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Peasants and Monsters in Third-Century Gaul. Rethinking the Jupiter Columns

Chłopi i potwory w Galii w III wieku. Nowe spojrzenie na kolumny Jowisza

ABSTRACT

In his panegyric for Emperor Maximian, delivered on April 21, 289, the Gallic rhetor Mamertinus draws a significant parallel between the Giants defeated by Jupiter and Hercules, and the Bagaudae, rebellious peasants of Gaul subdued by the imperial armies led by Maximian Herculius. Although Mamertinus belonged to the wealthy and educated urban elite, who typically regarded peasants with disinterest or contempt, it is plausible that his imagery was inspired not only by classical myth but also by monuments distinctive to Gaul – namely, the Jupiter columns. These columns, depicting a horseman trampling an anguiped, likely derived from local religious motifs prevalent among the less Romanized inhabitants of the countryside. Despite Mamertinus' strongly negative depiction of the Bagaudae, his description hints at an interaction between rural traditions and the literary practices of the Romanized urban elite, suggesting a deeper cultural exchange than sources usually reveal.

Key words: Third-Century Crisis, Bagaudae, Latin Panegyrics, Jupiter columns, *Cavalier à l'anguipède*

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STRESZCZENIE

W panegiryku poświęconym cesarzowi Maksymianowi, wygłoszonym 21 kwietnia 289 r., galijsko-rzymski retoryk Mamertinus dokonuje znaczącej analogii między gigantami pokonanymi przez Jowisza i Herkulesa a Bagaudami, zbuntowanymi chłopami z Galii, pokonanymi przez cesarskie armie dowodzone przez Maksymiana Herkulesa. Chociaż Mamertinus należał do zamożnej i wykształconej elity miejskiej, która zazwyczaj traktowała chłopów z obojętnością lub pogardą, prawdopodobne jest, że zainspirował go nie tylko mit, ale także konkretne zabytki charakterystyczne dla Galii – mianowicie kolumny Jowisza. Kolumny te, z charakterystyczną ikonografią jeźdźca depczącego anguipedę, prawdopodobnie wywodzą się z lokalnych motywów religijnych popularnych wśród mało zromanizowanych mieszkańców wsi. Pomimo zdecydowanie negatywnego obrazu Bagaudów przedstawionego przez Mamertinusa, jego opis sugeruje interakcję między tradycjami wiejskimi a praktykami literackimi zromanizowanej elity miejskiej, co wskazuje na głębszą wymianę kulturową, niż zazwyczaj ujawniają źródła.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys III w., Bagaudowie, łacińskie panegiryki, kolumny Jowisza, *Cavalier à l'anguipède*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, major strides have been made in our understanding of the rural world in Roman times, thanks largely to new and extensive excavation campaigns. These investigations have unearthed a wide range of significant finds, including remains of dwellings, production units, pottery, and other artifacts. These discoveries provide valuable information about the living conditions of the men and women engaged in farming, who constituted the vast majority of the empire's population[1].

One of the most significant outcomes of these investigations has been to give greater historical depth to peasant communities, which have often been perceived in the past as almost completely immune to change and insulated from major historical developments. This new understanding allows for a more accurate assessment of the impact of political and military events on the countryside and its inhabitants. The new discoveries have also helped to correct the traditional image of the rural world as a separate, passive space, entirely subordinate to the city. Indeed, archaeological evidence has made it clear that the Roman countryside was far from isolated: it was fully integrated into the network of trade that crisscrossed

[1] See for example: L. Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2010; M. de Vos, *The Rural Landscape of Thugga: Farms, Presses, Mills, and Transport*, in: *The Roman Agricultural Economy: Organization, Investment, and Production*, eds. A. Bowman, A. Wilson, Oxford 2013; *The Roman Peasant Project 2009–2014: Excavating the Roman Rural Poor*, 2 vols., ed. K. Bowes, Philadelphia 2020; *The Archaeology of Peasantry in Roman Spain*, eds. J. Bermejo Tirado, I. Grau Mira, Berlin–Boston 2022.

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the Mediterranean basin, especially in the Italic Peninsula. Far from being separated from the city by insurmountable social and economic barriers, Roman peasants lived in a much more interconnected and dynamic context than was believed until a few decades ago. The analysis of everyday objects found at rural sites, and their comparison with similar artifacts from urban settings revealed, quite surprisingly, an extraordinary similarity. These and other comparisons have led to the conclusion that the rural world had wide access to the material culture of cities. As Kim Bowes and Cam Grey observe, 'differences are more of scale than of nature, of quantitative not qualitative character'[2]. These new perspectives allow us to better understand the complex and varied interactions between city and countryside in ancient Rome, highlighting how the countryside was not a passive reflection of urban dynamics, but rather an integrated and active part of the vast social and economic fabric of the empire[3].

Building on these premises, this study seeks to determine whether, even at the cultural and religious levels – areas on which archaeology typically provides very limited evidence – a similar degree of mutual exchange and influence between city and countryside can be identified. Specifically, the study will explore the interconnection between the culture of the Romanized urban elites and that of the rural classes in a specific area of the empire, namely Gaul[4].

This is undoubtedly a very complex subject, especially considering the scarcity of available sources and their often biased origins. Existing records predominantly reflect the perspectives of the upper strata of society, which generally show little interest in the peasantry except in relation to the management of large estates and the collection of rents[5]. In these sources, the peasantry is mostly mentioned when it poses a threat to the established order, such as during uprisings and revolts. In such

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[2] K. Bowes, C. Grey, *Conclusions: The Roman Peasant Reframed*, in: *The Roman*, p. 628.

[3] This is particularly emphasized by C. Grey, *Constructing Communities in the Late Roman Countryside*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 148–177.

[4] I have partially addressed this question in my book *Santi e sciamani. Una lettura storico-religiosa della Gallia tardoromana*, Milano–Udine 2022.

[5] See: D. Kehoe, *Investment in estates by upper-class landowners in early imperial Italy: The case of Pliny the Younger*, in: *De agricultura. In memoriam Pieter Willem de Neeve (1945–1990)*, eds. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg et al., Amsterdam 1993; D. Vera, *Simmaco e le sue proprietà: struttura e funzionamento di un patrimonio aristocratico del quarto secolo d.C.*, in: *Colloque genevois sur Symmaque à l'occasion du mille six centième anniversaire du conflit de l'autel de la Victoire*, eds. F. Pashoud, G. Fry, Y. Rütsche, Paris 1986, reprint in: D. Vera, *I doni di Cerere. Storie della terra nella tarda antichità (struttura, società, economia). Texte réunis par J.-M. Carrié*, Turnhout 2020; A. Giardina, *L'economia nel testo*, in *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica. I: La produzione del testo*, eds. G. Cavallo, P. Fedeli, A. Giardina, Roma 1989, pp. 424–431.

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instances, ancient authors usually show little benevolence and even less curiosity about the motives of the rioters. The reasons for discontent and violence are rarely investigated and are usually glossed over[6].

The aversion evident in ancient sources towards the rural plebeians has contributed to the notion that the city and countryside were two quite distinct and, to some extent, irreconcilable realities. This view is particularly emphasized with regard to the empire's western provinces: according to this perspective, the cities – home to institutions and monuments symbolizing Roman authority – acted as the primary centers for the Romanization of Rome's ruling classes. In contrast, the countryside, with its scattered settlements only superficially touched by Roman culture, is portrayed as largely alien and hostile to the Roman political and social order.

