THE END OF THE BATAVIAN AUXILIARIES AS 'NATIONAL' UNITS

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The history of the Batavian auxiliary regiments of the Roman imperial army is comparatively well documented. The written evidence on such units usually consists of a few inscriptions and military diplomas, documents containing limited information that is very often difficult to interpret. As a consequence, we can at best reconstruct their development in a very broad outline only. In the case of the Batavian units, however, some valuable information is to be found in the literary sources, especially in Tacitus. Without his description of the Batavian revolt in the *Histories* and several references in his other writings we would not even know of their existence until the end of the first century when the first documentary sources on these units begin to appear. By then they had existed for more than half a century without leaving any trace in the epigraphic record. It is mainly through the testimony of Tacitus that we are informed about their reputation as an elite force and about their special status which implied that they were commanded, and probably also levied, by their native leaders. As a result of this arrangement their specific ethnic composition was preserved long after they had been first raised.¹

Despite this – admittedly relative – abundance of information there is much that remains problematic and open to debate. The discovery of only a few new texts during the last two decades of the twentieth century has undermined earlier reconstructions of the history of these units. It used to be thought, for instance, that the Batavian Revolt marked a clear break in their development. After this event their distinctive ‘tribal’ character was sup-

¹ Whether or not this implied that these troops maintained their native character in a cultural sense is a different question that will not concern us here. The Vindolanda tablets clearly show that by the end of first century these units were thoroughly influenced by Roman culture. Perhaps the situation in the pre-Flavian period was different: see e.g. N. Roymans, ‘The sword or the plough. Regional dynamics in the romanisation of Belgic Gaul and the Rhineland area’ in: *From the Sword to the Plough* (Amsterdam 1998), 27-28. See however the remarks by T. Derks, *Gods, Temples and Ritual Practices. The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam 1998), 54, on the cultural differences between the Roman army and German warriors that must have influenced the soldiers even in the pre-Flavian period.

posed to have disappeared and they were thought to have become much like other auxiliary regiments, ethnically mixed and commanded by Roman equestrians whose origins could be from anywhere in the empire. After the discovery of new military diplomas, a new inscription and the writing tablets from Vindolanda, this view has become untenable. In fact, the newly discovered evidence has led some to suppose that the regiments in question remained literally 'Batavian' well into the second century. In my view, this new theory is as unfounded as its predecessor.² It will be argued below that the change in character of these troops that was traditionally associated with the revolt did occur, but at the end of the first century.

In a sense the tribe of the Batavians was as a Roman creation. Its origin can be dated to somewhere in the second half of the first century BC, when a subgroup of the German Chatti settled in the Rhine delta with Roman permission. The archaeological evidence indicates that the river area was not totally deserted at that moment, so that the settlement of the Chatti meant a mixing of different groups. Reinforcing thinly populated areas by settling allied tribes is a characteristic element of the frontier policy in this period.³

The relations between Rome and the newly established tribe were defined in a treaty that gave the Batavians immunity from taxation and regulated *inter alia* the military obligations they had to fulfil. They supplied soldiers to the imperial bodyguard until the emperor Galba cashiered this unit. Furthermore, it seems that initially the Batavians operated as a client army with its own military organisation under the command of one of their nobles in certain military campaigns.⁴

In the course of the first half of the first century this obligation was organised on a more permanent basis by the raising of auxiliary regiments.

² K. Dietz, 'Das älteste Militärdiplom für die Provinz Pannonia Superior', *Berichte der römisch-germanische Kommission* 64 (1984), 159-268, esp. 205-206, on continued national recruitment; K. Strobel, 'Anmerkungen zur Geschichte der Batavikohorten in der hohen Kaiserzeit', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 70 (1987), 271-292, with a discussion on the continuity in command structure.

³ W.J.H. Willems, 'Romans and Batavians: a regional study in the Dutch eastern river area', *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek* 32 (1984), 206-213. N. Roymans, 'The lower Rhine *triquetrum* coinages and the ethnogenesis of the Batavians', in Th. Grünwald, ed., *Germania Inferior. Besiedlung, Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft an der Grenze der römisch-germanischen Welt* (Berlin 2001), 93-145.

⁴ Treaty: Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.12 and *Germania* 29; bodyguard: H. Bellen, *Die germanische Leibwache der römischen Kaiser des julisch-claudischen Hauses* (Wiesbaden 1981), M. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar. The Roman Emperors' Horse Guard* (London 1994), 12-31; client army: Tacitus, *Annales* 2.8 and 2.11.

By the year 69, when the revolt broke out, there were ten such units. One *cohors equitata* served in the Batavian homeland in AD 69, under its commander Julius Civilis who was to become the leader of the revolt. The most prestigious unit, the *ala Batavorum*, served in the immediate vicinity, at some unknown base of the lower Rhine army. When these units were first raised remains unknown.⁵

We are better informed about the series of eight *cohortes equitatae* that were raised in or shortly before AD 43 in order to take part in the conquest of Britain.⁶ A remarkable feature of these eight cohorts is that they operated in close cooperation for a considerable period of time. They were deployed en bloc as an elite force in major military operations almost as if they were a single force, as a short overview of their known movements until the revolt clearly demonstrates.

