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CHANGING SOME PHYSICO-CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

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Summary

Based on historical phenomena, our paper discusses changes of physico-cultural

borders over the centuries, with some anthropological applications.

Keywords *archeology; history; sociology; postcolonialism; entrepreneurship*

Legendary borders

In 2017, Mooij & Van der Leeuw [1-3] reported the unearthing in Alphen aan den Rijn (The Netherlands) of a 2,000 years old Roman road, which once had been part of the Lower German Limes (= border) of the Roman Empire. This limes was formed by a frontier river, the northern Rhine (figure 1). During two centuries (40-275 AD) this limes was not only a physico-cultural border, but also a military road [4].



Fig. 1. Roman limes [5]; Rhine (blue) (left); at : indication of road (right).

Archeological findings as described by Mooij and Van der Leeuw (2017)

Except a characteristic paved gravel road over almost 30 meters, the team also found pottery, iron objects, wood (poles, possible bridge parts), bone tools and sandstone parts of tombstones [3]. The parts of the tombstones are unique at this location. It was customary in Roman Times that there were cemeteries near roads and settlements, but parts of tombstones are seldom found at the Lower German Limes and castella. Citing from Mooij and Van der Leeuw (2017) [6]:

“Rationale.

We researched, during some time, a trench in a small headland between two waterways in Alphen aan den Rijn (the Netherlands) at the “De Hoorn” area, where the Regional Archeological Archiving Project (RAAP) previously had discovered a skull and traces of the Limes road. In the north side of the slope of this headland we found - so far not discovered, even not by RAAP, according to our information - very clear traces of the Limes road.

Research findings.

To prove that this was not a natural package gravel, but the Limes road itself, we looked if Roman pottery or building ceramics could be found in the gravel. Thus we examined the gravel over 14 meters length, and randomly found four fragments of building material, one Roman shard and one native-Roman shard. Furthermore, we looked at the thickness of the package. Its 16 cm thickness corresponds with, and is also reasonably consistent with, the gravel tracks of the Limes road previously found in Alphen aan den Rijn, like those in the 2007 study by the Amsterdam Archeological Centre (AAC) at the transshipment terminal on the east side of Alphen aan den Rijn (and other places along the Limes like Bunnik and De Meern). It concerns fairly fine gravel, mixed with rust brown organic material (loam) and shell. In terms of composition, this fits well with other traces of the Limes road near the river Rhine, such as the ones in Woerden (by the archeological advice and management office “ArcheoWest” in 2009, with the exception of the tufa found there) and Utrecht De Meern. We took a soil sample for further analysis. The gravel layer was 50 cm below the ground level.

Finds in the gravel layer.

The building material found in the layer, consists in three cases of freely straightened blocks. That could indicate that the Romans neatly cut their tegulae and imbreces into pieces to use for the Limes road. The pottery found consisted of a shard of red coloured Roman pottery and a shard of pottery made in Roman Times by the native population. The gravel itself has its origin in the ‘Opper-Betuwe’ (area between Arnhem and Nijmegen). In Roman Times the rivers Rhine and Meuse came here together.

Conclusions.

Earlier archaeological research in the area by the Netherlands Archeological Working Group (AWN) in 1999 already showed traces of the Limes road at the south side of the small headland. Mooij and Van der Leeuw (also members of the AWN) found their Limes road traces at the north side, while RAAP discovered traces in the centre of the headland. This could mean that the Limes road was quite broad here (six or seven meters) or it points out that there through times have been several routes of the road at this location. Another possibility is that two Limes roads came together here.”



Fig. 2. Detailed views of the Alphen Limes road gravel at the north side of the headland (left) and a Roman pottery bottom in the Limes gravel (right).

Norbert Elias's foresighted views on the changing of cultural borders

The authoritative Dutch Music Encyclopedia (1939) comments on Debussy's popular 1908 composition "Golliwogg's cakewalk" (from *Children's Corner*) as follows: "a prophecy that could learn our European music from the Afro-Americans, which has not yet been fulfilled in detail" [7]. Yet, within a few years (during The Netherlands's fascist occupation) Afro-American music performances became forbidden, merely based on racial motives (Figure 3.) [8]. Censuring "degenerate" visual arts was also part of Nazi propaganda [9].

