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Becoming Roman? “Militarised urbanisation” and the transformation of rurality in Roman provincial society.

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In what is now the Netherlands, the territory of the Cananefates tribe had supported a population of around fourteen-thousand people – with the arrival of a Roman army in the area in the first century CE, the population increased by perhaps as many as twenty-two-thousand soldiers plus their associated followers. Goods flowed into such areas to sustain the army; forts housed not only large populations of soldiers and their families, but also trade negotiators, workshops producing ironwork, bricks and roof tiles, and engineers for building roads and bridges. In even remote areas, military officers acted as magistrates bringing legal practices to the provinces such as access to regular law enforcement and courtroom litigation, much as would have been accessible in Rome. Forts were superseded in their original purpose by the tide of urbanism they had generated. Many became great cities, such as Strasbourg and Xanten. The consequences Roman provincialism must have had for local populations who found themselves abruptly at the heart of this “militarised urbanism” were clearly multi-faceted: not only were there changes we might see as positives, such as in infrastructure development, sanitation and law and order, but there would also have been significant changes in identity politics, which still defines academic debate, as well as epidemic disease such as the Antonine Plague which was likely carried on the supply routes that supported development, not to mention the ever-present potential for violence from soldiers.