This interpretative model has been largely revised and corrected, particularly in its most rigid and schematic aspects. While Romanization did advance more slowly and unevenly in rural areas compared to urban environments, and pre-Roman traditions continued to influence rural populations long after their incorporation into the Roman provincial system, we now recognize that rural communities were not only integral to the empire's economic life but also engaged with the cultural and religious patterns of Roman civilization[7]. Furthermore, peasant communities were not merely passive recipients of content from urban centers; they actively participated in both material and cultural production, expressing their own unique characteristics in ways that are often as significant as those of urban contexts.

The case I will illustrate in the following pages – the sculptural group known in French-language studies as the *cavalier à l'anguipède* and in English as 'Jupiter columns' – provides an opportunity to examine some of the results of city-countryside contacts in the imperial period. This example sheds light on the interactions between Hellenistic-Roman culture and the indigenous culture of the Gallic peasants. It showcases the complex dynamics that took place between these environments and reveals the relationships of exchange, contamination, appropriation, and reworking of distinctive elements from both contexts.

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[6] See: R. Syme, *Tacitus*, Oxford 1958, pp. 443–450; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treasons, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire*, Cambridge MA–London 1967, pp. 192–241; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, Baltimore 1989, pp. 355–367; T. Gerhardt, *Unterschichten und soziale Konflikte*, in: *Die Zeit der Soldatenkaiser. Krise und Transformation des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert n.Chr (235–284)*, eds. K.-P. Johne, U. Hartmann, T. Gerhardt, Berlin 2008, p. 763.

[7] P. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 61–62; P. Garnsey et al., *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd edition, London–New York 2015, pp. 219–222.

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The *cavalier à l'anguipède* depicts a horseman trampling a deformed monster, the lower part of which ends in a snake's tail. This well-known artistic motif, exclusively attested in Gaul, likely derives from a local mythical and religious theme of pre-Roman origin. It began to be artistically expressed from the second century CE onward, utilizing the figurative techniques introduced by Hellenistic-Roman culture. The motif quickly gained popularity, with several dozen specimens discovered, especially in eastern Gaul, and it was subject to various interpretations and reworkings. For peasants, as we shall see shortly, it primarily represented a symbol of fertility and abundance, counteracting the dark forces of drought and famine. For the Romanized ruling classes and the soldiers stationed along the *limes*, by contrast, it symbolized victory over forces no less threatening than natural ones – namely, the barbarians beyond the Rhine. Thus, the same depiction was open to two divergent interpretations: an elite, 'high' reading and a popular, 'low' one. The tensions between these interpretations provide valuable insight into how rural and urban cultures intersected in this crucial part of the empire.

However, recognizing the dynamic nature of Roman Gaul's cultural framework and the interactions between rural and urban spheres does not diminish the differences between these two realities. On the contrary, it is crucial to acknowledge that the third century was marked by heightened social tensions and rivalries between town and countryside, as well as between the ruling classes and the rural masses. These tensions were exacerbated by the enormous economic and military difficulties the empire faced following the end of the Severan dynasty. In Gaul, this strife culminated in the outbreak of the Bagaudae revolt, a widespread popular uprising with a predominantly peasant character, which recurred throughout the following centuries until the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Exchanges and interactions could not bridge the gap between two worlds separated by conflicting economic interests and distinct social and cultural forms. Yet, even amid such conflict, the same artistic motif was invoked.

Before directly analyzing the *cavalier à l'anguipède*, it is useful to review the main historical coordinates of the period under consideration.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND GAUL IN THE THIRD CENTURY CE

In 235 CE, the death of Alexander Severus and the accession of Maximinus Thrax marked the beginning of a period of heightened political, military, and economic instability for Rome, often referred to as the 'military anarchy' or the 'third-century crisis'.

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There has been much debate in recent years about the continued use of these historiographical categories, which are rooted in outdated methodological approaches and a naively positivistic reading of sources. In particular, the concept of 'crisis' has been deemed inappropriate by many scholars, given its implicit association with the now largely discredited notion of 'decline'. Moreover, it fails to account for the significant regional differences within the diverse Roman imperial structure. For certain areas, such as the Rhine and Danubian territories, which faced frequent Germanic attacks and the movement of imperial armies, the third century was indeed a period of hardship. However, in other regions – particularly Africa – the period was marked by significant development and economic prosperity, as recent archaeological research has demonstrated[8].

Furthermore, alongside events with undoubtedly dire consequences for many Roman citizens – such as barbarian invasions, epidemics, religious persecutions, and severe currency devaluation – a cultural and religious ferment of unprecedented magnitude occurred in the third century, affecting all strata of the society, not only the urban elites. The emergence of Neoplatonism, the development of Christian apologetics, the spread of Eastern religions like Mithraism and Manichaeism, and innovations such as the extension of Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the empire all contributed to a profound transformation of imperial culture and society. This ushered in an age marked by significant experimentation and the introduction of innovative and original solutions[9].

The third century is an exceptionally multifaceted period, and its complexity cannot be fully captured by the reductive concept of 'crisis'. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the Roman Empire faced unprecedented challenges and dangers, coming close to dissolution. In the 260s, under the reigns of Gallienus and Claudius II Gothicus, these difficulties reached their peak, with the empire dividing into three sections, each primarily focused on its own survival: the *Imperium Galliarum* in the West, the Palmyrene Empire in the East and, in between, what remained of the great Mediterranean empire. It was not until the following decade that a series of energetic rulers, nearly all from Illyricum (today's

[8] See: O. Hekster, *Rome and Its Empire, AD 193–284*, Edinburgh 2008, pp. 31–36; D. Hoyer, *Turning the Inside Out: The Divergent Experiences of Gaul and Africa during the Third Century AD*, in: *Rome and the Worlds beyond its Frontiers*, eds. D. Slootjes, M. Peachin, Leiden–Boston 2016.

[9] See: K. Strobel, *Das Imperium Romanum im ‚3. Jahrhundert'. Modell einer historischen Krise?* Stuttgart 1993, pp. 285–297; W. Liebeschuetz, *Was There a Crisis of the Third Century?*, in: *Crises and the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Seventh Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire*, eds. O. Hekster, G. de Kleijn, D. Slootjes, Leiden–Boston 2007; K.-P. Johne, U. Hartmann, *Krise und Transformation des Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert*, in: *Die Zeit.*

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Balkan Peninsula), managed to reunify the empire and re-establish its borders. This reunification came at the cost of enormous sacrifices, which disrupted the traditional structure of the Roman state and paved the way for the radical restructuring envisioned by Diocletian and completed by Constantine[10]. Thus, the concept of crisis remains relevant to the third century – though with necessary qualifications – particularly in relation to frontier regions such as Gaul, where the impact of economic and military problems was felt more acutely than in other parts of the empire[11].

In 285, after fifty years of wars and usurpations, Diocletian, a seasoned general from Illyricum, became the sole emperor. Recognizing that the empire had become too vast and its dangers too great to be managed by a single ruler – as had been the norm until then – he acted decisively. In the autumn of that year, he conferred the title of Caesar on one of his old comrades-in-arms, Maximian, assigning him the specific task of suppressing the Bagaudae revolt that was raging in central and northern Gaul[12].