The mechanisms behind such enigmatic contradictions, however, had already been perfectly explained in the famous sociologist Norbert Elias's 1939 book "The Civilizing Process" [10]. Quite rightly, Reicher nowadays says about Norbert Elias: "For him, Picasso, the Jazz-pioneers, the Beatles, and other great artists are examples of people who are able to fuse both areas: spontaneity and self-consciousness" [11, modified]. This illustrates Elias's foresighted views, from 1939 on. It is tempting, therefore, to investigate which other trends in history have foreshadowed any relativity of borders.

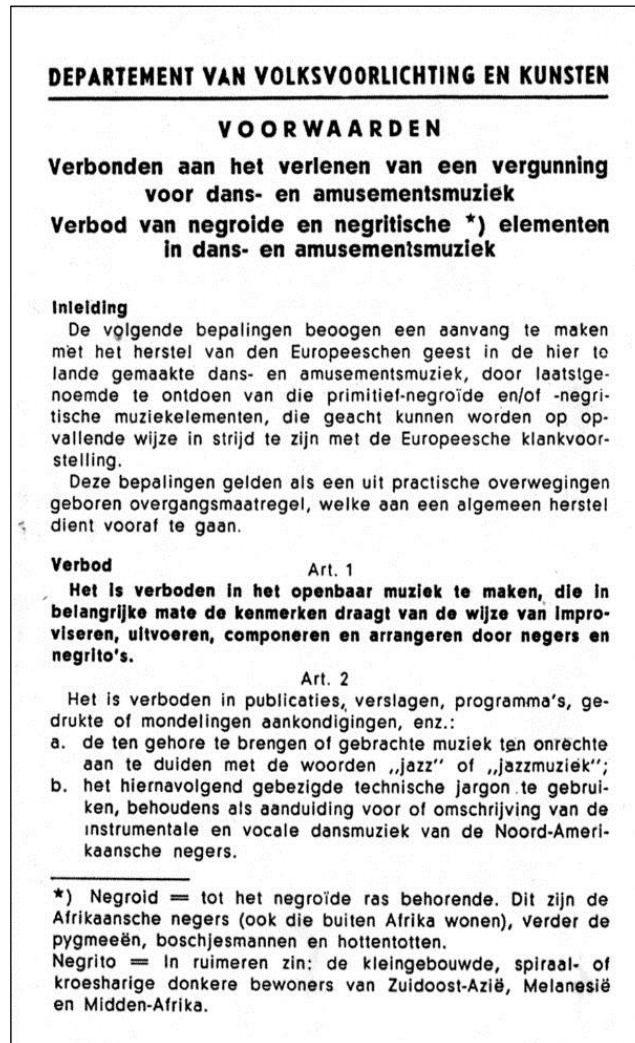


Fig. 3. Dutch announcement 1940-1945 banning jazz and jazz-like music [8]

Relativity of borders in history

A well-known Dutch verse line is: “I would like to know: why are the clouds so fast ? Perhaps it’s a lesson to man to teach him how fictitious borders are.” However this may be, European history often demonstrated the same as the verse line tells, namely the relativity of boundaries especially after Roman rule had ended. Even within the Roman Empire, mass migration occurred, as the transformation of habitation patterns shows [12]. Apparently, such processes are part of perpetual trends, like those regularly initiated by climatic influences, thousands of years ago [13]. Somewhat more recently, e.g., from the 6th to the 9th century, Avar, Bulgar and Magyar pastoral nomad tribes migrated to Central Europe’s southeastern planes, to “sedentarise” soon after their arrival, creating so-called “pseudo-steppe empires”, as Hoppenbrouwers [14] emphasizes. The author also states: “Fascinating mixed

cultures arose in pseudo-steppe empires, which first and in their most pronounced form got shape in the elite, and then trickled through to all layers of the population. Only in exceptional cases such acculturation processes were deliberately obstructed in the longer term”. “This however, was exceptional, and various examples of successful acculturation ... are much easier to produce” [14]. This example also illustrates that “nomads occupy enclaves that usually intercalate with those occupied by farmers and are not useful for agriculture” [15]. Meanwhile, Pascal [16] once stated that ”all the unhappiness of men comes from not knowing how to rest in a room. A man, who has enough good to live, if he knew how to stay at home he would not come out to go on the sea”. Nevertheless, successful examples of the relativity of physico-cultural boundaries can also be found in the following expressions of early 19th century entrepreneurship, not to say postcolonialism

