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The Universal and the Local in the *Civitas Batavorum*

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Abstract: Intense recruitment for the Roman army among the Batavians of the Lower Rhine exposed their community more profoundly to Latin literacy and the universal culture of the empire than many other provinces. However, through an anthropological examination of their community, the present paper demonstrates that even under these conditions, the cultural amalgamation of the imperial and the local was limited, and Batavian society retained a markedly distinct culture throughout centuries of Roman rule.

Keywords: Batavians, Roman imperialism, local culture, localization, universalization, military recruitment

Ancient empires spanned vast territories and encompassed a myriad of local communities. Yet they lacked the means of communication and transportation available to modern nation states, while the economic conditions of the pre-industrial world required a large proportion of their population to live in the countryside as agricultural producers. This affected the potential for cultural integration between the imperial elite and their provincial subjects, which is likely to have been slower and more limited than in modern states.¹

Yet in the case of the Roman Empire, one state institution, the military, reached deep into local communities through its recruitment practices. Through their years of army service provincials, mostly from rural areas, were exposed to Roman cultural and material practices as well as literacy and the Latin language before returning to local communities upon discharge. Since military recruitment was concentrated in particular provinces, these areas are likely to have experienced the most profound effects of the process.² The present paper will investigate whether

¹ Bang (2011), (2013), (2021), 264; Dench (2018), 78-79, 157-159; Rüpke and Woolf (2021), 21.

² Cherry (1998), 93-99; Haynes (2013), 100, 339-367.

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these effects constituted an exception to the general trend of local cultural divergence occasioned by the conditions of pre-modern society.

This will be done through an examination of the Batavians on the Lower Rhine. With continuous, significant contributions of recruits, the Batavians were particularly closely connected to the Roman military machine. Given the intense recruitment and the exposure of the recruits to Latin literacy, the *civitas Batavorum* may well have been among the most literate provincial societies outside Egypt. The evolution of the *civitas Batavorum* during Roman times is often portrayed as a *discrepant experience*. Whereas much of Roman Gaul grew closer to Mediterranean urban and agrarian culture, special conditions along the Lower Rhine led instead to a cultural convergence with the martial values of the Roman army.³ Yet *discrepant experience* is a descriptive term for irreconcilable differences rather than a model for understanding exchanges between cultures.⁴ For a closer approximation of the cultural processes at work in the Batavian provincial experience, the present paper will draw on the anthropological model of “universalization” and “localization.” In particular, Marriott’s case study of the Indian village of Kishan Garhi will serve as an ideal type for how cultural interaction between local and universal traditions play out in a provincial community. Setting this ideal type in contrast to the Batavian material will throw into focus the peculiarities of a local community deeply entangled with army recruitment and particularly exposed to literacy.

I Universalization and localization

The model of “universalization” and “localization” derives originally from the work of Redfield, anthropologist at the University of Chicago in the mid-twentieth century and a foundational figure in the development of peasant studies. The particular benefit of this model is its insight into the different natures of elite and local culture. Because the former is codified by literature, it takes the shape of a “universal tradition.” The codification ensures that it can spread across vast distances and be preserved across time without breaking up into different entities. In contrast, while people in local communities may possess degrees of literacy, it is often of a limited nature, as is their access to the written works of the elite. Thus, their culture remains mainly oral in nature and tends to change over time and from place to place. Given the limits on literacy in the pre-modern world, these “local traditions” are never fully assimilated into the universal one, but co-exist with it

3 Roymans (1993), 43, (2011), 157; Derks (1998), 245.

4 Said (1993), 36-37; Mattingly (1997), 11-15, 20, (2011), 203-245; Haeussler and Webster (2020), 1-2.

for millennia.⁵ This emphasis on the fundamental difference in cultural outlook between the literate and non-literate spheres allows the model to encompass the globalising nature of cultural idioms in agrarian empires while also addressing the extreme social hierarchies of these societies.⁶

The co-existence of the two traditions may be seen in practice by looking at the first case to use the model, the 1955 study of the Uttar Pradesh village of Kishan Garhi by Redfield's associate Marriott. Marriott argued that since the cultural traits making up standard Hinduism were codified by Sanskritic literature, they were "universalized." However, his study showed that the religious life of Kishan Garhi contained deities and festivals unknown elsewhere while some features of standard Hinduism were unknown to the villagers.⁷ Moreover, the Sanskritic culture present in Kishan Garhi had often undergone changes, adopting idiosyncratic features that anchored rituals more closely in the agricultural lifestyle of the village. For instance, the festival of Cow-Nourisher Worship derives from the tenth century AD *Bhāgavata Purāna*, yet in Kishan Garhi the celebrations had acquired a peculiar form with loaves of cowdung arranged to represent farm animals that families hoped to obtain.⁸

