

A new study of the Batavians

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NICO ROYMANS, *ETHNIC IDENTITY AND IMPERIAL POWER. THE BATAVIANS IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE* (Amsterdam Archaeological Studies 10; Amsterdam University Press 2004). Pp. xi + 277, many figs. including colour. ISBN 978-90-5356-705-0. EUR. 47.75.

The Batavians must be among the best-studied native tribes in the entire Roman Empire. This is due to the exceptionally rich source material: not only are there ample literary data and unique epigraphic material (including Vindolanda's wooden writing-tablets), the quality and quantity of archaeological data on them is superb. The soils of their home region in the Dutch river delta of the Rhine and Meuse are eminently suitable for the preservation of archaeological remains as well as for discovering them, and the region has now been studied intensively by four generations of archaeologists. The latest book, by N. Roymans (whom I would count in the third generation), provides yet another fine flower in a diverse bouquet.

The book is the result of a research project at Amsterdam's Free University that ran between 1999 and 2004 and has produced a number of other important studies, most recently one by J. Nicolay.¹ Roymans makes good use of the variety of detailed studies by his team to present a synthesis that in part repeats earlier work but is also innovative in several respects. As Roymans remarks, his work on the Batavians will be relevant for the broader discussion on ethnic identities in the Roman Empire.

The book is written in an easily accessible style. It starts out with a useful but rather brief chapter in which the theoretical basis for the study is laid out, as well as the methodologies required to interpret the archaeological and historical sources, and the way in which the different data-sets are going to be used to complement each other. The rest of the book, structured along chronological lines, can be divided into three parts, with a concluding chapter.

The first part (chapters 2-4), devoted to the native background, deals mostly with developments in the Late Iron Age before the beginning of the Roman period in 15 B.C. (in the meantime this date has to be changed to 19 B.C. because of good evidence for the founding of the Augustan *castra* at Nijmegen²). The period from about the mid-2nd to the mid-1st c. B.C. appears to have been one of rapid social change, illustrated by the emergence of regional sanctuaries, the advent of Celtic coinage, the emergence of specialized crafts (such as glass bracelets), and a settlement system that became more hierarchical and complex than had previously been believed. All these point to an increased importance of elite groups and of forms of authority that Roymans seeks to equate — in my view, convincingly — with the command of bands of horsemen, a *comitatus* or *Gefolgschaft*.

The conquests of Caesar brought major changes in the final decades of the Iron Age, with tribal reshuffling in the Lower Rhine area. As has long been established, there is too much archaeological evidence for continuity to posit major migrations, but some tribal polities (notably the Eburones, whom Roymans characterizes as a rather loose tribal confederation) were terminated. A sizeable part of the discussion is devoted to the gold staters of the type Scheers 31 that were originally ascribed to the Eburones and then shifted by C. C. Haselgrove to his circulation stage 3 (125-60 B.C.). Roymans has now moved them forward again to the Eburones' revolt of 54-53 B.C., which allows him to conclude that their distribution shows that the E part of the Dutch river area that was to become the centre of the Batavian region must have been part of the Eburones' polity. Not an issue that was ever really in doubt, it remains a side issue

J. Nicolay, *Gewapende Bataven. Gebruik en betekenis van wapen- en paardentuig uit niet-militaire contexten in de Rijndelta (50 voor tot 450 na Chr.)* [Armed Batavians: use and significance of weaponry and horse gear from non-military contexts in the Rhine delta] (Diss. Amsterdam 2005); a foretaste of this work was published in Grünewald and Seibel (*infra* n.4).

F. Kemmers, *Coins for a legion. An analysis of the coin finds of the Augustan legionary fortress and Flavian *canabae legionis* at Nijmegen* (Diss. Nijmegen 2005) = *Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike* 16 (2007)

for the theme of this book and would perhaps have been better published as a journal article; still, it has some value by providing a better focus.

The second part (chaps. 5-9) deals with the formation of the Batavian polity. As the author points out, this should be distinguished from their genesis as an ethnic group (treated in Part 3). The basic conclusions here are not new: they confirm that the new tribal unit must have developed from multi-ethnic origins, around a relatively small group of immigrants (whom Roymans terms 'Chatto-Batavians' on account of their origins as a faction of the Chatti) but including the remnants of indigenous populations, testified to by the overwhelming evidence for continuity. This new overview does, however, refine and expand our knowledge with new analyses and by bringing together a wealth of data from recent studies as well as new and unpublished finds.

A plausible case is made for the development of the new Batavian polity around an aristocratic leader with his *comitatus* who was recognized as king by Rome and succeeded various other groups in a new tribal unit. This is supported by an analysis of the shift in the circulation of Celtic *triquetrum* coinages that can be attributed to the Batavians. The evidence for this, first presented in 1980, has multiplied twentyfold, mainly due to the use of metal-detectors (legal as well as illegal, it should be added). As one who has worked in heritage management most of his life, I have an uneasy feeling about Roymans' unbridled use of coins and other finds made by metal-detectorists in illegal excavations. I would have hoped for a more critical approach, even though indisputably this material does provide valuable information.

The great wealth of finds, mostly from dredging for sand at Kessel/Lith in the centre of the river area, at a point where the Meuse and Waal (a branch of the Rhine) almost meet, is presented at length. The site (or rather a related complex of sites) has yielded large amounts of late La Tène metalwork. It is identified by Roymans as the site of Vada mentioned by Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.20-21) and interpreted as a settlement and associated cult-place. The finds include the remains of a monumental Gallo-Roman temple, presumably from the late 1st or early 2nd c., used as *spolia* in the construction of a Late Roman fort at the same site. Roymans interprets this site as the central place of the new Batavian polity.

