The Batavia, the book Hadrianus Junius from Hoorn was commissioned to write by the States of Holland in 1566, belongs to what Anthony Grafton eloquently characterised as ‘the smoothly classical texts of humanist history, with their gleaming marble façades of unfootnoted Latin’. Junius himself did not live to see the monumental result in print. He completed the book in 1570, but by then the political situation had evolved so dramatically that the very States which had commissioned the book forbade its publication. And when it was in fact finally published in 1588, the Habsburg world Junius had lived in was gone. Scholars like Justus Lipsius, Joseph Scaliger and Petrus Scriverius later called into question Junius’ authority in matters of geography, linguistics and history, but they never doubted his vast erudition and philological achievements. His Batavia, a glorious panorama of Holland’s past and present, stands as a grand monument to what is now known as the ‘Batavian Myth’. The myth would play a significant role in Dutch political discourse over the next two hundred years. Today however Ancient Batavia, the Batavian Myth and Junius’ Batavia have become a terra incognita to be rediscovered. As Junius once sighed: ‘...everything in our world tends to shift and to fall...’
In the first centuries AD, Roman Batavia or the ‘Island of the Batavi-ans’ as it was generally known had been the subject of considerable interest. Its location at the Lower Rhine frontier, its special political and military status in the Roman Empire, and certain details of its history are mentioned by Caesar, Pliny the Elder and especially by Tacitus, who wrote extensively about the Germanic uprising in 68 led by the Batavian Julius or Claudius Civilis. After the fifth century, however, there is no further mention of the Batavians. Archaeological finds, including a few inscriptions, confirm the existence of Roman frontier settlements, roads, harbours, ships and even some temples but they shed no light on the character of the indigenous population. At best they indicate that there must have been a highly Romanized local elite. Recent excavations in the Roman/Batavian frontier camp of Vindolanda in northern England suggest that as a result of the Batavians’ military service in the Roman legions, some knowledge of Latin was widespread among all the inhabitants of Batavia. But their ethnic background and language remain a mystery, as they left no trace in local traditions or in medieval chronicles. Their ‘Island of Batavia’ between the Rhine and the Waal is now called Betuwe, formerly Batouwe, and this may be the only remaining footprint of their presence. New finds in Maren-Kessel on the Meuse river seem to prove the one-time existence of a large indigenous settlement or religious centre and to con-

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78–101). Although it has been generally adopted since, I agree with the objection of Sandra Langereis: ‘Myth’ nowadays implies evil intentions, lying on purpose. It would be better to use terms like ‘self image’: ‘conceptions about a nation’s own identity versus foreign identities’ (S. Langereis, ‘Van botte boeren tot beschaafde burgers. Oudheidkundige beelden van de Bataven, 1500–1800’, in: L. Swinkels, ed., De Bataven. Verhalen van een verdwenen volk, Amsterdam and Nijmegen, 2004, pp. 72–105 (73)). Batavia was the subject of the Nijmegen exhibition ‘De Bataven’ in 2004 and the publication of a collection of scholarly essays of the same name. Still, ‘Batavia’ is associated either with Jakarta, or the reconstructed Dutch East India Company ship Batavia in Lelystad or the adjacent mall Batavia Stad with its ‘Roman’ walls and gates.

4 H.C. Teitler, ‘Romeinen en Bataven: de literaire bronnen’, in: Swinkels, ed., De Bataven, pp. 20–38 (37) quotes several passages about the Batavians from Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus, all of them referring to the end of the fourth century and, interestingly, not very flattering. The fifth-century Notitia Dignitatum (occidentalis, 35.24) mentions a Batavian cohort, but it is unclear if at that time it still consisted of real Batavians.