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ETHNIC RECRUITMENT AND MILITARY MOBILITY

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It is commonly accepted that while ethnic recruitment and the stationing of auxiliary regiments far from their homelands formed part of Roman frontier policy in the 1st century, the more settled conditions of the 2nd century soon led to a situation where soldiers were recruited and stationed locally (Mann, 1983: 66-67; 2003). But is this so? Is the available evidence sufficient for such conclusions to be drawn, or is the reality more complex? Removing troublesome youth from tribal societies has always featured in the strategy of expanding states, and military recruitment is an efficient method of achieving this aim, while being compatible with the warrior ethos inherent in many of the groups involved. In terms of military strategy, therefore, ethnic recruitment was as relevant in the 2nd century as in the 1st (Saddington, 2005: 63; van Driel-Murray, 2003). Actually tracing the movement of the soldiers themselves is beset with difficulties but indirect means may offer better perspectives, and it is in this context that the role of military families and dependents takes on a new importance. The belief that Roman soldiers lived in virtuous celibacy has long been dispelled, and military families were clearly a fact of army life (van Driel-Murray, 1997; Allison, 2006). Examining the material legacy of these families is not, however, just a case of adding human interest to military history, for in their adherence to regional costume and pottery traditions, it is especially the women who give us an insight into the maintenance of links with the far-off homeland and the course of ethnic recruitment.

Here I will touch on four instances of tribal recruitment—three of them from the Netherlands—where it can be shown that family members from the home region accompanied the soldiers to their new stations: Batavians (1st and 2nd century), Frisians (late 2nd and 3rd century), the Germanic forces at Cuijk (4th century) and the Germanic levies in the Taunus forts (late 2nd/early 3rd century). From these case studies, it will appear that the ethnic identity of units was maintained for much longer than is usually thought, and that the movement of families was a regular occurrence, not only confined to the officer class. It can indeed be argued that the great migrations of the 4th and 5th centuries merely continued existing practices.

1 This is a preliminary presentation of a study which will appear in Archaeologia Aeliana, the Journal of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in which the results of José Peeter’s study of Housesteads ware, as well as the evidence of the footwear will be fully presented.
Following the Batavian Revolt of 69/70, the tribal levies of the Lower Rhine region (Batavians, Cananefates, Sugambri) were permanently stationed outside the province. What happened when such large numbers of men were withdrawn from their native region? Did they all leave weeping sweethearts behind, or were some families able to follow their menfolk? At Vindolanda, where the 9th Cohort of Batavians was initially sent, there is as yet no information concerning the possibility of families accompanying the ordinary solders, and although their commander Cerialis was certainly accompanied by his wife, Lepidina and their children (along with other household staff), it is by no means certain that they were actually Batavians themselves, even if it is likely. In the next phase (Period IV, ca 120 AD) however, the Tungrian unit then in residence was most certainly accompanied by family members, as the shoes of women and children inside the barrack block reveal (van Driel-Murray, 1997). What is not clear here is where these women came from: were they local girls or had they travelled from the Tungrian tribal area?

By 105, all but one of the Batavian units had been withdrawn from Britain to take part in Trajan’s Dacian wars, and they –and the Cananefatians– eventually ended up in various garrison forts scattered along the length of the Danube basin. That at least some women made the long journey to marry a soldier and establish their family is recorded on the discharge diploma awarded to M. Ulpius Fronto, a Batavian, serving in the 1st Batavian cohort in Pannonia, with his wife Mattua, also a Batavian, and their three daughters: Vagatra, Sureia and Satua (RMD 2, 86). With pure Batavian parents, would the daughters have been considered to be Batavian in their own right, if they married a Batavian soldier out in Pannonia? If they were, the resulting families would form enclaves of “ethnic Batavians” from which future recruits could safely be drawn: this would lead to a situation of apparent local recruitment, though on a de facto tribal basis which is hidden from our view. Comparable filtering of candidates according to ancestry pervades Dutch military and administrative control in Indonesia throughout the colonial period, with subtle distinctions between those born of European parents (no matter how long they had lived abroad) and those with differing degrees of native blood. All were looked down on by new European arrivals and it needs to be considered whether such intricacies of ancestry could underlie the phrasing of Roman inscriptions.