Marriott's study revealed deep divides in lifestyle between the educated layers of the population and the peasantry. However, it also demonstrated that their cultural traditions existed in a state of continuous, low-intensity interaction. Traits from the literate tradition might experience localization, being transformed to suit a local context. The opposite process of universalization might elevate traits from the village level into the universal sphere, transforming them in the process so as to make them relevant and acceptable to literate high culture. As the traditions co-exist for millennia without merging, in the final analysis the processes represent a circular flow with elements borrowed from one tradition into another sometimes borrowed a second time, returning in transformed guise to their tradition of origin.⁹

While Marriott's research was limited to an Indian village, Redfield's original conception of the model, as well as those of later adapters such as Gellner and Chakrabarti, carries the premise that the features described above were common to pre-modern agrarian societies, seeing as these lacked the means to integrate the mass of

5 Redfield (1956), 40-59; Wilcox (2004), 4-5, 148-151. For a related approach to Roman Gaul and Spain, see Johnston (2017), 125-230.

6 Fernández-Götz, Maschek and Roymans (2020), 1630-1638. For globalisation of culture in the Roman Empire, see Hingley (2005); Pitts and Versluys (2015); Belvedere and Bergemann (2021).

7 Marriott (1955).

8 Marriott (1955), 199-200.

9 Marriott (1955), 202-203.

the population into a single culture in the manner of later nation states.¹⁰ The applicability of the model for the Roman world has been demonstrated by Frankfurter, who used it to make sense of the varieties of religious phenomena in Roman Egypt.¹¹ The existence of local cultures thriving beneath the universal Greco-Roman cultural package is likewise visible in other source corpora from the empire. While most preserved writing from Roman times is Latin or Greek, scattered pieces of evidence and mentions by Classical authors suggest a significant perseverance of local languages in many parts of the empire.¹² In material culture, pottery assemblages from Roman Essex show significant divergences in both fabrics and forms between urban locations and their rural hinterlands.¹³

The present paper will apply Redfield and Marriott's concepts to a somewhat different community. The Batavians were a provincial community like the villagers of Kishan Garhi. However, their extensive recruitment for the Roman army sets their society apart. For the Batavians, army service constituted a significant source of contact between their local world and the universal cultural forms of the wider empire. In particular, literacy is likely to have been significantly higher among the Batavians than other provincial communities because of the large number of veterans. The purpose of the present paper is therefore to investigate if the special nature of Batavian society still resembles the general contours of Redfield's model or whether by their close association to the Roman army, the Batavians experienced a cultural assimilation beyond that of other pre-modern provincial communities.

II The *civitas Batavorum*

A long tradition of archaeological research means that the Batavians are among the better known provincial populations of the Roman Empire. Since Willems' comprehensive 1984 study, a long range of publications by Derks and Roymans have both brought in new material and vastly increased our understanding of the cultural changes occurring in the region throughout the Roman period. Moreover, the contribution of van Driel-Murray has been valuable for the light it has shed on the role of women in Batavian agriculture and the phenomenon of 'ethnic soldiers', while

10 Redfield (1956), 40-59; Gellner (1983), 8-18; Chakrabarti (2001), 81-108. For applications of the model to other pre-modern societies, see e.g. Bodley (2000 [1994]), 227-232; Odner (2000), 29-43; LaBianca (2007), 275-287; Schwartz (2010), 3-5.

11 Frankfurter (1998), 97-144.

12 E.g. Gaulish, Pisidian, Phrygian, Punic and the ancestor languages of Albanian, Basque and Welsh. See e.g. Hemer (1980); Harris (1989), 182-183; Clackson (2015); Mullen (2019).

13 Perring and Pitts (2013).

the deposits of weaponry in the region have been particularly illuminated by Nicolay.¹⁴

The impact of Roman power on Batavian identity went beyond mere army service. Roman political decisions were instrumental in creating their community to begin with, as they originated as a subgroup of the Chatti that was allowed to settle in the Rhine delta. Here they presumably mixed with survivors of the local Eburones whom Caesar had devastated.¹⁵

