**Introduction/Motivation.** Around the year 100, in Vindolanda, Roman Britain, the *decurio* Masclus writes to his commander, the prefect Flavius Cerialis (*Tabulae Vindolandenses* III 628), asking for instructions regarding his men’s schedule. Politely, he also asks for more beer for his troop. Masclus bears a Latin name, although he is part of a Batavian auxiliary unit and appears to be a beer-drinker – a beverage preferred by Germans, but held in contempt by Romans and Celts alike. Local habits implanted into a Roman provincial environment go even deeper, as the *decurio* calls Cerialis *rex* (Cuff 2011). Expectedly, historical consensus over the exact meaning and reason for employing this unusual title lacks, but we believe that it refers to Cerialis’s appurtenance to the Batavian nobility and former ‘royalty’ (Birley 2002, 106-107; Eck 2002, 666-667; Bowman, 2006, 87). Relevant enough, the letter is addresses to Cerialis in his quality of prefect, and the appellative *rex* (*regis* textually) as part of the content, to be read by Cerialis alone.

The anecdote above speaks of the complex world of the Roman provinces, of conserved tribal identity going hand in hand with perfect integration, of material and immaterial cultures in the making.

Through the present project, we intend to research the Batavians in the provinces, the culture they brought form their Lowlands homeland and the cultures they locally created. We want to address the relationship between people and things/the materiality they created without dogmata of any kind and try to identify ways which could lead us to answers for plaguing questions: Was there a Batavian nucleus conserved, even during the 3rd C? Are the prominent Batavian military families still present in the *auxilia* during the late 2nd – 3rd centuriesand can we find material traces of their presence? What did the Batavian troops materially bring from the Low Rhine, and why? Which artefacts are identity defining from our point of view, and which were from theirs? How did the troops influenced the (material) culture of their new homes, and (how) can we see the local recruitment and local specificities?

These questions and their answers can be transplanted do other groups as well, ‘ethnical’ or otherwise, thus offering, besides the better understanding of our past and our nature, a methodological framework.

**State of the art.** While literary sources cover the pre-revolt history, documentation becomes less substantial after these relocations, shifting towards "ego-history" reflected in epigraphic sources. However, epigraphs alone are insufficient, and material culture is crucial for understanding the Batavians' integration, acculturation, and evolution during the late 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Relatively recent studies have shown that less grandiose theories lead to better and more focused results, speaking directly of identity formation as it appears from Roman age sources. Some of the most seminal ones are those pertaining to N. Roymans and T. Derks and dealing exactly with Batavian identity (Roymans 2004; Derks and Roymans 2009). Thus, the theoretical and methodological frameworks of an undertaking such as ours exist and they don’t need re-establishing, but only need to be adapted to provincial realities, based on our finds. While ’Romanization’ seems a bit of an obsolete concept, it is very reasonable (from a scientific point of view) to consider the movement of objects around the Empire and to try to distinguish between ’local’ and ’global’ (Hitchner 2008; Pitts 2008).

Discussing ‘identity’ is in part a speculative undertaking as well. (cartea 2020..) We must always be aware that what we see today as identity-defining for a certain group might not have been perceived as such by the group itself and that sometimes applying the sociological theories of identity construction (Gardner 2002) to ancient societies, founding our assertions on the remains of their material culture, is difficult and leads to incomplete results. Nonetheless, materiality has drawn together a very eclectic range of approaches and people, all interested in finding a more complex and complete systems for understanding the relationship between humans/society and material objects (Skibo and Schiffer 2008; Preucel, Mrozowski 2010, 5). Roman materiality is hugely complex and an exercise of imagination, suggested by J. Versluys, can help us better grasp the full complexity we are facing when dealing within the framework of materiality: If it were possible to have a map displaying all artefacts from the Roman world that have been preserved from a certain period, and if an anthropologist with no real knowledge of the Roman world and its history were asked to identify different clusters of material culture on that map to try and make sense of it, he would, I imagine, have a very difficult time drawing such clusters (Versluys 2014, 15).

What we have, at this point in our research, is diasporas of objects, objects in motion, imitations, imports, products (apparently) connected or unconnected. Material culture is an active agent in its relationship with people, rather than simply a representation of (cultural) meaning (alone) (Versluys 2014, 17). Does changing materiality mean changing people, or does the change in society come from a change (brought on by relocation of a group, for example) in material culture too? Of course, accepting these assertions makes all interpretations more difficult, but our duty and historians is to try to stick as loyally as possible to the truth of the sources.