A newcomer from overseas

In Koudekerk aan den Rijn (The Netherlands), a few hundred meters downstream from Mooij’s 2017 discovery site - but across the Rhine, on its north bank - the characteristic lime kilns of “Meerwijk” could be seen until 1965 (Figure 4, *inlay*). This industry was once built by John (Jan George) van der Stoop (1799-1861), an immigrant from overseas [17]. John was born in Berbice, a Dutch colony on the north coast of South America (the present-day Guyana), as the first son of J. J. van der Stoop. About his father, we read in the February 7 1807 Essequibo and Demerary Gazette: *The following Appointments in Berbice have been officially announced: J. J. van der Stoop, Esq. to act provisionally as Fiscal. ... And the said J. J. van der Stoop, Esq. to be Deputy Secretary, to commence his functions on the 1st of April next* [18]. After the death of his father, John settles in Koudekerk, where he is already known as a rentier in 1829. “He buys the Meerwijk mansion for 11,000 guilders. In 1837, Jan George had a new lime kiln building next to his country estate. This lime-burning factory with its characteristic chimneys, also called “Meerwijk”, is demolished in 1965 after some 130 years. In 1840, Van Der Stoop also buys a pans and tile factory in Koudekerk, which he sells again six years later. In addition to his industrial activities, he also works at the municipality (1833-1847) - more or less like his father did - in various positions, such as city councilor, local authority and polder master. After his departure from Koudekerk in 1847 he settled in the town of Leiden” [17].



Fig. 4. Honoring the industrialist J. G. van der Stoop (1799-1861) by a new road, named after him, north of the river Rhine [17]. Inlay: chimneys of his Meerwijk lime kilns. 2018 photograph: *Historisch Genootschap Koudekerk*.

Mid 1840's too, namely in the autumn of 1845, the then 23-years-old Sea Captain J. B. Altona (1821-1898) [19] skillfully navigated his koff (a type of sailing vessel) [20] from St. Petersburg to Rotterdam (The Netherlands) [21].

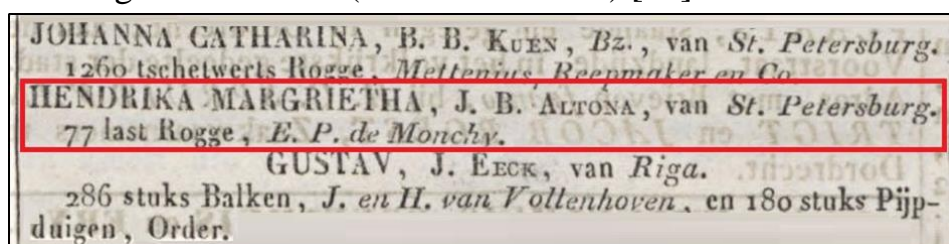


Fig. 5. 1845 Dutch journal showing St. Petersburg - Rotterdam cargos [21]. His ship "Hendrika Margarietha" was loaded (to the brim, apparently) with more than 150 tons' cargo of rye, a freight commissioned by Rotterdam grain merchant and warehouse (packhouse) master E. P. de Monchy (Figure 5) [21] These 19th century examples also show the relativity of borders in terms of entrepreneurship. Not only young, enterprising newcomers from abroad were welcomed, but also seafarers who stimulated the growing economy. Altona's sons in

turn became successful entrepreneurs around the Rotterdam area [19].



Fig. 6. J. B. Altona's 1881 election campaign, and his eventual 1883 election.

Having ended his career at sea (retired at the age of 56), Altona - more or less like Van der Stoop in his days - later became a municipal councilor in Rotterdam city: the first one ever to be elected for his party! (Figure 6) [19].

Closing remarks - Norbert Elias revisited ?

In order to finally summarize which possibly other trends in history may have foreshadowed the relativities of borders as well, we wish to make use of a totally different approach, namely the sheer anatomical, anthropological (and medical) fact that also our “skin represents an essential *physical boundary* between each person and the rest of the world” [22]. We concentrate on the phenomenon of deliberately *tattooing* our skin, at least some areas of skin.

“When tattoos came to the West from exotic and distant colonies, they were used by some of the lowest fringes of the social classes. Later, inking and piercing the body were included in some youth subcultures that emerged throughout the second half of the 20th century” [23]. Meanwhile, today's social investigations convincingly “suggested that, contrary to popular opinion as well as research findings with hiring managers and customers, having a tattoo does not appear to be associated with disadvantage or discrimination in the labor market.” ... “Tattooed individuals are also just as likely, and in some instances even more likely, to gain employment.” [24].

Here too, it looks as though even the physical boundary of our skin became subject of relativity, because this erstwhile exoticism turned into an advantage.

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