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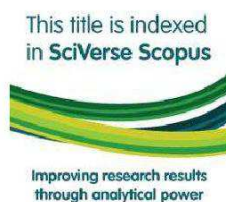
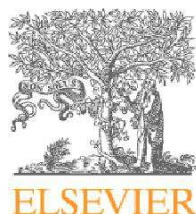
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## Germania Romana: the political evolution on the periphery of the expanding Roman world

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**Abstract:** *Germania Romana: the political evolution on the periphery of the expanding Roman world.* The paper examines how the Roman Empire shaped political life in *Germania* in the first century A.D. It focuses primarily on the time span between Rome's subjugation of Germanic tribes on the both sides of the Rhine and the creation of provinces *Germania Inferior* and *Germania Superior*. Most attention is put on the likeliest scenarios leading to the growth of Roman or Roman-style institutions in *Germania*. Therefore, a creation of provincial administration, magistracies and military prefecture in the region are considered. An analysis of literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources shows that the process of political change in *Germania* implied neither uniformity nor synchronism and the ways to transform political life on the barbarian periphery were numerous. They varied from a complete assimilation of Germanic communities to no more than superficial political subjugation of neighboring client states.

**Key words:** Germania, Germania Inferior, provincialization, Waldgirmes, Oppidum Batavorum, municipalisation.

Rome's encounter with tribes living in the region, which later became widely known as *Germania* took place over the course of the Gallic War. It is unfortunate that with the end of the war there follows a period when written sources dealing with the northern peripheries of the Empire are sorrowfully scarce (E. Wightman, 1985, p. 44). We know little about what was going on there in a long interval between Caesar and Tacitus. One of the things written sources are silent about is how the contact with the Romans influenced political life in *Germania Romana*. Not only do we know nothing about political change on the right bank of the Rhine, but we know just as little about exactly when and how *Germania Inferior* and *Germania Superior* were established as provinces on its left bank. The lack of solid historical evidence leads to a heated debate over how, when and even whether Rome achieved political control over *Germania*.

For this reason, modern scholars find themselves in a difficult situation when writing about how Roman political system was reinforced in *Germania* in the first century AD. They write in a careful manner about starting the formation of a Roman province between the Rhine and the Elbe. Yet they can't affirm that the process resulted in the creation of a province and they can't say exactly how the province was named. Some of them even assume that not a single new province but several new provinces were planned to be organized in *Germania* (A. Becker, 2003, p. 349; S. Schnurbein, 2004, p. 30).

The starting point for integrating the region into the Roman Empire was Augustus' inspection trip to Gaul in 16 B.C. (P. Wells, 1999, p. 89). He spent there three years, overseeing the reorganization of the defenses of eastern Gaul. His stay in Gaul resulted in administrative reforms that

have transformed the political landscape of Gaul for generations to come. Thus Under Augustus Gallia Comata was divided into three provinces (Gallia Belgica, Gallia Lugdunensis and Gallia Aquitania), known collectively as the Three Gauls, (*Tres Galliae*) (M. Goodman, 2012, p. 233).

As was mentioned above, the situation on the Gaul's northern border is poorly documented and all that we know for sure is that under Domitian this area became the provinces of *Germania Inferior* and *Germania Superior*. Some men believe that these areas became a part of Gallia Belgica under Augustus. Others may think that the Augustan reform was not aimed at the extension of administrative control over the Germanic tribes. Rather, the goal was to assert and maintain military control over vulnerable northern periphery of the Roman world (J. Slofstra, 2002, p. 27). If so, such a policy could have resulted in the creation of a buffer zone on the extreme north of Gaul, not a province (C. Rüger, 1996, p. 526).

In 12 B.C. soon after Augustus returned safely from Gaul, Drusus launched his first major offensive against Germanic tribes on the right side of the Rhine. He led these campaigns until his death in 9 BC and thus he had added to the Roman empire the German lands east of the Rhine bordered by the Elbe River. Romans controlled this region until the disaster suffered by Varus in 9 A.D. But contemporary authors say little or nothing about who administered it, and how it was administered. This is why so much ink has been spilled over the status of Germania within the empire.

