumph (the Roman equivalent of declaring victory and pulling out) and was sent to take care of the eastern provinces for which he was granted an imperium maius.

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1 Vell. Pat. 2.94.4: "(...) formam paene stipendiae prouinciae."
2 Tacitus described the location haud procu Teutoburgiensi saltu. Th. Mommsen deduced from repeated coin finds that the Niewedder Depression, just north of Osnabrück, located between the Kalkrieser Mountain and the so-called Great Moor, a natural bottle neck, had been the place of the devastating battle. The newest archaeological excavations now substantiate Mommsen’s hypothesis.
The Roman occupational armies, however, were not withdrawn. The two military spheres, the Lower Rhine, with military headquarters in Venta (Xanten), later moved to the oppidum Ubiorum (Cologne)⁴, and the Upper Rhine, with the main base in Mogontiacum (Mainz), naturally formed the two provinciae. The two military commanders, with four legions each, governed the areas of Germania inferior and superior as legati Augusti pro praetore exercitus while the financial administration of the two military provinces was assigned to the procurator of Belgica.

The uprising of the Bataui under the leadership of Civilis in 69-70 highlighted the weakness of the Lower Rhine limes. Vespasian militarily reorganized the Lower and the Upper Rhine area. He moved the legio II adiutrix, later replaced by the legio X gemina, into the area of Nijmegen, the center of the uprising. He placed the legio XXII primigenia in Venta, the legio VI uictrix in Neuss, the legio XXI rapax in Bonna (Bonn), and the legio I adiutrix and XIV gemina in Mogontiacum. Vespasian replaced most of the auxiliaries and added new ones. There were about six alae and twenty-six cohortes in addition to the four legions in the Lower Rhine area⁵.

The annexation of the Agri Decumates⁶ and the region around the Taunus Mountain⁷ allowed the construction of a road between the Upper Rhine and Upper Danube. There was reconstruction of the destroyed castella and construction of new ones as in Nida (Frankfurt-Heddernheim) and the row of auxiliary castella along the Lower Neckar. Under Domitian’s administration control of the provinces Germania superior and inferior⁸ was given to legati Augusti pro

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⁴ Under Claudius the oppidum advanced to colonia and was renamed colonia Claudia ara Augusta Agrippinensium.
⁶ Tac. Germ. 29. Originally inhabited by Helvetii and later Suebi, the migration of a Macomannic tribe under the leadership of Maroboduus around 9 CE destroyed the cohesive tribal units. E. Hesselmayer, “Was ist und was heisst Dekumatland,” Klio 24 (1931), 1-37.
⁷ This area included the Black Forest, the Neckar basin and the Swabian Alb.