New research

**Preliminary data.** Our preliminary research on Batavian provincial *auxilia* is solid: As co-coordinator of the archaeological excavations at the site of the *ala* in Dacia, I became aware the myriad of questions posed by the physical material and its meta-message regarding identity and the huge potential of detailed, inter- and trans-disciplinary analysis on materials. Dacia is a significant region for this research, due to its historical realities, as it hosts two Batavian military units: the *ala milliaria* (at Războieni-Cetate) and the *cohors I Batavorum milliaria* (likely garrisoned at Certiae/Romita). In 2022-2024 I was granted and subsequently implemented a national research project on the materiality of the Batavians from Dacia. The results of the project encouraged me in submitting the current application. Defining ‘Batavian artefacts’ is acknowledged as a challenging but crucial methodological and theoretical point. The Batavians' material culture is noted for being remarkably modest and unspecific, differing from neighbouring tribes like the Cananefates who retained traditional pottery longer. The research sought to identify what was truly important and identity-forming for the Batavians in a foreign setting, such as names, festivals, gods, food, drink, and language (reflected in material culture like pottery and glass).

Two important researches, undertaken along long-time collaborators, which will be part of the present project team as well, serve as base for the pottery analyses we envision doing in the future. The first (Varga, Crizbășan 2024) examines pottery from three Roman military sites, Războieni, Adony, and Romita, associated with Batavian auxiliary units in Dacia and Pannonia. The study analyses **pottery consumption patterns** to understand **supply networks, cultural interactions, and potential markers of Batavian identity** within these frontier regions from the early second through the third centuries AD. By comparing **fabric and form distributions**, the authors identified both **similarities driven by military presence and trade,** and subtle **differences that might indicate ethnic connections**: the significance of importedface pots and beakers with analogies in the Batavian homeland were interpreted as potential markers of cultural links.

The second (Varga, Tănăselia, … in print) employs **X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) and graph clustering** on pottery from the Războieni site to analyse its **chemical composition** and identify potential imports, local productions, and possible markers of **Batavian material identity** through elemental similarities. The presence of local imitations of ‘Batavian grey ware’, indicated as such by the chemical composition, is also interpreted as a possible sign of Batavian cultural continuity – the seeking for the taste of food from home. People’s social identity is often expressed and enacted through food (Hastorf 2016; Twiss 2012; Twiss 2019), with culinary practices serving as powerful tools for positioning oneself within a society. Hence, embracing, rejecting or emulating new foodways can signify changes within the social identity of individuals and communities. What you eat reflects with whom you wish to identify but also how you want to be perceived by other members of that community (Livarda 2018).

Both studies, albeit through different methodologies, aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the cultural aspects of Roman auxiliary units. The first does this through qualitative and quantitative analysis of pottery forms and fabrics across multiple sites, while the second utilizes X-Ray Fluorescence and graph clustering to analyze the chemical composition of pottery, complementing traditional methods. Both implicitly suggest that material culture, despite the adoption of Roman styles, can still retain subtle traces of ethnic identity and cultural practices. But more importantly, both highlight the great potential of this type of enterprises, the necessity to extend the analyses to the material culture of the other provincial Batavian troops – the potential to better understand the Roman world.

**Research gaps.** Dealing with the above aspects for the Batavian troops of Dacia, we realized the many gaps our knowledge and understanding of the ‘provincial’ Batavians – and implicitly ‘ethnical’ *auxilia* in general – has.

The Batavians emerged as an ‘institutionalised military ethnicity’ under Roman imperial policy, forming a community of ethnic soldiers bound by a treaty with Rome to supply men to auxiliary units led by their native elites. Following the 69 AD uprising, the Batavian troops were reorganized (Alföldy 1968; Spaul 2000). However, it appears that they were still led by their own leaders, members of the tribal aristocracy and former royalty. Rossum denationalization – **1st gap**

The nine cohorts that existed before the rebellion were reorganized into four new infantry troops. The *ala*, which was the elite cavalry troop, remained as it was: an *ala* *milliaria*, theoretically comprising 1,000 men (around 800 in practice). They were highly trained riders, often from traditional military families and prepared for a military career since childhood.