Tombstones and altar dedications only record that which is relevant at the time. A lot of information will have been common knowledge and required no setting out. Men serving in their own ethnic units did not need to mention their tribal affiliation, as their origin was perfectly obvious to all. In contrast, individuals with a different origin, such the Illyrian Dasatus Cenobarbi in the Ala Batavorum or the Batavian Flavus Blandus in the ala Frontoniana, did need to stress their separate identity in death (CIL III, 7800; AE 1938, 125). As is apparent from a perusal of the lists of personnel assembled by Spaul (1994; 2000), men tend only to specify their ethnicity where this differs from that of the unit in which they served. Thus the inscriptions which mention differing tribal affiliations and which figure prominently in the discussion concerning the supposed abandonment of ethnic recruitment in the 2nd century, in fact confirm exactly the opposite. There may indeed have been more “foreigners” mixed amongst the Batavians for any length of time (cf. De Weerd, 2006). The effects of recruitment on the native homeland are investigated in van Driel-Murray, 2008.

2 Considering the extent of their 1st century campaigning, none of them can be said to have been stationed at home for any length of time (cf. De Weerd, 2006). The effects of recruitment on the native homeland are investigated in van Driel-Murray, 2008.
or Tungrians in the 2nd century, but the majority of the units continued to be recruited from their own tribal area, along with the locally born children of suitable local veteran families. Inscriptions record the exceptional and rather than taking them at face value, we need to be aware of the relevance of the message to the potential audience.

For women it was a different matter, and as it is likely that rather fewer would have come from the home region, it would have been a matter of pride to state their origin. Tombstones to Batavians are few in number, so the occasional woman is even more significant. While Procula may have accompanied the main movement of Batavian units from the West to the Danube in the early 2nd century, this is certainly not the case for Romana, who was born in the Batavian capital Noviomagus/Nijmegen (Haalebos, 1999: 199; Bogaers, 1960/61: 283). She was the wife of Severus, the praefect of the 3rd Batavian cohort, which rather suggests that he, too, was of Batavian origin. Both she, and the Cananefatian wife of the surgeon to the legio I adiutrix, died far from home in the early 3rd century (CIL III 4279). So despite the common assumption that ethnic recruitment ceased during the 2nd century, Batavians (and others) evidently continued to travel east to join their traditional units, and so sometimes did their spouse/family. These ladies at least stated their town of birth, but on the whole, changes in nomenclature during the 2nd century mean that tribal origins fade from view. Neither Procula, nor Romana nor, indeed, Marcus Ulpius Fronto are names particularly resonant of Batavian origins and we need to develop other archaeological means with which to identify this mobile sector of tribal society.

THE TAUNUS LIMES

It has long been recognised that the Germanic brooches at forts on the Taunus Limes (Saalburg, Zugmantel) reflect the presence of Germanic mercenaries, probably from the Elbe region, stationed there (Böhme, 1972: 32-36; Beckmann, 1995). The debate concerning the exact area of origin of these brooches has tended to obscure the fact that at least some of these so-called “soldiers fibulae” occur exclusively in women’s graves in the north. Astrid Böhme’s original conclusion has been generally ignored: a fibula sex-change while crossing the frontier is apparently more acceptable than permitting women in or around a Roman fort. But fibulae are not the only witness to the presence of Germanic women. At the Saalburg, and to a lesser extent Zugmantel and Kleiner Feldberg, distinctive Germanic shoes for both adults and children confirm the presence of complete families here: indeed, in two cases the shoe of an adult is associated with that of a child in the same well (e.g. Busch, 1965: n. 3, 31, 82, 718). These single-piece shoes differ from the usual Roman styles, but are almost identical to footwear found in the bogs in Northern Germany and Jutland, with examples also present in the famous Thorsberg deposit (Hald, 1972: 51-54; van Driel-Murray, 1987: fig. 4). The conclusion must be that at least some family members accompanied their menfolk across the frontier in the late 2nd early 3rd century (Fig. 1).

