

“Creolization” and Agency in Divodurum Mediomatricorum

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This paper investigates the nature of enculturation and agency within an expanding hegemony, specifically the Roman Empire. However, rather than using the traditional concept of Romanization, the concept of creolization will be discussed and applied to the site of Divodurum Mediomatricorum (modern Metz, France), whose public architecture and landscape indicate different strategies utilized by the people of the indigenous Gallic society as they adapted various Roman practices in the creation of the Gallo-Roman culture. This paper will illustrate that the theoretical advancement of creolization can provide archaeologists with a better understanding of the processes of enculturation.

Introduction

As the Roman Empire expanded throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, it encountered numerous peoples who resisted this expansion. Some attempts failed, while some succeeded. Despite the immediate outcome of the struggles, these contests inevitably led to changes in the lives of the individuals involved and of the physical expressions of the settlements in which they lived. This paper investigates the nature of enculturation within the period of the first century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. However, rather than using the traditional concept of Romanization to explore these processes, the concept of creolization is discussed and applied to the site of Divodurum Mediomatricorum¹ in northeast Gaul, illustrating different strategies used by the people of the indigenous Gallic society as they interacted with various Roman practices in the creation of a Gallo-Roman culture.

Divodurum Mediomatricorum, which is now Metz, France, is located on a promontory at the confluence of the rivers Moselle and Seille. Cliffs along the rivers form two of Divodurum’s boundaries; a wall formed the third. Ten to thirty-five hectares were encompassed by these boundaries, but the larger figure seems more accurate.² Thus, Divodurum was one of the larger *oppida* known in northern Europe, and by far the largest settlement among the Mediomatrici.³ Even if Divodurum was much smaller, the size of the city compared to other settlements in the region suggests that it was of primary political importance in the area and served as a “capital” for the Mediomatrici.⁴

Divodurum shows no evidence of warfare and there is no evidence that Roman forces, whether military or civilian in nature, directly influenced the development of the site’s Gallo-Roman culture, unlike many

other Gallic sites.⁵ Rather, it illustrates a successful attempt by the citizens of the site to join the Roman Empire—an active, multigenerational process of participation and negotiation in the creation of a new identity which was derived from both Roman and Gallic sources, but in which neither culture dominated. Because of this, the citizens of the site built and utilized the various structures and symbols throughout the settlement’s landscape over the course of two centuries; this landscape is evidence of the intentionality of the inhabitants. This indigenous approach to interpreting the landscape is in contrast to traditional concepts of Romanization, in which the Roman culture was forcibly exported to Gallic elites and the role of non-elites was minimized or disregarded completely. By studying Divodurum, we are able to see the extent to which individuals were willing to alter their civic-ceremonial landscape without overt force from Rome in an attempt to participate in the Roman hegemony on their own terms.

Theoretical Background

This study employs the concept of creolization, rather than utilizing traditional concepts of acculturation and Romanization. Originally a linguistic term designating the blending of two dialects to create a third,⁶ creolization “has come to be used more generally for the processes of multicultural adjustment through which [blended] societies were created.”⁷ This theoretical framework was first applied to the development of African-American culture within the United States,⁸ but was successfully adapted for a study of the Roman religion by Jane Webster.⁹ It has since proven to be a valuable tool with which to approach the topic of cultural contact and ensuing change.

Creolization allows for a wide-ranging analysis of interaction, both political and social. It interprets the use of artifacts and

symbols by non-elites not as an attempt to become Roman, but rather the use of such artifacts through an indigenous, non-Roman set of rules. As Webster claims:

“Provincial artifacts in the Roman world may likewise appear Romanized, but can in certain contexts likewise operate according to a different, indigenous, set of underlying rules. As creole artifacts, they can negotiate with, resist, or adapt Roman styles to serve indigenous ends, and ultimately, they are part of the emergence of creole societies.”¹⁰