Their whereabouts immediately after the conquest of Britain are disputed. In my view, they are likely to have remained in the island, but it is often thought that they were part of the Rhine army for a certain period. The evidence for this is, however, not very convincing.⁷ In any case it is commonly agreed that they returned to Britain (if they had ever left the island) during the revolt of Boudicca to stay there until AD 66, when all eight cohorts were summoned to take part in an expedition to the Caucasus that was planned by the emperor Nero but never carried out because of his deposition and subsequent suicide in 68.

At the time of Nero's death the cohorts were in Northern Italy,⁸ from where they were sent back to Britain. However, when passing through central Gaul they were incorporated into the Vitellian army that was about to invade Italy. During this campaign there were growing tensions between these auxiliaries and the legionary soldiers, which led to open riots when they had crossed the Alps. When the Vitellian general Fabius Valens tried to restore order by splitting up the eight cohorts and took the step of sending some of them on campaign to Southern France, this was considered a very unusual measure. Even the legionary soldiers protested that their army would

⁵ The cohort of Civilis: Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.16. The *ala*: *Historiae* 4.18.

⁶ M.W.C. Hassall, 'Batavians and the Roman conquest of Britain', *Britannia* 1 (1970), 131-136.

⁷ This theory is based on Tacitus, *Annales* 14.38, where we read that during the revolt of Boudicca a reinforcement of eight auxiliary cohorts was brought in from Germany. But Tacitus does not state that these were the Batavian cohorts, although he mentions them specifically in many other passages.

⁸ Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.6, 2.27.

be considerably weakened by the sending away of some of the Batavian units and Valens had to revoke his decision. Finally, when the conflicts flared up again after the battle of Bedriacum, all eight cohorts were sent back north, where they subsequently became involved in the Batavian revolt.⁹

What happened to the Batavian regiments after the revolt? The answer to this question cannot be read in Tacitus' *Histories*. Our only manuscript ends in the middle of his description of the peace negotiations that were conducted between the Batavian leader Julius Civilis and the Roman general Petillius Cerialis. Until two decades ago common opinion held that the participation in the revolt of all these units meant the end of their special status. Tacitus described the revolt as a dangerous native uprising against Roman rule, although the real intentions of the rebels in their struggle against the pro-Vitellian Rhine army were initially veiled by their posture as partisans of Vespasian. Modern authors assumed that their conduct during the revolt alerted the imperial government to the political risks posed by the national character of these troops that had sided with their tribe against the empire. It seemed to follow from this that the Batavian privileges must have been withdrawn: they were no longer commanded by their own native leaders and were sent to serve far away from home. New recruits were no longer levied in the Batavian homeland, but in the region where they happened to be stationed, as was the normal practice in regard to auxiliary units.¹⁰

The discovery of new documents in the last two decades of the twentieth century has led to a reconsideration of these opinions. Two military diplomas show that national recruitment did continue after the revolt. The first of these, which was found near Regensburg, was issued to a Batavian soldier of the milliary *cohors I* in AD 113. It shows that recruitment among the Batavians for this unit went on at least until the late 80s of the first century.¹¹ The second diploma, which was found in Elst, in what once was Batavian territory, was published in 2000. It was issued in AD 98 to a Batavian horseman of the *ala Batavorum*, who must have been recruited shortly after the revolt.¹² A new inscription from Pannonia records the burial of a Batavian veteran of *cohors I*, M. Ulpus Inamn[us?]. This text can be

⁹ Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.59, 64; 2.27-28, 66, 69.

¹⁰ G. Alföldy, *Die Hilfstruppen der römischen Provinz Germania Inferior* (Düsseldorf 1968), 101-102; Willems 1984, op. cit. (n. 3), 243.

¹¹ Dietz 1984, op. cit. (n. 2).

¹² J.K. Haalebos, 'Traian und die Hilfstruppen am Niederrhein. Ein Militärdiplom des Jahres 98 n. Chr. aus Elst in der Overbetuwe (Niederlande)', *Saalburg Jahrbuch* 50 (2000), 31-72.

dated between 102 and 118. Since the age of the deceased has not been preserved, we do not know exactly when he was enlisted. He is likely to have received the citizenship when the entire cohort was honoured with citizenship by Trajan during the Dacian wars.¹³

New evidence on prefects of the units after the revolt was provided by the writing tablets from Vindolanda where the ninth Batavian cohort was stationed between 90 and 105. The names of one of its commanders, Flavius Cerialis, who was at Vindolanda from 101 to perhaps 105, strongly suggest a Batavian origin: his cognomen seems to have been borrowed from Petillius Cerialis, the Roman general who played an important role in the pacification of the Batavians in 70.¹⁴

It would seem therefore that the basic conditions of Batavian military service had not changed after the revolt. Although the new evidence is not very abundant, it is important that it neatly fits the contemporary testimony of Tacitus' *Germania*, according to which the ancient treaty between Batavians and Romans was still in force when this treatise was published, that is in AD 98.¹⁵ In the absence of any further concrete evidence on the situation of these troops around that date, twentieth-century scholarship has generally discarded this passage as an anachronism, but this no longer seems a tenable position now that the new evidence seems to corroborate Tacitus' statement.

We can find further circumstantial evidence for continuity if we take into account where and, in the case of their main force, how the Batavian regiments were deployed after the revolt. It has often been asserted that the disciplinary measures that were supposedly taken against the auxiliary units originating from the lower Rhine area after AD 70 took brought about not only a change in command structure and recruitment methods, but also their transfer to provinces far away from home. In the case of the Batavian regiments this contention is in part wrong and in part inaccurate.

