

# CIRCULAR FLOW: UNIVERSAL AND LOCAL IN THE *IMPERIUM GALLIARUM*

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**Summary:** This article investigates the cultural tendencies of the Gallic Empire (c. AD 260-274). The persistence of imperial institutions shows the Gallic emperors intended to convey an impression of continuity. Yet the numismatic record also shows the influence of a distinct cultural environment associated with the Batavian community and the Rhine army. Batavian forms of Hercules, originally developed through the transformation of the Roman Hercules to suit a local context, were elevated into Postumus' (r. c. AD 260 to 269) imperial propaganda, confirming a long-held hypothesis in anthropology postulating a circular flow of cultural borrowing in agrarian societies between local and elite traditions.

“Great, indeed, was the love felt for Postumus in the hearts of all the people of Gaul because he had thrust back all the German tribes and had restored the Roman Empire to its former security.”<sup>1</sup>

This laudatory description in the *Historia Augusta* (late 3rd c. or later) of a usurper in late 3rd century Gaul is likely more revealing of the author's feeling for the legitimate ruler, Gallienus (r. 253 to 268) than of the true nature of Postumus (r. c. 260 to 269).<sup>2</sup> The latter's actual support turned out to be too weak to overturn Gallienus' regime in Italy (if, indeed, that was ever an aim) yet too entrenched for the usurper to be evicted from north-west Europe (despite an attempt variously dated to 261, 265 or 266).<sup>3</sup> The consequence was the breakaway Gallic Empire (c. 260 to 274)

1 *Hist. Aug. Tyranni Triginta 3: si quidem nimius amor erga Postumum omnium erat in Gallianorum mente populorum, quod summotis omnibus Germanicis gentibus Romanum in pristinam securitatem revocasset imperium.* Trans. Magie 1968: 71.

2 Birley 2006: 19; Cameron 2011: 743-82.

3 Christol 1997: 155; Southern 2015 [2001]: 144-46.

consisting of the British, Gallic, Germanic and Iberian provinces. The Gallic emperor's later struggle with a usurper of his own, Laelian, and his subsequent murder at the hands of his own men (both 268 or 269), however, suggest limits to the love felt for him.<sup>4</sup>

Given his eventual failure and the general chaos of the time, Postumus' state-building is mostly studied as a political phenomenon, a symptom of broader imperial dysfunction in the latter half of the 3rd century. However, while extremely sparse, the evidence for the ruling ideology of the *Imperium Galliarum* and the symbolism Postumus employed to win 'love' in the 'hearts of all the people of Gaul' provide a fascinating vista on Roman imperial culture as it manifested itself in the provincial societies of the period. As the passage in the *Historia Augusta* reveals, these were societies quite capable of supporting a usurper carrying out a project of political separatism in the name of 'restoring the Roman Empire'. By comparing this evidence to the anthropology of local communities in agrarian societies generally, the present article analyses the *Imperium Galliarum* as a cultural phenomenon. It will demonstrate that Postumus' ideology was a logical consequence of a pre-modern cosmopolitanism that allowed for the cohabitation of local and universal elements and which explains the perseverance of imperial culture in north-west Europe throughout the tumultuous period.

Little is known of Postumus' background. He was possibly the governor of Germania Inferior before the Rhine army proclaimed him emperor. Even the year of the proclamation is uncertain. Tradition, not implausibly, favours 260 following the capture of Valerian (r. 253 to 260) in the débâcle of Edessa, while the Augsburg Victory Altar documents Postumus' assumption of the imperial title by September 11th in either 260 or 261.<sup>5</sup> Although the altar documents a Roman victory over invading "*Semnonnes or Iuthungi*,"<sup>6</sup> the period seems nonetheless to have witnessed the collapse of Roman defences along the Rhine and Upper Danube.<sup>7</sup> Coin

4 Jones, Martindale & Morris 1971: 492, 720.

5 Southern 2015 [2001]: 140-44. Lavagne 1994: 443-44 favours the victory commemorated on the Altar over events in distant Edessa as spark for the revolt.

6 *Semnonum sive Iuthungorum*. See König 1997: 344-45.