But individuals possess multiple identities throughout their lives (Hall, DeGuay 1996), some of which are flexible and subject to change. This framework has been applied to the Roman world (Mattingly 2014), introducing the concept of discrepant or hybrid identities, where aspects of an individual's identity could shift depending on the social context.

In the aftermath of the peace treaty, the cohorts returned to Britannia, where the old nine units had previously been stationed. They were documented for the first time outside the British Isle in Pannonia through a military diploma from 98 AD (CIL XVI 42):

The 1st and 2nd took part in Domitian’s Dacian campaigns. After stationing in Pannonia in the *interim*, the 1st cohort was then transferred to northern Dacia (Weiss 2002). Excav – acces sa nu la material

Subsequently, the 2nd cohort was transferred to Noricum (CIL XVI 174), possible to the fort of Favianis (modern day Mautern an der Donau, in Austria) (Rummel 2008). Possible Lentia ???

Cohorts 3rd and 9th were also dispatched to Britannia, and the Vindolanda tablets indicate that they were still present in Britannia circa 100 AD. A diploma from 107 AD attests to the presence of the 3rd cohort in Raetia. After participating in Trajan's Dacian and Parthian wars, it was relocated to Pannonia Inferior and stationed at Adony, ancient Vetus Salina, a fort just south of modern-day Budapest (and the ancient city of Aquincum).

The 3rd was replaced in Raetia by the 9th cohort around 135 AD (Lörincz, no. 305), stationing at Castra Batava (the old city of Passau), right at the border of Raetia and Noricum. Older excavations

The history of the *ala* differs slightly from that of the cohorts. In addition to the Elst diploma, we know that in 112 (Haalebos), it was stationed in Pannonia Superior. It was likely also deployed here in preparation for the Dacian wars, particularly the second one (105-106). The location of the *ala* at the beginning of Hadrian's reign is unknown, but probably it was still in Pannonia. A few years into the aforementioned emperor’s reign, it was deployed to Dacia. Specifically, it was stationed at Războieni-Cetate, located in Dacia Superior near the XIII Gemina legion from Apulum (modern Alba Iulia).

The Batavians arrive in the Danube and Balkan provinces at the end of the 1st C and during the 2nd C AD with the renown of elite troops, envied skills and high fame. And though a strong point of interest for modern historiography, their provincial history still has to be revealed and understood in many aspects. **2nd gap**

As we have demonstrated through the studies already undertaken, common artifacts, analysed inter-disciplinarily, chemically and… still have an interesting story to tell. **3rd gap**

**Where does this take us? What do you take with you, when an Empire sends you away, with a strong possibility of never returning home? What do you seek to recreate, in order to make your new home, home? As ours, the Roman world had an unifying supra-culture, with the same good and products circulating and being reproduced throughout the Empire. But, even so, it was a world with slighter communication than ours and….**

**Choice of investigation methodologies.** The investigation methods will be adapted to the needs of the research enterprise. The approach will include, as already stated, several original methods, along the traditional ones:

**The archaeological investigation**, as we will try to link artefacts to context as much as possible and asses the new artefacts which will show up, as we are continuing the excavations from Războieni during the project years. Old documentation that exists in Budapest and Passau will be digitized and we will try to connect the artefacts of old excavations with their archaeological contexts as much as possible. The major archaeological enterprise we plan to start and develop during the project is beginning excavations in the Războieni necropolis and using project funds to do anthropological and chemical materials discovered. This leads us to the next investigation, namely,

**The human remains analyses**, undertaken in collaboration with the Anthropology Institute Fr. I. Rainer, are dependent on the types of funerals we would uncover, but in this planning stage we are counting on classical biological examination (physiological parameters, injuries, disease), Mg and Sr isotopes (dietary data), genetic analyses (if possible) and whatever would be found fit and in accordance with the state and quantity of the remains.

**The artefacts’ investigation**,including mineralogical analysis of the materials; qualitative and quantitative analysis through the framework of socio-cultural practice and identity: this study uses pottery and its socio-cultural practice and use, to detangle unqualified assumptions about ethnic associations, shedding light instead on pottery consumption based on the specific forms and fabrics selected within the *auxilia*, in relation to ethnicity and image construction.