FOURTH CENTURY CUIJK

The different footwear traditions are also instrumental in identifying the presence of northern mercenaries in the Late Roman fort of Cuijk on the River Maas (ca 330–340 AD) (van Driel-Murray, 2007). Most of the footwear follows Roman fashion current in the 4th century, with low
cut shoes, which are fastened with a lace going under the foot. This style can be recognized on contemporary depictions, such as the statues of the Tetrarchs in Venice or the mosaics of the Piazza Armerina (van Driel-Murray, 2001: figs. 75-78). However, around one third of the footwear finds belong to a quite different tradition, which is best paralleled in shoes from the north, such as Damendorf, near Schleswig (Hald, 1972: 54) (Figs. 2 & 3). And, as on the Taunus Limes, these shoes occur in sizes for men, women and children. Once more, complete families are in residence within the fort, yet again coming from northern Germany or southern Denmark. There are, incidentally, no other finds at Cuijk to suggest foreign forces, only the footwear, and this emphasises the importance of organic materials in tracing identities. Small shoes are undeniable evidence of children, however problematic the correlation of other finds with sex or age may be. And if families from the home region are so prominent in the few instances where footwear is preserved, it seems likely that such movement is the norm rather than the exception.

ETHNIC TRADITIONS IN POTTERY MANUFACTURE

A less direct way of tracing females in military communities lies in pottery, and specifically in the technology used. Numerous anthropological and ethnographic studies of pottery manufacture reveal a strong correlation between technology and the sex of the maker: while wheel-thrown mass produced pottery is predominantly made by men, hand formed pottery is—world-wide—almost exclusively made by women (Peacock, 1982: 13-16). What first alerted archaeologists to the presence of Germanic forces in the Taunus forts was a considerable quantity
of hand made pottery, quite distinct from Roman forms (von Uslar, 1934; Walter, 2000). Though the shapes, technology and decorative schemes are closely paralleled in Northern Germany, the pots themselves were made in the Roman military settlements, and this strongly implies the actual presence of women from outside the frontier. Significantly, the brooches and footwear on the Saalburg and Zugmantel—and, indeed, Cuijk—were made locally with Roman materials, but according to Germanic traditions. Women are therefore much in evidence as makers and users of traditional pottery and wearers of traditional clothing. Nor is the traffic one-way: developments in pottery and brooches in the homeland are echoed in the objects manufactured on the Roman sites, while Roman influences are discernable in native leatherwork in the north, especially in decorative elements. Contacts between the regions were evidently maintained for a period of about 3 generations (Walter, 2000: 199). It is remarkable that these Germanic objects were reproduced in the Roman setting, forming a distinctive cultural expression which remained relevant to these people, and especially the womenfolk, for such a long time.

FRISIANS

An analogous situation developed between the north of the Netherlands and northern Britain between the later 2nd century and the late 3rd, possibly early 4th century. In this case, there are no shoes or brooches, but there are some inscriptions and a characteristic form of hand made pottery, the so-called Housesteads ware, which occurs at a number of sites along Hadrian’s Wall. The following section is based on a study of this pottery, undertaken by José Peeters for her undergraduate thesis at the University of Amsterdam, and I am grateful for her permission to present her results here.
Jobey (1979) first drew attention to the Continental antecedents of this pottery, and suggested parallels with units drawn from north of the Rhine, which can be dated to the second quarter of the third century (RIB 1036, 1593, 1594, 1596). Most Housesteads ware has been found outside the forts, at Birdoswald in what seems to be a separate settlement of wooden buildings, though at Housesteads it occurs in 2 of the barrack blocks, as well as in the vicus (Peeters, 2003: 23-29). Parallels have been sought along the entire coast of the Netherlands but a number of new studies and a better understanding of native pottery styles across a region where Rhine-Weser, Chaucian and Frisian traditions meet and interact (Taayke, 1996; Abbink, 1999; Diederik, 2002). On the basis of a detailed analysis of both published and unpublished material from both sides of the North Sea, José Peeters concluded that the best parallels for both individual forms and the broader developments lies in the western coastal region of present-day Noord-Holland (e.g. Schagen) and the island of Texel. Mineralogical analysis reveals that the best parallels for both individual forms and the broader developments lies in the western coastal region of present-day Noord-Holland (e.g. Schagen) and the island of Texel. The cuneus Frisiorum, numerus Hnafridi, and the cives Tuihantes. If the latter had come from Twente, as has been put forward on shaky etymological grounds, they would have used Rhine-Weser-Germanic pottery and not the Frisian ware actually found at Housesteads (Taayke, 1996: 7).