7 Strobel 1993: 292; Wilkes 2005: 223, 231.

evidence suggests the abandonment of the Lower Rhine forts between 260 and 270, while two late 4th century historians report the devastation of Gaul in the later reign of Gallienus by invaders from across the river.<sup>8</sup>

In Eutropius the people responsible are the Alamanni who “devastated the Gauls and penetrated Italy” while “Germans penetrated the Spanish provinces and stormed the renowned city of Tarragona.”<sup>9</sup> In Aurelius Victor the Alamanni are blamed only for the invasion of Italy while Franks are blamed for having “pillaged Gaul and occupied Spain, where they ravaged and almost destroyed the town of Tarraconensis, and some, after conveniently acquiring ships, penetrated as far as Africa.”<sup>10</sup> Since the attackers of Tarragona must necessarily have crossed Gaul, while invaders of Italy may well have done the same, these accounts are not necessarily as divergent as is sometimes assumed.<sup>11</sup> In any case they recount what must to contemporary observers have been a confusing series of events.

In such a context, Postumus’ usurpation seems likely to reflect an urgent need in the region for a commander-in-chief to manage local defences rather than a desire to meddle in wider imperial politics. The Augsburg Victory Altar appears to list local forces among the Roman troops, and it also seems likely that a substantial part of the Rhine army was recruited locally.<sup>12</sup> For the 3rd century, the available evidence for *Legio I Minervia* shows 9 Germans, 6 Gauls, 2 natives of Noricum and from Dalmatia, Pannonia, Syria, and Thrace a single recruit each; for *Legio VIII*

8 Willems 1984: 271-72. For the AD 270 dating of several Gelderland coin hoards, see Willems 1984: 141-42. A new defensive line later established between Cologne and Bavai is sometimes ascribed to the Gallic Empire but more likely hails from the decades following Aurelian’s restoration of imperial unity (Drinkwater 1987: 220-21).

9 Eutr. 9.8: *Alamanni vastatis Galliis in Italiam penetraverunt [...] Germani usque ad Hispanias penetraverunt et civitatem nobilem Tarraconem expugnaverunt*. Trans. Bird 1993: 57.

10 Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 33: *Francorum gentes direpta Gallia Hispaniam possiderent vastato ac paene direpto Tarraconensium oppido, nactisque in tempore navigiis pars in usque Africam permearet*. Trans. Bird 1994: 33.

11 E.g. Drinkwater, 1987: 50-51.

12 For a discussion regarding the local forces mentioned on the altar, including the possibility that the passage should be interpreted as referring to locals freed from Germanic captivity rather than participants in the battle, see Le Roux 1997: 281-84, 289-90.

*Augusta* 3 Gauls, 3 Germans and from Italy, Raetia, and Thrace a single recruit each; for *Legio XXII Primigenia* 20 Germans, 9 Gauls, 8 Thracians and 5 Raetians; for *Legio XXX Ulpia victrix* 10 Germans, 9 Gauls, 6 Thracians, 2 Britons, 1 Dalmatian and 1 Italian.<sup>13</sup> If these numbers are loosely representative of the Rhine legions as a whole, Postumus will have been raised to the purple mainly by Gaulish and Germanic recruits with a personal interest in the maintenance of the frontier and the protection of local communities.<sup>14</sup>

Postumus' response to this need was broadcast by the coinage of the regime. Much of this material seamlessly continued the traditions of the central government with legends such as *Pax Aug* and *Mars Victor*.<sup>15</sup> Other coins emphasise the restoration and defence of Roman civilisation in Gaul as the *raison d'être* of the new regime, hailing Postumus as *Restitutor Galliarum* ('restorer of Gaul') and as the provider of *Salus Provinciarum* ('safety of the provinces').<sup>16</sup> The lack of an attempted invasion of Italy may reflect sincerity in this respect.<sup>17</sup> If an anonymous Late Antique continuation of Dio's *Roman History* is to be believed, Postumus wrote Gallienus to declare himself content to rule those who had declared him emperor, and consequently asked his rival emperor not to cross the Alps, so that Romans would not need to fight one another.<sup>18</sup> While advertising its devotion to the welfare of the north-west provinces, however, Postumus' regime made no attempt at articulating a separate identity for this territory.<sup>19</sup> Coin legends such as *Romae Aeternae* and *Herculi Romano* instead

13 König 1981: 89-91.

14 Vogt 1993 [1965]: 63.

15 *RIC V Postumus* 78, 79, 153, 154, 218, 219, 219a, 312, 318, 319, 357, 359, 361.