The Romans viewed the Batavians as a naturally martial people (e.g. Tac. *Germ.* 29.1; *Hist.* 4.12). This ethnographic stereotype had wide-ranging effects on the evolution of the community, as the Batavians were granted immunity from state tax from the Augustan period onwards in return for supplying the Roman army with troops.¹⁶ By AD 43, there were eight Batavian *cohortes equitatae*, one *ala Batavorum* and a significant number of Batavians serving in the horse guard and the fleet, suggesting some 5,500 Batavians serving at any one time. After the cohorts participated in the Batavian Revolt of AD 69-70, they were reorganised as four *cohortes*, but at least by the end of the first century these four were milliary cohorts with double the strength of the previous *equitatae*. Hence it does not appear the reorganisation fundamentally altered the number of Batavians in Roman military service.¹⁷ Given the total population of the *civitas Batavorum* is estimated at around 35,000, scholars believe Batavian leaders must have recruited beyond their own tribe to satisfy the demand for so many recruits. Even so, it is hard to imagine that military service did not constitute a continuous, major drain on local manpower well into the second century.¹⁸

The Batavian case was not unique. Several of their neighbours such as the Nervii and Tungri also provided units for the Roman army. However, the recruitment of the Batavians was the most substantial and may have been the longest-lasting, persisting into the early second century AD.¹⁹ Fragments of Roman military equipment at rural settlements presumably evidences veterans bringing home their equipment after discharge, and the presence of fragments in almost all Batavian settlements from the first to the third century shows a persistent, close connection to the mili-

14 van Driel-Murray (2003, 2005); Nicolay (2003, 2007).

15 Slofstra (2002), 24; van Rossum (2004), 114; Roymans (2009b), 235; Fernández-Götz, Maschek and Roymans (2020), 1635.

16 Roymans, Derks and Heeren (2020), 274. See van Driel-Murray (2003), 205 for the observation that the Batavians were not exempted from all forms of taxation.

17 van Rossum (2004), 114–116 and 118; Haynes (2013), 112–116; Roselaar (2016), 150–152.

18 Birley (2002), 43; van Rossum (2004), 124–126; Derks (2009), 242–243; Roymans (2009b), 230. For a further investigation of the population estimate, see Vossen (2003).

19 van Rossum (2004), 114, 122–123, 130–131; Roymans (2011), 140.

tary.²⁰ The earliest examples of objects associated with Roman military and colonial sites such as colour-coated beakers to appear in local Batavian cemeteries even coincides roughly with the time when the first Batavian recruits are likely to have been discharged.²¹ Almost every family in the *civitas* probably had a family member serving in the army, and altogether Batavian exposure to at least the aspects of the Roman universal tradition central to military life must have been substantial.²²

The Batavians' special relationship with the Roman military dictated the socio-economic structure of their community. Throughout the late Iron Age, stockbreeding rather than arable farming was the main economic activity of the region, and pollen diagrams suggest this mode of living changed little through the first century AD.²³ Army recruitment may have acted as a brake on the development of arable agriculture due to the continuous absence of large numbers of men, and so in this respect actually contributed to a persistence of local cultural distinctiveness.²⁴ The high age of slaughter of cattle in the area suggests a need for manure to fertilize sandy soils.²⁵ Van Driel-Murray argues this may reflect an agricultural regime centred on products such as vegetables, eggs and cheese, a regime that, significantly, may have been primarily in the hands of the women, allowing men to leave for army service.²⁶ Such a regime may even be partly responsible for the dearth of Roman luxury goods in the region, as women are more likely to invest money in family support and economic buffers, where men are more likely to invest it in status enhancement. Archaeology has documented an excess of women over men in cremation burials from the region.²⁷

There is little certainty about either the date or reason for the end of Batavian recruitment. Gradually improving economic conditions in the *civitas* may have reduced the number of willing recruits, and the consequent gradual decrease of actual Batavians in the nominally Batavian cohorts would explain the appearance of non-Batavian prefects commanding the units in the second century.²⁸

Probably from the reign of Claudius onwards, Roman occupation brought urbanism to the Rhine delta. The chief settlement, Batavodurum, 'Fort of the Batavians', was destroyed in the revolt of AD 69, but rebuilt as Noviomagus, 'New Mar-

²⁰ Derks and Roymans (2002), 87-88; Nicolay (2007), 72-115; Roymans (2011), 143-144, (2014), 238-240; Haynes (2013), 362.

²¹ Pitts (2019), 215.

²² van Driel-Murray (2005), 84.

²³ Willems (1984), 233-239; Roymans (1995), 63.

²⁴ Haynes (2013), 113.

²⁵ Lauwerier (1988), 133-140.

²⁶ van Driel-Murray (2003), 205-206.

²⁷ van Driel-Murray (2005), 84, 90.