Some historians went so far as to suggest that Germania was indeed a *provincia* (A. Birley, 2006, p. 559). This view of the Roman-native interactions in Germania of this period is based primarily on the textual accounts left by classical writers. For example, Cassius Dio shortly reported that during the reign of Augustus “cities were being founded” in Germania (Cassius Dio 56.18) and Tacitus mentioned a “new colonies” established there (Tac. Ann. 1.59).

Other historians, however, suggest that such classical accounts tell us little about the situation on the ground and details about these “cities” and “new colonies” are still not clear. They argue that the region inhabited by Germanic tribes has

occurred far beyond the limits of direct Roman rule.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify what did ancient authors mean by the word “province”. The views of C.R. Whittaker that he put forth in the book *The Rome and Its Frontiers* seem to be relevant here. Whittecker finds – and it seems to be a very interesting and curious detail – that this term sometimes had nothing to do with what he calls “the administered provinces”. He analyses a cosmological view which has come down to us in the various Roman cosmographic writings now collected in the *Geographi Latini Minores*. There he finds three bands of space: “the administered territories, the unadministered territories under Roman rule and the outer periphery”. Some of these writings, he says, established that between the core of the Roman world and the “outer tribes” (*gentes externae*, stretching to the north as far as the ocean) lay the so called “inner tribes”. What is most interesting about them is that they lay still within the “provinces” (*provinciae*).

Whittaker writes among other things about how the Romans visualized this region in human form. They often envisioned Germania as female whose appearance evolved over the course of the first century AD. She started out as a woman whose hands were tied behind her back and her breasts were bare. That's how she is carved in relief on a stone found in Lydia. This same relief also shows an armed horseman riding at the woman. The inscription below names him as Caesar Germanicus (C. Whittaker, 2004, p. 117).

The Roman imperial coinage may very well illustrate the Roman perception of Germania. There one can find the same image of a female captive accompanied by the legends *Germania subacta* or *Germania capta*. That's exactly how she is shown on the coins of Domitian. Then similar pictures of Germania were found under Trajan. But in his reign “Capta” coin series ended (K. Christ, 1996, p. 99). The half-naked woman became *Germania pacata et pacifera* (J. Bennett, 1997, p. 74). And finally under Hadrian we can see the fully dressed woman, whose one breast is exposed. These changes in the iconography of Germania indicate the gradual changes in her status within the empire. The last picture shows “Germania taking her full share of imperial responsibilities” (C. Whittaker, 2004, p. 121). But

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a woman whose hands are bound behind her back doesn't look like the personification of a full Roman province.

Modern German historians pay a great deal of attention to the study of Germania Romana. Notable among them is Reinhard Wolters, who believes that during Drusus campaigns Rome imposed its hegemony over Germanic tribes. This hegemony had resulted in various kinds of Roman government. It may imply at least partial control over the political order and the administration of justice. Probably Rome even planned to turn this region into a Roman province.

After the Varian disaster Rome lost the political will to restore its hegemony over the lands east of the Rhine. According to Tacitus, an arch was consecrated "...to commemorate the recovery of the standards lost with Varus" and Germanicus Caesar celebrated his triumph over the tribes "which extend as far as the Elbe". But Germanicus had been forbidden to finish the war, which "was taken as finished" (Annales, 2.41). Thus in 16/17 AD Tiberius abandoned any further attempts to conquer Germania.

The project of Roman province east of the Rhine (if such a project had ever existed) was closed and the Rhine became a permanent northern frontier again. On its Roman bank all down the river some 100 000 soldiers were stationed (P. Petit, 1976, p. 27). These troops were divided into two major commands and were governed by their own legates. Each of the two legates was quite independent and by the end of the first century their commands formed the provinces *Germania Inferior* and *Germania Superior*. They were, however, at first reckoned as part of Belgic Gaul (W. Arnold, 1906, p. 117). That's clear, for instance, from Pliny who treats the region as if it belonged to *Gallia Belgica* (Wightman, 1985, p. 54).