16 The designation as *Restitutor Galliarum* was an innovation of Gallienus' coinage from the end of the 250's, following that emperor's war on the Alamanni and immediately predating Postumus' revolt (*RIC V Gallienus (joint reign)* 31-35; Elmer 1941: 16). For Postumus' usage see *RIC V Postumus* 82, 157-59. *Salus Provinciarum* was an invention of Postumus' regime (*RIC V Postumus* 38, 87; Drinkwater 1987: 167).

17 Southern 2015 [2001]: 145.

18 *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 4.194.6. For an assessment of this source and its reliability, see Drinkwater 1987: 82-84.

19 The phrase 'Imperium Galliarum' is a modern designation. The closest an ancient source came to conceiving of the breakaway state as a distinct political entity is Eutropius' remark that *Victorinus postea Galliarum accepit imperium* ("Then Victorinus took absolute authority in Gaul") (*Eutr. Breviarium* 9.9; Drinkwater 1987: 53).

signal its continuing cultural, if not political, attachment to the wider Roman world.<sup>20</sup> Continuation of convention also seems to account for the legend of *SC* (*Senatus Consultum*, i.e. “by decree of the Senate”) on Postumus’ sestertii, given the lack of other evidence that he should have established a senate of his own.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding the lack of a senate, the Gallic Empire furthered its ideology of political continuity through an emulation of Roman forms of government: magistrates were appointed, consuls were elected annually, Postumus was designated as *pontifex maximus*, furnished with a Praetorian Guard and had his *tribunicia potestas* annually renewed.<sup>22</sup> No changes were made to the structures of provincial government or the boundaries of individual provinces, and the state carried on the functions of the imperial government, for instance elevating Speyer to *colonia* and Carlisle to *civitas*.<sup>23</sup> The emphasis on protection and continuity gained Postumus a positive legacy seen not only in the *Historia Augusta* but also in Eutropius (late 4th c.) and Orosius (early 5th c.) both of whom credited him with the restoration of the north-western provinces following near collapse.<sup>24</sup> His self-presentation would be imitated some decades later by Carausius (r. c. 286 to 293), another usurper carving out a similarly independent sphere in north-west Europe, who in one coin issue declared himself *Restitutor Brit* (“restorer of Britain”).<sup>25</sup>

The appeal of a message of continuity of Roman civilisation reflected the way imperial administration was organised on the provincial level. The Roman Empire was far too vast for a central administration to monitor tightly with pre-modern means of communication and transportation. Instead, responsibility for most of the practical administration was delegated to local elites, mainly the councils of the empire’s estimated

20 *RIC V Postumus* 36-37, 306-7, 351; Elmer 1941: 52, supplementary sheet 3.

21 *RIC V Postumus* 115-17, 120, 121, 123-28, 135-36, 143-49, 152, 155-59, 165-72, 177, 179, 180, 185; Drinkwater 1987: 159-60.

22 Potter 2014 [2004]: 256; Southern 2015 [2001]: 140-45, 413. Postumus’ coinage abounds with designations of pontifical and tribunician authority, e.g. *RIC V Postumus* 1-2.

23 Drinkwater 1987: 127-30.

24 Eutr. *Breviarium* 9.9; Oros. *Historiae Adversus Paganos* 7.22.10.

25 Casey 1994: 54.

two thousand or so cities. Elite cohesion across the territories was ensured and political fragmentation prevented partly by a shared material interest in the maintenance of an imperial system that safeguarded local hierarchies. Yet cohesion was also provided by integration into a common elite culture. Crucially, this culture was not reserved for the elites of the original Latin population of Central Italy but was open to provincial propertied classes.<sup>26</sup> This is evident e.g. from Claudius' (r. 41 to 54) opening of the Senate to prominent Gauls.<sup>27</sup>

