

Brooches and burials: variability in expressions of identity in cemeteries of the Batavian *civitas*

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An underlying assumption of many analyses of burial rituals of the Roman period is that certain elements of the deceased's identity are communicated by relatives who perform the burial ritual. This may often be true for élite burials, especially those with stone monuments and inscriptions, but for the far more numerous, 'simple' cremation graves the meaning of the grave goods (if present) is open to debate. Many archaeologists acknowledge that we do not understand most of the ideas communicated in burial ritual, but the basic assumption that identity is expressed there is not often questioned. This paper aims to explore expressions of identity (the presence or absence of identity markers) in the burial grounds of the Dutch eastern river area, which roughly corresponds to the *civitas* of the Batavi, by focusing on certain groups of material culture, mainly brooches. It will be important to compare cemeteries of rural communities to those of central places, as well as explain the nature of the mortuary rituals studied. In the province of *Germania Inferior* cremation was the dominant rite in the Late Iron Age well into the Roman period, inhumation graves being very rare before the late 3rd c. Here we will consider the 1st-c. A.D. cemetery at Nijmegen–Museum Kamstraat, the late 1st-c. cemetery at Nijmegen–Onder Hees, and some 1st- to 3rd-c. cemeteries of rural communities, which consist exclusively of cremation graves.

Brooches are widely recognised as being markers of identity.¹ The choice of what brooch to wear is partly conditioned by the bearers' identities, in which aspects of gender, profession, wealth, age or religion can play a rôle. I will show that brooches, so numerous in settlements of the east river area, are conspicuously few in most funerary contexts, and argue that the absence of individual identity markers in the mortuary rituals is a hint of a strong group identity shared by rural communities; at the same time, some variability exists within different cemeteries, and in the town of Nijmegen identity markers are present far more often.

The many phases of the cremation ritual, and common assumptions about brooches

For a better understanding of the contexts in which brooches and other grave goods are deposited, it is necessary to consider the mortuary ritual. One can see the burial ritual as a rite of passage.² The ritual is performed in several steps, in which the individual is transformed from the living individual into a member of the group of ancestors.³ First, the descendants take their leave from the individual they knew. Second, his or her individuality is destroyed, mostly by burning the human remains. Third, the remains are collected and buried. This is part of the process of turning the former individual into a member of

1 S. Jundi and J. D. Hill, "Brooches and identity in first century AD Britain: more than meets the eye?" in C. Forcey, J. Hawthorne and R. Witcher (edd.), *TRAC 1997* (Oxford 1998) 125-37; H. Eckardt, "The social distribution of Roman artefacts: the case of nail-cleaners and brooches in Britain," *JRA* 18 (2005) 139-60.

2 Cf. R. Hertz, "The collective representation of death," in R. Needham and C. Needham (edd.), *Death and the right hand* (Aberdeen 1960) 27-86.

3 M. Bloch and J. Parry, "Introduction," in iid. (edd.), *Death and the regeneration of life* (Cambridge 1982) 1-44.