The term 'Bagauda' is likely of Celtic origin, meaning 'fighter' or 'warrior'[13]. According to the fourth-century historian Aurelius Victor, it was the inhabitants of Gaul who coined this term for the rioters[14]. However, Eutropius, another fourth-century historian, suggested that the rioters themselves adopted the name[15]. Since Eutropius, unlike

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[10] For an overview of the main political and military events of this period – which are not always easy to reconstruct due to the shortcomings of the sources – see: A. Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, London 1999, pp. 23–100; J. Drinkwater, *Maximinus to Diocletian and the „Crisis"*, in: *The Cambridge Ancient History, XII: The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193–337*, eds. A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey, A. Cameron, Cambridge 2005; O. Hekster, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–10.

[11] A. Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–20; A. Giardina, *La resilienza in un'epoca di angoscia*, "Futuro-Classico" 2015, 1, p. 50; C. Ferrari, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–57.

[12] A.K. Bowman, *Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, A.D. 284–305*, in: *The Cambridge*, p. 70; U. Roberto, *Diocleziano*, 2nd edition, Roma 2023, p. 51.

[13] S. Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Bagaudae*, in: *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplementband 11, *Abragila–Zengisa*, Stuttgart 1968, col. 347.

[14] Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus* 39.17–19: 'Namque ubi comperit Carini discessu Helianum Amandum que per Galliam excita manu agrestium ac latronum, quos Bagaudas incolae vocant, populatis late agris plerasque urbium tentare, Maximianum statim fidum amicitia quamquam semiagrestem, militiae tamen atque ingenio bonum imperatorem iubet. Huic postea cultu numinis Herculio cognomentum accessit, uti Valerio Iovium; unde etiam militaribus auxiliis longe in exercitum praestantibus nomen impositum. Sed Herculius in Galliam profectus fusis hostibus aut acceptis quieta omnia brevi patraverat'.

[15] Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Urbe condita* 9.20.3: 'Ita rerum Romanarum potitus, cum tumultum rusticani in Gallia concitassent et factioni suae Bacaudarum nomen inponerent, duces autem haberent Amandum et Aelianum, ad subigendos eos Maximianum Herculium Caesarem misit, qui levibus proeliis agrestes domuit et pacem Galliae reformavit'. See also Hieronymus, *Chronicon* 287: 'Diocletianus in consortium regni Herculium Maximianum

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the African Aurelius Victor, was probably a native of Gaul, he may have had more accurate information about the revolt, and 'Bagauda' might indeed have been the name chosen by the rebels to reflect their warlike nature and indomitable spirit[16]. Regardless, both Aurelius Victor and Eutropius agreed that the Bagaudae revolt primarily involved *agrestes* and *rustici*, that is, peasants.

Against whom or for what were these third-century Gallic peasants fighting? Unfortunately, we lack documents that directly convey the perspectives of those who participated in this revolt, and the available sources are silent regarding the motivations that drove thousands of peasants to revolt against Rome. To the Gallo-Roman elite, the Bagaudae were nothing more than *latrones*, marauders who threatened the established order and the very foundations of *civilitas*, and were therefore perceived as needing to be eliminated without hesitation.

It is possible to speculate that the harsh living conditions faced by much of Gaul's rural population, exacerbated by the severe economic and military crises of the mid-third century, lay at the root of the Bagaudae revolt. The violence and looting perpetrated by invaders from beyond the Rhine, the extremely heavy taxes imposed to sustain a large but ineffective army, and the gradual decline in the social status of peasants – culminating in their attachment to the land as decreed by Diocletian and his successors to secure tax revenues for the empire – were likely major factors driving many rural inhabitants of Gaul to rebel[17]. Despite past attempts to portray the Bagaudae uprising as an interclass revolt led by elements

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adsumit. Qui rusticorum multitudine oppressa, quae factioni suae Bacaudarum nomen indiderat, pacem Galliis reddidit'.

[16] B. Pottier, *Peut-on parler de révoltes populaires dans l'Antiquité tardive? Bagaudes et histoire sociale de la Gaule des IV^e^ et V^e^ siècles*, "Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome – Antiquité" 2011, 123, 2, p. 439 note 46.

[17] There are many excellent studies on the Bagaudae; see most recently: D. Lambert, *Salvian and the Bacaudae*, in: *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter. Kulturgeschichte einer Region*, eds. S. Diefenbach, G.M. Müller, Berlin–Boston 2014; A. D'Incà, *Martiri e briganti: la „Bagauda cristiana" e gli sviluppi della riflessione sul martirio nella Gallia tardoantica e altomedievale*, Trapani 2016; J. Grant Couper, *Gallic Insurgencies? Annihilating the Bagaudae*, in: *Brill's Companion to Insurgency and Terrorism in the Ancient Mediterranean*, eds. T. Howe, L.L. Brice, Leiden–Boston 2016. The following contributions also remain very useful: E.A. Thompson, *Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Gaul and Spain*, "Past & Present" 1952, 2; B. Czúth, *Die Quellen der Geschichte der Bagauden*, Szeged 1965; J.C. Sánchez León, *Les sources de l'histoire des Bagaudes: traduction et commentaire*, Paris 1996; C.E. Minor, *Reclassifying the Bacaudae: Some Reasons for Caution*, part 1, *Who Were the Third-Century Bacaudae?*, "The Ancient World" 1997, 28, 2.

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of the Gallic ruling classes to break away from Roman control[18], it should instead be understood as an expression of despair and resistance by Gaul's peasants against a system that not only failed to protect them but also contributed to their exploitation and misery.

Maximian, however, was resolute. The Bagaudae had dared to revolt against Rome and needed to be suppressed. Arriving in Gaul in the spring of 286 at the head of a large and well-trained army, Diocletian's Caesar faced the poorly armed and undisciplined rebels with determination. He swiftly gained the upper hand, restoring the peace demanded by the landed aristocracy and urban elites. As a reward for his valuable service, Diocletian elevated Maximian to the rank of co-emperor, granting him the title of Augustus. Despite this elevation, however, Diocletian's pre-eminence remained undisputed, effectively symbolized through religious imagery: Diocletian as Jupiter, king of the gods, and Maximian as Hercules, his devoted son and protector. This portrayal not only affirmed the balance of power between the two rulers but also celebrated their concord and cooperation in governing the empire, signifying the end of the era of usurpations and civil wars[19].

The repression of the Bagaudae and Maximian's rise as co-emperor marked the beginning of a phase of restructuring and consolidation of imperial power. Maximian's disciplined approach, combined with Diocletian's strategic vision, played a key role in establishing a new order capable of addressing the serious internal and external threats that had strained the empire in previous decades. The symbolism of Jupiter and Hercules became a powerful instrument for legitimizing their rule, evoking the idea of a divine and invincible power destined to protect and guide Rome toward a renewed period of stability and prosperity.