3 The ceramic fabrics, numerous Henegouwen, and the rare Cévennes. If the latter had come from Twente, as has been put forward on shaky etymological grounds, they would have used Rhine-Weser-Germanic pottery and not the Frisian ware actually found at Housesteads (Taayke, 1996: 7).
Afb. 52; Abbink, 1999: figs 8.14 & 8.24; Jobey, 1979: fig. 4). Housesteads ware in Britain therefore represents a distinct, and consciously selected sub-set of particular importance to Frisian communities living abroad. In the stemmed cups we may see a humble counterpart to the magnificent silver cups from Denmark and which can be related to the strong Germanic cultural traditions of guest-friendship and hospitality, immortalised in the heroic literature of Beowulf (610ff) (Cat. 2003, 116, 397; von Uslar, 1934: Abb 2, 7-8). In modern situations, it is frequently the traditional pottery associated with formal and ceremonial functions which endures in the face of competition from mass produced market goods (Hardin, 1996: 40). Ordinary cooking and storage vessels might be replaced by Roman wares, but practices bound up with the honour of the women of the household and the reproduction of social relationships are less easily discarded.

From the development of forms, a period of about 4-5 generations seems to have been involved, possibly lasting a bit beyond 300, by which time almost all the settlements in Noord-Holland had been abandoned anyway. Living in the shadow of the Roman empire, the population of coastal northern Holland had increased rapidly during the 1st century, precipitating a subsistence crisis which was compounded by worsening environmental conditions (Meffert, 1998: 73-75). From about the middle of the 2nd century, settlements begin to be abandoned, and occupation only continues on isolated favourable locations, such as the tip of Noord-Holland, Texel and the raised settlements on the northern mudflats. During this crisis, Roman imports begin once more to appear, and it seems that service in the Roman army offered these threatened communities a life line for survival, at least for a time (Erdrich, 2001: 125-126). There are even indication for the import of foodstuffs, grain and cattle, from Roman stocks. To judge from the pottery in northern Britain, the movement of entire households across the sea was initiated in this period: service in the Roman army formed the prelude to the migration of at least some of the Frisian population.

The three instances of cross-frontier recruitment discussed (Frisians, Cuijk, Taunus Limes) represent specific phases of targeted recruitment, possibly even initiated by the barbarians themselves or answering particular localized concerns on a certain sector of the frontier. The groups involved seem to be relatively small, and even though contacts with the homeland were maintained over several generations, the presence of families suggests that at least for some, it was seen in terms of permanent migration. The context for the exploitation of both the Frisians and the Taunus Germans lies in the changing political relations between the Empire and Germania Libera, as elucidated by Michael Erdrich (2001), and, as far as the Taunus episode is concerned, ceases at the end of his phase 5. The western Frisian lands evidently stood in a different relationship to the Roman Empire and continued to supply soldiers to the end of the 3rd century. For ethnic soldiers within the Empire the situation is much more complex with a variety of strategies open to the protagonists. Some families remained in the original tribal area, to be re-united with returning veterans after their service (van Driel-Murray, 2008), while others accompanied husbands or sons to new postings. Vast movements of Batavian and Cananefatian families across Europe are hardly a realistic proposition: travelling spouses must always have been in the minority, though in a number of cases there seem to be enough of them to leave recognisable traces. The Batavian case is not unique: Thracians were still manning forts along the Lower Rhine in the late 2nd century and they are well known for preferring to return home on discharge (Roxan, 1997: 487; Mann, 2003: 184). But occasionally they too were accompanied by family members, for women and children are also accorded their distinctive bustum cremation rite in Rhineland cemeteries (Smits, 2006: 163). Here, ethnic identity was apparently maintained through grave ritual, rather than specific forms of clothing or pottery.
These military migrants form the pioneer communities from which later movements drew their knowledge of routes and conditions. It is, however, salutary to note that in all cases, only a few, highly specific aspects of the traditional material culture were retained in the new setting. There was, it seems, a conscious selection of those elements which most defined group identity. Since these choices operate in the domestic sphere, it is the material culture associated with the families which can help us to unravel mobility within a military context. This is not to deny local recruitment: even if some kind of ethnic link was preferred, units will inevitably have been brought up to strength by whatever means were available, leading to some degree of mixing. My only contention here is that the situation is very much more complex than is usually represented, and that a case can be made for the continuance of ethnic recruitment till the end of the 2nd century at least.

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