At the same time the 'free' bank of the Rhine started developing along divergent trajectory. Wolters assumes that after the disaster the "peripheral client states" were developed in Germania beyond the Rhine. Rome left their administration fundamentally intact (N. Roymans, 2004, p. 197). Unfortunately for scholars studying *Germania Romana*, "more is known about Roman client management in the East" (E. Luttwak, 1979, p. 38).

Dutch scholar Jan Slofstra tries to fill in the gaps in the written record. He follows Wolters in suggesting that the Romans did not create formal provinces in *Germania* in the Augustan era. But then he adds more details to Wolters' model. He adds the concept of the "military prefecture" to Wolters' model. He argues that the prefecture was established under Augustus as the Roman institution to administer tribal communities there. Its prime concern was to ensure regular recruitment of Germans into auxiliary units and payment of tribute from them rather than to establish the political infrastructure of a Roman province in *Germania* (J. Slofstra, 2002, p. 27).

He finds two models of military prefecture. The first one has been created for smaller tribes, which had no long history of friendly relations with Rome. In such a case the position of prefect have been filled by a former Roman officer usually with the rank of *primus pilus*.

The second model Slofstra considers is so called the 'Cottian model'. Slofstra names it after Marcus Julius Cottius, who had been appointed by Augustus as *praefectus civitatum* over several tribes in the Alpine area in 12 BC. This type of prefecture has usually been created for tribes that concluded an alliance of friendship with Rome. In accordance with this model *praefectus civitatum* was usually appointed from the local noble families (N. Roymans, 2004, p. 197), who possessed both the Roman citizenship and equestrian status. They were members of the Roman aristocratic community and this fact is witnessed by the Roman nomenclature in the north-west Gaul: the list of nobles from the Germanic tribes involved in the uprising of AD 69 is full of indigenous Iulii, Tiberii and Claudii.

But topics of discussion are not limited to questions concerning the provincialization and military prefecture. Throughout the Roman Empire the normal form of local government was the city-state polity traditionally dominated by local aristocratic families. *Germania Romana* had to be forged into self-governing communities, and if so, then another discussed issue is the municipalisation of *Germania*. The term "municipalisation" denotes "the introduction of a Roman system of civic administration in line with the *civitas* model, with codified laws, elected magistrates and public priesthoods" (N. Roymans, 2004, p. 63).

The views of another Dutch scholar, Nico Roymans, are relevant here. He considers the process of “municipalisation” as a slow and gradual implantation of a Roman-style administration, which initially relied on tribal structures. He assumes that municipal structures were established long before either Germania Inferior or Germania Superior was created. These structures seem to him to be traditional governing structures which had been no more than superficially Romanized in the Augustan era.

Written sources neither confirm nor deny their real existence and Roman writers are totally silent about them. But despite this silence Roymans usually employs the term “monocratic magistracy” to describe them (N. Roymans, 2004, p. 201). This so-called “magistracy” was Roman by name but indigenous by nature. The altar stone from Ruimel, dating to the early first century AD, illustrates the differences between the two types of magistracy.

Here a certain “Flavus, son of Vihirmas” is mentioned as holding a high position of supreme magistrate (*summus magistratus*) of the *civitas Batavorum*. What is interesting about his office is that it does not fit into the Roman magistracy.

The Roman magistracy has been built on the principle of collegiality, while the *summus magistratus* held the monocratic authority over the community. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that a peregrine could have been trusted with such a high position as supreme administrator. But Flavus and Vihirmas – judging from their single names – were themselves not Roman citizens. This allows to consider the office of *summus magistratus* as “a Latinisation of an indigenous office”.

Most of our current knowledge about *Germania Romana* and changes in indigenous society are based mainly on the archaeological or epigraphic evidence. Perhaps the most famous and important epigraphic evidence on the topic of interest is the so-called *Tabula Siarensis*.