¹³ G. Alföldy and B. Lörincz, 'Die Cohors I Batavorum Milliaria Civium Romanorum Pia Fidelis im pannonischen Solva (Esztergom)', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 145 (2003), 259-262.

¹⁴ For the literature on this man see A. Birley: *Garrison Life at Vindolanda. A Band of Brothers* (Stroud, Gloucestershire 2002), 45, esp. note 12 (on p. 167). If Flavius Cerialis was a Batavian, we can assume that other commanders who are named in the tablets, such as Flavius Cerialis' predecessor Flavius Genialis, were Batavians as well, although their names have a more common occurrence and cannot as such be used to identify the origin of those who bear them. Cf. A. Birley, 'The names of the Batavians and Tungrians in the Tabulae Vindolandenses' in Grünewald 2001, op. cit. (n. 3).

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Germania* 29.

The *ala Batavorum* that deserted to the rebels just after the beginning of the revolt, was at that time stationed somewhere on the military frontier of the Lower Rhine. Before the publication of the diploma from Elst it used to be thought that after the revolt it was transferred to Pannonia, where it is first recorded in a diploma issued in 112. The diploma from Elst, however, shows that the *ala* was still in Germania Inferior in 98. The obvious conclusion seems to be that the unit was not transferred after the revolt, but remained in the same province.¹⁶

The case of the eight *cohortes equitatae* is somewhat more complicated. Instead of eight we find four *cohortes* after the revolt, numbered I, II, III and IX. They are attested as milliary cohorts by the end of the first century. When they first became units of double strength is debatable. It seems that *cohortes* I, II, III and IX are a continuation of the earlier eight cohorts rather than a new series. This can be deduced from the number IX of one them, since it is as good as certain that after the revolt there were no *cohortes* bearing the numbers IV-VIII. This strongly suggests that the number IX refers to the pre-revolt situation and that the four new units were created by combining several of the former eight.¹⁷

The reason for this may have been that heavy casualties suffered during the revolt had reduced some of the old Batavian units to far below their original strength. One or more cohorts may have become so small that they were no longer able to function properly. It must have been difficult to find enough new recruits to fill the ranks immediately. This problem was solved by combining different cohorts that were perhaps initially under the full strength of a milliary cohort, but could be built up gradually. In other words, although the number of units was reduced to four, their total strength may well have remained approximately the same, at least in the long run.

After the revolt these four cohorts were sent to Britain, but this was certainly not a new policy, but a return to the situation that had existed

¹⁶ The only difficulty in this assumption is that the unit is not mentioned in earlier diplomas from Germania. It has been suggested that the *ala* was in fact sent elsewhere, but subsequently returned to Germania Inferior: Haalebos 2000, op. cit. (n. 12), 43. But there is no evidence for this, while it is also dangerous to draw conclusions from the absence of a particular unit on a given diploma. Its absence on earlier diplomas has long been the main argument used by those holding either that the *ala* was sent to Pannonia immediately after the revolt or even that the Romans took the step of disbanding the old regiment and raising an entirely new *ala*. See the summary in J. Spaul, *ALA²: The Auxiliary Cavalry Units of the Pre-Diocletianic Imperial Roman Army* (Andover 1994), 63.

¹⁷ Alföldy 1968, op. cit. (n. 10), 47-48.

before 66. They just went back to their old base, although they were organised in a slightly different manner. We may note that they were soon deployed in major military conflicts and again as if they formed a single force, as had been the case before the revolt. At Mons Graupius (AD 83) the four milliary cohorts bore the brunt of the famous battle against the Caledonians, which is described in the *Agricola*.¹⁸ This suggests that the revolt brought no substantial change in the conditions of service of these cohorts. It is true that they were sent to serve away from home after the events of AD 70, but that had already been the practice before.

Only in regard to the cohort that had served in the Batavian homeland under Julius Civilis a strong case for discontinuity can be made. It is most unlikely that this unit stayed in Batavian territory after the establishment of the legionary base at Nijmegen in AD 70. It may have to be identified with a quingenary *cohors I*, not to be confused with the milliary *cohors I* referred to above, that is well attested in Britain in the second century. The earliest evidence for its presence in that province is found in a military diploma of AD 122. There is no evidence concerning the whereabouts of this unit between 70 and 122. It is possible that the cohort of Civilis was disbanded after the revolt or that its soldiers were enlisted in the four milliary units. If that theory is correct, the British quingenary *cohors I* may have been newly raised in the second century.¹⁹ Regardless of the merits of these speculative suggestions, however, there can be no doubt that, with the exception of one cohort, all other units were restored to their pre-revolt situation. All ideas to the contrary are based on second-century documents that refer to a different situation to which we will shortly return, and on the assumption that a withdrawal of privileges was in line with the general policy towards rebels who were always harshly dealt with.²⁰

The story of how the revolt was ended has not been preserved. There is only one clue: the founding of a legionary base near Nijmegen directly after the revolt. This measure was obviously meant to bring the region under closer surveillance. On the other hand, the prosopographical evidence re-

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola* 36.

¹⁹ First attested CIL 16, 69. It is sometimes identified as one of the cohorts that fought at Mons Graupius: M. Jarret, 'Non-legionary troops in Roman Britain: part one, the units', *Britannia* 25 (1994), 56, but see Hassall 1970, op. cit. (n. 6), 135-136.