²⁸ van Rossum (2004), 123, 129-131.

ket' (Nijmegen), the next year. Several secondary ones settlements such as Cuijk and Elst also appeared. By the second century Noviomagus appears to have had a population of c. 5000, while the other settlements are estimated to have had populations below 1000.²⁹

The earliest inhabitants of Noviomagus appears to have been outsiders from the interior of Gaul, who only mixed with the local population over time. Many features of Mediterranean urbanism adopted across Gaul, such as theatres, buildings with peristyles, private baths and floor heating are absent from the *civitas Batavorum* and neighbouring areas.³⁰ Despite such caveats, the introduction of urbanism must have been a drastic change, affecting not only the new urban population, but also the rural communities that were brought into economic ties with the settlements.

Villas appeared during the first century AD yet were relatively scarce. They seem almost entirely to have developed from pre-existing farmsteads rather than being new foundations, suggesting their owners belonged to the local communities. Their wealth was presumably derived from supplying the new settlements as well as the military forts constructed as part of the Rhine *limes* in the middle of the century.³¹ Except for the villas Batavian housebuilding changed little, continuing the pre-Roman tradition of byre houses though sometimes attaching a wooden porticus, evidencing inspiration from Roman military architecture. Whether these were first used by returning veterans or by people actively serving in the nearby legions has been debated.³²

Monumental burial architecture is completely absent from the *civitas* except for a few examples in the cemetery of Noviomagus.³³ Instead, as the recently transplanted Batavians constructed their society in the first century AD, they drew upon the distant past for burial practices. Their dead were interred in low barrows modelled upon ones in use in the area between 1100 to 400 BC and sometimes even built in the same locations.³⁴ This peculiarity suggests a deliberate intention to embed the community more deeply into the local world, possibly as a response to the dramatic background of originally being a transplanted ethnic group.

Despite the undeniable cultural change with the introduction of urbanism, the architectural world of the *civitas Batavorum* remains largely local. The adoption of the porticus is best termed a *localization* as it borrows from Roman culture, but only

²⁹ Willems (1983), 112–115, 117–118; Derks (1998), 66; Birley (2002), 42; Roymans (2011), 153–155.

³⁰ Derks (1998), 71, 192; Pitts (2019), 79.

³¹ Willems (1983), 112–115, 117–118; Roymans (2011), 153–155.

³² Heeren (2009), 155–161; Vos (2009), 237–251; van Enckevort (2017), 20.

³³ Derks (1998), 166; Vos (2009), 237–251; Roymans (2011), 154; Roymans, Derks and Heeren (2020), 275.

³⁴ Roymans (2009a), 92–93, (2014), 240–242.

to enhance byre-houses that otherwise retain a pre-Roman form. The limited urbanism, villa-construction and the deliberate emphasis on a local past in burial architecture further reveals a society with a distinctly local identity.

In some areas, however, Roman influence was early and substantial. Roman coinage entered the area in significant amounts in the Augustan era already, and from the Flavian era onwards even rural villages appear to have used coins to trade imported wares.³⁵ This rapid influx could reflect the hypothetical women's agricultural regime, as small-scale marketing (in this case with the nearby garrisons) is often a strategy employed by families affected by male migration.³⁶

The Batavians and their close neighbours also appear early on to have adopted Italian *terra sigillata* to a larger degree than communities deeper inside Roman territory. There was no history of Italian wine imports in the Lower Rhine region prior to the Roman occupation, and pre-Roman pottery consisted of handmade domestic wares. It seems therefore that *terra sigillata* was introduced by the Roman military. However, the rapid spread of the pottery to non-military sites suggests that Roman use of *terra sigillata* was emulated fairly early on by local auxiliaries.³⁷ Outside new Roman-era settlements wheel-turned pottery was rare until the Batavian Revolt of AD 69-70, but was rapidly adopted in the following years.³⁸

This change was accompanied by a spread of new pottery types such as amphorae for olive oil and wine, suggesting that exposure to Roman food culture during military service changed Batavian food consumption.³⁹ Notably, access to wider traditions of consumption did not only lead to cultural convergence as grave goods from late first-century AD Batavian cemeteries show a re-emergence of older beaker and fibula designs largely abandoned by their neighbours.⁴⁰ As in the case of the burial mounds, these grave goods suggest a desire to emphasize the unique identity of the community.

Altogether, the influx of coinage and pottery reflects the distinctive Batavian situation, as significant army presence and recruitment must have been the chief drivers of the process. By the second century, increased cultural convergence with the Mediterranean world is visible in other fields. The stockbreeding economy declined and a significant population increase in the same period was probably made possible by an increase of arable farming.⁴¹ A particularly sharp decrease in the

35 Aarts (2003), 166, 171-174, 177.

36 van Driel-Murray (2005), 89.