Creole culture is a combination of different traits, and the processes of creolization take place in a nonegalitarian social context of asymmetrical power relations.¹¹ These processes are given material expression through artifacts and landscape features which illustrate dual cultural traditions which are then utilized to different degrees within a colonial experience.¹² Within this colonial experience, links to the past are often maintained in opposition to the goals of the dominant culture’s elites, and oftentimes carry risk because of the asymmetrical nature of this relationship.¹³ From this we see that creolization is “a process of resistant adaptation” and what results is not “a single, normative colonial culture, but mixed cultures” evidenced by the multiple, various uses of material culture.¹⁴ Creolization therefore provides a much more nuanced interpretation of material culture; one that is not limited solely to the power-based explanations offered by Romanization.

The Civic-Ceremonial Landscape of Divodurum

It is through this framework of creolization that I approach the civic-ceremonial landscape of Divodurum Mediomatricorum to reinterpret how its members engaged the Roman world. The civic-ceremonial

landscape contains numerous features that were traditionally viewed as forced imports from Rome. These features, which include the city’s forum and associated religious structures, various temples, a grid road network, and aqueducts, were seen as evidence of civilization that accompanied the movement of Roman soldiers and traders throughout the region.¹⁵ This may have been the case in other cities, such as Arelate, Augustodunum, Treverorum, and Virunum,¹⁶ but the historical and archaeological record indicates that Roman forces had limited influence within Divodurum.¹⁷ Therefore, the construction of these features was likely the result of processes of enculturation initiated and undertaken by the agents of Divodurum itself. This discussion will focus on features of the sacred landscape, but also incorporates features of the mundane landscape of the city.

The Hauts-de-Sainte-Croix

The political, religious, and economic center of Divodurum was located on the summit of the Hauts-de-Sainte-Croix.¹⁸ There is no evidence for buildings on the summit previous to Roman control,¹⁹ and this lack of construction corresponds to current ideas that oppida originally preserved locations of spiritual and communal importance within the landscape, locations which may have been reserved for assemblies, feasts, and ceremonies.²⁰ During the period of incorporation into the Roman Empire, the summit maintained its status as the civic-ceremonial precinct of the city.²¹ However, it was converted to present an image of Roman power rather than Celtic sacredness, as illustrated by the construction of a forum and other Roman features circa 80 C.E.²² Conversion of landscapes such as this remains a common practice throughout time, and is an effective method of altering and appropriating the power associated with the civic-ceremonial landscape of a site.²³

The forum was the primary place of leadership within any Roman city, and served as the legislative, economic, and frequently the religious center within the city.²⁴ Divodurum’s forum was just south of the intersection of the two main streets of the city, the *Cardo Maximus* and the *Decumanus Maximus*, at the summit of the Hauts-de-Sainte-Croix.²⁵ The forum consisted of a basilica that functioned as the city’s *curia*, which was the administrative building housing the offices of local officials such as the *quaestor*, *tabellari*, and *statores*.²⁶ Within the forum was the Maison Quarrée, the *capitolium* of Divodurum. As the *capitolium*, the Maison Quarrée may have functioned as the temple to the Capitoline Triad, but more likely was dedicated solely to Jupiter Optimus Maximus.²⁷ Also present at Divodurum was an altar dedicated to Roma and Augusta, probably located within or near the forum. The precise location is unknown but inscriptions attest to its presence.²⁸ Finally, the forum also contained markets, shops, and baths.