This inscription on bronze dated to the emperorship of Tiberius contains the funerary honors decreed by the Senate to Germanicus. Among other things this tablet mentions Germanic *civitates* on the “near” (left) side of the Rhine whom the Emperor ordered to make sacrificial offerings to Drusus’ grave. Because of this passage, some scholars assume that Drusus had

established Germanic self-governing communities west of the Rhine.

But one of the most important archaeological sites forming a new understanding of *Germania Romana* was discovered and excavated in 1990-s by Lahnau-Waldgirmes in Hessen, Germany (A. Becker, 2003, p. 337). There an unnamed small town dated to the Augustan period was found. Perhaps it was called *Oppidum Chattorum*, but today it is widely known as Waldgirmes (K. Strobel, 2007, p. 210).

This settlement is not mentioned in any Roman writing. It was initially interpreted as a Roman military camp, but excavations have shown that it had little or nothing to do with the army. However, the absence of military equipment and military buildings was not the only striking feature of Waldgirmes. Yet more surprising is the presence of public buildings in Mediterranean style that is seen elsewhere in the Roman provinces but has never been met east of the Rhine. For example, buildings were discovered here whose possible function appears to be connected to municipal administration. Perhaps the most significant finding of this site was a forum considered to be the earliest building of this type north of the Alps (A. Becker, 2003, p. 340 – 344; H. Enckevort, 2004, p. 112). The creation of such a centre east of the Rhine might well be considered as good evidence that the Romans started building the political infrastructure of a province in the region. It led some scholars to conclude that “Waldgirmes was founded as a centre of administration in an embryonic province which was viewed as securely pacified” (M. Todd, 2004, p. 51).

However, it still remains unclear to what extent this hypothetical plan of “provincialization” was implemented in *Germania Romana*. Numerous Roman camps discovered in recent decades offer little help in describing the political processes that took place in the region. The study of Roman civil settlements in *Germania* could shed more light on the matter, but evidences available from urban areas are incomplete and fragmentary. Among them, archaeological data from town which can be identified as *Oppidum Batavorum* seems to be especially promising. It covered an area of some 20 ha and functioned as a key administrative center of the Batavian region until the Batavian revolt when it was burned to the ground and was never rebuilt.

The most interesting thing about this town is that Batavian chiefs have long enjoyed close relations with the Romans. The strength of these relations may be illustrated by the example of a well-known cult of Hercules Magusanus, whose name consists of two male elements and who should be regarded as the result of an amalgamation of two different deities – the Roman Hercules with indigenous Magusanus. This double-named deity was widely worshiped in *Germania Inferior* and appears to be the only indigenous deity north of the Alps to be associated with Hercules (N. Roymans, 1996, p. 91). All of this makes it likely that multiple signs of change within the indigenous society will be found there.

Unfortunately, the degree to which indigenous population of *Oppidum Batavorum* adopted Roman political practices is still far from being clear. Scholars know little or nothing about its indigenous residents. For example, the proportion of the Germanic population in the town is at the moment unclear and some scholars even “see it as a town located in Batavian territory, not as a Batavian town”. This is not surprising given that the area investigated is too small and comprises only 3% of the total (*Oppidum Batavorum* is almost completely covered by the medieval and modern town of Nijmegen). The problem is complicated by the fact that “there are as yet no definitive publications” on the topic (N. Roymans, 2004, p. 203-204).

The corollary of the above mentioned is that scholars may not be able to say exactly how and when Roman governmental structures have been established in *Germania Romana*. Hopefully, the issues over political transformation in the region will be resolved when all the recent results of excavations will be published in full detail. But still one may safely maintain that the ways to transform political life on the barbarian periphery were numerous. The process of transformation didn't necessarily imply uniformity and synchronism and the result of the transformation varied from a complete assimilation of indigenous communities to no more than superficial political subjugation of neighboring client states.

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