37 Roymans (2011), 148-153.

38 Willems (1983), 112-113; Collins, Enckevort and Hendriks (2009), 192.

39 Roymans (2014), 244.

40 Pitts (2019), 191, 202, 204-205.

41 Willems (1984), 246, 264-268.

number of sheep and conversely an increase in that of horses suggest the latter were bred for sale to the nearby Roman garrisons.⁴² Rural producers acquired more Gallo-Roman artefacts, presumably as a result of trade with the forts. Nevertheless, the limited potential for wheat production in the area meant the *civitas Batavorum* was never able by itself to feed the garrisons along its stretch of the Rhine, and it is even uncertain whether the civilian society was self-sufficient.⁴³

These later developments are evidence of closer engagement with the Roman universal tradition. Yet whether they might over time have produced a *civitas Batavorum* more akin to the neighbouring Gallic provinces is a moot question, as the period of growth was followed by collapse in the latter half of the third century. The area came under pressure from Frankish raiders while the imperial centre was mired in crises, and the number of settlements in the *civitas* contracted from nearly 300 to c. 70. Pollen evidence shows far lower levels of cultivation in the region than earlier, Noviomagus was largely deserted, and coin evidence suggests the abandonment of the forts by c. AD 260-270.⁴⁴ House types and material culture preserved from fourth-century settlements are radically different from earlier times, suggesting a transformation of the region which probably included the demise of the Batavian community. There is no epigraphic evidence of individuals identifying themselves as Batavians after the third century.⁴⁵

This short survey demonstrates that the *civitas Batavorum* is comparable to other provincial societies in the mixture of universal and local traits, just as Kishan Garhi contained mixtures of literary Hinduism and idiosyncratic cults. However, the influence of the army on Batavian society is unusually intense, appearing to be responsible for rapidly ushering in coinage and *terra sigillata* while acting as a brake on the transition to arable farming.⁴⁶

III Literacy

The influence of Roman recruitment is likely to have been particularly significant in regards to literacy levels. This aspect is crucial to the analysis as the written text is the central vehicle of the universal tradition. Where literacy is limited, cultural traits passing from the universal to the local are likely to be transformed through

⁴² Vossen and Groot (2009), 87, 93; Groot (2016), 84-91, 194-195; Kooistra (2018), 115-116.

⁴³ Willems (1984), 252, 264-268; van Driel-Murray (2005), 84.

⁴⁴ Willems (1984), 271-272.

⁴⁵ Willems (1983), 119; Derks (2009), 247.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Fischer (1999), 74; Speidel (1999), 83.

misunderstandings, such as was demonstrated by the festival of Cow-Nourisher Worship in Kishan Garhi.

At rural sites of the *civitas Batavorum*, incontrovertible proof of literacy has been found in only two settlements, which have both yielded fragments of *stylus* tablets. However, the countryside has produced a far larger amount (271 examples) of seal-boxes, and the academic debate on the extent of literacy in the area hinges on the different interpretations of these.⁴⁷

Seal-boxes are objects usually 20 to 40 mm in length consisting of a base and a lid connected by a hinge and furnished with holes allowing for a cord to pass through the box. It is generally agreed that their purpose was to protect wax seals as evidenced by an example from Wroxeter with remains of beeswax inside. Once wax was poured into the box and the lid was shut, whichever object was enclosed by the cord could not be accessed without either cutting the cord or breaking the seal.⁴⁸

In the *civitas Batavorum* seal-boxes have been found mainly at military camps (48 %) and cult centres (10 %), including a large quantity at Empel. At rural settlements they are found in smaller numbers, but taken as a whole their distribution through the countryside is significant (33 %). Derks and Roymans suggest these are evidence of literacy, arguing they were used to seal letters written on wax tablets. Their concentration at military and religious sites would suggest they sealed soldiers' letters and private vows, and their presence at rural sites would thus suggest a considerable degree of Latin literacy in the countryside.⁴⁹ Derks and Roymans further interpret the seal-boxes as the result of an ongoing exchange of letters between common soldiers and their families at home. The majority of rural dwellers may have been illiterate, yet returning veterans, having acquired literacy during military service, could have assisted in reading and writing letters on behalf of their neighbours.⁵⁰

The literacy of the Batavian soldiery is illustrated by the hundreds of leaf tablets with ink writing found at the auxiliary fort of Vindolanda in northern Britain. Most derive from the period of c. AD 90 to 105 when the Ninth Cohort of Batavians were garrisoned at the fort. About half of the 200 people named in the letters can be identified as garrison-members, many of them Batavians and almost all clearly not Roman citizens.⁵¹ The many different hands seen in the material suggest widespread

47 Derks and Roymans (2002), 93-97; Derks (2009), 240.

48 Bushe-Fox (1916), 27-30; Derks and Roymans (2002), 89-93.

49 Derks (1998), 228-229; Derks and Roymans (2002), 89-90; Hingley (2005), 96-99.

50 Derks and Roymans (2002), 100. For evidence of specific veterans returning to their homes in the Lower Rhine region, see Derks and Teitler (2018), 66; Roxan (2000), 313.