²⁰ See e.g. most recently S. Demougin, 'Les vétérans dans la Gaule Belgique et la Germanie inférieure' in: M. Dondin-Payre and M-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, eds., *Cités, municipes, colonies. Les processus de municipalisation en Gaule et en Germanie sous le Haut Empire romain* (Paris 1999), 363-366, who is unduly sceptical on the origins of Flavius Cerialis.

ferred to above and the passage from Tacitus' *Germania* suggest that the negotiations may have ended in some form of compromise that allowed that Batavians to retain some of their privileges.

The character of the revolt itself is subject to debate. Was it a native uprising against Roman rule or rather a military mutiny aimed at obtaining better conditions of service and fuelled by resentment over the Vitellian levy – a clear violation of the treaty – and the treatment of the eight cohorts? At the start of the revolt the Batavian leader Julius Civilis proclaimed that he supported the cause of Vespasian against the pro-Vitellian Rhine army. A false pretence to cloak his aim for independence or his real intention, at least initially?

Some ancient historians have questioned Tacitus' interpretation of the revolt as a native uprising. It could be re-interpreted as a conflict in the context of the civil war between Vitellius and Vespasian, in which the Batavian military had taken sides with the latter. This would mean that the events of AD 69 did not begin to take a native turn until the conflicts between the Batavians and the Vitellian Rhine army escalated into the unforeseen collapse of all legitimate authority in the entire region of North-Western Europe. It can certainly be argued that Tacitus' description is coloured by hindsight, bias and possibly the political interests of his pro-Flavian sources, but since his version cannot be checked against other traditions, it is difficult to come up with decisive arguments. The core of the problem lies both in the highly complex situation that developed after Nero's death and in the fact that Tacitus is our only source for the revolt.²¹

Around the end of the first century the 'denationalisation' traditionally associated with the Batavian revolt did take place, when the Batavian regiments were transferred to the Danubian region, with the exception of the

²¹ See for revisionistic interpretations of the revolt: G. Walser, *Rom, das Reich und die fremde Völker in der Geschichtschreibung der frühen Kaiserzeit* (Baden Baden 1951); R. Urban, *Der "Bataveraufstand" und die Erhebung des Iulius Classicus* (Trier 1985). Both studies have not met with much approval. Although they show convincingly that Tacitus' interpretation of the revolt is not consistent with many facts the historian himself adduces, both authors went too far in building reconstructions of their own that cannot be substantiated (Urban) or by suggesting that Tacitus was deliberately misleading (Walser), thus giving ammunition to critics who found it impossible to accept that Tacitus might have been wrong. See for an intermediate position: E. Flaig, 'Römer werden um jeden Preis? Integrationskapazität und Integrationswilligkeit am Beispiel des Bataveraufstandes', in: M. Weinmann-Walser, ed., *Historische Interpretationen: Gerold Walser zum 75. Geburtstag, dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen, Schülern* (Stuttgart 1995), 45-60, who argues that the revolt started as a military mutiny in favour of Vespasian, but developed into a native revolt.

quingenary *cohors I* that served in Britain from at least 122 until well into the third century. As we have seen, however, this unit may not have been in existence at the time when the other cohorts left this province.

The *ala Batavorum* is first attested in the Danubian region in a Pannonian diploma issued in 112.²² In 98 it was still in Germania Inferior, as the diploma from Elst demonstrates. Exactly when between these dates this unit was transferred is not known. One of the possibilities that come to mind is that it participated in Trajan's Dacian Wars.²³

The way in which the four milliary cohorts were transferred from Britain to the European mainland can be seen as a symptom of a change in policy regarding these units. It is to be noted that this time they were not transferred en bloc as had been the rule before. *Cohortes I* and *II* first appear in a Pannonian diploma issued in AD 98.²⁴ When their transfer had occurred is not clear. It is commonly thought that they had left Britain around AD 85, although it is debated whether they were stationed in Pannonia immediately or after spending some time in Germania Inferior. There is no good evidence for either of these assumptions. The new documents relating to the Batavian regiments discussed in this paper serve as a warning that modern reconstructions of the gaps in the history of such units are very uncertain. In my view, there is little point in engaging in speculative discussions concerning either the exact moment when these cohorts were transferred or the area to which they were initially moved until new evidence is discovered. What we do know is that these two units remained under the same provincial command for some time after their transfer. Around 130, however, *cohors I* was in Dacia and *cohors II* in Noricum.²⁵

Cohortes III and *IX* left Britain at a later date. The Vindolanda Tablets show that in the 90s AD cohort III was still in Britain. When it left is not clear. It is first seen again in a Raetian diploma of AD 107.²⁶ The evidence from Vindolanda suggests that *cohors IX* was still in Britain in July 104.²⁷ It is attested in Raetian diplomas from 116 onwards, but while *cohors IX*

²² B. Lörincz, *Die römischen Hilfstruppen in Pannonien während der Prinzipatszeit. Teil I: Die Inschriften* (Wien 2001), 306, nr. 510.

²³ K. Strobel, *Untersuchungen zu den Dakerkriegen Trajans* (Bonn 1984), 106.

²⁴ CIL 16, 42.

²⁵ Earliest diplomas: *Cohors I* in Dacia: P. Weiss, 'Neue Diplome für Soldaten der Exercitus Dacicus.' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 141 (2002), 249 (dated 130-131); *cohors II* in Noricum CIL 16, 174 (AD 131-133).