MONSTERS AND BAGAUDAE

In a significant passage from the panegyric delivered in Trier on April 21, 289, the Gallic rhetor Mamertinus highlights Maximian's military operations against the Bagaudae and his subsequent appointment as Augustus through a striking comparison:

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[18] See: R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Berkeley 1986, pp. 25–58. This interpretation is also based on a few coins depicting Amandus, one of the leader of the third-century Bagaudae, as an Augustus, although their authenticity is far from certain, see: A. Omissi, *Emperors and Usurpers in the Later Roman Empire: Civil War, Panegyric and the Construction of Legitimacy*, Oxford 2018, p. 76 note 4.

[19] U. Roberto, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–56, 60–65.

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'[Y]ou came to the aid of the Roman name, as it faltered, at the side of the leader, with that same timely assistance as your Hercules once lent to your Jupiter, when he was beset with difficulties in his war with the Earthborn. Hercules then gained a great part of the victory, and proved that he had not so much received heaven from the gods as restored it to them. Was it not similar to that calamity of the two-shaped monsters in our lands, I know not whether to say suppressed by your bravery, Caesar, or calmed by your mercy? Inexperienced farmers sought military garb; the plowman imitated the infantryman, the shepherd the cavalryman, the rustic ravager of his own crops the barbarian enemy. This I pass over in haste, for I see that such are your dutiful feelings that you prefer that victory to be cast into oblivion rather than glorified'[20].

Mamertinus, demonstrating a keen understanding of Diocletian's symbolism, compares Maximian's campaign against the Bagaudae to the mythical struggle of Hercules against the Giants, the monstrous offspring of Earth and Uranus[21]. Just as Hercules was welcomed into heaven by Jupiter for his crucial aid to the Olympian gods in their battle against the 'Earthborn', so was Maximian Herculius elevated to the rank of Augustus by Diocletian Jovius following his victory over the rebellious rustics. The comparison is further reinforced by the monstrous depiction of their adversaries: like the Giants – half-man, half-snake beings – the Bagaudae are presented as grotesquely dual-natured, being at once peasants and soldiers. Mamertinus emphasizes this monstrous vision, which subverts the laws of nature, not only to exalt the salvific role of the imperial duo but also to justify the violent repression against the rebels, portrayed as aberrant creatures emerging from the earth.

Mamertinus' reference to Maximian's clemency is also particularly intriguing, suggesting that the Augustus did not seek a complete victory

[20] *Panegyrici Latini* 2 (10) 4.2–4: 'praecipitanti Romano nomini iuxta principem subivisti eadem scilicet auxilii opportunitate qua tuus Hercules Iovem vestrum quondam terrigenarum bello laborantem magna victoriae parte iuvit probavitque se non magis a dis accepisse caelum quam eisdem reddidisse. An non illud malum simile monstrorum biformium in hisce terris fuit quod tua, Caesar, nescio utrum magis fortitudine repressum sit an clementia mitigatum, cum militaris habitus ignari agricolae appetiverunt, cum arator peditem, cum pastor equitem, cum hostem barbarum suorum cultorum rusticus vastator imitatus est?'. For the translation see: C.E.V. Nixon, B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The* Panegyrici Latini. *Introduction, Translation, and Historical Commentary with the Latin Text of R.A.B. Mynors*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1994, pp. 60–61. Although disputed by some scholars, Mamertinus's authorship of this panegyric – as well as of the following one (3 [11]), delivered on the occasion of Maximian's birthday in 291 – has been defended by M.S. de Trizio in *Panegirico di Mamertino per Massimiano e Diocleziano (*Panegyrici Latini *2[10])*, ed. M.S. de Trizio, Bari 2009, pp. 11–13.

[21] Hesiodus, *Theogonia* 182–185; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.6.1–2.

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over the Bagaudae – nor was this likely his intention – but rather adopted a strategy of containment. This approach involved eliminating the movement's most ardent leaders and supporters, dispersing the rest, and ensuring their return to their agricultural duties[22]. Despite this leniency, Mamertinus' depiction of the peasants remains highly negative. This demonization reflects the perceptions of the higher social strata, to which the rhetor belonged, viewing the rebels not only as a threat to order but also as violators of natural and social norms, who needed to be forcefully repressed. The symbolism of Hercules and Jupiter served to legitimize the power of Diocletian and Maximian, justifying their harsh and uncompromising response to any threat – internal or external – to the stability of the empire[23].

Mamertinus thus aligned himself with the official image promoted by imperial propaganda, portraying the rulers as divine figures tasked with maintaining cosmic order and justice. However, in his emphatic depiction of the victory over the Bagaudae, there may be more than a mere celebration of Diocletian and Maximian's authority. Indeed, Mamertinus' text seems to inadvertently offer a glimpse into the segment of society that had become a threat to Rome and which he sought to denigrate. By describing the Bagaudae as two-shaped monsters born of the earth, Mamertinus may have drawn not only from the myth of Hercules but also from other, less official and more rustic traditions, such as those expressed in the so-called Jupiter columns. The complexity of third-century Gallic society, where the ruling classes and rural population interacted more extensively than most written sources indicate, supports this hypothesis.

THE JUPITER COLUMNS

Jupiter columns are a distinctive type of monument found exclusively in Gaul, particularly in the central and eastern regions. These columns are characterized by a statue of Jupiter, the father of the gods, positioned at the top. He is depicted either sitting, standing, or, more commonly, on horseback, crushing an anguiped – a monstrous creature that is half-man and half-snake – under his hooves. This sculptural group is commonly referred to in French-language historiography

[22] U. Roberto, *op. cit.*, p. 54. See also *Panegyrici Latini* 3 (11) 5.3: 'non dico exacerbatas saeculi prioris iniuriis per clementiam vestram ad obsequium redisse provincias'.

[23] D. Lassandro, Sacratissimus Imperator. *L'immagine del* princeps *nell'oratoria tardoantica*, Bari 2000, pp. 41–48.

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as the *cavalier à l'anguipède*[24]. The exact meaning of this image and its exclusive occurrence in Gaul have been debated for over a century[25]. Several hypotheses have been proposed, but it is plausible that these representations were originally associated with religious concepts specific to the Gallic region. They likely depicted a deity unique to the local Celtic pantheon, similar to Epona, the equine goddess of fertility and abundance, or Cernunnos, the deer-horned god, both of whom are attested predominantly in Gallic territory[26].

From a formal perspective, Jupiter columns exhibit influences from both Greek and Roman prototypes. For example, the depiction of the anguiped on Gallic monuments typically combines human features in the upper body with serpent or triton characteristics in the lower body, possibly inspired by the Giants on the famous frieze of the Pergamon altar[27]. This influence may have been transmitted via the Gigantomachy depicted on the Porte Noire ('Black Gate') of Besançon, a triumphal arch likely erected under the reign of emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180), which vividly portrays the epic struggle between the Olympians and the offspring of Earth and Uranus[28]. Additionally, historical records indicate that in 91 CE, an equestrian statue of Domitian was erected in the Roman Forum. This statue portrayed the emperor triumphantly advancing while symbolically trampling the captive Rhine emerging from the earth[29].

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[24] See: C. Sterckx, *Le cavalier et l'anguipède, partie 1*, "Ollodagos" 1991–1992, 3, pp. 1–107; G. Woolf, *Representation as cult: the case of the Jupiter columns*, in: *Religion in den germanischen Provinzen Roms*, eds. W. Spickermann, H. Cancik, J. Rüpke, Tübingen 2001, and, more recently, F. Blanchard, *Jupiter dans les Gaules et les Germanies. Du Capitole au cavalier à l'anguipède*, Rennes 2015.

