Those who wait at home: the effect of recruitment on women in the Lower Rhine area

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Published in:
Frauen und römisches Militär

Citation for published version (APA):
Frauen und Römisches Militär
Beiträge eines Runden Tisches
in Xanten vom 7. bis 9. Juli 2005

Herausgegeben von
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BAR International Series 1759
2008
Those who wait at home: the effect of recruitment on women in the Lower Rhine area

Though the presence of women in and around forts can no longer be seriously disputed, the very idea that soldiers, during their 25 years service, formed family relationships akin to legal marriage continues to meet opposition. That this last bastion of male space could be thus invaded is somehow considered outrageous, and almost anything is mooted as an acceptable alternative explanation: prostitutes, transvestite soldiers, child sex-slaves. There is, it seems, a great reluctance to grant soldiers a normal family life. It is significant that it is only in this context that the burden of proof has to meet such exceptional standards. Possible indicators of female presence are subjected to extreme scrutiny, with a single instance of mismatch being sufficient to disqualify the group as a whole. Yet no such discussion is required for items conventionally regarded as male. Maleness is unproblematic: femaleness still has to be proved beyond a shadow of doubt. Do queries arise as to the masculinity of chain-mail armour when it is found in a female grave? Do the barracks at Vindolanda cease to be barracks in the absence of military equipment, or indeed, of any obviously male attributes? Of course not – other explanations are sought and the evidence is assessed on its merits. It needs to be acknowledged that if the same burden of proof were required for male presence, precious few Roman forts would survive the test. Unhappily, therefore, ‘sexing small finds’ though much criticised by those unfamiliar with the extreme opposition to involving women or children in Roman military affairs, continues to dominate the methodology of gender research in provincial Roman archaeology.

Since for me, the presence of women in and around the forts, and the reality of soldiers’ wives and children in military communities, is no longer an issue, I wish to move beyond the finds to investigate what happens to our perception of archaeological complexes when we make some fairly radical, gendered, assumptions concerning communities in the Lower Rhine area. How did the army impinge upon women’s lives outside the fort and military vicus? It is really quite remarkable how recent studies on tribal society in this region have managed to write out women: one could be forgiven for thinking these communities were composed solely of elite males. That the expectation of military careers dominated male-life courses is obvious, but the effects on the wider society are scarcely considered. What sort of society was this, how could it function in the absence of so many able bodied men, and how can the dichotomy between the removal of men for long term military service and the observed increase in population from the late first century onwards be reconciled?

The Lower Rhine region exhibits a number of peculiarities – in particular a low level of Romanisation: lack of hierarchies, failing urbanisation, absence of villa development, with, in comparison to neighbouring provinces, few signs of elites or accumulated wealth, slow uptake of Roman imported material and, in some areas, a continuing use of hand-made pottery. The manufacture of hand formed vessels is usually considered to be a female task, it occurred to me that the other peculiar features might also be connected to the economic roles of women in these tribal societies. And since the other, most obvious external factor shaping the character of these societies is their massive contribution to the Roman army, could these two factors be linked in some way? That the Roman occupation might have affected women differently is rarely considered, neither is the role of female labour given much importance.

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1 I sometimes think that the eagerness of scholars to digress on the brothels outside camp walls contains a strong element of wishful thinking.
thought in explanations of agricultural change. Yet in his classic study of peasant agriculture, Chayanov emphasised the complementary input of both male and female labour for the survival of the peasant household. Because tasks are specific, the absence of one of the partners threatens the viability of the unit: the response is either the very rapid re-marriage typical of European peasant communities, or an adaptation of the subsistence base. Anthropological studies of modern labour migration are useful to develop new ways of assessing the archaeological evidence: at the moment we do not seem to be asking the right questions and women remain invisible. It needs to be recognized that all our archaeology, from site report to ecological appendix, is androcentric by default and so long as this continues, the real impact of the Roman occupation on native communities will elude us.

THE ABSENCE OF MEN

The absence of partners was a feature of life for the women of Germania Inferior. The three tribes of the region, the Cananefates, Batavians and the Cugerni/Sugambri supplied large numbers of recruits for the Roman army, over a long period of time (Abb.1). For a self-sufficient agricultural society, the permanent removal of able-bodied men will have created grave problems for the families who remained behind and the strategies developed to cope must have distinctively shaped society as a whole. Loss of male labour shifts agricultural tasks onto women, assisted by children and the elderly, causing changes in practice which should be archaeologically traceable.