He then goes on to discuss the process whereby the region gradually becomes a Roman *civitas*, opting essentially for a middle road between the two viewpoints of Augustan or Flavian. An interesting idea (again not new, but here examined in a more encompassing context) is that of a pre-Flavian *civitas* which incorporated the territories of other tribes (such as the Cananefates, Frisiavones, Marsaci and Texuandri) who are seen as client tribes given an independent status after the Batavian Revolt.

Roymans rightly abandons recent ideas³ about the earliest administrative arrangements in the Augustan period (with the associated and faulty interpretation of the military settlements at Nijmegen) to suggest that the site in Nijmegen town centre, identified as *Oppidum Batavorum* or *Batavodurum*, was the successor to Kessel/Lith as the Batavian central place. This makes sense, although I fail to see why it should imply that *Oppidum Batavorum* cannot be seen as a colonial implantation (a town 'for', rather than 'of' the Batavians); indeed, the new excavations (2005-6) by the municipal archaeology service have reinforced this interpretation. The evidence suggests that the town is Gallo-Roman, and not native at all, although the implication from this is not necessarily that it was avoided by the native élite.

The third part (chaps. 10-11) addresses the Batavian genesis as an ethnic group in the 1st c. A.D. In this, both the most speculative and the most thought-provoking part of the book, he discusses the image and self-image of the Batavians — the way they were seen by the Romans and the way in which they saw themselves, and how that led to their tradition as a soldiering people. This interpretation resembles that recently put forward by C. van Driel-Murray.⁴ The

3 J. Slofstra, "Batavians and Romans on the Lower Rhine. The Romanisation of a frontier area," *Archaeological Dialogues* 9 (2002) 16-38.

4 C. Van Driel-Murray, "Ethnic soldiers. The experience of the Lower Rine tribes," in T. Grūnewald and

baffling amounts of military equipment from native settlements studied by Nicolay,⁵ as well as the epigraphic evidence studied by T. Derks,⁶ provide supporting evidence for the Batavians as a people where most families would have had sons in the army. So does the level of literacy deduced from the numerous seal-boxes found in the area (catalogued and discussed by Derks and Roymans in *JRA Suppl.* 48,⁷ but unmentioned here). In this context Roymans stresses and illustrates the special significance of the cult of Hercules.

All in all, Roymans has succeeded in pulling together a large amount of material from various sources and creating a mostly convincing, and certainly very interesting and useful, book. It is well written and well illustrated, though more color illustrations would have been welcome. It shows the value of having a team of researchers working for a long time on different aspects of the same study area. Much new evidence and many new perspectives are generated in this way, and this important synthesis should influence further research on native populations under the empire.

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S. Seibel (edd.), *Kontinuität und Diskontinuität. Germania Inferior am Beginn und am Ende der römischen Herrschaft* (Berlin 2003) 200-17.

5 Supra n.1.

6 T. Derks, "Beelden en zelfbeelden van Bataven: de epigrafische Bronnen," in L. Swinkels (ed.), *De Bataven. Verhalen van een verdwenen volk* (Amsterdam 2004) 40-69.

T. Derks and N. Roymans, "Seal-boxes and the spread of Latin literacy in the Rhine delta," in A. E. Cooley (ed.), *Becoming Roman, writing Latin?* (*JRA Suppl.* 48, 2002) 87-134.

Military architecture in the Gauls

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MICHEL REDDÉ (sous la direction de), RAYMOND BRULET, RUDOLF FELLMANN, JANKEES HAALBOS, SIEGMAR VON SCHNURBEIN, *L'ARCHITECTURE DE LA GAULE ROMAINE. LES FORTIFICATIONS MILITAIRES* (Documents d'Archéologie française 100; Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme/Ausonius éditions, Paris-Bordeaux 2006). Pp. 480, figs. 502 dont 8 en couleur. ISBN 2-7351-1119-9. EUR. 48.

In 1931, A. Grenier (1878-1961), then professor at Strasbourg but soon to move to the Collège de France, published the first volume of his *Manuel d'archéologie gallo-romaine*, a series which was to form the final part of J. Déchelette's *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique, celtique et gallo-romaine*. Déchelette, a territorial captain, was killed in the opening months of the Great War at the age of 52, and Grenier, living in the shadow of that terrible war, chose to begin the series with Roman military works, including urban defences. The present volume marks the beginning of a new series, *L'architecture de la Gaule romaine*, which is partly intended to replace the *Manuel*. Grenier confined himself to the largely civilian areas of Gaul, but the new work studies all of Caesar's three parts of Gaul, including the frontier zones of *Germania Superior* and *Inferior*. Its first three chapters, which are wide-ranging surveys of the historical and archaeological evidence, have 5 main authors. More than half the book, written by 53 contributors, is occupied by a catalogue of sites selected because of their contribution to an understanding of military architecture; it is not a general survey of forts in Gaul. The content has been strictly controlled. This is a book about Roman military architecture: it is not about the Roman army or life in forts, and even topics such as fort plans as a guide to the types of unit in garrison are treated briefly. The preface by P. Aupert, the series editor, explains its apparently narrow focus. In France the study of ancient architecture in general has been eclipsed by other intellectual developments. This new series on Gallo-Roman architecture is intended to draw together research scattered through numerous publications, many difficult to obtain, and present it to students and the "érudit local ou amateur éclairé". It will have a much wider