51 Birley (2002), 31, 62, 99; Derks (2009), 252; Houten (2020), 23-4.

literacy among the garrison, and at least some letters seem to derive from the lower ranks.⁵²

The Vindolanda corpus is not unique in demonstrating the role of the army in spreading literacy among its recruits. For instance, ostraca from the Bu Njem outpost in Tripolitania has preserved evidence of what appears to be African auxiliary recruits in the process of learning Latin.⁵³ The Vindolanda material demonstrates that this process affected Batavian recruits as much as any others.⁵⁴

While this material supports Derks and Roymans' theory of a population of literate veterans, their interpretation of the seal-boxes as evidence of this population in the *civitas* itself has not gained universal acceptance.⁵⁵ Andrews has pointed out that there is little certain evidence for the relation between seal-boxes and letters whereas he highlights three examples (from beyond the *civitas Batavorum*) suggesting they were used to seal leather pouches.⁵⁶ Besides these, he questions why common soldiers would use expensive stylus tablets and seal-boxes for simple family letters, as well as whether the Roman army would allow soldiers on duty to engage in sealed correspondence.⁵⁷ His practical experiments with reconstructed seal-boxes suggest that using them to seal *stylus* tablets is unnecessary and impractical, whereas they appear well-suited for sealing cloth purses and pouches. Thus, their wide dispersal may well evidence the provincial cash economy rather than literacy.⁵⁸ Derks and Roymans have voiced scepticism as to whether Andrews' research sufficiently demonstrates seal-boxes to have been used solely for sealing bags of valuables.⁵⁹ However, Andrews has certainly thrown into doubt their own theory of the boxes as a reliable measurement of the extent of rural literacy.⁶⁰ The general extent of literacy in the *civitas Batavorum* thus remains uncertain.⁶¹

52 Bowman (1994), 88; Roymans (2011), 146.

53 Adams (2003), 100, 236-237, 454-455

54 Galsterer (1999), 48.

55 Andrews (2013); Haynes (2013), 335.

56 Andrews (2015), 446-447. The examples consist of a find from Norfolk of a seal-box together with coins and linen scraps inside a jar whose neck is too narrow to accommodate a stylus tablet; a find from Kalkreise of a seal-box found together with a pouch of coins; and, most compellingly, a find from Trier of a seal-box actually sealing a pouch of coins.

57 Andrews (2015), 449.

58 Andrews (2013), 423, 431-434. For uncertainty regarding function of seal-boxes, see also Hingley (2005), 153 n. 50.

59 Roymans, Derks and Heeren (2020), 275 n. 30.

60 Vos (2015), 453; Mullen (2021), 375.

61 For the constraints on literacy in the provincial population as a whole, see Harris (1989). For a recent evaluation of Harris' estimates, see Bagnall (2011), 39-40, 52-53.

Nonetheless, the Vindolanda material demonstrates that Batavian recruits were exposed to Latin literacy. Taken together with the unusual extent of Batavian recruitment, it is likely that the *civitas Batavorum* contained a greater proportion of literate veterans than the average Roman province. Since there is little direct evidence of writing from the area, however, it is difficult to determine the effect of this literacy on the Batavian world-view. Under these circumstances, our best evidence for their world-view – and so for the degree to which this assimilated to the universal culture of the empire at large – is found in the remains of their religious culture.

IV Religion

The *civitas Batavorum* contained three monumental temples at Elst, Empel and Kessel.⁶² All three appear to have been of the Gallo-Roman type – rectangular stone temples constructed on top of earlier cult sites.⁶³ Animal remains discovered underneath the ruins of Elst suggest a pre-Roman open-air cult place, while Empel appears to have housed a temple already in the Late La Tène period. These two temples were destroyed in the middle of the third century and never rebuilt. The temple at Kessel is known from spolia and ritual deposits, including La Tène materials, but the temple site itself has not been located.⁶⁴