The Lower Rhine is not unique in supplying large numbers of soldiers, but it is well served in terms of archaeological research, which allows some drastic assumptions to be made as a starting point for discussion: I will offer no conclusions, this is merely an attempt to see what happens when slightly different questions are asked of the archaeological record.

1) In the 1st century, the Batavians supplied 1 ala and at least 8 cohorts, by the early 2nd century, 1 milliary ala, 4 milliary cohorts and 1 quingenary cohort; the Cananefates 1 ala and (possibly) 1 cohort. Both also had men in other units as well as the Imperial Guard, suggesting that between 5000 and 6500 men were under arms at any one time. The evidence for the Cugerni/Sugambri is much less certain and these are omitted from the further discussion, although they do also seem to have contributed a large number of men in relation to their tribal area.

2) Demographic models allow an estimation of the numbers of recruits required annually as well as the number of veterans eventually discharged after 25 years service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cananefates</th>
<th>Batavians</th>
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<td>Recruits:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cananefates</td>
<td>260-280 annually</td>
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<td>Batavians</td>
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<td>Batavians</td>
<td>125 annually</td>
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Fewer than half of the original recruits would reach the age of 45-50, when they would be discharged as relatively old men. Even if these figures are only a rough estimate, they do give an indication of the demographic pressure families in Germania Inferior were subjected to.

3) Ethnic recruitment continues till the middle of the 2nd century and probably longer.

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9 J.E.H. Spaul, Ala 2. The auxiliary cavalry units of the pre-Dioecletianic Imperial Roman army (Andover 1994) 62, 77; J.E.H. Spaul, Cohors 2. The evidence for and a short history of the auxiliary infantry units of the Imperial Roman Army. BAR Internat.Ser. 841 (Oxford 2000) 206, 245-47, contra Roymans (note 5) 22. For the Batavians: W.J.H. Willems, Romans and Batavians: A Regional Study in the Dutch Eastern River Area (Amersfoort 1986) 389-390. It is possible that other tribal groups such as the Frisivoni and Cugerni, formerly included in Batavian formations were only separated out after the Revolt of 69 AD, thus reducing the numbers to 5 Batavian units which were gradually raised to milliaria strength. This would represent a much heavier, punitive, imposition on the tribe. For the Cananefates: J.H.F. Bloemers, Rijswijk (Z.H.), ‘De Bult’. Eine Siedlung der Cananefaten (Amersfoort 1978). An ‘ala Cananefatium’ is attested before 69 but the cohort is considered by Spaul to be a 2nd century temporary formation as they first appear on a diploma of 164: J.K. Haalebos, Nederlanders in Roemenië. Westerheem 48, 1999, 197-210; 204, is not entirely clear on the matter. Considering all the attention Batavian horsemen receive in recent literature, the fact that the smaller territory of the Cananefates provided only cavalry is surely remarkable (Spaul 1994, 78; 2000, 235).

10 W. Scheidel, Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire: Explorations in ancient demography (Ann Arbor 1996) 120-22.
4) As a result, almost every family must have had one or more members in the army and the entire society was structured around military service and military identities.  

5) All regional surveys reveal a considerable increase in population from the mid 1st century to the end of the 2nd century, when the settlement system throughout Germania Inferior appears to collapse.  

6) The dense population and restricted arable potential imposed very real limits on agricultural production and it is questionable whether the area could have been self-sufficient in the 2nd century, the time of maximum population density.  

7) Certain agricultural tasks, such as ploughing, tend to be specific to men and the lack of labour at critical times in the agricultural cycle is a major constraint on production.

Most studies have been concerned with the question whether either the Batavians or the Cananefates (the Sugambrians have not yet attracted as much patriotic attention) were capable of meeting the military demands made on them. Various avenues have been explored to assess the population base: carrying capacity, theoretical population reconstruction, population estimates based on site surveys but there is no consideration of the long term social and demographic consequences of the imbalanced sex-ratio. Even with high-birth regimes, it would be difficult to compensate for the loss of about 300 of the most able bodied men annually. So assuming a 1:1 ratio at birth, what happened to the women and how was the population maintained?

