

Auxiliary soldiers: Romans-to-be

Revolts among auxiliaries

The First Cohort of Tungrians and the Third and Ninth Cohorts of Batavians were the primary forces stationed at Vindolanda although others, like a cavalry unit from northern Spain, joined them. These Cohorts were auxiliary units made up of non-citizen recruits who served up to twenty years in return for Roman citizenship.

None of them were Britons. In 69 AD the Romans had learnt a very valuable lesson from these very units. In the wake of the confusion in the year of the four emperors the Batavian auxiliaries, stationed near their homes, mutinied and were joined by their neighbours the Tungrians on the river Meuse. They were led by the Batavian commander Civilis.



Tacitus *Histories* 4.16-17 (translation B. Thayer, abridged)

Civilis turned to force and organised the Canninefates, the Frisians, and the Batavians, each tribe in a troop by itself: the Roman line was drawn up to oppose them not far from the Rhine, and the vessels which had been brought here after the burning of the forts were turned to front the foe. The battle had not lasted long when a cohort of the Tungri transferred its standards to Civilis, and the Roman soldiers, demoralised by this sudden betrayal, were cut down by allies and foes alike. *[Civilis then tried to win the alliance of the Germans and Gallic tribes as well in defying the Romans].*

At the same time in private conversation he reminded them of the miseries that they had endured so many years while **they falsely called their wretched servitude a peace**. "The Batavians," he said, "although free from tribute, have taken up arms against our common masters. In the very first engagement the Romans have been routed and defeated. What if the Gallic provinces should throw off the yoke? What forces are there left in Italy? **It is by the blood of the provinces that provinces are won.**' In this way Civilis, turning his attention eagerly toward the Germanies and the Gauls, was preparing, should his plans prove successful, to gain the kingship over the strongest and richest nations.

It would take five Roman legions to subdue them. The general Q. Petilius Cerialis then took them with him on his next tour of duty to Britain, where they stayed. From then on, the it was Roman policy not to allow auxiliaries to serve within their native province.

For what reasons do you think Civilis decided to rise up against the Romans?

How do you think auxiliary soldiers stationed at Roman forts felt about their allegiances and loyalties?
What incentives were there not to rebel?