Comprehension of this social structure in Roman imperial studies owes a great deal to the ideal type of the *agro-literate polity* described by Ernest Gellner.<sup>28</sup> This model envisages agrarian states as consisting of culturally diverse, insulated communities of agricultural producers ruled over by elite segments sharing a universalised prestige culture.<sup>29</sup> Gellner's conception of pre-modernity drew in turn on the anthropology of Robert Redfield, who first proposed a similar framework to explain the cultural life of peasant communities in early 20th century Mexico, and his associate McKim Marriott, who first employed it to structure the findings of a practical investigation, his 1951 to 1952 field study of the Indian village of Kishan Garhi.<sup>30</sup>

Central to Redfield and Marriott's theory was the hypothesis of an ongoing, low-intensity dialogue between the local traditions of peasant communities and the prestige tradition of literate elites. Indeed, the latter was constructed from elements of the former that were *universalised* - that is, transformed to suit a geographically unspecific upper-class lifestyle whose features were codified by literature. Conversely, the former was enriched by adoptions from the latter which were *localised* - that is, transformed to suit a mainly orally preserved culture whose value to the community depended on its relevance to the specific context.<sup>31</sup>

26 Bang & Turner 2015: 12, 26; Lavan, Payne & Weisweiler 2016: 3-6.

27 Malloch 2020.

28 Lavan, Payne & Weisweiler 2016: 5.

29 Gellner 1983: 8-18.

30 Redfield 1955: 14-21; Wilcox 2004: 151-52.

31 Marriott 1955: 181-91.

Though sources for the *Imperium Galliarum* are slight, they are noteworthy for supporting both the above postulates. Firstly, Postumus' ideology was not directed at a class of Italian landholders but at an elite of local origin that identified with the culture of metropolitan Rome. Postumus' own name Cassianus likely resulted from a common Gallo-Germanic practice of changing Latin *nomina* into *cognomina* and back again (Cassius > Cassianus). The names of two of his most important subordinates, Marcus Piavonus Victorinus and Gaius Esuvius Tetricus, both of whom would briefly rule as emperors themselves in the turbulent last years of the breakaway state, suggest Gallic origin (the uncertain Piavonus and the clearly Celtic Esuvius).<sup>32</sup> The position of these individuals at the head of a state striving to protect Roman imperial traditions amply demonstrates the success of elite assimilation in north-west Europe by the 3rd century.

Secondly, despite its strong focus on the continuity of the civilisation of imperial Rome, Postumus' coinage documents the existence, and vitality, of a distinct cultural tradition in the north-western provinces, more precisely in the heavily-garrisoned and heavily-recruited communities of the Lower Rhine. This is evident in the Gallic emperor's invocations of local forms of Hercules. In the vocabulary of Redfield and Marriott these are *universalisations* of cultural features that have previously been limited to local or regional traditions.

One is the figure of Hercules Magusanus, amalgamating the Roman god with a local deity.<sup>33</sup> This amalgamation has a long-documented history prior to the Gallic Empire. It appears (as 'Magusanus Hercules') as early as the mid-1st century AD in an inscription from present-day Ruimel in the Lower Rhine area.<sup>34</sup> That inscription was set up by a *summus magistratus* of the Batavi, and throughout the following centuries the link between the deity and this people remained strong. Of the three major sanctuaries in Batavian territory, Empel was certainly devoted to him as evidenced by a votive inscription and a statuette of Hercules.<sup>35</sup> Elst and Kessel are thought to have been too, the former based on the find of a

32 Drinkwater 1987: 125-26; Potter 2014 [2004]: 257.

33 For attestations in Postumus' coinage, see *RIC V Postumus* 68, 139.

34 *CIL* XIII 8771; Derks, 1998: 89.