The conventional answers – prostitutes, female infanticide and slavery - are simply not serious options, given the observed increase in settlement density. A society which murdered most of its females is not viable, quite apart from the fact that Classical writers would undoubtedly have pounced on such practices with glee. Indeed, such strategies are contrary to the nature of Germanic society given in the sources, neither are they supported by anthropological studies of communities affected by male out-migration. Moreover, a recent survey of cremation burials in Germania Inferior in fact finds an excess of females over males, in both rural and military vicus populations.

**FAMILY FORMATION?**

If the Romans valued ethnic recruitment there must have been systems in place to allow soldiers some form of family life. Contact with the home region is essential to maintain the tribal identity which underpins the desirability of ethnic regiments, while visiting soldiers inculcate the youth of the tribe with the military ethos which forms part of their destiny. All armies are fully aware of the importance of women – as mothers and wives – in supporting military vocations. Officially women may be ignored, but if recruitment is in jeopardy, steps are quickly taken to alleviate problems, often in quite unofficial and ad hoc ways, which will leave only faint traces in the literary or epigraphic record. It is noticeable, for instance, how often family relationships crop up as a cause for mutiny. Under ancient

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13 Willems (note 9) figs 60-63: these maps greatly underestimate the settlement density now being exposed by large scale excavations in the region; Bloemers (note 9) 103-4.


16 Kooistra (note 14); Bloemers (note 9) 105-110; Willems (note 9) 395-7.

17 Only Willems (note 9, 400) touches on the issue in relation to the deployment to Britain after 70 AD.

demographic regimes it would not be possible to maintain recruitment at the levels required unless family life was actively stimulated. Long traditions of military service within families are indeed indicated by the continuity of nomenclature between the Batavian members of the Imperial Guard at Rome and those 4-5 generations later in Vindolanda. Here, a specifically ‘military’ naming tradition seems to have developed from the substitutes for unpronounceable Germanic names given in early 1st century Rome. Although it is impossible to quantify the numbers concerned, Batavians and Cananefates evidently intended to return home after their 25 years of service. Although there are only three diplomae, there is a profusion of military metalwork on virtually every settlement in the Dutch river area. Military equipment displayed at home, like the offerings of weaponry at the temple of Empel, attests to an ethos of return, thus providing a powerful role model for the next generation of recruits. But men cannot suddenly re-appear after 25 years absence to pick up their civilian lives. Soldiers intending to return home would have had to invest in family relationships by means of letters, remittances and the distribution of lavish gifts on their visits, however infrequent these might have been.

Modern armies employing ethnic units invariably offer opportunities for contact with the home base. Texts from Vindolanda and Egypt do seem to document the possibility of leave, but give no indications of frequency or the length of time allowed, although the extensive absences revealed by duty rosters from Dura Europos, Egypt and Vindolanda may mask more than simply ‘out of camp on military duties’. During the 1st century, return home between campaigns might have been possible, but after the transfer to the Danube in the early years of the 2nd century, the sheer distance and the number of provincial frontiers to be crossed is assumed to have hampered contact. Yet there is constant evidence for individuals making this journey throughout the 2nd century and the well-documented, very high mobility of Roman officials suggests that we may well be exaggerating the difficulties of travel. Demanding a life-time of service, the army must surely have had a system for protracted leave, comparable to that granted to the Gurkha soldiers in the British forces. These men were allowed 6 months out every 3 years and there was also special provision for important family events, such as marriages and, particularly, funerals. The post-independence Indian army, which similarly employed Gurkhas and other tribal groups, also accepted substitutes in the case of family crises. Bearing such examples in mind, a reassessment of the evidence from papyri, ostraka and other ancient documents would be useful.

The scale of written communication with home throughout the 1st and 2nd century is betrayed by the distribution of metal seal boxes. Though in comparison to neighbouring regions the numbers are certainly exaggerated by regional differences in excavation practices and the reporting of metal-detector finds, the frequency of seal boxes – and by implication, letters – is certainly unexpected in rural sites which otherwise show a poor uptake of Roman material culture. Literacy was clearly much more widespread, and at a much lower social level than many Classical scholars are willing to contemplate. If literacy in the Rhine delta is a legacy of military service, concentrations of seal boxes elsewhere in the Empire might also identify the regions from which recruits were preferentially drawn. Literacy need not have been confined to soldiers and veterans: the desire to communicate with absent spouses, the necessity of handling remittances and the responsibility of running the household are

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major stimuli for women in modern situations of out-migration to seek education.\textsuperscript{25} Egyptian documents show soldiers taking an active interest in family affairs: the seal boxes discarded in rural settlements in the Rhine delta suggests an equally lively correspondence between soldiers, their families and friends.\textsuperscript{26}