Monumental temples are generally quite scarce in the Lower Rhine region compared to the rest of Gaul, possibly due to the lesser affluence of the landscape and the less urban way of life. Cult places commonly consisted of only some post structures, some pits and a bank or ditch.⁶⁵ The appearance of no less than three monumental temples in the *civitas Batavorum* thus constitute an unusual degree of assimilation to the universal tradition of religious practice in the empire and testifies to the presence of a resourceful elite. The latter is also reflected in an increasing archaeological visibility of graves in the second century AD due to the presence of

62 As this article was being written, another pair of temples were discovered in Zevenaar. Due to the recentness of the discovery, they do not form part of the main analysis here. However, their location right by the *limes* itself as well as the related finds suggest they served the Roman garrisons rather than the local population. Votive dedications to Mercury and Jupiter-Serapis also reflect the Roman universal tradition, but a dedication to Hercules Magusanus shows the temples to have interacted with the beliefs of the local population. “Compleet en relatief ongeschonden Romeins heiligdom ontdekt in Gelderland.” *Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed*. 20 June 2022, www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/06/20/compleet-en-relatief-ongeschonden-romeins-heiligdom-ontdekt-in-gelderland

63 For Gallo-Roman temples, see Woolf (1998), 235–236.

64 Derks (1998), 177, (2009), 247; Roymans (2004), 140, 242, Fernández-Götz and Roymans (2015), 26–28.

65 Derks (1998), 156, 166, 185, 244–245.

more Roman materials, suggesting a development towards a less egalitarian society in the period.⁶⁶

The main focus of public cult in the *civitas Batavorum* appears to have been the figure of Hercules Magusanus. All three known monumental temples were most likely devoted to this amalgamation of a local deity, Magusanus, and the Roman Hercules. Most dedications to the god derive from the *civitas* where they are mainly the work of soldiers and veterans.⁶⁷ Hercules Magusanus is also attested in places where Batavian soldiers were stationed, such as Dacia and northern Britain, while dedications from elsewhere in the Lower Rhine area demonstrate a regional spread of the cult. When in 260 Postumus seized control of the north-western provinces, he chose Hercules Magusanus and Hercules Deusoniensis ('Hercules of the town Dies-sen', located in the *civitas Batavorum*) as his patrons.⁶⁸

In large parts of Gaul, the principal deity of local communities was usually amalgamated with Mars. The Lower Rhine frontier is unique for the substitution of Hercules for this role.⁶⁹ Derks has advanced the hypothesis that Hercules' role as patron of wandering herdsmen made him particularly relevant for communities with economies based on cattle-breeding and religious practices centred on ritual feasting, whereas Mars was popular in areas dominated by arable farming.⁷⁰

Depictions of a club-wielding Hercules Magusanus clad in lionskin and either offering the apples of the Hesperides or holding in check the hell-hound Cerberus demonstrate the perception of the god as a variant of the Mediterranean Hercules. The identification appears to have extended to his functions, as Hercules Magusanus was seen as patron of travellers in the same fashion as his Mediterranean counterpart.⁷¹ The close similarity of the two deities fits with the theory that their amalgamation was the work of a pro-Roman elite, possibly people who had lived as hostages in Italy and been educated there. The pre-eminence of Hercules Magusanus in the temples and the epigraphic record certainly suggests a connection with local powerholders.⁷² This connection may have shifted the available evidence in the god's favour, as other aspects of Batavian religion are difficult to trace.

While the god's visual imagery and functions reflect the universal tradition, archaeology, however, also sheds light on important differences. Extensive evidence of butchered cattle at both Elst and Empel reveal the continuation of a

⁶⁶ Willems (1984), 265.

⁶⁷ Derks (1998), 25–26; Roymans (2004), 144, 242–245; Haynes (2013), 232.

⁶⁸ Derks (1998), 88, 98, 112; Roymans (2009b), 222, 227.

⁶⁹ Roymans (2009b), 220.

⁷⁰ Derks (1998), 104–105.

⁷¹ Derks (1998), 113–115.

⁷² Roymans (2004), 243–244.

pre-Roman culture of ritual feasting.⁷³ Moreover, while weapon offerings were prominent throughout Gaul in pre-Roman times, they lost significance after the occupation.⁷⁴ This was not the case among the Batavians, however. The temple at Empel has yielded large amounts of military artefacts, and weapon offerings are common throughout the *civitas*.⁷⁵ These aspects reflect a Batavian local tradition, though both become less prominent by the second century AD. The decrease in weapon-offerings may be due to the responsibility for army recruitment shifting from the Batavian aristocracy to the Roman authorities themselves, which may have dulled the martial values of the former.⁷⁶ The near total absence of fibulae and bracelets at Empel suggest little female involvement in the worship of Hercules Magusanus, leaving open the possibility of women's religiosity having been practised in different settings which have not left the same traces for posterity.⁷⁷

A few attestations preserve the name of a warrior goddess called Viradegdis, while two other goddesses, Haeva and Hurstrga, are each attested by a single inscription.⁷⁸ These suggest a local tradition pantheon largely ignored in the fields of temple-building and epigraphy. Despite the hypothesis of high veteran Latin literacy, moreover, these were not subjected to *interpretatio Romana*.