35 *AE* 1994, 1281; Derks, 1998: 98.

fragment of another figurine, the latter based on a predominance of military equipment among the archaeological finds.<sup>36</sup>

Votive inscriptions to the god have also been found in places where Batavian recruits are known to have served. In Rome an altar to Hercules Magusanus was erected by members of the horse guard, a unit so dependent on Batavian recruits that it was often referred to as ‘the Batavians’.<sup>37</sup> The god was also the object of a dedication in present-day Romania by a member of the *ala I Batavorum*, though a Batavian connection for a second dedication from the same region by a *stator* of the *ala II Pannoniorum* is more speculative.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that Hercules Magusanus dominated the religious landscape along a wider stretch of the Lower Rhine, as the neighbours of the Batavians have also produced inscriptions honouring the god.<sup>39</sup>

Postumus’ coinage also invokes Hercules Deusoniensis.<sup>40</sup> While the Celtic name Deuso (‘the raging one’) is known from elsewhere, this particular deity is unattested outside of this Gallic emperor’s coinage, a sole exception being the coins of the later usurper, Carausius, which likewise invoke the figure, presumably in another deliberate evocation of Postumus’ memory.<sup>41</sup> Possibly the god’s name should be understood as ‘Hercules of Deuso’, Deuso in turn being identified with the town of Diessen in present-day North Brabant. This would also place this Hercules in Batavian territory, and it is likely that he should be understood as the Hercules Magusanus worshipped in Diessen rather than as a rival local god. This would explain the paradox that the otherwise barely attested Hercules Deusoniensis is more common in coin hoards from the Gallic Empire than the well-established Hercules Magusanus. On some coins, Postumus even appears as the former.<sup>42</sup> The preference for Deusoniensis has

36 Roymans 2009: 227–28.

37 *CIL* VI 31162.

38 *AE* 1977, 704; Rubel & Varga, 2021

39 Haynes 2013: 232–35; Rubel & Varga, 2021: 108–18. For Hercules Magusanus among the Cananefates: *CIL* XIII 8777 (Domburg). For the Tungri: *RIB* 2140 (Polmont, near Edinburgh), a 2nd century dedication set up by a *duplicarius* of the *ala I Tungrorum*. For the Ubii: *CIL* XIII 8610 (Xanten); *CIL* XIII 8492 (Cologne); *CIL* XIII 8010 (Bonn).

40 *RIC V Postumus* 20–22, 64–66, 98–99, 130–34, 137, 200–2, 247, 343; Derks 1998: 21, 25–26.

41 *RIC V Carausius* 800; Shiel 1977: 195.

42 *RIC V Postumus* 99, 137, 247.



led to speculations that either Postumus himself or his revolt might have originated in Diessen. There is, however, no evidence for these hypotheses.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless it is quite plausible that Batavian soldiery played a crucial role in the establishment of Postumus' state. In the 1st century AD and possibly long into the 2nd the Batavian community was heavily recruited for the Roman *auxilia* with some 5,500 men serving at any one time out of an estimated total population of 30,000 to 40,000.<sup>44</sup> By Postumus' time this arrangement had come to an end, yet army recruitment continued to draw heavily on populations adjacent to established garrisons, and the Lower Rhine was a heavily garrisoned frontier. Batavians and their neighbours likely made up a notable proportion of the soldiery employed in these garrisons. With this soldiery rather than with the civilian population deeper inside Gaul lay the initiative for the elevation of usurpers.<sup>45</sup> The latter aspect is illustrated by Postumus' choice of capital which has scholarship divided between Cologne or Trier, the two locations where he minted coins.<sup>46</sup> Either possibility puts his centre of power close to the Rhine.

Moreover, the ascription of the Sack of Autun (sometime between 269 and 271) to the 'Bagaudae' by the orator Eumenius, a native of 3rd century Gaul, is generally thought to be a faulty Renaissance conjecture that should have read 'Batavicae' and probably referred to the armies of the Gallic Empire.<sup>47</sup>

Altogether it is reasonable to suppose that Postumus and his successors depended for at least some of their authority and military might on the Batavians and their neighbours on the Lower Rhine. Given the fundamentally local nature of most cults in the Roman world, even soldiers recruited elsewhere may have come to identify with the Batavian cultural world. In an example from Hatra at the other end of the empire, two dedications to local deities (Shamash and Nergal, rendered in Latin

