

Surplus production for the market? The agrarian economy in the non-villa landscapes of *Germania Inferior*

Maaïke Groot, Stijn Heeren, Laura I. Kooistra, and Wouter K. Vos

The heyday of the Roman Empire was the first time in history that substantial parts of the population of temperate Europe were not directly involved in agricultural production. These people, both soldiers and inhabitants of towns, still needed to be fed. It is widely believed that most of their food was produced by villas. While this is undoubtedly true, a different situation is found along the NW frontier, in what is today the Netherlands (fig. 1), where the rural landscape was dominated, not by villas, but by settlements consisting of wooden byrehouses.¹ These settlements were situated on stream ridges and surrounded by low-lying and often wet floodplains. It has long been thought that the farmers of this frontier zone were unable to pro-



Fig. 1. The Dutch River Area and main sites mentioned in the text.
Key: a - military forts. b - the *civitas*-capital of Nijmegen. c - rural settlements.