This approach moves beyond a simple typological analogy matching which tends to draw simplistic links to other ethnic analogous forms. Instead, it looks at the whole assemblage as quantified data. In this case, following Pitts’ suggestion (2007, 693) and switching the focus from the pottery’s style and universal character – such as the standardised *terra sigillata* – to social practice, identity can also be revealed through the use of objects, the evidence for specific choices independent from the big supply systems, and the local replication. The auxiliary soldiers may have thought themselves Roman or not, but their tastes in food and drink may have been very different to those of a contemporary Italian (Cool, 2006, 180). However, even in the first generation changes occur through incorporation of new (local) foodways, reflecting the adjustment process and the socio-cultural realities of the immigrant’s new environment. Simultaneously, immigrants share their culinary traditions with the local communities in which they are integrating. These types of interaction result in a culinary fusion with elements from different cultures, as was the case in Roman times.

Therefore, material culture, in this case pottery, is a sensitive indicator of identity provided that a cautious approach is employed, taking a holistic view across provinces, that separates general patterns in supply from selections resulting from distinct social practices. We will continue the collaboration…. XRF… whatnot…

Other material types

**Epigraphical investigation**: We plan editing a *corpus* of all the ‘Batavian’ inscriptions from provinces: mentioning the troops, soldiers from them, civilians linked to troops or some sort of Batavian ethos, and specific gods (Hercules Magusanus, in particular). Naturally, we will work on edited materials, but if something presents interest, we will try to access the pieces and apply Reflectance Transformation Imaging and Photogrammetry on key monuments. The *corpus* will also include onomastic and prosopographic analyses, creating an exhaustive compendium. The Batavians notoriously lack German names: Iulius Civilis, the above mentioned Masclus and his prefect, Flavius Cerialis, as well as the names from the graves of the undoubtedly Batavian riders from Rome, once again presenting Latin or Greek onomastics. In this interpretative key, a surprise came from Războieni: we discovered a few pots with graffiti in a barrack, more exactly registering the names of the owners *post cocturam* so they didn’t get mixed up. One of the names is Dionysius; etymologically Greek, it is an important addition to the onomastics of the site. Greek names became a tradition in Batavian military families, after the northern recruits from the Flavian Imperial Guard employed them, sometimes probably in order to replace unpronounceable Batavian names (Birley 2001; van Driel-Murray 2003: 201; Derks 2009: 243). Nonetheless, they later on became a mark of family military tradition – to whom many of the military graves of soldiers presumably returned from the provinces from the Batavian homeland pertain. Such surprises, big and small, will show up.

**Spatial analysis**, in order to obtain mobility maps for people and objects, but not exclusively. ArcGis analyses and projections undertaken for the area of the *ala* have led to interesting conclusions regarding the hinterland of the fort, its evolution through La Tene and Roman times and … While studies have been made in this direction for the Batavian homeland, they raise many questions for the areas where the troops were subsequently moved. We know the geographic generalities: the topography of western Dacia could have accommodated them easily, due to the resemblance to their home territory. The flat river landscape of Agrij and Somes rivers could be compared to their home situated between Waal and Rhine rivers (Haalebos, 1999, 199). The similarity between the two regions, added to their famous swimming and martial skills, made the Batavians the perfect match for western Dacia, leading therefore to an unusually high Batavian/Lower Rhine units’ presence in this part of the province. But the details…

Local recruitment

Research design

WP-uri

Feasibility, risks, impact. The project is highly ambitious, so it will pose a couple of challenges/risks.

WP 1 - Classification of the archaeological excavations and materials existed for the Batavians in the provinces. Digitization.

WP 2 – Large scale research

WP 3 – Investigation into the identity of material culture

WP 4 – field archaeological investigation + analize

WP 5 – Epigraphic corpus

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| WP | Team | Years |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| WP1 | PI, Postdoc 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| WP2 | Postdoc 2, Postdoc 3 |  |  |  |  |  |
| WP3 | Postdoc 2, Postdoc 3 |  |  |  |  |  |
| WP4 | Postdoc 4 |  |  |  |  |  |
| WP5 | PI, Postdoc 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| WP6 | PI, Postdoc 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Table 1: Gantt chart of the PetrIUS timeframe and team composition.PI: legal historian |Postdoc 1: legal historian | Postdoc 2: (legal) historian – a specialist in the field of late medieval and early modern palaeography | Postdoc 3: an early modern book historian | Postdoc 4: computational specialist in natural language processing and machine learning |

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