43 Biegel 1975: 835-36; König 1981: 123; Drinkwater 1987: 162-63; Gavrilović 2013: 178.

44 Haynes 2013: 114.

45 Vogt 1993 [1965]: 62-63.

46 Drinkwater 1987: 141-45, 228; Bourne 2001: 25-26.

47 Eumenius *Panegyrici Latini. Pro restaurandis scholis* 9.4; Nixon & Rodgers 1994: 154 n. 12; Woolf 1998: 1.

as, respectively, Sol Invictus and Hercules Sanctus) were made by the tribune of a unit stationed there for a brief period in the reign of Gordian III (r. 238 to 244).<sup>48</sup> It is quite plausible that decades of occupying garrisons on the Lower Rhine will have fostered a similar appreciation of the dominant local cult in the soldiers of the Rhine army, regardless of their individual origin, rendering the Batavian war god(s) a useful unifying symbol for an emperor depending specifically on this army. It has even been hypothesised that Postumus erected a temple for Hercules Deusoniensis.<sup>49</sup> However, given that the only evidence is the depiction on some coins of the god in front of a temple and that several Batavian temples for Hercules existed already, this theory is rather insubstantial.<sup>50</sup>

Curiously, the coins of the later Gallic emperors do not mention the Batavian deities and indeed rarely invoke deities at all.<sup>51</sup> Save for a single coin Hercules is not mentioned.<sup>52</sup> Visual depictions of the god are somewhat more common.<sup>53</sup> Given the iconographic conformity of the Batavian deities with the Roman, these coins may well have evoked both. The minor role of Hercules in the material, however, indicates his minor relevance to the ruling ideologies of Postumus' successors. One may speculate about the discomfort of identifying too closely with the ideology of a murdered emperor or the hypothesised Batavian origin of Postumus himself, which may not have been shared by his successors. There is, however, no obvious explanation, and little material from which to construct one, given the brief careers of these successors.<sup>54</sup>

Hercules Deusoniensis instead reappears on the coins of the later separatist emperor, Carausius, once again wielding a club in concordance with the standard iconography of the Roman god.<sup>55</sup> Since Deusoniensis is otherwise exclusively associated with Postumus, it is hard not to conclude that Carausius intended by his choice of deity to evoke the memory

48 *AE* 1958, 239-40; Stoll 2007: 466.

49 König 1981: 121.

50 *RIC V Postumus* 66, 134; Elmer 1941: 46 n. 316.

51 Drinkwater 1987: 175.

52 *RIC V Tetricus I* 230.

53 *RIC V Victorinus* 13, 23, 79, 91; *RIC V Tetricus I* 44.

54 Later Gallic emperors whose coinage appears in *RIC*: Laelian (r. c. 269), Marius (r. c. 269), Victorinus (r. c. 269-271), Domitian II (r. c. 271), Tetricus I (r. c. 271-274).

55 *RIC V Carausius* 800.

of Postumus, in turn suggesting a favourable view in the north-western provinces of the latter's political and cultural experiment.

Where the worship of Batavian forms of Hercules had previously been almost wholly limited to contexts marked by direct connections to the Lower Rhine, the importance of the Batavian soldiery for Postumus' regime manifested in the *universalisation* of their local religious tradition into the realm of state-sanctioned imperial coinage. In practice this was limited to the north-western provinces, yet the ideology displayed on the rest of the coinage was plainly pan-imperial. While Hercules is particularly prominent in Postumus' numismatic record, the other deities invoked by his regime make clear his continued devotion to the traditional cults of the imperial elite: Apollo, Diana, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Minerva, Neptune, Sarapis and Sol all feature, as do personifications of Victory and Good Fortune.<sup>56</sup> The correspondence of these deities with those ordinarily invoked by Roman emperors precludes the possibility that they mask devotion to local deities of the north-west.<sup>57</sup>

On the surface, the acceptance of Hercules Magusanus and Hercules Deusoniensis into this company required little accommodation with unfamiliar cultural concepts. An altar from Bonn displays Hercules Magusanus reining in the hell-hound Cerberus; a figure from Empel has him wearing a lionskin over his shoulders; and he is displayed holding the apples of the Hesperides on a statue from Xanten. Postumus' coins continue this pattern, depicting both Hercules Deusoniensis and Hercules Magusanus in the fashion of their Roman counterpart, clad in lionskin and wielding a club.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, the worship of Hercules by the Batavian community was distinctly different from elsewhere in the empire. The temples of