²⁶ CIL 16, 55.

²⁷ A. Bowman and J. Thomas, 'New writing-tablets from Vindolanda', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 311.

remained there throughout the second century, *cohors III* had left Raetia for Pannonia Inferior by AD 135.²⁸

It emerges therefore that the policy of keeping the main force of eight quingenary or – after the revolt – four milliary cohorts together as a group of cooperating units was gradually abandoned. Their deployment as a single force in major battles that was characteristic of their military performance in the first century, came to an end. As a first step they were divided into two groups consisting of *cohortes I* and *II* and of *cohortes III* and *IX* respectively. Around AD 130 the four cohorts were stationed in four different provinces.

If we look at the evidence on soldiers and commanders in the second century, it becomes clear that, following their transfer to the Danubian region, it was no longer the rule for the Batavian regiments to be commanded by Batavians. At the same time there is evidence to suggest that they no longer recruited their soldiers from among the Batavians. It is true that there are three examples of commanders of Batavian auxiliary regiments postdating Flavius Cerialis who are possibly of Batavian origin. But two of these instances have no bearing on question as to whether it was still normal for these units to be commanded by Batavian nobles after the end of the first century. They date from the early third century, when this was certainly no longer the case, as is recognized even by those authors who claim that the tradition still persisted during the second century. So even if the identification of their origins is correct, these examples merely show that Batavians were not explicitly excluded from these posts in the third century.²⁹

There is only one example from the second century. An epitaph for a prefect's wife mentions the Batavian capital Ulpia Noviomagus as her hometown. This might suggest that her husband Seve[rus] or Seve[rianus], prefect

²⁸ Lörincz 2001, op. cit. (n. 22), 305 Kat. Nr. 507.

²⁹ M. Simplicius Simplex *praefectus* of *cohors I* in Britain. Of his more or less contemporary colleagues three were probably Spaniards and two Italians; see E. Birley, 'The prefects at Carrawburgh and their altars', *The Roman army: papers 1929-1986* (Amsterdam 1988), 172-178. M. Simplicius Quietus, *tribunus* of *cohors III* between 212 and 222, cited by Strobel 1987, op. cit. (n. 2), 288. It is remarkable that he cites this example to prove his point, while the fact that commanders of milliary cohorts and the milliary *ala* still had the rank of *praefectus* instead of *tribunus* during the second century is one of his arguments for the continuity of native command. His explanation for this phenomenon is that it allowed Batavians to assume command of these units as a first step in their career, the function of *tribunus* normally being the third of the *tres militiae*. This would be an attractive explanation, if the traditional command structure was still in force during the second century, but since this was clearly not the case it cannot be right. Besides, the onomastic evidence for the Batavian origin of these two men is tempting, but not conclusive.

of *cohors III* (only his cognomen is partly preserved), was a Batavian as well.³⁰ But it will become clear that the other evidence on second-century commanders rules out the possibility that this was a general rule.

Three known prefects of the Batavian units were certainly not of Batavian descent. Galeo Bellicus, commander of the milliary *cohors I* in AD 164 was without any doubt Italian. Attius Tutor, prefect of the *ala Batavorum* during the reign of Marcus Aurelius originated from Flavia Solva in Noricum. C. Julius Corinthianus, who probably commanded the same unit around 165, was Numidian. The Italian descent of two other prefects, Tullius Secundus, prefect of *cohors I* in AD 113, and of L. Vittetius, prefect of *cohors II* around 130, cannot be proven with absolute certainty, but is highly likely.³¹ It can be safely concluded that in the second century it was no longer the rule that the Batavian regiments were led by Batavians.

Evidence on the soldiers is not very abundant, but shows clearly that the units no longer consisted exclusively of Batavians in the second century. In AD 164 a soldier of *cohors I*, called Sextus, son of Busturio, received his diploma. His origin is recorded as Pannonian. He was recruited around 140. From Dacia comes the tombstone of Dasatus Scenobarbi, horseman of the *ala Batavorum*. His names are Illyrian, just as the *gentilicium* of Bersius Ingenuus, a decurion of the same unit, who is mentioned in the same inscription. He is thought to have been enrolled in this unit around 120. An inscription from Potaissa, perhaps from the beginning of the third century, mentions a soldier, Aurelius Reatinus, who was probably an oriental.³² These

³⁰ H. Devijver, *Prosopographia Militiarum Equestrum quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum* (henceforth *PME*), S 101.

³¹ Galeo (Tettienus) Bellicus: *PME* 4,5 T15; Attius Tutor: *PME* 1,4,5 A 191; C. Julius Corinthianus: *PME* 1,4,5 I 49; Tullius Secundus: *PME* 4,5 T 42 bis; L. Vittetius: *PME* 5 V 121. Perhaps Claudius Tyrannus, *tribunus* of *cohors III* (*PME* 1,4,5 C 190), possibly originating from Ephesos, should be added as another example, but the inscription that refers to him cannot be dated. As to other commanders, we know only their names such as Flavius Miles (of *cohors IX* in 157), Victorius Provincialis (who led the same unit somewhere between 160 and 182). These names are all very common and can only be said 'to betray a Western origin'.

