

“It’s the wrong trousers Gromitus - and they’ve gone wrong!”

Following on from the points raised by the chairman on behalf of a ‘worried some’ in the unit, (Shame that people who have concerns still wish to remain anonymous) on the wearing of full-length braccæ by the auxilia, I, probably being the chief protagonist, felt the need to justify my choice in clothing. These are my personal views and in no way intend to reflect the views of my fellow auxiliaries, which may be somewhat different.

As Pudens stated in his article, I too joined the RMRS on the understanding that the group portrayed a period in history from the mid first, to mid second century AD. (Mid, from the Latin *medius* for middle). My maths says that the middle of the first century is 50AD – a good nineteen years prior to the revolt led by Julius Civilis. (Bless him!) I believe that prior to the revolt there would have been a large degree of extant native clothing worn or preferred by the Germanic auxiliaries. Therefore, the persona that I have adopted for ‘Peronis’ reflects this period, in the way that a Batavian conscript under the command of a native chieftain, from a colder province would have dressed. I wear long-sleeved tunic in the Germanic style and on cooler days, long trousers too. Obviously when more clement weather comes along, why wear long woollen trousers? Germans also wore shorter *femenalia* style trousers. I wonder what the Society’s view would be if I wore *femenalia*, but in check fabric?

I have been wearing full-length braccæ and long sleeves since I first joined the unit, after asking Fatalis whether he had a problem with me wearing them. He said he hadn’t. I initially wore this style to end the constant barrage of questioning from the public on my Marquesan tattoos, it was not my intention to encourage the other auxiliaries to wear long trousers – it just happened. (Obviously, a sensible and popular choice of clothing for inclement weather). I have not received any criticism, other than the odd jealous jibe from a cold legionary!

Our main aim, as I understand it, as a society, is to educate the public in the affairs of the Roman military machine in all of its aspects. We have a large variety of armour and weapon types from various periods of the one hundred years between 50 – 150 AD, so why not our clothing too? We have auxiliary soldiers who choose not to wear *femenalia* and those who portray a more ‘Romanised’ impression by wearing no leggings at all. Why not braccæ? What is our evidence for them?

Most, if not all of our reconstructions come from archaeological and sculptural evidence. Scant though the finds are, there have been long trousers preserved in peat bogs. The Angeln trousers that most of our braccæ are modelled on for example. The rest is sculptural evidence. Trajan’s Column depicts auxiliary soldiers, both infantry and cavalry wearing *femenalia*, but one Germanic auxiliary has most definitely got on a pair of long braccæ. This depiction is used in ‘*Roman Military Clothing I*’ by Graham Sumner. As for long sleeved tunicae, the *Vacheses Warrior*, although from an earlier period clearly shows the man to be wearing turned-back cuffs on a long-sleeved tunic. The tombstones of *Titus Flavius Bassus*, and *Longinus Sdapeze*, both auxiliaries, definitely dated to the first century AD both show the soldiers wearing the same type of sleeves.

Certainly until the reign of Galba, 68-69 AD, the Batavi horseguard kept their Germanic appearance. In the writings of Marcus Valerius Martialis (epigrammaton liber XIV *CLXXVI* ‘*Persona Germana*’) written onto the back of a terracotta mask of a Batavian we find...

"Sum figuli lusus russi persona Batavi. Quae tu derides, haec timet ora puer."

"I am a potter’s jest, the mask of a red faced Batavian. Though you make fun of it, a boy fears this face."

It somewhat betrays the feelings of the ‘city-Romans’ and how they looked at the emperors ‘*foreign*’ horsemen. It is interesting to see whether the Germans kept their ‘outlandish’ looks, or softened them for the city. Certainly the well-groomed looks of the Batavian horseguard depicted on the Column of Marcus Aurelius, later in the second century points to the latter. However, in 99AD, the new emperor Trajan brought the *equites singulari Augusti* to Rome. He saw to it that they looked as ‘Roman’ as possible. Like frontier troops of the line, they wore sleeveless or short-sleeved tunics and knee-length breeches (*femenalia*). This suggests that when the troops were on campaign or in the field that they wore un-Roman clothing, namely long sleeves and long trousers.

In the writings of Tacitus (Histories book 2.20) we find...

*“Caecina, who seemed to have left his cruelty and profligacy on the other side of the Alps, advanced through Italy with his army under excellent discipline. The towns and colonies, however, found indications of a haughty spirit in the general’s dress, when they saw the cloak of various colours, and **the trousers**, a garment of foreign fashion, clothed in which he was wont to speak to their toga-clad citizens”.*

Now we have to look at another point mentioned in Pudens' article – the 'human element'.

No soldier is going to let himself freeze! What soldier posted to a severe winter climate such as the Rhine frontier or the northern reaches of Britain wouldn't want to keep warm? Soldiers will adapt, people will adapt. If I saw a nice warm pair of woollen trousers, as a Batavian used to such clothing, why would I suffer the cold? I'd buy the trousers, or the fabric to make some.

Look at Napoleon's army returning from an expedition to Russia. The rag-tag rabble that returned was certainly not the well-ordered army that started out on the campaign. So many died of cold, soldiers were taking any warm clothing that they could find from the dead and dying troops and from settlements passed along the route of the march just to stay alive. Surely soldiers posted on a cold frontier in the first century, be they auxiliary or not, would want to keep warm. Romans saw trousers as effeminate, and possibly wore leg-wraps, levied troops from the provinces I am sure would wear trousers.

(See attached pic of soldiers on the Wall wearing long trousers and long sleeves).

The wearing of braccæ is NOT, as stated in the article a '*fashion statement*' but rather, yet another aspect of the auxiliary soldier's appearance intended to be a talking point with the public. The non-citizens, fighting for the glory of Rome versus the 'civilised' Romans appearance. It would only appear to be a '*fashion statement*' to the ill-informed, or to envious legionaries who cannot wear such parti-coloured finery!

At the first training event at the Lunt this year, I was complimented on how good my kit and appearance was by a very long-standing member of the Society and senior officer. (No names – no recriminations!) I take on-board all compliments and criticisms seriously, otherwise how do I know whether something is right or wrong? I am more than willing to wear femoralia instead of braccæ **IF** it can either be proved that from 50AD soldiers didn't wear them or, that the constitution of the RMRS clearly states that the Batavian soldiers we display are indeed post-revolt AD70.

I would suggest that the chairman calls an extraordinary general meeting to sort out all the issues members have with the kit and the time-period that we display. This not only affects the so-called "*fashions*" of the Batavians but also the appearance of clothing and kit of the legionaries and civilians who have spent a great deal of time, money and hard work to obtain.

What will be next? Will it be the 4th Century pillbox hats often seen in camp, or knitted socks? We have a lot of new members this year, and as I stated earlier, both compliments and criticisms help to expand their knowledge of our period. Newer members will look to the longer-standing members of the society for guidance and knowledge; currently we seem to be in a state of turmoil, somewhat incohesive and inconsistent. I agree whole-heartedly with open debate, (and this is in no way to be read as a criticism of the chairman personally) but perhaps matters concerning the auxilia alone, should have initially been channelled through our auxiliary representative. We have one, let's use him.

There are many other re-enactment groups in the UK covering the same Roman period as us. Auxiliaries are seen in these groups wearing braccæ. Are they too so misinformed or ill researched?

A rather warm and cosy Peronis.