56 E.g. *RIC V Postumus* 15, 29, 31, 60, 70, 76, 149, 263, 299, 312, 329.

57 König 1981: 112, 115; Drinkwater 1987: 165, 169, 173. The opposite possibility is attested elsewhere: the unusual popularity in the Balkans of Silvanus, a deity not usually promoted by the imperial centre, has been convincingly interpreted as the continuity in Latin guise of a regional god (Lulić 2015: 25-30) while the prominence of Saturn in Roman North Africa reflects continued adherence to the Phoenician deity Ba'al Hammon (Cadotte 2007: 25-44).

58 *RIC V Postumus* 20-21, 64-66, 68, 98, 130-33, 139, 200-1, 343; Roymans 2004: 243; Haynes 2013: 233-35.

both Elst and Empel have yielded substantial evidence for the ritual butchering of cattle, a continuation long into Roman times of a practice once common throughout north-west Europe but abandoned by most provincial populations in the immediate aftermath of the Roman conquest.<sup>59</sup> The Batavian area is also notable for the continuance of weapon-offerings into the 2nd century AD, another custom once widely common but abandoned elsewhere.<sup>60</sup>

More generally, peculiarities of the Batavian archaeological record suggest a community whose intense identification with the military role assigned to them by the imperial authorities led them to emphasise a martial Iron Age past that would have struck contemporary onlookers as 'barbarian'. Batavian pottery consumption is characterised by large drinking beakers that emulate products abandoned by their neighbours in the early Roman period, while from the 1st century AD onwards the Batavians adopted a new set of burial practices centred on the construction of low barrows, apparently in emulation of similar barrows found in the same area and deriving from the period 1100 to 400 BC.<sup>61</sup>

In this context the 1st century AD amalgamation of Hercules with the local war-god was, in the vocabulary of Redfield and Marriott, a *localisation*. Hercules Magusanus may have possessed the visual characteristics of the Roman god. Yet he only made sense for the Batavian community by serving as focus for a cult that embodied a set of local practices significantly dissimilar to those elsewhere associated with Hercules.

Postumus' invocation of Batavian forms of Hercules in place of the standard Roman variety was a novel development in Roman coinage and presumably a carefully crafted signal, communicating the association of the Gallic emperor with Batavian culture.<sup>62</sup> Crucially Postumus' wider self-representation was exceedingly martial, his coins often invoking Victory and representing trophies and prisoners of war.<sup>63</sup> Gallienus may have pioneered the title of *Restitutor Galliarum* but only on coins showing

59 Fernández-Götz & Roymans 2015: 26-27.

60 Nicolay 2003: 367-69.

61 Roymans 2014: 242; Pitts 2019: 189.

62 Derks 1998: 21.

63 *RIC V Postumus* 40, 89, 103, 166-72, 174, 230-31, 233-34, 236, 251.

him bare-headed and wielding a sceptre.<sup>64</sup> Postumus claimed the same title, depicted in full armour, his left hand resting on an upside-down lance, his foot in some cases resting on a conquered enemy.<sup>65</sup> The Batavian community was not only geographically close to Postumus' centre of operations and likely an important source of soldiers; there was also a congruity between the values traditionally associated with it and the values the Gallic emperor sought to display.

Postumus' apparent reliance on an indigenous elite and the prominence of local Batavian war gods have been described as *Gallicising* reactions to the generalising cultural tendencies of the imperial centre.<sup>66</sup> It would be more precise to describe the cultural tendency of the regime as a particular Rhine army culture asserting itself and glorifying its ability to protect the hinterland. The strongly Latin iconography of the Batavian versions of Hercules demonstrates that in the Batavian war-gods the amalgamation of imperial and local traits had progressed far beyond the point where their elevation into the realm of official coinage could be considered the introduction of a distinct 'Germanic' or 'Gallic' cultural element into the imperial. The central role of Roman recruitment in the development of the Batavian cultural outlook illustrates the same point on a wider scale.