³² Sextus: CIL 16, 185; Dasatus: CIL 3, 7800. For the names see I. Russu, 'L'onomastique de la Dacie', in *L'onomastique Latine. Colloque international du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Paris 1977), 359; Aurelius Reatinus: *Österreichische Jahreshefte* 5 (1902) Bbl. 107. On his origins: K. Kraft, *Zur Rekrutierung der Alen und Kohorten an Rhein und Donau* (Bern 1951), 169 nr. 1144. The name of one of his sisters Tavius is attested in Smyrna: Ignatius, *Epistula ad Smyrnaeos* 12.

examples suffice to show that the ethnic composition of these units gradually changed.

It is not easy to give an explanation for this change in policy. There are no grounds for assuming that it was due to a disciplinary measure or to a drop in the performance of these troops. From a Roman point of view the main advantage of the old arrangement will have been that they got value for their money: the Batavian soldiers were considered to be elite troops. It is hard to assess what made them good soldiers. Their reputation rested in part on the ability of their horseman to cross rivers in formation, but that cannot have been the only reason for the continued existence of such a large force: after all most of the soldiers were infantry men. Maybe it was precisely the ethnically homogeneous composition of these troops that improved their effectiveness on the battlefield.³³ However that may be, there is nothing to suggest that the units were reorganised because they had become less effective. As we have seen, they performed according to their reputation in the battle of Mons Graupius and the honorific titles bestowed on them show that were decorated for valour in the decades that followed, for instance in the Dacian wars.³⁴

Perhaps the best starting point for a discussion of this problem is the sheer size of the Batavian military effort. The ten regiments attested in Tacitus' narrative constituted a force of approximately 6000 men, at least on paper. After the revolt the paper strength of the regiments was reduced only slightly, to 5600 men. This is by far the largest number of soldiers supplied by any tribe in North-Western Europe. Once they had been called into existence these units had to be kept up to strength for more than half a century with new recruits who were drawn from a limited population. The disadvantage of this system was its inflexibility. Given the sheer size of the Batavian military effort, it does not seem far-fetched to suppose that finding new recruits became a problem in the long run.

To appreciate the demographic implications of this sustained national recruitment, we have to know the size of the Batavian population. On the basis of archaeological evidence Willems arrived at the conclusion that it consisted of 40,000 people at the most.³⁵ From this it is usually concluded that the involvement of the Batavian population in the Roman military was

³³ A.K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War, 100 BC- AD 200* (Oxford 1996), 253.

³⁴ *Cohortes I and II* were collectively rewarded with citizenship during the Trajanic campaign in Dacia: Lörincz 2001, op. cit. (n. 22), 145, with references.

³⁵ Willems 1984, op. cit. (n. 3), 234-237.

very heavy indeed. But on closer inspection it seems to be quite impossible to raise such a force, especially if most of these men served far away from home for a considerable period, as was the case with the eight cohorts raised in AD 43.

If we assume that the men of military age made up about a quarter of the population, that is 8000 men, the raising of eight cohorts would mean that more than 50% of all able-bodied men went into the army and became permanent emigrants. The problem is, however, even bigger than this implausible scenario suggests. The reason for this is that we must also take into account that normally only men in their late teens and early twenties were recruited when new units were established. And that will have been entirely impossible, for the simple reason that a population of 40,000 cannot have supplied the required 4500 new recruits. In a recent study based on life-expectancy tables the year class of men reaching the age of twenty is estimated at barely 1% of a given population. That would mean that if the share of the age classes 17-23 is put at 7%, there would be 2800 potential recruits in a population of 40,000.³⁶ Of course, these are very rough estimates, but they can only be discarded by assuming that they are off the mark by an improbably large margin.

It follows either that Willem's estimate of the size of the Batavian population is much too low or that the Batavian units were recruited from a larger population than that inhabiting the Batavian territory. Although estimating population figures in antiquity is notoriously difficult and the subject raises much debate and controversy, there is no good reason for assuming that Willems is entirely wrong. His results have found general acceptance among archaeologists. So until new discoveries drastically alter the picture, it seems preferable to accept his estimates of the number of settlements in Batavian territory, of the average size of these settlements and of the size of the households each settlement contained, as being roughly correct. The only objection that can be made to his views is that he too readily accepts the possibility of recruiting so many soldiers for long-term service abroad from such a small population. His admission that the levy must have put a considerable strain on Batavian society is clearly an understatement.

³⁶ For the rough estimate that 25% of the population was able to carry arms see Willems, op. cit., 235, referring to Caesar, *De bello Gallico* 1.29. W. Scheidel *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor 1996), 93, calculates the number of men aged 20 in a population of 5,200,000 at 49,400.

The only possible solution to this problem is to assume that the soldiers were not recruited exclusively in the territory of the Batavians, that is the Betuwe and the eastern part of the modern Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. It may be conjectured that the composition of the auxiliary regiments was similar to that of the imperial bodyguard. The guard could be referred to as 'the Batavians', but even though the epigraphic evidence of the guardsmen's tombstones shows most of the guards whose origins are mentioned to have been Batavian, there were others who came from different Germanic tribes.³⁷ If likewise some of the soldiers in the auxiliary units were not Batavians, where did they come from and by what authority could they be enlisted by the Batavian leaders? And to what extent can these regiments be called 'tribal' or 'national' if the soldiers originated from various tribes?