[25] For an overview see: F. Blanchard, *Jupiter*, *cit*., p. 105.

[26] See: S. Boucher, *Epona, in: Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, vol. 5, part 1, *Herakles-Kenchrias*, Zürich–München 1990, pp. 985–999; M. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*, London–New York 1992, pp. 204–207 and 230–234; S. Deyts, *Images des dieux de la Gaule*, Paris 1992, pp. 25–57.

[27] F. Benoit, *Le 'dieu à l'anguipède' de Straubing*, "Latomus" 1952, 11, p. 471; S. Deyts, *op. cit*., p. 105.

[28] W. Hélène, *La Porte Noire de Besançon. Contribution à l'étude de l'art triomphale des Gaules*, 2 vols., Besançon 1986, pp. 315–316; F. Blanchard, *Un témoignage du culte de Jupiter dans la cité des Arvernes: la redécouverte du cavalier à l'anguipède d'Égliseneuve-près-Billom*, "Bulletin archéologique" 2013, 37, p. 142.

[29] See: G.C. Picard, *Imperator Caelestium*, "Gallia" 1977, 35, p. 93; D. Gricourt, D. Hollard, *Taranis,* caelestium deorum maximus, "Dialogues d'histoire ancienne" 1991, 17, pp. 344–345. F. Blanchard, *Jupiter*, p. 108, refers to another statue of Domitian, fragments of which were found at Misenum. This statue depicted the emperor galloping, modeled after the famous equestrian statue of Alexander the Great created by Lysippus to commemorate the battle of the Granicus.

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Regarding the adornment of the bases of the Jupiter columns, which are often divided into two sections – the lower one typically decorated with images of deities such as Juno, Minerva, Mercury, and Hercules, and the upper one with planetary gods connected to the days of the week – Bauchhenß and Noelke have proposed that a possible prototype for these decorations could be a monument from the Neronian era erected in *Mogontiacum* (modern-day Mainz)[30].

Nevertheless, alongside the undeniably Hellenistic-Roman models, the Jupiter columns also feature elements that trace back to a distinct local religious and symbolic heritage. One such element is the wheel, a symbol of thunder, occasionally held by the father of the gods instead of lightning bolts. Scholars have noted that the wheel is associated with Taranis, a Celtic deity who, following the Roman conquest, was assimilated with the Latin Jupiter[31]. This suggests that, alongside the official Roman cultural tradition, the image of the horseman triumphing over the anguiped should be understood as part of a popular and local tradition rooted in religious customs predating Rome's conquest[32].

Another intriguing feature is the armor and the *paludamentum* (military cloak) typically depicted on the representations of Jupiter on the columns. This detail has led to speculation that the monument might represent not the father of the gods, but rather the Roman emperor, assimilated to the supreme deity, triumphing over enemies depicted as monstrous adversaries to be vanquished[33]. This interpretation could apply to certain columns, particularly those erected near the *limes*. However, it must be acknowledged that the original meaning of the Jupiter columns likely differed. Based on their stylistic attributes, the earliest Jupiter columns are dated to the mid-second century CE – well before the military challenges along the Rhine frontier that defined the third century and might

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[30] G. Bauchhenß, P. Noelke, *Die Iupitersäulen in den germanischen Provinzen*, Köln–Bonn 1981, p. 35.

[31] B. Rémy, A. Buisson, *Les inscriptions commémorant la chute de la foudre dans les provinces romaines de la Gaule. À propos d'un nouveau document découvert à Saint-Geoire-en-Valdaine (Isère)*, "Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise" 1992, 25, pp. 83–104; S. Deyts, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–101. For a discussion on the symbolism of the wheel see esp.: C. Sterckx, *Le cavalier, partie 1*, pp. 34–78.

[32] S. Deyts, *op. cit.*, p. 105; M. Green, *op. cit.*, p. 207; F. Blanchard, *Jupiter*, pp. 87–90.

[33] See: W. Van Andringa, *Religions and the Integration of Cities in the Empire in the Second Century AD: The Creation of a Common Religious Language*, in: *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. J. Rüpke, Malden 2007, p. 94 (who notes that in Egypt, gods such as Horus, Bes or Anubis were represented 'in Roman military attire, following the example of cuirassed imperial statues'); F. Blanchard, *Jupiter*, pp. 108–109.

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have prompted the erection of monuments to invoke divine (and imperial) protection against Germanic peoples.

Moreover, the depiction of Jupiter on horseback is highly unusual in classical iconography, suggesting it may reflect local influences, possibly associated with a solar cult. This hypothesis is supported by the plant motifs (stylized representations of bark and leaves) depicted on the shaft of Jupiter columns, likely symbolizing an oak – the sacred tree of the Celts – or the World Tree, a concept found in various Indo-European traditions as the axis supporting heaven and earth[34].

These observations trace the origin of the sculptural group of the *cavalier à l'anguipède* back to the religious milieu of pre-Roman Gaul. Even after the conquest, this milieu continued to serve as a fundamental reference, especially for rural populations less fully integrated into the process of Roman acculturation. While the artistic means of expression were rooted in the Greco-Roman tradition, the divine horseman depicted on Jupiter columns only partially aligned with the official Roman deity[35]. The resulting iconography was a hybrid form, reflecting cultural interaction and capable of diverse interpretations depending on the observer's perspective[36].

Supporting this hypothesis is an additional aspect that has not been sufficiently emphasized: Jupiter columns were discovered in various contexts – urban, sacred, and notably rural. This diversity suggests that the primary reason for erecting Jupiter columns, and the meanings attributed to them, varied according to circumstances and context[37]. This variability also helps explain the widespread popularity of this iconography in Gaul. In urban settings, Jupiter columns may have been erected as symbols celebrating the triumph of *civilitas* and the power of the emperor and the city, representing order over chaos. In sacred contexts, particularly in the vicinity of shrines, the significance of Jupiter columns likely assumed a more explicitly religious character. The figure of Jupiter, depicted in armor and on horseback, would have served as a potent

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[34] G.C. Picard, *op. cit.*, p. 107–109; C. Sterckx, *Le cavalier*, *partie 1*, pp. 31–33; idem, *Le cavalier et l'anguipède*, *partie 3*, "Ollodagos" 1994, 6, pp. 1–19; D. Gricourt, D. Hollard, *op. cit.*, p. 376; M. Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 207–208.

[35] See: E. Schallmayer, *Der Torso eines Jupitergigantenreiters aus Ettlingen, Kreis Karlsruhe*, "Fundberichte aus Baden-Württemberg" 1982, 7, p. 309; C. Sterckx, *Le cavalier*, *partie 1*, p. 27–28; D. Gricourt, D. Hollard, *op. cit.*, p. 385: 'S'il y a assimilation par interprétation, elle reste très partielle et relève du domaine de la juxtaposition'.

[36] F. Benoit, *op. cit.*, p. 469.