While the elevation of Hercules Magusanus and Hercules Deusiensis from a regional phenomenon centred on the Lower Rhine to patrons of a reigning emperor constitute a *universalisation* of the provincial into the imperial, this provincial culture was in prior centuries shaped by *localisations* from the imperial prestige tradition into the local context. Features deriving from Roman culture, such as Latin epigraphy and the myths of Hercules, were introduced into the Batavian community, where they were put to use reinforcing a cultural system that in many ways remained distinct from Mediterranean societies.<sup>67</sup>

64 *RIC V Gallienus (joint reign)* 31-35.

65 *RIC V Postumus* 82, 157-59; Elmer 1941: 43; Drinkwater 1987: 161.

66 Potter 2014 [2004]: 257.

67 Illustrating the extent of borrowing behind every supposedly 'pristine' culture, both the Latin alphabet, the activity of epigraphy and the figure of Hercules in turn entered the cultural world of the city of Rome through the adoption and reinterpretation of Greek culture.

In treating the interplay of literary and local elements in the festival cycle of Kishan Garhi, Marriott speculated that *universalisation* and *localisation* were arbitrary points in a circular flow. For instance, ancient peasant rituals for animal prosperity may have given rise to the Sanskritic legend of Kṛṣṇa rescuing a group of cowherds from a destructive storm by lifting their hill into the air. In turn, Marriott documented how the villagers of Kishan Garhi had transformed the Sanskritic ritual deriving from this legend into an idiosyncratic festival more in tune with their local agricultural context.<sup>68</sup> Marriott, however, had no evidence for the first half of his theory, the time-scales involved being far too vast for an anthropological survey to capture.

Yet the present examination of the cultural tendencies of Postumus' regime has a second result besides illuminating the traces of local traditions in the mainly imperial culture of the 3rd century provincial elite. It also delivers a documented example of such circular flow. In the first instance, in order to make sense of the continued local nature of their community within a newly established, universalising imperial world, the Batavians *localised* the figure of Hercules from literary prestige culture, fashioning the non-literary figure of Hercules Magusanus with his idiosyncratic cult. In the second instance, the political fragmentation of the later 3rd century brought the Rhine army, an institution intimately connected with the Batavian community and its cultural world, to unprecedented prominence. This produced the conditions for the *localised* form of Hercules to be *universalised* into an imperial tradition promoted by Postumus, depicted on coinage as an accepted member of the state gods.

This result demonstrates in practice the obsolescence of the 'Roman vs. native' paradigm by revealing both supposed extremes of that binary – the prestige tradition of the imperial court and the locally specific world of agricultural communities – to have shaped their cultures through adoptions of impulses from one another. A great many ostensibly 'Roman' elements were inherent in Batavian culture and would likely have been experienced as 'Batavian' by contemporary onlookers. Conversely, by Postumus' time, an ostensibly 'Batavian' war-god could evidently pass for Roman. This war-god was a cultural hybrid with a mixed local-universal origin, as was the imperial tradition into which he was

68 Marriott 1955: 199-203.

elevated, as indicated most obviously by the presence of the Greco-Egyptian god Sarapis among the cults inherited by the Gallic emperors from the Roman government.

The circular flow at play validates the move in recent Roman cultural history towards understanding the local and universal as points within a “continuous circularity”<sup>69</sup> rather than an exchange of elements between easily defined, unchanging entities such as ‘Roman’ and ‘Germanic’. Even in the first encounters between those cultures some three centuries before Postumus’ time, they were themselves hybrids of earlier cultural encounters in their respective areas of origin.

Since all cultures are ultimately hybrids the continued relevance of the ‘local’ and ‘universal’ binary in ancient history therefore results not from the retention or invention of particular cultural elements. It must be sought instead in the fundamentally different living conditions of the geographically unconstrained ruling classes and the far more local worlds inhabited by the majority of their subjects. Hercules might travel from one to the other and back, but the distinctive archaeological profile of the *civitas Batavorum* shows that provincial lifestyles could be very different from those of the metropolitan centre.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AE	<i>L’Année Épigraphique</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
RIB	<i>Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i>
RIC	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i>

69 Versluys 2015: 146, 150.

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