It is hard to find satisfactory answers to these questions. Perhaps the solution lies in the tribal and administrative structure of the Lower Rhine area in the early first century, but unfortunately the subject is very poorly documented and open to much debate. Thus we cannot rule out the possibility that in the early first tribes like the Canninefates, Texuandri and Frisia-vones were century *pagi* of the Batavian *civitas*.³⁸ According to this theory, the formation of separate *civitates* for the Canninefates and the Frisiavones is associated with the activities of Corbulo around AD 47. If this supposition is correct, it becomes easier to explain how the Batavians were able to raise eight cohorts on the eve of the invasion of Britain in 43. In the early 40s AD the tribe simply comprised more territory and people. But the problem of how these units were kept up to strength in the subsequent 50 years still remains.

According to another theory *civitates* on the Roman model were not established in this region until the reign of Domitian in AD 85. Before that date it was administered as a military zone, in which the Batavians, supported by imperial patronage due to their position in the imperial guard, were allowed to play a prominent part in a local system of allied tribes in which the smaller ones like the Canninefates were considered to be their clients. The Batavian leaders would then have been able to use their position of authority and their personal network of intertribal contacts to levy soldiers

³⁷ Bellen 1981, op. cit. (n. 4), 36: from 23 guards 10 were Batavians, 3 Ubii, 1 Bataesius and 1 Suebus. The origins of the remaining 8 guards are not recorded.

³⁸ M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, 'Les institutions municipales dans les Germanies sous le Haut Empire: bilan et questions', in Dondin-Payre and Raepsaet-Charlier 1999, op. cit. (n. 20), 283.

among the other tribes in the region.³⁹ The attractive elements in this scenario are that it explains not only how the Batavians were able to man an exceptional number of regiments for a long period but also why this effort could no longer be sustained towards the end of the first century. The supposed rearrangement of the tribal structure by Domitian implied that the smaller tribes became separate *civitates*, which would have made it more difficult for the Batavian leaders to recruit soldiers among them. To all this it has been objected that although it is difficult to document the *civitas* structure in this region during the early first century, the military administration of a region in the absence of *civitates* on the Roman model for more than a century is without parallel.

The only direct evidence for recruitment among other tribes concerns the Canninefates. In one passage of the *Historiae* Tacitus refers to the *cohortes Batavorum et Canninefatium*.⁴⁰ This seems to prove the point, especially because the contexts suggests that this expression refers to the eight 'Batavian' cohorts. Unfortunately, there are several problems. One of these is that the amplifying words *et Canninefatium* are found only in this passage and that there is nothing in the context that helps us to account for the use of this anomalous phrase. It might therefore be hypothesized either that the reading of the manuscript is incorrect or, less likely, that Tacitus must have made an error. A more serious objection is that an *ala Canninefatium* is recorded early in the Julio-Claudian period.⁴¹ This means that the inclusion of the Canninefates in the recruitment area of the Batavians will not solve the demographic problem, since this raises the number of regiments to be accounted for.

Another possible source of recruits to be considered is the 'free' Germans who lived outside the Roman Empire. It is striking how quickly Julius Civilis was able to mobilise a large force of supporters among the Germans from the other side of the Rhine in the initial phase of the Batavian revolt.⁴² This might indicate that there were more or less regular contacts between the Batavian leaders and tribes living outside the empire. Such con-

³⁹ J. Slofstra, 'Batavians and Romans on the lower Rhine. The romanisation of a frontier area', *Archaeological Dialogues* 9 (2002), 16-38, esp. 28 on recruitment.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.19. The usual interpretation of this passage is that Tacitus is referring to the eight Batavian cohorts and one (or even several) cohorts of the Canninefates (see H. Heubner, *Die Historien*, Band IV, *ad. loc.* for references). That can hardly be right, as there is no further mention of these cohorts of the Canninefates.

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annales* 4.73, referring to AD 28.

⁴² Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.28.

tacts would have put them in an excellent position as brokers of manpower. If the idea that soldiers were recruited from free Germany is correct, we can point to various military events of the late first century, such as the complete annihilation of the Bructeri, named as allies in the revolt, to explain the Batavian manpower problem around that date.⁴³

In sum, the conclusion that the Batavian regiments were recruited from a larger group than the Batavian tribe seems inevitable on demographic grounds, although it must be admitted that there is no hard evidence to corroborate this conclusion.

The final question that will be dealt with in this paper concerns the reasons why the special conditions under which the Batavian regiments had served were abolished at the end of the first century AD. As we have seen, it is not difficult to point to certain external events and developments that may have prompted the 'denationalisation' of the Batavian cohorts. However, even if external factors may help to account for this important change, it is important not to lose sight of the possibility that certain developments in Batavian society itself may have worked in the same direction.

One conclusion that emerges from the foregoing pages is that the Batavian regiments are unlikely to have consisted exclusively of soldiers from the Batavian homeland. Despite this there are no grounds for doubting that such soldiers formed the kernel of these troops and were perhaps the largest minority among many. Although we cannot be more specific than that, it is clear that even in this situation the demand on Batavian manpower was considerable. In recent research stress is laid on two interdependent factors lying behind this heavy involvement in the military: the existence of a strong military ethos and the fact that the Batavians operated a largely pastoral economy. Since pastoral activities were less labour-intensive than arable cultivation, more men could be made available for military service. Of course, this economic behaviour was dictated partly by the wet soil conditions prevailing in the river area where the Batavians lived. According to the recent archaeological literature, however, the tribe also intensified its pastoral activities as part of a deliberate economic strategy to cope with a declining population.⁴⁴ This would help to explain how this society was able to survive in spite of the absence of so many men.