[37] É. Thévenot, *Divinités et sanctuaires de la Gaule*, Paris 1968, p. 30; G. Woolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 118 and 129; F. Blanchard, *De Taranis au Jupiter cavalier à l'anguipède: réflexions autour du substrat celtique dans la religion gallo-romaine*, in: *Celtic Religions in the Roman Period: Personal, Local, and Global*, eds. R. Haeussler, A. King, Aberystwyth 2017, p. 320.

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intermediary between the divine and the earthly realms, ensuring divine protection and favor for the faithful.

Lastly, in rural settings such as those around Clermont-Ferrand in central Gaul, where several Jupiter columns have been discovered, it is improbable that these monuments were erected to glorify the city's civilizing influence or to invoke the emperor's protection against barbarian threats. A more plausible interpretation, firstly proposed by Pierre-François Fournier and Émile Thévenot[38] and later developed by Daniel Gricourt and Dominique Hollard, suggests that in rural contexts the depiction of the divine horseman trampling the anguiped represented a local religious concept through classical artistic forms, closely tied to the beliefs of the agricultural world. Gricourt and Hollard, drawing comparisons with similar concepts found in other Indo-European cultures such as Vedic India and the Baltic regions, convincingly argued that the *cavalier à l'anguipède* should be viewed as a symbolic representation of the conflict between the supreme celestial deity – protector of cosmic order and bestower of prosperity – and the chthonic demon associated with drought and famine. The defeat of the chthonic demon by the celestial god symbolizes the return of rain and fertility to the fields, which explains why many Jupiter columns have been found near lakes and rivers[39].

This hypothesis gains credibility from the fact that in Gaul, the figure of Jupiter appears to have had a pronounced agricultural significance. This is evident in inscriptions such as the one found at Saint-Zacharie in southern France, where Jupiter is referred to as *frugifer*, and another from Lescure in the Ariège, which describes Jupiter as *auctor bonarum tempestatium*, 'the originator of favorable weather'[40]. These inscriptions indicate that Jupiter was worshipped in Gaul as a deity associated with the fertility of the fields and the abundance of harvests, reinforcing the notion of a close link between Jupiter columns and local agricultural religious practices.

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[38] P.-F. Fournier, *Le dieu cavalier à l'anguipède dans la cité des Arvernes*, "Revue archéologique du Centre" 1962, 1, 2, pp. 105–127; É. Thevenot, *op. cit.*, p. 39. See also: J.-J. Hatt, *Mythes et dieux de la Gaule*, vol. 1, *Les grandes divinités masculines*, Paris 1989, p. 182.

[39] D. Gricourt, D. Hollard, *op. cit.*, pp. 346–355 and 381–384. See also: F. Blanchard, *Le cavalier à l'anguipède d'Égliseneuve-près-Billom rejoint les collections du musée Bargoin à Clermont-Ferrand, 170 ans après sa découverte*, "Antiquités Nationales" 2019, 49, pp. 27–38; R. Nicolle, *Les dieux de l'Orage Jupiter et Tarhunna. Essai de religion comparée*, Paris 2018, pp. 150–151 and 289–290.

[40] D. Gricourt, D. Hollard, *op. cit.*, p. 351. Saint-Zacharie: *CIL* XII, 336; Lescure: *CIL* XIII, 6.

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ICONOGRAPHY AND REBELLION: JUPITER COLUMNS AND THE BAGAUDAE

One of the primary reasons behind the widespread adoption and enduring success of Jupiter columns in Gaul lies in the local origin of the central iconographic motif – the celestial deity triumphing over the chthonic demon of famine. This element, combined with forms and symbols inherent to Greco-Roman artistic traditions, resulted in a monument of considerable power and adaptability, capable of addressing the specific needs of various Gallic communities, whether urban or rural[41]. For urban residents and soldiers stationed along the borders, accustomed to the forms of official imperial propaganda, the figure depicted on Jupiter columns represented the father of the gods – a symbol of power, security, and the triumph of *civilitas* over the irrational and chaotic forces embodied by Rome's adversaries. In contrast, for rural inhabitants, the appeal was primarily to the supreme celestial deity – first Taranis, later Jupiter – associated with the cycles of sun and rain, the agricultural calendar, and the protection of harvests against natural elements that could jeopardize field fertility and pose the ultimate threat of famine.

We can never be certain whether the primary meanings attributed to Jupiter columns by these two 'educational communities'[42] were mutually understood, though such a possibility cannot be excluded. Nonetheless, it is crucial to emphasize the intimate interplay between local folk elements and Greco-Roman influences evident in the Jupiter columns. This relationship suggests a multitude of connections between rural and urban spheres.

The artistic techniques derived from Hellenistic-Roman iconographic traditions, introduced in Gaul following the Roman conquest, extended even to rural communities. While these communities employed these artistic forms in a less refined manner compared to urban workshops, they adapted them to express their own beliefs through figurative imagery[43]. This resulted in original symbols and images that blended high culture elements – such as the Gigantomachy or equestrian statues – with those indigenous to pre-Roman culture, like the wheel and World Tree. The complexity of these monuments and their varied meanings, which

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41 G.C. Picard, *op. cit.*, p. 109–113; R. Kousser, *A sacred landscape: The creation, maintenance, and destruction of religious monuments in Roman Germany*, "Res" 2010, 57/58, pp. 122–123.

42 For educational communities in late antique Gaul see: Gallia docta? *Education and In-/Exclusion in Late Antique Gaul*, eds. T.L. Meurer, V. Egetenmeyr, Tübingen 2023.

43 See: R. MacMullen, *The Celtic Renaissance*, "Historia" 1965, 14, pp. 93–104, reprint in: idem, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary*, Princeton 1990, pp. 41–48.

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differ depending on context and viewer, point to a multifaceted and dynamic interaction between local cultures and Roman authority – an interaction that is only beginning to be fully appreciated[44].

These considerations prompt a return to the initial question: the inspiration behind Mamertinus' description of the Bagaudae and the potential connection between the panegyric and the Jupiter columns. Specifically, does Mamertinus' portrayal of the Bagaudae as monstrous beings with a dual nature (*monstra biformia*) exclusively draw from the grand archetype of the Gigantomachy?[45] Or could it be speculated that the widespread presence of Jupiter columns in Gaul – featuring a horseman overcoming an anguiped – may have influenced his depiction?

This issue has already been addressed, though not completely satisfactorily. Several years ago, Domenico Lassandro – who has produced significant works on the Bagaudae and Latin panegyrics – argued, based on Mamertinus' passage, that the Jupiter column discovered in Merten, near Trier, in the late 19th century and now housed at the Musée de la Cour d'Or in Metz, depicts Maximian triumphing over a Bagauda. Lassandro observed that 'in the image of the two-formed monster defeated by the emperor, both the panegyrist Mamertinus and the sculptor of Metz encapsulate the sense of fear that the Bagaudae must have instilled in the wealthy citizens of Romanized Gaul and the relief and gratitude of the inhabitants of Trier and its environs for deliverance from such a frightening evil'[46]. According to the Italian scholar, the Gallic environ-

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[44] A similar argument can be made regarding temples built in Gaul after the Roman conquest. In many cases, they were constructed over pre-Roman shrines, incorporating the older structures. An example of this are the shrines at Gournay-sur-Aronde and Vertault, where the Roman temple was built over sacrificial pits in which the remains of sacrificed animals were left to putrefy. According to C. Moser, *The Architecture of Changing Sacrificial Practices in Pre-Roman and Roman Gaul*, in: *Beyond Boundaries: Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome*, eds. S.E. Alcock, M. Egri, J.F.D. Frakes, Los Angeles 2016, p. 185: 'outward appearances may have become more Roman-like, but some memories of the experiences of pre-Roman sacrifice, some sense of 'cult continuity' is manifest in the careful preservation, maintenance, and material emphasis on the sacral character of the exact setting of the earlier ritual'.