The legal ban on marriage need not be an impediment to the formation of stable family relationships, since it only applied to Roman citizens and was obviously flouted. Native levies would have married under tribal custom in any case and Roman law recognized a whole range of alternative relationships between men and women which were just as real for the people concerned.\textsuperscript{27} Whatever the legal case, it is quite clear from both archaeological and epigraphic evidence that soldiers had families, and that women and children formed part of the fabric of life within the forts.\textsuperscript{28} Some tribal women certainly accompanied their husbands, and are recorded epigraphically in \textit{Dacia} and \textit{Pannonia}.\textsuperscript{29} We have no idea of numbers, whether they followed their men at recruitment or were sent out later. Sisters and daughters are essential for cementing ties between men, as we can see from the family tree of the Batavian leader Civilis, where his sisters’ sons figure prominently. This is why female infanticide is unlikely: women are crucial in long-term family strategies, especially in tribes such as the Batavi where loyalty and cooperation were highly valued. Wives at home are, I think, also implicit in the phrase on the discharge \textit{diplomae} granting citizenship to the soldier and the right of \textit{connubium} with one wife only. This does not refer to polygamy, but to soldiers with a wife at home married under native law and visited irregularly and a second ‘official’ partner in the camp. This is the choice many Europeans had to make in the Dutch East Indies. Often the native concubine was left behind, but there are equally many cases where men remained in Indonesia on account of these families – indeed this was why the Dutch military authorities actually encouraged soldiers to take an approved concubine. And a considerable number of men brought their Indonesian wife to the Netherlands, something inconceivable in British colonial society, but easily paralleled in the variety of tribal origins, relationships and locations recorded on Roman \textit{diplomae}.\textsuperscript{30}

In a society where almost every family had a son, brother or father in the army, children from their earliest years knew they would follow relatives into the forces. Such communities place a high premium on marriage and large families. If men enlisted at 20-22 they could already have established a family at home, a fairly common practice for migrants from Greece and Italy to the USA in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and which is also documented elsewhere.\textsuperscript{31} Such strategies are especially common if property or rights to land use are involved. There is perhaps evidence of this practice on a grave stone from Nijmegen concerning a family from Spain (CIL XIII 8732). The son, who died at 18, was born just before his father entered service, and had accompanied his father to Nijmegen, working as a \textit{lixia} - he was no doubt filling in time before joining up himself. There is no mention of the mother on the tombstone, which was raised by ‘the heir’, but this is hardly surprising as only a male heir could claim the soldier’s savings deposit from which the stone would have been paid. She may well have been present in Nijmegen, preparing the snacks her son sold to the soldiers much as the Indonesian concubines of Dutch soldiers did. But married women are perhaps more likely to have remained at home, managing family affairs and property, as the correspondence of soldiers in Egypt so richly documents. The closeness of family contacts revealed here is remarkably similar to the picture emerging from the \textit{Vindolanda} documents, adequate proof that the maintenance of family links was far more general than the cold repetition of military ideals by distant historians or legal experts would

\textsuperscript{25} Gulati (note 21) 117-8. Graphically illustrated in Kelvin Wilson’s illustration in Swinkels (note 24) 294, fig. 10.17.

\textsuperscript{26} R. Alston, \textit{Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt}. London 1995, 97-8, 117ff; Maxfield (note 22) 30ff.

\textsuperscript{27} B. Pfehdeirt, \textit{Die Rolle des Militärs für den sozialen Aufstieg in der Römischen Kaiserzeit}. Monogr. RGZM 49 (Mainz / Bonn 2001)144; S.E. Phang, \textit{The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C.- A.D. 235) Law and Family in the Imperial Army}. Columbia Stud. Classical Tradition 24 (Leiden 2001) 200ff. Many of the legalistic intricacies discussed here would be circumvented by lists of approved wives/concubines, such as were maintained by the Dutch colonial forces. From Roman Egypt, list of women’s names are known from desert postings and suggest similar official control of these irregular, but sanctioned relationships.


\textsuperscript{29} Haaebos (note 23).


have us believe. There is evidently a yawning gap between the literary and legal statements and the reality of everyday life, as revealed by the archaeological evidence and now, also, informal documentation.32

There is probably no single – and certainly no simple – answer, but it is inherently unlikely that an equal number of ladies accompanied the recruits when they were marched off to their Danube stations, and the reality is that society in Germania Inferior was dominated by women, children and the elderly.