The forum’s layout and function conformed to the Roman plan.²⁹ Traditional interpretation through Romanization would claim that its presence would indicate the combination of state and sacred functions according to Roman design and illustrate the wholeness of Roman control. However, the construction of these public buildings was privately sponsored; inscriptions related to the construction and maintenance of the forum mention local individuals.³⁰ A reinterpretation through creolization would claim that local elites adopted the use of these Roman symbols for personal or corporate goals.³¹ This practice of financial contributions made by wealthy and prominent members of the Mediomatrici was known as *euergetism*, which was “a competition for, or expression of, civic status by means of lavish contribution”³² in an attempt to “persuade the imperial authorities that the

city and its inhabitants had been sufficiently Romanized to warrant promotion to a higher [*colonia*] status.”³³

If it is true that the population was expending their energy and money in order to gain a higher status for their city, it was not merely for the title only but also for the additional benefits associated with being a *colonia*. These benefits not only included the survival and growth of their settlement, but also the establishment of particular imperial offices which were later present at Divodurum, and the granting of Roman citizenship to the elite of the *civitas*, the state, of the Mediomatrici.³⁴ Thus, the elite of Divodurum were investing their resources in an attempt to navigate the expanding Roman hegemony on their own terms.

Roads

Divodurum’s roads were repaved using cut stone by the mid-first century C.E. The city used a grid plan by then, with streets every 122 m (400’), but it is unknown whether the grid predated the buildings or if the buildings had influenced the layout of the streets.³⁵ This grid pattern expanded with the city, eventually including the island of Pontiffroy and the construction of stone bridges across the Moselle and Seille.³⁶ The streets contained drainage ditches along their margins, and a few of them also paralleled the layout of aqueducts and water pipes throughout Divodurum.³⁷

The position of the forum at the center of the grid followed Roman custom, which may indicate that the roads were reoriented and rebuilt to correspond with the forum. However, if the layout of the roads was a pre-existing feature of Divodurum, the land for the forum was appropriated for public use according to Roman practices. Either situation illustrates the degree to which the inhabitants of Divodurum were willing to alter their city’s landscape. As Woolf states:

“The laying out of a grid across an entire city implies a single moment of foundation or re-foundation, with an impact on existing property rights and structures, and a cost in resources and manpower that can only be guessed at.”²⁸ This process is usually attributed as an example of power over a conquered settlement, but at Divodurum this realignment was undertaken by the citizens themselves, as a result of a collective decision to create a new capital city for themselves on the imperial model.³⁹

Aqueducts & Baths

Like many other Roman cities, aqueducts supplied water to a *castellum*, a reservoir, which divided and transmitted water via lead pipes to the various neighborhoods, where the water was distributed further to three ultimate destinations: basins and fountains, baths, and private homes.⁴⁰ The people of Divodurum constructed such an aqueduct supplying water to the summit of the Hauts-de-Sainte-Croix circa 80 C.E.⁴¹ Local officials known as the *seviri augustales* financed the aqueduct and associated structures, as indicated by a related inscription.⁴² The termination of this aqueduct was near a bath complex; the two may be related. The water was supplied *in nomine Caesaris*, in the name of Caesar, and for private and public uses. The former was directed towards projects and events ordered by Caesar, whereas the later provided water for public works (including baths, theaters, markets, et cetera), fountains which served as emergency reservoirs, and public basins or troughs.⁴³

Romans considered the *balneae*, or baths, a civilizing influence; Tacitus listed it among three “demoralizing temptations” of civilization of which native peoples readily assumed (*Agricola* 21). The baths, and the aqueducts which supplied them, are considered a distinctively Roman feature throughout Europe. Long distance aqueducts were not constructed

in continental Europe before the arrival of Roman administrations, and the technology to sufficiently waterproof the floors of the baths was unknown in Gaul. These innovations appeared to have accompanied the movement of Roman traders and administrators. As such, the presence of four baths within the limits of Divodurum is expected.⁴⁴ However, rather than being merely signs of civilization, the baths would have likely served the same function as the forum during this transitional period—a forum through which the Mediomatrici would participate with Roman culture on their own terms, and convince the Roman government of the suitability of the granting of *colonia* status for the city.