[45] As noted by C.E.V. Nixon, B.S. Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 60: 'the war between the Giants and the Olympians, aided by Hercules, is a recurrent theme on coins and monuments of the Tetrarchic period'.

[46] D. Lassandro, *Sacratissimus*, pp. 50–51: 'Nell'immagine del ‚mostro biforme' sconfitto dall'imperatore, tanto il panegirista Mamertino, quanto lo scultore di Metz racchiudono, sinteticamente, sia il senso di paura che i Bagaudi dovettero incutere nei ricchi cittadini della Gallia romanizzata, sia il sentimento di sollievo e di riconoscenza degli abitanti di Treviri e dintorni per la liberazione da un male così spaventoso [...]'. See also: idem, Paneg. *10 (2), 4 ed un gruppo statuario del Museo di Metz*, "Invigilata Lucernis" 1987, 9, pp. 81–82.

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ment did not influence the text of the panegyric at all; it was in fact the text that shaped the monument. In his view, 'the panegyrist's passage could almost be considered an explanatory caption for the monument itself'[47]. Essentially, Lassandro believed that both Mamertinus' text and the Jupiter column from Merten, as well as others found in areas affected by the Bagaudae revolt, drew exclusively from the 'high' model represented by the artistic and literary tradition of the Gigantomachy, which effectively served imperial ideology.

However, this interpretation is not convincing for at least two reasons. First, as noted above, although the figure on the Jupiter columns often wears a breastplate, he does not represent the emperor per se but rather the supreme deity Jupiter, as indicated by the lightning bolt – or alternatively, the wheel – he holds in his hand. Therefore, even if we accept that the artist intended to depict an emperor endowed with the features of Jupiter, it would be more plausible to identify him as Diocletian Jovius, rather than Maximian Herculius, as Lassandro claims.

Second, the proposed *terminus post quem* of 286 for the Jupiter column in Merten appears excessively late. The Jupiter columns that have been securely dated based on their inscriptions were erected over a period of approximately eighty years, between 170 and 246, with the earliest likely dating to the first half of the second century[48]. Thus, it is more plausible that the Merten column, like all Jupiter columns found so far, predates Maximian's campaign in Gaul and originally bore no relation to the Bagaudae revolt. Additionally, I concur with Jean Gricourt's insightful 1953 study, which posits that Mamertinus's portrayal of the Bagaudae as *monstra biformia* was likely influenced by the Jupiter columns. These columns, prominently displayed in both urban and rural settings throughout Gaul, would have been readily visible to Mamertinus and his contemporaries. Given their widespread presence and distinctive imagery, it is reasonable to assume that the rhetorician drew upon these local monuments for inspiration, integrating their symbolic elements into his depiction of the Bagaudae[49].

Lassandro's hypothesis is accepted by L. Cracco Ruggini, *Établissements militaires, martyrs bagaudes et traditions romaines dans la* Vita Baboleni, "Historia" 1995, 44, pp. 107–108 and by M.S. de Trizio in: *Panegirico*, p. 80. This hypothesis was first proposed by O. Hoffmann, *Die Bagaudensäule von Merten im Museum zu Metz*, "Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Lothringische Geschichte und Altertumskunde in Metz" 1888–1889, 1.

[47] D. Lassandro, *Sacratissimus*, p. 50: 'il passo del panegirista potrebbe in un certo qual modo essere considerato quasi didascalia esplicativa del monumento stesso'.

[48] G. Bauchhenß, P. Noelke, *op. cit.*, p. 27; F. Blanchard, *Un témoignage*, pp. 142–143.

[49] See: J. Gricourt, *Mamertin et le Jupiter à l'anguipède*, "Latomus"1953, 12, p. 317. Moreover, on p. 319, Gricourt argues that in his second panegyric, dated 291, Mamertinus also

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This conclusion leads us to one final consideration. As noted, most Jupiter columns originated from rural contexts. Their coarse and stylistically simple craftmanship confirms that they were created by and for rural communities, within which the Bagaudae revolt erupted toward the end of the third century[50]. For the peasants of Gaul, the image of Jupiter-Taranis crushing the anguiped likely symbolized the triumph of good over evil, representing the celestial deity's victory over the dark, chthonic forces associated with famine and starvation. This parallels, for example, the practice of sixteenth-century peasants in Northern Italy, who placed crosses in their stables and properties as a means of protection against years of poor harvests and famine[51]. In Mamertinus' panegyric, however, the monstrous anguiped serves a different purpose: to demonize the enemies of the established order, namely the Bagaudae. Paradoxically, these enemies were the very rural dwellers, connected to pre-Roman traditions, who had contributed to the creation of the artistic motif of the *cavalier à l'anguipède*, using the image of the celestial horseman trampling the anguiped to express a religious concept distinct from imperial culture.

In essence, the meaning of the *cavalier à l'anguipède* varied significantly depending on the context in which it was embraced – whether by rural or urban society, peasants or members of the upper classes. The horseman triumphing over the anguiped shifted from symbolizing fertility to representing the victory of order over chaos, embodying the emperor's success against external enemies and, later, through Mamertinus, against the rebellious Bagaudae. This process of reworking and adaptation illustrates how culture – both material and symbolic – is shaped by complex, multidirectional exchanges involving borrowing, acquisition, and reinterpretation.

Of course, this does not imply that Mamertinus, in depicting Maximian's triumph over the Bagaudae as Hercules vanquishing the Giants, relied solely on the Jupiter columns. As a member of the educated ruling elite, Mamertinus would have drawn upon a broad array of references. The numerous allusions to mythology, particularly the Hercules myth, throughout his panegyrics indicate that his primary inspiration was

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refers to Jupiter columns when recalling Jupiter's victory over the Giants, who are once again described as *monstra biformia*. See *Panegyrici Latini* 3 (11) 3.4: 'Ille siquidem Diocletiani auctor deus praeter depulsos quondam caeli possessione Titanas et mox biformium bella monstrorum perpeti cura quamvis compositum gubernat imperium atque hanc tantam molem infatigabili manu voluit omniumque rerum ordines ac vices pervigil servat'.

[50] J.-Y. Eveillard, Y. Maligorne, *Colonnes de Jupiter en Bretagne: trois exemples attestés*, "Revue archéologique de l'Ouest" 1996, 13, pp. 157–168.

[51] See: A. Prosperi, *Croci nei campi e anime alla porta. Religione popolare e disciplina tridentina nelle campagne padane del Cinquecento*, in: idem, *Paure e devozioni*, Macerata 2024.