WOMEN'S SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: AGRICULTURE

The native units from the Lower Rhine were almost continually on campaign outside their own area throughout the 1st century so the absence of males was not simply an issue which came to a head with the Flavian deployments.33 These tribes undoubtedly already possessed internal structures which allowed for the absence of warriors, and this ability might, indeed, have been a contributory factor in the Roman decision to exploit the military potential of the Batavians so eagerly. Roman demands were, however, systematic, continued for about 150-200 years and the men were taken not for a short campaign, but for a life time of military service. Studies of modern migration show that when men are absent women become responsible for household and agricultural decision making, and also take over financial control of remittances.34 Sending money home would certainly have been possible in the Roman situation, but even if there was a male household head to manage money, women would still be left to run the farm without the assistance of able bodied men, and would have to develop their own strategies for survival. A more sophisticated analysis of the ecological reports is necessary to shift the focus from the subsistence potential of a region to a consideration of external factors as agents of change. With the help of anthropological studies on the economic effects of migration, structural measures to compensate for the absence of men are indeed recognisable in the archaeological record of the Lower Rhine area, but given the androcentric perspective these signals tend to be interpreted as matters of ideological choice.35

A drawback of the ecological remains is that it is almost impossible to assess the relative contribution of animal husbandry and arable farming to the agricultural economy as a whole.36 Amongst the domestic animals, however, cattle and horses consistently dominate the bone spectra of the Lower Rhine area.37 This is explained variously as a response to the natural environment or as an ideological construct linked to the warrior mentality inherent in Batavian ethnicity.38 Both views contain elements of the truth but they both miss the salient fact: stock raising is a form of agriculture which releases adult males for other activities. As Tacitus puts it “all the heroes and grim warriors dawdle their time away, while the care of the house, hearth and fields is left to the women, old men and weaklings of the family.”39 The hardy horses require particularly little care as they can be left out all winter to forage in reed beds,40 while children and the elderly take care of herding and fodder collection. Subsistence agriculture is the responsibility of the women, with whatever assistance is available.

Characteristic for female dominated agriculture is a horticultural mode of production, with small, intensively cultivated plots realizing high yields per unit, but dependent on a heavy input of manure.41 The long north European tradition of stalling cattle inside houses is inextricably linked to the need to

32 Maxfield (note 22).
34 Gulati (note 21) 122-3; Phang (note 27)187-9.
35 Roymans (note 5).
36 Resulting in complex tables of variations, such as in Kooistra (note 14) 69, table 7.
37 Roymans (note 5) 80, tab. 5.
38 Respectively, Kooistra (note 14) 61-62 and 123; Roymans (note 5); 1996: the dominance of cattle bones in faunal complexes does not warrant the conclusion that these societies are ‘pastoralists’ since not only is the percentage contribution of arable unquantifiable, but it also needs to be recognised that the pastoral myth forms a traditional part of the ethnic stereotyping associated with the definition of ‘martial races’ by colonial powers.
39 Germania 15.
40 As is confirmed by the breeding success of the wild populations of horses and cattle in the nature reserve of the Oostvoordense Plassen.
41 Boserup (note 7); Netting (note 15) 2-3; van der Veen (note 15).
collect manure to maintain the fertility of the poor sandy glacial soils of the entire region, but the development of the potstal (deepened byre area) as early as the 2nd century in the Rhine delta area points to particular pressure on arable production here.\textsuperscript{42} It is not cattle, but their manure that forms the basis of these communities. Small plots are manageable by women, assisted by children and the elderly, using hand implements such as hoes and spades: it is typical of the male dominated discourse that the agricultural hoes in the deposits of tools and weapons at Kessel-Lith are interpreted as ‘axes’, while the evidence of other agricultural tools is ignored completely to justify the martial, warrior nature of the complex.\textsuperscript{43} There is indeed some archaeological evidence for hand cultivation: spade turned ground in Katwijk was initially (and incongruously) interpreted as mouldboard ploughing, while at Wijster, a complete hand dug garden of 80 sq. m. was excavated in the 1960’s. Although this settlement lies outside the formal Roman frontier, it also functioned in the context of military migration.\textsuperscript{44}

Amongst the new species of plants cultivated on rural sites in the Netherlands, fruit, vegetables and condiments are prominent additions, though the grains retain their traditional composition.\textsuperscript{45} Rather than regarding the introductions as evidence of changing lifestyles (characteristically published as that of elite men) we need to consider whether they form part of a new agricultural strategy developing to take account of a growing shortage of labour. In many modern situations the cash remittances of the migrant are essential to support families on tiny marginal farms, and staples may even be purchased so that the land can be used for better value products. Obviously the situation was very different in Roman times, but such comparisons should alert us to alternative explanations. Thus the occasional finds of lentils or peas on rural sites may point to nutritious food supplements rather than a taste for exotic luxuries and the presence of millet – a typical crop of last resort in small scale intensive agriculture – is also significant.