In my view, these observations, important though they are, cannot fully explain certain striking episodes such as the massive recruitment of eight

⁴³ Tacitus, *Germania* 33.

⁴⁴ Willems 1984, op. cit. (n. 3), 234; Roymans 1998, op. cit. (n. 1).

cohorts in AD 43, which in demographic terms amounted to a major emigration. Evidence concerning similar developments in better-documented societies suggests that most of those who were willing to enlist as soldiers wanted to escape poverty. The frontier zone of the Roman empire was a peripheral and underdeveloped region.

In the long run we can detect a slow but steady development of the region in the course of the first century. Archaeological evidence indicates that the pastoral economy was intensified and became more market-orientated. Integration in a wider economic zone made further specialization possible, such as the breeding of cattle and horses to satisfy the demands of the Roman army.⁴⁵ The installation of the tenth legion in Nijmegen in AD 70 will have given the economy an important impulse. At the same time a new *civitas* capital was developed to replace Batavodurum which had been destroyed during the revolt. One is left with the overall impression that economic conditions gradually became better: as a consequence it will have made more men less eager to serve abroad in the army.

Perhaps this problem became visible when the four milliary cohorts left Britain around the turn of the first century. The transfer of these units to theatres of war must have made it necessary to bring them up to full strength. The casualties suffered in these wars must have made further recruitment necessary. We may note that this was also the time when a new imperial guard was raised by the emperor Trajan: the *equites singulares*, a unit consisting of 1000 horsemen, who were recruited from among various existing *alae*. Batavian horsemen formed a substantial part of this force.⁴⁶ They served in such numbers that this guard was commonly referred to as 'the Batavi'. This makes it improbable that they were just detached from their units: it will have been necessary to replace them.

To conclude, a few words must be said about another event that can be linked to the revision of the ancient treaty implied by the changing composition of the Batavian regiments: the change in status of the *civitas Batavorum* early in the reign of Trajan. The exact nature of this change is not clear. The only certainty is that ancient Nijmegen was renamed *Ulpia Noviomagus*. It has long been thought that at this date Nijmegen obtained the *ius nundinarum*, that is the right to hold fairs and markets, as a compensation for the departure of the tenth legion to Pannonia. More recently, it has been suggested that the *civitas* may have obtained Latin rights at this moment.

⁴⁵ Roymans, op. cit., 82.

⁴⁶ Speidel 1994, op. cit. (n. 4), 38- 55.

Even the elevation to municipal status cannot entirely be excluded, although it was very uncommon for an urban community to receive an imperial epithet such as *Ulpia* on such an occasion.⁴⁷

The recent excavations of the Gallo-Roman sanctuary at Elst lend a certain measure of support to the theory that Nijmegen did in fact become a *municipium* under Trajan. The foundations of this temple – and those of a much smaller predecessor – had already been discovered in 1947 underneath the protestant church at Elst. Until recently it was assumed that the small temple was destroyed during the Batavian revolt and was rebuilt on a grander scale after peace had been restored. It is only this second temple that concerns us here.

The recent (re-)excavation has yielded some interesting results. To begin with, a fragmentary altar inscription proves beyond doubt that the sanctuary was dedicated to Hercules Magusanus, the principal deity of the Batavians. Secondly, the temple complex turns out to have been exceptionally large. It must have been the principal sanctuary of the Batavian community. Thirdly, dendrochronological evidence has led to a redating of the building activities. It is now clear that the sanctuary was not built immediately after the revolt, but around AD 100.⁴⁸

It probably is no coincidence that the rebuilding of the Hercules sanctuary and the elevation in status of Nijmegen took place at about the same time. It is tempting to hypothesize that Nijmegen became a *municipium* and that one effect of this was to redefine the legal obligations of the newly established decurions *vis-à-vis* the public cults of the *municipium*. The rebuilding of temple would then testify to the wish to have a principal sanctuary that suited the new dignity of the *civitas*.

It is also tempting to assume the existence of a connection between these events and the end of the special status of the Batavian units. We cannot tell if the whole arrangement was abruptly terminated. It is equally possible that it lapsed gradually. If this supposition is correct, the whole process may have started when a shortage of recruits made it necessary to look for new soldiers elsewhere. When external recruitment became regular, this must have contributed to the realization that local recruitment no longer func-

⁴⁷ See the discussion in Dondin-Payre and Raepsaet Charlier 1999, op. cit. (n. 20), 281-282, where a preference for a date in the middle of the second century is expressed with due caution, although a Trajanic date is not excluded.

⁴⁸ For a preliminary report of this recent excavation, see T. Derks, *De tempels van Elst (GLD). Nieuw archeologisch onderzoek rond de N.H. kerk*, Brochure nr. 9, Archeologisch Instituut Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (October 2002).

tioned satisfactorily. Finally, when the composition of the troops had gradually altered, the rationale for using 'national' commanders must have disappeared. We even cannot rule out the possibility that this view was shared by the Batavian nobles, whose lifestyle closely resembled that of any Roman equestrian officers by this date (as the Vindolanda tablets testify) and who could command any regiment if they were ambitious to follow a military career. In any case, there can be no doubt that the treaty regulating the special position of the Batavians was revised at some point. The change in status of the Batavian *civitas* in the reign of Trajan provided a suitable occasion for such a revision.

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