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the literary tradition, familiar to him and his audience[52]. Yet the widespread presence of Jupiter columns in Gaul, where the panegyric was composed and delivered, likely influenced Mamertinus' decision to depict the Bagaudae as anguipeds. Despite having numerous options from the rich mythical cycle of Hercules, which is filled with monsters and terrifying creatures, Mamertinus chose to represent the rebellious peasants as anguipeds. The opportunity to draw connections between the surrounding environment and the mythological realm, creating a reflective interplay between the present and the timeless world of myth, must have been too compelling for him to ignore.

As previously noted, the rural inhabitants who erected these columns to protect their fields had themselves been influenced by artistic models from Greek and Roman iconographic traditions. Therefore, distinguishing between 'borrowers' and 'lenders' in this context is particularly challenging. What can be stated with certainty is that, during the second and third centuries CE in Gaul, the interaction between 'high' and 'low' culture, urban and rural worlds, produced remarkable creations. This dynamic is evident in various traces, including those found in the Jupiter columns and Mamertinus' seemingly straightforward panegyric text.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Gaul, as in other parts of the Roman empire, a significant divide separated the peasant and urban spheres – two cultural domains often perceived as vastly different. However, this division did not preclude interaction, the exchange of information, and shared experiences between rural communities and urban elites. This is exemplified by the origin of the motif of the *cavalier à l'anguipède* and its adaptation in the panegyric for Maximian. Written in the late third century, this text by Gallic rhetor Mamertinus appropriated a popular artistic and religious motif from Gaul's rural milieu, redeploying it to portray the rebellious peasants known as the Bagaudae.

While illustrating a connection between rural and urban spheres, Mamertinus' panegyric also highlights the increasing divide between these two realities. By the end of the third century, the Roman state had entered a new era marked by increased centralization and greater reliance on coercion compared to earlier periods. Society became more hierarchical, with expanding economic, social, and cultural disparities between

[52] J. Gricourt, *op. cit.*, p. 320; *Panegirico*, pp. 23–25. See *Panegyrici Latini* 2 (10) 1.3, 2.1, 13.5; 3 (11) 3.6, 9.5, 10.5.

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the lower and upper strata[53]. Mamertinus' disdain for the peasantry, evident in his portrayal of rebellious peasants as grotesque anguipeds, reflects this growing polarization between town and country, *honestiores* and *humiliores*. This divide would continue to deepen over the course of the following century.

To be sure, in Roman thought, the peasant long epitomized the ideal citizen: dedicated to the cultivation of his land, living a modest and pious life, ever ready to defend the state in times of need and danger. This ideal was embodied by figures like Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, famously summoned from his plow to accept the dictatorship[54]. However, by the second and third centuries CE, this conception had undergone profound change. With the transition from the Republic to the Principate, the army of Italian peasant-soldiers that once led the conquest of the Mediterranean had been replaced by professional troops permanently engaged in military service and frontier defense[55].

Furthermore, in the provinces – especially in the western regions such as Gaul, Spain, and Britain – rural communities often remained on the fringes of Romanization[56]. They were only superficially affected by the introduction of Latin, the adoption of new religious practices, changes in legal administration, and other cultural transformations, while remaining rooted in customs and traditions that city dwellers likely viewed with puzzlement and suspicion. When these rural inhabitants, such as the Bagaudae, took up arms against Rome, they were perceived as monstrous adversaries that needed to be suppressed and eradicated.

Facing increasing economic and social pressure imposed by Rome, rural communities sought ways to escape the empire's suffocating control. By the fifth century, when Bagaudae revolts occurred in Gaul and Spain on a larger scale than in the third century, the Christian author Salvian of Marseilles wrote that impoverished Gallic peasants preferred joining barbarian groups rather than enduring Roman servitude[57]. While Salvian may have exaggerated, his assertion undoubtedly contains a kernel of truth.

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53 U. Roberto, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–164.

54 P. Garnsey, *Cities, Peasants and Food in Classical Antiquity: Essays in Social and Economic History*, ed. with addenda W. Scheidel, Cambridge 1998, pp. 93–94.

55 K. Gilliver, *The Augustan Reform and the Structure of the Imperial Army*, in: *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. P. Erdkamp, Malden 2007, pp. 181–200.

56 See e.g.: P. Galliou, *L'Armorique Romaine: Mutations et resistances*, in: *Current Research on the Romanization of the Western Provinces*, eds. M. Wood, F. Queiroga, Oxford 1992, pp. 29–33; A.C. Johnston, *The Sons of Remus: Identity in Roman Gaul and Spain*, Cambridge MA–London 2017.

57 Salvianus Massiliensis, *De gubernatione Dei* 5.5.22: 'malunt enim sub specie captivitatis vivere liberi quam sub specie libertatis esse captivi'.

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Following the empire's conversion to Christianity, a kind of posthumous reconciliation took place under the symbol of the Cross. Bagaudae and Christians – both persecuted by Diocletian and Maximian – found common ground as victims of past oppressions. The memory of the Great Persecution of 303 serves as the backdrop for a 11th-century hagiography, the *Vita Baboleni*, where Amandus and Aelianus, leaders of the third-century Bagaudae, are surprisingly referred to as 'advocates of the Christian faith' (*christianae cultores fidei*)[58]. Moreover, by the fifth and sixth centuries, the term Bacauda had come to be used as a proper name for individuals of higher social status, including bishops[59]. Thus, the new religion's emphasis on compassion for the poor and afflicted enabled the peasants of Gaul to undergo a final, spectacular transformation, evolving from two-shaped monsters into venerated Christian martyrs.

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[58] A. Giardina, *Banditi e santi: un aspetto del folklore gallico tra tarda antichità e Medioevo*, "Athenaeum" 1983, 61; L. Cracco Ruggini, *op. cit.*

[59] The name *Bacauda* appears in connection with a bishop of Toledo, a bishop of Egabra (modern-day Cabra in Spain), and a bishop of Formia (*Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclesiastiques*, vol. VI, eds. A. Baudrillart et al., Paris 1932, pp. 42–44). Additional instances include a *praefectus urbi* from the fifth or sixth century and a *tribunus voluptatum* in Milan between 523 and 526 (*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. II, ed. J.R. Martindale, Cambridge 1980, pp. 207–208), as well as a wealthy individual in Ravenna who funded the construction of the church of S. Michele in Africisco (*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. IIIA, ed. J.R. Martindale, Cambridge 1992, p. 162).

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Carlo Ferrari – doktor, jest badaczem historii rzymskiej na Uniwersytecie Roma Tre. Studiował w Scuola Normale Superiore w Pizie i na Uniwersytecie w Pizie, gdzie w 2014 r. uzyskał dyplom z filologii klasycznej. W 2019 r. uzyskał tytuł doktora na Uniwersytecie Florenckim, broniąc pracę doktorską na temat kultów pogańskich w późnoantycznej Galii, opublikowaną pod tytułem *Santi e sciamani. Una lettura storico-religiosa della Gallia tardoromana* (Mediolan–Udine 2022). W latach 2019–2021 prowadził badania w Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici w Neapolu nad szwajcarskim filologiem i historykiem religii Karlem Meuli (1891–1968), które zostały opublikowane w formie monografii w 2025 r. Jego prace koncentrują się w szczególności na historii religii późnego antyku, zwłaszcza na wymianie kulturowej między ludami basenu Morza Śródziemnego a ludami germańskimi i środkowoazjatyckimi.

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