Horticultural regimes are particularly suited to the cultivation of fruit and vegetables which not only supplement the diet but also supply marketing opportunities. The same applies to other traditionally female-controlled activities – cheese, butter, chickens, eggs and brewing (see below). Such products allow women to enter the market in a very small way. These transactions, which need not involve money at all, can be difficult to trace, although the numbers of chickens and eggs, as well as the quantities of beer, bought by the \textit{Vindolanda} garrison shows the potential of such production.\textsuperscript{46}

That subsistence cultivation was carried out mainly by women does not mean that there was no plough agriculture at all, it must have been severely constrained by the availability of labour. The farmstead at Rijswijk, which tripled in size over a period of 120 years, was certainly producing grain on the associated 13 ha. field system and would have required a plough to do so. But the three farms at De Horden have garden compounds suitable for hand cultivation, as do the strings of farmsteads revealed by large scale excavation near Tiel, Nijmegen and Midden Delfland.\textsuperscript{47} A single plough and its handlers could be shared between several homesteads on the restricted arable of the river levees, but such cooperation invariably builds up debts between families which would have to be paid, either by the returning soldier bringing gifts (as in Nepal), with cash from remittances (as in Morocco) or with food or beer feasts (Africa). Brewing is notoriously difficult to trace archaeologically, but it is predominately a female occupation through which male labour can be mobilised for specific tasks such as ploughing.\textsuperscript{48} Some of the wild fruits, berries and leaves, normally classed under ‘local


\textsuperscript{43} N. Roymans, \textit{Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power} (Amsterdam 2004) 187, pl. 25.

\textsuperscript{44} W. van Es, Wijster. A native village beyond the Imperial frontier 150-425 A.D. \textit{Palaeohistoria} 11, 1967, 406, fig 181; H.M. van der Velden, Archeologisch onderzoek op de Zanderij-Westbaan te Katwijk, forthcoming.


\textsuperscript{46} \url{http://Vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk} for examples. TV II-302 mentions 20 chickens, 100-20 eggs and 100 apples, presumably collected from the local population by middlemen.

\textsuperscript{47} Bloemers (note 42) Abb. 9.9; W.A. van Es / W.A.M. Hesing (Hrsg.), \textit{Romeinen, Friezen en Franken in het Hart van Nederland} (Amersfoort 1994) 59, Afb. 42.

\textsuperscript{48} Netting (note 15) 70; Blumberg (note 15) 19 and pers. comm. Ing. M. Driessen.
vegetation’ in ecological reports might be re-considered as brewing indicators: the weak grain beers of rural Africa are enhanced with a variety of such natural flavourings. Just as African women today recycle oil drums as brewing vats, so amphorae or stave built barrels in rural settlements should be seen primarily in terms of re-use for brewing, rather than as indicators for a growing taste for Mediterranean luxuries. In its simplest form, brewing remains elusive, but this is another instance where simply assuming that it happens enables a whole series of apparently unrelated observations to coalesce into a consistent pattern of activities. It is surely also significant that other natural resources, especially wild berries and fruits, suddenly appear in the biological samples from the Roman period and it is worth considering whether this wild vegetation was not being cultivated in garden plots as part of a very careful strategy of risk reduction, diversification and small scale marketing. 49