The limits of our evidence for religion is underscored by the scarcity of votive altars and votive inscriptions in the Lower Rhine countryside, with the Batavian area producing only a few and their neighbours, the Cananefates, none at all. This contrasts markedly with areas further south, such as the territory of the Ubii which has more than a hundred inscriptions.⁷⁹

Batavian society thus presents us with a localization of the Roman figure of Hercules into a local religion based on martial values, ritual feasting and weapon-offerings. Ironically, the longevity of these local elements under Roman rule was encouraged, rather than impeded by Roman imperialism, as recruitment practices reinforced their social foundation. Hercules Magusanus aligns Batavian religion with the values of the Roman army, but as other elements of local religious life demonstrate, this alignment does not reflect an assimilation of the population to a Roman religious outlook. It is instead yet another example of a local tradition adopting elements from the universal tradition to make sense of life in the local context.

73 Roymans (2004), 247; Fernández-Götz and Roymans (2015), 26–30.

74 Derks (1998), 45–54, 167; Pitts (2019), 126.

75 Derks (1998), 112–113; Roymans (2004), 242–243.

76 Nicolay (2003), 367–369.

77 Roymans (2004), 247.

78 Willems (1984), 269.

79 Derks (1998), 86, 245.

The case of Hercules Magusanus is rather unique since the evidence makes visible a full circular flow of cultural borrowing. Through his attachment to the figure of Magusanus and local Batavian customs, Hercules is localized and transformed into a deity fit for traditional weapon-offerings. However, upon Postumus' seizure of the north-west he is (briefly) universalized into the patron deity of the breakaway Gallic Empire. He is thus an apt illustration of the continuous give-and-take between the local and universal spheres of culture.

V Batavian Culture

The Vindolanda material supports Derks and Roymans' hypothesis of a significant population of literate veterans in the *civitas Batavorum*, even if the purpose of the seal-boxes remains uncertain. This paper has surveyed the broader cultural evidence from the region to investigate whether the probably closer familiarity with the imperial universal tradition on the part of this veteran population can be seen in Batavian society in general.

Roman policies had a transformative effect on Batavian society, creating their community to begin with, spreading monetisation and *terra sigillata* unusually rapidly and introducing a limited degree of urbanism. However, while these developments in some respects brought the Batavians into close alignment with the Mediterranean world, Roman recruitment also led to a persistence of stockbreeding and to the likely development of an unusual women's agricultural regime.

Our glimpse of their religion follows the same pattern. Hercules Magusanus is hardly distinguishable from his Roman counterpart, yet the practices of ritual feasting, weapon-offerings and deliberately archaic burial mounds and grave goods reveal a local tradition co-existing with the influences of the universal one. Hercules Magusanus aptly summarizes Batavian cultural identity as it appears to us: a close and significant identification with the martial values of the Roman army, but existing together with a shadowy presence of local goddesses rather than other Roman gods, comparable to how everyday life in the *civitas*, with its limited urbanisation, scarcity of villas, and traditional byre houses, must have remained very different from Roman Italy.

The mixture of local and universal traits reveals that despite an unusual degree of access to Latin literacy and the cultural practices of the universal tradition, the *civitas Batavorum* remained fundamentally a local community with a distinct identity of its own. The influence of the Roman army drove a series of specific cultural alignments to produce a highly militaristic society which adopted universalized symbols from the Roman army. Yet at the same time, unintended consequences served to heighten the peculiarity of Batavian society which remained quite cul-

turally distinct from the Mediterranean. Some of these peculiarities – the stock-breeding economy, weapon-offerings and ritual feasting – were in relative decline by the second century. Yet the distinctive architectural traditions were not, and the collapse of Batavian society in the third century came before it could be seen if the developments of the second would go far enough to fundamentally alter the character of the area.

In the *civitas Batavorum*, veteran literacy probably produced some of the best circumstances for cultural assimilation in the empire. Yet even here the imperial universal tradition did not take the shape of a national culture that was exported wholesale. The social and economic conditions of provincial life were too different from the urban environments at the centre of imperial power. Instead, the imperial cultural tradition was engaged with and borrowed from to satisfy local cultural needs.

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