

Lynx in the Castellum!

In 2001 and 2002 the remains of a Roman fort were revealed in the town of Alphen aan den Rijn: *Castellum Albaniana*. This fort was located along the old Rhine, which was a mighty and very wide river at the time. This fort was used by the Romans for centuries (41 AD - 275 AD). Remains of lynx bones were found between the bones of animals from the surrounding canals. Lynx is not native to the Netherlands, but it may have been. This animal could certainly also have been brought to the *Limes* region by the Romans; the Romans did drag more wild animals from one place to another in the huge empire. But the animal may also have been caught in the immediate vicinity of the castellum.

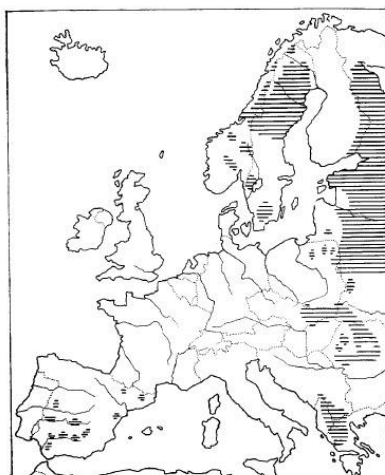
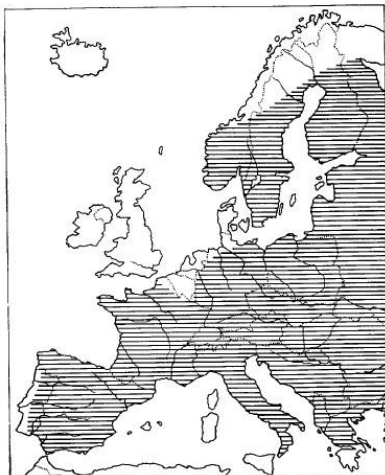
We carried out a project to study the bones to first make sure that it is a lynx and second to find out where this lynx came from. This type of work is also called bioarchaeology: the use of biological knowledge to answer archaeological questions. In this study we compared the DNA of lynxes from all over Europe with the DNA we found in the bones. We also used (sometimes very old) skeletal remains of lynx that we found along the Dutch coast, for example on the Sand Motor near The Hague. The North Sea, which was a land mass ten thousand years ago, is an important site for retrieving bones of animals that are extinct or simply no longer exist in the Netherlands. The investigation showed that this lynx may have come from the south of France; other data in the study could neither support nor disprove that. We do know that the swampy environment in the west of the Netherlands was certainly not a habitat for lynx, which feels much more comfortable in higher, hilly terrain. This may very well mean that the animal did indeed come from further away and was brought here by the Romans.

The bones will soon be preserved in the South Holland Archaeological Depot in Alphen aan den Rijn. If you would like to learn more about this research, the original article can be found under the following link:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2021.102835>

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Lynx remains used in the study. A, B: lynx bones found at the Castellum excavation; C, a fossil lynx jaw found on the island of Texel; D, sampling in Naturalis of a fossil lynx molar found on the Sand Motor.



Presumed distribution of lynx in Europe at the beginning of the historical period (left) and mid-twentieth century (right, after Kratochvil, 1968).