WOMEN’S SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: COINAGE

The coin distribution provides some additional support. Contrary to what Joris Aarts expects of ‘non-monetised, essentially Celtic use of Roman money’ there is, in the 1st century a rapid diffusion of very low value coin into the rural hinterland of the forts.50 Aarts sees this as soldiers loosing pocket money when they went home rather than as an active part of the rural economy of the area, since in his model coins in a rural context are a priori considered to have lost their monetary function.51 However, the low denominations echo the circulation of the forts and surely chart transaction between the soldiers and the rural population. We may consider the sales of foodstuffs, provision of roadside refreshments and snacks, scenes which are familiar in rural Africa or S. W. Asia where women and children supplement subsistence agriculture with small scale marketing. The constant movement of troops and foraging parties provide ample opportunity for such face-to-face transactions. Later the pattern changes, but in a way that is entirely predictable from the way that female headed households tend to employ cash resources. There is extreme care in using small coin and a tendency to convert any surplus into higher value silver for emergencies and special occasions. Aarts regards the high proportion of silver on rural sites as invariably ritual, and in the end it may well be, but he overlooks the primary function of silver in a migration-affected household: to provide a buffer in times of need.52

Taken together, all the signs point to be a very careful strategy of risk reduction, curtailing expenditure on non-essentials to ensure family survival, building up buffers for use in times of dearth and maintaining social networks of cooperation. Modern development studies document similar strategies, one outcome of which is a much improved nutritional status for especially the children in female headed households. Furthermore, contrary to expectation, the demographic effects of migration are limited since the increased survival and better health of both mothers and infants compensates for the longer intervals between births.53

CONCLUSION

Although the archaeological signals are few, they do add up to form a consistent pattern with parallels in modern migration affected households. In an overpopulated and agriculturally restricted environment, military service provided men with long-term employment, enabling them to subsidise their families. Thus sending at least one son per generation into the army was a survival strategy for an entire household, much as it is for Gurkha soldiers or Moroccan labourers. As a consequence of the absence of male labour, agriculture is re-focussed, giving women more scope for developing alternative strategies. But women’s agriculture is invisible, and plays no role in archaeological theory. In the literary tradition of Caesar and Tacitus, native economies are still consistently misrepresented by modern colonial administrators, military writers and the scholarly community alike, all of whom

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49 R. Johnston, A social archaeology of garden plots in the Bronze Age of northern and western Britain. World Archaeology 37, 2005, 211-223, esp. 216 draws attention to the cultivation of wild species together with domesticates in garden plots and calls for more attention to be paid to wild plants in ecological reports as these may be more than just a proxy for cultivation.


51 id. 238.

52 id. 67.

53 Caplan (note 21) 43; Gulati (note 21) 130.
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prefer to construct an imagined pastoralist ideal to fit masculine concepts of noble warriors and martial
ethnicities, downplaying or ignoring evidence to the contrary.\textsuperscript{54}

Cross-cultural studies consistently note the increase in self-confidence, respect, and independence
shown by women responsible for agricultural and financial decision-making, while also drawing
attention to major differences in the use of available resources. Women tend to spend remittances and
earning on family support, additional food and education, while men retain a large proportion of their
earnings for status enhancement and luxury purchases.\textsuperscript{55} This raises the possibility that the outward
signs of Romanisation may not be linked to ideological concepts, but are rather a direct reflection of
who controls the purse strings. From this perspective, the low level of Romanisation and lack of
imported wealth in the Lower Rhine region is not due to ‘resistance’ or ‘traditional warrior values’ but
to female controlled agriculture, which invests returns in basic subsistence rather than the unnecessary
status-related luxuries which men tend to prioritise.

The Roman army affected women not just as wives, dependents and sexual partners. The constant
demand for recruits changed the lives and expectations of women in entire regions of the Empire.
They were expected to maintain the agricultural base in anticipation of the return of husbands and
sons, and to produce the next generation of soldiers. The fortunate ones may have escaped the
drudgery of tribal life accompanying their husbands to far off postings, the majority struggled to
maintain family subsistence in the absence of their menfolk. In his study ‘War Women and Children in
ancient Rome’ J.K. Evans links Rome’s ceaseless warfare with the increasing emancipation of Roman
women, at least for those with property.\textsuperscript{56} For rural women, on the other hand, his conclusion is bleak,
and goes little further the old prostitution argument. By applying modern migration theory to
archaeological and ecological evidence, and posing question from a slightly different perspective we
may begin to understand he impact of Rome on marginal communities, and to develop archaeological
correlates for similar situations in less well studied regions.

Acknowledgment
I am grateful to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for their support in
funding the sabbatical leave during which this paper was prepared.

\textsuperscript{54} van Driel-Murray (note 5) 2003, 202,
\textsuperscript{55} Blumberg (note 15) 27-30.
\textsuperscript{56} J.K. Evans, \textit{War Women and Children in Ancient Rome} (London 1991) 27.