The Temple of Icovellauna

A temple dedicated to the Celtic goddess Icovellauna was located to the south of Divodurum. This temple is located near the course of the Gorze aqueduct, possibly because of the goddess’ association with water (her name may mean “beautiful water”).⁴⁵ The exterior of the temple was octagonal and fabricated of cut stone while the interior was circular; the building was surrounded by a portico. Within the building, a stream flowed through a ditch 6.4 m deep by 6 m wide and fed into a hexagonal basin that contained over a thousand coins; these coins dated to the second and third centuries C.E.⁴⁶ The physical form of the structure is similar to other Celtic temples discovered. Their central chambers and surrounding ambulatory were circular, as opposed to the rectangular designs of Roman and Greek temples. A sacred precinct, which may have been square or rectangular, enclosed the temple. Similar designs have been found at Augustodunum and Vesunna Petrocoriorum.⁴⁷

While the temple was constructed using Roman techniques, the plan of the structure

resonates as Celtic in style. Likewise, the practice of depositing coins within a water filled basin is Celtic in origin, as “offerings made into an underground basin reflect typical pre-Roman Celtic ritual practices according to which offerings were made into ditches, underground shafts, or water sources.”⁴⁸ Like the forum, the temple of Icovellauna was an attempt to combine preexisting social expectations with institutional form. However, rather than combining Roman institutions (such as the forum) with Celtic convention (such as the location of civic-ceremonial buildings), the temple combined a Celtic institution with the Roman expectation of how a temple ought to be constructed. The construction of the temple according to Roman techniques while maintaining Celtic conventions concerning the shape and function of the temple allowed for a compromise without resorting to either extreme, which might have proven objectionable according to either Roman or Celtic cultural rules.

The Taurobolium of Cybele

Also present at Divodurum was an altar for the *taurobolium* of Cybele, a Phrygian fertility goddess whose Roman cognate was Magna Mater, the Great Mother. The precise location of the altar is unknown, but it is mentioned in an inscription. This inscription is dated to 199 C.E., which is determined by the consuls named therein, and would date the utilization of this structure in the same time period as the Temple of Icovellauna.⁴⁹ The practice of the *taurobolium* involved “the ritual slaying of a bull or ram over a ditch in which the priest or devotee stood,” resulting in the priest or devotee being bathed in the blood of the sacrificial victim, similar to initiation rites within mystery cults.⁵⁰ Some evidence suggests that this rite was repeated every twenty years on the birthday of the worshipper, as the altars were dedicated *ob natalicium*, or, on account of a birthday party.⁵¹

The Roman custom entitled *interpretatio Romana* allowed the continuation of local practices, such as the worship of Icovellauna, as long as the people also participated in the Caesarian cults.⁵² While Romans viewed this as benevolent, the Mediomatrici surely saw this as an opportunity to continue pre-Roman, Celtic religious practices without interference from Rome. This accommodation extended both directions: unlike the worship of Icovellauna, the *taurobolium* was a Roman religious practice, possibly imported by legionaries. Romanization would explain the presence of the *taurobolium* as a unidirectional impact of the presence of imperial forces within the region, but creolization incorporates a degree of bidirectionality. The presence of both practices within the landscape of Divodurum illustrates a degree of syncretism present within the community, an *interpretatio Romana* that extended not only from Rome to the Mediomatrici, but from Divodurum to Romans.

Conclusion

Romanization was an attempt to explain the spread of Roman material culture throughout Gaul. According to Romanization, culture was consciously exported by Roman administrators in an attempt to civilize their new subjects.⁵³ However, this theorization ignores the fact that the new subjects exhibited agency and had the opportunity to determine how they interacted with Rome. Creolization incorporates this agency as a key component in how material culture is interpreted. It acknowledges that individuals and groups made decisions concerning the incorporation and utilization of outside institutions, rather than simply subscribing to these institutions because of outside forces or desirability.

The previous examples illustrate how the citizens of Divodurum altered the landscape of their city and its various institutions to reflect a superficial image

of Rome in an attempt to maintain aspects of pre-Roman belief and practices. Rather than interpreting this through the theory of Romanization, which dictates that these changes were unidirectional, the lens of creolization allows us to more fully understand the multidirectional and multidimensional processes of change undertaken by *Mediomatrici* agents and their reflection in the civic-ceremonial landscape of the city. These institutions of this landscape, which were duplicated at other sites and in other scales throughout Roman Gaul, illustrate larger patterns of creolization evident throughout the provinces. These patterns are evidence for the development of a hybrid Gallo-Roman culture in which neither Celtic nor Roman symbols dominated, despite the establishment of Roman hegemony. This paper has shown that the theory of creolization can be applied to situations such as that experienced by the people of *Divodurum* who negotiated competing identities within Roman Gaul during the period of time in which a distinctive Gallo-Roman hybrid culture evolved.

Endnotes:

- 1 Much of the data for the archaeology of *Divodurum* is derived from Gregory's 2002 dissertation on landscape change within the city during the period of transition from Gallic oppidum to Roman colonia. However, this data is reinterpreted using Webster's concept of creolization.
- 2 Gregory 2002, 34.
- 3 Gregory 2002, 34.
- 4 Gregory 2002, 34.
- 5 Gregory 2002.
- 6 Abrahams 1983.
- 7 Webster 2001, 217.
- 8 Braithwaite 1971; Ferguson 1992.
- 9 Webster 2001.
- 10 Webster 2001, 219.
- 11 Webster 2001, 218.
- 12 Webster 2001, 218.
- 13 Scott 1985, 1989, 1990, 2009.

- 14 Webster 2001, 218.
- 15 Walthew 1981; Gregory 2002, 13.
- 16 Wightman 1970; Nicholson 1996; Cunliffe 1997, 218.
- 17 Gregory (2002) discusses the supporting, albeit circumstantial, evidence of the archaeological record at length. This evidence relates primarily to the late 1st century C.E. date of construction for the Roman institutions: if the Romans had accomplished this construction, it would have occurred during the 1st century B.C.E., at the end of the Gallic Wars, similarly to other sites such as *Augustodunum*. Secondly, Gregory analyzes historical records concerning *Divodurum*, which is limited to two accounts: Caesar's Gallic Wars, which mentions movements against several *Mediomatrici* neighbors, but not the *Mediomatrici* themselves in 56 B.C.E., and a possible sack of the city in 69 C.E. as a result of the secession crisis precipitating from the death of Nero. The lack of documentation concerning the city suggests it played such a minor role in the events of the Gallic War that it was literally unremarkable.
- 18 Gregory 2002, 60.
- 19 Gregory 2002, 36.
- 20 Bowden et al. 2005.
- 21 Gregory 2002.
- 22 Drinkwater 1983, 144.
- 23 Duncan 1989.
- 24 Woolf 1998, 70.
- 25 Gregory 2002, 60.
- 26 Gregory 2002, 61.
- 27 Gregory 2002, 66.
- 28 Gregory 2002, 70.
- 29 Woolf 1997, 343.
- 30 Gregory 2002, 113.
- 31 Woolf 1998, 125; Gregory 2002, 113.
- 32 Gregory 2002, 108.
- 33 Gregory 2002, 29.
- 34 Gregory 2002, 25.
- 35 Gregory 2002, 97.
- 36 Gregory 2002, 97.
- 37 Gregory 2002, 97.
- 38 Woolf 1998, 119.
- 39 Woolf 1998, 120.
- 40 Evans 1982, 402.
- 41 Gregory 2002, 129.
- 42 Gregory 2002, 129.
- 43 Evans 1982, 403.
- 44 Gregory 2002, 128.
- 45 Gregory 2002, 67.
- 46 Gregory 2002, 67.
- 47 Drinkwater 1983, 147-148.
- 48 Gregory 2002: 118.
- 49 Gregory 2002: 68.
- 50 Gregory 2002: 69.
- 51 Gregory 2002: 69.
- 52 Webster 1997: 331.
- 53 Haverfield 1923; Redfield et al. 1935.

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